

There's Music in These Walls: A History of the Royal Conservatory of Music. By Ezra Schabas. Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2005. ISBN 1-55002-540-6. 288 pp., ill. \$50.00 (hardcover)

Many Canadians, this reviewer included, know the Royal Conservatory of Music as an invisible force behind years of childhood piano lessons. We spent hours practising music listed in the RCM syllabi, performed nervously for RCM examiners, as well as studying and writing theory, history, and harmony tests during summer vacations. Ezra Schabas, in *There's Music in These Walls*, introduces a side of the Conservatory that most Canadians never see: the on-campus, Toronto-based music school.

Schabas's personal history and expertise shine in this work. His previous publications include *Sir Ernest MacMillan: The Importance of Being Canadian* (1994) and (with Carl Morey) *Opera Viva: Canadian Opera Company: The First Fifty Years* (2000), which explains the weight given to both subjects in *There's Music in These Walls*. Schabas's own history with the RCM may also explain the "Toronto-centricity" of the text; he was hired in 1952 as director of its publicity and concerts and of its Concert and Placement Bureau, and served as its Principal from 1978-83. There is a wealth of information on teachers, students, ensembles, conductors, and concert and opera programs (with reviews), but unfortunately it ends at the Toronto city limits. The reader gets no hint of RCM activity in any other Canadian city, let alone in rural areas. Even the branches are mentioned in administrative terms only.

A continuing theme of the book is the turbulent relationship between the RCM and the University of Toronto. The Conservatory's long affiliation with the University of Toronto began in 1896 and ended in 1991. The saga of this on-again, off-again relationship is told gradually throughout the book, and the success or failure of an RCM principal seemed to lie, in part, in how the affiliation was managed. What started as symbiosis (the RCM benefited from university affiliation; the U of T benefited from student tuition revenue) degenerated over the years into bickering over land, buildings, faculty, and, of course, finances. As a former principal himself, Schabas does not hesitate to give his candid opinions of various administrators, past and present.

The book's coffee-table gloss and format includes an eye-catching dust-jacket: a full colour photograph of McMaster Hall, the RCM's well-known Bloor Street home. There are over seventy black-and-white photographs, and the reproductions are excellent. Generally the pictures reflect the context of the subject matter (the one glaring exception is a delightful photograph of the young Glenn Gould on page 101 that appears in the middle of a lengthy discussion of opera).

Despite the book's classy, grand appearance, the contents are not light reading. While the conversational tone is engaging, the attention to detail is exhausting at times. The descriptive titles of the twelve chapters (e.g., "Toronto Has a Music School," "The

Travails of Reorganization,” “Buildings Old and New”) indicate how the author has classified chronological events into broad categories. There is an index, and the appendices include a chronology. Other visual aids such as an organizational chart would have been helpful.

The research and scholarship that went into this account are impeccable. Schabas has backed up his personal memories with extensive interviews. He and researcher Dorith Cooper also combed several archives to paint a vivid picture of daily life at the Conservatory.

But his treatment of Glenn Gould is puzzling. This reviewer was looking forward to learning more about Gould’s early years as an RCM student. Yet the RCM’s most famous graduate is rarely mentioned, except in bland statements such as “Glenn Gould and Lois Marshall

were both on the 1950 series” (p. 121), and a short, rather offhand, personal reminiscence (p. 130).

Ezra Schabas has many stories to tell thanks to his long association with the Royal Conservatory of Music. *There’s Music in These Walls* is not merely a collection of stories, however; it is a significant addition to the scholarship of Canadian music. The book is certainly a boon to researchers, especially those who are interested in the RCM’s presence in Toronto. There is much more to this institution than mere music books and examinations, and readers will come away with a much fuller understanding of what is arguably the most important music school in Canada.

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