

Cultural activities felt downplayed

By Richard Newman
of The Free Press

If music takes him for a "ride," composer Peter Paul Koprowski doesn't care what it says, or how it is said.

That's the kind of free-wheeling attitude he has toward composing music, to the New Music At Western series of concerts he co-ordinates, and to the Canadian composing scene in which he is vice-president of the League of Canadian Composers. It's also part of disappointment in London, where he is in his fifth year with the University of Western Ontario's music faculty in the department of theory and composition.

The New Music at Western series, with an international and Canadian program of contemporary music, opens its season Friday in the faculty's recital hall with Simon Streatfeild and Koprowski sharing the conducting.

Koprowski doesn't think the media in London give culture a fair shake — not so much in what is happening in the city as in relating London to what is happening culturally around the world.

He shudders each Sunday night, he said in an interview, when he hears the public apology which announcer Geoff Bingle utters on CFPL-FM for programming the evening's classical music program. He feels it's a put-down for the Canadian music which is heard for 15 minutes after Bingle's explanation that the schedule of the evening is described as fulfilling the station's commitments to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

"CFPL-FM's own surveys say that almost 18,000 people in London are interested in serious music. Why do they apologize for programming it?"

(Bingle commented on the Koprowski statement that the announcement was a requirement of the CTRC.)

He says the arrival of CBC will make all the difference to London. "We now will be able to know what is happening in Vancouver, Edmonton and Calgary.

"Our media do not contribute enough to the culture of the city. The sports pages are filled with information about sports around the world as well as local events, yet we in cultural activities do not get the same treatment in our newspapers."

"Although London is nicely located, I want to know what is happening in Bayreuth, the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco, Paris and London, England."

He is almost a local legend because each time his compositions were played on CBC with consistent frequency he drove to Kitchener and parked in a supermarket to hear his compositions when broadcast over CBC.

During the CBC London Festival, his ~~Quotations was performed by the Canadian Electronic Ensemble in the faculty's recital hall.~~ He doesn't write electronic music more than any other kind of music, he said, but this one received some interesting reaction. He was surprised that so few in the audience got the joke, which combined quotations from avant garde composers which the work was designed to chide.

He blames a lot of the cultural malaise of the city on the shoulders of London itself. "It is the only city of its size that doesn't have a freeway going through it. The desire to keep this a small city has seen a lot pass it by. I can understand why Bill Aide (pianist William Aide, now at the University of Toronto) left London.

The city administration made its mistakes 15 years ago, he said, when it did not attract industry and business which would have made London "important." "When I came to London, it was the 11th largest city in Canada. Now, it's 12th, surpassed by Mississauga.

"You might ask what this has to do with a composer's life, Koprowski said. "It has everything, because all elements go to make up a composer's life.

"I like to be able to pick up a paper when I get to Toronto and pick a place to go for a show. I'm thrilled when I hear that four theatres in Edmonton are constantly sold out. London is a beautiful

city, but what can you do with scenery? There is not enough happening."

Now 31, Koprowski has been a boy wonder composer in his native Poland, fled when confronted with three years of military service although he had finished his five-year university course in two years, studied in Britain and Paris (with Nadia Boulanger), became a professor at McGill and taught part-time at the University of Toronto.

For him, music is a combination of intellect and emotion at the composition level, but from the listener's standpoint, the roles are reversed and they become emotion, first, and intellect second.

While the New Music at Western series originally focused on music composed at Western, he and conductor Simon Streatfeild are taking it in a different direction. For Koprowski, it became more important to show off all kinds of new music than the local scene alone. "Our student composers have shown they can do well in other places, and have been offered opportunities in many important institutions, including Harvard University (none accepted). We will have a students' compositions program in the spring."

The Friday program as a result includes Japanese Michio Mamiya's *Serenade For Two Violins, Viola, Cello, Piano and soprano*; Israeli Tzvi Avni's *Collage For Flute, Voice and Percussion*; Canadian John Rea's *Anaphora For Chamber Ensemble*; American Morton Feldman's *I Met Heine On The Rue Fuerstenburg For Chamber Music*; Australian David Lunsdaine's *Annotation Of Auschwitz* and UWO faculty member Allan Heard's composition *Variatione Accademici For Two Flutes And Two French Horns*.

While he doesn't feel modern music needs defending, Koprowski cites one special example of one of the great modern compositions, fellow-Pole's Penderecki's *St. Luke Passion*. "If he did not use the modern idiom, it is almost certain it would not have spoken so clearly to the modern audience."

For him, music is a combination of intellect and emotion on the composition level, but from the listener's standpoint, the roles are reversed in priority and they become emotion first and intellect second.

While he jogs two miles each day with his dog and his wife, who manages the Talbot Theatre program at UWO, he is busy reviving his manuscripts from his youth and working on "no less than three compositions at the same time." And the commissions continue to come in.