

On Douglas Finch – by Dietmar Schmuecker (SOCAN, CLC, 1994)

Douglas Finch was born in Winnipeg in 1957. He began music lessons at an early age and in 1980, following studies with Jean Broadfoot, William Aide and Beveridge Webster, received his Masters Degree from the Juilliard School. Major prizes at piano competitions in Brussels and Washington, D.C. helped establish his international performing career. Although largely self-taught as a composer, Finch received coaching and guidance from S. C. Eckhardt-Grammatté, Robert Turner, Alan Heard, Peter Paul Koprowski, and from David Diamond and Roger Sessions at Juilliard.

Two distinct stylistic tendencies emerge from his earliest mature compositions: the Sonata for piano reveals a coming to terms with traditional formal structures, while Hommage a Satie, written for Juilliard as his first commission, follows a more intuitive improvisational line in the manner of Finch's popular concert improvisations first developed at that time. These and other piano works brought Finch national exposure with recordings for CBC Radio in 1982. Finch's first major orchestral composition, the first Piano Concerto, was premiered in 1988. Like the earlier Sonata, it relies heavily on traditional models. Dreams of Quetzalcoatl, first performed by the Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra in 1994, and the piano pieces in Yeibichai are more improvisational and draw upon themes and idioms from mythology and folklore.

Finch's broad eclecticism is further evinced in the two Landscape works, the first of a projected series, which experiment in sound and proportion to give expression to the numinous quality found in natural landscapes. Although outwardly often complex and abstract, Finch's musical style remains essentially lyrical.

In the more recent part of his career, Finch was a faculty member at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto (1981-87), visiting professor at University of British Columbia (1987-88), lecturer at Trinity College of Music, London, England since 1990, and assistant professor of piano at UBC (1990-93). In September 1993, Finch accepted a position as faculty member at London College of Music at Thames Valley University in England.