

The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

Ohio State Engineer

Title: Music Notes for Engineers

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Issue Date: Oct-1935

Publisher: Ohio State University, College of Engineering

Citation: Ohio State Engineer, vol. 19, no. 1 (October, 1935), 13.

URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/35227>

Appears in Collections: [Ohio State Engineer: Volume 19, no. 1 \(October, 1935\)](#)

MUSIC NOTES FOR ENGINEERS

By GEORGE S. BONN, B. Ch. E. 1935

IT USED to be that an Engineer was a fellow with a worn, bedraggled look, a fairly dirty shirt, and a slide-rule stuck in one of his pockets. He didn't care very much how he looked or how he talked. He cared less about what he read, and as for going out of his way to hear music, that never entered his mind. These notions have changed to a great extent. It is getting more difficult to pick out an Engineer from a group of, say, Arts students by looks alone; the slide-rule is almost the only sure method. The present-day Engineer is able to express himself better and has taken a mild interest in writing; hence, this magazine. There is a section in this magazine devoted to books—good books, reviewed by one of our English professors; this recognizes the fact that Engineers are beginning to read more and better books.

But, dadgum it, when it comes to good music, the Engineer (and a lot of others, for that matter) just won't bother with it. If you mention Ben Bernie, they'll tell you he's great, etc., but if you suggest Ormandy, they think of a steamship. Then you get: Why in the world should I bother about music; I can't understand it; I don't play an instrument; it always bores me; that's only for Arts students; and a lot more. The chances are, this same fellow couldn't understand the first book he read, either, and it probably bored him, but now he reads a lot of books every year that he never before thought of. The first time he jumped into the water he probably couldn't swim, but it didn't take so long to learn how to, after a little practice. The same reactions take place when we first hear good music. We must practice listening to it before we really get any enjoyment out of it.

There are too many interesting and amusing events connected with music to miss by refusing to listen or read. Some of the world's best stories are told in an orchestral score. Some of the world's most noted figures were musicians. For instance, it was just a small event that caused the late Nicholas Longworth to become a member of Congress instead of a violin concert artist; he was headed in the direction of the violinist from his earliest years. Old "Hell 'n Maria" Dawes, one-time vice-president of the country, has written a very tuneful composition for the violin. Scientist Einstein is often pictured with his violin; Schwab, the steel man, DuPont of Wilmington, Florence Allen, Justice in the Federal District Court, Benito Mussolini of Italy, Lord Balfour of England, George Bernard Shaw, Upton Sinclair, Rupert Hughes, all studied music when they were young and kept it up as they grew older. Professor Thomas E. French of our own Engineering Drawing department played in the University band and in the orchestra when

he was in school here years ago. He was also drum major of the band. It would be a revelation to many of you to see the professors who attend the concerts at Memorial Hall—Engineers, too.

The Eastman School of Music in Rochester was founded by and is maintained by endowment of the late George Eastman; money you spent taking pictures helped put this great institution on the map. Cyrus H. K. Curtis of Philadelphia financed and endowed the Curtis School of Music there; his daughter, Mrs. Edward Bok, is still actively interested in it. College boys' great interest in *Saturday Evening Posts* helped found that school.

Paderewski, one of the greatest men that Poland ever produced, was prime minister of his country just after the War; at the same time he was building his reputation as the world's greatest pianist. Right now the young pianist, Dalies Frantz, is playing his way to the top of the present-day musicians; his big ambition is to become an Indianapolis speedway king; in his younger days, he was a championship swimmer.

All of us can't be outstanding musicians or be even as active in music as these people have been. However, we can all find out just why these people have been interested in the subject, especially of good music, and possibly build up for ourselves an interest in it that will do us as much good as any single course we are taking in college. Maybe a lot more.

Sigmund Spaeth has said that melody is perhaps the most important factor in this study, because it is by the melody that we remember music, and it is the music we remember that we like. Everybody can at least recognize a tune, even those who are as limited as the man who said he knew only two tunes; one was Yankee Doodle and the other was not.

The oldest tune in the world has only two tones. That was the tune that the cuckoo sang in the Garden of Eden. Today it is the "come-hither" whistle of the whole world. From this cuckoo beginning, the musical literature has developed into great symphonies, oratorios, operas, and—jazz. Most of the modern popular songs are direct steals from the older works; many law suits have come and gone on account of this; Tin Pan Alley admits it, but it doesn't do anything about it.

Stories of these compositions and their composers are more interesting than you may think. Even more interesting sometimes are the present-day adaptations of some of these same compositions. We hope to be able to give you some of these stories in the forthcoming issues of the *Engineer* which will help you become acquainted with better music and its originators.