

Western prof Chalmers winner

By Joe Matyas
Free Press Arts
& Entertainment Reporter

At 50, University of Western Ontario music professor Peter Paul Koprowski is one elated fellow.

Looking back, the big risk he took in leaving Europe for Canada so many years ago was worth it. He left a sure thing for God knows what and it has worked out just fine.

So fine, in fact, that Koprowski was honored in Toronto on Monday night as the 1997 recipient of the prestigious Jean Chalmers National Music Award for his orchestral compositions.

Koprowski, a composition professor at Western for more than two decades, won the award for four recent works — a full symphony called Nordic Tales, an overture called Saga, a viola concerto and a retrospective of classical music.

"I'm both humbled and gratified to receive this kind of recognition," said Koprowski, a frequent composer of orchestral and chamber works, who has also won two Jules Leger awards.

Koprowski said he doesn't regard the Chalmers honor as a lifetime achievement award.

"Heavens, no. I hope I'm in mid-career with a lot more to come."

Critics have called Koprowski Canada's "composer laureate" and "a towering figure in contemporary composition."

"I don't care whether it's true or not," he said. "What's important is the change I've seen in Canada since I first got here."

Two decades ago, some conductors almost apologized to audiences before orchestras played contemporary compositions by Canadian composers, he said.

"There's a lot more acceptance

and appreciation of new works by Canadians now."

Koprowski's career began in Poland where he was born and raised and where he completed a five-year university-level music program in only two years.

At the age of 21, he was already a music teacher and rising composer in Poland.

"I had secure employment in Krakow and my music was being played. I was well launched."

He was also a young man with an itch to see more of the world. He migrated to France, then England and finally Canada in 1971.

After earning a doctoral degree at the University of Toronto, Koprowski became a music teacher and then a full professor.

"I love teaching and I taught full-time for many years, but I went part-time in the early 1980s because I was composing as much as I could and I wanted more time to do it."

Steady stream

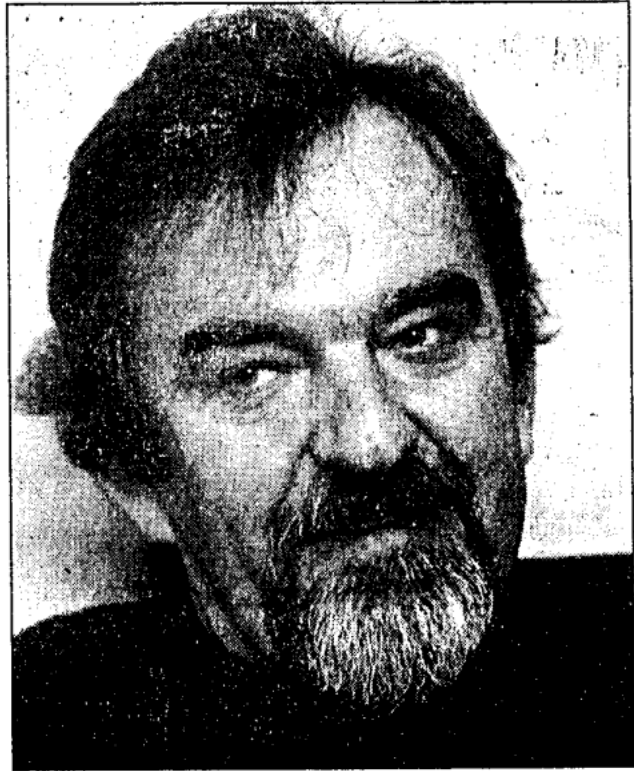
Since then, Koprowski has produced a steady stream of compositions for orchestras, chamber music groups and individual musicians. He's written five full symphonies and about 40 commissioned concerti, overtures and other shorter works.

"I've never written anything just for myself because I've always been too busy working on commissioned works," he said.

Nordic Tales was commissioned and first performed by the Ottawa Symphony, Saga for the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, the viola concerto for Rivka Golani and the retrospective for the Guelph Spring Festival.

"I'd like to write some compositions for the joy of pure creativity some day, but it will be hard to do because there's always deadline work ahead of me."

"People contact me and ask me



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Peter Paul Koprowski, orchestral composer and UWO music professor, has won the Jean Chalmers National Music Award.

to write something lively for a celebration, something sombre for a serious occasion, something for a string section or for woodwinds, something for a particular instrument. I've written solos for trumpets, flutes, violins, cellos and even for the accordion."

Koprowski said he's constantly juggling assignments. "There's music dancing in my head all the time."

Once a full-time resident of

London, Koprowski now commutes between here and a small community south of Ottawa every two weeks. His wife works at the National Art Centre.

His compositions are scheduled to be performed by orchestras in Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Quebec, Mississauga and Albany, N.Y., this season. Orchestra London will perform some of his works and the Toronto Symphony is recording three on a CD.