

Community Efforts to Organize Symphonies Prove Nebraska Is Not a Cultural Desert

By Diane Lindquist

The following was written for a University of Nebraska School of Journalism depth reporting class.

On a Sunday afternoon in the spring and in the late fall 45 musicians take their places, tune their instruments and fidget in their chairs as the audience gathers at the North Platte High School auditorium to hear the Sandhills Symphony perform.

These presentations are made possible through donations from local patrons, a grant from the Recording Industries "Music Performance" Trust Fund and a spreading demand for culture on the prairie.

Can it be true that such concerts exist in a state located in what has been called the "American cultural desert"? The truth is that this is only one of six communities in Nebraska that have symphony orchestras.

Omaha and Lincoln have had symphonies for more than 40 years. Besides being the more established symphonies in the state, they are the only professional symphonies in the sense that the members are paid.

The Hastings Dime Symphony was started during the depression. The name developed because the admission price was a dime, and it stuck, probably because the cost has remained at a dime.

The McCook, the Sandhills and the North Platte Valley symphonies have been created in the last 15 years, largely because the communities demanded cultural entertainment.

Dormat Source

Nebraska author Mari Sandoz gave reason to believe that for years the cultural interest now being recognized was lying dormant waiting for someone to untap the source and let the music swell forth.

"Evidently something of the old interest in music has lasted," she wrote in a letter noting the creation of the Sandhills Symphony. "There was a season, right after settlement, when every community with an E-flat cornet man had a band. I recall, also, that in the 1920's there was at least one member of the Lincoln Symphony from out at North Platte, commuting. However, the real crystallization now must be due to your special interest in a peculiar talent with these people."

The interest and talent to which Mari Sandoz was referring was that of Dr. Louis C. Trzcinski, professor of music at the University of Nebraska. He is the man who has urged Nebraska's businessmen, teachers, and housewives to dig out their instruments, dust them off and create the sounds they had nearly forgotten.

Trzcinski has found that Nebraska communities are

thirsting for orchestras, which have been neglected for so long. All it takes is a little push and some local pride.

Community Effort

"It's amazing," he said. "I think people are more interested because it is in their own communities."

"Many people don't realize the potential here in the terms of talent. It's amazing how much potential there really is."

As a consequence of the University of Nebraska String Plan, Trzcinski helped train players in the McCook symphony. Several North Platte musicians were playing in that symphony and they wondered why they couldn't have their own orchestra.

In November of 1961 they asked Trzcinski to help organize the Sandhills Symphony — "There were even a few who thought this was a bunch of guitar players and fiddlers," said conductor Lawrence H. Romeiser — and on Sunday afternoon, April 30, they gave their first performance.

This year Trzcinski helped organize the North Platte Valley Symphony in Scottsbluff.

The idea is to help rather than to govern," Trzcinski said. "If they do it, then it's that much more important to them. The symphonies depend a lot on the local leadership and on their resourcefulness."

No Boundaries

Even though the symphonies depend largely upon the human and financial resources of one particular community, membership is not restricted in terms of geography. The lonely, devoted commuter driving between North Platte and Lincoln may no longer have to travel across the state to perform with a symphony, but the distance some symphony members travel is still impressive.

Every other Sunday when the Sandhills Symphony rehearses, first violinist V.R. Eychner drives 140 miles from Grand Island. He and his daughter, Mrs. Robert Deuschman, from North Platte, play side-by-side.

A flute player and former North Platte elementary teacher drives from Sterling, Colo. because she likes the group so much. There are also members from Cozad, Stapleton, Arnold and other surrounding communities.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Budenberg, who farm south of Gothenburg, often bring their seven children with them to the rehearsals. He plays the trumpet, she plays the tympani and now their oldest son has joined the symphony as a trumpet player.

While the symphonies are devoted to the production of harmonious strains their situation may become strained at times in the areas of an adequate num-

ber of players, audience attraction and finances.

Need Players

"We need to be working to develop more active players," Trzcinski said. "Right now there just aren't enough around."

Omaha and Lincoln, 75-member symphonies, have fewer problems attracting enough members. In fact, membership has to be restricted and the musicians are chosen through auditions.

"Here many more people are applying," Trzcinski said. "Lincoln and Omaha are more prolific in terms of talent."

Furthermore, the school systems have had orchestral training for years and both cities have youth symphonies. This year a second youth symphony, for elementary students, was started in Lincoln.

"We feel the Lincoln Youth Symphony is more or less a feeder," Gene Stoll, conductor of the Lincoln Youth Symphonies, said. "Most students play three to four years and have had quite a few years of experience if they become members of the Lincoln Symphony."

In the Lincoln symphony college students are offered an apprenticeship. If they are exceptional they are allowed to play two years with the orchestra and then become regular members and get paid.

Students Help

Students, both college and high school, have helped solve the problem of adequate membership in the out-state orchestras. An oboist or a bassoonist is sometimes difficult to find in these communities so a high school or college student who fills the need or shows particular talent is used.

The Nebraska String Plan, a program designed to upgrade the teaching of string musical instruments in many of the state high schools, has also increased the quantity and quality of student musicians in the out-state symphonies.

The problem, then, of participation seems on the way to being resolved. Symphonies now can get enough players to come, but what of the audience? Are there enough people who are interested in this type of music to make a community symphony worthwhile?

Again, in Omaha and Lincoln, the problem is less severe because of the larger and more varied populations.

In the other communities, where an admission price may discourage a mildly curious audience, the performances are free. The support of the local patrons help generate enthusiasm, and, of course, there are some who have a strong, sincere interest in the symphony, and encourage others to develop a similar interest.

Once the curious skeptic

is lured to the auditorium to witness a performance, the symphony is determined not to lose him and several methods are used to hook him.

"We try each time to bring in a guest artist or a group," Sandhills Symphony conductor Romeiser said.

"We do choose a variety of music — something that the larger symphonies would do to start off, and we end up with progressively lighter music."

The Sandhills Symphony has steadily increased its audience since its beginning.

Getting the people to come is not enough, Trzcinski said. They must be able to understand in order to appreciate.

"We need to fill our halls with an audience that understands and appreciates good music — not just the folk songs, even though they are often good, too. But, yet, to hear something in depth, this requires a better understanding of the tools involved in such a work."

He suggests that information programs would provide an opportunity to discuss the elements of a piece of music so the average listener would know what to listen for. People have been doing this, but not enough, he said.

Yet, more and more people are coming to the symphony concerts so this problem, too, is partly resolved. The problem that remains and looms the largest, is money.

Money Needed

It is needed for the music, the equipment, guest artists and the rental of places to hold practices and performances. Although

they would perhaps like to, all the symphonies cannot afford to pay the members.

Even in the Lincoln and Omaha symphonies, which charge admission prices, the wages are low.

"It is more a contribution as far as time is concerned," Trzcinski said.

About 60 of the 75 musicians are connected with some field of music and are members of the Musicians Association.

"They play for about half of what they normally get paid just to have a symphony . . ." Gene Stoll, president of the Lincoln Musicians Association, said. "We feel the members of the symphony are donating their time. If they didn't do it, we wouldn't have it."

The Musicians Association give members, who are usually in a numerical minority, permission to perform in the out-state symphonies without a wage.

The North Platte local has granted the Sandhills Symphony a unique situation which, along with donations by ten local businesses, covers its expenses.

A trust fund has been formed at the national level of the association from a few cents paid on every record made by association members. Called the "Music Performance" Trust Fund, it is allotted on the basis of previous use and given to every local to be used to promote live music. The money enables groups to get paid for performing at state hospitals, veterans hospitals, and Children's and nursing homes.

Agreement Made

The Sandhills Symphony



Miss Helen Snyder, University of Nebraska's associate dean of student affairs, has been elected national president of Mortar Boards, the women's honor society. The election took place at Lafayette, Ind., where Mortar Boards held their annual four day convention at Purdue University. Miss Snyder, who was among the featured speakers at the convention, is the past first vice president of the group.

Campus Safety Stressed

According to J. V. Edsall, director of planning and construction at the University of Wisconsin, one way to end a minor safety hazard is to make it a major one for a major hazard "will often be the scene of fewer accidents."

Edsall spoke at the Monday session of the three-day National Conference on Campus Safety at the Nebraska Center. He noted the need for closer cooperation and communication between the safety officers and the architects designing new campus buildings.

Many of the safety problems that occur after a building is constructed could be eliminated if safety officers participated more in the preblueprint stage by offering recommendations on features to be included or struck from a slated project, he said.

Also speaking to the delegates Monday was National Safety Council president Howard Pyle. He discussed safety as a science concerned with the movement of people.

Pyle said that the Safety Council was organized by industry 54 years ago when about 80 per cent of all accidents were industrial; today it is 14 per cent.

A recent survey of 108 colleges and universities revealed that only 27 had safety directors and they did not offer safety courses, while 18 had safety courses but no safety director.

Pyle said only one of the schools surveyed offered a degree in safety and it was in the area of fire prevention.

However, Pyle noted that there is a growing national awareness of the safety problem and said this awareness is being expressed.

He specifically cited the automobile, noting that new requirements are being installed, such as the collapsible steering wheel.

Pyle added that the total number of traffic fatalities in the nation dropped 2 per cent for the first five months of 1967, compared with the same period of 1966 and said the death rate per miles traveled has decreased by 6 per cent for the same period.

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Two University Faculty Members Take Part in Home Ec Convention

Two staff members at the University of Nebraska School of Home Economics have a part in the program at the American Home Economics Association convention June 26-30.

Dr. Shirley Kreutz, professor of home economics education, will present some beliefs and definitions about the development of a structure for curriculum content during one of the subject matter section meetings.

Dr. Hazel Anthony, chairman of the home economics education department, will report on the activities of the Associated Organizations for Teacher Education at the 58th annual convention in Dallas.

Nebraskans Attend

About 60 Nebraska home economists are attending the convention. Serving as Nebraska member delegates to the meeting are Dr. Dorothy Lacey, chairman of the NU Department of Family Economics and Management and chairman of delegates; Dr. Virginia Trotter, associate dean of NU College of Agriculture and Home Economics; Helen Gill, assistant director of the Omaha and Council Bluffs Dairy council; Dorothea Holstein, associ-

ate State 4-H Club leader and Margaret Killian, president of the Nebraska Home Economics Association and presidential delegate.

Alternate delegates are Ardith Von Housen, home economics teacher in the Holdrege public schools; Agnes Arihaud, assistant state director of the agricultural extension service and Lorraine Brandt, professor of family economics and management at NU.

Speakers at the convention project the theme "Focus on Interaction" through professional sections and subject matter groups.

Interaction Viewed

Dr. Elizabeth Crandall, AHEA vice president, will present an overview of interaction, and Dr. Helen LeBaron, dean of the College of Home Economics at Iowa State University, will tell delegates about professional interaction. Another featured speaker is Dr. Bernice Milburn Moore of the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health at the University of Texas who will give clues to interaction among generations — a factor in future family patterns.

About 25 student home economists from the Uni-

versity of Nebraska, Omaha University, Peru State College, Wayne State College and Kearney State College are also attending the meeting.

Students attend all the section and professional meetings as well as having a special professional meeting for college chapters. There is also a special college mixer planned for them.

The 25,000 member AHEA is a national professional organization of home economists. It includes college graduates trained in the areas of home and family life and working in research, health, welfare, extension, business, institutional management and education.

Speaking In French Required

Maison Francaise, a French house, will be open for one month from July 5 to Aug. 5 for students who have completed three years of high school French or passed French 13 at the university, announced Miss Lenore Buford, French instructor.

All participating students will be required to sign a pledge to speak only French during the month and may gain permission to speak English from the house director only in case of emergency, Miss Buford said.

The students may earn a college credit by participating in two daily classes of two hours each. The morning class consists of grammar review, phonetics and composition and the afternoon class will cover civilization and literature, in the main short stories reflecting the milieu of various periods.

The social aspect of the month will include a series of French feature films every Friday night, songs and informal discussion groups, all with stress upon frequent conversation, Miss Buford said.

"All students will matriculate as dormitory students, living in the Nebraska Center for Continuing Education. Residence is mandatory and necessary if objectives are to be achieved," she mentioned.

In addition to three years of French, each student is required to have a passable accent and an adaptable personality.

The department will accept applications until July 1, Miss Buford said. Others who are interested in seeing the films are welcome to attend providing they speak only French during their stay.

"We eventually hope to have a house for each language during the year. This is the first time it has been tried at the university," Miss Buford commented.

Five Colombians Visit, Study Midwest

The group includes Dr. Alejandro Sandino, vice rector of the National University; Dr. Santiago Fonseca, dean of the College of Agronomy at Bogota.

Dr. Alvaro Gutierrez, dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine of Bogota; Dr. Rafael Bravo, dean of the National University at Palmira; and Dr. Rodrigo Duarte, director designate at Bogota.

After spending several days at the University's College of Agriculture and Home Economics the group will tour the Mead Agricultural Field Laboratory and the Saunders County Extension Office at aWhoo, June 26.

The group also will tour the Scotts Bluff Experiment Station at Mitchell. Other universities included in the tour are Iowa State, University of Wisconsin, Michigan State University, the Kellogg Foundation at Battle Creek, Mich.; University of Missouri, Colorado State University.

They will return to Colombia Aug. 1.

Sheldon Shows Nebraskans Art

An art exhibition, arranged by the Nebraska Centennial Commission and the Nebraska Arts Council, is currently on display at Sheldon Art Gallery.

"Nebraska Art Today — A Centennial Exhibition" opened last week and will continue through July 30. It is sponsored by the Lancaster County Centennial Arts and Cultural Committee.

About 50 pieces of art are on display—all by Nebraska artists, either resident or non-resident. A variety of media, styles and subjects have been used in the printings.

Many familiar names appear in the catalog, and Nebraskans as well as out-of-staters and all summer school students should find a visit an exciting experience.

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