

REVIEWS

Sunset on the St. Lawrence: a history of the Frederick Harris Music Co., Limited, 1904-1984. By Wayne Gilpin. Oakville, Ont.: Frederick Harris, 1984. (136 p.)

There are so few monographs available on the music publishing industry in Canada (Music publishing in the Canadas, 1800-1867 / L'Édition musicale au Canada 1800-1867 by Maria Calderisi being the only one that comes readily to mind) that I was prepared to like this book, no matter what its shortcomings. As I read it, I tried desperately to like it. However, in spite of this overwhelming desire to find something positive, this is going to be a negative review.

Music publishing to date has, unfortunately, been given short shrift by Canadian musicologists, despite the important place the industry held in the country's social development until after World War I. Literally tens of thousands of pieces of Canadian music, good to bad, popular to classical, folksong to operetta, were published between 1800 and 1920 by over 50 companies. The topics ranged from celebrations of Canadian involvement in international wars and other events, to paeans to the railroad and hydro, to cruises on the Saint Lawrence.

This brings me to the first complaint: why this title? Apart from being the title of a song published by Harris, of which the melody is reputed to have been invented by Harris himself, I can find no justification for this choice. The piece did not have the sales or popularity of Carrie Jacobs-Bond's "A perfect day", which might have been a more appropriate title. Is Mr. Gilpin intimating that he has written the swan song of a dying company (of which he was Vice-President and General Manager)? Given the rousing last chapter, it is hard to imagine that the author means this interpretation, but the ambiguity exists as the title stands.

The major problem is that the author gives the impression that there is nothing of interest to the general public in a history of the Frederick Harris Music Co. You are faced with pages of facts and figures presented in as plain and boring a fashion as possible, interspersed from time to time with tidbits of interesting anecdotes about the characters' personal histories, tantalizingly incomplete, and without elaboration. Frederick Harris himself springs

forth on page one as an established member of the music publishing industry, with precious little background to inform us why he was there at all. The EMC shows his birth date as uncertain (ca. 1866) while Gilpin implies that this year is the definite one. If his browsings in the British Library and elsewhere have unearthed new information, it would have been far more prudent to have regaled the reader with archival gems, than to have rendered him or her somnolent with lists of now-forgotten titles carried by the company in the 1920s.

Further, there is an unfortunate mixing of company history with personal biography to the detriment of biography. In the middle of the aforementioned lists, we will be enticed by some truly interesting facts in the life of one of the characters in the story, only to be returned abruptly to some unessential listing of publications better forgotten. A division of these areas might have been wiser and have increased readability. Then it would be possible to be entertained by the lives of the principal characters in the drama, without having to encounter the tedious tales of litigation and copyright infringements, which seem to have bored everyone including the author. It is also unfortunate that two-thirds of the book are spent on the first half of the company's history, when the last half is more germane to the needs and interest of readers. The lists of works of Willan and MacMillan published by Harris should have been supplemented by lists of contemporary works of Canadian composers still available.

In short, if you wish to fill the void by undertaking research on one of the many Canadian music publishing houses which have existed since 1800, do not use this book as the model. Instead, I might furnish an outline of a more viable format. Firstly, some background of Canadian society of the period, and of the music industry specifically, should set the stage. Next, the principal characters should be introduced. If the story is a long one, new characters may have to be presented, but they should be treated in at least a separate section of a chapter. When supplying the facts concerning the company's

history, try to attach some flesh to the bones of lists being presented, for example by comparing the company's activities with those of its rivals. Finally, make sure that you are enthralled by your subject; then your audience stands some chance of becoming interested also.

A research library which prides itself on its Canadian holdings should probably have this book in spite of its shortcomings. Otherwise, I cannot recommend it as suitable bedtime reading.

-Stephen C. Willis

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Guidelist of unpublished Canadian string orchestra music suitable for student performers. By Patricia Martin Shand. Toronto: Canadian Music Centre, in co-operation with the Canadian Music Educators' Association, 1986. (138 p., \$6.00)

How many times have I been approached as a string adjudicator or clinician with: "Help! I desperately need some new titles for my classes and particularly for my string orchestra. Have you any suggestions?" Thanks to the recent efforts of Patricia Shand and the John Adaskin Project, we have here available an excellent source of unpublished string orchestra music, repertoire that will also contribute an oft-needed "Canadian content" component to our music programs.

Within the narrow confines of the title, Dr. Shand and a panel of string specialists examined, and tested in the classroom, 156 manuscripts written before 1983. Of these, 72 were selected as suitable for elementary or secondary school ensembles. The Guidelist describes 63 of these, for which scores and parts are readily available. Only fourteen composers across Canada are represented, and 60% of the compositions chosen are by three composers -- Walter Buczynski (including nine of his Legends), Donald Coakley (thirteen of his Fifteen String Pieces), and Brian Strachan (eleven of his works for "easy" and "medium ensembles). Of prime importance is the clearly indicated method of access to these works, a plus for the busy teacher/conductor who can seldom find the time or energy required to travel to a CMC office and pore over the manuscripts personally.

Dr. Shand has planned the format of the Guidelist carefully and has presented a wealth of information in a clear and orderly manner. Compositions are grouped into three levels of difficulty: easy (less than two years of string instruction required); medium (two to three years of instruction); and difficult (three or more years of instruction). Indexes by composer and by title give useful cross-references. One omission might be pointed out: Michael Pepa's Simple Suite for Strings, while included under composers, is missing from the title index.

To indicate the scope of Dr. Shand's thorough treatment, here is a summary of the categories under which each composition is discussed:

Technical challenges:

Left hand (finger patterns, positions, shifting, finger dexterity, special effects)

Right hand (types of bowing, tone production, dynamics, string crossings, chords, pizzicato)

Left-right hand coordination

Ensemble (balance, blend, fluency, intonation, phrasing, rhythm)

Musical characteristics:

Form, harmony, melody, rhythm, texture, timbre

Pedagogical value

Two pages are devoted to each piece, whether it be 35 seconds or 10 minutes in duration: most of the entries use less than the full two pages however, leaving room for notes. In a later edition, perhaps a few biographical lines about each composer would be an interesting and helpful addition. With the occasional exception, discussions of compositions are objective and detailed. This is not light reading for a summer beach!

Of prime concern to this reviewer are the comments under the heading "Pedagogical value". Dr. Shand has in a few lines admirably summarized the principal technical and musical benefits to be derived from the study of each composition. While elsewhere in her descriptions she has carefully avoided value judgements, here we may discern some indication of personal preferences. Along with occasional comments such as "somewhat contrived" (p.44), "awkward string crossings" (p.20), and "somewhat monotonous" (p.16), we read of others as "effective, imaginative...interesting and enjoyable" (Coakley's Sunrise, p.54), "an enjoyable study in détaché bowing" (Strachan's March, p. 36), and "an interesting introduction to graphic notation" (Keane's The Oreads, p. 78). Assessments such as these help to answer

the inevitable question: "It's Canadian, but is it good?" Also under "Pedagogical values" may be found good descriptions of avant-garde sounds or novel performing situations, such as the seating of players in a circle around the audience to perform David Keane's Tondo.

While I hesitate to suggest an addendum of such magnitude, a set of performance tapes of each composition would do much to assist the teacher/conductor in translating the detailed descriptions of harmony, texture, tonal colour, etc. into the actual klang of each piece.

This Guidelist has been researched and compiled by a string specialist obviously intimately

familiar with the many technical problems of young string players. It fills a real gap in published Canadian source material for the string teacher. Perhaps it may even spur other Canadian composers to write for young string ensembles, requiring a revised second edition representing more composers from more areas of Canada. Dr. Shand is to be commended for this addition to her growing list of publications of the John Adaskin Project. This source book is indispensable to all present and future conductors of student string ensembles, be they active in the schools, youth orchestras, conservatories, music camps, private teacher studios, or university music education programs across Canada.

-Robert Skelton

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The Canadian Musical Heritage / Le Patrimoine Musical Canadien. 6: Piano music II / Musique pour piano II. Elaine Keillor, Editor/Directeur de l'ouvrage. Ottawa, 1986. (xv, 282 p., \$34.95)

Since the launching in 1983 of the comprehensive anthology of early Canadian music by the Canadian Musical Heritage Society, performers, researchers, and teachers have had access to a veritable gold mine of musical scores from our past. No longer must we rely upon secondary sources which describe in words the nature of early music in Canada.

Within the projected 25-volume set, three have been designated as piano music anthologies. Volume 1 (1983), edited by Elaine Keillor, a recognized scholar and performer of early Canadian music, is comprised of pieces written up to the last decade of the 19th century -- pioneering efforts largely by foreign-born Canadian residents; Volume 6 (1986), also edited by Keillor, encompasses the period between 1880 and 1940. The third and final collection of piano works, Volume 14, will be edited by Helmut Kallmann and is scheduled for publication in October of 1990; it is to be an anthology of considerably lighter piano pieces dating from the mid-19th century through the early 20th century.

In Volume 6, all but four of the 25 composers were native-born. While some were trained in Europe, an increasingly large number received some or all of their musical training in Canada. The majority lived and worked in Canada. Several,

including Clarence Lucas and Colin McPhee, spent a great deal of time outside Canada and established international reputations. Toronto, Quebec City, and Montreal, the major cultural centres, were homes to most of the Volume 6 composers; a smattering of other cities and towns are represented including Saint John, N. B., and Winnipeg, Manitoba. Little "serious" music from the west coast of Canada found its way into print during this period.

Volume 6 contains a fine cross-section of Canadian piano works -- 46 in all -- written between 1880 and 1940. Many are light salon pieces in the mid-19th century French tradition. There are dances such as the valse, mazurka, gavotte, and pavane, and a host of "character" pieces with romantic titles such as " Confession ", " Evening Song ", and " La Lyre Enchantée ". The influence of German Romantic music of the 19th century can be heard in many of the works; others were inspired by texts either by the composer or by a great poet such as Shakespeare (for example, the Scherzo, Op. 55 entitled " Ariel ", by Clarence Lucas.) There are few compositions in the traditional larger forms: only two sonatas and two suites.

There appears to be little influence of one Canadian composer upon another, and no conscious attempt to form a national school of composition,

unlike the situation in the visual arts during this period of Canada's cultural history. At first glance the music reveals a decided preference for traditional styles and forms, and an apparent reluctance to experiment. However, the excellent historical notes disclose a different story. Experimentation did take place, but such music was not well-received by Canadian audiences which generally lacked a comprehensive musical education and opportunities to hear performances of the best and most recent music from Europe or even the United States. It is unfortunate that as a direct result, some of our most important musical innovators -- composers like Rodolphe Mathieu, Léo Pol Morin/James Callihou, Leo Smith, and Colin McPhee -- either stopped writing experimental music altogether, or moved to a different location, e.g. the U.S.A. where a larger population, fighting less critical environmental hardships, included at least a small group of critical, curious ears. A particularly distressing case is that of Colin McPhee, who destroyed large numbers of his most innovative piano scores. The difficulties early cultural pioneers faced as they struggled to develop distinctive, Canadian voices are clearly presented here.

The music of this volume has increased my admiration for a second group of musical pioneers: the solid, traditional composers who lived and worked in Canada for a full lifetime during the turn of the century: Alexis Contant, W.O. Forsyth, Clarence Lucas, and Gena Branscombe.

The eight works of W.O. Forsyth trace the growth and development of his style from the sentimental, pleasant "Wiegenlied, Opus 12, No. 1" to the comparatively adventuresome harmonic progressions of "In the Vale of Shadowland (Romance), Op. 50, No. 2." Gena Branscombe's "Valse Caprice" is an attractive, sprightly dance which displays a real awareness of formal structure and a freshness of development as the piece unfolds.

It is delightful to discover appealing works by composers hitherto unknown to me such as Susan Frances Riley Harrison, a pianist, singer, and poet with the pseudonym Seranus, whose "Chant du voyage" sounds like the songs of the voyageurs, and C. A. E. Harriss, whose "Happy Moments" Gavotte prompted me to search for more information about this composer. Timothy J. McGee's book The Music of Canada reveals the astonishing fact that Harriss loved extravaganzas and his 1924 concert at the Empire

Stadium in London called for 10,000 voices and 500 instruments!

Although Canadian incorporation of native folk material into "serious" composition generally occurred later than it did in Europe, the beginnings of this exploration can be seen in the music of Henri Gagnon and Léo Pol Morin. However, experimentation with tone clusters such as those found in "Tintamarre" by J. Humfrey Anger took place in 1911, one year before Henry Cowell's revolutionary tone cluster work "The Tides of Manaunaun" of 1912.

I am happy to be able to see and to play for myself such works by my predecessors. When my university piano students ask me what was happening in Canada at the same time as Schoenberg, Milhaud, Messiaen, Hindemith, or Ives were beginning to compose, I now have musical as well as verbal answers to their queries.

In fairness, it should be pointed out that a number of pieces in this anthology are excruciatingly boring. The first prize for dullness goes to Byron C. Tapley's Sonata, included because he was the first composer in the British Colonies to write a piano sonata. Full-sized reproductions of their cover pages precede eleven pieces in the volume. At first glance it would appear that the cover page of Tapley's Sonata should take first prize for being the dullest; however, upon closer scrutiny, the fine print reveals outrageously egocentric, humorous "information" about the composer, who, it appears, was an "Associate of Chopin", "Player for Sultan", "Court Pianist to the Emperor of Germany", and a "Graduate of Boston"!

Two of the most interesting works are the Trois Preludes and the Sonata by Rodolphe Mathieu. Expressed in a harmonic language which is not immediately accessible, these original compositions use as their springboard the highly colourful style of the Russian composer Scriabin; they are also influenced by Wagner and Debussy, and frequently suggest the writing of Berg. The Mathieu works, along with the important early works of Claude Champagne -- the "Prelude, Opus 4" and "Filigrane, Opus 5" -- deserve to be played and heard often.

The penultimate work in the collection, Barbara Pentland's Rhapsody 1939, is a magnificent early composition which clearly points the way to an exciting new era of Canadian music -- an era in which Pentland was to emerge an

important leader. John Weinzwieg's small piece, "Dirgeling", the first Canadian composition to be based on a 12-tone row, closes Volume 6, but it opens up enormous possibilities for the future of Canadian piano composition.

There have been a number of improvements since the first volume was published in 1983. Chief among these is the quality of the printing, which was frequently poor in Volume 1. Ink smudges are gone and, in general, legibility is good. Unfortunately, imperfect print quality is still to be found here and there, particularly in facsimile reproductions (for example on pp. 175, 252, 258, 259, 260, and 263). Faulty or missing ledger lines create reading problems in several places (for example, p. 258, measures 77 and 68, and on p. 260, measure 130). On p. 62, the 8va indication should come one beat earlier than written, over the second beat of the bar rather than over the third.

Abbreviations are straightforward, with one major exception: the use of square and curved brackets. It is unclear why one is used in preference to the other (on p. 28, as an example).

Editorial clarification of unfamiliar signs and indications would be useful (for example, what is the meaning of the squiggles on p. 4 in measures 43, 45, 47, 51, 53, and 55? And on p. 253, measure 24, what do the initials M.P. stand for?)

Editorial notes stating reasons why certain corrections were deemed necessary would be appreciated. Two such examples are: 1: the Critical Notes give the manuscript version of p. 129:4:3 L.H. which, although the alternate has 4 sharps rather than 3, results in the same pitches being struck as in the printed version; and 2: while I can see a valid reason for the rhythmic alteration in the editor's change to p. 252:176:1, I would like to know the logic behind the change of pitch from G to F.

At times I would welcome an editorial suggestion where none has been offered. A questionable area arises on p. 107, measure 62, in the midst of Tapley's supremely conventional harmonic progressions. Is the shocking D-natural correct? Would not an *Ed* better suit Tapley's style? In the Suite Canadienne by Léo Pol Morin, perhaps the first note of the left hand in measure 135 on p. 260 should be a C#. Because this suite contains numerous printing problems and inaccurate ledger lines, it is possible that the lack of a ledger line through the D#, which would alter it to C#, is as mistake as well. However, because

the suite abounds in unexpected notes which take one by surprise, an editorial comment on such a spot would aid the conscientious pianist in making a well reasoned choice.

The historical introduction, critical notes and bibliography, in French and English, are excellent; however, because they and the music are all in different locations, I spent a great deal of time flipping back and forth from section to section trying to gather together all references to a given work. Several solutions exist: perhaps the simplest would be to use a bolder typeface for composers' names in the introduction; this would serve to differentiate the names from the surrounding text.

A small correction is necessary to the listing of the works of Claude Champagne in the Table of Contents: the "Prelude" and "Filigrane", listed together as one work, opus 4, should appear as two works, opus 4 and opus 5 respectively.

As a pianist, I look for two things in a binding: 1: stitched pages which do not fall out as soon as serious work is commenced; and 2: pages which lie flat on the music rack and do not flutter closed as the pieces is being played. The binding here is very sturdy, and the paper is excellent, but the pages will not stay open. As I played through the volume, I had to remove it from the rack at each page-turn to pry and bend the binding; in addition, I became quite short of breath from blowing on pages which threatened to close -- a frustrating experience for a pianist, and one which does little to encourage future playing of the music.

It is a pity that these problems continue to plague this publication, even after the mention of similar ones in reviews of Volume 1. At least in Volume 1 a leaf of corrigenda was inserted; no such page has been included with Volume 6. I hope that one will be issued, and that editorial housecleaning will be sharpened in future volumes, so that the excellent quality of the research and presentation of the music will not be marred by any sloppiness.

This is a much-needed contribution to the history of early Canadian music. The series is a must for all Canadian music libraries, and, indeed, would make a splendid addition to personal and university music libraries around the world.

-Janet Hamcock
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