

CANADIAN YOUTH

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ON A DAY when the world, and central Europe in particular, was already feeling the envenomed edge of race slogans soon to be flung at its victims, a prominent musician wrote in a Viennese paper: "*Blut wird zu Gedanken und Gedanken werden zu Blut.*"

The turmoil of today, the migration of races and cultures, our own daily contact with "mixed" nations, give us efficient instruments for testing such ideas. And nowhere better than in the Americas. Inter-racial contacts here, fresh and far-reaching, invite such a test.

This writer recently had a valuable opportunity to observe the younger music of Canada at close quarters. A summing up of the esthetic lesson – the moral one, too – of his view of these works, would run something like this. Yes, young Canadian music does range itself along the blood veins of the nation. In this music we perceive a reflection of racial layers. of the old Anglo-Celtic and Franco-Canadian stock on which are superimposed new ingredients. Music that stems from the older Canadian stock has a decided firmness of line and bears traditional tonal traces as to form and melos, whereas creative elements that derive from newer stock, are fluent, changeable, more responsive to the radical voices of present-day harmony and rhythm.

Well, and what of it? All of these forces live together, not at war with themselves or in resentment, but in a sort of mutual cultural deference and creative adjustment. And here is America for you: a Ridout in the same group as Weinzweig, and a Brott in the same circle as a Gratton. However, I do not mean to stir up the rigmarole of racist theology. The backdrop is lifted here only for a moment – to give us a glimpse of the whole.

Of the two main centers of Canadian creative art, Toronto, the cosmopolis of business and of the more recent Canadian settlers, is naturally more open to progressive musical tendencies than traditionalist and somewhat cloistered Montreal. The gifted young trio of outstanding Toronto composers, Godfrey Ridout, Louis Applebaum and John J. Weinzweig, were

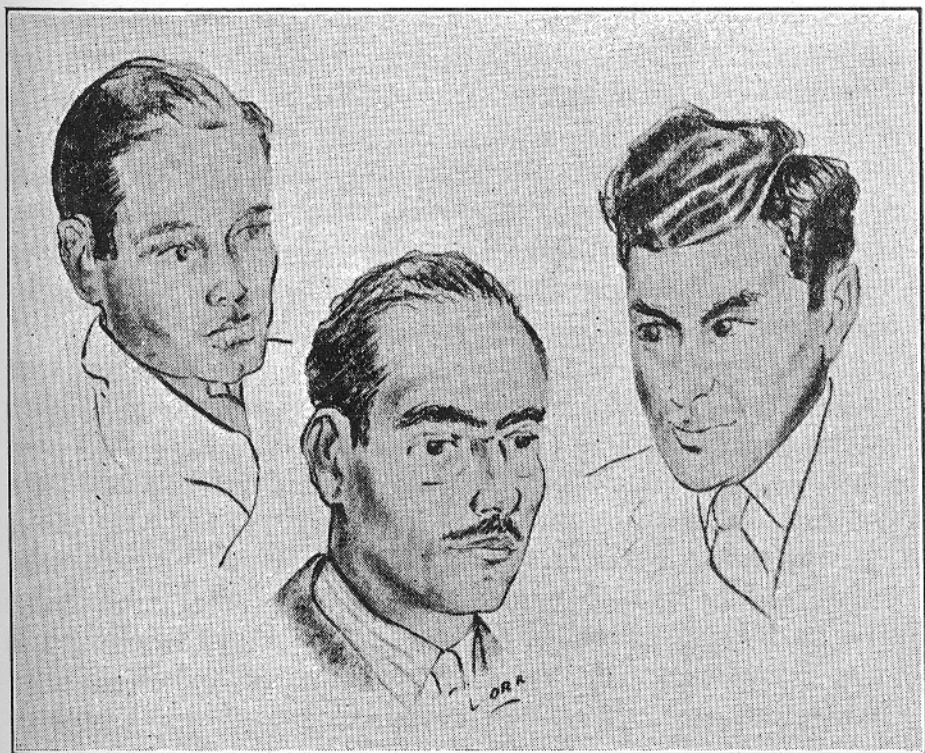
all born in Toronto, musically reared in its excellent Conservatory under Ernest MacMillan and Healy Willan. After post-graduate work in the United States they all have returned to their native city - to compose and teach at their alma mater. It is important to point *en passant* to the admirable policy of Sir Ernest MacMillan, director of the Conservatory, a brilliant musician himself, conductor, composer, author of excellent choral arrangements of Canadian folksongs - the policy of immediately utilizing young talent while it is keen and enthusiastic and craves an outlet for its fresh spirit.

Ridout's works, all of them already performed, include an orchestral *Festal Overture* (to be introduced in the United States by the Cincinnati Symphony under Goossens), a *Ballade* for viola and orchestra given by the Toronto Symphony and our NBC orchestra, a *Concerto* for violin and orchestra, songs for oboe and soprano, pieces for string quartet, and others. Of the attractive oboe-soprano songs, the first, *Virginia*, is outstanding in its delicacy of mood and transparency of tonal texture. The *Festal Overture* is more stringent harmonically but has the same clarity of thematic backbone as the songs.

Louis Applebaum, youngest of the group, is author of a *Dance* for orchestra, two string quartets, a piano sonatina and songs. In the opening movement of his best work so far, the *Second Quartet*, we find this very fine creative talent still in the prison of atonal thought, but there is something keenly his own in both the emotion and the thematic curve. The lively second movement of the quartet is fresh, individual, spurred on by an attractive rhythmic energy. Of his songs, the subtle *Cynara* and the humorous one are the best.

The most mature of this group is John J. Weinzwieg, a leader of the radical wing in Canada's music. He has studied the ways of modern art more intensively than anyone else there. Of his numerous works - among them two string quartets, a symphony, a suite for orchestra and *Spectre* for strings and percussion, the last three premiered in Toronto under MacMillan and S. Hersenhoren, director of the Canadian Broadcasting Orchestra, and in Rochester under Howard Hanson - the symphony is both the most monumental and the most expressive.

There is a kind of lyric and emotional complexity in this symphony. The opening movement with its stark polyphony is decidedly Schönbergian, but it contains emotional turns and a definite force of clearly personal nature. At times Weinzwieg's music is crystallized into a very individual



GODFREY RIDOUT

JOHN J. WEINZWEIG

LOUIS APPLEBAUM

YOUNG MEN OF TORONTO

A drawing by

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ensemble, such as the *Tempo Secondo* passage with its low oboe theme counterposed by the grotesque, obstinate pizzicati. Sturdiness of thematic stem is the earmark of the symphony's Adagio, yet its polyphony seems strained. Another shortcoming of the texture is an overdose of ostinato that at times makes the music rather stagnant. One could say it is passacaglia-ridden. As to the orchestra, its detailed writing is contrasted by too little counterweight of the *tutti*; these are too few for the force of the basic statements.

In one of Weinzweig's best pieces, a suite for piano, it is curious to see how from tenacious and somewhat doctrinaire lines a discreetly ardent emotion arises – in the *Walzling*, for instance. There is more inner kinship with Schönberg and Alban Berg in this music than in the fanatically atonal symphony.

But, for all his anti-traditionalism, Weinzweig has not escaped from the grip of that something which the very woods and rivers of Canada breathe, the Indian melos. He has made use of it in his *Tale of Tuomotu* and in the music for the film *Mackenzie River*, a picture of life in the Canadian Northwest.

Turning now to the young group in Montreal we find three out of four of old French Canadian stock. They are ranged on the traditionalist side. Of these, André Mathieu is a small boy, Maurice Blackburn still in the throes of a literary nationalism, and Hector Gratton at the cross-ways, looking with equal anxiety toward either clearing, folk melos or the new music.

Of André Mathieu, the wonder of Canada, the eleven-year-old composer and pianist who played his concerto under Beecham, Jacques de la Presle, his Paris mentor and well-known composer, has said that he moves in the various spheres of composition like a fish in water. His high intelligence, the swiftness of his mental and creative progress and his versatility are indeed prodigious. He gave his first piano recital in Montreal in 1935 when he was five years old; he composed his *Trois études* at four, *Danse sauvage* at six, *Berceuse* at nine. His latest pieces *Premier recital* and *Trois pièces pittoresques* are naturally derivative and reminiscent but their boyish ardor and engaging directness have a touch of the unusual.

Maurice Blackburn is, despite his name, pure Franco-Canadian. His orchestral poems *Les Murs du vieux Quebec* and *Fantaisie en mocasins*, were successfully given in both Montreal and Toronto (again, under the indefatigable MacMillan). These still show the strong influence of Canadian folksong, the naive early stage of musical nationalism.

With Hector Gratton, descendant of a seventeenth century Quebec family of Breton-Scottish ancestry, we come upon a very interesting and illuminating case. Here is the clear struggle between a racially creative instinct and an allegiance to new musical thought. Of Gratton's works, already extensively performed in London, Paris and throughout Canada, the *Danses canadiennes* and particularly the orchestral *Légende* are marked by a definite Franco-Canadian folk flavor. But while this music is at times almost birdlike and given to watercolors of simple hue, Gratton's thought does often harden into something beyond that peculiar Canadian impressionism.

The other young man of Montreal, Alexander Brott, and Barbara Pentland of Winnipeg, bring us again to a world of sharper modernity. A graduate of the McGill Conservatory, Brott also studied in the United States, where he was obviously affected by our up-to-dateness, and now teaches orchestration and history of the instruments at McGill. His *Oracle* for orchestra written a few years ago and given by the Montreal Symphony, is somewhat facile and naively direct in both its thematics and its grotesquerie, but there is enough fresh young juice in this music to make it attractive. Brott's *Hasidic Dance* for violin is not folkloristic. True, it is somewhat derivative, but the uncommon treatment of a modal motive takes the music far away from a rather familiar base.

From the limitless prairies of Manitoba and Saskatchewan have come two gifted musicians, Barbara Pentland of Winnipeg and Robert Fleming of Saskatoon. Miss Pentland seems to be the only case of a Canadian creative musician who comes of a long line of Canadian ancestors and is unmoved by the traditionalist vista. She is of radical tonal temper, and her interesting *Piano Quartet*, music of sharp harmonies and vigorous dynamics, marks her for the red camp. She has already written *Lament* and *Holiday Suite* for orchestra, a ballet *Beauty and the Beast* and music for various radio dramas.

Robert Fleming, though still very young, is the author of numerous piano and vocal pieces. *Northern Lights* from the *Three Preludes* has appealing grace and delicacy. Fleming is also an outstanding pianist.

A review of young Canadian music, even a *vol d'oiseau* such as this, leads to the same conclusion as would any survey of new European music. There are two kinds of radicalism in music today: one organic, consequential, issue of a long tonal refining process, such as Schönberg's; the other—a radicalism of the new sons easily dazzled by fireworks seen from afar. But it is the first that really holds the marrow of new tonal thought.