

Letter to the Editor

John Beckwith

Volume 28, numéro 2, 2008

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/029965ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/029965ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités
canadiennes

ISSN

1911-0146 (imprimé)

1918-512X (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Beckwith, J. (2008). Letter to the Editor. *Intersections*, 28(2), 138–139.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/029965ar>

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The substantial review by Claudine Caron (*Intersections* 28, no. 1, 191–197) of Elaine Keillor’s *Music in Canada* raises several critical issues but ends by praising the book for its “form, and the clarity and pertinence of its information.” I have enjoyed working with Dr. Keillor on a number of musical projects over a period of many years, and I greatly respect her many achievements, but found shortcomings in the book, elegantly produced though it certainly is.

Since I no longer teach, the advantage of the “sidebar” treatment is lost on me. I find it a distraction. The sidebar on the music of the Children of Peace at Sharon, Ont., (94–98) contains a number of inaccuracies, as does, unfortunately, much of the literature on this nineteenth-century movement. I feel badly about that, having spent a good deal of time and effort on the Sharon material, which I love. Another disappointment, which similarly hurts because I’m familiar with the area, is the section on nineteenth-century “Sacred Music” (112–114); it’s in fact rather a jumble. Two tunes are mentioned at the outset as being “of note,” though we’re not told why. That “the melody is in the tenor” is no particular distinction if you know the early tunebooks. Davidson is said to have “followed Burnham’s practises [*sic*]” but the author doesn’t mention what those practices were. There is reference to the influence of a “harmonic style” but no illustration either of that style’s features, or of the “characteristics associated with the first New England School,” and no explanation of that (I believe) less than universally known term (Hitchcock speaks of it with a capital for “First”). The distinction between “tune book” and “hymn book” is not explained (they’re not synonymous), and the author mentions a French-language tune book without finding its success as a Quebec Protestant publication “of note.” Slightly later, the term “florid singing” is introduced, but we are left in the dark as to what it is. Etcetera. In my teaching, I tried to relate the Canadian story to what happened in the U.S., using the researches of George Pullen Jackson, Irving Lowens, Allen P. Britton, Nicholas Temperley, Richard Crawford, Karl Kroeger, Nym Cooke, and others. It’s an area I developed real fondness for. I hope those who teach it will not use this book as a guide.

Similar discrepancies arise in references to psalmody and hymnody occurring elsewhere in the book. The illustration from *Judith Humphrey’s Book* (87) shows a famous Scottish hymn melody set to secular words. This oddity is not made clear in the text, and the words are too blurry to read. The tune appears with a transcription of the text in *Sing Out the Glad News* (Toronto 1987), 7, 10. Dr. Keillor’s brief account of hymn-tune adaptations (101) refers to “the American composer Lowell Mason,” although he was not an all-round composer as this implies but rather a music educator who wrote hymn tunes, some of which became very famous. Mason’s “considerable influence” was on the hymnal-

publishing industry, not on “notated repertoire” in general. The author says that “some of his publications include portions of large-scale choral works by composers such as Handel and Haydn,” and cites as Canadian examples four pieces in J. P. Clarke’s *Canadian Church Psalmsody*. It is unclear, I believe, that these are not choral arrangements but hymn tunes *based on* choruses by Handel and Haydn, a practice much used in the early decades of the nineteenth century (the “portions of” classical pieces used by Mason are part of the trend, though they didn’t inaugurate it).

Music in Canada includes as a bonus insert the CD played by Dr. Keillor called “Canadians at the Keyboard,” originally issued on the Carleton label, containing excerpts from various volumes of *The Canadian Musical Heritage*. Your reviewer lists it at the end of her review but doesn’t describe it or comment on it. Eleven of the thirty-six tracks are taken from volume 5 of that series, for which I was the editor. These are examples of hymnody and psalmsody. Playing them on the organ represents, as Dr. Keillor’s notes suggest, one way in which in earlier times they may have been appreciated (“in homes ranging from small sod huts, log cabins, to large stone and brick mansions”), but this distorts their origin as pieces meant to be sung, and makes them in my view quite unsuitable as models for study by the readers of her book. In particular, the historically unique tune “Singing School,” by Stephen Humbert, makes no sense without its original text (also by Humbert) and without voices to demonstrate its “fuguing” style. (The important term “fuguing” is neither illustrated nor explained in the text, despite this example on the CD.) Two of the eleven tunes, “Canada” and “Port Hope,” are incorrectly attributed in the CD repertoire list, although the proper attributions appear in both the text and the author’s program notes for the CD. In that list also the noted early-twentieth-century hymnologist James Edmund Jones is wrongly referred to as “James J. Jones.”

Appendix C (332–335) is a list of Canadian tunebooks and hymnals, “compiled by John Beckwith.” The implication is that I made this compilation at the author’s request, whereas she never contacted me about it, and I was quite surprised to see this inaccurate acknowledgement. The list is based on three compilations I made in the late 1980s published respectively in *Sing Out the Glad News*, *CMH5*, and an article in *American Music* (6, no. 1). It contains omissions, additions, and errors. Dr. Keillor has apologized for the evident oversight regarding the use of my name and my material. This part of the book, too, has to be used with caution.

JOHN BECKWITH
PROFESSOR EMERITUS
FACULTY OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO