

## Review

**George W. Lyon. *Community Music in Alberta: Some Good Schoolhouse Stuff!* Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1999. 156 pp. ISBN 189517832 (paperback)**

Music has always been an integral part of community life throughout Canada's history, and the book, *Community Music in Alberta*, makes a portion of this history readily accessible. The large soft-covered publication by George Lyon effectively documents a century of community musical activity in the province of Alberta through the careful use of photos and anecdotes. The book is 8.5 x 11.0 inches in size, and contains more than 300 black and white photos of musicians and musical venues, dating as far back as the 1890s. It is divided into ten large sections and ten small sections, each featuring a unique aspect of Alberta music. For example, the first large section deals with community halls and schools, situates their place in a changing society over a century, and describes the music played within their walls. One large section details the history of brass bands in the province while another features the native influence in mainstream culture. The ten smaller sections supplement the larger sections as they focus on more specific aspects of community music such as fiddle contests, making music in the home, and stories about particular musicians and orchestras.

Photographs dominate the book, supported by an interesting text that was developed from magazines, books, journals, community archives and local histories. The text and photos make the publication accessible to anyone with an interest in music. It can be equally read and enjoyed by music teachers, professional musicians, university lecturers, or working people. George Lyon, while focusing on Alberta, reminds us that music has played a significant part in the social and cultural history of Canada and has always been part of community life. His book provides a window into a piece of Canada's musical past. There are stories of local choirs, orchestras, school concerts, house parties, tent shows, dance halls, radio broadcasts, and other community events. There is a story about a dance in a country school where a blizzard forced the participants to stay for more than 24 hours while the musicians played on. There is the clarinet player who regularly walked for more than a day to play at weddings and parties, and it was common knowledge in rural Alberta that housewarming dances were an easy and pleasant way to smooth a newly laid floor.

The stories are informative and entertaining, but they are totally overshadowed by the outstanding collection of photographs. The photos, ranging from one-half to one-tenth of a page in size, provide an important and inclusive look at Canadian music history with clear images of musicians, audiences, and places. There is a photo of a young native fiddler, impeccably attired in a vest and dress shirt, playing while sitting on a chair in an open doorway, circa 1900; and a photo of a bagpiper leading a group of labour protesters in 1932. There is a photo of a wedding procession on a rural road in the 1920s led by two violin players, an accordion player, and a cello player who has the instrument strapped to him so that he could play as he strolled. Paul's Orchestra, a four-piece ensemble that included a drum kit, a harp, a trumpet and a violin, is pictured standing on a wooden platform in Battle River in 1910. From 1935, there is a photo of the all-female dance band, The Rhythm Queens, posed beside their touring car. Traditional music is well represented with an assortment of photos showing fiddle, banjo,

and guitar players entertaining at sawmills, lumbercamps, farms, and picnics. Typical of these photos are the two banjo players sitting on a porch in Turner Valley in the 1920s and a banjo player supplying music while dinner cooked at the Jarboe Ranch, early in the century. The photos are the most important part of this publication because they provide a definitive pictorial history of Alberta music over the past century. They enable us to see the actual dance halls and housewarming parties, family bands and school choirs, minstrel shows and fiddle contests, radio shows, and music at the Calgary Stampede.

George Lyon has tried to include everything and everyone, but to do so is difficult, and the attempt to categorize the photos and stories has led to some imbalances. Dividing the book into twenty sections of varying lengths tends to chop up the pictures and text in an awkward manner, especially since several of the sections appear to blend with each other. A few of the large sections also seem to be incomplete, for example, the attempt to include professional musicians in one unique section has resulted in some notable musicians not being included. As well, there may be a little too much emphasis on commercial country music, possibly at the expense of other traditional musical styles. However, these are very minor criticisms. Overall, *Community music in Alberta* is a well researched and nicely compiled collection of stories and photos that provides a descriptive insight into Alberta's community musical history.

Community music is part of Albertan and Canadian history, and such a series of photographs and stories could be, and maybe should be, collected from within each province and territory. George Lyon has shown the importance of home-grown music to community life and development. This book emphasizes the fact that music is not the exclusive property of universities and music schools, record companies and concert promoters, radio and television stations, music teachers and scholars, professional musicians and unions. Lyon presents the evidence to support the idea that music is an integral part of Canadian heritage and culture. *Community music in Alberta* can be read and enjoyed by anyone with an interest in music. It is a refreshing addition to Canadian music literature and deserves to be in university, college, and public libraries.

**Allan Kirby**