

Careers for Women

Canadian Composer Known Abroad, Fights for Recognition in Homeland

By BETTY DAVIDSON

A battle Canadians generally are not aware of is being waged by Winnipeg-born Barbara Pentland, a composer well known in Europe and the United States. The education and encouragement a young composer expects from older and more experienced ones had, in her case, to be obtained outside her own country. It was France and the United States which gave her the go-ahead signal, and as she puts it: "It is in Canada where I fight my battles against indifferences toward true creative thought."

Canada knows Barbara Pentland as a teacher of composition at the Royal Conservatory of Music here, having heard little of her music, classified by some as "radical" or "left."

Toronto music lovers will have an opportunity when her pianist-composer friend, Harry Somers, will devote an entire recital to her piano works in the Concert Hall of the Royal Conservatory on Saturday night. Somers is convinced that more people should listen to Miss Pentland whom he considers a musical prophet. Her orchestral and chamber works, performed in over a dozen different countries, have attracted the eye and ear of composers, conductors and concert artists interested in new ideas.

"The prairies are in my blood, which may explain my feeling for long line and lean texture," 36-year-old Miss Pentland declares. Rather than an experimenter, she feels that she is a seeker of truth, "pure and simple musical truth."

In her search she does not limit herself to the diatonic scale. She employs the material of all scales, including the chromatic, separately or combined, for a poly-tonal effect. Just as harmony was revolutionary at the turn of the 17th century, so her music, melodic in conception, is revolutionary in that it is independent of harmony. For the layman it is best explained by pointing out that where earlier melody came out of harmony, her harmony rises from melody.

Pentland puts it this way: "Since diatonic harmony is so exploited, it is more interesting and exciting to get back to vertical sounds that combined melodies can produce."

"I don't like my landscape filled up and I like to breathe spaciouly," she says.

In her studio at 85 Spadina Rd. she is completing the fourth movement of her first symphony. She calls it her "spare-time" symphony since she's been at it three years. The third movement was recently performed on the Dominion Concert Hour.

Barbara Pentland was groomed for a social life in Winnipeg and after making her debut at a ball was sent to Paris "to be finished." The Parisian move turned out to be her real beginning. Her teacher trained her in harmony, counterpoint, fugue, form, analysis and orchestration. She composed continually, returned home for six years of intensive study before proceeding to the Juilliard Graduate School in New York, where she came in contact with contemporary music.

In the belief that a real composer does not imitate but rather learns, adopts and rejects through selection, and builds something additional, Miss Pentland is striving for perfection of the means of expression.

"All great music," she says, "conveys the ideas of its period in the language of that period. Anything else is false expression which is finally submerged. A composer's language is therefore compounded of living, listening and creating." To Barbara Pentland, composition is a completely necessary part of living.



BARBARA PENTLAND

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