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CUMS Imagined

Une vision de la SMUC

Tom Gordon

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Article abstract

Encouraged by the engaging reflections of John Beckwith, the current President of the Canadian University Music Society, Tom Gordon, peers into the institutional crystal ball to imagine the challenges that lay ahead for the Society and the roles it might play in the future. Building on the organization's strengths of disciplined scholarship and the healthy diversity that characterizes our membership, a provocative role is envisaged for CUMS in communication around the many issues that unite the Canadian university music milieu.

CUMS IMAGINED/UNE VISION DE LA SMUC

Tom Gordon, President/président

John Beckwith's eloquent and whimsy-filled souvenir of thirty years of the history of the Canadian University Music Society inevitably tempts speculation on what our organization has in store for it in the years ahead. What kind of society is CUMS likely to be fifteen or thirty years from now? Will our purposes in coming together be the same as they were for that august group that first met at Stanley House in Gaspé, in the early 1960s. And what will it mean—could it possibly mean—to be a Canadian association when a buzzword of choice has become “globalization”? We already live within continental economy, even as some among us wring our hands over the seeming predestination of a continental culture. What might the purpose of a specifically *Canadian University Music Society* be in a global village?

Longevity in an institution is in direct proportion to the relevance of its purpose. CUMS was born, as John Beckwith reminds us in his contribution “CUMS Remembered,” of the need perceived by the players in Canadian university schools of music to “network.” What a prescient bunch they were—in the veritable avant-garde of networking well before the word became the imperative verb form it is today. The context of these early get-togethers was altogether pragmatic: the nuts and bolts of running (and in those days setting up) schools of music in Canada. Thirty years later CUMS continues to encourage networking, though perhaps we have both broadened and focussed how we do it. On the one hand, we have taken seriously our affiliation with the umbrella group formerly (and forever in our hearts) known as the “Learneds.” A good deal of our exchange in the Society is learned. Our journal meets and exceeds international standards of scholarly rigour. The fruits of fresh and ongoing research animate our conference programs in profusion. But the high tone of our discourse has far from eradicated the evident chumminess of those early years; it has simply been shored up by the appropriate rigour. The exchanges around the quotidian business of being university-based musicians has largely moved off the agenda and into the corridor—next to the coffee urn (or into the beer tent). Trade secrets continue to be traded—or withheld—whenever we get together.

Les besoins qui motivent le maintien de notre réseau de communication évoluent de plus en plus rapidement, peu importe que nous souhaitions partager des informations sur des questions d'ordre pratique ou sur des questions savantes. Alors qu'auparavant nous avions surtout besoin de prendre connaissance des moyens découverts par chacun d'entre nous pour évaluer l'enseignement en interprétation, pour équiper les laboratoires ou pour attribuer les crédits appropriés aux cours de musique d'ensemble, par exemple, nous avons

aujourd'hui quantité d'autres préoccupations qui n'existaient pas à l'époque où la principale question était de savoir dans quelle mesure nous devrions emprunter aux modèles américains, français et britanniques pour constituer le programme de musique universitaire canadien. Nous avons tous une énorme quantité de défis à relever, et il en va de même pour les institutions dont nous faisons partie. Quoique nous ne sachions pas où la recherche des solutions à ces problèmes nous mènera dans 15 ou 30 ans, nous savons que ces questions demeurent ouvertes. En tant qu'individus, nous sommes aux prises avec les défis soulevés par la recherche effectuée dans le monde virtuel et par les nouveaux moyens de diffusion de nos travaux en tant qu'interprètes, chercheurs, enseignants ou compositeurs. Bien entendu, nous tâchons aussi de profiter des occasions offertes par ces nouvelles technologies. Pour nous aider dans nos travaux de recherche et de création, nous avons besoin de connaître les réponses des autres membres aux nombreux changements d'orientation de nos partenaires financiers. Il nous faut pouvoir discuter, comme par le passé, de questions telles que l'introduction de nouvelles disciplines et de nouvelles orientations dans le champ des études universitaires en musique. Nous pouvons tirer profit des expériences de chacun lorsqu'il s'agit de relever le défi de conserver la qualité tout en composant avec ces contraintes que sont les compressions budgétaires, la nécessité de distribuer équitablement des ressources financières limitées, les changements démographiques et l'innovation dans les méthodes de sélection et de recrutement. Certains d'entre nous ont obtenu différents degrés de succès avec l'ouverture des programmes d'études à des méthodes d'enseignement basées sur les médias, à des cours donnés sur Internet et à la communication par Internet. Nous savons que certains d'entre nous découvriront des solutions plus profitables que d'autres, et nous sommes convaincus que tous peuvent tirer profit du partage de l'information relative aux réussites ou aux échecs obtenus par nos différents membres.

Much of what we have to talk about will also be the vehicle for how we talk with each other. As a society we are on the cusp of a kind of MacLuhanesque breakthrough: the medium and the message will often be one. We have already signalled in-principle agreement with an acceptance of electronic publication. *CUMR On-line* is a fledgling fact. It is certainly not inconceivable that *CUMR* and *CUMR On-line* will eventually become one, tree-friendly forum for communication. With all the provisos about of a professed Luddite, I see the appeal in the more immediate, interactive, and economic potential of electronic scholarly publication. And as essential as our annual meetings remain, we are moving to supplement them with the instant exchange of electronic communication. Our Web site—early out of the gate—stalled on the first lap. Handsome and efficient of design, it is not yet the vehicle for immediate information and lively exchange that it could be. But that should begin to change over the next few months. We have recently established e-mail communication with 75% of the membership. And we are soon going to be dedicating an increasing proportion of our resources to keeping our members in contact with up-to-date information on issues of importance to the community, a bank of rich and practical resources, as well as opportunities for on-line exchange of both a

scholarly and practical nature. Frequent electronic newsletters, cybersymposia, interactive information surveys on topics of common interest, comprehensive links to useful and practical tools and data banks are among the kinds of material we can potentially produce. It is a wealth of exchange our founders surely did dream of, but with an immediacy beyond their imaginings.

De quelle manière serons-nous une société savante spécifiquement canadienne dans ce contexte de bouleversement du domaine des communications? Il n'est pas facile de répondre à cette question. C'est un fait que plusieurs sociétés américaines comparables à la nôtre nous ont damé le pion en établissant déjà des réseaux de communication électronique efficaces. Pourtant, la question de notre identité canadienne ne cesse de surgir spontanément alors même que nous adoptons les critères d'internationalisation. De toute évidence, la vitalité de la question canadienne est bien réelle et n'est pas seulement un faible écho d'un nationalisme construit autour d'un centenaire ou d'une autre chose du genre. Au congrès de l'année dernière, plusieurs communications portaient d'une manière ou d'une autre sur la question canadienne. Qu'y a-t-il de canadien dans les quatuors à cordes de Murray Schafer? Comment l'identité se construit-elle dans le monde de la musique populaire au Canada et dans celui des États-Unis tels qu'on peut les voir traduits par MusiquePlus et MTV? Pourtant, au cours du même congrès, nous avons aussi abordé la possibilité de changer le nom de cette publication, la *Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, pour un titre plus englobant qui laisserait tomber l'étiquette nationaliste pour quelque chose d'un peu plus scientifiquement... séduisant.

The Canadian identity—as some intellogags would have it—is an oxymoron. But there is a virtue imbedded in that cruelty—a positive expression that translates to a real edge in a globalizing context. Pluralism: Canada is born of it and we, as the Canadian University Music Society, were too. We are bilingual and multicultural—and when we feel we are not living up to that definition very well (as we often fail to do), we have the grace to agonize over it. We are multidisciplinary; our individual members are not composers only, exclusively musicologists, performers, music educators, theorists. We are all of these and we can talk across the boundaries of our disciplines—as we must do in the real life of our institutions. The pluralist edge has served us well. We have managed, for instance, to develop an immunity to flavour-of-the-month ideological waves that has hit other organizations. In the 1970s we saw one such wave transform the Society for Music Theory into musical mathematicians. Another seemed to overwhelm American musicology by sociological bent in the 1990s. A decade earlier European scholarship seemed to be held hostage by reception theory. We have duly noted all this. And we have hosted lively, informed dialogue around these and other topical issues at our meetings. But we have not “signed on.” As a small community of scholars and university-based artists, we are simply too blessedly diverse to erect even a temporary monolith. We are practiced at respectful cohabitation. It is a strength that could justify our existence well into the twenty-first century. Like Canada itself, our backgrounds are wonderfully diverse—our population sparse and thinly spread. That we should continue to feel that we have much to say to one another across

our diversity is something to encourage and to celebrate and something that should assure the vitality of CUMS thirty years from now.

Abstract

Encouraged by the engaging reflections of John Beckwith, the current President of the Canadian University Music Society, Tom Gordon, peers into the institutional crystal ball to imagine the challenges that lay ahead for the Society and the roles it might play in the future. Building on the organization's strengths of disciplined scholarship and the healthy diversity that characterizes our membership, a provocative role is envisaged for CUMS in communication around the many issues that unite the Canadian university music milieu.