

Bulletin of
The American Concert Choir and Choral Foundation, Inc.

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Foreword

This first issue of the American Concert Choir and Choral Foundation Bulletin is a general announcement of the aims and purposes of the Foundation. It is also an appeal to choral conductors throughout the United States for their assistance in planning projects designed to carry out these aims and purposes.

Perhaps the most difficult period in the development of any musician is that time after he has graduated from school and when he must take over the functions of being his own teacher.

After careful investigation, the American Concert Choir and Choral Foundation finds that the necessary tools for study of performance techniques and for the selection of repertoire are woefully inadequate. There has been no central agency from which advice on the organization and administration of choral groups could be obtained.

It is in the hope of serving the general and specific needs of the field of choral music that the Foundation has undertaken its present program.

I THE FOUNDATION

The American Concert Choir and Choral Foundation is a non-stock, non-profit institution organized to further the cultivation of choral conductors and to foster the development of choral groups in the United States. In order to facilitate its services to the musical public, it has been organized in three divisions: Musical Activities, Services, and Research and Publications.

The Musical Activities Division has the function of introducing new works for chorus, and chorus and orchestra to the public and performing standard works from the choral repertoire. By special invitation during the 1957-58 season, representatives from 37 high school

and college choruses in the New York metropolitan area attended concerts given by the American Concert Choir and the American Concert Orchestra.

The Services Division of the Foundation maintains a rental library of parts of choral works and an advisory service that answers inquiries with regard to the choral repertoire and the administrative and organizational problems of choirs. It will also serve as headquarters for the association of choral conductors described below.

The Research and Publications Division of the Foundation is at present conducting a survey of choral groups throughout the nation. It is also preparing various manuscripts including catalogues of choral music and a journal devoted to choral activities.

II THE FOUNDATION'S SURVEY OF CHORAL GROUPS

In September of 1957 the Foundation began its survey of choral groups in the nation. We felt this project was necessary because there exist no systematic reference tools which describe choral groups in the United States, and because activities of the Foundation are to be based, as far as possible, on needs as they are reported by choruses throughout the country. Results so far have been extremely gratifying. Over 270 choruses have told us of their repertoire, training procedures and problems. We, in turn, have sought to find solutions to many of the problems called to our attention.

Many choral people who received the survey form have asked by whom it was prepared. Both format and questions were determined by the staff of the Foundation and a group of advisors including Dr. J. M. Coopersmith of the Library of Congress; Prof. Martin Bernstein, Chairman of the Department of Music at New York University; Hyman Faine, National Executive Secretary, American Guild of Musical Artists; and Noah Greenberg, Director of New York Pro Musica. The form,

which is divided into seven sections, includes questions on the training of choristers, repertoire, budgets, administrative procedures, and so forth.

The Foundation plans to devote five years to its study of choral groups and publish findings as they become available. When complete, the study will be of value to educators and administrators as well as the personnel of choral and orchestral groups. We hope you will notify us if you have not yet received a form for your organization.

III THE ASSOCIATION OF CHORAL CONDUCTORS

Many of the questions asked of the Foundation are those which deal with the common experience of the American Concert Choir and other choral groups in finding repertoire and organizing and managing concerts. From letters and information in the "To The Conductor" section of the survey, it seems evident that there is a general need for an organization to serve as a clearing house for information on choral activities. There are several institutions that serve the public admirably in specific areas of the field. These institutions, however, do not have detailed listings of the activities and services of other organizations so that many questions go unanswered.

In response to this problem, the Foundation is organizing a national association of choral conductors that will coordinate and supplement existing facilities. The association will have its headquarters in New York City, and until the first convention, at which officers will be elected, the staff of the Foundation will serve as administrators.

In the next issue of this bulletin you will find an application blank for membership in the association. It will set forth the privileges of membership, dues and a new plan for centralizing information on the choral resources of the largest library in each state of the union.

IV THE FOUNDATION AWARDS PROGRAM

In December of 1957 the Foundation initiated its annual awards program. Two trophies, modeled after the ancient Greek *tripos*, were given Archibald T. Davison, Professor Emeritus of Music at Harvard University and

Jacob K. Javits, United States Senator from New York. These awards were made in the spirit of the *choregic* competitions, at which awards were given those *choregi* who distinguished themselves by service to the cultural life of their country.

Among the notable speeches made that evening was one by Dr. J. M. Coopersmith. We of the Foundation can think of no better way to express the purposes of our organization than to reproduce his address.

Address by Dr. J. M. Coopersmith

First Annual Tripos Award Dinner 12/10/57

Dr. Davison, Senator Javits, Miss Hillis, Friends of the American Choral Foundation, and distinguished guests:

This memorable evening is a culmination and a beginning. The plan to honor two men of vision was conceived some time ago by Margaret Hillis, Musical Director of the American Choral Foundation. On this occasion we are gathered to honor Dr. Archibald Thompson Davison, Professor Emeritus of Music, Harvard University, for his magnificent contribution to the development of a great choral tradition, and the Honorable Jacob K. Javits, United States Senator from New York, for his continuing legislative activities toward the creation of a National Arts Foundation.

To many of us Dr. Davison is inextricably tied to "the multitude of singers" known collectively as the Harvard Glee Club which is celebrating its centennial during the present academic year 1957-58,—one hundred years of growth and development in the art of singing fine choral music. The Glee Club of this centennial year is a considerably different type of singing group from that of 1858, both in the composition of its membership and the musical standards it maintains and in the University environment in which it functions. The socially-exclusive, 16-member club of 1858, whose repertoire contained such choice gems as "Mother I'm slowly dying," was organized during a university administration headed by a president who was reputedly "stone deaf and totally devoid of aesthetic sense." The Harvard Glee Club of today is a musical organization of 125 members whose only admission requirements are musical ability and a dedication to great choral music, and the University administration has for some time recognized the club's

international role as a cultural ambassador and as an integral part in the cultural life of the academic community. The ideals and standards which have evolved, as successive generations of singers have become increasingly aware of the greatness and breadth of choral literature, are largely those of one man, who for nearly a half century has succeeded in making articulate to Harvard men and Radcliffe women his convictions that there is no compromise with greatness. That he has succeeded preeminently is common knowledge; but what seems to me most important is that successive generations of his students, inspired by his greatness, are carrying on this noble tradition of music as a humanistic discipline, not only in their respective academic communities, but also in their homes and in public musical life. This transformation from the mediocrity of third-rate college and community music-making to the understanding and the recreation of the great musical masterworks of all ages needed a catalyst who would provide, through vision and knowledge, through love and persistence, and through the spoken and the written word, the essential ingredients. Dr. Davison has all these qualities in great abundance.

But this is just the beginning. In 1940 Dr. Davison published a book on choral conducting. In its 73 pages are distilled not only the wisdom, the convictions, and the experience of some 35 years of choral conducting, but also a prognosis for the future. To paraphrase his conclusions would be presumptuous; I can do no better than quote what he has said about choral performance:

"The most tragic artistic and educational error that has been committed in this country is the blind assumption that the best is too good; that the enthusiasm of all the participants, including the audience, can be maintained only by the employment of music that is second-rate and attractive only for the moment. That this is untrue has again and again been proved. Yet we, as conductors and music committees, still persist in killing off successive choral enterprises that originated in enthusiasm and high hopes of success, simply because we cannot bring ourselves to believe in the capacity of the average man and woman to respond not to superficial prettiness but to enduring beauty. We descend from appeals to the singers' loyalty to reliance on social and sex distinctions, to suppers after rehearsals, to free tickets for our concerts, and finally we acknowledge a foreordained failure on the ground that 'the interest in music is too

slight to warrant continuance.' Exactly the reverse is true. It is because the singers and the audience are musical that they forsake us; it is because we fail to accept the self-evident fact that a chorus, like any other body that grows by what it feeds on, must have nourishment. Zeal for fine music depends not at all upon education, musical or otherwise. It grows out of an experience of the satisfactions that spring only from association with the highest manifestations of musical art. To initiate this experience, to cultivate it, to enlighten it with technical resource,—these are the duty, but still more the privilege, of the conductor."

These words, are in essence, the unwritten constitution of the American Choral Foundation. Founded by Margaret Hillis to fill a continuing need for the propagation of the ideals of such pioneers as Davison, the Foundation has a four-fold purpose:

First, as a central organization, to represent in our national life, the interests of the many choral groups in our musical life, to the end that the great tradition of choral performance be fostered and encouraged;

Its second purpose is to create a central repository of the choral monuments of all time and to make information concerning these works readily available for study and performance to the conductors and choral groups of America;

To fulfill its third purpose, the Foundation plans to implement Davison's ideals through the publication of a Dictionary of Choral Composers, through guides to the works of special periods and occasions and to the works of individual composers, and through a journal for the dissemination of knowledge of choral music containing articles on the history and practice of choral music, news of choral activities, and the exchange of ideas;

And, finally, the Foundation hopes, through practical choral demonstrations in the field, to encourage existing choral groups in the smaller communities of our nation to reach for the great in music and to aid in the organization and the development of newly-organized choral groups.

Admittedly, this is an ambitious program; nonetheless, it is an essential one. It should be emphasized that it is not the intention of this program to invade the field of the music educator; it should be construed, rather, as a service to the musical community. Education ought to

be a continuing process long after school lets out. Sir Quiller Couch's dictum that in America we "take" courses while in England they are "studied," is not so valid today as when it was first promulgated. There is, nevertheless, a suspicion abroad that we in America are culturally backward and that our interests are purely material ones. This is patently untrue and it seems to me that we must as a nation demonstrate our heritage by example and precept. Subvention of the arts by European governments is a long-standing tradition that evolved from princely patronage; it is in this area that we as a generous nation can learn much. It is not enough that more and more enlightened business corporations are recognizing the value of the humanities, not only in their daily operations, but also in their encouragement

of the arts through financial aid. At the present time this aid is too tenuous and exceptional to have any permanent impact on our national cultural life. More hopeful are the attempts in recent years by successive sessions of Congress to remedy this condition. Unfortunately these have met with small success; but the cumulative efforts of such legislators as Senator Javits are not wasted. Each expression of legislative need for a National Arts Foundation is ultimately an expression of public opinion that favors this kind of activity and in the final analysis hastens the day when a Ministry of Fine Arts is considered an indispensable function of our national government. Significant roles in this program are being played by the scholar, the legislator, and the artist: Dr. Davison, Senator Javits, Margaret Hillis,—we salute you.

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