
Mary Parkinson
Third-Year Student (Bachelor of Arts, Music and Biology)
School of Fine Art and Music, University of Guelph, CANADA

The vicious Nazi and Communist regimes that governed Europe during the 1930’s and 1940’s displaced millions of non-Aryans, and exiled these individuals to countries and cultures with which they were completely unfamiliar. Paul Helmer’s monograph, Growing with Canada: The Émigré Tradition in Canadian Music, focuses on the Jewish individuals who fled Germany, the Baltic States, and other European countries before, during, and after the Second World War, eventually establishing themselves on Canadian soil. Helmer explores the contributions these individuals made to Canadian music and to music education establishments nationwide and turns to specific stories to illustrate that Jewish émigrés were a key component in the development of Canadian musical culture. Helmer also attempts to prove that individuals who were forced from their homelands due to circumstances beyond their control should be viewed as émigrés rather than exiles. Helmer explains that the term exile retains a negative connotation, arguing that the people discussed in his book did not all perceive themselves as exiles, but rather as individuals who, although driven from their homes, faced the alternative with a sense of adventure and opportunity.

Helmer opens Growing with Canada by illustrating the horrific realities that Jewish individuals endured within Europe during the Nazi and Communist regimes. Almost instantly, Helmer directs his attention to the fate of music in
Europe during the Second World War, and then narrows the discussion to the lives and music of Jewish European musicians. Although Helmer supplies a brief depiction of the “enslavement of art to political ends” (5) and the role of music in totalitarian Europe, the narrative quickly gives way to a focus on the lives of musicians rather then the music they were producing. Helmer’s treatment of music’s role in political statements and the ‘Germinzation’ of music in Nazi Germany relates directly to concepts presented in Michael Kater’s extensive book, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich*, which focuses on the fate of Jewish music in Nazi Germany. In *The Twisted Muse*, Kater, unlike Helmer, thoughtfully combines both a musician’s personal experiences and the effect that these experiences had on the musician’s compositions. Brigid Cohen’s essay “Musical Modernism Beyond the Nation” is also an example of scholarly writing that encompasses both personal and musical biographies, focusing on how encounters in different countries and cultures shaped the music of the exile Stephan Wolpe. Perhaps Helmer could have created a broader spectrum of understanding for the reader if he had chosen to discuss the musical contributions of the émigrés he focused on, rather than only treating their institutional and social contributions. In this way, a reader of *Growing with Canada* could understand how a musician’s music contributed to the shaping of Canadian culture, rather than just their personalities, political endeavors, and other social interactions.

The first part of *Growing with Canada*, entitled “Europe,” is subdivided into two chapters, “Facing Totalitarianism: Journeys and Refugees” and “Life in Jurisdictional Limbo.” In the first chapter, Helmer aims to describe the three waves in which musicians from Europe arrived in Canada. Helmer includes graphs that illustrate these three waves (1937-1940, 1945, and 1956-1987) and shows from which country, and from whom (Nazis, Communists, a mixture of the two, or demographic Czechoslovakia) these individuals were fleeing (24). These graphs are useful in conceptualizing the accompanying prose, as Helmer uses numerous miscellaneous examples in this section. Although these stories are interesting, the significant concept of exile and immigration to Canada bobs in


2 Kater, *The Twisted Muse*.

and out of clarity, thereby becoming lost. In “Temporary Havens” (26) and “Arrivals in Canada” (26) Helmer also uses graphs to clarify when, from whom, and to where individuals fled. “Paths out of Europe” (33) are defined in this section as well, and, as before, Helmer uses specific individuals to demonstrate the varying routes that were available to exiles as a means to escape the menacing regimes in Europe. Essay collections such as Reinhold Brinkmann and Cristoph Wolff’s *Driven into Paradise* and books such as Dorothy Lamb Crawford’s *A Windfall of Musicians* discuss in detail the paths taken by émigrés before settling in the United States. Few scholars have addressed, however, the routes and experiences that European exiles underwent before settling in Canada, and in this way Helmer’s own chapter is extremely important. Experiences by those who would become Canadians were similar yet different in some regards to experiences by those who chose to emigrate to the United States. Helmer’s book focuses almost exclusively on emigrations to Canada, and because of this *Growing with Canada* is unique.

In “Facing Totalitarianism: Journeys and Refugees,” Helmer describes the personal reasons that several musicians considered when choosing Canada as their new home. Helmer also explains that although Canada was a paradise compared to Europe during the war years, there were still Canadians who harboured anti-Semitic ideals. Although Helmer touches upon this notion, he chooses to focus more on the positive aspects of coming to Canada rather than on the oppression that many exiles faced upon landing. In this way, he creates a one-sided and biased account of the situation.

“Life in Jurisdictional Limbo” describes the concept of “statelessness”(57) and the problems with obtaining legal immigration documents and adopting citizenship in a new country. There is limited dialogue on the legal policies and process of immigration into Canada during the 1930’s and 40’s, and Helmer relies more on personal accounts and stories than on exact legal policies. For example, the recollection of “internment” and the so-called “Camp Boys” in this chapter narrates the positive aspects of internment in Canada such as the congenial atmosphere and opportunities for musicians in the camps. He significantly understates the horrifying reality that accompanied a lack of citizenship and the threatening atmosphere within the encampments, details

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instead outlined in Irving Abella and Harold Troper’s *None is Too Many*.\(^5\) Through his work, Helmer creates a fascinating and page-turning narrative of the lives of the musicians facing exile, however, the prose lacks a legal framework that a reader can grasp. *None is too Many* explains in detail the apprehension and legal scrutiny that immigrants faced at Canadian borders.\(^6\) *Growing with Canada* would have been more informative if Helmer had included concrete information on immigration into Canada with regards to legal policies, and then elaborated using the personal accounts he was privy to through interviews.

In the second half of this book, entitled “Canada,” Helmer explores the contributions made to Canada and Canadian music by émigrés upon settling there. Helmer begins by clarifying that before the mass immigration, Canada had its own “vibrant and multifaceted musical life,” (83) and that the émigrés who settled there did not create, but rather added to this culture. In the first chapter, “Musical Life in Canada: An Overview of the Interwar Years,” Helmer provides a brief synopsis of musical culture within Canada between the wars, addressing such subjects as music education, orchestras, concerts, operas, ethnomusicological pursuits, compositional practices, and radio broadcasting. Helmer asserts that all of the makings of a rich musical society were present in Canada during the interwar years, and that émigrés enhanced this society. The overview Helmer renders supports his argument. It is here that Helmer finally addresses the opportunities that were available for émigré musicians in Canada. As in previous chapters, Helmer uses snippets of personal accounts to conceptualize his broader thesis of exiles as émigrés. In this chapter, however the stories are shorter and appear more relevant to the material presented, and therefore much more affective. It is in this section that Helmer successfully lays the framework for understanding Canadian musical culture at the outset of the Second World War.

The second chapter of “Canada,” entitled “Rebuilding Canada’s Post Secondary Music Education System,” is a concise account of how several émigrés took the traditional and antiquated Anglo-Saxon music programs in Canadian post-secondary institutions and transformed them into music faculties worthy of competing with prestigious European ones (98). In chronological retellings of both the development of music programs at the University of Toronto and the University of McGill in Montreal, Helmer proficiently demonstrates the


\(^6\) Abella and Troper, *None is Too Many.*

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significant contributions of émigrés Arnold Walter and Helmut Blume. This is perhaps the most informative and concise section of *Growing with Canada*. That said, although Walter’s contribution to the University of Toronto and Blume’s contribution to the University of McGill are demonstrated in a clear and factual manner, it would have served the intention of *Growing with Canada* better if Helmer had described both Walter and Blume’s terms of exile from Europe. Walter and Blume’s biographies are available through the Canadian Encyclopedia, and both are admirable examples of the struggle and success of émigrés in Canada. In his book, *Composers of the Nazi Era*, Michael Kater illustrates the terms of exile and success experienced in the new counties of eight composers who lived through the Nazi regime in Europe. Through his format, Kater effectively illustrates the tremendous success over adversity and ultimate triumph of each individual included in his narrative. Helmer could have presented a more complete history for Walter and Blume if he had followed a format closer to that of Kater. Both Walter’s and Blume’s contributions to music education in Canada, however, are clearly illustrated.

The topic of opera in Canadian post-secondary institutions is addressed in “Opera in the University.” In this chapter, Helmer concisely illustrates the evolution of opera in Canadian institutions by organizing the chapter around the different faculties across Canada. He provides the history of Canadian opera education and describes the émigrés who were most valuable to the development of opera for each faculty at the Universities of Western Ontario, Toronto, McGill, Halifax, and Vancouver. By dividing the discussion into the different institutions, Helmer brings clarity to the topic of opera education in Canada during the modernist period.

The last chapter, which addresses the contributions of émigrés to the newly formed music education faculties in Canada during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, is entitled “New Faculty Appointments Complete the Transformation of Music in the University.” This chapter focuses solely on the “hiring of staff for the programs that Arnold Walter and Helmut Blume created at the University of Toronto and the University of McGill” (155). Again, Helmer combines anecdotes and evocative prose to clarify the details surrounding the hiring of staff members for the newly formed faculties. However, the exhaustive mention of different persons and excessive repetition causes one to drift through this chapter without truly grasping any new concepts apart from those already addressed in previous chapters. Again, Helmer divides this chapter along institutional lines, touching...
upon the many different schools and faculties that experienced an influx of émigré teachers. Although this method proved successful in the previous chapter, the countless names that are mentioned in this section make it too overwhelming for the reader to absorb. Arnold Walter’s essay “History of Music Education in Canada” in his own book, entitled *Aspects of Music in Canada*, explains the histories that Helmer attempts to elucidate, however Walter’s chronological approach and articulate detail produces a far clearer version of this story.\(^8\) Therefore, while Helmer’s version is a more fascinating read, Walter’s account is more informative.

The final chapter in *Growing with Canada*, “Discovering Canada and Canadians,” (184) centres on émigré musicians who pursued musical careers in Canada outside of post-secondary institutions. This includes careers as orchestral players, conductors, and radio broadcasters, to name a few. Akin to previous chapters, it is divided into major cities in which émigrés settled, then discusses the musicians who made a musical and cultural contribution to each city. It is here that Helmer develops his thesis: that émigrés should be viewed as individuals who experienced positive changes after leaving their homeland rather than exiles who suffered. He shows, through stories about varying artists and their contributions to Canadian musical culture, that many émigrés embraced Canada. Helmer ends this chapter with an account of the émigré Nicholas Goldsmitch, claiming that his career “provides a perfect conclusion to this cross-country examination of émigrés in Canada” (228). He describes Goldsmitch’s vast contribution to musical festivals in Canada and the inspiration that he provided to students and other musicians alike. Helmer concludes that not only did the émigrés who settled in Canada carve a niche for themselves, but they also encouraged Canadian born musicians to do the same, thus again proving his initial thesis that émigrés can be viewed as persons who made a decision to better their lives and who positively contributed to Canadian culture.

The epilogue, “Looking Forward, Looking Back,” provides further evidence that many émigrés who departed from their homelands in at least mild disdain learned to embrace Canada and truly adopted the nation as their own. This epilogue is exceptional in proving Helmer’s thesis because it shows that most émigrés did not migrate back to Europe after settling in Canada, and in some cases, even a brief voyage to their homeland mustered feelings of contempt for Europe and strengthened their appreciation of Canada. Helmer attempts to avoid his bias here by including a few stories that recount positive returns to an émigré’s homeland. In any case, Helmer proves that the majority of émigrés who

came to Canada during the Second World War each have diverse biographies, dependent on each individual’s background, circumstance during the war years, personality, and most importantly, passion for their art.

Perhaps the most clear and useful part of Growing with Canada is appendix A, “Bio-Bibliographies of Émigré Musicians”. In this appendix, Helmer provides a brief and concise biography of and list of contributions by each émigré mentioned in his book. Many sections of Growing with Canada are so overly diluted with anecdotes that the concrete facts and figures regarding each émigré’s experience and influence on Canadian music are buried under the prose. This appendix acts much like The Canadian Encyclopedia, and allows a reader to better understand each individual who is mentioned in the copious anecdotes in Growing with Canada. If one feels lost while reading and feels the need for more concrete biographical details of an individual Helmer mentions, one can simply turn to Appendix A to clarify any questions or confusion.

Overall, Paul Helmer’s Growing with Canada was an exceptional and informative read. Perhaps Helmer’s only weakness is the lack of chronological order in terms of each musician’s personal experience. Helmer mentions each of the 121 musicians he covers multiple times, and even recycles anecdotes to explain the contributions of the different parties involved. In this way, Helmer’s overall thesis that émigré musicians and their experiences can be viewed positively rather than negatively is lost within the prose. The chapters on Arnold Walter and Helmut Blume are excellent examples of the effectiveness of chronological story-telling, and Growing with Canada would have been more effective if the entire book were modeled after these two chapters.

Works Cited


