

# Profile

## Victor Feldbrill - conductor of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra from 1958-1968

By



DAVID EISENSTADT

*Under The Radar: 30 Notable Canadian Jewish Musicians, which I wrote with Alan L. Simons (Publisher) takes an historical approach, covering musicians of most genres and genders, some alive and others having passed on, but excelling somewhat out of sight. This is the first in a two-part series of excerpts from the book, which was released in November 2021, and is available in paperback and as an eBook from*

*Amazon.ca. The two performers with Winnipeg, Manitoba roots are Victor Feldbrill and Oscar Brand.*

The son of Polish-Jewish immigrants Helen (Lederman) and Nathan Feldbrill, Victor Feldbrill was born on April 4, 1924.

The young classically-trained violinist was destined to pick up a baton, become a conductor extraordinaire and lead orchestras around the world, starting at Toronto's Harbord Collegiate high school.

For future conductors, it was all about leadership. "Authority comes from being prepared," he once told the Toronto Star's classical music columnist Bill Littler.

During his high school years, the young violinist also conducted student orchestras, and after sharing his ambition with Toronto Symphony Orchestra (TSO) conductor Sir Ernest MacMillan, Feldbrill enrolled in Ettore Mazzoleni's conducting class at the then Toronto Conservatory of Music. He succeeded his music theory teacher John Weinzweig as the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra's conductor in 1942-'43.

His TSO conducting debut took place on March 30, 1943.

Stationed in London during the Second World War with the Royal Canadian Navy, he played violin in the Navy Show while continuing his violin, harmony, composition and conducting studies for two years at the Royal Academy, but returned to his fiancée Zelda in Canada, ultimately holding concertmaster and assistant conductor positions from 1945-'49 with the Royal Conservatory of Music Symphony Orchestra and Opera Company.

He was TSO's first violin from 1949-56 and freelanced as a violinist and conductor for a variety of CBC-TV and radio programs.

The maestro had a special interest in young musicians and during the

### White supremacists (Continued from page 16.)

ments.

Ernst Zundel was a German neo-Nazi author who lived in Canada between 1958-2000, espousing Holocaust denial conspiracy theories, publishing titles such as "The Hitler We Loved and Why" and "Did Six Million Really Die?" He was eventually charged under a section of the Criminal Code for "likely to incite hatred against an identifiable group." Zundel was convicted and spent time in a Canadian prison as a result.

As well, he was twice denied Canadian citizenship, first in 1966 and later in 1994, on the grounds that he was a national security threat associating with known violent extremists, including Richard Butler, head of the Aryan Nation. In 2005, Zundel was deported back to his native Germany, where he died while in prison there.

David Irving is a well known British pseudo-historian and Holocaust denier who has written extensively about World War II and Nazi politics. His books such as "Destruction of Dresden" and "Hitler's War" are revisionist writings meant to draw sympathy to Hitler and Germans during World War II by downplaying or outright denying Nazi war crimes, while simultaneously focusing on alleged Allied war crimes, such as the bombing of civilians.

Neo-Nazi Fred Leuchter was an execution equipment technician employed by the U.S. federal government to improve its methods of capital punishment. Using his so-called occupational expertise, he authored the infamous "Leuchter Report," in which he alleged that no gas chambers were utilized in Auschwitz-Birkenau to exterminate Jews, Roma, and other undesirables.

Tony McAleer and I discussed these individuals because they all had two things in common: they were literate and their writings reached wide audiences. None of the three fit the image of skinhead, swastika-adorned and tattooed street thugs. They might be described as the sort of ideologues who can lend a veneer of sophistication to the otherwise illiterate prattle that we commonly associate with the kinds of thugs we often see assembled at right wing rallies of various sorts

I wondered what roles men such as the three I've cited, who pretend to use academic tools in their research and writing, play within neo-Nazi

that people like Ernst Zundel, David Irving, and Fred Leuchter have played in white supremacist movements.



VICTOR FELDBRILL

1950s, he conducted for Ontario School Broadcasts and National School Broadcasts.

Always honing his skills, he became TSO's assistant conductor in 1956-'57 and took the reins of the Winnipeg Symphony in 1958. His stable leadership over the next 10 years helped give Canada, for the first time, a symphonic ensemble with a serious commitment to Canadian music.

Feldbrill never regretted building his career in his home country.

There were guest appearances over the years with symphony orchestras across Canada, the UK, China, Italy, the Philippines and the Soviet Union, followed by a short-term teaching engagement which led to a professorship and principal conductorship of Tokyo National University's Geidi Philharmonic.

For several years, he conducted nine of Tokyo's ten symphony orchestras.

Throughout his career, he included, when possible, one Canadian work in every concert he conducted. A highlight in his 50th year of conducting for the TSO was leading the premiere of Srul Irving Glick's *The Reawakening*.

A recipient of many accolades and honours, including the first Roy Thomson Award in 1985, Feldbrill was made an Officer of the Order of Canada that year and names to the Order of Ontario in 1999. Toronto's Arts & Letters Club recognized his body of work, bestowing upon him the Sir Ernest MacMillan Award and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Toronto Musicians' Association.

A true champion of Canada, he died on June 17, 2020 at the age of 96.

Excerpted from

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movements? I asked McAleer whether he agrees with my observation that there is an element involved in the white supremacist movement in which certain individuals create a leadership class. These individuals have the knowledge and often the academic credits to draw in those who are uninformed, thus spreading misinformation and conspiracy theories to others who don't have the intellectual capacity or curiosity to realize that what they're being fed is false.

Tony responded, "I think that all radical political movements have those characteristics; it's not unique, you know, ISIS employed the same tactics."

I said, "Yeah, you get an Imam or someone from the religious class who is educated in the Quran; they misuse its teachings and warp things, and then draw in young impressionable people..." to which Tony added, "to do the dirty work."

I said to him, "there is a sense of class envy within [radical groups], but as you mentioned before, you don't have to be rich or poor to join these hateful ideologies, but perhaps being rich or poor, educated, or non-educated, determines what facet of the group you end up taking part in."

Tony agreed with that observation, but added that there are many different roles people can play within the white supremacist movement. He also said that within the movement there is often the opportunity for "vertical growth," something, he said, he personally experienced.

He explained that he started as a street thug, but as a well-educated and well-read individual within a group of mostly poorly educated skinheads, his role quickly changed.

According to Tony, he went from "fighting with his fist to fighting with his words", citing as an example that "when people wanted to argue about immigration with a group of skinheads, if there was a really tough guy who wanted to fight us, I knew exactly who in the group to go say, 'this guy wants to go.'"

"When someone wanted to engage intellectually, I was that person," he added. Tony would later lead the W.A.R. into the internet age by creating websites and radio broadcasts to bombard people with misinformation and conspiracy theories, providing a service to the movement similar to what David Irving was also able to do.

In part three of my report about former neo-Nazi Tony McAleer, I will discuss the roles that rejection and redemption play in the white supremacist movement, focusing on the role of "shame" in hateful ideologies. In that concluding report I'll also describe strategies for deradicalization as suggested by Tony McAleer.