

R. Murray Schafer



"Neshmoor," "Sloofulp," "Maunklinde," "Sheelesk," and "Malooma" are Canadian seventh-graders' solutions to the following assignment: "Create a more suggestive word in a private language for 'moonlight'."

"Plimniblemay," "Cudabulut," and "Drimpollillins" are examples of *raindrops* contributed by university students.

The perpetrator of these forays is R. Murray Schafer, now Resident in Music at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia. The private and original words which students generate for themselves do several important musical things. They provide material for musical setting. They exercise the student's creative abilities. They set him thinking about the basic stuff of music and sound.

Another example of Schafer's ability to stimulate students is his "Biography of the Alphabet," a compendium of Schafer's own attitudes and reactions to the letters of the alphabet:

- "A" (pronounced *ah*) The most frequent vowel-sound in English. Elemental. *Ur*-sound. If the mouth is wide open, you can't produce any other sound. Together with "m" as "ma" it is the first word spoken by millions of infants.
- "G" Guttural, brash in a solar-plectic sort of way.
- "J" Sound of metal striking cement. Jaded, jingle. When sustained, "jjjjjjjjj," it suggests a motor needing oil.
- "SH" White noise. Full frequency-spectrum of random sound.
- "T" On a typewriter, all letters sound like "t" — tttttttt.

These and many other unorthodox approaches to musical education and to the education of music educators characterize Murray Schafer as a seminal mind in his field. Besides being an artist as a teacher, he has written books for adults to read and pieces of music for youth choirs and youth orchestras to perform.

The first of Schafer's four books on musical education was *The Composer in the Classroom*, basically a set of transcripts of class sessions in which Schafer and his students are recorded in

verbal form. In a first chapter the students express their musical preferences and distastes. A tone of acceptance of their opinions is set from the beginning. Next Schafer explores "What is Music?" and, slowly stimulating their ears and minds, builds his class up to a point of musical creativity on their own.

A second book, called *Ear Cleaning*, is a set of notes written directly to and for those music educators who wish to attack the problem of making a course on new music. The book is subtitled, "Notes for an Experimental Music Course." The chapters are concerned with "Noise," "Silence," "Tone," "Timbre," "Amplitude," "Melody," "Texture," "Rhythm," and culminate with "The Musical Soundscape." This book gives an orderly format for creating a course which encompasses new music.

A third book, called *The New Soundscape*, is diverse in its format and polemic in its tone. It calls attention to the dangers of noise pollution with pointed eloquence, and, more importantly and almost uniquely, is full of examples of how to fight the noise pollution and thoughtless brutalities of The New Soundscape:

"Keep a world sound diary. Wherever you go take note of what you hear." From this admonition to students and teachers alike, Schafer progresses to this one:

DEAR STUDENTS:

IT IS TIME TO GET ACQUAINTED WITH A NEW SUBJECT: FORENSIC ACOUSTICS, THE STUDY OF THE GROWING NUMBER OF NOISE-NUISANCE AND EAR-DAMAGE CASES TAKEN TO COURT.

He goes on to advise his students to join or form a noise-abatement society.

Schafer's most recent book returns to words. It is called *When Words Sing*, and is a rich source of creative thinking and sound reasoning on the subject of words and spoken sounds in life and in music.

As in his earlier books, Schafer sets the tone of the lesson and of the text with his assignments: "Take your own name. Repeat it over and over until it gradually loses its identity. Lull the sense of it to sleep. Hypnotize it until it no longer belongs to you. Now that it is merely a quaint sound object hanging in front of you, examine it thoroughly with your ears."

The book builds up to a discussion of Schafer's piece for Youth Chorus and Optional Bells en-