REVIEWS

The music of Canada. By Timothy McGee. New York: W.W. Norton, 1985. (xii, 257 p., $9.95)

It is exciting to see a book on the music of Canada from such a prestigious publisher, in a size that is convenient, and relatively inexpensive for the general reader. According to the jacket blurb, the book is "abounding in music examples and replete with illustrations," so much so that the actual text space given to the author is about 150 pages. As we shall see, brevity, with its attendant decisions of what to include, is one of the problems of this book. An anthology of scores is included: more than sixty pages at the end of the book are devoted to it, and an additional twenty or so in the body of the text.

To my knowledge, the narrative is a correct account of Canadian musical history. McGee follows contemporary musicological trends by including performers, ensembles, and social and cultural history, as well as the more traditional descriptions of works and composers. This is very helpful, and reveals how music, particularly art music, functions in the culture. The book shows how an imported art form gradually took root in the musical life of Canada. Folk music is not neglected, and there is even a chapter on the music of the Inuit and Canadian Indians. But the telling throughout is rather dry; this reader (probably just another emotional Yank) longs for some enthusiasm or at least some interpretation of the facts. The book reads like a careful synopsis of the EMC, except that the latter is more colourful and opinionated.

To criticize someone else's choices for inclusion or omission, especially choices made under rather strict limitations, is something of a game that anyone can play. Nonetheless, I feel that some of McGee's choices deserve comment. My criticisms of the early chapters are probably a bit petty: e.g. why does the Théâtre de Neptune, for which there is no music, deserve a full page (pp.9-10)? A full page is also given to the shape-note edition of Davidson's hymnal, Sacred harmony (p.40), surely a strange choice when McGee admits that the "shape-note idea did not catch on in Canada."

But it is in the chapters devoted to the music of this century that McGee most falls short. In his analyses, he often refers to the styles of other composers as a model for the work under discussion. Not only does this imply a derivative, looking-to-European-models attitude, but such references are often wrong, or at least misleading. For example, how is the reference to John Cage's "compositional mood" related to anything in Schafer's Requiems for the party girl (p.137)? And since when do "conventional notation, graphic scores, and electronic sounds" qualify as "compositional techniques" (same page). This just reveals the author's inability to analyze or understand contemporary music. On p.127, in discussing Pentland's Symphony for ten parts, McGee mentions the influence of Webern and "pointillistic techniques." The example shows this rather poorly; surely it is more important to bring out the many differences between Pentland and Webern. Perhaps if McGee had been more conversant with 20th-century styles, the chapter entitled "Recent developments, 1945-1984" would not have ended in the early 1960s. Surely the twenty-five composers listed in the last six lines of the chapter deserve better. These composers, and others not mentioned, are the glory of Canadian music, and dozens of their works rank aesthetically with the finest in the world. If Canadian don't promote and honour this music, who is going to? (Also, Healey Willan's music accounts for twenty-three of the sixty-five pages of the anthology. I love Willan's grand organ and choral music too, but not at the expense of over one-third of the available anthology space.)

My real criticism of this book results from McGee's discussion of contemporary French-Canadian composers. The author has worked scrupulously in his earlier chapters

to keep the balance between the two cultures, but his blind spot is revealed here. There are only two French-Canadian composers discussed (Jean Papineau-Couture and Gilles Tremblay) in a total of two pages! In contrast, thirteen Anglo-Canadian composers are treated, in a total of twenty-one pages. McGee's presumed reason for this glaring imbalance is that "the music of the [Anglo] composers ...is more varied than that of their French-speaking counterparts and exhibits a broad variety of backgrounds and influences." From this reviewer's perspective, such a statement is insupportable. It is simply one more lamentable example of the cultural blindness of some Anglo-Canadians, a blindness noticed again and again by my Canadian-studies colleagues in the United States.

McGee's lack of understanding of French-Canadians also reveals itself in his minimal references to Marius Barbeau, and in his discussion of French-Canadian folksong (p.63). The author says "although folk songs were still sung - mostly in the rural areas - the growing taste for ballads almost totally eclipsed them. When they were sung in urban areas they were nostalgic reminders ...rather than an expression of contemporary life." If McGee had spoken with even one Quebec resident over the age of 30, he would have discovered the falseness of this statement.

The above situation is not entirely McGee's fault, because it is partly a cultural result of where he lives. But surely we need to try to escape the cultural blinders that we all live with, to see things more clearly from another's point of view. I would like to pay tribute to the late Godfrey Ridout by saying that he (seemingly the most Anglophile of Canadian composers) was one of the very few Anglo-Canadians (of the many I talked with in the summer of 1983) who repeatedly told me to go to Quebec, that my understanding of Canada would be incomplete without it.

In conclusion, let me say that I am glad the book exists; it is a well illustrated and careful account of Canadian musical history. I hope it will inspire ever greater interest in Canada and her music. I am only sorry that I could not be more excited about the book itself.

-Stephen E. Young
University of Tennessee

Milestones II: the music & times of Miles Davis since 1960. By Jack Chambers. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985. (viii, 416 p., $24.95)

With Milestones II, Chambers completes his study of Miles Davis in the same style used in Milestones I, which treated the first and (to jazz history) more important fifteen years of Miles' recorded legacy, up to 1960.

The same minor problems noted in my review here (v.13, no.1, 1984) of I are continued: discography integrated throughout the text rather than in a convenient appendix; unindexed illustrations; some vital unreleased "private tapes" in circulation ignored. Chambers acknowledges the latter problem by noting that with the proliferation of portable cassette recording of "live" sets since the early 1960 s, a complete list of existing recordings is impossible. However, the 1964 Japanese tour that included Sam Rivers is documented beyond the Tokyo LP issued: the Kyoto concert recording more than doubles existing material by the Miles Davis Quintet with Rivers, and has been in circulation since at least the early 1970 s in excellent fidelity. This type of documentation (which may eventually be issued, of course) would have been useful in Chambers' discussion of that collaboration. But perhaps he did not have access to this item, and in all fairness his point is well taken.

Chambers' analysis of Davis' recordings, lifestyle and perspectives continues in Milestones II with the same astute and incisive perceptiveness as in the first volume. Unfortunately for everyone (including Davis)

it is not the triumphant growth of a major artist overcoming various problems to develop a unique and influential style, as described in I. Rather, he documents the decline of Davis' innovative powers, music, and health, through the peculiar double-think attitudes expressed by Davis, and discussions of recordings so dismally commercial that even Chambers seems hard-pressed to discern any redeeming values.

While the Miles Davis Quintets of the 1960s continued the trend initiated by Davis' innovative Quintet and Sextet that included John Coltrane in the late 1950s, the development of jazz as an art form had taken some directions Davis never followed. Although influential in developing a contemporary "mainstream" style, perpetuated even now by Wynton Marsalis among others, Davis was eclipsed as an innovator in jazz during the period when rock escalated in popularity to the extent of obscuring what little market jazz had held. The hard-core jazz followers of the 1960s recall the cacophonous excesses and political posturing of some of the jazz avant-garde with the same dismay as noting the increasing tendencies of some jazz figures turning instead to more "accessible" styles incorporating rock elements. While Davis' Quintets seemed to carry on a mainstream direction, the spiritual vitality of the music's development was being displayed elsewhere (by Sun Ra, Cecil Taylor, etc.)

By the end of the 1960s, Miles was already experimenting with "fusion" elements in the studio, but his "live" performances were actually hinting that he may also have been evolving closer to the free-form avant-garde. I saw the group perform in this manner in 1969, but when I heard Davis' new group in 1970 (with Keith Jarrett, Gary Bartz, etc.) it was wholly into "fusion" patterns. Chambers makes this transformation appear more gradual than it seemed at the time, and documents the factors in Davis' life which contributed to this radical turn.

The effect on the jazz world was unfortunately to provide an example for many developing jazz figures who showed creative potential in the 1960s to "sell out" to the fusion movement. Those committed to the development of jazz as an art form, either as artists or as listeners, responded by ignoring Davis' subsequent output and the fusion movement generally, but it was a shock to realize that a figure like Davis, with 25 years of vital and frequently innovative work on record, could make such a decision for any motive. While Chambers' analysis does much to reveal Davis' state of mind and stated goals in opting for this direction, it is not a pleasant insight; it is difficult to emerge from this study without feeling Davis deteriorated in character as well as musically and physically (his health problems, as documented by Chambers, are appalling.)

One footnote: on p.186, the familiar story of Davis and his Ferrari being fired on by a gunman, is retold. When asked if he though it could have been the husband of his female companion, Davis responded, "I don't mess with married women." I happen to have known the woman in question, Marguerite Eskridge, whose face appears twice on the Miles at the Fillmore LP cover. In fact she was married, to a close friend of mine, a drummer with whom I worked often in the 1960s. (When she ran off with Miles, my friend's only response was to sell his Miles Davis albums.) The point is that Davis' statement on this occasion was untrue: one wonders how many other quotes are equally questionable, especially as Davis seems often to contradict himself.

In any case, Chambers has done a superb job of tracing the decline of this important figure. Milestones II also documents an important trend in contemporary music in following Davis' influence through former sidemen who became major fusion figures. Taken together, Milestones I & II thoroughly discuss the career and music of one of the most interesting figures to emerge from the jazz world, and deserve to be read as social and psychological texts as well as jazz and fusion music history. It would be a mistake to regard Chambers' study as merely the story of a Black musician. Certainly all public and University libraries ought to have these books available in their collections.

-Vladimir Simosko
University of Manitoba Music Library

Carnatic music. By Ananda Balasubramaniam. Winnipeg: India School of Dance, Music and Theatre Inc., 1985. (75 p.)

This little book fills a void in a straightforward and clear manner. The reader with a desire to learn more about the South Indian tradition will not be disappointed. Ms. Balasubramanian teaches at the India School of Dance, Music and Theatre in Winnipeg, and is an active performing artist in the tradition. The previous lack of a clear, concise, but thorough study of Carnatic music should make this publication a welcome addition to the extensive, but often esoteric literature on the music of India.

Comparisons to Western music and to the North Indian Hindusthani tradition have been made and illustrated where appropriate, and the text abounds with examples and careful descriptions of detail. In addition to discussions of the raga and tala systems, the methods of traditional teaching are described, so that the book could be used as a pedagogical guide. A history of the tradition, and descriptions and illustrations of the instruments and performers in action, also help bring the music to life. (The author is the elegantly lovely musician holding the tambura in the photo on p.64). The final chapter gives a vital description of the performer preparing for a recital, that should enhance the appreciation of concert-goers.

Multiculturalism Canada and Manitoba Education assisted financially in producing this work, and deserve congratulations and thanks for their support. Such works can assist greatly in bridging the cultural gaps between not only the Indian community and the larger community, but also the equally great distance between appreciators of the arts, and the rest of the population.

-Vladimir Simosko
University of Manitoba Music Library

1985 IAML CONFERENCE

Berlin, the capital of East Germany, was the site of the 1985 IAML conference, September 8-13. Our East German hosts, led by Karl-Heinz Köhler and Heinz Werner, were very well organized and welcomed us warmly. We were treated to a lavish reception following the opening ceremonies, and to numerous musical events. Meetings were held in the Berliner Stadtbibliothek, which was closed for the week of the conference to the general public of Berlin. There was an official photographer for the conference: results from each session were on display for sale the next day! Simultaneous translation in IAML's three official languages was provided for Council meetings and for the larger sessions.

Over 300 delegates attended, from 27 countries, with notably large contingents from East Germany and other socialist countries. All the Canadians and most other Western delegates stayed at the luxurious new Hotel Metropol. From there it was a pleasant walk - along the Unter den Linden - to the Berliner Stadtbibliothek through the heart of the city, past some of the most important landmarks - the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek (National Library), Deutsche Staatsoper, Humboldt University, St. Hedwig's Cathedral, Palace of the Republic, and several museums and galleries. The former centre of Berlin, before the division of the city, is now in the Eastern sector: after the devastation of WWII, many of the historic buildings have been so lovingly reconstructed that it is difficult to tell old from new. Others are now in the process of being restored. Some are still just propped up with scaffolding.