

Contemporary Canadian music

by Will O'Hara

Contemporary Canadian music, like puberty, is something that most of us would prefer to avoid if we

could. However, Canada is a growing country and Canadians have to face the facts of life.

The performance on October 26 at

the Cohn was presented by two contemporary music groups from Upper Canada: Societe de musique contemporaine du Quebec, and the

Contemporary music Chamber Orchestra from Toronto. These two groups have proven that music is truly an interprovincial language. They have just returned from the International Society for Contemporary Music concerts being held this week in Boston.

Because two cellists were lost in the fog from Montreal, the concert program was altered to include two international works that were performed first. Stromung, written by Japanese composer, Yoshiro Irino, in 1974, was designed to show the continuity of life. This work was meant to be merely a fragment of the continuing "stream" (as the title translates), and so it was. The flute, harp and percussion played in a way that seemed to be undetermined. Free from foreshadowing or symmetry, sometimes violent yet sometimes still. The harp was played like a Japanese koto with the harpist bending the note to raise its pitch. The last note, a striking crack on the wood block ended the flow of the stream, throwing everyone back into their own fragments.

Alfred Del Monaco from Venezuela composed Solentiname for piano, flute, violin, clarinet, cello violin and two percussion. This work was based on that neglected interval, the unison- or close to it. Actually, the most interesting parts of the music are written between the lines. The piano was played mainly with a finger on the string to mute it slightly. It was also played with a beer bottle like bottleneck guitar to give it a glissando. At one point the piano struck a note that was stolen by the clarinet so that it seemed to sustain indefinitely which pianos can't do. More and more contemporary composers are using microtones in this way to avoid the scales that we know so well, but they present problems for fixed pitch instruments.

The most exciting part of the evening, I'm proud to say, was "le sifflement des vents, porteurs de l'amour" by the Canadian composer who doesn't play hockey, Gilles Tremblay. Not nearly as quiet as its title suggests, this work is a powerful dialogue between flute and percussion. The percussionist has the enviable role of smashing the hell out of his instruments. The sifflements des vents in contrast were whistled by Robert Aitken who is well known to Halifax audiences.

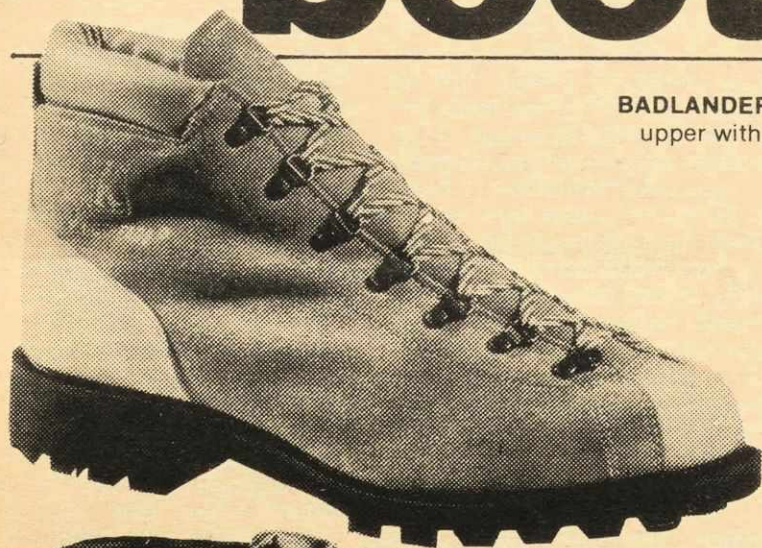
In the second half Bruce Mather conducted from the piano his Madrigal 111 for piano, harp, percussion and voice. This work is a collection of international cliches from the sixties with a borrowed Canadian title.

Finally there was Murray Schafer's Arcana based on a text of Middle Egyptian hieroglyphics. The method of composition is aleatorical but Schafer gives the piece a sense of primitive continuity. These compositions are always a wealth of new sounds. Even when you think its all been done he will find a new sound. How exciting it is to see ten of our best performers say UGH! at the same time or to hear a violinist sing while he plays. That's why Murray Schafer is saved for the end.

One final note: Apparently only two members of the entire Music Department Faculty made an effort to experience Contemporary Canadian music -- the Contemporary music representative and the Canadian representative.

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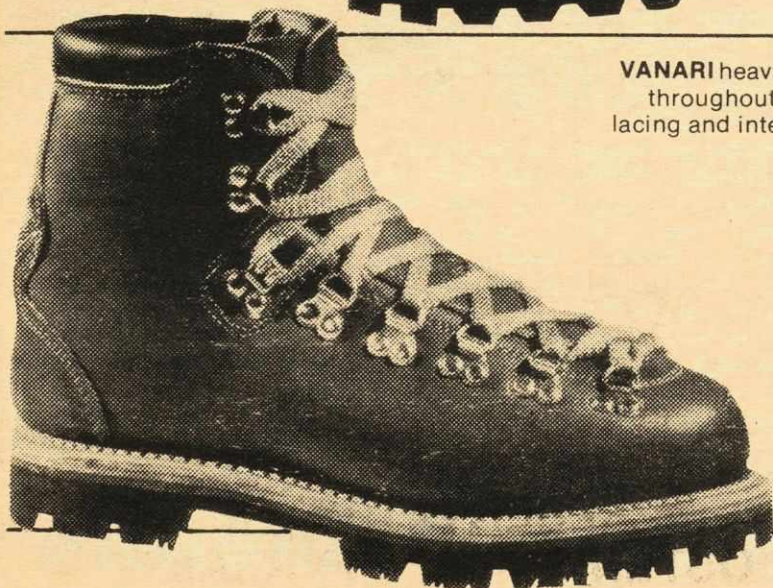


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