

## **Music Memory Contests**

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### MUSIC MEMORY CONTESTS

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One wonders if much of the looseness in speech, morals, dress, and conduct that characterizes the modern age is not directly traceable to the degradation of one of the fine arts, a universal art-music. Consider the popular music of today. It consists chiefly of ragtime and jazz.

Music and dancing are so closely allied that the degradation of the one means the degradation of the other. Jazz music means jazz dancing. It is difficult to say which precedes in the process of degeneration. In all probability the two move downward together. Jazz dancing means the taking of liberties. Any inclination of the dancer to be bold and reckless is increased by the noisy, wild, simple beat, beat of the tantalizing music designed to appeal purely to the physical. The natural accompaniments of jazz dancing are slang, immodest dress, and a general lowering of moral standards.

But the fact remains that people must have music. By means of it they express practically every emotion. It necessarily follows that there must be popular music. What we as a people know familiarly and fondly is popular with us. We like the melodies that we can all "join in and sing."

This liking of the human heart has been exploited and commercialized by unscrupulous individuals who, particularly since the war, have foisted upon the public such an unlimited quantity of "blues" as fairly to choke out any tendency or desire to hear the better music. The choking process, however, can be practiced only on the immature and uninformed. Fortunately, our country still counts in great numbers its trained leaders who can appreciate fine music and who cannot lend heart or voice to the support of ragtime or jazz.

John R. McMahon, in a forceful article on "Toddling to the Pit by the Jazz Route," makes the following pointed remarks:

*"Is America dancing, via the jazz route, hellward? In so far as jazz dancing relaxes morality and undermines the institution of the family, it is an element of tremendously evil potentiality. . . . Jazz is a signboard on the road that was traveled by Greece and Rome. .... Orgies of lewd dancing preceded the downfall of those nations..... Is not all America a little touched with jazz? .... [The author visits dance halls.]*

*If Beethoven should return to earth and witness the doings of such an orchestra he would thank Heaven for his deafness. The players were white men, and they did not yowl an accompaniment to their so-called music. Otherwise it seemed to be regulation jazz, with a couple of saxophones, a violin, bass viol, piano, drum, cymbals, and probably some kitchenware. All this music had a droning, jerky incoherence interspersed with a spasmodic "blah! blah!" that reminded me of the way live sheep are turned into mutton.*

*I will say right here that nothing that we saw or heard had a more painful effect on me than the mutilation and degradation of divine music. If human beings care to wallow, it may be that they are fulfilling destiny, and the sooner they sink the better the atmosphere for those who survive. But why drag man's noblest art down to the level of the modern dance? Why make music disreputable and foul? We used to have cheap, commonplace, and tawdry music. Now we have music that is fit only to be arraigned in night court and given an indeterminate sentence in the house of correction.*

*If Moses had foreseen the jazz he would have written an eleventh commandment....  
The dancers wiggled, jiggled, and hopped about...  
It was a free-for-all, every hold permissible and no referee to break clinches...  
A feature of the Caf6 de Rank, which is widely prevalent in connection with the jazz dance, was the dim if not religious illumination of the hall...  
The zero hour of human degradation was reached in this public place. .... It was indifferently viewed by persons of both sexes who no doubt regarded themselves as respectable. It is this state of moral indifference on the part of both sexes that seems most appalling. .... [Jazz music and dance with resulting loose conduct], unless checked, in time will devastate our country."  
Reprinted from Ladies Home Journal, XXXVIII (November, 1921)*

People concerned with education and ideals are naturally the ones who note keenly the damaging effect of conditions that have prevailed for some time. But are not educators in some sense responsible for these conditions? Youth hardly can be blamed for them. The ignorant and uninformed cannot be held altogether accountable. To be sure, educators did not write any of the songs that are characterized by vulgarity and obscenity.

They did not promote music that appeals purely to the physical at the expense of mind and morals. They have had no part whatever in exploiting the public with cheap melodies. But what have educators done in a masterful way to satisfy the natural, human desire for expression in music? Just what have they done to supplant the ordinary and baser types with music of an uplifting and elevating character? Just how much of sweetness and loveliness and idealism in the form of fine music have they brought into the life of the school child?

"Music lessons" have been given for centuries; yet instructors admit that they have found little time for developing music appreciation. Public-school music has had years of opportunity to create taste, and it deserves great credit for good that has been accomplished. But the obvious need is not supplied in a large way by these or by any other types of training that have long been in operation.

The "check" which Mr. McMahon regards as essential to the preservation of our civilization appears in the form of a recent movement. It is the **music memory contest**, one of the finest forms of competition and at the same time one of the best fields for co-operation that the educational world has ever known. This movement promises great results: first, in familiarizing persons with the better music; second, in developing music appreciation; third, in creating a desire to use, and sometimes even to produce, fine music.

The **music memory contest** represents a type of activity in which all pupils may engage, in which a whole community may participate actively for months at a time, and in which everyone takes a part with positive benefit to himself. The **music memory contest** is unquestionably the greatest force in operation today in combating the evils accompanying low-grade music. It does its clean, effective work, not by attacking ragtime and jazz at every point, but rather by providing means for gaining a knowledge and appreciation of the kind of music that is infinitely superior in its influence.

It is noteworthy that the **music memory contest** originated in a home. Mr. C. M. Tremaine, now director of the National Bureau for the Advancement of Music, is entitled to the credit for having started it as a game with his children. He later introduced it to the local supervisor of music, Miss Mabel E. Bray, who favored his plans for trying it in the schools of their city, Westfield, New Jersey. The following is a partial list of more than two hundred cities and towns, representing approximately three-fourths of the states, that have conducted one or more of the contests:

Birmingham, Ala.	Oklahoma City, Okla.
Cleveland, Ohio	Portland, Ore.
Duluth, Minn.	Raleigh, N.C.
Erie, Pa.	Richmond, Va.
Grand Rapids, Mich.	Rochester, N.Y.
Helena, Mont.	Salt Lake City, Utah
Los Angeles, Cal.	St. Louis, Mo.
Louisville, Ky.	Seattle, Wash.

Mrs. Agnes Moore Fryeberger, director of music at the State Teachers College, San Diego, California, was chairman of a contest in May, 1921, which was entered into heartily by the city of San Diego and neighboring towns. The fine spirit of co-operation between twenty-seven different organizations-musical and educational-was in itself distinctive.

Five weeks were given to thoughtful listening to forty musical masterpieces. Twenty-four contestants scored perfect cards and were rewarded with ten dollars each; forty-two others had cards with only one small mistake. Fourteen scholarships, each for a term of free musical instruction, were also given by leading teachers of voice, piano, organ, violin, and other orchestral instruments. The enthusiasm was so general that it was decided to make the contest an annual event.

Professor Edward Bailey Birge, now of Indiana University, has held two **music memory contests** in the public schools of Indianapolis, Indiana. He says of the project that "it is worth doing, not only once, but every year." In his first work, high schools competed with one another, each sending a team of ten to participate in the finals. Later the contest was introduced into the grades.

The map of Texas is dotted with cities that have held **music memory contests**. It would be impossible here to mention all of the systems that have done meritorious work. Miss Willie Stephens, supervisor at Austin, Texas, used the **music memory contest** "as a final resume of a four and one-half months' course in music appreciation. The entire town was interested, and co-operation from every musician was the keynote of success."

Miss Sudie Williams, of Dallas, Texas, said of her first contest that "it did not introduce a new phase of work into the schools, but it certainly seemed to vitalize it as nothing else could have done. The people of Dallas are proud of the record made by the children, and all forces that served the cause are ready to help make the contest of this year [1920] just as successful." Her third contest is now under way, the project having become an annual event.

The New York Globe printed the following paragraph when the contests were introduced into the schools of New York City:

"Plans have been completed for a city-wide **music memory contest** for the pupils in the seventh and eighth grades of the elementary schools. The object is to increase the musical knowledge of the pupils and to stimulate their appreciation of good music by familiarizing them with standard compositions of this and other countries. By this means it is hoped, not only to advance the general culture of the pupils, but also to keep alive in the schools the wave of patriotic enthusiasm which has arisen during the past two years."

New York has done considerable contest work since the foregoing was written.

The Chattanooga Woman's Club, of Chattanooga, Tennessee, sponsored a contest given in the public schools of that city under the direction of Mrs. A. S. Dickey, supervisor of music. Madison, Wisconsin, is now in the midst of its third **music memory contest**. Professor Peter W. Dykema, director, conducts city-wide contests of a most comprehensive nature. Adults as well as children enter the competition. In

his last contest there were 3,200 entries in the preliminaries; 1,200 gained admission to the finals; and 220 persons handed in perfect papers, thus making it necessary to conduct another and more difficult contest to determine the winners. Out of the efforts to promote better music in this city by means of the **music memory contest** has grown a new organization, the Madison Community Music Committee, "a group of music lovers formed to further the greater social uses of music in Madison." Music performance is being included in the third contest, violin and piano contestants being admitted. In each of the first two contests "rather elaborate prizes of considerable monetary value were presented. It is the plan this year to give prizes of honorary or symbolic value."

A carefully worked out high-school contest was held last year at the Thornton Township High School, Harvey, Illinois. The theaters, newspapers, churches, and civic, musical, and social organizations freely supported the movement. Twenty-two members of a leading Chicago orchestra gave the final concert. A new contest to be conducted on a still more elaborate scale is now under way. One of the results of this school's work in music, stimulated by the contest, was the composition of instrumental and vocal numbers. Another outgrowth of the contest has been the interest created throughout the school in the development of a taste for better music. For example, the science department is making an effort to install in the high school wireless equipment which will make it possible for the students, assembled in the auditorium, to hear grand opera and other musical programs given in nearby cities.

The subject of prizes is receiving not a little consideration from persons concerned with contest work. There is no question that the giving of cash and other individual prizes in early contests has proved to be a valuable stimulus in the work. It seems to be the consensus of opinion, however, that, since the advantages gained from the competition are in themselves such a fine reward, it is better to eliminate the individual prizes as far as possible and to present each successful contestant with a certificate or some other inexpensive symbol of achievement and to award the winning team or school a banner or cup.

Professor Birge says:

A banner need be the only trophy, for the winning of which school spirit and loyalty will be sufficient incentive. If the banner be of proper size, it can be used a great many years, the name of the winning team being placed thereon each year. In the event that different schools form a league to compete against one another, a cup might be used as a prize. This would pass from year to year into the possession of the school that wins in the annual competition.

For the convenience of those who may be interested in conducting **music memory contests** the following general directions are given:

- i. Furnish each pupil with a copy of the approved list of compositions.
2. Provide means whereby the selections may be heard.

3. Encourage home study.
4. In presenting numbers on programs give incidents in the lives of the composers and tell the stories of the productions.
5. Arrange parties, in and out of school, for playing the music memory game, popular classics.
6. Secure the co-operation of music dealers, music organizations of the community, managers of motion-picture theaters, and editors of newspapers and magazines.
7. Conduct a preliminary contest for the purpose of selecting from each school, club, or other organization a definite number of persons to participate in the final contest. Award certificates of merit to the winners to admit them to the finals.
8. Conduct the final contest in a large auditorium. Invite the general public. Appoint judges. Provide each contestant with a pencil and a numbered competition card. In order that guests may have the pleasure of testing their knowledge, provide them with competition cards of a different color. Each contestant writes on his card his name and, if desired, the name of the organization he represents. Below this he writes the titles of the compositions and the names of the composers in the order in which the selections are played. Collect the cards and give them to the judges. An accepted method of scoring is to give three points for each correct title and two points for each correct composer. One point is deducted for each misspelled word. Entertain the audience, while the judges are out, with musical numbers, speeches, and community singing.

The list of compositions should also be read. When the judges reappear, announce the names of the winners and present the prizes and certificates of award.