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Main content

Article Preview :

The Ben Horch Story. By Peter Letkemann. Winnipeg, Man.: Old Oak Publishing. 2007. Pp. 490. \$37, Can.

The name Ben Horch is known to most western Canadian Mennonites of my generation, especially any who have been interested in music. The child of German Lutheran immigrants from Ukraine, Horch was brought to Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1909 at the age of 2. The family eventually settled among many immigrants in North Winnipeg, where they were drawn into and joined a Mennonite Brethren mission church. Though becoming Mennonite, the Horch family retained its Lutheran appreciation of instrumental music, and all the Horch brothers played the cello, violin or flute. Ben himself learned to play both violin and piano passably and later helped organize the Mennonite Symphony Orchestra in Winnipeg.

Horch was a mediocre student through elementary and high school, but showed an interest in art, drama, architecture and, especially, voice. Following high school he studied under one of Winnipeg's most recognized voice teachers and joined Winnipeg's premier male chorus, where he got the opportunity to observe good conducting techniques firsthand. Soon he was directing the choir of one of Winnipeg's Mennonite Brethren churches.

Not so incidentally, it was in high school that Ben met and fell in love with Esther Hiebert, daughter of the Mennonite Brethren mission church pastor C. N. Hiebert. Esther and Ben were married several years later in 1932. Esther herself was a gifted teacher, first in the Manitoba public school system, later as professor of hymnology at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College. She also studied voice, performed solos in choirs that her husband directed, and supported his career. Important for author Letkemann is...

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