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CONCERT IN 1946 REFLECTS THE HOPE OF POST-WORLD WAR II AMERICA

1 COMMENT

While I polish the final draft of the next Maggie Sullivan mystery, which will be out this fall, I'm pleased to have another fine guest column about a group mentioned in the novels. The group is the one-of-a-kind Inland Children's Chorus, and the author is Gerald (Jerry) Alred, Professor Emeritus of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He's webmaster at inlandchorus.com, which features pictures and sound files of the group. Thanks, Jerry!

BY GERALD (JERRY) ALRED

PROFESSOR EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE

An earlier post on this blog noted that the Inland Children's Chorus, which sang only a week following the attack on Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941, helped lift spirits in Dayton, Ohio. Soon after World War II ended, this chorus gave a series of four performances at the Dayton Art Institute in May of 1946. The enthusiastic reception of these concerts, and even the music, reflected the hope of audiences and community leaders for the future.

The Inland Children's Chorus was the only corporation-sponsored children's choir in the United States. It was sponsored by the Inland Manufacturing Division of General Motors Corporation and offered musical training and education to thousands of children from 1936 to 1970. The concert in May 1946 was "dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Charles F. Kettering because of the intense interest of the Ketterings in the welfare of the group."

Charles F. Kettering, featured on the cover of Time magazine, was an engineer and inventor who was director of research at General Motors for 27 years. He later established what became the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Kettering, Ohio was named for him and was his home until his death in 1958. Charles Kettering stated that the work of the Philharmonic and the Inland Children's Chorus is "just as essential as factories and stores, a fundamental building block just as important as schools and churches." Below is a photo of the Inland Children's Chorus in May 1946 on the stage of the Dayton Art Institute.

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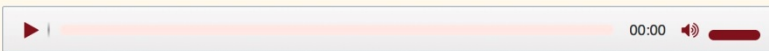
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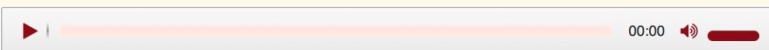


In his comments to the audience, Inland general manager J. D. O'Brien linked his hopes for the future to the power of music: "We believe music to be a means of better understanding and a medium through which hate eventually may be abolished." The **concert program** and accompanying newspaper review describe the inspiring selections taken from classical and popular music.

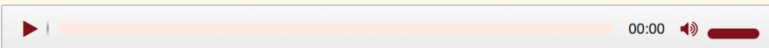
You can listen to selections recorded at this concert using the following links:
George Gershwin's **Summertime** from Porgy and Bess,



Hoagy Carmichael's haunting **Stardust**,



and Sigmund Romberg's rousing **Stouthearted Men** from his operetta The New Moon.



The Chorus was praised by Arthur Kany, The Dayton Herald reviewer who writes: "We have never heard the 100 children – 50 boys and 50 girls – sing so well as they did last night." He continues, "the children are immaculately clad in their usual manner and occupy the tiered platform originally arranged and lighted by Raymond Sovey." Sovey was the Broadway theatrical designer and Tony Award nominee who was hired by Inland and General Motors to stage the concerts. After praising the "moving" and "splendid" interpretations by the children, Kany concludes: "Augmenting Richard B. Westbrook's directorial finesse are the organ and piano accompaniments of Mary Werner McCash and Isabel Herbst, which background and bind the vocalization into a solid unit."

The professionalism of the young people and the music must have given hope to those who had just finished living through the horrors of a world at war. A concert over 70 years later may have justified their hopes. Former chorus member Stephen Roddy, who founded the Houston Children's Chorus, directed his singers as they participated in the nationally televised Barbara Bush Memorial events on April 21, 2018 in Houston.

My time in the chorus was in the 1950s. Practicing many hours and performing for large audiences certainly provided excellent training for whatever success I've had in my publishing and academic career. Visit InlandChorus.com, which is dedicated to preserving and making widely available the history and music of the Inland Children's Chorus for current and future generations.

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