

PIONEERING FOR AMERICAN MUSIC

ARTHUR FARWELL

THE story of the promotion of serious American musical composition, from its emergence out of the nocturnal mists of adolescence and provincialism into the present encouraging dawn of its artistic importance, covers a period of about thirty-five years. This story has by no means yet been written with all its implication of detail, human interest, personalities, incidents and historical significance, although excellent and important steps have recently been taken in that direction.* Within the limits of time and space permitted in a brief magazine article, I can myself set down only a few random observations out of my own experience in this general development.

When the Manuscript Societies of New York, Philadelphia and Chicago were organized, between 1889 and 1896, no broad awakening to contemporary world-developments in music had yet taken place in America. My own contact, a fugitive one, was with the New York society in the nineties. To those of us who were beginning to get a faint glimpse, a very faint one, of "modern" music and future American possibilities, this organization appeared hopelessly dilettante, though I now recognize that it had its place in the gradual evolution. Its founder, Addison Andrews, once took a printed song of mine from his desk drawer to show me with what he was accustomed to horrify musical visitors. The chiefly horrifying element was an altered major dominant ninth chord, with the ninth below the third.

It was in those days that MacDowell was living, obscurely enough, in Boston, and Paderewski was said to have scolded Arthur Nikisch into producing some of his works with the Boston Symphony. I was present when Nikisch subsequently directed an orchestral suite by MacDowell and his second piano concerto with the composer as soloist. On the former occasion

*Notably by John Tasker Howard in his book *Our American Music*, and in the survey, *Altruistic Music Publishing in America*, which Juliet Danziger contributed to the *Musical Mercury* of October, 1934.

MacDowell made his nervous bow from his usual seat in the second balcony.

The American discovery of the real Wagner, and the staggering emergence of Tschaikowsky, Brahms and Strauss in the last decade of the nineteenth century drove many young American students of composition to Europe. There soon appeared a new generation of composers, who were aware of contemporary music. Not until such a generation should arise could there be any true awakening to the art of writing music in America. It was now, in this decade, that Anton Dvorak stepped into the scene, to teach students who could not go to Europe and to send out his call to American composers to strike into the musical folk-sources of their own soil. Dvorak came to this country, I was informed in Europe, against the scornful protests of Brahms, who urged him not to accept America's invitation, saying that Americans "cared for nothing but the dollar."



The result of these events appeared in the first decade of the present century, which I have termed the "Period of American Musical Awakening." For the first time American composers began to write music which showed that they were observing what France and Russia, as well as the more advanced Germany were doing to expand and modernize music. But the publishers would have none of it and would accept only the most conventional pieces from these men. I made a contact with this younger group in 1901, two years after my return from European study. During this latter experience I had particularly observed that the countries which were gaining a national individuality of their own, notably France, Russia, Norway, Bohemia, Spain, were doing so through the development of their own folk material. I had taken Dvorak's challenge deeply to heart, and worked in the field of Indian music, not with the idea that this or any other non-Caucasian folk music existing in America was the foundation of a national art, but because it existed only in America and its development was part of my program to further all unique and characteristic musical expressions that could come only from this country. By 1901 the de-

gree of interest shown in some early recitals of my Indian developments, given in Boston, led me to believe that they should be printed. But I could find no publisher who was like-minded. So I had reached an impasse.

I went to Chadwick with my troubles, and found him sympathetic. I said, "We go to Europe and spend a lot of money, or it is spent on us, to be trained as *composers*; we come back and they will have us as lecturers, writers, accompanists, teachers, or what not, but they won't have us as composers. Composers, they tell us, are Europeans." "True," said Chadwick, "but what are you going to do about it?"

I said, "I am going to fight," and received his approbation and blessing.

The issue, of course, was not for myself alone, but for the new generation of composers. My contact with the younger group, and my own impasse, led me immediately afterwards, in December, 1901, to the founding of the *Wa-Wan Press*, at Newton Centre, Massachusetts. Stillman-Kelley, of somewhat more advanced years and experience, cautioned me about using this cryptic name, (that of an Omaha ceremonial of peace, fellowship and song), but I felt the moment demanded a striking and curiosity-provoking title. My capital was about ten dollars, which went for stationery and postage. With the first subscriptions to come in for an announced quarterly series of works, I paid for the circulars and the printing of the first issue.

The point which I wish to make here is that this was not a mere whimsical adventure on my part, but an inevitable event, forced by the condition and movement of the times. It is this which gives it historical importance as the first of such ventures. There was no avoiding it; if I had not undertaken it, someone else soon would have.

In the eleven years of our existence we published works of some thirty composers, and the passage of time indicates that we did not fail to gather in a very good proportion of those then beginning their careers who have since come to national prominence. Among them were Edgar Stillman-Kelley (the only one among us who already enjoyed a considerable reputation), Frederic Ayres, Louis Campbell-Tipton, Arne Oldberg,

Edward Burlingame Hill, Arthur Shepherd, Gena Branscombe, Henry Gilbert, and Noble Kreider, whose name has not carried as far as it will one day. Charles T. Griffes and John Alden Carpenter would have been with us, but at the time they knocked at the Wa-Wan doors I was compelled by force of affairs to terminate the enterprise, and was turning the catalog over to G. Schirmer, New York.

In the earliest days of the venture we gave numerous concerts in various places, usually under private auspices. One of the most memorable of these was held in the parlors of the Lafayette-Brevoort Hotel in New York, on February 16, 1903. Among various other offerings, Henry Gilbert played his *Negro Episode, a Tone-Poem on African Rhythms*, and *Verlaine: Sunset Colors and Reveries*, and characteristically made the affair unforgettable by removing his cuffs, which bothered him in playing, and placing them prominently on top of the piano.

Between 1903 and 1907, I made four trips to the Far West, stopping everywhere across the country, at towns large and small, drawing audiences by playing my Indian music, preaching the gospel of American music, and discovering new composers. The Indian music, because of its novelty, became a powerful weapon of propaganda; it enabled me to reach large numbers of people. Indeed I could not have made this national campaign without it.



It was in the midst of these affairs, in the summer of 1905, that I received a telegram to rush over to New York on a most important matter. I found there a musical wild-man, by the name of Louis A. von Gaertner, who had interested Wall Street to support an orchestral society for the production of American scores. The "New Music Society of America" was duly organized, with Modest Altschuler and his Russian Symphony Orchestra as the medium. It gave two concerts late in the season of 1905-6, at Carnegie Hall, and presented works, about one half of which had been heard before, by MacDowell, Henry Gilbert, Arthur Shepherd, Henry Holden Huss, David Stanley Smith, Frederick Converse and Chadwick. Plainly, too much stress was given

to what was not "new." At all events, "Wall Street" declared that such an organization should have a \$15,000 *European* conductor (!), and as it did not come forward with the fifteen thousand, the New Music Society of America died the death.

The Western tours led, in 1907, to my forming the Wa-Wan Society of America, in 1908 renamed the American Music Society, with sixteen Centers for the production of American music throughout the United States. An important concert was given by the New York Center at Carnegie Hall on April 18, 1910 with the People's Symphony Orchestra. Its program included the Prelude to *The Hamadryad*, by William J. McCoy, *Four Songs* by Loeffler, MacDowell's *Concerto in D-Minor*, *The Raven* by Arthur Bergh, the orchestral fantasy, *Dawn*, by Arthur Farwell, Chadwick's ballad, *Lochinvar*, and the orchestral dances, *Creole Days*, by Harry Rowe Shelley.

The Paderewski Prize Competition for American composers, through its wide publicity, undoubtedly was not without its moral effect on the general movement. The winners of the first competition in 1902 were Horatio Parker, Henry Hadley and Arthur Bird. At the second, in 1905, only one award was made, to Arthur Shepherd for his *Overture Joyeuse*.

A new and powerful force was added to the development of American music at the Fifth Biennial Convention of the National Federation of Music Clubs at Memphis, Tennessee in May, 1907, when a prize competition for American composers was established, and a general study plan of American music formulated.

Apparently wholly unique and unattached to other movements was the remarkable series of Litchfield County Choral Union festivals, given by Carl Stoeckel in the famous "music shed" which he built for this purpose in Norfolk, Conn. While this, one of the most brilliant and dignified musical phenomena of America, was started in 1900, Mr. Stoeckel did not begin commissioning American composers (and foreign) to write works for it until 1908. Between that date and 1922, he requested works for these festivals, offering a large honorarium, from the following Americans: Horatio Parker (twice), George W. Chadwick (four times), Henry Hadley (twice), Stillman-

Kelley (twice), Henry Gilbert, Charles Martin Loeffler, John Alden Carpenter, David Stanley Smith, Edward Burlingame Hill and John Powell. These works were generally conducted by their composers, under ideal conditions, with the members of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra (though not under that designation), who were luxuriously entertained there for the period of the festival. Mr. Stoeckel chartered the two hotels in Norfolk for the orchestra, and provided a separate house for the solo artists, bringing up a chef and staff of cooks and waiters from Delmonico's to serve them.

About the Stillman-Kelley Publication Society I am very little informed, but I know that the original intention of publishing Kelley's scores (the Wa-Wan Press was not in a position to publish orchestral works) was broadened to include those of others. The war, I believe, interfered rather seriously with this movement so that it could not exert a continuous influence, but it remains a factor in the present connection.



Except for the Norfolk festivals, the war definitely broke the continuity of this practical attention to American creative work. When it was over, the changed spiritual condition of the nation produced a generation of composers with different aims from those of their musical forbears, and a change in the character of interest in music. A new outfit of enterprises, with a new personnel was necessary to meet this change. A new crowd of hot-heads, enthusiastic and young, like our own in 1901, now rallied to fight new battles to the death. But the battles which they fought presented one distinction from our own, which stamps the greatest difference of all upon the two periods. These later men have had to fight only for the recognition of new styles of music, whereas we had to fight to make the nation admit that there could be any composers in America. They have had to fight only for the right to stand in a particular place. We had to fight for any place to stand in at all. This it appears to me is the fact which demands recognition more than any other at the present time, if the historical implications are to be grasped, and if the composers of the younger generation of today are to know what the

struggles of the century's beginning means to them.

Also the economics of promoting new, serious American music has completely changed. The enterprises with which we are familiar today, such as the Society for the Publication of American Music, the New Music Society, the Juilliard Foundation, the Rochester enterprise, the Cos Cob Press, can command the financial resources necessary for the publication of large works, in orchestral and chamber music forms. This was impossible to us in the earlier time, and now represents a great gain in the stability of American interest in music.

Looking backward to the American musical awakening of the first years of the century, and even still farther to the apparently but not really futile efforts of an earlier time, we realize that the present status of composition in America, and the enterprises for its promotion, strike deep roots, in a continuous series, into the past. True, the present battle for new styles and more matured technic could not have been fought without our previous struggle for national recognition of the composer in America. But that earlier battle also could not have been fought without the basic effort for national musical education, with its attendant primitive creative efforts, in the Reconstruction period.