

Fourteen years later

Canadian writer resurfaces with new book

By KEVIN CONNOLLY

Lawrence Garber first appeared on the Canadian writing scene in 1969, with his novel *Tales from the Quarter*, closely followed by his widely-acclaimed *Circuit* in 1970. *Circuit* was so well received that one of its three novellas, "Visions at Midnight", was included in the *Penguin Book of Canadian Short Stories* in 1980. Why then has he not released another book until this month's *Sirens and Graces*?

Garber, now 46 and an associate professor at the University of Western Ontario, gives two reasons: his Ph.D. thesis, and the struggles of establishing himself in the academic world.

"It takes a while to get out of that non-writing syndrome," says Garber, although he's quick to add that he hasn't been idle. Since his first sabbatical in 1975, he has drafted three manuscripts, the first of which is *Sirens and Graces*. A second manuscript is completed and ready for publication, and the third Garber hopes to finish on a sabbatical this year.

Garber grew up in the Junction Triangle area of Toronto, and was educated at U. of T. He completed his Masters in 1962, but spent the next 10 years traveling between Europe and Canada, living in the Latin Quarter of Paris, and when at home, chipping away at his Ph.D. thesis.

Garber describes his stint at U of T as "interminable" and in fact the first chapter of his new book deals satirically with the procrastination, guilt, and anxieties of the thesis syndrome. He likens the ordeal to "softening to death in a vat of vaseline," adding "everyone's essay seems easier than your own."

In *Sirens and Graces* he projects these ideas onto his characters. Leland Garland, Garber's mythical alter ego, is hard at work on his thesis project, *The Carnal Endeavor*—a catalog of literary lechery, while his comical British Museum chums, from a bizarre range of ethnic backgrounds, work on such projects as biblical allusions in the Old Testament: a checklist, and The Definite Article as motif in the Works of Joseph Conrad. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to fast word-play and intellectual one-upmanship form atrophied scholars.

The principal character, whose string of aliases range from Lyle Gerring to Lars Gunner, cavorts his way across Europe on a series of obscure grants from a black market list. Garber says that in the 1960s many of his contemporaries traveled in the same manner, desperately trying to produce some sort of academic work that would warrant a renewal. He recalls one young prodigy who managed to squander a "juicy scholarship" in two weeks and promptly disappeared.

Sirens and Graces is written in seven parts, each taking a city's name for a title, all but the final chapter ("Toronto: Ten years after") set in European cities. Garber has, so far, set all his novels in Europe—he describes himself as an "internationalist" who never shook his first impressions of the continent. "All my ideas seem to attach themselves to a European landscape," he says.

The principle character in the book, who we will call L.G. (his initials are the only thing constant about his name), makes his way across Europe, partly on his Bridget Krasnopolski Memorial Scholarship, and partly on the beneficence of his various lovers.

His antics are those of a contemporary Tom Jones, obsessed with the sexual act and his own self-conscious triumphs over women. None of his lovers seem to satisfy him, however. Not the matronly Simmie, the experienced Lorna, the suicidal Buffy, or her clownish friend Kay—the third member of an existential ménage à trois.

His focus seems to return consistently to Emanuela, the virginal Italian who gave him a cough drop in the British Museum and has been writing him increasingly pleading letters from Bologna ever since. In Amsterdam and again in Venice he is told by his friends that he is unconsciously moving towards his virginal obsession and the trouble begins when he finally resolves to go to her.

In Bologna his weeks are spent systematically alienating Emanuela's domineering family and becoming increasingly frustrated with the slow pace of his sexual life.

Trapped in a hotel room, he becomes mentally and physically ill—his annoyingly passionate neighbors inspiring wild and frustrating hallucinations. When Emanuela finally submits to him, it is in a direction he hadn't bargained for. While preserving Emanuela's "purity" for her family, their sodomistic activities scar L.G. mentally—and physically. After he escapes to Florence it becomes apparent that while Emanuela's virtue is still intact it is L.G. who has lost his innocence.

Sirens and Graces is at times hysterically funny. The humor is often crude and always irreverent, but Garber's unique style pulls it off without becoming offensive. "I was very influenced by stand-up comics," says Garber. "They have this ability to reduce the world to comic aphorisms."

Like Garber, they can transform pain and suffering into something hilarious, often making themselves the butt of the joke. To deny the serious undertones of the novel would be a mistake, but it is the humor which "takes the curse off the



PHOTO: AVRUM FENSON

Canadian author Lawrence Garber is back. "I think I'm a very Canadian writer," he says, although he always writes about Canadians in Europe.

tragedy."

But how does all this European reverie fit into the rest of the Canadian writing scene? "I think I am a very Canadian writer," says Garber, who always writes about Canadians in Europe. He looks at Europe through Canadian eyes—and credits all his sensibilities to his Toronto-junction roots. It is difficult, however, to incorporate a lot of Canadian iconography in the process. As Garber says, "You can't write about bears and caribou walking down the Champs-Élysées."

His new novel, due out in a year or so, will be his first written in a Canadian context, keeping the

Toronto setting from the last chapter of *Sirens and Graces*. "In the past I've felt too close to Toronto," he says. "Now I feel I can look at it with a little more objectivity."

As far as the future of Canadian writing is concerned, Garber is very optimistic. He believes that we are entering a "golden age," in which Canadian authors are gaining increased international status. In the past, particular writers rather than Canadian writing as a whole, have been popular abroad, and things appear to be changing. "I'd like to be popular in Tasmania someday," Garber quips. If he keeps writing novels like *Sirens and Graces*, he may just get his wish.

Classical Indian music intriguing

By RICHARD UNDERHILL

The popular myth that Sundays at York are devoid of worthwhile entertainment (Pac Man addicts excluded) was dispelled last Sunday afternoon when Curtis Lecture Hall "I" was the scene of an exciting display of South Indian classical music. The well-attended concert featured master violinist Lalgudi Jayaraman, his son Lalgudi Krishnan, also on violin, and York professor Trichy

Sankaran on mridangam, a South Indian drum.

A master of the Karnatak (south Indian) style of classical violin performance, Lalgudi Jayaraman has been active as an accompanist, performer, and composer for four decades, and has received many awards both in India and abroad. Jayaraman, who is currently on a month-and-a-half-long North American tour, has visited York once prior to his concert on Sunday. That time, in 1971, was significant as it marked the start of the York Indian Music program.

Sankaran, who currently head studies on Indian music here, is accompanying the violinists on the Eastern leg of their tour and is a highly respected, innovative musician in the Karnatak style.

What is Karnatak music? Historically, India had a fairly unified musical culture. However, in the thirteenth Century A.D., succeeding waves of Persian invaders in the North caused a division of the styles into North Indian (Hindustani) and South Indian (Karnatak).

Hindustani musicians were influenced by the instruments (sitar, sarod, tabla) and musical performance practices (looser style, accelerated tempos) of the invading Arabs. Karnatak performers, however, were more isolated and thus able to maintain their traditional mode of playing. As a result, Karnatak music is based on strict, traditional musical values which are harder for Westerners (who are used to the stellar role of musician as individualist—found also in the Hindustani tradition) to appreciate. It is worth the effort.

Despite this separation of styles, both traditions rely on nearly equivalent musical parameters for performances and composition. In Karnatak music, the melodic content of a given piece is based on the raga (or scale). The raga defines all the notes—usually in the form

of a seven note scale—that can be used in the melody of a given piece, and in subsequent improvisations around the theme. Also inherent in the raga is the ornamentation (called gamakas) to be used on each note of the scale. As exclusively melodic music, inflections and ornamentations of the melody take on great importance during performance.

The rhythmic structure around which a piece of music is composed and improvised is called the tala. Unlike Western classical music, both Indian traditions freely use odd meters (other than the standard 4/4 of much Western Art music, and Rock, for that matter) for composition and improvisation. Thus, at a concert, someone is often designated to keep the tala of a piece by means of claps, hand waves, and finger counts, (although accomplished musicians are able to do this mentally). Rhythmic and melodic improvisations are always based on the tala, or extensions of it, but the resulting music can sound surprisingly free.

Another fundamental ingredient of any Indian classical concert is the drone. Usually played on a four-stringed instrument called a tamboura, the drone is the key note of the entire performance. Thus, all instruments, including the drums, are tuned to the tamboura drone, which sounds continually throughout the performance and gives the proceedings a spacey, free-floating atmosphere.

A surprising temple-like calm was achieved in the cold concrete structure of Curtis "I" on Sunday afternoon. Clothed in traditional dress—white cotton robes and pants—the musicians were seated on an elevated stage at the front of the hall. A great deal of attention was paid to the tuning of the instruments, even Sankaran's mridangam. Such tuning is necessitated by the precise, microtonal pitch system used by Karnatak musicians in their playing.

The concert got under way with a moody, free-time improvisation by Jayaraman and continued for about four hours. The audience was treated to some very fine, inspired improvisations from Jayaraman, and his son, who, at several points during the concert exchanged melodic and rhythmic ideas in telepathic fashion. Trichy Sankaran was featured at the mid-point of the performance with a breathtaking display of virtuosic drumming, leading the audience down one rhythmic avenue, and then surprising them by finding his way to the beginning of the tala via another route. Another highlight of the performance was Lalgudi Krishnan's inspired solo improvisation (called an allapana) on a musically complex and interesting raga.

A thoroughly enjoyable and educational musical experience, Sunday's concert was followed up Wednesday afternoon by a lecture/demonstration held in McLaughlin JCR. Music and other interested students queried Jayaraman on several points, including raga and tala. Responding in a warm, informative manner, Jayaraman played through several ragas, emphasizing the unique intervals of the scales and also adding appropriate ornaments. With the help of Trichy Sankara, he also demonstrated numerous talas and showed in a step-by-step manner how to proceed in rhythmic improvisation.

Unfortunately, Wednesday's demonstration was the last chance we'll have to hear Lalgudi Jayaraman and Lalgudi Krishnan, as their tour finishes in October and does not include a return engagement at York. Trichy Sankaran will remain here, however, and will most likely be featured in other Karnatak concerts.

Toronto has a very active Indian music scene and it would be worthwhile for anyone interested to attend some of the upcoming events.

