

Rodolphe Mathieu: L'émergence du statut professionnel de compositeur au Québec.
By Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre. Sillery: Les éditions du Septentrion, 2005. 278 p. ISBN
2-89448-408-9. 29,95 \$

Rodolphe Mathieu was a pioneer figure in Canadian composition. Born into a rural family, he moved to Montreal at the age of sixteen to study piano and, ultimately, composition. His talents were quickly recognized. With the aid of funds raised by friends and later a grant from the Quebec government (one of the first awarded to a composer) he left for Paris in 1920 to continue studies in composition and orchestration. On his return to Montreal in 1927, he established a career as a teacher and composer while furthering the cause of Canadian music through his writings, concerts, and other projects (notably the founding of the Canadian Institute of Music). Despite the originality of his works, Mathieu eventually ceased compositional activities to focus on teaching and the career of his son, André Mathieu. Rudolphe Mathieu was an original and creative thinker with a free spirit, yet he remains an enigma. Despite his stature and early promise, his works did not find a larger public and to this day remain seldom performed.

Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre's text sheds light on Mathieu's career but also transcends the scope of a traditional biography. Instead of focusing on the individual, she looks instead at his social environment and the place of composition in the cultural makeup of Quebec society. She examines not only artistic production, but also the discourses surrounding composers and the people around them as conveyed in their intimate journals, correspondences, and articles. To achieve this end, she

addresses larger questions: what did the composers think of the music they heard? How did they feel about their social environments? What did they read? What were their musical tastes and choices? The result is a compelling look at the discipline of composition in its early stages in Quebec. One sees not only Mathieu's career as it develops, but also the ways in which it developed within the social expectations of the time.

Lefebvre approaches the subject logically by dividing Mathieu's life into obvious chronological periods. The first chapter deals with Mathieu's formative years. This covers his infancy, his early experiences in music, and his largely autodidactic training. The chapter also provides a revealing look at daily life in rural Quebec at the turn of the century and the cultural life in Montreal in the subsequent decades. The following three chapters describe the artistic life in Paris and Montreal during the 1920s. The musical life in Paris during this era was understandably exciting and Mathieu found companionship with a number of fellow Canadians who had likewise come to Paris to study. The situation in Paris was in contrast to the problems in Montreal, especially in the areas of music publication, the need for the establishment of an accessible conservatory environment, and the necessity of creating an audience for modern music. After a short chapter on the aesthetic and originality of Mathieu's music, the book ends with Mathieu's growing disillusionment in the post-war years. Unfortunately, at a time when

Mathieu's music should have reached a wider audience and led the way for younger composers, it was understood and appreciated neither by audiences nor critics.

The book is obviously the result of meticulous research. To support her observations, Lefebvre quotes extensively from archival materials including personal letters and documents. It is also rich in contemporary photographs that help convey the era with a striking vividness. The appendices include a works' list (listed both chronologically and by genre), the texts for Mathieu's vocal works, a list of concerts in Quebec devoted to Canadian and foreign music between 1903 and 1953, and a bibliography that includes archival material.

What is missing, however, is a sense of the music. Although several works are alluded to, especially works that exerted an influence on Mathieu, there is not a single music example in the text. Even Chapter 5, "L'esthétique et l'originalité de la musique de Rodolphe

Mathieu," does not deal with his compositions in any depth (at eight pages, it is also the briefest chapter by far). Musical analysis is clearly not Lefebvre's focus, but its absence diminishes the overall strength of this study and leaves the reader without a clear impression of Mathieu's compositions.

Despite the lack of musical analysis, this remains an excellent book. Not only does it trace the life and work of an important early figure in Canadian music, it sheds light on the emergence and establishment of the professional composer in Canada and documents the historical and musical milieu in Quebec during the first half of the twentieth century. It is an area of research that previously has been neglected, yet one that adds much to our understanding of how the profession of music developed in Canada.

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