

Louis Applebaum: A Passion for Culture. By Walter Pitman. Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2002. 512 pages, photos. \$39.99 (cloth). ISBN 1-55002-398-5

As the composer of some 250 film scores for the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), numerous American films including an Academy award nomination for *The Story of G.I. Joe* (1945), plus many CBC radio and television programs, a founding father of the Stratford Festival and the National Arts Centre, Executive Director of the Ontario Arts Council (1971-79), chair of the Applebaum-Hébert Committee, Louis Applebaum (1918-2000) undoubtedly deserves a comprehensive study. Walter Pitman, formerly Director of the Ontario Arts Council, has taken on this challenge and produced a detailed account, somewhat in the Horatio Alger mould of how this son of East European Jewish immigrants managed to impact many areas of the Canadian cultural scene to this day.

Although Pitman does not refer to Jews being banned from most parks in Ontario prior to 1950, he provides vivid illustrations of the subtle discrimination that Applebaum along with other Jewish youth faced at the time. Like many others who have contributed immensely to the arts in Canada, Applebaum attended Harbord Collegiate in Toronto, but his initial interest in creating music had been established by his piano teacher, Boris Berlin. A short period of training in New York encouraged Applebaum to turn his attention to writing music for film. Soon after his arrival back in Canada, he became the first music director of the NFB for which he created scores until 1960. Pitman has obviously taken the time to view some of these films and comment on how Applebaum's score effectively complements image and text. Unfortunately, no complete listing of the films is given. At one point he

loosely refers to some hundred (p. 53) being done, but even the NFB gives the number as over 250, and of course there were numerous Hollywood or New York-based films in addition. The "northernstars.ca" Web site lists forty-one films along with the comment: "Although not impossible, it would be extremely difficult to catalogue every Louis Applebaum composition. This listing is but a small representation of his considerable output."

This book has been based almost exclusively on numerous personal interviews and a thorough combing of the Louis Applebaum *fonds* located at York University. Accordingly, these sources have provided detailed, blow-by-blow accounts of Applebaum's negotiations during difficult battles such as those of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee and the merger of the two performing rights organizations, CAPAC and PROCAN, into SOCAN. Surely the composer's papers would yield the basis of a catalogue that would be more extensive than the fifty-eight films presently listed on the NFB Web site. It is disastrous that this book contains no attempt at providing a catalogue of Applebaum's output. Indeed, even the organization of the index is confusing. Within the text it seems the decision was made to place the titles of stand-alone compositions within quotation marks while names of films, radio and television programs for which scores were written are italicized. This distinction is not retained in the index which seems to have started out being arranged by genre, but in the end became considerably muddled. There are separate index entries for CBC radio and

television programs, but many of these also appear in the list under "Applebaum, Louis: MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS." The fifty-nine Stratford productions for which Applebaum wrote seem to be jumbled in with everything else, although the text emphasizes that these were uniquely written for that location, including the four separate settings of *Hamlet*.

Entitling a chapter "I want to be remembered as a composer," the author has not even given dates for all of the stand-alone compositions, their scoring, or availability as publications. Pitman does state that the Canadian Music Centre does not have all of his compositions, but this book will not help the musician who wishes to locate works or even the interested reader to find relevant recordings. Occasionally a recording is referred to, but no details are given. For example, on page 366 there seems to be a reference to the CD *Sweet Airs That Give Delight: Forty Seasons of Music from the Stratford Festival* (Attic ACD 1378), but no title or information is given. *Fanfare: The Stratford Music of Louis Applebaum* (ERAD 269/Marquis) probably had not been released when the book went to press, but there is no mention of the recording *from the mountains rising* (Unical UC-CD9503), which includes Applebaum's *Suite of Miniature Dances*, a work praised several times within the text. Because there have been more live performances of Applebaum's *Fanfares* at the Stratford Festival than any other Canadian composition apart from the national anthem, the lack of a properly presented discography is doubly regrettable.

Speaking of the national anthem, I was shocked to find that its composer's name, Lavallée, was misspelt within the text and in

the index. However, other composers or prominent persons in music often suffered the same fate: Lukas instead of Lucas; Macmillan for MacMillan; Kallmann; Kasemets; and Copland among others. Indeed in one photo, Aaron Copland is identified as Igor Stravinsky! On page 399 reference is made to Murray Adaskin but his place of residence was Victoria, not Vancouver. Other typographical errors are frequent such as wrong forms of a verb or adjective, seemingly missing connectives, and superfluous repetitions. The resultant incongruous syntax often disturbed the otherwise lively if at times wordy presentation.

Because Pitman has not always consulted existing complementary materials, he tends to overstate the significance of certain developments. The information regarding the "Composer-tron" developed by Ken Kendall in Ottawa should have at least made reference to the work of Hugh Le Caine who created the first voltage-controlled electronic instrument (now called a synthesizer) in 1945, also in Ottawa. Gayle Young, in her study of Le Caine (1989), describes Kendall's "drawn sound" technique, which fascinated Applebaum in the mid-1940s. Pitman makes no reference to LeCaine although they were obviously acquaintances as Applebaum was responsible for bringing Le Caine into the Canadian League of Composers. The author also frequently refers to the close relationship between Applebaum and John Weinzweig, but it seems Pitman did not consult my own study of the latter (1994). If he had, he would have discovered that Lazare Saminsky had actually come to Canada in 1942 to explore Canadian music, not in 1949, and that Saminsky's book was published in 1949, not 1951 (p. 486).

In spite of these reservations, Pitman has indeed made a very convincing case for the enormous contributions of Louis Applebaum as a music creator, an administrator, and advocate of the importance of the arts in education and cultural life generally. Above all, he worked tirelessly to improve the lot of his

fellow composers and performing musicians in Canada.

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Works Cited

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