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| Anhalt, Istvan (1919-2012) |
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| Istvan Anhalt was a Hungarian-born Canadian composer and one of the leading figures in avant-garde composition during the second half of the twentieth century in Canada. Nearly all of his major compositions were written after his emigration to Canada in 1949. At various times in his works he made use of dodecaphony, electronic music, and extended vocal techniques. Many of his most significant compositions are for orchestra, but he contributed to all major genres, from solo instrumental works to opera. From the mid-1970s onwards he began to use more traditional compositional techniques, from which he fashioned an original, distinctive, and evocative idiom. In addition to his work as a composer, Anhalt had an important career as a university music professor and administrator (at McGill University and then at Queen’s University in Kingston) and he was also known for his work as an insightful music theorist. About half of his two dozen or so major compositions were completed after his retirement from academia in 1984. |
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About half of his two dozen or so major compositions were completed after his retirement from academia in 1984. Early Career in Europe Anhalt was born and raised in Budapest. He received his initial education in music there, at first privately and then (1937-1941) at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music, where he was a pupil of Zoltán Kodály and Albert Siklós. His earliest compositions date from this period, notably the song cycle *Six Songs from Na Conxy Pan*. In 1942, Anhalt was conscripted into the Hungarian forced labour service system for Jewish men. Late in 1944 he fled from his unit and spent the remainder of the war in hiding. Realising that his prospects in post-war Budapest were uncertain at best, he left Hungary as a displaced person early in 1946 and made his way to Paris. During a three-year sojourn there, Anhalt studied composition with Nadia Boulanger. In January 1949 he emigrated to Montreal to begin teaching at McGill University. The Montreal Years Anhalt remained at McGill from 1949 to 1971; he became a full professor in 1967 and served as the chair of the music theory department (1963-1969) and director of the Electronic Music Studio, which he founded (1964-1971). The major work from his early years at McGill was the Symphony for full orchestra, which together with the later orchestral work *SparkskrapS* (1987) is the subject of a major analytical article by William E. Benjamin (published in Elliott and Smith, 2001). Benjamin identifies the works written from 1941 to 1953 (ending with the Piano Trio) as broadly neoclassical in idiom. This period was followed by a serialist phase (1954-1958), which includes the Violin Sonata and Fantasia for piano (recorded by Glenn Gould) in addition to the Symphony. Influenced by the electronic music pioneer Hugh Le Caine, whom he met and befriended in Ottawa in 1958, and by the circle around Karlheinz Stockhausen, with whom he worked during a brief visit to the Westdeutscher Rundfunk’s electronic music studios in Cologne in 1958, Anhalt immersed himself in electronic music. He organised the first tape music concert given in Canada (Montreal, 30 November 1959), created four electronic music compositions (1959-1961), and set up the Electronic Music Studio at McGill in 1964 with Le Caine’s help. He used recorded sounds in a handful of other works up to the mid-1970s, but was not involved in electroacoustic music thereafter. During the 1960s he became increasingly interested in the voice, including extended vocal techniques and other new directions in vocal composition. His researches in this field are evident not only in his own compositions, such as *Cento* (1967), *Foci* (1969), and his later operatic works, but also in his publications as a music scholar, especially his monograph *Alternative Voices* (1984). The Kingston Years In 1971, Anhalt moved to Kingston, Ontario to become head of the Music Department at Queen’s University. He served two five-year terms in that position, and continued to teach at Queen’s until his retirement in 1984. A major event during his tenure there was the construction of a purpose-built music building, which opened in 1974. Academic duties at Queen’s curtailed his compositional output; only two major works date from this thirteen-year period, the operas *La Tourangelle* (a ‘Musical Tableau’ about Marie de l’Incarnation, founder of the Urusline order in New France, premiered in 1975) and *Winthrop* (a ‘Musical Pageant’ about John Winthrop, the English Puritan founder of Boston, premiered in 1986), both to libretti by Anhalt and premiered in concert versions without staging. His retirement years were enormously productive ones; he completed two works for voice and orchestra, also to his own libretti — *Traces* [*Tikkun*], a ‘Pluri-Drama’ for baritone (1995; dedicated to the memory of four classmates at the Liszt Academy who perished in the Holocaust) and *Millennial Mall (Lady Diotima’s Walk)*, a ‘Voice-Drama for the Imagination’ for soprano (1999) — as well as a string quartet movement in memory of Glenn Gould (1992), six orchestral works (1987-2004), and his last completed work, *Four Portraits from Memory*, which exists in versions for piano (2006) and orchestra (2007), and is the subject of a study by Friedemann Sallis (in Sallis, Elliott, and DeLong 2011). He also wrote a libretto and extensive musical sketches for *Oppenheimer*, an opera about the father of the atomic bomb, between 1987 and 1991, but abandoned the project when he and the Canadian Opera Company could not reach an agreement about the terms of a planned commission.  Anhalt’s entire output as a composer is not large — there are about three dozen works, completed over a period of 60 years from 1947 to 2007. The entire oeuvre performed back to back would last about twelve hours. Two dozen of these compositions are major works and the rest are shorter works or juvenilia. With the exception of *Symphony of Modules* (1967), which has never been performed, all of the works received notable premieres, but only a handful were performed more than once. The four late orchestral works were all premiered by the Kingston Symphony under Glen Fast, bringing late but welcome recognition for Anhalt in the city that he called home for the last forty years of his life. Only eleven of his works appeared on recordings, but others are available online via CentreStreams, the Canadian Music Centre’s streaming audio service. Anhalt’s stature as a ‘heavyweight among Canadian composers’ (Kasemets 8), together with a growing body of scholarly work on his music, suggest that he will retain his place as an important voice in Canadian composition of his era. List of Compositions:Stage *Arc en ciel*, ballet (two pianos) (1951)  *La Tourangelle*, opera (1975)  *Winthrop*, opera (1986)  *Traces (Tikkun)*, monodrama (1996)  *Millennial Mall (Lady Diotima's Walk)*, monodrama (1999) Orchestra *Interludium* (1950)  *Funeral Music* (1951)  *Symphony* (1958)  *Symphony of Modules* (1967)  *Simulacrum* (1987)  *SparkskrapS* (1988)  *Sonance•Resonance* *(Welche Töne?)* (1989)  *Twilight Fire (Baucis’ and Philemon’s Feast)* (2002)  *The Tents of Abraham (A Mirage-Midrash)* (2004)  *… the timber of those times … (… a theogony …)* (2006)  *Four Portraits from Memory* (2007) Chamber Trio (violin, cello, piano) (1953)  Sonata (violin and piano) (1954)  *Foci* (soprano, chamber ensemble, tape) (1969)  *Doors ... Shadows (Glenn Gould in Memory)* (string quartet) (1992) Piano Sonata (1951)  Fantasia (1954)  *Four Portraits from Memory* (2005-2006) Choir *The Bell Man* (Herrick) (1954)  *Three Songs of Love* (de la Mare, anonymous) (1951)  *Three Songs of Death* (Davenant, Herrick) (1954)  *Cento ‘Cantata Urbana’* (Eldon Grier) (1967) Voice *Hat Dal Na Conxy Panból* / *Six Songs from Na Conxy Pan* (Sándor Weöres), baritone, piano (1941-1947; English version, 1984)  *Psalm XIX ‘A Benediction’* (A. M. Klein), baritone, piano (1951)  *Journey of the Magi* (Eliot), baritone, piano (1952)  *Comments* (newspaper clippings compiled by Anhalt), contralto, piano trio (1954)  *Chansons d’aurore* (André Verdet), soprano, flute, piano (1955)  *A Little Wedding Music* (G. M. Hopkins), soprano, organ (1984)  *A Wedding Carol* (Anhalt), soprano, organ (1985)  *Thisness*, ‘duo-drama’ (Anhalt), mezzo, piano (1986)  ‘The Squirrel’ (E. Barnett), voice, piano (2002) List of Published Writings: ‘Electronic Music: A New Experience in Sound.’ *Jeunesses musicales of Canada Chronicle* 7.4 (1961): 3.  ‘The making of Cento.’ *Canada Music Book* 1 (1970): 81-89.  ‘About Foci.’ *Artscanada* 28 (1971): 57-58.  ‘La musique électronique’ and ‘L’histoire de Cento.’ *Musiques du Kébèk*. Ed. Raoul Duguay. Montreal: Éditions du jour, 1971. 13-17 and 21-28.  ‘Composing with Speech.’ *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Phonetic Sciences*. Paris: Mouton, 1972. 447-51.  ‘Luciano Berio’s *Sequenza III*.’ *Canada Music Book* 7 (1973): 23-60.  ‘About One’s Place and Voice.’ *Identities: The Impact of Ethnicity on Canadian Society*. Ed. Wsevolod W. Isajiw, Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Ltd, 1977. 39-45.  ‘John Beckwith.’ *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*. 1st and 2nd eds. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981/1992.  ‘*Winthrop*: The Work, the Theme, the Story.’ *Canadian University Music Review* 4 (1983): 184-95.  *Alternative Voices: Essays on Contemporary Vocal and Choral Composition*, Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1984.  ‘What Tack to Take? An Autobiographical Sketch (Life in Progress ... ).’ *Queen's Quarterly* 92.1 (1985): 96-107.  ‘Pst ... Pst ... Are You Listening? Hearing Voices from Yesterday.’ *Queen’s Quarterly* 93.1 (1986): 71-84; reprinted in *Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought*. Ed. John Paynter, et al. Vol. 2. London: Routledge, 1992. 977-92.  ‘Thisness: Marks and Remarks.’ *Musical Canada: Words and Music Honouring Helmut Kallmann*. Eds. John Beckwith and Frederick A. Hall. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1988. 211-31.  ‘Music: Context, Text, Counter-text.’ Contemporary Music Review 5 (1989): 101-35.  ‘Text, Context, Music.’ *Canadian University Music Review* 9.2 (1989): 1-21; reprinted in *Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought*. Ed. John Paynter, et al. Vol. 1. London: Routledge, 1992. 272-89.  Six chapters in *Istvan Anhalt: Pathways and Memory*. Eds. Robin Elliott and Gordon E. Smith. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001.  ‘Of the Centre, Periphery; Exile, Liberation; Home and the Self.’ *Centre and Periphery, Roots and Exile: Interpreting the Music of Istvan Anhalt, György Kurtág, and Sándor Veress*. Eds. Friedemann Sallis, Robin Elliott, and Kenneth DeLong, Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011. 57-71.  Resources:  Anhalt’s archival papers have been deposited in Library and Archives Canada (repository number MUS164); a finding aid in the form of a numerical list of files was created by Stéphane Jean in 2004 and is online at http://collectionscanada.ca/obj/028021/f2/01-e.pdf. Scores and recordings of his compositions are held by the Canadian Music Centre (www.musiccentre.ca), and many of these materials can be accessed online through their website. Biographies of Anhalt can be found in most major music reference sources, such as the *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* (article by Carl Morey) and *Grove Music Online* (article by John Beckwith). |
| Further reading:  (Elliott and Smith)  (Gillmor, Eagle Minds: Selected Correspondence of Istvan Anhalt and George Rochberg, 1961-2005 )  (Gillmor, Echoes of Time and the River)  (Kasemets)  (Renihan)  (Sallis, Elliott and DeLong)  (Smith)  (Smith, From New France to a ‘Millennial Mall’: Identity Paradigms in Istvan Anhalt’s Operas )  (Smith, Memory at the Millennium: Composer Istvan Anhalt) |