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At the beginning of *An Orchestra at My Fingertips: A History of the Canadian Electronic Ensemble*, Alexa Woloshyn relays an anecdote about a 2016 concert appearance of the Canadian Electronic Ensemble (CEE). Woloshyn recounts an eager audience in attendance to see the ensemble perform extended works with eurorack modular synthesizers, laptops, and microcontrollers. The result? “Complete confusion” over methods and ownership of sound creation—an experience likely shared by electronic musicians and listeners the world over (p. 4). Thus begins Woloshyn’s portrait of the CEE, a largely obscure Canadian electronic music ensemble that began in the early 1970s performing both improvised and composed works focused mainly on the use of modular synthesizers.

Just as CEE’s performances have challenged audiences’ understandings of their individual and group musical goals, the very goal of Woloshyn’s book is, at first, deceptive. While a mere “History of the Canadian Electronic Ensemble” is promised in its title, the author’s stated aspiration is actually far more ambitious: to use the story of the ensemble in order to fashion “a pedagogical aid for teaching the history of electronic composition and performance,” which aims to “prompt examination and analysis that can enrich our understanding of all live electronic music making” (pp. xii, xiii). Falling somewhere between a monograph and textbook, this level of ambition is further complicated by the book’s chosen subject ensemble itself. Woloshyn acknowledges from the very beginning that almost no scholarly writing exists on the CEE (with most attention coming from studies that are Canada-centric) and readily concedes that despite a five-decade career “deeply embedded in the Canadian new music scene,” the ensemble remains almost wholly absent from both academic and vernacular knowledge of the global new music scene (p. xii). At face value, one might consider it a difficult proposition to justify
the focus on this group over any other, but any attempt at such a justification gets to the heart of what Woloshyn's book is trying to achieve: how do we examine and evaluate the culture of live electronic music performance, which exists in the midst of a centuries-long tradition of acoustic concert music? From this line of questioning, Woloshyn pushes further, both in examining the cultural impact of Canadian experimental music in a global context and in steadfastly championing said music.

Discussion within the text extends from musical training and aesthetics centered on the Western conservatory, and university, positioning the CEE at the periphery of academic music-making. While much is made of the group's beginnings at the University of Toronto, Woloshyn contrasts the CEE's place within an overwhelmingly academic experimental music community with the fact that the ensemble's members have never been able to afford its full focus. In the first three chapters of the text, Woloshyn examines such dynamics related to the group's motivations, providing rich context to the individual trajectories of the group members not only in relation to their place in the CEE but also as artists existing in a wider community. The final three chapters then position the group within the musical community, examining how audiences listen to live electronic music and investigating the impact that the CEE has had on music in Canada and worldwide.

The main point of interest that surrounds Woloshyn's writing is its perspective. The author, by her own admission, approaches the topic from the viewpoint not of a lifelong lover of the type of live experimental electronic music in which the CEE engages but of an educated and open-minded listener who is curious and willing to engage with such a performance practice. This, of course, does create barriers within the book's perspective. Woloshyn's engagement with the practice of live electronic music beyond the CEE is limited, with only sparse reference to electronic music praxes and scholarship that lie outside the ensemble's modular-synthesis-heavy performance practice. Though these limitations in perspective are important to consider, the book thrives from its focus on the CEE's practice and avoidance of oversaturating the text with potentially competing pieces of electronic music philosophy. As Woloshyn quotes CEE member David Jaeger, “one of the great attractions to the medium of electronic music and certainly live electronic music is that it is wide open, and you can go anywhere” (p. 187). While one certainly may ask, why did we go here?, Woloshyn's text confidently and decidedly responds, why not here?

Though the material within An Orchestra at My Fingertips is excellently researched and concisely communicated, Woloshyn avoids dogma. In her introduction to the book's robust appendix and listening guide, she positions the potential of “dialogue with other interpretations” in the process of engaging with electronic music, encouraging readers to criticize her own “reliance on Western ontologies of music as the unmarked norm” and remaining dedicated throughout to the possibility of outside perspectives (p. 198). The very strength of An Orchestra at My Fingertips is that Woloshyn is an outsider of sorts—one who is willing to explore, listen, and analyze a practice outside of her own. It is very easy to approach goals as lofty as Woloshyn's with skepticism, but this book's ambitions do indeed transcend what could simply be a study of any musical group. In first engaging with the music of the CEE based on personal passion, Woloshyn displays how different methodologies of listening can remove barriers for those who are not already engaged with live electronic music praxes, while her musico-logical perspective looks to the core of how many audiences approach the live performance of electronic music and offers excellent pedagogical techniques that could appeal to both individual listeners and educators. There are many foundational texts that examine electronic music from the perspective of a dedicated expert electronic musician
but not enough in which an expert listener engages the practice with such a genuine spirit of inquiry as does An Orchestra at My Fingertips. Offering both distinct methodologies and general suggestions of listening praxes, Woloshyn's text opens sonic doors to electronic music for both new and experienced listeners alike.

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