

A History of the First Fifty Years of the Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix

by

Robert C. Butler II

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

David Schildkret, Chair
Amy Holbrook
Jerry Doan

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ABSTRACT

The Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix occupies and maintains an historical place in the musical and civic history of the City of Phoenix and the State of Arizona. Organized in November, 1929, the Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix (OMC) is the only performing arts organization in Phoenix that can claim eighty-one years of continuous performance. The chorus gained popularity locally, nationally, and internationally in its first five decades. The breadth of the chorus's recognition began to decline in the latter part of the 20th century, but the chorus still retains a loyal following of audience members.

This study focuses on the first fifty years of the OMC, especially the period from 1946 to 1979, the years the chorus was under the direction of Ralph Hess. Through his leadership the group's popularity and recognition reached a peak, thanks largely to his emphasis on civic responsibility, ties to service organizations, and musical ability and showmanship.

No scholarly publications exist regarding this organization. Several boxes of memorabilia housed in the Arizona Historical Society Museum in Tempe, Arizona, serve as the primary source of material for this study. Concert programs supply information about concert repertoire, advertising, and chorus history. Newspaper articles from local and international press offer reviews, announcements, and media perceptions of the chorus. Information illustrating the abundant civic engagement of the OMC appears in proclamations and awards from local, state, national, and international personalities. This objective information helps propel the story forward, as do the personal letters and stories

contained within the collection. Because many documents from the latter part of the 1970s are missing, the primary source information becomes more anecdotal and subjective.

This study illustrates some of the ways in which the OMC went beyond mere survival to occupy a significant place in the musical life of Phoenix. Engagement in civic and social functions and support for non-profit organizations established the chorus as more than just a musical ensemble. Their pursuit under Hess of “Cultural Citizenship” earned them international recognition as civic leaders and ambassadors of goodwill.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix was established in 1929 and celebrated its eightieth anniversary on November 4, 2009. During its eighty-year history as a part of the Phoenix cultural community, the chorus has given concerts every year and is the only performing arts organization in Phoenix that can make that claim.

The personnel of this community-based chorus has always been highly diverse, drawing from a variety of professional businessmen, students, government employees, salesmen, clergymen, doctors, attorneys, professional and non-professional musicians, and numerous other occupations. Singers came from all parts of the United States, as well as Europe and Mexico.

This study focuses on the first fifty years of the Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix. During this time, the chorus has grown both in number of singers and popularity. There has been a whole host of reasons for the successes of this community chorus. Certainly, the music the chorus has provided to its audiences is at the very heart of the organization's success, and the variety and scope of the repertoire is admirable.

There were, however, two other components of equal importance to the success of the chorus. First, there were the elements of practical governance and management of the chorus through the efforts of its officers, musical staff, and membership. The production of the performances, the publicity, ticket sales, finance, correspondence, travel, and later, staging and costuming, and the

sponsorship of the Phoenix Boy's Choir, were all tasks undertaken by the volunteer singers. No one was paid for attending to these duties, and chorus members and officers devoted themselves to all of the operational work in addition to the demanding rehearsal and performance responsibilities. Support also came from such adjunct volunteer groups as the Ladies Auxiliary, which was made up primarily of the wives of the chorus members and saw to the organization of social and fundraising functions.

The second component of equal (if not greater) importance was the civic role of the chorus. Quite apart from the performance aspect that would be expected of any musical organization, the Orpheus Club, as it was known until 1964, was a model of civic engagement. It became apparent quite early in the development of the chorus that one of its goals was to serve the community that so solidly and steadily supported it, something I refer to as "cultural citizenship." During the first fifty years of the chorus, the members, officers, and music directors understood the importance of creating governmental relationships on the one hand and engaging culturally diverse segments of the population on the other. This cultural citizenship was a source of pride for the chorus, the City of Phoenix, and the State of Arizona.

Commendations, proclamations, acclamations, and a variety of correspondence from leaders at every level of government within the United States and around the world form a significant background to the story of the Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix. These accolades were not only indicative of the quality of the performances by the chorus, but serve as a profound testament

to the cultural citizenship the Orpheus Male Chorus shared with the community both locally and abroad.

This study focuses on the chorus's history from its inception in 1929 through the retirement in 1979 of the most successful and beloved director in the organization's history, Ralph Hess. Hess's musical leadership, his ability to create profound relationships with the city of Phoenix (indeed with civic and music leaders throughout the world), and his strong bond with corporate and business leaders can serve as a model for anyone who ventures into the realm of community performing arts.

The majority of primary source material for this research comes from the Library and Archives of the Arizona Historical Society, Central Arizona Division, located in Tempe, Arizona. Supporting material was extracted from a series of files that are divided into several categories: Administration, Financial Records, Concert Programs, Publicity, and Correspondence. Where appropriate, portions of personal letters have been included; care has been taken to protect the identity of the authors when the content might compromise their reputation in some way. Several newspaper articles in the archive collection are clippings and are therefore missing references to the authorship or date. Print media sources include articles from Arizona newspapers, *Arizona Highways* magazine, foreign newspapers, concert programs and pamphlets, and two booklets prepared for the sixtieth and seventy-fifth anniversaries of the chorus.

In 1989, for the sixtieth anniversary of the organization, Ardis Cox and OMC member Sam Lowe compiled an extensive multipage document about the

group's history in souvenir booklet form. The booklet was made available to patrons and audience members only and never published more widely. The booklet is not paginated and is an extensive compilation of personal and taped interviews of chorus members, directors, and officers. The names of the participants are listed in the credits at the end of the souvenir booklet, but in the body of the text there are no specific references to what information came from whom. The booklet contains no bibliography or other source references.

In 2004, Dr. Wayne Goulet, a member of the chorus and president of the chorus during the 2003-04 season, prepared another historical document for the celebration of the group's seventy-fifth anniversary. The document, again made available only to patrons and members, is unpublished but provides another source of data for this study.

The success of a volunteer community-based arts program can be measured on many different levels. The historical documentation is the basis for the narrative account that follows of the early successes of the Orpheus Male Chorus. Understanding of the practices of this ensemble in its first decades can be helpful to anyone involved in similar arts organizations.

CHAPTER 2

A NEW CITY, A NEW CHORUS

The city of Phoenix was incorporated on February 25, 1881, with the signing of the Phoenix Charter Bill by Territorial Governor John C. Fremont. Thirty-one years later, on February 14, 1912, Arizona was signed into statehood by President William Howard Taft, making it the forty-eighth state of the Union. As the capitol of the Arizona Territory since 1889, it was only natural that Phoenix would remain the capitol of the new state and begin to establish itself as a major urban center throughout the early years of the twentieth century.

In October 1929, seventeen years after the establishment of Arizona statehood, the Stock Market crash crippled the economy of the United States. However, Phoenix and Arizona were not established as major manufacturing centers of the country, and while the region did not completely escape the ravages of the impending financial disaster, the four C's of Arizona were fast becoming attractive to potential residents and business developers. The four C's, according to Ardis Cox and Sam Lowe, co-authors of the unpublished document celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the OMC, were "Copper, Cotton, Cattle and Climate."¹ (Later, people would speak of five C's, adding citrus to that list.) These resources drew people to the new career and life opportunities available in the Phoenix area.

L. Douglas Russell was the founding director of the Orpheus Club, as it was known from 1929 to 1959. Russell was a voice teacher in Phoenix who was

¹ Ardis Cox and Sam Lowe, "A 60-Year History of the Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix." Unpublished manuscript, 1989.

looking for an opportunity for his male students to perform.² On Monday, November 4, 1929, the Orpheus Club of Phoenix was formed, a musical arts organization that would become a major player in the fabric of the city's arts community.

An article in the November 5, 1929, Arizona Republican announced,

A Phoenix men's chorus was organized last night at the Young Men's Christian Association when a group of singers formulated plans and elected temporary officers which will be replaced by permanent officers at a meeting in December. L. Douglas Russell was selected permanent director of the new chorus. Twenty attended the meeting. Plans for a concert and occasional radio broadcasting were discussed. Tuesday was set as the date for the next meeting to be held at the Masonic Temple at 7:45 pm.³

Russell was able to start the inaugural season with singers who were chosen based on the completion of a simple audition to determine vocal quality and sight-singing ability. According to a document in the Arizona Historical Society archives, an executive committee was formed, and by-laws were created and adopted by the membership on December 17, 1929.⁴ The implementation of this type of committee structure proved beneficial to the organization, becoming important to the management and support of the fledgling chorus, and this indeed would prove to be the backbone of the Orpheus Club through most of its history.

² Ibid.

³ "New Chorus Formed," *The Arizona Republican*, November 5, 1929. Print.

⁴ The Orpheus Club *Constitution and By-laws*, December 17, 1929

The November 5 article also tells of the intention of the chorus to provide occasional radio broadcasts, and on the morning of December 25, 1929, the chorus was heard for the first time, on a Christmas Day broadcast of the new Phoenix radio station, KTAR. The 1929-1930 concert season was a substantial one for the new organization. An article dated February 13, 1930, in *The Arizona Republican* announces that the first concert is to take place the following evening and also tells of several other performances that the club had given for various civic clubs, dinners and luncheons. The article goes on to state, “The Phoenix Orpheus Club was organized under the auspices of the Young Men’s Christian Association to encourage musical talent among Phoenix men.”⁵ In another paragraph, “It will be the aim of the organization to give Phoenix a program of quality in order to demonstrate excellence of local talent, officers said.”⁶ The first formal concert took place on February 14, 1930, at the Phoenix Women’s Club.

As the February 13 article indicates, civic engagement outside of the concert hall appears to have been of central importance to the organization even in these first years. A February 14, 1930, article in *The Arizona Republican*, the day of the concert, says, “One of the aims of the board of directors has been to prepare the club for public service.”⁷ A second article from the same newspaper, dated February 15, 1930, says that the club was organized “several months ago

⁵ *The Arizona Republican*, February 13, 1930. Print.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *The Arizona Republican*, February 14, 1930. Print

for the purpose of giving Phoenix a society of singers to add to the cultural advantages of the community.”⁸

Russell left the chorus sometime in 1930, and in the fall of that year, Raymond F. Marquis was appointed as the new director of the Orpheus Club. Mr. Marquis was the son of Harry S. Marquis, conductor of the Phoenix Symphony at the time. During the 1930-31 season, the first in Marquis’s nearly eight-year tenure as director, there was significant growth in the number of singers in the Orpheus Club. The *Arizona Republican* article from February 14, 1930, indicates that there were thirty-five singers in the first formal concert. The February 9, 1931, concert program lists sixty-nine singers, and the May 2, 1931, program lists eighty-five singers.

The February 9, 1931, concert program, the earliest printed program in the collection, shows that the chorus performed nine pieces. Included in the chorus’s repertoire were a male chorus setting of Brahms’s *Cradle Song*, Clarke’s *The Blind Ploughman* (spelled “Plowman” in the program), and “Allah’s Holiday” from Rudolph Friml’s operetta *Katinka*. The back cover of the single-sheet February program gives Marquis’s description of the chorus. In part, he says,

The club is a non-profit educational institution. Its members dedicate one evening each week throughout the season to the study of the best male-voice music our literature affords. The club has no guarantors – accepts no donations. Its expenditures are limited to the cost of the music and smaller incidentals. Neither member nor director receives compensation

⁸ *The Arizona Republican*, February 15, 1930. Print

beyond the pleasure derived from the study and performance of the finest and most rarely heard forms of music – male-voice chorus music.⁹

Marquis also explains that the chorus is on “sound financial footing” due to “the large and well-merited patronage of its concerts.” He explains that a nominal admission fee is charged to provide music and meet auditorium expenses.¹⁰ The formal concerts of the 1931-32 season were held in the Phoenix Union High School auditorium, and the facility remained the main performing venue for the chorus through the 1938-39 season. The auditorium is now part of the Biomedical Campus created in partnership with Arizona State University and the University of Arizona Medical School. It does not appear to have retained any of the natural acoustics of the original space, since the facility has been acoustically dampened to accommodate lectures and multi-media presentations.

In the January 12, 1932, program, there are 108 singers listed. This was also the first time that the texts of the songs appeared in the programs, along with a listing of chorus officers. Marquis continued the broad spectrum of programming with ten pieces by the chorus and four piano duos by guest artists. Included in the program was a large extended work by Dudley Buck, *King Olaf's Christmas*, based in part on Longfellow's poem *The Musicians Tale: The Saga of King Olaf*. Other repertoire included J. H. Maunder's setting of Sir Walter Scott's *The Border Ballad* and Thomas Morley's *Now is the Month of Maying*.

⁹ Orpheus Club Concert Program, February 9, 1931.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Sometime in late 1932, in preparation for the January 12 concert, a handsomely produced booklet was mailed to Associate Members of the chorus. An Associate Member could purchase an annual membership for one dollar, which helped to provide a stable funding base for the chorus and entitled the member to attend club functions and formal concerts, then referred to as “recitals.” A portion of the mailer could be detached and returned so that the Associate Member could reserve seating for the formal concerts. The mail-in membership had the added benefit of building an address list for the chorus, which resulted in Associate Memberships that would number 800 or more throughout the 1930s. In the May 5, 1932, concert program, the first program to appear in booklet form, a list of the Associate Members appears. There are 675 Associate Members listed, as well as the 65 Business Members. No documentation shows what a Business Membership cost, but the listing of the Business Members established a connection with the local business community that would benefit the chorus for several decades.

During Marquis’s tenure, the chorus continued to grow in number, in part because he neither auditioned singers nor required that they be able to read music. Existing concert programs show a steady increase in singers from sixty-nine at the beginning of the 1931 season to 126 by May of 1933.¹¹ The programming reflected Marquis’s apparent vast knowledge of music, as indicated by the variety of pieces listed and the continued addition of guest artists. During his tenure, he

¹¹ Orpheus Club Concert Program, May 24, 1933.

was reported to have given some seventy-two music lectures around the Phoenix area.¹² In May of 1933, his connections with the Phoenix Symphony and the Musicians Club of Phoenix culminated in the first joint concert of the Orpheus Club with the Ladies Chorus of the Phoenix Musicians Club and the Phoenix Symphony. The May 24, 1933, program lists four works. The orchestra opened the concert with the Overture from *Pique Dame* by Franz von Suppé. The first combined piece of the three ensembles was Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's *The Wedding Feast of Hiawatha*. The orchestra then appeared alone performing *Ballet Egyptienne* by Alexandre Luigini. The concert concluded with *Italia Beloved* (as it appears in the program), combining the forces of the Orpheus Club, the Ladies Chorus, and the Phoenix Symphony.¹³

The back cover of the May program gives the reader some insight into the three performing ensembles that participated in the concert. The Phoenix Musicians Club had existed for twenty-five years and provided their audiences with monthly recitals of music from various genres. The Women's Chorale of the Phoenix Musicians Club had existed for five years as of 1933. They would appear regularly with the Orpheus Club in the ensuing years. The information relating to the Phoenix Symphony Orchestra labels it as the youngest of the major musical organizations, although the founding date is not given. The article states that the orchestra gives two "recitals" each year and is privately and permanently financed. Harry S. Marquis, father of Raymond F. Marquis, was the director.

¹² Cox and Lowe.

¹³ Orpheus Club Concert Program, May 24, 1933.

Information on the Orpheus Club occupies the largest amount of space on the program. By this time, according to the program, the club had 126 singing members and more than 2,000 Associate Members. No singer or staff member received any remuneration; the organization was still supported through the annual purchase of Associate Memberships. The information on the back of the program also indicates that the Orpheus Club had gained a reputation throughout the United States through its “regular broadcast programs” over the National Broadcast Company network and had received over 500 congratulatory telegrams and letters in response to these broadcasts.¹⁴ The program does not name the radio station, but KTAR was the only NBC affiliate in Phoenix at the time.

The information contained in the concert programs indicates the success and the growth of Associate and Business Memberships. The January 19, 1937, program boasts over 1,700 Associate Members and 155 Business Associates. The list of Business Associates includes such important names as Valley Bank, Sears and Roebuck, St. Luke’s Hospital, the *Arizona Republic* and the *Phoenix Gazette*, Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph, Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railways, Libbey Fruit Company, Goldwater’s Mercantile, Central Arizona Light and Power, Westward Ho and Arizona Biltmore hotels, and the AAA of Arizona. It is clear from this partial listing that the Orpheus Club had secured impressive support from the Phoenix business community.

¹⁴ Orpheus Club Concert Program, May 24, 1933.

Ramond F. Marquis remained as director of the chorus through the first concert of 1938, ending his professional association with the Orpheus Club following the January 18, 1938, performance. There is no documentation explaining the reason for Marquis's departure; it is worth noting, however, that there was a significant drop in the number of singers, from 126 in 1937 to 94 in 1938.

CHAPTER 3

NEW DIRECTORS, NEW WAR

Raymond Marquis was replaced by David N. Murdock, the son of the U.S. Representative from Arizona, John R. Murdock. Marquis had chosen David Murdock to serve as Assistant Musical Director in 1937, just prior to the club's becoming part of the Adult Education program at Phoenix Junior College.¹ Murdock had attended Phoenix Junior College and later the University of Arizona, where he received his bachelor's and master's degrees in music. Murdock was employed by Glendale High School, where he directed both the band and the glee club.

At Murdock's first concert there were eighty singers in the chorus, and the repertoire Murdock chose was somewhat lighter in nature than that of his predecessor. In the Cox and Lowe sixtieth anniversary booklet, Marquis was described as a disciplined and serious musician, where as Murdock is described as having a much lighter nature and affable personality.²

On April 25, 1939, perhaps as a result of their partnership with Phoenix Junior College, the Orpheus Club invited the Phoenix Junior College Glee Club to perform on the program. The concert was held in the Phoenix Union High School auditorium, which had been the major performance venue for the Orpheus Club for the previous ten years. But the venue was about to change for the club with

¹ Wayne Goulet, "Orpheus Male Chorus: 75 Years of Artistic Excellence." Unpublished Manuscript, 2003.

² Cox and Lowe.

the completion of a new auditorium on the Phoenix Junior College campus. The new auditorium was lauded in the press as having the finest acoustics in Phoenix.³ The Orpheus Club staged the first concert of its kind in the new auditorium on Tuesday, December 12, 1939. In a December 11, 1939, article in the *Arizona Republic* announcing the concert, Murdock is described as a widely known composer, pianist, and conductor.⁴ He continued to direct the chorus through the spring of 1941, providing audiences with one season concert each in the spring of 1940 and 1941 and three additional performances at Glendale and Tolleson high schools. These performances received as much attention in the local press as did the more formal season concerts. Murdock was drafted into the U. S. Army in the summer of 1941 and was killed in action in Sicily on August 11, 1943.⁵

World War II had its impact on the number of singers in the chorus as well. In 1938 when Murdock took over directorship of the chorus, there were sixty singers listed in the concert programs. The number of singers averaged around sixty throughout Murdock's tenure but began to drop steadily at the end of 1941, probably due to the exigencies of the war. In spite of the dwindling numbers, the chorus officers decided to keep the club going. In the fall of 1941, Fr. Owen da Silva, O.F.M., was appointed as director of the Orpheus Club. It is not clear what connection, if any, Fr. da Silva had with the Orpheus Club prior to his appointment as their director. He was a priest with the Order of St. Francis

³ Editor, *Arizona Republic*, December 11, 1939.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Goulet.

and was serving at the Franciscan Renewal Center on Lincoln Drive.⁶ Cox and Lowe suggest that Fr. da Silva was the right man at the right time, bringing a much-needed morale boost to the chorus and continuing the long-standing rapport between the chorus and the Phoenix community.⁷

Fr. da Silva's first concert was on December 16, 1941, and contained Adolphe Adam's *O Holy Night* arranged for male chorus and six boys, but the arranger is not identified. This is the first time that any children were listed on an Orpheus Club program. Fr. da Silva directed the Orpheus Club until 1943, when the Franciscan order moved Fr. da Silva to another pastoral assignment. In the only concert program contained in the archive from that year, dated February 9, 1943, there appears a list of "Members in Service," among them, Lieutenant David Murdock. The program lists only twenty-eight singers. The program also contains the text for the National Anthem, the first such appearance in any Orpheus Club program to this date.

In early 1944, Elmer Grundy was appointed director of the chorus. Not much is known about Grundy's professional background. His first concert, on April 18, 1944, was dedicated to the memory of David Murdock. The program included a performance of one of Murdock's compositions, *Desert Night*, for TTBB chorus and piano, with text by Margaret Wheeler Ross.

⁶ Goulet.

⁷ Cox and Lowe.

Also appearing on the program was the Ruth Freethy Dance Troupe. The all-female dance company performed the “Gypsy Dance” from Bizet’s *Carmen* (the program erroneously lists the dance as the “Farrandole” from *Carmen*) and a piece titled “Chopiniana Impromptu, Music by Chopin.” There are no opus numbers to identify any of the works, but the dance set included a Mazurka, the Waltz from *Le Sylphides*, and *Waltz Brilliante*. Throughout its history, the Orpheus Club made it a principal objective to include guest artists. Including a dance troupe in this concert was significant, as it was the first appearance of non-musicians as guest artists. Grundy continued to conduct the chorus through his final concert with the organization on March 15, 1946. Once again, the program was enhanced by dancers, this time Spanish dancers Jose and Florita, for whom no biographical information or last names are given.

A listing of patrons appears for the first time in an Orpheus Club program on March 15, 1946. Prior to this date, the Orpheus Club had retained Associate and Business Memberships as the basic means of financial support. Business Memberships no longer appear in the program; they are replaced by the roster of individual patrons. The number of patrons—only thirty-two—is significantly lower than the Business Memberships of previous years, but the names on the list are impressive, and they give a strong indication of the path the Orpheus Club was taking towards sustained financial support. Among those listed are Congressman John R. and Myrtle C. Murdock (the parents of David Murdock), Mr. and Mrs. Robert Goldwater (parents of the future Arizona senator, Barry Goldwater), and Dr. and Mrs. Grady Gammage. Dr. Gammage served as

President of Arizona State College (the forerunner of today's Arizona State University) from 1933 to 1956.

Lee Miller replaced Grundy as the director of the Orpheus Club and conducted the first of only two concerts he gave with them on December 10, 1946. By the end of 1945, servicemen were beginning to return home, and membership in Orpheus grew accordingly. In 1946, the number of singing members grew from thirty-one at Grundy's last concert in March to sixty on Miller's December 10 concert. Miller's second and last concert was on April 8, 1947. At the end of the 1947 season, Miller decided to return to his native Oklahoma to further his education. Ralph Hess, who had been appointed Assistant Director in 1946, took over as director of the Orpheus Club. This appointment began the nearly thirty four-year odyssey of arguably the most successful director in the history of the Orpheus Club of Phoenix.

CHAPTER 4

MILESTONES IN MUSIC AND MANAGEMENT

Ralph Hess earned music degrees from Central University of Arkansas, Northern Arizona University, and the University of Southern California. He moved to Arizona in 1929 and was employed as a music educator in the Glendale, Arizona, public school system from 1932 to 1945. Hess relocated to Phoenix in 1945 and served as District Music Supervisor for the Phoenix elementary school system for twenty-seven years, retiring from that position in 1972. He also served as president of the Arizona Music Educators Association and president of the Music Educators National Conference, Western Division. In 1964, Ralph Hess was designated as “Arizona Music Educator of the Year.”¹ Hess also served as Minister of Music for Central Methodist Church of Phoenix and later at Valley Presbyterian Church in Paradise Valley, Arizona. He was also a member of the Phoenix Rotary Club. His association with that organization would create many service and performance opportunities for the chorus both nationally and internationally. In 1979, Hess was made a Paul Harris Fellow, an esteemed award, named after the founder of Rotary International.²

¹ Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Fiftieth Anniversary Concert Program, March 17, 1979.

² “Individual Recognition: Paul Harris Fellow,” Rotary International, <http://www.rotary.org/en/Contribute/DonorRecognition/IndividualRecognition/Pages/PaulHarrisFellow> Recognition (accessed September 13, 2010).

A number of changes took place once Hess assumed the position of director of the Orpheus Club. The December 9, 1947, concert program makes the first reference to the newly established Murdock Memorial Scholarship. The scholarship was devised as a means of helping college-bound students with tuition costs. The students were required to apply for the scholarship, and the Board of Directors under the leadership of Hess would consider the applicants and then invite them to audition. The winners would receive a cash award and would also appear as guest artists in subsequent performances with the chorus.³

It is evident from the December 9 program that Hess and the officers of the club were on a path to create a new, fresh image for the seventy-five member chorus, both in the programming of the concerts and relationships with the business community. That booklet included the first paid advertisements in an Orpheus program. These appear in place of the Business Associates listings in earlier programs.

On the December 9 concert, the chorus provided the audience with a performance of “A Christmas Preview.” This was a scripted presentation with the chorus occasionally singing in the background. The scene was Christmas Eve, 1947, in a room in the American Zone of occupied Germany, although no more specific location is given. The characters were an American GI and a “child of postwar Germany.” The script for the scene does not appear in any of the archive collections at the Arizona Historical Museum. The only other information about

³ Orpheus Club Concert Program, December 9, 1947.

the scene is in the December 9 program, which lists Captain Mac R. Stanley as the GI and Florence Terrill as the child. The chorus sang the carols “The First Noel,” “Fairest Lord Jesus,” “Joy to the World,” and “Silent Night.”⁴

More changes in the printed program occurred in the spring of 1948. The names of the singers had always appeared in the major concert programs throughout the early history of the chorus. The program for April 26, 1948, lists the state or country each singer had originally come from, along with his profession.⁵ The chorus continued the practice of listing the singers’ professions for several decades to come. The program for December 7, 1948, added the number of years that each individual had been with the chorus to the member information.⁶ This was also the beginning of the Annual Christmas Concert series, which continued through 1956, another important innovation for the chorus and the Phoenix audiences.

Hess understood the region where the chorus resided, and he played upon that with concerts on April 5 and 8, 1949, saluting the Phoenix Jaycees World Rodeo Championship. This was an important and influential connection. The Phoenix Jaycees established the rodeo and parade as a means of funding their Underprivileged Children’s Christmas Party. There are two small-format programs that show the chorus appearing at the Christmas party, as well as singing the National Anthem at the rodeo. Hess was creative in his approach to

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Orpheus Club Concert Program, April 26, 1948.

⁶ Orpheus Club Concert Program, December 7, 1948.

programming, as is evident in the concert programs of April 5 and 8, 1949, which he titled “A Little Western Atmosphere.”

The repertoire for these concerts was light and celebrated the life of the cowboy with songs like “Red River Valley,” “Home on the Range,” “Home Sweet Home,” and “Honey, ‘A Little Moo’d Music.’” These concerts also inaugurated the long-standing Orpheus tradition of ending concerts with “Now is the Hour, A Maori Farewell Song.”⁷ This piece would close every Orpheus Club concert through 1964. Hess wrote the arrangement and always sang the solo, with the chorus accompanying him. The manuscript is still part of the permanent music library of the Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix.

In the years following the 1949 concert season, Hess and the Orpheus Club of Phoenix continued their quest to expand the number of appearances, although not always with full formal concerts. Ever mindful of the community they served, the chorus did smaller recitals and appearances for such organizations as the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Lodge #335, the Phoenix, Mesa, and Tempe Rotary Clubs, Williams Air Force Base, the Phoenix Baptist Children’s Home, the Arizona State Hospital, and countless luncheons and dinners. Their connection with the broader Phoenix area community also continued to expand, with appearances sponsored by organizations such as the Sunnyslope Concert Association, the Sunnyslope Women’s Club, the Mesa Women’s Club, the Phoenix Kiwanis Club, and the Glendale public schools.

⁷ Orpheus Club Concert Program, April 8, 1949.

Hess and the chorus realized that the formal concert hall was not the only place to connect with local communities.

Perhaps as a result of his deep devotion to the ideals of an organization like the Rotary Club, Hess took every opportunity to make sure the chorus members were perceived as civic leaders as well as quality musicians. Hess's involvement in the Rotary International would pay off again and again for the Orpheus Club.

In the December 16, 1949, program, the president of the club, John Holland, saluted the one remaining charter member: "Such loyalty may be attributed to the simple purpose of the Club...namely chorus singing and the enjoyment of the fellowship of group music."⁸ Holland went on to point out that the club had sung statewide, at war camps, the State Hospital, and the State Penitentiary. "We have sung for winter visitors, conventions, radio audiences, and we generally finish the year with Christmas Carols." Holland sums up by saying, "We hope your enjoyment of this evening's program equals that which the chorus experienced in preparing and bringing it to you."⁹ This sense of service to the community and to each other pervades the early history of the Orpheus Club. These same values will bring the club a new level of respect within the local community and take the Orpheus Club beyond the borders of the United States to set the stage for international recognition as Arizona's Goodwill Ambassadors.

⁸ Orpheus Club Concert Program, December 16, 1949.

⁹ Ibid.

Hess needed more singers to meet the demand for an increasing number of appearances, so the chorus advertised auditions for members in each of the concert programs. If Hess liked the voice of a potential member, but that person did not read music, Hess would place that person in between two singers who did read. To further improve the musical skills of his singers, he would conduct classes separate from rehearsals to teach them to read music, count time, and maintain pitch.¹⁰ Ralph Hess also asked his uncle and local voice teacher Homer Hess to augment Ralph's classes with sessions aimed at developing the vocal quality and technique of the singers. Neither man ever received any remuneration for these extra efforts.

¹⁰ Cox and Lowe.

CHAPTER 5

SOUTH BY SOUTHWEST

The 1953-54 season would prove to be one of the most pivotal for the nearly twenty-five-year-old male chorus. The Orpheus Club had already cemented its standing in the Phoenix community and was enjoying large audiences, multiple bookings, and a number of associations with professional and non-professional musicians throughout the city.

Perhaps the most far-reaching association occurred in the summer of 1953, when the Orpheus Club took over sponsorship of what was then called the Phoenix Boy's Chorus. Prior to 1953, the Phoenix Boy's Chorus had been sponsored by A. L. Moore & Sons Mortuary, when the chorus was known as The Moore's Boy's Chorus. Hervey Mastin, who worked as the mortuary's funeral soloist, served as the group's director. He had also served as Music Director of Bethel United Methodist Church in Phoenix.¹ Mastin left the Phoenix area in the fall of 1952 with hopes of establishing a cotton business, and the Boy's Chorus was left without a director.² Moore decided that the Boy's Chorus would not continue for the 1952-53 season, and the Orpheus Club assumed sponsorship.³

¹ Richard E. Shaffer, "History of the Phoenix Boys Choir: From 1947 through 1989" (DMA diss., Arizona State University, 1992), 32-33.

² Goulet.

³ "Boy's Chorus Reorganized," *Phoenix Gazette*, September 19, 1953, 7. Print.

Mastin's business failed as a result of devastating rains that destroyed much of the cotton throughout the state.⁴ Mastin returned to Phoenix and, at the request of Orpheus Club director Ralph Hess, resumed directorship of the Boy's Chorus for the 1953-54 season. The Boy's Chorus appeared on the December 1, 1953, concert with the Orpheus Club. They sang three pieces of their own and one combined piece with the Orpheus Club, J. S. Bach's, "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring."⁵

In 1954, Mastin resigned again as director of the Boy's Chorus. There is no documentation to explain the reasons for Mastin's departure, but in his 1991 dissertation on the history of the Phoenix Boys Choir, Richard Shaffer includes an interview with Mastin's wife, Clara. She suggests that there was "some kind of conflict of interests, but I'm not sure that I ever really knew what it was."⁶ Shaffer also explains that he was not able to uncover any further information that might explain the reason for the conflict.⁷ In the summer of 1954, Ralph Hess hired Serge Huff to direct the boys. Huff was a local music teacher who had just completed his Master of Music degree at Arizona State College. One of the conditions of the Orpheus Club's sponsorship of the Boy's Chorus was that the Boy's Chorus commit to appearing on the Club's Annual Spring Concerts.

⁴ Goulet.

⁵ Orpheus Club Concert Program, December 1, 1953.

⁶ Clara Mastin in Richard E. Shaffer, "History of the Phoenix Boys Choir: From 1947 through 1989," 36.

⁷ Ibid.

It is not clear why the boys didn't appear on the 1954 Annual Spring Concert, but according to Shaffer they did perform "one short program at Grace Court School in Phoenix, when the boys sang for the Orpheus men, and perhaps one Christmas engagement."⁸ Beginning in the spring of 1955, however, they would appear at each of the next seventeen annual spring concerts of the Orpheus Club.

Two smaller developments took place in 1953. The first was the addition to the club's schedule of a very popular annual religious gathering. Beginning in March 1953, the chorus regularly sang at the Annual Interfaith Outdoor Desert Devotionals. The event was co-sponsored by The Arizona Council of Churches and real estate developer and landowner Paul W. Litchfield. The site of the event was a beautifully landscaped area at the back of Litchfield's home. There are no statistics about the number of persons attending, but photographs in the Historical Society archives indicate that these events were well attended. It appears from the printed programs that the Orpheus Club would typically lead the gathering in the singing of hymns. They occasionally sang an anthem, but their participation in the Devotionals was more for singing support of the congregation than for performing.⁹

The Club also began taking part in the Phoenix Parks and Recreation's annual Week of Music celebration, which first took place in May 1953. The

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992. MS3. Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

concert series presented a number of performing groups from Phoenix and the surrounding area. The Orpheus Club was a regular participant in these summer concerts, which were held in the Band Shell at Encanto Park. The programs in the archive suggest that their appearances continued until 1964, although there is not a complete year-by-year collection of programs to support this speculation. The participation in the Desert Devotionals and the Week of Music celebrations was yet another example of the chorus's goal to engage with the community.

1954 was an important year for establishing the chorus's international reputation. In the early spring of 1954, at the invitation of Governor Ignacio Soto of Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico, the club embarked on its first tour outside of the United States. On February 20, 1954, seventy-two of the chorus members left for a two-day tour to Hermosillo. Governor Soto asked the Rotary Club of Hermosillo to assume sponsorship and coordination of the events surrounding the chorus's visit. Cox and Lowe, in the sixtieth anniversary booklet, describe the arrival of the chorus: "When the busses were ten miles from Hermosillo, they were met by a cavalcade of motorcycle police who escorted them through the traffic, with sirens wailing."¹⁰ The first concert, held in the Museum Auditorium on the campus of the University of Sonora, was a private affair with invited guests in attendance. Cox and Lowe report that there were 1,000 audience members. To demonstrate a sense of unity and cultural exchange, the Orpheus Club opened the program by singing the *Himno Nacional de Mexico* in Spanish, followed by "The

¹⁰ Cox and Lowe.

Star-Spangled Banner.” Cox and Lowe point out that the audience stood for both anthems, which led to an overwhelming ovation “that could be heard for several blocks.”¹¹

Two performances took place the following day, February 21, 1954. The first was held on the outside steps of the University library. The concert was open to the public, and by the accounts in the sixtieth anniversary booklet, there were an estimated 5000 in attendance. The last performance of this first tour took place in the afternoon of February 21, 1954, at a local radio station in Hermosillo, although Cox and Lowe do not name the station. The Orpheus Club returned to Phoenix the following day. Though it is not clear when or by whom the moniker “Ambassadors of Goodwill through Music” was coined, following the tour the title would become a permanent part of the identification of the Orpheus Club.

The chorus continued to maintain an aggressive concert schedule following their first tour to Mexico, with three appearances at the auditorium of Phoenix College in March, April, and December of 1954. The March 5 concert was a benefit for the Youth Employment Service and was sponsored by the Sertoma Club of Arizona, a local service organization. The program opened with the American National Anthem, followed immediately by the *Himno Nacional de Mexico*. The following month, the Orpheus Club sang in a combined concert with the Phoenix Symphony, the Arizona State College Choral Union, and the Lyric

¹¹ Ibid.

Singers of Phoenix College, culminating in the performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with Dr. Leslie Hodge conducting.¹²

The Annual Spring Concert took place only one week later, on April 27, 1954. The Phoenix Boy's Chorus did not appear on this program, though the sponsorship agreement required it. There is no explanation given; instead, Olga Rogers, a monologist, was the guest artist.

The Orpheus Club reinforced their reputation as goodwill ambassadors with two further tours to Mexico. On February 25, 1956, the Club traveled to Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, on a trip co-sponsored by the State of Guadalajara and the University of Guadalajara. The only documented performance of this tour was held in the DeGollado Theatre. *The Guadalajara Tourist News* announced the performance in its issue of Friday, February 24: "Choral group at DeGollado Theater: The University of Guadalajara and the State of Guadalajara proudly presents the Orpheus Club of Phoenix, Arizona on Saturday, February 25 at 9:15 p.m. at the DeGollado Theater."¹³ The concert was recorded, and the two-hour tape would become a promotional tool for the Club in late 1957.

A third tour to Mexico would come in February 1957 at the invitation of the Governor of the State of Sonora. Once again, the Orpheus Club of Phoenix would perform at the University of Hermosillo, but this time the entire tour was funded by the Portland Cement Company, according to the concert program.

¹² Phoenix Symphony Concert Program, April 20, 1954.

¹³ "Choral Group at DeGollado Theater," *Guadalajara Tourist News*, February 24, 1956.

Cox and Lowe recount a humorous incident that took place on the return trip:

After two concerts in Hermosillo, as the Club in its two chartered busses reached the border to re-enter the U.S., a U.S. health officer asked to see the vaccination certificates of the travelers. No one had bothered to secure recent vaccinations...the health officer announced all 80 of the tourists would have to have the immunizations before they could proceed. "I'll just have to vaccinate all of you myself," he said, and did, compliments of Uncle Sam.¹⁴

During the 1955-57 seasons, the chorus continued their appearances at the Interfaith Desert Devotionals, the Annual Memorial Services of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, the National Music Week concerts, and various Rotary Club gatherings. They also continued to provide one Annual Winter Concert and one Annual Spring Concert.

On May 5, 1957, the Orpheus Club made its last appearance in Mexico. The chorus had been invited by the Mayor of Nogales to participate in that city's Cinco de Mayo celebration. The singers traveled by car to the Arizona and Mexico border, and then walked across the border and into the Mexican city. "The men were scheduled to sing in a bull ring, but only a few spectators showed up, so the chorus moved to a bandstand on a city street corner and sang to their heart's content...they didn't even know if they were being heard."¹⁵

¹⁴ Cox and Lowe.

¹⁵ Cox and Lowe.

This small gesture of international goodwill was the last venture into Mexico for the chorus. But in the second half of 1957, Orpheus Club member and secretary of the club, Julius Festner, would have border crossings of a different sort in mind.

CHAPTER 6

CONNECTIONS AROUND THE WORLD

The year 1958 would prove to be a transformational one in the history of the Orpheus Club. The chorus was busy fulfilling the obligations of an active concert season, giving five formal concerts and six smaller-scale performances in the first five months of the year. They also continued their commitments to the Annual Interfaith Desert Devotionals and made other local appearances for service organizations. The highlight of 1958, however, was the chorus's first European tour.

Julius Festner, an officer and member of the chorus, had friends in Germany and Austria. Festner had served as American Vice-Consul in Germany and was interested in an exchange of international choral music as a means of broadening the repertoire of the Orpheus Club. He sent the reel-to-reel tape of the 1956 concert in Guadalajara to a friend in Cologne, Germany. The recording was subsequently played over a Cologne radio station. As a result of that broadcast, the Orpheus Club was invited to participate in the Third Annual Austrian International Song Festival to be held July 17-20, 1958, in Vienna, Austria. The 1958 tour took the singers to Shannon (Ireland), Heidelberg, Augsburg, Salzburg, Vienna, Landeck, Geneva, Paris, Brussels, and Amsterdam. Cox and Lowe point out that up to this point, the governing board of the Chorus had never held regularly scheduled meetings, and therefore the club was entirely unprepared for

the planning and organization needed for such a monumental task as taking a group of seventy-three singers on an overseas tour.¹

Financial records contained in the Historical Society of Arizona collection show that in September of 1957, the chorus had \$1,000 in their treasury. The estimated cost of the trip, according to records in the collection, was around \$47,000. The Annual Spring Concert, on March 3 and 4, 1958, featured internationally known pianist and entertainer Alec Templeton with the Orpheus Club. A publicity flier shows a silhouette of Templeton and states that all net proceeds from the concert will benefit the club's July tour to Vienna. According to his own publicity, Templeton was known as much for his ability to entertain audiences as for his competency at the piano.² Templeton was placed in the middle of the program, just prior to the intermission. He played Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," his own arrangement of Richard Strauss's "*Staendchen*," Gershwin's Piano Prelude No. 2, and a selection of four arrangements of his own, titled "Improvisation on Viennese Favorites." The club sang many of the selections they would perform on the upcoming tour. The Orpheus Club financial report for April 1958 shows that the chorus netted \$5,000 from the two performances. Donation records from the same files show individual, business, and service-organization contributions ranging from one dollar to \$1,000.³ Even

¹ Cox and Lowe.

² Alec Templeton, Concert Publicity, 1958.

³ Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

beyond those amounts, Goodyear Tire Company and Phoenix newspaper publisher Eugene Pulliam each donated \$2,500. But the largest single donation by far was that of western clothing by Levi Strauss and Company of San Francisco. Several letters in the collection document the negotiations between Levi Strauss and Ralph Hess. It was Hess's goal to honor the request of the Vienna Festival organizers by having the chorus wear costumes that represented the American Southwest. Through contact with Levi Strauss and Company, Hess obtained jeans and custom-made western style shirts. In return, Levi Strauss and Company expected their advertising to appear in all printed domestic concert programs for the season.⁴ In addition to the clothing donated by Levi Strauss, the choir members wore ten-gallon straw hats and red bandanas. They were also required to have cowboy boots, which each member had to purchase individually.

Despite the Templeton concert and a steady flow of individual and corporate donations, the chorus had less than a quarter of the money they needed by the end of the spring, according to Cox and Lowe. In May 1958, just two months before they were to depart, they had only \$11,000 in the bank, according to the financial records. Hess decided to approach two of his friends in the federal government to see if they would be able to provide financial support. He first contacted Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater. Goldwater had been an active supporter of the Orpheus Club, but in a letter of May 27, 1958, he writes:

⁴ Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

There is nothing in this world I would rather do than help the Orpheus Club in its efforts to get to Vienna, but at this moment, having just completed a new home, I am not in a position to make a contribution. I would suggest that you call my brother Bob at the store and see if he might be interested, but even in that instance, I am not aware of any excesses in earnings this year that would enable a sizeable contribution.
–Barry⁵

The very same day, Hess received a letter from Arizona Congressman John J.

Rhodes:

Dear Mr. Hess: Immediately upon receipt of your letter, I had a conversation with the State Department, and urged upon the State Department the merits of the Orpheus Club of Phoenix. I have asked them to make every effort to assist the Orpheus Club in some way. As soon as I hear from the Department of State, I will so advise you.
–John J. Rhodes.⁶

Hess also contacted Senator Carl Hayden of Arizona, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. In a rather lengthy response, Senator Hayden suggested that Hess immediately contact the American National Theater and Academy in New York, which sponsored touring companies to foreign countries following World War II. Hess wrote back to Hayden thanking him for the information regarding the Academy and inquired, at the suggestion of Phoenix Chamber of Commerce President Lew Haas, about the possibility of “the Orpheus Club men getting passage from New York to Europe on U.S. Army or Air Force

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

planes.” In return, Hess offered to have the chorus sing throughout Europe at U.S. military bases.⁷

The military’s response was not encouraging. Apparently, Hess’s request was a common one. In a response to Hess’s letter, R. V. Lee, who signs himself “Major General USA, Acting The Adjutant General,” refers to the large number of choruses that apply for assistance as “units.” Lee also explains that “the overseas commands have continually declined offers of thirty persons as being beyond their capability to transport, billet, and mess.” This apparently overtaxed the bases. He goes on to explain, “The highest priority and emphasis is placed on variety entertainment units which feature attractive young wholesome girls. In the category of choral music, mixed groups are much preferred to all male or even all female, since the flexibility and scope are greater.”⁸ The response from the Academy, which followed the letter from the Major General, was not any better, citing that the funds for the current year were already disbursed, and that the Academy preferred to present choruses of thirty-five or fewer members.⁹

An urgent plea went out to the local media, and on June 6, 1958, an article by *Arizona Republic* columnist Bert Fireman states that a public donation of \$14,000 was still needed:

If the club is to rock the hills of Austria with a rollicking rendition of “There’s Nothing Like a Dame.” If Vienna is finally to see a real Red

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Indian – with feathers. If the Orpheus Male Chorus members are to distribute Arizona Highways magazines through five countries. If songs of the West and songs of brotherhood are to be taken to Europe, which needs to hear the authentic, clear voice of America singing. Won't you please contribute your dollar or whatever you can? Mail your bit to the Orpheus Male Chorus, P.O. Box 217, Phoenix – and take pride in helping send the song of peace over the seas!¹⁰

Fireman's article is in direct response to his hearing the Orpheus Male Chorus sing at a lunchtime gathering of the Phoenix Kiwanis Club. The "real Red Indian" he mentions was Orpheus singer Victor Manual, who was a member of the Pima tribe. Fireman's reference to the "Orpheus Male Chorus" is the first time that the title appears in print, although the chorus retained its official name of The Orpheus Club at the time. The name Orpheus Male Chorus next appeared in March 22, 1959, in the Music Educators National Conference program in Salt Lake City, which the chorus was invited to attend.

The June and July donation records show a steady increase, from \$11,271 on June 13 to \$17,005 on July 11, 1958. These donations in combination with the balance in the chorus's operating account still did not meet the \$47,000 goal. As the July departure approached, and despite Fireman's plea, the chorus still found themselves nearly \$5,000 short. Two letters in the archive show that two local broadcasting companies, KPHO Radio and Television and KOOL Radio and Television, came to the aid of the chorus. Each of the stations promised to air spot announcements on four of their radio and television programs. The last

¹⁰ Bert Fireman, "Small Investment Can Help America," *Arizona Republic*, June 6, 1958. Print.

appeal was on KOOL radio, on July 8, 1958, five days before the chorus was to leave.¹¹

Cox and Lowe point out that each member was required to pay \$200 out of their own pocket to participate in the tour, and an additional \$200 if their spouse accompanied them. They do not explain whether the per-member cost was required prior to the fundraising push or as a result of the shortfall in donations. Nonetheless, the chorus did manage to make their first overseas tour.

There had been high hopes of the chorus performing in New York City on the first leg of the tour. They had applied to appear on the popular Ed Sullivan Show, but Sullivan turned them down, citing union regulations limiting the number of choruses that could be booked per year.

The chorus departed from Phoenix on July 13, 1958, after singing for well-wishers and passengers in the airport. The men were required to dress in western shirts, trousers, and cowboy hats, even while traveling. They flew from Phoenix to Oklahoma City, where they refueled, and then on to New York's Idlewild airport. In the airport, while waiting to change to the chartered flight that would take them to Gander, Newfoundland, the chorus sang for passengers in the airport terminal coffee shop and socialized with the patrons. The next portion of the flight was to take them to Shannon, Ireland, but after two hours of flight one of the engines developed trouble, and the plane had to return to Gander, dumping fuel as it approached the landing strip. The travelers would be grounded in

¹¹ Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

Gander for eight hours while a new plane part was flown in from New York. The chorus was put up in a “barracks-like”¹² hotel for about seven hours, where the men tried to get a little sleep. The chorus was awakened, and as they were served breakfast, they sang for the hotel staff to show their appreciation. At 2:00 a.m. the chorus was finally allowed to board and make the seven-hour flight to Shannon. On approach to the Shannon airport, however, the landing gear was stuck. The plane had to circle the landing field several times before the pilots could get the landing gear to work. The chorus landed safely and immediately began the second leg of their tour, ultimately stopping in Salzburg.¹³

The choir spent one night in Salzburg before the buses continued on to Vienna. On the way, one of the buses had a flat tire, and the chorus had an unexpected delay in the Austrian town of Wels. According to the account by Cox and Lowe, one of the local residents said, “You Americans are welcome by bus, but please don’t come again with planes and bombs.”¹⁴ The singers, who by now were accustomed to providing small impromptu performances, gathered in an area near the town center and sang for the local residents. Even in the midst of travel delays, the men of the Orpheus Club would make time to share their songs with people they had never met. This sort of generosity would earn them the title of “Goodwill Ambassadors” during their first European tour and beyond.

¹² Cox and Lowe.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

The Festival to which the chorus had been invited, the Oesterreichisches Saengerfest, was reported to have approximately 30,000 singers in attendance.¹⁵ In his account of the tour, columnist Ewald A. Stein says that there were 40,000 singers participating.¹⁶ The first official Vienna performance of the Orpheus Club came at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, July 19, 1958, in the Wien Grosser Konzerthausaal. Both in the sixtieth anniversary document and in Stein's account, the Grosser Konzerthausaal is said to have had between 2,000 and 2,500 seats at the time of the Third Annual International Song Festival. The total number of seats is not as important as the fact that there was standing room only by the time the Orpheus Club came on stage. After the chorus returned to the United States, Mike Mikol, who had served as the chorus spokesperson to the Vienna audience, translated an unsigned review from the July 23, 1958, edition of the Vienna newspaper, *Oesterreichische Neue Tageszeitung*:

Listeners stood in double rows in the aisles, on the stairs, between the seats in the galleries, and crowded and pushed by the open doors of the hall. Was it the announced appearance of the Pima Indian Victor Manuel who offered ceremonial chants of his tribe? Was it the cowboy attire? Was it the bright straw hats with their turned up brims as if taken from some movie? No, but even if so, this external showing vanished rapidly when the choral quality of the 80 men became evident. Originality, naturalness, power, heartfelt feeling (especially the negro spirituals) drew forth-thunderous applause and stamping of feet from the audience.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ewald A. Stein, "Singing Ambassadors of Goodwill," *Arizona Days and Ways Magazine*, June 24, 1962, 6.

¹⁷ Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

Another unsigned review (later translated by Mikol) appeared in the July 20, 1958, edition of the newspaper *Neues Oesterreich*:

In the Konzerthaus, there occurred a veritable sensation such as Vienna has not experienced for a long time, the appearance of the Orpheus Chorus of Phoenix, Arizona, U.S.A. Just the fact that they had a real Indian in their ranks was sufficient to cause a stampede among the public which overflowed the great concert hall. Their concert began, not at all exotic, but in a detached classical manner with motets by Palestrina and Victoria, and one could assure himself after hearing only a few measures that these singers from the West of the United States by no means lived only from the fame of their rare, ethnical addition. They maintained every rating given by objectively severe standards. They sang everything, rhythmically and technically intricate pieces, from memory, in a striking manner, with soaring ease of tone, incorruptible sureness, and firm musicality. The real sensation for the public, however, was of course the 70-year-old Indian, dressed in the showy garments of his forefathers who sang, unfortunately too few tribal chants. That Palestrina and Winnetou [a fictional Native American hero in the works of German author Karl May] are so closely related no one could have suspected before the concert. Now, one can truly say: music has no bounds.”¹⁸

The Phoenix press was equally enthusiastic in its reporting of the Vienna event. William H. Gooding was a Special Correspondent for the *Phoenix Gazette*. In his article of July 25, 1958, he reprints this excerpt from an account by an unidentified member of the chorus, under the title “Audience Reaction Brings Tears from Members of Orpheus Club”:

Vienna, July 20 (By Air Mail). The hall is jammed. People are standing in the aisles and at every exit on the main floor and in the two balconies. There must be 3000 people crammed into a hall built for 2000. There are photographers everywhere. We sing several classical religious numbers – the applause is solid. Then Phil Shaw, choral director at Washington High School, sings the Negro spiritual, “There Is a Balm in Gilead,” with choral

¹⁸ Ibid.

accompaniment. The applause is thunderous. We sing the Austrian folksong, *Ewig Liebe Heimat*, in German. This time there is not only applause, but the rumble of stomping feet and a sea of waving programs. We had lumps in our throats when we first came on stage; now tears are streaming down the cheeks of many of us. Director Ralph Hess signals to sing the second verse over again. Half of us could not make anything come out. The mood changes when we sing our “Ol Zip Coon on A Yellow Flute,” a novelty song. Mike Mikol explains to the audience how we are going to sing four old favorites at one time and that we hope to end up all together. Then Vic Manual came on stage to do his Pima Indian chant in full regalia. This is what the audience had been waiting for. They love our Vic. As we file off stage, we wave goodbye with our hats – 3,000 handkerchiefs respond. Those in the audience who were lucky to get one of the 2000 Arizona Highways programs which were distributed, ask members to autograph their pictures. Most of us get away after an hour. This evening we are invited to a banquet by the Vienna Men’s Chorus. Last night we fell in love with Vienna. Tonight we feel that Vienna likes us a little bit, too.¹⁹

The day after the Konzerthaus event, the Orpheus Club took part in a parade of all the participants of the festival, led by the mayor of Vienna. Cox and Lowe point out that the singers of the Orpheus Club were mobbed; the Viennese wanted a picture or an autograph of the American cowboys and Victor Manual. Captions under the photographs from the Austrian and German press nearly always included the phrase “Goodwill Ambassadors.” The following day, the chorus left Vienna for Geneva, Switzerland, on their way to Brussels, Belgium. The route might seem a little circuitous, given that the chorus also sang in Dijon and Paris, France, but here is where Hess once again used his Rotary Club International connections. The singers were guests of the Rotary Clubs in Geneva

¹⁹ William H. Gooding, “Audience Reaction Brings Tears from Members of Orpheus Club,” *Phoenix Gazette*. July 25, 1958. Print.

and both of the French cities, and they sang in concerts sponsored by the local Rotary chapters. Cox and Lowe briefly mention that the Orpheus Club even made a small appearance at the Moulin Rouge nightclub in Paris the night before they departed for Brussels.

Although the chorus was in Brussels for only one day and one night, their stop there would prove significant to the national and international recognition of the Orpheus Club. On July 26, 1958, at 4:00 p.m., the Orpheus Club was featured in the U.S. Pavilion at the Brussels World's Fair. In full cowboy regalia, with Victor Manual featured in the performance, the chorus made their final concert appearance of the tour.²⁰ The flight back to the United States started in Amsterdam, with the first leg of the flight taking the chorus to Shannon, Ireland, where this time the chorus entertained shopkeepers, restaurant guests, and travelers. The men made an impression wherever they went, because they were required to wear the cowboy apparel even when traveling between continents. After another mechanical problem kept the chorus in Gander, Newfoundland, for two hours, the chorus finally returned to Phoenix, arriving on July 31, 1958, eighteen days after they departed.

Hess and the chorus continued to receive accolades and letters of thanks from a number of individuals who had heard them. In the Arizona Historical Society collection, there are letters from the presidents of the Rotary Club International chapters in Dijon and Paris. There is also a letter from M. Arthur

²⁰ Cox and Lowe.

Kline, M.D., of the American Medical Association in Vienna. In his letter Dr. Kline says, "... your fellows made a wonderful impression here – one which will linger in the memories of the music loving Viennese for a long time to come. For my money you were real American Ambassadors and did more to establish good will here than a whole army of bureaucratic stuffed shirt diplomats ever could."²¹ Also preserved in the archives is a January 13, 1959, letter from the White House, signed by Howard Pyle, who had served as governor of Arizona from 1951 to 1955 and was now Assistant Deputy to President Dwight D. Eisenhower. In the letter, he thanked Alton Clark, Orpheus Club secretary, for sending a copy of the Vienna program to the President's office. Pyle goes on to say,

From many points of the compass, I have heard nothing but the best from this cooperative effort to make a very real person to person contribution to international understanding. Although it is understood that you all gave a great deal to the project, it must likewise be recognized that each of you in turn got a great deal out of it also. We hope it can be done again.²²

In the Historical Society collection there is one other document relating to this tour that is worth mentioning. The undated, unsigned press release announcing the first rehearsal following the tour on September 16, 1958, reads:

The members of the Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix who made the good-will mission to Europe last July learned conclusively that the language of music is understood by all peoples. Not only in their formal appearances in Vienna, Dijon, Paris, and Brussels, but especially in the

²¹ Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

²² Ibid.

many informal, impromptu bursts of song where at meal, rest, and overnight stops, they honored requests for them to sing. The Orpheus men had the thrilling experience of communicating with these people through the language of music. Even though most of these listeners did not understand English and not many of the Orpheus men spoke their language, it was most obvious the Arizona “cowboys” had spoken from their hearts to the hearts of the Europeans who heard them.²³

The chorus also received an official Recognition of Public Service from the United States Department of State. Simply dated October 1958, the document says in part, “In Recognition of Public Service, The United States Department of State extends to Orpheus Club of Phoenix, the appreciation for assistance in the American program for the Brussels Universal and International Exhibition 1958.” The document is signed by Howard S. Cullman, United States Commissioner General, Brussels Universal and International Exhibition 1958.

This tour was the first of five trips to Europe that the choir would take between 1958 and 1976. In addition to European travel, the choir also visited Toronto and Hawaii during this eighteen-year period.

In 1962, the chorus returned to Germany, having been invited to the hundredth anniversary of the Sängerbund in Essen. In 1964, the chorus would be invited to sing at the Rotary International Convention in Toronto, Canada and to perform three concerts at the 1964 New York World’s Fair. A tour to Hawaii would be the highlight of the summer of 1966, and the third European tour would take place in the summer of 1968. In a little more than twenty years with the

²³ Ibid.

Orpheus Male Chorus, Ralph Hess took the chorus on six tours outside the continental United States.

In addition to the tours in the decade from 1959 to 1969, the chorus maintained its support of the Phoenix Boy's Choir. The chorus continued its service to the community and support of service organizations throughout Arizona and the United States, and Hess's membership in the Rotary Club International would continue to provide an important link between this service organization and the chorus. The OMC continued its participation in the Interfaith Desert Devotionals in Litchfield Park and became a staple of the annual Pops Concert Under the Stars series held each May, sponsored by Central United Methodist Church of Phoenix. Typically the chorus performed with the McConnell singers from Phoenix College and the Phoenix Boy's Chorus in these May concerts.

On January 11, 1959, the chorus participated in a performance celebrating the music of Arizona composers David N. Murdock and Eugene Redewill, sponsored by the Society of Arizona Composers. Murdock had served as the director of the Orpheus Club from May of 1938 through April of 1941. Redewill was a local composer and owner of Redewill Music Store. The concert included one piece by Redewill, *Mignnone, Valse de Concert*, for violin and piano. The OMC performed three of Murdock's choral compositions, and Hess sang three of Murdock's songs. Hess also conducted another Murdock composition sung by the Women's Vocal Ensemble of Central United Methodist Church. In addition,

there were three pieces for organ and strings and one piano solo composed by Murdock.²⁴

On March 3, 1959, the chorus held its Annual Spring Concert at Phoenix Union High School. The theme of the concert was “A Vienna Musical Travelogue,” and the program was built around the 1958 tour itinerary. It began with a section called “The Departure from Phoenix” and included “The Star Spangled Banner,” “O bone Jesu” by Palestrina, and “Seventy-Six Trombones” by Meredith Willson. The stop in London was depicted by “I’ve Got a Lovely Bunch of Coconuts” by Fred Heatherton. Then there was a selection of pieces that the chorus had sung in an impromptu concert at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam: “As Torrents In Summer” by Edward Elgar and “Ain’-a That Good News,” a spiritual arranged by Dawson, though the program does not explain how these two pieces were representative of the chorus’s stop in Amsterdam. Just preceding the intermission, the Phoenix Boys Chorus sang J. S. Bach’s “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring,” Edward Purcell’s “Passing By,” and an American folk song, “The Arkansas Traveler.” Among the songs depicting Paris and Vienna were Jerome Kern’s “The Last Time I Saw Paris” and *Ewig liebe Heimat* by Otto Richter. The last selection on the program was listed as “The South Seas (in fantasy).”²⁵ It is not clear why Hess chose this for the closing of the March 3 concert.

²⁴ The Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Concert Program, January 1, 1959.

²⁵ The Orpheus Club, Concert Program, March 3, 1959.

The printed program also contained several personal accounts of the tour by club president Joe H. Wilson, Ralph Hess, and other chorus members, as well as translations of the Austrian newspaper reviews. There was also a one-page advertisement for attracting new members to the chorus. At the top of the page is a handsome photograph of the club in performance at the Wien Grosser Konzerthausaal in Vienna. The text underneath the photograph asks, “Do you like to sing? Did you sing in high school and/or college? Would you like to continue a singing activity?” Other statements contained in the body of the text are, “Orpheus is fellowship and fun through singing,” “Orpheus serves the Phoenix area as a civic chorus, singing for conventions, community functions, charitable institutions, etc.,” and “Orpheus makes periodic international tours for goodwill purposes.”²⁶

At the same time that their international reputation was growing, the chorus achieved expert recognition at home. In 1959, they were invited to sing at the annual convention of the Music Educators National Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. On the way to the convention, the chorus made a stop in Richfield, Utah, on March 19, 1959, to sing a benefit concert. Despite their grand success, the choir was still willing to help out a community in need. The Richfield Rotary Club was raising money to build baseball diamonds for the Richfield Little

²⁶ Ibid.

League and Pony League. In the spirit of “cultural citizenship,” the chorus donated all proceeds from their concert, a total of \$243, to the project.²⁷

Two significant changes took place at the end of 1959 and the beginning of 1960. Sometime in late 1959 Lovell Lieurance, a member of the chorus and local attorney, filed papers changing the name of the chorus from the Orpheus Club to The Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, which remains the name of the chorus today.²⁸ While there is no document or letter in the Historical Society archive collection that shows when the name change became official, all subsequent concert programs and publicity used the new name.

The second significant change came about in the summer of 1959 when Serge Huff resigned as the director of the Phoenix Boys Choir [PBC]. Ralph Hess hired Harvey K. Smith as the new director, and Harvey’s wife, Hazel W. Smith, as the accompanist. Harvey Smith had graduated from Scottsdale High School and had gone on to earn an undergraduate degree in sociology from Grand Canyon University in Phoenix. He pursued a master’s degree in music at the University of California, Los Angeles, and later at Occidental College. At the time he was appointed to direct the PBC, Harvey was serving as the Minister of Music at First Baptist Church of Phoenix, where Hazel served as organist. Harvey Smith was also employed as a music teacher in the Madison school

²⁷ Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society

²⁸ Cox and Lowe.

district in Phoenix when Hess hired him.²⁹ According to Richard Shaffer, Harvey Smith was very successful in building the PBC. There is little information in the archives beyond the OMC programs, which document that the PBC continued to sing on the Orpheus Spring Concerts. Meanwhile the boys' group began to develop its own following and reputation.

The OMC continued to capitalize on the success of the 1958 tour in its concert programs and publicity. In January 1961, Joseph Stacey published an article in *Arizona Highways* magazine titled "They Pay to Sing For Their Supper." A reprint of the article, which gives Stacey's account of the 1958 tour and additional historical and promotional text, appears in the 1961 Annual Spring Concert program. A year later, Joseph Stacey remarked that, as a result of this article, the chorus received "envelopes containing hundreds of U. S. and foreign postmarks brought the same general inquiry: Where can we buy a record (or records) by the Arizona Cowboy Ambassadors?"³⁰

This response would bring about the production of the chorus's first album, a twelve-inch, long-playing, high fidelity record. The album, a copy of which is housed in the Arizona State University Library, is titled "Arizona's Cowboy Ambassadors." It features a full-color cover photograph of the 103 chorus members seated and standing in a desert location. The album was sold locally at Redewill Music Store in Phoenix, and 500 copies were purchased by

²⁹ Richard E. Shaffer, "History of the Phoenix Boys Choir: From 1947 through 1989," 55.

³⁰ Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Concert Program, March 12, 1962.

First National Bank for distribution throughout the United States and in foreign countries. The album was made available for sale at the choir's 1962 Spring Concert. There was a half-page tear-out order form in the concert program that patrons could fill out and return by mail along with the five-dollar cost of the album (tax included). There were numerous requests for the recording from around the world, as Stacey writes in his cover notes for the album. He also writes that his January 1961 article reached 600,000 people through the magazine's world-wide distribution.³¹ An undated and untitled newspaper article in the archive collection states that two of the songs from the album, "Autumn Leaves" and "Yellow Bird," were on 5,500 jukeboxes throughout the United States.³²

In late March of 1961, the chorus received an invitation to participate in the hundredth anniversary of the German Saengerbund to be held in Essen, Germany, in July of 1962. The fifteen-city tour took them to Holland, Germany, Italy, and Denmark. Recalling the sensation that Victor Manual had caused on the 1958 tour, Hess had six teenage dancers from St. John's Indian School join the OMC on this trip. Victor Manual did not perform a solo in this tour program, but he did sing with the chorus.

³¹ The Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, *Arizona's Cowboy Ambassadors*, long-playing album, February, 1962.

³² Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

The first concert of the tour was held in Limburg, Germany, and was a joint concert with the Männerchor Eintracht of Limburg. The Orpheus Male Chorus sang a repertoire of spirituals, selections from the musical *Oklahoma*, Willi Richter's "The Creation," two American folk songs, and "Now is the Hour," which had been the choir's closing song for several years. They were joined by the Männerchor Eintracht to sing *Ewig liebe Heimat* by Otto Richter and "*Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten*" by Frederick Silcher. The Indian dancers performed a Zuni chant, "Wah Tah Ho." Männerchor Eintracht sang one piece in English in honor of their American guests: they opened their second set with "Swanee River." There are a number of souvenir booklets and handwritten notes in the collection, along with the tour itinerary and repertoire lists, but few newspaper clippings from either Germany or Arizona.

Cox and Lowe document this tour in their sixtieth anniversary booklet, but not with the same sense of awe or detail as their account of the 1958 tour. They continue to illustrate the many personal encounters the chorus experienced in the numerous stops they made throughout Europe on their way to the large festival in Essen. The chorus performed a major concert in Heidelberg. The authors' description of this concert indicates that Hess was replicating the successful costuming from the 1958 tour: "The Orpheus Male Chorus, in blue western shirts, black gambler ties, western dress pants, and 10-gallon hats, marched single file

onto the stage. The audience response was instantaneous, intense, and sustained.”³³

The chorus spent three days in Essen where, according to Cox and Lowe, there were 40,000 participants in the festival. Cox and Lowe describe the chorus’s triumph in Essen:

When the Chorus went on stage for their performance at the Festival, they were scheduled for 30 minutes. However, the audience requested more and more until the men had sung for 70 minutes. The program marshal finally interceded to give the other groups a chance while the audience booed and insulted him. When he held his ground, half of the audience walked out.³⁴

The Orpheus Club continued to express their trademark camaraderie. “Wherever the Orpheus stopped, whether they traveled by boat, bus or plane, they were met by enthusiastic crowds: fellow humans offering acceptance and friendship; music lovers listening for the pure pleasure of it.”³⁵

There is probably no better way of understanding how the group was perceived than in these excerpts from a letter sent to the Orpheus Club from one of the singers they encountered in Limburg:

Not everything which comes from the U.S.A. is better, but we could learn a lesson from the happy shirt-sleeved cowboys from Arizona. To us it was something so different, so unusual, this “hand in the trouser pocket” mannerism...Why did the Arizonians, wherever they appeared, receive such a tremendous ovation? Was it because they wore blue sheriff shirts

³³ Cox and Lowe.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

and cowboy hats? No! But they earned the right to be called Cowboy Ambassadors....And imagine, at the conclusion of a song, they even gave a yell and threw their hats into the air. That is the secret of the sunny boys of USA.³⁶

In 1963, the Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix received two invitations to travel. Rotary Club International was holding its international convention in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, June 7-11, 1964, and OMC was asked to furnish the music for some of their convention gatherings. The second request was from the Association of Male Choruses of America inviting them to sing with 2,000 other male voices at the World's Fair in New York City on June 6, 1964. The chorus accepted both invitations and continued their commitments to the Phoenix community as well. From October 1963 to April 1964, there are thirty documented appearances of the chorus throughout the city of Phoenix and the surrounding area. These performances ranged from the Annual Spring Concerts to appearances at senior centers, churches, service club meetings, banquets, conventions, and memorial services. In addition to the many performances in 1963, the chorus released its second album, "Orpheus at Christmas."

The end of 1963 was a dark period in the United States and around the world following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22. On November 26, 1963, a letter was sent to the chorus from Josef Seif, President of the Männergesangverein of Limburg, Germany. This was the first chorus the OMC had encountered on their 1962 tour, and they seem to have developed a

³⁶ Ibid.

strong bond with them. The letter appears in the archive collection in its original German version, but it was subsequently translated into English. Seif first refers to a German mine disaster that had occurred earlier in November 1963. He goes on to say:

All this, however, was nothing compared to what took place in our country and in the entire world when the news of the assassination of the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, coursed through the ether. The breath of the world seemed to stand still. No one knows how many tears were shed, in our land as well as in others, and even men, steeled in the recent wars, were not ashamed of them. We mourned together with the American people, and we feel the same as many other persons in the world...And so we wish to extend to you, the Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, whom we learned to know as such leading representatives of the American people, our most sincere and deepest sympathy on the occasion of the death of President John F. Kennedy. /s/ Josef Seif.³⁷

December was a difficult month of contrasts for the OMC. On December 13, 1963, the chorus performed in a Festival of Christmas Carols sponsored by the Downtown Merchants Association, an activity that Phoenix Mayor Samuel Mardian recognized in a Citation of Community Appreciation. Just five days later, however, on December 18, the choir sang at a memorial service for the late President Kennedy. The service was sponsored by the Maricopa County Democratic Central Committee, in cooperation with Maricopa County Republicans. There were seven additional civically oriented appearances by the chorus in December 1963 for service organizations like The Good Shepherd Home for Girls, the Soroptimist Club, and Phoenix Indian School, among others.

³⁷ Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

In May of 1964, shortly after the chorus's announcement of the invitations to the Rotary Club International Convention and the New York World's Fair, the chorus received a designation from Paul J. Fannin, Governor of Arizona.

Fannin's designation opens with, "WHEREAS, the Phoenix Orpheus Male Chorus has made a an outstanding contribution to the world of fine music and international goodwill," and concludes with "Therefore, be it known that in appreciation of the superior talents, and their generous gift of music for the enjoyment of all, I, Paul J. Fannin, Governor, hereby designate the Orpheus Male Chorus, Arizona's Cowboy Ambassadors."

This official designation helped to solidify the identity of the OMC for the next fifteen years, an identity that would be their trademark locally, nationally, and internationally. A reproduction of the declaration appears on the inside back cover of the 1965 spring program.³⁸

The chorus left on June 7, 1964, to sing at the Rotary International Convention in Toronto. Their first performance was for the General Assembly of the convention on Monday morning, June 8, 1964. The General Assembly was held in Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens, where Cox and Lowe estimate that there were 15,000 Rotarians from around the world in attendance. The chorus also participated in smaller gatherings at the convention on Tuesday, June 9.³⁹ From Toronto, the chorus traveled to Montreal and Quebec City for sightseeing and

³⁸ The Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Concert Program, March 12, 1965.

³⁹ Rotary International Convention Program, June 9, 1964.

then on to Boston, where they held their second concert performance, a benefit for a new school, before moving on to New York.

At the New York World's Fair, the chorus performed at three venues, the Tiparillo Band Shell and the U.S and Austrian Pavilions. Following the appearances at the World's Fair, the OMC was a guest of Del Webb at a New York Yankees game, where they opened the contest singing "The Star Spangled Banner."⁴⁰

The final destination of the tour was Washington, D.C., where the chorus had been invited to sing an outdoor performance at the Sylvan Theater, located near the Washington Monument. Senator John Rhodes of Arizona was the master of ceremonies, and Arizona State Representative John R. Murdock and his wife Myrtle C. Murdock were in attendance. There were a few remaining members of the chorus who had sung under the direction of the Murdock's son, David, which made this concert especially poignant.⁴¹

Some months later, the choir received a letter of thanks from Michael Foley, Director of Special Events at the New York World's Fair. He congratulates the group and goes on to recognize the singers' individual commitment.⁴² He says, "The effectiveness and success of the program was due to

⁴⁰ Cox and Lowe.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

the high level of musicianship and the fine performance of each member of the group.”⁴³

The only two programs from 1965 in the archive collection are for the Annual Spring Concert and the Wuppertal chorus concert, which the OMC had sponsored on October 1, 1965. The spring concert included some new pieces by Gene Burdette, a citizen of Waikiki, Hawaii, and a composer, arranger, and radio personality. His popular songs were a feature on his Waikiki radio program, “Hawaii Calls.” In 1964, OMC baritone Matt Mataluwie had met Burdette while vacationing in Hawaii. Mataluwie made Burdette aware of the OMC and later sent him a copy of their first recording. Burdette responded by writing three pieces for male chorus. He inscribed them, “Composed exclusively for Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix.” The chorus had sung Burdette’s “One Hundred Men” for the first time as the opening number on the spring 1964 concert and again on the 1965 spring program.⁴⁴ The 1965 program also had a significant departure from the long-standing tradition of closing each spring concert with the “Maori Farewell Song.” Hess had written this arrangement and had always performed it as a solo with the chorus singing the refrain. In 1965, Hess replaced the “Maori Farewell Song” with Burdette’s “The Music Fades Away.” The third piece Burdette wrote for the chorus was “Hawaii Calls,” which the OMC premiered on Burdette’s Honolulu radio show in July 1966.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Concert Program, March 3, 1965.

The second 1965 program in the archives is from a concert the OMC sponsored in October 1965. OMC member Julius Festner, who had been so involved with the early planning stages of the chorus's first tour in 1958, learned of an upcoming American tour of the Schubert-Bund male chorus from Wuppertal, Germany. The choruses had met in 1958 during the concert event in Vienna. To celebrate their hundredth anniversary, the Schubert-Bund had planned to tour the eastern United States in October of 1965. Festner wrote to the German chorus asking if they had any plans to travel to the western part of the country. The reply stated that they had not planned to do so and that extending the tour would cost an additional \$12,000.⁴⁵

The Schubert-Bund was willing to change their plans if the OMC could underwrite \$1,500 in travel expenses, sponsor them in a concert, and provide housing for the singers in the homes of OMC members. The German chorus would obtain the remaining funds.⁴⁶

The Orpheus Male Chorus took up the project, and on October 1, 1965, the German chorus appeared in concert at the Phoenix Union High School Auditorium. The concert program was extensive, with the Schubert-Bund performing 29 selections. The OMC appeared on the program in only a single combined piece, Richter's *Ewig liebe Heimat*, which had become part of their permanent repertoire. The OMC also sponsored the German chorus in concerts in Sun City and at a gathering of the Phoenix Lion's Club. In addition, they

⁴⁵ Cox and Lowe

⁴⁶ Ibid.

chartered buses so that members of both choruses could tour the Grand Canyon. As was typical of the OMC, there was an impromptu concert with both choruses at the Bright Angel Lodge at the Grand Canyon, followed by a chuck wagon dinner at the Williams, Arizona, ranch of chorus member Jerry Sullivan.⁴⁷ On the last night of the Schubert-Bund visit, the Orpheus Ladies Auxiliary provided dinner for their guests at South Mountain Park in Phoenix. Cox and Lowe report, “It was a perfect Arizona night with the lights of the city serving as a backdrop for the dinner and singing. Although neither group understood the words of the farewell songs, there was a bond of real friendship and affection between the two groups.”⁴⁸ After they returned to Germany, the Schubert-Bund thanked the OMC for the trip to Arizona:

Dear Song Friends: Prosaic Germany with rain and cold and the gray everyday life has us again! However, our thoughts are still in orbit as we remember the things and events which occurred there in your Fairyland...Many of my friends tell me (and this is my experience also) that while at work in an office or at a lathe they look up and catch themselves being somewhere in Arizona in their thoughts; in the midst of your laughing faces with those big cowboy hats, the firing of pistols upon our arrival, and the feeling of helping along in the boyish pleasure you manifested when you beheld our speeches and astonished expressions. We bow deeply before you, take off our hats, and offer you, the Orpheus singers with your director Hess, the generous hosts who took us into their homes, the whole city with your Mayor Graham, our most heartfelt thanks for an experience that comes only once in a lifetime.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Cox and Lowe.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

As a result of the Schubert-Bund visit, the OMC received an invitation to participate in the German Saengerbund to be held in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1968.

In 1966, the Orpheus Male Chorus would make their first trip to Hawaii, at Gene Burdette's invitation. This was a short tour by OMC standards, lasting only seven days with five scheduled concert appearances in addition to Burdette's radio show. The chorus performed at First Methodist Church in Honolulu, the Church College of Honolulu (a branch of Brigham Young University), the Pearl Harbor Submarine Base, the U.S. Naval Station on Oahu, and the Punahou School of Honolulu.⁵⁰

The Methodist Church performance came about as a result of Hess's position with Central Methodist Church in Phoenix, and the Church College performance was organized by Mormon members of the chorus. On July 26, 1966, the chorus made a visit to the USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor. Though it was not a performance, Cox and Lowe make it clear that it was an important and deeply meaningful part of the tour:

The men took their singing positions facing the white marble Roll of Honor on which all of the names of the dead are engraved. Never has the National Anthem been sung with more emotional intensity. Then as they sang "Let There Be Peace On Earth" the native American, long-time Orpheus member Victor Manual, Pima Indian, stepped forward to place a memorial wreath below the Honor Roll. Although there were tears in his eyes, Vic placed the wreath with simplicity, with great dignity and pride. The chorus stood for a moment with bowed heads and then turned to go. No one trusted himself to speak and there was scarcely a dry eye as they walked the length of the Memorial and boarded the Navy launch.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Tour Itinerary, July 1966.

⁵¹ Cox and Lowe.

They followed that visit with a concert that evening at the U. S. Naval Station on Oahu and a luau sponsored by the Edgewater Hotel where the chorus was staying.

While each of the concerts carried its own significance, the choice to present a program at the Punahou School in Honolulu was yet another example of the generosity and selflessness of the Orpheus Male Chorus. The chorus had been contacted by Commissioner William J. Parkins of the Salvation Army, Western Territory, who asked if the chorus would consider providing a benefit concert for the Salvation Army of Hawaii. The chorus agreed, and on Wednesday, July 27, the chorus sang in the auditorium of the Punahou School.⁵² All proceeds from the concert went to the Salvation Army, according to the printed program. There is, however, no financial data or correspondence to indicate how much money the Salvation Army raised as a result of the OMC's charity.

As they had for so many years before, the OMC began 1967 with numerous appearances throughout Phoenix, fulfilling the chorus's commitment to its home community. They released their third LP, "Stage West," just in time for their Annual Spring Concert. These concerts were especially big affairs for the chorus and, since the first public concert in 1931, they had usually been held in the Phoenix Union High School Auditorium. In 1967, there was a new opportunity for the chorus. They moved from Phoenix Union High School to their new venue, Grady Gammage Auditorium on the Tempe campus of Arizona

⁵² Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Concert Program, July 27, 1966.

State University. Since the late 1950s, the OMC had always had a committee in charge of staging and costuming, and this new venue gave ample opportunity for that committee to play out its responsibility. The chorus gave its single spring concert performance in the 3,000-seat auditorium on March 11, 1967. The production was apparently quite extensive, as Serge Huff, the music critic for the *Phoenix Gazette* wrote:

The spectacular and grandiose scale on which Orpheus operates is worthy of a large stage and unlimited facilities for lighting, staging, and accompanying ensembles, all of which were used to the fullest extent in Saturday's concert. So elaborate was the production that in view of the thousands of man hours put into the preparation of the show, we find it not a little disappointing that it will receive only the one performance.⁵³

There were some interesting elements to the spring program held in Gammage Auditorium. The OMC opened the first segment with Burdette's "One Hundred Men," which was somewhat appropriate, as the chorus had 115 singers at this time. Burdette's piece was followed with a mix of sacred and popular songs. The second segment was Randall Thompson's *The Testament of Freedom*. This is the first time that the chorus had presented this four-movement work, although Thompson had written it in 1943. Hess used organ, piano, and a complement of three trumpets. Following the Thompson piece, Harvey Smith conducted the Phoenix Boys Choir in five selections. The first appearance of the PBC in Grady Gammage Auditorium in 1967 with the OMC was well received.

⁵³ Serge Huff, "Spring Concert Orpheus' Finest," *Phoenix Gazette*, March 16, 1967. NP.

Serge Huff reported in a March 13, 1967, *Phoenix Gazette* article: “Mighty near stealing the show away from the veteran songsters (and obviously to their extreme satisfaction) was the Orpheus-sponsored Phoenix Boys Choir.”⁵⁴

When the OMC returned for the fourth segment, they had changed out of their white dinner jackets and bow ties and were dressed in their cowboy outfits to appear as “The Cowboy Ambassadors,” as they were listed at this point on the program. They sang four cowboy songs, including Norman Luboff’s arrangement of “The Streets of Laredo.”⁵⁵

Following the intermission, the Orpheus Male Chorus returned to perform a segment called “Memories of Hawaii.” The programming was very similar to the format of the programs following the European tours, with a sort of travelogue recounting the Hawaii tour. The chorus opened this segment with Gene Burdette’s “The Birth of Hawaii,” which the chorus had premiered one year earlier on Burdette’s radio program from Waikiki. ASCAP composer and arranger J. R. Amelung, a member of the chorus, created the male chorus arrangement. The piece contains a number of sections, not really movements, that poetically describe the “Creator’s work,” referring to the creation of Hawaii. There is no librettist listed on the score; it is possible that Burdette wrote the text as well as the music. The score is still in the permanent library of the OMC.

The program continued with five more pieces, including “Blue Hawaii” by Leo Robin and Ralph Rainger, from the movie of the same name, and ended with

⁵⁴ Serge Huff, *The Phoenix Gazette*, March 13, 1967, 52.

⁵⁵ Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Concert Program, March 11, 1967.

the “Hawaiian War Chant.” Hess did the arrangement and used an instrumental ensemble of Hawaiian guitar, vibraharp, string bass, and percussion.⁵⁶

The chorus followed their Annual Spring Concert with another appearance at the Pops Concert Under the Stars, held on May 22 and 23, 1967, at Central United Methodist Church. This concert, like all of the other Pops Concerts, was a combined effort between the Orpheus Male Chorus, the Phoenix Boys Choir, and the McConnell Singers from Phoenix College.

Only the Annual Spring Concert program of 1968 is in the archive collection for that year. In the spring of 1968, the chorus presented their second concert in Gammage Auditorium. This time the chorus scheduled two performances, both of which sold out. Hess reversed the earlier programming model of depicting places the chorus had been: in the second half of the program, the chorus provided the audience with a segment titled “Travelogue, a musical salute to the European Countries we will visit this summer.” The printed program also featured a cover that advertised the upcoming tour with a half-page photo announcement captioned “Traveling Again.”⁵⁷ This features a picture of Phoenix Mayor Milton Graham presenting a copy of the chorus’s newest album, “Stage West,” to Dr. Ingel L. Anderson, Swedish vice-consul in Arizona. The album was to be delivered to the mayor of Vasteras, Sweden, Phoenix’s sister city, in advance of the chorus’s upcoming tour, which was to take place in the summer of 1968. Another half-page announcement in the program lists the chorus’s itinerary

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Concert Program, March 25, 1968.

for the tour, as well as the repertoire for their main concert in Stuttgart, Germany, on June 20, 1968.⁵⁸ This tour would be the third European tour for the chorus in a period of ten years.

In the 1968 tour folder of the archives, there is an interesting packing list of required clothing for the singers: “one sport coat, preferably a Western jacket, two pairs of Frontier Pants (not including Concert or Parade pants), one or two neckties (not including Concert or Parade ties), two or three Cowboy shirts (not including Concert or Parade shirts), and 1 pair of Dress shoes.”⁵⁹ The concert and parade outfits mentioned in parentheses were again supplied by Levi Strauss and Company and were specifically designed for the OMC tour. Hess realized the impact the Western outfits would have on European audiences. The trademark outfits were required on both the 1958 and 1963 tours and on this tour as well.

The 1968 trip progressed in much the same fashion as the prior tours. There were many opportunities for impromptu singing at restaurants, hotel lobbies, fuel stops, parks, bars, and airports. Although the chorus performed in Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland prior to their participation in the large choral festival in Stuttgart, there were really two main missions for the chorus on this trip. The major event was their appearance at the Sixteenth German Saengerbundfest, which was held in Stuttgart, Germany, from June 27 to July 1, 1968. The second objective, almost equal in importance to the first, was to reunite with their friends from the Schubert-Bund chorus of Wuppertal, Germany.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Tour Packing List, June 24, 1968.

The two choruses had developed quite a bond, first in 1962 when the OMC toured Europe for the second time, and again in 1965 when the Schubert-Bund visited Phoenix under Orpheus's sponsorship.

The OMC arrived in Wuppertal, Germany, to meet the Schubert-Bund two hours later than their expected arrival time of 11:00 p.m. Nonetheless, the Wuppertal chorus was waiting at the train station to meet them, accompanied by a brass band dressed in medieval costumes. Just as the OMC had done for their guests in 1965, the chorus was housed in the homes of the Wuppertal chorus. Cox and Lowe indicate that upon the chorus's arrival there were already signs posted throughout the city that announced that the concert was sold out.⁶⁰ After three days of re-establishing their friendships with the members of the Wuppertal Chorus and performing a formal joint concert there, the chorus took a side trip to Leverkusen, Germany, to tour the Bayer plant and perform a joint concert with the Bayer Männerchor in the Leverkusen Konzerthalle.⁶¹

In Stuttgart, the Orpheus Male Chorus performed for approximately forty minutes during their main performance. Cox and Lowe point out that this was an honor, as the typical performance time at any of the ten venues in the city was twenty minutes per choir.⁶² The choir planned a twenty-minute segment, just as other choirs were required to do, but they were allowed to continue an additional

⁶⁰ Cox and Lowe.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

twenty minutes as a result of the enthusiastic audience response.⁶³ On the 1962 tour, the chorus had brought along six young dancers from St. John's Indian School to perform a segment designed to highlight the American Indian culture. On this tour the concert featured Enoch Walkingstick, a Cherokee Indian who had been a member of OMC for six years. Walkingstick sang *Wah Tah Ho*, a song from the Zuni tribe, in an arrangement Hess made of this chant for solo voice and male chorus. A mimeographed copy of Hess's manuscript remains in the OMC library.

On the day following the concert, there was a mammoth parade through the streets of Stuttgart. A Stuttgart newspaper article boasts that there were 120,000 singers participating in the festival and an estimated 250,000 persons in attendance at the parade and in the park, where vendors and carnival rides helped create the atmosphere.⁶⁴ Photographs of the festival show dense crowds gathered along the streets of Stuttgart, and just like the parades in Essen and Vienna before that, the Cowboy Ambassadors walked through the streets dressed in their western attire, waving their cowboy hats to the crowds.⁶⁵

At the end of the four-day festival, the chorus departed for their next concert engagement, which was in Copenhagen, Denmark. The performance took place in the concert hall of Tivoli Gardens. The repertoire was more extensive

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Cox and Lowe.

⁶⁵ Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

than the one for the Stuttgart performance, including songs from *Man of La Mancha*, *Dr. Zhivago*, *The Sound of Music*, *Wildcat*, spirituals, and “Vaya Con Dios,” described in the program as “A Farewell Song in the Mexican Idiom.”⁶⁶ As had become so typical of the chorus’s desire to establish goodwill wherever they went, they made a side trip while in Copenhagen to perform a short outdoor concert at the Old People’s Town: “Next morning the men sang in an outdoor quadrangle of a hospital for the aged. Some were in wheelchairs but most of the audience was in bed and listened with windows wide open.”⁶⁷

The OMC tour continued on to Vasteras and Stockholm, Sweden, and then to Oslo Norway, with performances in each of those cities. Vasteras and Phoenix were sister cities, and according to Cox and Lowe, Vasteras flew American flags throughout the city on July 4 in honor of the chorus’s visit. The chorus had most of the day for sightseeing and shopping, as their performance didn’t take place until 8:30 p.m. in the Folkets Park, an amusement park in Vasteras.⁶⁸

The chorus left the following day for Stockholm and gave a formal concert in the Stockholm Tivoli Auditorium on Friday July 6, 1968. They presented the same program as the Copenhagen concert. Ed Newkirk points out in the chorus itinerary that this concert was a “professionally sponsored concert,” and that wives of the singers and others who had travelled with the chorus would be

⁶⁶ Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Concert Program, Copenhagen, Denmark, July 1, 1968.

⁶⁷ Cox and Lowe.

⁶⁸ Cox and Lowe.

expected to purchase tickets for this performance. This is the first time that this type of information appeared in the tour itinerary. There was a similar notation regarding the July 8 concert in Oslo,⁶⁹ which took place on a rainy evening at the covered outdoor stage at the Vigeland Museum. Cox and Lowe say that the chorus had been left off several blocks away from the concert venue and had to walk in the rain to their performance. There were several hundred people in the audience for this final performance of the OMC tour. “They sat under awnings and umbrellas and demanded encores in spite of the weather.”⁷⁰

As one aspect of their community engagement, the OMC continued its sponsorship of the Phoenix Boys Choir. The boys sang on the OMC spring concerts and appeared with them on other occasions. By 1968, however, the PBC was beginning to grow into a thriving, independent organization.

According to Richard Shaffer, the 1967-1968 season brought the beginning of changes within the Phoenix Boys Choir that ultimately led to a change in the relationship with the OMC.⁷¹ Harvey Smith formed a Training Choir as a means of developing new singers, and he directed both the Training Choir and the more experienced choir. Shaffer does not indicate whether the addition of the Training Choir was done with any official approval of its

⁶⁹ Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

⁷⁰ Cox and Lowe.

⁷¹ Richard E. Shaffer, “History of the Phoenix Boys Choir: From 1947 through 1989,” 68.

sponsoring organization. The changes that took place in the fall of 1968 were directly related to the upcoming season. The Boys Choir had committed to a performance of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* with the Phoenix Symphony in April of 1968 and an appearance at the Music Educators National Conference Western Division convention in Honolulu, Hawaii.⁷² There was also the standing commitment to appear on the OMC's Annual Spring Concert in March of 1968. Shaffer reports that these three performances occurred within a forty-day period. The boys' repertoire was demanding enough, requiring them to learn and perform both Britten's *War Requiem* and *A Ceremony of Carols*. In addition, the trip to Hawaii needed to be funded, so the boys needed to give extra performances. The OMC agreed to contribute part of the \$13,000 cost,⁷³ which allowed the boys to travel to Hawaii.

The next season's Annual Spring Concert, held in Grady Gammage Auditorium, was again booked for two nights of performance, February 20 and 21, 1969. The boys performed an unusually extensive repertory on both of those nights. They began their set with Benjamin Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*. This was followed by Constantini's *Sing We Now With One Accord, Four Negro Spirituals* arranged by Phyllis Tate and accompanied by The Young People's String Orchestra (sponsored by the Phoenix Symphony), and *Sleepytime Bach*, an arrangement of Bach's "Sleepers Awake" by Bennett Williams. Including the eight movements of the Britten, this meant that the boys sang fourteen songs on

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

this program, while the OMC performed twenty-two pieces. The PBC was on a trajectory toward more independence. This independence would continue to develop further, until the complete separation of the two choruses in 1972.

In May of 1969, shortly after the Annual Spring Concert, the OMC received a letter and Honorary Certificate from Essen/Altessen, Germany. The certificate, although addressed to the chorus, was actually meant for Victor Manual. Manual had performed solely as a chorus member at the 1962 German Saengerbund Festival in Essen, Germany, and as a soloist at the 1968 German Saengerbund Festival in Stuttgart. The certificate recognized Manual for his achievements in the field of choir singing and served to notify Manual of his election to Honorary Membership in the Mannergesangverein, Harmonie #3 of Essen/Altessen, Germany. Accompanying the certificate was an engraved silver pin.⁷⁴ Victor Manual was not able to participate in the February 1969 Annual Spring Concert. He passed away on October 18, 1969, after singing with the OMC for thirty-eight years.

⁷⁴ Cox and Lowe.

CHAPTER 7

THE LAST DECADE

The period from 1958 to 1979 was one of growth in popularity for the Orpheus Male Chorus both nationally and internationally. The group made five trips outside of the continental United States in those dozen years, three of them to Europe, one to Canada, and one to Hawaii. It was also a period of growth within the chorus as indicated by the steady increase from eighty-five singers in 1958 to an average of 115 singers through 1979.

There was similar growth in the number of business sponsors appearing in the printed concert programs in this period. The programs were multipage, large format booklets printed on high quality, glossy paper, with pictures from each of the tours and numerous photographs of the director, accompanist, board members, and singing members. The chorus also produced three long-playing albums between 1962 and 1967. Their sponsorship of the Phoenix Boys Choir was consistent and proved beneficial for a good portion of the 1960s. By 1970, the Orpheus Men's Chorus had matured from a group of men singing together casually into a large organization with both an international reputation and a significant local presence. They had become a major component of the cultural life of Phoenix, which was poised to become one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States.

There is an unsettling lack of documentation in the Historical Society archives for the period from 1970 through 1979. In most cases, all that is preserved are one or two copies of the Annual Spring Concert programs. The

financial records appear to be incomplete compared to previous years, and in some cases (for example, from 1961 to 1974) they are absent altogether. The administration files contain little correspondence, and documents regarding rehearsals and other concert information are limited to a scant collection of items concerning the occasional appearance of the chorus at a corporate gathering or church service. Information in the publicity files is lacking, and there are no files from 1970-1972, 1974-1975, and 1977-1983. Therefore, in order to document this period, we must rely heavily (and sometimes exclusively) on the information from the Cox and Lowe sixtieth anniversary booklet. This booklet contains no attributions for individual comments, interviews, or correspondence, although a list of persons who contributed information appears at the end of the non-paginated booklet.

At the beginning of 1970, the chorus was no doubt still feeling the loss of Victor Manual, who had passed away on October 18, 1969. Their mood was perhaps brightened on January 15, 1970, when the chorus received another award, this time from Greater Arizona Savings. The award, with its engraved motto "Builders of a Greater Arizona," was a medallion encased in Plexiglas, within a wooden frame. The award was given to the Orpheus Male Chorus for the recognition they brought to Arizona through the field of entertainment. In the spring 1970 concert program there is reference to the chorus's participation in the soundtrack for a movie on American heritage titled "I Am an American."

The program states that the movie was distributed to high schools and service organizations around the country.¹

In 1970, the relationship between the OMC and the PBC was about to take a significant turn. The PBC, under the direction of Harvey Smith, had begun to establish itself as a reputable and successful performing ensemble quite apart from their association with the OMC. Richard Shaffer states: “Smith was aware of the widening rift between the PBC and its long-time sponsor, the OMC. Due to the recent successes at the MENC and ACDA conventions, Smith viewed future touring possibilities with great enthusiasm. Unfortunately, that enthusiasm was not shared by the OMC.”² In response, the boys’ chorus founded the Phoenix Boys Choir Association as a way of coordinating volunteers and raising funds, according to Shaffer.³ He further relates, “On July 6th, 1970, a meeting was held by the OMC’s Boys’ Choir Steering Committee to establish clear guidelines regarding financial support and ownership of the PBC. The OMC committed \$2,000 to the PBC for the 1970-71 season.”⁴ It was understood at that point that any special projects or trips by the PBC would become their sole financial responsibility. Shaffer says that Smith knew the PBC would require more funding than the Orpheus chorus could provide. Thus began the PBC’s move away from

¹ Orpheus Male Chorus Records, 1929-1992, MS 3, Library and Archives, Central Arizona Division, Arizona Historical Society.

² Richard E. Shaffer, “History of the Phoenix Boys Choir: From 1947 through 1989,” 85.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

OMC oversight and support, although the boys continued to perform on the OMC Annual Spring Concerts for two more seasons.

The printed program from the 1970 Annual Spring Concert is the only document in the 1970 concert file. The cover art of the program is reminiscent of that on the 1970 release of the Led Zeppelin III album. The March 7, 1970, concert held in Grady Gammage Auditorium was titled “Songs For The Seventies,” although there is nothing in the repertoire that suggests anything relating to the new decade. Hess opened the program with a set of “Songs of Worship.” These included Vitoria’s *O Vos Omnes*, which was a staple of the repertoire throughout Hess’s tenure with the chorus. There were also arrangements of hymns, a spiritual, and a premier of “Redemption” by chorus member and ASCAP composer J. R. Amelung. The Phoenix Boys Choir followed with six of their eleven pieces (compared to OMC’s fourteen pieces) for this concert. Daniel Pinkham’s setting of *Ave Maria*, four sixteenth-century motets, and the *Alleluia* from Mozart’s *Exsultate, jubilate* K. 553, comprised their first set. The OMC followed with a set called “Songs of Romance,” beginning with Romberg’s “Serenade” from *The Student Prince*.

The Boys Choir followed the OMC set with two more sixteenth-century motets and three pieces by Zoltán Kodály.⁵ The last two segments of the OMC performance were a mixture of cowboy songs, selections from *South Pacific*, two spirituals, “Dry Bones” and “When the Saints Go Marching In,” and “Clancy

⁵ Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Concert Program, March 7, 1970.

Lowered the Boom,”⁶ which had appeared several times in previous seasons. The printed program also contained a memorial to Victor Manual and announcements of the upcoming tour to the Fifth International Song Festival in Vienna that was to take place in the summer of 1971.

The cover art for the Annual Spring Concert Program of March 13, 1971, depicts a large compass and carries the title “Roads to Roam,” a reference to the tour planned for July that included a stop in the Italian capitol. The repertoire for the concert included very little new material. In fact, it contained fifteen selections from prior seasons and tours. The one new piece that stands out is the popular song of the time, “By The Time I Get to Phoenix,” by Jim Webb and arranged by Jerry Lehmeier. The concert program has a full-page description of the upcoming tour indicating that the pieces heard on the March 13 concert would be similar to the repertoire for the tour. The program also lists 124 singers, the largest number of members in the first fifty years of the organization.

The most important information in the printed program from March 13 is a statement that the PBC was being “co-sponsored” by the Orpheus Male Chorus, a subtle indication of the PBC’s shift toward independence. This is the first public reference to shared sponsorship, although there is nothing in the program that identifies the other co-sponsors.

The tour in 1971, the fourth European tour for the chorus, took the OMC to London, Rome, Paris, Vienna, and Munich. Cox and Lowe provide a very brief

⁶ Ibid.

overview of the tour. They list the major performances and mention just a few of the personal encounters for which the “Cowboy Ambassadors” had become so well known. Cox and Lowe tell of the chorus singing in Gatwick Airport outside of London while waiting for their luggage, of the first formal program at a luncheon of the London Rotary Club, and of another impromptu sing at Victoria Station before boarding the train to head for Rome. There is a humorous story about the chorus’s arrival in Rome, which shows the dedication of a single person to the success of the tour. From Cox and Lowe’s account, the domestic staff at the hotel had gone on strike. “Lynn Gage, the tour director, had flown on ahead to be sure everything was in readiness. When he found this wasn’t so, he made up 40 of the hotel’s beds himself.”⁷ The chorus did not perform a formal concert in Rome, but Cox and Lowe indicate, without giving many details, that there were informal singing breaks throughout the three days the chorus was in Rome. The chorus then traveled from Rome to Vienna, stopping only in Venice to change trains.

The Fifth International Chorus Festival, held in Vienna in July of 1971, was the Orpheus Male Chorus’s third appearance at this event. Cox and Lowe devote only a couple of paragraphs to the festival, but they do say that the chorus sang for a televised presentation from the Chinese Pagoda in the English Gardens of Munich. They also briefly report that the chorus recorded several numbers in the studios of Radio Free Europe.

⁷ Cox and Lowe.

The archive files for 1972 contain only four documents. The first is a flier announcing the OMC's participation in the Horseless Carriage Convention held at the Pasadena, California, Hilton, on January 22, 1972. The flier does not list any repertoire. The second document is the printed program from the Annual Spring Concert, which took place on March 18, 1972. This program, like all other post-tour programs, contained a description of the 1971 tour. This time, however, the narrative is so brief and so similar to those of previous tours that it could refer to any of them. The third document is a program from the May 1972 Annual Pops Concert Under the Stars. It is difficult to determine how many of these Pops Concerts the OMC had performed in, as the printed programs do not appear with any regularity in the collection.

1972 would bring about the last performance of the Phoenix Boys Choir at the OMC's Annual Spring Concerts. The Phoenix Boys Choir repertoire on the March 18 concert was ambitious to say the least. The first half of the program included Three Sacred Choruses for Treble Voices, Opus 37, by Brahms, and Psalm 150, Opus 67, by Britten. In the second half of the concert, the Boys Choir performed two Japanese folk songs, two Russian folk songs (no composer or arranger is listed), and eight other pieces, of which four were sung in Spanish. In contrast, the OMC repertoire was a much lighter collection of popular songs, folk songs, and show tunes.⁸

The Orpheus Male Chorus, Concert Program, March 18, 1972

Shaffer offers some insight into the last days of the association between the two choruses: “Three days after the [March 18, 1972] concert, the OMC Board of Directors passed a motion to no longer provide monetary support to the PBC as of August the 31st, 1972.”⁹ Following their performance on the Annual Spring Concert, the PBC fulfilled their obligation to the May 5, 1972, Pops Concert Under the Stars. This was to be their last appearance with the Orpheus Male Chorus under their sponsorship.

The 1972 season ended the following night, on May 6, 1972, with the celebration by the Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the directorship of Ralph Hess. A dinner reception and tribute took place at the Del Webb Townhouse. Cox and Lowe summarize the tribute, although it is not clear whether the text was spoken at the event or appeared in some printed form. “The tribute spoke of Ralph as an esteemed friend, educator, musician, churchman, Rotarian, scout leader...Mr. Music of Arizona.”¹⁰

Very little information about OMC exists in the Arizona Historical Society Collection for 1973-76, so it is impossible to construct a detailed account of those three years. The chorus continued its Annual Spring Concert series and its participation in the Annual Pops Concert Under the Stars.

In the absence of the Phoenix Boys Choir, the Annual Spring Concert of March 1973 included Thomas L. Thomas as guest artist. Thomas, who lived in

⁹ Richard E. Shaffer, “History of the Phoenix Boys Choir: From 1947 through 1989.” 90.

¹⁰ Cox and Lowe.

Scottsdale at the time, had an extensive radio career, most notably as the “Voice of Firestone.” He performed pieces by Handel, Britten, de Falla, and Berlioz, as well as *Ar Hyd Y Nos*, a folk song from his native Wales. A somewhat unusual part of the program came after the last set by the Orpheus Male Chorus.

Following “Aquarius/Let The Sunshine In” by Galt MacDermot from the musical *Hair*, the curtain was closed for a moment, and then Thomas reappeared on stage to end the concert with the Edvard Grieg song “Landsighting.” In a program where the chorus sang mostly popular songs and selections from *My Fair Lady*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and cowboy songs, the Grieg piece must have seemed a little out of place as a concert closer.

The printed program for the 1973 Spring Concert includes an overview of the upcoming season. Here we get another indication of the chorus’s civic involvement. The program lists two March appearances, a dedication concert for the new Auditorium at South Mountain High School and a benefit concert for the Lions Club of Kingman, Arizona. Also listed are an April performance for the Southwest Electric Conference at the Arizona Biltmore and the Annual Pops Concert Under the Stars, held at Central Methodist Church in May of 1973.

In the fall of 1973, the chorus released their fourth album, “Glory,” a compilation of religious songs and spirituals. Many of the songs on the album would be presented on the Annual Spring Concert the following year. The highlight for the chorus in 1973 came in the fall when, on October 19, they once again hosted their friends from the Schubert-Bund of Wuppertal, Germany. The German chorus stayed in Phoenix for five days and presented a concert at Grady

Gammage Auditorium. The OMC sang only in two combined pieces with the Schubert-Bund, “There is a Balm in Gilead,” arranged by William Dawson, and the “Lorelei Legend” by Friedrich Silcher. There is an impressive photograph in the 1973 publicity file of the Historical Society collection from the concert, which shows the Orpheus Male Chorus in white dinner jackets and the Schubert-Bund in black tuxedos standing in alternating formation on the Grady Gammage stage.

There are no records of the OMC in the Historical Society collection for the 1974 season. For 1975, there is one Spring Concert program and one article from the *Phoenix Gazette* by staff writer Les Masters and published on March 29, 1975. The piece gives a little of the history of the chorus and then quotes Ralph Hess: “The men devote their time and effort to the organization, just because they love to sing. That is what Orpheus is for – to give an outlet to men who love to sing, and who love the fellowship.”¹¹ Masters continues his article by providing some information regarding the upcoming concert at Grady Gammage Auditorium. “The concert will feature guest Lyn Larsen, organist, playing the Aeolian-Skinner organ in the auditorium. His program is unannounced, since he prefers to narrate and introduce his own portion of the program.”¹² Larsen is a world-renowned theater organist who, at the time of the March 1975 concert, was the principal organist at Organ Stop Pizza in Phoenix. In addition, he toured internationally, playing some of the world’s best theater organs. Masters goes on

¹¹ Les Masters, “Love of Singing Makes Orpheus Chorus Tick,” *The Phoenix Gazette*, March 29, 1975 NP. Print

¹² Ibid.

to say, “Musically, the Orpheus attempts to make each concert a cross section of many things.” He then quotes Hess: “Purists in music might criticize our kind of music because we don’t stick to one kind. But we feel we know our audiences pretty well.”¹³

Pieces selected for the 1975 performance were pulled from the OMC permanent repertoire and included the by now traditional mixture of sacred pieces, songs from their tour repertoire, and a segment of songs from “The Cowboy Ambassadors.” The printed program includes the following address to the audience from the Orpheus members:

We of the Orpheus Male Chorus sincerely enjoyed the opportunity of being with you this evening. We hope that our music in some way made your day a memorable one. We gather together in one large body to express ourselves in a language that is universal the world 'round. From way down south of the border to the Indian reservation at Window Rock – From the Easter Sunrise Services each spring to the Crippled Children’s Hospital at Yuletide – From “Wonderful Copenhagen” to the festive life in Vienna, we sing for the joy that returns to us and attempt in this musical fashion to spread the feeling of fellowship with our brethren in all walks of life.¹⁴

This somewhat generic sentiment stands in sharp contrast to the moving anecdotes given in earlier programs. As the amount of documented information decreases in the Historical Society archives, so too do the personal expressions of what the Orpheus Male Chorus represented for its members and audiences.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Concert Program, April 5, 1975.

As was true of most performing arts organizations in the United States Bicentennial year of 1976, the OMC was busy with patriotic-themed performances. That year the chorus also made its fifth tour to Europe and released their fourth record album, "Liberty, Our Heritage." The April 10, 1976, Annual Spring Concert carried the same title as the album, and most of repertoire performed on the concert was from the album. The first part of the concert contained a collection of patriotic and early American songs, such as Helen Steele's "America, Our Heritage" and Wallingford Riegger's arrangement, "Songs of Stephen Foster." Also on the program were "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," arranged by Wilhousky, and "When the Saints Go Marching In," arranged by Don Large.

A set of three American folk songs was performed by a "Semi-Chorus," but the members of this small ensemble are not listed. The chorus closed out the first half of the concert with "God Bless America," arranged by Roy Ringwald, followed by "A George M. Cohan Patriotic Fantasy," arranged by Walter Ehret and Paul Yoder. In the second half of the concert, the chorus opened with Randall Thompson's *The Testament of Freedom* and closed with "I Am an American." This last item appears to be a compilation of patriotic songs from the movie of the same title. The performance included a narrator, and there was a slide presentation adapted by Ewald A. Stein that accompanied the music.¹⁵

¹⁵ The Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Concert Program, April 10, 1976.

Also contained in the April concert program was information on a new scholarship that the chorus had established:

The Orpheus Scholarship program provides two \$1,000 scholarships each year to assist Arizona students in furthering their education. Applicants must be Arizona residents, at least 16 years of age, and a high school graduate or equivalent by September 1st of the year of the award. Applicants must be planning an advanced educational program in which music is an integral part, though not necessarily as a major. Selection of the winners is based on the applicants' interest in and use of music in their plans and the extent to which these plans help to further the Orpheus objective of goodwill, peace and understanding among all people.¹⁶

The chorus has continued to offer these two \$1,000 scholarships to qualified students from Arizona, although current publicity does not show any scholarship information.

Two weeks later, on Sunday, April 25, 1976, the OMC was one of many performing groups that participated in a bicentennial event celebrating the dedication of Patriots Square in downtown Phoenix. The program, which lists all of the events, does not name the songs performed by the chorus, but it does indicate that the OMC had a full half-hour time slot, while other groups were typically scheduled for twenty minutes.

On June 7, 1976, the Orpheus Male Chorus embarked on its fifth European tour in a little over twenty years. The tour was very similar in many respects to the four previous trips to Europe. This time the chorus was bound for the Deutscher Saengerbund Chorfest in West Berlin. After clearing customs in

¹⁶ Ibid.

Brussels, the chorus headed by bus to Cologne where they were met by their long-time friends, the Schubert-Bund from Wuppertal, Germany. The German chorus once again hosted the OMC singers in their homes, and the OMC offered three concerts in Cologne. The first was an outdoor concert during the afternoon of June 8 for the Cologne Rotary Club. That evening the chorus gave a second concert in Hagen, and the following evening they sang another in a Wuppertal church. The information on these concerts is very limited in Cox and Lowe's sixtieth anniversary booklet, with only a sentence devoted to each of the three performances. On Thursday, June 10, the chorus left their friends in Wuppertal and traveled to Berlin. The first performance there was given at noon on Friday, June 11, 1976, for a lunchtime meeting of the Berlin Rotary Club. A second concert took place that same day in the late afternoon on the steps of an unidentified church. Cox and Lowe once again point out the popularity of the American Indians who accompanied the chorus on this tour. Saturday, June 12, 1976, was the day of the formal performance at the Kongresshalle. Cox and Lowe do not provide any details about this concert beyond the fact that the OMC encores were cut short by the Director of the Deutscher Saengerbund Chorfest, who "entered an effusive speech of appreciation, congratulations and praise."¹⁷ The tour continued on to Hanover and then Vienna. It does not appear that the chorus performed a formal concert in either city. The group went on to Zurich and Lucerne, Switzerland, before returning to Brussels for the trip back to the

¹⁷ Cox and Lowe.

United States. There were apparently few personal encounters with individuals or groups outside of the major performances, and Cox and Lowe have resorted to reporting the incidental sightseeing trips of members of the chorus, with the result that the account is not much more than a vague travelogue.

There are only two programs in the 1977 concert file, the Annual Spring Concert program and the Summer Pops Under the Stars program. One gets the sense that in the mid-seventies things began to wind down for the chorus. Beyond the obvious lack of documentation in the Historical Society archives, there is little to no passion in the reporting that appears in the Cox and Lowe booklet. There are fewer accounts of civic involvement for the chorus, and there are only a handful of programs from a few service organizations. Despite an apparent decline in activity (if the scarcity of material in the archives is any indication), Hess maintained a roster of over one hundred singing members through the end of the decade. It is entirely possible, however, that the scarcity of material is a result of poor record-keeping rather than a lessening of the chorus's work. There is no way to be certain about which is the correct interpretation.

The Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in the spring of 1979. Despite the significance of this milestone, there are only three documents in the Arizona Historical Museum archives relating to it.

The first document is a single copy of the program from the March 17, 1979, Annual Spring Concert, titled "Fifty Years with Orpheus." As had been the practice, the first two pages of the program have photos and biographies of the director, Ralph Hess; the accompanist, Zoe Beaff; the chorus president, John

Todd; and the assistant director, Paul Morrow. The next page of the program lists all of the current members with their professions and the number of years each had been with the chorus. On the facing page are photographs and biographies of the three remaining charter members, all of whom had been with the OMC since its founding in 1929.

A “History and Highlights of Orpheus” page lists the recordings and tours of the chorus, and on the next page are the lists of the Board of Directors, section leaders, and nineteen committee chairmen. The number of committee chairmen demonstrates how much the chorus members themselves were involved in the management and production of the season. Throughout the first fifty years of this chorus, the members bore the primary responsibility for every facet of chorus operations.

All of the singers are identified in two pages of black and white photographs, where the men are grouped by the section in which they sing. The middle of the program contains the repertoire for the performance. There are only two new pieces listed, “Smiles,” arranged by Hawley Ades and “Great Day” by Vincent Youmans.¹⁸ The remaining repertoire, according to the Cox and Lowe booklet, were “oldies-but-goodies,” including Palestrina’s *O bone Jesu*. Each piece on the program is listed with the year it was first performed and a brief description. For example, the listing for the Palestrina piece indicates that OMC first sang it 1932 and describes it as “an example of polyphonic perfection.”

¹⁸ Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Concert Program, March 17, 1979.

Miller and Jackson's "Let There be Peace on Earth," which the chorus first performed in 1958, "expresses well the thinking of the Orpheus men in their objective of using their music to further intercultural and international good will."¹⁹ Lists of past OMC presidents, emeritus members, and accompanists follow, as do several pages of advertisements and a message from the Orpheus Ladies Auxiliary regarding the Northern Arizona University Summer Music Camp scholarships, which were offered to qualified grade school and high school students.

A proclamation by Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt naming March 10-17, 1979, as Orpheus Week occupies the entire inside back cover. The archives do not contain the original proclamation, nor are there any newspaper articles referring to Orpheus Week in the collection.

On April 3, 1979, a banquet was held at the Del Webb Townhouse to honor the chorus's fiftieth anniversary. A plain 8-1/2" by 11" aqua-colored sheet of paper, vertically folded and simply typed, lists the dinner menu and the evening's program. Even though there were speeches by former Phoenix Mayor Milton Graham and then-current mayor Margaret T. Hance, there is virtually nothing celebratory about this 50th Anniversary Banquet program. It has the appearance of being hastily put together and printed, as evidenced by a somewhat humorous but nonetheless sad mistake on the menu, "Beverage - - Flaming Cherries Jubilee." The program has simple two-word phrases, such as "A song"

¹⁹ Ibid.

or “The Food,” and in fact all but one of the one-line listings begin with “A,” as in “A presentation of special awards,” “A few more songs with Ralph Hess,” and “A time for leaving.”²⁰ The apparent lack of interest in producing a quality program for such a celebration was perhaps a precursor to the next and final event documented in the archive for this period.

The 1979 administration file of the OMC collection contains a mimeographed copy of a letter from Ralph Hess addressed to John Todd, President, Members of the Orpheus Board of Directors, and the Orpheus Membership. The July 23, 1979, letter is quoted in its entirety here:

Dear Fellows:

This letter brings my resignation as Musical Director of the Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, effective immediately.

The Orpheus Board of Directors has asked that I make the upcoming season (1979-80) my last one. It is the responsibility of the members of a Board to do their best to reflect the wishes of the Orpheus membership, and this action indicates that they feel the Chorus is not completely satisfied with my leadership.

After a great deal of emotional and soul-searching thought on my part, I have decided the best time to terminate my Directorship is now. I will remain available for putting the Orpheus office work and materials in order and for a conference or conferences with the new Musical Director. However, even if these details should overlap the opening of the new Orpheus season, I will not be available to direct any rehearsals.

In view of the fact that the Orpheus Chorus has just passed a significant milestone in its growth and development – the completion of its first fifty years – this is a logical time for the changeover. I would have preferred that a long-range committee might have started to think about this matter three or four years ago and to confer with me about a timetable, which would dictate the best time for me to bow out. Perhaps I should have precipitated this thinking.

²⁰ The Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix, Fiftieth Anniversary Banquet Program, April 3, 1979.

The memories of my intimate association with the finest men I have ever known will always be close to my heart. I will always remain interested in the singing and the activities of the Orpheus Chorus. Keep on singing! Fraternally and affectionately yours, /s/ Ralph Hess²¹

Hess was evidently taken off guard by the request that he leave. Although the board tried to provide a smooth transition by asking that he stay on for one more year, Hess, obviously hurt by their decision, chose to leave immediately. He gracefully acknowledges that this might be a good moment for his departure but wishes that he had been consulted and that a long-range plan had been developed for his exit.

There is very little information in the archives regarding Hess's departure. Cox and Lowe completely omit the matter in their chronology of 1979. Only one short sentence appears later in the sixtieth anniversary booklet, and that is merely a passing reference leading to a mention of the search for a new director. The remainder of that section recounts the 1980 tour to Great Britain. Revealingly, there are no newspaper articles, personal letters from chorus members, or official administration documents in the archive collection from 1979, with the exception of an advertising poster announcing an Oktoberfest celebration with the Orpheus Male Chorus and the Schubert-Bund from Wuppertal, Germany.

Hess's abrupt departure was a particularly sad ending to a career that had meant so much to so many people around the world. He was not only an accomplished musician and showman; he also exhibited keen management skills

²¹ Ralph Hess, Director, to Orpheus Board of Directors, July 23, 1979, Orpheus Male Chorus Records, Tempe, Arizona.

and promotional ability. Arguably, his deep sense of service to humanity was a strong driving force behind the many accomplishments of the Orpheus Male Chorus throughout his tenure.

Paul Morrow, Hess's assistant director at the time, served as interim director for the 1979-80 season. Perhaps the final cap on this episode comes from the only document in the 1980 publicity file, probably meant for the media, which simply announces the search for a new Musical Director for The Orpheus Male Chorus of Phoenix.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

When L. Douglas Russell founded the Orpheus Male Chorus as the Orpheus Club in the fall of 1929, he was looking to provide performance opportunities for his male voice students. No male chorus existed in Phoenix at the time. After the initial period in which the group became established and functioned successfully under various directors, it was the more than thirty-year tenure of Ralph Hess as director that brought Orpheus into its strongest era. Hess's unique vision and combination of gifts brought Orpheus to a new level of excellence and prosperity. Above all, Hess understood that the group had to remain good citizens of Phoenix and the surrounding community as its worldwide reputation grew.

Hess was appointed as director of the Orpheus Club in December of 1947, a position he would hold until 1979. During this period, the chorus experienced its largest growth in number of singers, frequency of performances, and size of audiences. Equally important was the increase in financial support of the chorus, which among other things would make it possible for the organization to make eight tours outside of the continental United States and become known internationally as "Ambassadors of Goodwill." The moniker "Cowboy Ambassadors of Goodwill" would later become the trademark of the Orpheus Male Chorus, as it was known after 1959.

The Orpheus Club, as it was first named, began with a small ensemble of twenty singers but quickly grew to over one hundred singers in the early years of

the Great Depression. The challenges of World War II would see the number of singers drop to just twenty-eight by 1943. Despite the diminished numbers, the chorus continued to perform at least one concert per year until the 1947-48 season, when Hess became director and the performance opportunities for the chorus were greatly expanded.

Early funding of the chorus came in a variety of forms, from the sale of Associate and Business memberships and modest ticket sales to the first paid advertisements, which began to appear in 1938. In the late 1940s, under Hess's leadership, the number of paid advertisements increased. So did corporate sponsorship from local and national companies along with personal donations. Hess's ability to seek and successfully secure funding enabled the chorus to survive and to flourish. An especially important example of corporate sponsorship was the contribution of the western wear from Levi Strauss and Co. that the group wore while traveling and in its performances and other public appearances. Hess and the board were willing to be audacious and think big when it came to approaching possible donors for monetary or in-kind contributions. Their financial success allowed the chorus to take on projects on behalf of other organizations. One such organization was the Phoenix Boys Choir, which the Orpheus Male Chorus founded in 1953. The Orpheus Male Chorus sponsored the Phoenix Boys Choir for nearly twenty years, thus establishing the groundwork for one of the nation's most important boys' choruses.

Above all, the Orpheus Male Chorus was recognized for its contributions to the people of Phoenix and Arizona. The chorus earned many proclamations

from local and national leaders and gained a substantial reputation for their outstanding community service. The support of non-profit organizations and the civic engagement of the chorus helped to preserve its mission of civic leadership throughout most of its eighty-year history. The chorus developed annual scholarships for university-bound students as well as younger students who might wish to attend the Northern Arizona University Summer Music Camps. They also gave benefit performances on behalf of non-profit organizations whose projects they found especially worthy. This profound sense of cultural citizenship was at the very heart of the organization, especially under the leadership of Hess.

The OMC had seen itself as an institution for singers who loved music, desired social integration with the people they encountered, and maintained a strong fellowship with each other. The group's success was partly dependent on the strong personal relationships of its members and their commitment to serve the community that supported them. Through Hess's association with Rotary International, Orpheus undertook many worthwhile endeavors that helped inspire the singers, officers, and volunteers. This made them something more than a chorus hoping to fill the seats at their concerts.

Hess was highly savvy with regard to the marketing of his chorus and took advantage of Arizona's Wild West image to create international recognition for the group. Outside of the local community, Hess used all of the tools necessary to bring the American cowboy to audiences who had perhaps only read about them in books or seen them in motion pictures. This strategy helped the group to attract enormous crowds, especially overseas. Eventually, however, the choir sought to

project a more sophisticated image. While the full story is not documented, it is likely that Hess would have resisted dropping the group's cowboy persona, and this may have contributed to the decision to replace him as director.

Hess had the artistic capabilities to lead his singers in entertaining performances of good musical quality. Many of the reminiscences of the group's performances both at home and overseas remark that capacity audiences came to hear the choir that wore ten-gallon hats but were then entranced by the excellence of their performance. Hess combined this musical ability with a strong sense of public relations and the understanding that the chorus must function as a part of the community in order to gain recognition and appreciation from the people in its home base. This unique combination of abilities contributed to the extraordinary growth of the Orpheus Male Chorus under Hess's leadership, a tenure that is unmatched in the group's history both for its longevity and its record of accomplishments.

Conductors seeking to use Hess's success and that of the chorus as a model for their own community-based choruses can draw these lessons from the history of the first fifty years of Orpheus:

1. Develop the performers', staff members', and Board members' passion for their art and express that passion vigorously in order to build audiences and obtain quality funding.
2. Place the organization in performance venues beyond traditional concert halls or churches.

3. Engage with the community to enrich the lives, cultures, and populations the chorus serves.
4. Identify social and civic partnerships and engage in dialogue with people who understand the workings of the local and state governments.
5. Continually reassess the group's business and artistic models to ensure that they are still the best models for the organization.
6. Continually reassess the cultural fabric of the community surrounding the choir, and adapt the organization to remain part of that fabric.

As Marin Alsop recently said, “We owe it to the communities that support us to become the very fabric of the life of those communities. The rewards will be well worth the effort on many different levels.”¹ Ralph Hess fully understood this. He took an already active and engaged organization and placed it at the center of Phoenix's burgeoning culture. In doing so, he helped point the way to a new kind of artistic organization: rather than merely setting up concerts and waiting for the audience to come, Hess understood that the group would be more successful if they undertook strong, creative marketing that capitalized on the choir's unique circumstances in a growing city in the American West. He also knew that they needed to produce excellent and entertaining concerts with a wide-ranging repertory. Above all, he understood that local audiences and funding would grow as the Orpheus Male Chorus maintained its deep ties to the local community, even as it developed a worldwide reputation. The proof of his success was the large

¹ Marin Alsop, (roundtable discussion, Chorus America National Conference, Denver Colorado, June 23, 2008).

number of singers who performed as members of Orpheus in the Hess era and the consistently standing-room-only audiences the ensemble drew both at home and abroad.

In the end, though, the real success for Hess and Orpheus lay in the lasting memories and feelings they created for both the singers and the audiences who heard them. Nowhere is this more evident than in the moving stories members told of their experiences of singing for audiences who may have come out of curiosity—they wanted to see the singing cowboys—but who then stayed because of the choir's fine singing. These narratives, almost always anonymous, still make a profound emotional impact decades later. From one man's account of the choir's first performance in Vienna in 1958 to the story of utter silence as the singers left the USS Arizona Memorial, the history of the chorus in the Hess era is one of deep connections. Those connections, musical, social, cultural, and civic, crossed boundaries and made lasting ties for Orpheus, its audiences, and the people who sang in it.

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