



HARRY FREEDMAN 1922 - 2005

An Appreciation

Larry Lake, the host of CBC's "Two New Hours," a weekly radio program devoted to coteremporary classical music, called Harry Freedman "a great composer," Harry has also been referred to as this nation's "most Canadian composer." Ironically, Harry was not born in this country. He was born in Poland, where he lived until the age of three when his parents immigrated to Medicine Hat, Alberta.

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Harry has given us a vast array of over 200 compositions ranging from solo voice to choir, from full orchestral symphonies to string, wind and brass ensembles, from theatre to dance stage and from film to television programs.

His works have been performed across Canada and around the world. Much of his music celebrates the breadth and magnificence of the Canadian landscape, a musical analogue to Canada's visual artists. As well, Harry has written compositions celebrating such famous Canadians as Terry Fox, Margaret Laurence, Harold Town and fellow composer Harry Somers.

Harry's love of Canada was intense and purposeful. He spent his formative years in Medicine Hat where he observed the condition of native peoples, and he resolved to devote time and energy to furthering social justice for Canada's First Nations. Winnipeg was home for his teenage years during the Great Depression. Harry never forgot the pain and suffering that economic dislocation brings to innocent people, including members of his own family, and he has actively supported agencies concerned with poverty in Canada and elsewhere.

Long before environmental movement came into the Canadian consciousness, Harry campaigned for the preservation of our lakes and rivers and fought for reduced levels of noise pollution. He had very strong feelings about the intrusion of ambient music (in elevators, restaurants, airplanes, for example), which demeans and trivializes both music creation and performance. He was anxious to enhance the value of silence in our industrialized society.

He was also an ardent critic of the flawed Canadian electoral system, which is not based on representation by population. Over time, FairVote Canada came to represent his views. Always protective and proud of the uniqueness of Canadian culture, Harry steadfastly rejected the incursion of any American influence that would weaken our multicultural values.

Not content to confine his beliefs to Canada alone, Harry maintained an international focus as well. He lobbied federal ministers in successive governments to give strong support for the United Nations, believing that it is society's best chance to provide for a peaceful world where social justice prevails.

Harry was also dedicated to using music in an education forum to promote his vision of society. In the 60s and 70s he spent many months each year teaching in the elementary and secondary classrooms of Ontario. His 25 years as the Toronto Symphony's English Horn virtuoso coupled with his faith in young people gave him a unique perspective. As an impassioned communicator, he was able to pass on his love of music by teaching children and adolescents how to listen, hear, play and create music. Harry never lost faith in the natural inquisitiveness of youth. Curiosity provides an appreciation of music as a universal language and strategy to shape the world.

On a personal level, Harry was always very proud of the accomplishments of Mary Morrison, his spouse of 54 years. Mary was a glorious soprano who dominated Canada's concert and opera stages, including performances for radio and television. Indeed, some of his most popular works were written specifically for Mary's voice. His legacy continues through one of his three daughters. Harry has written several works for Lori Freedman, an internationally acclaimed creative musician (bass clarinet) in her own right.

These artistic, educational, political and personal roots were the context that anchored Harry's 60 year professional career. In all his musical endeavours, Harry was a composer guided by the belief that all cultures should espouse the finest aspirations of all people. Canadians are fortunate that Harry left such a wealth of musical expression. Whether one listens to "Tableau," "Tangents," "Touchings," "Rose Latulippe," "Oiseau Exotiques" or the haunting call of the loon in "Keewaydin," Canadians now and in the future will experience Harry's sense of national community and heritage.

Harry Freedman received many honours. He is an Officer of the Order of Canada, he received a Canadian Film Award (Etrog) in 1970, and was proclaimed Composer of the Year by the Canadian Music Council in 1979. He will be most remembered, however, for his intense convictions framed by a freespirted laugh and a radiant smile. Harry Freedman is and forever will be a piece of the Canadian mosaic and a part of everyone who experienced him.

Walter Pitman has just completed a biography, "Music Makers: The Lives of Harry Freedman and Mary Morrison to be published by Dundurn Press in the next few months.