

ROBERT AITKEN (CANADA) FLUTE

Aitken, Robert (Morris) Flutist, composer, conductor, born Kentville, Nova Scotia, Canada 28 August 1939. B. Mus. (Toronto) 1961, M. Mus. (Composition) (Toronto) 1964. After flute studies with Nicolas Fiore in Toronto (1955-59) he became principal flute of the Vancouver S. O. (the youngest principal in that orchestra's history) while studying composition with Barbara Pentland at U.B.C. From 1960-64 he served as second flute of the C.B.C. Symphony Orchestra while studying electronic music with Myron Shaeffer and composition with John Weinzweig at U. of Toronto.

He considers Marcel Moyse, with whom he studied intermittently for 9 years in Vermont and in Europe, as his most significant flute teacher. However, he also studied with Jean Pierre Rampal (Paris, Nice), Severino Gazzeloni (Rome), André Jaunet (Zurich) and Hubert Barwähser (Amsterdam) during his 1964-65 European sojourn on a Canada Council grant.

In 1964 Aitken, with pianist Marion Ross (his wife) and soprano Mary Morrison, formed the Lyric Arts Trio. He served 1965-70 as co-principal flute of the Toronto S. O. but gave up this position to devote himself to solo performance and to appearances with the trio and with harpsichordist Greta Kraus. He won prizes at the "Concours international de flûte de Paris" (1971) and the "Concours international de flûte pour la musique contemporaine" (1972) in Royan (France).

In 1970 Aitken founded and directed until 1972 the "Music Today" series at the Shaw Festival (Ontario) and in 1971 co-founded with Norma Beecroft "New Music Concerts" serving thereafter as artistic director. In 1977 he was one of 12 instrumentalists invited by Pierre Boulez to present a solo recital at IRCAM (Paris) playing solo pieces of Takemitsu, Morthensen, Fukushima, Globokar, Sigurbjörnsson, Y. Matsudaira, Holliger and himself.

Aitken taught 1960-75 at U. Of Toronto, 1972-82 at the Shawnigan Summer School of the Arts (British Columbia) and in 1981 founded "Music at Shawnigan", a 3-week festival devoted to advanced chamber music study. From 1985-89 he was director of the Advanced Studies in Music program at the Banff School of Fine Arts (Alberta). He has given master classes in many countries including Cuba, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the U.S.A. From 1988 to 2002 he was professor at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg, Germany.

He has also been very active as a conductor with New Music Concerts (Toronto), with orchestras in Canada and Japan and in 1987 conducted the first performance of Schafer's "Patria I" for the Canadian Opera Company.

Critical comment on his playing seems to centre on his incredible variety of dynamics and timbres and on his exquisite sense of phrasing.

Aitken is one of Canada's outstanding composers. Like several other Canadian composers who traveled in East Asia (Gilles Tremblay, Claude Vivier and José Evangelista), he has been profoundly influenced by the contact with non-Western musical cultures. On listening to his Berceuse, one is struck by the absolute fresh use of diatonic materials, devoid of clichés, by the poetic and convincing integration of special flute effects and by the clarity of formal and rhythmic structure.