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**John Gilmore. *Swinging in Paradise: the Story of Jazz in Montréal*. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1988, 322 pp.**

**Robert Witmer**

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copies and originals (where extant), and brief biographical information on the composers.

Ford's editorial eye is sharp and numerous mistakes in the original copies have been corrected in clear and logical ways in the facsimile reproductions. Editorial emendations have extended to the choice of variant readings and to the completion of missing lines of accompaniment in manuscript works, thereby rendering these works in a form conducive to modern performance. One can appreciate the difficulty of selecting appropriate examples from a repertoire strongly tinged by Victorian sentimentality; however, further information on the methods used for selection (beyond the editor's statement that the volume is a 'distillation of a repertoire of over 300 short sacred choral works' and the general editorial aims and methods which are reprinted in each volume in the series) would have been beneficial. All but two of the 46 works chosen for the edition emanate from composers situated in Ontario and Quebec (perhaps not surprising given the distribution of population prior to 1920), and music from the Anglican tradition (the reprinting of six works by Healey Willan will be welcomed by many) dominates the section devoted to Protestant music. Church musicians looking for performing materials may question the decision to combine music from both the Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions in one volume.

Visually, the large format of the volume produces a generally favourable impression; however, the commitment to facsimile reproduction results in some problems of print definition and consistency that were presumably unavoidable. Indeed, the improvements seen in the transcriptions of works in manuscript or for which no suitable published copy could be found are sufficient to make one wish that all of the materials had been transcribed.

Although some of the repertoire in *Sacred Choral Music II* will appear dated today, the volume preserves examples of the best from the era in a source that is both scholarly and practical. The preservation of our musical heritage is a matter of importance, and it is reassuring to see that considerable care and attention to detail has gone into this project.

P.F. Rice

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JOHN GILMORE. *Swinging in Paradise: the Story of Jazz in Montréal*. Montréal: Véhicule Press, 1988, 322 pp.

John Gilmore begins his exhaustively researched and engagingly written account of jazz in Montreal from the World War I period to the 1970s by asserting that: 'For almost half a century, more jazz was made in Montreal than anywhere else in Canada' (p. 13). That claim cannot be disputed, at least not

at present, since histories of jazz in other parts of Canada are as yet nonexistent. The makings of such accounts are present in Miller's two volumes on Canadian jazz musicians (1987 and 1982) and in McNamara's and Lomas' overview of Canadian dance bands (1973) but Gilmore is 'first on the block' with a regionally delimited study.

Gilmore provides an admirable model for anyone who might attempt a history of jazz in Toronto, Vancouver, or wherever. He has culled an impressively wide range of documentary source materials and conducted numerous telephone and face-to-face interviews in the preparation of his study. (In this regard, the bibliography of *Swinging in Paradise* is deceptively cursory: only the major sources are listed there, many others being carried in the endnotes, which run to 23 pages.) He lends an immediacy and authenticity to his account by quoting his informants/subjects extensively, and he includes numerous photographs of musicians, venues, and reproductions of promotional material and memorabilia. In sum, in terms of ferreting out and exhibiting the 'evidence,' Gilmore's study is first-rate.

*Swinging in Paradise* is a descriptivist work — 'another territory heard from' (to paraphrase Geertz 1973: 23); but a number of the author's underlying assumptions are nonetheless in evidence. For example, Gilmore is of the opinion that 'Canadian trends in music follow closely those in the United States, though generally at a cautious distance' (p. 114). This staunchly diffusionist view, in combination with Gilmore's tacit general allegiance to the 'jazz is black music' camp of jazz scholarship, results in a history that is — to the World War I period at least — essentially the story of black American expatriate musicians bringing 'the sounds of the latest black music' (p. 43) to Montreal. While there is undoubtedly a lot of truth to this, and it is a compelling tale, somehow it is just too pat, especially when considered against the well-documented biracial nature of contemporaneous jazz activities south of the border.

A major strength of *Swinging in Paradise* stems from Gilmore's conviction that 'an awareness of . . . social conditions can deepen our understanding . . . and enhance our appreciation' [of Montreal's jazz and jazz musicians] (p. 13). He is meticulous and intelligent in locating his topic in a broad and well-sketched social and cultural context, and in showing the place of jazz in the multifarious professional (and personal) lives of its Montreal practitioners — most of whom, as is pointed out frequently, could not depend solely on jazz for their livelihood.

Gilmore's occasional brief forays into 'impressionist ethnography' (Van Maanen 1988: chapter 5) disclose, in an often poignant way, the limitations and tribulations that bedevil the oral history enterprise. For example, one of Gilmore's elderly subjects, bandleader Myron Sutton, disclaims: 'I haven't got much to tell you' (p. 64); clippings in Sutton's scrapbook lack dates and citations (p. 73), and browsing them with Gilmore is 'not enough to jog a memory' (*ibid.*); 'he doesn't really remember the details' (p. 84) — and so on.

Luckily for us, Gilmore was able to supplement his sometimes uninformative interviews with a wealth of archival information.

In a book as wide-ranging and groundbreaking as this, there are bound to be a number of assertions and interpretations that test one or another reader's credulity. For example, Gilmore has John Philip Sousa's 'sixty member, *all-black* concert band' (p. 30; italics added) appearing in Montreal in 1918. This sounds like a boner to me, but since there is no citation, Gilmore's reportage can neither be easily dismissed, nor confirmed. Elsewhere (p. 35) we read that Montreal's white and black musicians personally helped each other with their respective musical weaknesses during the 1920s. The evidence for this assertion is circumstantial at best. In addition, it perpetuates unfortunate racial stereotypes (black musicians lacked reading skills and technical proficiency, while white musicians lacked a jazz 'feel').

The final chapters have an elegaic tone, for it is Gilmore's perception that the late-1960s and 1970s witnessed the 'disintegration of a homogeneous jazz community in Montreal' (p. 230), and he feels duty-bound to 'attempt to explain [its] demise' (p. 13). His account of the disappearance of one after another jazz performance venue under the impact of a variety of social and musical forces makes for grim reading, and forces recognition of the aptness of his opening headnote, taken from Baudelaire: ' . . . the delicious past shines through the somber present' (p. iv).

For this reviewer, a book about music is a success if it engenders a strong desire to actually hear (or re-hear) the music/musicians under discussion. By this criterion, I find *Swinging in Paradise* to be a successful book. How sad, then, that there are so very few readily available sound recordings of Montreal's jazzmen, past or present. Until this situation is rectified, the history of jazz in Montreal — or elsewhere in Canada, for that matter — will remain not so much the history of a music, but rather the history of musical lives.

Robert Witmer

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