

IN MEMORIAM

Gustav Ciamaga

1930 ~ 2011

BY Dennis Patrick



Gustav Ciamaga was born in London, Ontario on April 10, 1930. Throughout his life, he would wear many hats: as a performer, composer, writer, teacher, administrator, photographer, and orchid grower. With true passion he applied his highly refined intellect to all of these endeavors, beginning at an early age with music.

At eight years of age he played the violin with his brother Bob on accordion in amateur shows at local theatres in London, and in his high school days he wrote dance band charts for several local bands. Although he majored in architectural drafting in high school, he chose to study music and went to the University of Western Ontario in 1951 where he earned a BA.

Ciamaga was a welcome talent at Western where he wrote for the annual music review. His brother Bob shared his reflections on these early days and the intense personal commitment that Gustav made to his music: "I remember one year he had completed the orchestration, dance routines and skits (songs) two weeks before the opening of a show. Coming back from Toronto, he left the score and parts on the train. After a search and offering a reward for the music's return, he rewrote the entire show. The price of this herculean effort was stomach ulcers and a bad case of nerves."

Gustav continued his studies in composition with John Weinzwieg and John Beckwith at the University of Toronto (1954-56) and with Arthur Berger, Harold Shapero and Irving Fine at Brandeis University (1956-63). While at Brandeis he founded their Electronic Music Studio, and was invited back in 2008 to deliver a lecture on the early days of the studio. Ciamaga was always a great raconteur.

Gustav joined the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto in 1963 and became Director of its Electronic Music Studio in 1965. During these early years in the studio he worked with Hugh Le Caine of the National Research Council on developing equipment such as the Serial Sound Structure Generator. Many of his *Two-Part Inventions* employ this equipment. He also collaborated with Jim Gabura on the application of computer

control of analog oscillators as part of the PIPER Project at the University of Toronto in the mid 60s – this helped produce numerous transcriptions and his *Fanfare for Computer* (1968). His output continued unabated during a sabbatical in 1970: Gustav visited several European electronic music studios, composing his *Two part Invention No. 8* while at Utrecht.

Ciamaga's musical interests covered many genres. He composed a number of non-electronic works including a mass, a string quartet, pieces for jazz band, and also arranged many pieces. Most of his compositions from the latter half of the 1960s to the early 1980s employed electronic tape and computers. During this period he produced approximately twenty-four tape studio compositions: among them scores for films, the theatre, and TV documentaries. One highlight included *Curtain Raiser*, composed with Louis Applebaum, which opened the NAC in 1969.

Beginning in 1985, using MIDI technology, he began to work on original computer programs to control hardware samplers and electronic synthesizers. He became particularly interested in using algorithmic techniques in his compositions. The opening movement from *Quartets* (1994) is a brilliant example. With shifting technologies and methodology, Ciamaga composed roughly 60 electroacoustic works between 1986 and 2010.

He was tireless in his commitment to furthering electronic composition. He wrote numerous articles on electronic music, including "The Tape Studio", a definitive chapter that appeared in *The Development and Practice of Electronic Music* published in 1975. In recent years Ciamaga was involved in the proofing and development of CDP 6, a new multi-channel version of DSP software from the Composers Desktop Project based in England.

Gustav Ciamaga passed away on Saturday June 11, 2011 after a long battle with cancer. He is survived by his wife Gwen Dunlop and daughter Kathryn Ciamaga.