

Developments in Canadian music

The production and performance of good music has increased notably in Canada in recent years. While Canadian composition generally reflects international trends, inspiration from Canadian literary and historical sources and Indian, Eskimo and French-Canadian motifs can be detected. Publicly-controlled broadcasting and television have proved of great benefit to Canadian composers, both in making their work known and in contributing to their income. Commercial sponsorship too has been the source of much assistance.

Symphony

By the mid-1950s, symphonic music was widely accepted by Canadian audiences and, in the larger cities, had reached an appreciable level of maturity. Since then, considerable development has taken place with perhaps the most significant indication of the growth being the emergence of the Montreal and Toronto orchestras on to the international scene. Canadian symphony orchestras now number more than 30 and over one-third of them are fully professional.

One of the keys to Canada's musical future is the work of Les Jeunesses Musicales du Canada and the National Youth Orchestra, membership of which is confined to players under 25 years of age. The national concert circuits of these groups give work to many talented young professionals and a greater understanding of the music of our time to younger audiences. Another recent milestone was the forming, in 1969, of the orchestra of the National Arts Centre. In the short space of the three years since its foundation, this orchestra has earned a reputation as one of the leading small orchestras in North America.

Chamber music has not yet achieved the measure of acceptance accorded

to the other forms of musical expression in Canada. A series of new music concerts, similar to those being offered in Montreal over the past several years, is now being offered to the Toronto public for the first time. Created to provide an outlet for contemporary composers to hear their own works in performance and foster a more vital approach to chamber music, these concerts will feature works by both Canadian composers and composers from other countries around the world.

Opera

Despite its early acceptance, a flourishing native operatic tradition has yet to develop in Canada. Even in the larger centres, no company yet boasts a season of more than a few weeks' duration. By 1954, there was a fully professional company in Toronto which, in 1959, became the Canadian Opera Company. That same year, a touring program was introduced. However, although progress is slow, opera in Canada is growing in popularity and support. Five Canadian centres at present offer opera on a more or less regular basis – Montreal, Quebec City, Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver. Stratford also offers opera but its operatic activities take place as an adjunct to the Shakespearean Festival. Save for occasional visits by the Canadian Opera Company or similar ensembles, cities and towns in the Atlantic Provinces are not at present likely to hear grand opera.

During the past several years, there has been a revolution in original recording of Canadian artists and Canadian music. By far the most active region is Quebec. The development of the cult of the *chansonnier* in particular has depended on the record industry and public demand for such recordings has reached considerable proportions. These poet-singers, who compose their own lyrics and music, have long had the reputation of reflecting the aspirations and sentiments of their compatriots. Few of the record companies concern themselves with serious music. In English Canada, most of the original recording is also devoted to music of a popular nature although there have been several notable instances in which the recording companies have co-operated in the recording of more serious works.

Ballet

While ballet has been a latecomer among the arts, it has made astonishing progress and has become one of the arts of highest prestige in Canada. The country is at present supporting three main ballet companies – the National Ballet of Canada, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. In 1950, after a short period as a semi-professional group, the Winnipeg Ballet was able to become fully professional, and in 1952 its name changed to the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. The National Ballet Company was formed in 1951 by a group of interested Toronto citizens, called the National Ballet Guild. In 1957, Les Grands Canadiens was founded in Montreal. The National Ballet was given the honour of performing at the opening of Canada's National Arts Centre in Ottawa, and was the only classical dance company invited to perform at Expo '70 in Osaka, Japan. To celebrate its twentieth anniversary season, the National Ballet Company recently made its first professional tour of Europe.

Although contemporary dance is a typical North American form of expression, it has taken root slowly in Canada, and then, it is interesting to note, only in cities that also have a major ballet company. However, Canadian dance is now beginning to show signs of the development of its own tradition. The repertoire of the colourful and popular Feux Follets, Canada's national folk-dance ensemble, is a capsule history of Canada's varied heritage, from past to present, and from coast to coast. (*The foregoing article is one of a series, reprinted from the July/August issue of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce Commercial Letter.*)

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