

Sacred Choral Music / Choeurs profanes. Richard Johnson, editor. Ottawa: Canadian Musical Heritage Society, 1996. (The Canadian Musical Heritage; v. 17.) 276 p. \$49.99 ISBN 0-919883-24-9.

Oratorio and Cantata Excerpts / Extraits d'oratorios et de cantates. John Beckwith, editor. Ottawa: Canadian Musical Heritage Society, 1995. (The Canadian Musical Heritage; v. 18.) 297 p. \$49.99 ISBN 0-9199883-25-7.

Canada has a history rich in choral music. At the turn of the century, most Canadian towns and cities boasted at least one choral society; Montréal and Toronto had three. The choral society had begun to flourish in England in the latter half of the 18th century and was commonplace throughout Europe within a hundred years. North America followed suit and indigenous compositions by European-trained composers living in the United States and Canada began to appear among performances of established works like Handel's *Messiah* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.

Volumes 17 and 18 of *The Canadian Musical Heritage* series offer terrific insight into the history of choral music in Canada up until 1940. Like the others in the series, both volumes are laid out smartly, beginning with an historical summary of the genre under discussion followed by brief biographical notes on included composers; critical notes are provided for each piece, as is a complete bibliography of editorial sources. All text appears in English as well as French. In keeping with the editorial mission of the collection, pieces by both known and obscure composers are included, chosen on merit and historical significance.

One of the challenges in putting together a volume of secular choral music (vol. 17) is coming to grips with how to organize a fairly diverse body of work. The editor, Richard Johnson, has chosen to align the material into three main sections: arrangements of traditional tunes, accompanied part songs, and

unaccompanied part songs. Each of these larger categories is divided into subsets of mixed voices, high voices and low voices; these categorizations make for a very user-friendly collection.

Volume 18 (edited by John Beckwith) is a collection of oratorio and cantata excerpts. In compiling this volume of extended works, the editor was faced with the challenge of deciding what works to include and how to excerpt them - a daunting task heavily influenced by the constraints of space. It is unfortunate that two volumes could not have been devoted to presenting these larger works; the excerpts are enlightening, but one is left wondering how successful a given work is as a whole. The other concern, addressed thoroughly by the editor in the introduction, relates to the problem of distinguishing the two genres in question.

Volumes 17 and 18 are an excellent resource for the adventurous choral director. Many of the pieces included are well-crafted and display a creative flair for the setting of text as well as a knowledge of how to write for voices. Some of them are available in commercial print or can be obtained through other sources provided in the critical notes. These compilations are a valuable addition and provided an enlightening look at the brief but surprisingly well-stocked heritage of Canadian choral music.

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