

Commemorating Fifty Years

Do you remember in pre-war days how the more valiant of us risked the chance of hitting stray cattle on the fog-bound highways to our neighboring cities to hear great music?

Today we are not allowed to take that chance, but artists equally as great as the baritone, Igor Gorin, and the Hungarian pianist, Edward Kilenyi — both of whom have already appeared before us — are waiting outside our own door.

Shall we let them in?

BCCA letter, November 1, 1943

Written on letterhead proclaiming the slogan “We Shall Have Music,” those words appeared in -an open letter in The Brunswick News to announce the third season of the Brunswick Community Concert Association.

Despite national adversities during its first few years, the Brunswick Community Concert Association has without interruption brought first-rate performances to the Golden Isles for the past fifty years.

With a planning meeting held just a couple of days before Pearl Harbor, the Association’s founders quickly resolved their hesitation to begin a concert series in such perilous times. Despite the declaration of war, it was decided to offer the series, for “in times of war, everything that builds and strengthens morale is vital and should continue.”

Although the first campaign dinner meeting at the Oglethorpe Hotel was set for January 12, 1942, the Association did make an exception to the scheduled membership sales in the new year. A December news article announced plans to make “membership to be used as gifts available at this time.” Subscriptions (\$3.85 for adults, and \$1.65 for students) for the first season numbered 450, and three programs were presented: Igor Gorin, baritone; Edward Kilenyi, pianist; and Dorothy Crawford, dramatist.

Wartime shortages including gasoline rationing (referenced in the 1943 campaign letter) seemed no obstacle, however, as memberships increased to 650 for the second season. Yet sensitivity to the times is verified by the fact that concert programs proclaimed across the bottom of their pages “Buy War Bonds and Stamps.”

George T. Rives served as the first president, along with vice-presidents Mrs. A. N. Shelander, John Hill, Bernard Nightingale, and Lee Belford. E. H. Diemmer was the first secretary, and Villard Royal served as treasurer. Margaret McGarvey devoted much time to the Association, handling publicity for many years and being elected secretary in 1943. Ms. McGarvey not only wrote advance promotions for the concerts as well as commentaries following each program, but it is her meticulous scrapbooks of the early decades that document the beginnings of the concert association. Her hand also penned many of the reminder postcards (bought and mailed for one penny) sent out prior to the performances. One card from 1944 reads: “If you were listening, you heard on the New York Philharmonic broadcast William Ham....”. Then she reminded the membership that Ham was coming on Feb. 9, concluding with the recurring slogan, “Remember --- we shall have music.”

Even in tenuous times, the people of this community recognized the value of the arts, and continuing support has kept those values alive.

Peak seasons in the late forties produced sold out series (frequently offering four programs) for more than half a dozen years. Lean years in the late seventies and early eighties produced tougher times and tighter budgets, but the Association has faithfully executed its charge, and we have had music --- everything from the prominent solo performers of the day to major groups

including the symphonies of Detroit, Memphis, Baltimore, New Orleans, and Washington.

Gone are the days of unfenced cattle, and our neighboring cities are easily accessible. Yet, our local concert association has continued to receive community support which has sustained it. Reportedly the fifth oldest of the associations which are continuing their relationship with Columbia Artists Management, Inc., the Brunswick Community Concert Association can credit many with much work, long hours, and perseverance on its behalf. One past promotional letter used, as its complimentary close, the phrase *In Crescendo*. That certainly describes the Association of the past fifty years — an organization growing increasingly stronger.

Thus, as the Brunswick Community Concert Association commences its second fifty years, may it continue to move forward *In Crescendo*. And to all those who made it happen in the past and to those who will continue to make it happen in the future, one word will suffice: Bravo!

—*Jan Lane Harper*