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Problems of Music in Canada

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CHAIRMAN T. D'ARCY LEONARD:—Ladies and Gentlemen. No introduction that I have been asked to make has been more pleasing to me personally than this of to-day for I have known Sir Ernest since the days we were at University together. Since that time his achievements have been too great and too numerous to mention. I will therefore refer only to the fact that he won his Doctorate of Music with a setting he wrote to Swinburne's *Ode to England*, that he was interned in Germany during the war, that he is principal of the Toronto Conservatory of Music and Conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. His most recent honor is to have been asked to lead a famous United States Orchestra in a series of five concerts to be broadcast over a national network in February and March. This is music day, and after Sir Ernest has addressed us on the problems of music in Canada we are to have an innovation which I am sure you will enjoy. Through the courtesy of Mr. Norman Wilkes we are to hear the Oriana Singers under the direction of Mr. Albert Whitehead, recently from London, England, who will sing English and French Carols. Following that we shall hear Miss Fredda Bradley, a violinist, who, you will be interested to know is a scholarship student at the Toronto Conservatory of Music, having been sent there by the Rotary Club of Saskatoon.

SIR ERNEST MACMILLAN:—I am to speak today of the problems of music in Canada. My own most pressing problem at the moment is to see that the annual Christmas Party of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra goes over without a hitch. It is a very serious problem indeed, and a rather ex-

hausting one. When I accepted your kind invitation I hoped that it would be a thing of the past before I spoke to you, and its postponement has made some very busy days. I now realize the truth of Shakespeare's saying that one man in his time plays many parts. This morning we have been very busily preparing for tomorrow night, but wild horses would not drag from me the details of what is going to happen. It has been very exhausting, and I am going to ask your indulgence if I read my speech.

The first problem of music in Canada, or anywhere else, is to effect a *rapprochement* between the professional musician on the one hand and the well educated citizen on the other. Too often the intensive training required for an artist's technical training leads to the exclusion of almost all other subjects from the more advanced stages of his education, and hence to a lack of proper perspective in his own field of vision. Many a Layman must feel acutely uncomfortable when he finds himself forced to exchange conversation with a musician, who, he imagines (sometimes quite correctly) can only talk shop. Not only the Babbit, whose musical activities are largely confined to his more roistering moments—moments to which only ditties of the "Sweet Adeline" or "Wild Irish Rose" variety are appropriate—but also to the intelligent and well-read man of affairs may be exasperated by the one-track minds of some of us musicians. He doesn't feel that he must always talk medicine to a doctor, or stocks to a stockbroker. He is justified in thinking it a very one-sided arrangement that he should be expected to talk another man's shop just because the other man shows little or no interest in anything outside his profession. Perhaps his early years have left him musically high and dry, and however eager he may be to learn, he finds no point of contact with his musical Vis-a-vis. In pressing for wider understanding of and interest in music among the laity, therefore, we must not neglect our duty as musicians to widen our own intellectual horizon. The solution to both sides of the problem lies, of course, in our schools and universities, and it is encouraging to see music beginning to assume its rightful place in both. It is only reasonable that a music course should be offered, as it now is, to our University students in arts; at every stage in our

educational scheme, non-vocational facilities will be offered to the many, and I hope that to these will be added abundant facilities for more intensive work by the specially gifted few. Not for ever will music be crowded out of the curriculum by subjects of less disciplinary value in themselves, and of far less social benefit in their effects. Not forever, I hope, shall we neglect to exact some minimum qualifications in those who teach, and expect the teaching of music, practically alone among the subjects of educational importance, to pay its way at all stages. Not forever shall we grudge instruction in music to those whose mild talents point to no musical career: still less shall we fail to provide reasonably cheap facilities for the few genuinely gifted ones.

Music has of late years entered into our social consciousness—not, perhaps, very deeply as yet—but even now its educational value is so patent to anyone with an open mind that the battle seems half won. I have yet to hear of any statistical survey that has not shown that, taking the averages over a reasonably large number, the general intelligence of young people studying music is superior to that of non-students of music.

I make no apology, therefore for stressing the need at the present time of a recognized place for music in our social scheme. Someone may say we are on the verge of wars, revolutions and other upheavals which will, if they come, sweep away all the arts, together with the institutions of greater importance; so why prattle about music, when we are on the verge of catastrophe? Granted that we are living on the edge of a volcano, which, if it erupts, will blow us all into nothingness, but we shall get nowhere in music or in anything else if we make this an ignoble excuse for inaction. We must set ourselves to build a nation in Canada, and our only practical basis is the belief that what we are now building matters, and matters supremely.

Why should our attitude to music and the other arts matter? Let us seek first an equitable economic system—the rule of law—physical fitness—preservation of individual liberty in a world in danger of losing it. Are not all these matters of such paramount importance, as to throw our aesthetic tastes entirely in the shade? Why should it matter that one man derives spiritual uplift from sounds which to

another are meaningless noise, or that one man revels in a color scheme that nauseates another? Are not Aesthetic questions merely personal to the individual, and should not each individual be left to make all aesthetic adjustments for himself? It is true that it matters little to the community whether this or that individual takes most aesthetic pleasure in Beethoven, in Michael Angelo or Shakespeare. What does matter, and matter enormously, is that our citizens should develop intellectual and spiritual faculties that transcend their everyday existence. Our lives are so specialized that narrow mindedness would seem in most cases inevitable. So far as our hours of leisure are concerned, it is so fatally easy these days to fill them with the cheapest kind of amusements and distractions—cheap, that is to say, in demanding little or no mental or emotional response—that our capacity for living life to the full becomes atrophied. There is no special social significance in this or that person's indulging in a taste of Jazz, many intellectual people do, for detective stories, which I confess to devouring in many of my leisure moments, or for burlesque shows and strip tease acts; but it will affect the whole character of our civilization, if these diversions in their multifarious degrees of coarseness or refinement become the measure of our fundamental tastes. In short a healthy digestion is not impaired by moderate indulgence in many things that would be ruinous as a steady diet.

Inasmuch as we cannot get away from the clever ephemeral, the cheap and the shoddy, which thrust themselves under our noses at every turn, it becomes increasingly important to instill into our people, particularly our young people, a knowledge of, and a taste for, the best things of every type. And as music of one kind or another is coming into every life nowadays, it becomes not a private matter but a public function to see that musical tastes and musical talents, great or small, are given proper direction. To fulfil those functions adequately we need well supported institutions — institutions of a national character comparable to those which have fostered the musical life of other lands. We need adequate financial backing—a matter in which Canada is far behind most countries. We need standards that can be steadily maintained independently of commercial

considerations. We need artists of the highest skill and permanently established organizations for concert-giving. I am sometimes asked why seat sales cannot pay for operatic productions or orchestral concerts, and why people who do not like such things should be expected to bear the financial burden. Bernard Shaw's answer you will remember, was; that people who support hospitals do not necessarily like being ill, though perhaps there are some who would as soon be subjected to the surgeon's knife as to the conductor's baton. But I think we have a better answer than Shaw's. Public Libraries, Art Galleries and museums are not expected to pay their way, for it is universally recognized that they are the chief means of preserving for the present generation the great heritage left by the past, and of adequately presenting the works of our contemporaries. So with music. The only music that lives for all but a very few is the music that is performed. This is so, whether it is the music of the past or the present.

Whether you hear music performed at concerts or not, whether you go to see exhibitions of painting and sculpture or not, matters very little to anyone save yourself, but you cannot as a citizen escape some share of the responsibility for the intellectual and cultural life of your country. If the civic conscience were fully awakened in the majority of our citizens I would have no fear of not receiving a proper share of support. A few minutes thought will surely convince us that this art which has woven itself so deeply into the fabric of the whole human race since the dawn of time is no mere fad, to be left to the few among the wealthier classes, whose tastes happen to run in that direction.

A further consideration is the necessity of preparing the ground for Canadian musical composition. In the long run the performance of music is of secondary importance. The exercise of the creative faculty is the highest function of the musical mind, although only a small proportion of musicians show the creative faculty in large measure. The artistic creations of a nation are more than influential—they are symptomatic—"by their fruits ye shall know them." In spite of many great works produced in Canada, it must be admitted that with us creation runs far behind performance; especially among native born Canadians, and that little

of what is written bears a distinctive Canadian stamp in the sense that much of our painting does. We cannot force the process of creation—"the wind bloweth where it listeth" —but we can prepare a receptive soil. We can also turn the minds of our children in the direction of creation—whether it be in the direction of music, painting, story-telling, or gave-inventing. The exercise of the creative faculty in our young people should be looked on as perfectly natural. Perhaps among a couple of hundred children who are encouraged to make up their own tunes you will find one who is capable of developing that faculty to pleasant talent in later life, and perhaps one in two thousand will become a composer who has something to say. That is quite a large enough proportion for all practical purposes. The rest of the children, who have at least tried to put music together, will have the same understanding of it, as a boy has of an engine, that he has learned to take down and reassemble. But while we wish to give all encouragement to the development of creative musical effort, we must remember that, as Mr. Alan Sullivan once said to me: "In order to be truly national, Canadian art must meet international standards." A work is neither more nor less valuable, because the composer happens to be our next door neighbor.

Another reason Canadian musical life merits private and public support is that we have close at our doors many American communities where the need of support has been recognized for many years. We are grateful to be able to hear on the air, and occasionally in the flesh fine American musical institutions, and long may we continue to do so. We are grateful to our neighbors who accept students from Canada in their well endowed institutions and give them free facilities far beyond what they can secure here without prohibitive cost, but we must not be content to batten on the largesse of others. Some Canadians seem to think it quite right and proper to entrust the defence of Canada to the British and United States navies, while making a great verbal parade of our independence as a nation. A parasitic existence of any kind is likely to prove a boomerang. The nation that lets its neighbors do its work in any sphere ends, by losing just that part of its independent nationhood. When our talk of independence means getting out from under when

there is work to be done—work in the realms of statesmanship, economics, science, education, art or music, then we shall sooner or later be compelled to eat our words. Incidentally I would hazard a guess that if revolution with a capital R ever comes to our country it will be less because of the concentration of wealth in a few hands than because of the seeming irresponsibility with which it is spent.

So far the problems I have outlined might be the problems of music in any country. In Canada we have one or two special problems of our own. I need hardly refer to our geographical problem—the division of the country into four units of which the largest is itself split by racial differences. Music is affected by these divisions as is every other aspect of Canadian life, and only a few musicians in one part of the country know what is being done in the other parts. The foundation of teachers' associations in Ontario and in the west help to modify the cleavage created by distance, and it is greatly to be hoped their organizations will in the end bring about a unified musical profession with standards of admission and codes of professional ethics analagous to those of the medical and legal professions. Such associations would provide the public with a much needed protection against charlatanism and musical humbug. Closely allied with this is the question of examining bodies and their status. Any examining body under the present conditions may be anything from a University to a limited liability company operating for profit. To ensure reliable standards in perpetuity it is necessary that we encourage recognition of public bodies whose examiners are musicians of standing and experience. A private organization, it is true, may make a worthy effort to uphold high standards, but even if it does not change hands, as it is liable at any moment to do, it is exposed to the constant temptation to sacrifice standards for profits. And every institution is in the long run dependent for its excellence on the individuals composing it. It is obvious that eventually, if the public is to be protected from incompetence and rackets in the musical profession, some specific means of establishing high standards will have to be recognized. Some people disparage examinations, diplomas and similar paraphenalia, and I should be the last person to claim that they are a complete

solution of the problem. As a rule, however, I find that such criticisms boil down to the not very profound observation that many musicians who have won diplomas are less qualified than others who have not, that is perfectly true. The custom of holding examinations and granting degrees or diplomas has never been a very universal one in the very individualistic profession of music. It is also true that you cannot measure the higher forms of music adequately in marks; you can only register an opinion and give an approximate assessment. But if the opinion be given by a well-qualified impartial and experienced musician it is helpful in itself, and if one thinks of a diploma as establishing a minimum—not a maximum standard—that in itself is a protection to the public. We know that a medical man or a lawyer, before being allowed to practice his profession must cover a certain minimum of prescribed study. In other words he is not entirely a quack. The course of study and the degrees that he obtains do not ensure that he is a medical or legal genius. He must still prove his worth as an individual, and in the upper reaches of professional skill no academic qualifications are adequate. But anyone, qualified or not, can practice as a music teacher; if he has a persuasive tongue he can secure a lot of pupils—just as though a medical man were allowed to practice on the strength of his bedside manner alone. The wonder is that the musical teaching profession is not hopelessly inefficient. A good stiff test in all round musicianship, as well as in the special branch of each teacher's work is an obvious desirability, and we need not be afraid that such tests will clip the wings of Pegasus as some of our more sentimental music lovers fear. Technical knowledge of one's profession never did anyone any harm. If pedantry appears in some cases, it is, I imagine, inherent in the individual.

Our geographical difficulties in Canada are nowwhere more in evidence than in our broadcasting problems. The fundamental difficulty here is the distribution of our population—the bulk of it in a comparatively narrow strip running eastwards and westwards, with wide gaps where there is scarcely anybody to listen. Line charges are naturally out of all proportion to revenue, and far too little money is available for programs. Nevertheless we see a valiant effort

being made to keep Canadian programs of good quality on the air, and doubtless as equipment becomes complete there will be a greater proportion of revenue available for programs. Of one thing I am convinced that without a nationally owned and controlled system of broadcasting it would be difficult or impossible to maintain Canada's political independence indefinitely. The sacrifice of political independence would be the sequel to and partly the result of the sacrifice of cultural independence. The radio is, with the possible exception of the press the most influential single factor in moulding the minds of our people, and much as we admire and enjoy the finest broadcasts that come to us from the United States we must guard against allowing our individuality to be swamped. If anyone could tell me how under the circumstances anyone but a public body could withstand such powerful inflence I should like to hear particulars. In the meantime, while the C.B.C. is bound as a public body to consider the interests, not only of the audiences, but to some extent of the broadcasters as well; in order to build up Canadian organizations and foster artistic effort; its chief consideration must be one of quality. Whatever the program it must be the best of its type obtainable with the available material.

I have said nothing of the special problems facing our musical organizations and institutions: of the adequate financing of our orchestras and other concert giving organizations: of their need for a first rate Canadian musical journal: of the need of a large supply of highly qualified teachers to carry out the admirable and ambitious programs of school-music which our enterprising departments of education in Ontario and other provinces have announced, of the relationship of music to the churches, which in some cases seems less of a handmaid than a bait: I have only suggested some of the difficulties of providing adequate facilities whereby our talented students may develop their talents, as they should be able to do without leaving their native country. You would, I imagine, be astonished at the daily demands made on such an institution as the Toronto Conservatory of Music from all parts of the country. Yet the Conservatory has never in the fifty years of its history received a dollar by way of legacy

or permanent endowment, nor has it received public grants. Of the few scholarships offered the only one received in the form of a capital sum was that donated by our honorary registrar, Miss Ferguson. I could, enlarging on another aspect of the matter speak at some length on the lack of outlets for graduate students who are ready to appear before the public, but whose talents wither through lack of opportunity to be heard. We really do not seem to have shaken off the old colonial inferiority complex when it comes to judging our own young musicians for ourselves.

These and other problems are all dependent upon the fundamental one I outlined in my opening remarks—the problem of awakening the public mind to a complete consciousness of the importance of music in our national life; of accepting efforts toward the support of musical institutions as natural and inevitable—in short, of pulling music out of the watertight compartment it still seems to occupy in the minds of many.

I do not wish to seem pessimistic. It would be foolish to ignore the enormously increased interest our people have shown in music during the past few years, or the enormous strides they have made in knowledge of the art. Never before in the history of the world has there been so much making of music—although perhaps former eras have more to be proud of on the creative side. Never before have a multitude of musical organizations in Canada been accomplishing finer work. How long they can continue to do so under present conditions would seem doubtful. Our problem is to make the most of this widespread interest—to see that everyone obtains his fair share of enjoyment and benefit and contributes in proportion to his means to its support. We must listen to music, not solemnly but thoughtfully as a language in which are embodied ideas equal to those of painting and literature, and treat the art with the respect due to one of the great revelations made to and through the human mind.