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Review of *Community Music in Alberta: Some Good Schoolhouse Stuff!* By George W. Lyon

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BOOK REVIEWS

Community Music in Alberta: Some Good Schoolhouse Stuff! By George W. Lyon. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1999. Illustrations, bibliography, index. xix +156 pp. \$29.95 paper.

If you have any Alberta connections, you will not be able to resist paging through this engaging, photo-full book looking for people and places you know. I found my grandfather on page 43, but still can't make out if my grandmothers are in the background of some of the other scenes.

Most of *Community Music in Alberta* is given over to photographs of a stunning variety of music groups from the 1880s to the present. Not only are there the fiddlers, dance bands, brass bands, pipers, CFCN and CKUA radio groups, cowboy singers (including Wilf Carter), powwow drums, little theater choruses, and others that we might expect, but also symphony orchestras, family groups, a Hungarian restaurant orchestra dressed in white cowboy hats for the Calgary Stampede, the Chieftains All-Indian band dressed in long black wigs for an unidentified festivity, a pair of violinists leading the Torah procession into a Calgary synagogue in the 1940s, Chinese New Year parades, and a mandolin orchestra playing for a Communist gathering in a Crowsnest Pass mining community, circa 1920. George Lyon, an enthusiastic folk musician—the jacket photo shows him playing acoustic guitar—has put together a wonderful volume that would be a delight were it only a coffee

table collection of photos and anecdotes. The brief text, however, is a sophisticated and effective essay that quickly revises all the clichés about both settler and indigenous musics in Alberta.

Lyon begins by showing that the settlers brought music with them and that it was dearly appreciated. It was never a cultural fill to be added only after a family had “made it.” He deliberately structures the book so that Indians appear during the present, not as “Vanishing” peoples. He points out the structural similarities between things that seem different—the identical rhythm sections of polka, rock, and country bands—and the difference between things that sound similar—the uneven length of phrases differentiating Métis from Celtic fiddle styles even when the tunes are ostensibly the same. He also identifies astutely the ways that contemporary community musics, from fiddling contests to powwows, are both old and new, parts of vital cultures changing even while they retain older ways. “Contest fiddling and chicken dancing have become complex displays of virtuoso competence which might have been inappropriate in older worlds.”

This is a thoroughly satisfying book. Now if there were only a way to produce a CD.

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