

Club Lesson - March 2, 1932.

Our Folk Music and Composers Who Have Used It.

- (a) Controversies on the Americanism of our Folk Songs.
- (b) Indian and Negro Music.
- (c) Other Sources of Folk Songs.

The folk-music of the United States - What is it? Where did it come from? Which part of it is truly American? This is clear, if Americanism is a matter of geography or residence. But American folk-song is not easy to solve if the source and distinguishing traits must be considered.

Folk-song is a song of the people, one that lives for generations, origin generally unknown, must be typical of the people who sing it, a part of their daily lives. The song itself must be more important than its composer. Of our many groups of folk-songs in this country, few of them belong to the United States as a whole.

The Negro songs are characteristic utterances of those who were slaves. The Cowboy songs belong to the West; Mountain songs to the mountaineers; Hill-billy songs from the Ozarks; American Indian Music is the primitive expression of that people and has nothing to do with a civilized people. The question is raised as to whether Primitive Indian music is American folk-song? As soon as composers attempt to develop the Indian's songs with the white man's harmonization, they are apt to lose their whole character in the process. The term Indian, is too general, for there were over 50 basic races and these were divided into separate tribes. These races all had different customs and ways of living. Each had its own legends and presumably its own music. Instead of speaking of Indian Music, it would be more accurate to designate it by the name of the tribe to which it belonged. Certain characteristics apply only to certain tribes. For instance, the famous Snake Dance is peculiar to the Hopi Indians. The music for the Snake Ceremonial Dance is wild and extreme, and is a matter of the

greatest seriousness to the Indians.

The Navajos are the only tribal blanket weavers, bead work is done by other tribes; pottery by others; basketry by others, and so on. The Indian has occupational songs for almost everything he does, and the material available for composition purposes is inexhaustible.

The Indians burlesque songs, include his Pleasure Dances, the Owl Dance, the Sage Hen Dance. These are often done as a kind of improvised dramatization of things that have happened in the tribe during the past few moons. Then there are the Spiritual Songs, such as Tobacco Planting Song, in which the leaves are burned as incense, the Medicine Pipe Songs, The Ghost Songs for both good and bad ghosts. Then, there are the Love Songs and Flute melodies. The Flute, Tom-tom, Big Drum, and Rattle, constitute the Indian's Orchestra. However, these instruments are never played in ensemble as a part of a regular song.

In singing, the Indians know nothing of Harmony. They never have been heard to attempt to harmonize. In the Squaw Song, the squaw will chime in at times, one octave higher, to produce some desired effect, but otherwise the music is wholly in unison. The Indian Musician is very proud of his voice. He does not welcome any rivals. And the one with the largest compass is supreme. Some have developed abnormally high voices. The man who has the biggest compass and knows the most songs, is the best musician. They are very particular that the songs be given accurately and resent tampering with them. It is difficult to produce the Indians split intervals on the piano with its equal-tempered scale.

The most of the Dance Songs have 9 measures (Group of 5 followed by 4). War dances are mostly in $2/4$ rhythm. Practically all other songs are in $6/8$. The greatest similarity among the music of different tribes, is in the War Songs. The music is often very imitative. The long, chilling howls of the Coyote, braying of the hungry wolf, growls and snorts of the bear, Caw of the crow, melancholy hoot of the owl, are all manifested. The singing is

done with surprising expression. In the Eagle Dance, for instance, the soaring of the Eagle as he flies from rock to crag, is designated by wonderful pianissimos rising to astonishing fortes. It is mostly only in the Love Songs and in the Prayers or Petitions to the Spirits, that words are used. Other songs are sung to syllables. Those most frequently used - Hay-uh and High-uh.

There is so much material that is interesting and beautiful in the traditional music of the various Indian tribes. American Composers have given us interesting examples of what can be done with these songs in larger compositions. MacDowell's Indian Suite has already been mentioned in last week's lesson, and there are many others who have sought to idealize this music of the savages. Yet many haunting and very beautiful melodies have lost their appropriateness, by the use of our modern harmonization.

Probably no other American composer has delved so deeply into the musical customs of so many different tribes of American Indians or has sacrificed so much, to secure results of a thoroughly accurate character, as has Thurlow Lieurance. Born at Oskaloosa, Iowa - 1880. Son of a physician. First musical training came in the town Band. Enlisted in U.S. Volunteer Army at 18. After serving in Spanish American War, went to Cincinnati Conservatory, studied composition under Van der Stücken, piano and voice under other teachers of note. In 1905, the United States Government, which had been unsuccessful in securing the records it desired of certain tribes, gave Lieurance a chance of visiting the Crow Reservation. This led to the preservation of over 500 records of different tribal melodies, now kept under seal in the Museum at Washington as well as many other collections of records held at the New Mexico Museum, Berlin University, Germany, and University of Penna. These observations were not a matter of a few short visits to the different tribal reservations, but often have been prolonged stays of several months at a time, during many years.

Negro Music.

One of the choicest groups of folk-music is found in the songs of the American Negro.

In 1619 the Dutch traders brought the first contingent of Negroes to this country from Africa. The Negroes brought with them their African characteristics, which included their native music. Rhythms and almost monotonal expression with their voices and primitive instruments represented their musical development. Association with white masters, gradually gave them the English language. Later, the characteristics of the white people were mimicked until a few generations established the Negro as a part of a new nation. Along with the slave traits and feeling of inferiority, came the artless imitations of musical utterances made by the white people, with results that were entirely different from the original. The ~~sombre~~ quality that the Negro chooses in his musical expressions, may be accounted for by his long condition of slavery, during which he was free only to sing on sad occasions, such as funerals, religious orgies, being in jail, etc. The Negro lacks originality in music, thereby preventing his songs from being carried on from generation to generation, and the Composer who attempts to write music based on Negro music, will soon find his themes extinct with the people who furnished them.

Much of our American Music is constructed, not on so called Negro Folk-tunes or Spirituals, but created by our Composers out of their impression of general Negro characteristics.

Negro singing first became known to the country at large, through the travels of Negro singers from Fisk University which was founded in Nashville, Tenn. in 1866. Starting on a concert tour in 1871 with 13 members in the choir, they raised \$150,000 in 3 years travel, for the University.

It was after Dvorak wrote his New World Symphony, that the idea of using Negro Music took hold.

The Negro uses the pentatonic scale and syncopation is an outstanding characteristic . The question arises as to how much of the Negro music is African and how much is taken from the white man. At any rate, the Negroes interpretations are of his surroundings, his superstitions, etc., and if their songs have been influenced by their American surroundings and influences, they surely have a greater claim to be American Songs.

Other Sources of Folk-songs.

As a result of the composite nature of the population of the United States, various types of folk-music are to be found, other than those already discussed. Splendid examples have been found in the great Northwest among the Scandinavian colonies; - in the highlands of Kentucky, Tennessee, the Carolinas, and Virginia. Lack of modern transportation into some of these communities, has left this music in its natural state, and offers a genuine background for making masterpieces conforming to the feelings of the people.

The Cowboys of the Southwest have had their songs, a great many of them preserved by Lomax and others. Like all folk-song literature, these songs are typical of the temperament and life of those who sing them.

Composers Who Have Used Our Folk-Songs.

American Composers experimented with folk-music, way back in the 18th Century. The works of Dvorak written during his 4 years in this country, were intended as examples of what our own composers could do with the material at hand.

Arthur Farwell - Born in St. Paul, Minnesota - 1872 - Decided to become a musician after graduating from Mass. Institute of Technology, at age of 21. Studied composition under Chadwick, and later went abroad for further study. After return To United States in 1899, became lecturer on History of Music at Cornell University. Founded the Wa-Wan Press, which was organized for the purpose of issuing unsalable works by American Composers. He helped launch such composers as Henry Gilbert, Edgar Stillman Kelly, Harvey Loomis, and many others. He has held many important positions, including that of conducting theoretical courses and lectures on Music History at the Michigan State College. He has made many settings for Indian, , Negro, Cowboy and Prairie Songs.

Harvey Worthington Loomis - Born in Brooklyn, New York - 1865
Died - Roxbury, Mass. - Dec. 25, 1930.
Was very successful in catching and preserving the spirit of Indian Music in his arrangements.

MacDowell has already been ably discussed in our lesson of last week.

Charles Wakefield Cadman - Born at Johnstown, Penna - 1881
Musical from childhood. One of the most widely known of our composers
to-day. He dislikes to be labeled so, but he is famous as a composer who
utilizes Indian material. Has written 2 Indian Operas - "Shanewis" and
"The Sunset Trail". His works are divided into distinct stages.

1st - Comic Operas and Operettas.

2nd - Writing of songs and part songs.

3rd - Interest in Indian Music - and giving many lecture recitals on
Indian customs and music.

4th - Opera - His present ambition is to be the composer of what shall be
called the "first great American Opera". Also to compose a Symphony and
Symphonic Poem which shall reflect the spirit of this country.

Henry Thacker Burleigh - Born at Erie, Penna. - 1866 -

Negro - A pioneer in arranging spirituals for concert use. A singer,
having sung the songs of his people throughout the country. His arrangement
of "Deep River" has probably been one of the most popular of the Negro Songs.

Nathaniel Dett - Negro - Born on Canadian side of Niagara Falls -
1882 - Studied at Oberlin, Ohio. Has appeared as concert Pianist, holding a
number of positions in Colored schools, notably at Hampton Institute in
Virginia. He emphasizes the native character in his compositions. His
"Juba Dance" for Piano and his settings of spirituals for chorus are
particularly successful

David Guion - Born in Ballinger, Texas - 1895 - Musical training in America, also studied in Vienna. Held teaching positions in Texas, and in Chicago Musical College. He is Important among the group of white composers who have turned to Negro Songs. His concert transcriptions for Piano, of "Turkey in the Straw", ranks with Dett's Juba Dance, as one of the most characteristic arrangements of native music. His compositions for piano are classified in the following groups:-

"Cowboys" and "Old Fiddler's Breakdowns".

"Alley Tunes"

"Mother Goose Rhyme Tunes".

His music expresses things as he sees them, hears them, and feels them. He writes of the Southwest, that part of the country from which he comes. It has been said that his settings of "Old Fiddler's Breakdowns" are to American Music what baseball is to American Sport.

John Powell - Born in Richmond, Virginia - 1882.

In his use of Negro themes, he tries to interpret the Negro, not America. His "Negro Rhapsody" for Piano and Orchestra has become one of the most widely played of the larger works by American Composers. He is excellently equipped as musician, with a cultural background, with something definite to say, and the ability to say it.

And so we find our noted musicians and historians disagreeing and in doubt as to "What is American Folk Music". May I return the question to you to be answered - "What is it? Where did it come from? Which part of it is truly American?"