



Brian Willer

permit the emergence of national “schools” in painting, writing, or the performing arts. What we have instead is a collection of cultures.

Ethnic and Geographic Diversity

The French-derived and the British-derived remain the two most powerful strains, but together they only begin to indicate the ethnic and geographic diversity of the arts in Canada. For instance, the new English-language novelists who emerged in the 1980s included Michael Ondaatje (originally from Sri Lanka), Josef Skvorecky (from Czechoslovakia) and Neil Bissoondath (born in Trinidad to Asian parents). Since the

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's Evelyn Hart: nothing short of absolute perfection satisfies this dedicated dancer.

But it is a widespread belief in Canada, a belief expressed through extensive government support for the arts, that Canadians should have the opportunity to reach the highest levels of excellence inside Canada as well as out. Gradually, over the last 40 or so years, the electorate has come to understand that the arts are essential to the life of the people and that the people's tax money is essential to the arts. The federal government, many provincial governments, and more recently a few cities now see it as their duty to subsidize the arts.

In the beginning there were those who advocated government support in the hope that it would somehow produce a uniform national viewpoint, a set of ideals and images that would bind all Canadians together. In our history there are few examples of artistic myth-making that fits such a pattern — for instance, the landscape paintings of the Group of Seven (which

formed in 1920 and flourished for the next 30 years) and the one Canadian novel known around the world through most of this century, *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery. But for the most part, Canadian culture, as it has become more sophisticated, has grown not more unified but more disparate.

Themes may sometimes recur within, say, the Quebec novel, or in poetry from British Columbia, and from time to time a certain kind of painting or stage play will dominate this or that region. A “unified Canadian culture” has not emerged, however, and no one any longer imagines that it will. The country is too large, too richly diverse, and too much focused on its regions to

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