

FAN MAIL FOR MR. WHALEN

DEAR Grover Whalen,

Right under your picture in the music program you ask if I'm enjoying the Fair and what goes on in the Hall of Music. Definitely, I say "Yes." Here it is only the fifteenth of May and already Swiss, Poles, Finns, Norwegians have been and gone, the Brazilians and Rumanians even came twice. Now the Poles are on their way back, the British are due in June, the Hungarians in July and the French are down for August. With a marathon like that it's hard to run out every night, but when I do get there I like the whole show—bright flags over the orchestra and people in gaudy, native costumes. Sometimes, too, it's very moving, for a lot of those countries are not sitting so pretty just now and yet here they are saying, "Look, this is our music, we hope to go on making more, and we want you to hope the same." Well I do. The sponsoring nations, with due regard for their occasional great men, have not been what you might call exactly first-class musical powers. Yet they can put on a whole evening or two of their own music, without benefit of a major classic, and they have quite a good time. And so do we. And so it seems does the press, for which, especially, Mr. Whalen, gardenias to you.

Now it's my turn to ask questions. Did you see the May first *Vogue*? With the girl on Page 89 floating along in yards and yards of crisp organdie over a caption that said "For dining at the French pavilion and then going on to the Music Hall to hear concerts of *American music*?" Those italics are mine. Because in all your announcements I can't seem to find a date to tie up with that alluring costume.

Originally, in the dark pre-Fair era I didn't think in musical headlines. All I expected was plenty of swing blaring out of

Midway honky-tonks and maybe some soft crooning piped by Muzak to the wayside beer stands. That, however, was before your press department really got under way and sounded off on the high notes of *Salzburg for the U. S. A.* This seductive theme has been going round and round here for many a year, but for the first time, it seemed to mean business, even when air-conditioning the Met and Carnegie cooled off to a frost. Remember the Clean-up trucks you sent through New York in April saying Company was Coming? That clinched it. With all those countries just moving off the map of Europe and no place to go except their Fair pavilions, I knew it would have to be diamonds and dirndls for Flushing.

And here we are, right on the dot as you promised, in the middle of the World of Tomorrow, bringing the peoples of the earth into "closer understanding by a festival of international pattern and absolutely unprecedented proportions."

But what I want to know is, now that Company has Come what does Company Think? I mean out at those parties in the brand-new pink and starry Hall of Music—where the modest host has shooed his family way out of sight before the celebration begins? Everyone, I suppose, feels proud and happy hearing old familiar songs from home. But don't they wonder just what we play and sing on our own? Whenever royalty goes calling at Hyde Park you know how Franklin and Eleanor throw a hot-dog picnic, for local color. From all reports, not a bad idea either

To date, anybody wanting a sample of American music at the World's Fair Music Hall has had a choice of three assorted hors d'oeuvres by Griffes, Damrosch and Barber, innocuously served up on the general table d'hôte. Hardly what you might expect from those popular slogans of "never before" and "world of the future," but let that pass. From now on, it seems, every program not sold to a nation, an opera, a Japanese ballet, a singer or Duke Ellington is supposed to have one serious American number. For anybody who can wait around all through this summer and next that may add up to quite a lot of music, but with present bookings the way they are the plan begins to look like an inconclusive strip-tease.

Seeing that the Fair is happening right here in New York City,

I don't suppose it comes as a surprise to have people writing letters to editors, asking when there's going to be a whole American concert or a live opera, or maybe even a local festival. After all you can't stage a monster musical parade of nations big and little, without making the home folks wonder just why their turn hasn't come out on the shores of Fountain Lake. Months ago the Fair even made some broad announcements along these lines, but now the papers, on what appears to be a good inside tip, have been talking about obstacles which are it seems mostly "practical."

Off hand that sounds odd, because picking up some American music only a stone's throw from the Fair Grounds ought to be easier than having the Polish Ballet or the Red Army Chorus shipped across the Atlantic. Last night, however, the *Sun* explained the "American problem" by tactfully suggesting that this government doesn't subsidize music. So what? That's not news, any more than the fact that all the others do. It's good business of course to sell these patriotic visitors the advantages of a night in the Hall of Music with the Philharmonic Orchestra; obviously the Fair only goes as it pays. But if the U.S.A. isn't in the market (it never has been) why that only means of course that the U.S.A. isn't the right customer for this particular line of goods. It still leaves American music—which has been bought and sold in other ways before—right on the spot. And if I may say so, Mr. Whalen that's just where it leaves the World's Fair too.

Anyone landing over in Flushing can see right away that a lot more goes on besides Ford and the mechanical heart and midgits and Beechnut. Those cultural benefits, to use your highly descriptive phrase, are played to the hilt with murals and lights and singing fountains and architecture and a whole acre of Contemporary Art holding 1214 paintings and statues, all by Americans too. In the biggest show on earth there's only one thing left out, and it makes quite a lot of noise, because sometimes the missing can be louder than Neon lights or a great brass band.

In the end, the way I see it, Mr. Whalen, this "problem" is just coming right home to roost with you in Perylon Hall. Pep meetings of well-intentioned people around town who are ready to promote American music at the Fair may yield lots of enthusi-

asm, moral support, and programs. But so far not a single super-salesman has showed up. And isn't that what this "problem" boils down to? Finding some way to foot the bill?

Until a few days ago, to tell the truth I couldn't see the way out. But when I read in the *Saturday Evening Post* exactly how you prepared for the first of May, I stopped worrying. Anyone who could lightly shrug off Europe's cold shoulder and then, to the tune of thirty millions, demonstrate foreign prestige advantages in Jamaica Bay meadows while they were still swamplands, who could coax Heinz out of his pickle-shaped plan into a plain but expensive dome-topped building, who could win Chrysler back to Transportation when he wanted to be by himself out on Constitution Mall, who could glamorize a two-summer club on the Lake so that hundreds of people have felt lucky to pay a \$5,000 initiation fee—why, Mr. Whalen anyone so persuasive ought to find the selling and yes, maybe even the buying of a little American music just a piece of very small-time business.

Yours in the greatest confidence,

Minna Lederman