

***Community Music in Alberta: Some Good Schoolhouse Stuff!* By George W. Lyon. (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1999.156 pp., bibliography, index, \$29.95, ISBN 1-895176-83-2, pbk.)**

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Figure 283, which is toward the end of this book, is captioned “Ann Beaver and the Stony Indian All Girls Brass Band at the Calgary Stampede, 1944.” About sixteen women, mostly young, stand, holding instruments — tubas, trombones, other brass instruments, a snare drum. It must be Ann Beaver positioned in the front, a bass drum resting on the ground at her feet. Wearing their berets at jaunty angles, the women are in uniform — dark trousers, light jackets, dark neckties. Two teepees contain the sides of the image, with the roofs of frame buildings filling in behind. This is provocative, enigmatic. Native women, European instruments, a staged venue, ersatz military garb, a moment in time both ordinary in its quotidian qualities and mysterious in its cultural complications.

Opening the book to the middle, I find figure 162, “The band at the Hughendon Community Hall, 1926.” Two men stand, in suits, one holding a violin, one a saxophone. A woman is seated at a piano; she looks a little like a flapper, with a scarf or shawl on her shoulders. Streamers hang overhead. Each person wears a headband, perhaps of crepe paper. All three look as if they’ve been celebrating for a while. Earlier, figure 24 shows “A Filipino string quartet which also toured the Chatauqua circuit during the 1930s.” The four young men wear white shirts and old fashioned ties — bows at the neck, with ribbons trailing beneath. They hold a tenor banjo, a guitar, what appears to be an upright string bass with a round sound hole (not the more typical f-holes), and a mandolin, cuatro, or tiple-like instrument of more strings than the small image allows me to count.

Community Music in Alberta: Some Good Schoolhouse Stuff! is the scrapbook no one person would ordinarily have compiled. Slightly more than three hundred black and white images chronicle music in everyday life across Alberta, generally ranging between the early years of the twentieth century through the 1960s or so. The pictures come from a variety of sources, many of them published local histories. George W. Lyon, for whom this seems to have been a real labour of love, loosely links the photographs in a narrative of sorts, using his own interviews, historical and ethnographic sources, and an admirably broad knowledge of music in one part of the world. The book is loosely organized in chapters covering such topics as the genres of musical

entertainments — Chataquas, plays, blackface minstrelsy — that came through local communities, the primacy of dance music in local settings, the fact that bands tended to be *brass* bands, wedding music, the presence of commercial country music, the participation of Native people in “mainstream” culture, and the importance of the voice as music-maker.

I’m reminded, in a very general way, of Ruth Finnegan’s 1989 *Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town*. Finnegan’s book is an ethnographic overview of the wide variety of musical activities in contemporary Milton Keynes, ranging from networks of classical musicians to folk revivalist clubs, and it gives readers a useful understanding of the complexity and varieties of the worlds of music one encounters in a given place under the conditions of multicultural Western modernity (Milton Keynes, of course, seems to have been tending toward postmodernity). George W. Lyons doesn’t promise that his work is systematic, and Alberta is a dramatically larger canvas than Finnegan’s Milton Keynes. But like Finnegan, Lyons gives readers reason to pause and think about the sheer volume, no pun intended, of music in particular places in particular times.

The photographs are nearly all in excellent condition — perhaps they’ve been digitally restored. A great number of quotations from musicians or other authors — again, typically from local histories — add context. Lyon is respectful and enthusiastic in his discussions, especially when he knows, or knew, the musicians himself. A book like this might fall into the trap of quaintness, exoticizing and romanticizing the past, but Lyon’s enthusiasm never verges on the sentimental, and it never gets the best of him. Early on he tells readers that styles, repertoires, and communities exist in complicated interactions, and that point is clear throughout the book. There’s not much that one could call “analysis” here, and the book tends to amble around its subjects rather than drive home any particular large points. A book like this is likely to have a primarily regional readership. But it’s a pleasure to read through *Community Music in Alberta* and to contemplate the frequently intriguing illustrations as a way of reminding yourself of the vitality and diversity of music in local settings no matter where they may be.

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