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# Weinzweig's early work is still fresh

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Late Review, John Lehr, TORONTO STAR, MARCH 20, 2003

For those interested in timelines, Canadian composer John Weinzweig was born a few months before Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring* had its notoriously fractious debut in Paris. That was ninety years ago, and this month we are celebrating all the music that Weinzweig has created (and is still creating) and all that he has meant to Canadian music in particular.

Yesterday evening at the University of Toronto's Walter Hall, the Faculty of Music, where Weinzweig both studied and taught, honoured him with a selective retrospective of his compositions. The Faculty's Contemporary Music Ensemble, directed by Gary Kulesha, performed seven of his works. They remain fresh and vital today, though many were written sixty years ago, and they clearly appealed to the young musicians who played them.

Each half of the concert began with a work from the early 1940s and progressed to works from the '60s and '70s. The first half concentrated on works of elegance and charm; beginning with the restless lines and youthful questioning of *Interlude in An Artist's Life For String Orchestra*, which Weinzweig wrote in 1943. His spare, lyrical, mercurial piano sonata of 1950 followed. Pianist Brian Harman gave a splendid performance of this work, bringing out its jazzed rhythms as well as its fluidity.

*Intermissions For Flute And Oboe* (1943), played by flutist Emma Tessier and oboist Lief Mosbaugh, gave an extensive demonstration of Weinzwieg's wonderfully skilful two-part writing, which we had heard in the sonata as well. The interweaving of the parts multiplied two into hundreds of colours and innuendos. Elegance and humour then blossomed into high comedy and wit in *Private Collection*, a group of eight songs that had soprano Kristin Mueller singing into the echoing piano strings and even strumming them to augment Kulesha's accompaniment.

The second half was equally masterful though the tone of the pieces suggested greater seriousness. From *Improvisation On An Indian Tune For Organ* (1942), played by Roger Bergs, the program progressed to the sombre fire of the second string quartet (1946), performed by The Downtown Quartet.

As a finale, the Ensemble played the spikey *Divertimento No. 4 For Clarinet And String Orchestra* from 1968, with Peter Stoll giving a committed and powerful reading of the solo clarinet part. More to come. On Sunday, at the Glenn Gould Studio, New Music Concerts will present new works by Weinzwieg and two of his distinguished former students, John Beckwith and Harry Freedman.

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### Late Review

JOHN LEHR  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

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