

CANADIAN COMPOSERS PORTRAITS SERIES
JEAN PAPINEAU-COUTURE DOCUMENTARY

Transcription

JEAN PAPINEAU-COUTURE (spoken in English by R. Godin): As far as I'm concerned, being a composer means arranging sounds in a logical manner, so as to allow an eventual listener to grasp at least a part of that logic. Perhaps, at first – but, at least, after two or three – my music is marked by extreme rigour, and therein lies its difficulty. It's calculated like the movements of a watch, if you like, and once it's set up, it yields results.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Jean Papineau-Couture is known as the dean of Quebecois composers. Along with John Weinzweig, his counterpart in English-speaking Canada, Papineau-Couture established and defended both the profession and the teaching of composition in Canada. That involved a lot more than “arranging sounds in a logical manner.” His rigour was tempered by his devotion to his family, to teaching, to language, and to his heritage.

The musicologist Louise Bail has observed that the music of Papineau-Couture has evolved between two poles: one of sensitivities and emotions barely held in check; and the other of sheer cerebralism, wherein the need for organization becomes both fundamental and natural. The tension between these two poles drove Papineau-Couture for five decades. During that time, his music underwent a continual process of development.

An examination of Jean Papineau-Couture's work could begin with a question about another duality. Why the two names?

JEAN PAPINEAU-COUTURE (spoken in English by R. Godin): Well, my usual reply is that it comes from my father. His name was also “Papineau-Couture.” It happened that Guillaume Couture, my grandfather, who was a composer, married Mércèdes Papineau, his second marriage, incidentally, and Mércèdes Papineau was the grand-niece of Louis Josef Papineau. It was thought that the name of “Papineau” was too important to drop, and my father, along with both his elder brothers, decided, not even together, but each one spontaneously on his own, to call himself “Papineau-Couture”.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Louis Josef Papineau was the leader of the Rebellion of 1837. The Canadian Encyclopedia records that he saw himself as the defender of the national heritage of French Canada. Complex and contradictory, Papineau was nevertheless the first effective political leader of his people. Jean Papineau-Couture's daughter Nadia:

NADIA PAPINEAU-COUTURE: The “Couture” part of the name comes from my father's grandfather Guillaume Couture which was a composer like my dad. So, basically, “Couture” is part of the cultural history of Quebec, and Papineau is part of the historical, political background of our culture. The name was Dad's identity, primarily. It was a source of reference as to who he was in life. It was a challenge, and it was also a responsibility. I guess that's probably what would sum up the way Dad saw his name and wore it: a responsibility vis a vis citizens in this province, and in Canada, in general, in terms of music: a heritage not to betray.

EITAN CORNFIELD: It was by no means clear that Jean Papineau-Couture would pursue both aspects of his heritage. Composer John Beckwith was a life-long friend.

JOHN BECKWITH: Jean told me that his father had warned, “Don’t become a musician. Whatever you do, don’t” – when he was growing up – “don’t ever become a musician.” So, in fact, Jean’s mother was the one who guided him towards music.

JEAN PAPINEAU-COUTURE (spoken in English by R. Godin): I began, I think, by singing folksongs, but more specifically, I started on the piano when I was six, with my mother. She was my first teacher, and then it just went on from there. Since Guillaume Couture was my grandfather, composition was also discussed, with the result that I heard a lot about composers.

This started me on writing, and when I was in my first year of classical studies in Latin at the College Ste. Ignace, the Jesuit father who was the organist was transferred, leaving the college without an organist. They sent for me. “You play piano, so you should be able to play the organ.” At fourteen, you’re a bit naïve. I replied: “I could probably play the organ”, and so, just prior to his departure, the kind father explained to me how to switch on the motor, the stops, the pedal-board, and said: “Next Sunday, you’re the accompanist.”

Everything was fine for the mass, because my piano teacher, Françoise D’Amour, had given me extensive training in sight-reading, but after the mass, there were the *Vespers*, and there, I was caught with Gregorian melodic lines, employing square notes in the C clef. I didn’t know square notation, and I could not play without a written accompaniment. It was total confusion, but thanks to a good ear, I could follow the melodic line.

This forced me – oh, I don’t know how long it took – perhaps five to six weeks – before it sounded reasonably all right. At any rate, it forced me to study harmony, a bit, after which I became quite interested in it, and kept on with it, and I started to improvise on the piano, and then, around sixteen, I started to want to write down what I was improvising, and to write other things besides improvisations.

All this time, I was continuing with my classical studies, which provided a wonderful intellectual training, which is lacking today. When those studies were completed, I got down to studying music seriously, working with Gabriel Cusson, at harmony, counterpoint, and fugue.

JOHN BECKWITH: Jean himself received his musical education, his early musical education, from two very important musicians, Gabriel Cusson and Léo-Pol Morin, and Léo-Pol Morin was not only an outstanding pianist, but who was a kind of future-looking musician. He was by no means an establishment figure. He was one of the people who spoke about Debussy and Ravel and Schoenberg and Stravinsky, in Montreal, at a time when these people weren’t being performed, and Jean took piano lessons from him. He got his piano training from Léo-Pol Morin.

Now, that was an influence, certainly, and a very important one, I think, for him. Gabriel Cusson also was a very good composer. I’ve seen some of his choral music, which I think stands up very, very well, so I mean he had good models in Montreal at that time. I don’t think it was a cultural desert, and I don’t think it was all in a kind of formative stage, at all. These were decent, professional musicians.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Though there were a few fine musicians in Montreal, choosing to become a composer was by no means an obvious career path, in Depression-era Quebec. If Papineau-Couture wanted to find a model, he had to look elsewhere, in his case, to Paris, and the music of Igor Stravinsky. John Rea is himself a composer, and was for a time dean of McGill University's Faculty of Music. He spent years researching Montreal's musical history, and says that while many important composers were emerging the world over, there was only a handful of musicians in the Quebec of Papineau-Couture's generation, with any kind of public profile as composers.

JOHN REA: If you then, say, were to compare that same generation with the generation south of the border – I can give you a couple of names very quickly. I mean, I could say John Cage, for example; perhaps Elliott Carter is just a little bit older, but if you extend your reach and you go to Europe, you could name Lutoslawski, for example, the Polish composer; Benjamin Britten.

If you contextualize like that, you see that in Canada, that handful of people had to come to grips with what is music. Who is doing it? Why would I want to do it? Why would I want to be a composer of all things?

So, in the context of Quebec, he probably was one of one -- just one of one – but, for someone whose path turned out to be his, I mean, I would say he had good taste. He had the smarts enough to know that certainly there was the tradition of Stravinsky, and that it might be something that could be familiar to him. I mean, actually, Stravinsky is a kind of French composer at someplace in his career, so he was a good model.

EITAN CORNFIELD: The best way to absorb the work of Stravinsky was to study with his greatest champion the famous French composition teacher Nadia Boulanger. Boulanger had studied composition with Gabriel Fauré. Among her pupils had been Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, Virgil Thompson, Elliott Carter, and Papineau-Couture's own teacher Gabriel Cusson. It was 1940, and Nadia Boulanger was in the United States, teaching mainly at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge. Papineau-Couture arrived only to discover that Boulanger was on a year's leave of absence. While he waited for her to return, he enrolled in the New England Conservatory of Music, where he studied with the American composer Quincy Porter.

JEAN PAPINEAU-COUTURE (spoken in English by R. Godin): Nadia Boulanger finally arrived, bringing with her the strict intellectual discipline for which she is renowned. I think it's legendary by now, because it really is an extraordinary training, and at the same time, what is even more extraordinary, but less talked about, is the faculty she possessed to penetrate the musical personality of each of her students, in just two or three weeks.

EITAN CORNFIELD: During the two years he spent with Boulanger in Cambridge, Papineau-Couture was immersed in the music of Igor Stravinsky. He spent 1943 teaching in Montreal, but with the help of a grant from the Quebec government, he was able to return to Boulanger in the following year. He and his wife Isabelle joined Boulanger first in Wisconsin, and then in California, where they finally got to meet and socialize with Stravinsky and his wife.

JOHN BECKWITH: But, before that, even in Montreal, when he was studying with Morin, he was exposed to some of Stravinsky's music, and I think when I one sees a Stravinsky strain in his early music, it doesn't just come from Nadia Boulanger, but from music that he knew before he was studying with her, but she developed that further. The

Violin Sonata, for instance, which he wrote under – I think under her guidance or just after – is in many ways like a Stravinsky Neo-classic work, a lovely work. I like it very much, but you could certainly see an influence of Stravinsky in it.

They remained in contact, of course. She was godmother to one of his children, and then I think he visited her in France, when he was on leave later. So, they remained in contact. I think he was a devoted disciple of hers, certainly.

NADIA PAPINEAU-COUTURE: That was a – I would say—a fabulous part of his life, a very challenging one, as well. He moved to Santa Barbara, at the Sachs property. My parents had just gotten married, and lived in the garage, on the second floor, because Nadia Boulanger was a guest of the Sachs family during the war.

My godmother is an extremely exigent person, very, very demanding, but will not demand anything she won't deliver herself, plus she was very preoccupied, I would say, of getting the best out of each individual. She did that with all her pupils. She did it with my father, but I've also met other of her students later, when I was an adult, and they all say about the same thing: she is challenging, demanding, pushing us to the extreme of what we can give as human beings, and as musicians.

Igor Stravinsky used to say: “Le travail c'est de se mettre à sa table de travail.” “It's not just inspiration.” “Mais inspiration commence par se mettre à sa table de travail”, is something that Dad has always done afterwards. It's a discipline. Inspiration just doesn't wait for you on the corner of the street, and suddenly jumps on you. It's not true. He had a huge admiration for Stravinsky, really liked his music a lot, which I wouldn't say was necessarily the case for all the music of that period, and was also fascinated with the way he constructed sound.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Papineau-Couture had been composing long before he met Stravinsky, at a time when he was under the spell of other French composers.

JEAN PAPINEAU-COUTURE (spoken in English by R. Godin): When I began writing, Stravinsky had not yet influenced me, and neither of course had Schoenberg and Webern; but people like Poulenc, Milhaud, yes. Impressionism was my starting point, and modality, a modality a bit Faurésque in concept, if you like, very shifting.

When I returned to Boston with Nadia Boulanger, composers like Prokofiev were already beginning to affect me. His rapidly shifting tonality struck a responsive chord, and was already beginning to emerge in my writing. There's no longer any trace of it in what remains of my work, for about fifty works were destroyed; and when I say “destroyed”, I hope that nothing remains.

My first extant work dates from 1942. It's impressionistic, in part. Its title is *Églogues*, for contralto voice, flute and piano. It's partially impressionistic, yet beginning with the last of these three pieces, there is a definite sensation of a move to Neo-classicism, and the works that followed were neo-classical for a time.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Composers who worked in the Neo-classical idiom valued coolness and clarity. Not for them the hot-house emotions of Romanticism, or the dreamy vagueness of Impressionism. The most important proponents of Neo-classicism were Hindemith and Stravinsky. Their influence also extended to the Toronto composer John Weinzweig. Weinzweig was in many ways Papineau-Couture's counterpart in English-Canada. Weinzweig looks at Neo-classicism as a transitional phase in the development of new music.

JOHN WEINZWEIG: It was really about new music, with a higher dissonant flavour, but – but hadn't found its own form yet, and so – and so, relied on the classical forms. So that, new music still had to find its own form, which happened later on, but we were both Neo-classical composers, yes.

I mean, I wrote a piano sonata; I think Jean wrote a piano sonata. I was writing my *divertimenti* series for strings and a solo woodwind instrument; and he was composing a series of concertantes. I think he wrote five, but we were doing the same thing. We were dealing with rhythm. We were dealing with a higher degree of dissonance, but we were controlling it with the classical forms. That was a combination of new wine and old bottles.

EITAN CORNFIELD: The Hungarian-born composer Istvan Anhalt studied in Paris with Igor Stravinsky's son Sulima, and with Nadia Boulanger. When Anhalt emigrated to Canada in 1949, Boulanger provided him with a letter of introduction to her old friend and former pupil Jean Papineau-Couture. Anhalt and Papineau-Couture formed a close personal and professional relationship. Anhalt would go on to develop the composition program at McGill University, while Papineau-Couture did much the same at the Université de Montréal. Arriving as he had from one of the crucibles of modernism, Anhalt had an owls-eye perspective from which to judge the music of Jean Papineau-Couture. The first work he encountered was *Églogues*.

ISTVAN ANHALT: I thought it's – it was slightly conservative, coming from Paris, and I, by that time, I was very much interested in Schoenberg. I found his music well-made, a little mild, and a little cute, but well-done – no, not cute. That's – I take this word back – pleasant, a little bit on the pleasant side. There was no bite to it, so to say, but I – it took me a while to understand that the thought-world from which Papineau-Couture emerged, French Canada, a part of French Canada, which he very much identified with – I mean, he, as you know, his family settled in – on the island of Montréal in the 1640's, and the name "Papineau" is one of the great names in French-Canadian history.

So, in a way, what he gave expression to is this *recherché*, bucolic gentility – peacefulness – a playfulness, which is, I learned, years, years later, to identify as one of the strands of Quebecois culture.

EITAN CORNFIELD: While Papineau-Couture's cultural background may have made him especially receptive to the Neo-classical aesthetic, the Montreal composer and pianist Bruce Mather feels that Papineau-Couture continued to broaden his style over time.

BRUCE MATHER: He changed a great deal over the years, if you take pieces like *Psalms 150*, which was a '54, '55, something like that, which was very much a Stravinsky – I think it a magnificent piece, and I revisited all of this quite, quite recently, and I found the string quartets, the two string quartets really absolutely outstanding, but a work from like '73 or '74, the *Slano* string trio, which is – I don't know – marvellous it is, but light years away from his early works. He was constantly developing, and, of course, he didn't accept the new techniques. He didn't accept everything, but he's an example of a composer whose language did evolve a great deal.

JEAN PAPINEAU-COUTURE (spoken in English by R. Godin): It's difficult to say when I finally broke out of tonality, but I still remember when they were rehearsing the *Pièce concertante No. 5*, which I had written for the opening of the Place

des Arts. Pierre Mercure came to hear the rehearsal with me, and was following my score, and after the rehearsal, he said: “Bravo for your last chord, and now you’re off in a new direction.”

I believe he was right. In the 5 – *Pièce concertante*, and in other pieces, as well, I relinquished traditional forms. I had gradually relinquished tonality, and was rediscovering colour. For me, colour suddenly was becoming once more of a parameter of structure, and from then on, around 1964, ’65, there was certainly a main direction different from what had existed previously. It was a turning point.

I began to explore. I started with the piano, and I said, well, well, after all, that’s the instrument I know best, and I examined what I could do, if I decided to depart from the technique I had learned thus far. I abandoned the normal path with a piece called *Complémentarité* which was commissioned by the CBC, and was written for Jean-Paul Sévilla.

EITAN CORNFIELD: John Rea has followed Papineau-Couture’s music ever since he heard a 1959 Columbia LP with a performance of the *Pièce concertante No. 1*. Like Bruce Mather, Rea is impressed by Papineau-Couture’s restless creative energy.

JOHN REA: I was able to hear at least three manners. I really like to use this word, because it’s connected to the work of the artist. I saw three manners. I would say already that’s incredible, because for somebody to keep growing is to say that somebody is alive and someone is questioning and someone is doing something; so I saw three manners.

I saw the relatively youthful Neo-classical manner, filled with energy and filled with drive, which attracted me. I saw and heard that second manner, which was those pieces which were – I don’t want to say a funny word here. I would say they were a bit tortured. I mean, one senses that torture that’s involved in struggling with methods and substances, the materials of music, which showed that he was in a kind of maybe even a battle with himself, an artistic one, that brought him new challenges, and he had to try to resolve them in different ways; and the last period was this new manner which I found surprising, by saying that I found it to be lyrical.

Maybe that allowed him to re-examine his past or his first manner, or maybe even the manner that he destroyed, but there’s no question that the latter pieces are more cantabile.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Despite these different manners, John Beckwith hears the same concerns running throughout Papineau-Couture’s music. He is preoccupied with form and with clarity.

JOHN BECKWITH: And, like his mentor Stravinsky in early days, I guess, -- very selective in what he wants to do – he prunes the lower branches and he gives you a good view of a piece, you know. I remember he talked to me about that piece he was writing, *Clair-Obscure*, I think is the title, and it’s for – very unlikely – a commission that he had for contrabassoon, double bass and orchestra, and deep instruments -- “c’est un chose très grave,” he said to me, making a pun.

Well, that was typical, and I remember when I heard the piece, it’s a very selective and precise score, where he obviously took careful thought what you could express in those lower registers, with those very special instrumental colours, and what you needed for contrast, because *Clair-Obscure* can’t all be down in the lowest octave, or

we won't listen to it. I mean, it will just be turned off; but so, I mean, I think that was typical.

There's certain intervallic gestures which I think always came up, and I think composers always have this tendency that they – their ideas fall into the same interval patterns, and with Jean it usually was quite astringent interval patterns.

JEAN PAPINEAU-COUTURE (spoken in English by R. Godin): The way in which I select my instruments and group them, always indicates a concern for bringing out all the lines, and that means that each time I wrote things that were almost always contrapuntal in nature, but whenever I refined the work, it was to eliminate everything that would interfere with a clear perception of the line, with a precise definition, and that I owe to Gabriel Cusson and Nadia Boulanger.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Jean Papineau-Couture returned to Montreal from his studies with Nadia Boulanger in 1945. He immediately began a pedagogical career, which he pursued alongside his composing for the next four decades. He taught first at the Montréal Conservatoire. Then, he moved to the Université de Montréal. There, he fought to develop and maintain a music faculty, and ultimately became its dean. He also began a lifelong career as a musical activist. He started with the Music Teachers Association in Quebec. He was already championing the work of Quebecois composers in 1951, when John Weinzweig invited him to join the fledgling Canadian League of Composers.

JOHN WEINZWEIG: Jean phoned me when he got the invitation, and this is not generally known, but he phoned me, and wondered what this was all about. I tried to reassure him that the purpose of the League of Composers was to raise the status of composition in the country, and to work for the interests of composers, because nobody else was, because we didn't have the recording, you know, the publication industry here, and it was very difficult for composers who now are writing extended works to have them performed. That's what the League of Composers was all about. So, he didn't join at once. He waited a while. Sometime during that year, he did sign up.

JEAN PAPINEAU-COUTURE (spoken in English by R. Godin): The purpose of the Canadian League of Composers was to defend composers professionally. I was very active in it, and it led me, along with Pierre Mercure and Alexander Brott, to try to organize concerts of Canadian music in Montreal, and with the help of my wife, very effective help, I might add, we managed to organize a concert committee for the League of Composers in Montreal, which presented its first concert in 1953, I believe, and which slowly became an independent organization called the Société de musique canadienne. The results were disappointing, superficially, but in the long run, it did at least bring about the foundation of the Société de musique contemporaine du Québec.

NADIA PAPINEAU-COUTURE: He and mom used to share and try and find strategies, before strategic thinking in the world of music, I guess, was popular, and, plus, they weren't alone. Obviously, they both had the capacity of bringing together other people. In the case of the faculty of music, it was less obvious. In the case of the league, it was a lot more obvious. I mean, I can remember a bunch of composers at home, sitting on the floor, or whatever, after a concert, or just working on the next concert, and just discussing. I mean, there were a few of them, like, Clermont Pépin, Jean Vallerand, Pierre Mercure, and many others, obviously, but I mean, where was the kettle? Well, the kettle was boiling, I guess, pretty often, under our roof.

EITAN CORNFIELD: The kettle boiled under Jean and Isabelle’s roof for the League of Canadian Composers, and for the Société de musique canadienne. The Papineau-Coutures took an equally important pioneering role in the establishment of the Canadian Music Centre, and the Société de musique contemporaine du Québec, or SMCQ. Composer Gilles Tremblay was still a student when the League began to present concerts in Montreal, but he was often at the home of the Papineau-Coutures.

GILLES TREMBLAY: You know, we made – sometimes we called him “Pap-Cout”. It was shorter, instead of “Papineau-Couture”. It was a little too long to say; we called him Jean “Pap-Cout”. He organized, at a time, when it was very difficult, you know, to organize – he organized music of Canadian contemporary music, with orchestra. He organized it within the frame of the League of Composers, and, you know, I, at this time, I went at his home, and I knew Isabelle was a young mother, you know, but with all the – a few children making a lot of noise, and, you know, it was a young family, and you know what it is to have a family.

Sure, it’s a lot of work, but in spite of this, they were both of them completely devoted to make the very ordinary job of distributing papers, you know, of publicity, and I think this is very admirable. He was not, you know, an animator on the back of his desk, making the other people do it. He did it, a lot of things, himself, and it was a very good example, and I think it is still today a very good example of this very altruist generosity.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Gilles Tremblay was sixteen years old in 1948, when he began private studies with Jean Papineau-Couture.

GILLES TREMBLAY: He was teaching at the Conservatoire de Montréal at this time, and he had a class of advanced theory, and this was a very beginning of the conservatory, so it was at the – the conservatory was the same building that the Bibliothèque St-Sulpice at the time, which became now the Bibliothèque Nationale, and there was no room, so we had our classes in the couloir, you know, in the corridor, somewhere, but it was – it was very interesting. Whatever the décor was, it was very – for me, it was a discovery. I owe to him to have discovered the laws of acoustics, Pythagore, Zarlino, all these people.

All my music is marked by the natural acoustic, the progression of the natural harmonics, for instance. Pythagore used to say, “the music is the incarnation of numbers,” and so it’s struck my imagination, and for me, that I had the intimate conviction that the real harmony was just the natural resonance. All the rest is purely cultural, so it’s a kind of universal law.

JEAN PAPINEAU-COUTURE (spoken in English by R. Godin): Acoustics is the study of vibratory movements, all vibratory movements, of course, if you take the whole field of acoustics, but what I insist on is just musical acoustics, the study of the vibratory movements which cause sound, which is the actual phenomenon with which composers in general work. The composer confronting his responsibilities needs to know what sound is, what happens when sound is modified by this or that unusual means of sound production; what happens when two sounds meet and collide with each other, or marry, and when they arrive at the ear, which will itself transform the sound. He has to know all that.

JOHN BECKWITH: His point of view always was that if you don’t know acoustics, you don’t know where to start, as a composer. You’ve got to know sound.

You've got to know the physics of sound, and I think he got that across to me, because I didn't have that background. I had to pick it up out of books and out of contact with other specialists, after I took my degree and so on. I didn't have that, but he was convinced that that's something students should really have as one of their basics, and he taught that course at U of M, and I still speak with people who went through that course, and were very affected by it. I think that was an outstanding thing, the sort of stand that he took, you know.

JOHN REA: The study of music as an academic subject was an uncommon feature of university life. I suppose in general people thought – with some reason – that music is about performance, and therefore, should be most probably housed in conservatories.

Whereas, there was a model in which music as an academic study, which actually also included composition, but particularly musicology, ought to be placed in the university, but the struggle is always there, because within the complex family, which is the university, when you're sitting around the table, and you happen to be an administrator, you realize that your portion of the current cake, the current pie, is going to be a little bit smaller than your bigger brother there, who is in the faculty medicine, and – et cetera – faculty of engineering.

That struggle is a perpetual one. It will always continue to exist. If there is, I suppose, a faculty of music, today, still at the University of Montreal, I suppose it's due in some measure to his struggles.

NADIA PAPINEAU-COUTURE: I guess the administrative part of the faculty of music was a very big burden. It's a burden that he shared a lot with mom and with us at – when we had meals together. For instance, as I was a kid, I remember vividly year after year after year the existence of the faculty of music, being re-questioned by the board of governors at the University of Montreal, and I could remember that and Clément Morin who was the dean then, trying to find the best arguments, and dad coming back home, and bouncing ideas with mom on, okay, now, how would be the best way to convince all of these board members that a faculty of music is essential in a university?

EITAN CORNFIELD: Jean habitually relied on Isabelle's judgment, and she was the power behind the concert organizing committees. Theirs seems to have been the perfect marriage.

JEAN PAPINEAU-COUTURE (spoken in English by R. Godin): My life's dream was to have the wife I have, and to succeed in our life together, as we have. I think we've been remarkably successful, the two of us. We have the impression, with respect to each other, that our life together has been a great success, and there are quite a few who will vouch for that.

NADIA PAPINEAU-COUTURE: It was a couple that was very, very, very much in love. I can remember coming back from university. I wasn't a kid anymore. Like, I was in my early twenties, and finding mom and dad on the living room couch, just kissing, just having a good time. I guess it does set a reference, and a standard, and we are, I guess, quite lucky to have had the chance of having parents that were very much in love. There has been like a lot of love, but a lot of "complicité" I don't find an English equivalent for this word. I mean, it's part of reading one another's mind, sharing objectives, sharing a vision of life, wanting to make things happen together, but just not needing words, just to look or just a glance.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Nadia remembers building houses under the piano, with her brother and sister, while her father was composing. He had the ability to concentrate through all the mayhem. He may have seemed totally absorbed, but if one of the kids wanted his attention, they would just have to say “Jean” in a certain way, and dad would snap out of his composer’s trance. Nadia’s parents complemented one another. Isabelle was a student of history, a ballerina, and as joyful and outgoing as her husband was deep and introspective. Yet, recalling his old colleague, John Rea reminds us that Papineau-Couture was at heart a sharp-witted and funny man.

JOHN REA: He had a very clever sense of humour. He was also self-mocking. I always enjoyed it, because I was – I am still – a member of the artistic community of the SMCQ, and he was there, in the early years of the eighties, when I was there, for a number of years, and he had ways of using the French language that would twist the meanings, a kind of punster type of – and then, he would get – he would become very, very serious, when somebody had, let’s say, written a text for a – the minutes of a meeting or something like that.

He would be absolutely picky. He would say, you know, this word is not spelled correctly, and that word is an inversion with another word, and this is not the – he was like very, very meticulous, and of course, this always elicited laughter, because he would be mocked by the younger members, naturally, for being fuddy-duddy, or being the dean, you see, for being the dean.

It is said that people who are punsters often are good as composers. I’ve heard this before. Stravinsky was certainly a punster, and it has something to do with sound, of course, and double meaning, and music is always filled with double meaning.

GILLES TREMBLAY: You know, he was somebody who was thinking fast. You know, he was not a turtle, you know. He was more a rabbit than a turtle, and he liked always to play with words, you know, for the “jeu de mots, et puis” – you know, we had, you know, this teaching with him. It was almost a joke from the beginning to the end of the class, but we learned things through that, you know. It was not too serious, in the bad meaning of the – of the word. There was an expression, at the time of Rabelais: “Le gai savoir”. Le gai savoir is a joyous knowledge, so I think Papineau-Couture was a very joyous teacher.

ISTVAN ANHALT: Oh, Jean was a very lively man. He was very enthusiastic, very committed. Sometimes, I also had the feeling that he’s a bit opinionated.

EITAN CORNFIELD: About what kinds of things?

ISTVAN ANHALT: Well, as far as musical tastes, well, serial music was not – “I’m not interested in it” – he was violently against it, on principle or what grounds, I don’t know. It was a commitment which not only said, “well, I have nothing for that. I am not – it doesn’t interest me.” It was, “one should not be interested in that, and I don’t understand you, why you are interested in that.” So it was not only an exchange of information. It was a debate.

EITAN CORNFIELD: On occasion, the debate would become political.

JOHN WEINZWIEG: Well, Jean could be very angry. You know, he was really a strong nationalist in that he believed in the Quebec culture. He was a defender of the rights of the province of Quebec, I think. He could be touchy about anything that might suggest that – or some criticism about Quebec. So, I had to be careful, just what I stepped onto, you know, about certain subjects.

ISTVAN ANHALT: I have the feeling that Jean, with his name, with his family history, with his belonging to Quebec culture mainly, and only secondarily to Canadian culture, he identified with the Quebec point of view to such an extent that it came to be the primary, secondary and tertiary criteria in his political and cultural/political identity.

NADIA PAPINEAU-COUTURE: I will say that my father comes from a very concrete, historical family, that he believes in family roots and history. He is a fighter himself. There are fights that he believes in, and there are inequities that he believed should be destroyed, as well, and that there should be a better understanding of who we are, respectively.

When Canada says what does Quebec want, maybe if Canada would say, with a good intention of listening, as opposed to finding an immediate solution, and starting a conversation, as opposed to finding a solution, I guess things could be different, and I guess that's probably the view my father had; but that's a nationalistic or political view which didn't necessarily translate totally into the world of music, and that's maybe where some of his colleagues could feel that, yes, he was battling for the Canadian music scene, as a whole, not for Quebec's music solely, but for music in Canada.

GILLES TREMBLAY: He liked to provoke a situation of manifestation of life. Manifestation of other works, of other composers, and you know he was very nationalist, as people mention, but he worked with a fantastic collaboration with the composers from English Canada, with a great devotion. It was exactly the same, so it's – I think it's beautiful to be like that. You know, he had his opinion, but he was very, very open-minded, and he could have his opinion, and have his arms open at the same time.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Jean and Isabelle were so close to one another that they dreamed of dying at the same time; but it was not to be. Isabelle died unexpectedly -- thirteen years before her husband.

NADIA PAPINEAU-COUTURE: It was total devastation, and it's a very weak word, to describe what it was. My mother passed away suddenly. She had been hospitalized for something that was relatively minor, and she was coming home that day. I guess disbelief, "colère" – how would we say that: something from within oneself that is so powerful that there's the sense of being unable to do anything about it. I guess we were all in shock. Mom was everywhere in dad's life, in every little teeny, weeny place you could imagine. She was part of his life.

We often say "couples". They were a couple, one being the other, and vice versa, in a way. Yes, they had autonomy and they were also people by themselves, but that was devastating. It was like learning to live without the one who has been your permanent reference, and the one who you share things with, probably the only person that he shared all of his dreams with.

He did continue composing, I guess, because he knew that that was what was left for him to accomplish in life, and because I guess he also did it with Mom looking over his shoulder, not being there physically, but still being there. Yes, she was very present, even after she had passed away.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Papineau-Couture retired from the Université de Montréal in 1982. In failing health, and nursed by Nadia, his inquisitive mind continued to wrestle with the nature of music. A fascination with timbre was at the heart of his final works. In 1989, he composed *Les Arabesques d'Isabelle*, in memory of his late wife. He

said that he had been seduced into writing it by the sound of the clarinet and the English horn in their low registers; but, of course, there was much more to it than that.

JEAN PAPINEAU-COUTURE (spoken in English by R. Godin): I am a human being. My sensitivity is what moves me, and everything I do is programmed, I may even say motivated, by that sensitivity. It's our destiny. It's difficult to analyze, however, just as the content of a musical work is hard to analyze. If its content could be expressed in words, there wouldn't be any music, because words are much more precise than music; but that's what makes music so special. A work always remains enigmatic.

- transcribed by Mara Zibens