

Little Did I Know: A Sister's Memoir of George Little, Musician. By Edna H. Knock. Brandon, MB: Philomena Press, 2002. 242 pages, ill. \$24.95. ISBN 0-9730603-0-1

Musician and educator Edna Knock has written a memoir of her elder brother, George Little, the internationally known conductor and pedagogue. *Little Did I Know* reverently traces the personal and professional life of the founder of the Montreal Bach Choir and co-founder of Canadian Amateur Musicians/Musiciens amateurs du Canada (CAMMAC). Using a blend of reminiscence and biography, Knock outlines her brother's career by drawing on interviews and correspondence with Little (who died in 1995), his family, friends, and professional associates as well as some published and unpublished material.

Knock's 167-page memoir divides into six parts. These sections are organized in a somewhat uneven mixture of chronological and topical styles. The first two parts move sequentially through Little's early years, family life, education, and work experience. Parts three and four describe the apex of Little's career by focusing on his conducting, performing, and educational activities with various groups and organizations. Rather confusingly, part five then revisits the same period by decade, while part six describes Little's retirement and poignant battle with Parkinson's disease. The memoir also includes fourteen pages of photographs and four appendices that contain a sample programme and concert review, bibliography, discography and filmography.

The first chapter describes the Little family's French Protestant and English Protestant background and the importance of music to the household. Her account of the musical influence of both cultures on the

Little family and the ways in which these were manifested is fascinating. This musical heterogeneity formed the cornerstone of Little's subsequent career as a teacher, arts administrator, performer and conductor, as well as his lifetime passion for making music in the home, music in school, and music in church.

Part three of the memoir details Little's contribution to musical life in Montreal in the post-World War II era. In 1951, he formed the Montreal Bach Choir, a thirty-five-voice group that gave an average of ten concerts a year until the mid-sixties. The choir performed a wide range of early music in addition to the works of contemporary composers. It made nine recordings and was featured in the National Film Board production, *Music From Montreal* (1962). The choir also traveled extensively, including to Europe and Japan. Out of the Montreal Bach Choir, Little formed the sixteen-voice George Little Singers and the quartet, Le Petit Ensemble Vocal, which performed early music for the CBC and Radio Canada respectively.

It is disappointing that Knock—a musician who frequently performed with these groups—does not provide more insight into Little's approach to musical content and style. There is no discussion or critique of extant recordings of his ensembles. As interest in this rich period of Montreal's music history continues to grow, a more detailed analysis of these groups and their part in the early music movement will be required.¹

¹See, for example, Kelly Rice's recent compilation CD of performances of the Renaissance

A persistent theme in twentieth century early music revivals has been the development of audiences through amateur participation.² CAMMAC was founded in 1953 in an effort to counteract musical audience “passivity fostered by advances in broadcasting, recording, and television” (p. 79). By offering courses in choral singing and recorder ensemble performance, and lectures in the history and theory of music, the Little family reflected and participated in similar

revivalist movements in England, France, Germany, and the United States. Because Knock’s book is a personal memoir rather than a history, it often lacks the cultural context for Little’s activities. However, historically sensitive readers of this work will undoubtedly appreciate Knock’s contribution as well as see the need for further research on this important period in Canadian music history.

Cynthia Leive
Marvin Duchow Music Library
McGill University

²For a thorough discussion, see Tamara Livingston, “Music Revivals: Toward a Generative Theory,” *Ethnomusicology* 43:1 (Winter 1999), 66-85.