

A simple idea A wonderful achievement!

The air is cold and rainy, this late afternoon of this Sunday, October 9, at the Lake MacDonald music camp. But on the glass terrace of the main house, there is an air of authentic warmth and serenity. An eloquent contrast to the weather, I dare say. One that is elicited by the company of George and Madeleine Little, two of the founders of CAMMAC and with whom the editor of this newspaper is having a chat, shortly before the traditional candlelight Thanksgiving dinner.

CAMMAC Express: George and Madeleine Little, 42 years since the foundation of CAMMAC, it's a lifetime ... If I asked you your impressions on this long journey?

Madeleine Little: Yes, my God, it's a long journey, eh, George! Very long! But CAMMAC has grown in an absolutely extraordinary way, because the first year, we were 19, including the staff. In the second year, the number doubled and so on, so much that today, in the space of eight weeks, there are roughly 800 people here. So that's what is impressive. It must have been a good idea because it germinated and developed in a remarkable way.

CAMMAC Express.: Which has greatly exceeded your expectations ...

George Little: We had no expectations.

Madeleine Little: No, we just wanted to make music together. It was at Christmas when we were at Otter Lake House with George's brother and his wife and we said: It would be wonderful in summer to make music here with friends. And there must be other people who had the same idea and who got in touch with the different organizations and that's it!

CAMMAC Express: Did you foresee CAMMAC as an ongoing, long-term concern when you started CAMMAC in 1952?

Madeleine Little: (laughing) No! We were the ones who followed the organization.

CAMMAC Express ... which was conceived in a vacuum, so to speak.

Madeleine Little: Rather yes ... That's it.

CAMMAC Express: Do you have any regrets about certain things that you could not achieve or that did not necessarily materialize during these forty years of active life with CAMMAC?

Madeleine Little: (knowingly) Do you think of the trout lake, George?

George Little: Yes.

Madeleine Little: It may be the only regret, because the government had given us a lake, totally our own, near here, which was very, very beautiful and ...

George Little: which was called...

Madeleine Little: ... which was called Trout lake. And George and I wanted to build there at that time. But the Board preferred to buy here rather than build there, which was simpler.

CAMMAC Express: ... for financial reasons?

Madeleine Little: I think that for us, it was the idea of having an infinitely more developable place at that time.

CAMMAC Express: Which is not the case here.

Madeleine Little: Which is not the case here! And we had no neighbours, so no risks that go with the neighborhood, right? And to be able to do exactly what we wanted, with a building built as we want etc ... See, now we have these problems to solve because the building is old. But it's just a detail. The main issue is not the building, it is CAMMAC.

CAMMAC Express: And from an artistic or musical standpoint, are there things that did not always correspond with your own vision of CAMMAC?

Madeleine Little: I don't know ... I don't think so, eh George? It's because at the end, the philosophy that you had stayed on, right?

George Little: Yes.

Madeleine Little: It stayed. In fact, there were obviously small differences. But really, I find that overall, in essence ...

CAMMAC Express: ... The spirit of CAMMAC has remained the same.

Madeleine Little: It has remained as it should. Perhaps there is something that George insisted on a great deal and that is not very present now. And that is getting acquainted with what we call ethnic music, something we would like to see more of perhaps but ...

CAMMAC Express: Yes. I'm going to get back to that ... But, according to you, is there a difference, a distinction between the amateur musicians of 40 years ago and those of today?

Madeleine Little: Do you think there is a difference George? I do not think so, no. These are people who love music, who love to make music. And I think the real amateur musician is the same today as it used to be. He may have other means at his disposal. But...

CAMMAC Express: ... the emergence of electronics?

Madeleine Little: One may think that is a factor. But in fact, there are always so many people who come to CAMMAC and even more and more. So, it seems that these things did not succeed in lessening the enthusiasm of amateur musicians. In fact, the amateur musician is someone who, despite the increasingly fast pace of life and despite, as you mentioned earlier, all the electronic means available to us and the appeal to become passive instead of active, is able to resist all these things. Let's say that it takes more energy today and even courage I would add, to be an amateur musician than in the past. Do you agree with that George?

George Little: Yes.

Madeleine Little: I know that at home, for example, we never had a television set. Until a few years ago, when our children were young, they did not watch television. They were making music.

CAMMAC Express: Well, Mrs. Little, you must certainly read my mind since I am going to refer to your children, who are all musicians, as well as your grandchildren. Do you believe that CAMMAC provides enough for children and young people?

Madeleine Little: I think that has improved a lot, because initially we did not have a program for children, it gradually increased. I must say that as our children grew up and needed it, so it was also (laughing) a little selfish from our part and we were very happy to see that there is now a draft program for teens who may need something a little bit different, though I don't believe so much, George either, we don't believe in categorizing teens as such. They are human beings like everyone else. I think it is a bit of a North American fiction, that notion of the adolescent as we understand it. It is not the reality. And at CAMMAC, adolescents are not treated like that. They are considered full-fledged people, young adults.

CAMMAC Express: Do you think CAMMAC has all the tools it needs to spread its influence, both in terms of advertising and its educational vocation?

Madeleine Little: A big question, eh George? From an educational point of view, I think it's developing very well. From an advertising standpoint, maybe less. I think there is still a lot that could be done and I think there is some concern about keeping CAMMAC fairly private and not too big.

And that can be argued of course. On the other hand, I believe that an institution that does not grow ends up dying.

CAMMAC Express: Do you have a precise idea of the number of staff or participants, since we are on the verge of this important phase of renovation here at the camp?

Madeleine Little: Well, I find that ... growing in numbers is a bit difficult, eh George? A bit risky, maybe not ideal. But I think we could certainly grow in time. That is to say that instead of having eight weeks in summer, there might be a way to extend that.

CAMMAC Express: ... And perhaps develop a stronger relationship with the activities of the regions during the winter season for example?

Madeleine Little: Absolutely. There is certainly a great development which can be done on the side of the regions, precisely. Because finally, the year is fifty-two weeks long, isn't it?

CAMMAC Express: Certainly. Madeleine Little, this question is more specifically for you. Because I read in one of your messages that you would like CAMMAC to be extended, artistically speaking. Is it a multicultural CAMMAC as a reflection of the country that you would like to see? And what do you think of the opinion that this would water down the prime position of what some call, rightly or wrongly, *great music (la grande musique)*?

Madeleine Little: (laughing) ... George would have a lot to say about that because George doesn't believe in great music and other music. George believes in music, period. Music is music. And the one we saw in Cameroon, with the African tribes was music. The music we hear with Charles Dutoit is music. And I do not believe that one has the right to be cited more than the other, personally. And I think it's very important for people in our society to hear, understand and participate in music other than Western music, because if you want to have a general understanding in the world, music is when even a privileged means of communication, because one does not need to know another language. And so, it is very important to participate in the music of others. When we were in Cameroon at one point, I remember, women signaled to me: come with us. I went with them, they gave me little sticks and shells and they showed me how to do it. And I didn't speak their language. But we communicated admirably. And I believe that in a multi-ethnic country like Canada, it is all the more important.

CAMMAC Express: And George Little strongly agrees.

Madeleine Little: It was he who started this. It's not my idea, it's his (laughing).

CAMMAC Express: Everyone knows that CAMMAC is currently going through a decisive phase with regard to the dilapidated infrastructure of Lake MacDonald. Do you recommend a global approach to this situation, despite the financial challenges we know, or do you still believe that we can envisage a gradual restoration of the premises, even if it means tackling more modest budgets, but over a longer period, and therefore a phasing of the operations in the more or less long term?

Madeleine Little: I don't think you're much in favour of the phasing option, George, eh?

George Little: No.

Madeleine Little: (laughing) It's not the kind of move that he likes either. I will tell you that if CAMMAC had considered these things, they would not exist today. I remember once when the treasurer ... was ... when I was secretary, there were three of us with the president at the time, the treasurer and me. And we were doing financial calculations and they both came to the conclusion that we couldn't do the music center the following year because financially it was impossible. So there, I

said: listen, I suggest that we throw in the fire all the papers that we have filled with figures so far and that we do next season without knowing whether it is profitable or not. And that's what we did and it worked.

CAMMAC Express: We are the living proof of that, by the way! George and Madeleine Little, at the end of this century, do you have any wishes for CAMMAC 2000?

Madeleine Little: Do you have any wishes for George, for CAMMAC 2000? I don't know. You know, we are, George and I, people of the present. And, we have always dealt with issues as they arise. And I don't know if we look ahead that far. Anyway, things are going fast. It is difficult to know what the possibilities will be in the year 2000, how the people of the year 2000 will be. Even our grandchildren, it is difficult to know what they will be in the year 2000. So, (laughing) I think the people of the year 2000 will take care of it.

CAMMAC Express: I hope so and I hope so for CAMMAC. Finally, the last word. Something close to your heart, perhaps?

Madeleine Little: .. Who is dear to our hearts ... CAMMAC has represented a good part of our life, eh George? .. Enormously! It has been a great asset for us. It was a lot of hard work, we spent a lot of time, energy, with a lot of joy. And when we see a lot of people who share this and who have a lot of joy and who also spend a lot of energy, well we are very satisfied.

CAMMAC Express: Well, we are very happy to have you. George and Madeleine Little, I want to thank you for your time. And on behalf of the entire CAMMAC community, I wish you long life with us.

Interview by Rafik Matta

President - CAMMAC Montreal

October 9, 1994