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CUMS Remembered

Souvenirs de la SMUC

John Beckwith

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Article abstract

On the occasion of his induction as a lifetime honorary member of the Canadian University Music Society, the Dean of Canadian composers, John Beckwith, offers a personal reflection on the triumphs and vicissitudes across more than thirty years of the Society. From its 1964 founding as a network of music deans and directors under the acronym CAUSM, through its metamorphosis into a learned society in the 1980s, to its present day hybrid form, CUMS is remembered—with affection and whimsy—as an agent in development of the Canadian music establishment.

CUMS REMEMBERED/SOUVENIRS DE LA SMUC

John Beckwith

This organization, through its publications and its annual gatherings, has been a quiet force for enlightened inquiry and for quality standards in the musical life of this country.¹ So of course I'm touched and deeply grateful to be here accepting this wonderful honour. But I'm also somewhat surprised. The cantankerous side of my nature wants to ask, why me? Did you check out my CV? Let me level with you. I began university teaching with a two-year undergraduate music degree,² and quit graduate studies after finishing my master's. That's right, I possess no earned doctorate. Moreover, I was not among the founders of CUMS and beyond a couple of seasons on the program committee have never held office in the organization.

While you're gasping and wondering whether you should reconsider, I thought it might be appropriate to recount the early history of the Society and recollect informally a few of my own connections with it. Pour vous remercier de cet honneur merveilleux, j'ai eu l'idée de vous raconter — de façon très brève et, si vous me le permettez, assez personnelle — quelques moments de l'histoire de la Société.

Celle-ci portait, au début, le nom d'Association canadienne des écoles universitaires de musique (ACEUM ou, en anglais, CAUSM), fondée à la suite de quelques conversations tenues au cours de l'été 1964. La réunion initiale, en février 1965, rassemblait des représentants de l'Université de Montréal, de l'Université McGill et de l'Université de Toronto. La première assemblée générale, tenue cette même année, a attiré des délégués de 13 facultés ou départements de musique, soit presque l'ensemble des institutions qui offraient un programme de musique à cette époque. Il semble que le premier président, Arnold Walter (directeur de la Faculté de musique de l'Université de Toronto, et mon patron), soit parvenu à persuader ses collègues d'un océan à l'autre de l'importance d'un forum commun et, plus particulièrement, de la nécessité d'un organisme visant à régir les études musicales post-secondaires du Canada³

¹This contribution consists of remarks made by John Beckwith in acceptance of honorary membership in the Canadian University Music Society at the joint banquet held on 11 June 1999 on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Canadian University Music Society (CUMS) and the Canadian Association of Music Libraries, Archives, and Documentation Centres (CAML), in Sherbrooke and Lennoxville.

²The University of Toronto Mus. Bac. was a three-year degree in 1945. Holders of the associate-ship diploma of the Toronto Conservatory of Music could enter the second year. I completed the ATCM in piano performance that year.

³This may seem a biased view on the part of a University of Toronto Faculty member, but those

Apart from that, the mid-1960s were a period of national networking in the arts and education—CUMS and CAML are both evidence of that.

Though not an active participant, I well recall the prime movers in those early days: Arnold Walter, Harvey Olnick, Ezra Schabas, Godfrey Ridout (Toronto); Clément Morin, Jean Papineau-Couture (Montréal); Lucien Brochu (Laval); Helmut Blume, Marvin Duchow, István Anhalt (McGill); Kenneth Bray (Western); Lorne Watson (Brandon); Howard Brown, George Proctor (Mount Allison); Welton Marquis, Cortland Hultberg (UBC). Also well remembered of course is the only woman among the first team members, Violet Archer (Alberta); needless to say, the early CUMS documents use only male pronouns.

An early project was an ambitious plan for a two-week conference, adorned with premières of newly-composed works, including a composition prize work, for all of which the Centennial Commission would be asked to foot the bill. Nothing more is heard about this after 1966; we're left to assume the funds were not forthcoming. (Or was it that the composers already had their hands full? It was Gordon Delamont who observed in 1967 that the Centennial people seemed to be handing out commissions to anyone who could resolve a dominant seventh.)

The first CUMS publication was the "Standards" booklet, issued in 1969. The cover says "Standards," but the inside title page says "Curricular Standards." The names of its authors or editors do not appear. Ethnomusicology and computer music are included in the curricular purview—a forward-looking touch—and Canadian music courses are envisioned, though at the time CAUSM was founded I believe only one university calendar in the country offered such a course. Musicology is in the senior accreditation position: PhDs in other disciplines are to be discouraged (keep your cottonpickin' hands off our PhD). The rules provide for provincial and national approval for accreditation of graduate music programs; CAUSM is seen as potentially taking responsibility for appointment of accreditation bodies at the national level. This was a step in the direction of a national professional regulating function for music in higher education. The lawyers and the doctors had never achieved it: why did we think we could? In reality the organization has managed to regulate only its own admissions for institutional members—but even this modest function has certainly influenced maintenance of standards.

There have been annual meetings, with presentation of papers, in the context of the Learned Societies/Congress gatherings, for thirty years, starting at the University of Manitoba in 1970. The Society's journal began that year, and was known for its first decade as the *CAUSM Journal*. Vol. 1, no. 1 gives a short history of the organization's founding years—curiously, unsigned. In 1980 the Society changed its name to Canadian University Music Society (CUMS or, in French, SMUC), and the *Journal* became the *Canadian University Music Review/Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*.

Out of thirty annual meetings I think I attended more than twenty, and gave papers at at least seven. In fact at the first meeting in 1970 I gave a talk on the

closer to the scene confirm that Walter played the dominant role in early discussions.

teaching of music theory—more a recounting of my own teaching experience than a serious research paper. Papers were solicited but not professionally scrutinized either before delivery or before publication. I remember Terence Bailey, editor of the *Journal*, pestering me for a copy for publication. I spoke from notes, and was too embroiled in administration then to be able to convert these into proper prose. Unwisely I sent Terry a copy of my notes, and he published them. The result is an embarrassment. It's no reflection on Terry that today's *Review* operates on a far more stringent editorial level. Librarians here, with their awareness of the hazards of periodical production, will agree that thirty years of continuous publication in the two national languages is a remarkable record.

By the early 1970s the annual CAUSM dues had built a surplus fund in five figures, but the treasurer at the time, Malcolm Brown of the University of Calgary, issued dire warnings about saving and frugality. I cheekily said at one annual meeting that I wanted to play grasshopper to his ant: what's money for except to spend? I asked. Those were the days. On the program committee, when François Bernier and Robert Stangeland and I needed to meet, what more appropriate venue in late January than Vancouver?—at the Society's expense, needless to say. So you see I'm not only a fraud but a freeloader as well. (I think perhaps George Proctor was also on that committee.) In justification, the program for the Toronto meeting in 1974, on the theme of music in Canada, proved worthwhile and stimulating.

My memories of the meetings at which I gave papers always seem to contain the tableau of last-minute writing—in Edmonton in 1975 writing on the plane and finishing around midnight in a Learned Societies typing room; in Windsor in 1988 offering a lift to Robin Elliott on condition that he would drive my car so that I could write my paper in the passenger seat; then in 1997 crossing Newfoundland from Port aux Basques to St. John's in a similar sweat, this time with Kathleen McMorro as the driver.

Nous connaissons bien les barrières aux communications que nous impose notre géographie. C'est en grande partie grâce à la SMUC que nous avons pu combattre ce problème, qui touche bien sûr notre vie musicale. Ses publications nous permettent de nous tenir au courant des recherches et des progrès réalisés dans toutes les régions du pays; ses congrès annuels nous donnent l'occasion de nous rencontrer, de causer, et de partager des repas conviviaux; enfin, les concerts qu'elle organise nous permettent d'écouter des pages de notre propre musique, jouées sur scène par des musiciens de talent. As a composer, indeed, I find the attention to live performances of Canadian repertoire especially significant (and of course I'm delighted to have heard performances of my own music at this conference).

You expected me to drag in CanMus, didn't you? Two years ago in Edmonton I took part in a round-table discussion on the topic of Local Music History. I wondered whether, after acknowledging the great masterpieces, we could not for once ignore them and examine our own local habits and conditions. A bright member of the panel took issue, suggesting there might be dangers and risks in such a "nationalistic" approach, as he called it. All I could think of in

response was the quintessential Canadian question, as voiced by Northrop Frye, “Where is here?”, and I regretted not being able to pursue the exchange. Later I learned my debater went in for rap singing in spare moments; on what topic? oh, the local Edmonton scene. Knowing that in advance, I might have thanked him for illuminating my point.

Well, where is *here*? Où est-ce, cet « ici »? Sherbrooke, c’est la ville où a vécu dans sa jeunesse l’un des personnages les plus importants de notre musique en ce XX^e siècle, Serge Garant⁴. Nous étions cet après-midi à l’École de musique de l’Université de Sherbrooke, dans la salle nommée en son honneur. Le souvenir de Garant ne confère-t-il pas à nos activités musicales, à Sherbrooke, une ambiance particulière, voire unique?

Last year, just a few weeks after the great ice-storm, I visited Lennoxville and heard a fine performance of a piece of mine for solo organ. The piece, based on early-nineteenth-century Canadian tunes, has been played numerous times. But this time I was hearing it in the beautiful early-nineteenth-century Chapel of St. Mark at Bishop’s. Another case of a unique ambience; I was quite moved.

From an accumulation of local scenes, each with a slightly different scenario and cast, we get a national scene, as reflected periodically and importantly in the work of a coast-to-coast crucible organization like CUMS. That seems to me just as necessary now as the founders thought it was in the 1960s. So, I thank the Society, I congratulate it on thirty-five years of useful and vital activity, and I wish it a strong and enduring future.

Abstract

On the occasion of his induction as a lifetime honorary member of the Canadian University Music Society, the Dean of Canadian composers, John Beckwith, offers a personal reflection on the triumphs and vicissitudes across more than thirty years of the Society. From its 1964 founding as a network of music deans and directors under the acronym CAUSM, through its metamorphosis into a learned society in the 1980s, to its present day hybrid form, CUMS is remembered—with affection and whimsy—as an agent in development of the Canadian music establishment.

⁴Par une coïncidence, Sherbrooke est également la ville natale de Frye.