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## Passion flows from a fluent pen

ROBERT HARRIS, *Globe and Mail*, Mar. 24, 2003

**Hatzis @ 50**  
**University of Toronto's Walter Hall in**  
**Toronto on Friday**



AARON HARRIS/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Christos Hatzis's ability to combine diverse musical styles makes him a composer always worth listening to.

One of the more interesting and confounding things about Canadian composer Christos Hatzis, who celebrated his 50th birthday at the University of Toronto's Walter Hall on Friday night, is his ability to combine within one compositional mind such diverse musical styles.

On the one hand, Hatzis is comfortable and conversant with many of the musical devices championed by the postwar musical avant-garde, those dour serialists who frightened off so many musical audiences. Like them, Hatzis uses tape in many of his compositions (all five on Friday night), and cleverly combines prerecorded and live sounds. He is fascinated by non-Western music (as many of the postwar avant-garde were), and in Hatzis's case, this has resulted in an almost obsessive interest in the throat-singing of Inuit culture. He is comfortable with combining musical styles and idioms like the most postmodern of the postmodern composers.

However, where Hatzis parts company with his musical confreres is in the honest, direct, emotional and heartfelt nature of his musical world. Hatzis may use the sophisticated techniques of the avant-garde in his works, but his message is clear, and frank and very fluent. He is a composer, and one suspects, a man with deep beliefs about the world, and a confidence to put those feelings into sound. And to my mind

and ear, the combination works. Always, the power of Hatzis's musical convictions overwhelms whatever stylistic devices he chooses to clothe them in.

This was most evident on Friday night in Hatzis's magnum opus, and perhaps his most interesting work to date, a cross-cultural, multimedia extravaganza called *Constantinople*, four excerpts of which were presented. This is an ambitious and rich work, combining Western and Arabic musical traditions, with a bit of Greek orthodox chant thrown in for good measure, commissioned and held together by the fine Gryphon Trio.

As was the case the last time this work was presented, the extraordinarily potent voice of Maryem Tollar was the highlight of the work, but soprano Patricia O'Callaghan and the Gryphons added their talents to it as well to make the performance very intense. *Constantinople* is a very mixed work, but avoids the pitfalls of pastiche with its deeply felt and passionate musical message.

Something of the same set of forces was at work for Hatzis's *String Quartet No. 1*, which combines tape of throat singers and railway sounds with a live string quartet. In the piece, Hatzis uses to best effect a technique he employs often, where the music seems to come to an end, but then adds, as it were, a second ending, which takes the emotional intensity to a new level.

In the quartet, the players, who had been listening to the taped sounds on headphones, removed the contraptions when you thought the piece might be over, and added a coda of surprising power.

Also effective, on a different level, was Peter Stoll's virtuoso clarinet display for *Melisma*, a piece in which Hatzis draws on his Greek heritage to fine effect. (Hatzis became a Canadian citizen in 1985 on his 32nd birthday).

Sometimes the very intensity of Hatzis's convictions, both musical and extramusical, can veer dangerously close to New Ageism, but the originality of his mind, and his ability to combine the heterogeneous in his compositions make him a composer always worth listening to. And based on the energy he displayed on Friday evening, there's lots more to come from his fluent pen.

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