
Becoming the youngest concertmaster ever of Sir Thomas Beecham’s Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at age 24, the Canadian violinist Steven Staryk continued to add many firsts throughout his career. Although he recorded 190 works that were mostly released on minor labels, only a small coterie know that many of these performances are considered definitive. Canadians are the least likely of knowing about this musician’s musician and his considerable influence as a solo, chamber, and orchestral performer, and as a teacher.

This book contains major sections on McCarthyism and its impact on Canada in the 1950s, the politics of a solo career and the role of competitions, the realities of the recording business, and a wonderful appendix in which Staryk discusses various violins and particularly those made by Stradivari or Guarneri del Gesu on which he has performed. Each of these sections is included to try to explain certain aspects of Staryk’s career. The episode of the “Symphony Six,” in which Staryk, as a member of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, was banned from entering the United States, relates some details that contradicts the views expressed in Ezra Schabas’ Sir Ernest MacMillan: The Importance of Being Canadian (1994).

...With the co-writer a former student of Staryk’s, it is not surprising to find the framework of this monograph to be the teaching award presented to Staryk at the University of Washington in Seattle in 1995. Much emphasis is placed on Staryk’s outstanding mentoring of students from around the world and the innovative program which he introduced to prepare violinists for orchestral work. Undoubtedly, this book should be purchased with the accompanying CD as it presents proof of the high esteem in which knowledgeable musicians hold Staryk.

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