

## Land of Music and Song

Davenport, from its very beginnings, seemed destined for greatness. On August 4, 1838, the *Iowa Sun and Davenport and Rock Island News* declared:

The country around Rock Island is, in our opinion, the most charming that ever the eye beheld. Here nature has clearly intended that the Queen City of the Far West should be built. Rock Island is of itself, one of the greatest natural beauties on the Mississippi . . . and Davenport with its extended plains and sloping bluffs, completes one of the most splendid pictures that ever delighted the eye of man.

Twenty years later, in 1858, Franc B. Wilkie wrote in his *Davenport Past and Present*:

Davenport, among its other excellencies, possesses its quota of musical talent — albeit its development . . . both vocal and instrumental, rests with our German population. Strasser, as a violinist, and Braeunlich and Schlegel, as pianists, take a front rank among amateur musicians.

The newly-formed Philharmonic Society, Wilkie pointed out, which had been created for the improvement of vocal music among males and females, gave promise of future greatness. Meanwhile, the seven-year-old German Mannerchor had taken second at the Western Singing Festival in Chicago in June, 1857. Ten other musical or-



ganizations, equally divided between vocal and instrumental, were listed by Wilkie in 1858.

Forty years later, in 1898, Davenport and its sister cities across the Mississippi, welcomed the Northwest Sangerfest for a brilliant three-day musical festival. The Davenport *Democrat* of July 31, 1898, editorialized as follows:

Three days of song, of melody, and harmony. Three days to live in memory with choruses to return in dreams by night and reverie by day. Three days of Beethoven, Schumann, Verdi, Meyerbeer, Gounod, Donizetti, Wagner, Schubert, and the other worthies who have made the world better to live in by driving care away, by elevating thought, and enlarging happiness.

We cannot all enjoy the creations of these masters as they come from first sources, but when they are interpreted as they have been during these four concerts by those we see and know; those who have studied to find the sentiment, the feeling, the music; those who have brought home to us the charm of song, then we are dull and unappreciative not to realize the inspiration. Take the children's chorus of Thursday evening, of Friday, or the grander one of the matinee with the national songs of two countries by the children from the public schools, and the man is more than a barbarian who does not soften under the divine power.

And so it is with each of the four concerts in their completeness. They have been a surprise, a delight, and a blessing. What if this feast of song did cost thousands and tens of thousands of dollars, looking at it merely from the low plane of transaction! — it has more than paid. That, however, was not the incentive in securing the Saengerfest for Davenport. . . . No investment within The



Democrat's time has returned larger dividends than the one made in this festival of music.

Music, both instrumental and vocal, continued to thrill Davenporters as the 20th Century advanced. In 1915 the Tri-City Symphony Orchestra was formed with Ludwig Becker of Chicago its first conductor. This outstanding musical organization, the twelfth oldest Symphony in the United States, observes its Golden Anniversary in 1964.

The Iowa Federation of Music Clubs was incorporated at a meeting held in Davenport in 1916. Davenport music clubs have played an important rôle in the activities of this Federation. For example, in 1921 a still greater honor befell the Queen City of the Far West when the National Federation of Music Clubs held a ten-day session in Davenport from June 4 to June 14. The City of Davenport alone spent \$31,000 to promote this outstanding music festival. That such expenditures were bearing fruit is attested by the comment of Mrs. Frances Elliott Clark of Philadelphia, who was chairman of the department of education for the National Federation of Music Clubs. According to Mrs. Clark: "Iowa is really a wonderful state in its musical organizations and we have found the school work in Davenport has come forward so rapidly and developed so fast, this is becoming one of the outstanding cities of the country in school music."

That Davenport and Iowa had forged to the



forefront in musical development was attested by Walter Damrosch on February 10, 1928, when he declared: Iowa is the most musical state in the Union." Damrosch based this opinion upon the response to his radio broadcasting from letters received from all over the country.

In addition to the Federated Music Clubs, one would have to point to the thousands of music lovers, and the more than two score music teachers who found steady employment in Davenport.

Nor should one overlook the numerous musical families identified with the Davenport scene. The names of Jacob Strasser, C. Frederick Toenniges, Theodore Reese were written large in the story of music in the 19th Century just as those of Albert Petersen, Ernst Otto, and Will A. Paarmann were boldly written among the immortals of the 20th Century. Two of these men have transmitted their unusual musical gifts to their progeny. Thus, the sons of Albert Petersen and the family of William A. Paarmann have played a dynamic rôle in Davenport musical circles through fifty years of time. Indeed, Arthur Petersen, a charter member of the Tri-City Symphony, will be playing his fiftieth season in 1964. Six Paarmanns have played with the Tri-City Symphony in a single season. Davenport is fortunate to harbor such stellar musical performers.

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