CANADIAN COMPOSERS PORTRAITS SERIES
HARRY FREEDMAN DOCUMENTARY

Produced by Eitan Cornfield

Transcription

EITAN CORNFIELD: In the summer of 1955, the members of the Canadian League of Composers gathered for a group photo outside their Toronto headquarters. John Weinzweig and Sam Dolin were there; so were the two Harry's: Harry Somers and Harry Freedman. Somers is tall. He looks bright and preppy. Standing just behind him, Freedman looks shorter, thicker, ready to go a few rounds. Like John Beckwith, Jean Papineau-Couture and a radiant Barbara Pentland, Freedman is sporting a smile. He looks confidant, even cocky.

They're all pioneers, banded together to tame a musical wilderness. The League's mission was to establish composition as a profession in Canada. In this, they succeeded, though twenty years ago, there were still only four or five composers in all of the country earning their livelihood from composition. Harry Freedman was one of them. The Toronto Star's music critic William Littler argues that Harry Freedman played a significant role in Canada's musical coming of age.

WILLIAM LITTLER: Harry, by his example, told us that composers matter. He really established more than anybody else I think the idea of the professional composer in Canada as being just that. You don't have to be a composer on the side. A composer is how you're defined, and everything he did in music really in the post-Toronto symphony years said "I'm a composer and that's the way I have to be accepted."

EITAN CORNFIELD: Harry Freedman has fought hard for respect, for his music and for his profession. He has set the country's standards for composition in almost every field of music, film, television, ballet, jazz, and the concert stage. He was one of a small handful of artists whose common objective was to give Canada a distinctive musical voice. It was a mission of cultural nationalism whose golden age coincided with the creative peak of Harry Freedman's career. The role of pioneer was no stretch for Freedman. His father and mother emigrated to western Canada in the twenties, to join his uncle in the fur business.

HARRY FREEDMAN: Both of them grew up in Europe. My mother was a nurse, and this was in Poland, in Lodz. After the war, there was a saying that for any Jew to be in the Polish army was like a death sentence, and my father was in the Polish army. He had I think about eight or nine brothers, all of whom were in Canada already. He was the last one in the family. Even his father and mother were in Canada, so we came in 1925, which was three years after I was born.

One of his brothers had gone to Medicine Hat and had opened a – he bought furs from the Indians, and my father went out there. We lived in Medicine Hat the first five

Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du ministère du Patrimoine canadien pour la traduction de ce documentaire.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the translation of this documentary.
© Canadian Music Centre / Centre de musique canadienne 2005, www.musiccentre.ca / www.centremusique.ca

years that we were in Canada. One of the first memories was going into my father's and my uncle's place, which was called the Winnipeg Hide and Fur Company, and seeing Indians there, smelling the raw furs stretched on these boards. One of the first girls I ever fell in love with, when I was all of six years old or seven or something, that was a little Indian girl who came in with her parents into my father's store, with these big black shiny eyes.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Harry's family moved to Winnipeg from Medicine Hat in 1931. By then, he had already discovered a talent for drawing.

HARRY FREEDMAN: Somehow, I became very interested in airplanes. You know, I guess it was about 1927, 1928, or so, and I began drawing them. As I became more and more interested in airplanes, I could draw any airplane that you named, particularly from the First World War, and then of course it just grew. It just grew and grew, and I began Saturday morning classes, first of all, at the art school, but later on, I went to night school three times a week, and I wanted to be a – I had to be – I mean, if you grow up in a Depression like that one was, you don't do anything except figure out how you're going to make a living.

I was offered a mathematics scholarship, and I thought to myself what – what in hell can I do with mathematics? I wanted to be an artist, so I said no thanks, and I went to art school, and worked in a drug store, to make a little bit of money. I remember when my sister was beginning to take music lessons, and I was so envious of her being able to play the Strauss waltz *Roses from the South*. It was an arrangement for two pianos, so you know so that the teacher could play along with the student, and she taught me how to play the second part on the piano. I can't even begin to tell you how – what – that left me with such a – I mean, we were very poor.

We were on – it was the Depression, and we were on relief, like most people, relief – welfare, and my mother borrowed the money from friends to pay for my sister's music lessons, so she certainly didn't have enough to pay for any music lessons for me, and I was studying at the art school. I was going to be a painter, a visual artist. Very shortly after that, I began to – well, of course, I was listening to the radio and listening to popular songs and so on, and then one day, I just heard – I heard -- there was a program called "Let's Dance" on Saturday nights, and one of the bands that was on that was the Benny Goodman band.

I can't even begin to describe it. It was like the whole world opened up. I had never heard anything like that. I had never felt that way about music. It was at that point that I began to lose interest in becoming an artist and becoming a musician, and it took me – it would have been about three years before I began studying music, because that happened I think when I was about fourteen, fifteen, and I began studying music when I was eighteen. I still don't know how I – how I knew at that time – it made the transition from visual art to music much easier, because I thought now this isn't getting me anywhere. This isn't what I want to do. I want to express myself in music.

That was – I didn't even have to say the words. It was just there. I wanted to be another Benny Goodman at that time, so on my eighteenth birthday, I bought myself a clarinet. I think I was paying five dollars a month or something like that, and I started taking music lessons, always though with the idea of writing music eventually, because by that time, I had also begun to realize, wow, Duke Ellington – somebody actually wrote those sounds. Wow!

Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du ministère du Patrimoine canadien pour la traduction de ce documentaire.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the translation of this documentary.
© Canadian Music Centre / Centre de musique canadienne 2005, www.musiccentre.ca / www.centremusique.ca

EITAN CORNFIELD: Freedman developed his own chops as a jazz man and dance band arranger with a group in the Royal Canadian Air Force. An attack of appendicitis prevented him from being shipped out with the first overseas band, and he ended up spending the war years in Ottawa playing clarinet with the Central Silver Band. He learned a lot along the way, but kept looking for an opportunity to formally study composition. He finally got his chance in 1945.

HARRY FREEDMAN: Actually, there were really only two – two people in all of Canada at that time who you could go to to learn about contemporary concert music, as opposed to jazz. John Weinzweig was one of them, and Claude Champagne in Montreal was the other one. Well, I didn't speak French at that time, so I decided I would go to Toronto. That was it.

EITAN CORNFIELD: John Weinzweig had been teaching composition at the Toronto Conservatory of Music since 1939. He had become accustomed to classrooms full of eager teenagers.

JOHN WEINZWEIG: This new generation of students that came out of military service were already in their early and middle twenties, so they were more mature. They had experience in music, and they had experienced life in the military, whatever, and they were eager to find a place in civilian life and to take advantage of the opportunities to learn, to study and advance their music, and that showed up in our lessons, and their enthusiasm changed the whole atmosphere of the conservatory for the next four or five years.

HARRY FREEDMAN: It was a great – a lot of fun, because John was not that much older than most of us. I think he was about maybe in this early thirties, and most of us were in our mid-twenties or so, so it was really more like having a friend – a colleague than a teacher.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Weinzweig prepared his students well. He stressed ear training and analysis, and did what he could to preserve their individuality. No two of his pupils turned out alike.

HARRY FREEDMAN: There's only one thing that you can learn from anyone else, and the best way to learn that, of course, is in a one on one situation, the kind of a master/apprentice relationship, and the only thing you can learn is your craft. After that, it's up to you. You either have something to say or you don't. I wanted to be a composer, and I was also studying oboe, because my intention was to do four years of oboe study, and I had been in the air force for four years, so I got four years of tuition, under the veterans' rehabilitation, and I wanted – I was going to do my four years there, and then I was going to go back to Winnipeg and play in the Winnipeg Symphony, but the second year that I was here in Toronto, there was an opening on English horn in the Toronto Symphony.

I had never played English horn before in my life, and I had my audition with Sir Ernest and Etore Mazzolini, and they rather liked the – I wasn't ready for – to play in a professional orchestra, but Sir Ernest was very good that way, and there I was, after one year of study, and I was playing in the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Well, it was hard. It was very hard. I mean, I remember the first time I played Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet, when the love theme comes in, in the violas, and English horn. Well I started in, and I don't remember the rest of it. I was so nervous. I was just so nervous – but anyway, I got through it, and then I walked home that night from the concert. I couldn't

Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du ministère du Patrimoine canadien pour la traduction de ce documentaire.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the translation of this documentary.
© Canadian Music Centre / Centre de musique canadienne 2005, www.musiccentre.ca / www.centremusique.ca

believe it. I just couldn't believe it that I was playing in the Toronto Symphony Orchestra after one year of study.

EITAN CORNFIELD: William Littler became the music critic of the Toronto Star in 1966. By that time, Harry Freedman had already been a member of the Toronto Symphony's winds for twenty years. It wasn't the orchestra's strongest section.

WILLIAM LITTLER: We referred to them as "ill winds that don't blow good". Our wind section wasn't our glory, and Harry was not one of the glories of the wind section. I would describe him as a journeyman player, and there were a lot of journeymen players in the orchestra then, that if they re-auditioned today, would simply not make the cut; so we have to look at him as a player in his time, and remember he was twenty odd years in the orchestra. He saw a lot of growth within that time, and the orchestra that he began with was certainly a less substantial ensemble than the one he ended with; so the orchestra grew up around him, as it did for many of his colleagues, and I think at the point at which he retired, it was appropriate for him to do so.

EITAN CORNFIELD: During the twenty-five years he was playing with the orchestra, Freedman kept developing as a composer. His last years with the orchestra were a struggle, but by this time, he had accomplished as a composer what he never could have done playing the English horn. He regarded those years in the orchestra as an invaluable lesson.

HARRY FREEDMAN: It was a great experience. It's – especially for a composer, because there is no book on orchestration that has ever been written, and it's – that comes anywhere close to sitting in the middle of an orchestra and hearing those sounds, and it stayed with me, because I never did study piano. I'm not a pianist. What I hear when I sit down is an orchestra. All the ideas come to me, all sort of fully clothed, so to speak. That came I'm sure directly from all those years that I spent in the orchestra.

EITAN CORNFIELD: His orchestral experience, along with the basic tools he had picked up in his years with John Weinzweig meant that Harry Freedman was perfectly equipped to search out his own voice as a composer. Under Weinzweig's guidance, he had absorbed the influences of the twentieth century's most important composers.

JOHN WEINZWEIG: I discovered in all my years of teaching that there was a basic need for the students to become aware of a sense of rhythm. That was a weakness, so I made my students aware of these two things. One is rhythm which is the life-blood of music, and the other is the ability to extend an idea over time, so that your composition has a sense of continuity, and so I brought to their attention the repertoire of Stravinsky, and of the newly discovered Bartók.

WILLIAM LITTLER: If you listen to the First Symphony, the echo of Béla Bartók is there, and there are other composers like Prokofiev and like Stravinsky, particularly, I think – of course, Stravinsky was a great rhythmic innovator, so naturally he would be interested in Stravinsky's music, so there were influences from elsewhere, and I think that he didn't try consciously to avoid all influences, but I think he took what he needed from what was in the past and what he had learned, and used it according to the needs of the occasion, so he wasn't a doctrinaire student of anybody, as far as I could tell.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Freedman seasoned the stew of Weinzweig, Bartók, and Stravinsky, with a generous helping of Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman and Stan

Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du ministère du Patrimoine canadien pour la traduction de ce documentaire.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the translation of this documentary.
© Canadian Music Centre / Centre de musique canadienne 2005, www.musiccentre.ca / www.centremusique.ca

Keaton. Whether or not you could hear it on the surface, there was a jazz sensibility at the heart of much of Freedman's music.

HARRY FREEDMAN: One writer who is working on a survey of my work – it's not really a biography—she has pointed out that you can find it if you look for it, but I use it rather apologetically. You know, it's – after all, it's classical music, and there's still that – in the early works, there's a little reluctance to use it, just for that reason, but at one point – and I can't remember where it was – I said, oh, to hell with it. This is my music. This is where I come from and I'm going to use it, period. There are little bits of melodic turns of phrase and so on that keep creeping in.

One of my favourite phrases is a rising fourth and a half one, like B, E, F. Well, those are the three notes, that if you take the F down an octave – I'm sorry if I'm being a little too technical about this, but it then becomes F, B and E. It's – there's a major seventh between those things. Well, those are the three upper notes of that famous jazz chord that you hear in Gershwin, for instance, all the time, which contains both the major and minor form of the third, and that's what gives it that jazzy feeling, because of the so-called blues third.

The very first work that I was really proud of starts off with that interval, a rising fourth and then a half-tone, in *Tableau*. The tone row occurs in the first bar, and then it's repeated in the second bar, and then it's developed a little bit, and then when the first melody in the very high strings comes in, that's what it is. It's a rising fourth and a half-tone. You'll find that in almost everything I've written in the past fifteen, twenty years. I just like the sound of it. That's the way I write music. I like the sound. I use it to express whatever it is I'm expressing, anger or joy or whatever.

That's what you do. I mean, that's the way I do it, anyway, when I'm planning a work. I think about, first of all, what is it going to be about? Where is – you know, and then I'm thinking what's it for? It's for an orchestra? Is it for a string orchestra? Is it for string quartet? Is it – you know, what is it for -- a choir? What can I do with it? And then, I start thinking about what sounds can this group make, and then, I don't know, the ideas start coming, and I just write them down quickly before I forget them.

EITAN CORNFIELD: In her five decades of marriage to the composer, Mary Morrison has become an astute observer of Freedman's creative impulse.

MARY MORRISON: He gets a commission, and he thinks about it a lot before he puts anything down. He even writes notes to himself about what he has been thinking or what direction things are going. I don't know that he always hears the exact notes until he starts to put them down. I think it's more of a direction – that's my feeling, anyway. He needs his own space, for sure, and he has to have absolute quiet. It's not easy when there are children around, animals, cats, and just neighbourhood noises.

Trying to find a balance, how to do all these things, is the biggest challenge for me, or was the biggest challenge for me. You know, the girls had their own interests, and they were all into music, as well. I mean, they all played instruments and sang, but they did the swimming and all the other things, so you had to be available to take them or be involved in some way in what they were about, so it was this continual balancing act. Sometimes you succeed; sometimes not at all. I think we all – we all felt that Harry should just be allowed to do his thing, which was to write. I think the girls would agree with me there.

Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du ministère du Patrimoine canadien pour la traduction de ce documentaire.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the translation of this documentary.
© Canadian Music Centre / Centre de musique canadienne 2005, www.musiccentre.ca / www.centremusique.ca

EITAN CORNFIELD: The relationship between Harry Freedman and Mary Morrison is a marriage on more than one level. Mary has at times been Harry's voice and Harry's ears, and by his own admission, she has taught him everything he knows about the human voice. They first met in the late forties, and didn't exactly hit it off, until a chance encounter a couple of years later.

MARY MORRISON: We were both at the Conservatory, but at that time, his opinion of singers wasn't too high. I think that's putting it mildly. He thought we were not the greatest musicians. Maybe we weren't. I don't know, but he just categorically thought that, so I don't think I formally met him then, although he was kind of a matinee idol for all the girls at the Conservatory and in the symphony. We were actually out on a double date. I think my date was Phil Nimmons, and I'm not sure who Harry's date was.

HARRY FREEDMAN: And, we went dancing out to the Palais Royale, and I don't know, I just thought, hey, I would like to take this Mary out, because we were dancing, and she was a very good dancer, and I was not bad, either. I loved dancing.

MARY MORRISON: Well, we had different ideas about dancing. I like it to be very smooth and have some elegance. He was more rhythmically inclined I would say. He won't like that, but I think it's true. I had had quite a lot of dancing in my past ---

HARRY FREEDMAN: So, our first date, we went to see a performance at the university ---

MARY MORRISON: --- and that week, I think he asked me out and we went ---

HARRY FREEDMAN: --- of *The Importance of Being Earnest.*

MARY MORRISON: I don't know if we went to a ballgame or ---

HARRY FREEDMAN: And, that was our first date, and it kept on. I think it was two or three years after we got married, Avram Galper commissioned me to write a piece for clarinet and piano and soprano, and it was a wordless piece, because it's just such a wonderful sound, a voice, without words, singing as if it were an instrument. The latest thing that I wrote for voice was a thing called *Spirit Song* which has words, but they're invented words. They're not – they don't mean anything. They're – at least, I don't think they do.

WILLIAM LITTLER: He's an interesting example of a theatre composer, in one sense, who hasn't written an opera, and you might have thought he would do, but in fact, he writes vocally using the voice as an instrument. He really – his thinking is instrumental, but he also seems to operate very comfortably in a theatrical situation, as a collaborative artist, in the dramatic activity within his orchestral textures even. There's – there's a lot of drama listening to Freedman.

EITAN CORNFIELD: That drama may not have found its way into opera, but Harry's dramatic gifts have reaped real rewards in the world of dance.

HARRY FREEDMAN: Well, most of the ballets I did were with Brian Macdonald. I think probably the happiest experience, for me, anyway, just as a composer, was the first one *Rose Latulippe*.

BRIAN MACDONALD: I think it was the first full-length Canadian ballet.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Brian Macdonald.

BRIAN MACDONALD: It was a commission from the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, and it was the first colour special that the CBC did for television, and it was the first

Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du ministère du Patrimoine canadien pour la traduction de ce documentaire.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the translation of this documentary.
© Canadian Music Centre / Centre de musique canadienne 2005, www.musiccentre.ca / www.centremusique.ca

effort to really find a Canadian theme that lay well for dance, which that legend is about dancing, so that kind of helped.

HARRY FREEDMAN: The great thing for me was that after it was all done, Brian came and he heard it played on a piano. Now, I don't play piano, and I got Bruce Mather who is a very dear friend in Montreal. He came – he was in Toronto, and I asked if he would come and play this – the score for Brian. Mary was home. She looked at – he was babysitting there with our first-born, so Mary looked after the baby, and Bruce came and played through the score for Brian.

MARY MORRISON: I'll never forget the look on Bruce's face when the session was over, because he said something like, "well, if ever anyone did to my music what I just did to your music, Harry, I would kill them,' but he's – you know, he's a remarkable pianist, and he could somehow get the gist of everything, so Brian went with it.

BRIAN MACDONALD: His music was ahead of its time in the sense that I'm not sure audiences were quite prepared for that treatment of French-Canadian legend. Where it was difficult for me – a lot of it was wonderful for me. The difficulties occurred when he would throw in, like Stravinsky, a bar of 3/16, and everybody loses the downbeat, and when you've got twenty-four dancers losing the downbeat or having to shuffle around and find it again – so I used to berate him, and say "don't you ever do that to me again," because it really is quite complicated.

WILLIAM LITTLER: His collaboration with Brian Macdonald is probably the single most important example of a composer and a choreographer working together in Canada, productively over a long period. That's something that dance has suffered, because most composers come in to do a one off thing. They don't know the choreographer well. They don't know the dancers well. They don't have a sense of what is required, and I think this ongoing relationship has been productive, not only for Freedman in that they gave him several good engagements musically. It also was very good for dance, because they wound up with a composer who got to know what was needed.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Harry Freedman and Brian Macdonald worked on seven ballets together. In 1973, they presented a brand new take on *Romeo and Juliet*. Both felt that because of its association with Prokofiev's famous score, the story had become too Russian. Harry decided to plant the story firmly back in its time and place, by scoring his music for Renaissance ensemble.

BRIAN MACDONALD: The balcony scene follows directly on the ball, and she comes out on this beautiful night – if you've ever been to Verona in the summertime, you know those Italian nights, and he arrives, caped, below, and Harry went to Mary's voice which was very beautiful, and it had just enough rise and fall and impulses in it to create a beautiful pas de deux.

The whole thing has to begin tentatively and become more passionate, and then as they realize that they have to part, "parting is such sweet sorrow," it has to die away, but not terminate, and he captured that very well. It really is transporting. It's really marvelous, and of course, it's one of the great love scenes ever written.

We loved doing that, and the story is that Mary went into the studio, had a look at the score, and read it at sight, and that was it. That's the recording we used, and Harry

Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du ministère du Patrimoine canadien pour la traduction de ce documentaire.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the translation of this documentary.
© Canadian Music Centre / Centre de musique canadienne 2005, www.musiccentre.ca / www.centremusique.ca

went back and took all the breathing out, so you never hear – the sound just floats effortlessly, and there's never an intake of breath. He was quite clever about that.

WILLIAM LITTLER: Choreographers have to have bodies moving, and bodies should move rhythmically if they're going to make a nice visual impression, and so you go to a composer who has a rhythmic sense, to begin with, and this is certainly true – I mean, *Oiseaux Exotiques*, I'm very sorry, dropped out of the ballet repertoire of the National Ballet of Canada, because some of those dancers really came alive through Freedman's music.

He used Venezuelan folk materials as part of his inspiration, and the dancers were dressed up, almost as though they had come out of the Copa Cabana Supper Club in Havana. It was just a terrific romp for them, and he was able to energize them in a way that very few composers have done that have written specifically for the National Ballet of Canada, so I think it was a liberating thing for them to dance Freedman, and that to me was an example of him really being able to rise to the choreographic challenges.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Harry's Freedman's command of his medium didn't come easily. Like all composers, he worked hard to find his own voice, and to perfect his craft. All the while, he had a full-time job in the Toronto Symphony's wind section. He could only dream of life as a full-time composer, until the flowering of the Canada Council in the years leading up to Canada's centennial.

HARRY FREEDMAN: Up to that point, there wasn't very much chance of earning your living as a composer, so I was still very much – like, in the late forties and early fifties, I was still very much learning my craft as a musician, learning how to play the English horn, and composition was a separate thing. It was always the most important thing, but you had to make a living. Most of my colleagues went into teaching. I became a musician. I supported myself. I supported myself as a composer by playing in the orchestra until the Canada Council was formed.

After that, performing organizations could apply to the Canada Council for money to commission, and I used to get a lot of commissions. As a matter of fact, towards 1967, our centennial year, there were many, many commissions around. I mean, I was so busy, and it was shortly after that that I left the orchestra, because even the years after the centennial year, there was still a lot of commissions around, and I was just loaded with commissions, so I thought, well, it looks as if it's going to continue, and I'm just going to quit, and write music, and make myself available for other things.

WILLIAM LITTLER: Leaving the Toronto Symphony was one of the best things that could have happened to him, as a composer, because it allowed him to put out his shingle as a professional composer. That was how he earned his living, and it was a rather shocking thought. Now, could he have lived it if he hadn't been in a two-income household, because his wife the soprano Mary Morrison also had a career and an income, so they could afford even to live in Rosedale, something mere music critics only dream of, but the point was, he could say "this is how I earn my money". He wasn't one of these university teachers who composed on the side. Composers of his generation in Canada usually had other affiliations, usually with a university or they were music administrators. They had another day job. Music writing was his day job.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Through the years, a constant theme keeps recurring in Freedman's compositions. It's obvious in his titles: *Tableau, Images*, *Graphic I*, *Klee Wick*, *Blue…Green… White*. It's as though part of him remains a visual artist. He

Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du ministère du Patrimoine canadien pour la traduction de ce documentaire.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the translation of this documentary.
© Canadian Music Centre / Centre de musique canadienne 2005, www.musiccentre.ca / www.centremusique.ca

certainly draws inspiration from the graphic world. It was a course set in his student days, when he first encountered Walt Disney's animated classic *Fantasia*.

HARRY FREEDMAN: It was in 1941. I had just been studying music for, I guess, just over a year, and of course, I was recently out of art school, but the whole art experience, visual art experience, was still very, very recent, so the combination of the two things in *Fantasia*, well, that first year, I saw that film about twelve times, and it left me with – with a very, very strong desire to do something like it, but not – not the way Disney did it. I was more interested, and always have been, in abstract art, because it's so much like music, but what is there about abstract art? It's line; it's colour; it's texture; and it's a mood.

WILLIAM LITTLER: A Freedman work almost invariably has a lot of energetic life in it. To resort to his visual background, he is a tone colourist, and he likes working with shapes. There is a lot going on.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Freedman's first mature work *Tableau*, from 1952, was an evocation of a painting of the Arctic landscape. In 1958, he composed his best-known orchestral composition *Image*. In the tradition of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, and Hindemith's symphony *Mathis Der Maler*. Harry set three of his favourite artists to music.

HARRY FREEDMAN: Three paintings, yes; one is this painting of Lawren Harris, and it's called *Lake and Mountains*; and then the middle Kazuo Nakamura's *Structure at Dusk*; and then, the third one was a Riopelle which was very, very unusual. The paint was very, very thick, as they usually are in his, but it was all in greens. It was such a lyrical painting, compared to most of his works, and that's – that's what struck me about it.

EITAN CORNFIELD: By the end of the fifties, the air was filled with the sounds of the post-Webern serial composers. Freedman plunged into that atonal world, but he anchored himself firmly with a strong visual reference.

HARRY FREEDMAN: By that time, that was in the sixties, and Mary and Bob Aitken and Bob's wife Marion had formed the Lyric Arts Trio, which traveled literally all over the world, including Japan, so on one of the trips, I asked her to bring me back a geisha. Well, [laughter] that was a joke, but I said if you can't find a geisha, bring me back a book of the Tokaido.

The Tokaido was the name of the road, and it means, in Japanese, the way facing the eastern ocean. It was the road from Kyoto to Tokyo, and of course, it was very slow, so there were these inns were created, about a day's journey apart, and there were 53 of them. Hiroshige made that trip, and he made a sketch as he went, for each of the stations, and later on, they became the woodcuts. This particular edition of the Tokaido had a poem that somehow related to each of the prints, so I just selected some of them, and collected them into four different things, actually. One was about nature. One was about love. One was about wine, and then the last one was a kind of a philosophical thing, and each of them had several of the poems that related to the subject.

It is the only piece that I wrote that is totally serial. It's twelve-tone, and totally serial. It's a good piece to listen to, I think, but it's the tail wagging the dog, you know. It's – when you're working with rows, with the 48 different versions of the row, and you have a particular, for instance, a particular musical contour in mind, you have to look through all the 48 rows to see if there's anything that comes anywhere close. I mean, it is

Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du ministère du Patrimoine canadien pour la traduction de ce documentaire.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the translation of this documentary.
© Canadian Music Centre / Centre de musique canadienne 2005, www.musiccentre.ca / www.centremusique.ca

so time-consuming and it's – it also proves to me that I didn't – I'm not a twelve-tone composer, and certainly not a serial composer.

EITAN CORNFIELD: But then, what kind of composer is he? How can you describe the character of his music? Brian Macdonald.

BRIAN MACDONALD: There's a certain sparseness or an angularity that I would recognize very quickly. With Harry, it's sometimes quirky and rhythmically exciting, rhythmically demanding. It can be quite astringent at times, which I like, although he does have a very, very lyrical side, which I think he's almost afraid to show sometimes; you know, it's not very modern to show that, but it's there, and it's wonderful when it comes out.

MARY MORRISON: I also hear very distinct cut-offs, like, a sort of sharpness to a descending line, "prr-ungh", and that's it, lots of complicated rhythms.

WILLIAM LITTLER: I think the thing that I've always been impressed by about him was his chameleon qualities, that he was equal to almost any compositional circumstance. He was, and is, a composer in the old sense. Before, they worried about the composer as artist. They were composers as craftsmen, and he is that. You give him a ballet to do; he'll do it. You give him a film to do; he'll do it. You have different styles; he can adapt to them, and I think that's because he has a very secure technique, and he also has a secure sense of himself, so he's not worried about making stylistic changes for the sake of the particular project. It will still come out "Freedman".

The fact that he had a quirky rhythmic sense, a lot of his music has a rhythmic profile that isn't all that predictable, and I think partly that is his jazz background, but it goes a long way beyond that, because as a jazz player and jazz admirer, he liked improvisation, so I think some of his music has a kind of flexibility in it, because the players themselves who are performing have been given more discretion than many players in many pieces, so that gives them a certain looseness. This I guess makes him in some ways a bit elusive. You can't say there is a big stamp of "Freedman". "Freedman" seeps through, but I think you have to hear a lot of Freedman before you know it's Freedman.

EITAN CORNFIELD: Fortunately, there's a lot of Freedman to hear. There's not a lot of it on compact disk, mind you, but enough to get the measure of the man. You could start with *Oiseaux Exotiques* and *Rose Latulippe*. You could dig the playing of Gerry Mulligan on the concerto Freedman wrote for him, and listen to collections of his vocal and orchestral music, but these few CD's represent only a tiny fraction of his output. What's more, he isn't being played anywhere nearly as much today as he was in the sixties and seventies; but Freedman hasn't allowed this relative neglect to discourage him. He did go through a bad patch for a while, but the well never ran dry. His resilience may well have its roots in his jazz background, or it may be something more fundamental.

MARY MORRISON: You know, it's a very strong habit that he has, and I once remember Yugi Takahashi, a Japanese pianist and composer, saying music for him was a habit, and he had to have it, and I think that applies to Harry, but now, a lot of things are out of the way, so maybe – maybe the path is clear.

HARRY FREEDMAN: I spent four years in the late eighties with an analyst, and it was a wonderful experience. Before then, everything was hard work. I'm not sure exactly how, but you know I developed a craft which enabled me to write very quickly,

Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du ministère du Patrimoine canadien pour la traduction de ce documentaire.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the translation of this documentary.
© Canadian Music Centre / Centre de musique canadienne 2005, www.musiccentre.ca / www.centremusique.ca

and yet I'm amazed that it's there, and yet it was hard. It was difficult developing that craft. Now, it's very easy. Now, there's – it's still there, I hope – I think it is. All I can say is that I'm –I'm very happy about everything that I've done since then. Everything is more comfortable now.

MARY MORRISON: Oh, there is a change. I think it's freer, wide-ranged, too. Maybe a good word would be he's more mellow.

EITAN CORNFIELD: But not so mellow that he's entirely without bitterness. William Littler:

WILLIAM LITTLER: He has wounds. He has wounds. I think he has like most of our substantial veteran composers, a legitimate grievance that he hasn't, over the years, been given the recognition that he really has merited, and that he has produced a substantial body of work that largely lies on a shelf, and that applies to others of his generation and earlier. I mean, from John Weinzweig through Harry Somers to him, and it applied to the west coast people, too; Jean Coulthard got more performances, because her music was more accessible, but anybody who tried to write challenging music was rewarded by a long shelf-life.

HARRY FREEDMAN: I'm one of the most celebrated of Canadian composers. That's what – that's the way I keep hearing myself being described by some of the younger composers, and as far as they're concerned, I guess that means that I can be put on the shelf and forgotten about. Fortunately, there are a few people who still believe that the older generation produced music that's worth hearing.

WILLIAM LITTLER: I think it's a great time to re-evaluate Freedman and the others of his generation who were leading composers then, because what was difficult then is not so difficult now. We've simply lived longer, and more dissonances entered the common musical language, and I think some of those pieces that our earlier listeners found very hard to take, our current listeners would find really very acceptable; and I don't want to sound patronizing in saying that, but in fact when people go to a concert, they still want to have a good time, and I think that a lot of these pieces that are currently being ignored have a real capacity to give them that good time.

\- *transcribed by Mara Zibens*

Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du ministère du Patrimoine canadien pour la traduction de ce documentaire.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the translation of this documentary.
© Canadian Music Centre / Centre de musique canadienne 2005, www.musiccentre.ca / www.centremusique.ca