

Book of interviews gets inside classical music business

For the Love of Music: Interviews with Ulla Colgrass
Ulla Colgrass
Oxford University Press, 200 pp

review by Mike Spindloe

Ulla Colgrass is the editor of *Music Magazine*, a Toronto-based periodical which reports primarily on the classical music field. Starting in 1978, Colgrass interviewed a great many of the prominent classical musicians of today, and *For the Love of Music* is a selection of 22 of those interviews, which all appeared first in *Music Magazine*.

Despite the book's inherent redundancy, it does read well, and through its diverse assemblage of viewpoints, it at least partially succeeds in its goal of closing the "gap in communication between musicians and their North American audience." Most of the musicians interviewed are also North American and many are Canadian, including composer R. Murray Schafer, singer Maureen Forrester and the late pianist Glenn Gould.

Gould's iconoclastic opinions, which contrast strikingly with many others expressed in the book, make for some of the most interesting reading. Certainly his views are the most controversial: Gould retired from the concert stage fairly early in his career and refers to concertizing as an "utterly wasteful activity," further stating that "what one really does in concert is concentrate on an individual collection of moments and string them together to create a superficial impression of a coherent result."

This view, of course, is directly opposed to that of many of the other interviewees, some of whom have developed busy careers in performance almost to the exclusion of recording. Another contentious subject is the interpretation of the great composers: some, like Wynton Marsalis feel that "there's only one way to play Mozart right. The music... is written precisely enough for you to know how it's supposed to sound." Marsalis also provides one of the book's lighter moments when Colgrass' husband Michael Colgrass (himself a well-known Canadian composer) asks him "What kind of non-musical experience do you think is important to become a well-rounded performer?" Marsalis' answer: "A woman."

Just about everyone interviewed has something interesting to say; there's thankfully little carrying on about how tough and competitive life at Juilliard was, although many of the interviewees did indeed attend that foremost of North American music schools.

R. Murray Schafer, for instance, invited Colgrass to hear and witness a musical project that involved a choir of trombones, a lake in Ontario, the local wildlife and the breaking of dawn. Cellist Yo-Yo Ma speaks about recording Paganini's 24 Caprices for Violin (a fiendishly difficult part of the repertoire) on his own instrument.

And so it goes. There are several different stripes of instrumentalists, including an entire string quartet, composers, conductors and singers. If you've ever paid any attention to the field of "serious" music, you'll recognize many of the names on sight. Strangely enough, Marsalis is the



Above are the 22 interviewees in *For the Love of Music*. Who are they all? Now there's a trivia question even Grant and Lloyd couldn't answer without the book.

only "crossover" artist present (he also plays jazz). The entries are arranged in alphabetical order by names, so it's easy to pick out the interviews that interest you most or take whatever comes up next.

Though *For the Love of Music* will surely appeal most to those who are already aficionados of classical music, its goal of widening that audience by demystifying the profession of classical

musician is a worthy one. Perhaps conductor Christopher Keene says it best: "What musicians are and what they do is almost incomprehensible to a vast portion of our audience... Just hearing that a musician can actually speak in the English language and that he can make fun of himself and be human can dispel the image of the musician as a tall, austere person with white hair." If you give it a chance, *For the Love of Music* may just do that for you.

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