

The Ontario Music Teachers Association and the Canadian Society of Musicians

MLA NYSO Chapter meeting, October 15, 2016

Slide 2

In July of 1885, three Ontario musicians, George B. Sippi, from London, Ontario, Edward Fisher, and Waugh Lauder, both from Toronto, attended the 10th annual meeting of the American Music Teachers National Association in New York. They returned inspired to create a comparable organization in this country. They mailed out circulars to colleagues, and held a series of committee meetings over the summer, resulting in the foundation and first meeting at the end of the year, of the Ontario Music Teachers Association.

This sketchy history of the association, later named more ambitiously the Canadian Society of Musicians, has been known from the preserved reports from the second and sixth meetings, and a journal notice of the fifth.

Slide 3

In 2013, a hand-bound volume of complete reports from the first six meetings arrived in a donation from the estate of William Vaisey, the volunteer archivist of a much later Ontario Music Teachers Association. The volume appears to have been assembled by a music teacher in St. Catharines named Teresa Vanderburg: her name is written on the inside cover of the volume, and appears in the list of attendees at all six meetings.

These reports add further texture to the fairly well-known picture of southern Ontario's colourful musical life at the end of the nineteenth century. Participants in this life and in the Association were predominantly men, multi-skilled organist/choirmasters, educated in England, and jostling to make careers, in some cases empires, in a new country. They had applied to Queen Victoria for a charter to name it the Royal Canadian Society of Musicians, but were dismissed by the Buckingham Palace bureaucracy, too involved with preparations for her Golden Jubilee the following year. After further consideration, and recognition of Quebec sensibilities during the first business meeting, this request was not repeated.

Slide 4

Most of the meetings took place at the Toronto Normal School, the teachers training college, St. James Square, on Gould Street at Church. This area is now the main campus of Ryerson University, and an architectural bit of the Normal School is still visible there. Attendance at the first meeting was 84, rose to 186 at the second, and peaked at 225 in 1888. The 1890 meeting, held in Hamilton, drew 161.

Since the pattern of the meetings or conventions was established with the first, and since the published report is a new source, we'll have a good look at the program.

Slide 5

Papers, called “essays” or “addresses” were read and discussed, there were mid-day recitals and evening concerts, and afternoon business meetings, consideration of the constitution, and elections. All of this material, a good deal of it transcribed presumably with shorthand, plus a list of participants, with their addresses and specialties, is recorded in the reports.

Edward Fisher opened the first meeting with “Some of the benefits to be derived from an association of music teachers.” He suggested that as well as generating intellectual stimulus and self-improvement from contact with other specialists, an organization can assist government in improving the quality of music teaching in schools, elevating standards of performance, stimulating original composition, and advancing the standards and status of the profession. J. E. P. Aldous started the discussion by proposing two contrasting goals for the new association: to establish of a system of certificates, and to engender a more friendly spirit. Robert Ambrose, one of the oldest participants, immediately proclaimed that “the fullest liberty should be given to all men....I should be very sorry to see anything done to prohibit from teaching anyone who is disposed to do so.” Then Waugh Lauder spoke up using an analogy: “the law of our land prohibits the profession of medicine from being practiced by anyone who chooses,” and called for the establishment of tested qualifications, and a protective union. F. W. Torrington, conductor of the Toronto Philharmonic Society, the leading ensemble of the period, attempted to moderate: “I agree with the opinion of those who take the ground that some qualification is necessary, and that such qualification should be recognized among musicians.”

After a welcome address from James Alexander McLellan, a prominent educator, who announced he knew little of music, but knew it was a good thing, the next presentation was from Waugh Lauder, a virtuoso pianist, the only Canadian-born pupil of Liszt. As a preface to his paper he made this appeal: “Let every musician here present make up his mind that he will never belittle or disparage the efforts of a brother, and let the petty jealousies and contemptible squabbles that have frequently disgraced the musical profession never dim the powers of fair criticism of anyone belonging to this body.”

In his essay on “The piano: its technique and resources” he maintained that technique requires an anatomical understanding of the hand, and extensive reading and practising of the standard studies. Later in the discussions, Robert Ambrose scoffed at the teaching of physiology as “too much of a tendency to require, on the part of the pupil, an understanding of the mechanism...teaching a long lot of names is only bothering them unnecessarily,” Waugh responded “Will anyone tell me that Tausig did not understand the muscles of his hands, or that Liszt does not? It is utter nonsense and rubbish to talk such stuff in an assembly of cultivated musicians.”

The only woman to offer a paper was Nora Hillary, a soprano, vocal teacher, and later a choral conductor. Her “Short resumé of artistic singing” modestly outlined some basics: management

of the breath, appropriate use of varied timbres, artistic tone-attack, clear enunciation, and cultivated expression of the text. W. Elliott Haslam, a more prominent vocal pedagogue, thanked her by remarking "I have much pleasure in congratulating our fair essayist on the graceful paper which she has favoured us on so abstruse a subject as that of voice culture."

The American visitor, Hosea Holt, expounded his theories on elementary pedagogy, consisting of instruction in recognizing intervals and scale relationships through sight-singing, and reflected in his recent publication *The normal music course : a series of exercises, studies and songs, defining and illustrating the art of sight reading*.

The final presentation returned to the contentious issues of the first. Aldous claimed that a "swarm" of fraudulent music teachers was wasting the country's time and money, and proposed a state system of standards, provoking the composer W. O. Forsyth to ask "Who are to be the examiners of the examiners?"

Quite soon after these meetings three of the major figures in the room indeed provided their answers. In 1886 Edward Fisher founded the Toronto Conservatory of Music, in 1888 Torrington founded the Toronto College of Music, and in 1889 Aldous himself established the Hamilton School of Music.

You can find summaries of these papers, and of those delivered at later meetings, in *RILM Abstracts*. Titles from the second include "The educational study of music," "Essay on the piano," "The encouragement of Canadian composition," "Church music," and "Voice culture;" at the fourth were heard "Transition from tonic sol-fa to staff notation," "The advantages of the study of harmony," and "The organ as applied to choir accompaniment." Obviously these were not researched or analytical treatments of their topics; speakers explained how they had success in the studio, or lectured on their own positions and opinions.

More interesting, I think, from our perspective, are the midday recitals and evening concerts. They confirm our ideas of nineteenth-century musical events as marathons. On the first day Waugh Lauder began his lunch-time program with Beethoven's half-hour piano sonata op. 111, and played through half a dozen assorted other works, before finishing with the Liszt Fantasia on Beethoven's *The Ruins of Athens*. The evening concert began with the Toronto Quartette Club's performance of Mendelssohn's op. 44, a 30-minute work. After that were eight mixed vocal and instrumental pieces before Lauder performed Beethoven again, this time the Waldstein sonata.

Slide 6

The final musical program of the convention included a few more women -- singers were required of course -- but also the pianist Annie Lampman, and violinist Bertha Drechsler Adamson, professionals who had studied and performed in Europe. Notably included in the ten numbers were several vocal and instrumental numbers by two local composers, J. Davenport Kerrison, and Arthur Elwell Fisher.

Slide 7

The report of the 1890 meeting, at 40 pages, was dramatically less substantial than earlier ones, and may have been the last issued. Though in less detail, the Society's activities from 1891 until 1896 can still be followed through articles in the now-digitized Toronto *Globe*. Here is the notice of the tenth meeting in April 1895.

The questions of what to teach, how to teach, and who should teach were still to be answered. In 1895 the president, then Humfrey Anger, was still recommending provincial governmental supervision as the only way to rid the community of the incompetent teacher and the charlatan, and calling for musicians to come together to "serve the best interests of the profession at large rather than with jealousy and malice aforethought."

Slide 8

In early November 1896 the *Globe* reported that a circular had been issued calling for the end of the Society. On November 21, 1896 the newspaper announced the "absolute dissolution" of the organization, the unidentified reporter suggesting that interest, particularly on the part of musicians living outside Toronto, had waned because of the impression that the Society was in the hands of "one particular section", that the few individuals who started it "seem to have kept its guidance amongst themselves."

For a few months in 1899, a group including many of the same prominent individuals, under the name The Associated Musicians of Ontario surfaced, on the tide of what became known as the "examination wars". Eventually the Toronto Conservatory of Music and the Toronto College of Music sheltered under the protection of the University of Toronto, competing against the Associated Board of the English Royal Schools of Music, which was promoting its own syllabus, system of standardized tests, and visiting examiners, all across Canada.

One of the goals of the old Society, the involvement of the state in the establishment of standards in the teaching of music, was realized here, since the university is a provincially mandated and funded institution. Let's hope the jealousy and malice subsided too.

Let's be grateful for Teresa Vanderburg with her archival instincts, and keep our eyes open for future glimpses into the past.

My first presentation to a meeting of this chapter was in October 1972, on the topic of --
Collecting local history in music.

Kathleen McMorrow

Librarian emerita, University of Toronto