

Moravian Music Foundation Houses Treasure Of Music

Donald McCorkle, Director, Relates Tales Of Conch Shell, New Manuscripts

The Moravian Music Foundation looks like another one of the stylized buildings in Salem, but it is exceptional because in the building is housed one of the most priceless music collections in the world today. In fact, the Foundation is the only institution of its kind for the purpose of doing research in the early musical heritage of America. In the small underground vault may be found some 7,000 pieces of music dating from about 1750 to 1850. This music has become worn through countless years of storage, the destructive activity of silverfish and mice, and the gradual eating-away of the paper by the acid-filled ink used in the 18th century. In cleaning these dusty manuscripts, the Director, Dr. Donald M. McCorkle, used over 60 cans of wall-paper cleaner.

When the Moravians came from Germany to settle in the areas of Pennsylvania and North Carolina, they brought with them a high musical culture. Some of the men laboriously copied by hand the music in Europe; it was put away and forgotten in the attic of what is now The Moravian Music Foundation.

A few years ago when the attic was re-opened, among the piles of fragments of compositions (which had to be sorted and pieced together) was found the earliest known copy of Haydn's Symphony No. 17 in F major. The President of the American Musicological Society said, "It is incredible to find that America possesses European music which is not even preserved in Europe." Some compositions by Haydn not listed in any history or catalog were uncovered. The oldest copy in America of Handel's "Messiah" also was found in the Foundation attic.

A particularly important discovery was the only existing copies of compositions by two members of the 18th century Bach family. Of these seven pieces, the symphony by Johann Ernst Bach is the most important because, not only is it an excellent composition, but more significantly, it is the only copy of any symphony by Johann's godson which has come down to posterity.

In the attic of the Foundation also was found the "Paradisiacal Wonder Music," one of the rarest books of early American music, of which not more than six copies exist in the United States. The book is dated about 1766 and contains the words to the hymns composed by members of the Ephrata Cloister sect in Pennsylvania. Its companion book, containing the music used by the members, later turned up in the Foundation archives. It is a delight to see the oddly-shaped notes and the ornamental doodlings in red ink along the margins of the pages.

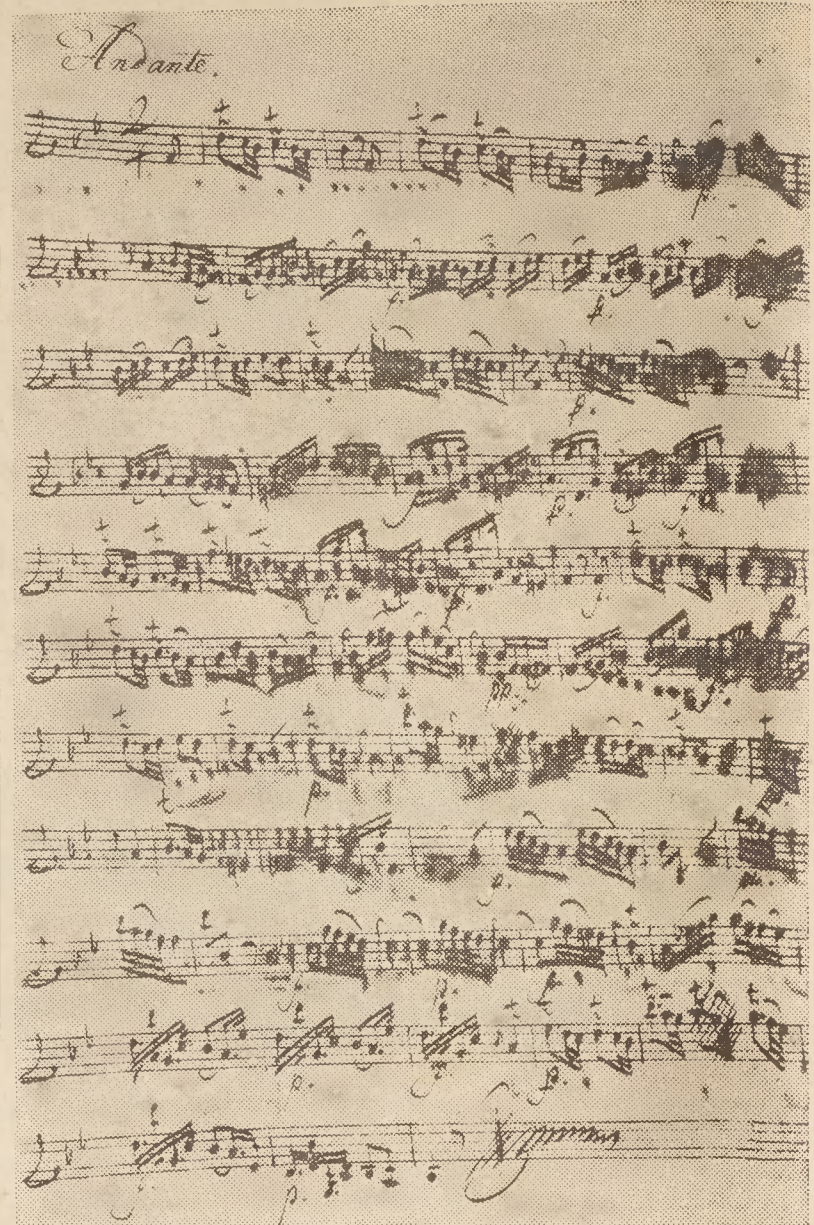
The goal of the Ephrata people was to attain ethereal, angelic voices. To do so, they ate no rich foods which they thought would make their voices rough or harsh. They were very pious people who lived separately (not believing in marriage), and who strived for a good and simple life. The doors of their residence houses were built low so that they had to stoop to enter, constituting a symbol of humility.

In 1958, Dr. McCorkle was elated when he discovered one of the four existing copies of three sonatas by Christian I. Latrobe, an English Moravian who was a friend of Haydn. This copy was listed in the catalog of a London music dealer, Dr. McCorkle

bought the rare edition for \$3.00—about 200 per cent less than its historical value! And beside the fact that in itself it was a rare edition, it is the only one of the four which is autographed by the composer.

And now a new and novel research project, a study of watermarks, is being undertaken by two outstanding musicologists, Dr. Jan LaRue and Dr. McCorkle's assistant, Miss Liselotte Schmidt. The watermarks—manufacturers' trademarks which can be seen when the paper is held up to light—which are in the Moravian manuscripts can be used to determine the composition dates of music in European collections. Fortunately, the Moravian composers and copyists dated their manuscripts while the European composers and copyists often failed to do so. Thus, the European manuscripts can probably be dated now, thanks to the Moravian research.

The Foundation, being an affiliate of the Moravian Church, helps organize and participates greatly in the production of the Early American Moravian Music Festival. Three years ago in Salem, one of the most unique of musical instruments was used to open the Festival. This was the conch, a two-pound sea shell, which was blown by the night watchman in the Moravian village to denote the hours. When blown, the conch sounded like the piercing blast of a modern diesel locomotive! Dr. McCorkle has recently been appointed assistant conchist, and as such will sound the call of the watch to open the next Festival in Winston-Salem in June. Mr. B. J. Pfohl, the official conchist, has said, "People will have to recognize the tune from the rhythm, because you can't play but one note on the conch!"



Courtesy of Moravian Music Foundation
A piece of music copied by the Salem composer John Frederik Peter in 1785. It is typical of the manuscripts found in the archives of the Moravian Music Foundation.

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