

Here Today, Canada Tomorrow

By Kyle Gann

Tim Brady

I have heard the future of Western music, and it is Canada. For that matter, the future of everything here may be Canada, what with the U.S. economy's swirl down the toilet, Desert Storm, Justice Thomas, Zappa's cancer, Magic's virus, and the greenhouse effect inexorably warming Saskatchewan into a quasitropical paradise. Like Europe, Canada believes in paying artists, and even in recession their arts budget cuts are larger than U.S. arts budgets. Partly as a result, Canadians have a new-music magazine, *Musicworks*, more informative and professional than New York's currently defunct *EAR* dreamed of being. (*Musicworks*, 1087 Queen Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6J 1H3.) There are reasons New Music America slinked off to Montreal to die. You probably will too.

As Canada emerges from its traditional introversion (Robertson Davies: "Canada is an introverted country straining like hell to behave like an extravert"), we hear its new music more, and its vigor is always impressive. Canadian composers have the best of two worlds. On one hand, they (like the Mexicans) learn their craft in Europe rather than in the States. Consequently, Canadian music breathes culture, whereas U.S. music has breathed physics since Henry Cowell (or, alternatively, set theory since Milton Babbitt).



LONA FOOTE

How do we explain this guy?

On the other hand, Canadians have in their midst no towering authority figures of the kind that have stifled Europe's latest generation. They are free to learn from Boulez without becoming obligated to, or overawed by, him. (That's not to say that they don't have their own undiscovered greats like Hugh Le Caine and R. Murray Schafer.) To coin a cliché, we have freedom, Europeans have training, Canadians have both.

Which partially explains Tim Brady, the Montreal composer who deluged Roulette with music November 8. Brady, an inventive guitarist, soloed in four out of five works, backed by his Bradyworks ensemble on their first United States tour. The farther he got from the guitar, though, the more interesting his music became, for

like composing virtuosos of all eras, his self-played essays stayed too close to the instrument. He knows hundreds of thrilling guitar effects and used most of them in incoherent succession in a piece called *Imaginary Guitars*. The ensemble works were better.

They were based on a postminimal tic popular in Canada: a pattern idiom in which figures repeat but develop nonlinearly, in abrupt stages. Ten years ago that feature pointed back to Stravinsky. (If you're looking to justify postminimalism via European roots, old Igor makes a natural role model.) Today those patterns stem unabashedly from Steve Reich, while Brady's harmonic sense sounded more jazz than Old World. In *Changes* for piano and percussion, discontinuous patterns and

jazz licks collaborated in a tour de force. Bradyworks' dynamite pianist, Louise-Andrée Baril, and equally explosive mallet player, Marie Josée Simard, took off slowly with mystical tremolos, then burst into additive chord progressions and ripped out hectic lines in virtuosic unison. At last their hairpin lines went out of phase, erupting in the piano as they simmered in the marimba, and vice versa.

... of *Julie's Dance*... was a more engaging guitar solo, limiting itself to trill and tremolos, each dying off in electronic delay as Brady eased into something else. My favorite piece, though, was a *Symphony in Two Parts* for guitar and tape whose rich textures justified the portentous title. Brady soloed over atmospheric wisps and wails with an occasional slight drumbeat. Those patterns swirled into a Terry Riley-ish background, but with a stern edge of dissonance, scale steps refusing to resolve. In that sea of sounds Brady's guitar playing floated in an endless melody so angular and complex, yet so calm and controlled, that I'm eager to hear it again to calculate what made it tick. He slid at last into a hard-strumming finale.

Technically, *Symphony* wasn't out of reach of your average guitar-banger with a basement full of gizmos. What made it compelling was a secure sense of large-scale harmony that no American I know of could (or at least would) have brought to so original a texture. The same facility held to-

gether *The Songline*, a chamber concerto with multiple solos (like Berg's) and the evening's most ambitious work. Its textures, for guitar, piano, sax, percussion, and cello veered unmistakably close to Reich's famous Octet. A long piano movement was the only inadvertent homage to that composer whose influence few Canadians escape—Olivier Messiaen. Between slow chords in the piano's extreme registers rang out virtual "birdsongs" of soft, shimmering dissonance, and no *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* fan could have missed the connection.

Overly ambitious, *The Songline* rambled for too long before reaching its pell-mell finale over a seven-beat ostinato, but even at its most diffuse it never lost its sure craftsmanship. American post-minimal pieces get caught up in the literalness of their own processes, but *Songline* curved toward its goal with astute contrapuntalism.

Brady has several CDs on the market, three of them on Montreal's Justin Time label (5455, rue Pare, Suite 101, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H4P 1P7). *Double Variations* is a mellow series of electronically expanded guitar duets with John Abercrombie, and *Visions* has as its title cut a seething concerto for improvising flügelhorn with string orchestra. The newest, *Inventions*, trades more in sampled noises and raucous atmospheric sound collages than its title leads you to expect, but also shows off the Bradyworks ensemble's fusionlike rapid-fire unisons. Brady's putting out so much work, so much of it good, that you're bound to run into his name again. He's got that Canadian sound. Get used to it. ■

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