

# Classical Commissioning Program

by Russel Kelly and Shannon Peet

*The Music Section of the Canada Council for the Arts is pleased to have Shannon Peet provide this overview of the Commissioning Program. The time for this is appropriate given the change with CLC rates and the nature of calls and letters we have been receiving. The purpose of this letter is to provide clarity concerning the current state of the program, the process by which it operates, some challenges it faces and some suggestions about applying for composers and commissioners.*

*Over the past ten years this program has grown significantly in the number of requests from a variety of communities. This growth - plus the policy of allowing for multiple applications and having two competitions a year - has resulted in a 60% increase in the number of applications. This has been matched by a 100% increase in available program dollars. However, even with this growth of access and funding, we recognize that not everyone's expectations are being met. We hope that this article will provide some answers to the feeling of frustration that a number of people have expressed.*

**Russell Kelley, Head of Music**

As many composers are aware there are aspects of the Classical Commissioning Program that are complex and others that are quite simple and straightforward. The application forms and process of applying are quite simple. The *evaluation* process – due to the fierce competitiveness of the program – is much more complicated. The following information is provided to give an insight into the process in an attempt to demystify what happens when a commission application is sent to Council.

The program receives at each deadline anywhere from 150-180 applications. There are many senior, mid-career and emerging composers in a variety of genres: orchestra, opera, functional (music theatre/dance), choral and chamber music. These 'genres' are separated into their own 'pools' for appropriate comparison purposes - so one is not evaluating an orchestra work against a work for solo clarinet + electronics. If we receive enough electroacoustic applications, we create a pool for them as well. The 'chamber music' pool consists of all chamber music requests *as well* as all the new music organizations. The ratio of applications number 2:1, chamber/new music vs. orch/opera/chor/functional pool. Simply put, there are twice as many applications for chamber/new music than the total of all the others.

*continued....*

For a number of years, the program's success rate has been one-in-four. For each 'pool', we try to keep the same success rate so that all pools are funded equitably, as *all* communities, choral, orchestral, new music, depend on commissioning for their programming. In each pool there are again, senior, mid-career and emerging composers of very, very high quality.

As you can see, if it is possible to only fund one in four applications – currently more like one-in-six with the new rates – for every pool or genre eligible to the program, there will always be a number of commission requests for nationally known and very respected composers turned down. *All* juries struggle with the success rate – that is a given for most programs at Council.

However, the Commissioning program, unlike most other programs at Council, has *two* deadlines with *multiple* applications per commissioner and composer allowed at each. I always encourage composers and organizations to re-apply – sometimes over and over again. Here's why:

The parameters on the 'nature' of the project are few (compared with other project programs); basically, commissions are funded to enable professional artists (soloists, ensembles and organizations) to engage a composer to write a new work. Combine this open and generous criteria with the overwhelming number of extremely good proposals received each deadline. Each new competition consists of new jurors – with their own expertise and their issues; new types of competing applications and new numbers of applications in each pool, creating a new national comparison *each and every time*. The priority list of these Peer Assessment Committees is therefore potentially quite different each time.

Care is taken to award grants to both senior and younger composers, established and fledgling ensembles and toward regional diversity – accomodating the prominence of new music groups in centres across the country. The PAC (Peer Assessment Committee) considers both partners in the process – the organization *and* the composer – when looking for balance between genres, region, gender, cultural diversity and young/established artists

**CLC Rate Increase:** The rate increase had a significant impact on this past commissioning competition (March 2003). While the rates had not been raised in five years, the increases per minute were significant and the impact of these rates – applied across the board, even if applicants applied with the old rate – reduced the rate of success in this program from one-in-four, to one-in-six. This will have significant impact on the milieu. The point #3 raised in the fall newsletter – discussing

the lack of flexibility in determining rates for younger/less experienced composers versus senior composers is, in fact, very real. But it is Council's understanding that any structuring of fees (reflecting a number of issues – experience just being one of them) has, historically, been the League's responsibility to resolve – not Council's. So when the League fails to determine how these rates should be applied, Council has simply continued their policy of applying the universal rate to everyone – as *minimums*.

Finally, a change to be implemented in the near future is to request that the commissioner write a short project description. This will assist the PAC greatly in evaluating the context of the project request. As the program becomes increasingly competitive, this information becomes more important in the assessment of a file. It will also assist in grounding applications in a deeper intention, as few artistic directors describe their commission as part of any artistic project, vision or even rationale. (This is the case in most of the applications – even from senior organizations. In this regard, well-prepared applications are as necessary in the Commissioning program as in any other competition, in any other granting program). The majority of applications have neither party taking responsibility for stating the purpose of the commission. Therefore the addition of a very short project description will be very effective in determining the impact of a potential work. Which leads us to the next aspect of this article.

#### **Tips on Applying:**

Understanding the competitive nature of the program, there *are* ways in which composers and commissioners can clarify and strengthen their applications.

Many applications lack a signature from the composer – or a complete contract. Contracts take many forms, but no matter how formal or informal, they must have the pertinent details – that match the application form – and they must bear the composer's signature. A short letter from the composer indicating his/her intentions to the project doesn't hurt either. Besides the signature being required, these factors lend the impression that the composer has had a part in the application and has expressed his or her commitment. It is amazing to witness the number of applications where there exists not the slightest imprint of the composer in this collaborative application process, yet they are the partner most present in questioning their lack of success. (This is not to say that composers are not welcome to request feedback. On the contrary, beyond the intention of this article to offer general advice, individual consultation is always possible.)

Even more important is the preparation of support materials – audio and scores from composers, C.V.'s and bios from commissioner, performers, and composers. There is a detailed **Notice to Composers** on the final page of the application form (which is supposed to be sent by the commissioner to the composer) explaining how not to waste valuable time at the jury presentation by organizing well your support material. This page is available on the Canada Council Web site. I cannot emphasize this aspect enough.

**C.V.'s:** Composers: please do not send in a 15-page C.V. that lists every work going back 30 years. Neither do photocopies of 30-yr old CMC brochures put the best foot forward. Only a 2-page resume and a 4-page list of works are allowed. Pages beyond this maximum will not go to the jury. Updated, edited, concise C.V.'s are essential.

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## **BULLETIN**

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**Audio:** Listening time IS limited. (see Notice to Composers). Unless composers really believe that the first minute of their works indicate the best example of their writing, PLEASE cue your audio. The impact of cuing audio and scores cannot be underestimated when listening to hundreds of works at a time. In addition, Peer Assessment Committees have little patience to sit through stage introductions, CBC announcements, tuning, stage management or even extended applause on your audio. If your examples cannot be located quickly the jury will move on – automatically. Believe it or not, 90% of audio is submitted without cuing, identifying tracks, or sometimes even checking at all to see if that hastily-burned CD even worked!

Note: Composers often ask whether to send their most recent work or an example closer to the instrumentation, scale or style of the requested commission – even if its older work. Out of the two examples, one must submit something that is closely related to the proposal. If one has NOT written for strings, voice, piano etc., please send something (another solo instrument example) that might suffice. The other work submitted could either also support this example OR show a new compositional direction, or what you believe to be your best work. Here too, a short note explaining your choices may assist in the evaluation of the file.

**Notification:** Due to the volume of files in a national competition, letters are only sent to the commissioners. Please ask the commissioners to inform you upon receipt of their notification or please call them first before calling Council for results.

Finally, it is becoming more difficult to obtain commitment from composers to take part in the Peer Assessment Committee process. This applies particularly to senior composers and composers who hold teaching positions. Yes, the current six-day process is a big commitment but a peer process needs peers! (Please note that due to Council regulations one cannot commit to a jury if you have been used on another, recent jury; if you have applied to the program; or if you are in the midst of a Grant to Individual.) Officers try to line up jurors well in advance but often must wait for the applications to be opened to know if potential jurors have applied. So if you know that you are not applying, are available late October and late March, and might be interested to take part, please feel free to contact the Officer.

I welcome and encourage composers across the country to let me know if they are available and interested. If you know you have a sabbatical approaching, please consider doing your jury 'duty'. Its hard work, but it *is* fun, it pays well, and it is extremely informative!

**Shannon Peet**

## Euphrosyne Keefer

Canadian composer Euphrosyne Keefer died January 23, 2003 at the age of 84. Keefer completed a rigorous program of studies in composition, piano, viola and voice in England, and had been hired by Sadlers Wells Opera when World War II broke out, leading to the cancellation of all opera performances - and also to her marriage to Canadian Thomas Keefer. They spent five years in the Canadian north with a growing family, and then moved to Toronto where she resumed composing and teaching piano and theory, moving to Vancouver in 1977.

Keefer composed prolifically from 1970 onward, writing works for chamber ensembles, flute, and piano as well as choral music and music for students. Her works were widely performed by distinguished musicians in the Vancouver area, and a number were broadcast over the CBC. Keefer's music was marked by a fresh and disciplined lyricism.

An Associate member of the Canadian Music Centre, former Secretary of the Association of Canadian Women Composers, and member of the League, Keefer made a most positive impact on the Vancouver music composition community. Her music can be heard on a number of CDs including *Far Other Worlds* and *River of Golden Dreams*.

**Janet Danielson**

orch = orchestral  
 opera = opera  
 choral = choral  
 mth/dance = music theatre/dance (functional)  
 electro = electroacoustic  
 ch/nm = chamber/new music

**2002 spring:**  
 # of applications: 153 36 funded  
 # of orch app's : 22 # funded: 6  
 # of opera : 4 0  
 # of choral : 9 1  
 # of mth/dance : 11 3  
 # of ch/nm : 101 23

**2001 spring:**  
 # of applications: 179 43 funded  
 # of orch app's : 23 # funded: 6  
 # of opera : 11 2  
 # of choral : 16 4  
 # of mth/dance : 8 3  
 # of ch/nm : 122 28

**2003 spring:**  
 # of applications: 163 31 funded  
 # of orch app' : 19 # funded: 5  
 # of opera : 7 1.5  
 # of choral : 8 1  
 # of mth/dance : 5 2  
 # of electro : 19 3  
 # of ch/nm : 105 17

**2002 fall:**  
 # of applications: 177 41 funded  
 # of orch app's : 22 # funded: 7  
 # of opera : 6 1  
 # of choral : 13 4  
 # of mth/dance : 17 3 (1 electro)  
 # of ch/nm : 120 26 (4 electro)

**2001 fall:**  
 # of applications: 158 40 funded  
 # of orch app's : 18 # funded: 6  
 # of opera : 8 1  
 # of choral : 15 2  
 # of mth/dance : 6 1  
 # of ch/nm : 111 30

# Canadian music courses at Canadian universities

At John Weinzweig's request, the CLC is conducting a survey of Canadian music courses at Canadian universities. The Canadian University Music Society (CUMS) guidelines for member institutions state that part of a music degree's core curriculum should include: two to three years of music history and literature, including Canadian music. Glen Carruthers, the out-going president of CUMS, iterates that it is not the society's mandate to enforce this guideline, and the act of enforcing it contravenes the collegial atmosphere of the society. Therefore it is prudent to regularly monitor the availability of Canadian music education within Canadian universities.

The CLC study consists of three parts: data collection, data reconciliation and follow-up.

## Survey Parameters and Data Collection

In order not to duplicate research efforts, the CLC chose to limit the survey to Canadian music history and literature courses. (In 1995, the education committee of the CMC's Ontario Regional Council undertook a survey of Canadian content in Canadian university music and education departments including course work for performers, composers, musicologists as well as music education students.) We surveyed all Canadian institutions offering studies leading toward a post secondary degree that included music courses as part of their curriculum. For example, the institution did not have to offer a music degree, but did have to offer music courses. The data was gathered from university course calendars via the Internet. The preliminary results, (below) found that 73% of schools surveyed offer at least one Canadian music history course and 17% of schools surveyed offer two or more courses. Course descriptions and data sources are posted on the CLC web-site: [www.composition.org](http://www.composition.org).

## Summary of Data Collected

Prov./University	# of courses		
		Newfoundland	
		Memorial	1
		<b><u>Subtotals: (Universities) 1</u></b>	<b>1</b>
Alberta		Nova Scotia	
University of Alberta	2	Acadia	1
University of Calgary	2	Dalhousie	3
Univ. of Lethbridge	0	St Francis Xavier	0
<b><u>Subtotals: (Universities) 3</u></b>	<b>4</b>	<b><u>Subtotals: (Universities) 3</u></b>	<b>4</b>
British Columbia		Ontario	
UBC	Pending fall 2003	Brock	1
UNBC	0	Carleton	3
SFU	unknown	Guelph	1
UVic	1	Lakehead	1
<b><u>Subtotals: (Universities) 4</u></b>	<b>2</b>	Laurentian	0
Manitoba		McMaster	1
University of Brandon	1	Nipissing	0
University of Manitoba	0	Ottawa	3
University of Winnipeg	0	Queen's	2
<b><u>Subtotals:(Universities) 3</u></b>	<b>1</b>	U of T	0
New Brunswick		Waterloo	1
Mount Allison	1	Western	1
U of New Brunswick	1	Wilfrid Laurier	1
University of Moncton	1	York	1
<b><u>Subtotals: (Universities) 3</u></b>	<b>3</b>	<b><u>Subtotals: (Universities) 14</u></b>	<b>16</b>

PEI		
U of PEI		2
<b><u>Subtotals: (Universities) 1</u></b>		<b><u>2</u></b>
Quebec		
Bishop's		1
Concordia		0
McGill		1
Sherbrooke		0
U of Laval		1
U of M		1
UQAM		1
<b><u>Subtotals: (Universities) 7</u></b>		<b><u>5</u></b>
Saskatchewan		
University of Regina		1
Univ. of Saskatchewan		1
<b><u>Subtotals: (Universities) 2</u></b>		<b><u>2</u></b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>39</b>

#### Data Reconciliation:

Due to the fluidity of some university calendars and the possibility of incomplete data on the web, the CLC will be contacting the surveyed universities to confirm course descriptions and course record, and number of occasions the course has been offered within the last ten years. We are also asking the CLC membership to confirm, correct and make additions to the survey. This addendum can be forwarded to: michelineroi@hotmail.com.

#### Follow-up:

Once the data has been reconciled, the CLC is planning a two-stage follow-up. First a summary of the complete results will be sent out to all participating schools. The second stage will be to offer the survey results to MacLeans magazine for inclusion in their annual university rating issue. The CLC hopes that the circulation and publication of this survey will raise awareness of the deficient state of Canadian music in post-secondary curricula.

For further reading on the subject see: Andrews, B.W. & G. Carruthers. "Needle in a haystack: Canadian music in post-secondary curricula." In P. Shand (Ed.), Proceedings of the Music in Schools and Teacher Education Commission, International Society for Music Education Bi-Annual Conference, Toronto, ON, 2003.

**Micheline Roi**

# Arthur Polson



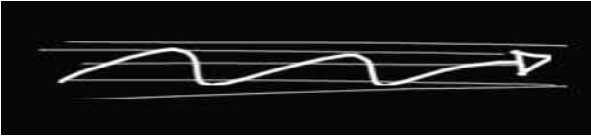
Vancouver's musical community was shocked by the sudden death February 26, 2003, of Arthur Polson, composer, solo violinist, concertmaster of the CBC Vancouver Orchestra and Vancouver Opera Orchestra, and conductor of the Vancouver Youth Symphony. He was at home recovering from a mild heart attack, and was expecting to return to the podium before the end of this season. Polson composed more than 100 works, including eight pieces for orchestra and numerous pieces for chamber ensemble.

Arthur Polson was born in Vancouver, and achieved international recognition for his many musical accomplishments. He lived in Winnipeg from 1966 to 1985 where he served as concertmaster of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the CBC Winnipeg Orchestra, and the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, as well as conductor of the Winnipeg Youth Orchestra. In 1979, he performed as concertmaster at New York's Carnegie Hall for the Symphonicum Europae Foundation with artists such as Sir Yehudi Menuhin, Jorge Bolet, Maureen Forrester, Peter Ustinov, Ruggiero Ricci and Roberta Peters. He was the featured performer on a number of CDs including *Silhouettes*, which included his Two Pieces for Violin and Piano, and *Pulsations* where he performed music by Victor Davies.

In his 15 years as Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra senior conductor, Polson introduced generations of young Canadian musicians to new Canadian music, frequently featuring premieres of new Canadian orchestral works. The VYSO plans to use any donations received to build an Arthur Polson Bursary Fund. There will also be an Arthur Polson Memorial Concert May 25 at the Michael J. Fox Theatre in Burnaby. For further information contact the Vancouver Youth Symphony at 3214 West 10th Avenue, Vancouver, B. C. V6K 2L2, or vyso@telus.net

**Janet Danielson**

# ISCM CANADIAN SECTION JURY SELECTIONS



*The Canadian Jury of the ISCM met in Toronto to select the works to be submitted to the International Jury in Switzerland. The International Jury will make the final selection of works to be performed during the 2004 World Music Days, Switzerland. Results of the International Jury will be announced in summer 2003.*

## **Works selected by the Canadian Jury are:**

**Christopher Butterfield**

**Chris Paul Harman**

**Melissa Hui**

**Eldritch Priest**

**Bob Pritchard**

**Port Bou**

**AMERIKA**

**Come as you are**

**PART (miräzh)**

**...flow mingled down**

In addition the works above, due to the high quality and interesting nature of submissions, the jury has also chosen to propose a special project/concert overview of recent Canadian Electroacoustic Music featuring:

**David Berezan**

**Christian Calon**

**Monique Jean**

**Robert Normandeau**

**Scott Wilson**

**Cyclo (CD)**

**souffles primitifs (flute and CD)**

**Low Memory II (flute and CD)**

**Chorus (CD)**

**Müllmusik (CD and computer graphics)**

Thanks to all composers who submitted works to the Canadian Jury.

**- Paul Steenhuisen, President, ISCM Canadian Section**

**Canadian Jury:**

Kevin Austin (CEC), Linda Catlin Smith (ACWC), Peter Hatch (CLC), and Paul Steenhuisen (non-voting chair)



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