

Frank Welsman: Canadian Conductor: a Biography, a Memoir, and a Music History. By Mary Hughes. Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2006. ISBN 1-4120-8856-9. 252 p., ill. \$25.00 (includes price of shipping in Canada; add \$5 for outside of Canada). Order online from Trafford at www.trafford.com.

Franks Welsman (1873-1952) played an important role in the musical life of Toronto, most notably as the first conductor of the Toronto Conservatory Symphony Orchestra. Founded in 1908, the group, which ran sporadically until 1918, is widely regarded as the precursor of the present-day Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Welsman was also one of the first to make a full-time career of music in his hometown of Toronto, where he received the bulk of his education—although he studied in Leipzig as well. He toured as a concert pianist until age thirty-six, when he gave up his performance career to join the faculty at the Toronto Conservatory, apparently on condition there was support to establish the orchestra. Throughout his life, he taught at prominent schools and traveled as an examiner for the Toronto Conservatory.

While Welsman's story deserves to be better known, this tribute by his granddaughter does not fulfill its promise. The book's subtitle—"a biography, a memoir, and a music history"—provides the clue to the problems that lie within. It dabbles in each genre without committing to a particular one. As a result, one is left wondering who the intended audience is.

The book is self-published through Trafford, but the publisher appears to have provided little in the way of support. The text wraps around photos in a manner that is difficult to read and the photos are often dark or blurry. There

are also structural problems, including an index that is far too brief. The head of the index states that it "does not include Welsman family references." Consequently, even Welsman himself is not indexed, although it would have been helpful to list periods of his life such as education or his work as an examiner. There are also other persons and ensembles cited throughout that are not indexed.

In her author statement, Hughes says she does "not pretend to be a scholar, but is a seasoned feature writer." She feels that Welsman "has not had the recognition he so fully deserves." Yet, surprisingly, despite her personal motivation for writing, there is little insight into Welsman the man. Anecdotes are offered, but they seem disconnected from the thread of the story, and there are only brief glimpses of family life. For instance, we hear from only two of Welsman's eight children. There were no interviews with other family members, friends, or students, and few references to correspondence or personal papers.

But perhaps the weakest of all is the musical history. The coverage is uneven. Hughes has done a great deal of research into primary sources, but the decision to quote many of them in their entirety slows the pace of the narrative to the point of annoyance. There are pages of quotes from the *Musical Journal*, for example, and what seems like every mention of Welsman in contemporary press accounts such as the *Toronto Daily*

Star. The attempt to set the historical context also results in long stories about the history of the city and Canada. Because much of the material on music in Canada comes from Helmut Kallmann's history, readers would have been better served by referencing this classic resource. Particularly problematic is the inclusion of several pages on the history of conducting, when once again a few brief sentences would have sufficed.

Considering all these various shortcomings, it is difficult to recommend this book to anyone but the most dedicated of readers. One wishes it had tough editing since there is some useful and interesting information. As it stands, however, the effort required to extract it is more than most will be willing to expend.

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