

***Music for Silent Film: A Guide to North American Resources.*** By Kendra Preston Leonard. Middleton, WI: co-published by A-R Editions and the Music Library Association, 2016. (MLA Index and Bibliography Series; no. 39) xviii, 277 pp. ISBN 978-0-89579-835-0.

There has been a growing interest in silent film and silent-film music in recent years along with a growing availability of scores, individual pieces, and documentation. This interest has made it important to have a reference resource with information on the primary sources (the music itself) and the secondary sources (articles and books). Kendra Preston Leonard's *Music for Silent Film: A Guide to North American Resources* addresses this need by presenting the major resources about silent-film music in one volume that can be used by performers, scholars, and enthusiasts. As Leonard notes in the preface, the book contains "information on how to find music, publications from the period about how and what to play for the movies, and scholarship about the music used for silent cinema" (viii).

Leonard's book follows a simple and logical organization. In part 1, she assembles lists of archives and libraries that house surviving early movie music as well as publications from the period about how and what to play for the movies. This includes instructional books for piano and organ, photoplay albums with collections of music appropriate for film accompaniment, interviews and biographies with silent film accompanists who had direct experience of the practices, and articles offering advice, cues, suggestions, opinions, and philosophies of accompaniment.

Part 2 provides details on more recent publications devoted to the history and analysis of the music used for silent cinema. This includes scholarly books, reference guides, source readings, theses, and articles. Leonard prefaces each section and subsection with brief overviews to help guide readers through the material. Additionally, each entry is accompanied by an annotative description of the materials. The final quarter of the book comprises an index offering multiple search options that include a name index, a title index (articles, chapters, and books), a film title index, and a subject index. The lists of materials, especially the primary sources, and the detailed indexing makes Leonard's book an essential resource that will guide readers to an enormous body of music and literature related to silent film.

Although the book is extensive in the range of materials it covers, Leonard's use of "North American" in the title is problematic and misleading. The book's emphasis is clearly on the United States, with Canada largely overlooked. Moreover, since the book includes English-language sources only, Mexico and French Canada are excluded completely. After searching the guide thoroughly, I identified only four Canadian sources. These consist of two archival collections, a book chapter, and a dissertation. I was also unable to locate a single Canadian film among the approximately 2,400



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films listed in the film title index. This small number of Canadian sources could possibly be attributed to the nature of the topic. The Canadian film industry, then as now, was dwarfed by the American industry and it seems clear that many of the practices and the repertoire used for American films were widely available to Canadian musicians and used to accompany both American and Canadian film screenings in Canada. However, it seems more likely that the paucity of Canadian sources is due to Leonard's lack of familiarity with Canadian libraries and archives.

When I contacted Leonard to inquire about the book's Canadian resources, she responded with a detailed description of her efforts to find Canadian materials. These included searching earlier publications listing silent film resources, consulting silent film music scholars, searching for Canadian-specific periodicals from the silent film era, contacting silent film-related organizations such as the Toronto Silent Film Festival and the Toronto Theatre Organ Society, searching through the collections available through [archivescanada.ca](http://archivescanada.ca), and, finally, searching information and contacting librarians directly at various Canadian university, college, regional, and municipal library, archive, and historical society sites. Her efforts led either to suggestions to search American collections or were frustrated by difficulties with search engines that did not allow searches to be limited to "media type: music score" or did not tag items as being for silent film. Her conclusion was that "while there may be tremendous resources for silent film music scholarship at the Bibliothèque et Archives Canada/Library and Archives Canada and in other Canadian archives and libraries, there does not currently appear to be a way to identify them."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it appears that Leonard did not make site visits to any of the Canadian archives and none of the eleven people she thanks in the book's acknowledgements are based in Canada. Greater familiarity with Canadian institutions would certainly have led to additional sources. For example, Shana Anderson's 2013 Ph.D. dissertation, "[Ideal Performance Practice for Silent Film](#)," which is listed in Leonard's book, is based on a collection of cue sheets, now housed in the University of Ottawa's Silent Film Music Collection, which belonged to the Toronto musician, A. E. Witham. This collection is not listed among the resources in Leonard's book.

The omissions in Leonard's book point not so much to shortcomings, but rather to the difficulties in documenting an immense repertoire that has been lost or overlooked and is difficult to locate and catalogue. Although there is very little on a distinctly Canadian repertoire, the resources listed in the guidebook hold enormous potential for new research into this repertoire. It is a valuable first effort that sets the stage for further inquiry that will augment our understanding of silent film music to demonstrate the ways in which this music commented on the values and tastes of the era.

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1. Kendra Preston Leonard, e-mail message to author, November 4, 2016.