

MUSIC FOR THE ARMY

RICHARD FRANKO GOLDMAN

BAND music is about the only form of musical activity in the Army today which people take for granted. As a result, there is much loose talk about what is being done and what ought to be done. Almost every musician has some pet project which he thinks should be put into operation: a symphony orchestra for every division, chamber music concerts every Friday night, special privileges of one sort or another for musicians. Most of these projects are hopelessly unrealistic, when they are not completely absurd, and have little bearing on the primary business of the Army, that of winning the war. There is no time now for boondoggling, none for business-as-usual, and certainly none for business-as-unusual, which is what many seem to propose.

One may be sure that a sincere effort is being made to use music in the armed forces and to use it effectively. If occasional mistakes in judgment or execution are made, the Army is certainly entitled to point out that it has no monopoly on them. The men in the Army seem to want music and they are going to get it. But they are going to get the kind of music *they* want, not the kind someone thinks they ought to have. The Army cannot now take time out for courses in music appreciation.

It is risky for anyone outside the Army to make statements about what the soldiers want in music. One would hardly guess for example, that soldiers would ask to have phonograph records of band music, since they would seem to have a surplus of this sort of entertainment, but several reports indicate quite clearly that there is just such a demand.

One survey recently conducted showed some rather interesting things about soldiers' preferences in listening to music on the radio. An overwhelming majority expressed a liking for current popular music, with straight dance music strongly preferred to "swing;" a rather large percentage recorded a liking for "hillbilly" music; while a surprisingly large number (about thirty percent) expressed a liking for "classical" music. It is true that an equal number professed an active dislike for "classical" music; and

it must also be remembered that the term "classical" is used very loosely. In such a survey it would include the *Poet and Peasant Overture* as well as Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, and the *Aragonaise* from *Le Cid* as well as the Brahms *Violin Concerto*; in short, exactly the type of "classical" music one gets on a radio.

Phonograph recordings, chosen as nearly as possible in accordance with such expressed preferences, are being made available in large quantities to the men in service going overseas. "Records For Our Fighting Men, Inc." is providing many of these records both for the Army and Navy. It is planned to supply a number of record kits, completely varied as to contents, in order to provide music to suit all tastes. The emphasis here is distinctly on entertainment rather than on education, although the inclusion of a certain amount of serious or "classical" music may be construed as having "educational" and "cultural" implications.

Specially designed radio-phonographs are provided for use by the men wherever practical. These sets, in addition to playing the records provided, will also pick up the shortwave programs sent out by the Office of War Information for men in service overseas. The O.W.I. programs are varied, and include music of many types, thus providing a further source of both entertainment and edification.

Much attention is being given to the creation of a "singing army." Whether these efforts will succeed, or even whether they are undertaken from the right angle, only experiment will show. Singing can be a cause, but is much more often an effect, of good morale. It cannot be a cause when there are no new songs which can possibly arouse singing enthusiasm. The basic song material is contained in the Army Song Book, of which each soldier receives a copy. Of its newer service songs and anthems, only the Army Air Corps song can be said to have any vitality. The best ones are still those comparative old-timers, *Anchors Aweigh* and *The Marines' Hymn*. (The melody of the latter, by the way, was written by Offenbach; a fact not generally known.) For the rest, the Song Book is filled up with "Old Favorites" (especially from World War I) and stuff from which the shine, if it was ever present, has long since worn off. It is hard to imagine any group singing much of this material with enthusiasm, or to expect that it would arouse any emotional response.

The song-leaders in the Army and United Services Organization are now receiving directives on material supplemental to that in the Army Song Book. It is hoped to provide these leaders with "bibliographies" and

other help, as well as with a selection of song slides. All of the slides and bibliographies will not, of course, improve the music itself. One need not dwell on this point here, for our war songs have already been brilliantly discussed in *MODERN MUSIC* (March, 1942) by Lehman Engel. Engel's article, so full of keen good sense and so pointed in its conclusions, should receive the widest possible circulation, especially among song-leaders, while there is still time to contribute really effective ideas.

Perhaps the most important development in the wartime musical situation was the appointment of the first groups of music advisers in the Army Specialist Corps, prior to the abolition of the Corps on October 31. The Army Specialists were to be a body of non-combatant experts, serving in all fields from chemical to musical warfare. As this article goes to press, no reliable information is available as to what will become of the thirty-odd music specialists already appointed. The official announcement intimated, however, that the work of the specialists would be carried on under regular Army supervision, and that present members of the Corps might receive specialist commissions in the regular Army "with the concurrence of the chief of the branch to which they are assigned for duty, and if otherwise found qualified for officers' commissions."

The group of music advisers already appointed in the A.S.C., if they continue to function in one way or another, may be able to make a considerable difference in the Army musical picture. They have received a course of training at Fort Meade, Maryland, under Major Howard C. Bronson, Music Officer of the Special Service Division, and have been assigned to duty at camps and service commands throughout the country. Many of them, according to the original plans, may eventually be sent overseas. Again barring changes in organization and aims, their duties are various and in fact may be said to be limited only by the imagination of each individual. But in all cases, they have been expected to "sell" music to commanding officers, to iron out problems in various localities, to act as song-leaders, organizers, teachers and observers, and to encourage the men to participate in musical activities.

With imagination, enterprise and a realistic approach, such specialists should be able to accomplish a very great deal. The appointments (prior to October 31) have been of an interesting nature. The field of popular music is represented by two well-known personalities: Glenn Miller and Wayne King. The pianist, Beryl Rubinstein, has also received an A.S.C. Commission; but for the most part the new specialists are persons not well

known in the world of professional music. Many are college men, mostly band and choral music teachers, and there are also a few high school music supervisors. The idea of varying the type of specialist seems to be a good one, at least experimentally. No one can tell which background and ability may prove to be the most generally useful and adaptable. For music specialists will have to adapt themselves to the men and to conditions as they find them rather than attempt to put a preconceived program into operation. Obviously the amount each man will be able to accomplish will depend almost entirely on himself: on his experience, knowledge, adaptability, originality and capacity to improvise, as well as on his ability to get along with men and officers alike. This again is true only barring the issuance of a brand new set of directives since the abolition of the A.S.C. as a separate agency.

One of the important features of the current work in the Army is the emphasis on trying to create musical self-sufficiency. It has been realized that there are limits to the usefulness as well as the enjoyability of any program which is "promoted" or led by outside professionals. An attempt is therefore being made to encourage the soldiers to make their own music. This endeavor varies from encouraging groups to form glee clubs and dance bands, to encouraging individuals to play the harmonica, the ukulele, the ocarina and other homely and easily learned toys. Large quantities of such instruments are distributed. For amusement and self-entertainment this movement should have value, and should be particularly welcomed by soldiers on isolated posts where no bands are stationed, where no camp shows arrive, where no phonograph may be available, and where even the radio may be unreliable. Self-instruction manuals are being improvised, and every other effort made to see that any soldier who wants to toot, blow or scrape gets some kind of instrument on which he may make noise.

Special attention is also being given to music composed by the soldiers themselves. No tangible means of encouragement has yet been found, but the question is being seriously studied. Nothing could give a truer insight into the psychology and morale of the men than such compositions. There is reason to hope, if not to believe, that some really good things will be turned up; things, moreover, that might otherwise never reach anyone's attention.

From the standpoint of the cultivated musical amateur or of the intelligent professional musician, much of what is being sung and played and encouraged in the Army today has its distressing aspects. The general level

of music available is quite bad, of course. There is an urgent need for new music both in and out of the Army. That is really the crux of the whole problem. For the Army situation is only a very special reflection of the national musical consciousness, and cannot be expected to show improvement over the original. If much needed new music were written tomorrow, there is little likelihood that it would be used, for there is no reason to believe that the musical tastes and habits of the country in time of war will change dramatically from the standards of the country in time of peace. Under the given circumstances, it may be certainly said that music in the Army is doing as well as can or should be expected.