

EDITOR: Jim McNulty, 429-5345

Discovery finale discovers Canada

By BARNABY PAGE
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The ESO wound up its three-concert Discovery series Saturday night with a predominantly Canadian program.

Vancouver-based Jean Coulthard (b. 1908), perhaps the leading composer of the West Coast, introduced her 1977 Symphonic Ode for Viola and Chamber Orchestra in person; and the musicians' performance of this extended work was worthy of the composer's presence.

This seemingly diffuse work is in fact quite tight enough to support Coulthard's almost impressionistic textures. Violist Robert Verebes, of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, played with total commitment and virtuosity; and under Maestro Mayer, himself a solo violist in other times and other places, the supportive orchestra allowed Verebes full play with each of the gorgeous solo lines.

Lothar Klein's Concerto Sacro for Viola and Orchestra was announced as a world premiere, but an orchestra member told me it has been recorded.

Certainly posterity deserves the work, for though it falls short of masterpiece status and

Edmonton Symphony Orchestra
Conducted by Uri Mayer
With Robert Verebes, viola
Maclab Theatre at The Citadel

could stand some re-working by the composer, the Concerto Sacro makes some most effective musical points. It is based on the sacred works of Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), and Klein conjures up some tortured Baroque textures that the close of the work transmutes to ecstasy.

It was difficult on a first hearing to pick out specific thematic references to Monteverdi's music. But aspects of the idiom were well reproduced: florid solo lines, repeated chords, and passages that seemed to be vocal work *manque* (the four-note subject of the third movement, Crucifixus, for instance, could be well sung to "crucifixus").

Klein's startling, other-worldly orchestration was impressive, and though the ESO's performance was a little rough-and-ready it whetted the appetite for another hearing of this work — next season, perhaps? Klein (b. 1932) is a composition teacher at the University of Toronto.

From Klein's abrasive sounds the audience

was taken to a more gentle world by the speech and music of Lethbridge Symphony Orchestra music director Stewart Grant. His Symphonic Variations, written for the Lethbridge orchestra, were thoroughly well-done by both composer and performers. The variations were more or less conventional displays of different musical idioms: march music, orchestral jazz, the Grand Finale, and so on.

The short coda was unfortunately very short, but the work was otherwise successful.

The Discovery series ended on a rather poorer note, with the Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera's everyday Variations Concertantes. The 12 variations showed off the various sections of the orchestra (sometimes showing the brass off too much, to the detriment of the strings' sound), rather in the fashion of Britten's Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra.

The quotation from the opening bassoon solo of Stravinsky's Rite of Spring was amusing, the ESO's playing was acceptable, and the finale was exciting. However, after the highjinks of Lothar Klein, Ginastera's 1953 composition was just a little dull.