

North Gower composer wins awards for classical pieces

by Patricia Hitsman
Review Staff Reporter

North Gower's Peter Paul Koprowski is a man of immense musical talent and insight.

The composer resides in a rural Rideau Township village, but his musical compositions are by no means a small-town affair. His works are recognized on an international scale. His list of credits are lengthy but the most recent is the \$25,000 Jean A. Chalmers National Music Award presented to him in Toronto last September.

He received the award for writing four orchestral compositions: *Nordic Tales*, *Saga*, *Ancestral Voices* and *Viola Concerto* within the last two years.

Together the four pieces make up about 90 minutes of music.

Nordic Tales, his fifth symphony, was premiered by the Ottawa Symphony. This piece lasts about a half an hour and is played by a large orchestra of about 80 people.

Saga -- a concert overture -- was written for the Kitchener Waterloo Symphony. Lasting 10 minutes, this composition is also geared toward a large symphony.

Ancestral Voices, amounts to 16 minutes of music and was written by Koprowski for a string orchestra for the Guelph Spring Festival.

On a slightly smaller scale, *Viola Concerto* was composed for the Windsor Symphony with Rivka Golani performing as the soloist. In this half hour piece, Golani was accompanied by an orchestra of about 10.

The Chalmers awards are presented annually to honor Canadians who have made outstanding contributions in the arts. The jury who selected Koprowski cited "the great beauty of his music, his mastery of orchestral writing and his remarkable ability to speak with his own voice."

"His music is expressive, highly sophisticated, and while demonstrating a high level of craftsmanship, retains the capacity to move and excite the audience."

Recognizing primarily the quality and beauty of Koprowski's writing, the award was also presented to him because of the "staggering" quantity of pieces composed in the last two years.

Koprowski, 50, admits writing one orchestral piece lasting 20 minutes is considered an achievement. To compose four orchestral pieces in two years he calls an enormous effort.

"This was incredible," said Koprowski. "It nearly killed me."

Written for various sized orchestras, he terms the four winning compositions as substantial works. During the period of their creation he was also a professor of composition at the University of Western Ontario where he continues on staff today.

"All of these works represented something solid," says Koprowski from his North Gower home where he does much of his writing. "Quantity by itself doesn't mean much."

But to his credit he has written more than 40 commissioned works for orchestras to ensembles.

Born in Poland, he was recognized at the early age of 16 for writing his orchestral *In Memoriam Katol Szymanowski*. He graduated from the Krakow Academy of Music



earning awards and having his works broadcast and performed in concerts.

Koprowski immigrated to Canada in 1971 and took his doctorate at the University of Toronto.

His *Flute Concerto* first performed by the Oslo Philharmonic and *Per Oien* in 1983 was described by the soloist as "the most substantial concerto since Carl Nielsen's and was praised by the late Witold Lutoslawski for its outstanding colors, drama and architecture as well as an absolute control of the symphony orchestra as a vehicle."

Koprowski's pieces have been performed by many recognized artists such as Jukka-Pekka Saraste and Okko Kamu. They have performed and recorded by major orchestras in Canada, United States, Europe and Asia.

He has twice received the distinguished

Jules Leger Prize named after one of Canada's former Governor Generals.

Koprowski says he has no specific recipe for composing something that is at the same time appealing, beautiful and magical. "Creation is always with you and it evolves on a continual basis."

He explains that a piece begins with birth in his mind in a very general sense in terms of sound, drama, color, sequence and presentation. Koprowski says he carries this around in his head until it crystallizes into something tangible.

"You become the first listener of it," he added.

When it becomes clear to him, he begins putting the score on paper. Along the way he must put his skills to use in addressing the tempo, volume and the intensity of one instrument versus another.

At no point during this process has he yet tested out what he has written on an actual instrument. Koprowski says part of the talent of composing is just knowing what will work on various instruments. He must first hear it in his head and that's some-

•Please turn to page 5R

CONTINUED

Focus

(Continued from Editorial page)

thing he admits takes a lot of concentration.

Once it has been put to paper, it's almost as if it exits his soul and becomes the possession of the orchestra and director. "It will have a life on its own."

But as much as his works become someone else's to perform, they reflect a lot of who Koprowski is.

"Your creations are a mirror of what you are and where you are in your mind."

He draws his inspiration from different facets of his life including his teenage daughter, his beliefs in life and how he finds himself reacting to what takes place in the world. But they do not include any realism or references to specific events.

He describes the classical music he writes as more of a metaphor. Koprowski adds that to understand classical music, one has to be mature with an inner-self that is ready to accept the abstract.

Koprowski describes music as a reflective art which has the power to call to mind various moods and memories.



Peter Paul Koprowski, of North Gower, is a renowned composer. He has numerous awards to his credit.

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