John Weinzweig at seventy

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A Concert in Honor of

John Weinzweig

on his Seventieth Birthday

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Sinfonia
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from Eighteen Pieces for Guitar (1980)
first performance

JOHN WEINZWEIG

Rocking	Manor Road Blues
Glissade	Dialogue
Promenade	Soliloquy
Incantation	City Blues
Pulsation	Sparks
Oscillation	Birds

Philip Candelaria, guitar

Trialogue (1971)

JOHN WEINZWEIG

The Lyric Arts Trio:
Mary Morrison, soprano
Robert Aitken, flute
Marion Ross, piano

INTERMISSION

L.A. (1980)

KRISTI ALLIK

Robert Aitken, conductor

Divertimento No 6 (1972)

JOHN WEINZWEIG

Lawrence Sereda, alto saxophone
Robert Aitken, conductor

The program for this concert has been selected by John Weinzweig.

Roy Thomson Hall, Toronto
Sunday, March 6, 1983
at 8.30 pm

John Weinzweig at seventy

JW at age 16, with mandolin

JOHN WEINZWEIG'S FATHER, Joseph, had been jailed briefly in his native country, Russian-occupied Poland, for participation in radical union movements. His mother, Rose, a strikingly handsome woman, had a deeply passionate nature, later subject to depressions; her brother Sam was the family artist, an itinerant wild-haired poet. Settled in Toronto, the Weinzweigs raised a family of three – John Jacob (born 1913, the oldest), his brother, Morris, and his sister, Grace.

The combined elements of radical idealism and courage on the one hand and moodish fantasy on the other are observable in Weinzweig's compositional life. A vivid adolescent memory for him is a symbolic 'death march,' at his Jewish school's summer camp, in protest over the executions of Sacco and Vanzetti. A sympathizer, though not an activist, he was affected by the leftist politics of Toronto artists and writers in the between-wars era – its atmosphere well evoked in Earle Birney's novel *Down the Long Table*. If his musical radicalism is obviously represented by his early espousal of twelve-note serialism and his later kinship with dadaism, his idealism is shown in key works such as *Wine of Peace*, *Dummiyah*, and the String Quartet No 3 (the last-named written around the time of his mother's death, and dedicated to her memory). At the same time, his lifelong habit of instrumental experimentation has its origin in a spirit of imagination and fantasy – the same spirit which may well have sustained his young ambition to take up, of all unlikely professions in the Canada of the thirties, the composing of music.

JOHN WEINZWEIG'S SECONDARY SCHOOL was Harbord Collegiate Institute, whose student population at the time was dominated by children of Jewish immigrant families, many of whom (thanks to a strong academic tradition) became leaders in government, business, and the performing arts – Louis Rasminsky, Sam Shopsowitz, Hyman Goodman, Morris Surdin, Wayne and Shuster, Louis Applebaum, Victor Feldbrill. Musically it was a fortunate connection, since Harbord had one of the few school-orchestra programs in Canada at the time. John's first music lessons, at fourteen, had been mandolin classes at his Jewish school (the Workman's Circle Peretz School), but at Harbord he had the opportunity to learn the tuba and the saxophone, and even to conduct. Brian McCool, head of music at Harbord and later music supervisor for the provincial education ministry, was an energetic and resourceful teacher, and did much to encourage Weinzweig's talent in these crucial formative stages. His parents sent him to Gertrude Anderson for private piano lessons; continuing these, later with another teacher, George Boyce, he attained a university-entrance level in piano and musical theory at the Toronto (now Royal) Conservatory in the years following his high-school graduation. Morris Weinzweig took up the saxophone, and later became a leading studio professional on that instrument (the solo alto-saxophone part in *Wine of Peace* was composed for him, and he played its première). In the late twenties and early thirties he and John were active young free-lancers. As John once recalled: 'Between the ages of 14 and 19 I studied the piano, mandolin, sousaphone [a wraparound tuba], double bass, and tenor saxophone – and harmony. I played and conducted school orchestras, dance bands, weddings, lodge meetings, and on electioneering trucks for a range of fees between two dollars and a promise. I played Pirates of Penzance, Santa Lucia, Poet and Peasant, Blue Danube, St Louis Blues, Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies, Chopin waltzes and the Tiger Rag. At age 19, I got serious and decided to become a composer.'

But those years were difficult ones for the family. Though he had determined on a musical career, the 1929 economic collapse spelled hardship for his father's College Street fur business, and John helped out by taking a book-keeping course and assisting in the factory. He remained musically involved, as he and his brother continued to fulfill a colorful variety of gigs with other Harbordites. After playing 'In a Persian Market' for restaurant patrons, John's trio would pass the hat demanding, 'Alms for the love of Allah.' Morris was a Groucho Marx look-alike, and comically exploited this. The pop-music repertoire of those years indeed quite evidently influenced Weinzweig's future predilections, as seen in the quirky rhythms of the Divertimentos Nos 2 and 3 and in the evocations of blues and ragtime in the more recent Divertimento No 8 and *Out of the Blues*; even abstract scores such as the Violin Concerto and the Wind Quintet show blues characteristics in their melodies, and Weinzweig's advice to student composers has often started with a hip-wagging complaint: 'It doesn't *swing*.'

In cultivated music, McCool had introduced him already to standard 19th-century symphonic works. The local orchestral and choral repertoires emphasized English music. Holst's *The Planets* was the most-frequently-played modern piece in the Toronto Symphony's programs. At the 1934 celebrations for the centenary of the city's incorporation, the music, sung by a 2,500-voice choir led by Dr H.A. Fricker, included large doses of Stainer and Stanford alongside Handel, Mendelssohn, and Wagner. Weinzweig later recollected Sullivan's operettas (produced at Harbord) as tolerable; but the same composer's 'Onward, Christian soldiers!' was considerably harder to swallow. Personally he bristled when his surname was pronounced in a European or over-educated way, the W's as V's, and always preferred the Americanized version. Backward though it seems in retrospect, in Toronto Sibelius and Holst constituted the most 'advanced' models for an aspiring composer. But the city in the thirties did offer a few isolated events that made a strong impression: a solo appearance by George Gershwin in his own *Rhapsody in Blue*, Igor Stravinsky conducting the bewildered Toronto Symphony ranks through a concert of his own music, including *Petrushka*.

JW rehearsing the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra in the mid-thirties

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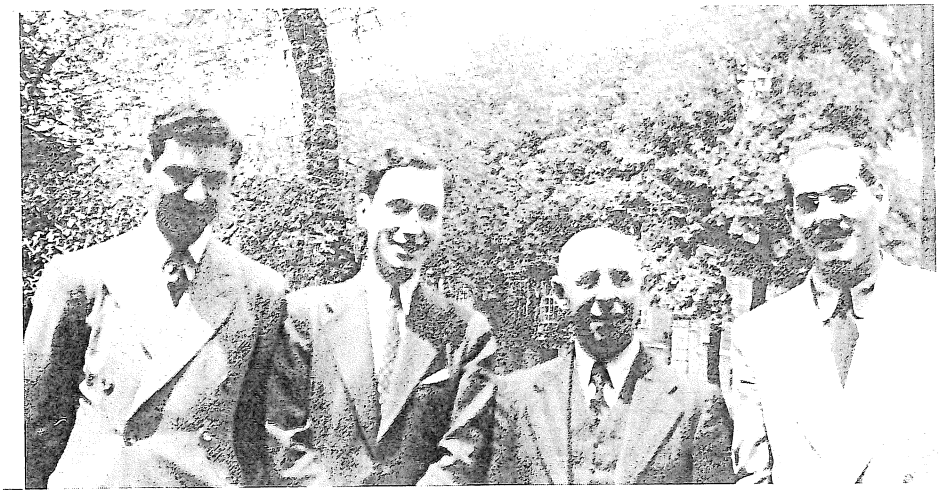
THE ENGLISHNESS of Toronto's musical establishment was epitomized by the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music. Founded in 1918, it began only in the early thirties to offer systematic tutorial work leading to the degree finals, and John Weinzweig was among the first to enroll. His instructors – Leo Smith, Healey Willan, Dr (later Sir) Ernest MacMillan – were all composers and performers, but their pedagogy was largely theoretical and divorced from their creative work, and their own music upheld English ideals with which Weinzweig could not identify. His patience and determination won out, and he was awarded the Mus.B. degree in 1937. As the graduation 'exercise,' candidates were required to submit either a major musico-analytical paper or a composition in several movements. The latter could be either a string quartet or a short cantata. Weinzweig wrote a quartet, his first extended piece. When it was rejected (he was told it was 'not Brahmsian enough'), he composed another, which was accepted, and became his Quartet No 1.

Uncomfortable, and even resentful, in some aspects of his University program, Weinzweig however showed strong initiative in others. Anxious to develop his conducting and orchestral experience begun at Harbord, he placed an ad in *The Varsity* for students to play in a symphonic ensemble, and became the conductor of the first University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra, giving concerts with it in Convocation Hall through his three undergraduate years. Concert fare ranged from classical symphonies (Mozart's G minor, Schubert's *Unfinished*) to Grieg's *Peer Gynt* Suite and short works by Brahms, Chaikovsky, and Wagner. An excerpt from Goldmark's *Rustic Wedding* Symphony was a favorite. Weinzweig's own early orchestral music was not included. At this time also, as a supplement to his degree course, he was taking conducting lessons with Reginald Stewart. A tall and commanding figure, Weinzweig showed an affinity for conducting, enjoyed its challenge, developed insights and techniques which were to prove of great practical use to him as a composer for large ensembles, and in later years became a particularly effective conductor of his own music.

Besides the required quartet, he had been producing a steady stream of shorter



Left to right, Louis Applebaum, Godfrey Ridout, Lazare Saminsky, JW, Toronto c. 1941

works, many of which he characterizes in retrospect as romantic and impressionistic. He showed some of these to Howard Hanson, the ebullient US composer and director of the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, who was in Toronto on a guest-conducting engagement. Hanson encouraged him to come to Eastman for graduate work in composition.

His decision to take up this suggestion was unusual and significant. It was unusual because it anticipated a change of routing in the professional formation of Canadian-born composers – towards American rather than British and European models and traditions. Eastman was an important choice because it was a new and well-endowed centre devoted, through the vigorous leadership of Hanson, a conservative and a staunch chauvinist, to fostering fresh musical repertoire by native US composers. The program and its resources were a marked contrast to Toronto: newly composed works were tried out by the Rochester Civic Orchestra, led by Hanson himself, as soon as they were finished, and an annual festival of US composers' works, several days long, offered live contact with this growing body of pieces. Robert Ward, Owen Read, and Vladimir Ussachevsky were among Weinzweig's fellow students. His teacher for composition and orchestration was Bernard Rogers, a prolific orchestral and operatic composer, whose personal warmth and humanism were a stimulus alongside his sharing of practical experience. Students were expected to participate in a performing ensemble and, since double-bass players were in short supply that year, Weinzweig joined that section.

Through the classes, and using the splendid library at Eastman, he found his awareness of musical repertoire expanding at an accelerated rate. A major force remaining with him from the Eastman year (he received the Mus.M. degree in 1938) was the impact of two 20th-century scores he heard and studied for the first time there – Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and Alban Berg's *Lyric Suite* for string quartet. The former excited his sense of the rhythmic possibilities of new music, while the latter opened to him the melodic and harmonic potential of atonalism, and specifically of the twelve-note serial technique invented by Arnold Schoenberg in the early twenties and employed by Berg in the Suite.

That his teachers at Eastman were unresponsive to his curiosity about Schoenberg's work is not surprising. Though known to some of Schoenberg's Berlin students and to his two Vienna disciples Berg and Anton Webern, the new technique had been written about comparatively little, and the as-yet-small repertoire of works based on it was only slowly gaining the attention of professionals and audiences. Aside from one 1936 article by Richard S. Hill in *The Musical Quarterly*, with which Schoenberg himself had taken issue, virtually no commentary in English was available. Schoenberg's own explication, the essay called 'Composition with Twelve Tones,' was given as a talk in 1941 but appeared in print only in 1950. A few American practitioners (Wallingford Riegger, Ben Weber) were isolated exceptions, ignored in the generally conservative atmosphere found at Eastman.

Undaunted, Weinzweig pursued his analysis of the Berg Suite and other key twelve-note works on his own, and eventually composed, in the 'Themes with Variables' movement of his Piano Suite No 1, the first work by a Canadian composer to apply the Schoenbergian technique. The date was 1939. In immediately subsequent works, especially the Violin Sonata of 1941, he enlarged his use of the technique, and it is an integral element of most of his mature music. A timely English-language publication in 1940 was a little twelve-note manual called *Studies in Counterpoint*, by Ernst Krenek, the prolific Austrian composer who had just emigrated to the United States. Weinzweig studied it and realized the exercises in it (though he found them 'dry'), and he credits it with giving him the basics of the technique.

Deliberate, critical, and selective in his adoption of serial principles, Weinzweig acknowledged Schoenberg's powerful influence on the music of his time but remained personally cool to Schoenberg's own music, preferring that of Berg (and, when it became more accessible, Webern). Though historically important, his move towards serialism did not take the form of a total conversion – though that is what it must have seemed to his Toronto associates and former professors. None of his early teachers, he now says, had ever taught him what tonality was; he therefore felt none of the same need to rebel against it as the Viennese founders had done: twelve-note serialism had for him a positive attraction in which avoidance of tonality (in the sense of definite keys) was not the essential component. He in fact gradually mingled with the technique other modernist vocabulary-elements from Stravinsky, Bartók, Copland, Varèse, and he never forced it on his own composition students in any exclusive or doctrinaire sense, though many of them too did adopt its procedures.

THE LATE THIRTIES and early forties saw Weinzweig's self-confidence and drive applied to the building of a professional career of a sort no

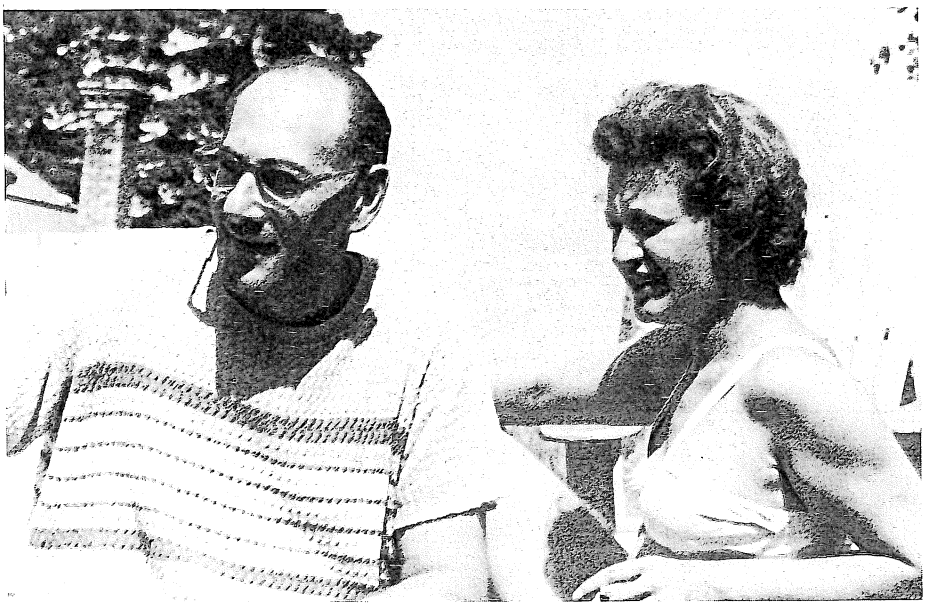
JW in the RCAF 'band hut' during World War Two

Toronto musician before him had attempted. He hung up a shingle for private students in music theory, composition, and orchestration at the Toronto Conservatory, but found few takers at first. More fruitful were the opportunities offered by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which had just been created as a crown corporation in 1936, and the National Film Board of Canada, begun in 1939. These agencies were committed to the use of originally composed music – large quantities of it, preferably by Canadians. Weinzweig soon found himself busy with weekly deadlines. Over the decade following his Eastman sojourn, he produced 100-odd scores, many of them for substantial forces, a 20-to-30-piece orchestra being quite common for forties film-music and radio-drama backgrounds. Out of the experience came two scores to which he gave more permanent status as concert pieces – *Our Canada* (subtitled 'Radio Music No 1') and *Edge of the World* ('Radio Music No 2'); the second of these, along with a choral work of his from the same period, represents the first use by a composer of Inuit folk materials as found in the published collection of Helen Roberts.

The Russian-American composer and musicologist Lazare Saminsky visited Toronto in the early forties, and reported for the journal *Modern Music* on his interviews with young composers there. Besides Weinzweig, he met Godfrey Ridout, Barbara Pentland, and Louis Applebaum. In 1942 he arranged for a New York concert of some of their works. With Applebaum, then already internationally active as a film composer, and Pentland, a fellow Conservatory staff-member, Weinzweig found a ready professional accord. Other prominent young talents, Ridout and Robert Fleming, were more accepting of the British traditions represented especially by Willan, but Weinzweig remained on collegial terms with them despite this difference of view. This generation's response to the new local opportunities made for a creative upsurge that was quite new to Toronto. Public reaction was limited, but CBC Radio was supportive, and they had allies among a number of young performers, notably Harry Adaskin and his brother Murray, both violinists, Harry's wife, Frances Marr, pianist, and Murray's wife, Frances James, singer.

World War Two both increased the need and suggested specific propaganda directions for films and radio dramas. The war affected his life more closely: between 1943 and 1945 he served in the Royal Canadian Air Force as an instructor in its band school, working alongside some of the same wind players he had known in the Toronto broadcasting and recording studios. Out of his 'band hut' at the Rockcliffe base, near Ottawa, came once again several pieces of permanent interest, notably the *Band-Hut Sketches* for wind ensemble. It was here also that he began the slow movement of the Divertimento No 1, inspired by the long-held flute notes being practised in an adjoining room by one of the bandsmen, Dirk Keetbaas.

Weinzweig and Helen Tenenbaum were married in July 1940. Their two sons are Paul, a sociologist, and Daniel, a film executive, born in 1943 and 1947 respectively. Helen's role in her husband's career has been at the same time conventional and sharply unconventional. Her contribution to the personal and professional struggles of the forties consisted at least partly of intellectual challenge, with a strong touch of humor. The cherry pie she is known to have baked, later, at the formative meeting of the Canadian League of Composers (it will no doubt turn up one day in some Canadian wax museum), though a colorful image, is probably less important to cultural history than her pointed urgings to John and his colleagues on that occasion to stop yakking and *do* something. Helen served as secretary of Canadian Music Associates, the concert-giving wing of the League, in the fifties. The Weinzweigs' family retreat on the shore of Loon Lake at Kearney, Ontario (a logging town rather than a resort centre), was at first a modest summer cabin but has been developed and improved over the years, and a second building has been added on the attractive property, a rocky point. The place has a special influence in the creative work of both Weinzweigs. Helen's own remarkable literary creativity was to emerge gradually. Her first publications, a short story in *The Canadian Forum* and a witty article for *The Canadian Composer* called 'Field Guide to the Care and Feeding of Composers,' were published only in the later sixties, and only after her family-raising years did her first and second novels (*Passing Ceremony*, 1937, and *Basic Black with Pearls*, 1980) appear, bringing her quickly to the forefront among Canadian writers. With

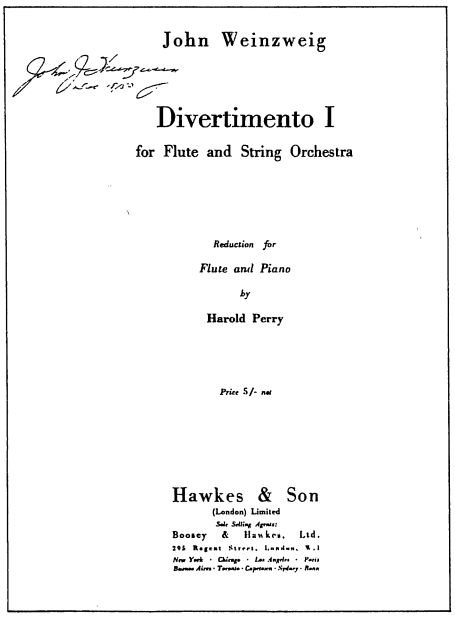


JW with Helen at Kearney, 1953

her early example, John Weinzweig gained insights on the connections between musical and literary modernism, as illustrated in his frequent compositional analogies based on Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

IN THE IMMEDIATE POSTWAR YEARS in Toronto, with his growing family, Weinzweig found marked changes in the style and emphasis of his work. Under veterans' education grants, large numbers of young musicians came to him for lessons and classes. In his mid-thirties he was suddenly looked on as a figure of experience and progressiveness who was able to stimulate many of the coming generation – Andrew Twa, Lorne Betts, Samuel Dolin, Harry Somers, Harry Freedman, Phil Nimmons, as well as a late-starting contemporary, Murray Adaskin. His reputation as a teacher grew rapidly at this time. He offered not only modernism but authority: Somers once remarked, 'John couldn't tell you how to get to Bloor Street without making it sound like a profound truth.' Above all, he had an ideal of a new kind of here-and-now creativity in music, to which students eagerly responded.

His musical output was expanding and attracting serious attention. He appeared on the program of the Toronto Symphony's first all-Canadian concert in 1947. The newly formed Canadian Music Council submitted the Divertimento No 1 for flute and strings, among other pieces, to the arts division of the 1948 Olympic competitions in London, and the Weinzweig entry was awarded highest place in the chamber-music category. Ralph Hawkes, of the English publishing firm of Boosey and Hawkes, published the score and later that of the Divertimento No 2 for oboe and strings as well. Weinzweig's only stage work was produced in 1949, the ballet *The Red Ear of Corn* (he never liked the title), suggested by an Indian legend and choreographed by the Russian-born ballet-master Boris Volkoff. In 1950 Weinzweig attended the four-day Symposium of Canadian Music in Vancouver; there were performances of his String Quartet No 2 and 'To the Lands Over Yonder' for chorus, and he conducted part of his own *Red Ear of Corn* Suite.


John Weinzweig

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Cover of JW's first published work, Divertimento No 1

The Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto had undergone a considerable postwar enlargement and restructuring, and Weinzweig was one of the professors appointed on the retirements of Smith and Willan. With the addition of Ridout and the new Canadians Oskar Morawetz and Talivaldis Kenins, a broadening of the Faculty's compositional outlook was inevitable. Thus after 1952 Weinzweig's free-lance composing and private teaching activities gradually receded as his University classes took more and more of his energy. Among his students of the fifties were Anne Eggleston, Norma Beecroft, Gustav Ciamaga, R. Murray Schafer, Bruce Mather, and Robert Aitken. He taught not only composition and orchestration but a variety of music-theory subjects as well. In his courses for performers, he used the sight-singing approach he had been shown at Eastman, but spurned the Eastman harmony-teaching method, using instead the textbook by Paul Hindemith, *Traditional Harmony*. His classroom analyses are preserved in light-pencil notes in his neat slanted hand still to be found in scores of the Edward Johnson Music Library's collection; they convey his insight but also his pleasure at musical discovery, and they ought not to be erased. Towards the end of the decade he moved into graduate teaching as well; the first master's candidates he prepared were John Fenwick and a younger Faculty colleague, John Beckwith.

In February 1951 Somers and Dolin met informally with Weinzweig at his Belgravia Avenue home, and from their discussion of the state of the composing profession in Canada emerged a resolve to form a professional organization. Contacting a dozen or so others, over the next year they acquired a federal charter as the Canadian League of Composers. Weinzweig was a logical choice as first president, and has remained active with

Annual meeting of the Canadian League of Composers, 1960(?); left to right, Louis Applebaum, Morris Surdin, Harry Freedman, JW, William McCauley, Harry Somers, Jean Papineau-Couture (front), Srul Irving Glick, John Beckwith, Talivaldis Kenins, Norma Beecroft, Bruce Mather, István Anhalt

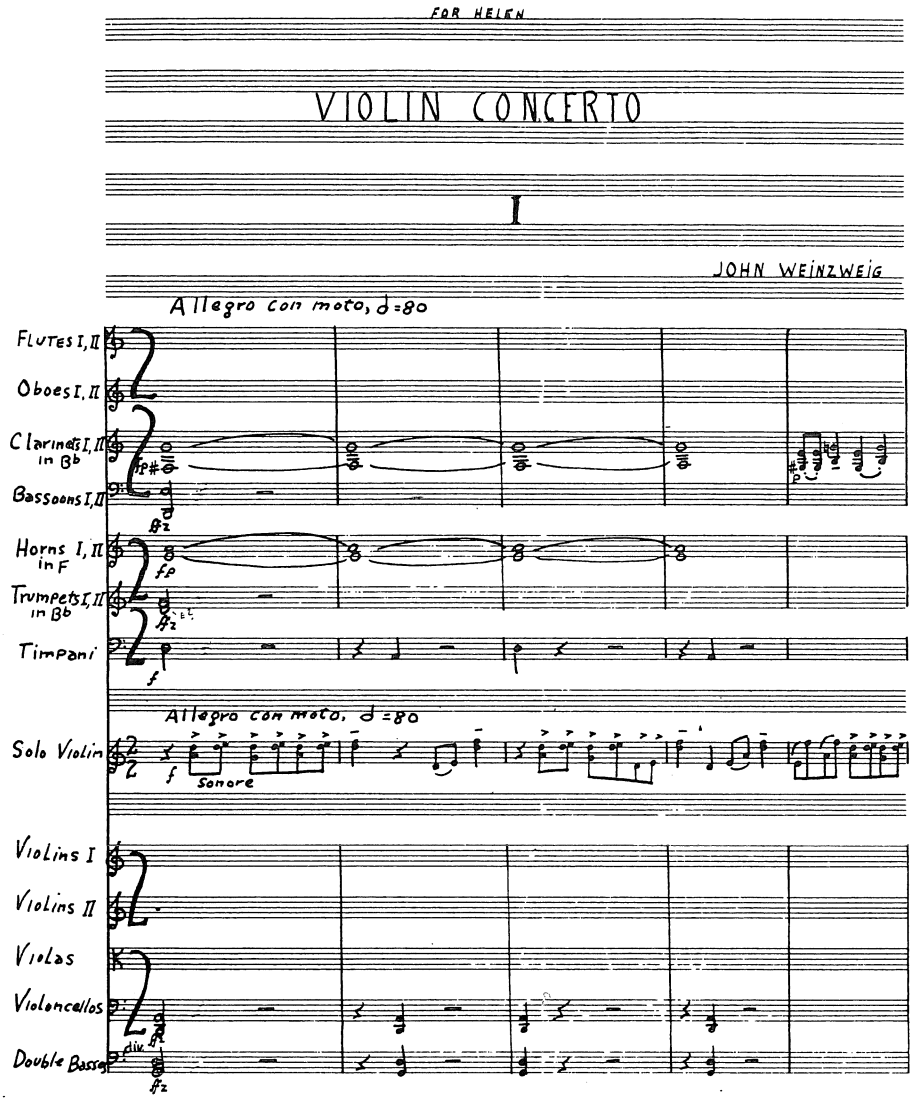
the organization for thirty years, in which time its national membership has grown to nearly 200.

The first public notice of the new body's existence was also the first entire concert devoted to Weinzweig's music, in May of the same year. A number of colleagues – the Adaskins, the pianist Reginald Godden – had already been planning the program as a surprise tribute to Weinzweig. With the League's birth it became co-sponsor along with the Royal Conservatory and the CBC. The program was a substantial one, demonstrating the composer's progress over a ten-year period in three sonatas, for violin, cello, and solo piano; the short song-cycle *Of Time and the World*; the two Divertimentos; and the string-orchestra piece *Interlude in an Artist's Life* (the title refers to the short, uncertain interval just prior to the start of his RCAF duties).

The League aimed at first to fill a vacuum by sponsoring public concerts of new Canadian repertoire (orchestral music, chamber music, even opera), then largely shunned by the established performing groups, by editing an anthology of new piano pieces, and by accumulating a small library of members' scores for use by interested conductors and soloists. Although initially made up of Weinzweig's circle, the membership was based on adherence to a common professionalism rather than a common musical ideology. Two senior composers, Healey Willan and Claude Champagne, were elected honorary members. The small score collection eventually became the nucleus of the Canadian Music Centre, founded in Toronto in 1959 on the recommendation of a League committee (and with financial support from the lately formed Canada Council). Weinzweig has served on the Centre's board of directors for a number of years. As an early peak of these movements, the League organized an International Conference of Composers as part of the 1960 Stratford Festival, bringing together leading composers from about thirty different countries, among them older figures such as Krenek and Varèse as well as younger luminaries such as Berio. Weinzweig's *Wine of Peace* was among the larger works performed in the Conference concerts.

JW with John Adaskin (executive secretary, Canadian Music Centre) and Healey Willan, c. 1962

As the League's concert-giving activities in various cities across the country were rendered less urgent by the appearance of new-music concert societies and by the gradual inclusion of new repertoire in regular programs, the organization turned its attention to various



Violin Concerto (1954): first page of the full score, composer's autograph

lobbying needs, in which again Weinzweig provided experience and leadership – such areas as publishing contracts, standards for commissioning fees, and copyright legislation. He was elected to the board of the performing-rights firm CAPAC (Composers Authors and Publishers Association of Canada) around this time, and later served a term as its president.

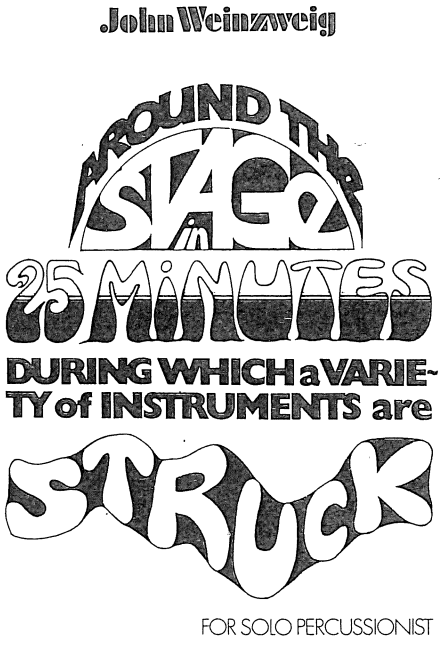
THIS PERIOD of heavier committee duties with professional organizations, and major Faculty responsibilities, was nevertheless a steadily active one compositionally. If not the first Canadian composer to regard composing as his primary role, Weinzweig is perhaps the first to gain acceptance of that view. His unwritten contract with Faculty associates was that one day each week was exclusively a composing day for him, and he used the two summer months of break (later stretched to three) for uninterrupted work on his current musical project in the relaxed surroundings of Kearney. The fifties saw the completion of important orchestral achievements – the Violin Concerto and *Wine of Peace* (with its dedication to the United Nations) for soprano and orchestra – as well as the *Symphonic Ode* and the third piece in the continuing Divertimento series, a work for bassoon and strings; and in the early sixties he produced his largest chamber-music score, the five-movement String Quartet No 3, following it with a strongly contrasting chamber work, the tightknit and sardonic Woodwind Quintet.

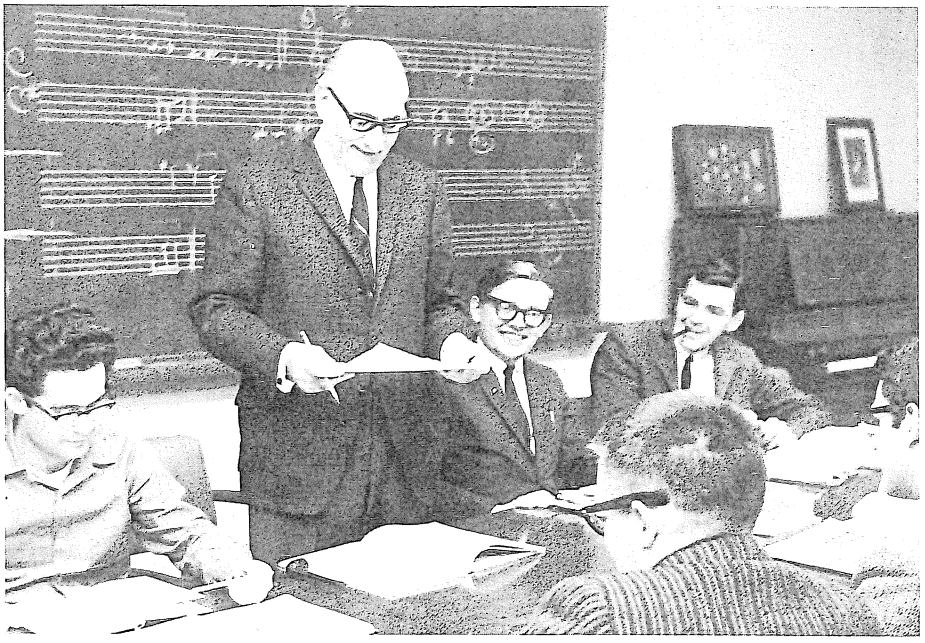
He began to respond to invitations to travel, and his works received performances over a wider span. In the sixties he visited the University of Hartford and Indiana University; he attended festivals and conferences in Puerto Rico and Israel; he visited England, Scotland, and Wales, France and Germany, as a spokesman for new Canadian music. In 1967 the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon mounted an exhibition of his scores, and performed some of them in a mini-festival, thanks largely to his friend and sometime composition pupil Murray Adaskin, who had settled in Saskatoon as head of the music department. The University of Ottawa presented him with an honorary doctorate in 1969.

His music had begun to take new directions. The three-movement neo-classical forms of most of the instrumental works of the forties and fifties (fast, slow, fast) gave way to freer shapes articulated in repetitive, almost ritualistic, gestures; the concentration on inherent instrumental capacities expanded to take account of newer discoveries such as the two- and three-note chords ('multiphonics') in the solo clarinet part of the Divertimento No 4. The Piano Concerto explored the effect of the

JW visiting the Mexican composer Manuel Enriquez at the Conservatorio Nacional, Mexico City, 1968

John Weinzweig





Around the Stage ... (solo percussion, 1970): title page of the score, drawn for JW by Norman White

'bleeding cluster' – striking a large number of notes simultaneously and then subtracting them from the mass one at a time to form a sort of shadowy melody. In the Harp Concerto and the eloquent *Dummiyah*, there was a new sense of musical sounds framing, and being framed by, silence. *Dummiyah* is in fact a Hebrew word meaning silence – silence in a particular awestruck sense. Weinzweig composed this work during a few months' visit to Cuernavaca, Mexico, as part of his 1968–9 leave year, and it was influenced by the visible, brooding, sometimes smoking, volcanic peak of Popocatapetl. The music's particular qualities – an ominous stillness with long silences – he associated with the horror of the Nazi Holocaust; there is a short quotation (unusual in his music up to this point) from the traditional chant *Kol Nidre*.

Equally surprising were the changes of style in a series of works of the early seventies. Starting with the solo percussion work exuberantly entitled *Around the Stage in 25 Minutes During Which a Variety of Instruments are Struck!*, he introduced theatrical actions and verbal comments into his scores, and began to adopt aphoristic and open-form structures whose components were sometimes playable in several different orders. Interrelationships are seen between *Trialogue* for voice, piano, and flute and the solo works he wrote for the same three forces – *Private Collection* for voice (to his own whimsical texts), *Impromptus* for piano, and *Riffs* for flute – all of which quote musical fragments from each other and from earlier Weinzweig pieces. Their purpose has been regarded as partly autobiographical; their oddball combinations of gesture and wordplay with brief characteristic sounds mirror Weinzweig's ruminations on dadaism and its later manifestations, the 'happenings' of sixties theatre.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Program-booklet cover of the CBC's 60th-birthday concert, 1973; the cartoons of JW were done 20 years apart by the same artist, Avrom Yanovsky

JW teaching a graduate seminar at the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto, c. 1967

HIS SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY in 1973 was marked by publication of a special Weinzweig issue of the journal *Les Cahiers canadiens de musique/Canada Music Book* and by a CBC birthday concert at which he conducted. The later seventies have added more honors – the Order of Canada, the Canadian Music Council annual medal, an honorary life membership in the Toronto Musicians' Association, and, from the University of Toronto, a professor-emeritus citation on his retirement (1978) and an honorary doctorate (1982). Radio Canada International devoted the first album in its *Anthology of Canadian Music* series to the music of Weinzweig. In 1981 at the University of Windsor the Canadian League of Composers celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in a three-day series of discussions

and concerts; a highlight was the presentation to Weinzweig of the Canada Council's annual Molson Prize, previously won by several outstanding Canadian performing musicians but never before by a composer.

Retirement from his University post has made little difference, seemingly, in the rhythm of Weinzweig's life. His recent years have been busy and productive ones. He has fulfilled commissions (including a major orchestral assignment for the Toronto Symphony, his Divertimento No 9) and produced works in what for him are new fields of instrumental specialization (brass quintet, the guitar, the double bass, the tuba). He has been a guest teacher not only at several universities but for secondary-school music classes, where he is a genial and liberal introducer of new Canadian music to the coming generation. Frustrated by the limited response of Canadian music publishers to new music, he has begun (like several of his colleagues) to act as his own publisher.

Recent addresses have given him an opportunity to reminisce about his career and about the changes in the Canadian cultural scene he has lived through: from the feelings of the isolation and oddity of his work in the thirties to the timely openings that came his way in the forties and eventually to the wider appreciation accorded him in the seventies and eighties; but also, in a broader view, from the ad-hoc collectivism and problem-solving of the forties and fifties to the era of the administration of culture by the Canada Council and other new bodies, and the beginnings of private-sector subsidization for music.

'Are things better now than then?' he was asked by a University of Toronto student on a recent return visit to his alma mater. Weinzweig replied, 'There's certainly been a breakthrough; more careers are possible for composers now. Back then, you had to *invent* a career.' His early battles were exciting, and many have obviously been successful. But clearly he has not yet hung up his gloves.

JOHN WEINZWEIG'S MUSICAL OUTPUT is difficult to summarize, but an impressionistic review of a few groups of his compositions may suggest its range and flavor.

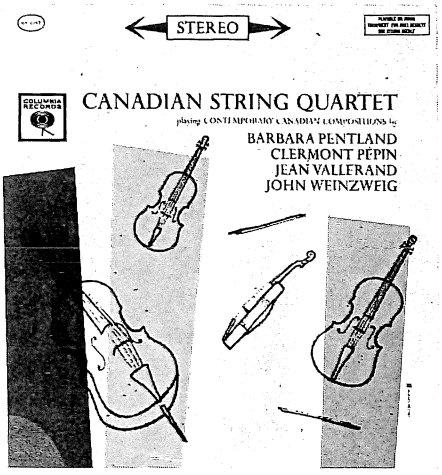
JW and Isaac Mamott rehearsing for the first performance of the Cello Sonata, 1950

The early works concentrate on the orchestra. He presented one movement of a Suite for orchestra as guest conductor at a 1940 Promenade Concert in Toronto: at 1 minute, 45 seconds, it was judged 'too long' by the conductor, his former teacher Stewart. The *Rhapsody* (1941), originally part of a larger Symphony, was salvaged by the conductor Victor Feldbrill (one of his very first private pupils, and a longtime Weinzweig booster) and successfully revived; the more fancifully titled *Whirling Dwarf, The Enchanted Hill*, and (suggested by a Polynesian legent) *A Tale of Tuamotu* – student pieces, some of which received readings by the orchestra at Eastman – may well merit a similar rescue from oblivion. Never played in full, the score of the Symphony was commented on favorably by Saminsky. The emergence of twelve-note serialism as a governing principle of pitch organization may be seen in the attractive early piano suites.

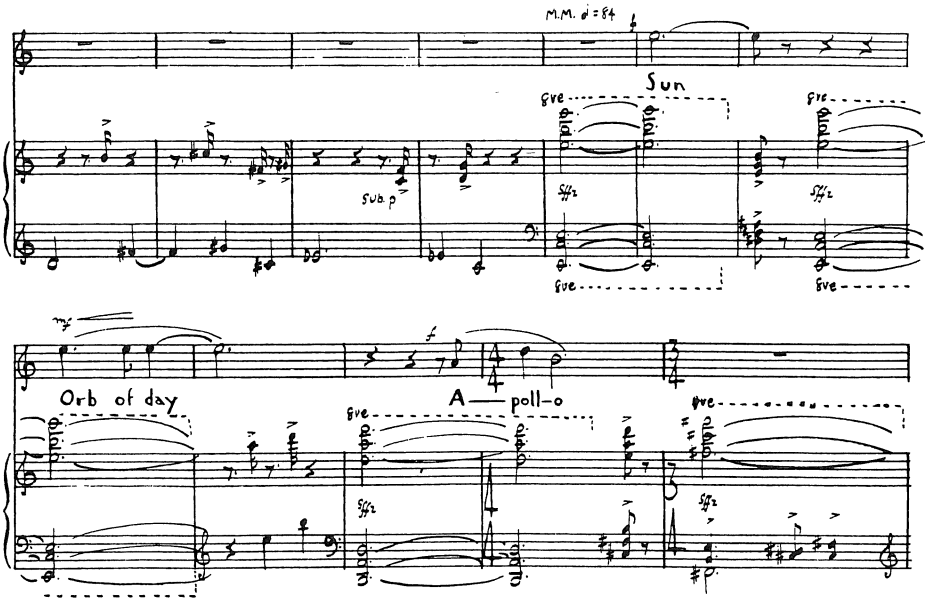
Only three works bear the name 'sonata' and all belong to the decade 1941–50. That for violin and piano, in one longish movement, is a blend of rhapsodic feelings with abstract melodies struggling to free themselves from associations with traditional vocabulary. That for cello and piano its subtitled 'Israel' and commemorates the founding of the state of Israel around the time it was written. Its structure is an original one: two movements separated by a free cello solo. The choice of cello for these serious musical thoughts is significant, and the work succeeds in evoking a wordless cantorial mood. The Piano Sonata represents Weinzweig's closest rapport with Stravinskian neo-classicism. Deceptively easy-looking on paper, crisp and economical in texture, it displays a gradual unfolding of the twelve-note series, one or two notes at a time – a process which became a Weinzweig trademark – but its cadences make no effort to avoid implications of key.

The three extant string quartets characterize three different stages of Weinzweig's development. No 1 – a student work in which he no longer has any interest, though one movement exists in an early CBC recording – exhibits a careful and evidently self-acquired grasp of instrumental idioms amid conservative quartet structures. No 2 is typical of the brevity and neatly expressed neo-classicism of his mid-forties music. But in No 3, which he says was his response to an immersion in the music of Webern, the expression is deeper and more sustained: three of the five movements are in slow tempo, and the musical meaning resolves at the end on a low, quiet unison note. As in the late Bartók quartets, suggestions of intensity and violence are given a long time-span in which to dissipate and settle.

Weinzweig says his emphasis on the association of soloist and ensemble stems from his love for the dialogue of opposite



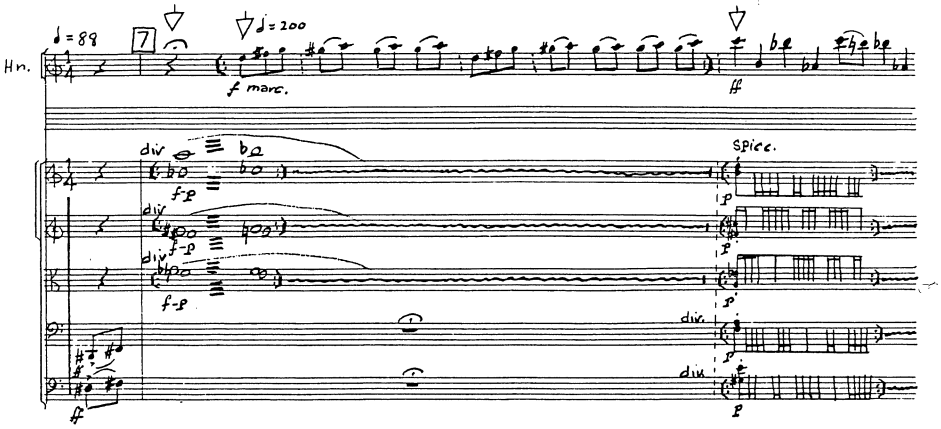
Album cover of Columbia MS 6364 (1962), including JW's String Quartet No 2



Of Time and the World *(voice and piano, 1947): fragment from the third song, composer's autograph*

or unequal forces. The drama of this musical set-up, its humorous aspects, its surprise factors, all surface recurrently in his divertimentos and concertos.

The divertimento series consists by now of nine works, eight of them pitting soloist against ensemble while the ninth regards the full orchestra as an aggregation of many contrasting solo elements. The first three, for one woodwind instrument with strings, all show the same serviceable three-movement shape, but gradually increase in length. In No 2 the plan of colors is interesting – low strings with the soloist in the first movement; high strings with the soloist in the second; all forces combined in the third. The swinging character of No 3 almost converts the bassoon into a saxophone. In No 5 – composed, and numbered, several years before No 4 – there are two soloists, a trumpet and a trombone, and the ensemble consists of winds and percussion, no strings. No 4 in the late sixties and Nos 6, 7, and 8 in the seventies give off a new assurance in their uniting of musical thoughts with the appropriate instrumental devices and in their almost clinical focusing on the peculiar capacities of each soloist. Solo passages and cadenzas are structured in original formal patterns, sometimes necessitating adoption of an advanced notation. The ensemble in Nos 4, 6, and 7 is again made up of strings only, but No 8 uses full orchestra. In it and in No 9, as in the earlier Divertimentos and much other instrumental music by Weinzweig,



Divertimento No 7 (horn and strings, 1977): fragment from the composer's autograph score

constant illustration is found for a comment he once made to an interviewer, namely that the hardest thing a composer has to learn is 'to put down the essential note and no more.' The 'essential note' for a Weinzweig Divertimento soloist is usually one of the 'good notes' on the instrument, verified by the composer through a deliberate process of research and consultation with players.

Of the three concertos, only that for harp has achieved the large circulation all three deserve. The three-movement Violin Concerto was modeled neoclassically after those of Mozart and Beethoven in its form and scoring, but is perhaps closer to those of Prokofiev in its melodic and rhythmic tone. It constitutes a peak of seriousness in Weinzweig's earlier music. The Piano Concerto turns its back on the grandiloquence of the conventional genre, in favor of sparseness and understatement. Dotted with little rhythmic abstractions echoing the jazz pianism of Tatum and Peterson, it ends pianissimo. For the Harp Concerto, commissioned for Judy Loman, Weinzweig persuaded the well-known Toronto Symphony harpist to give him a few harp lessons. The most original touch of the score is its formal exploitation of a series of twelve different color-effects in the solo instrument. The clusters and the dramatic silences in this Concerto foreshadow the stark mood of *Dummiyah*.

Weinzweig has written little for solo voice or choir. A baritone song and a choral piece both to Hebrew texts are of interest as marking a specific source for some characteristic rhythms and melodic turns of the instrumental works: repeated-note treatment in the Violin Concerto can be traced to *Am Yisrael Chai!*, for example. *Of Time and the World* is a fascinating microcosm, as unlike conventional art-song repertoire as one could imagine. Sensitive to poetry but reluctant to face the compromises involved in setting it to music, he hit on the idea of deriving his own text from phrases found in *Roget's Thesaurus* under three topics: time, rain, world. Thirty years elapsed before he returned to the same medium, but essentially his approach was quite similar: *Private Collection* again avoids conventional poetry-setting and uses original words, this time without recourse to the *Thesaurus*. The unique large-scale voice-and-orchestra

JW receiving applause following a performance of the Harp Concerto, Paris 1974

work, the splendid *Wine of Peace*, uses two contrasting texts, both translations from distant time periods and distant cultures, one Spanish and the other Arabian. The second piece rises to one of Weinzweig's most impassioned musical statements.

THE IMPRESSIVENESS of the repertoire reflects a strong personality. Achieving all this has demanded personal resources of immense patience, single-mindedness, and meticulous slow concern for the details of a correct solution. Behind it also (the real music behind the sounds) is a personal capacity to acknowledge feelings – enjoyment, and the vitality of humor, as well as democratic and humanitarian sympathies that go as deep as the unspeakable reaction to real tragedy.

A certain sharp crustiness is also detected. The radical in Weinzweig remains a latent force, emerging now and then for a bold and dramtic effect. In 1981 a gathering of Toronto artists welcomed a delegation of musicians from the USSR. Amid the polite cross-cultural platitudes, Weinzweig's words produced a noticeable jolt. From an experience of Canadian-Soviet relations going back further than most of those present, and from his immediate knowledge through his CAPAC work of the one-way avenue of royalty payments for musical performances, he reviewed the long history of unfulfilled promises for the performance of new Canadian music in the USSR, ending with the rhetorical question, 'Is there something *wrong* with our music?' There was an uncomfortable air and no one answered. Every Canadian composer could relate to his point, and none could have made it more effectively.

JOHN BECKWITH

Excerpts from John Weinzweig's Convocation Address

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO,
JUNE 11, 1982

THIS HALL has been a kind of vocational centre for me. I was born in a flat just a few blocks from here – I conducted the University Symphony here 45 years ago (March 1, 1937) – that same year I walked to this platform to receive my first degree – a first performance of an early orchestral work took place here (February 13, 1940) – I recorded some of my music here just last year – as a new boy on the teaching staff, I ushered at several convocations. I owe a great debt to this University. However, there is another column in my ledger that shows an item marked 'overdue.' I don't wish to be a complainer, but in the final year as conductor of the University Symphony, I was promised an honorarium of $50. On this occasion, I am happy to erase the debt ...

OUR COMPOSERS know more about the physical laws of sound than composers of past centuries; about transistors, electronic circuits and computers. We no longer ask the composer, 'What kind of music do you make?' but rather, 'What kind of sound?' The English sculptor Henry Moore said, 'You start with nothing, which is space, and you build around it.' The composer starts with silence ...

I DON'T REMEMBER ever being threatened by an audience. I was threatened with physical violence by a trumpet player of an orchestra in Massey Hall, which shall be nameless. He was only a second trumpet ...

After a performance, orchestra parts are never returned to the composer in their original condition. We find annotations that range from complaints to boredom, to hostility, in a variety of expressions drawn from slang, jargon and others unfit for business correspondence; even a musical offering to improve the work. I used to erase them. Now I collect them. These orchestra graffiti constitute an under-the-podium network of personal frustrations which I have learned to share with them. They are the unofficial minutes of the proceedings. They should be read and adopted before every concert.

It has become clear to me that I must accept some of the blame for the vandalism of my orchestral parts. The amount of unsolicited comments varies in proportion to the number of bars rest given to the players. You know what the devil does with idle hands. Of course, no wind player can be expected to play non-stop for an entire piece. Still, I may have been guilty of over-indulgence in the allocation of rests in my scores ...

FROM INSPIRATION to realization, composers are circumscribed by time: rehearsal time, performance time, broadcast time – and a metronome and stop-watch sit in the shadow of every score to count out tempo time and tenure time. We are prisoners of Time; often its victim. A piece that is a few minutes too long, or too short, may be excluded from a program, especially from the broadcast and recording media ...

WHY DON'T COMPOSERS write beautiful melodies as in the good old days? Because they choose not to. Because they are probing other areas of sound that may not always be compatible with lyric flights, i.e., rhythm, percussion, new colors and techniques in woodwinds and brass instruments that were not possible 150 years ago. Because our sensibilities have been extended by Joyce, Freud, Einstein. Because the moon has become a reality. Handel never watched TV. Mozart never travelled in a Volkswagen, nor Brahms in a DC10! We may look back. We can't go back. The world of 1982 is not beating in the tempo of a minuet ...

Compositions by John Weinzweig

String Quartet No 0 in G minor (1936)
String Quartet No 1 in D minor (1937)
The Whirling Dwarf (1937), medium orchestra
Legend (1937), full orchestra
The Enchanted Hill (1938), full orchestra
Suite (1938), full orchestra:
  Pulsation
  Introspection
  Fugando
Spectre (1938), string orchestra and timpani
Suite for Piano No 1 (1939):
  Waltzling
  Dirgeling
  Themes with Variables
A Tale of Tuamotu (1939), solo bassoon with full orchestra
Symphony (1940), full orchestra
Rhapsody for Orchestra (1941), full orchestra
Musical scores for certain episodes in the radio series, *Jalna* (1940–41)
The Terror that Walks Like a Man, musical score for radio drama, (1941)
New Homes for Old, musical scores for series of 13 radio programs, (1941)
Sonata for Violin and Piano (1941)
Mackenzie River, film score (1941)
Brothers in Arms, musical scores for 14 radio programs (1941–42)
Improvisation on an Indian Tune (1942), organ
Alt for Norge, musical score for radio drama (1942)
St. George for England, musical score for radio drama (1942)
Our Brothers in Arms, musical scores for 14 radio dramas (1942)
British Commonwealth Series, musical scores for 6 radio dramas (1942)
Canada Marches, musical scores for 14 radio programs (1942)
West Wind: The Life and Art of Tom Thomson, film score (1942)
Comrades in Arms, musical scores for many of the 50 radio programs (1942–43)
Our Canada, musical scores for 13 radio dramas (1942–43)
Our Canada (Music for Radio No. 1) (1943), medium orchestra:
  Wheat
  Bonds of Steel
  The Land
Musical scores for 'China', 'Czechoslovakia' and 'Greece' in the radio series *Somewhile Before the Dawn* (1943)
Lidice Lives Forever, musical score for radio drama (1943)
We See Thee Rise, musical score for radio drama (1943)
We Here Highly Resolve (Tribute to Lincoln), musical score for radio drama (194?)
Intermissions for Flute and Oboe (1943)
Musical Escapade 'A.W.O.L.' (1943), two clarinets, double bass
Fanfare (1943), three trumpets, three trombones, three percussion
Interlude in an Artist's Life (1943), string orchestra
Band-Hut Sketches (1944), military band
Prelude to a New Day (1944), full orchestra
The Great Canadian Shield, film score (1945)
Turner Valley, film score (1945)
To the Lands Over Yonder (1945), mixed chorus
White Empire, musical scores for 13 radio programs (1945–46)
Edge of the World (Music for Radio No. 2) (1946), full orchestra
Divertimento No 1 (originally named Suite for Flute and String Orchestra) (1946)
String Quartet No 2 (1946)
The Ivory Farm, musical score for radio drama (1946)
Of Time and the World (1947), song cycle for soprano and piano:
  Time
  Rain
  The World
Divertimento No 2, oboe and string orchestra (1947)
The Great Flood, musical score for CBC *Wednesday Night* play (1948)
Sonata for Cello and Piano, 'Israel' (1949)
Red Ear of Corn (1949), ballet score
Red Ear of Corn (1949), suite for medium orchestra:
  Tribal Dance
  Ceremonial Dance
  Barn Dance
Round Dance (1950, revised 1977), medium orchestra
Suite No. 2 for Piano (1950):
  Conversation Piece
  Berceuse
  Toccata Dance

Piano Sonata (1950)
Riel, musical score for radio drama (1951)
Dance of the Masada (1951, revised 1975), baritone and piano
Am Yisrael Chai! (Israel Lives!) (1952), mixed chorus
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (1954)
Wine of Peace (1957), soprano, full orchestra:
  Life is a Dream
  City of Brass
Symphonic Ode (1958), full orchestra
Divertimento No 3, bassoon and string orchestra (1960)
Divertimento No 5, trumpet, trombone and winds (1961)
String Quartet No 3 (1962)
Woodwind Quintet (1964)
Clarinet Quartet (1965)
Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (1966)
Concerto for Harp and Chamber Orchestra (1967)
Divertimento No 4, clarinet and string orchestra (1968)
Dummiyah / Silence (1969), full orchestra
Around the Stage in 25 Minutes During Which a Variety of Instruments Are Struck! (1970), solo percussion
Trialogue (1971), soprano, flute, piano
Divertimento No 6, alto saxophone and string orchestra (1972)
Impromptus (1973), solo piano
Riffs (1974), flute
Private Collection (1975), soprano and piano
Contrasts (1976), guitar
Pieces of 5 (1976), brass quintet
Refrains (1977), double bass and piano
Divertimento No 7, horn and string orchestra (1979)
Divertimento No 8, tuba and orchestra (1980)
Eighteen Pieces for Guitar (1980)
Out of the Blues (1981), concert band:
  Deep Blues
  Raging Blues
  Meditation Blues (1)
  Jumpin' Blues
  Meditation Blues (2)
  All Together Blues
Divertimento No 9, full orchestra (1982)

JW photographed by Walter Curtin in the living room of his cottage at Kearney, c. 1975

HAROLD TOWN, the renowned Canadian artist, was commissioned by New Music Concerts to make the sketch of John Weinzweig appearing on the front cover. Sittings took place in January 1983.

JOHN BECKWITH, composer, who edited this booklet, is a member of the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto, where he once studied under John Weinzweig. He is also a member of the New Music Concerts board.

ELAINE KEILLOR, who prepared the chronological list of John Weinzweig's musical works, is with the Department of Music at Carleton University, Ottawa. She is at work on a book-length study of Weinzweig for the series *Canadian Composers*.

This booklet has been made possible by the generosity of:

Canadian Music Centre
Max Clarkson Foundation
Composers Authors and Publishers Association of Canada Limited

and friends, colleagues, and former students:

Mr & Mrs Murray Adaskin
Robert Aitken
Norma Beecroft
Victor Davies
Mr & Mrs Victor Feldbrill
Harry Freedman
Mr & Mrs Arthur Gelber
Srul Irving Glick
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John Rea
Godfrey Ridout
R. Murray Schafer
Harry Somers
Norman Symonds

This booklet was designed by William Rueter and was produced by University of Toronto Press.