

New music is far too loud not too musical, critic says

By Gaynor Jones

Not only can new music written for the organ sound resplendent, it can be almost deafening. It may not have been the intention of New Music Concerts' performance Friday night at St. James Cathedral to produce such excruciating side-effects, but at least I survive to tell the tale.

Certainly it was not the fault of the excellent performers who showed a sense of devotion and dedication to the music which in some cases was more than it deserved. These were the distinguished guests — American organist/composer William Albright — French horn players Fred Rizner, John Simonelli, George Stimpson and Scott Wilson and percussionists Robert Becker, Robin Engelman, Russell Hartenberger and John Wyre.

It was the programming that was heavy-handed, juxtaposing pieces for organ and ensemble which featured too many crashing chords and too few moments of silence or even relative repose.

Lovely lyricism

For this reason, the world premiere of Canadian Walter Buczynski's *Miserere* (for organ, four horns and four percussion) sandwiched between the pounding of four percussionists in Albright's *Take That* (1972) and another American William Bolcom's *Black Host* (for organ, percussion and tape) was not heard in an ideal context. Buczynski's piece provided some lovely lyricism and textural variety and deserves to be set off to more advantage.

Black Host (1967) was the most odd work stylistically, although the

anonymous author of the program notes considers it to be a "classic." It aroused facial expressions ranging from ardent interest to the controlled mirth of a few of the listeners.

The concert was the occasion of another world premiere of a Canadian work: Otto Joachim's *Tribute to St. Romanus* (for organ, four horns and four percussion) which showed a fusion of contemporary idioms with Byzantine chant.

Murky sounds

Guest performer Albright also gave the Canadian premiere of his own six etudes for solo organ (from *Organbook III*, volume II, 1978) which demonstrated a variety of technical and sonorous resources and showed that the organ is as capable of shimmering effects as it is of crashing stereophonic ones.

Only the muffled murky sounds of *Code for four horns* by Swiss composer Balz Truempy (b. 1946) remains: this piece opened the concert and was as soon forgotten.

New Music Concerts has a regular following of devotees who filled up a surprisingly large number of the seats at the Cathedral on Friday. These members of the audience were fortunate to hear a guest artist like Albright who specializes in the performance of contemporary music. Yet subscribers deserve more careful programming, especially of imported works from overseas and south of the border, when there is so much new music still to be heard.

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