



The President's Message

Orlando, Florida – July 19, 2009

“Every painter paints himself” – Cosimo de’ Medici

Any society that is built for the purpose of preserving certain principles in spite of the shifting tides of a constantly changing world has a responsibility to know its own nature, and to maintain its integrity by adhering to the core ideals that it was founded to preserve. This is especially crucial when integrity itself is one of the society's highest principles, and this has always been so in Sinfonia's case.

Over the last four decades there has been a movement to restore our Fraternity's integrity by resetting it upon the foundation-stones that were laid soundly and well at our beginning. We have uncovered keys to understanding Sinfonia's origins and mission that had been lost or overlooked for most of the Fraternity's existence. Today the message that these words and symbols transmit is intelligently grasped by thousands of men nationwide. The result has been a renewed sense of responsibility to Sinfonia's legacy and mission, and a surge in growth and enthusiasm that is plainly evident at this Convention, the largest and greatest gathering of Sinfonians ever.

Some might question the practical value of spending so much time, energy, and resources on ideals, or wonder what any of this has to do with developing brotherhood or advancing music. Well, ideals are the means by which our Fraternity carries out its most basic function, which our Founder, Ossian Mills, described as “the making of men.” He wrote that Sinfonia would do well if we could inspire our men “to have high ideals and to strive to live up to them.” This is the reason we come together at our meetings, color nights, Rituals, workshops, and other gatherings—to consider and aspire to ideals, so that they will draw our thoughts, words, and actions higher. This is not just theory; the principles of this Fraternity have made a deep and lasting impression on countless men in music.

Ideals are also the logical basis of the bond that unites a hundred thousand men of music as one national Fraternity. A Sinfonian can visit two hundred and twenty four music schools from ocean to ocean and lake to gulf and will find men who cherish the same core principles and the same love of music. The faith that a fellow Sinfonian shares the same ideals and the same love of music is a precondition for the trust, loyalty, and understanding among us. You may never have met the man, but if he is a Sinfonian you can count on his ideals and his work.

So ideals are the foundation of both personal character and our bond of Brotherhood, but what does any of this have to do with *music*? One century ago Supreme President Percy Burrell wrote that the development of virtues in the man will result in “a transmitting and an infusion of these better,

nobler qualities into the every composition and performance of the artist and musician.” In other words, a man’s ideals will influence his music. If he has high ideals, broad intelligence, and deep feeling, his work will reflect these qualities; art will imitate life. This principle that the advancement of music depends on the character of the artist is not new. In ancient times Plato wrote that “the good man is the only excellent musician, because he gives forth a perfect harmony not with a lyre or other instrument but with the whole of his life.” The message is that what we *do* for music depends on who we *are* as men – and *that* depends on our ideals.

For one hundred and eleven years Sinfonia has advanced music by building the man in the musician, and promoting a true spirit of Fraternity in the world of music. However, despite our legal classification as a social fraternity, and our Founder’s call of “Come on boys, let’s get together!” our mission does not end at sociability. We have a practical responsibility to promote the best in musical composition and performance.

Sinfonia was founded in a post-Enlightenment age, a time when artists had gained new freedoms to create the music of their own inspiration. Amid the opportunities and influences of a growing music industry, Sinfonians stood for quality and sincerity in music. For example, George Chadwick, who established the American symphonic style and suggested our name ‘Sinfonia’, asked, “Have we the right to debase our music simply to earn bread and butter?” In every age the forces of commercialism and ego support music of the most common type, but the promotion of the best in musical art – in every genre and style of music – relies on those who are devoted to the principles of excellence and artistic integrity. Sinfonia is the rite of passage through which student musicians have dedicated themselves to those ideals since 1898.

Yet what Sinfonia preserves in music goes beyond even standards of quality or musicianship. The idealism of the men who set forth the highest teachings of our Order asserts that the indescribable sensation that we feel when we are deeply moved by music is a real and direct experience of transcendental Truth, which we perceive through music in its forms as Expressiveness, Power, and Beauty. In the ancient Mysteries, this type of exalted experience with music was the primary means by which an initiate’s consciousness was raised to be made one with the Divine. Percy Burrell spoke of this same concept when he said that we must love art, “not for the sake of art itself, but art as a means toward bringing all men up to that verdant plateau where their souls may be fed in very rejoicing in all that is true, beautiful, abiding.” Brothers, we are the heirs to this enduring tradition of Truth in music, and our highest charge is to create music with such inspiration, sincerity, and fervor that it exalts the human spirit in this way.

Am I overstating Sinfonia’s importance? Is all this talk of Sinfonia as a movement for the uplift of mankind an illusion, or as Burrell asks, just “a dream of some Utopian fraternity?” People sometimes hear a phrase like “the uplift of mankind” and think of it as mere rhetoric, or at best a noble but unattainable ideal that requires some grand gesture or great effort; but in reality it takes place one person at a time. So I’d put the question to you individually. Has Sinfonia inspired you to be a more sincere, genuine, and upright man in your dealings with others? Have you formed real friendships with those who share the same values and the same deep devotion to music? Has your voice or instrument moved someone to an experience of utter bliss, or to forget their worry and suffering? What we do to accomplish Sinfonia’s mission depends on who we are, individually, as men. As our founder Father Mills tells us, “if we are men of low ideals or no ideals, it is folly to expect much of worth from the organization.” Or in the words of Supreme President Peter Dykema, an important force in the growth of music education, “What Sinfonia does for music depends not so much upon rules and regulations as

upon the quality of our being; not upon our organization but upon our men. It is you and you and you who determine what we shall become.”

Once again the message is that Sinfonia advances music by building the man in the musician. Our ideals are not historical relics to add substance to our ceremonies, but realities that are central to our mission and call for expression in our lives. So as we go forward let us continue to focus on and cherish our ideals, so that we may prove at all times true and faithful brothers, work at all times in the spirit of self-sacrifice, and exemplify at all times the true spirit of Harmony. *This* is the duty of every brother, and the highest calling of our Order. So, Brothers...

Is there a song – a brave song in your heart –
Song of a soul yet undaunted by fear,
Buffeted sorely, but cowering not,
Yielding no ground tho defeat seemeth near?
Sing it today.

(Someone is fighting with strength nearly gone –
Someone needs courage to still “carry on”)
Sing it today.

Is there a song of real love in your heart –
Love for the brother who toils at your side.
Love that will help him to carry his load,
Kindness and patience and sympathy wide?
Sing it today.

(Someone waits vainly for kind words unsaid –
Someone needs love as the hungry need bread.)
Sing it today.

Is there a song of high faith in your heart –
Faith that endures through the gloom of the night;
Faith that sustains when all other things fail,
Whispering ever, “The end will be right”?
Sing it today.

(Someone is lost in the night of despair –
Lost for the gleam of the faith that you might share.)
Sing it today.

- B. Y. Williams

Never doubt that lifting your fellow man with the purest art is a calling worthy of the whole of your life, for it *is* you and you and you who wield that almighty power of a simple song, honestly sung, and together, we *will* win this world to Harmony.

So let it be for Sinfonia.

John Alan Mongiovi