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Music Education in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

HAROLD LAYCOCK

How does music fit in to the Mormon way of life? What is its place in Latter-day Saint theology and philosophy? In what directions can it most effectively contribute to the enrichment of our daily lives, or, more significantly, what part should music play in helping the individual on his eternal journey toward perfection? If these questions could be conclusively answered we would be in possession of a definitive guiding principle, a measuring-rod by which we could evaluate all phases of musical activity, whether they pertain to public worship, to the home, to the school, to recreational programs and amusements, or to the reflective and creative thoughts of the mind. As music educators in the Church school system, some of us are vitally concerned with the problem of orienting our efforts as finely as possible in the direction in which lies the fullest value for us all.

However, Latter-day Saint theology, and philosophy, as far as it has been defined, touch only indirectly upon this subject. Direct pronouncements by the prophets have been few. We are enjoined to "seek after those things" which are "virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy."¹ In the Doctrine and Covenants we read:

My soul delighteth in the song of the heart, yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads.²

If thou are merry, praise the Lord with singing, with music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.³

Brigham Young put his ideas concerning music into the following words:

Mr. Laycock is assistant professor of music at Brigham Young University. A second paper, presenting another point of view, will appear in a future issue of *Studies*.

¹Joseph Smith, Jr., *The Pearl of Great Price*, p. 57.

²*Doctrine and Covenants*, 25:12.

³*Ibid.*, 136:28.

There is no music in hell, for all good music belongs to heaven. Sweet harmonious sounds give exquisite joy to human beings capable of appreciating music. I delight in hearing harmonious tones made by the human voice, by musical instruments, and by both combined.⁴

Lacking more specific enlightenment from the scriptures or from the published words of Church leaders, we are forced to assume that a comprehensive blueprint of the role of music in the eternal plan of salvation, so far as it pertains to the present earthly existence, is ours to work out on a more or less pragmatic basis. To assist us in this task we must make use of the total resources of the history of mankind's experience with this art, not neglecting the history of musical practice in the Mormon church itself.

This practice includes three phases: sacred music as used in worship; social and recreational music; and music education as carried on in the schools of the Church. The first phase has been treated in studies of Latter-day Saint hymnody by William Wilkes,⁵ by Newell Weight,⁶ and by D. Sterling Wheelwright.⁷ It is the purpose of this paper to describe briefly some aspects of the other two phases—recreational music and music education. Recreational music of the early history of the Church will be considered first; however, the principal emphasis will be upon musical practices related to a neglected area of Mormon educational history, the period of the Church academies.

Joseph Smith's philosophy concerning music and recreation is expressed in his own words: "What many people call sin is not sin. I do many things to break down superstition, and I will break it down."⁸ He did not regard dancing or music as being sinful pleasures, but gave wholesome recreation of this kind a respected place in community life. B. H. Roberts,

⁴John A. Widtsoe, compiler, *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., c. 1925), v. 9, p. 244.

⁵William L. Wilkes, Jr., "Borrowed Music in Mormon Hymnals," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1957).

⁶Newell B. Weight, "An Historical Study of the Origin and Character of Indigenous Hymn-tunes of the Latter-day Saints," (Unpublished D.M.A. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1961).

⁷D. Sterling Wheelwright, "The Role of Hymnody in the Development of the Latter-day Saint Movement," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1943).

⁸Joseph Smith, Jr., *Documentary History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1925), I:iv:445.

one of the foremost historians of the Church, describes Joseph Smith's attitude in these terms:

The result of these views of the Prophet has been to enlarge the liberty of the saints in many respects; to remove the somber hues supposed to be essential to a religious life; and more especially in the manner of innocent amusements. In things not harmful or sinful in themselves, but only in their abuse, the ban was by him largely removed, leading to a wider social life, and greater freedom of enjoyment. Until the violin is not regarded by the saints as an instrument of satan; nor the ball room, when properly safeguarded, as the antechamber of hades; nor the theater as the broad highway to damnation; hence the enjoyment of these innocent amusements and pleasures was allowed to the saints by the Prophet—and by the church since his day—to the scandal, perhaps, of some sections of orthodox christendom [*sic.*]⁹

Joseph Smith encouraged musical organizations of both religious and recreational types during the early days of the Church. In Nauvoo he supported a quadrille band which frequently played for dancing,¹⁰ at least two other bands (a martial band and William Pitt's Nauvoo Brass Band), an orchestra, and several choirs of mixed voices. Musical instruments in the homes at Nauvoo included several melodeons, three organs and two pianos (two of the latter instruments were brought to Salt Lake Valley with the 1948 migration). Duets and quartets of flutes and violins were known in Nauvoo.¹¹

Music of all kinds affected the lives of the early Latter-day Saints. Austin Fife has described a distinctive body of Mormon folksong, according to Wilkes.¹² Wheelwright views the hymnody of the Mormons as a potent social influence during the rise of the Church.¹³ Recreational music played an important part in the westward migration and the early colonizing of the Salt Lake Valley and other localities. Formal music study was initiated at the University of Nauvoo, but that city was abandoned before the institution could develop its potentialities.

⁹Brigham H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Century I, vol. ii (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), p. 359.

¹⁰Susa Young Gates and Leah D. Widtsoe, *The Life Story of Brigham Young* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1930), p. 242.

¹¹Wheelwright, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹²Wilkes, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

¹³Wheelwright, *op. cit.*

Brigham Young was forbidden to enjoy secular music in his boyhood home; however, he was not without the influence of music. His daughter, Susa Young Gates, reported:

Father was a natural musician. His mother Abigail Howe, one of the famous Massachusetts Howe family, was one of five sisters, who were locally quite famous as singers in Northboro and Hopkinton, Mass.¹⁴

Brigham Young's association with Joseph Smith undoubtedly contributed to his liberal and favorable attitude toward music which characterized his life.¹⁵

The Curwen "Tonic Sol-fa" method of teaching music reading was introduced by Brigham Young into his own private school at Salt Lake City in 1861. Materials were brought directly from England, and David O. Calder was put in charge of the instruction, which was to be a model for music teaching in all the schools of the Territory.¹⁶

Music of lighter vein was sponsored in the Social Hall (dedicated January 1, 1853), with what was described as an exceptionally fine orchestra,¹⁷ and in the Salt Lake Theater (opened by Brigham Young in 1862). The Mormon leader has been described by a well-known drama historian as the founder of the little theater movement in America.¹⁸ Bands were important parts of community life in the West, organized by leaders such as Domenico Ballou, a former band leader at West Point. Congregational singing was regularly a part of church services, and trained musicians were always included in colonizing parties sent to different localities of the Church.¹⁹ Pianos or organs were found in many of the homes of the people of early Utah.²⁰

Singing schools were popular in the Territory, as they were in the Eastern States. Wheelwright alludes to a highly

¹⁴"Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Office), November 20, 1915.

¹⁵Gates, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-240.

¹⁶*Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), December 12, 1860.

¹⁷George D. Pyper, *The Romance of an Old Playhouse* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1937), p. 49. This book gives a detailed account of early musical and dramatic accomplishments in Salt Lake. See also Martha T. Cook, "Pioneer Bands and Orchestras of Salt Lake City." (Unpublished master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1938).

¹⁸Kenneth Macgowan, *Footlights Across America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1929), pp. 43-44.

¹⁹Gates, *op. cit.*, pp. 244-245.

²⁰Wheelwright, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

successful one held in Springville during the winter of 1854-55, in which "nearly all the people in town, young and old, turned out to be instructed."²¹

The last half of the nineteenth century saw a great improvement in the cultural level of music in Utah, due largely to the influence of a number of well-trained musicians who joined the Church in the British Isles, and emigrated to Salt Lake City. David O. Calder was a pioneer in singing class instruction about 1861, using the Tonic Sol-fa method. He later went into the musical instrument business, through which he supplied a large share of the instruments used in Salt Lake City. Charles J. Thomas, who came to Utah in 1862, directed the first orchestra of the Salt Lake Theater and also the Tabernacle Choir. A few years later he was sent to St. George, Utah, for the specific purpose of raising the level of musical culture there. John Tullidge, who arrived in 1863, was the first trained music critic of the city; he did much to raise musical taste in Utah. As a conductor, he achieved a fair amount of success, performing parts of Haydn's *Creation* in 1864. George Careless, a graduate of London's Royal Academy, came to Utah in 1864, where he conducted both the Theater Orchestra and the Tabernacle Choir. He was responsible for the first Salt Lake performance of the *Messiah*, and composed music for many musical plays that came to the theater, as well as numerous hymns still in use by the Church.²²

This list could be expanded by the addition of a number of important locally-trained musicians, among them Ebenezer Beesley, Evan Stephens, and Joseph J. Daynes, all of whom played active roles in the development of artistic music in the valley before 1900.

The files of the *Deseret News* prior to the turn of the century contain numerous references to band concerts, choral festivals, operas, and oratorios, which suggest an active musical center. Dr. Albert E. Winship, a distinguished educator from Boston who was one of the early guiding spirits of the N.E.A., was quoted in the *Deseret News* of July 15, 1913, in regard to the musical culture of Salt Lake City. "Today one little county in Utah has in the world's arena some of the best artists, sculptors, singers, and instrumentalists in America,

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 155.

²²Howard Swan, *Music in the Southwest, 1825-1950* (San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1952), p. 54.

more, probably, than any other state of ten times its population."²³

The city was a natural stopping-place for touring artists and companies on their way to San Francisco, providing a rich offering of top-flight concert fare in addition to the home-produced variety. Opera was frequently found on the bill of the Salt Lake Theater during this period.²⁴ An article in the *Millennial Star* of June 23, 1890, lists some of the artists who had appeared there: Parepa, Rosa, Schalchi, Gerster, Emma Thursby, Kellogg, Cary, Marie Roze, Juch, Abbott, Campanini, Trebelli, Tagliapietra, Joseffy, Wilhelmj, Musin, and others. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra presented a memorable concert in the Tabernacle in April, 1907.²⁵

This cultural climate was not confined to Salt Lake City, but was felt in the surrounding areas. St. George, in southern Utah, developed into a focal point for musical activity toward the end of the century, and continued to be important for decades to follow.²⁶ Widespread improvement in the vocal music of local church organizations resulted from the work of the Tabernacle Choir, as noted by Karl G. Maeser in 1897:

Our public school, Sunday Schools, Primaries, and Mutual Improvement Associations, are putting forth praiseworthy efforts in giving vocal music sufficient attention to popularize it more and more. The progress which congregational singing, especially when led and assisted by a well-trained choir, is making in our worshipping assemblies, is also a step in the right direction. The impetus which the celebrated Tabernacle choir of Salt Lake City is giving, is felt already to a greater or less extent throughout all the stakes of Zion. 'Wo man singt da lass dich ruhig nieder, boese Menschen haben kein Lied.' These words of Schiller are like milestones on the road to happiness. Flowers at the windows and songs around the hearth, are the ensigns of contented homes.²⁷

The vital part played by music in the lives of the early Mormons was reflected in educational thought and practice.

²³*Deseret News*, July 15, 1913.

²⁴Pyper, *op. cit.*

²⁵*Deseret News*, April 13, 1907.

²⁶Reed Paul Thompson, "Eighty Years of Music in St. George, Utah, 1861-1941," (Unpublished master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1952).

²⁷Karl G. Maeser, *School and Fireside* (Salt Lake City: Skelton and Co., 1898), p. 333.

According to Joseph Smith, the Kirtland adult schools gave music a prominent place:

During the winter of 1837, The House of the Lord at Kirtland was filled to overflowing with attentive hearers, mostly communicants; and in the evenings the singers met under the direction of Elders Lyman Carter and Jonathan Crosby, Jr., who gave instructions in the principles of vocal music.²⁸

Shortly after the founding of the University of Nauvoo, a petition was presented to the Board of Regents by the members of the Nauvoo Choir, asking for a "professor and wardens in the Department of Music in the University of the City of Nauvoo" to act as a board for regulating music instruction in the city's four elementary schools (1841). The professor and four wardens were duly appointed.²⁹ Later in the same year Lowell Mason's *Manual of Instruction* (1834), and Porter's *Cyclopedia of Music* were adopted by the "Lyceum of Music" as texts for the examination of teachers in the elements and more advanced phases of music.³⁰ Lowell Mason's popular *Carmina Sacra*, (1841), was also used in the university.³¹

Music instruction therefore became a part of the curriculum for the elementary schools of Nauvoo just three years after being adopted in Boston's public schools through the efforts of Lowell Mason.³² Had the city of Nauvoo not been vacated by the Mormons because of religious persecution, this city of 20,000 inhabitants probably would have been honored as one of the pioneer cities in the development of music education in the United States.

Music instruction was not neglected by the Saints after their emigration to Utah. Special mention is made of music teaching in such institutions as the Deseret Philharmonic Society (1855), devoted to vocal and instrumental music,³³ and the Polysophical Academy (1858), with courses in music on the high school level.³⁴

²⁸Joseph Smith, *Documentary History*, I, 474.

²⁹*Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Ill.), vol. iii, p. 653.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 666.

³¹Wilkes, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

³²Edward Bailey Birge, *History of Public School Music in the United States* (Bryn Mawr: Oliver Ditson Co., 1937), p. 53.

³³J. C. Moffitt, *The History of Public Education in Utah* ([n.p.], 1946), p. 27.

³⁴Kate B. Carter, compiler, *Heart Throbs of the West* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1940), vol. ii, p. 119.

Not long after the General Church Board of Education was organized in 1888, a circular was issued (May 1899) which established a board of examiners for certification of teachers in the Church school system. Curricula were listed for the various departments, which specified vocal music in the primary, preparatory, and intermediate departments. Special care was urged in procuring competent music teachers because of "the great importance of music in the schools."³⁵

The true place of music in the educational philosophy of the Church can best be determined by looking into the fruits of this philosophy, the actual practice in regard to music education in the Church schools.

Recent research³⁶ has disclosed that during the period 1876 to 1926 the Mormon Church, always active in educational fields because of its basic assumption that educative experience is the main purpose of man's life on earth, had sponsored a total of thirty-one seminaries (elementary schools) and thirty-three academies (secondary schools) in the wards and stakes of its territory. This area included seven Western states (Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, and Texas), and in Canada and Mexico.

The majority of these sixty-four schools did not survive later than 1900 because of financial problems, and because of the development of public elementary schools. Twenty-two of the academies, however, continued to thrive during the early twentieth century. They constituted the only high schools in many Mormon areas until after 1911. Between 1912 and 1926, as public high schools developed, all but one of the academies were either closed or converted to normal colleges, and the Church provided religious education for its youth through theological seminaries established in connection with public high schools.

The twenty-two academies were located as follows: in Utah, Brigham Young Academy at Provo, Brigham Young College at Logan, Latter-day Saints College at Salt Lake City, Dixie Academy at St. George, Snow Academy at Ephraim, Weber Academy at Ogden, Millard Academy at Hinckley, Murdock Academy at Beaver, Summit Academy at Coalville,

³⁵*Circular No. 4 of the General Board of Education of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1915), p. 15.

³⁶Harold R. Laycock, "A History of Music in the Academies of the Latter-day Saint Church, 1876-1926," (Unpublished D.M.A. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1961).

Emery Academy at Castle Dale, and Uintah Academy at Vernal; in Idaho, Fielding Academy at Paris, Oneida Academy at Preston, Ricks Academy at Rexburg, and Cassia Academy at Oakley; in Arizona, Snowflake Academy at Snowflake, St. Johns Academy at St. Johns, and Gila Academy at Thatcher; in Wyoming, Big Horn Academy at Cowley; in Colorado, San Luis Academy at Manassa; in Canada, Knight Academy at Raymond, Alberta; in Mexico, Juarez Academy at Colonia Juarez.

It was found that in terms of curricular development, the history of the Church academies could be divided into three periods. During the first period, roughly from 1875 to 1900, the emphasis was upon elementary work, including vocal music, with a limited amount of academic and normal work on the secondary level. Vocal music was required for normal courses and was elective for the academic courses. Choirs were usually included in these schools, using the vocal music class as a nucleus, and in isolated cases a band or dance orchestra was found associated with the school on an extra-curricular basis. During the second period, roughly from 1900 to 1910 or later, the academies offered three- and four-year secondary courses of a diversified, terminal nature, including special music courses which granted diplomas for church choristers and organists, or for music teachers in church and public schools. The music courses developed into rich offerings in theoretical, vocal, choral, and instrumental music, which prepared performers, teachers, and consumers for vocations or avocations in music. During the earliest part of this period were laid the foundations for choral, orchestral, and band organizations, which were later developed into a total musical offering by the Church schools which was proportionately much stronger than that of the state high schools. During the final period, after 1910, specialized courses were gradually reduced or eliminated by the academies in favor of standard high school courses, academic and normal, with music serving as an elective for all students. While choral ensembles remained stable in size, their growth in proficiency made possible an extensive program of operetta and oratorio production. Bands were greatly stimulated by the first world war, developing into better-balanced, disciplined organizations. Orchestral musicians found vocational opportunities attractive because of the motion picture theater. Orchestras emerged from the early status

of opera orchestras to become independent organizations, sometimes approaching symphonic proportions. Glee clubs, small vocal ensembles, instrumental groups, music clubs, public service departments, and sponsored concerts by imported artists were typical features of academy music departments after 1910. This period came to a close in 1926, when all of the academies not connected with college departments were discontinued by the Church. Of those in Utah, four became public high schools.

Noteworthy among the many features of the music programs of the academies was the great popularity of operettas, the early development of special music courses and instrumental organizations, and the high caliber of training attained by the music teachers.

Choirs were established in the academies as they were founded, or at least as they added academic departments. As special music teachers were brought into the schools, the quality of the choral performances improved, and secular concert music was added to the choral repertoire. Concerts featuring oratorios and cantatas, as well as shorter works, developed along with annual light opera performances in many of the schools. The later activities involved community cooperation, and were frequently taken on tour to nearby localities. They were often successful financial ventures, and provided welcome cultural opportunities and entertainment for the students and townspeople associated with them. Glee clubs and smaller vocal ensembles became more prominent after 1910.

The development of music courses and organizations in the academies closely paralleled the national and regional trends reported by Birge.³⁷ Certain exceptions were found, however. Credit for piano and other private lessons was allowed in a very few of the academies at a considerably earlier date than 1960, the average date of the introduction of academic credit according to Birge. The L.D.S. College, the B.Y. Academy, and the St. Joseph Academy had organized special music courses on the high school level before the year 1902, when, according to the same author, the New England Education League first drew up a major music course for high schools.

High school orchestras, on an extra-curricular plan, became general in the Mid-West by 1900, and spread to the

³⁷Birge, *op. cit.*

West by 1910, with credit generally allowed by 1915. Orchestras in the Church academies were generally started later than those in the first category, but in advance of the 1910 movement. There were at least eight academy orchestras, four with credit, by 1905, and at least fifteen by 1910. In many of the academies, however, academic credit did not accompany orchestral participation until rather later than the date set by Birge.

In one area, however, the Church academies were considerably in advance of the national trend. According to Birge, high school bands began to appear generally about 1910. The twenty-two academies had organized at least seven bands before 1905, and fifteen by 1910.

Band instruction had been instituted by Albert Miller at B.Y. Academy in 1901, growing to a large scale operation with four band classes by 1905, and carrying academic credit from the beginning. Accredited band instruction was listed in the catalog of courses for Murdock Academy in 1901, but was omitted from the catalog for the following year, and it is not known if such a course was actually taught there before 1905. W. O. Robinson, who had studied music at L.D.S. College in Salt Lake City, organized a twenty-one piece band at B.Y. College in 1902, with credit allowed by 1903. One of Miller's pupils, John T. Hand, organized the first band at Emery Stake Academy in 1904, also with academic credit. The town band of Juarez was taken over by the Juarez Academy somewhere around 1903, but it was not determined when credit was first given. In 1903 there was a fifteen-piece band at L.D.S. College, as shown in a photograph in the 1904-05 announcement of courses. The instructor, whose name was not mentioned, might have been either Arthur Shepherd or Theodore Best. Credit for band was given at that school in 1907, when Professor Kellersberger organized a twenty-five piece group. He organized two band classes in 1908. Bands were taught for credit in 1905 at Snow Academy under Frank Christensen, and at Murdock Academy under George Woodhouse.

One factor in the early development of school bands in the Church schools was the precedent of widespread town band activity in the Mormon settlements, which began as far back as Nauvoo. Another was the migration to Utah of trained bandsmen, such as Albert Miller, Robert Sauer, and others,

from Germany, the Scandinavian countries, and England. The fact that the average age of academy students was greater than that of the average public high school student must also be considered.

Music teachers for the academies were recruited from Mormon immigrants who had been trained in English and Continental music schools, from talented local residents, from graduates of the music schools at B.Y.U. and L.D.S. College, and in later years from the ranks of conservatory-trained or university-trained Mormon musicians. Certification was obtained through examinations by the Church board of examiners, or through a music diploma from one of the established special music courses in the academies. In later years, normal colleges established by the Church were the means of meeting Church and state requirements in this matter. Certification requirements of Church music teachers were always at least equal to those of public high school music teachers of Utah.

Data concerning their musical training were obtained for nearly half of the 237 persons identified as music teachers in the academies before 1926. Of these 116 individuals, forty-seven had attended B.Y.U. Over half had received training at European and American music conservatories, nineteen of them at New England Conservatory. Thirty-six had been trained in colleges and universities, and another fifteen had obtained their musical educations by way of private instruction from well-known artist-teachers.

The average continuous term of employment served by music teachers was about three years. Many served one-year tenures, and a few remained at the same school for long periods, ranging up to twenty-one years. Those with longer periods of tenure were notably successful music teachers. Salaries received by regular music teachers were about the same, as far as could be determined, as those received by teachers of other subjects. They were allowed to keep private instruction fees in addition to their salaries. Those whose entire load consisted of private lessons were paid no additional salary.

The foregoing have been a few highlights from what has proved to be a fascinating study. There are many phases of the early Church school system that have not as yet been touched by research. It is to be hoped that they will soon be brought to light, that we might enjoy the benefits of past experience in plotting our course for the future.