

THE SPREAD OF THE COMMUNITY MUSIC IDEA

BY PETER W. DYKEMA, M.LITT.,

Professor of Music, University of Wisconsin.

The National Conference of Community Centers and Related Problems held in New York City in April, 1916, prefaced its call to the workers in the various parts of the United States by the following quotation from John Dewey, professor of philosophy at Columbia University, which may well serve as the motto or underlying idea of the movement for community music in this country: "The furtherance of the depth and width of human intercourse is the measure of civilization. Freedom and fullness of human companionship is the aim, and intelligent coöperative experimentation, the method."

COMMUNITY MUSIC DEFINED

Community music is a term that has obtained great vogue the past three years and yet so far as I know it has never been defined. It may be worth while, however, for the sake of definiteness in this paper and the discussion which may ensue, to indicate one conception of a proper definition. First of all, it may be said that community music is not the name of a new type of music nor even of musical endeavor. It does not include any particular kind of music or any particular kind of performer. It is not so much the designation of a new thing as a new point of view. It may employ any of the older and well tried manifestations of music and musical endeavor, and by means of the new spirit transform them to suit its own purposes. Stated positively and concretely, community music is socialized music; music, to use Lincoln's phrase, for the people, of the people, and by the people. Let us look for a moment at each of these three aspects.

(1) MUSIC FOR THE PEOPLE

That "man shall not live by bread alone" is a statement which implies that while it is entirely proper that man's physical needs be taken care of, his life is incomplete, his development stunted, if



only these needs be provided. The movement for community art in its various manifestations is one of the responses which America is making to this hoary dictum. Never before have there been such widespread efforts to give everybody the opportunity of hearing an abundance of music. Free concerts by bands and orchestras during the summer season; free or lowpriced concerts by bands and orchestras, popular priced opera, free organ recitals during the winter; lectures on music with copious illustrations, concerts by school organizations, open demonstrations of the wonderful possibilities of mechanical music producers; the use of these same instruments in countless homes—these are all indications of the tremendous development of opportunities for even the lowliest to hear all the music he desires. Many of these developments are purely private financial schemes for increasing revenues by obtaining a small profit from a very large number of auditors. A surprisingly large number, however, are either the activities of groups of public-spirited citizens who furnish the entertainments, at their own expense or at cost prices, or the direct undertaking of the municipality itself. From coast to coast, there is a chain of civic music associations, municipal orchestras, choruses, and organs. In Portland, Maine; New York City; Tiffin, Ohio; Richmond, Indiana; Winona, Minnesota, and in many other places, out to Oakland, California, are found the outposts of what promises to be a large army of municipally employed musicians. Starting with Evanston, Illinois, and working east and west has gone the movement for the establishment, in connection with the public libraries, of a collection of records for piano-player and phonograph which may be borrowed and taken home as though they were books—as, indeed, they are to many whose ears must be their eyes. A number of normal schools and universities in the middle west are using the plan which has been so excellently developed at Emporia, Kansas, of sending upon call, even into the remotest communities, records with accompanying lectures or explanations and in some cases with a phonograph or even with lantern slides. Five of these universities have gone rather extensively into the business of furnishing, at the lowest possible prices to the communities of their states, high class musical entertainments. By this means small communities that heretofore have heard only mediocre musical entertainments now are able to hear excellent soloists and good ensemble work. The height of the latter type

was reached when one town in Wisconsin with a population of 600 people, located twelve miles from a railroad, was able to become part of a circuit formed by the university for a series of concerts by seventeen of the best men from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

And not only is the quantity of music to be heard increasing; there has also been a steady gain in the quality. The experiences of New York under the guidance of Arthur Farwell, director of community music, are typical. Band and orchestra leaders in their popular concerts need only guidance and encouragement to strengthen their desires to play the best, and tact and patience to lead their audiences to prefer the best.

(2) MUSIC OF THE PEOPLE

But these concerts are not to be given entirely by professional musicians. The people themselves are entering into the production of music in entertainments. Lindsborg, Kansas, with its annual production of the Messiah; Bethlehem with its restored Bach chorus; New York, Boston, Cincinnati, and scores of other places with their established and historical choruses; Worcester, Massachusetts, Ithaca, New York, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Evanston, Illinois, and other centers with their great three-day, or more, spring festivals—these down to the thousands of towns which support, albeit sometimes rather precariously, choral organizations, bands, or orchestras, are typical of the demand that there be a place for the amateur producer of music. It is a far cry from the tremendous chorus that New York gets together for its open-air festival society down to the village choral union of twenty-five voices, struggling to round into shape for its initial performance a presentation of the "Rose-maiden." But in each case the same impulse is present, namely, the desire of the men and the women to use music as an expression of the emotions and the sense of beauty.

One of the most remarkable phases of this aspect of music is the developments that have gone on in industrial establishments. One of the first manifestations of the so-called welfare work of the great business houses is invariably some musical endeavor. In Chicago, for example, Marshall Field and Company have a large choral society; the Commonwealth Edison Company a choral society and an orchestra; the International Harvester Company a choral society and a band; the Bell Telephone Company an orches-

tra, a band, and a glee club. In many parts of the country a number of newspapers have bands or glee clubs. Associations of commerce, rotary clubs, university clubs in the large cities, in fact the most diverse organizations seem to be able to unite in their love for the study and production of music. Movements like the People's Singing Classes of New York and extension divisions of some of the universities devote their energies to the formation of choral organizations for the definite acquirement of a certain minimum of musical knowledge, the study of some of the larger choral works, and the presentation of those in a rather formal way. It is certain that an organization such as the Civic Music Association of Chicago, which began its work by giving at low prices concerts by professional musicians who largely volunteered their services, has found that an increasing proportion of its work is being devoted to the forwarding of choruses. At its June, 1916, spring festival, there were included works by eleven choruses, six of them being children's groups, the others being adults, one of the most interesting being the Volkslieder Verein, a group of women under the leadership of Mari Ruff Hofer, most of whom are housewives or scrubwomen. Likewise in Pittsburgh, one of the noteworthy contributions which Mr. Will Earhart has made to the music of that city has been the development of a number of robust evening choruses and orchestras of adults. As the democratic movement in our country slowly elevates the standard of every individual, it is inevitable, if our growth is steady and sane, that the people should more and more desire to enter into a serious study of music, the most companionable of the arts.

(3) MUSIC BY THE PEOPLE

In this phrase, "the most companionable of the arts," lies the secret of that phase of the development of community music which has attracted most attention and which probably is most characteristic of the democratic movement, namely, informal or community singing. In this type of music the social element becomes so strong that in selecting a leader for this work it is difficult to know which is the more important attribute, the knowledge of music or the knowledge of people. If the community music movement has developed a new form, it is in connection with this phase of the work. Singing by great groups of people has occurred again and

again. The revivalist, the militarist, and the politician, have used it on special occasions, but never yet has it been capitalized as a permanent social force. The community Christmas tree with its attempts at general singing has each year started into vibration a great wave of love, brotherliness, and community consciousness. But in the year that intervenes before it is reinforced, these waves have lost their force. The community music movement proposes to keep these vibrating and to add to them the reinforcement of many other musical attributes. This is not a movement primarily for the study of music, or the mastering of technique; it is rather the using of that natural love and command of music which everyone possesses and which, when rendered collectively by a large group, is surprisingly efficient, even with comparatively difficult music. The National Conference of Music Supervisors at its meeting in Rochester in 1913 agreed upon a list of eighteen songs which were to be used for community singing and which, in preparation for later adult use, were to be taught to the children of the country. This material, all of the simple folk-song type, has been sung by thousands of people under hundreds of directors and, from these four years' experience, one lesson has already emerged, namely, the group can do things which are impossible for the individual. Mr. Harry H. Barnhart has demonstrated, with his so-called community choruses in Rochester and New York City, that, with an inspiring conductor and proper accompaniment, a great group of people can easily pass beyond such songs as "Old Folks at Home"; "Love's Old Sweet Song"; "Sweet and Low"; "How Can I Leave Thee," simple three-part rounds, and like material which makes up the original collection of eighteen songs, and can give with little or no rehearsal great, sweeping renderings of such great compositions as the "Pilgrims' Chorus" from Tannhauser; "Soldiers' Chorus" from Faust; and Beethoven's "The Heavens Resound." In the new list which the music supervisors are about to publish, the number of songs will be extended to fifty which will include the larger portion of the simpler folk songs of the original eighteen and many others of the same type. But there will also be included some of the massive material for great groups with large accompaniment such as that just mentioned. Another interesting aspect of this community singing idea has been developed in Chicago, that city of many nationalities, in a program called the "melting pot of music."

Here were gathered groups of Swedish and Norwegian singers, united Bohemian singing societies, German liedereh re, and Polish singing groups. Each group in turn sang songs of its own nationality and then from the music thrown upon the screen, one song of each nation was sung in English translation by the entire audience. Finally, all the elements joined in the singing of a number of American patriotic and folk songs.

The results of these great community sings are already having their effect on external conditions. In Rochester, the Park Department, under the guidance of an enthusiastic architect, went to considerable expense and an endless amount of pains to prepare an out-of-door auditorium for a great community chorus. In Central Park, New York City, preparations are made to receive the 10,000 participators in the Sunday afternoon sings. At the other end of the scale in population, but more permanent in form, Anoka, Minnesota, a town of 8,000, has built a concrete stadium with a capacity of almost 2,000. As a direct result of those community singing gatherings, in a large number of places, the school architect is making such a procedure unnecessary for the greater part of the year by providing suitable auditoriums in the school building. Undoubtedly, however, Anoka's stadium, the great pageant grounds at St. Louis and Philadelphia, the Greek theatres, all possess possibilities through their being in the open air, which are closed to the indoor auditorium.

THE HEART OF IT

The community music movement is measuring all musical endeavors by the standard of usefulness for the great social body. It is increasing the number of concerts and bettering their quality. It is stressing the necessity of serious choral study and enlarging the membership of choral organizations. And finally, it is giving the opportunity to every man and woman for free and frequent participation in music, especially in choral singing with great groups of people. It is insisting that, while man must be fed, clothed and housed, while his body must be properly cared for, these measures alone will make but well groomed animals. It maintains that man's glory lies in his intellectual and spiritual attributes and that music aids in satisfying these longings which make life here worth while, and points the way to those aspirations which make a life beyond possible.