

Jocelyn Morlock Profile

Comedian Steve Martin was once quoted as saying: “Talking about music is like dancing about architecture.” Both forms of communication are imprecise at best, so when Vancouver composer Jocelyn Morlock sits down to chat about her own writing she makes little effort to conceal her trepidation. “I don’t think I could say that I have a particular aesthetic, or that my music will sound a certain way. I know I’m interested in the idea of what [Alfred] Schnittke called ‘poly-stylism.’ I don’t know if I’m really doing it yet, but the idea is to possibly use any kind of style, using what’s best to support what you’re trying to say,” she explains. Once she begins speaking, however, it is clear that she chooses her words as carefully as she chooses the sounds with which she constructs her music.

A native of Manitoba, Morlock is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in composition at the University of British Columbia, but her work has been gathering attention since the late 90’s. Her piece *Bird in the Tangled Sky* was recorded by Toronto’s Continuum contemporary music ensemble, for their self-titled CD. Last year Continuum also premiered her composition *Lacrimosa* at the Massey Hall New Music Festival, to great popular and critical acclaim, and her *Icarus, Landing* was commissioned for the 2000 Vancouver New Music Festival. Upcoming works include commissions for the Pacific Baroque Orchestra and the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra.

Although she avoids pigeonholing her own music to a particular style, Morlock does have clear intentions about communicating through her work. “I think I have to say that emotional, spiritual, or philosophical content is more important than whatever elements you choose to write with,” she insists. She lists composers like Claude Vivier, Sofia Gubaidulina, Gyorgy Ligeti, and Giya Kancheli, among others, whose work has encouraged her to create music with depth of meaning and significance beyond surface concerns of technique and form. “They get you thinking about how someone might search for the perfect way to say something, to express a particular message, or emotion, or philosophical idea. They’ll look around for materials and specific sounds, everything that supports what their message is about... I think most often they attempt to have a cultural signpost, or a reference backward or sideways in time, or to a different artform. All of these add further layers of meaning by harkening back to something else.”

No matter what she chooses to communicate through her music, Morlock does not consider her work to be mere entertainment. “I don’t think listening to classical music is like watching TV. I think you have to make your brain work at it,” she suggests. “I don’t necessarily want people to enjoy the music. Sometimes I want them to be disturbed. I guess I just don’t want them to be bored, to have them say ‘ho-hum, that was pleasant.’ If I have an emotion in mind I want them to feel it.” Morlock confesses that she composes primarily to please herself, but she also believes that an attentive listener can find his own satisfaction in the music. “I hope that every now and then someone will hear something that will have meaning for them. I think that’s the best you can hope for,” she says optimistically.

Audiences will have a chance to hear Morlock's composition *Shade*, for vibraphone and cello, on Vancouver New Music's October 3rd program "Shifting Tides." "I started writing that piece when my Dad was dying. That's probably the first piece where I have extra-musical meaning happening in it... I didn't want to attach too much religious meaning to it, but there's a symbolism of separation," she explains. On October 27th the Pacific Baroque Orchestra will premiere a work of hers written in memory of recently deceased composer Nikolai Korndorf, with whom she had been studying at UBC.

Korndorf, who will be remembered in a memorial concert at the UBC School of Music on September 15th, made a strong impression on Morlock. "I learned a lot of things from him. His enthusiasm and knowledge about music was incredible. I can't imagine meeting someone who knows more [than he did]," she recalls. "If he hadn't happened to move here, to Burnaby, there is no way I would have met him. It was very lucky for me and everybody else who knew him that this is where he came."

Despite her recent successes, and a promising outlook for the future, Jocelyn Morlock has a sober view of her career, and she offers careful advice: "It's not really a great idea to think of composing as your means of employment. That's not really what it's for. I think the best thing is not to expect or want a whole lot of money." She is an artist who creates from the heart, and finds her reward in reaching others.