

CHAPTER LXXII

THE FAMILY ORCHESTRA

Grandfather could not sing. Of that he was convinced. The school rules required every child to try to sing, but something within Grandfather whispered to him that he had better not try, and this hunch he imparted to his teacher. But the teacher could not see why a child with a loud, clear-speaking voice could not sing and insisted that Grandfather, against his better judgment, make a good try. So Grandfather dutifully but with misgivings made one lusty try, which quickly convinced the teacher even more completely than Grandfather had been convinced that he was not born to emulate the lark. Therefore he was passed from grade to grade, accompanied by a note stating that he was not to be allowed again to try to sing.

Grandmother had received an organ from her Grandfather the Christmas before her twelfth birthday. She had had some music lessons before that time and continued until she went away to school. Later she exchanged her organ for a piano, but she never had time for music lessons after going away to school. This was unfortunate, for Grandmother had a good appreciation of music and with good instruction would probably have done well. But of this hidden talent Grandfather was quite unconscious, for he cannot recall that he ever saw Grandmother sit down to the piano to play for the fun of it.

All this is preliminary to stating that one thing Grandfather was quite sure about with his robust young family - that none of them would ever take to music. With that thought he was well pleased, because he had observed that when students in high school became interested in music, they were likely to become poor students and as soon as they became proficient enough to play dance music, they usually joined some jazz orchestra, played nights and became no good at school.

However, in Wausau was a youthful genius in music - Lawrence Bernhard - who at thirteen played pipe organ in the Episcopalian Church. When he was about fifteen, Charles and George, then eleven and nine, said they wanted to take piano lessons of him. Grandfather was willing and they started, but after a couple of years, the boys tired of practicing and wanted to quit, to which Grandfather, not suspecting any musical talent in the family, raised no objection.

After the family moved to Boston, George got an idea he would like to play a mandolin. Grandfather, who aimed not to discourage any wholesome ambition in his children, bought George a \$5 mandolin and engaged a teacher to harmonize with a \$5 mandolin. Soon George, who thought, perhaps correctly, that he knew as much as his teacher, decided to instruct himself and shortly thereafter lost interest.

A second time George took up mandolin and quit. Then he went with his mother to a concert of all the mandolin clubs of Boston combined and a third time he asked for a teacher. This time Grandfather, thinking perhaps George might really wish to learn, bought a good mandolin and engaged a good teacher and soon George was quite proficient. He had a good time in the University Musical Club and took a tenor banjo to war with him.

Meanwhile George had come to desire a more serious instrument. A friend of Grandfather's - Russell Kingman - who was an excellent amateur cellist, recommended the cello and, happening to know of an excellent instrument which was passing into the hands of an estate, bought it at small cost. A man who played in the Philadelphia Orchestra was obtained as a teacher and soon George evinced a great interest in playing. George, needing an accompanist, exhorted Ruth, who had started piano at a tender age and was a student in Hyperion School of Music, to master the piano accompaniment to his cello pieces and soon George and Ruth were playing together by the hour.

One year while in University of Pennsylvania George was president of the Philomathia Literary Society and managed a Shakespearean play given afternoon and evening for a week. George, in the interest of good finance, decided to supply a volunteer orchestra. He persuaded Howard Sanborn, who had received instruction from one of the outstanding violin teachers of New York, to act as first violinist, got a good flute player, Alverson, and himself played the cello.

At dress rehearsal the boys quarreled with their pianist and George persuaded Grandfather - not an easy task - to allow Ruth to play every afternoon and evening for the week. Thereafter on Sunday afternoon this "Shell Shock Quartette", whether so called because of the supposed condition of the players or because of the effort they were supposed to produce on their hoarers Grandfather never was informed, met at Grandfather's for a rehearsal - a rehearsal for what Grandfather never learned.

But after much diligent rehearsing and some other events of which Ruth may perhaps write, Ruth married the first violinist, thereby permanently acquiring high class talent for the future family orchestra.

George way back in high school days could see clearly that Dorothy Elcome was the most charming young lady in the world, and after ten years of strenuous courtship - George may undertake to write you about it, but take it from Grandfather, he will not be able to do justice to the subject - married her, and thus another excellent musician was added to the family by marriage. Incidentally, dear grandchildren, was it not indeed fortunate that music brought Ruth and Howard and George and Dorothy together? If it had not, would not some of you have been out of luck?

Meanwhile Ruth had wished to take some lessons on the violin. Russell Kingman had shopped around and bought an Italian violin of excellent

tone, made in 1765, and Ruth in a couple of years made sufficient progress to be able to play second violin. So now a family orchestra of four pieces - first violin (Howard), second violin (Ruth), cello (George) and piano (Dorothy) replaced the Shell Shock Quartette.

While in high school Ruth had a chum, Marjorie Watson, who took singing lessons from a well-known vocal teacher and induced Ruth also to take some lessons. Grandfather agreed, but with no thought of developing a vocal soloist in the family. After Ruth had been taking lessons for about two years, Grandfather happened one day to call at Green's Studio for Ruth and said to Mr. Green, "I don't mean to be too practical, but I was just wondering whether Ruth, if she went on with voice training, could ever support herself with her voice." "Oh, yes," said Green, "she could support herself and you too."

Grandfather expressed a hope that the latter might not be necessary, but approved a plan for Ruth to take voice throughout her four years in Wellesley at the New England Conservatory of Music, with Mr. Hunt as teacher, and after graduating from Wellesley, Ruth continued voice culture with Mr. Fergusson, a leading teacher in New York. So now the family orchestra had a vocal soloist.

After graduating from Wellesley, Ruth took a Master's Degree at Columbia University in Music. In taking a course in conducting high school orchestras, it occurred to Ruth that Charles might be persuaded to play the bass viol. This appealed to Charles until he priced a bass viol. Being still in the early struggles of winning a way in the law, the price of a bass appeared to Charles to be prohibitive. Ruth, however, persuaded the family to give Charles a bass for a Christmas present and, at Grace's suggestion, a stocking was made so huge that it held the bass without revealing by its shape what it contained.

Grace, as master of ceremonies, kept Charles anxiously waiting until all other presents had been delivered. As Charles began to unpack his sock, first he found a package about the size of a book which, upon the removal of bright Christmas wrapping, turned out to be only a block of wood labeled "To prevent your present from turning into a white elephant." (to keep the instrument from marring Miriam's floors). Charles handed it to Miriam, saying, "Miriam, if you see anything turning white, hand me this."

Great was the hilarity of the family as Charles unpacked the bass viol. Ruth had written some music for the bass and coached Charles on how to play. Charles, quite oblivious to all about him all Christmas Day, with marvelous endurance sawed away and by evening was ready to make his first appearance with the family orchestra. Charles from this time forth was a most enthusiastic member of the orchestra and, in fact, much was due to him for holding the orchestra together during the days when small children in the homes made rehearsals difficult.

Only Miriam was left on the side lines. That was surely too bad. She had had foundational work on the piano and possessed an excellent appreciation of music. "What we need," says Ruth, "is a flute." So Charles and Grandfather jointly presented Miriam with a silver flute, and Miriam with her characteristically marvelous spirit of cooperation, applied herself with enthusiasm to the role which had been wished on her, and before long she was able to join in on some of the pieces and continued to advance rapidly in efficiency.

As the rumors of the family orchestra spread, many in Philadelphia expressed an interest in hearing it and invitations were issued by Grandfather and Grandmother to about 300 persons to a party in the Germantown Woman's Club auditorium for Saturday evening, January 2nd, 1932.

The response to the invitations was unusual and more than 250 guests assembled. They came with such unusual promptness that it was possible to start the program ahead of schedule. The start of the program led to one of the most humorous moments in Grandfather's life. It may not sound funny to read about it, but Grandfather can hardly write, the recollection of the moment so stirs his sense of humor.

In the assembly hall was a stage decorated for the occasion with palms, the audience was arranged with a clever informality by Grandmother, which gave the impression of a packed house. It had seemed best in view of the formal stage setting for the boys to wear full dress, so Grandfather also donned "tails" and a white bow. It had also seemed that it might be courteous after the orchestra were in position on the stage and ready to go that Grandfather should express a few words of welcome to the guests. So the orchestra, having given the final touch of tuning, Grandfather stepped from the wings and advanced to the front of the stage, whereupon the audience gave a burst of applause and then a sudden hush.

Grandfather, who from years of experience on the platform was always alert to the moods and thoughts of an audience, suddenly saw that the audience assumed that he was the conductor of the orchestra. As Grandfather faced this expectant audience, the sudden mental picture of himself turning his coat tails to the audience and lifting a baton to bring forth the strains of music so stirred his sense of humor that with difficulty he kept his laughter within bounds and said: "As I look in the face of this smiling and expectant audience, I see that you think I am the conductor of this orchestra. But you have me all wrong. My role in this program is only to make you a speech of welcome."

The sudden wave of amusement and surprise which swept over the

audience at this announcement again nearly swept Grandfather off his feet, but again laughing, he went on to say: "We appreciate your presence this evening. All members of the orchestra are our children either by birth or by marriage. No one has at any time followed music as a vocation, no one has at any time given entire attention to the study of music. With all, music has been an avocation. They have studied from a love of music, for the pleasure they might receive and for the pleasure they might be able to give. Music has been a large factor in our family life and tonight, so to speak, we have invited you within the bosom of the family to enjoy with us just such a program as we are wont to have when, as frequently happens, the family gets together for an evening all by ourselves."

The party was a grand success. The audience was in a mellow mood and each performer was a credit to the family. Many were surprised at the perfection of the execution, many expressed surprise that so much and so varied musical talent should be in one family.

Probably some marveled at the nerve of parents to invite three hundred people to a party just to hear their children perform. This thought Grandfather confided to one outspoken individual, who generously responded, "You are not sham, you have a personality of your own, it seems perfectly natural for you to do such a thing and when you stage a program your friends know you will make good. You can get away with inviting folks to listen to your family."

No one was more pleased than Grandfather. The last thing Grandfather expected as he welcomed his children into the world was that they should some day make for the family a musical triumph. The unexpected had come to pass and Grandfather was pleased.

The following write-up appeared as first-column on front page of

the Germantown Telegraph, written by their special correspondent, Herbert Hollis, who attended the event:

MUSICAL PARLINS' GIVE FINE CONCERT

Entire Family Present Delightful Evening
of Music at Woman's Club

By Herbert Hollis

A large, appreciative and fashionable audience attended an orchestra concert given at the Woman's Club of Germantown, last Saturday evening, by the Great Musical Parlin Family composed of four children, two daughters-in-law and a son-in-law of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Coolidge Parlin. Not one of the entire party pursues music as a vocation but only for their own and others enjoyment.

The orchestra was made up of first violin, C. Howard Sanborn; second violin, Ruth Parlin Sanborn; bass, Charles C. Parlin; flute, Miriam Boyd Parlin; piano, Dorothy Elcome Parlin and assisting soloist, Grace E. Parlin, every one of whom proved to be an artist of no mean ability and presented an evening of music that was delightfully refreshing from the opening number, "The Magic Flute," by the orchestra until it closed with Victor Herbert favorites.

Following the opening, two splendidly rendered piano solos were given by Mrs. Dorothy Parlin - the first, "Tarantelle," by Pieczonka, and then "Chapel Chimes," as an encore.

This was followed by a trio, composed of C. Howard Sanborn, George S. Parlin and Dorothy E. Parlin, who gave "Melody in D" as a contribution.

Two lively numbers from the orchestra came next - "Ballet Music from Rosamunde" and "Theme from Overture to Rosamunde." Both were well received.

George S. Parlin showed his ability with the cello by giving "Barcarolle" and "Momento Passara" in fine style.

Ruth Parlin Sanborn was next with a group of three songs in which she made a distinct hit. The numbers were "My Lovely Celia", "Damon," and "The Little Shepherd's Song."

Two popular numbers from the Orchestra, "March of the Tin Soldiers" and "Humoresque" were warmly received and showed the splendid musical talents of the Parlin family.

Grace E. Parlin fairly made the piano talk in two numbers - "Moto Perpetuo" and "Claire de Lune."

Then the orchestra, with Ruth Parlin Sanborn as soloist, contributed three very pleasing numbers, "Songs My Mother Taught Me," "I Plucked a Rose," and "When You and I Were Young, Maggie." The young woman was in excellent voice which she showed to good advantage.

Two beautiful violin solos by C. Howard Sanborn - "Souvenir de Lubeck" and "Old Refrain" - closed a program that was indeed a credit to the musical Parlins and a rare treat for those who were privileged to attend.