

Review of the book *Growing with Canada: The Émigré Tradition in Canadian Music* (2009), by Paul Helmer

Iain Gillis

2010

Musicological Explorations

UVic Libraries ePublishing Services

© 2010 Gillis.

Original citation:

Gillis, I. (2010). [Review of the book *Growing with Canada: The Émigré Tradition in Canadian Music* (2009), by Paul Helmer]. *Musicological Explorations*, 11, 142–146. <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/me/article/view/2270>

Downloaded from UVicSpace Research & Learning Repository

dspace.library.uvic.ca



**University
of Victoria**

Libraries

performances featured on this CD far outweigh the gratuitous nature of the liner notes.

What makes a composer ‘accessible’? Certainly, musical works can be accessible as a result of transparency and predictability. In the century that witnessed the invention of elevator-music, it was not uncommon for ‘audience-friendly’ music to be condemned as artistically suspect. Without proper consideration, the compositional style as exhibited on *Lament in the Trampled Garden* could easily be dismissed as pandering to a common denominator when compared to more avant-garde voices of his generation. However, this latest release proves that with clarity of intention and courageous simplicity, Marjan Mozetich’s music is both accessible and stimulating.

Michael Dias
University of Victoria

Paul Helmer. *Growing with Canada: The Émigré Tradition in Canadian Music*. Montreal, QC and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009. xii, 388 pp. ISBN 978-0-7735-3581-7

European exile studies have grown and advanced significantly on both sides of the Atlantic in the past decades. The tale that so many European artists took flight from Nazi Germany to start anew in the United States has been told many times. The story of the musicians whose impact on the American music scene (Korngold in the film industry; Schoenberg taking on political and religious works on the west coast; Hindemith at Yale) has been told and refined:

scholarship on these composers and their impact is well-developed by now, and continues to grow.

The story has been waiting to be told in Canada, and Paul Helmer's contribution to McGill's "Arts Insights" series admirably lays the foundation for that to take place. I keep returning to the notion of story, for Helmer's approach is essentially a multi-narrative one. The book comprises two parts, of two and five chapters, respectively, plus an introduction and epilogue.

The introduction serves as a critique of current exile studies. Helmer rightly points out the overwhelming favour that has been given those émigrés who left Europe in the prewar period, and also reminds us that people were leaving from more places than Germany, although Germany has taken centre stage in the scholarship. He does not, of course, exclude Germany from his study, but his scope extends to those who fled from Communist regimes in addition to those whose motivation for leaving was National Socialism. To paint a fuller picture than one normally sees, the cut-off exit dates for his study are 1933 and 1948. The introduction also provides a concise summary of "Canadian Immigration Policy and Practice" – an effective section-heading style that Helmer employs throughout the book.

The first chapter describes the spread and reach of totalitarianism in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s. Germany, Austria, the Baltic states, and Czechoslovakia and Hungary are attended in turn, along with their associated sooner-or-later-to-be Canadians. The cultural scene that these musicians had known and grew up in is described as rich but

troubled, and where they had established themselves, the musicians' careers are related summarily. The paths to Canada were as diverse as the people traveling them: many musicians spent time in other parts of Europe, the Far East, and the United States before arriving in Canada.

Chapter two tells the story of eleven "Camp Boys" – enemy aliens who were interred *en masse* in England in 1940 – whose Canadian careers began "behind barbed wire in the backwood of New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario." It presents a cultural-intellectual scene in a prison camp that, on its artistic merit alone, might well be the envy of many universities and cities today. The rich confluence and activity in trying circumstances of talented minds reminds one of Terezin (Theresienstadt), although the story of the "Camp Boys" ends much less graphically.

The third chapter establishes Canadian musical life in the 1920s through 1940s, including music education, performance, and academia. It is a stark contrast to Europe's richness, and is indicative of the youth of our country. The differences between Europe and Canada, and the small scale of the latter, both made it difficult for émigré musicians to adjust to their new environment and presented them great opportunity.

The fourth chapter primarily tells the story of two men, Arnold Walter and Helmut Blume, and their vast influence at the University of Toronto and McGill, respectively. In addition to being valuable for illuminating these men's remarkable talents as administrators and diplomats, this chapter is also of great worth for its overview of the post-secondary music tradition in Canada. Walter and Blume, Helmer

shows, are largely responsible for the hybrid system we now enjoy in Canada, whereby performance, composition, and musicology-theory are given equal footing and their practitioners rub shoulders.

Chapters five and six deal with the establishment of opera programs and the spread of influence with new hirings across the country. Given Helmer's roughly chronological approach, those who might be inclined to criticise his reinforcement of the Eastern Canadian tale of hegemony might charm their tongues. The story begins in the major centres of Montreal and Toronto, and as the influence of Walter, Blume, and others spreads, so does Helmer's scope. The final chapter examines the myriad influences these émigré musicians had outside of the academy, in positions as conductors, instrumentalists, adjudicators, promoters, and teachers.

A very personal colour comes through in the epilogue, which recaps some of the achievements of the émigré musicians in the study (twenty-one have been inducted into the Order of Canada) and relates the complex experiences of those who returned to Europe after the threat had lifted.

Helmer writes in an accessible, personal style (perhaps influenced by the many interviews he conducted), and his research is extremely thorough. The book is valuable as a humanist work in its own right, but is also of great worth to those in Canadian studies and exile studies in any field. The first appendix, a bibliography spanning a full forty pages, is invaluable as a reference and starting point for further research. The cover of the book presents us with the artistically grainy, cropped image of a conductor's hands amid a

void. It now lies in the hands of other scholars to paint the rest of the picture.

Iain Gillis
University of Victoria

Christina Petrowska Quilico: *3 Concerti. Concerto for piano and orchestra* by Alexina Louie, *Concerto No. 1 for piano and orchestra* by Violet Archer, and *Piano Concerto* by Larysa Kuzmenko. Centrediscs, 2010. CMC CD 15610.

This new release under the Centrediscs label is quite unique: it consists of three piano concerti by contemporary Canadian women composers, performed by a prominent female Canadian artist who is known for premiering and promoting new music alongside the more traditional Classical and Romantic canon. According to the liner notes, this project of women's piano concerti was the result of teaching graduate classes in gender and performance at York University, where Christina Petrowska Quilico wanted her students "to hear the brilliance of Canadian women composers, especially in live performance." These recordings of concerti by Alexina Louie, Violet Archer, and Larysa Kuzmenko seem so amazingly flawless that it is difficult to believe that they are, in fact, live performances.

As is typical of Louie's style, *Concerto for piano and orchestra* is a blend of eastern and western influences and is highly dramatic. Her piano music is particularly notable for its contrast of aggressively rhythmic chordal sections with incredibly fast