

**Fiddling with Life: The Unusual Journey of Steven Saryk.** Thane Lewis, with Steven Saryk. Oakville, Ont.: Mosaic Press. \$18.95; with CD \$28.95. 247 p., ill. ISBN 0-88962-613-8

Becoming the youngest concertmaster ever of Sir Thomas Beecham's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at age 24, the Canadian violinist Steven Saryk 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 Saryk discusses various violins and particularly those made by Stradivari or Guarneri del Gesù on which he has performed. Each of these sections is included to try to explain certain aspects of Saryk's career. The episode of the "Symphony Six," in which Saryk, 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).

Unfortunately, these wonderful sections are marred by inaccuracies particularly on matters related to music in Canada. The Toronto Mendelssohn Choir, founded in 1894, was certainly not the "brainchild of Sir Ernest [MacMillan]" (p. 20); Fiala is spelt incorrectly twice (pp. 132, 241); a lack of understanding of the development of performance divisions in Canada's university music departments and the differences between the conservatory systems of French and English Canada is revealed in the

discussion of Saryk's difficulties of finding a secure teaching position in his home country (p. 150ff); indeed, the University of Western Ontario, where Saryk was in residence with Quartet Canada from 1976 to 1981, is referred to as "Western University" (p. 164). A non-existent *Encyclopaedia Canada* is referred to as a source, but neither *The Canadian Encyclopedia* nor *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* is even mentioned. Other errors are a reference to Vladimir Ashkenazy moving to London, England, in the early 1950s (p. 38) when he did not play there until 1962 and moved there only the following year; a reference to "three different musical continents" (p. 39) when only Europe and North America are involved; the apparent unawareness of the role of Theodore Thomas in destroying the "deputy system" in orchestras (p. 71); the use of "principle" instead of "principal" on page 61 and spelling errors on pages 50, 60, 118, 127, 134, 139, and 147.

With the co-writer a former student of Saryk's, it is not surprising to find the framework of this monograph to be the teaching award presented to Saryk at the University of Washington in Seattle in 1995. Much emphasis is placed on Saryk'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 Saryk.

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