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St. Paul's SCHUBERT CLUB

MUSICAL MENTOR of the NORTHWEST

JAMES TAYLOR DUNN

THE AUTHOR of this article is especially indebted to Zylpha S. Morton for extensive and detailed research on the history of the Schubert Club done under a 1963 grant from that organization. Mrs. Morton's manuscript is now on file among the Schubert Club Papers in the Minnesota Historical Society. Three shorter manuscripts are also included in this collection: "The Schubert Club," by Henrietta W. Willius (1915); "Glimpses in the History of the Schubert Club," by Mrs. Clifford L. Hilton (1923); and "History of the Schubert Club," (undated), probably written by Mrs. Charles A. Guyer.

"I CANNOT IMAGINE a finer society than existed in the villages of Mendota, St. Paul, and St. Anthony, and at Fort Snelling, small as the numbers were." These were the words of Rebecca Marshall Cathcart, who recalled life in territorial Minnesota in a reminiscent talk given in 1913. Mrs. Cathcart singled out the Danish-born banker, Charles W. W. Borup, as one who added much to the gaiety and social life of St. Paul when he first arrived in 1849. Perhaps Borup's most lasting

contribution to the embryo village of some eight hundred inhabitants was sponsoring frequent get-togethers of local musicians in his St. Paul home, and thereby introducing the new territorial capital to what Mrs. Cathcart called its "first musical cultivation."¹

That the pioneers of St. Paul brought with them from Europe and the Eastern Seaboard a high standard of culture which they wished to continue in the new region is shown by the numerous musical groups which sprang up through the 1860s and 1870s. During those early years St. Paul saw the enthusiastic organization of several active singing societies and orchestras, especially among the German immigrants. Informal evening musicales featuring local talent were also enjoyed. Following the tradition begun by Borup, these casual, irregular meetings were usually held in some private home where there was a good piano, harpsichord, or melodeon.²

As late as 1880, however, St. Paul still lacked an organized group dedicated to the presentation in recital of the solo voice or instrument. By then the informal musical "soirées" had changed to "matinées," held at homes such as the Alexander Ramsey residence on Exchange Street, where the former governor's daughter, Mrs. Charles E.

¹ Rebecca M. Cathcart, "A Sheaf of Remembrances," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 15:542, 545 (St. Paul, 1915).

² *St. Paul Daily Press*, November 14, 1872.



Furness, was hostess. Mrs. Henry M. Knox, wife of a St. Paul banker, was also noted for her frequent musicales as well as her unusual abilities as a ballad singer. The popularity of these events steadily increased, and soon they outgrew the crowded parlors and narrow hallways of private homes. The forty or more women who regularly attended recognized a need in St. Paul for the formation of a musical organization.³

So it was that on a wintry afternoon in 1882 these energetic women gathered for the purpose, probably at the Summit Avenue home of Mrs. Charles McIlrath, wife of the former state auditor. "Ladies Musicale" was the name selected for the group during the following year, and by 1885 it numbered thirty honorary and forty-five active (musically proficient) members. Annual dues were two dollars, and the organization was solvent.⁴ A third type of membership soon helped swell the club's coffers and provided a larger audience at the afternoon recitals, when St. Paul women who were not trained musicians were asked to become associates. The pioneer organization struck a musical chord that was to echo throughout the city for over eighty years.

EARLY IN 1888 the "Ladies Musicale" was rechristened the "Schubert Club" to honor the famous Austrian composer, Franz Peter Schubert. The group soon adopted its distinctive and familiar trademark, a device consisting of a music staff with a clef and notes spelling out the club's name.⁵ During these early years a life-size bust of Schubert adorned the platform at all meetings and concerts. Although the sculpture has long since vanished, its subject continued for some years to be honored by occasional memorial concerts, the first of which apparently was given in 1889.

By this time the afternoon concerts and study groups were more formally organized; fortnightly recitals were presented by the active members and discussions were held on such topics as "The Orchestra," "Dance Forms," and "The Symphony." The talks were usually given with accompaniment.⁶

Addresses on musical subjects were given not only by club members but by lecturers of national reputation when these could be secured. Among those who traveled to Minnesota was Henry E. Krehbiel, the famed music critic of the *New York Tribune*, who made a number of St. Paul appearances in 1895, presenting lectures on lyric drama, Wagner, "Folk-Song in America," and "Dramatic Dances and Children's Games." Fran-

³ Marion Ramsey Furness, "Recollections of Old St. Paul," in *Minnesota History*, 29:119 (June, 1948).

⁴ Ladies' Musicale, Secretary's Book, 1885-88, n.p., Schubert Club Papers, in the manuscript collection of the Minnesota Historical Society.

⁵ The exact date of the insignia's first use is not known, but probably the year was 1892. The unique sketch, which continues in use today, was the idea of Florence Fairchild (later Mrs. Charles H. Bigelow), assisted by William L. Banning, Jr. See *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 18, 1932, sec. 2, p. 10.

⁶ Where otherwise unidentified, information concerning concerts and lectures presented by the club has come from a series of scrapbooks, containing programs, newspaper clippings, and miscellaneous items, included in the Schubert Club Papers, or from a chronologically arranged collection of programs in the library of the Minnesota Historical Society. The library also has a file of informal printed reports issued annually by the club. These are hereafter referred to as "yearbooks."

ces Densmore of Red Wing gave a popular talk, with piano illustrations, about the "Music of the American Indians," and in 1896 Walter J. Damrosch lectured in St. Paul on "Die Meistersinger" before a delighted audience of Schubert Club members.⁷

Early in 1891 the club adopted a constitution and bylaws, for the first time affirming its aims in print: "To study and practice the best music. . . . To advance the interests and promote the culture of musical art in the City of St. Paul." In partial fulfillment of this promise, the club imported its first prominent artist, bass George E. Holmes, a frequent performer with Theodore Thomas' Chicago Orchestra, who presented a program of songs at the Christ Church Guild Hall on December 30, 1892.⁸

In this year also the high standards so desired by club members were first spelled out. The directors ordered that the musical abilities of all active or performing members were to be examined annually by a committee of accomplished artists. Those unable to give satisfactory results could become associate members. Requirements for admission to the club were strict, and all aspirants — whether to active, associate, or honorary status — had to be vouched for by two members and passed on by the board of directors. The careful examination of ap-

plicants for active membership persists today, and the regulations are but little altered from those set down in 1892.⁹

TO PRESENT recitals, the club rented a great variety of auditoriums at prices ranging from three dollars an afternoon to \$150 for the season.¹⁰ Among those used were Litt's Grand Opera House (now replaced by the Garrick Parking Ramp), Mozart Hall on Franklin Street, and Summit Hall, which still stands at 512 Laurel Avenue. Some concerts were also held in the Aberdeen, Ryan, and Windsor hotels and at the Park Congregational, Central Presbyterian, and People's churches. But the most popular location during the first twenty years was Ford Music Hall, constructed in 1892 for Nathan Ford, a dealer in musical instruments, and located at the intersection of Sixth, St. Peter, and Market streets.¹¹

At least two concerts in the 1894-95 series of "Five High Class Artists' Recitals" were held there. The first was given on November 1 by the great piano virtuoso and composer Xaver Scharwenka, whose "profound musicianship and deep insight" delighted "an appreciative and cultured audience." On December 6 the Rubinstein String Quartet with the twenty-one-year-old Brooklyn soprano Lillian Blauvelt also appeared at Ford Music Hall, but the season's largest audience assembled in the People's Church at Pleasant and Chestnut streets on April 29 to hear the renowned Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe.¹²

This concert and the Scharwenka recital were unqualified financial successes and helped bring to fruition one of the club's early hopes — the encouragement of talented local music students through an educational loan fund established in 1893. The fund benefited further from recitals given by pianist Adèle Aus der Ohe, by violinist Henri Marteau on his first American tour, and by the lovable, erratic baritone Plunket Greene. Ella Richards, the first recipient of financial aid, was thereby assured study in Vienna. The loan fund idea was soon abandoned, however, because young mu-

⁷ Schubert Club, Secretary's Book, 1892-96, p. 168; Yearbook, 1894-95, p. 8; 1896-97, p. 26.

⁸ Yearbook, 1892-93, p. 12; Philo A. Otis, *The Chicago Symphony Orchestra*, 96 (Chicago, 1924).

⁹ The directors also made certain that no one entered by the back door. In October, 1894, Grace B. Whitridge desired active membership "in her capacity as an elocutionist." Her request was quickly denied, although later the board relented, and she was admitted. See Secretary's Book, 1892-96, p. 93.

¹⁰ Secretary's Book, 1892-96, p. 19, 93, 165.

¹¹ Since 1895 this local "Flatiron Building," with its once plush, elaborately decorated third-floor auditorium, has been known variously as Conover Hall, Raudenbush Hall, The Odeon, the Schiffman Building, and the Degree of Honor Building. The musical motifs which decorate its St. Peter Street entrance betray its original purpose, and the numerous studios on the top two floors have at one time or another housed most of St. Paul's best-known musicians and music teachers.

¹² *Pioneer Press*, November 2, 1894; April 30, 1895.



THE building at Sixth, St. Peter, and Market streets

sicians found it difficult to repay the sizeable sums borrowed.¹³

For a few years another experiment to promote musical art gave local young ladies a chance to develop their singing talents. During 1892 Samuel A. Baldwin, a St. Paul music teacher, who was later to become a noted organist and composer, organized a women's chorus for the Schubert Club. Associate members were permitted to join the active section by taking part in the chorus class where "good instruction and good accompaniment is provided."¹⁴

In the year after its formation the ladies' chorus and four selected local musicians represented the Schubert Club at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. On that occasion conductor Theodore Thomas gave the club a diploma of honor, "because of the high standard of performance maintained by its representative musicians at the National Convention of Women's Amateur Musical Clubs held in June 1893."¹⁵

During the 1895-96 season the ladies' chorus was encouraged to new heights by Elsie M. Shawe, who was soon to become supervisor of music in the St. Paul public school system. The following year another and even more distinguished leader took over. He was Emil Oberhoffer, a German-born and trained violinist, pianist, and conductor, whom John K. Sherman, the Minneapolis newspaper critic, has called a "musical jack-of-all-trades."¹⁶

Stranded in St. Paul early in the 1890s when the group he was with disbanded, Oberhoffer opened a music school and found additional employment playing in local restaurants and orchestras. The Schubert

¹³ Secretary's Book, 1892-96, p. 53, 72-74.

¹⁴ Secretary's Book, 1892-96, p. 86. The good accompanist, Mrs. Louis Milch, received the munificent sum of fifty dollars for the sixteen afternoon and evening concerts presented by the group in 1894.

¹⁵ The diploma is preserved in the Schubert Club Papers.

¹⁶ John K. Sherman, *Music and Maestros*, 38 (Minneapolis, 1952).

Club soon befriended him and used his services as a lecturer and accompanist on numerous occasions. In late 1897 and early 1898 — although by then he had moved to Minneapolis — Oberhoffer made himself valuable to the club as director of its ladies' chorus and newly organized orchestra. In return for a salary of fifty dollars a month, he directed three evening concerts for the club. Shortly after the turn of the century, however, Minnesota's great conductor was well on his way to founding the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. The ladies' chorus and the orchestra of the Schubert Club did not long survive his departure.¹⁷

During the last years of the century the Schubert Club broke ground in another area by creating a student section — reportedly the first in the United States to be formed within a musical organization. Heretofore no one had paid much attention to the young musician, but during the presidency of Mrs. Russell R. Dorr and her successor, Miss Shawe, talented youngsters were encouraged and provided with opportunities to perform in public.¹⁸ Today any music student of fourteen years or older, who is certified by his teacher, may become a member of this group by receiving the approval of an audition committee. When the embryo musician is considered ready for a public performance, he has the chance to play or sing in the club's student programs.

For a period toward the end of its first twenty years the club became involved in frequent activities with other groups. Musical programs sometimes took on the semblance of a cultural exchange. During the winter of 1894, for example, members chartered a private streetcar for a trip to Minneapolis where they joined in an afternoon of

entertainment with the Thursday Musical group.¹⁹ A few years later the Minneapolis ladies returned the compliment by traveling to the capital city to honor Schubert Club members with a vocal and instrumental performance, and in 1909 the *Matinée Musicale Club of Duluth* gave an afternoon recital in the Elks Hall.²⁰

An experiment in co-sponsorship was less satisfactory. During the 1898–99 season the members joined with the Commercial Club of St. Paul to present a series of programs for the benefit of the public library building fund. The concerts were unqualified artistic successes, for they included such luminaries as the Metropolitan Opera Company's major Wagnerian soprano, Johanna Gadski, popular Welsh baritone Ffrangcom Davies, soprano Blanche Marchesi, and pianists Emil Sauer and Moriz Rosenthal. These recitals attracted capacity audiences and of Miss Marchesi, for example, the *Pioneer Press* exulted: "In the whole musical history of the city no other artist has created equal enthusiasm." Unfortunately, the cost of the concerts so depleted the club's treasury that in future years the group shunned similar arrangements.²¹

Concert planning had its difficulties then as now. Perhaps the most taxing job was — and still is — to guess which upcoming young artist might make the grade to stardom. In 1896 the French operatic soprano Emma Calvé, later to become one of the great singers of all time, was turned down as an unknown. Artists' fees were high, too. When the officers considered American soprano Lillian Nordica, they thought her price of six hundred dollars too steep and engaged another performer. In 1898, on the other hand, the twenty-two-year-old pianist Josef Hofmann received \$750, but Schubert Club members had to be urged to "work hard for the success of this concert, that we may make it one of the great events in our Club history." A young California soprano of amazing vocal range, Ellen Beach Yaw, was fresh from her New York debut when she sang at Ford Music Hall in February,

¹⁷ Sherman, *Music and Maestros*, 39; Secretary's Book, 1895–97, p. 145.

¹⁸ Yearbook, 1900–01, p. 6.

¹⁹ The thirty dollars charged for the streetcar was deemed exorbitant by Schubert Club members, but the city council remained adamant despite protests. See Secretary's Book, 1895–97, p. 111.

²⁰ Yearbook, 1909–10, p. 13.

²¹ Yearbook, 1898–99, p. 29; *Pioneer Press*, March 3, 1899.

1894. For her hundred-dollar fee she rendered only two solos and an encore.²²

It was also a difficult struggle to enlist the support of some members for the public concerts. Mrs. Dorr emphasized this in her president's report for 1895, complaining that "Many of us have not yet waked up to the great importance of hearing fine music at every possible opportunity if we would become broadly cultured." She urged members to coax their husbands, sons, and brothers to attend the recitals. Regardless of grumbles, she concluded, the men would thereby "become musically educated in spite of themselves."²³

By 1902 the Schubert Club's reputation was such that nationally known artists were eager to appear under its auspices. From 1882 to 1902 it nourished and strengthened musical interests in St. Paul even though in the latter year its membership stood at only 301.²⁴ Many talented local musicians such as Katherine Richards Gordon, Lewis Shawe, Marie Geist Erd, Addison DeC. Madeira, Harry E. George, Walter Petzet, and the Milch family found the chance to present concert programs at fortnightly meetings. But it was artists of international renown that lent real luster to the first twenty years of the club's history. They included not only names like Davies, Hofmann, and Ysäye, but also such outstanding performers as baritone David S. Bispham and pianists Leopold Godowsky and Fannie Bloomfield Zeisler. The organization was bringing to the area the best music available, and Minnesotans were listening.

SCHUBERT CLUB members devoted the second two decades in their history to the consolidation of past efforts and to broadening their musical influence not only in St. Paul, but also throughout the region. In her first presidential statement, made early in 1903, Mrs. Warren S. Briggs described the club's development as it reached its twenty-first year: "The early days of infancy," she reported, "and the rapid growth of a life in its teens it has out-

lived, and comes to its maturity in the full strength of a pride in its past and a healthful respect for itself as it stands, from which is born a natural faith in its future,—a faith which is vital in that measure in which it is accompanied by good works."²⁵

The early years of the new century were indeed a time of "good works." During this period the club began to provide free musical entertainment for the enjoyment of others. Over the years club members have given hundreds of programs at industrial plants and correctional institutions. Today, however, they perform mainly in rest homes and hospitals. This enduring phase of the club's activities caught the imagination of many St. Paul residents. The program flourished especially under the dedicated supervision of Mrs. James C. Niemeyer, who undertook direction of this work in 1928.²⁶

Another altruistic effort was a program for teaching underprivileged youngsters. It started in 1911 with a music class at the West Side Neighborhood House under the direction of Mrs. Briggs and Miss Clara M. Kellogg, head resident of the settlement. Worthy pupils, who wanted a musical education but were unable to pay for the training, received lessons at twenty-five cents per half hour under the watchful eyes of teachers from the ranks of the club's membership. The venture began with fourteen pupils. They eagerly took advantage of the opportunity to learn, and the class grew. Soon organizations like the International Institute and the Protestant Orphan Asylum asked for similar privileges, and before many years went by twelve such groups were being served in St. Paul. Numerous

²² Secretary's Book, 1899, p. 89-97; *Pioneer Press*, February 28, 1894. The reference to the Hofmann concert is in an undated "Special Notice" signed by Mrs. Charles E. Furness as chairman of the club's executive board, which is filed with the programs in the library of the society.

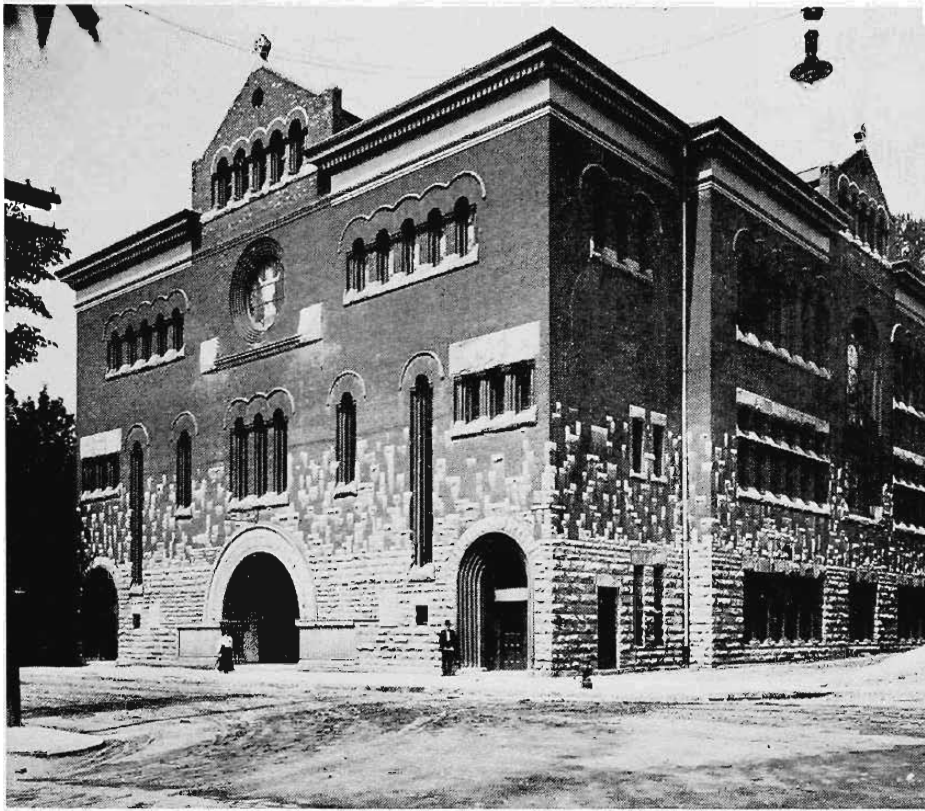
²³ Secretary's Book, 1895, p. 133.

²⁴ Yearbook, 1902-03, p. 11.

²⁵ Yearbook, 1903-04, p. 3.

²⁶ Yearbook, 1927-28, p. 7.

THE People's
Church on
Pleasant Avenue



pupils also competed for prizes of twenty-four free lessons in piano, voice, or violin.²⁷

By 1932 the Schubert Club Music School, as the group was called, could boast a faculty of twenty-six teachers who gave two hundred lessons a week in ten centers. It reached its period of greatest activity during the depression of the 1930s. By 1958, however, the need for it was no longer felt, and the program was brought to an end after forty-seven years of unstinting service.²⁸

THE 1912-13 season witnessed six member recitals, two of which were held in the evening, six student concerts, five studio teas, many study classes, and three all-

member meetings. During this busy time the club also sponsored a series of "Young People's Popular Concerts" which were presented by the St. Paul Symphony Orchestra. When the "admirable" Flonzaley Quartet made its local appearance in November, 1912, as part of a concerted effort to popularize the music of small ensembles, the *Pioneer Press* was lavish in its praise: "The musical public of St. Paul," stated an enthusiastic reporter, "owes no small debt of gratitude to the Schubert Club for its unremitting and highly successful efforts in behalf of chamber music." The season also saw an attempt at self-analysis and a look into the future. A symposium held in May, 1913, centered on a discussion of "The Schubert Club: Its Purpose, Scope and Work." The topic was appropriate, for the years ahead were to be difficult ones.²⁹

In 1914 membership reached a peak of 1,263, but from that point on it steadily dropped until, by 1916, it was down to 811. To make matters worse, a disastrous

²⁷ *Pioneer Press*, September 18, 1932, sec. 2, p. 10.

²⁸ *Northwest Musical Herald*, 7:1 (September, 1932).

²⁹ *Pioneer Press*, November 22, 1912; May 18, 1913. The club's entire program for this season is in a folder of "Announcements," dated October 4, 1912, and filed with the yearbook for 1912-13.

fire at the St. Paul Public Library in April, 1915, destroyed all the club's study material, sheet music, and many of its manuscript records and scrapbooks going back to 1882. Another low point was reached in 1918 when only 574 St. Paulites could be counted as dues-paying supporters of the Schubert Club, and it was found necessary to move the evening concerts from the People's Church (where they had been held for two years) back to the smaller Park Congregational Church. A local businessman in 1916 deplored the lack of musical interest among the capital city's 275,000 residents. Aside from Schubert Club events, he complained, "St. Paul . . . has had but one public artists' recital during the season and that by John MacCormack. . . . And the worst of it is," he concluded sadly, "that we seem perfectly satisfied to have it so."³⁰

The organization did not accept these setbacks without a struggle. On September 13, 1915, it optimistically incorporated under the laws of Minnesota. In an effort to overcome the wartime indifference to cultural activities, the energetic Mrs. Briggs traveled widely and gave talks, arguing that the Schubert Club's work was needed more than ever as an educational force and as an agency to lighten heavy hearts during war years. She pointed out that "Volumes of testimony from Government officials, from Army and Navy, in camp, field and on the sea, and from great masses of civilians urge music as essential, a war-time need." The public was apparently unconvinced, however, for not until 1919 did the club's membership once more exceed a thousand.³¹

Although the amount spent that year for artists' recitals came to only \$950, concerts were again held in the People's Church, with its spacious hall and ideal acoustics. For several decades this was to remain the Schubert Club's home. Although Charles M. Flandrau, a popular local critic and author, apparently thought the building garishly decorated and vulgarly lighted, it

was possibly the best auditorium that St. Paul has ever had, and throughout most of the 1920s and 1930s it was the city's musical center. The St. Paul Municipal Auditorium—so familiar to present-day music lovers—saw its first Schubert Club concert in 1918, when Metropolitan Opera soprano Mabel Garrison gave a benefit performance for the American Friends of Musicians in France. It did not come into regular use by the club, however, until the 1940s.³²

MINNESOTA'S OLDEST and largest musical organization entered its vigorous fifth decade with a constructive program and a burgeoning enrollment of over thirteen hundred members. One of the features of its fortieth anniversary celebration was an appeal for voluntary subscriptions to strengthen a newly formed scholarship fund devoted to the encouragement and perpetuation of competitive trials for gifted young musicians. This program replaced the unsuccessful scholarship loan fund of the 1890s. So effective was the campaign that three scholarships of \$150 each were awarded in 1922.³³

They marked the beginning of what today is one of the Schubert Club's major activities: giving young people a chance to compete for prestige scholarships and thereby encouraging them to continue their musical careers. Several other funds have since been established, such as the Mrs. R. E. Van Kirk Discretionary Prize and the Maude Taylor Hill Scholarship. These and frequent annual memorial gifts today make a major contribution to the musical educa-

³⁰ *Pioneer Press*, April 28, 1915; Yearbooks, 1914-15, 1915-16, 1916-17, 1917-18, 1918-19. Membership figures are penciled on the front of each book. The quotation is from the president's annual report, April 19, 1916, Schubert Club Papers.

³¹ Yearbooks, 1918-19, p. 1; 1919-20, p. 1. The certificate of incorporation is on file in the office of the Minnesota Secretary of State, Book A-4 of Incorporations, p. 529; an amendment of March 19, 1947, is in the Nonprofit File, no. 4534.

³² Treasurer's report, April, 1918-April, 1919, Schubert Club Papers; Yearbook, 1918-19, p. 2.

³³ Yearbook, 1922-23, p. 3.

tion of many midwestern students. In the twenty years prior to 1964, the club officers paid out well over twelve thousand dollars to deserving aspirants from Minnesota and nearby states.³⁴

As the club's work along educational and philanthropic lines was expanding, so, too, its progressive program continued to be reflected in the artists it made available to the citizens of the Twin Cities area. There was glamour and box-office appeal in names like violinists Jascha Heifetz and Jan Kubelik; contraltos Sophie Braslau, Julia Culp, and Louise Homer; pianists Rudolph Gans, Percy Grainger, Ossip Gabrilowitsch, and Ernest Schelling; baritones Emilio DeGogorza and Reinald Werrenrath; and bass Herbert Witherspoon, who are still remembered as great performers of their times.

Mrs. Briggs, in her presidential greeting for 1923, pointed out that the club was "a St. Paul institution, rooted in the city's traditions, with its ear to the ground and alive to the day's work." Furthermore, she boasted, the organization's financial stability was excellent—a position gained "without underwriting or intensive campaign." For the following season the evening concerts were optimistically extended from three performances to four, and fees expended on recitalists that year came to almost three thousand dollars. "Artists of our course," concluded the club's president, "although of superior merit, were artists not appealing to the speculative manager and, but for us, would not have been heard here in recital."³⁵

The St. Paul appearance of Heifetz on January 26, 1922, typifies the perspicacity of club officers in choosing young and little-known performers of superlative talent. The violinist had not yet reached his majority when, on his first American tour, this

"miraculous boy" electrified a capacity audience (including critic Flandrau) with the "sentimental loveliness" of Max Bruch's *Concerto in G Minor*. Two other promising young unknowns presented during the early 1920s were pianist Benno Moiseiwitsch and violinist Toscha Seidel. At about this time a so-called "matinee series" became a sort of proving ground for upcoming young artists. Pianists Vladimir Horowitz and Nikolai Orloff, who performed at matinees, were among those later engaged for evening concerts. These trial programs ended with the depression years.³⁶

IN SPONSORING artists over a long span of time, there is bound to be occasional criticism of the choice of recitalists as well as a few less than satisfactory performances. To the Schubert Club's enduring credit, its percentage of disappointments has been low. One abysmal failure (at least in the eyes of a local newspaper critic) was the recital presented by the Metropolitan Opera star Mario Chamlee and his wife Ruth Miller on December 2, 1926. Ned B. Abbott's review of the concert in the *St. Paul Daily News* the following day was devastating—a refreshing change from the bland notices in the two local newspapers after the departure of Flandrau and before the advent of James Gray and Frances Boardman as critics on the *Pioneer Press* and *Dispatch*.

"Whether Mr. Mario Chamlee, tenor, doesn't know any better," complained Abbott, "or whether he considers St. Paul the 'sticks' and thinks we don't know any better, somebody ought to tell him that according to the Schubert club's artistic standards his recital last night . . . was perilously near a joke. . . . Programing such songs as 'Goin' Home,' 'Liebestraum,' 'Dawn,' 'Moon Marketing,' 'The Old Refrain,' etc., are hardly calculated to engender serious consideration of him as an artist.

"The 'St. Sulpice Scene' from 'Manon'

³⁴ Miss Ethelwyn Power to the author, February 19, 1964.

³⁵ Yearbook, 1923-24, p. 1; president's annual report, April 16, 1924.

³⁶ *Pioneer Press*, January 27, 1922; Yearbook, 1926, p. 2; 1927, p. 2.

done in costume, while not successful from an artistic point of view . . . served to demonstrate that the operatic stage and not the concert platform is where both Mr. Chamlee and Miss Miller belong. One felt that here the singers were at home despite the strain on the imagination watching Manon steal through the cloistered confines of St. Sulpice via the port side of a grand piano."

Abbott hastened to absolve an undoubtedly embarrassed impresario: "One has no disposition to criticize the Schubert club for this concert," he concluded. "It was merely a case of guessing wrong, a matter easily forgiven when one remembers [soprano Maria] Kurenko and [pianist Alfred] Cortot."

Few concerts ever matched the all-out sensation made by pianist Vladimir Horowitz during the 1928-29 season. Early in March, 1928, two months after his New York debut, he performed at an afternoon concert in St. Paul. Abbott astutely observed that, although "not yet a full-fledged artist . . . he will not only be heard, but heard of often as the years go by." Horowitz' October, 1928, return engagement, however, produced what another *Daily News* reporter, William H. Marzolf, called a "well-behaved riot" among the usually undemonstrative members of the Schubert Club. According to Minneapolis critic John Sherman this event was "probably the most exciting 'one-man show' . . . by any musical artist in the twenties."³⁷

Although the overflow audience outdid itself in showing enthusiasm and delight, Miss Boardman qualified her laudatory review in the *Pioneer Press* of October 31 by noting that Horowitz was too preoccupied with his own virtuosity and "put himself too much between the audience and the composer." Marzolf made essentially the same comment in more forceful phrases, calling the pianist a technician, but not yet an artist. Both were convinced that this tendency would disappear with the increasing maturity of the young performer.

ST. PAUL, MINN.
ST. VALENTINE'S EVE, FEB. 13th, 1901,
4 O'CLOCK.

Overture, "Euryanthe" Miss HALL, Mrs. FITZPATRICK.
MRS. DAVIDSON, MISS THOMPSON.
"The Piccininies" (from "The Runaway Girl")
"In Winter I Get up at Night"
"Did You Ever See a Rabbit?"
"There Was a Whale"
MRS. GORDON
Ballade, No. 3
MISS ETHEL McMILLAN.
"Birthday Song"
"My Dear Jerushy"
"The Sugar Holly"
"The Captain"
"This Little Maid of Mine"
MRS. VULP
Scherzo, Valse Op. 40
MISS ETHEL CARTER
"Daddy"
"Always Do as People Say You Should" (from "The
Fortune Teller")
"A Summer Lullaby"
MRS. SKAPP.
Gavotte et Musette, Suite 100
MISS HALL, MISS THOMPSON.
STEINWAY PIANOS kindly loaned by W. J. DYER & BRO.
(chocolate will be served at last of program)

An early recital program, showing

Beyond any doubt, Horowitz' midwestern debut was an outstanding success, and those who heard it can still vividly recall how the very foundations of the People's Church seemed to shake during his madcap crescendos and fortissimi.

Throughout the decade the club's public concerts continued to be impressive, and more often than not they represented first appearances either in St. Paul, the Twin Cities, or the Northwest. On one occasion the club sponsored an American debut, that of soprano Ria Ginster in 1935.³⁸

³⁷ *St. Paul Daily News*, March 8, 1928, p. 22; October 21, 1928, sec. 3, p. 8; Sherman, *Music and Maestros*, 178.

³⁸ *Minneapolis Journal*, October 31, 1935, p. 15.



Schubert Club's musical emblem

During the palmy predepression days the yearly program was once again extended, this time to seven major afternoon and evening concerts. By 1930, however, these had to be reduced to five evening recitals—a number adhered to until 1961, when it was cut down to four. The largest sum paid for performers in the 1920s was close to five thousand dollars for the 1926–27 season, or about a thousand dollars a concert. Today the amount is almost ten thousand dollars for four recitals. Yearly rental of the People's Church auditorium varied from \$300

³⁹ Treasurer's report, April, 1926–April, 1927.

⁴⁰ President's annual report, April 16, 1930; *Pioneer Press*, September 28, 1941, magazine section, p. 4.

to \$450, about a quarter of the present rate charged at the St. Paul Auditorium.³⁹

AT THE CLOSE of the 1929–30 concert season, Mrs. Briggs' long tenure as president ended. Under her strong leadership there had been a slow but noticeable change in the club's basic structure. Despite sporadic opposition to her program, Mrs. Briggs had begun democratizing the organization. She swept away many membership restrictions and most vestiges of the small, socially exclusive group it once had been. In her final report to Schubert Club members she stressed the intangible results of her many years as president—the awakening of an appreciation for music, the development of musical abilities in the young, and the increased emphasis on the annual series of artists' concerts. "There is nothing to see," she summarized, "no temple made with hands, no imposing monument . . . nor have we aimed at such." When Mrs. Briggs died in September, 1941, Frances Boardman emphasized the long fight of this "devoted and far-seeing woman" on behalf of chamber music.⁴⁰

Another name holds a special place in the story of the Schubert Club's first half century. Mrs. Frank L. Hoffman was for many years after 1900 an active member of the organization. Although never a featured artist on any of its musical programs, she frequently made herself available to the club as a piano accompanist. Born in Joliet, Illinois, Mrs. Hoffman, then Katherine Collins, became the organist at the Cathedral of St. Paul in 1897. A chance request brought her international recognition. When Ernestine Schumann-Heink sang at the People's Church in 1906, Mrs. Hoffman was invited to assist at the recital. So impressed was the Austrian contralto that immediately after the performance she asked Mrs. Hoffman to become her permanent accompanist. In that capacity the St. Paul pianist traveled widely over the globe, performed before kings and emperors, and studied musical interpretation in Vienna

under composer Richard Strauss and conductor Felix Weingartner.⁴¹

Nor was the "indomitable Ernestine" Katherine Hoffman's only musical associate. The pianist's unusual abilities won her repeated engagements with Fritz Kreisler, Herbert Witherspoon, Johanna Gadski, Edward Johnson, and other ranking artists. In St. Paul, Mrs. Hoffman assisted at the Schubert Club evening recitals of contralto Merle Alcock in 1921 and soprano Lucrezia Bori in 1922. Near the close of her colorful career, she not only summarized her personal experiences, but by inference spoke out in behalf of musical organizations like the Schubert Club which were responsible for the wide dissemination of good music. "It is impossible," she told a *Pioneer Press* reporter, "to acquire a musical education without constantly hearing performances of every sort."⁴²

In 1933 Mrs. Webb R. Raudenbush became the tenth woman to head the group. She capably led its twenty-three committees for a decade—the second-longest tenure in the club's history. The years of depression were among the most difficult faced by the organization since the days of World War I. The determined efforts of Mrs. Raudenbush and her board, however, prevented the great loss in membership which had been experienced in the war years. Five concerts a season remained the rule, and the sharp-eyed ability of the club's officers in obtaining talented artists never slackened. There was no decrease of interest in the scholarship plan, in the music lessons for underprivileged children, or in the work with young people and professionals. Membership fees remained at the modest figure of five dollars a year, with three dollars for students.

NEAR THE END of her ten years in office, Mrs. Raudenbush faced the most drastic readjustment in the history of the Schubert Club. In 1939 the People's Church was closed and then sold to become the Catholic Community Center. Concerts for the



MRS. Warren S. Briggs

1939–40 season continued in its auditorium, the fourth recital being presented late in February by the talented and decorative contralto Elizabeth Wysor. During the early hours of March 22, 1940, however, fire swept with explosive rapidity through the tinder-dry wooden interior of the building. By the time twenty pieces of fire equipment answered the alarm the holocaust was out of control, and the Schubert Club was confronted by an emergency. With the season's fifth and final concert only two and a half weeks away, the officers had to move fast. They engaged the large theater section of the St. Paul Auditorium, and the return engagement of tenor Richard Crooks after an absence of fourteen years took place as scheduled.⁴³

For the next two seasons the Schubert Club followed its long-established rule of confining audiences to the yearly subscription list, but since the auditorium was twice the size of the People's Church and

⁴¹ *Pioneer Press*, April 10, 1927; *St. Paul Dispatch*, June 1, 1933, sec. 1, p. 1.

⁴² *Pioneer Press*, April 10, 1927.

⁴³ *Dispatch*, March 22, 1940, sec. 1, p. 1.

the annual rental considerably higher, this plan soon proved financially unworkable. During 1942–43 the main floor was still reserved for holders of membership cards, but the two balconies were thrown open to the general sale of single tickets. This semirestrictive policy lasted only one year; in 1943–44 the entire auditorium became available to the public, and the word “membership” was dropped from all publicity.⁴⁴

In 1943 the Schubert Club presented its first Negro soloist, the attractive soprano Anne Brown of the original *Porgy and Bess* Broadway production, who, in the words of Miss Boardman, was a “singing artist of such superlative gifts and craftsmanship as seldom adorn any concert season more than once, if at all.”⁴⁵ Miss Brown’s sponsors encountered prejudice, however, when they tried to secure lodgings for her in the city’s hotels. Complaints, it is said, were also heard because a fourteen-year-old Negro music student and her mother used membership tickets given them by a local music teacher and sat downstairs in “aisle-seats, second row, center section.” Officers of the Schubert Club did what they could to counteract these attitudes by engaging for the next season the popular Negro baritone Todd Duncan.⁴⁶

The club has since presented a number of the finest Negro singers available within its price range, including Ellabelle Davis and Mattiwilda Dobbs. Not many concerts in Schubert Club history have equaled the sensational 1961 Twin Cities debut of the Metropolitan Opera soprano Leontyne Price. For the first time, area newspapers reported, the “Standing Room Only” sign hung outside the theater section’s box office. The “stunning” Price concert ended, according to John H. Harvey of the *Pioneer Press*, “in a blaze of vocal glory.”

making more than one long-time concert-goer recall with pleasure the excitement of Horowitz’ 1928 midwestern debut at the People’s Church.⁴⁷

Throughout the Schubert Club’s more than eighty years, many recitalists have been engaged for a second performance, but only nine international artists and musical groups have been invited to make three appearances: pianists Adèle Aus der Ohe and Harold Bauer, violinist Isaac Stern, bass George London, baritone Heinrich Schlusnus, the Kneisel String Quartet, the Flonzaley Quartet, the London String Quartet, and the Budapest String Quartet. Top honors go to pianist Robert Casadesu who is the only soloist to have given four recitals before Schubert Club audiences — in 1939, 1946, 1949, and 1963.

The club first departed from its usual policy of presenting only individual musi-

Mme. Ernestine Schumann-Heink (left) and Mrs. Frank L. Hoffman, her accompanist



⁴⁴ Yearbook, 1942–43, p. 3; 1944–45, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Pioneer Press*, February 10, 1943, sec. 1, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Jeanette Murray, “Highlights of a Music Group of My Experience,” 2 (1954), in the Schubert Club Papers.

⁴⁷ *Pioneer Press*, April 7, 1961, sec. 1, p. 1.

cal artists and small ensembles when it brought to St. Paul the Carmelita Maracci Dance Group in November, 1941. Since then two similar companies have packed the auditorium: the Roberto Iglesias Ballet Espanol in 1959 and José Limon and Dance Company in 1961. Other memorable concerts during these later years include those of violinist Isaac Stern (1943, 1947, and 1951); pianists Maryla Jonas (1947), Lili Kraus (1960), and Rudolf Serkin (1961); cellist Mstislav Rostropovich (1963); singers Kathleen Ferrier (1949) and Irmgard Seefried (1952 and 1958); the chamber orchestra I Solisti di Zagreb (1957 and 1960).

The Paganini Quartet's St. Paul recital on January 20, 1948, will be long remembered not so much because of the good chamber music heard that evening, as for a mysterious, dark-haired stranger and his bold, successful masquerade. When the quartet's four musicians reached the auditorium early that evening, a middle-aged, bespectacled gentleman dressed in evening clothes met them at the entrance. He obviously knew his way around the theater and immediately took charge of things on stage, seeing that the chairs and music stands were placed correctly and instructing the electricians how best to direct the spotlights. He escorted the performers to their dressing room and then retreated unnoticed. Officers of the Schubert Club thought him the quartet's business manager; the artists took him for an official of the club. At the end of the concert four violin bows, valued at about twelve hundred dollars, were missing. When last seen, shortly after the concert began, the thief was boarding a Minneapolis-bound streetcar. Removing the four bows from under his coat, he carefully placed them across his lap and rode west into oblivion.⁴⁸

BY THE MID-1940s the Schubert Club found it difficult to make ends meet. Expenses increased, and there was growing competition from other concert courses in

the Twin Cities. To cover one year's deficit the club had to borrow money—a necessity which made board members realize that a guarantors' fund was the only solution. Yearly fund appeals continued until 1958 when the seventy-six-year-old institution became a part of the newly formed St. Paul Council of Arts and Sciences and made the transition from a private club to a nonprofit civic organization.

No one has better summed up the problems of running a concert course than John Harvey. There are several ways to solve them, he told readers of the *Pioneer Press* on April 22, 1952. "One way is to play safe and present artists known by performance to be sure-fire boxoffice draws. Another is to gamble with a group of unknowns. A third is to mix sure things with calculated risks. It is to the credit of the Schubert Club that, operating with a modest budget and on a narrow margin of security, it traditionally has followed the third policy of venturesome conservatism." Such a course will not always fill theater seats with enthusiastic audiences; sometimes it brings criticism. In the long run, however, the policy demonstrates the organization's continuing vitality.

In the fall of 1964 a new three-million-dollar arts and science center will be opened in St. Paul. At that time the city's major cultural institutions will move from two old houses, a run-down church, and rented offices into a handsome new building occupying a full city block on the edge of the downtown area. For the Schubert Club, Minnesota's oldest musical unit, this long-anticipated event will mark another important milestone. At the advanced age of eighty-two the organization will at last have adequate rehearsal, meeting, and office space in its first permanent home.

⁴⁸ *Dispatch*, January 21, 1948, sec. 2, p. 1.

THE SKETCH of the Schubert bust on page 52 is the work of Celine Charpentier; the program on pages 60 and 61 is from the Schubert Club Papers. All other illustrations are from the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society.



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