

Editor's Corner

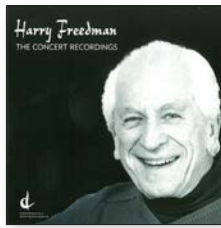
DAVID OLDS

I was thrilled to receive the latest shipment of **Centrediscs** from the Canadian Music Centre (CMC) shortly after filing my February column and several days before that month's issue hit the streets. I knew exactly what would take pride of place in my March column: **Harry Freedman – The Concert Recordings (CMCCD 23517)**. I was therefore a little dismayed when I did see the February *WholeNote* and found that David Jaeger had stolen my thunder. His excellent and extended article about Freedman's orchestral music and the particular pieces included on the disc, from his perspective as producer of a number of those recordings, would seemingly make anything I had to say redundant. But perhaps not irrelevant. In my own years as a broadcaster (at CKLN and CJRT) I met Freedman on a number of occasions and got to know him fairly well, but it is his music that made a real impression on me. In my formative years this was the music, particularly Freedman's orchestral works, that I grew up understanding to define what made Canadian music Canadian: aural landscapes reminiscent of the North, stark and angular, crisp and rugged, but at the same time lush and evocative.

All of the tracks are exceptional, but there are two real standouts for me. *Borealis* for orchestra (TSO) and a (heavenly) host of choirs (Danish National Radio Choir, Elmer Iseler Singers, Swedish Radio Choir and Toronto Children's Chorus) was written for and performed in the towering Barbara Frum Atrium in the CBC Broadcast Centre as part of Soundstreams' Northern Encounters Festival of the Arts in 1997 with the orchestra and choirs surrounding the ground floor audience from the balconies above. *Images* predates *Borealis* by almost four decades (1960) and is heard here in a 1979 performance with Sir Andrew Davis at the helm of the TSO. It is a three-movement work inspired by Canadian artists Lawren Harris, Kazuo Nakamura and Jean-Pierre Riopelle which in the words of the composer is "not so much concerned with the content of the paintings as with their design...in effect, a translation into musical terms of the artists' styles."

As a reflection of that aspect of the CMC's mandate to preserve and promote the history of our musical heritage, I feel this is one of the most significant releases from Centrediscs' in recent years and as we enter Canada's sesquicentennial an important reminder of our artistic heritage.

The other disc in the shipment from the CMC has left me scratching my head. I understand that an important part of the CMC's mandate is to promote the music of our emerging composers and to reflect changing concerns and aesthetics, but I would still expect that to be done within the context of art music. **Ravens (CMCCD 23217)** features the music of Yellowknife-based composer **Carmen Braden** and it is a truly eclectic recording that would, I feel, be most at home in *The WholeNote*'s Pot Pourri section. Please don't get me wrong, I like the disc very much and there are indeed some "classical" compositions included – a brief excerpt from *Candle Ice* for piano trio and field recordings of melting ice; *Magnetic North* for violin and piano; and *Waltz of Wing and Claw* "a string quartet of ravens playing in the wind" which turns out to be another excerpt from a larger work *The Raven Conspiracy* – but the bulk of the album consists of quirky and clever pop songs with occasional nods to jazz (à la Joni Mitchell) and even a twangy ode – *Small Town Song* – explained in the composer's notes with the statement "The banjo is wonderful, but it scares me a



little." Braden seems to have overcome her fear of this predominantly southern instrument and this rousing sing-along brings an intriguing northern journey to a satisfying end. I just wish we could have heard the instrumental compositions in their entirety.

Another truly eclectic disc has come to my attention in the context of an upcoming Toronto performance. Vocalist and songwriter **Simrit** was born in Athens, Greece, but adopted and brought up in South Carolina by Greek immigrants. Her music draws on the Greek Orthodox chants of her heritage and on the pulse and melodic sensibilities of West African traditions which she has studied intensely. Add to this such influences as Mazzy Star, Jeff Buckley, Loreena McKennitt, roots reggae and world music from the Mediterranean to the Subcontinent and I'm not sure quite what you get, but I've been captivated by its compelling ambience for several weeks now.

As well as her haunting vocals, on **Songs of Resilience (simritkaurmusic.com)** Simrit plays harmonium and mellotron and is accompanied by a septet who between them play kora, pueblo log drums, congas, cello, electronics, electric and acoustic guitars, drum kit and miscellaneous percussion. Simrit says "This music changes consciousness, and that is where we can start. For the world to shift into a potentially peaceful place, we must start with ourselves first." But as the press release assures us "the central message is not sappy or facile. It's about finding the sounds to aid change, to expand what you can see and embrace."



Concert note: You can find out what Simrit's music and message is all about at St. George's Lutheran Church at 410 College St. in Toronto on March 29 at 7:30.

Sticking with my Pot Pourri theme, I had the pleasure of meeting up with a friend from my early childhood at Winterfolk on the Family Day Weekend. **David Storey** and I knew each other back in our pre-school days, attending the same Anglican church and each other's birthday parties. Somewhere around our teenage years we lost track of each other as he went off to choir school and I attended York County's experiment with open plan education in the early years of Thornlea Secondary School. Evidently Storey spent some years as a singer-songwriter before taking a 25-year hiatus to direct television and film productions, including the iconic *Corner Gas*. When this last had run its course, Storey returned to his first love, playing the guitar and turning some wonderful stories into song.

He recently released his first full-length CD **Coming Home (davidstoreymusic.com)** and the name is particularly apt. The songs tell tales (tall and otherwise) of his life and adventures and although they are complete in themselves it was a treat to hear some of their background in intros and asides during his performance at the Black Swan on the Danforth, the central venue of Winterfolk. Performing with Lawrie Ingles (keyboard), Henry Lees (harmony vocals) and Bob Cohen (bass and something that seemed to be an eight-string ukulele, a new one on me) Storey was able to recreate a bare-bones version of the arrangements from the album, with Ingles providing some convincing fiddle lines on his electronic keyboard and adding a third voice to some tight harmonies. Cohen shone with fluid solos on two cover tunes, Little Feat's *Willin'* and Van Morrison's *Crazy Love* but the rest of the hour-long set was devoted to original material

