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Musical Life in Grand Rapids at the Turn of the 20th Century: An Archival Study

Thomas J. Stutz

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Abstract

This project focuses on outlining the vibrant musical soundscape and traditions of Grand Rapids Michigan at the turn of the 20th century. At the forefront of this research is the contrast between men's and women's clubs at the time. Our analysis indicates that the foremost women's club—the St. Cecilia's Society—took a more nuanced and intellectual approach to musical programming and performance whereas their male counterparts were more focused on the social and public view of their club; this view is in line with the historical trend of women's clubs holding a great deal of power in the arts at the time. Part of our analysis comes from researching the Grand Rapids May Festival, a colossal financial failure, put on by the all-male Schubert Club; the analysis further concludes that the concept of a May Festival was a growing trend in the Midwestern United States in the early 20th century. Our research also employs a statistical review of public and church performances in Grand Rapids during the entirety of 1903, an approach that found an overwhelming preference of contemporary American over European composers. Other findings include a growing interest in Indigenous North American music, particularly in the context of utilizing these styles over the growing dominance of African musical elements. The story of Grand Rapids musical life is set against the backdrop of a resistant public whose apathy made the ambitions of impassioned advocates of the arts particularly difficult.

Prelude

A crisp and calm October evening in 1903 on the Grand River is suddenly interrupted by a surge of voices as the doors to the Powers Opera House open. In the heart of downtown Grand Rapids, Pearl Street is suddenly overwhelmed with an effervescent energy that circulates through the adjacent streets and into the nearby living quarters as the audience begins the journey home. Here, in this sleepy midwestern town, they have witnessed one of the world's premiere soloists; Madame Nellie Melba. Less than a block away, the Pantlind Hotel, situated on the banks of the Grand River, is soon the center of the night's afterparty wherein Madame Melba is hosted under the auspices of the Schubert Club. Warm regards are exchanged; Madame Melba remarks that the grand decorations of the green room and auditorium at the opera house—consisting of palm leaves, rugs and various oddities—were second to none she had ever seen in her travels;¹ an intricately crafted mahogany chair is presented to the performer as a gift of gratitude;² the opulent event comes to a close as the fall evening turns into night. In the morning, the *Grand Rapids Press* features articles praising the performer for her grace and aptitude as Grand Rapids, the furniture city, settles back into business as usual.

Five and a half years later, in May of 1909, the *Grand Rapids Press* prints an article detailing the revival of the May Festival, a multi-day concert series with the Theodore Thomas Orchestra and various soloists.³ This revival comes four years after the same concert series left the Schubert Club in a state of self-inflicted financial ruin. The story of the 1905 festival is one of ambition and pride burning too bright before bursting suddenly and unceremoniously. Undoubtedly, the tone of the *Press* coverage in preparation for and following the festival had a major role to play in its downfall. They did what they could and tried their best, but ultimately

¹ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Music," October 24, 1903, 15

² *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "It Caused Wonder," October 24, 1903, 18

³ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Last Note Played," May 29, 1909, 6

the city did not respond to the boastful nature of their coverage. The words of this morning's edition are carefully woven together so as to not put the proverbial cart before the horse; there is no mention of the event as a testament to the artistic epicenter that Grand Rapids ought to become; no mention of the city as a champion for artistic indulgence; it is a single column detailing the program heard the day prior.⁴

The May 29, 1909 edition of the *Grand Rapids Press* and the October, 1903 visit of Nellie Melba are artifacts bound to strands of context that extend to both the past and the future. What the city was and what the city became all connects to these anecdotes; a connection that is an omnidirectional web of stories and events. The contextualization and overall comprehension of these stories is only possible through the work of collecting and compiling these artifacts and others just like them. Through this process it becomes possible to see, with clarity granted through hindsight, the story of Grand Rapids.

Methodology and Introduction

The research that Dr. Lisa Feurzeig and I have conducted between the months of May and July of 2022 has taken many forms. Though the methodology has shifted in conjunction with these forms, the intent of our project has largely stayed the same: a study of Grand Rapids musical life in the early 20th century. Grand Rapids became the subject of our study because both Dr. Lisa Feurzeig and I live in Grand Rapids—I myself grew up just outside the city—and our institution, Grand Valley State University, is located partly in Grand Rapids, with the main campus being only a short drive west. Needless to say, our roots, in many regards, are entangled with this city.

⁴ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “The Real Test,” May 31, 1905, 4

The dates that we have selected to focus our efforts on have been the most malleable piece of our project. It began with 1903—an arbitrary year—before becoming 1903-1905 when we learned about the Grand Rapids May Festival in those years. Upon further research and findings that dated back as far as 1883 and into the 1910s, we operated with the looser definition “Grand Rapids at the turn of the 20th century” which allowed us to take in more information beyond an arbitrarily strict set of years.

The statistical information in regard to repertoire and composers performed in Grand Rapids was derived from Saturday issues of the *Grand Rapids Press* in 1903. The Saturday paper featured a musical column, varying in size, that included items such as performances that had happened the week prior, upcoming performances, and the church music that would be performed the day after the publication. For obvious reasons, the data are not meant to be a complete picture of Grand Rapids musical life. If a church was not included in the Saturday publication, this does not mean that there was no music heard in their congregation on Sunday. Undoubtedly some performances were missed in the weekly review, and others were perhaps deemed too unworthy or unsubstantial to publish in the minds of the paper’s musical writers—such as ethnic music, impromptu performances, and burlesque shows. Even so, the Saturday issues provide us with one of the most consistent primary sources available regarding musical performances in the city. These data also provide a unique opportunity for the researcher and readers alike to familiarize themselves with the musical habits, in a statistically supported form, of midwestern America in the early 20th century: i.e., what composers were being heard, and where the music was being played.

In addition, we used a mixture of primary and secondary sources from several libraries and archives to synthesize our image of Grand Rapids. We visited the Grand Rapids History

Center at the Grand Rapids Public Library, viewed collections of documents held by the Grand Rapids Public Museum, and visited the library of the Schubert Male Chorus, formerly the Schubert Club. The archives of the St. Cecilia Music Center are now at the public library, and they included a scrapbook of music programs compiled by an unknown person that includes materials from the group's founding in 1883 until roughly 1910.⁵ These programs illustrate the particular care that the St. Cecilia's women had for their club. Everything from the themes and programs of events to the unique musicians and scholars brought to the city seems to have been created and chosen with regard to musical and artistic enrichment for the members of the group and of the broader Grand Rapids community. The highlights of these programs will be explored further in this project.

Although the St. Cecilia's group has played a seminal role, in the past and in the present, in the musical ecosystem of Grand Rapids, it was far from the only musical group or club. Numerous other groups, varying in size and scope, also took part in musical activities; part of our methodology was piecing together the history and the role that each group played in the city. We scoured through editions of local newspapers and journals beyond the *Grand Rapids Press*, including the *Grand Rapids Herald* and the short-lived magazine *Woman*. In rare cases, we had the opportunity to work with groups that are still in existence today such as the Schubert Male Chorus. For this side of the project, doing our due diligence as researchers meant we had to follow many threads that could either branch off to others or "fray out" in some unfortunate cases where records may have never been kept or lost to time.

Our intent with this project, in many regards, is akin to painting a portrait on a blank canvas. This is not to say that our research has been done with any less regard to fact, but rather

⁵ Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, St. Cecilia Music Society Records, "scrapbook/Programs, 1884-1911," Collection 453, Box 23

that our goal is to paint a vivid picture of musical life in Grand Rapids at the turn of the century. With the explosion of various modernist artistic movements at the time in Europe, and the lack of a universally cohesive American aesthetic, the contrast between North America and Europe became even more exaggerated in this time period. In various ways, Grand Rapids seemed to have tried to mimic European practices (e.g., musical clubs, and ethnic choirs) while striving to be modern in what we might call an American style by programming a majority of American composers and expressing an overwhelming civic pride in their own musicians regardless of their caliber. The overarching question that is contemplated throughout this project is whether or not Grand Rapids was a leader or a follower at the turn of the 20th century. Though the answer to this question is not binary, it is the culmination of small actions that places Grand Rapids somewhere on the spectrum between leader and follower.

Overview of the Pillars of Grand Rapids Musical Life

How might a picture of musical life in Grand Rapids be painted? Allow me to begin with the general overview before venturing into the details. A quick survey of Grand Rapids at the turn of the century must include the mention that the city was, at one point in time, a large player in the consumer furniture industry. Because of this, Grand Rapids received the colloquial nickname “Furniture City,” a term that was used as a point of pride by many citizens. The city is also situated along the Grand River, a geographical tool that allowed the early settlers to easily access trade, and a waterway that was vital in the later development of industry. The Grand River has been the keystone to the vitality and longevity of Grand Rapids; especially in difficult times, having access to this aquatic highway was essential. It also bears mentioning that Grand Rapids was built on Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi land. This led to some musical results that will be

explored further later on in this project, but it is important to note that interaction between these cultures is at the roots of this city's history.

In regards to music in Grand Rapids, it is helpful to explore what I refer to as the three pillars of musical life in Grand Rapids: clubs, concerts, and church. Musical clubs were undoubtedly the primary drivers of Western classical art music in Grand Rapids, with other concerts being a medium that primarily drove ragtime and popular music— though, there are some noted exceptions for both of these categories. Most obviously, church music was a pillar that is primarily steeped in hymns and other sacred music, but there seemed to have been a few musicians in the city who took it upon themselves to play contemporary Romantic era music in the context of church services.

Musical clubs in Grand Rapids at the turn of the century came in various forms, but the purpose for each group was largely similar: social music making. St. Cecilia's Society of Grand Rapids was arguably the most active group at the time; they began in 1883 as a women's club and presented concerts on a weekly basis with an extensive ecosystem of different membership categories.⁶ The concerts that they would perform weekly during the season existed alongside what they referred to as "artist recitals" in which prominent musicians, composers, and scholars of the time were invited to Grand Rapids— more on that later.

Other clubs in the city that existed as centers for musical enrichment include the Schubert Club and the Germania Maennerchor. First and foremost, the Schubert Club began in the same year as the St. Cecilia's group. In fact, it was started by the son of a founding member of St. Cecilia's, Mr. Henry C. Post, as a response to the success of the St. Cecilia's women.⁷ The

⁶ Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, St. Cecilia Society Records, "Yearbooks, 1903/1904," Collection 284, Box 2, Folder 4

⁷ Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, Schubert Male Chorus of Grand Rapids, Michigan Collection Historical Records, "Biographical/Historical Information," Collection 351, Box 1, Folder 1

Schubert Club is unique in that it exhibits two qualities: enthusiasm and indulgence. The Schubert Club was incredibly enthusiastic about their work, and they were the group that put on some of the most grandiose shows and concerts. On top of this, they also seemed to focus a lot on the social aspects surrounding their club. One mention of their group in the *Grand Rapids Press* was about a banquet that they put on at which community leaders and political figures joined them for a night of music, comedy, and social dining.⁸ Needless to say, the Schubert Club was in the public eye as a group that put on extravagant and indulgent events.

The Germania Maennerchor is a somewhat elusive group in Grand Rapids history. In our research, we found evidence that there were many groups that existed only for a short period of time, or even possibly on and off again over the course of several of years (other examples include the Fortnightly Club Orchestra,⁹ the Grand Rapids Letter Carrier's Band,¹⁰ the Newsboy Band,¹¹ etc.) We know of the Germania Maennerchor's existence, having seen numerous mentions of them in the *Grand Rapids Press*,¹² but any information about how they began or when they disbanded was not found. Additionally, there was a similar group called Polyhymnia that also existed as a German men's choir, with their concert program containing numerous advertisements from local businesses in German.¹³ Regardless of these groups' respective history,

⁸ The clearest example of this is seen in the publication of an article titled "Music and Mirth" in the *Grand Rapids Press* on January 19, 1905. This article details the festivities of a Schubert Club banquet that various judges and even Mayor Sweet attended. The article includes mentions of cigar smoking that left the hall in a blanket of haze; a surprise serving of a court summons for breaching campaign promises to the Mayor that was immediately rejected by one of the judges in attendance; "alleged wireless communications from the scene of war in the East" that were used as a comedy bit; and various other festivities that were written in a manner to try and paint the Schubert Club in an extravagant and fun loving light. Found in *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Music and Mirth," January 19, 1905, 3

⁹ Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, Finding aid for Friedrich Brothers Music House Papers, "Theater Programs, 1886, 1890, 1902," Collection 015, Box 2, Folder 1

¹⁰ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Letter Carriers' Band Concert at North Park Sunday, July 2, 3:30pm," June 30, 1899, 2

¹¹ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Pioneer Musician Taken by Death," February 10, 1923, 2

¹² *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Music," September 26, 1903, 11

¹³ Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, Finding aid for Friedrich Brothers Music House Papers, "Polnhnmnia. Mannerchor Bolnhnmnia ... Concordia Orchesters," Collection 015, Box 2, Folder 1

the existence of the Germania Maennerchor and Polyhymnia proves the presence of a strong German ethnic heritage in Grand Rapids.

Concerts beyond musical clubs were played in a wide variety of contexts and venues by an equally wide variety of performers. Naturally, this pillar of musical life is intertwined with that of musical clubs, but it is expanded to include performances from groups such as the Furniture City Band, and other performances at venues like the Powers Theater. Although the category of public concerts in Grand Rapids includes performances of world renowned classical musicians—such as Madame Schumann-Heink and Madame Nellie Melba—the majority of public performances were minstrel shows, vaudeville shows, and ragtime. These concerts were held quite regularly in the city, and from week to week in the *Grand Rapids Press*, there were articles under the section titled “About the Theaters” that discussed plays, minstrelsy, various opera styles, and vaudeville. During the winter months, the Grand Rapids Furniture City Band would play assorted band pieces—mostly ragtime—at the Powers Theater.¹⁴ In the summer—during the off season of most clubs and other music groups—the group would play a series of concerts at John Ball Park, a listening experience that was also mentioned for decades in the *Grand Rapids Press* with a tone of heartfelt nostalgia. These examples make it clear that Grand Rapids was exposed to a variety of different styles and genres of music at the turn of the 20th century.

The final pillar, church music, is fairly self explanatory. Clubs and concerts were somewhat reserved for those who had a particular interest in music. This is especially true for the St. Cecilia’s group, seeing as how active membership in the club, and access to perform at events were dependent upon a successful audition. However, church music was a way for those without

¹⁴The Furniture city band was the brainchild of Mr. J.W. York who invited Mr. Ellis Brooks to his instrument factory in Grand Rapids in 1900 wherein he proposed the idea of using the already established Wurzburg band—started by Mr. Frank Wurzburg—as a starting point. Mr. Wurzburg, who would later come to direct the band again in 1904, agreed to give Ellis Brooks the leadership position on account of Brooks’ small national fame of conducting wind ensembles in Chicago. In the *Grand Rapids Press*, the group was promised to rival any similar organization in the country. Found in, *Woman*, January 9, 1909, 14

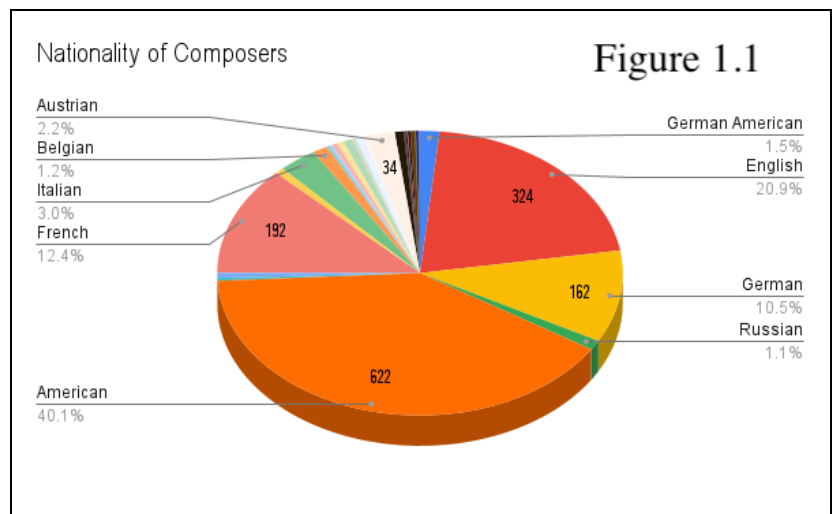
musical inclinations to be exposed to music, and the directors of the churches seemed to recognize this fact. Although hymns and anthems were dominant in church programs, there were still instances of an organist playing music from Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*,¹⁵ or a piano solo by Robert Schumann.¹⁶ In the Midwestern United States at the beginning of the 20th century, church was an essential part of musical life in a town, especially since the performers and directors from the churches were also some of the most prominent musicians of secular music in their niche.

Conclusions Derived From the Data

The final broad point that I would like to discuss about Grand Rapids is our statistical analysis of music performed in 1903. We focused on three aspects of this data: composers’ nationality, birth year, and gender.

Musical performances in Grand Rapids notably emphasized American composers more than any other nationality—their music made up 40.1% of all pieces performed. Next after American composers in order of frequency were English (20.8%), French (12.4%), and

German composers (10.5%). The next national group below Germans was Italians, who composed only 3% of all pieces played, and each national group below the latter is only a smaller and smaller fraction of the overall total. If we were to add to the count of American composers those who we counted as immigrants (E.g., German American, Austrian American,



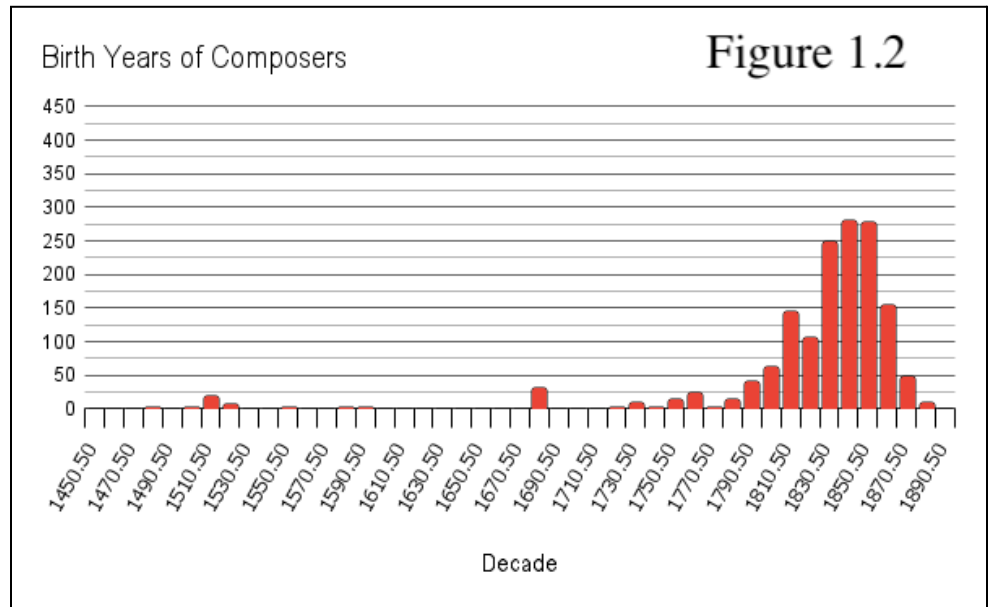
¹⁵ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Music,” February 7, 1903, 10

¹⁶ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Music,” January 17, 1903, 8

etc.) then the overall count of American composers would be roughly 43%, meaning that roughly 57% were of European or other origins. Within the other 57%, the non-European nationalities were Canadian (.7%); Mexican (.06%); and Australian (.06%).

Birth year is another important category to analyze. Taking a look at Figure 1.2, composers' birth years grouped in decades, we can see that the overwhelming majority were

born either just before or during the Romantic era in the 19th century. In fact, 75% of all pieces performed were written by composers born after the year 1820, placing them in the Romantic Era. In conjunction with the



nationalities, we can begin to see what the preferences of listeners and performers in Grand Rapids were at the turn of the century: contemporary American composers. This is in line with some of the sentiments that we came across in our research. We will discuss the concept of boosterism in greater detail further. Here, it should be noted that national pride is closely associated with this concept and that the people of Grand Rapids were quite proud of their country and their city; we can deduce that this partially explains the preference for American composers. Though there could be various explanations for why they programmed more Americans than any other national group, it follows the narrative that the people of Grand Rapids were taking an active part in the dissemination of contemporary American classical music.

The final category to analyze is gender: did the city value and play the music of female composers? According to our data, 4.2% of all pieces performed were composed by women, a statistic that underscores the importance of the progressive programming habits of some clubs in the city. Without groups like the St. Cecilia Society, that percentage would have been significantly lower, as it seemed to be part of their mission to program in a progressive manner. The club even had a regular Friday concert on February 26, 1904 dedicated to pieces written by women composers.¹⁷ The women composers who were heard in 1903 included names that are being heralded in the modern day such as Amy Beach, Teresa Del Riego, and Cécile Chaminade, but this list also contains numerous women who were writing under male pen names such as Guy d'Hardelot—pen name for French composer Helen Rhodes—and Paul Ducelle—pen name for American composer Carrie Williams Krogman. Of course pen names have been popular throughout history for female artists trying to break into a part of society that was closed to them, and their presence here is a reminder that these women were fighting an uphill battle. Within that 4.2%, Mary Frances Allitsen, an English song composer, composed the largest percentage of pieces with 18.2%, and Cécile Chaminade, a French composer and pianist, is second with 13.6%. Of the female composers played, 40.9% were American and 30.3% were English, 19.6% were French, and the other 9.2% came from a mixture of other European nationalities.

Case Studies from Grand Rapids' Musical Life

St. Cecilia Society

Now that we have established the broader points about musical life in Grand Rapids, I would like to take a closer look at a few notable examples, starting with the St. Cecilia group.

¹⁷ Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, St. Cecilia Society Records, "Yearbooks, 1903/1904," Collection 284, Box 2, Folder 4 pg. 5

This organization stands out as important because of the cultural trend it was following, the prominence of the group, and the nuanced artistic approach the women took toward music.

At the turn of the 20th century, Europe and America were in stark contrast to one another in regards to the treatment of Western classical music. In Europe, there were deeply rooted traditions of advocacy for the arts, government funding, and musical excellence; at this time, America was still coming of age, and learning how to develop a strong musical culture. As was mentioned previously, Grand Rapids was colloquially known as Furniture City, and this name came with all of the outcomes an industrial society can offer: more leisure time for the elite, a middle class, and the unfortunate exclusion of women from certain social realms. These circumstances led to the active engagement of many women in American musical life. The view from Germany in the 1920's—a short time outside of our focal period but closely linked—was in line with this: that while American men were working and making money, women were running all of the artistic and cultural institutions. This was referred to as the *Frauenkult*, or “women’s cult,” a term that explained why American culture was “backward” and “wrong.”¹⁸ To recontextualize this practice in a modern light, we can see that the tradition of the women’s clubs comes into focus as the seed from which musical culture in America was able to blossom.

The prominence of the St. Cecilia Society is evident from the positioning of the group in the city itself, and the connections and influence they had beyond Grand Rapids. In the organization’s 1903-1904 yearbook there are five pages of active members, five of associate members, three of student members, and a single page for the male and honorary members.¹⁹

This was a large group, nearly all female, and all for the annual membership fee of \$5 in

¹⁸ See Fritz Giese, *Girlkultur* (Munich: Delphin-Verlag, 1925); Adolf Halfeld, *Amerika und der Amerikanismus* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1927); Gerhard Venzmer, *New York ohne Schminke*, (Hamburg: Weltbund-Verlag, 1930); and Fritz Voechting. *Über den amerikanischen Frauenkult* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1913).

¹⁹ Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, St. Cecilia Society Records, “Yearbooks, 1903/1904,” Collection 284, Box 2, Folder 4 pgs. 22-36

1903—around \$160 in today’s value. The mentions of the group in the *Grand Rapids Press* were quite positive, and the concerts and regular Friday performances were mentioned with praise.²⁰ All of this leads us to conclude that the group was held in high regard by the artistically driven citizens of Grand Rapids.

The prominence of the group outside of Grand Rapids is evident from the fact that two members—Mary Atwater Kelsey and Mrs. Frank M. Davis—traveled to Rochester, New York to participate in the 1903 meeting of the National Federation of Musical Clubs.²¹ The fact that St. Cecilia’s members were taking an active part in National Federation business—one of them served on the board and the other performed at the meeting—goes to show that the group had influence and connections outside of the city. Mary Kelsey (who was always referred to in our sources as “Mrs. C. B. Kelsey”) later served as president of the National Federation of Musical Clubs from 1907 to 1911.²² The group was also notable for having raised funds to build the St. Cecilia’s building, which is still standing and in use today, for the express purpose of club business. This was somewhat rare for women’s clubs at the time, earning the mention of the group by name in the *The Cambridge History of American Music*.²³ It is evident that the St. Cecilia’s group was a leader in some regards and a follower in others, but it is notable that they had some form of national prominence at the time.

The nuanced artistic approach of the St. Cecilia’s group is important because of the way it contrasts other groups at the time, and because it shows how much the members took care in creating their niche in the city. An important focus of the group was chamber and solo music; both are cheaper to produce than large ensemble pieces, and they are just as artistically

²⁰ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Music,” April 4, 1903, 12

²¹ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Music,” May 16, 1903, 14

²² *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “One Indian Girl,” May 22, 1909, 1 and 10

²³Michael Broyles. “Art Music from 1860 to 1920,” in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, edited by David Nicholls, 227–32. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521454292.010. (This chapter unfortunately identifies Grand Rapids as being in Missouri rather than Michigan.)

rewarding as any other form of musical performance. Where other groups in the city decided to only put on a few—or even just a single—grandiose performance of the season, the St. Cecilia’s group seemed to focus on presenting numerous quality performances throughout the season. Furthermore, with membership fees and donations, the group had the capital to bring in numerous world famous musicians, endow memberships for those who could not pay, and put on free philanthropic performances around the city.²⁴ To illustrate this point, in the 1903-1904 season, the group managed to host both the vocalist Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink and the pianist Miss Augusta Cottlow.²⁵ Additionally, a survey of musical programs from 1880-1910 includes numerous performances by noted American composer Edward MacDowell, and performances by Adele aus der Ohe—German pianist and composer; Madame Fannie Bloomfield Zeisler—Austrian-born Jewish-American pianist; and Vladimir de Pachman—a notable Russian concert pianist.²⁶ Over the course of a few decades, the group was able to continuously put on concerts of high caliber for the city of Grand Rapids, and there is no doubt that this was thanks to the financial and artistic care taken in programming and performing.

Schubert Club

Another group to explore in greater detail is the Schubert Club. The story of this group is similar to that of St. Cecilia’s, but it serves as a contrasting example in some regards. Even the inception of this group is of note, in response to that of the women of the city, which is a theme that presents itself multiple times going forward. What is particularly of note in regard to this group is the May Festival from 1903 to 1905, a two-day extravaganza of orchestral, chorus, and

²⁴ Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, St. Cecilia Society Records, “Yearbooks, 1903/1904,” Collection 284, Box 2, Folder 4

²⁵ Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, St. Cecilia Society Records, “Yearbooks, 1903/1904,” Collection 284, Box 2, Folder 4 pg. 8

²⁶ Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, St. Cecilia Music Society Records, “scrapbook/Programs, 1884-1911,” Collection 453, Box 23

solo performances. The May Festival in Grand Rapids began in response to the growing trend of other similar concert series in neighboring cities—such as Ann Arbor²⁷ and Cincinnati. It is unclear whether these performances were at all connected to one another, but it seems to have been a trend in the midwestern United States to put on some sort of extravagant musical event at the end of the regular performance season in May. It also bears mentioning that the Theodore Thomas Orchestra, the precursor to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, seemed to be the star guest ensemble of the Grand Rapids and the Cincinnati May Festivals each year. Furthermore, there is quite a bit of crossover among performers—such as Madame Nellie Melba, and Madame Schumann-Heink—which indicates that these performers likely planned their tours around where each May Festival was occurring.²⁸

To discuss the Grand Rapids May Festival further, it is important to first understand the practice of boosterism and how it relates to the Schubert Club. Boosterism can best be described as the practice of engaging in the promotion of a topic, idea, or group with an overly positive bias. In regard to the Schubert Club, the topic of boosterism is of particular interest. For example, leading up to the first May Festival in 1903, the *Grand Rapids Press* published numerous articles unashamedly claiming that the Grand Rapids May Festival would undoubtedly cast a shadow over the Ann Arbor one.²⁹ Although we do not have access to the financial records of the Schubert Club, we do have secondary sources outlining how the May Festival went.³⁰ The first year seems to have been a success, although it would be impossible to know whether or not the Grand Rapids festival overtook the Ann Arbor festival. Now, in the two subsequent years

²⁷James Tobin. “The May Festival Rising,” the Heritage Project, University of Michigan, 2022
<https://heritage.umich.edu/stories/the-may-festival-rising/>

²⁸See appendix A for more soloists

²⁹*Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Music,” May 16, 1903, 11

³⁰Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, Schubert Male Chorus of Grand Rapids, Michigan Collection Historical Records, “Biographical/Historical Information,” Collection 351, Box 1, Folder 1

following the first festival, there was a similar lead up in the *Grand Rapids Press*. Articles outlining how incredible and breathtaking the performances would be, interviews from musicians in the city discussing why one should not miss this year, and even discussions about how tickets were going to be sold out were all commonplace in the months of March and April.³¹ However, secondary sources indicate that the Schubert Club barely broke even in 1904, and was unfortunately crippled by the financial losses of the 1905 May Festival.³² Ultimately this led to there not being a May Festival at all in Grand Rapids put on by the Schubert Club, all of which was missing from the newspaper headlines.

The contrast between the Schubert Club and the St. Cecilia Society is directly related to the May Festival. As was outlined in the St. Cecilia's section, that organization was much more focused on the ability to put on performances of high caliber over the span of a few decades, whereas the Schubert Club was more focused on putting on a single very large performance that led to financial ruin. This is not to say that the Schubert Club was less important than any other, or that they were wrong in taking a chance on the practice of a May Festival, but it is important to note these differences when contextualizing their roles in Grand Rapids. In particular, the fact that the May Festival made a brief return in 1909 underscores the difference between these two groups. The 1909 May festival was financed by a group of philanthropists, led by Mr. Charles B. Kelsey, the husband of Mary Atwater Kelsey.³³ Mary Atwater Kelsey, as mentioned previously, was an active member of the St. Cecilia's group and also the president of the National Federation of Music Clubs in the same year.³⁴ The Kelseys no doubt saw a great opportunity to put on a May Festival because the National Federation of Music Clubs had their biennial meeting in Grand

³¹See appendix B

³² Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, Schubert Male Chorus of Grand Rapids, Michigan Collection Historical Records, "Biographical/Historical Information," Collection 351, Box 1, Folder 1

³³ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Plan a May Festival," January 5, 1909, 12

³⁴ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "One Indian Girl," May 22, 1909, 1 and 10

Rapids at that time, all of which inextricably connects the 1909 May Festival to the St. Cecilia Society. Now, to say that the St. Cecilia's group was the sole organizer of the 1909 May Festival would be somewhat inaccurate, but to see that the Kelseys had such a seminal role in putting this concert series together leads us to speculate that this was largely driven by two people closely tied to the organization. Additionally, seeing that the concert series was sponsored in a philanthropic manner is also of interest, for it takes away the risk of financial ruin that the Schubert Club unfortunately blundered into.

The Indianist Movement

American art music at the turn of the 20th century was but a seedling of what it would become in the middle of the 1900s. Because of this, there was disagreement among composers who wanted to cultivate this metaphorical seedling into a distinctly American style. In this project, we are primarily concerned with what is known as the "Indianist" movement, an American artistic movement that grew out of early ethnology of Indigenous North American culture.³⁵

For our purposes, we will emphasize and contrast two approaches to Indigenous North American culture: those artists and scholars whose work was based upon ethnomusicological research conducted with actual Indigenous groups, and those whose work was based upon preconceived perceptions of Indigenous groups. In Grand Rapids, there were striking connections to both categories of this movement. For example, in 1905, the St. Cecilia's Society offered a lecture presented by Miss Frances Densmore, who was to become one of the preeminent scholars of Indigenous North American music in the 20th century. Frances Densmore

³⁵ Tara Browner. "'Breathing the Indian Spirit': Thoughts on Musical Borrowing and the 'Indianist' Movement in American Music." *American Music* 15, no. 3 (1997): 265–84. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3052325>.

would be considered as part of the group who created an intellectual product based directly upon ethnological research involving Indigenous peoples; she traveled the country studying the musical elements of various groups and subsequently presented lectures and publications on her findings. The lecture in Grand Rapids included both discussion and performance of music she had learned while living with these groups; it is unknown whether the performance at St. Cecilia included direct recordings from tribes or renderings by other performers of transcriptions of these melodies and songs. This lecture came roughly five years before her tenure with the American Smithsonian Museum and subsequent renown. This example shows that not only did the city take a great interest in Indigenous North American music, but they also were part of the early wave to do so.

Related to Frances Densmore is the performer-composer duo Princess Tsianina Redfeather Blackstone and Charles Wakefield Cadman. Princess Tsianina was an operatic vocalist who grew up in the Muscogee Nation in Oklahoma, and Charles Cadman was a composer of Indianist music in America. Charles Cadman wrote several pieces with Indigenous elements. The best example is his 1918 opera *Shanewis*, in which Princess Tsianina debuted in the lead role at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.³⁶ Another example is *From the Land of Sky-Blue Water*, a song that Cadman composed based upon a collection of Omaha tribal songs done by Alice Fletcher, one of the first ethnologists to study Indigenous North American music.³⁷ Charles Cadman, in a similar intellectual vein to Densmore, was composing music directly based upon stories and musical elements that he had learned from the field of Indigenous studies.

Cadman and Tsianina visited Grand Rapids twice, first to perform at a private party at the Kelsey

³⁶ Redfeather Society, "The Story of Princess Redfeather (Tsianina Redfeather Blackstone)," Princess Red Feather History, <https://redfeatherhistoricalsociety.org/local-histories/red-feather-lakes-history/princess-red-feather/>

³⁷ Charles W. Cadman, Alice Fletcher, and Nelle R. Eberhart. *From the Land of Sky-Blue Water*, Op. 45, No. 1, Boston: White Smith Music Publishing Co. 1909

home and then for a public performance.³⁸ With both Frances Densmore and the Tsianina duo visiting the city, there is a clear interest in Indigenous groups coming from those involved in musical circles.

These two examples exist in contrast to some of the other composers and pieces focused more on the use of aesthetic elements related to Indigenous culture as an extension of the European “exoticism” that can be seen in music by composers like Georges Bizet—specifically in *The Pearl Fishers*—and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart—specifically in *The Abduction from the Seraglio*.³⁹ Examples of interest in this category from Grand Rapids can be found in the programs of the Furniture City Band. On four occasions throughout the John Ball Park concert series in Summer 1903, they played a piece composed by Charles N. Daniels based on “Song of Hiawatha” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Furthermore, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor’s *Overture: Hiawatha* can be found in the 1903 May Festival program.⁴⁰ Longfellow’s “Song of Hiawatha” is a heavily romanticized and largely inaccurate depiction of Indigenous North Americans from which many people derived a false understanding of Indigenous life.

We were struck by the lack of performance of African music in comparison to the abundance of Indigenous North American music. Throughout our research, we struggled to find even a single case of music played that would point toward an interest in African musical elements set in a Western art music context. Outside of this context, a clear interest in ragtime music can be seen in the city; ragtime takes a simplified version of African rhythms and places it within the context of popular American music— though, it would be an overstatement to say that

³⁸ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “An Indian Program,” October 31, 1914, 7

³⁹To take this exoticism a step further, we can see a clear example of appropriating Indigenous musical elements in the rendition of *From the Land of Sky-Blue Water* done by the Andrews Sisters. The original melody was composed by Charles Wakefield Cadman based on direct ethnological study done by Alice Fletcher, but the version by the Andrews Sisters takes the melody and places it within the context of early big band and swing music.

⁴⁰*Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Hamlin the Man,” May 28, 1903, 1, 7

this proves any inclination of the public's interest in African musical elements. The words of Edward MacDowell, an American composer from this time period, bring clarity to this question.

We have here in America been offered a pattern for an "American" national music costume by the Bohemian Dvorák—though what the Negro melodies have to do with Americanism in art still remains a mystery. Music that can be made by "recipe" is not music, but "tailoring." To be sure, this "tailoring" may serve to cover a beautiful thought; but—why cover it... with the badge of whilom slavery rather than with the stern but at least manly and free rudeness of the North American Indian?... Masquerading in the so-called nationalism of Negro clothes cut in Bohemia will not help us.⁴¹

The language here is quite clear in that it states MacDowell's underlying preference for the music of Indigenous North Americans over that of African Americans. Furthermore, it pits the two ethnic groups against each other in a sort of chess game in which Europeans choose which one to elevate for their self serving best interest. MacDowell claiming that African music is somehow marked with the "badge of... slavery" as opposed to the "manly and free rudeness" of Indigenous Americans shows that if given a choice between the two groups, he would choose the latter. In addition, the prevalence of minstrel shows in Grand Rapids is important to note when considering the lack of interest in African music.⁴² The act of minstrelsy taking place is a particularly damning practice in that it shows the interest of consumers to continue partaking in subjugating an ethnic group. Through the words of MacDowell and the contextualization of Grand Rapids minstrelsy, we can surmise that the public simply saw Indigenous North Americans as superior to African Americans, and by extension their music. Furthermore, we can also see that some felt they were ultimately superior to both ethnic groups, and the music and

⁴¹The mention of "the Bohemian Dvorák" comes from Antonin Dvorák having spent time in the United States. During this time, Dvorak published an essay titled "Music in America" calling for America to develop its own artistic voice, wherein he mentions the use of different ethnic groups' music to do so. MacDowell's comments are in response to this essay. Found in Browner. "Breathing the Indian Spirit," 267-68.

⁴² For articles that go in depth describing Grand Rapids locals taking part in Blackface Minstrelsy, see: *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "It Was A Hummer," April 6, 1894, 1; *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "The Social Side, A Symphony of Black and White in Rehearsal," March 17, 1894, 5; *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Fine Minstrel Show," May 24, 1905, 3

culture of minority groups were inherently open and available for artistic use to further their own self interests. The stereotype that Indigenous North American groups represent some primitive version of society that has developed to a higher stage in Europe is harmful, and to see their music as a form of “primitive” and “exotic” is equally so. It is well established that ethnic and racial discrimination can be seen throughout American history; Grand Rapids at the turn of the 20th century was not immune to this practice.

Conclusively, there was a clear interest in Indigenous North American music in Grand Rapids and the United States at the turn of the century. What remains somewhat inconclusive is whether this interest comes from a place of genuine fascination and inclusion, or a place of exoticism and cultural fetishization. For example, the use of the headline “One Indian Girl” in the *Grand Rapids Press* was printed on the front page to announce information concerning the 1909 revival of the Grand Rapids May Festival.⁴³ At face value, it refers to a factual matter, that a girl would be performing who was also of Indigenous descent, but it is difficult not to read this headline as a form of carnival barking and ethnic othering, especially seeing as how it would have been read on the front page of the newspaper. It is also important to understand that the history of Grand Rapids is also closely tied to the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi tribes, since White settlers in West Michigan were mostly on the land of these two tribes. It would be a fair question to ask whether the interest in Indigenous music in Grand Rapids was related to this history, but it is not conclusively answered by our research. Beyond Grand Rapids, and in the broader music community, we can see Indigenous culture becoming further appropriated, ending up with Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, a British composer, writing music based on *Hiawatha*, and American comedian Harpo Marx improvising a harp solo that used the melody of *From the Land of the Sky-Blue Water* in the movie “Go West” filmed in 1940; these examples open even more

⁴³*Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “One Indian Girl,” May 22, 1909, 1 and 10

questions as to where the interest came from. Regardless of intent, it can be said that Grand Rapids was taking part in a nationally growing interest in Indigenous North American music.

Musical Leaders in Grand Rapids

Musical life in Grand Rapids would have gotten nowhere without the persistent advocates who made it their mission to carve out a niche for themselves. Although we will discuss leaders of this movement, it goes without saying that the many people who participated in musical exchange in some form—philanthropic donors, concertgoers, choir members, etc.—all played important roles as well. To keep music alive in a city that, for the most part, may have been somewhat apathetic is an impossible task without those who value the experience of music.

Examples of individuals who stand out in this era are abundant, and we will begin with Mr. Rudolph A. Wellenstein. Described in his obituary as both the most distinguished musician in Grand Rapids and the dean of musicians, Mr. Wellenstein's name frequently comes up in documents from this era as the director for a wide variety of events and programs. He also served as organist and musical director for the Fountain Street Baptist Church, as well as remaining active in Schubert Club affairs in the early 20th century.⁴⁴ Mr. Wellenstein is an example of a musician that we know quite a lot about, largely due to his respect and activity in the community; he also had acquired a small degree of fame from serving as director of music for the New York Arion Choral Society, preceding Leopold Damrosch. His musical compositions can be found in a variety of places, but it seems as though his career as a musical director and teacher was much more lucrative. A similar individual to Mr. Wellenstein is Mr. C. N. Colwell, who was the organist for Park Congregational Church, as well as a prominent music teacher and composer.

⁴⁴ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "R.A. Wellenstein, Pianist, Is Dead," March 19, 1920, 1

Colwell was posthumously described as one of the best-known musicians in this part of the country— though these claims are somewhat untrustworthy, considering the aforementioned practice of boosterism that was so prevalent in Grand Rapids.⁴⁵

Another example of a musical leader whose name frequently appears in documents is Mr. Frank Wurzburg. Serving as director of both the Furniture City Band and the Grand Rapids Newsboy Band, Mr. Wurzburg was a strong advocate for wind band music in the city. Furthermore, his obituary indicates that he was connected to every prominent band and orchestra organized in the city during his tenure.⁴⁶ Something that remains unclear is whether he was related to another prominent musician of the time, Mr. Frederick A. Wurzburg. Little is known about the latter Wurzburg, but we do know that he was a violinist who was closely tied to the German-American community, and he served as director for the Fortnightly Club Orchestra.⁴⁷

Mrs. Elisabeth Wikstrom comes to the forefront as an example of how musicians were able to find an avenue for upward mobility in their corner of society. Her name comes up as a regular performer on Sundays at St. Mark's Church, but she is also seen at the Church of the Good Shepherd, and regularly at St. Cecilia's meetings as well. In December of 1903, it was seen that she would become the director of the Division Street M.E Church in the following year.⁴⁸ Clearly, the divisions between churches and denominations became somewhat liquid and malleable for musicians who were looking for opportunities to perform. Mrs. Wikstrom was able to find her way into a higher position, directing church music, by establishing herself in Grand Rapids as a trusted musician. Wikstrom also had close ethnic ties to her homeland, Sweden, where she was born before traveling to Paris to study voice.⁴⁹ This tie is best illustrated by the

⁴⁵ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Music Teacher, Taken by Death," May 15, 1925, 36

⁴⁶ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Pioneer Musician Taken by Death," February 10, 1923, 2

⁴⁷ Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department, Finding aid for Friedrich Brothers Music House Papers, "Theater Programs, 1886, 1890, 1902," Collection 015, Box 2, Folder 1

⁴⁸ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Music," December 5, 1903, 8

⁴⁹ *American Scandinavian Review*, 1921, p. 341.

concert on March 23, 1903 put on by the “Scandinavians of the city” as a way to raise funds and awareness for a famine that was occurring in Northern Sweden; Mrs. Wikstrom was one of the soloists at the event.⁵⁰

We would be remiss not to mention the most acclaimed musician from Grand Rapids, though he exists somewhat outside of this timeframe of this study. Leo Sowerby, Pulitzer Prize winner for music in 1946, was born in 1895 and raised in Grand Rapids, so he was a young child around the time of our focus. He did appear in 1906, at age ten, as a piano soloist for a benefit concert under the auspices of the Furniture City Band.⁵¹ Additionally, Sowerby returned to St. Cecilia’s from Chicago, where he studied in his young adulthood, to give a lecture on the music of Arnold Schoenberg and Korngold at the age of nineteen.⁵² His awareness of these composers shows his connection with modernist European music at a fairly early stage. What is of note about Sowerby is that his musical roots exist in turn-of-the-20th-century Grand Rapids, and he went on to have a very successful career in music. It is such advocates and leaders that we have to thank for keeping music as vibrant as it was in Grand Rapids during this time period.

An Apathetic Public

On the topic of vibrant musical life, it is important to also understand that this aggregated artistic project took place against the backdrop of a resistant public. Most obviously, we have the example of the May Festival backfiring, a concert series that had the potential to seat Grand Rapids amongst larger cities as an epicenter of artistic excellence. Additionally this was a concert series that brought the opportunity to hear a full orchestra play new and beloved European music, not to mention the performers themselves who were among the most famous at the time. In

⁵⁰ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Music,” March 21, 1903, 16

⁵¹ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Social News,” March 10, 1906, 13

⁵² *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “The Social Side,” May 4, 1914, 7

hindsight, the lead up to the 1904 and 1905 May Festivals reads as somewhat solemn: impassioned musicians trying their very best to get people to realize how incredible this event truly was, only to fail and have to carry the financial burden.

There are also more localized examples of concerts or events having poor turnout. In 1903, a lecture on the music of Wagner's opera *Parsifal* was given by one Mrs. Carpenter.⁵³ It comes as no surprise that the event was received quite warmly in the newspaper, but in a rare example of the *Grand Rapids Press* using negative language to describe the citizens of Grand Rapids, the author laments the poor turnout as pitiful. The author of the article goes further to say that a similar lecture on *Parsifal* was given in Chicago by Walter Damrosch to a packed auditorium. This example illustrates the limit to the power of boosterism, and it also gives a glimpse into what the reality of turnout and enthusiasm was in the city.

Another example of this reality peeking through the veil of boosterism was written in the publication titled *Woman*, a weekly feminist newspaper that was only in print for a limited time in 1908 and 1909. The pianist Miss Mary Angelle of Chicago played a concert at St. Cecilia's in 1909, and the subsequent review in *Woman* indicated that the city ought to be "censured" for allowing a pianist of such a high caliber to play with such poor turnout.⁵⁴

What we see here is a theme that repeats itself throughout the history of Grand Rapids. Despite the effort of passionate music lovers, the public still seemed to not show up to greet artists of high quality. Furthermore, the impassioned words used by the author show another theme that repeats, the act of those same music lovers getting frustrated with their apathetic fellow citizens. Despite these examples, the advocates and leaders of music in Grand Rapids

⁵³ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Music," November 28, 1903, 8

⁵⁴ *Woman*, "A Missed Treat," January 23, 1909, 8

were able to carve out a piece of the city for themselves, even if other parts of the city were somewhat resistant to coming out and seeing musical performances.

Postlude

The story of Grand Rapids musical life is one of individuals and their stories, and simultaneously one of collective effort and the culmination of decades-long projects. The scope of our scholarship has been the linking of these two ideas in the hopes of maintaining a holistic and measured approach to understanding this city. It should be noted that there is much more scholarly work to be done on this city, particularly in regards to ethnic groups and the roles that immigrants played in impacting the musical landscape of the city. More broadly, there is much more scholarship to be done in regards to the musical life of Grand Rapids and how it is interconnected with other midwestern towns at the time. Musical life in the midwestern United States in this time period is vastly different from that of big cities like New York or Boston; even this thought could be explored further. The story of Grand Rapids is a microcosm through which we can better our understanding—and possibly draw further questions from—regarding musical life in America at the turn of the 20th century.

The provoking question still stands: was Grand Rapids a leader or a follower? In many ways, this question is too binary for the modern era, and should be met with skepticism; our research has brought us closer to the conclusion that the city was both simultaneously. The St. Cecilia Society was part of the vanguard trying to make America—more specifically Grand Rapids—an epicenter of the arts. Look no further than Leo Sowerby, a fruit only achievable through the consistent and dedicated labor of individuals seeking to further the musical access of the greater collective. However, to say that the city as a whole was a leader because of this would

be an overstatement. Grand Rapids is not widely accepted as an epicenter of the arts, especially when there are cities like New York, Paris, Vienna, and others that exist as the true epicenters of many cultural attractions. Even Leo Sowerby exists somewhat in obscurity, in large part due to the fact that he existed in the shadow of Aaron Copland. Copland's music is more widely appreciated today, and he even won the Pulitzer Prize the year before Sowerby. There are too many factors to take into account when considering if a city might have led a cultural movement, or joined the bandwagon after it grew too popular to ignore. What we can say is that there is conclusive evidence pointing toward the fact that Grand Rapids was, at the very least, at the forefront when it came to progressive viewpoints on music in America.

Today, the St. Cecilia's building still stands proudly just off Fulton Street in the heart of downtown Grand Rapids. Although the role of the group has changed, the St. Cecilia Music Center programs some of the very best in Jazz, Classical, and Folk chamber music, maintaining the tradition of bringing great artists to the city. The Schubert Club, now known as the Schubert Male Chorus, is also still in existence, keeping the tradition of social music making alive in Grand Rapids. This city has also grown to the point of maintaining a full symphony orchestra, and there are more concert series of all different scopes and sizes cropping up year after year. At the heart of the story of musical life in Grand Rapids are passion and persistence. The passion to bring art to the people of Grand Rapids even through years of apathy and indifference is only possible with persistence and dedication to one's mission. The passion to pursue artistic endeavors after financial failure is proof of one's persistent nature and belief in a greater cause. The passion to make music together through floods, pandemics, and wars is only achievable through a collective persistence of gratitude, and recognition of one another's humanity and

dignity. These qualities are what keep the delicate seedling alive before it can proudly blossom forth; without them, we risk wilting away before our roots can take hold.

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Appendix

A. May Festival Soloists

1903

Signor Giuseppe Campanari, baritone

Miss Jeannette Durno, piano

Mr. Glenn Hall, tenor

Mr. Leopold Kramer, violin

Mr. Gwilym Miles, baritone

Miss Jenny Osborn, soprano

Master Charles Rouse, soprano

Mme. Schumann-Heink, contralto

Miss Grace Van Valkenberg, contralto

1904

Mrs. Willard S. Bracken, contralto

Miss Carrie Bridewell, contralto

Signor Giuseppe Campanari, baritone

Jeannette Durno Collins, piano

Mr. Glenn Hall, tenor

Leopold Kramer, violin

Mr. Gwilym Miles, baritone

Miss Jenny Osborn, soprano

Mme. Schumann-Heink, contralto

Mme. Shotwell-Piper, soprano

Mr. Bruno Steindel, cello

1905

Mr. David Bispham, baritone

Mr. Holmes Cowper, tenor

Mr. Marion Green, bass

Mrs. Minnie Fish Griffin, soprano

Mme. Louise Homer, contralto

Mr. Leopold Kramer, violin

Miss Anita Rio, soprano

Mr. Bruno Steindel, cello

Mr. Brahm van den Berg, pianist

Miss Genevieve Wheat, contralto

1909

Miss Perceval Allen, soprano

Dan Beddo, tenor

Miss Margaret Keyes, contralto

Herbert Witherspoon

B. May Festival Quotes

-“This testimony from artists who have been applauded all over the world is especially gratifying to GR music lovers, who begin to hope that the town’s reputation for coldness is a thing of the past. Altogether the musical future of GR and the festival idea seems assured.” *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “A Musician’s Tribute to the May Festival,” May 20, 1903, 2

-“To be sure the attraction of the university makes Ann Arbor a good center for such an enterprise, but in all other respects, GR has the advantage. With two great musical organizations, an immense auditorium, perfect car and hotel service as well as railroad facilities as good as any

in the state there is every reason for the optimistic attitude the Schubert club has taken toward this new and delightful artistic enterprise.” *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Grand Rapids' May Festival,” May 16, 1903, 11

-“The out of town interest in the May Festival to be held next Monday and Tuesday’s a feature of this event. The people of towns throughout Western Michigan appreciate the magnitude of the offering, and are glad to show their interest. The response is about equal from Muskegon, Grand Haven, Holland, Ionia and Kalamazoo, and there are tickets sold also in Saugatuck, Zeeland, Lowell and Coopersville.” *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Interest Is Wide: Western Michigan Looks Forward to May Festival,” May 24, 1905, 6

-“A corps of workmen has been kept busy for days to transform the place into a bower of loveliness in which statues and artistic draperies will be set off by ingeniously placed lights and masses of palms and vines. A surprise of beauty awaits all who enter the Auditorium Monday evening, and the three concerts will be a feast for the eye as well as for the ear.” *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “For the Great May Festival,” May 27, 1905, 11

- “The local musicians are more than usually enthusiastic over the programs for the May Festival... Mr. C.E. Pease says: ‘The attractions are away ahead of any previous year to me, not on account of the programs alone, but because of the artists, especially Bispham. I consider him one of our greatest singers in oratorio and concert.’” *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Programs Please: Local Musicians Discuss May Festival Offerings,” May 18, 1905, 7

-”Miss Katherine Conley, the violinist, cannot compare the program with the two previous ones, as she was studying in Chicago on those occasions, but she says: ‘I heard of the Grand Rapids May Festival from the Thomas men, whom I met sometimes in the studios, and they expressed themselves with enthusiasm over the ambitious undertaking and the results. I have heard in Chicago nearly all the artists who are booked for this festival, and I must say that a better group of singers could not have been secured. I think the festival ought to have the support of every music lover of the city.’ *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Programs Please: Local Musicians Discuss May Festival Offerings,” May 18, 1905, 7

- “That [Tchaikovsky] symphony, says Mr. Colwell, ‘is a wonderful composition and has never been played here to my knowledge. I am very anxious to hear it. And the Rubinstein concerto to be played by Mr. Bohlman, the pianist, must be a great thing. In glancing over the program, it struck me that nearly all the orchestra numbers are new as far as Grand Rapids is concerned. I’m glad they have arranged miscellaneous numbers instead of a cantata for the chorus, because people are too tired by the time of the third concert to listen to a long heavy number. Well, the festival ought to have crowded houses. It makes me tired to hear people say, as they do sometimes, ‘Oh, I guess I won’t go—I’ve heard ‘em before.’ You might just as well say you would not eat ice cream because you ate some last year. Everybody ought to go as a matter of education.” *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, “Programs Please: Local Musicians Discuss May Festival Offerings,” May 18, 1905, 7

- "The May Festival has passed the Rubicon. Triumphant, it has come through the crisis of its career. Today its future is assured. It has established itself as a permanent institution in Grand Rapids. It will go onward and upward... The first May Festival two years ago was a novelty. Its unqualified success might, by doubters, have been ascribed to that fact. Last year the newness had not yet worn off. This year came the real test, and it was met victoriously. The people of Grand Rapids and western Michigan showed that they wanted the May Festival for itself—that they wanted it because they are musical and demand the best there is in music. The May Festival is here to stay. The third annual has gone in a halo of glory, but the fourth annual festival is to come. Grand Rapids could not now well do without it and its successors." *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "The Real Test," May 31, 1905, 4

- "So successful was the May festival, financially as well as artistically, that those most interested are looking forward enthusiastically to a repetition as soon as circumstances may warrant. The festival not only paid expenses, but when the committee met today to receive reports and audit accounts it found that there was even a balance on the right side of the books. This means that the twenty business men who made up a \$2,000 guarantee fund by pledging \$100 a piece—thus rendering the holding of the festival possible—will not have to contribute a cent on their subscription, but will have the feeling of gratification that comes as the chief reward of the knowledge of public service generously performed. The reports' presented by I.W. Barnhart showed that the receipts of the festival were \$2780.25. The expenses, it is figured, will not run far above \$2,600 when all bills are paid" *Grand Rapids Press*, published as *The Evening Press*, "Came Out Ahead: May Festival More Than Paid Its Cost. Will Be Repeated As Soon as Grand Rapids Has a Convention Hall," June 1, 1909, 7

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