

THE COMPOSERS ORGANIZE

A Proclamation

THE American composer of serious music is about to proclaim a new principle for his work as a creative artist. He intends to campaign for the right to make a living by composing.

Up to now it has been taken for granted that he shall write sonatas and symphonies on the side, while the real business of supporting himself and his family occupies most of his time. But America cannot fairly ask the composer to make a valuable contribution to the world's music and at the same time withhold a just return for his output. Some native composers have at times been paid for writing music. But as a fundamental right, the elementary principle that every composer is worth his wage has never been established.

On December 19, 1937, forty-eight representative composers* banded together at the Beethoven Association in New York City for the express purpose of furthering this cause. They took the name of the American Composers' Alliance and announced two objectives: first to regularize and collect all fees pertaining to performance of their copyrighted music, in other words, to protect the economic rights of the composer; second, to stimulate interest in the performance of American music, thereby increasing the economic returns.

The United States is the only country which has copyright laws and does not have an *all-embracing* protective association to effect the purposes outlined. Our popular composers, of course, are taken care of. The American Society for Composers, Authors and Publishers, better known as ASCAP, has managed after twenty-five years to collect royalties and generally protect the interests of its members. The playwrights also have their Dramatists' Guild, the writers their Authors' League; the performing musicians their American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA).

*The list of names is given on Page 95.

It is clear that the principle of organization of creative and interpretive artists is not a new one in America. Also noteworthy is the fact that playwrights, novelists and musical soloists, like composers, do not work on a basis of weekly salaries; yet the need for a central organization able to speak for them and work for their mutual benefit has been felt in every case. Why then, the question may well be asked, has it taken the composers of serious music so long to arrive at a similar point?

There are some who think it is because the demand for American music has been so small as not to warrant the formation of a protective body. That may have been true in the past, but is becoming less true with each new season. Moreover, it is one of the plans of the Alliance to make reciprocal arrangements with foreign performing rights societies. It is too often forgotten that as far as performance fees go in all but the dramatic and symphonic fields, Strauss, Sibelius, Stravinsky et al, are in the same boat with ourselves. By collecting their performing rights and that of every other serious European composer, we not only immeasurably strengthen our own position, but can ask a similar service for the American composer in Europe.

There are others who say that the composer's desire for performance comes before every other consideration. The Alliance is ready to admit that the collection of royalty fees for performance rights may act as a deterrent to performance, but only for a short period. In the end this music will be more valuable in the eyes of the very people who are asked to pay for the privilege of performing it, just because of that condition.

The law of the land gives every composer the right to collect a fee from a public performance-for-profit of his work, whether it be a two-page song or a two-hundred page symphony. That means that every composer of serious music who owns a performance right in his music, whatever his musical style may be, has an interest which can be served by the American Composers' Alliance.

As a fellow society of ASCAP, the Alliance will protect him in all fields not now covered by that organization, such as those of the symphony orchestras, opera companies, choral societies, chamber music organizations, instrumental soloist recitals, music

clubs, schools and colleges, dance recitals, and the movies. The radio, also, is an important medium, though a special one, in that it is already partly covered by ASCAP. Thus, without conflict of interest, a composer may belong to both ASCAP and the Alliance.

There are several well-known models to be followed in the actual collection of royalties, which the Alliance is now considering. The European plan takes a certain percentage of the gross receipts and turns them over to the protective society. The American system, as devised by ASCAP, imposes a yearly license fee on all organizations that use the copyrighted music of its members. But whichever one is followed, it will be necessary to establish minimum royalty charges. In the present chaotic situation some composers are paid when their orchestral works are played and others are not. No composer receives royalties when his song is sung or his trio performed. A famous singer now has the right to purchase a song at a music shop and sing it in hundreds of cities throughout the country, while the composer gets no return other than a few cents from the sale of sheet music. Since the *right to a performance fee* has been firmly established by law, it is obvious that composers can get together to exercise it.

Besides the matter of fee-collection there are other ways in which the composer's interest will be furthered by this new society. Take the question of the publishers, for example. So far as we know there has never been any collective bargaining between composers and publishers in relation to the form of contract governing the publication of music. We assume that the publishers' mutual protective association jointly drew up a form acceptable to them. In most cases this is taken in blind faith by the individual composer. But there seems no good reason why the contract should not now be submitted to a body of composers for discussion and approval.

Concerted effort on the part of an all-inclusive body of American composers for increased performances of their music should have a profound effect on our musical life. It is not the purpose of this Alliance to undertake concerts or to promote individual works by any composer. But effective general propaganda will be made on a national scale to encourage the Federation of Music

Clubs, the American Guild for Performing Artists, the music departments of high schools and universities, et cetera, in the performance of our native music, though the organizations themselves will decide what works they wish to perform.

The Alliance, moreover, intends to campaign for the commissioning of new works. It proposes that specific sums be set aside for the encouragement of creative art in this country, where almost all money for music is allotted to the performers.

Thus in general, the Alliance will exist as a representative body speaking in the name of the serious composer in America. It will be the official Voice of the American Composer, which is so seldom heard.

For such an alliance to obtain its object the support of every composer is needed. It may take several years before a functioning society can be said to exist. But now a start has been made, and it is the belief of the undersigned that the combined efforts of American composers will give them a place more commensurate with what they deserve in the musical affairs of our country.

*Drawn up by the Temporary Executive
Board of the American Composers' Alliance.*

AARON COPLAND, *Chairman*

Marion Bauer	Douglas Moore	Elie Siegmeister
Roy Harris	Quincy Porter	Virgil Thomson
Goddard Lieberson	Wallingford Riegger	Bernard Wagenaar
	Roger Sessions	

Composers present at the meeting of December 19th were Erno Balogh, Hans Barth, Marion Bauer, Nicolai Berezowsky, Joanna Beyer, Evelyn Berckman, Marc Blitzstein, Paul Bowles, Elliot Carter, Norman Cazden, Samuel Chelinsky, Annabelle Comfort, Aaron Copland, Paul Creston, David Diamond, Lehman Engel, Vivian Fine, Dante Fioreillo, Elliot Griffis, Roy Harris, Herbert Haufrecht, Walter Helfer, Rosalie Housman, Herbert Inch, Harrison Kerr, Goddard Lieberson, Alexander Lipsky, Otto Luening, Robert McBride, George Maynard, Marion Miller, Douglas Moore, Solomon Pimsleur, Harvey Pollins, Quincy Porter, Muriel Reger, Wallingford Riegger, Earl Robinson, Carlos Salzedo, Lazare Saminsky, William Schuman, Roger Sessions, Elie Siegmeister, Virgil Thomson, Edgar Varese, Bernard Wagenaar, Jacob Weinberg, Mabel Wood-Hill.

Composers not present, but who have since endorsed the A.C.A. are George Antheil, Charles Wakefield Cadman, Abram Chasins, Rudolph Ganz, Vittorio Giannini, Edward Burlingame Hill, Frederick Jacobi, Philip James, Werner Josten, Daniel Gregory Mason, Walter Piston, Bernard Rogers, Arthur Shepherd, Leo Sowerby, David Stanley Smith, Randall Thompson, Henry Eicheim, Deems Taylor.