Circuit
Musiques contemporaines

“Isn’t That Life, in a Way: Trying to Accommodate Dissonance?” Reflections on Lesbianism and the Life and Music of Ann Southam

« N’est-ce pas la vie, en quelque sorte : tenter de s’accommoder de la dissonance ? » Réflexions sur le lesbianisme, la vie et la musique d’Ann Southam

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Volume 31, Number 1, 2021

Quelle norme ? Parole queer et création musicale

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1076404ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1076404ar

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Publisher(s)

Circuit, musiques contemporaines

ISSN

1183-1693 (print)
1488-9692 (digital)

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Cite this article

Bernstein, T. (2021). “Isn’t That Life, in a Way: Trying to Accommodate Dissonance?” Reflections on Lesbianism and the Life and Music of Ann Southam. *Circuit*, *31*(1), 43–53. https://doi.org/10.7202/1076404ar

Article abstract

Canadian composer Ann Southam (1937–2010) was a proud, outspoken, and generous feminist who found affinities between feminism and the minimalist musical language she developed in the late 1970s. At the same time, Southam was a very private person; it was only towards the end of her life that she began to speak on record about being gay. Music writer Tamara Bernstein, a friend of the composer, weighs the merits of focussing on this side of Southam’s life: the willingness with which Southam spoke in her final interviews about the difficulty of coming of age as a lesbian in the 1950s, and the fact that material related to this from her final interview has not been published until now; the importance of remembering how recently LGBTQ *rights were fully enshrined in Canadian law. Finally, alongside a caveat about the dangers of reductivism, and reminders that Southam found musical inspiration in other sources (e.g., nature), the author suggests ways in which Southam’s struggles with a sexual identity considered “dissonant” may have found their way into her music.*

"Isn't That Life, in a Way: Trying to Accommodate Dissonance?" Reflections on Lesbianism and the Life and Music of Ann Southam

Tamara Bernstein

> *Growing up gay in the 1950s was a social nightmare, because you were certainly not supposed to be* that. *And I found, as I've said many times before, that a great way of accounting for my being such a social misfit, and being temperamental, and in a bad mood most of the time, [and] drunk a lot of the time, was to be an* 'artiste.' *So this was why I was a musician. It was a great outlet for feelings. And then being part of the dance world, everybody was higglety pigglety—you didn't know who was what; you didn't have to conform to anything. It was a comfortable world to be in. It was a godsend for me!*
>
> — Ann Southam, video interview with the author, April 17, 2010.

That Ann Southam belongs in this issue of *Circuit*—perhaps even with pride of place (so to speak)—is beyond dispute. Born in 1937, she was, to my knowledge, the first female Canadian composer of so-called art music to "come out" in a modern sense of the term—self-identifying as gay in interviews, and agreeing to appear on a concert of music by LGBTQ2 composers.[1] She was a role model for—and champion of—women in music. And Southam's compositional voice remains one of the most distinctive and compelling of her generation, from her early, mesmerizing electroacoustic pieces written for pioneering modern dance choreographers in Canada, through the exuberant process music of works like *Glass Houses* for piano (1981; rev. 2009), to the vast, meditative, emotionally ambiguous canvases of late works like *Simple Lines of Enquiry* (2007), and *In Retrospect* (2004).[2] In short, Southam's music and life—along with the possibility of connections between them—matter.

And so one strides confidently forward, only to feel squishy ground underfoot almost immediately. What, if anything, does the public need to know

1. Elinor Dunsmuir (1887–1938), a singer, pianist, violinist and composer whose music was recently rediscovered, has emerged as an intriguing candidate for the honour of "first known Canadian lesbian composer." The biographer of the Dunsmuir family avoids "the L-word" but evokes Elinor's lesbianism through innuendo and vintage stereotypes ("masculine" attire and presence; cigars; self-loathing), apparently based on reminiscences of a great-niece of Elinor Dunsmuir (Reksten, 1991, pp. 244–45, 278). In 2019, an exhibition called "Finding a Voice: Gender, Sexuality and Music Through the Work of Elinor Dunsmuir" ran at the Courtenay (B.C.) and District Museum and Paleontology Centre. (See www.courtenaymuseum.ca/programmes-exhibits/online-exhibits/finding-a-voice (accessed December 2, 2020). More research on Dunsmuir is needed. I am grateful to Janet Danielson of Simon Fraser University for alerting me to Dunsmuir's story.

2. Scores to Southam's music are available through the Canadian Music Centre: https://cmccanada.org.

about the sexual orientation of a composer who, while fearlessly outspoken on certain topics (notably anything to do with sexism and misogyny!), was a fundamentally private person? What would Southam have wanted written about her in this issue of *Circuit*—and does that matter? And what of the age-old questions around mapping an artist's biography onto her or his work: is it reductive to do so, or puritanically "formalist" not to? Or both?

We are on much firmer ground when it comes to Southam and feminism. "Proud and outspoken feminist" is the quasi-Homeric epithet that got attached to her name in her later years, and it's true. She was instrumental in the founding of the Association of Canadian Women Composers (ACWC) in 1981, becoming its first president and a significant financial supporter; over the years, she commissioned numerous works from female composers and choreographers. She spoke truth to male power in the New Music world.[3] Later, Southam found a philanthropic home for her feminism in the Canadian Women's Foundation (CWF), donating generously to its programs designed to empower girls in the crucial age group of 9–13 years, when our culture's pervasive sexism has a particularly corrosive effect on girls' self-esteem. Southam left the bulk of her estate to the CWF; announced as $14 million but eventually amounting to $17 million, it was the largest single donation a community-based Canadian women's organization had ever received from an individual—a record the CWF believes still stands in 2020. The CWF invested most of Southam's bequest in an endowment fund to help assure the Foundation's ongoing existence; in 2020, income generated by the endowment helped support its ongoing programs and operations. Ann's gift also helped to double the size of the CWF's Girls' Fund, a program she helped found in 2006.[4]

And then there's the music itself. In numerous interviews, Southam spoke of her encounter with feminism and minimalism in the 1970s, and the powerful effect both had on her, quasi-simultaneously. She consistently mentioned composers Steve Reich and Terry Riley as influences—the latter's *A Rainbow in Curved Air* (1968) was a particular inspiration[5]; in 2010 she also singled out Reich's *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ* (1973), saying that she loved the piece "to this day."[6] While she initially included Philip Glass among these models, by the late 1980s she was no longer a fan, saying that his harmonic choices conveyed "a failure of spirit."[7]

By the early 1980s, Southam had stepped back from regular collaborations with choreographers, and was exploring minimalism—perhaps more fruitfully described as "pattern" or "process" music—in piano works like *Glass Houses* and *Rivers* (1979–1981; rev. 2004–2005).

3. See, for instance, Southam's contributions to early ACWC newsletters (Southam, 1984).

4. Kate Hawkins of the CWF, in an email to the author, December 9, 2020. See also https://canadianwomen.org/empowering-girls, and https://canadianwomen.org/your-living-legacy (both accessed October 8, 2020), and Graham, 2001.

5. See, for instance, Everett-Green, 2009.

6. April 17, 2010 interview, 01:25:12 to 01:25:26.

7. Conversation with the author, c. 1989. When reminded of this comment in 2010, Southam confirmed her assessment of Glass's music, then expressed her enthusiasm for the fundamental sunniness and "hopefulness" in Steve Reich's music (April 17, 2010 video interview, 01:51:44 to 01:53:00).

Process music, in which small musical units undergo minute variations as they are repeated over and over, and are gradually transformed by the cumulative changes, clearly delighted Southam's musical mind and ear on several levels. A keen listener, she heard the pulse of minimalist music in many natural soundscapes:

> Being out in the fields and hearing all the insects singing and singing in the fall, it sounds like the whole universe is singing, which is like Steve Reich's music: it's the sound [that] minimalism can produce. The insects go in and out of phase. It's like antiphonal singing. The same applies to birds and frogs. To me it's like the whole of life is singing.[8]

8. Quoted in Egoyan, 2008, p. 44. Southam spoke of this in numerous other interviews, including a lovely clip in Cornfield, 2005, track 7, 0:42 to 1:15.

But Southam also loved to talk about the way minimalism resonated with her feminism:

> Women's work is traditionally repetitive and life-sustaining. It takes great patience. It doesn't have the big climaxes that lead to something new, and often there's nothing to show for it at the end. I see process music as the perfect way of expressing this, and as a wonderful metaphor for life.[9]

9. Quoted *in* Poole, 1997.

In April 2010, Southam elaborated on the feminist context for this shift to process music, and away from the contemporary dance world for which she had been creating electronic music for almost a decade:

> I guess it would be the mid-[nineteen]-seventies when feminism really started to get through to me. And I was aware that the way women were being represented in the modern dance world was pretty conventional—there was nothing adventuresome about it at all, [in the] very stereotypical roles that they played. I just was wishing for more.[10] […]
>
> So I decided to explore minimalism. And then I was interested in trying to find a way of writing music that would have a feminist aesthetic, because what was thought of as feminist music back in those days was usually vocal music, and it would be the words that would give the feminist meaning. I wanted something [where] the very workings of the music would reflect a feminist aesthetic.[11]

10. Southam remained enthusiastic about the work of choreographers who challenged gender roles—Julia Sasso and the late Rachel Browne for instance, both of whom choreographed Southam's music. She mentioned Sasso in this context in the April 17, 2010 video interview, c. 02:41:35 to 02:45:29.

11. April 17, 2010 video interview, 01:32:57 to 01:36:10.

Mending, knitting, weaving, making things by hand—these were among the "life processes" traditionally associated with women that Southam felt had a counterpart in process music. She was careful to stress, however, that this feminist dimension to her process music was not inherently audible in it: "[M]usic is music[;] it's not politics or ideology. It can be used in the service of such things[,] of course."[12] But it is clear that writing (in the sense of both composing and writing out by hand) and playing her process music was a way for her to integrate feminism with her art and life—another "godsend," one might say.

12. Quoted *in* Egoyan, 2008, p. 45.

By 1979, Southam had developed the unique musical language—her personal dialect of minimalism, so to speak—that would sustain and fascinate

her through the rest of her life: the gradual unfolding of a 12-note row, which is inherently unstable and dissonant, within a stable, consonant minimalist framework involving repeating patterns and often included an anchoring drone (though the latter might shift, especially in her late pieces).[13] The interaction between the stable, consonant elements and the tonally unstable 12-note row created an *atelier* for Southam's quiet musical exploration of emotional ambiguity, through the play of stability and instability, and of constantly shifting expectations. The composer spoke of literally seeing the 12-note row as "a red dissonant line" running through the consonant elements of her music, then added, "Isn't that life, in a way: trying to accommodate dissonance?"[14]

In a number of works—among them, *Slow Music: Meditations on a Twelve-Tone Row* (1979), *Soundings for a New Piano* (1986), and *Simple Lines of Enquiry*—Southam would write twelve short movements or sections, each one using the same minimalist process and the same 12-note row, but starting on a different note of the row each time. Southam described it as "twelve different ways of telling the same story"[15]; pianist Eve Egoyan, for whom Southam composed important, late works like *Simple Lines of Enquiry*, has compared it to the tapping of a kaleidoscope.[16]

To consider Southam's life as a lesbian is like giving a kaleidoscope a gentle tap; it is to shift the anchoring drone to another pitch, changing everything. The "red dissonant line," which I always assumed had something to do with the injustices against and oppression of women, takes on new possibilities.

According to my research, Southam first referred to being gay in an interview in 2003.[17] In late June of that year, I devoted my weekly newspaper column to two concerts scheduled for Toronto's Pride Week. One of them, called "Amour: The Language of," was a program of music by gay composers, presented by the newly formed Contact Contemporary Music (CCM). The CCM commissioned Southam to write a piece for the concert; she responded with *Rainbow Trout*, the title of which alludes simultaneously to the LGBT flag and to the famous song by Schubert, who many believe was homosexual.

Before writing the article, I spoke to Southam, who was 66 at the time, about her involvement in the concert. She told me that she was "very happy" to be identified with the gay community, but otherwise swatted away the opportunity to wave the rainbow flag:

> [A]s far as my own sexuality goes, I can't really say where I am on the continuum at this point. And I couldn't care less! By far the greater issue for me is the fact that I'm a woman composer. I think I'm far more likely to be discriminated against as a woman than as a gay person. You'll notice, for instance, that I'm the only woman

13. The pieces from 1979 are: *Rivers, First Set* (two pieces), *Rivers, Second Set* (eight pieces), and *Slow Music: Meditations on a Twelve-Tone Row*, which contains the embryo of her late masterpiece, *Simple Lines of Enquiry*.

14. April 17, 2010 video interview, 02:00:34 to 02:02:35.

15. Ann Southam, program note to *Rivers*, in CD booklet to *Ann Southam* [Composer Portrait], Centrediscs CMCCD 10505, 2005. Unpaginated.

16. Eve Egoyan, in conversation with the author.

17. Restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to access archival CBC Radio interviews with Southam recorded for the show Two New Hours between the late 1980s and 2007. David Jaeger, who produced the show during those years, does not recall Southam mentioning her lesbianism in any of them (email to the author).

> composer on the [CCM] program. But I'm so tired of the presumption that everyone in the world is heterosexual, I'm all for anything that flies in the face of that![18]

18. Quoted in Bernstein, 2003. The CCM concert took place on June 24, 2003 at The Music Gallery, Church of St. George the Martyr, and also included music by Barry Truax, Lou Harrison, Michael Gfroerer, and Michael Parker.

At the time, I was disappointed—perhaps even a bit annoyed—by this response. Southam was a much-loved role model in my circle of classical music-loving lesbians: how could she imply that she was not 100% gay? Now that I'm almost the age that Southam was then, I don't see her answer as evasive: I think it merely reflects shifting priorities over a woman's lifetime, along with Southam's characteristic honesty. And good on her for reminding the young, well-meaning gay men who'd commissioned her that gender equity had yet to be addressed in the classical/new music world.

By the summer of 2009, however, when Robert Everett-Green interviewed Southam for *The Globe and Mail*, things had changed. The cancer for which she had undergone treatments the previous year had returned; I'm sure she knew that her time was likely limited—and along with it, her chance to tell her own story. So I find it significant that she spoke of being gay in Everett-Green's interview,[19] as she did in a video interview with me the following year.

19. Everett-Green, 2009. The article includes a quotation very similar to the one that appears as epigraph to this article.

I've already quoted from the video interview in this article, but a few words of context are in order. On April 17, 2010, thanks to practical assistance from Tim Southam (a filmmaker and relative of the composer), I spent an afternoon interviewing the composer at her home, our conversation recorded by a crew hand-picked by Tim: cinematographer Iris Ng and sound operator Mary Wong.[20] While I hoped to have the chance to return for more filming, I also knew that this might be our only chance (as indeed turned out to be the case). So the interview covered a lot of ground; Southam gamely repeated stories she had told other interviewers about her childhood, studies, and specific musical works, as was necessary. But she was also more open about lesbianism than I had expected.

20. Video excerpts taken from the recording of the interview are available as part of the web supplements to this issue of *Circuit*, at the following address: https://revuecircuit.ca/web.

At one point, for instance, I asked Southam what feminism brought to her on a personal level. Here is her reply, more or less unedited:

> Well, all of a sudden, things started to make sense. Thinking that I should be straight, I went into psychoanalysis in about 1963, and had an absolutely *ghastly* time with the analyst. It was an 11-year nightmare with that guy. And finally, when feminism started to get through to me, I [realized] that psychoanalysis that was not informed by any kind of feminist analysis was a complete waste of time, as this was. And the analyst himself was a complete *jerk*.
>
> [Growing up], you got the impression that, as a female, you were supposed to love men simply because they were men. I mean—give me a break! Anyway, feminism made me aware of the fact that I had been born into and grown up in an androcentric, phallocentric, misogynistic world, and maybe, in a situation like

this, there's a good reason for not particularly liking men. It was pretty bloody hard. Also, back in those days, I think it was Adrienne Rich who talked about compulsory heterosexuality. And I think the analyst was kind of the enforcer.

So all of a sudden my life started to make sense, which was a huge relief—I can't tell you![21]

21. April 17, 2010 video interview, 02:09:33 to 02:11:31. Rich's text was first published in 1980, so if Southam's 11-year ordeal with psychoanalysis began in the early 1960s, she was telescoping time a bit here. See Rich, 1980.

An "eleven-year nightmare" of what we'd probably now call conversion therapy from a "complete jerk" of a psychoanalyst? This is a significant tap of the kaleidoscope.

A bit later in the interview, Southam spoke of a difficult "coming out" scene with her mother in 1981:

I came out to her in very difficult circumstances in 1981, and then we never talked about it again. She was not pleased. She wouldn't have known what to do with that information, because that was not her world—it was unnatural [to her]. And I don't know how she could have understood it. […]

It's kind of a hard thing to dump on a parent […] I think it was during an argument that I came out to her, which is the worst time to do anything, when you're angry. I wish I'd had more sense; a broader vision. I just wish I'd been willing to take into account the difference in generations. […] Really, I'm amazed at my own stupidity, you know—my limited thinking. I couldn't see past the end of my nose.[22]

22. April 17, 2010 video interview, 02:27:00 to 02:28:38.

But when I asked her, in response, if she had had any lesbian role models, Southam regaled me with stories of her grandmother's sister, Mary Millichamp—"known in the family as Aunt Mame"—and Millichamp's "long-time companion," Pansy Reamsbottom. The couple could have walked out of a 1920s lesbian pulp novel (or at least the lesbian pulp novel we'd all like to read). Millichamp had swanned off to study in Paris and returned with French chef credentials; "Pan," as Reamsbottom was known, was "the dearest soul in the entire world—and truly a remarkably ugly-looking woman, but everybody just *loved* her," Southam said. "They would [have been] a butch-femme combo back in those days," with Pan covering the "huntin', shootin' and fishin'" side of the equation.

Millichamp and Reamsbottom were independent businesswomen who ran a succession of dining establishments, including the restaurant at the top of the swank Park Plaza Hotel in downtown Toronto, before opening Millichamp's eponymous restaurant, which became something of an institution in the nearby Yorkville district. Southam recalled the pleasure of visiting their home as a child:

There was something very relaxing about going into this non-heterosexual, tension-free household, which was absolutely lovely. And also they had a cottage up at [Lake Simcoe], just down the shore from where we had a cottage. And I can

> remember going down there and playing canasta with them at night for hours. They were wonderful to be with—just the best company![23]

However, when I followed up by asking Southam when she became comfortable with her own lesbianism, she replied:

> I think it has been a struggle all my life, to tell you the truth. Maybe when I got connected with Canadian Women's Foundation, dedicated as it is to women and girls deciding for ourselves who and how we're going to be in the world, and it's not going to be dictated by anybody. [Pause] I don't know: It's a hard one to answer.[24]

Later in this interview with Southam, Egoyan arrived and we migrated to the piano to film a sequence of the two of them together. After Egoyan left, Ann played and talked about some of her music. By then the afternoon was wearing on; Ann was visibly tired (and my concentration was flagging). But she agreed to talk a bit more, and chose to remain at the piano. Perhaps the comforting bulk of the instrument made her feel protected; I think, too, that the initial "dissonance" of having the small film crew in her house had worn off, and that she was enjoying Ng's and Wong's presence. In any event, the mood shifted along with the afternoon light of a chilly April day. It was the moment in an interview where (if you're lucky) some invisible barrier falls away, and you feel that the conversation is really starting.[25]

Here are some excerpts from what followed, minimally edited for clarity. They start with Southam's response to a question about how she fared at Bishop Strachan School (BSS), the private, Anglican all-girls' school (founded in 1867) that she attended in Toronto.

> **Ann Southam (A. S.):** I rather enjoyed it. It was a very structured life, which I appreciated. I did well enough. I think that when BSS ended, and I went out into the straight, heterosexual world, into mixed society, I really couldn't see my way ahead at all. I just couldn't. So yeah, BSS was good fun.
>
> **Tamara Bernstein (T. B.):** How did you cope after you left the all-girls' school?[26]
>
> **A. S.:** I drank. A lot. And pretended to be an *artiste*, you know. But I'm very grateful for the booze. I would never have managed without it. As I say, in those days, it was compulsory heterosexuality. What the heck.
>
> **T. B.:** When did you stop drinking?
>
> **A. S.:** Well, I joined AA,[27] and I didn't like that—I didn't like the "Higher Power" business. I didn't want to stop drinking, so I didn't. And eventually, a friend said: "If you don't stop drinking, I'm not going to see you anymore." And that did the trick! That really scared me. And then I just stopped. So I never went through the struggles that people at AA go through. I got to the point where I simply couldn't

23. Millichamp's and Reamsbottom's retirement, in 1958, was sufficiently traumatic for upper-class Toronto that the *Toronto Daily Star* (now the *Toronto Star*) declared that "part of Toronto seemed to die" (Piper, 1958).

24. April 17, 2010 video interview, 02:33:48 to 02:34:55.

25. Notice how Southam returns to events she described earlier, but with slightly different emphasis—the tap on the kaleidoscope, again.

26. Southam graduated from BSS in 1955.

27. Alcoholics Anonymous.

force down another drop of the stuff because it made me feel *so awful*. So I just stopped. It had served its purpose. That's how I tell it anyway.

T. B.: Was there anything that gave you a new kind of strength at the time? Feminism?

A. S.: Oh yes! I was also involved in a lesbian relationship. It was all pretty crazy, but at least my partner—she's the person who said, "If you don't stop drinking I'm not going to see you again."[28]

28. April 17, 2010 video interview, 05:10:13 to 05:13:08.

Some five minutes later (and to my eternal gratitude), Mary Wong, holding the microphone boom aloft, asked, "Did you write anything when you were in love?"

A. S.: Yes, but it didn't make any difference [to what I wrote]. No—I think that when I was in the closet, the music that I wrote was my song, as if [I was] trying to seduce with my song [the way birds do]. But then when I came out of the closet there was no need to do that anymore. So I would be writing from a different place.

Mary Wong: When was that?

A. S.: Well, I came out in 1974, when I finally got rid of this ghastly psychoanalyst [laughs]. I ran into the person I'd known for years—we'd kind of danced around each other but neither of us [had] said anything. I was back from England on my way out west; I was driving north on one of the streets in the Annex,[29] taking my car to be fixed. And I came to a stop [sign], and there was this person that I hadn't seen for ten years. She just happened to be walking across! And that's when we became involved in a relationship. But if the timing for either one of us had been different, we would have missed each other, and my life would have been very different. That was really something—can you imagine?[30]

29. An area of Toronto near the University of Toronto. Now thoroughly gentrified, in the 1970s it was a popular haunt of students and artists.

30 April 17, 2010 video interview, 05:19:13 to 05:20:59.

(I can, actually: the scene is like something out of a Jane Rule novel. And the car is a perfect touch: Ann had rather dashing good looks, and drove fast and well.)

What, then, is my point in plucking out the "gay" parts of Southam's interviews for this piece? For one thing, I've not yet done much with the April 2010 interview, which in a more perfect world would have been the first of several such sessions, leading to a substantial film. So I welcome the chance to publish excerpts, in most cases for the first time, in this issue of *Circuit*. And while Southam's struggles with both external and internalized homophobia shed light on just one of many facets of her life and creative world, they are a wrenching reminder of how recently LGBTQ2s in Canada acquired the rights and freedoms we now take for granted in this country. When Southam was born, in 1937, homosexual acts between men, variously defined, had been illegal in Canada since early colonial days; south of the border, US composer

Henry Cowell was serving the first year of a 15-year sentence in San Quentin prison for consensual homosexual activity.[31]

Canadian law initially ignored sex between women ("as was customary at the time"[32]), but in 1953—the year Southam turned sixteen—Canada's so-called "gross indecency" provisions in the Criminal Code of Canada were amended to apply to women, by removing male-specific wording. The relevant passage now read: "Every one who commits an act of gross indecency with another person is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for five years."[33] The 1953 Criminal Code effectively criminalized homosexual conduct that wouldn't be covered by the law against sodomy. In May 1969—a month before New York's Stonewall riots launched the Gay Liberation movement in the USA, and amidst growing public outrage at arrests of gays—the Liberal government of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau amended the Criminal Code to legalize sex in private between two consenting adults—not just husbands and wives—over the age of 21, with Trudeau famously declaring that "there's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation."[34] But police could and did use the amended legislation to arrest homosexuals in public places or in groups—most notoriously in raids on Toronto bathhouses—until it was finally revoked in 1987. Meanwhile, in 1977, Quebec became the first province to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, and the Federal government removed a provision that prohibited gay men from immigrating to Canada.[35]

To be sure, after the repeal of the gross indecency sections from the Criminal Code in 1987, police availed themselves of other legal tools, such as liquor license violations, to harass gays, even after sexual orientation was added to the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1996.[36] Nor were lesbians exempt: an infamous police raid on a lesbian bathhouse event called Pussy Palace in Toronto took place as late as September 2000.[37] Gays and lesbians did not have to frequent such establishments for the chill to seep into their lives.

Looking at this timeline, it's hard not to notice that the profound transformations of Southam's life and music in the 1970s coincided not only with a burgeoning feminist movement, but also with significant advances in gay and lesbian rights around the same time. Other cultural norms were changing, too: in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*—the psychiatric equivalent of decriminalizion.[38] Notwithstanding that romantic encounter at a stop sign, one wonders if it was entirely coincidental that Southam entered her first lesbian relationship the following year, shortly after extricating herself from the "ghastly" psychoanalyst.

31. Nicholls and Sachs, 2013.

32. Levi, 2019.

33. Criminal Code of Canada, S.C. 1953-54, c. 51, s. 149. Constance Backhouse charts the history of Canada's Acts of Gross Indecency legislation on www.constancebackhouse.ca/fileadmin/website/gr_indec.htm (accessed September 29, 2020).

34. An archival television clip of Trudeau's statement is viewable on www.cbc.ca/player/play/1811727781 (accessed January 10, 2021).

35. Rau, 2019.

36. Levi, 2019

37. For a summary of the Pussy Palace raid event and its legal aftermath, see https://arquives.ca/newsfeed/the-pussy-palace-raid-a-brief-herstory (accessed December 21, 2020).

38. The first edition of DSM (1952) classified homosexuality as a "sociopathic personality disturbance"; the second edition (1968) reclassified it as a "sexual deviation." It was removed for the third edition (1973). Still, "[p]sychoanalysts were one of the last groups of medical professionals to openly view homosexuality as a curable mental disorder […]. It wasn't until 1991 that the American Psychoanalytic Association passed a resolution opposing public and private discrimination against homosexuals." See Baughey-Gill, 2011.

Where does all this leave us? I'm reminded of the story of a famous pianist who was asked whether he played (single hand) octaves with his wrist. "No," he replied. "But I can't play them without it." Likewise, it would do both Southam and her music a disservice—and cross a number of important hermeneutic lines—to suggest that her music is "about" being gay. It is far too capacious and multilayered to be reduced to any one concept or idea. But at the same time, given that the composer herself opened the door to metaphor in her process music ("Isn't that life, in a way?: Trying to accommodate dissonance?"), it would seem a failure of imagination, not to mention compassion, to ignore the possibility that her struggles with homophobia might have found their way into at least one strand of that red, dissonant thread in her music—whether consciously or not.

As I mentioned above, near the end of our interview Southam moved to the piano and gave a whirlwind tour of several of her compositions—explaining the minimalist process underlying each; identifying the song of a chickadee, which she loved and incorporated frequently in her music. (If you want to go hunting for it: she rounded the two-note descending interval up to a descending minor third.) She finished with one of the *Returnings* pieces that she was currently working on. "What I like about it," she said, "is [that] it seems like a continual: 'Why?'"

As she began the main, process-driven part of the piece, she gave a running commentary of each new chord:

> [That] is the first "Why?"; [that] is the second "Why?," but in a different way; then you ask "Why?" again. So it's a continual asking, and you keep repeating the question; you go back over the [12-note] row, asking the question over and over. That's how these new pieces for Eve are working.[39]

That seems a good note to end on: questions turned over and over, asked in different ways, and left to hang in the air as their sound decays into silence. A red line of dissonance running through the life-affirming repetitions of process music, and ultimately "accommodated." The spaciousness, the mystery, the emotional ambiguity that Southam spun into the musical web that sustained her for so many decades. And above all, perhaps, the patience, the attentive listening, and the immense kindness woven into so much of her music.

Perhaps squishy ground is not such a bad place to be after all.

39. April 17, 2010 video interview, 04:41:52 to 04:42:39. Eve Egoyan subsequently recorded these pieces on *Returnings* (2011) and 5 (2013); see Southam, 2013.

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