

# Bookshelf

---

## **Both Sides of the Street: One Man's Life in Business and the Arts in Canada**

by *Floyd Chalmers*

Published by Macmillan of Canada, Toronto, 1983, 296 pp., \$24.95

### REVIEWED BY JOYCE FORSTER

No question about it, the rise of Chicago-born Floyd Chalmers, son of a Canadian father and an American mother, from nine-year-old door-to-door salesman of *The Saturday Evening Post* in Potsdam, New York to president and chairman of the board of the Maclean Hunter publishing empire during its years of greatest expansion would have done Horatio Alger proud. The transformation of the same young salesman, this time selling sachets door-to-door to win a prize phonograph he was too poor to buy, into board member of the Royal Conservatory of Music, founding member of the Canadian Opera Company, president of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival and founder of the Chalmers Foundation is equally astonishing.

Literary criticism is outside the scope of *The Philanthropist*, nevertheless this reviewer would like to record that, surfeited with the autobiographical horn blowing of too many of Andy Warhol's 15-minute celebrities, she found the wry humour, deliberate understatement and matter-of-fact writing style of this autobiography a refreshing change. There is a place in the history of Canadian publishing for investigative reporting of Maclean Hunter, warts and all, and for the "inside story" of the often tempestuous relationships between the company and its star alumni—Doris Anderson, Pierre Berton, Peter Gzowski, Christina McCall, Peter Newman, Blair Fraser, Arthur Irwin—the complete list would be almost a *Who's Who* of Canadian journalism. The reader in search of scandalous history or shocking "inside" stories will not find them here. What will be found, is an engagingly "Canadian" view of many of the great events and notable figures of the past 50 years both in this country and abroad.

It is, however, "the other side of the street", the side occupied by Floyd Chalmers, philanthropist and patron of the arts that is the most absorbing, perhaps because there is at least a hint that the author himself values these achievements more than his business successes.

The difficult early years of the Conservatory (alas, far from over), the Canadian Opera Company and Stratford provide an absorbing tale for anyone who has been involved with these organizations as either participant or public. Yet when the book is laid aside it is not the history of the arts in Canada that remains uppermost in the mind. It is an increased awareness of the power and possibilities of voluntary

action and the truly amazing things that can be accomplished by a relatively modest fortune in the hands of an altruistic man (or more properly family) blessed with vision and imagination.

In short, this book will be rewarding reading for anyone who believes that doing well should carry with it an obligation to be doing good.