

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

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music

FROM: RWJ

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COMMENTS:

SUBJECT: Music

MAY 22 1963

There seems to have developed during recent years a substantial increase in the sources to which musical organizations in the United States can look for help. Foundations of all sorts are in the field, American businesses are more and more underwriting musical performance, and there is already the beginning of government aid in New York State with prospect that the federal government may institute some form of assistance within the next few years.

Thus far we have operated on two premises 1) that RF activity should be marginal, i.e. should be concerned with doing important but neglected things rather than adding our bit to meet the obvious needs in the field and 2) that we are interested in the development of new music and the establishment of a broader base of economic support for the musical arts.

The widening support of musical activity in the United States and the possibility of government subsidy argues for a re-examination of our objectives and strategy. With government aid in prospect, our premises for the economic base of music may no longer be valid. With other foundations, industry, and individuals playing an increasing role, we must face the possibility that our own effort is no longer consequential and that we should withdraw from the field, particularly in view of our growing involvement with the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

I would like to review various areas of musical activity and suggest, for purposes of discussion, what we might wish to do or not do in each.

Composition and Performance of New Music

There does not seem to be the necessity for RF emphasis in this field that there was eight or ten years ago. Ford, Fromm, and others are increasingly active, groups interested in new music are much in evidence at least around New York, university music departments are taking responsibility for introducing new works in various parts of the country, and orchestras are broadening their programs to include contemporary works, some as the result of orchestral commissions. Our most recent projects involving new composition - the electronics work at Columbia and the improvisational music of Lukas Foss - seem to be proceeding successfully. It is difficult to know whether they will require additional attention from us - quite possibly not. For the moment there appear to be no other major areas of musical experiment which command attention.

Performing Groups

Direct support of symphony orchestras has never fallen within program and, given other sources of assistance, there is no reason why we would wish to change our position now.

Chamber ensembles have not prospered in America but through recordings, university programs, and small groups connected with orchestras the requirements of a small number of devotees seem to be met. Some years ago we looked into the possibility of helping amateur music-making by encouraging the composition of chamber-scale works. More recently, it has been suggested that some foundation ought to encourage commission of works with flexible orchestration so that they can be performed by the full symphony and the chamber ensemble alike. Akin to this is the problem of the complexity of much modern music and the need for simple scores that lie within the grasp of the amateur and semi-professional performer in the community orchestras. Previous help toward the Portland Symphony pointed in this direction. It is questionable whether there is much more we can do in this direction for the moment. However, it might be worth exploring the matter with the ASOL, possibly as part of the general question of orchestral programing.

The whole area of choral music was studied a couple of years ago without any clear indications of unmet needs which we might be able to deal with. I should think that commissions of simple music for amateur performance would be more easily dealt with in the choral than the instrumental field. There is already a certain amount of activity to this end by church groups and it is difficult to see what we could do to bring about any important changes or substantial improvement. I see no particular reason for reopening the choral field at this time.

Performance of modern opera has been a major Ford interest and there would seem to be no reason for our entering this area. At one point we thought of doing something with opera in television but since NBC has abandoned its opera series, there no longer seems to be opportunity in this direction.*

The Economics of Music

Despite optimistic figures citing the rise in sale of records, the increase in use of musical instruments, the expansion in number of performing groups, and the growth of audiences, there is the continuing indication that ascending national interest in music has not been matched by our willingness to pay for it, at least through the commercial box office channel. Most of the thousand-odd orchestras offer only part-time employment, individual musicians' incomes are depressed, performers are constantly leaving the field for better paying positions, and the annual deficit continues as the uniform characteristic of virtually all performing groups. The American Federation of Musicians is apparently looking toward some form of governmental subsidy as its solution to the problem.

We have done one or two things to explore the economics of music largely in the area of orchestral management. Most notable perhaps has been the grant to Pro Musica Antiqua to enable it to establish itself as a financially viable touring company of national reputation and influence. During four years of operation with our support Pro Musica has expanded its range from a few concerts mainly in the New York area to extensive national coverage, the receipts from its tours greatly increasing individual musician income. At the same time it has moved toward financial stability, steadily reducing its overall deficit despite its greatly expanded activities and commitments. There is the prospect that we will be asked to help Pro Musica for an additional three

* JPH may wish to bring up the Kansas City Opera at this point

years after our present help terminates in 1962 and on the basis of its record of accomplishment and its promise, such aid may well be justified.

The other major Foundation move in the economics of music is the grant to Carnegie Tech for the appointment of a specialist dealing with the economics of the arts. Although his initial work will concentrate on the theatre, I would hope that eventually he might be able to study some of the other performing arts, perhaps specifically something in the field of orchestral financing.

In this connection there is also the interesting investigation being conducted by Helen Thompson into means for establishing orchestral musician salaries on a 40-hour week rather than on a piece work basis. This could lead to important changes in the whole pattern of orchestral financing and management, but since this is being explored in cooperation with the Ford Foundation, there appears to be no immediate need for action on our part.

Non-Western Music

This is an obvious field of interest, given the increased RF involvement in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. We have already done a number of things, although few beyond GA proportions. Presumably there will be continued activity in this field as opportunities emerge, principally in connection with area studies in American universities.

The other aspect of non-Western music is the possibility for developing use of non-Western materials in Western musical expression. I don't understand this field very well; this is, the degree to which techniques, modes, and musical ideas of one musical culture can fertilize another. On the whole the record doesn't look good. Much of the work of composers working in a non-Western idiom often seems like pastiche. The record of resistance of Western music to non-Western materials is also discouraging as is the concurrent existence of Western music and traditional music in Japan without any apparent mutual influence. Our activity in this field is minimal and is likely to remain so. I would imagine that the best opportunity for advances in this field will be presented through Mantle Hood's institute of ethnomusicology.

American Symphony Orchestra League

Support of a single organization doesn't constitute a program but it seems likely that our next major step in music will come in the form of help for the League. The conductor training work is proceeding with success but we should try to stabilize it and terminate our aid as soon as we can conveniently do so. Meanwhile the League is taking steps to develop permanent headquarters, broaden its base of support, and establish a connection with the proposed northern branch of the University of Virginia to be located near Washington. Our current support for conductor training terminates in June 1963. By that time the League should be well along with its plans for a headquarters and music school in Virginia with university affiliation. Thus we might now begin to explore major assistance which will help the League to develop the stability and permanence it is seeking while at the same time enabling us to withdraw from perennial support of orchestral conductor training.