

## MUSIC REVIEW

# Contemporary composers worth hearing

BY RICHARD TODD

The National Arts Centre has long been criticized for paying insufficient attention to contemporary music in general and Canadian music in particular. Every once in a while, a token gesture is made. Last evening, for example, the Ensemble contemporain de Montréal gave a fantastic concert under NAC auspices in Dominion Chalmers Church.

Its program consisted of four works by four youngish Canadian composers, all of them worth hearing.

So what's the problem? As usual for new music, the NAC's promotion for the event was exceedingly sparse. On top of that, the concert was given in a venue that can seat nearly 1,000, an attendance that could scarcely have been approached with any amount of publicity.

Does someone at the NAC need a reality check, or is management just practising for the next rendition of its old refrain, Why Should We Program Music That No One Comes to Hear?

For the hundred or so who did come, however, it was a fascinating evening. It opened with Fuhong Shi's imaginative and descriptively named

*Kaleidoscope*, a work of seemingly endless combinations of timbre, rhythm and sonority. Its instrumentation of three strings, four winds and percussion is more or less standard for the ECM.

The Ensemble and its conductor, Véronique Lacroix, handled the frequently demanding score with aplomb, as indeed they did with all of the evening's music.

Michael Berger's *Skeleton* is an exploration of a two-note motif and its implications relative to the listener's short-term memory. Described that way, you might imagine that the piece is taxing for the listener and admittedly it's a tad short on pretty tunes. But anyone willing to sit back and just experience the sound is likely to find it more than satisfying.

One of a series of pieces reflecting upon the relationship between humans and technology in today's world, Brian Harman's *Gregarious Machines* opened the second half of the program. In addition to the basic makeup of the ECM, this score involves an electric guitar, played last night by Tim Brady. Its function is to suggest one aspect of technology that stands apart from the already mechanized

life of our times, but eventually becomes a part of it. It's an effective, sometimes chilling piece.

Scott Good's *Shock Therapy Variations* also included Brady's guitar along with the composer's own trombone. This piece, paradoxically, was more grounded in classical form than any of the others, yet was the most gloriously cacophonous of them all.

## CALL FOR CHRISTMAS CONCERTS

In coming weeks, the *Citizen* will publish a selective list of Christmas concerts in the Ottawa area. To be considered for the list, please send written details of your group's concert, including date, location, time and program, with a telephone number that we can publish for people who would like more information about your event. Send to: Steven Mazey, Entertainment Dept., *Ottawa Citizen*, 1101 Baxter Rd. K2C 3M4, e-mail [smazey@thecitizen.canwest.com](mailto:smazey@thecitizen.canwest.com) or fax 613-726-1198. Deadline for submissions is Nov. 21 at 5 p.m.