

Begins With the Oboe: A History of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. By Richard S. Warren. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. viii, 287 p., ill., ports. \$60.00 ISBN 0-8020-3588-4.

An alternate title for this work might be, *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. The recent financial troubles of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra are not a unique development in its almost century-old existence.

Richard S. Warren, who was the volunteer archivist of the TSO from 1976 until his death in 2001, says in his preface that "this book is intended as a history of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra: a chronicle of achievements, challenges, and outstanding events during the past eighty years. My aim...was to give the reader an enlightening and accessible insight into the Orchestra." He has succeeded insofar as this is the first substantive history of the orchestra. The five appendixes will be useful to researchers, who will discover lists of musicians, conductors (including those for the Toronto Youth Symphony Orchestra), Presidents of the Board, lists of Canadian works commissioned by the TSO since 1960, and a discography. The work also includes an index, a few footnotes and a short bibliography. The latter, however, does not include any of the earlier histories of the TSO, nor any relevant journal articles.

Unfortunately, Warren's book does not illuminate the reasons behind the TSO's problems nor does it provide an in-depth analysis of the symphony's development as one of Canada's foundational musical organizations.

Instead, *Begins with the Oboe* is a coffee-table chronicle and a very localized one at that. The chapters are organized and identified by the conductor's era, as if the conductor and his repertoire are the only factors that define the orchestra. Paragraph after paragraph is simply a description of conductors, repertoire, concert dates and the financial bottom line generated by these activities. For a work that is intended to be accessible, it is a very dry read. There are many formal photographs of the orchestra looking much the same from season to season and many portrait photographs of conductors. Nearly all of the photographs are black and white.

Warren mentions other Toronto arts organizations in passing, but does not provide any perspective on the Toronto Symphony's development within the Canadian arts community. *The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (1949-51)*, also known as the Massey Commission, a seminal document for Canada's cultural development, is not even mentioned. The Canada Council is mentioned only a few times, mainly for various decisions to cut funding or for its linking of funding to the programming of Canadian works. Even local politics which influenced the Symphony are glossed over. Warren describes the "Symphony Six" incident of 1951 when six TSO musicians were denied entry to the U.S. for a concert in Detroit and later dismissed from the

orchestra for not fulfilling their contractual agreement to play the out-of-town engagements. Presumably they were suspected of being Communist sympathizers, but Warren does not make this explicit. Why not? Why did the Board of the time decide that dismissing the musicians was a more ethical option than the orchestra simply refusing to play in the U.S., as did some European ensembles? What were the politics of the Board members that may have influenced this decision? Why did the Toronto Musicians Association agree with it? None of these questions are even raised, let alone answered.

Warren's history provides the bare facts about the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. It is to be hoped that future researchers will flesh out the organization's place in Canada's cultural history and provide some critical analysis of its achievements and problems. Libraries should purchase *Begins With the Oboe* because it is the first major TSO history. But they should also realize that it is only an exposition, while the development and recapitulation remain to be composed.

Lorna Young
Regis College
University of Toronto