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Hall, Frederick, ed. *The Canadian Musical Heritage: Songs I to English Texts / Chansons I sur des Textes Anglais*. Vol. 3, Ottawa: Canadian Musical Heritage Society, 1985

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HALL, FREDERICK, ed. *The Canadian Musical Heritage: Songs I to English Texts/ Chansons I sur des Textes Anglais*. Vol. 3, Ottawa: Canadian Musical Heritage Society, 1985.

This anthology contains a selection of 65 songs written during the nineteenth century by composers resident or soon-to-be-resident in Canada. In his lengthy introduction to the volume, the editor, Frederick Hall, provides the social and historical background for this music, incorporating discussion of individual songs found in the collection. Space does not permit a full summary of this excellent introduction, but a few points might be noted. Hall states that the song was the most popular type of composition published in Canada in the nineteenth century. It was “the most portable form of music making. People performed parlor songs and ballads in their homes and occasionally attended concerts” (p. vi). He notes that “the main developments of solo song in Canada began in the 1830s and 1840s when Canadian literary journals included music” (p. vii). With regard to texts, Hall observes that “composers selected verses from current popular publications of poems or from literary periodicals to which they subscribed” and that “poets residing in Canada also contributed texts for songs” although very few major poets (e.g. Byron, Shelley) were set to music by Canadian composers, particularly during the pre-Confederation period (p. vii).

The “Introduction” is followed by a section containing brief biographical notes on all the poets and composers represented in the collection. Concluding this verbal part of the volume are five pages of critical notes on the individual songs and a bibliography.

In the main body of the anthology, the editor has included 24 pre-Confederation songs which he divides into three categories: patriotic songs (8 examples), popular songs (2 examples) and art songs (14 examples). The patriotic songs are period pieces of more historical than musical interest; it would be difficult to imagine a place for them in today’s recital programmes. The line which Hall draws between popular songs and art songs seems a very slim one at times; many of the pieces he assigns to the latter category are quite unsophisticated, based largely on I-IV-V harmony and commonplace melodic and accompanimental figures. On the other hand, such songs as Stephen Codman’s “The Fairy Song”, H.E. Gilbert’s “Where shall our song be sung”, and Samuel Warren’s “The Wings of Song” display a more imaginative use of the piano, more interesting melody and harmony, and some use of through-composed structure. These songs, together with one or two of the simple strophic art songs, such as J.P. Clarke’s “O could to me” and James Caldwell’s “The Raven” might be of interest to today’s singers.

The above three categories are also employed for the 41 songs included from the post-Confederation period: nine patriotic songs, 13 popular songs, and 19 art songs. The patriotic songs include Alexander Muir's famous "The Maple Leaf For Ever" as well as such quaint oddities as Henry Sefton's "Lacrosse, Our National Game" and Oscar Telgmann's "Our Premier". The popular song group ranges from temperance songs and a sacred solo through love songs to one about the Ottawa fire. These provide insight into the literary and musical tastes and outlook of later 19th-century Canada, although, as with the pre-Confederation songs, many would be of little interest to present-day performers. Several of the 19 art songs are of substance and merit reviving, though many others seem more akin to those in the "popular" group in that their musical idiom is saturated with the sentimental parlour-song clichés of the time. Highly recommended are the two songs of W.O. Forsyth, "Frühlingsabend" and "Trust"; these are probably the highpoint of the anthology. Also noteworthy are the five songs of Clarence Lucas, Paul Ambrose's charming, almost Schubertian "Rose-Bud", and Charles Harriss' "A Brigand Bold" which would make a daring recital encore for any baritone.

A puzzling omission in this collection of songs written in the nineteenth century by composers "resident or soon-to-be-resident in Canada" is the group of three songs ("Sonnet," "Farewell," "Serenade") composed in January, 1899, by Healey Willan to poems by Thomas Hood. These are quite the equal of any in the anthology and better than most.

*Songs I to English Texts* is a well-produced and useful volume, preserving and making available an important part of Canada's musical heritage. The anthology is obviously of value to musicologists and historians; it should also be of value to singers and singing teachers, for it makes available in one place at least a dozen songs which deserve revival. In our present obsession with the avant-garde in Canadian music, it is important for us to be reminded that there are works of substance dating from earlier times.

F.R.C. Clarke