THE CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN NEWSPAPER MUSIC CRITIC

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the contemporary newspaper music critic. Much of the information it contains was gathered through a series of live interviews and written correspondence with critics. This material was then cross-referenced with material derived from other critical readings listed in the bibliography. The preliminary chapters provide a brief history of North American criticism. The second chapter is two-fold; the first part examining critics' responses to the questionnaire and the second part examining their critical writings. Subsequent chapters look at the critics' approaches to reviewing new music, and possible future directions for music criticism. The final chapter also touches on the sociological position of the media in the classical music world. During the course of the study my perceptions on the validity and nature of music newspaper criticism changed drastically. I did not embark on the study with the same scepticism of opinion with which I finished it. The formation of the questionnaire and the live interviews were therefore carried out as objectively as is possible and without the sceptical frame of mind with which I concluded this study.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF NORTH AMERICAN CRITICISM

Why music criticism? What is in musical performance that necessitates and inspires critical commentary? The Random House College Dictionary defines criticism as "the act or art of analyzing and judging the quality of something."[1] The second offered definition expands to include "the act of passing severe judgment; censure; faultfinding," a definition perhaps more indicative of the subject in question, newspaper music criticism. Since early antiquity criticism has functioned as a catalyst of enlightenment, making intuitive knowledge concrete. From Thomas Morley's attacks on John Dunstable's improper division of text and words, through Giovanni Maria Artusi's savage comments on Monteverdi's "seconda prattica,"[2] which made the words the mistress of the harmony, to Hanslick's

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1 Jess Stein, ed. The Random House College Dictionary (New York: Random House, Inc., 1969), p. 317.

2 Norman Demuth, ed., An Anthology of Music Criticism from the 15th to the 20th Century (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1947), p. 3.

infamous remarks on Wagner, the polemics of criticism have reflected the battle between the old and the new, the understood and the misunderstood.

How does one define Canadian music criticism? In order to begin to understand its many facets, it is helpful to briefly examine the past history of North American criticism and trace its development to the present day.

The mainstream of North American criticism uses as its voice the medium of the daily press. One of the first documented written musical opinions in newsprint appeared in 1767 in Philadelphia. The subject was Thomas Arne's opera "Love in a Village," and it appeared in the form of a letter written to the paper. For the most part these 'musical opinions' were rarely signed or initialed. The first instance of an autographed review was in 1839, an article appearing in the Boston Daily Evening Transcript under the name of Burchall.

More extensively annotated material is left behind by critics such as William Henry Fry, who joined the staff of his father's paper, the National Gazette, when he was only twenty-three writing there for five years (1836-41). Englishman Henry C. Watson also worked actively as a critic and music promoter, eventually founding the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and contributed criticisms to The Albion.

Newspaper criticism's expansion parallelled that of the press. The surge of new dailies created a demand for more musical and social commentary. It was between 1850 and the begining of World War 1 that this rush of critical activity was felt. The inception of magazines such as Harper's New Monthly Magazine, and the Atlantic Monthly, both national magazines, along with the backing of such critics as Richard Grant White and the aforementioned Henry William Fry, crusaded for music as an important and newsworthy event.

New programs in universities and colleges also resulted in further critical development. Since Boston was the home of the prestigious Harvard University among others, many of the freshman years of American music criticism are rooted in Boston. This city's history, rich in musical pursuits such as the 1815 Handel and Haydn Society, lent itself well to rapid musical development.

One person active in Boston's musical life was John Sullivan Dwight (1813-93). He began publishing Dwight's Journal of Music in 1851. The journal's credo was "to point out steadfastly the models of the True, the ever Beautiful, the Divine."[3] It reflected transcendentalist values which "exalted ethical, intellectual, and critical concepts derived as much from New England puritanism as from Plato,

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[3] Max Graf, Composer and Critic: Two Hundred Years of Musical Criticism, (London: Chapman & Hall, 1947), p. 307.

Kant and Ralph Waldo Emerson." [4] Although conservative in nature, the journal succeeded in reaching a wide spectrum of readers from the layman to the professional. His successors were William Foster Apthorp and Philip Hale. Apthorp was a natural writer: clear and to the point, yet he viewed the critic's role quite differently from that of his predecessor. He adopted a less dogmatic approach, striving to be a mediator between the performer and the public. His goal as a writer was to provoke people into thinking about the music, leaving the final decision up to them.

Hale studied in Berlin, Munich and Paris and adopted the French qualities of readability and wit in his writings. He claimed to favour neither the old nor the new, but preferred to draw out the 'truth' in music.[5]

During the period of growth set off by the industrial revolution, New York was transformed. One of the outcomes was the expansion of the musical community. More space was allotted in the papers to music criticism, and critics' voices assumed the role as leaders of the public taste. Much authority and pride was linked to the printed word, often resulting in the subsequent success or failure of the artistic endeavour in question.

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[4] Edward O. D. Downes, "Criticism," The New Grove Dictionary of American Music, p. 538.

[5] Graf, Composer and Critic, p. 312.

Yet there were critics who chose a less polemic route, preferring to be indifferent instead of harsh in their criticisms. William Henderson (1855-1937) was such a critic. He wrote for The New York Times and The Sun, believing that music criticism served to educate and enlighten the public.[6] Another critical bright light was James Gibbons Huneker (1860-1921). He was perhaps one of the most fascinating critics. He wrote for both the Sun and the Times, and his training as a musician, novelist and painter gave him a broader musical perspective.[7] Educated in Philadelphia and Paris, he wrote for the New York dailies between 1891 and 1921. He championed the development of contemporary music with a claim to fame as having recognized Richard Strauss as "the living issue in music today; no other master has his stature."[8]

Criticism underwent drastic changes between the two World Wars. Aside from the revolutions in musical style, scarcity in supplies and personnel reduced both the quantity of criticisms and the numbers of papers in print. The personnel of criticism was also changing. Within the span of

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6 Edward O. Downes and John Rockwell,"Criticism," in The New American Grove Dictionary of American Music, ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie, (London: Macmillan, 1986), vol 1. p.540.

7 Graf, p. 316.

8 Downes, New American Grove Dictionary, p. 541.

a few years many of the icons of New York criticism, such as Richard Aldrich, Henry Krehbiel, and William James Henderson, either retired or died. They were succeeded by the likes of Deems Taylor, Lawrence Gilman, and Olin Downes. This new group thrived on divergences of opinion. Gilman maintained that there can be

> ...no such things as ascertainable standards of judgment; no such things as recognized conceptions of ideal excellence; no such things as touchstones: and, indeed, in relation to the art of music, there obviously are not.[9]

Upon the death of Gilman in 1939, Virgil Thomson was appointed to replace him. Thomson's witty, simple, if sometime patronizing style, along with his deep knowledge and love of music earned him many faithful readers. Other luminary critics of the time were Claudia Cassidy and John Rosenfeld.

More recently, critics such as Paul Henry Lang and Howard Taubman took up the literary pen. Lang was one of the first American critics to bring academic scholarship to daily criticism for he was at the same time a professor of musicology at Columbia University. With the growing expansion of the popular press came a larger audience which commercialized the musical world. Managers sought ever more publicity for their performers and critics were faced with a

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9 Downes, New American Grove, p. 541.

new musical language upon which they were expected to write knowledgably. The role of the critic tipped the balance between the scholarly academic and the promoter and unabashed music lover.

In Canada the earliest examples of musical criticism began to appear with the first newspapers. The Halifax Gazette (1752), La Gazette de Quebec (1764), and La Gazette du Commerce et literature de Montreal (1778) are but a few examples.[10] These early articles focused on reporting musical events as social events within the community. Comments on the performer's dress, the audience response, and the intermission refreshments were noted with careful detail. The following example appeared in the Winnipeg Manitoba Daily Free Press on January 14, 1885.

> The programme throughout was well given and was received with much applause. Miss Cambourne, in response to a hearty encore sang sweetly 'Turnham Toll.' A vote of thanks was tendered the ladies at the close for the excellent tea and entertainment.[11]

Canadian journals were often nationalistic in flavour. Helmut Kallmann later described the Music Journal (1887), as "a first class musical monthly which shall be purely

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10 John Beckwith, "Criticism," Encyclopedia of Music in Canada, ed. by Kallmann, Potvin, and Winters (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981, p. 243.

11 Ibid.

Canadian in its every department."[12] The Canadian Musician (1889) was another early periodical but differed from its counterparts by directing its articles towards the educated musician rather than the music lover.[13]

One of the more interesting critics was Guillame Couture. He wrote extensively in both English and French, publishing articles in La Minerve (1875), La Patrie, and later, in the Montreal Star under the pseudonym 'Symphony.' His writings possess authority and conviction as evidenced in the following review of the soprano Christine Nilsson.

> ...she sang the aria from 'Judas Maccabeus'...in an impossible, unbelievable way, making constant errors in both notes and time-values, changing the text, breathing in the middle of words, introducing into Handel's cadenzas the style of Bellini! (June 1884)[14]

Another notable personality was composer Léo-pol Morin. He wrote reviews, essays and program notes, still finding time to compose, teach, and perform as a pianist. He left behind two collections of writings, Papiers de musique (1930) and Musique (1944), both discussing a wide range of musical topics from Canadian composers, the classics,

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12 Dean, New Grove, p. 39.

13 Gordon P. Howell, "The Development of Music in Canada," Ph. D. dissertation, Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester, 1959, p. 101.

14 Beckwith, "Criticism," p. 243.

current European music to folklore and jazz.[15]

Although newspaper criticism fared quite well, few periodicals were able to sustain a life of longer than a few years. The heartiest periodical, Le Canada Musical, only lasted for seven years.[16] In order to stay alive, many journals underwent continuous change. In 1906 the first issue of Musical Canada appeared under the title The Violin. By the next year the title was changed to the more universal Musical Canada and in successive years the periodical grew and absorbed various other small, struggling periodicals.[17]

A decidedly nationalistic periodical was the Canadian Journal of Music, edited by Luigi von Kunits. It examined the activities of Canadian musicians both at home and abroad. Continuing until 1919, the journal was paralleled by the French magazine Le Canada Musical which was similar in form and content, being published bi-monthly from May 1917 until April 1924.[18]

Other active Canadian periodicals include Curtain Call (1933-39) which was the official publication of the Dominion

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15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

Drama festival. It contained many articles on the historical development of Canada's symphony orchestras and thus serves as valuable reference material.[19]

An alternative magazine was the Canadian Forum which continued to be printed into the 1940s and 1950s. It did not have the same commercial pressures as larger publications of its kind and subsequently its articles are illuminating in showing how musicians of the time viewed their world.

The first nationwide magazine was The Canadian Review of Music and Art (1940). Published in Toronto, it reflected the bilingual culture by containing articles in both English and French.[20] This nationalism was also reflected by the CBC Times/ La Semaine a Radio-Canada which emerged with the creation of the CBC and provided important critical information on music in Canada viewed from a broadcasting perspective. Perhaps the evolution of this idea developed from Dr. Eugene Lapierre's La Quinzaine musicale, which printed actual sheet music supplements and L'Action musicale, whose format followed that of a newspaper and which also printed radio schedules.[21]

With the rise of broadcasting, new national interest

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19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Howell, p. 113.

was taken in the works of Canadian composers. The Canadian Review of Music and Art (1942-1947) sparked a new era in journals by shifting the interest from the performer to the composer. One of the goals of the journal was to gain enough support to form a national school of composition.[22] The journal provided country-wide coverage with articles in both French and English. It pushed for government support of the arts which eventually paved the way for organizations such as the Canada Council.

Two peridicals made their priority the education of the younger generation. Musique et Musiciens (1952) was directed towards the youth of Quebec. The articles were designed to impart basic knowledge of musical theory and history while at the same time, appeal to the interests of the youth of the day. Biographies and interviews with famous musicians and composers were also printed.[23]

Le Journal musical canadien boasted a circulation of 35,000 and followed a newspaper-like format. Biographies and sketches helped promote Canadian composers and their achievments. The Montreal based magazine Qui? also helped to educate Canadians about musicians and composers working in Canada. Edited by Romain Gour, it contained reviews of

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22 Howell, "The Development of Music in Canada," p. 201.

23 Beckwith, p. 243.

important performances in Canada and biographical sketches on Canadian artists.

Later periodicals such as the Canadian Music Journal, a quarterly publication of the Canadian Music Council, surveyed Canadian music by reviewing new music publications, recent record releases, and books, along with articles on the lives and works of Canadian composers.[24]

Despite the developing musical environment in Canada, after the 1950's the production of periodicals was generally in decline. The exchange and debate of ideas which had flourished in the earlier part of the century had fallen away to mere reporting and publicity. The following remarks of Helmut Kallmann sum up the situation at the time.

> The chronicler will find it easy to discover what Canada's musicians were doing in 1968, but the future historian and biographer will be hard put to discover what our musicians were thinking about their art and what kind of people they were.[25]

Newspapers could not help in filling this void. Limitations of space, deadlines, and conflicting priorities plagued the music critic and forced him/her to simply describe the events of the concert. Leslie Bell's musical column in The Toronto Daily Star was an exception to this rule. His column was printed for sixteen years (1946-1962)

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

and covered a large range of topics written from the perspective of a music appreciation enthusiast.[26]

Since then, new magazines such as Music Canada and Orchestra Canada have emerged serving predominently as trade magazines that document the current musical scene and mentioning important accomplishments of Canadian artists. Increasingly, the field of musical criticism has been given a greater voice in Canada. The conference on criticism in 1973, the annual Canadian Music Conference, and the 1974 winter arts festival in Victoria along with the recent November 1991 conference at McMaster university have all encouraged exploration into the present state of music criticism.[27]

Radio and television have also taken on significant roles through their critical choices of documentaries and commentaries, subsequently reaching a larger public and in turn expanding the critical approach to music in Canada. Presently there are critics in every major Canadian city. They predominently work for the larger newspapers, although free-lance critics do exist in the larger cities. There are surprisingly few women critics, an imbalance which, in time,

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26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

will hopefully be rectified.[28]

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28 See Appendix for a complete listing of currently practicing Canadian critics. The list was taken from the 1990 edition of Editor and Publisher.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PROFESSION OF CRITICISM AS VIEWED BY PRACTISING CRITICS.

What is music newspaper criticism? Who are Canadian critics and what do they do? What qualifications do they have? In order to attempt to answer these questions I conducted a series of interviews throughout Canada during 1990-91. Critics working in the larger cities were all approached, along with their counterparts in some of the smaller Canadian centres. In the event that an interview was unobtainable, a questionnaire was sent to the critic.[1]

Although not all of the contacts agreed to participate, the responses obtained provide a representation from areas throughout Canada. Approximately two-thirds of the critics contacted agreed to participate. The responses of the critics which follow were not manipulated to fit into a preconcieved view of criticism. They are the direct comments made in response to a set questionaire. Although the live

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[1] A sample copy of the questions asked in both the interviews and the questionnaires is found in Appendix Two.

interviews were not so rigid, all of the same questions were asked. The questions arose from various readings on criticism and were derived to approach the practice of criticism in as factual a way as is possible. They were not constructed to ilicit a controlled response. Naturally some of the comments uttered by the critics were statements of the obvious. The truistic approach in which many critics view their profession is perhaps indicative of the uncertainty and precarious nature of the whole art of newspaper criticism.

HOW DID YOU BECOME INVOLVED IN MUSIC CRITICISM?

To begin assessing the modern-day newspaper critic, it is first necessary to examine who the critics are. How did these Canadian critics become involved in music criticism? The interviews revealed that a number of contemporary critics did not necessarily evolve from performing or other musical roots. Rather they emerged from a variety of backgrounds, including anthropology, journalism and teaching. Many started writing criticism as a means of earning extra money while in college. Michael Scott remarked that it seemed like an ideal option for a music lover, the task of writing the review but a small price to pay for hearing a free concert. Others such as Adrian Chamberlain took the more traditional pathway of journalism school and began not as a music critic, but as a general entertainment

writer. James Manishen of the Winnipeg Free Press recounts his dive into the throes of music criticism by writing that,

> the Winnipeg Free Press was looking for someone to do classical reviews--and someone casually suggested they contact me, and just as casually as that I started.[2]

It must be added that Manishen was no stranger to working in the musical arena, possessing a background in jazz and musical theatre, and working as an active composer for films, television, choirs, and even symphony orchestras. Pauline Durichen of the Kitchener-Waterloo Record also confesses to becoming involved in newspaper criticism more by accident than by design. During her university years she occasionally reviewed for the college paper, The Imprint, yet one specific incident catapulted her into the mainstream of newspapers. After the amateur university orchestra, designed specifically for non-music majors, was cut out of the budget, she, along with a few other incensed colleagues, wrote to the local paper in protest. Her letter was published and a few weeks later, while interviewing for a position as a night copy editor, she was asked if she had ever done any other writing on music. It turned out that The Record's music critic had retired nine months ago and the paper was still looking for someone to fill his shoes. She began as a free-lance writer describing her full time

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[2] James Manishen.

appointment as follows,

> Sometime during the Christmas holidays I was called and offered full time work: not knowing any better, I accepted and have been there ever since.

Very few critics seemed to have deliberately entered criticism as a lifetime vocation. Educationally speaking, most possess journalism or English related degrees. Pauline Durichen seemed to be the most extensively educated from a university standpoint, having earned a BA degree, two MA degrees, a partial Mphil, and a soon-to-be-completed doctorate. What appeared to be the most distantly related degree was one in anthropology. Although only very few possessed professional or even amateur training in music, all seemed to have a love and curiosity towards music. Many continue to play as amateurs or take lessons for their own enjoyment. Despite these divergent beginnings, the critics could be divided into two main groups: either musicians with abilities as writers, or writers with an acceptable knowledge of music.

WHAT COMPRISES A TYPICAL DAY FOR THE CRITIC?

On the whole, the schedules of most Canadian critics could hardly be described as regular. Since much of their job revolves around two set deadlines over which the critic has little control (the concert date and the paper's deadline) the word "typical" doesn't seem to apply. However, critics seemed to have predictable duties. Aside from

attending and reviewing concerts, other responsibilities often include collating weekly concert calenders, special interviews or feature stories. A few critics such as Pauline Durichen also do a fair bit of proof-reading. In terms of regularity of schedule James Manishen writes,

> I am a free-lancer writer so my typical day is vastly varied. I do write a classical music column once a week on Tuesday mornings for Friday's paper. On Wednesday I phone the assignment editor to get my reviewing assignment for the week.

Due to the inevitable variability of her days Pauline Durichen believes it is perhaps more appropriate to look at a typical week.

> In a typical week I may easily work six days rather than five. During that time I can expect to do two or three reviews (on a wide variety of entertainment, not just classical), at least one informational advance/feature, a number of quick news briefs, a personality feature, a book review and perhaps a page of record reviews as well. Generally I average one by-lined piece every working day, although I may not be published every working day.

Hugh Fraser also mentioned that the character of the job demands that he be at it seven days a week. It quickly became apparent that critics considered their job to be no easy one. Since concerts are not confined to the hours of nine to five, the critic operates very different and erratic hours. Weekends and holidays are prime working times since concerts are scheduled for the general public. On the average, most critics tended to work a six-day week, for the

nature of the job is all-consuming. Moreover, the next day's publication may result in letters and calls of protest or support, all of which need to be addressed.

In many papers the job of a critic is often not exclusive to music, but may extend to drama and ballet as well. Interestingly, the only music critic interviewed whose duties were purely musical was Hugh Fraser of the Hamilton Spectator[3]. Upon reflection, it seems odd that in the three largest Canadian cities (Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal) the critic's coverage is not exclusive to music. This obligation to cover other artistic endeavours is not wholly without value. Chamberlain remarked that this cross-fertilization of artistic fields can enhance the critic's writings on music, and help place new musical events within the whole spectrum of the artistic scene.

WHAT QUANTITY OF NEWSPRINT SPACE DO MOST CRITICS RECEIVE?

Manishen writes that it averages between 10 and 12 inches per review, and he adds "not enough of course." Durichen writes that the length of her pieces varies with the perceived status of the material, with 'status' being defined by her editor. She laments that

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[3] Since this study was done, economic pressures have made it impossible for Hugh Fraser to continue as solely a music reportere, he now covers other arts as well as regular city stories.

> If I were a film or rock reviewer, I would have section fronts most times and could write anywhere from 15" to 25", have photo art included, and have a picture logo with my name on it. Instead, I am mostly 'inside' and have more than 16" or so only when they're desperate to fill space.

This type of sentiment was echoed by many other reviewers who did not enjoy finding their work regularily sandwiched between glossy advertisements or tucked in the back of the section.

WHAT CHOICE DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR CONCERT COVERAGE?

On the brighter side, most reviewers have complete autonomy over what they choose to review. Often this is due to the fact that the classical reviewer is the only one who knows enough about the field to be able to judge what is worthy of attention. The concert coverage ranges anywhere from Kiwanis winners to international visiting artists. Durichen admits to having "a perverse delight (and genuine interest) in covering avant-garde and experimental new chamber music." All reviewers cover the traditional outlets such as the local symphony, choir, and chamber ensembles but generally only in the smaller cities do amateur groups get any sort of extended coverage. Hugh Fraser's coverage includes all levels of musical performance. He believes that responsible coverage "must nurture the child, and get people to go hear Valerie Tryon." Yet in the setting of larger musical environments even concerts by the local university

may overextend the time available to the critic. Concerts at the University of Toronto are often overlooked by critics who are already swamped in the very fertile musical climate of Toronto.

WHAT READERSHIP DO YOU AIM AT?

With the premise that critics, on the whole, choose what is to be reviewed, it is interesting to discover for whom they think they are writing. Critics uphold that it is their intended audience who determine the style and content of the reviews, not the paper and its policies. Many insisted that they write not for the artist, nor the composer or musicologist, but solely for the reader. Hugh Fraser says that he "looks around at intermission-and writes for the people he sees there." Adrian Chamberlain believes that it is important to write for the average person who has not attended the concert. It is his goal to reach a wide audience and interest the average person in the music. Perhaps more realistically, Pauline Durichen responds that her readers are probably within the musical community and tend to be middle-aged or older. She also brings up what in newspaper thinking is a more important issue, the size of her readership. She candidly remarks that,

> I would like to think a lot of people read my material, but in reality, I'm probably read far less than the others in our department.

Although it is virtually impossible to determine the

exact readership of Canadian critics, many critics mentioned their intent to provoke interest in all potential readers, not just those who have attended the concert under review. Dealing with the physical facts of music at the layman's level is a fundamental part of newspaper music reviewing. The ideal balance most critics strive for is a review that is understood by the layman and musically educated alike, in other words a review which is useful to them both. Manishen directs his reviews towards,

> The average newspaper reader who takes the time to be interested in something other than the sports page or the business section. I do not aim at music specialists.

Chamberlain makes an important point when he says that one is "writing at a level that is simple, but perhaps not writing about simple things." It is a very precarious balance, for while trying neither to belittle, nor to insult, the critic is also writing for "the art form itself."

The critics are also concerned with offending or polarizing the reader. Patronizing or criticising the reader's taste does nothing to help win the reader over to the critic's point of view. Critics realized the importance of subtly persuading the reader by including some 'human understanding' in the review. Although the temptation to write clever and biting comments always exists, most critics

refrain from doing so except when they can support these statements with specific citations and examples. Critics talked about the importance of constantly reasoning with the reader, re-creating the event to such an extent that the reader can come to a conclusion on the concert, whether having attended or not.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH WRITING A REVIEW?

Papers often prefer the critic to adopt the pyramid approach to review writing. Having a strong opener is crucial to the success of the review. Pauline Durichen asserts that,

> ...a lead is not just an easy springboard into the piece, but in fact encompasses an atmosphere, an attitude, something that has hit me strongly enough to pervade the tone of the event as I see it.

Although this approach may take away some of the suspense of the review, a good lead is supposed to entice the reader to read further. Clarity and precision are highly valued by papers, especially in music criticism which is often treated as extraneous news and therefore not allotted a large amount of space. Manishen maintains that he is

> ...basically an informed reporter, thus his task is to report the facts of the concert, who, what, where, when, why, and then express my view of the success in achieving what I consider to be the aim of the concert, with a reporting of how the audience reacted.

WHAT KIND OF PREPARATION DO YOU UNDERTAKE BEFORE A

CONCERT?

In order to write informed reviews the critic would need to undergo some form of preparation. Obviously studying scores helps facilitate the ease with which the review is written. The responses of the critics were fairly predictable, citing logical choices such as attending rehearsals and contacting composers and organizations like the CMC in order to preview new and unfamiliar scores. Interviews with performers and composers were also mentioned as being useful in preparing for the performance, though critics cautioned against becoming too sympathetic with the artists to be reviewed. Although a given to many, critics reiterated the fact that pre-concert preparation is essential and is practised extensively by most of them. Michael Scott admitted to doing four or five hours of research before a concert. He also stressed the importance of being rested, his rationale being that whenever he has found himself overtired or emotionally overwrought he has failed to produce what he considers to be a successful review. Hugh Fraser firmly advocates knowing the music and having done background research. He notes that there is "no excuse to go in [the concert hall] ignorant, come out ignorant, and write ignorantly about a piece."

With the hectic lifestyle of most critics, these last remarks struck me as being an unobtainable ideal. The

comments of Pauline Durichen were more genuine and probably a little more honest. She admitted that often she has little time for a lot of pre-concert preparation, especially for new music concerts for which no score or recordings exist. James Manishen also did not profess to always entering the hall completely prepared. He writes,

> I will sometimes try to get the score for new original works to be performed, and occasionally will go to a rehearsal of a new work.

In many cases, it appeared that the critic most strongly relied on the accumulation of knowledge acquired throughout a lifetime. Few critics enter the concert hall completely uninformed, just as few critics enter with all-encompassing knowledge.

In terms of practical techniques, most critics mentioned taking notes throughout the concert. This involved jotting down specific music success or failures to formulating specific literary phrases evoked by the music. Durichen remarks that,

> I think the key to writing a review fluently, without taking all night about it, is to concentrate on the event as fully as possible and not wait until it's over to begin serious thought.

It was generally agreed that following scores while listening does not always aid in the 'justness' and ease of the review. Hugh Fraser admits that while following scores may be beneficial and productive for critics like Harold

Schonberg, he personally finds the danger of mentally filling-in the music to be too great. The temptation to re-create the score within one's mind poses problems, as it may not equate with what is actually being heard in the concert hall. Practical concerns such as the dimly lit atmosphere of the concert hall also impede score consultation. Many critics mentioned that the process of writing the review is much easier if they work out the angle from which they are to approach the review while still within the concert hall instead of waiting until they return to their computer terminal.

DOES THE OBLIGATION TO WRITE IMPAIR THE CONCERT ENJOYMENT?

Adrian Chamberlain says that having to write about a concert actually amplifies his appreciation as he is forced to think carefully about what he is hearing. Pauline Durichen believes that "it's often a question of liking the work [reviewing concerts] but not always being able to like the job." There is no question that most critics enjoy concerts, but they are often so used to taking an active part in them that not writing a review later is unnatural and less satisfying. External pressures such as being well-known within a community also impede the possibility for critics to enjoy concerts on their own time. Perhaps more openly, James Manishen admits that yes, his enjoyment of

concerts has diminished since he started reviewing. He writes,

> Yes. I seldom enjoy concerts as I once did. I am too concerned with what the hell I will say in the 45 minutes I will have to write the review.

DO PERSONAL PREFERENCES PLAY A PART IN THE REVIEW?

Most critics that were asked attempted to minimalize biases to the extent that they enter the hall in a neutral state of mind. Yet Adrian Chamberlain professes that this does not mean drifting off into ambivalent accounts of the concert. He says that one has to give a point of view, and that "obviously you are writing some sort of opinion." Michael Scott confesses that you would have nothing to write about, were you entirely objective. James Manishen admits that his preferences come through in his writing and that he usually tries to state his biases if they are an issue. Pauline Durichen does not mind expressing personal preferences as long as she can put them in a context. This may mean an open explanation of her musical prejudices so that her readers can see how her opinions influence her subjective judgements. She does, however, believe that "if personal preferences become one's substitute for general aesthetic standards, that can be very dangerous and limiting." Although no critics intentionally let their biases influence their opinions, it is often easy to spot certain biases. For example, the writings of Tamara Bernstein, who writes for

The Globe and Mail, seem to favour early music performance groups and the works of women composers. This becomes apparent through the frequency that reviews of this nature appear. This is not to say that all women composers or early music performances are favourably reviewed, or that Bernstein focuses on these groups at the expense of other ensembles, but it does seem that it is almost impossible to separate the person, the reaction and the review. The three seem to flow together and if the critic had no opinions, the review itself would read rather blandly. Thus critics of critics are misguided if they believe an unbiased review is possible or even desirable. The more important issue is whether the reviewer can work through these biases to the extent of giving the performer a 'just' review.

For instance, a review by Ronald Hambleton, contained no performance evaluation, aside from a mention in the headline, "Pianist's premise proved nonsense," but focused solely on the pre-concert speech. Hambleton begins,

> If pianist Monica Gaylord had talked just a little less in introducing her recital last night at Walter Hall, devoted to music of Canadian women composers, the evening would have been perhaps what she intended, a genuine tribute to good composers through their own music.[4]

There is nothing else in the whole review which even mentions Gaylord's ability, or goes into any in-depth

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4 Ronald Hambleton, The Toronto Star, December 2, 1975.

examination of the music. The space of the review is instead used for Hambleton's views on the popularity and exposure of Canadian women composers. In this instance Hambleton's personal preferences overshadowed his professional ones, resulting in a review which neither tells the reader how successful the concert was, nor anything about the music itself.

WHAT DOES THE CRITIC INCLUDE IN THE REVIEW?

Since one of the tests of a good critic is to be readable, critics may be more likely to write interestingly about what they like. This often means concentrating on what is new in a performance. Critics expressed a fascination and enjoyment with new developments in Canadian music. Since there is no prior performance tradition, the new element in a concert is also perhaps the most interesting to the readers. New and different elements about the music are far more arresting than a simple critique of the success of the performance execution.

From reading many reviews, it becomes evident that many critics do not limit the content of their reviews solely to the music. Columns may include discussions on concert etiquette, comparisons with recordings, the cost factors of music, illuminations on different schools of conducting and performance, personalities, philosophical concepts, etc.

Yet should all of this be included within a review?

Durichen writes that she "emphatically avoids personal gossipy stuff about musicians."[5] She also, unlike many of her male colleagues, avoids

> ...gratuitous physical descriptions when such material does not relate naturally to the music; similarly for matters of colour or race, except when the performer may verbally address such issues.

WHAT RESTRICTIONS ARE IMPOSED UPON THE CRITIC BY EXISTING LIBEL LAWS?

Restrictions imposed upon the reviewer by the paper and existing libel laws may dictate what can and cannot be said in the review. Yet, surprisingly, many critics are unaware and as yet, unaffected by the laws that exist. Durichen, in company with a few of her colleagues, admits to being a little vague on libel laws apart from basic legal commonsense which dictates that you do not indulge in unsubstantiated accusations or direct personal attacks, profanity and the like. On the whole she feels that she has never felt constrained in any manner. The same is true of Manishen, whose only imposed instruction is to report on the size of the audience. Only one of the critics interviewed related an incident involving a libel suit.[6]

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[5] Durichen.

[6] Hugh Fraser mentioned a pending law suit of 1.1 million dollars by Boris Brott, the past conductor of the Hamilton Philharmonic. Fraser was accused of damaging Brott's professional reputation and influencing the decision of the board for the

At the 1972 critic's congress in Rotterdam, and at the recent McMaster conference it was felt that the critics could write as they wished. It is true that open censorship rarely plagues the daily music press, yet music politics are continually at work to sabotage the seeming neutrality of the critic. Even critics who believe that they enjoy complete freedom in writing, are often unaware of being limited by academic or social pressures.

A recent ruling from the U.S. Supreme court has introduced a new legal element into music criticism. This ruling denotes that writers or speakers may be sued for expressing 'opinion.'[7] According to Chief Justice William Rehnquist, the divergence between opinion and fact is one of an 'artificial dichotomy.' Only statements uttered in 'rhetorical hyperbole' will be outside the jurisdiction of the new law. This is based on the assumption that no reader would take this genre of comment literally. This new precedent replaced the previous one in which a person could only be sued for false statements of fact. The new law was prompted by the "opinion" of Chief Justice Rehnquist who wrote that " the statement, in my opinion Jones is a liar can cause as much damage to reputation as the statement

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conductor's dismissal.

[7] Taken from the Newsletter of the Music Critics Association, p. 6.

Jones is a liar."[8]

These new mandates will change the freedom and direction of future criticism. Excessive rigidity in upholding this new law may alter the function of the critic's review. Instead of offering opinions, the review is in danger of solely operating as an advertising announcement board. Editors also may conclude that allotting space to criticism which is continually subject to libel suits no longer proves worthwhile. It is not clear of how the effects of the Supreme court ruling will affect Canadian criticism or whether the new ruling will create more difficulties than it resolves.

HOW DO CRITICS DESCRIBE THEIR OWN PROFESSION?

Most reviewers have come to terms with the fact that they are not critics in the traditional sense. They are aware that the limitations of time and space prohibit them from elucidating at any length on a concert attended. Scott offers the following definition of a newspaper reviewer,

> ..an educated, inquisitive, music-loving person who sits in the theatre focused on the music and attempts to recreate it afterwards- that's all I pretend to be.

He continues by saying that in its simplest form, it "is the newspaper's coverage of the musical world." But is what is known as newspaper reviewing the same thing as criticism?

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8 Newsletter, p. 6.

Victoria critic Adrian Chamberlain thinks not. He asserts that "criticism and reviewing are completely different." Hugh Fraser describes himself as "a reviewer who gives a notice, not a criticism." He further notes that "criticism is a term with dignity," and that he gives "a judgment, a review." William Littler writes that the public often views critics as music's witnesses who document occurrences which happen in the musical world.[9] He says that critics therefore translate the language of music into the language of words. He continues by asserting that music critics are most commonly assumed, by the layperson and professional alike, to be those who write music reviews for a newspaper. He believes this is justified since there are no full-time music critics in Canada who do not fall in this category.

DOES THE CRITIC FUNCTION AS A REPORTER OR A CRITIC?

Many believe that because reviewers rely heavily on their emotional stimuli, they are not true critics. It is evident that there are distinctions between the critic and reviewer, but in daily newspaper criticism they are often blurred. Most newspapers regard their music writers as reporters who happen to write on music. Who do critics think they are? Michael Scott believes that his is the responsibility of writing sensitive, provoking articles on

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[9] William Littler, "Dropsical Drips, or a Higher Calling?," Music and Musicians, (1985), p. 17.

music within the restraints of space and time allotted by the paper. Yet due to editorial restrictions and pressing deadlines, critics become locked into the paper's view of musical events as news. Many critics have worked in other departments of the paper and are accustomed to being treated by the paper as reporters. Hugh Fraser adheres to what he terms the 'Harold Schonberg school of criticism' in which the critic

> ...should hit the streets, follow the ambulance, and write the story of the fire.

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE CRITIC?

On the whole the journalistic aims of the paper define the genre of criticism produced. Essentially the newspapers are searching for someone who can write in clear, basic English without confusing the reader with excessive musical terminology.

Michael Scott speaks of the expectations and responsibilities of his job as 'crushing.' He further observes that giving

> ...an opinion on something that others have spent hours preparing for in the course of an hour, that will be read by tens of thousands of people is very humbling.

Durichen also comments quite candidly on the public and professional expectations of her job.

> That part of the public which finances or promotes concerts and performers naturally expects glowing reports to put in their press kit; that's why it's

> so important to work hard at writing balanced reviews.

She adds,

> "I don't particularly care if I'm liked, but I should write and think competently enough to be respected. As you know, respect can be a love-hate relationship, which keeps everyone sharp."

Manishen seconds Durichen's first statement when he writes,

> The musical community looks to me for good reviews and quotable quotes to use in their advertising and grant applications. The readers, I guess, look for advice when considering where to spend their money.

He thus regards honesty as one of the critics' prime obligations. Adrian Chamberlain distinguishes that his responsibility is "not to support the arts, but to write about the arts--to be a reflection of what is happening and not one who actually makes the scene." He, along with others such as Scott, hopes that the critics' job is one of educating the public and therefore wants to provide them with some social and historical context to his reviews. Hugh Fraser is a little more aggressive in his views. He asserts that aside from getting people to go to concerts, one of the critic's jobs is to maintain the level of artistic standards in the community. After pondering the question a bit more, Chamberlain concluded that, on the whole, perhaps an observer would be a better judge of the critic's actual role in society.

HOW IS THE CRITIC USEFUL TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC?

One of the most common public presumptions is that the critic functions as a consumer guide who personally filters through all artistic pursuits, directing the readers only to that which is worthy. The critic 'shops around' and informs the public of what is considered, in the critic's opinion, to be the most valuable entertainment for the money. The danger in this viewpoint is self-evident. Functioning in this capacity, the critic loses the position of neutrality, and assumes the guise of a publicity agent who promotes only that which has been personally pronounced valuable. Criticism working in this capacity has a great potential to dictate the taste of the public. In terms of the influence on the day-to-day concert attendance, if consumers rely soley on the printed review to determine what or what not to attend, the power of the critic becomes omnipotent.

Is this form of propaganda a part of criticism? Most critics asserted otherwise, steering clear of using their columns as a viewer-guide, and emphasizing the importance that the critic stand alone and not become a mouthpiece for favoured artists or the local symphony orchestra. Littler writes,

> The critic exercises a concerned individual's conscience, and the fewer strings attached, the better.[10]

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10 William Littler, "Dropsical Drips, or a Higher Calling?," Music and Musicians, (1985), p. 10.

Yet there is a certain political element in reviewing, especially in relation to amateur or new groups. Here, most critics like to encourage new musical activity. In these instances, as a cautionary guide, certain critics felt it was important to identify to one's audience that the review is of an amateur group, since different criteria are used when reviewing amateurs and professionals. Previews also fall under this category, as these are the reviewer's platform for publicity. Continuing on their mission to widen the artistic community, some critics prefer to fill these columns with news of younger, less known groups, and provide the public with knowledge of new musical happenings. The irony in the role of criticism in setting artistic standards is that although most critics feel that it is their responsibility to uphold artistic standards, they also do not feel that they have much authority or influence in their community. The average critic does not want to accept the responsibility of influencing the readers' tastes. Critics prefer to regard their work as a stimulus which provokes musical thought in the reader. Here a problem emerges because much of the general public accepts what lies in the printed page as fact and use it as a musical guide. The critic must accept the fact that the printed column often becomes an active ingredient in forming public opinion.

HOW MUCH AUTHORITY DO CRITICS FEEL THEY HAVE?

The majority of critics seem unaware or unwilling to admit that they may have authority. Michael Scott remarked that although others consider that he has authority he does not think that he has. He wishes to make people think and hopes that he does not have that much of an effect on the musical scene itself. Durichen prefers to think of gaining respect rather than authority through her writing. She notes:

> When applied to a newspaper writer, the idea of authority often gets mixed up with that of power. Perhaps what I'm looking at instead is the issue of influence. If I can influence or persuade people that the music I write about is exciting, interesting, and a real part of life, then I don't mind being considered an authority. But it is a very limited authority by virtue of enforced eclecticism.

This last remark is important when one considers the amount of material that the critic is expected to know and expand upon in the press. Manishen, although recognizing that he does have influence, suggests that it is probably "more than he should have."

How then does this authority originate? Manishen points out that much of his 'influence' comes from

> ...my employers, the newspaper assumes I know what I am writing about, and I am prepared to accept their judgment.

Hugh Fraser is much more philosophical in his response.

> I do not serve you and I also do not serve myself. I cannot be dishonest. I must tell the truth the way I see it, for your sake as much as mine.

Durichen writes that much of her 'authority' is drawn from every experience that she has had in music.

> I realize that my accumulation of exposure to a wide variety of performing arts (more than 1,200 concert reviews to date, plus more than 1,000 other byline musical articles) has given me a perspective from which to see things in a fairly representative way.

Perhaps most universally, the critic's authority derives from the importance that the artists themselves have vested in critical opinion. William Littler told a story in which a New York manager was willing to change the concert date to suit Mr. Littler rather than forgo the opportunity to use a portion of the future critique as publicity. Showered with such respect, the critic would have to be inhuman not to feel an obligation to the artist in question.

WHAT DIFFICULTIES FACE THE MUSIC CRITIC?

One of the most pressing limitations is that of the overnight deadline. Critics are forced to accept the overnight deadline as part of the job. This deadline usually occurs a few hours after the concert. Very few have the luxury of being able to 'sleep' on it and reexamine their opinions in the morning. Although this immediacy flavours the review with a freshness it may otherwise not have, one must question the desirability of the practice. The deadline may encourage critics to offer hasty opinions which not only do a disservice to artists, but also the critics themselves.

One of the outcomes of pressing deadlines is the temptation to oversimplify and offer easy solutions.[11] Often these solutions manifest themselves in the form of labelling the music instead of describing it. It is far simpler to coin a work 'neo-classic,' or 'post-serial,' instead of attempting an accurate description.[12] Is the outcome of a concert really "news" in the sense that the review must appear the next day? Apart from its effects on the musical community, what effects does this pressure assert on the daily lives of the critics?

"Writers block" was mentioned by many critics as an occupational hazard for anyone involved extensively in writing. It affects critics a little more acutely since they also have immovable deadlines. In these instances, most critics blame themselves and not the performance. Critics agree that there is always some aspect of the performance to comment upon. Michael Scott says that

> If I were to find myself at the end of the hour really blank, I would feel that I had failed in some way. It would be my fault and not the artist's fault.

Irregular work and sleep, "feast and famine" work loads, and many last minute assignments demand a person who has a flexible personal life. Perhaps the problem stems from

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11 Littler, "Changing critic," p. 158.

12 Ibid., p. 161.

the fact that most editors have regular working shifts and do not realize the pressures imposed upon reviewers required to assess a lifetime of artistic work within the restraints of a few hours. Other drawbacks include disrupted personal lives due to irregular work loads and hours, as well as the pressure of constant critical attack from the public. Durichen voiced that hectic schedules also impede the critic's ability for self-improvement on a regular basis. Inflexibility in the dates of concerts and interviews make it very hard for critics to take university courses, attend other entertainment events and delve into further musical study. In larger centres free-lance critics may help ease the work load, but critics in smaller cities enjoy no such luxury. Another very interesting and seemingly counter-productive limitation imposed on critics was addressed by Pauline Durichen. She writes,

> The most ironic Catch-22 for music critics is that they are expected to come to the job with some advanced performing experience--yet cannot perform in public because this constitutes conflict of interest; consequently their skills atrophy.

In view of the fact that most critics exercise complete autonomy in the choice of concerts they review, many also feel pressured by the community when they fail to review certain artistic groups. A general sentiment that the public is often very ill-informed on the size and demands of the critic's workload was expressed. Other job related problems

include pressures exerted by editors and by different arts organizations in the form of bribes such as free tickets, trips, recordings, and meals, and a general decline in interest in classical music reviewing.

HOW DO ARTISTS AND CRITICS RELATE?

Perhaps one of the greatest obstacles which critics face is the artist's perception of the critic. Unfortunately the stereotypical image of the critic as an uneducated or failed musician is still prevalent among artists. Many feel that critics write well, but are not qualified to offer musical opinions. Much speculation was offered as to the amount of preparation and knowledge which critics actually impart in each review. Many artists felt that critics are not knowledgable enough on the subjects they review. When asked whether professional musicians would make better critics the response was split. Although it was felt that the opinions of a musician would perhaps be better substantiated, the question of whether the musician had the ability to write in an engaging matter remains open. Musicians tend to have more faith, or at least respect, for critics whom they know have studied music quite extensively. In defense of the critic, it should be noted that many of them are aware of the shortcomings of newspaper criticism. In every critic's life there exists those rare times when hectic schedules often leave them with little choice but to

come to the concert ill-prepared. William Littler explains that,

> When [a critic's] calendar includes six concerts, two press conferences, an interview, and the preparation of a Saturday piece or record column--how can they possibly find time to dig out all the scores, peruse the secondary literature and approach each musical event as though it meant as much to him as it does to the artist. It doesn't. It can't.[13]

Yet in terms of professional similarities the critic appears to be more closely allied to the performer than any other occupation in music. This may seem unlikely as the performer often feels at the mercy of the critical pen. The president of the American Music Critic's Association Robert Commanday (1985), defined criticism as "a work of art about a work of art," with the critic acting as a performer "when an issue [review] comes out, his performance begins."[14] Michael Scott also recognizes the role of the critic as performer when he says that criticism "is like a performance, [and] that the act of collecting one's thoughts is aided by adrenaline."

The performer and critic also are similar in that they both take on judiciary roles. Both critic and performer derive their perception of the work from the same source,

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[13] Littler, "The Changing Critic in a Changing Press," Canada Music Book, 10-12 (Autumn 1975), p. 93.

[14] Ruby Mercer, "Editorial," Opera Canada (Fall, 1985), p. 2.

the composition.[15] They both probe into the work, extracting historical and musical information which will characterise the performance. It is these elements which determine both the critic's and the performer's perception of the work.

Critics commented on their similarities to performers, distinguishing that while they try to convince the reader verbally, the performer does so orally. Both critic and performer are acting as critics through their re-creation of the composition.

Many critics view themselves as a middle-person between the composer and the public.[16] Violinist, conductor, and author Yehudi Menuhin asserts otherwise. He regards the composer as the producer, the audience as the consumer and the performer as the true middle-person.[17] In his view the critic seems to ally more with the audience than with the artist. William Littler opts for a middle-of-the-road position, asserting that the critic "is the spokesman both

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15 Edward Cone, "The Authority of Music Criticism," Journal of the American Musicological Society, 34 (Spring, 1981), p. 5.

16 William Littler, "The Changing Critic and a Changing Press," Canada Music Book, 10(Autumn/Winter, 1975), p. 159.

17 Ibid.

for and to the public on behalf of music."[18]

Despite these similarities, most practising critics have poor or non-existent relations with artists in their communities. Hugh Fraser goes as far as to say that "a critic can be enemies with the artistic community-[it] does not impair his ability to write." This well may be, but it seems contrary to the ideal one would desire in a well functioning musical community. Yet it appears unavoidable. Most critics find the musical community distant, wary of befriending what is perceived as an enemy to their artistic world. Pauline Durichen remarks,

> I had a lot of musician friends up until the time I got my job at the Record, but even as a 'green' critic I soon realized that I had to gently -- sever my connections with them.

Although this situation may facilitate more objective reviews, this form of isolation seems undesirable and counterproductive. Durichen further explains that if she, as a performer and friend, had continued to perform or socialize with her musician friends her objectivity and critical abilities would have been questioned. Many critics expressed that friendships with musicians get in the way of their critical thinking and make it very difficult competently to do their job.

Manishen admits that he would find it hard to give a

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18 Ibid.

friend a bad notice, believing that friendship is more important than music criticism. He continues by writing that

> Artists are much more fearful and dependant on critics than they should be. I am always astonished that someone who spent a year on a composition or preparing a performance should be so concerned by an opinion that took 45 minutes to write.

Durichen also professes that,

> Yes, I do feel friendships can get in the way of my writing-more importantly, they can get in the way of my thinking. I believe anyone who preaches otherwise is a fool and egoist.

She continues by saying that she gives bad notices if they are deserved, and elaborates that

> ...if a former friend gives a so-so performance that is better than I heard some years ago, when he was truly awful, then I can justly refer to things like commitment, improvement and hard work without compromising or distorting the truth.

The overall justification many critics offered for not befriending the artistic community (assuming that the artistic community is open and willing to be befriended) was that too much involvement in artist careers may cloud their own judgment and make them feel that they owed the artists the best possible shot at success.

How then, should the performer and critic relate? The only time the performer and critic seem to agree is when a critic praises the performer. One critic suggested that the ideal relationship is one which remains at "arm's-length." This way there is no danger to the critic of getting caught-

up in the artist's own aspirations and personality. Most critics respect the artists in their communities and caution against too much personal involvement. Although frictions exist, let one hope that the situation will not deteriorate to the extent of Hugh Fraser's comment:

> Performers despise you when you write a good review and hate you when you write a bad review.

Can the critic be beneficial to the artist? Adrian Chamberlain believes that the critic provides vital feedback on how the artist is perceived across the footlights. Yet negative reviews often cause the fragile critic/artist relationship to crumble. Artists are not the only ones who feel unjustly attacked by negative reviews. Journalist Ken Winters laments the response critics receive for publishing harsh criticisms. He writes in the Canadian Music Journal that,

> No one calls a physician cruel for diagnosing appendicitis or for noticing an increase in the incidence of polio. But if a critic draws attention to severe cases of swallowed enunciation or abdominal contralto, or spots an epidemic of dull pianists, even though these are being sold publicly in the name of music, he is put down as a nasty type.[19]

Of course Winters neglects to distinguish that one is a medical fact, scientifically determined, while the other is merely an opinion, open to contradiction.

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19 Ken Winters, "Music Criticism," Canadian Music Journal, 5 (Spring 1961), p. 8.

HOW OUTSPOKEN ARE CRITICS' REVIEWS?

Obviously, all critics admitted to having written negative reviews but few view polemics as a way to build a career or a critical name. Pauline Durichen explains that,

> Very few of my reviews are wholly negative, just as very few performances are wholly bad. As a reviewer, one of my core responsibilities is to identify good and bad aspects of an event and temper the review according to what dominated. It is important to show the reader what succeeded on stage, what didn't, and--most importantly -- WHY.[20]

It is not surprising that many critics expressed that it is often easier to write about a poor performance than a good one. If more goes wrong, there is inevitably more to comment upon. Concerts of extremely high calibre force the critic to probe at a deeper level than an evaluation of performance execution. In order to temper harsh critical notices, one critic suggested never writing anything that he would be unwilling to say to the performer's face. This policy falls in line with Harold Schonberg's dictum that one should be able to confront the performer the next day with the review.

An interesting approach was taken by Kenneth Winters in a review which appeared in The Telegram. The review serves as a good example of unnecessary negative criticism. In the course of the review, Winters, dissatisfied with the piano

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20 Durichen.

performance of Leo Barkin, suggests other players who may have performed the work better.

> When I say that a professional accompanist and orchestra pianist like Leo Barkin- for whom I have the greatest respect in these other capacities- is out of his technical depth in this exacting music, I am grouping him in my mind with such players as John Newmark and Gerald Moore, two other distinguished men who would have failed in it as he did last night. The part needed Anton Kuerti- who, ironically, was in the audience last night instead of on the piano bench- or a Menahem Pressler, who has made piano-trio literature his career.[21]

This approach adds insult to injury. It was not enough that Barkin may have struggled over the work, but to suggest others who would also have failed (who have not even been given the chance), and then suggest those who would have succeeded seems uncalled for, and not indicative of responsible journalism. It is also unfair to other pianists John Newmark and Gerald Moore, who receive reprimand without even being on the stage, or given a chance to perform the work before judgment.

Yet negative reviews are not always detrimental and may help to raise the standard of performance and even save existing reputations.[22] Most critics preferred to write

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21 Kenneth Winters, The Telegram, Sept 1976.

22 Hugh Fraser recounts a situation where a visiting New York critic was planning to attend the local opera's production of La Traviata. Fraser was attacked by the opera's organizers for writing a deservedly negative review, while he realized that if he had not done so the visiting

indifferently rather than harshly, thus eliminating the fear of libel yet not compromising their opinion. Well aware of the effects of a bad notice, William Littler writes,

> Contrary to common belief, the way for an incompetent critic to keep his job is not to hurl bricks, but to drop rose-petals-to tell the local symphony orchestra that it is doing fine when it can't play in tune, to praise the local choirmaster for keeping Ebenezer Prout's trombones in his Christmas Messiah, for reviewing the local teacher's student recitals as though Horowitz were in town.[23]

WHAT DO ARTISTS THINK OF CRITICS?

National descrimination was what seemed to ruffle most artist's feathers. Many lamented the fact that if Canadian artists wish to be recognized in Canada, they must first go to Europe and return with rave notices from abroad. This distrust of our own is not limited to the sphere of music, it is readily apparent across Canada in other fields such as science, art, and dance.

Although the acceptance of Canadian talent has greatly expanded and grown through organizations such as the CBC, the Canada Music Council, and the Canadian League of Composers, the attitude that 'foreign' is better still persists. These organizations figure importantly and have

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critic would leave with a poor impression of the opera company's usually superior abilities.

23 William Littler, "Canadian Newspapers and Criticism," Canada Music Book. 7(Aug-Win 1973), p. 89.

due to, in his view, the hostility of the critics.

Harkening back once again to the issue of responsibility, critics have to accept the fact that their critical notices are often the artist's ticket to further concert bookings and publicity. Although I am not advocating jumping on the performer's bandwagon, a critical notice is crucial in the development of a rising performers career. Perhaps critics should try cultivating instead of castigating them so that they will not have to be 'discovered' outside of Canada before they are claimed to be an intricate part of Canadian musical life. [26]

Despite the lamentations on the state of musical criticism, it is still presumed that it is necessary. One artist summarized this aptly with the telling phrase, "bad criticism is better than no criticism." This holds true because any criticism is a form of publicity, and sometimes the more polemic the review, the more attention it generates.

The survey of critics reflected the fact that criticism seems to have been stretched beyond the boundaries in which it can effectively operate. Some of the blame might be placed on the editors of the newspapers who often do not have the knowledge or insight to hire people familiar with

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26 Littler, Music and Musicians, p. 17.

the field. The space given to classical reviewers is rapidly decreasing and is markedly less than that offered to other entertainment columns. This vulnerability prompted one critic to describe it as the 'nudist' of all musical professions. These situations produce critics who are a bizarre mix of ego and anonymity; proud of their writing, yet not sure whether anyone reads them or takes them seriously. The problem encompasses all facets of society; artists, promoters, the public, academics, and the newspapers themselves which, in all likelihood, would rather devote the space to more lucrative endeavours.

WRITINGS OF CANADIAN CRITICS

After exploring how Canadian critics view the day-to-day operations of their profession, it is illuminating to examine some examples of their writing in light of their own viewpoints on criticism.

Criticism in the 1980's has evolved and developed; focusing more on reporting and consequently becoming more restricted in style. Gone are the sometimes outlandish comments of earlier days, when strict libel laws and paper policies were not so imposing as they are today. With the limitations of time and space, there is the imminent danger of criticism reading like a laundry list wherein each work on the program and each soloist is given the perfunctory evaluative line, as exemplified in the following review.

> Oboist Nancy Elbeck shone in Albinoni's Oboe Concerto Op. 9 No. 11-- while tenor Paul Jenkins was stunning in a fabulous performance of Monteverdi's Laudate Dominum. Beverly Leslie was a disappointment. Her voice didn't always keep pitch. Countertenor Richard Cunningham was his usual immaculate self.[1]

Although often not the work of the critic, reviews are also

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[1] Hugh Fraser, Hamilton Spectator, Feb. 25, 1991.

often preceded by headlines which sensationalize the content of the review. "Organist who set fire performs for the first time in four years," was the caption which headed Peter Kuitenbrouwer's review in the Montreal Gazette.[2] The review itself continues with paragraphs like,

> More than 100 people showed up for the event, Tiemersma's first public concert since she started a fire in May 1987 which razed the Church of the Messiah on Sherbrooke St. Two firefighters died in the blaze.[3]

The style of the review is anecdotal, reporting on Tiemersmas' years in detention, her father's joy at hearing her perform again, and her cure from the pyro-technics of her past. Obviously, critical musical analysis is not a priority here. In the same paper, an article on Canadian cellist Ofra Harnoy reads, "Cellist fights glamour-queen image-'I can't even pose for photographs,' Ofra Harnoy says."[4] This review is accompanied by a large photograph of Ms. Harnoy draped over her cello. Definitely the content of the review is not the editor's priority in this piece. Within these sorts of editorial decisions, how does the serious critic operate? Durichen writes that music criticism of the serious arts is one of the lowest priorities of most

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2 Peter Kuitenbrouwer, The Montreal Gazette, Feb. 21, 1991.

3 Peter Kuitenbrouwer, The Montreal Gazette, Feb. 21, 1991.

4 Kirk Bastien, The Montreal Gazette, February 7, 1991.

entertainment editors. She assesses that "newspaper managements are far more concerned with mass media seduction, or the quick-fix in entertainment, than in encouraging thoughtful reading (even at accessible comprehension levels)." A few critics questioned were fortunate enough to receive minimal alterations from the editing table, due to the night deadline and absence of many an editor. Only a small few are able to compose their own headlines, yet these catchy captions need not detract from the review. Ronald Hambleton's review of a concert of works performed by ten pianos and up to 32 performers and tied into the Halloween season was introduced with "100 flying fingers make monstrous fun."[5] The review continues by weighing the success of such a commercial venture. Hambleton writes,

> ...the Danse Macabre by Saint-Saëns sounds a bit ridiculous played by 10 piano duettists instead of an orchestra. But then, maybe a Monster Concert needs a touch of the ridiculous, otherwise it wouldn't be fun, which was one of its advertised aims.[6]

Like all arts media, much emphasis is placed on the commercial.

Yet some critics, through their clever use of the language, not only catch the eye, but also fulfill their

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5 Ronald Hambleton, The Toronto Star, October 29, 1990.

6 Ibid.

review requirements. William Littler is such a critic. His slightly sarcastic tone and decision to recount the 'sexual' components of Monteverdi's opera The Coronation Of Poppea bring humour and much readability to the review. He writes,

> For make no mistake, The Coronation of Poppea is an opera (possibly history's first) about real people on the make, with Poppea herself sleeping her way to the throne. If the scenes of sexual dalliance brought less steam to the eyeglasses this time around, unrevealing, vaguely stylized costumes provided part of the answer and the fact that Nero's were worn by a women provided the rest.[7]

His light style captures the whimsical nature of the opera, as well as entertaining and educating the reader.

Another of his reviews which captures the human element of music quotes conductor Kirk Muspratt as saying, "I beat them (that is, the players) a lot this week,--and I promised them hot tubs and lots of rum."[8] By choosing to include this quote, Littler reveals his own sense of humour and a sense of fun with the whole of the concert proceedings. In this way he fulfils the 'readability' factor which many critics expressed was one of the more important aspects of the review.

Many reviews stray from addressing the music and are more concerned with documenting the musical stage

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7 William Littler, The Toronto Star, October 29, 1990.

8 William Littler, The Toronto Star, January 31, 1991.

politically and socially. A review in the Hamilton Spectator openly recounts an interview with a guest conductor Brian Priestman, who was a candidate for the conductorship of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra.

> That he's on the short list means his baton is definitely on the podium to become the next HPO music director and it means the powers that be are taking a serious look at this veteran of more orchestral ups and downs than the old roller coaster at Crystal Beach.[9]

The review continues by praising Priestman's qualifications and past orchestral experience. It must also be said that Fraser commented on all of the visiting conductors. But although it may be argued that the public has a right to know what is going on within an organization which they partly support, the ethics of printing such a review must be examined.[10] Are all conductors who are eligible given the same amount of publicity? Was the committee of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra which decides these matters consulted? Should the local critic become involved in the politics of organizations under review? These questions delve into the issue of the boundaries of newspaper criticism. What extent of coverage would serve both the artistic groups and the public well? As a reporter, the

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9 Hugh Fraser, The Hamilton Spectator, February 25, 1991.

10 Much of the same brand of reportage occurred in the search for a conductor to replace Rudolph Barshai of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra.

critic has as much freedom as any other employee of the paper. And it is, in some respects, the reporter's job to get to the inside of the story. However, stories which bias or favour a certain perspective are damaging in their limited portrayal of the whole issue. It must be remembered that critics are not the creators of the artistic scene within their city, only the documenters of it.

A review may succeed in reaching a broader readership if it relates the music to the events of its time. Tamara Bernstein does just that in her review of the Toronto Symphony and guest conductor Eliot Gardiner. She begins by placing the review within the other celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the death of Mozart. She writes,

> On Wednesday and Thursday nights, Roy Thomson Hall was probably the only Mozart-free concert zone in Toronto...The programming was ironic, in that Gardiner would have been an ideal person to discharge the TS's Mozart Year obligations.[11]

The program included a performance of Edward Elgar's Symphony No. 2 in E-flat Major, Op. 63. Through the following comments, Bernstein ties the music into the current events of the Persian Gulf War, which in its involvement of Canada was ever-present on the minds of Canadians.

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[11] Tamara Bernstein, The Globe and Mail, February 22, 1991.

> The performance left me vaguely disturbed by the piece. "Fifty years ago," wrote William Mann in 1984, "it was accepted that Elgar's Second Symphony was about Pageantry. No way. It is about a fine man, deeply disturbed by the times he lived in, comforted by many friends, and terrified by the future." Whether Mann's words reflect Elgar's intentions in pre-First World War England or modern sensibilities is a moot point. But on Feb. 20, 1991, they struck an all-too-resonant chord.[12]

The approach taken in this review, which extends beyond the mere recounting of performance executions, and places the music into the context of world events, although not new, is a positive step for music criticism. This may be what Scott implied with his comment that critics can work as 'ethnographers.' One also might tie in Chamberlain's comment that one is too isolated and distant from his readers if the review is too limited to classical music. He follows by commenting that he feels the classical community is often living in a cloistered world.

Anne Burrows, writing for The Edmonton Journal in 1971, also takes this wider approach.

> The machine age, if that is what we are still living in, is not without its anomalies. On Monday, astronauts return from space to make a pinpoint landing in the vastness of the Pacific. On Wednesday the Purcell String Quartet of Vancouver is stranded in Prince George, for all the world as though the aeroplane had never been invented and Edmonton were on the other side of

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12 Ibid.

the moon.[13]

This review is more lighthearted in tone, perhaps reflecting the celebratory nature of the event Burrows chooses to parallel with the concert: that of the successful mission to the moon.

HOW DO TWO CRITICS REVIEW THE SAME CONCERT?

With respect to content, reviews of solo recitals generally comment more on the performer than the music, unless there is also a performance of a new and unusual work. Anne-Sophie Mutter recently toured Eastern Canada, playing concerts in both Toronto and Ottawa. The same program of violin sonatas by Brahms was performed on following Tuesday and Wednesday nights, and it is illuminating to compare two reviews by the critics in the respective cities.

The reviews written by Tamara Bernstein of the Toronto Globe and Mail and Jacob Siskind of The Ottawa Citizen are surprisingly similar. Both found Mutter's most expressive playing in the second work on the program, Brahms' first sonata. Bernstein writes,

> But Mutter provided all the sweetness one could hope for in the autumnal opening of the Sonata in G Major, Opus 78. And suppleness, giving us every turn of thought of the first melody- the exquisite hesitations of the falling gestures, the rising flurries of hope, the gentle, eddying descent into

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13 Anne Burrows, The Edmonton Journal, February 11, 1971.

> the next theme- all of which the performers brought to a dramatic fulfilment in the explosive development section.[14]

She also alludes to Mutter's "sobbing chords" and "breathtaking white sound within this sonata."[15] Siskind writes,

> Mutter's most personal playing came in the first of the composer's three sonatas, offered second in this recital. Here, she seemed to be sufficiently involved to plunge more deeply into the emotional depths of the music.[16]

They both isolated her vibrato as a weakness. Siskind writes that Mutter's vibrato is unfocused, while Bernstein writes that its usage was, at times, excessive. Both also commented on the dramatic reading of the third concerto.

> The last work, the Sonata Op. 108, one of the greatest masterworks in the violin repertoire, was given a still more dramatic reading, one that seemed, ironically, more youthful and more excited than the playing heard in the first part of the recital.[17]

These comments of Siskind's are echoed by Bernstein when she records that "the performers unleashed the drama hinted at in Mutter's taut opening of the sonata."[18] Another similar

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[14] Tamara Bernstein, The Globe and Mail, February 28, 1991.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Jacob Siskind, The Ottawa Citizen, February 28, 1991.

[17] Siskind.

[18] Bernstein.

feature in Mutter's playing which arrested the attention of the two critics was her tendency to bring out the melodic aspects of the piece over the harmonious ones. Siskind wrote that Mutter "lays the stress on the purely melodic aspect of these scores,"[19] while Bernstein commented that she "wished for a stronger sense of harmonic groundings in [Mutter's] phrases.[20]

In style, however, the reviews are quite different. Bernstein rhapsodises about her memory of "exquisite moments-- still turning around [her] head," and is more emotive in her comments as depicted in the following quote.

> And suppleness, giving us every turn of thought of the first melody- the exquisite hesitations of the falling gestures, the rising flurries of hope, the gentle, eddying descent into the next theme- all which the performers brought to fulfilment in the explosive development section.[21]

She tries to share the feeling left with her by the concert with her readers, but she is scrupulous in clarifying to her readers that it is her opinion of the concert that she is relating, not the universal truth. She does this by the use of the pronoun 'I' and by personalizing her comments as she does in her final phrase where she writes, "but it is her last note of the first movement, in which she refused to

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19 Siskind.

20 Bernstein.

21 Ibid.

really settle into the D-minor chord that still haunts me."[22]

Siskind's review is more dogmatic in tone. He refrains from the usage of the pronoun 'I' and from interpreting the music in any way. He also gives some background to the works.

> Since the three works all date from the same basic period of [Brahms'] creative activity. While they contain a great deal of variety within each individual work, they are basically similar in style and character.[23]

His tone is authoritative and at times patronising. His description of Mutter as a "comely blond virtuoso" and "a performing animal" are perhaps better omitted from the review since they may be read as sexist and degrading. Yet, on the whole, he is careful to explain the music and its effect on the audience.

> In the first two sonatas, she began her opening measures with a soft, breathless whisper that forced the audience to sit quietly, listening to each delicately brushed note.[24]

Many critics prefer to interpret the music in an attempt to explain it to their readers. Michael Scott does precisely that in his description of Mahler's Symphony of a Thousand. He captures the essence of the final moments of

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22 Ibid.

23 Siskind.

24 Ibid.

the work as follows;

> The work fades into a mystical half-light in its final minutes, filling with bottom organ notes that seem to rumble through the soul, and the silvery breeze of a children's choir. Mahler was trying to articulate the redemptive power of love here, and clears away torrents of sound in favour of delicate instrumental effects: an ensemble of piccolo and celesta, for instance. 'Blicket auf, the choir plead, 'look up.'[25]

He also describes the gala feeling of the whole event. The opening of the review reads like the opening of a descriptive novel.

> There was a slight delay, getting through the corridors that lead from the lobby into the concert hall in the Queen Elizabeth Theatre last night. As people stepped into the hall and caught a glimpse of the stage, they were stopped dead in their tracks.[26]

The suspense evident in this opening sentence compels the reader to continue to find out what warranted the occasion. It also well reflects the grandeur and occasion involved in performing the work. Scott is, in his own words, re-creating the concert so that those who did not attend still get the impression that they were there.

Critics view the opening lead as being one of the more important aspects of the review. Arresting the attention of the reader from the start will hopefully entice the reader to continue reading. From a grammatical viewpoint, many

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25 Michael Scott, The Vancouver Sun, November 10, 1990.

26 Ibid.

critics use compound sentences to introduce the rest of the review. James Manishen writes,

> All season long the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra has demonstrated a consistently high level of performance, but last night's pleasure came from the discovery of music that is not often played but ought to be.[27]

Jacob Siskind introduces Anne-Sophie Mutter's concert this way,

> While the music of Brahms can be a tough pill to swallow, especially an entire evening devoted to his chamber music scores, German violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter made it all seem incredibly painless.[28]

This bi-partite approach helps contextualize the review and implies that the concert in question is, in some way, special. Arthur Kaptainis uses this technique to show how a concert by quest artists Oscar and Eric Shumsky parallels Montreal's own father and son act in the McGill Chamber Orchestra.

> Notwithstanding the double occupancy of the McGill Chamber Orchestra podium, father-and-son acts are fairly uncommon in the music world. Last night at the Theatre Maisonneuve, the ensemble under Alexander Brott presented a household duo of universal interest, Oscar and Eric Shumsky.[29]

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27 James Manishen, The Winnipeg Free Press, February 6, 1991.

28 Jacob Siskind, The Ottawa Citizen, February 28, 1991.

29 Arthur Kaptainis, The Montreal Gazette, Sept. 17, 1990.

This places the event in a context that is readily understandable to the average Montrealer. The comparison to events at home equips the reader with an anchor with which to approach the concert and review.

Many of Hugh Fraser's reviews opt for a one-line opener. On Wednesday, September 26, 1990 he writes, "A new era opened for the Hamilton Philharmonic in Hamilton Place last night."[30] Most of his reviews appear to open with a brief introductory sentence, perhaps reflecting a policy of the paper.[31] At times his opening statements beg further reading. "How can you have a visit to Vienna without that 'Harry Lime' staple of the city's music, the zither?"[32] The reader's curiosity is certainly piqued by this 'out-of-the-blue' statement.

Often criticism can be blunt and harsh. Performer-teacher William Aide advises critics to temper their views, especially when dealing with young artists. He maintains that younger artists often do not have the thickness of skin required to withstand curt critical comment. Jacob Siskind took a moderate approach when reviewing 18-year-old

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[30] Hugh Fraser, The Hamilton Spectator, September 26, 1990.

[31] Other writers in the Entertainment section exhibit the same tendencies which might presuppose that it is a stylistic choice of the editor.

[32] Hugh Fraser, The Hamilton Spectator, March 13, 1990.

violinist Allen Lu. He evaluated the progress Lu had made since his last performance in Ottawa. Although "fascinated to see how [Lu] has developed since his last performance here," Siskind also expected more from Lu than what was heard. He writes,

> Lu is at an age when child prodigies are generally considered adults. At this point he should be making personal statements about the music he plays.[33]

Yet the review is not damning in its approach, but more fatherly in tone. Siskind, perhaps aware of the delicacies of youth, is careful to juxtapose the good with the bad.

> There were indeed some fine moments in each of his performances, despite an obvious nervousness. His sound has developed and become larger, warmer, more personal. His bow arm is much more secure and draws ample tone from his instrument easily.[34]

Siskind seems to have decided that Lu has graduated into the adult world of a soloist, and is therefore enforcing the standards that he would place on a more experienced performer. His final comments read like a prescription for professionalism.

> Clearly Lu needs more experience playing in public with a variety of different accompanists- good, bad and indifferent. Only then will he be prepared for the worst and still be able to triumph.[35]

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33 Jacob Siskind, The Ottawa Citizen, February 15, 1991.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

From the readers' view point, the review, although very 'fatherly' is capable of helping the young artist progress and be prepared for the intense demands of a professional career.

In another of Siskind's reviews, Canadian pianist Bernadene Blaha in concert with cellist Shauna Rolston. He writes,

> Pianist Bernadene Blaha was less fortunate. The NAC salon is particularly unkind to the sound of a piano, especially when its lid is opened only part way. The tone quality that emerged seemed strangled and bass was particularly ugly. While this meant that the piano was less likely to swamp the cello, it distorted the musical values in the scores offered.[36]

One of the difficulties in this paragraph is that one wonders whether it is the piano or the pianist that is at fault for the 'ugly' sound. Also, Siskind does not cite specific 'musical values' that were distorted, and how they were distorted. This sort of review may sting deep into the psyche of a young artist and since young artists are often impatient to begin a career, they may value the twelve inches of space too highly.

Most critics did say that they applied different standards to amateur, as opposed to professional groups. Hugh Fraser professed that he likes to "celebrate, not castigate" the artists under his critical jurisdiction.

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36 Siskind, The Ottawa Citizen, February 20, 1991.

Michael Scott also says he cannot ignore who is performing (professional or amateur), but gives a sense of this by using such words as 'enthusiasm.'

In an interesting pairing of reviews, Hugh Fraser summarizes the events of the weekend in one column. Juxtaposed side by side is a review of the professional Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra and the semi-professional ensemble of the McMaster Chamber Orchestra. Although the concerts must have been measured by different standards, no reference is made to this fact in the review, nor to the fact that the McMaster group is largely comprised of students. Fraser writes the following of the HPO's performance.

> I was a little disappointed with the playing of the HPO. Most of it was up to the usual fine standards, while some was surprisingly ragged. But trumpeter Mary Jay huffing into her Harmon mute and those cooking violas in Fascinatin' Rhythm- very, very tasty indeed.[37]

Directly following this paragraph he continues,

> McMaster Chamber Orchestra conductor Keith Kinder featured his accomplished wind section in the first half of last night's concert at Convocation Hall. And well he might. There was some wonderful soloing from all hands...[38]

He then compliments individual players on their fine playing. For the average reader with no knowledge of the

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37 Hugh Fraser, The Hamilton Spectator, March 11, 1991.

38 Ibid.

fact that this is not a professional orchestra and that different reviewing standards are in effect, the review is not a truthful reflection of the musical activities in the city. His remarks on the performance of Haydn's 'La Passione' symphony may likewise misrepresent.

> After a shaky opening Adagio, which had the strings a bit at sea, the Allegro Di Molto, Menuet and Finale danced by, taut, light and luminously intelligent and with a crisp highly buffed ensemble that was laden with the elan of Haydn's music.[39]

The column seems to infer that the latter concert was a better performance than the former. To an uneducated audience, this type of comment may have an impact on ticket sales, thus influencing which concerts will be attended in the future. In smaller cities this type of criticism affects the very future of music, while in larger cities events by non-professional organizations rarely receive notice.

Reviews can also serve as bulletin boards which publicize the views of musical organizations and explain some of the programming choices and changes. Hugh Fraser admitted that he often tries to sell tickets because of the fragility of Hamilton's musical environment. As he expresses it, "there is sort of a missionary job as well." This is well evidenced by his preview columns of Valerie Tryon which advertise and encourage the public to come out and hear her.

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39 Ibid.

Other critics were not as open in their role as publicity pushers and were uncomfortable with the idea of influencing the attendance with their comments.

Yet some reviews can help the reader and concert goer understand the programming choices and illuminate some of the backstage decisions of different artist organizations. Under the headline "Bernardi to give oratorio needed rest,"[40] Eric Dawson examines conductor Mario Bernardi's decision to substitute another of Handel's oratorios in place of the ever popular, ever present Handel's Messiah. Using the review this way informs the loyal music patrons why Messiah will not be heard in the upcoming year and sheds a sympathetic light on the reasons behind these decisions. Dawson quotes Bernardi as follows,

> It is difficult to do the same score year after year. I consider it a challenge. It forces you to look deeper into the work every time and in Handel to explore the many alternatives. I don't think, though, that it is something I want to do indefinitely.[41]

He then goes on to list the many times and places Bernardi has conducted and recorded this work. The review leaves the reader with a sympathetic ear towards Bernardi and with a sense of anticipation for the new oratorio to be performed in the coming season. The second section of the 'review'

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40 Eric Dawson, The Calgary Herald, November 23, 1989.

41 Ibid.

also discusses programming changes, but this time focuses on the new music series. Bernardi talks of the possibility of engaging conductor Witold Lutoslawski to conduct the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra in a performance of his Third Symphony. Devoting space to an elucidation of these issues serves to provide publicity for this series of concerts and also helps to develop a friendlier image of Mario Bernardi. Dawson uses sympathetic quotes by Bernardi such as,

> "We don't discount anything. My job is to entertain and to attract more people to hear the orchestra. But any music director's job is also partly to educate a little and enlarge the audience's sense of what's going on now in music. Anything that will accomplish that we will consider."[42]

This whole review, which occupied a third of a page in the entertainment section, functions as an information piece for the reader. In it, the critic works as the middle-man, bridging the gap between the public and the artists by explaining why and how programming choices are made. In this way the public can feel more a part of the development and progress of the local artistic scene.

The same principle operates in a review by Michael Scott which introduces the new music director of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra to the public. A large cartoon image of the maestro is blown up on the front page of the

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42 Ibid.

leisure section, along with half a page of material on the past history and accomplishments of conductor Sergiu Commissiona. There is a personal element to the piece which tries to uncover a little bit about what Commissiona is like as a person, as well as his abilities as a music maker. Scott quotes Commissiona as saying

> The decision to marry my wife, to leave Romania, to say yes to certain conducting engagements, these were taken in a moment. There is an element of fate which has always steered me.[43]

He also romanticizes about Commissiona's childhood:

> As a child he was captivated by the flamboyant fiddling of the gypsies who roamed the outskirts of Bucharest where he lived...[44]

Much of the review quotes the generally high opinion many in the music world have of Commissiona. There are quotes from other conductors, critics and musicians. The review is designed to introduce Vancouver audiences, which have continued to shrink, to the new conductor in a manner as attractive as possible. Even the headline which reads "Sergui Commissiona will add Romanian charm, flair to VSO" is designed for this purpose. It seems that even though critics disdained the usage of the review as a tool for publicity, many reviews do exactly that. The sympathetic tone in this review is unavoidable; Commissiona is also

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43 Michael Scott, The Vancouver Sun, February 3, 1990.

44 Ibid.

quoted raving about the beauties of the city of Vancouver, and ends with saying "it is amazing what you can accomplish with patience and love- in music, perhaps that's all you need."

Critics seem to let the outcome of the concert dictate the content of their reviews. What is and is not included is often a reflection of extra-musical developments which influence the scene.[45] They fairly consistently fulfil the "who, what, where, when" requirements along with some foregrounding which helps to explain the works at hand. On the whole, many of the reviews, although expressing a personal opinion, try to explain and justify why the reviewer felt the way she/he did.

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45 For example: Scott's review on the gala Mahler concert, Hambleton's review on the fire-organist, and Fraser's review on the guest conductor Brian Priestman.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CRITIC AND THE COMPOSER

"The critics? The very worst of the useless races on this earth!" fumed Puccini,[1] who was one in the long line of composers upset by the unjust nature of a critic's written judgment. Benjamin Britten staunchly believed that most criticism was governed by "sheer malice or irresponsible prejudice,"[2] and George Bizet died barely a week after having a violent scene with journalist Oscar Comettant, a man who had denounced his opera Carmen as "a miasma of corruption."[3] Throughout history composers and critics have been at each other's throats, each the target of the other's misunderstanding.

In his book A Lexicon of Musical Invective, Nicolas Slonimsky pinpoints what he feels to be a fissure in the relationship between composers and critics.

> Their [the critic's] only failing is that they confuse their ingrained listening habits with the

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1 John W. Klein, "Critics and Composers," Musical Opinion, (January, 1970), p. 189.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

unalterable ideal of beauty and perfection.[4]

Obviously much of this union suffers from the malady of misunderstanding. Composers are accused of being overly sensitive and critics of being too subjective. It is an interesting relationship, for both seek the esteem and appreciation of the other. Just as every composer enjoys receiving a good notice, so every critic likes to think that their written appreciation will be valued by the artist in question. Both are uncertain of their musical position, and both seek approval.

Having explored the daily practice of Canadian newspaper criticism in the last chapter, this chapter will delve into how the critic judges new music. What is the critic's role in the development and exposure of new music? How does the critic decide what contributions are valuable and which are merely mediocre? How should the critic approach and evaluate this new music? Is the critic an interpreter or translator, a 'wine-taster' sampling the newest creative endeavour, a public relations officer pleasing both the artist and public, or is she/he a judge?[5]

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[4] Nicolas Slonimsky, Lexicon of Musical Invective, p. 3-4.

[5] Winton Dean, "Criticism," The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, ed. Stanley Sadie, (London: Macmillan, 1980) p.43.

How do critics move forth to meet the music? How do they guide their readers through the musically unknown? Do critics merely chart "the bounds of chaos"[6] or do they attempt to categorize the music, deciding what to condone as quality, and what to dismiss as mere novelty? It becomes imperative for critics and public alike to have some standards with which to evaluate new music.

One critic remarked that due to the broad coverage demanded by the paper it is practically demanded of critics to be continually open to new music. Hugh Fraser is representative of many critics when he says that he feels it is "essential to be at New Music concerts and take an interest in what is currently happening in the Canadian music scene." Many critics recognize their responsibility in supporting new Canadian music. Yet, this task can at times prove overwhelming. Hugh Fraser explains that "there are thirty thousand composers in North America alone, if they all write a sonata a year, I'm finished." Consequently, most critics limit themselves to promoting and focusing only that which they find personally meaningful and understand. Critics said that they work actively in reassuring their readers that it is allright to let go of the past's more established music traditions. Many critics bridge the gap

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6 Dean, New Grove, p. 44.

between composer and audience by describing their own interpretation of the work as they experience it in their own capacity as listeners. Pauline Durichen believes that in order for a critic to 'fairly' assess a work critics must above all, be honest. She writes,

> That may mean acknowledging to the reader that a given event has proven baffling or disturbing...

For critic Adrian Chamberlain, "new music needs help, but not uneducated help." In his view, the critic can be a valuable tool to the composer in describing how the music was received by the listeners.

Manishen, an active composer in his own right, says he is open to much new music, admitting only musical biases in disliking Mahler. He actually dislikes being referred to as a 'classical' reviewer for he feels this limits the sphere of much of what he reviews.

How can the reviewer help the listener reach the music? What language and style can make the imaginative world of a new work tangible to the listener? Many critics confessed that descriptive information which presupposes a certain amount of technical language on the reader's behalf is not very helpful, nor is the 19th century aesthetic of characterizing the music by its expressive content. Description seemed to be the path that many critics followed in reviewing new works, yet judgments are demanded of the

critic and any criticism that moves beyond description becomes judicial.

Many of the troubles between composers and critics may be traced to the fact that most judgments are rooted in personal taste. Michael Scott, although professing that he can never learn enough about the music around him, admits that he promotes 20th century music which he "finds meaningful." Critics are limited to their own composite of knowledge and experience and it is upon this base that opinions are formed and 'verdicts' spoken. Taste is a personal expression, completely subject to each critic's storage of information and preferences; it can therefore never be good or bad.[7] Critics recognize this and say that their challenge is to justify and explain personal taste. This requires working actively at balancing both mental and psychological states in order to convincingly support the viewpoints they offer. Even though critics realize that criticism is one person's opinion, the subjective element of criticism is one aspect which many shy away from. They prefer to try and justify their opinions scientifically and logically.

How objective are most reviews? With the given that most new works do not deal with the musically known, or

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[7] Boas, p.138.

patterns of past traditions, in what context can the judgment be objective? If there are no set models or criteria, how does the critic defend any sort of objectivity? Pauline Durichen describes objectivity as "an attribute of the open and curious mind." She continues by saying that if one's first reaction to a different and unfamiliar work is fear, then the objectivity is immediately compromised. If, the response is one of curiosity and anticipation, then objectivity is well served "by the need to share that learning." To her, and many others, the critic must keep an 'open' mind.

> Critics who seek traditional mental footholds whenever faced with difficult assignments run the risk of losing their objectivity:this does not mean that one shouldn't relate known ideas to new ones, but known ideas should not be an escape into presumption.[8]

Michael Scott thinks that all the critic can do is to try and be honest in a consistent way, admitting that critics would have nothing to write about were they completely objective. Manishen does not believe that the critic can 'justly' evaluate a work, but does attest that the review can be balanced. Intuition also plays a part in the formation of critical judgments. Even if the performance proved bizarre and baffling, critics, on the whole, are confident in their abilities to sense whether the work is

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8 Durichen.

performed with sincerity and conviction. Sharing doubts with the reader, on both the composition and the critic's own ability to assess the work, helps ensure 'fair' treatment of the work at hand. Durichen defends this practice by writing,

> If there is a doubt about whether one can fairly comment (pro or con) I make sure to express that in my writing. I don't mean relaxing into wimpy ambivalence, but simply sharing the idea of new and unprecedented contexts.

Overall, the critical consensus was that reviews of new music concentrate more on the work than the performance. Chamberlain said that he "focuses more on the music, although what the performer is doing also provokes interest." He explains that he "makes a judgment about the performance when it enters the realm of performance art."

Scott articulated that his new music reviews are generally "more descriptive," and that he "will make a judgment if one presents itself."

On the whole, critics show a reluctant resignation toward the inevitable subjectiveness of reviews. Looking back in history, one finds London critic Ernest Newman fighting adamantly on this point in a series of articles published in the London Times as early as 1923. He disregards subjective criticism on the basis that its critical insight derives solely from probing into the physiological effect that the work of art generates in the critic. Newman strives for "a form of criticism that will

tell me more about the object criticised and less about the critic."[9] He admits to being guilty of using this same genre of criticism and searches for a stronger structural basis for making judgments other than the personal reaction of the moment. He seeks to shift away from the psychology towards the physiology of music. He wishes to deduce the unique stylistic fingerprint of each composer and with this knowledge establish boundaries of musical correctness. He postulates,

> Now suppose we had worked out in this way the constituent elements of Schubert's style- not at all a difficult task. Suppose we had found that, in the bulk of his work, a certain technical procedure was always unconsciously employed when Schubert wished to express a certain mood. If, when, we found the same formulae in a work that, through the lack of more precise directions on his part, different conductors look at from different points of view, should we not be justified in saying 'Here is the formula that we know to have been used again and again by Schubert for a particular emotional purpose: is it not a fair inference, then, that when he uses it here his purpose was the same as in the other cases, and therefore the work is to be taken at a certain tempo and in a certain mood, and no other?'[10]

This scientific reduction of a composer's oeuvre to carefully regimented formulae is akin to early developments in the performance practice movement which upheld the authenticity of a performance above all else. Many critical

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9 Ernest Newman, The London times, Dec. 16, 1928.

10 Ibid.

judgments seem to be accepted not because of their accuracy, but because of their relevancy. Thirty years ago performances of Baroque works were accepted and valued, without adhering to the rigidities of the performance practice movement. Today, due to increased research and the subsequent enforced merit of re-creating the 'original' sounds, no modern performance passes without scrutiny of its neglect of stylistic procedures of the past.

Perhaps this quest for 'authenticity' is in fact a substitute for the value judgments critics have given up making.[11] The reliance of critics on scientific, documentable (objective) data has paralysed many critic's ability to effectively bestow judgment on works. To Kerman, criticism deals with musical response which, by its very nature, is intangible. Yet there is a debate as to whether this descriptive stance which many critics prefer exonerates them from making value judgments. Critics are not all to blame, for it is the limitations of newsprint that drastically curtails these statements. Many critics seemed eager to rationalize the emotive component of the aesthetic impulse and establish some firm criterion upon which to base their judgment. They are reluctant to admit that it is

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[11] Joseph Kerman, Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 43.

impossible and perhaps undesirable to be exclusively objective in critical judgements. Without the 'emotive' response, the critic cannot be said to have fully experienced the music heard. One critic felt it unfair that while the performer and composer are allowed to immerse themselves in-and experience-the music, the critic is barred from this privilege.

How does what the critics expressed compare with the written opinions of scholarship in the field? Leo Treitler writes that subjective statements are unable to derive their validity from factual correctness or formal consistency, and are therefore disqualified from the status of knowledge and subsequently relegated to the category of expression.[12]

Composer Gunther Schuller echoes a similar sentiment when he writes that "evaluation in the arts is bound to be subjective, indeed, cannot be objective, and is entirely a matter of personal taste, personal opinion, and background. He goes on to expand his argument,

> That precisely because it is an art essentially non-utilitarian, at least in our western civilization's concept of music and art, and because it can say nothing specific or incontrovertible, it therefore can say everything.[13]

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[12] Ibid., p. 190.

[13] Gunther Schuller, Musings-The Musical Worlds of Gunther Schuller, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 287.

He does, however, admit that on a scale of one to ten, eight represents what is known objectively. But he says that the other twenty percent represents the "most interesting, refined, sophisticated aspects of performance, as well as the most personal."[14] This may tie in with the freedom many critics described that they felt when writing about new music. Scott exclaimed that he "feels freest when writing about new music," and that he 'judges' the experience undergone in the concert hall.

The responses of the critics indicated that they tend to construct the review on a balance between the known and the unknown with greater emphasis on the former. To Scott and others, "so much of the review comes from experience"; both from other written reviews and prior reading.

Certainly one of the positive attributes of such subjective criticism relates to its charm and readability. The blatant subjectivity of critics such as Bernard Shaw and Hector Berlioz is at the root of the popularity of their criticism to this very day.

Some very different views come from the writings of composer/critic Stewart Hylton Edwards. He argues that critics should confine their remarks to generalities only. He believes the performance should be criticised, but not

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[14] Gunther Schuller, p. 249.

the new work in question. He provides the following advice to other composers,

> As a composer, I say without hesitation that all criticism of mature work should be disregarded. Once the composer is sure of himself and knows that he has left the formative years behind, he should concentrate with an insular singularity of purpose on his aim, and be deflected neither one way nor the other by criticism. He must adopt the attitude of Brahms to fault-finding criticism, which was a shrug of the shoulders and a remark to the effect that all his critic's would be proved wrong- as indeed they have been.[15]

He also asserts that today's music critics tolerate a lot of 'nonsense' within the contemporary music scene because they fear that their critical faculties cannot be trusted. He believes that as a result we have generally lower standards of art.

Is it possible to make a purely musical judgment, distanced and uninfluenced by its external environment? One must question whether there is immanent value in works of art or whether the outside influence from which value judgments are made themselves set the criteria for what is considered valuable. Is not the division of the classical and popular culture reflective of the value different social groups have allowed the genres to have? Often value is bestowed upon works for reasons not all together musical, letting subjective judgments masquerade as aesthetic ones.

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15 Stewart Hylton Edwards, Critics and Composers (New York: Vantage Press, Inc., 1984), p. 21.

If critics serve a social function by informing the public on the happenings within the classical world and publicizing the activities of a celebrated few through their notices, should it be expected that their judgments be aesthetic ones, and is that even desirable?

Supportive readings by philosophers Carl Dahlhaus and Theodor Adorno uphold that without some subjectivity, judgments are worthless.

> Just as a judgment based in feelings without objective content is empty, so too is any attempt at objectivity without the substance supplied by emotion.[16]

Theodor Adorno asserts that the subjective reactions of a critic are not opposed to objectivity of judgment but are instead the foundation for all judgment, the experience of music being impossible without them. Adorno leaves it up to the "critic's ethic to raise his impressions to the rank of objectivity, by constant confrontation with the phenomenon."[17] He continues by saying that critics are in the wrong, not when they have subjective judgments, but when they do not have any. To him, criticism is a means that facilitates the musical matter to be absorbed by the public, and therefore subjective input is essential.

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16 Carl Dahlhaus, Analysis and Value Judgment (New York: Pendrageon Press, 1983), p. 34.

17 Theodor Adorno, An Introduction to the Sociology of Music (New York: The Seabury Press, Inc.,), p. 149.

Recognizing the futility of criticism as a mass tool for any enlightenment into the work of a composer, Newman calls for the formation of critical analysis. At the time when these articles were written the field of analysis was not yet as clearly defined as it is today. Yet has analysis competently filled this critical void? It seems to have reached an anti-musical point which equates value with complexity. It also has steered clear of taking any sort of a critical approach. Granted, the field of criticism is really no more efficient. Critics shirk their responsibility to do more than describe unusual aspects of new works. Richard Middleton denounced experimental music as "a rather amateurish branch of philosophy and comparative religion, as against a genuinely musical movement."[18] How does one define a genuine musical movement in our perpetually changing society? Walter Benjamin asserts that works of art should no longer be judged as isolated objects of art. He believes that if one's purpose is to determine quality then the work must be "inserted into the context of living social relations."[19] One should not be evaluating the works of

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18 Richard Middleton, Music and Letters (January, 1975), p. 85-6.

19 Christopher Ballantine, "An Aesthetic of Experimental Music," in Music and its Social Meaning ed. F. Joseph Smith, (New York: Gordon & Breach Science Publishers, 1984), p. 109.

art's position vis-a-vis the productions of its time, but its position within the events of its time.[20] Much of this approach relies on examining the broad impact on the work.

What are some of the works which provide challenges for today's reviewers? Max Newhaus' Public Supply relies on a co-creation of the event with the audience. In this work the caller dials a given number and then the sounds or words made are modified electronically and mixed with those of other callers. The social aspects of this type of work cannot be overlooked. In 1967 John Cage wrote that,

> ...art instead of being an object made by one person, is a process set in motion by a group of people. Art's socialized. It isn't someone saying something, but people doing things, giving everyone (including those involved) the opportunity to have experience they would not otherwise have had.[21]

Another work which tries to break down the traditional audience/performer roles is Frederic Rzewski's Free Soup. In this work the audience is invited to bring instruments and join 'the performer' under the instruction "to relate to each other and to people and act as naturally and free as possible, without the odious role playing ceremony of traditional concerts."[22] These types of concerts break

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20 Ballantine, p. 110.

21 Ballantine, p. 111.

22 Ballantine, p. 112.

down the barrier between private and group activity and ensure a 'sharing ' of the musical experience.

In these instances, the role of the critic as a bridge between the audience and music is superfluous since the music requires the interaction of the audience. Notions that the music is the sacred ground of a mysterious creative genius are destroyed and make newer works not the property of those with elite understanding, but creatable and enjoyable by everyone.

Improvisation is another component of newer music which may be addressed from a sociological standpoint and which poses a problem for the critic's evaluation. Christopher Ballantine asserts that improvisation turns cooperation and social behaviour into an aesthetic matter.[23] He believes that through improvisation an audience may gain practice at observing social norms. He writes that "historically, all forms of group music-making reflect types of social behaviour, kinds of social relationships."[24] With its undeterminable nature, improvisation makes each piece and performance unique. This open basis for criticism is why anyone can enter into it. Terence O'Grady writes

> It is an aesthetic advantage of indeterminate music that it forces the listener to enlarge his

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23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

> capacity for judgment to include nontraditional means of expression, and to become an active participant in the making of music.[25]

With a wider range of aesthetic appreciation possible, the critic can evaluate the music by determining whether the piece provides valid possibilities for aesthetic reflection, and then try to determine how effectively this aesthetic potential was fulfilled.

The broad spectrum this form of 'evaluation' allows lifts the burden of making critical judgements to the point of absolving the critic from any responsibility at all. In indeterminate music, with its ever changing manifestations of form, the critic has no basis for comparative judgement because the results of the work cannot be previously determined. That leaves the newspaper critic with only one task, that of publicizing upcoming concerts of new music. The critic is no longer needed as interpreter since the music is designed to involve and interact with an audience. Nor is the critic needed as a judge since the performance may change from concert to concert, and there is no established aesthetic from which to base judgment.

The following pages examine some criticisms by Canadian critics which appeared in the press and reflect the genre of Canadian criticism produced. Calgary critic Eric Dawson

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25 Terence J. O'Grady, "Aesthetic Value in Indeterminate Music," The Musical Quarterly, 67 (1981), p. 381.

writes the following about a performance of a Little Suite by Malcolm Forsyth and Vincent Persichetti's Symphony for Strings.

> The Forsyth suite-unpretentious, personal and with not a bar too many or an extraneous gesture anywhere-simply confirmed the positive impressions left by all of this Edmonton composer's best scores.
> Vincent Persichetti is one of the most fecund of America's contemporary composers and a man cursed with the gift of facility. Everything about his Symphony for Strings heard here is fluent, coherent, a fine test of the orchestra and evidence of finely-honed craftsmanship. Yet like most of his work, it is utterly devoid of a single striking idea.[26]

It is interesting to examine the parallel structure of this review. The first work is already assumed to be a worthy composition. The phrase "simply confirmed the positive impressions left by all..." implies that the work, although not specifically good or bad, is a positive contribution to new music. The latter half of the quote, is negative even in its exterior cordiality. Words such as "fecund," "cursed with the gift," and "a fine test" betray that the work, despite being regarded as worthy by the larger musical community, is not among the reviewer's personal favourites. As Forsyths' work is 'positive' like all of his 'best scores,' so Persichetti's is "utterly devoid of any single striking idea." This reviewer is careful to proclaim all his

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26 Eric Dawson, The Calgary Herald, November 15, 1990.

opinions as universal ones. Opinions are therefore made to sound like authoritative judgments.

Michael Scott's approach is a little more like that of the ethnographer. He writes the following of Jean Coulthard's Canada Mosaic.

> Coulthard composed her Canada Mosaic suite in 1974 specifically for the VSO, weaving folk songs and musical memories into a series of postcards, among them harbour views of Vancouver, the totem poles of an Emily Carr painting, prairie wheat fields, and a Chinatown parade...Coulthard's elegant details-the echoing native rhythms of the timpani in the first section, for instance; and the coiling dragon dance created by a bass clarinet in the last part.[27]

This descriptive approach which completely absolves itself from the task of value judgments, is akin to the 19th century practice of describing the music, this time without the emotional baggage of the psychological effect the music has on the reviewer. Scott is pinpointing recognizable landscapes to which the audience can readily relate. In the latter part of the review he refers to specifics of the orchestration technique (the rhythms of the timpani and the use of the bass clarinet) for which the reviewer can listen. He seems to favour describing the music visually and for this reason may be able to provide a wider audience with some understanding and tangible links into the piece.

James Manishen evaluates an unusual concert of music in

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[27] Michael Scott, The Vancouver Sun, Nov. 15, 1990.

Manitoba as follows,

> Canadian George Fiala's Concertino for Piano, Trumpet, Timpani and Strings is also strong on lyric impulse but more tersely crafted. Fiala shows a well-synthesized blend of influences from Prokofiev, Shostakovich and others, but the piece has a fine level of dramatic tension and is very well put together.[28]

Once again the nationality of the composer is mentioned. The description of the work is confined to one sentence: "strong on lyric impulse but more tersely crafted." The reviewer fails to define this statement further by giving musical examples of clarifying exactly what he means although his second sentence does position the work by alluding to influences that the reviewer perceives in the music. His concluding statement, "the piece has a fine level of dramatic tension and is very well put together," has a favourable slant to it but does little to help the reader grasp the composition and says nothing tangible about the composition.

In Toronto, much of the Toronto Star's coverage of new music is left up to free-lancers. The city's New Music Concerts is a case in point, most of the concerts being covered by Ronald Hambleton. Though generally concentrating on describing the new works, Hambleton's comments often evolve into expressions of value judgement. He writes the

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28 James Manishen, The Winnipeg Free Press, Feb. 6, 1991.

following of Nils Vigeland's In Black and White, a work scored for piano and 14 instruments,

> Despite the violence in Vigeland's music--- it may best be described as a rhapsody in an off colour, sort of a jazz gone berserk. But it was complex and skilful writing, and full of clever little tricks.[29]

Words like "skilful" and "clever" imply an underlying worth in the music, whether it is explicitly said or not. The descriptive section of the paragraph is also very helpful to the reader who has not attended the concert for it provides a tangible analogy to which the reader can relate. Other descriptive passages are likewise as accessible.

> Alvin Curraqn's For Cornelius,--which began as a waltz that stopped just short of schmaltz, but rose to a manic frenzy by means of a rigidly controlled passage of minimalist drumming of chords that built on themselves by slow changes.[30]

Although this review uses terminology such as 'minimalist' and 'chords,' Hambleton does try to explain the concept to the reader. He tells the reader how the work is minimalist, "chords that built on themselves by slow changes." In this way he tells something to both the casual and educated reader alike.

In another review, written about a concert of works by German women composers, he chooses a more technical approach

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29 Ronald Hambleton, The Toronto Star, Dec. 11, 1990.

30 Ibid.

in his evaluation. He writes that Barbara Heller's Anschluesse,

> ...displayed a consistent and even thoughtful idiom, full of agreeable sonorities, and featuring almost Chopinesque figurations as a linking device between the sections.[31]

The reader would have to know something about the works of Chopin to deduce what 'Chopinesque figurations' sound like. Hambleton does, at times, inflict criticism on the choices of the composer. He writes that Susanna Erding's El Sueno

> ...was disappointingly amphorous in its texture. The difficult flute part dominated the work, and though there was some ingenious support from the others, it was as if the composer had not worked out the best union between the three instruments.[32]

Another example comes from he criticism of Jana Skarecky's Night Songs.

> Despite an overblown ending, the music was subtly-conceived, versatile in the use of the 'Batterie Park' percussion quartet's instruments, and even surprisingly melodic at unexpected times.[33]

He is careful in combining the good with bad in his judgments, and consequently seems more authoritative in what he says. There are times, however, when he sinks into the nebulous arena of eloquent, useless sentences. He describes Alexina Louie's Star-Filled Night as "a shifting turbulence

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31 Hambleton, The Toronto Star, Oct. 15, 1990.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

of sound that reflected an excited auditory imagination."[34] Obviously bemused with Henry Brant's Inside Track, which calls for keyboard and three separate ensembles which are not required to pay any attention to each other, he writes that it was,

> ...indescribable, except to say that it was a throwback to a style of pastiche that few composers bother with any more.[35]

Although unimpressed himself, he does not pronounce a dogmatic judgment to his readers, and lets them decide for themselves.

How do two critics review a premiere of a new opera? With the imminent difficulties in criticizing new musical endeavours, it is illuminating to compare the remarks of two of Toronto's most prominent critics, Robert Everett-Green and William Littler. John Oliver's first opera premiered on Tuesday, February 26, 1991. Both reviews appeared a day late, a fact probably owing to the length of the opera and missed overnight deadlines. Although more space was allotted to the review in the Globe and Mail, both are quite similar in their assessment. A major gripe with both critics was the positioning of the orchestra on stage. Littler writes,

> But as effective as turning the stage over to the 12-member orchestra was in solving the usual

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34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

> balance problems between singers and instruments, it meant turning conductor Richard Bradshaw into an obtrusive object, positioned in the front row of the audience, with the singers between him and his players.[36]

Everett-Green echoes these sentiments with the following.

> ...was diluted by the fatal positioning of the cast: between conductor Richard Bradshaw in front, and the orchestra on a raised stage behind. This deflationary presentation gave the show the flavour of an ad hoc, high-school effort, or a semi-staged reading.[37]

Along with the mandatory plot summary, both critics also described what was unusual in Oliver's music: the use of recorded animal and bird calls from the Guatemalan countryside. Littler sums up Oliver's efforts by writing that,

> Oliver exhibits a promising talent for setting words and making then intelligible. He knows how to support the voice and particularly in the opera's later scenes, how to give it singable melodies.---the score breaks no new ground technically. The musical language is accessible, even when the textures involve a fair amount of contrapuntal activity.[38]

This review describes the music in layman's terms. Littler does not cite specific examples, nor does he go into a detailed analysis of the score. Everett-Green agrees that the music reflects a more popular idiom, but goes into more

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36 William Littler, The Toronto Star, Feb. 28, 1991.

37 Robert Everett-Green, The Globe and Mail, Feb. 28, 1991.

38 Littler, Star, Feb. 28, 1991.

depth in his impressions of the music. He describes the music as follows,

> Much of the music's effectiveness stems from its variegated colours and densities of sound...Tiny shards of acoustic or sampled sounds are combined into mysterious, one-of-a-kind timbres and textures...Melodically the work takes a simplified, naive tack that is at times reinforced by prominent open intervals within the orchestra. Rhythmically, it is evasive from first to last, frequently offering an apparently stable beat, but crossing meters furiously underneath. Much of the score resembles a dance suite for multipeds, with a particularly string pull toward minuet or slow waltz.[39]

This description is much more specific and helpful to the reader. Specific aspects of the music are examined such as the melody and rhythm, and analogies are made for both. The description also avoids value judgments.

Although discontented with the "rudimentary storytelling" of the libretto, Littler ties his review in politically and relates it socially to other surrounding events. He writes,

> It is as if mother and son see in the false gods of Mayan legend counterparts to more recent leaders of that unhappy part of the hemisphere.[40]

Both seem to have similar impressions of the opera, and both reviews steer clear of obvious judgments of preference. They seem cautious in delineating value to the work. Both do

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39 Everett-Green, Globe, Feb. 28, 1992.

40 Littler.

commend Oliver, for this his first opera, by nonspecific phrases such as "commands respect,"[41] and "[offers] much food for thought and for the ear."[42]

Has the approach to new music changed much from that of earlier writings? An obvious modification is the effort late twentieth century critics have made to avoid gender related comments. Remarks such as the following made in 1956 by S. Roy Maley, the critic for The Winnipeg Tribune, would be deemed as sexist and unnecessary today.

> There is much virility and energy in the symphony, for Mme. Eckhardt - Gramatte writes with masculine impulse. She creates overwhelming effects at times, in building up her orchestral climaxes, but lyricism is evident whenever needed, but the prevailing impression is one of rhythmic force.[43]

With the development of the feminist movement, the stereotypes of strong, masculine and weak, feminine writing have been discarded. Reviews such as the following would be hard pressed to pass unaltered by editors.

> S. G. Eckardt-Gramatte is certainly the visual antithesis of her music. Her Concerto-Symphony practically assaults the ear with its determined masculinity, its relentless drive forward, its constant barrage of musical exclamation points. Nothing could sound less feminine. This is music

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41 Ibid.

42 Everett-Green.

43 S. Roy Maley, The Winnipeg Tribune, March 23, 1956.

> that seizes the listener by the collar and shouts its message straight into his face. Like it or not, it's strong stuff.[44]

This one appeared underneath the headline "It's strong stuff from a lady." Another feminist-influenced change in criticism is the removal of the pronoun 'Miss' from prefacing the female composer's or performer's last name. Today, more often than not, both male and female are addressed by their last name only.

Aside from style technicalities like those above, it is interesting to observe whether the critic's approach to new music has changed. In 1954 George Kidd reviewed a complete evening of new music by Canadians. His comments on the work reflect the auspices of the event more than the actual merits of the works at hand. The review reads as ambiguously positive. He writes,

> Alexander Brott came from Montreal to conduct the Dembeck String Quartet in his four songs, with Trudy Carlyle, mezzo-soprano, as soloist. These works are based on poems by Lord Milne, Tennyson and Rossetti. Miss Carlyle gave a warm and understanding performance. The Cradle Song and Strangers Yet were given with beautiful dramatic nuances that added to their appeal.[45]

Other remarks, like those about Murray Adaskin's Sonata are likewise as elusive.

> Murray Adaskin performed his own Sonata, with

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44 William Littler, The Vancouver Sun, June 6, 1969.

45 George Kidd, An unidentified Toronto newspaper, 1954.

> Gordon Kushner at the piano. This violin work has been heard before and with each performance its musical patter becomes more clear. Mr. Adaskin's work made it a most outstanding presentation.[46]

The reader is uncertain whether it was Adaskin's piano performance or his compositional efforts which "made it a most outstanding presentation." Throughout this whole review the reviewer seems more intent on capturing who was there and who played what, than with the aural experience of the music. Kidd also relies on commenting upon performance execution rather than on the worth of the compositions.

> Godfrey Ridout was represented with a selection from the dramatic symphony, Esther, with the chorus and James Milligan. It would seem that Mr. Milligan has the exact voice to bring this dramatic lament to its highest peak, and with the use of the chorus the work became a most thrilling experience.[47]

Some critics did attempt to describe and infer value on new works. Eric McLean was one such critic. He writes the following of a concert by the Montreal Bach Choir.

> Violet Archer's 'Proud Horses' is a particularly skilful piece of choral writing which avoids most of the musical cliches suggested by the words. There is a great deal of imagination, too, in Kelsey Jones handling of some oblique lines by Blake. It is true that Jean Coulthard Adam's 'More Lovely Grows the Earth' comes closer to established choral conventions, but it is done with taste and a good deal of perception in

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46 Kidd.

47 Kidd.

translating the words. [48]

Hugh Thomson provides an indepth, descriptive analysis of Jean Coulthard's String Quartet.

> It was a work of strong talent, romantic and predominantly rhapsodic, and the boys gave it an eloquent, brilliant reading. Almost from the beginning, its rhapsodic character was affirmed. It was a most interesting work in its contrasts. First would come declamatory passages which seemed to transcend the limited sonorities of a string quartet; then would follow moments of comparative serenity, clothed in modern, bitter-sweet harmonies. [49]

From reading this, the reader gets a sense of how the music sounded to the reviewer. No technical musical terms are used, but the comments are intriguing enough to warrant an enthusiastic reader to go and listen to the work.

Reviews of Canadian music can be quite nationalistic in tone. Some critics seem to attach some inherent value to the fact that the work is Canadian. Much emphasis is placed on the event aspect of the work: the fact that it is a premiere, that the composer was present, and a general lamentation of the fact that these events are few and far between in the main stream musical season. Francean Campbell uses much of her review to discuss the practices of the Canadian League of Composers and the rarity of choosing

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48 Eric McLean, The Montreal Star, September 23, 1958.

49 Hugh Thomson, The Toronto Daily Star, 1952.

Vancouver as the location to hold their annual concert.

> The Canadian League of Composers was given what I took to be the League's annual showcase of new music, usually held alternately in Toronto and Montreal. Vancouver was elected this year, the program to be drawn from composers across the country. But with the local membership of perhaps four, the composers undertook a do-it-yourself concert, with families pressed into service to sell tickets at the door, hand out programs, arrange the stage, and generally help out.[50]

She continues by comparing this 'unprofessional' approach to the attention such a concert would have received were it given in Toronto or Montreal. Very little is said about the music, and she concludes the review by writing, "There will be more to say about the concert at a later date, for there were more significant things about it than meets the eye." One wonders what the newspaper space is supposed to be used for, if not for some information on the works being performed.

There are some critics who do not shy away from harshly criticizing new works. John Yocom, of The Toronto Star writes,

> Barbara Pentland's 'Vista,' despite an excellent performance, resulted mostly in tiny gusts of ideas that got nowhere. There was a marked rhythmic framework as its strongest identifiable feature but what little lyricism there was never seemed to join hands with the rhythm.[51]

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50 Francean Campbell, The Vancouver Sun, date unknown.

51 John Yocom, The Toronto Star, 1948.

Gilles Potvin, obviously unimpressed with the style of Sophie-Carmen Eckhardt Gramatte's Capriccio concertante writes,

> L'oeuvre est écrite dans la tradition et le style en vogue en Europe centrale avant la guerre. Si son instrumentation si brilliante, retient l'attention, cette page offre sans son ensemble assez peu d'interet.[52]

One critic undertook to chastise composers for not being avante-garde enough. William Littler's 1966 review entitled "Rare Phenomena" laments the general conservatism of Canadian composers. He tries to rationalise this trait in the course of the review by writing,

> Perhaps an explanation lies in the relative immaturity as well as the strong Romantic streak pervading in the music of these three composers, because even if Romanticism itself has been long out of vogue, it can still be directed far more originally and productively than they directed it.[53]

Littler, obviously a supporter of the younger, more avante-garde so in 'vogue' at the time, assesses the concert by writing, "the word daring doesn't even apply." He addresses the issue of a Canadian style, and concludes that "Canadian music can mean anything from recollections of Cesar Franck to evocations of an Indian pow wow." This review is a direct product of the times, when the avante-garde was in

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52 Gilles Potvin, Le Devoir, 24, fevrier 1977.

53 William Littler, The Vancouver Sun, April 15, 1966.

prominence and all else was considered (as Littler phrases it) "passe."

Max Wyman, the Vancouver critic in the late sixties and early seventies, favours the romantic tradition of emotionally characterizing the music. He describes Jean Coulthard's Threnody as follows,

> Our emotions are worked on, remorselessly; but so are our minds. Matching the anguish of the work's emotional content is the style of the writing itself- torn, harsh, yearning, angular, jarring. The quartet has a rare wholeness about it- a continuous thread that binds the three movements into a smoothly-fitting unity. We sense a special anguish in the second movement; we feel death stalking relentlessly throughout the third; but always, we are aware of the work's singleness of purpose.[54]

Wyman is definitely trying to appeal to the visual imaginations of his readers. Due to the sterility inflicted on music perception in the past ten years, very few critics in the nineties continue with this genre of criticism. Theirs is much more reporterial and less personal in flavour, essentially avoiding ideas which might be of interest to the reader. Instead of interpreting the music, critics prefer to describe the technicalities of it. John Kraglund evaluates Ligeti's Night and Morning for choir.

> The fantastic harmonies built up by overlapping sections in a seemingly endless repetition of words, and phrases were especially dazzling in Night, but there were individual notes which were

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[54] Max Wyman, The Vancouver Sun, May 29, 1970.

> equally memorable in the descriptive sounds of cocks and bells in Morning. [55]

Increasingly, the newspaper reviews may be the only review a composer receives of a new work. Each therefore becomes more and more important. Like the performer, the composer values reviews as a necessary source of publicity. For both critic and composer, much emphasis has been placed on the overnight review. Yet it is impossible for the reviewer to approach the work with the same commitment and dedication as the artist. The priorities of the two groups are vastly different. To the critic, the composer's work may be one of several others, on one of several programs, all to be reviewed within the time frame of a week. The composer is naturally more attached to the work and is therefore more likely to be upset or badly served by inadequate criticism. One difficulty in reviewing new music is the emphasis much avante-garde music has placed on electronic devices. Assessing these musical contributions presupposes that the critic be competently trained in this technical knowledge. With the heavy work load most critics face, one critic compared these assignments to cramming for an exam. Pauline Durichen openly admits that,

> I genuinely forget the content of some of the

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55 John Kraglund, The Globe and Mail, May 27, 1984.

> things I've written about in the past and it can be quite disturbing; for a few hours you can feel you really know something about, say, digital sound sampling and can create a credible story about it. Two weeks later, it may look like someone else wrote it.

However, in light of the admitted highly subjective nature inevitable in criticism, the authority of the critic's printed judgment begs scrutiny. How much influence does a critic's words have in shaping the artistic scene? The impact of negative remarks cuts deeply: composers are far more likely to remember scathing comments than praiseworthy ones. From a business perspective, the spirit of the review extends beyond the fleeting comments of the next day's review. Neil Harris of the Winnipeg Free Press accurately points out that,

> The musical community looks to me for good reviews and quotable quotes to use in their advertising and grant applications.

The approach and acceptance of new music by Canadian critics is generally quite positive. Almost all that were questioned felt that it was one of their more important functions as a critic. The reasons for this are numerous. Perhaps it is a relief to hear something new after sitting through a two-hundredth performance of Beethoven or Mozart. Then too, because of the relatively youthful ages (mid-30's) of many of the critics, they are more open to the developments of their time. The misunderstandings between

composers and critics also do not seem as pronounced as those between artists and critics. This is interesting viewed from the standpoint that much of the content of new music reviews is based on personal opinion and expressions of taste.

CHAPTER FOUR: NEW DIRECTIONS TO MUSIC CRITICISM

What new directions are open to newspaper music criticism? Its viability is constantly under pressure. Many papers are unable to support music reviewers, and if they do it is the least priority of the Entertainment section. The mass appeal, easy to read dictum of many papers demands brief, uncomplicated, reporter-style music criticism and leaves little room for effective comment. Much of what has dictated the criticism produced is based on the assumption that the general audience is not looking for intellectual criticism, but rather superficial writing which informs them of where spend their extra dollars. Yet at the same time the critic is supposed to act as a publicist, a media information outlet, a judge, and a consumer guide. Allan Shields assesses the dilemma of the modern critic as follows:

> A modern critic is trapped. He is thought to be a reporter who should serve as a public relations man, and a personal acquaintance of the artists. After all these duties, he is asked to produce objective, professional criticism at an intellectually respectable level. It cannot be done.[1]

What is happening in our papers is not music criticism,

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[1] Allan Shields, "Critic Past, Critic Present," Music Educators Journal, 58 (1971-72), p. 75.

instead it is musical commentary which by its very nature threatens the precarious growth of music in Canada. Critics are given less and less space to amplify, argue, and explore musical ideas and hastily made judgments seem par for the course. This is not the fault of practising critics, but of the demands that have been placed upon them from their papers, musicologists and the general public. Music reviews suffer from the fact that newspaper management is unqualified in the recruitment of people to fill the arts-journalism field. They often are unaware of the level of specialization required to competently fill the job and, those who are qualified, often prefer to work in a more rewarding area. Durichen writes that papers "are far more concerned with media mass seduction, or the quick-fix in entertainment, than in encouraging thoughtful reading." She traces this trend back to the changing patterns of education over the last quarter-century. These patterns de-emphasize the renaissance value of a broad general knowledge and cultural literacy. She recognizes that there are more people than ever who can read and write, but she believes that on the whole the general standard of analytical thinking has continually declined. Durichen continues by writing that,

> Unfortunately, the idea that solid, cogent reporting and reviewing can also be entertaining and accessible seems to be out-of-date -- especially to the folks who keep redesigning section fronts to look more and more like USA

> Today, and who shorten articles to a brief and glib pass through incomplete ideas. If people are taught to want only that kind of reading, they'll come to believe it's what they should have.

From these remarks it would appear that if music criticism is to survive under the limitations of the newspaper, it must learn to capitalize on the glitz and superficiality which papers demand. Appendix Three shows an example of an article that appeared in the Hamilton Spectator. The pairing of these two music reviews of different genres reflects this growing trend towards the more commercial and eye-catching. The fact that the reviews were probably edited in order that they match in length and the rhythmic caption "Flav came a rappin--Victor was a tappin,"[2] is evidence to this point. To succeed as viable criticism the review must be able fool readers into thinking that they are being entertained, while all the while they are being educated on the music.

During the 1990 Canadian Managing Editors' Conference, Phil Mcleod, representing the London Free Press, admitted of his paper that,

> We're essentially in the information business, not necessarily the writing business. We will use and exploit good writing if we've got it, or if there's some more appropriate way of presenting the information than simply writing it, we will

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2 The Hamilton Spectator September 26, 1991.

attempt to do it.[3]

Within this type of framework and the 'commercial' objectives of many editors, is there a place for effective music criticism? When questioned, critics still believed that the review is still perhaps the only viable outlet for music criticism since it ideally includes some analysis, comparison, and an aesthetic judgment. What needs to be questioned here, is whether the whole idea of music criticism itself is a viable form of expression.

Part of the difficulty which emerged in the course of this study was that music criticism itself was hard pressed to be defined. Music criticism presents itself in a great variety of widely differing genres, and there exists no established criteria to tell one what is criticism and what is not. The boundaries of music criticism range from the specialized 'scientific' analysis of musicologists to the highly subjective opinion of critics working for newspapers. In the past half century the critical aspect of newspaper reviewing has been disregarded in terms of its validity and authority by theorists, historians, and artists. Newspaper reviewing sits precariously on the fence between the scientific and the literary, completely justifiable by neither one. Winnipeg critic Neil Harris is aware of these

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3 Phil McLeod, CNDPA Newsletter, 1990, p. 1.

limitations when he writes,

> The newspaper is not the place for serious criticism. That requires reflection.

Such a utilitarian idea of paper reviewing makes its whole standing in today's society suspect. The idealistic philosophy which defends that through the popular medium of the paper a critic can arrest the attention and interest of potential non-classical music lovers and in some way broaden their horizons and compel them to explore this genre of music themselves, is ill-founded and unreflective of general human nature. Critics working for the press, although intending to write for the general masses, are always writing for, and about themselves. What this form of critical opinion can accomplish is to provide future generations with an idea of how music is viewed by the people of today. Yet from a general perspective even this is misleading. Allowing space for the coverage of classical music, which is enjoyed by a minuscule percentage of the general population, is deluding and misrepresentational of the interests and events of our time. Though critics wholeheartedly uphold their dedication to new music, to what degree does this depict the actual public interest in these endeavours? Why employ someone to document the interests of a few, in a medium which is read less and less every year? Contact with growing generations is not achieved through

eloquent prose and literary finesse, but through the aural and visual arena of new technology. It would therefore stand to reason that if any form of mass criticism is to succeed it should make use of these media.

Already there is some evidence of the increased reliance on new technology. The new market of CD's, laser disks, and videos are changing the direction of newspaper music criticism. The increasing importance of such magazines such as Gramophone, Fanfare, and Notes, move the critic away from the concert hall and towards the direction of record reviews. Marked decrease attendance in the main series concerts of many Canadian orchestras[4] reflect a new type of listener who would prefer to enjoy the same music in the comfort of their own homes. Record reviewing increasingly becomes the way of the future for criticism. With the emergence of the laser disk, a device which allows the consumer to recreate the visual and aural experience of the concert hall, it becomes more evident that the nature and parameters of newspaper reviewing are changing. William Littler suggests that the newspaper critic will slowly evolve into a music and video reviewer who conceivably will

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[4] The orchestras in the Eastern region have been hit quite hard by low ticket sales in the last few years. The only increase in sales is reported in the pops or children's concerts. Information taken from the Dec, 1990 edition of Orchestra Canada.

never have to leave the reviewing desk.

Other new trends instigated by record companies which have long been struggling with the glut of performances of the same music, include re-categorizing the music to reach a broader public and producing classical music videos. The latest of these tactics can be seen by the series of 'dinner' music disks put out by Sony in 1988. These disks feature recordings of various performers playing suitable 'dinner' music, or music indigenous of a certain region such as Spain etc., accompanied by recipes which complement the music. The newly released music video of Berlioz' Symphonie Fantastique by the Montreal Symphony Orchestra also moves the music into a visual arena that comes complete with whips, chains, and the mock execution of three of Canada's prominent critics.

With these new developments, it appears that the world of classical music is in the process of change. Thus, the rules and parameters of daily criticism must also expand and explore new approaches to the musical scene. Evermore, it seems that the critic must be more than someone who has the ability to write well and be well educated not only in music, but in other areas as well. The performance-oriented criticism of the past needs to be replaced by a brand of criticism that promotes understanding between all members of the musical community, and continually evolves with the

artistic world.

How can the critic help in the listener's approach to new works? One idea which surfaced was that the review of a new work appear before the concert. This method would allow the critic to explain the work to the readers, and thus aid in the work's reception. Program notes presently serve this function, yet are only useful to those who attend the concert and decide to read them; at times their content is more of an exercise in intellectualism rather than helpful hints to the first time listener. Reviews which appear after the performance are less useful at approaching an understanding of the work and generally serve as comment on the technical execution of the performers. Yet much of this genre of musical commentary focuses on determining the 'meaning' of the work. Although the meaning may aid in a clearer reception of the work, meaning and value are two very distinct entities.

Almost everyone who comes in contact with music functions in some capacity as a critic. Simple choices such as what one listens to, or chooses to teach or study, all reflect some form of criticism. These critical choices often reflect the social milieu of the music and its listeners. Any particular music is best understood in terms of the criteria determined by the group or society which makes and

appreciates that music. Future critics must be able to interpret the music sociologically, recognizing the specific public for whom it is intended. The question of music's relation to public opinion overlaps with that of its function in present society. Often what is written about music has nothing to do with what should be one of criticism's major concerns: that of the effect music has on people's lives. Music must be treated not with reverence and 'clubbiness,' dutifully paying homage to the composer in fashion, but instead be approached from different perspectives as diverse as musical, aesthetic, sociological and educational. The current stratification of music and its criticism is an expression of general social class structures in society. Musical production and reviewing are re-enforcements of what people find relevant and the manner in which they relate to their world. Music obeys not only the laws of its own development, but those of general culture as well.

The consumption of culture and differentiation of musical genres reflects the definitions of class systems and labour. Although exceptions exist, the appeal of classical music has traditionally been limited to an elite, educated audience. Many of these musical tastes are based upon what is viewed as normal. The public musical ideal frequently becomes entwined with one of comfort and consequently the

public rejects innovations which conflict with the habitual vision of performance. This attitude is detrimental in the music world for its practice results in the overlooking of many artistic endeavours which are different or unfamiliar in interpretation. Critics, functioning as intermediaries, are often held liable as symptoms of a musical malady for which they are merely hosts. They represent the public views, and their volatile position is well captured by the epigram of Benjamin when he writes that "the public must always be wrong, and yet it must always feel represented by the critic."[5] Active communication between artists and artistic consumers becomes possible by criticism which views and interprets music sociologically. Adorno writes that,

> Socially, music criticism is legitimate because nothing else enables musical phenomena to be adequately taken in by the general consciousness...[6]

What has inhibited the effectiveness of much criticism is its link to institutions of social control such as the press. In the last quarter century, the topicality and enlarged publicity aspect of daily criticism has hampered the critic's role, forcing much of the music cultures literature of appreciation to gravitate toward being purely

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5 Theodoro Adorno, "Public Opinion and the Critics," An Introduction to Sociology in Music, p. 149.

6 Adorno, p. 149.

informative in genre, with no room or need for real critical interpretation. Pressure from academic institutions has also hampered critics from the natural reliance any critical activity exerts on subjective reactions. It is far worse if critics were to have no such reactions at all, for such reactions are witness to the fact that the music has penetrated into the critic's psyche. Working within the medium of the media helps to minimalize the gulf between the working class and classical music. Leonard Bernstein was aware of this and capitalized on the fact that the masses are more easily reached verbally and visually than literally and aurally. Future music criticism should reflect this wider approach and take into account the steady stream of different genres of music which continuously reaches a variety of listeners, all with divergent musical tastes. A look at the value of a musical genre should move beyond that of the historical perspective, and begin to examine the genres themselves. Following the lead set by literary criticism and exploring the music from different perspectives such as feministic, religious, sociological, ethnographical, etc. would help place the music in easier grasp of a larger public. Reporting and value judgments should be abandoned in favour of interpretation, something not possible in the constraints of the daily press.

Past critical inquiries have limited themselves to

'classical' music performed in the concert hall. This elitism should be abandoned and a broader range of music should be examined. In terms of a social context the music of the theatre, television productions and films is far more relevant and influential to millions of cinema-goers who have yet to explore other classical forms. Changes in the form of criticism must be based on the overall awareness of every aspect of society.

The emergence of the 'cultural journalist'[7] who is at home in several branches of art, and has the ability to relate this to an audience, is a possible and probable new direction of criticism. This type of criticism will shift its focus from the immediate individual artistic pursuits of the performer and will instead concentrate on the whole of the music arena. Reviewing in this capacity has already occured. Much of it not by conscious decision, but due to economic restraints. Most papers need reviewers who can cover other artistic events or city reporting.

The new type of 'journalist' will be active at a base level in musical development and will serve more as an ethnographer than a pronouncer of aesthetic judgements. This 'critical' work will appear, not in the papers, but more readily on television in the form of documentaries, or in

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[7] Fred K. Prieberg, "The Critic is Superfluous Today," World of Music 14 No. 3, (1972), p. 40.

the radio. More effort will be spent in illuminating different artistic pursuits in different genres and different cultures, than in labeling and categorizing the music. Artists need not rely too heavily on the judgment of the new critic, for few assessments will be made on the work presented at one concert. Instead, the artistic output of the performer will be examined in light of the entire career and development of the artist. Music will be examined on the whole for its impact on its functions in the market place, social behaviour, foreign impact, etc. This critic will explore the whole gamet of music-making and place it historically, politically, and sociologically.

It must be realized that the harmony of composer, critic, and audience is necessary to the development of any kind of national art. Helmut Kallman asserts that in Canada there are not enough channels of criticism, and those that do exist are limiting and unproductive.[8] He upholds that "without public and critical reaction, art shrivels and dies."[9]

The music world should not be afraid to turn towards the media and capitalize on educating the senses of the consumer television audience. This does not mean 'selling

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8 Helmut Kallmann, Canada Music Book, p. 80.

9 Kallmann.

out' and insulting the viewers with watered-down facts and musical examples (like the trend set by many media operations who feel it is the only way to create an audience), but to get behind the scenes and show the viewer the 'real life' story of classical music: its inception, its rehearsal and its performance, explaining the music and treating it and its musicians not as artifacts from another time, but as human beings who possess the same struggle with daily life as every person. Some papers (although perhaps unconsciously) are addressing these issues through pieces which delve into the personality and lifestyle of celebrated musicians. A recent addition to The Hamilton Spectator is a section entitled "My Pleasure Spot." This column, appearing every few weeks or so, attempts to uncover the 'person' behind the personality by illuminating the favourite place of the artist in question. Through this approach of exploring the world of classical music through a common denominator, it may open the doors to a wider appreciation. The canyon that separates many from the beauty of classical music is not ignorance, or lack of musicality, but society's insistence that it belongs to the members of a certain social class.

Music criticism should reflect this concept, interpreting music humanistically. Joseph Kerman defines criticism as,

> ...the way of looking at art that tries to take into account the meaning it conveys, the pleasure it initiates, and the value it assumes, for us today.[10]

He traces the decline of criticism with the rise of musicology which, through its reliance on fact finding, can evade judgments of value. He suggests that musicology and criticism should merge and deal with,

> ...pieces of music and men, fact and feeling, with life of the past in the present, with the composer's private image in the public mirror of an audience.[11]

It should therefore be a challenge that forces one to re-examine the fundamental philosophical principles by which one functions. Kerman goes on to suggest that "theory and analysis should be treated as steps in the ladder to criticism."[12] He bases this in his presumption that

> ...the main incentive that brought musicologists to musicology, and theorists and analysts to their fields, was something close to the critical urge- not the scientific fervour for research.[13]

Research belongs with criticism since it forms the background which unlocks different aesthetic perceptions and helps ground new interpretations. It forms the grounding of

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10 Joseph Kerman, Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 61.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., p. 63.

the critic's basis for judgment. If criticism is to be effective in educating and discussing issues of 'value,' it must originate from a broader perspective. It should not be couched within passing aesthetic trends, regurgitating the attitudes of the elite music 'in vogue' at the time, instead its purpose should be to observe the music being produced and document this from the perspective of a musicologist, ethnographer, and sociologist. This type of criticism cannot be accomplished in the daily press whose reads for topicality and sensationalism. Even after hearing the justifications and views of critics throughout this study which do suggest the opposite, I believe that daily criticism really serves no purpose at all, except to widen the gulf between all of those who work within the music industry. Snap assessments written in less than as hour hardly deserve the importance and space the paper currently allots. If true critical activity is to exist at all in the field of music, it cannot operate within time deadlines and space restrictions.

Who emerges as victorious from the newsprint? Those who are not interested in music are often repelled by the elitism of the commentary in the press. Many of the critics who write for papers are not writing in a style that is accessible and beneficial to the reader. Writings often read as dated, clever prose which insult the very readers it is

supposed to attract. William Bennett addresses this issue in a 1985 article on popular-market science writers:

> Yet many editors persist in asking their writers to address prose to an imaginary reader who was educated two generations ago, [and] hasn't read anything of science since.[14]

Although Bennett is writing about science-writing, a much similar situation is evident in music writing.

In regard to the artist, daily criticism can only be damaging. Even if the notices are positive, reliance on a non-practising musician, often who have never known the rigors of a performing career, seems detrimental and contradictory toward raising the standards of performance and of art. Too many artists are hurt by flippant remarks in the press, which are often unfounded. The development of artistic careers should not be in the hands of critics, but in the hands of the teachers and managers who, through an intimate knowledge of the performance field at hand, are better equipped at an informed evaluation.

An alternative to the printed word, which by its very nature suggests authority, is through other media-related media such as radio and television. Much of this genre of critical activity is already being pursued. Developments such as record comparisons between panels of informed individuals and television documentaries which observe the

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[14] William Bennett, p. 125.

artist at work help nourish while at the same time impose standards on the musical arena.

Music criticism in contemporary newspapers contributes very minimally to the cultivation of most music endeavours. The immediacy of its commentary threatens artistic careers and has only time and space to brush the surface of new music. Critics are often overworked and are the recipients of inhuman demands on their time and knowledge. Their whole position in the music world struck me as extremely isolated and unproductive in developing a positive musical environment. Perhaps newspaper music criticism should be limited to concert listings and leave the more indepth evaluation to teachers and specialists in the field. Music criticism itself is still a viable form of expression, but not within the constraints of a medium such as the newspaper.

APPENDIX ONE

List of Practicing Canadian critics as listed in the 1990 edition of Editor and Publisher International.

British Columbia

Vancouver:

The Province---Music---Ray Chatelin.
The Vancouver Sun---Music Classical---Michael Scott.

Victoria:

The Victoria Columnist---Music/Drama/Art---Adrian Chamberlain, Michael D. Reid.

Alberta

Calgary:

The Calgary Herald---Music---Eric Dawson.

Edmonton:

The Edmonton Sun---Music---Valerie Gregory.
The Edmonton Journal---Music---Leisure and Entertainment---Jeff Holubitsky.

Lethbridge:

The Lethbridge Herald---Entertainment---Pat Sullivan.

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan:

The Star-Phoenix---Entertainment---Pat Macsymic.

Manitoba

Winnipeg:

The Winnipeg Sun---Music---John Kendel.

Ontario

Brantford:

The Expositor---Music--- B. Gallagher.

Brockville:

The Recorder & Times---Music---Roy Lewis.

Cambridge:

The Cambridge Reporter---Music--- C. Aagard.

Chatham:

Daily News---Music---Steve Zak.

Guelph:

The Daily Mercury---Music---Gerald Manning.

Hamilton:

The Hamilton Spectator---Music---High Fraser.

Kingston:

The Whig-Standard---Music---Greg Burliuk.

Kitchener-Waterloo:

The Kitchener-Waterloo Record---Music---Pauline Durichen.

London:

The London Free Press---Entertainment---Larry Cornies.

Ottawa:

The Ottawa Citizen---Music/Dance---Jacob Siskind.

St. Catherines:

The Standard---Music---Heather Junke.

Sarnia:

The Observer---Films/Theatre/Music---Dave Pattenaude.

Simcoe:

The Simcoe Reformer---Fashion/Music---Cheryl Bauslaugh.

Toronto:

The Globe & Mail---Music---Robert Everett-Green.

The Toronto Star---Music---William Littler.

THe Toronto Sun---Music---Bob Thompson.

Windsor:

The Windsor Star---Entertainment---Harry Van Vugt.

Quebec

Montreal:

Le Devoir---Cultural---Robert Levesque.

The Gazette---Music---Arthur Capitanis.

La Presse---Music---Claude Gingras.

Quebec City:

Le Journal de Quebec---Music---Pierre Nadeau.

Sherbrooke:

Le Soleil(Fr.)---Music---Marc Samson.

La Tribune(Fr.)---Music---Rachel Lussier.

Nova Scotia

Halifax:

The Daily News---Entertainment---David Swich.

APPENDIX TWO

The following questions were mailed to criti[illegible] and [illegible] with the nature of daily musical newspaper criticism. T[illegible] ar[illegible] determined much of the preceding narrative.

General

1) How did you become involved in music critic
2) What musical training do you have?
3) Describe a typical day.

The Review

4) How much space does your publication allow?
5) Do you have any choice in the type of concert[illegible] review?
6) What readership do you aim at?
7) How do you approach writing a review?
8) What kind of preparation do you undergo before/a[illegible] concert? (Studying scores, attending rehearsals, sec[illegible] reading)
9) Does the obligation to write impair your enjoyment[illegible] concert?
10) Do personal preferences come through in your revie[illegible]
11) Is there anything you avoid when writing?
12) What restrictions are imposed on you by your paper[illegible] existing libel laws?

Role

13) What do you feel is your role to your surrounding musical community? to your readers?
14) What are the expectations of the critic?
15) What difficulties face the music critic?
16) How is music criticism useful to the general public?

Authority

17) Do you feel you have any musical authority in your community?
18) Can criticism be objective?
19) By what authority do you criticize?
20) Do critics have any influence on the artistic scene?

Performer

21) Do you have any musician friends?
22) Can these friendships get in the way of your writing?
23) Can you give a friend a bad notice?
24) Are you ever really outspoken in your reviews?
25) How do you write a bad review?
26) How do critics and artist interrelate?

)THER

27) What is the future of music criticism?
28) What do you suggest would improve criticism?
29) What do you think makes good criticism?
30) Do you think it is possible to justly criticize a work?
31) Do you feel the review is still a viable outlet for musical criticism?

APPENDIX OF CRITICAL WRITINGS EXAMINED

The Vancouver Sun:
Robert Sunter, Tuesday, Oct. 3, 1967.
William Littler, Monday, April 13, 1964.
" " April 15, 1966.
" " June 6, 1969.
LLoyd Dykk, Thursday, Oct. 24, 1968.
Francean Campbell, June 3, 1956.
Max Wyman, May 29, 1970.
Michael Scott, Nov. 10, 1990.
" " Feb. 3, 1990.
" " Nov. 15, 1990.

The Edmonton Journal:
Anne Burrows, Feb. 11, 1971.

The Calgary Herald:
Eric Dawson, Nov. 23, 1989.
" " Nov. 15, 1990.

The Winnipeg Free Press:
James Manishen, Feb. 6, 1991.

The Winnipeg Tribune:
S. Roy Maley, March 23, 1956.

The Toronto Daily Star:
Glenn Julian, Jan. 21, 1953.

The Toronto Star:
John Yocom, 1948.
Ronald Hambleton, Dec. 2, 1975.
" " Oct. 15, 1990.
" " Oct. 29, 1990.
" " Dec. 11, 1990.
William Littler, Oct. 29, 1990.
" " Jan. 31, 1991.
" " Feb. 28, 1991.

The Globe and Mail:
Tamara Bernstein, Feb. 22, 1991.
Robert Everett-Green, Feb. 28, 1991.
John Kraglund, May 27, 1974.

The Hamilton Spectator:

Hugh Fraser, Feb. 25, 1991.
" " Sept. 26, 1990.
" " March 11, 1991.

The Montreal Gazette:
Peter Kuitenbrouwer, Feb. 21, 1991.
Kirk Bastien, Feb. 7, 1991.

The Montreal Star:
Eric McLean, Sept. 23, 1958.

Le Devoir:
Gilles Potvin, Feb. 24, 1977.

The Telegram:
Kenneth Winters, Feb. 4, 1980.

The Ottawa Citizen:
Jacob Siskind, Feb. 28, 1991.
" " Feb. 15, 1991.
" " Feb. 20, 1991.

APPENDIX THREE

NOW

THE SPECTATOR B

LIFE/ENTERTAINMENT Wednesday, September 26, 1990

Different strokes for different folks

Photos by Barry Gray, The Spectator

☐ Public Enemy rapper Flavor Flav had them jumping at Carmen's.

Flav came rapping

By NICK KREWEN
The Spectator

DON'T BELIEVE The Hype was more like Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood at Carmen's Banquet Centre last night, as controversial New York rap group Public Enemy overcame adverse conditions to perform its two-hour show.

Faulty microphones, problematic sound and a stage that couldn't take too much bouncing around gave the rap pioneers their fair share of headaches, but everything settled down well into their performance. A late arrival by the band resulted in no sound check, so that was fiddled around with as they rocked the house with Who Stole The Soul and Brothers Gonna Work It Out from their Fear Of A Black Planet album.

The late start — the band eventually began its set around 10.30 p.m. — also resulted in threats to turn the power off in mid-set as they approached curfew.

Cooler heads prevailed, and the only fists that were raised were those of the crowd in unison with the service announcements of Public Enemy, whose verbal missives were jackhammered into the brain cells of listeners by a very loud sound system.

Carlton Ridenhour — better known as Chuck D. — articulately took exception to some of the bad press Public Enemy has been through, and sought to clarify the situation.

"We want to show the media that they're wrong about us," said Chuck D., during a rare break between numbers.

"We came in peace, and we're going to leave in peace."

Chuck claimed that reports of violence at Public Enemy concerts were greatly exaggerated, and countered with the statement: "Don't you think that if there was some major violence connected to a Public Enemy show, it would be known worldwide?"

He blamed the hype on "a severe lack of education."

He also disavowed any problems with the police, thanking the Montreal police for helping the band cross quickly over the Canadian border.

"We work well with the police. Their motto is to serve and protect the people. But in some places in the black community, we've encountered problems because the police try to protect the property first, and you second."

Chuck said the reason the group is so popular is because "we're too black, we're too strong and we have a little bit of intelligence on the side."

One of the most visually stunning rap groups, Chuck D., his humorous sidekick Flavor Flav, D.J. Terminator X and the khaki-clad Security Of The First World (whose usual toy machine-guns were nowhere to be seen last night) certainly kept their energy up, plowing from Brothers Gonna Work It Out and Fight The Power, from Spike Lee's film Do The Right Thing to She Watch Channel Zero? The show finally ended around 12.15 a.m.

Despite the growing popularity of rap, it still isn't drawing substantial numbers for live performances.

Last night's total attendance was about 725, despite four opening acts — and promoter Ranjay Singh said he needed 825 to break even.

☐ While new HPO conductor Victor Feldbrill took his first night's applause.

Victor was tapping

By HUGH FRASER
The Spectator

A NEW era opened for the Hamilton Philharmonic in Hamilton Place last night.

The new conductor, Victor Feldbrill, took the Classics series podium for the first time and the choice of music was vintage Feldbrill. His dedication to Canadian music was represented by the opener, John Weinzweig's Symphonic Ode, a gem of logical structure and expressive moods.

The orchestra played it with care and precision — Weinzweig himself pronounced himself very happy at the after-concert reception and told a wonderful tale of getting a list of orchestral infirmities along with the commission from the Saskatoon Symphony in 1959. There were no infirmities last night. The principals took their parts well for a crisp, lively performance.

Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola K364 followed and was far less happy.

The soloists were HPO concermaster Lance Elbeck and principal violist Brett Allen. It was a careful, anxious read that lacked both warmth and charm. The soloists didn't seem to fit together well and their intonation was far from unanimous at times.

I have heard Elbeck play with far more conviction than this and I'm sure I'll hear Allen under far better circumstances, this being his first solo outing with the orchestra. The Andante was taken much too slowly by Feldbrill. It became sluggish and lacked any elegance or beauty of line.

The finale of the evening was very different.Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony is not something one can play half-heartedly.

It was written under terrifying duress, with Stalin himself playing music critic — a music critic with brutal labor camps at his disposal. The orchestra sounded fine with fine solos from clarinet, flute and violin and with the brass section sounding magnificent. And yet for all the excellent ensemble and precision, the performance didn't compel the tears of agony in the Largo as it should or the half-believing hope of relief and then ecstacy in the finale.

Still the HPO is sounding better, more together and full of beans under Feldbrill's direction. It augurs well for an exciting season.

Conductor Feldbrill wasn't the only new thing on hand during the evening.

A slick, chatty, magazine called Fanfare replaced the usual Hamilton Place program. An interview with the maestress, Zelda Feldbrill, and a recipe for her delicious-sounding Mocha Cake informed its glossy pages.

It featured an editorial, an address from Philharmonic president David Gow, performer profiles (the apple-cheeked and marvellous new tuba player, Mark Bonang) along with Richard Gale's breezy and informative program notes.

I loved it and am happy it's to come out about every Classics concert.

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