

Pomp and Canadian Circumstance: Sir Ernest MacMillan's *Cortège Académique*

Abstract. Son of a Presbyterian minister and educated partly in Edinburgh, Sir Ernest MacMillan (1893–1973) embodied the once-dominant British tradition in Canada by the very title (conferred in 1934 during a brief revival of royal honours) attached to his name. Yet MacMillan was conscious of the heterogeneous makeup of the country he loved and expressed this awareness by making arrangements of French-Canadian folksongs and participating in an expedition in 1927 to record and transcribe the songs of the Tsimshian Indigenous people of British Columbia. In 1953, when MacMillan—by then the preeminent musician of English Canada—was persuaded to write a celebratory organ piece for the 100th anniversary ceremonies of University College in Toronto, he produced *Cortège Académique*, unabashedly adopting the form and spirit of Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*. The main purpose of this paper is to assess the status of the piece as a memento of the British presence in Canada.

Keywords: Sir Ernest MacMillan, *Cortège Académique*, Canada, Toronto, Sir Andrew Davis, Canadian International Organ Competition, University College, University of Toronto, canon, organ, British influence, *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*, Novello.

1. Introduction

National origin and ethnicity have long played crucial roles in the identification, classification and evaluation of composers and their works. Even the most concise reference resources give high billing to a composer's place of birth or (where these are different) upbringing and settlement. Whether the music is deemed to show strong or weak allegiance to a presumed national style, the link is taken into account. This dynamic can be reciprocal or even circular: the symphonies of Jean Sibelius have largely defined the national Finnish musical style they are taken to reflect.

Discussion of national style as a component of Canadian music is complicated by the prevalence in Canada of immigration. A case in point is *Cortège Académique*,¹ a five-minute work for organ written in 1953 by Sir Ernest MacMillan (1893–1973), an eminent composer, conductor and administrator of Canadian birth and British ancestry. Despite the French title, *Cortège Académique* is manifestly a score that can be compared to the British patriotic model established by Edward Elgar in his *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*. Whether this resemblance stamps it as an appropriation of British style or a valid expression of Canadian consciousness at a time when British influence on national affairs remained forceful is a question with interesting implications for Canadians, who rarely hear their music performed beyond their borders. My principal aim in this paper is to assess the status of the piece as a memento of the British presence in Canada and the extent to which its British characteristics are responsible for its increasing popularity among organists.

2. National Identity and Canada

Extant as a confederated nation since 1867, Canada reaches back hundreds of years as a vast territory that has played host to an Indigenous population of more than 600 communities as well as settlers from France (which founded Quebec in 1608 as part of the royal colony of New France) and Britain (which, having defeated France in 1763 to end the Seven Years' War, established the colonies of Upper and Lower Canada in 1791 and the unified but still colonial Province of Canada in 1841).

Most settlers in the 19th century were from the British Isles or the United States. Starting around the turn of the 20th century, waves of immigration from many sources combined to create what is today, with a population of about 40 million, among the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. Twenty-three percent of Canadian citizens and permanent residents in 2021 were immigrants (Statistics Canada 2022). The percentage was about the same in 1921.

A high proportion of the remaining 77 percent are descendants of immigrants, especially from Europe and Asia. It is reasonable to say there is no such thing as an ethnically typical Canadian. There exist old-stock Canadians descended from 18th- and 19th-century settlers, particularly in Quebec, and there are 1.8 million people who identify as Indigenous. But when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told the *New York Times*

¹ This paper uses *Cortège Académique*, the spelling found on the cover of the Novello edition of 1957. *Cortège académique*, following French-language practice, is also seen.

in 2015 that “[t]here is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada,” he was articulating a defensible point of view (*New York Times* 2015).

If there is no longer a core Canadian identity, this is not to say there was not a dominant group of Canadians of British descent a hundred years ago and more who to a large extent dictated the economic, social, cultural and political character of the country. The links are evident in political and ceremonial institutions: Canada is governed by a House of Commons, a Senate meant to replicate the British House of Lords, a governor general representing the monarchy and, ultimately, by the British sovereign, who is head of state. The Canadian Citizenship Act came into force in 1947. Prior to this, Canadians were British subjects. It was not until 1980 that “O Canada” officially replaced “God Save the King” (alternatively “God Save the Queen”) as the national anthem. The Canadian Constitution superseded the British North America Act in 1982.

3. Ernest MacMillan and the British Heritage

It was very much into a transplanted British society that Ernest MacMillan was born in Mimico, a suburb of Toronto. His father, Alexander, was a Scottish-born Presbyterian minister and hymnologist who edited the Canadian Presbyterian and United Church hymnbooks. Ernest was an organ prodigy who made his first public appearance at 10 and at age 15 was appointed organist-choirmaster of Knox Presbyterian Church in Toronto.

Even before this, he took music classes in Edinburgh, where his father was on a sabbatical. He was in Britain again at age 17 to complete his Fellowship in the Royal College of Organists and his Bachelor of Music at Oxford. These early experiences (undoubtedly fortified by the example of his father) left his speech with an English-Scottish lilt that the novelist Robertson Davies regarded as authentically Canadian and in no way an affectation (Schabas 1994, 55).

3.1. Sojourn in Europe

Back at home MacMillan studied history at the University of Toronto, which then offered no degree program in music. In view of this shortcoming, he travelled to France in 1914 as a prospective student at the Paris Conservatoire—feeling, perhaps, a need to expand his musical literacy beyond British models—and spent the summer in Bayreuth. He was in something of a Wagnerian reverie when the Guns of August began to assemble. In Nuremberg he was jailed for having failed properly to register with the authorities, and transferred the following March to Ruhleben, a converted racetrack complex outside Berlin, where he spent the following three years and eight months as an enemy alien.

This experience ended up reinforcing his immersion in British culture, as most of his fellow inmates were British. Many were musicians, which made it possible to perform concerts and stage works as recreations for both the prisoners and their overseers. One highlight was a production of *The Mikado*, the score of which was reconstructed, mostly by MacMillan, from memory.² Ruhleben gave MacMillan his first taste of conducting, a discipline in which he never received formal training.

3.2. England: *An Ode*

MacMillan’s most extraordinary exploit in captivity, however, was to write his Oxford doctoral composition thesis with only occasional access to a piano. This was a 40-minute setting for orchestra and chorus of Algernon Charles Swinburne’s *England: An Ode*, a lavishly patriotic poem awash in maritime imagery that praises the English as “the race that is first of the races of men who behold unashamed the sun”. If this project looks like *prima facie* evidence of unabashed devotion to all things British, it should be remembered that MacMillan was, like doctoral candidates then and now, motivated to give the examiners what they wanted to hear. “...As a rule my feelings towards Swinburne are cool”, he wrote to his wife Elsie, adding that he could rationalize the choice of text as apt at a time of war (Beckwith 1998, 40). The Canadian scholar and composer John Beckwith (1927–2022), in his analysis of the work, finds points of comparison with Strauss, Wagner and Debussy in the ten-minute Overture and draws attention to the skill and originality manifested in the six-part fugue of Part 1, one of a few academic requirements of the so-called “exercise” (Beckwith 1998, 40–42).

² There are many stories attesting to MacMillan’s innate musical gifts. The conductor Ettore Mazzoleni (1905–1968), MacMillan’s brother-in-law, told of an occasion when he sketched the final page of Franck’s Piano Quintet when it was discovered that this page of the piano part was missing (Schabas 1994, 80).

4. Career and Identity

Returning to Toronto in 1919, MacMillan became organist and choirmaster of Timothy Eaton Memorial Church, “one of the most prestigious and richest congregations in Canada” (Schabas 1994, 58). This position gave him a platform which to work as an organ recitalist and conductor. He also began a career as an educator at what would become the Royal Conservatory of Music. Named principal of the school in September 1926—and, four months later, dean of the fledgling University of Toronto Faculty of Music—MacMillan founded the Conservatory choir, launched an opera program (the North American premiere of Vaughan Williams’s *Hugh the Drover* was a notable highlight), updated the ear-training and sight-singing textbooks and improved the administration of a national examination system that survives to this day.

4.1. An Interest in Folk Music

Remarkably in view of his upbringing, MacMillan also developed an interest the music of Indigenous peoples and French Canadians. Inspired by the research of Marius Barbeau, he joined this Canadian anthropologist on an expedition in 1927 to the Nass River area of British Columbia, recording and transcribing the songs of the Tsimshian elders. The result was a catalogue of at least 70 transcriptions, three of which were published by the Frederick Harris company under the title *Three Songs of the West Coast* (Barbeau 1928, Schabas 1994, 321/88).

“Salvage ethnography”—as it is called—is no longer viewed uncritically in scholarly circles, and the notion that the songs recorded would otherwise disappear is disputed. MacMillan’s report, however, is based on first-hand experience and should not be disregarded:

The ancient melodies of the West Coast tribes, still surviving in the memory of the elders, seem to have little interest for the majority of the younger generation, and would without a doubt be totally lost in the course of thirty or forty years but for the energy and enthusiasm of a handful of collectors. (Barbeau 1928, Introductory Note)

MacMillan biographer Ezra Schabas (1924–2020) speculates that the attitude of the younger Tsimshians was due to their conversion to Christianity and consequent indifference (or hostility) to pagan traditions (Schabas 1994, 87). In any case, there can be no doubt that MacMillan was fascinated and impressed by what he heard at Nass River. “It was a wild, strange sound”, he told the Zonta Club of Toronto in 1930, describing a woman singing to herself, “something like the keening heard in parts of Ireland, but much farther removed from anything like European music” (as quoted in Schabas 1994, 88).

4.2. Widening Horizons

Even before the Nass River adventure, MacMillan’s understanding of Canadian musical identity was broadening. In a 1925 review of Barbeau’s earlier work he wrote:

We have been too much concerned with teaching new arrivals our own ways and too little in discovering the contributions they are making to our own national life. If we have been negligent in the case of immigrants, what can we say of the people in whose eyes we are mere usurpers. (Canadian Forum 79–81)

The words are remarkable for their contemporary flavor. Few non-Indigenous Canadians in 1925 would call themselves “mere usurpers”.

4.3. Mixed Feelings about the “Motherland”

Years later, MacMillan would identify “two main sources of material which we may consider uniquely Canadian”:

Indian music indigenous to the soil but alien to the white race, and the great literature of French Canadian folk-song, most of it of European origin but so long established in Canada that it has developed a distinctive flavour unlike that of European French music. (MacMillan 1955, 3)

This quotation omits reference to music of British origin. It is noteworthy that he did not regard “English-speaking Canada” as sufficiently venerable to lay claim to a native folk tradition (MacMillan 1955, 3). We should not infer from this a prejudice against the British legacy: MacMillan’s immensely popular *Canadian Song Book* included what its compiler called “the best songs (whatever their origin) that have taken root in the Canadian soil” (Schabas 1994, 90). Rather it should be deduced that MacMillan was conscious

of his own public identification with the British tradition and a need to maintain a critical perspective on it. By 1955 he could write in his introduction to *Music in Canada*, a collection of essays of which he was the editor, that “nurtured through infancy and adolescence by a wise and tolerant, though occasionally autocratic mother, Canada has grown to become a lusty, energetic young nation”. A few sentences later, he opines that “nineteenth-century England was hardly an ideal source of musical inspiration except in certain restricted fields. Nowadays, when musical life in the Motherland presents so much brighter and more varied a picture, it exercises relatively less influence on Canada” (MacMillan 1955, 3).

5. Responsibilities and Accolades

It is remarkable that MacMillan found time for thoughtful writing on music in Canada given how much time he devoted to its administration and performance. In 1931 he became conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and by 1942 had added the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir to his portfolio. In the middle of the century it becomes difficult to synopsise his activities. Broadcaster, administrator, president of the copyright organization CAPAC, co-founder of the Canadian Music Centre, music advisor to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, he was truly the dominant musician of English Canada. Nor was he a distant or austere figure. His appearances as Santa Claus at TSO Christmas Box concerts were renowned. The critic William Littler, who as a teenager in the 1950s served as president of the MacMillan Club at his Vancouver high school, recalls that MacMillan was regarded by club members as an “avuncular” rather than “glamorous” figure (Schabas 1994, 143). This is perhaps one way of saying he was characteristically Canadian.

5.1. Sir Ernest

In view of his early accomplishments MacMillan was knighted in 1935 during a brief revival (under the Conservative government of the time) of the practice of recommending Canadians as recipients of British honours. Only 42, he was the first citizen of the Commonwealth outside of Britain to be knighted for service to music. He received the distinction two years before his friend the British conductor Adrian Boult, who was four years his senior.

While opinion at the time differed on the propriety of the revival of knighthoods in Canada, the title certainly enhanced MacMillan’s prestige and reaffirmed his credentials as a Canadian of British heritage. In all likelihood personally delighted by the honour, he was aware of its potential for controversy and took care to stipulate that he would accept it “as a recognition of the importance of music and the musical profession in the Dominion” rather than as “a merely personal distinction”. A friend in a congratulatory telegram pointed out the probable financial benefit to the organizations he directed (Schabas 1994, 131–132).

5.2. Reduced Output

Active as he was, by the time of his knighthood MacMillan was no longer productive as a composer. The simple explanation is that he was so deeply involved in national musical affairs that he had neither the time nor the peace of mind to devote to composition. Keith MacMillan said that his father “found it difficult to compose with so much of other people’s music in his head” (Parsons 1993). It is an obstacle that other conductors who were active as composers—Wilhelm Furtwängler, Otto Klemperer and arguably even Leonard Bernstein—struggled to overcome.

“It is hard to fault him on this”, Schabas writes. “Canadian composers in the 1920s and 1930s earned little if anything for their labours, and there was no community of composers to whom they could turn for artistic and moral support.” The possible exception in English-speaking Canada, the London-born organist Healey Willan (1880–1968), was an Englishman who composed like one (Schabas 1994, 94).

6. *Cortège Académique*: Historical Background

Yet after years of relative silence came *Cortège Académique*, MacMillan’s only composition for organ, written on relatively short notice in 1953 for the centennial celebrations of University College. This great Victorian pile is the true founding college of the University of Toronto, despite the common equation of the origin of the university with the royal charter granted to King’s College in 1827.

6.1. Conflicts

MacMillan, as noted earlier, had been both principal of the Royal Conservatory (until 1942) and dean of the university's Faculty of Music, institutions that maintained an uneasy coexistence and indeed today overlap in many ways. The question of who should lead each resulted in a disagreement with the university administration in 1952 that made headlines in Toronto and resulted in MacMillan's resignation. The details are not germane to this paper, but they resulted in hard feelings. When MacMillan was approached the following year about participating in the centennial celebration, he declined. Then University College raised the stakes to include an honorary degree, which was an appropriate recognition of service as well as an appeasement. This provided the necessary incentive. The composer gave the premiere of *Cortège Académique* at what was billed as a Centenary Service on Sunday October 18, 1953. MacMillan was at the Casavant instrument of Convocation Hall, a setting he knew well, having led the *St. Matthew Passion* there many times.

6.2. The British Tradition Reemerges

What MacMillan produced was as forthrightly and joyously British as any work could be. It is cast in an ABA form, the "A" part a jaunty concoction of vigorous martial rhythms, the contrasting "B" part dominated by a long-lined tune of noble and imperial overtones. Like Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* March No. 1—a universally recognized model of British ceremonial composition—the piece is in D Major and begins with a tune animated by a pair of insistent semiquavers that mischievously dislocate the listener's perception of a bar line. (*Crown Imperial*, the march William Walton wrote for the 1937 coronation of George V, also begins with a propulsive pair of semiquavers.) The main tune of the middle section is mostly in B flat major, a less conventional choice than G major, the subdominant, which Elgar used for the famous melody popularly sung to the words "Land of Hope and Glory". Indeed, MacMillan runs through a panoply of key signatures (three flats, six flats, four sharps and five sharps all make appearances) before an exultant coda, pressed forward by a vigorous pedal ostinato, restores the tonic. In the penultimate bar there are two saucy dissonances with pre-dominant and dominant function that can be interpreted as "raspberries" directed at the university authorities who had recently caused him so much frustration. MacMillan here managed to add to the score a characteristic often associated with the English: a sense of humour.

6.3. Entering the Repertoire

The author could find no reports on what impression *Cortège Académique* made on its premiere, the occasion being an academic assembly rather than a concert. That it was not instantly forgotten is clear from its publication in 1957 by Novello, the great British disseminator of music to the masses. The Canadian organist and composer Gerald Bales (1919–2002), who studied at the Conservatory during MacMillan's time as principal, thought highly enough of it to create a transcription for organ, brass and percussion in 1977.

6.4. An Influential Recording

However, it was a 1984 recording by Andrew Davis (b. 1944)—later, Sir Andrew Davis—that launched the international career of *Cortège Académique*. As music director of the Toronto Symphony, Davis was tasked with leading the orchestra through the opening in 1982 of Roy Thomson Hall, which was outfitted with an organ by the German-born Canadian maker Gabriel Kney. A former Cambridge organ scholar, Davis acted as a consultant in the design of the instrument. No performer knew it better. In 1984 the Marquis label released a Davis recital featuring music by Bach, Purcell, Ives, Franck, Messiaen—and Sir Ernest MacMillan. According to the producer of this recording, Deborah MacCallum, it was thought appropriate to include a Canadian (or even Torontonian) work on the program. MacCallum's mother, Roma Page Lynde, a Toronto organist and choir director who had studied with Charles Peaker (a student of MacMillan) in Toronto and Marcel Dupré in Paris, suggested *Cortège Académique* and furnished the score from her personal collection. MacCallum speculates that the work may have been in her mother's repertoire in part because the MacMillans were neighbours in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Deborah MacCallum, email message to author, Nov. 1, 2023).

In any case, it was the first recording of *Cortège Académique* and released at a time when recordings were more likely to be noticed than they are today. "I certainly didn't know the piece before", Davis writes in a personal communication with the author. "... I do think it's a splendid piece with a middle section most worthily

continuing the Elgar/Walton tradition. (I hear a little Cesar Franck in there too!)” (Sir Andrew Davis, email message to author, Nov. 3, 2023). Roger Sayer, organist of the venerable Temple Church in London, reports that it was this recording that alerted him to the piece and prompted him to add it to his repertoire (Roger Sayer, email message to the author, Nov. 13, 2023). It is indicative of his enthusiasm that Sayer has posted a recording on YouTube.

6.5. Canadian International Organ Competition

Another stimulus to the wider circulation of *Cortège Académique* was the establishment in 2008 of the Canadian International Organ Competition, a triennial contest in Montreal that includes a prize awarded by the Royal College of Canadian Organists for the best interpretation of a Canadian composition. As a manifestly effective work of about five minutes, *Cortège Académique* has been popular among contestants. David Baskeyfield, the British winner of the 2014 RCCO prize, as well as the CIOC grand prize, begins a 2015 recording on the Canadian ATMA label with *Cortège Académique*. This is one of five recordings listed in the Presto Music catalogue, including the Andrew Davis “original”, which was rereleased in 1993 by Centrediscs, the label of the Canadian Music Centre, as part of a commemorative album of MacMillan’s music. At least eight performances have been posted to YouTube, by British and American organists as well as Canadians, including a posting as recent as July 2023. More than 70 years after its composition, *Cortège Académique* is finding a place in the international organ repertoire.

7. Repertoire and the Canon: Discussion

It should be noted that the organ repertoire is in many ways distinct from what is traditionally regarded as the classical canon. Bach, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Franck and Messiaen all made contributions to the organ repertoire that might be viewed as canonical. Organists, however, accept figures like Dietrich Buxtehude, Charles-Marie Widor, Louis Vierne and Julius Reubke as equally important composers whose music can be programmed with no explanation.

7.1. Canonicity and Popularity

“Canonical” should not be used as a synonym for “popular”. Korngold’s *Violin Concerto*, almost 90 years after its premiere, is now heard as often as the standard concertos of Bruch and Sibelius. We might nevertheless hesitate to call the Korngold canonical. Is frequency of performance the main criterion to be considered? If so, Beethoven’s unambiguously canonical Piano Sonata Op. 106 (*Hammerklavier*) and *Missa Solemnis*—both programmed infrequently because of their difficulty—might be deemed suspect. The priority assigned frequency of performance in making such judgements is an interesting issue at a time when strenuous efforts are being made to construct a counter-canon around composers who have (according to the new arbiters) been unfairly excluded from the standard repertoire. Florence Price (1887–1953), an African-American whose symphonic music faded after a burst of interest in the 1930s, now appears regularly on concert programs and radio playlists in North America. Similar renewed attention is paid to the Black British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912).

7.2. Performers and the Canon

At all events, the content of the organ canon (like all canons) is determined in part by performers, who decide which works make the greatest effect in live concerts or as recordings. The growing popularity among organists of *Cortège Académique* is a salient example of the result of this dynamic. As a Canadian conductor and administrator active in the mid-20th century, MacMillan has little claim to contemporary relevance. Yet a special-occasion piece he wrote on short order in 1953 has developed a trans-Atlantic following. Whether or not it is deemed canonical, *Cortège Académique* has emerged as one of the very few works by a Canadian that can be heard outside of Canada.

8. MacMillan, Canada and the Trans-Atlantic Dilemma

Cortège Académique would be MacMillan’s last significant composition. Possibly more music of British sentiment and style would have been within his grasp. But as Canada evolved, the country’s most influential musician, particularly after his exposure to French-Canadian and Indigenous folk music, felt less and less

entitled to express himself in this idiom. At a joint conference in 1935 in London of the Royal College of Organists and its Canadian counterpart, the RCCO, he lamented that Canadian composers had still not developed a national style (Schabas 1994, 138). Yet in February of the same year he led the TSO in a program of music by Delius, Elgar and Holst (all of whom died in 1934) that concluded with “Land of Hope and Glory” given as an encore. Links across the ocean then were strong in academia as well as the concert hall. In 1934 MacMillan wrote in his capacity as dean of music at U of T that “Toronto degrees have in times past suffered from prejudice in the Motherland” (Schabas 1994, 128).

No Canadian today could unselfconsciously refer to Britain as the “Motherland”. Polls suggest that a plurality of citizens and residents would favour an elected head of state (Canseco 2023). In Kingston, Ontario, the former capital of Canada, a statue of Sir John A. Macdonald (1815–91), the Scottish-born first prime minister, was removed from a downtown park in 2021 by decree of the municipal government. This was rough justice for a figure without whose influence, in the opinion of many historians, Canada would never have come into existence (Milnes 2017). In the same year a statue of Egerton Ryerson (1803–1882), a noted Canadian educator and champion of free schooling, was torn down and defaced by a mob in Toronto. Ryerson University the following year changed its name to Toronto Metropolitan University. In these cases, the rationale was the involvement of Macdonald and Ryerson in the establishment of now widely discredited residential schools for Indigenous children. The proposed change of the name of Dundas Street in Toronto (approved in 2023) is based on the allegedly unsatisfactory performance of the Scottish parliamentarian Henry Dundas (1742–1811) in the process surrounding the abolition of the slave trade. (In fact, Dundas was a committed abolitionist whose work was crucial to the effort.) While this change is not unopposed, it is still accurate to say that historical figures of British birth or heritage are no longer viewed with reverence by Canadians.

9. Conclusion

We can look back on MacMillan’s multifaceted career and wish he had contributed more as a composer. Schabas speculates that MacMillan “could have provided, if he had continued writing, a bridge for other English-Canadian composers eager to escape from the typically British school of composition exemplified in Healey Willan’s work” (Schabas 1994, 97). The popular trajectory of *Cortège Académique* suggests that retaining an allegiance to the British school and working freely within it might have been an equally productive path. Much stress is placed on the role of music in asserting national identity. Music can function also as an instrument of its preservation, especially in cases where national traits have evolved, declined or disappeared. All indications are that *Cortège Académique*, a brief and vigorous work for organ, will keep alive the name of the musician who served Canada more assiduously than any other and constitute an enduring musical testament to the British presence in Canadian history.

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**Pompastika ir kanadietiškos aplinkybės:
sero Ernesto MacMillano *Cortège Académique***

Santrauka

Seras Ernestas MacMillanas (1893–1973), presbiterionų pastoriaus sūnus, išsilavinimą įgijęs Edinburge, įkūnijo kadaise Kanadoje vyravusią britišką tradiciją – 1934 m., trumpam atgaivinus karališkus apdovanojimus, jam buvo suteiktas titulas. Visgi MacMillanas suvokė, kad jo mylima šalis yra nevienalytė. Šią koncepciją jis išreiškė rengdamas prancūzų ir kanadiečių liaudies dainų aranžuotes ir 1927 m. dalyvaudamas ekspedicijoje, kurios tikslas – užrašyti ir transkribuoti Britų Kolumbijos čiabuvių timšianų dainas. 1953 m. MacMillanas – tuo metu garsiausias angliškosios Kanados muzikas – buvo įkalbėtas parašyti šventinę pjesę vargonams Toronto universiteto koledžo 100-mečio iškilimams. Taip gimė *Cortège Académique*, kuriame kompozitorius nesivaržydamas įkūnijo Edwardo Elgaro *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* formą ir dvasią. Pagrindinis straipsnio tikslas yra įvertinti šio kūrinio, kaip britų buvimo Kanados istorijoje *memento*, statusą.

Vertinant įvairiapusę MacMillano karjerą, gali sukirbėti noras, kad jo, kaip kompozitoriaus, indėlis būtų buvęs svaresnis. Ezra Schabas spėja, kad MacMillanas, jei būtų toliau kūręs, „būtų galėjęs tapti tiltu kitiems anglų kanadiečių kompozitoriams, trokštantiems ištrūkti iš tipiškai britiškos kompozicijos mokyklos, kurios pavyzdys yra Healey Willano kūryba“ (Schabas 1994, 97). Vis dėlto *Cortège Académique* populiarumo trajektorija rodo, kad ištikimybės britų mokyklai puoselėjimas galėjo būti toks pat produktyvus kelias. Straipsnyje daug dėmesio skiriama ir muzikos vaidmeniui įtvirtinant nacionalinę tapatybę. Muzika gali būti jos išsaugojimo priemonė, ypač tais atvejais, kai nacionaliniai bruožai evoliucionuoja, menksta ar išnyksta. Visa tai rodo, kad trumpas ir energingas kūrinys vargonams *Cortège Académique* įamžins muziko, kuris Kanadai tarnavo uoliau nei bet kas kitas, vardą ir taps išliekančiu muzikiniu liudijimu apie britų vaidmenį Kanados istorijoje.