

BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

Chisvin, Sharon. *Our Musical Heritage: A Century of Jewish Music and Musicians in Winnipeg*. Winnipeg: Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, 2000. 127 pp.

This is another in a distinguished series of publications sponsored by the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada documenting the history of the Jewish community of Winnipeg. Sharon Chisvin wrote and edited the book. It is, however, the product of a committee which attempted to document the musical history of Winnipeg Jewry in preparation for a museum exhibition.

The book begins with a short chapter situating the community historically. Its first substantive chapter concerns the music of the synagogue. Cantors and the choirs they organized served to enhance and enrich the service of the synagogue. Cantorial music constituted a recognizably Jewish art form which also played a role in the non-liturgical life of the Jewish community in the form of records played at home and on Jewish radio programs.

Synagogues were not the only venue for Jewish musical talents; many schools, organizations, and youth groups boasted musical groups, as detailed in the next chapter. A further chapter speaks of Yiddish and Hebrew folk music and the Winnipeg musicians, amateur and professional, who performed them over the years. Musical theatre had a place in the community, which was not satisfied with the occasional touring theatrical troupe. From 1904, Winnipeg Jews began organizing their own Jewish Operatic Company. A chapter is devoted to the musical education of Jewish children, many of whom became known in community performances, while others, like Bert Pearl, achieved Canada-wide fame on CBC Radio's "The Happy Gang". A chapter chronicles Winnipeg Jewish musicians who

played jazz and rock and roll, and yet another is devoted to classical musicians. A useful time-line concludes the book.

What becomes clear, on even a cursory reading of this book, is that it is possible to understand a great deal about a Jewish community from its musical endeavours. The Jews of Winnipeg were able by and large to make the most of their own resources to create an extraordinarily rich Jewish cultural life. It also becomes clear that the division of the book into thematic chapters, while necessary, gets in the way of the fact that musical life for Winnipeg Jews was not neatly divided into “synagogue”, “folk”, and “secular” music. The same musicians who sang in synagogue choirs also performed in productions of Broadway musicals. Music taken in its broadest sense, as this book sensibly does, was a consuming passion for many within the community, and an important matrix for the community as a whole.

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Choquette, Robert. *Canada's Religions: An Historical Introduction*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004. xviii, 464 pp.

This is an interesting book about the history of the Christian religion in Canada, written by a distinguished historian of Canadian Christianity. The title, however, misleads the reader into thinking that religions other than Christianity will get a full and fair exposition, and this is not the case. The author himself is quite conscious of the fact that professed Christians make up only 75% of the current Canadian population, and that other religions, like those of the Amerindians, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and others need to be addressed. Yet, of the twenty chapters in the book, only three substantially address religions other than Christianity.

Choquette's treatment of Judaism, the first non-Christian, non-Amerindian religion to be established in Canada, serves as an illustration of the short shrift non-Christian reli-