

PROMOTING CANADIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC COMPOSERS THE CANADIAN MUSIC CENTRE

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Saul Bitran, a member of the *Quartetto*, described this event from the Mexican point of view. He recalls that "The composers there brought scores for quartets which we took home and there were several which we liked." The composers involved include John Beckwith, David Deane, Walter Buczinski, John Rea, Murray Adaskin, and Alexina Louie.

Mr. Bitran says that the group is trying to put together a program consisting exclusively of Canadian music for string quartets. "The idea is to present that program in Canada but the hope is to put the best of those pieces in our permanent repertoire and tour in Latin America and the United States." He adds that Mexican musicians feel a special affinity with Canadians. "We love to go to Canada. We feel a great connection with audiences there — much more so than in the United States. In the music from Canada there is an urgency and an expressiveness which is very similar to the work of composers in Mexico."

Like some others interviewed for this profile, Mr. Bitran sees cultural exchange as a more important driving force than commercial trade. "We all hope that [the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)] will translate into more cultural exchanges," he says. "In a way, it is easier to increase trade in culture. There are no deficits or balances — we just need to know more about each other."

- economic feasibility of distribution (6);
- language barriers (5);
- economic feasibility of touring (4);
- receptiveness of Mexican audiences to Canadian products (4); and
- lack of faith in the Mexican music business infrastructure (3).

Four respondents also expressed concern about the reliability of performing rights reporting coming from Mexican radio, television and film. This contradicts the opinion of the Canadian Performing Rights Association (SOCAN), who claim that their reciprocal agreement with Mexico is operating in a reasonably thorough and timely way. Industry observers in Mexico say that no radio royalties have been collected for the past several years, but that other users of recorded music pay royalties reasonably efficiently.

Several Canadians with experience in the Mexican music industry were interviewed for this profile and they were asked about their experience with barriers to entry. Their chief concerns were the stability of Mexican currency and a fear of piracy. The former is less of a concern to classical music artists and major pop artists who contract in Canadian or US dollars. But it is more of a concern for independent artists seeking to set up their own tours without the benefit of major international representation. Piracy is a primary concern for popular music artists.

INTERNATIONAL CLASSICAL MUSIC SCENE

Many Canadian classical performers enjoy international reputations and are routinely booked as individuals by orchestras around the world. The pianist Anton Kuerti is one of several Canadians who have been invited to play in Mexico. This is seen as part of the world market for classical musicians and is not regarded as a Mexico-specific issue. Host orchestras in Mexico, just like those in other countries, hire artists of international calibre through their agents for negotiated fees. Then they arrange for travel and working visas on a standard contract basis. The host orchestras are not especially interested in talent from any particular country — they are just filling guest engagement positions with the orchestra.

In Mexico, symphonies, ballet and opera orchestras have been publicly supported. Ann Summers, who books Canadian artists in Mexico, traditionally says that the wealthier orchestras simply pay the prevailing fees of foreign performers. Groups with less funding are generally able to pay prevailing international rates — or at least make competitive offers. Some of this activity has dropped off since the devaluation of the peso in December 1994.