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Music Conference

February 25, 1949

Those present were: Virgil Thomson, composer and music critic for the New York Herald Tribune, Quincy Porter, composer from Yale, and Otto Luening, composer from Columbia, in addition to DHS, JM and EFD. All three of the music representatives present have been extremely active not only in composition and performance of modern American music, but have also taken active part in the organization and activities of the numerous associations for the benefit of modern music. JM had prepared from the reports submitted previously by Virgil Thomson and by Otto Luening and suggestions made by others a series of topics for possible discussion which was entitled, Suggestions of Possible Interests in the Field of Music. This material had been sent to the three musicians several days in advance of the conference. It was not to be regarded as an agenda, but simply as a guide in the conversation and discussion which might take place.

Quincy Porter suggested that discussion might well begin with item 6, recordings. He stated and the others agreed that this was a crucial problem in the field of music at the present time. Virgil Thomson, who did most of the talking and did it extremely well, stated that recently Wallerstein of the Columbia Records had spoken to him about the willingness of Columbia to record a great deal of American chamber music if artists were willing to work on a profit-sharing basis. Arrangements would have to be worked out since at present orchestra pay and cost of recording are recompensed through royalties. Thomson stated that the backlog of American music is building up and recording is lagging sadly behind. It is possible that if recording artists would deal on a 50-50 basis Columbia could be of material assistance. Thomson thought this could be arranged, but has been too busy recently to follow it up.

At the present time, it appears that recording of chamber music at least could be done if artists were willing to work on "scale" which is estimated at \$40 for three hours. If the artists would do this and there were an honest sharing of profits by Columbia and the artists, a great deal could be done in the way of recording modern music. It would be desirable to have someone other than Columbia determine which works should be recorded and for this purpose a committee could be extremely useful. Columbia could then sell its records on the basis of the committee's name and guarantee.

Porter and Luening felt that this would work for Columbia, but not for the smaller firms whose real problem is distribution. There is a genuine demand for modern American music not only among composers and those interested in the performing side but in the numerous appreciation courses in many American institutions. As an example of the kind of thing which has already been done, Luening spoke of the New Musical Quarterly recordings which were first conceived and managed by Henry Cowell. These were extremely good, but the finances throughout were small and precarious. The whole project was disrupted by the war. Earlier publications in this series had become collectors' items and unfortunately there is at the present time not sufficient capital available to repress many of the early records. Nor does there exist the proper means of reprinting, repressing or publicizing the recordings. Actually, the sales did finance four new works a year. Porter pointed out that these recordings began in the so-called "bad boy" era and the things Cowell chose to record were

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definitely regarded as provocative music. Thomson defined this further by saying that essentially the works recorded were those that belonged to the school using the twelve-tone scale and other works of a kind not likely to find another outlet. All agreed that it was a remarkable collection. Its continuation at present is called New Music Editions. A few of these works have been repressed or reprinted through the Army or the State Department.

This led the discussion to the relationship between recording and printing of modern music. Recording lags behind printing. As a matter of fact, printing at the present time is not in a bad state. Thomson has himself organized a private venture publishing modern American music which is moderately successful. Porter stated that if a recording comes first, publication is almost certain to follow, because of the outlets. Luening defined the outlets a little more precisely in terms of schools, public libraries, and some hundred and fifty to three hundred places which are now interested in reference collecting. There are about one thousand Carnegie sets of recorded music in various institutions and probably very many of these institutions would want recordings of modern music if they were available. Unfortunately, Thomson pointed out, recording companies are not organized like book companies for a special audience and Porter went on to say that recording companies want immediate returns; they are not willing to wait for long periods to get a turn-over in their recordings. Luening stated that as of five years ago only fifty modern American works had been recorded.

EFD asked if the same situation were true for non-American music. Thomson stated that Europe is far ahead of the United States in recording modern music and spoke particularly of the facilities made available through the French Office of International Cooperation which have kept the French well in the forefront of recording their own and other modern European music. The British, too, have done a great deal. One reason for this undoubtedly is, as Porter pointed out, that recording is cheaper in Europe. On the other hand, Luening stated that European firms are interested in obtaining American music through publishing and recording, and Thomson stated that if the problem of distribution were worked out European music as well as American music could be distributed through the agency chosen. Consequently, he felt that the problem of American music is representative of the problem of modern music in general and any solution for American music could be applied also to non-American music as well.

The discussion then turned to consideration of the organization or outlet which could properly be found. Porter, for example, felt that master matrices for some of the earlier recordings might be available and could be repurchased and issued. He referred specifically to the four Schoenberg quartets which Luening had mentioned as recorded by MGM and now selling, when available, at a cost of \$50 per quartet. JM asked specifically what the Foundation might do in this field. Thomson replied that a library and distribution center for twentieth century music was badly needed and might well be supported by the Foundation. The task of such a center would be to collect old matrices, to subsidize small companies to make recordings, to stimulate their sale and distribution through cultural organizations, and to make collections available for those who are interested.

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Porter asked whether it might not be possible that the American Music Center could do the job. Luening explained that the American Music Center is a collection of non-profit organizations. At the present time, it runs the Arrow Press and New Music for the printing side of modern music; it contains the American Composers Alliance library of unpublished manuscripts; it has its own lending library; and in addition acts as an information center which answers inquiries. Thomson spoke highly of the American Music Center which was founded largely as the result of the efforts of Porter and Luening. At the present time, the board members consist of Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, William Schuman, Philip James, Marion Bauer, Harrison Kerr, Otto Luening, Quincy Porter and Ray Green, Executive Secretary. The American Music Center enjoys the confidence and good will of many groups who are otherwise extremely antagonistic. It has functioned well for ten years, starting first with small grants from the Weymond Fund and later with small grants from the Carnegie Corporation. It is an operating agency on a pro rata basis with very little capital. Broadcast Music, Inc. sponsors some phases of its activities. The Center is much used, not only by musicians but by visiting conductors and by publishers who visit the Center to see what manuscripts are available for their particular interests.

DHS suggested that if a list of things to be recorded could be drawn up, the list could be distributed through the American Music Center. In this way, a backlog of subscriptions could be built up and the recordings undertaken on a subscription basis. Luening and Porter both remarked that orchestral works are extremely expensive to record and that a thousand records must be made to break even at standard rates of production. EFD asked if the Center should do the recording. Luening stated that it would be better not to have the Center an operating agency or as the agency to choose the works to be recorded. It would be much better to set up a committee which should do this particular task. As a result of this discussion, it was gradually made clear that the American Music Center might request the Music Committee of the National Institute of Arts and Letters to act as a committee to make these decisions involved in what works should be recorded. The Center might then request funds from the Foundation for a study of the current situation with particular relation to increasing the printing and recording of American music and for effecting the distribution of works so printed and recorded. Depending on the results of this study, a further request might then be made by the Center for ^{an} operating program.

Attention was then directed to other topics on the list prepared by JM. Luening spoke of rural and state orchestras as particularly worthy of attention and Thomson was emphatic in declaring that the major orchestras do not need assistance or study. Luening spoke at some length of the successful way in which the Louisville orchestra has become established through the interest of the mayor, Charles Farmsley, a lawyer. The local orchestra, originally composed of 80 amateurs and professionals under Whitney, a good young American conductor, transformed itself into an orchestra of 50 professionals. This orchestra gives six pairs of subscription concerts, 52 broadcasts annually, one every Sunday, and 15 to 20 concerts in the city's schools.

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There are also arrangements with the University of Louisville whereby the chiefs of various sections of the orchestra teach in the Music Department. The public libraries of Louisville are interested and may soon offer another outlet for the work of the orchestra. In this way, a resident, multi-purpose orchestra has been brought into being. Within the last year, the orchestra has commissioned six composers to write works for \$500 each and has offered an additional \$500 to the composers to conduct those works. This whole orchestra has not been corrupted by the professional musicians of 57th Street. There was also comment on the Minneapolis orchestra which is gradually being transformed from private to state support through the medium of the university where the concerts of the orchestra are held. The Minnesota University Press, for example, will publish a few scores of modern music per year now. Illinois is moving in the same direction.

As for opera, a study of the whole field is needed. Motion pictures hardly require attention, since if any contracts are let for music, musicians are well taken care of. Under the heading of musical magazines, although there is need for good publications of this kind, it was felt that those now in the field would hardly warrant Foundation support. A study is now being made of the influence of music reviewers and consequently nothing further need be done on this topic. Under the heading of government activities, Thomson suggested that it would be better to wait until a good project emerges before the Foundation should consider any action. Under the heading of societies for the promotion of lesser known new and old music (topic 15), it was felt that something might be done. Some of the societies now active in the field might well be assisted, since even if major attention is devoted to recording it will be necessary for the performances to come from some of these groups. Church music (topic 16) was characterized by Thomson as "a headache". Topic 19, the American Federation of Musicians, was regarded as very important. Samuel Rosenbaum, who is to have the administration of the two million dollar fund under the agreement with ASCAP, was generally agreed to be a very enlightened man. Hence, there is no need for the Foundation to spend money. It is unlikely that this money will be used for making recordings, since, as Thomson pointed out, this is contrary to Petrillo's principles, although there might be help for performances on a non-profit basis which might ultimately be used for recording purposes.

It was generally agreed that under topic 20 there is no need for (a.) aid toward publication and (b.) recording of contemporary work had already been discussed; (c.) under this heading, aid toward copying costs for larger works, represented a matter of real importance and a genuine problem. Under government support, WPA funds were used through the Philadelphia Free Library for the copying of parts. At the present time, it costs a composer \$1,000 to prepare parts for a symphony performance. Thomson stated that the actual cost to him for preparing the parts for Louisiana Story recording was \$1140. Consequently, any commissions which a composer obtains are eaten up by the cost of copying the parts. Perhaps the best way for the Foundation to assist in this difficulty would be to help the Fleischer Collection at the Philadelphia Free Library. The Fleischer Collection lends scores free to conductors only with the written permission of the composer. Unfortunately, the copying done under WPA funds was rather badly done, but aid for copying is definitely needed and some arrangements could probably be worked out through the Fleischer Collection.

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The composers present stated that at least 20 performances are necessary to break even on the cost of copying parts.

Porter raised the question of a complete catalogue of American music with notations stating the nature of the composition, the parts, the scope of music, etc. Much of this material has been collected at the American Music Center, but it is not published as yet. Luening pointed out that the ASCAP and ACA catalogues will soon be ready. They will not be complete, but with the material available at the American Music Center a complete collection could easily be produced. In addition to information on modern American music, the Music Center also contains good, although not complete information, on Dutch, French and Danish music and the Music Center could be of great assistance to Unesco in any international music project which it might undertake.

DHS asked if any assistance were needed in connection with formal music education. Luening stated that probably a study of the reports already made could advantageously be done, but Thomson retorted that Carnegie has done this repeatedly.

As for topic 21, scholarship, Thomson spoke enthusiastically of the Encyclopedia of Stringed Instruments now being compiled by Luigi Silva, a cellist at Rochester. Silva has been working on this for many years and is nearing the completion of his work, but needs some financial assistance to bring it to completion. Little interest was manifested in the proposal of the American Council of Learned Societies to undertake an Encyclopedia of Music, although all agreed that a good encyclopedia is needed and would be very useful indeed.

EFD asked the composers present what interest they had in studies in esthetics, the relationship of music to other forms of art and the place of music in the contemporary cultural and sociological scene. Thomson spoke highly of a new book by Calvin Brown, Music and Literature, which is very good indeed and agreed that further studies could be useful, but on the whole he and the other musicians agreed that esthetics is the concern of philosophers and not of composers.

JM raised the question of getting new works into production. Thomson stated that only experience in the theatre can do the job. University productions are useful, but this is only part of the total operation. It would be preferable if the professional orchestras, theatres and operas could undertake the education of the young, but as things are at present the universities are the only institutions which have the money. Thomson observed that many things in the music field, as elsewhere, accrete to the institutions which have the money. At the present time, the theatre is working on a shoestring and the margin between financial success and failure is very small indeed. Luening stated that it is highly desirable to mix professionals with students to improve the standard of production and Thomson supported this by illustrations from the Cleveland production of his opera, The Mother of Us All, from which he had just returned. All agreed that if the universities had money to bring in professionals it would help enormously in the training and development of musicians, conductors and composers. At the present time, conductors, coaches and stage directors are not being developed. There is also a woeful lack of librettists.

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Many state universities have wonderful equipment, but direction is lacking, and, as Thomson observed, the theatre like medicine must have living cases to work on. The music profession can not practice without performance. The sense of communication is lost without constant opportunity to perform in public. This is one reason why the Julliard orchestra, opera and chamber music organizations are the equal of any professional organizations of similar types, because they must constantly prepare performances and compete with professional performances in New York. Stanford, Western Reserve and Columbia were mentioned as three places which might very well have fellowships for advanced students and resident fellowships for professionals.

JM observed that there is no agency in the musical field comparable to the NRC or the ACLS for the awarding of fellowships. Thomson suggested that the National Institute of Arts and Letters, through its Music Committee, might act as an awarding body. It has already shown excellent judgment and a remarkable lack of conservatism in the award of its grants.

To sum up, a great deal of useful comment came from the music consultants. The practical suggestions were as follows. The American Music Center might request a small sum from the Foundation to make a study of the situation in relation to the recording and possibly the printing of modern American music. Depending on the results of this study, a larger grant might subsequently be requested for carrying out the plans presented. Assistance for copying is also needed and could possibly be worked out through the Fleischer Collection, although some relationship to the American Music Center and its plan should be worked out. Some support to performing organizations might also be considered, since recordings would depend on performances to be given not only by professional orchestras but by small groups concerned with the presentation of new or unfamiliar old music.

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