John Weinzweig (1913-2006)

Born in 1913 to Polish-Jewish immigrants, John Weinzweig became a noted Canadian composer, educator and advocate. He began music study at the age of 14, learning mandolin at the Workmen's Circle Peretz School, a Jewish community school in North Toronto. During his high school years at Harbord Collegiate, Weinzweig joined the orchestra playing the violin parts on the mandolin but eventually learned the tuba, tenor saxophone, and bass. Weinzweig's early musical training led to an interest in composition and he spent between 1934-37 studying at the University of Toronto with Healy Willan, Leo Smith, and Sir Ernest McMillan. During his time at the University of Toronto Weinzweig founded and conducted the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Following the completion of his education in Toronto, Weinzweig moved to Rochester, NY to study with Howard Hanson at the Eastman School of Music. There he was first introduced to serial compositional techniques. Upon his return to Toronto, Weinzweig experimented with serialism in his *Piano Suite no. 1* (1939) and in incidental music for docudrama radio programming at the growing CBC. For the remainder of his career, Weinzweig continued to use serialism as the governing structure behind his compositions even when he experimented with other musical ideas.

Following a decade long tenure at the CBC (1941-51), Weinzweig's compositional interests returned to concert music. He began composition of his Divertimenti, with *Divertimento no. 1* winning an award for chamber music at the 1948 Olympics. Works such as *String Quartet no. 1* and *Suite for Piano no. 2* soon followed. In 1951, Weinzweig, along with Harry Somers and Samuel Dolin, founded the Canadian League of Composers. The CLC acted as an advocacy group for Canadian music and sought to represent Canadian composers by increasing recordings and performances of Canadian works and, in later years, providing scholarships to young composers. Aside from establishing the CLC in the early 1950s, John Weinzweig also joined the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto in 1952 where he taught generations of Canadian composers.

Although the late 1950s began a period of decreased compositional output for Weinzweig, he became a determined advocate for Canadian music. Weinzweig, along with fellow composer John Beckwith presented a brief to the Canada Council in 1957 which led to the formation of the Canadian Music Centre in the same year. In 1959, Weinzweig began his second term as president of the CLC and during this term travelled to European and Central American conferences to represent the league. From 1973-5 Weinzweig acted as the president of CAPAC, the Composers, Authors, and Publishers Association of Canada.

From the late 1970s until his death in 2006, John Weinzweig's compositional output increased dramatically. Weinzweig's later compositions followed the form of his earlier works, he used serial techniques but expanded to include other musical ideas. In this time, he moved away chamber, orchestral, and dramatic works and towards solo works for instruments. Weinzweig's late compositional period included the completion of his series of divertimenti for solo

instruments and chamber groups with *Divertimento no. 12* (1988). In the 1990s, Weinzweig further explored vocal and theatrical works, composing new dramatic works for voice such as *Walking-Talking*.

Weinzweig received a number of awards recognising his advocacy, pedagogy, and compositions including the Order of Canada (1974), the Canada Council Medal (1978), President Emeritus of the CLC (1981), the Molson Prize (1981), The Roy Thomson Hall Award (1991), the Toronto Arts Award for Music (1998), and in 2004 at the age of 91, the SOCAN life achievement award. Weinzweig remained an active voice at SOCAN and CLC meetings until 2004 and continued to compose until shortly before he passed away in 2006. He is remembered as the Dean of Canadian Composers, as his advocacy, pedagogy, and compositional style changed the face of music in Canada.