

Ten Centuries in five seasons: the music comes first By John Beckwith

Senior concert-goers in Toronto will remember Ten Centuries Concerts, a musical venture which flourished for five seasons from October 1962 through April 1967. It achieved a fresh approach to concert-giving the like of which the city had not seen previously and really hasn't since. At its best – and the programs often reached a high professional level – the series offered unique juxtapositions of genres, styles, and periods of music, and enacted cross-referencings between them, and between music and other arts, including literature, film, drama, puppetry, and visual art. A member of the organizing committee throughout the series, I have lately browsed through the programs, recollecting the special flavor of those events of forty years ago – is it really *forty*?

In the 1960s, “arts administration” had not yet been invented. No university gave courses in it, and no young people seriously undertook it as a career. The Canada Council, less than a decade old, had enunciated no recipe for planning and fund-raising, concepts that arts organizations now take as their first concern. 10CC in fact benefited not at all from Canada Council aid, until its final season, when it successfully applied for funds to commission new pieces. The series never had an office or a paid secretary. It was run by a founding committee of musicians, whose members chose the programs, negotiated the artists, wrote the program notes, sold tickets, and staffed the house and the backstage. There was no official “board of directors.” “Shoestring” is the word that comes to mind.

The idea originated with R. Murray Schafer. An eager young composer just returned to Toronto after studies in Europe, he joined with four other composers – Harry Somers, Harry Freedman, Norman Symonds, and Gordon Delamont – to start actively planning a wide-open concert series. The group soon expanded to include the publisher Bailey Bird, the TSO principal horn Eugene Rittich, the husband-and-wife team of Diana and Tom Brown (she was a CBC music producer and he was a CBC publicist and a baritone with the Festival Singers), and another composer, namely me.

There were seven concerts each fall and winter, on the first Sunday of each month. The location was the Concert Hall of the Edward Johnson Building, home of the University of Toronto's faculty of music – later called Walter Hall, after the then-director of the faculty, Arnold Walter. Only two larger-scale events moved to the building's other auditorium, the MacMillan Theatre. The building was brand new that Fall of 1962, and the first 10CC event was in fact its inaugural concert, predating the faculty of music's own dedication concert by just a few days.

Schafer's colorful reminiscence of 10CC, written in 1978 and republished in his 1984 book *On Canadian Music*, recalls Dr Walter's doubts as to the possible success of such a series.¹ Walter certainly regarded the committee as a bunch of radical upstarts, recognizing Schafer as a notorious U of T drop-out but perhaps forgetting that I was a fairly well-behaved junior member of his own staff. The first crisis in relations came at the opening concert, when a percussionist placed a cymbal on the faculty's mint-condition concert Steinway, leaving a small scratch. Walter's fury was slow to subside.

The program of the opening event established the kinds of contrast that were to become the series' trademark, even though it consisted of works from only one century, the twentieth. Two works for percussion ensemble were interleaved with two violin-and-cello duos (their composers were respectively Mexican, French, U. S., and Canadian), and the evening ended with Dixieland jazz. Schafer says the audience continued to encore the jazz sextet until nearly midnight. He perhaps exaggerates; the program was a huge success, certainly.

The audience filled the hall. In fact the committee felt proud that, mainly through contact with friends, it managed to sell out the first season by subscription. The same happened in the second season. Subscriptions later fell off slightly, but attendance in the five-hundred-seat hall remained close to capacity.

One of the organizers' main principles was "the music comes first." Because the program items were unusual and unfamiliar, the program notes – often substantial

¹ R. Murray Schafer: *On Canadian music*, Bancroft, ON 1984: Arcana Editions, 21-35.

background essays – were prepared by committee members or specialist colleagues, and mailed to subscribers a week in advance of each concert. Expenses – rental of the hall, performers' fees, printing and mailing, a limited amount of paid promotion – were charged to the monies raised from subscriptions (the seven-concert series was offered for \$12 in its first three seasons, later raised to \$15). Performers enjoyed participating in offbeat repertoire, and often returned their fee. There may have been a few donations; there was never a fund drive.

The music came first. The parade of centuries promised in the series' name was, believe it or not, fulfilled. Troubadour songs and organum, the early music-drama *Aucassin et Nicolette*, Machaut's *Notre Dame Mass*, a selection of vocal pieces illustrating various Italian genres from 1300 to 1600, recitations by the poet George Johnston in Old and Middle English interspersed with contemporaneous music, excerpts from Purcell's *King Arthur*, Bach's *Musical Offering* contrasted with jazz pieces specially composed on its "royal" theme, classical guitar and mandolin works, psalmody by William Billings and other New England composers of the Revolutionary era, Schumann's *Kreisleriana* with spoken excerpts from the E.T.A. Hoffmann stories that inspired it (specially translated by Schafer), works by Erik Satie along with some of his witty writings and projections of the zany performance indications in the music. Ten centuries – count them, ten.

The music came first. Composers outnumbered others six-to-four on the original committee, and there was no prohibition of our own works. Quite the reverse: over the five seasons there were two pieces each by Beckwith, Schafer, Somers, and Symonds, three by Delamont, and four by Freedman. But if that sounds like self-promotion, the programs also list works by Anhalt, Weinzweig, McCauley, Joachim, Pentland, Behrens, Collier, Garant, Kasemets, and other Canadian contemporaries.

Given the series' name and mandate, there was also Canadian music from earlier centuries – a particularly innovative feature. Helmut Kallmann's *A History of music in Canada, 1534-1914*, published in 1960,² had revealed the unexpected extent of this

² Helmut Kallmann: *A History of music in Canada, 1534-1914*, Toronto 1960: University of Toronto Press.

repertoire, and the author was an active participant in 10CC's revivals. Examples were Anton Kotzwara's *The Siege of Quebec*, Joseph Quesnel's *Colas et Colinette*, and, in 1967, a centennial miscellany of songs and dance music specifically associated with Toronto. The Kotzwara, a late-eighteenth-century "program sonata" written as a sequel to his *succès-fou* called *The Siege of Prague*, was newly scored by Kallmann, Schafer, and me, and accompanied by projected subtitles and period pictures, in the manner of a silent film. The Quesnel (Montreal, 1790) is historically North America's first comic opera with original music. This attractive work had not been revived since the early 1800s, and the full score and orchestral parts no longer survived; a new restoration by Godfrey Ridout had its première under 10CC auspices, in concert form with spoken narration, and went on to a new life in publication, recording, and further performances.³

The "survey of Toronto's music, 1867-1967" was also illustrated with projections and a witty narrative, spoken by Harry Freedman. The mayor, William Dennison, was in attendance. The survey included a mix of serious compositions and musical ephemera, all locally produced. Major works excerpted were Humphrey Anger's impressionistic piano study *Tintamarre* (1911), the cantata *Gulnare* by Francesco D'Auria (1891), a piano suite by the teen-aged Colin McPhee (1916), and the String Quartet of Sir Ernest MacMillan (1921). Songs ranged from temperance (J. M. Whyte's "Toronto the good") through romantic sentiment (Edwin Gledhill's "Sighing for rest") and patriotic pride ("Toronto's Jubilee" composed by Theodore Martens for the half-centenary of the city's incorporation, the inevitable "Maple leaf for ever" by Alexander Muir), to local evocations ("Come to the

³ Joseph Quesnel: *Colas et Colinette*, reconstructed by Godfrey Ridout, Toronto 1974: Gordon V. Thompson Ltd. LP recording (12 excerpts), 1968: RCI 234. Schafer (op. cit., 33) says the recording was issued without acknowledgement of 10CC's initiative. This is incorrect: both the published score and the recording include a substantial essay by Helmut Kallmann on the history of the work, mentioning in detail the circumstances of 10CC's première.

vale of the beautiful Don,” “The Humber fairy” – her name was Mary –, “Take me to Toronto fair”). Dance music included George Strathy’s “National Lancers,” a “Rosedale three-step,” and a “Toronto Opera House galop,” and there was even an early commercial jingle: “We dye to live,” for Parker’s Dye Works, set to the tune of G. F. Root’s “Tramp, tramp, tramp.”

If that selection leaned on popular nostalgia, *current* popular musics were a category evidently excluded from programming – though I don’t recall whether there was ever any discussion about this. Three of the founding composer-activists (Delamont, Symonds, and Freedman) were associated with the jazz world, so there was a regular jazz component – new works, surveys of sub-genres (swing, Dixieland), or presentations centring around a particular solo instrument. While active Toronto ensembles in other spheres regularly performed for 10CC, for some reason the Phil Nimmons jazz ensemble never did. In retrospect I wonder why, because Nimmons was a personal friend of several of the committee members.⁴ A vivid memory among the surveys is a group of piano parodies (Waller, Tatum, Bill Evans, among others) brilliantly presented by Norm Amadio. Appearances in 1964 by the Paul Hoffert Jazz Quartet enhanced the early reputation of the future Lighthouse member, then still a U of T undergraduate.

The theatrical ventures included a team-created play by George Luscombe’s Toronto Workshop Productions called *The Mechanic*, with music composed by 10CC affiliates, and a mounting of Stravinsky’s *Histoire du soldat* with three well-known actors, Ron Hartmann as narrator, John Vernon as the soldier, and Hugh Webster as the Devil, the English translation of the Ramuz text being newly adapted by the director, Pamela Terry. A Manuel de Falla program, one of only two 10CC events concentrating on works by a single composer, featured his Harpsichord Concerto, the vocal ensemble work *Psyché*, and a staging of *El Retablo del Maese Pedro* by live performers and puppets. Among other

⁴ When asked, Nimmons said he had no explanation except that he and his fellow players were exceptionally busy in broadcasting and recording during that period. (Personal communication, 31 January 2006).

dramatic pieces, given in semi-staged form, were Bizet's *Djamileh*, Banchieri's *Il festino*, and Monteverdi's *Il ballo delle ingrate*.

Film was a tricky inclusion. Some ideas succeeded, others bombed. A engaging selection of short silent films was accompanied by live piano improvisations featuring a veteran of this art, Horace Lapp. The film world's cutting edge brought us Michael Snow's *New York Eye and Ear Control*. A minimalist ground-breaker, it has since earned venerated status in cinematic circles, but in the mid-1960s Toronto wasn't yet ready: many 10CC viewers walked out.

Another rare clinker roused not a walk-out, but, what was worse, unintended laughs. The metal sculptures of Gerald Gladstone were enjoying a certain vogue, and someone relayed to us that this artist had musical aspirations. Always open to the new, and aware that "sound sculpture" was being talked about elsewhere, we signed up to perform two or three new compositions combining a flute ensemble with a large Gladstone – a sphere of bronze about a metre in height, with punctuating holes and protruding spikes. The idea was that flute notes would resonate from the surface and interior of the sculpture and percussionists would create further noises by stroking and banging it. The percussion volunteers were Schafer, Mather, and myself. Aiming earnestly for some sort of effect, one of us – I believe it was Mather – broke the head off a mallet. But worse was to come. As Schafer tells the story, one of the flutists (Aitken) put both his instrument and his head in one of the holes, at which point the audience could no longer withhold its mirth, and all the performers broke up, with one exception – me.⁵ My memory is that no one inserted his head (the perforations weren't that large) and that, yes, I managed to retain my impassivity, having learned in early theatre classes that you don't break character in front of an audience, no matter what. The enterprise was badly misjudged from the start: our commitment included not only the acoustically unproductive metal object but a composition by the sculptor himself, which we saw only a day or two prior to the show, an embarrassingly amateurish work. In my memory this is 10CC's only absolute turkey.

⁵ Schafer, *Op. cit.*, 34.

On the other hand, the spectacular mixed-media “happening” *Trigon*, by Udo Kasemets, was enthusiastically received. It filled the stage with a simultaneity of vocal and instrumental sounds, readings, and instant visual art – drawings and wood sculptures taking form in tandem with the audio elements. Its real inventiveness and verve typified the avant-garde events Kasemets was just starting to organize with his Isaacs Gallery ensemble.

In retrospect, I think it was not the wide-ranging repertoire so much as the juxtaposing of vastly different program segments that became the 10CC trademark. The series logo, varied season by season and designed by Dennis R. Mason, Peter Dorn, and other professional typographers, depicted a large Roman-numeral “X” with the top half in a historic type-face and the lower half in a more contemporary one, symbolizing the music’s opposition of eras. One concert offered in succession the slide-illustrated Kotzwara novelty from the late eighteenth century, the Machaut mass from the fourteenth, and the Purcell-Dryden masque from the late seventeenth – a teaser and two monuments, all in different styles. The *Histoire du soldat* production shared an evening with a reconstruction by the musicologist Terence Bailey of one of the medieval *Quem queritis* liturgical plays. The English poetry-and-music cycle was embedded along with a pair of mandolin quartets from early-nineteenth-century Austria among a varied group of works for brass and percussion by Gabrieli, Purcell, and Ives. Preceding *Trigon* was a presentation of Indian ragas, apparently the only non-Western inclusion in the series. Following the Satie extravaganza was a sampling of Third Stream. If “the music comes first” was principle no. 1, contrast was no. 2.

The original committee remained in charge for two seasons. In 1964-5 there were changes and additions. Eugene Rittich and Tom Brown both resigned, the former in protest at the sexual content of the text in a Schafer composition (it was mild by 2006 standards), and the latter for unclear reasons; both continued to participate in performances when asked. Of seven new members joining the committee, all but one were composers; the exception was the TSO bassist Ruth Budd. Three of the composers were also known in other capacities – Robert Aitken as a flutist and at that time also a TSO member, Howard

Cable as a conductor, and Keith Bissell as a music educator. The others were Gustav Ciamaga, who had returned to Toronto after graduate music studies in the U. S.; Norma Beecroft, returning after studies in Europe; and Bruce Mather, a doctoral candidate at the U of T and after that a faculty member. Schafer continued in an advisory capacity, having meanwhile left Toronto for academic positions, first in St John's and then in Vancouver. The composer/non-composer ratio in the committee now stood at 12:3.

The main change of pattern observable in the programs from the first season to the last lies in the choice of twentieth-century repertoire. The earlier programs focus on modern classics – Webern's String Trio, Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, the *Octandre* of Varèse, Milhaud's *Machines agricoles*, Stravinsky's *Balmont songs* and *Japanese lyrics*, as well as the *Histoire* already mentioned. Later concerts link with the more current European avant-garde – works by Boulez and Berio, for example. The only one-composer show besides the Falla program was a special Stockhausen concert featuring the composer and fellow guests David Tudor and Max Neuhaus. The discernable trend foretells the emergence a few years later of New Music Concerts, of which Beecroft was the founding administrator and Aitken was, and still is, artistic director.

The list of performers and performing ensembles yields a picture of 10CC as a microcosm of professional music-making in Toronto in its period. The Festival Singers of Toronto (not yet "of Canada"), conducted by Elmer Iseler, performed in each of the five seasons, as did also the Toronto Woodwind Quintet; there were several appearances by Rowland Pack, Hugh Orr, Hans Kohlund, Wolfgang Grunsky, Greta Kraus, and other early-music proponents of the time; the conductors Victor Feldbrill, Howard Cable, and Mario Bernardi undertook special assignments; most frequently engaged among the soloists were the singers Mary Morrison, Patricia Rideout, Geneviève Perreault, Albert Greer, and Maurice Brown and the instrumentalists Stanley McCartney, Donald Whitton, Robert Aitken, Eugene Rittich, Bernard Piltch, and Vair Capper. Liaison with music programs of the Toronto-area schools was reinforced by appearances of outstanding school ensembles on two or three of the programs; on one occasion a U of T choir shared the stage with a visiting choir from the University of British Columbia. But non-Torontonian performers

appeared rarely. The UBC singers are one example, the cast of the Stockhausen concert are another; the only others were the Montreal Consort of Ancient Instruments led by Otto Joachim, and, also from Montreal, the Petit ensemble vocal led by George Little. The series thrived almost entirely on *local* artistic resources.

In the summer of 1967, 10CC presented four special programs in Montreal, at the Canadian Pavilion of Expo. This was the organization's swan-song: it had announced in April that the subscription series would not continue. The notice, unsigned, read:

We must announce, regretfully, that the Ten Centuries Concerts series is to be discontinued for next season. We extend the most sincere thanks to our subscribers and patrons and we hope that the concerts over the last five years have brought you pleasure. For us, the venture has been a continuously rewarding experience, and we hope to be with you again in the future.⁶

The Expo concerts continued the "mixture" approach familiar from the Toronto series, and included repeat performances of Amadio's jazz piano survey and the centennial survey of Toronto's music. One program placed renaissance and baroque recorder pieces alongside a group of Jacobean "ayres," and ended with a song cycle by Turina. Another consisted of three brand new Canadian works – Harry Somers' *Evocations*, Bruce Mather's Piano Fantasy, and my radio collage *The Line across* – with the composers as keyboardists.

In 1970 there was a further spurt of Toronto activity in the St Lawrence Centre's Town Hall (now the Jane Mallett Theatre). The three programs (15 March, 26 April, and 31 May) constituted a brief revival for 10CC – temporary, as it turned out. Satie's *Socrate*; more renaissance recorder music; a ragtime survey featuring the pianist John Arpin; Schumann's Andante and Variations, in the original version for two pianos, two cellos, and horn; and a realization of a fourteenth-century "rota" (round) discovered by the musicologist Robert Falck were among the highlights. There was a strong input of new music from

⁶ Ten Centuries Concerts, program for 16 April 1967.

Europe by Goeyvaerts, Pousseur, and Berio (his *Sequenza* for solo trombone, memorably done by Eugene Watts), from the U. S. by Edwin London and (Canadian-born) Sydney Hodkinson, and from Canada by Surdin and Freedman (his *Toccata* for voice and flute).

That was the end of the road. Other more specialized series were by then dissipating any remaining audience appeal for the 10CC format. Aside from that aspect, the committee's frank reasons for closing down were that its members a) no longer felt they could give the same energy to the project and b) resisted turning its administration over to a board. As one program note observed,

During Centennial Year those composers and instrumentalists, who took part in and administered the Ten Centuries series, became actively involved with many musical events of [the] Centennial and the complex administration and fund raising of the Ten Centuries Concerts became too heavy a load.⁷

Our creative ideas sometimes failed (though not often), and our early-music restorations were sometimes impulsive rather than informed, by today's performance-practice standards. But the series, with its brief, vivid streak across the Toronto musical scene, clearly stimulated musical activities in a number of significant new directions.

John Beckwith.

NOTE

This article is an expansion of an earlier version, published in the Women's Musical Club of Toronto's *News and Notes*, no. 33, January 2006, 3-5. Robert Aitken, Norma Beecroft, Udo Kasemets, and Patricia Rideout kindly helped in verifying details. The files of Ten

⁷ Ten Centuries Concerts, program, 26 April, 1970. This is a rare reference to "fund raising" among the committee's announcements.

Centuries Concerts form part of the Norma Beecroft Fonds, Special Collections (Richard Johnston Archive), in the University of Calgary library. I am grateful to Marlys Chevrefils for locating several items. The Faculty of Music library, University of Toronto, has a complete set of the 10CC programs and program notes, along with finding lists of repertoire and performers. There is also a set of programs, almost complete, in the Toronto Public Reference Library's concert-program collection. *J.B.*