



The Canadian Music Centre: A History

Author(s): Karen Keiser and Mark Hand

Source: *Fontes Artis Musicae*, Oktober-Dezember 1987, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Oktober-Dezember 1987), pp. 216-223

Published by: International Association of Music Libraries, Archives, and Documentation Centres (IAML)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23507516>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

International Association of Music Libraries, Archives, and Documentation Centres (IAML) is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Fontes Artis Musicae*

microfiche update, 45rpm discs, sound effect and production-music records. Long-range plans include the possibility of networking the computers in these libraries for faster data entry and retrieval.

The Canadian Music Centre: A History*

Karen Keiser (Toronto) with Mark Hand (Toronto)**

The Canadian Music Centre was founded on January 1, 1959, by the Canadian Music Council, thanks to grants from the newly formed Arts Council of Canada, and CAPAC (Composers, Authors and Publishers Association of Canada Limited). Its national office is located at Chalmers House in Toronto, and there are regional branches in Montreal, since 1973, Vancouver, since 1977, and Calgary, since 1980.

The main object of the CMC is the promotion of Canadian music, but the organisation also provides a variety of information services, administers many awards to young composers, and offers copying and reproduction services to professional composers.

In 1981 the Centre began to produce discs of the Centrediscs recording label, and has distributed a selection of sound recordings of Canadian music. Jointly with the Canadian Music Educators' Association, the CMC co-ordinated the Adaskin Project, which aims to encourage the study and performance of Canadian music in schools.

The Centre is a private body, without profit making ends, funded by the public and private sectors. It is governed by an administrative council, with representation from the various regions.

The Establishment

No one can recall who thought of it first. It seemed to be "in the air". As early as the 1930s Sir Ernest MacMillan wrote about the need for a central repository of information on Canadian music. In 1979, when the fledgling Canadian Music Council applied to the Government of Canada for incorporation, its aims and objectives included the promotion of Canadian music and the facilitation of its performance. But all concerned realized the necessity of an agency dedicated to achieving this purpose.

The United States was the first country to establish such an entity – a "music information centre". The American Music Center was set up in New York City in 1940. Following the war, one of the most illustrious examples of the breed emerged in Amsterdam. Donemus was formed to publish and promote the music of Dutch composers, with ample subsidy from the Netherlands government. Today there are music information centres in twenty-three countries throughout the world.

Composers and other involved individuals in Canada during the 1950s watched the developments in New York and Amsterdam with great interest. At that time, a number of organizations shared the initiative and responsibility for providing information and materials on newly-created works. The Canadian League of Composers collected music scores of all kinds from 1954 on. Stacks of orchestral parts, chamber music, songs and piano music accumulated in the house of John Beckwith, then secretary of the League.

* This article is excerpted from *The Canadian Music Centre: a History* by Karen Keiser (first published in *Celebration* [Toronto: Canadian Music Centre, 1984]), revised by Mark Hand, National Librarian, Canadian Music Centre, 1987.

** Karen Keiser is Head of Radio Music, The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. – Mark Hand is National Librarian, The Canadian Music Centre.

He would periodically write to members requesting that they send in music for performance on the regular League concert series. Following these airings, Beckwith would persuade the composers to leave their manuscripts and parts with him as contributions to a central circulation library. In a few cases, such a system provided each composer with a small revenue from score and parts rental. But never did the income fully reimburse the composer for his initial expense in providing all these materials for the premiere performance.

Another organization which dealt with requests for information about Canadian music was the Canadian Music Council, headed from its inception by Sir Ernest MacMillan. At this point, the Council had no official secretariat, not even an office, and depended totally on the good will and energy of its members. From the outset it had aimed to assist composers, placing their work at the top of its numerous priorities. Through its efforts composers would be alerted to international competitions, their scores would be sent abroad to libraries and Canadian embassies and they would be introduced to potential performers of their music. The Council's overall objective was to establish a circulating library of Canadian music scores, an institution which would erase the financial and logistical barriers between the composer and the performance of his music.

In Canada the publishing situation was never happy and continues to be severely troubled to the present day. The leading house was BMI Canada Limited, started in 1947 by the Canadian subsidiary of the New York-based performing rights organization, Broadcast Music Incorporated. During its years of operation, the publisher, BMI Canada Ltd. provided many crucial services to the composers it represented – promotion, the copying of manuscripts and parts, shipping and retrieval. However, only composers of the “BMI faith” could even hope for this treatment. The other Canadian performing rights organization, Composers, Authors and Publishers Association of Canada Limited, was affiliated with the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, and had no such publishing arm. Therefore CAPAC, whose president was also Sir Ernest MacMillan (from 1947–1969), was vitally interested in obtaining for its members the necessary support to establish their careers.

This was the climate for creative musicians in Canada in the autumn of 1956. It was then that the Government of Canada acted upon the recommendations of the Massey Report (1949–1951) and projected the establishment of the Canada Council for early 1957. The Canadian Music Council immediately took steps to chart out music directions and responsibilities for the new national council. At a meeting in Toronto on November 24, 1956, the chairman of the Canadian Music Council announced that the Music Council should promptly ascertain “what the Canada Council should do for music in Canada”. It was determined that the Music Council would submit a substantial brief to the new council, a brief that would be “fully documented and (would) cover every phase of Canada’s musical life”.

The Canadian Music Council was an umbrella organization which represented the interests of a number of national music organizations – such groups as the Canadian Federation of Music Teachers, the Canadian College of Organists, the Canadian Music Publishers’ Association, *les Jeunesses Musicales du Canada*, the Canadian Library Association, the two performing rights organizations, CAPAC and BMI Canada – and the Canadian League of Composers. In canvassing all its constituents on the state of music in the nation, the Music Council placed particular emphasis on the plight of the composers and the need for a circulating library of Canadian music and information. One of the directors on the Board of the Music Council was John Weinzweig, the President of the League of Composers. He offered, on behalf of the League, to document the case for a Canadian Music Centre.

In late 1956, the League membership numbered thirty-seven composers resident in seven Canadian cities. Weinzweig quickly called a meeting of the executive committee in Toronto on December 3, 1956. Present along with Weinzweig were secretary Beckwith and treasurer

Andrew Twa. Suggestions ranged from the circulating library to the areas of publishing and recording. Taking these and other ideas with them, Weinzweig and Beckwith left the meeting charged with the responsibility of submitting a comprehensive brief to the Canadian Music Council by early January.

Other music information centres were taken into account when these men forged the essential concept of a “Canadian Music Library Centre”. They first determined that the Centre would be located in a large enough office space to house a circulating collection of scores and parts plus copying services and information. It would have to be located near a major music talent pool in the country, either Toronto or Montreal, so that performers would have easy access to the music. At a minimum, the staff would consist of a national director, a professional copyist and a secretarial assistant. John Beckwith’s prose continued:

“This Centre would collect and catalogue serious musical works (symphonic, chamber music, solo works) and folk music on a selective basis. It would copy and duplicate such music, which might necessitate having reproduction and binding equipment. Catalogues listing the contents of the collection would be drawn up and circulated as widely as possible to performers and performing groups. Such catalogues would require revision from time to time as the collection expands: mailing lists too would require constant expansion and revision; in this sense, the Centre would be an information agency on Canadian music.”

Beckwith went on to include possible Centre activities as monthly or quarterly newsletters dealing with composers’ happenings, the recording of Canadian works and the commissioning of two or three new works a year. He concluded with the following:

“Material in the Centre’s collection would be available on a loan basis both nationally and internationally. Requests from at home and abroad for scores, records or information on Canadian works could be directed to the Centre – instead of, as at present, being directed to any one of the half-a-dozen volunteer agencies or individuals, none of which is equipped to deal efficiently or fairly with them . . . In general, the Centre, although set up to serve conditions in Canada, would be comparable to such organizations as the local-centre offices of the British Council, the “Donemus” music centre of The Netherlands and many such offices sponsored by other governments.”

On December 29, 1956, John Beckwith dispatched this brief on behalf of the Canadian League of Composers directly to John Cozens of the Music Council. The process had begun. The Canadian Music Council called meetings on January 10 and February 21, 1957 to pool the various findings on the music situation in the country. The League brief was read aloud at the first meeting and dissected at the next. The essential concept of the information centre and the circulating library was “unanimously endorsed”, according to the Music Council minutes. However “the commissioning of new works was not endorsed despite the need. It was felt that this would not be considered by the (Canada) Council in its early years.” Thus came the first of several cutbacks to Weinzweig’s and Beckwith’s initial plan.

The Music Council board designated three of its members – Arnold Walter, John Weinzweig and Leslie Bell – to form a “drafting committee” to further hone the proposal and prepare an accompanying budget.

Toward the end of 1957, the entire Canadian Music Council brief arrived at the Canada Council offices in Ottawa. It was, in fact, one of the first applications to be received by the new organization. In February 1958, the Council commissioned an independent feasibility study from a Toronto accountant, Kenneth LeMesurier Carter. Carter spoke to involved persons in Canada, attended a meeting of the Music Council and visited another already established centre – the American Music Center in New York. On April 29, he submitted his report.

Carter began by reiterating the terms of reference for a library centre, as put forward in the Music Council submission:

- “a) To encourage publication, recording and distribution of Canadian Music.
- b) To keep in touch with individuals and groups concerning the Centre’s activities, with a view to the securing of donations.
- c) To disseminate information generally, at home and abroad, about Canadian music.
- d) To maintain a library of photostated scores and of recordings, available to conductors, musical organizations, Canadian missions abroad, exhibitions and conferences.
- e) To stimulate the playing or other use of Canadian music by orchestras and other groups and individuals at home and abroad.
- f) To issue an annual booklet containing a survey of the year’s music in Canada.
- g) To undertake such other activities as may from time to time prove expedient on behalf of Canadian music.”

While admitting in his report that the American Music Center was underfunded, Carter proceeded to reduce the resources proposed by the Music Council. First he rejected the notion that the CMC would initiate, finance and produce recordings of Canadian music . . . “for the time being the International Service of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is recording a sufficient number of Canadian pieces, and no funds should be provided at this time for that purpose.” There was no mention that these recordings were commercially unavailable. The 6,000 dollar budget proposed by the Music Council for recordings was struck from the agenda. Then, in assessing the necessary staff to run the new institution, Carter cut back the League’s original estimate of three persons – an Executive Director, a copyist and a secretarial assistant – to two, leaving out the copyist. He made further reductions in reckoning salaries, operating costs and start-up expenses. Finally, he recommended the formation of the Canadian Music Centre on a yearly budget of 30,000 dollars for its first three years – 20,000 dollars from the Canada Council and 10,000 as promised by CAPAC.

Whether Carter was constrained by conditions he knew to exist at the Canada Council or whether he approached his task with admirable but unfortunate frugality, the ramifications of the cuts perpetrated upon the original League proposal are felt to this day. Undernourished from the start, the Canadian Music Centre has succeeded by the efforts and ingenuity of several specific employees and Executive Secretaries (General Managers, Directors General, Executive Directors) over the years. One can only speculate how much more effective the organization would have been had Carter examined the healthy, well-financed Donemus instead of the impecunious American Music Center.

However Carter revealed foresight and breadth of vision in other areas of his report. After touching on the necessity of carefully selecting by a jury system the actual scores to be contained in the library, and the speculation that in the future the Centre would be able to generate a portion of its financing from private sources, Carter concluded his report with the proviso that the success of such a centre was contingent upon the appointment of a suitable Executive Secretary.

By the next meeting of the Canadian Music Council, this proviso was the only factor standing in the way of the new Canadian Music Centre. The date was May 15, 1958, and Sir Ernest MacMillan announced to those present that the Canada Council was prepared to follow the terms of Carter’s report once an acceptable person had been found. The gathering decided that the Board of Directors would consult the music community at large, confer with one another, select a candidate and place the name before the Music Council membership for approval.

How it actually happened was another matter. John Weinzwieg recalled that before even the board members knew it, the appointment had been made. Sir Ernest and Arnold Walter had for the most part taken the matter into their own hands and had engaged Jean-Marie Beaudet for the job.

In many ways, Beaudet was the ideal candidate for the position. A well-known Canadian conductor and pianist who had premiered a number of Canadian compositions and a former board member of the Music Council, he brought a francophone presence into a mix that was decidedly too anglophone and Toronto-weighted for a national organization. Sir Ernest and Arnold Walter had visited the music section of the Toronto Public Library at the invitation of Ogretta McNeill who was in charge of the branch. This beautiful old house was to be the first home of the Canadian Music Centre. Four rooms on the second floor were cleared, and the Music Council board authorized a budget for Beaudet to furnish and redecorate them, as well as to buy some audio equipment.

On December 31, 1958, the official charter of the Canadian Music Centre was authorized in Ottawa by the Honourable Henri Courtemanche, Secretary of State of Canada. The organization's title officially became Canadian Music Centre/Centre musical canadien (later changed to Centre de musique canadienne through a by-law on October 13, 1973).

Composer and Library Services

Throughout the past twenty-five years, the Centre has existed to serve the composer in direct, tangible ways, and by all accounts, it has done the job well. To quote John Weinzwieg: "The Centre is my agent. First of all, when I want a copy of a piece of music, I get marvelous service at the Centre, I also get a very good copy and good binding. And it doesn't cost me anything – that's a pretty big deal. If I get a letter from Europe or the United States or any place in Canada saying, "I'd like a copy of a work of yours," I can refer that person to the Music Centre. I don't have to mail out the stuff myself. The Centre handles all the orchestral rentals of my unpublished works, and for that I'm glad to share the revenue with it. I get better service from the Centre than I get from any of my publishers."

When the Centre first opened in 1959, all Canadian works adhering to the "serious" (or "classical" or "concert") vein were admitted to its library in order to build up the performing repertoire as quickly as possible. However, as the years passed and the budget lagged behind demand and inflation, the notion of selectivity (which had been implicit from the start) began to be exercised. The Board believed the Centre would have to confine its services to "career composers", men and women who had clearly demonstrated commitment and achievement. In 1965, the Board recommended that an "Associate" status be accorded those composers whom the Centre would serve. Others, such as students and individuals less well-developed in their craft, would have less priority and would be charged a modest amount for services. As these people progressed in their art, they could apply for admission. Their scores would be evaluated by a national selection committee in Toronto. Strictly speaking, only the Board would have a final say on who was admitted to Associate status. Since the League of Composers already had established this principle for acceptance, League members would automatically enter the Centre. This procedure held until the League membership began to expand rapidly in the late 1970s and the Centre chose to be master of its own house and vigorously control access to its services. In April 1982, the Board passed a constitutional by-law decreeing that in future all composers who sought Associate status, including League members would have to pass the Centre's Selection Committee. Further amendments issued at a later date determined that the committee members' identities be disclosed and the application process be more clearly defined.

At time of writing, 249 composers were Associates of the Centre. For these men and women the services are numerous: recopying of a new score (if necessary), duplicating and binding to form a performing edition, preparation of parts and shipping to the location of first performance. After the premiere, the Centre collects the performing materials and holds copies of the score in each of its four regional libraries. The composer receives a complimentary copy of the score.

As far as the public is concerned, a request by letter or a visit to an office of the Centre can result in a free loan of numerous scores with no unreasonable time limit – an extraordinary service in itself. Several thousands of copies of scores are in circulation at any given time. And if a score is out and is desperately needed, another copy can be quickly reproduced from the original, always kept in reserve. The same service is available for chamber music parts and no rental is charged.

Visitors to any of the Centre's offices can also listen to a wide range of discs and tape recordings of Canadian repertoire. In Toronto, the discs represent a large collection of records no longer available, as well as tapes provided through private means (often the composer) or by the CBC or (most frequently) recorded off-air from CBC broadcasts. Since the tapes' status is often delicate, they cannot be removed from the Centre. The Montreal office also has a complete collection and the libraries in Vancouver and Calgary are building steadily.

As a general rule, scores are also available for sale at cost to users, and over the past few years, there has been a rising tendency to buy rather than borrow. The Centre also sells a wide range of manuscript paper and transparencies to all comers at cost.

The Centre maintains an information file on each Associate composer, as well as documentation on the major events and issues concerning Canadian music over the years. All in all, the holdings represent a vast national resource: over 9,000 scores (ninety-five per cent unpublished), over 300 discs, 3000 audio tapes and a myriad of other unique reference materials. Not surprisingly, the library is frequently full of high school and university students, often arriving in whole classes with their teacher. Everything to do with Canadian music is at their fingertips.

Records and Recording

Each Executive Director of the CMC has realized the importance of records for promoting Canadian music, but record production has proven elusive to establish and maintain. Centrediscs caps a number of abortive attempts, but hopefully will survive economic peril.

Jean-Marie Beaudet led the Centre into a co-production with Columbia Records as early as 1960. This resulted in two long-playing discs: orchestral music by Adaskin, Papineau-Couture and Somers, with the CBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Walter Susskind, and string quartets by Pentland, Pépin, Vallerand and Weinzwieg, with a quartet of Toronto musicians led by Albert Pratz. A third record projected for this series never materialized, and the co-production deal faded away.

In early 1964, John Adaskin, then Executive Director, with board members William St. Clair Low and Louis Applebaum brought the Centre in as administrator of a recording venture to be funded jointly by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) and CAPAC, and to be promoted and distributed by three major record companies: RCA, Capitol and Columbia. Five records emerged over the next two years. The first three concentrated on "light" music. *Music in the Round* and *Souvenir de Québec* (both RCA) featured the Howard Cable Concert Band doing works by Weinzwieg, Applebaum, Gayfer, Decelles and Cable himself. The third in the series, *Action with Agostini* (Capitol) represented what today would be called "crossover", with music by Hyslop, Camilleri, Surdin and Agostini himself, to mention a few. The remaining two discs in the group were devoted to more substantial fare. Both were symphonic and involved considerable cost. *Scored for Ballet* (Columbia) contained ballet music by Applebaum, Fleming, Mercure, Surdin and Weinzwieg, played by the Toronto Philharmonic Orchestra and directed by Walter Susskind. The final disc presented two concertos – Morawetz's *Piano Concerto No. 1* with Anton Kuerti and Matton's *Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra* with Victor Bouchard and Renée Morisset. The Toronto Symphony Orchestra was conducted by

Susskind (Capitol). By the end of 1965, the project ground to a halt. The Centre, the CAB and CAPAC were all disappointed with the record companies' efforts at promotion and distribution. Even though the project principally represented CAPAC composers, its demise was regrettable, for no further recordings materialized from the Centre before the advent of Centrediscs in 1981.

The Centrediscs recording label has had an on-going agreement with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), which has contributed to the production of most of the master tapes. The post-production procedures and label management remain in the Centre's hands.

Private funding organizations have helped support packaging and post-production costs as has the Centre itself and the Canada Council continues to contribute to all facets of the production funding requirements. However, the costs of record production, compact discs and other new technologies continue to increase and new sources of income are continually being sought to keep the label in production.

Nevertheless, 26 high-quality recordings, including one compact disc, featuring, in all but one instance, Canadian artists have been released to date, with several more forecast for the near future. Most are digitally recorded. They have been widely and highly reviewed throughout North America and are now being distributed in the United States and the United Kingdom. The challenge will be to maintain the project despite constantly shifting economic foundations.

The John Adaskin Project

John Adaskin, the Executive Secretary of the CMC from 1961 to 1964, has always been associated with his main cause, the need for Canadian music to be taught in schools. After his death, various efforts to carry forward his initiatives finally coalesced in 1973 when the CMC joined forces with the Canadian Music Educator's Association. Patricia Shand, the Director of the Project, has since published *Canadian Music: A Selective Guidelist for Teachers* (1978), dealing specifically with published materials. (A French edition was issued in 1982.) More recent projects have included the publication of a *Guidelist of Unpublished Canadian String Orchestra Music suitable for student performers* (1986) as well as other repertoire lists.

The Project is funded through the proceeds of the John Adaskin Memorial Fund, which since 1979 has been administered by the Ontario Arts Council.

Funding

There is no question that the Canadian Music Centre owes its existence to the Canada Council. From the very first grant which launched the Centre in 1959, the Council has been the financial cornerstone of the institution. As the years have passed, other public bodies have added their support: the Federal Department of Communications, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, the Ontario Arts Council, the Ministère des affaires culturelles du Québec, the British Columbia Cultural Fund, Alberta Culture, Calgary Region Arts Foundation, the Alberta Foundation for the Canadian Music Centre, the University of Calgary and the Arts Councils of the city of Toronto, metro Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.

The two performing rights societies have also been instrumental in maintaining the Centre over the years. CAPAC backed the venture from the start, and P.R.O. Canada (formerly BMI Canada Ltd.) joined in 1965. By the extent of their ongoing support, these two organizations have acknowledged the importance of the Centre in the absence of a vital publishing industry in the country.

In addition, various project grants from the arts councils have assisted such initiatives as the Alberta Composers' Commissioning Program and the study scores mentioned earlier,

and, as previously discussed, assistance has frequently been sought and received from foundations and corporations in order to realize such enterprises as Centrediscs, the McPeck Pops Library and the 25th anniversary celebrations.

Looking to the future, the challenges for the Centre will be to maintain the confidence of its sustaining funders while acquiring new sources of revenue in both the public and private sectors – revenue which will ensure resources and flexibility in the coming years.

The Tradition and the Future

Throughout its twenty-five year history, the Canadian Music Centre has played an integral role in the musical life of the country. It has provided a meeting place for such groups as the Canadian Music Council, the Canadian Music Educator's Association, the National Youth Orchestra and committees of the Canada Council. It has compiled manuscript scores for all manner of juries, from the CBC national Competition for Young Composers to the International Society for Contemporary Music. It has administered prizes, and supplied logistical support for such extravaganzas as Musicanada, the 1977 festival of Canadian music in London and Paris and the International Year of Canadian Music in 1986, all this on top of the regular day-to-day activities.

Le Centre de la Musique canadienne au Québec Une brève description

Mireille Gagné (Québec)*

The Canadian Music Centre in Montreal was founded in 1973 to meet the demands for scores by, and information about composers in Quebec. The library holds about 10,000 scores and responds to requests for borrowing and for information from all over the world. Close co-operation exists between the Centre and Société Radio-Canada, also with the Montreal municipal government. The Centre actively promotes 20th century Canadian music, and maintains strong contacts with musical activities in schools. It receives 90% of its financial support from government subsidies. It is difficult to say if a true "Canadian" or "quebécois" style of music exists, or if it is rather a universal style of music that reflects the character of the country.

Les origines du Centre de Musique Canadienne au Québec remontent au 12 Octobre 1973. L'augmentation du nombre des demandes de partitions, de renseignements sur les compositeurs du Québec et le désir de devenir une présence tangible pour les gens de la région constituaient des raisons sérieuses d'établir un Centre régional au Québec. Un comité formé d'un musicologue, d'un homme d'affaires, d'un critique musical, de deux compositeurs et de deux administrateurs (7 personnes en tout) travailla entre 1969 et 1973 à mettre sur pied les assises de ce Centre.

La première Directrice régionale, Louise Laplante, a mis sur pied la bibliothèque et a amorcé les premiers contacts avec le milieu musical québécois en vue de faire interpréter la musique canadienne. Bientôt, elle ouvrait les portes aux ensembles musicaux de l'étranger.

* Mireille Gagné est la Directrice régionale du Centre.