

Minnesota Musicians of the Cultured Generation

**Donald N. Ferguson, Musician-Scholar  
and the Elements of Musical Expression**

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Ferguson around the time of his London residence  
A charcoal sketch by an unknown artists in possession of the Ferguson family



Ferguson around 1950

Courtesy of University of Minnesota Archives

Photo by the photographer and Curator of Photos, Museum of Modern Art  
New York City

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Sometime in the late 1940s, after the war, the Bureau of Concerts and Lectures began a unique series which brought a series of master pianists of the world to the University of Minnesota—each of these, a specialist: Rubenstein for Chopin, Arrau for Beethoven, and Tureck for Bach among others. While Rosalyn Tureck was in town, she gave a master class in the auditorium of Scott Hall. Her concert had revealed a new Bach to the Twin Cities public; now students and faculty were eager to get her advice, none more than Professor Donald Ferguson, the founder of one of the earliest Bach Societies of the nation.

As she worked with a student, she showed the budding pianist how to get a change in the timbre, the quality of the tone. I noticed that Ferguson screwed up his face at that suggestion. Only later I realized that Fergie, as we affectionately called him, had published an article in 1924 that showed that loudness or softness, a degree of dynamics, was the only thing that the pianist could change by touch; certainly not the timbre. Here was a fabulous pianist that delighted him but who was refuting his carefully thought-out proof. Ferguson was not one to give up his opinions easily. As he said:

Almost always the highly artistic personality is egoistic to the point of ruthlessness—willing to overthrow, in the belief that he can himself rebuild and improve.<sup>1</sup>

Later when I studied with Tureck and had learned the secret of that touch—which involved the elimination of all extraneous noise particularly from the keybed so that the tone was extremely pure—I probably could have acted as intermediary between the two. At that time I could do nothing.

Two creative deep-thinkers were in the room that day, Tureck and Ferguson. Each exceeded the expectations of the ordinary. Their exceptional thought could only be approached in imagination, in a poetic way. They were like champions in sport, originals whose minds operated on a different plane from the rest of humanity.

Fortunately Ferguson based his thought to a great extent on scientific reasoning which he presented in complex but lucid prose. I trust that the reader will see in this lengthy—perhaps too lengthy—biographical essay Ferguson's vivid thought: the concept of the musical line, the image of the emotion behind that line, the use of the piano as a vehicle of expression, the craft of involved counterpoint, and the spirit of intense human discourse.

## I. Early Years

Donald Nivison Ferguson, the son of Drysdale J. Ferguson and Emilie Nivison Ferguson,<sup>2</sup> was born 30 June 1882 at Waupun, Wisconsin, a settlement at that time of about 2,000 inhabitants. The town got its name from the Algonquian word for dawn, an appropriate word for the pioneers and for the boy and man of this essay.<sup>3</sup>

His forebears lived up to the Scottish heritage of hard work and hard-won success. Donald's grandfather had established a farm near the town in 1850 after emigrating from Kirkcaldy, Scotland.<sup>4</sup> His father developed a thriving hardware business in Waupun.

Donald read before he went to school. When he did attend he needed but one year instead of the usual two to complete the primary course. His family's collection of good books and his grandfather's bound volumes of the "cultured" periodicals, *Harper's*, *The Century*, and *The Atlantic Monthly* gave him exemplary reading experience and led him toward that mastery of language for which he became noted.

His early musical experiences were limited but telling. Young Donald showed signs of musical "susceptibility."

Mother related that I could—and did—sing the "Bye-o-baby" tune she put me to sleep with before I could talk. And, incredible as it may seem to anyone who has heard me sing in later years, I had a rather exceptional boy-soprano voice.<sup>5</sup>

The only instrument available to him was an Estey reed-organ. His mother, whose musical abilities far exceeded her training, showed him the C major scale and then left him free to experiment—which he accomplished to the point of being able to accompany himself quite simply but correctly. Still it was his singing that attracted attention.

I had been asked to sing for the convicts at the usual chapel service. I was supposed to impersonate somebody, for I remember that mother rigged up some sort of costume for me and I wore a hat with a feather alongside its crown. The tread of 600 pairs of heavy feet, marching in single file to their places, was a little alarming, but it was nothing to the noise they made when my little song ended.<sup>6</sup>



Illustration No. 2: A lad singing

From G. L. Morrill's *A Musical Minister* (Minneapolis, 1906)

A piano suddenly appeared when he was about nine and with it lessons from a local teacher. Since he had heard his teacher play the Military Polonaise, he expected to do something comparable quickly and therefore tired just as quickly of the little exercises in the beginner's book.

I could already “make up” out of my head much more intricate (and to me more interesting pieces) than were those in my book. The result was that my lessons with her were soon stopped.<sup>7</sup>

While he “knew” a lot about music, he was a “pitiful sight-reader.”

But I can hardly blame either Mrs. Stewart or my later teachers, for they saw notes as directions for finger movements on a clearly measured scale (the keyboard), whereas I saw that keyboard as a scale on which I could immediately find the keys to strike when I knew the sounds I wanted to hear...having no notion of methods and having from the moment when I had found out what I wanted to hear—an image of that sound, I strove for the image without any other method of realizing it than to strive for it. If somebody had been able to show me how to discipline my fingers toward the execution of refractory patterns *before* I tried to shape those patterns into my image, I believe I might have

become a considerable pianist. For I did have a touch, and I got it, where everybody, I believe, must get it, from my image.<sup>8</sup>

This image remained with him throughout his over 100 years and formed the basis for his approach to music. At that time no one thought of music as a profession for a male; it was considered a feminine accomplishment<sup>9</sup> and while a man might sing or play a instrument, it was in addition to his *real* work.

Ferguson's family was a literate and accomplished group and wished to further the education of a gifted child. In the 1890s, high school education was by no means the norm. Many larger cities had only one or a few high schools which served also as normal schools for public school teachers. Many of these offered a thoroughness in the academic courses seldom seen today. Waupun had such a school in the South Ward, a good one at that. When Ferguson spoke of the principal, Frank Howard and his wife, Nellie, he found:

Both as teachers were the equal to any I ever sat under in college or have known as colleagues. The general survey of English literature, which Nellie gave, made the course I took in the same subject at the University of Wisconsin seem hardly more than repetitious. And "Old Howard's" teaching in math especially was so lucid that even my non-mathematical mind was illuminated. He taught Latin, also, giving us the grammar with constant references and comparisons to the principles of English grammar (which Nellie had already illuminated admirably), and with as little as possible of the finicky discriminations of the Latin grammars. I had no Latin in college, but what I learned in High School served for the study of those mediæval treatises on music which I had later to scan rather carefully and for a blank-verse translation of Vergil's Aeneid which I began as a hobby. The arts as such were not recognized. There was no music, no drawing, no painting, no acting, no "creative writing"—and consequently none of the gobbledygook of critical lingo, which—like the superfluities of Latin grammar—tends to substitute technical verbiage for the immediate observation of the artist's human appeal to his audience.<sup>10</sup>

When Ferguson graduated two or three weeks before his sixteenth birthday, his father felt him too young for university and so had him return to high school to take those subjects he had missed—German, Vergil, and Physics. How seriously he took these can be judged by his learning in high school the old German script, an exercise that daunts even many Germans today. When, after that year, he was still adjudged too young, he was sent for a year to work in an uncle's bank in Kansas before being allowed to enter the business course at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Within a short time, Ferguson discovered at the university his real interests, English and French, and he found a mind as active as his own.

I seemed to have an unusual aptitude for French—so much so that my instructor, Otto Patzer, arranged for me to sit in, in the second semester, on Prof. Giese’s conversation course, where I learned a good deal of French, and learned something of the dimension of Mr. Giese’s mind. He had, I learned from an older student, taught Greek and Latin at Brown University just after his graduation. His mother was Norwegian so that he grew up bilingual from birth; he told me, much later, that at different times he had known Italian and German rather better than he now knew French, and he had written a rather widely-used Spanish grammar.<sup>11</sup>

In retrospect Ferguson judged clearly which courses were useful and lasting, which were superficial, and summed up his experience thus:

What my four years in college gave me was a sophomore acquaintance with French literature, mostly before the nineteenth century; a similar purview of mediæval history; a similar understanding of physics as it was known in 1900; some notion of German poetry (but little prose) but a pretty sound knowledge of German grammar; a superficial reading-skill in Italian (I never did learn the grammar properly for “Buck” Owen, who taught it, didn’t lay any stress on it); and smatterings of other subjects which I can no longer remember.<sup>12</sup>

At the beginning of his junior year, Ferguson played accompaniments for a singer at a party and later found that one of his listeners was Alice Regan, “newly returned from study with Michael Hambourg in London and engaged as piano teacher at the university.” Upon her encouragement, he registered for lessons and soon was absorbed to the detriment of his French studies. In his senior year he gave a recital.<sup>13</sup>

<i>Scarlatti</i>	Pastorale
<i>Beethoven</i>	Sonata, Op. 26
Two Songs sung by Alexius Bass:	
<i>Metcalf</i>	At Nightfall
<i>Dudley Buck</i>	Sunset
<i>Chopin</i>	Nocturnes Op. 15, No. 2, Op. 27, No. 2 Polonaise, Op. 40, No. 1 Valse, E minor Ballade, Op. 47
Quartette: Blanche Fridd, Ethel Moore, Erma Ketchpaw, Rose Wagner	
<i>Brinley Richards</i>	The Bridal of the Birds
<i>Schubert-Tausig</i>	Marche Militaire



At Ferguson's commencement ceremonies in 1904, his favorite professor, William Frederic Giese, read an ode which he had composed in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the University of Wisconsin. This paean subtitled "The Scholar" deeply impressed Ferguson and unleashed far more substantive thought than the usual commemorative ode. Stanzas two through five outlined a vision.

Here our forefathers, 'mid the uncouth  
Beginnings of the infant state,  
This fairest spot did consecrate  
And lighted here the torch of Truth.

They reared her temple on a height  
And bade it face the rising sun,  
And spoke, as once God's self had done,  
The solemn words, Let there be light!

Theirs was the fervent faith that bends  
The smallest things to largest scope,  
Outreaching in prophetic hope  
Through narrow means to noble ends.

And so they shaped a lofty plan  
And 'mid the baser cares that wait  
On each day dared interpolate  
The vision of the coming man.

Though Giese intended the coming man to be the "Scholar," Ferguson carried the thought into another realm as well, the vision of what America might become. So steeped was he in this image, a picture as vivid to his mind as his early musical images, that he, two years later, based his symphonic poem, "America, A Dream" upon Giese's words. That Ferguson saw the scholar as one noble embodiment of American democracy is not surprising since his schooling in the decade of the 90s was the period in which the major patriotic associations were formed and American flag rituals were introduced.<sup>14</sup>

Beyond this vision, Ferguson garnered yet another principle that would serve him as an axiom throughout his life. Giese spoke of "the happy scholar's old-time unity" in which Beauty—which seemed too frequently "lone as an unwelcomed guest"—though in reality the "divinest child of Hellas' soil"—might once again be joined to Truth—an echo of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

Thus all that is is fed by all that seems,  
And the chill orb of Science must complete  
Its cycle in the gracious world of dreams,  
Where Truth is beautiful, and Light is sweet.

In reading Ferguson's memories of his education, we can see that his father's permission to enter the "business course" has now been long forgotten and music has gained the upper hand.<sup>15</sup> In September, Ferguson sailed for London with a recommendation from Alice Regan to Michael Hambourg—a pupil of Nikolas Rubenstein—who was teaching piano both privately and at the Guildhall School of Music. Hambourg was the father of a family of musicians of Russian extraction whose son, Mark, became a pianist of renown and whose other sons, Jan and Boris, became noted string players. Ferguson recounted his first impressions:

As soon as I was settled in the Maida Vale place, I went to 2 Clifton Gardens, where all the Hambourgs lived. Prof. Hambourg was a big man with a wide smile and I was much taken with him. I played, I think, that day only the D-flat Prelude of Chopin. I had hurt my right hand at home...and had been unable to play very much for several weeks. He expected more of me, and I ought to have tried to do more. But he was pleased with my musicality and I think with my evident obsession with music. He did give me some studies—exactly the mechanical things I needed to learn how to do—and the Bach Fantasie in C minor perhaps with some more sugar-coated stuff—but again he had no insight into my actual problems.<sup>16</sup>

After a fairly extended period of study and following a petty dispute, Ferguson abandoned his lessons with Hambourg who seemed uncongenial to this free-thinking student.

Another avenue opened up. Many American students went abroad to study with a private teacher and therefore usually got instruction solely on their instrument and relatively little of the theory of music so necessary for a real understanding of the art. Wilma Anderson of Minneapolis, in Europe shortly before Ferguson, found that she was given Bach Inventions as technical studies and only discovered their structural and emotional qualities many years later.<sup>17</sup> Ferguson had a better experience.

Mr. Hambourg mentioned one day, that he had engaged Josef Holbrooke—then a very conspicuous English composer—to hold a class in counterpoint for several of his pupils. I had had only one year of harmony at the University of Wisconsin and was eager to learn what I supposed was one of the deeper mysteries of composition and was at once enrolled. Mr. Holbrooke gave us the old-fashioned five-species counterpoint, and my exercises ("reams of them," he said, one day) pleased him. The others' interest soon

lagged, but mine grew, and I arranged to take individual lessons in composition, however, since I had learned the mechanics of counterpoint pretty well, and with a native knack of improvisation had managed to work over a few things which I took to him.”<sup>18</sup>

This work with Holbrooke marked him for life as one who favored complicated musical textures and led him more and more toward the music of Bach. His fluency, as a result of this training, made it possible for him in later classes to improvise counterpoint examples which he wrote as quickly as one would write sentences in one’s native language.<sup>19</sup>

Ferguson delighted in the canon, a contrapuntal genre which has intrigued and tested composers for centuries; two of these, a three-voice *Improperium with violin and bass or organ* (for Palm Sunday) and a three-voice *Verbum caro factum est* (for Christmas) are extant.

Anaante con molto e gioio

Verbum caro etc.

*mf*

Verbum ca-ro etc.

Verbum ca-ro factum est et ha-bi-ta-vit in-nobis,

*mf quasi cari glorie*

et vi-di-mus glo-ri-am e-jus, glo-ri-am qua-si Uni-ge-ni-ti

The musical score is written for three vocal parts and piano accompaniment. Part I (Soprano) and Part II (Alto) are in treble clef, while the piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The tempo and mood are indicated as 'Anaante con molto e gioio'. The lyrics are in Latin and Italian. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with the lyrics 'Verbum caro etc.' and 'Verbum ca-ro etc.'. The second system continues with 'Verbum ca-ro factum est et ha-bi-ta-vit in-nobis,'. The third system continues with 'et vi-di-mus glo-ri-am e-jus, glo-ri-am qua-si Uni-ge-ni-ti'. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a harmonic line in the left hand, with dynamic markings like 'mf' and 'mf quasi cari glorie'.

Verbum ca-ro  
a Pa-tre, a Pa-tre plenum gra-ti--ae et ve-ri-ta-tis.

This system contains the first four measures of the musical score. It features a vocal line in the upper staff and a piano accompaniment in the lower two staves. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Verbum ca-ro a Pa-tre, a Pa-tre plenum gra-ti--ae et ve-ri-ta-tis." The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings such as *f* and *mf*.

factum est et ha-bi-ta-vit in no...bis, in no...bis.  
Ve-ri-ta-tis. Ver-bum ca-ro factum est et ha-bi-ta-vit in no...bis.  
Verbum ca-ro factum est et ha-bi-ta--vit in no...bis, in no...bis

This system contains the next four measures of the musical score. The lyrics are: "factum est et ha-bi-ta-vit in no...bis, in no...bis. Ve-ri-ta-tis. Ver-bum ca-ro factum est et ha-bi-ta-vit in no...bis. Verbum ca-ro factum est et ha-bi-ta--vit in no...bis, in no...bis". The piano accompaniment continues with various chords and melodic lines.

Ferguson marvelled that Holbrooke took an interest in him because his early original work was utterly devoid of any of the later “expansions of harmony (even by Wagner).” In retrospect, we can understand the relationship. Holbrooke, Slonimsky says, “stood aloof from modernistic developments of European music, and preferred to write for a mass audience, which, however, failed to materialize at the infrequent performances of his music.”<sup>20</sup>

Ferguson brought to Holbrooke various efforts of his years at Madison: The Indian Serenade of Shelley,<sup>21</sup> settings of Goethe’s Wanderers Nachtlieder, a Ritornelle on a poem of François Coppet, and a movement for string quartet on the model of Beethoven’s Sonata Opus 26. From the first year of his London sojourn, Ferguson had conceived the musical ideas for a tone poem based on Giese’s Commencement Ode. He worked this over with Holbrooke and arrived at some thematic transformations that caused him to feel a “Eureka.” After the completion in April of 1907 of “America, A Dream,” it was to be submitted to Henry Wood for performance at Albert Hall but the hoped-for occasion fell through due to a mixup of timing. Ferguson later said: “I still think this was a rather significant achievement for one who had begun the serious study of music only four years earlier.”<sup>22</sup>

Holbrooke had Frederic Austin,<sup>23</sup> a prominent baritone, sing the Indian Serenade and arranged for publicity about its composer. The London *Black and White* spoke of the work as “full of character, charm, and color” and of Ferguson as “a young American with a future.”<sup>24</sup> While with Holbrooke, he wrote in addition to “America, A Dream” and songs, a Fantasia for Piano and Orchestra and a Piano Quintet—in short the major compositions of his life (see List of Works in the appendix to this essay).

Although he succeeded reasonably well with composition, Ferguson could not help but contrast his slow method with that of several friends, notably Felix White<sup>25</sup> who could compose constantly—as a sort of exercise—in much the same manner as a pianist “kept in shape.” Ferguson, as White, improvised at the piano,<sup>26</sup> a sure sign of musical imagination, but he remained a slow composer because he was a severe critic of his own music and refused to continue when something did not satisfy him.

London’s rich musical life offered Ferguson many opportunities, especially in the symphony concerts given for only a shilling each night of the week at the Promenade Concerts in Queen’s Hall under Henry Wood.<sup>27</sup> The hall itself, originally opened in 1895, was striking with “towering palms at the sides and back of the orchestra, and a fountain, surrounded by cool blocks of ice [in hot weather] in the centre of the promenade, together with the general arrangements for the comfort of visitors testify at once to the astuteness and good taste of the management,”<sup>28</sup> proper accoutrements of the cultured

generation. Monday night was Wagner night, Wednesday Tchaikowsky, and Friday Beethoven while the other two nights were given to lesser composers, often Brahms, Schubert or Schumann and the moderns as well, Strauss and Reger among others. Ferguson went almost every night.

I am sure I learned infinitely more of the harmony I was so fascinated by on those evenings than I ever could have learned whether from books or teachers...but I was still bewildered by what was then the contemporary idiom. I remember that the first performance of the Tristan Prelude at the Proms was only a swirl of unfamiliar and only half-intelligible harmonies.<sup>29</sup>

The world-renowned opera house, Covent Garden,<sup>30</sup> likewise offered. at only 2s. 6d.. many musical treasures but none so dear to Ferguson as the Wagnerian dramas. That, he later concluded, was a “commentary on my musical education, the fruits of which are still apparent in my ignorance of much contemporary opera.”

These London experiences essentially completed Ferguson’s studies, an education absolutely at variance with a musician’s usual training which at this time meant a sort of apprenticeship, “following the master.” Using his native intelligence and fundamental talent together with a minimum of instruction, he developed the musical art on his own. While there were certain drawbacks to this method, it did leave him free of the stultifying hand of tradition and it established a life-long habit of independent thought that allowed him to view music not *sui generis* but as part of western European culture to which he was devoted.

## II. First Years in Minneapolis

The year after his return to the States, Ferguson spent in piano practice and in playing a few concerts in Wisconsin. Then, partly based on his brother’s residency in Minneapolis and partly on the fact that “Minneapolis was standing on its own feet,” he made inquiry of the Minneapolis School of Music, rival to the long-established Northwestern Conservatory of Music. He interviewed with Mr. Pontius,<sup>31</sup> the director, and was hired. On this “prospecting” trip, he heard the Minneapolis Symphony for the first time.

I cannot remember the program, except for the soloist, who was Mischa Elman, and the concerto, which was Tchaikovsky’s. The applause was deservedly clamorous; Mr. Elman bowed his thanks, I don’t know how many times; but the audience wanted an encore, and although he finally waved his hand in obvious farewell, they kept right on applauding until the orchestra returned to the stage for the second half of the program. I

suppose you might call their behavior a sort of tantrum, but it was also a sign of high enthusiasm, not only for the soloist but for the orchestra and its conductor.<sup>32</sup>

Ferguson moved to the city in the fall of 1909. During his first years in the Twin Cities, Ferguson was known principally as a pianist and teacher of piano, professions in which the Twin Cities had continually excelled since the early tradition established before 1900 by Carl V. Lachmund, Gustavus Johnson, and Hermann Zoch.<sup>33</sup>

Shortly after his arrival in Minneapolis, Ferguson gave a recital at the Handicraft Guild Hall.<sup>34</sup>

Sonata in A Major	<i>Mozart</i>
Thirty-Two Variations in C Minor	<i>Beethoven</i>
Clair de Lune	<i>MacDowell</i>
In der Nacht	<i>Reger</i>
La Soirée dans Grenade	<i>Debussy</i>
Prélude, Chorale et Fugue	<i>César Franck</i>
Three Études	<i>Chopin</i>
Nocturne	<i>Chopin</i>
Six Preludes	<i>Chopin</i>

and followed this with a program with Mabel Augustine, violinist:

Sonata in A Major, Op. 100	<i>Brahms</i>
Miss Augustine and Mr. Ferguson	
La Folia	<i>Corelli</i>
Miss Augustine	
Carnaval, Op. 9	<i>Schumann</i>
Mr. Ferguson	
Sonata in A Minor, Op. 105	<i>Schumann</i>
Miss Augustine and Mr. Ferguson	

A comparison of these programs with the earlier recital shows how much progress Ferguson had made in England, how much he was immersed in the most profound works of the piano repertory. Later he would occasionally sit down at the piano in class and absolutely astonish his pupils with the quality of his playing, so true to the feeling of the work that it seemed the only possible way in which to perform, from memory, the Appassionata or the Opus 101 of Beethoven. His memory for music was so vivid that he never needed to consult



a score in illustrating, in writing program notes, or in writing test examples, all drawn from the piano, chamber, orchestral and operatic literature.

As Ferguson began his work at the Minneapolis School of Music in 1909, he began to formulate a teaching method based upon the structure and feeling of the music itself. In large measure this was drawn from his own approach to music. When he engaged a piece of music, it was evident that he had a vivid image of the sound and that that mental image seized him. Like a fine conductor he waited for the exact moment to begin, to let the initial note be an already moving event. In the final song of Schumann's *Frauenliebe und -Leben*, he made me wait as I drew in a breath and then let the minor triad explode so that the singer was launched at a declamatory pace that instantly conveyed the piercing sorrow of "*Nun...hast du mir den ersten Schmerz getan*" another similar wait and "*der aber Traf.*" He would begin to move in the rhythms of a composition, not with extraneous swaying and such,<sup>35</sup> but with vitality. At the same time, the harmony and melody, what he would call the tension characteristics of the music, were vivid enough in his mental image to call forth a kind of vocal murmuring, at times almost grunting. In short, he played the piano more like a conductor who was "expressing," that is "pressing out" the music. This is what he wanted students to achieve on their own terms.

I had never given any lessons to speak of, and had to learn how to teach from the beginning. A few pupils had been assigned to me, and I found my education in pedagogy very interesting. It took me two hours to give my first lesson, and I was never able to cut that time by more than half during all my teaching years. For although I had learned a very correct muscular attitude from Alice Regan, I felt that I must somehow inculcate or draw out the native musicality of my students, and I spent endless time on what I have called "drawing"—a process which I really had thought about analytically in London, and of which I think I had a good deal of mastery.<sup>36</sup>

I taught them to shape melodic phrases and rhythmic contours and harmonic tensions so as to recognize the subtle complexities of feeling which expressive music delineates; and I found myself sought for as a teacher because I knew how to steer the minds and fingers of my students toward that kind of portrayal. It was largely an intuitive perception on my part, and it was a long time before I could discern the reasonableness of my effort.<sup>37</sup>

Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck.

The image displays a musical score for the opening of Beethoven's Op. 90. It consists of five systems of staves. The first system shows a piano introduction with a treble and bass clef, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system features a melodic line in the treble clef marked *dolce* and *dim.*, and a bass line with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The third system includes a treble clef line with *in tempo* and *ritard.* markings, and a bass line with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The fourth system shows a treble clef line with a *tempo* marking and a bass line with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The fifth system continues the bass line with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a *ritard.* marking. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Opening of Beethoven's Op. 90.

What he had in mind can be suggested by his later notes on Beethoven's Sonata..

There is first of all a striking contrast (in spite of their similarity in design) between the first two phrases. Not only the *f* and the *p*, but the melodic design, suggest an opposition of vehemence and gentleness. The forte phrase has detached eighth notes for the up-beat, the "three" of the first bar, and the last note; but in the piano phrase, these notes are all quarter notes (the last two, portamento). the forte phrase ends with an upward leap; the piano phrase moves stepwise throughout. But in these simple-looking five-note groups,

the stress points are not easy to determine. The final A of the first phrase is the highest note, and the apparent goal of the motion; but if the staccato is observed, the loud note sounds uncomfortably harsh. Thus the major emphasis seems to fall on the first down-beat, G. The parallel note to the A, in the piano phrase (i.e. the B), is a quarter note, and easily bears the greater stress. If this is so, the whole eight-bar period sets forth a subtle antithesis of feeling in which the vehement somewhat yields to the gentle.<sup>38</sup>

He went on to discuss the remaining strains noting that the structure is composite and the “inference of feeling” may not be easily understood. After due consideration, he found this a change in style in Beethoven’s late works where the forthright yields to the *tentative*, but *tentative* “through understanding, not through timidity—in this case an “almost selfless tenderness.” Interpreted in this way, the parts of the first subject will not exhibit too harsh contrasts. If the first movement is interpreted in this way, it can lead convincingly to the heartwarming song of the final movement.

### III. A Leader among Music Teachers

Shortly he abandoned the conservatory and opened a private studio where he could pursue these original ideas unhindered and, at the same point, found another forum for his beliefs: the Minnesota Music Teachers Association (MMTA). He joined the group upon his arrival in the Twin Cities and, as a new teacher with challenging ideas, he soon became an officer of the society. There he could place his ideas before his colleagues and the public.

In 1911, he gave his first account of the state of music as he found it in Minnesota. All too often, it seemed to him, that in Minneapolis a whole symphony might go essentially unheard; whereas,

we see a popular soprano, by the exercise of a magical voice, but by the use of questionable artistic methods, in singing questionable music, arouse that same audience in a fifteen-minute spasm of applause.<sup>39</sup>

He was convinced that “in such cities as ours, where the opportunities for repeated hearings of the best music are somewhat meager, [shades of London!] there can be no question that the musical public... is very largely the fruit” of the piano teacher. Quite beyond the mere playing of notes, the function of the teacher in the community “is to leaven the whole lump of musical inappreciation,” and achieve the musical ideals of the cultured generation.

“We deal with the instrument which, better than any other, is able to treat a musical composition in its entirety as an *art-work*.<sup>40</sup> The piano is, with doubt, by far the greatest medium for the dissemination of *musical culture*, and an

understanding of its enormous literature would be, in itself, a sufficient foundation for the almost immediate appreciation of all other purely musical forms.<sup>41</sup> [italics mine] It was the piano teacher who must set standards for effective teaching and “upon whose shoulders rests the burden of the elevation the public taste.”

Ferguson was convinced that music had a definite meaning and while it was difficult to state exactly that meaning, none-the-less it was there. After a long quest he later found the means to make this proposition capable of proof but at this stage of his inquiry—in typical Fergusonian and “cultivated” lengthy periods—he stated:

Properly speaking, music is itself a natural phenomenon reflecting aspects of human nature as accurately as social and political evolutions reflect other human aspects which are at length formulated into a science of sociology. Music is not a haphazard creation by individuals; it is the evolution of a human necessity, and its growth is as firmly founded upon solid principles as the evolution of the animal world itself. It is, of course, much more than a body of law, just as the daily life of the human race is much more than the sociology which attempts a scientific explanation of it; but it is as inextricably bound up with its law as is our daily life with the constitution of the United States and in the process of musical education, the real purpose of the teacher is to explain this law and its application.<sup>42</sup>

As a secondary theme of his discourse, he maintained that teachers should work with students on scientific matters, the theory of music and the science of piano technique, just as he had worked on counterpoint in London and as he had formed his ideas of technique. In this fashion, piano teachers could be thoroughly professional.

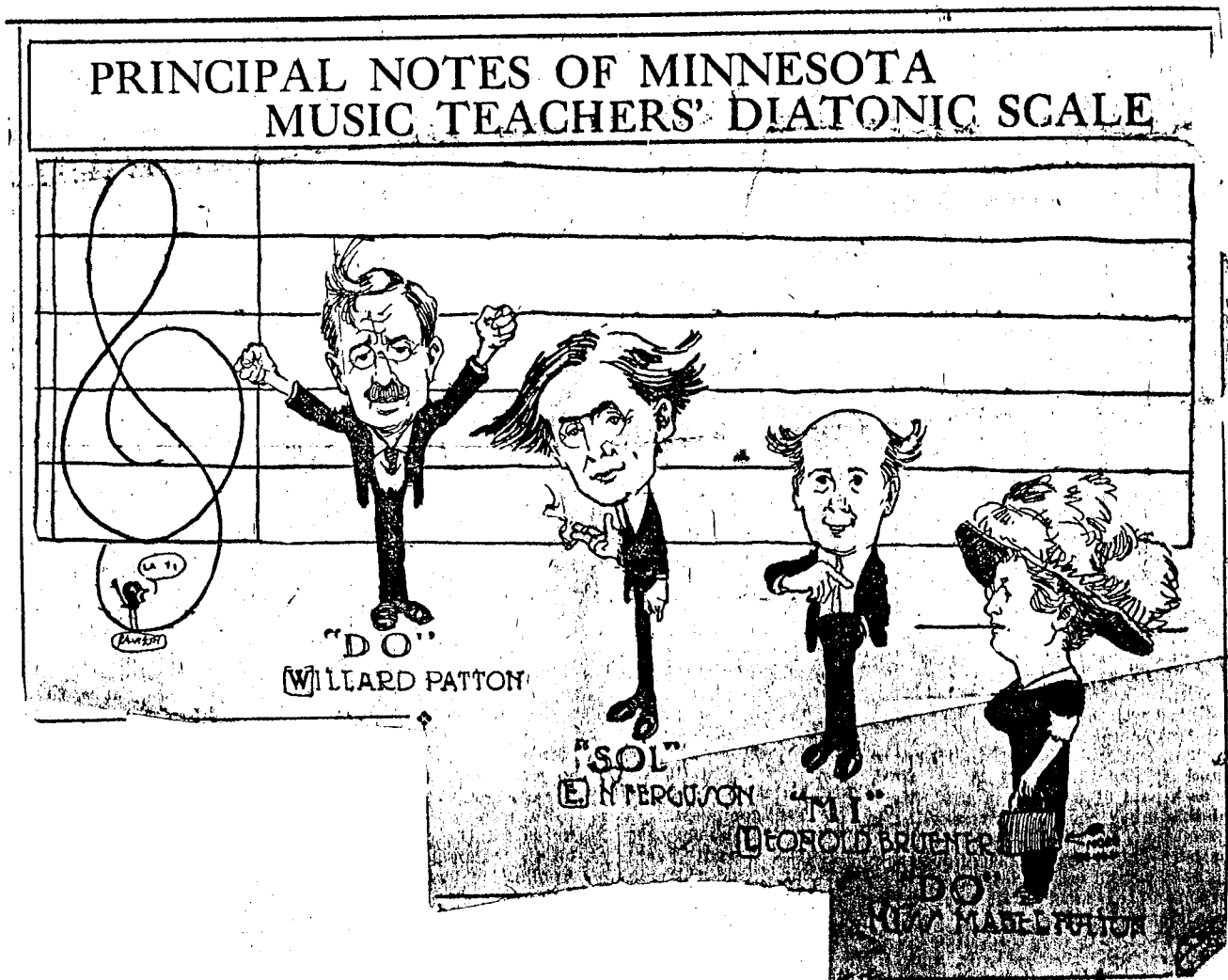
Your true professional man, the physician, for example, has managed to teach his public to consult him in order to get treatment according to scientific methods, for disease. He is not expected to perform miracles of healing, or to raise the dead...we, who in our capacity as teachers ought to be no less professional scientists than the physician.<sup>43</sup>

The studio will become, as the modern school-room is becoming, to a certain extent a psychological laboratory: We shall determine scientifically, rather than intuitively, or not at all, in what way the mental efforts of our pupils are frustrated, and in what way this frustration may be remedied. We shall be held responsible for a correct diagnosis of cases presented to us as the physician, for example, is held responsible.<sup>44</sup>

Not content with rhetoric, Ferguson tackled the business tasks needed to make the teachers’ association “professional.” For some years the Minnesota Music Teachers Association had been grappling with that problem. The society had been founded in 1901 upon the model of the national group—a central

yearly national convention and state vice-presidents—which Minnesota organized as a central state convention with county vice-presidents.

By 1907, MMTA was discussing incorporation, “incorporation” being a symbol of serious endeavor. George A. Thornton, a St. Paul violinist and organist, Licentiate of Trinity College, London, read to the convention the rules of the Incorporated Society of Musicians of Great Britain and Ireland—a group probably known by Ferguson during his London years.<sup>45</sup>



Cartoon of the *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* of the leaders of MMTA

In 1912, the society, in its first move toward “professionalism,” proposed the certification of teachers through qualifying examinations, Minnesota being the first state to make this important move.<sup>46</sup> During 1912 and 1913, Ferguson and Thaddeus P. Giddings,<sup>47</sup> the supervisor of music in the Minneapolis Schools, worked out a plan, unique in the nation, to give a high-school class in harmony led by Ferguson and pair it with credits for private lessons given by certified teachers. This arrangement gave the students the opportunity to study with reputable teachers in that one-to-one setting so necessary for the art plus the opportunity to study the “scientific” side of music. It gave them as well an incentive to incorporate their artistic training into their established schoolwork.<sup>48</sup> As Ferguson explained:

The accreditation of the applied music teachers was, of course, the big problem. The M.M.T.A. was the only agency which could initiate such a scheme. We established what might be called two “degrees” in music—Licentiate and Associate of the Association—and instituted annual examinations which teachers of credit students in the high schools must pass before their pupils could receive credit. This plan was not wholly Mr. Giddings’. I have no idea how many, or what proportion of all those who were giving lessons [in Minneapolis] took the examinations, but there were forty or so at the first examination and considerable numbers thereafter.<sup>49</sup>

In 1913, the association, in a second move, secured Articles of Incorporation signed by Heinrich Hoevel, Donald Ferguson, and Hal S. Woodruff.<sup>50</sup> Finally in the same year, MMTA made the third move toward “professionalism” by deciding to publish its own journal, *Minnesota Music*.<sup>51</sup> By 1914, all of these features were operative. At the conclusion of that year’s convention, the group celebrated with a well-earned picnic at Minnehaha Falls. Various prizes were awarded the winners of contests and races. Ferguson, stalwart of the group, received the medal of “Most Popular Man.”

In the ensuing years, MMTA began a campaign to get official state recognition and high-school credit for students studying with private teachers. The Minneapolis plan of combining a school course with the private instruction had been a success, and Mankato had instituted another successful plan that culminated in end-of-the-year exams for which Ferguson often served as examiner.

After World War I, the MMTA teachers made plans for standardizing their own teaching so that the “course content” became more definite thereby bringing private instruction more into line with classroom teaching. In 1925, Ferguson, now teaching in the music department of the University of Minnesota, was elected MMTA president just as all of these matters were coming to a boil. The educational system had grown and such ad hoc

arrangements as the above were frowned upon by the State Commissioner of Education. Ferguson and others led a gallant fight but in the end, the matter remained unsettled. The Minneapolis plan which Ferguson and Giddings had initiated grew into a remarkable program. Fergie had to give up the program in 1917 as his university duties grew more pressing. In his place, Gertrude Dobyms developed the program so that high school students in addition to study of theory wrote original compositions each year and presented them in a concert. This composition program, unique in the nation, was developed still further by J. Victor Bergquist and after his death in 1935 by Harry Ranks. It died a slow death after World War II.<sup>52</sup>

#### IV. The Quest Begins in Earnest

In the same season, 1913-1914 as MMTA completed its accrediting plans, Ferguson was appointed Instructor for Pianoforte at the University of Minnesota, a position of honor but one which still required outside private teaching for satisfactory income. Now in a position of public recognition, he put forth his views of Bach, a composer with special meaning for Ferguson but whose works still figured only incidentally on programs. Organists were just beginning to program Bach's music regularly and piano teachers tended to treat his compositions more as something technical than as cause for delight. Ferguson understood their qualms. Here was a chance to consider the dual approach that he espoused—technique and expression.

There is no great figure among the music-makers who stands so far away from our twentieth century world as Bach. His polyphony is not our polyphony; his affections, his sorrow, his old-worldly and naive lightheartedness are all in a fashion of speech now long outworn, and, for all but the exceptional student, this strangeness of speech seems to be an almost insuperable barrier to the real charm and depth of the thought.<sup>53</sup>

This seemed "a great pity." Ferguson, beyond his mastery of contrapuntal technique so essential to the understanding of Bach's music, had experienced in London a great awakening to the music of the Leipzig master. There he heard a transcendent performance by Heinrich Fiedler of the E-Major Violin Concerto, an event which stirred his soul to the extent that he frequently mentioned it as an example of the reaction that occurs when an audience suddenly realizes that it has lived through a performance that has captured the full essence of a composer's thought, an event that is of rare and irresistible power. Similarly he was overwhelmed by the Bach B-Minor Mass in a performance less perfect than the concerto, but with an awakening spirit.

Mme. Albani was the soprano soloist and she smirked her way through the *Laudamus Te* as if it were the trial song in *The Barber*, but the choral portions were sung with reference to their texts (as I think they were composed) and were profoundly moving. Nobody applauded when the conductor came on. I had brought the score and was deep in it, and that tremendous opening of the Kyrie nearly turned me inside out.<sup>54</sup>

Now he set out to convince a group of music teachers of how they might introduce this marvel to their students.

Toward this end he suggested the small dances which Bach set down in notebooks for his young wife, Anna Magdalena, and for his son Friedemann. He was singularly attracted by what he saw as the quiet happiness of Bach's family life and the charm of Bach helping his wife "to a deeper understanding of his art by writing for her these little pieces." While this opinion had a sort of poetic justness, he also realized the stylistic gap that his generation found when they first looked at this older music.

With a clear notion of the shape of the music, and of the precise thematic material in our minds, we have not far to go, if we are diligent, before we can begin to taste the great charm of Bach's thought. People talk as if Bach were all teedle-ee-dle-ee-dle—as if it had "no tune," in the time-honored phrase. Well, the really earnest student will find out before long, that Bach's music has more tunes to the square inch than absolutely anybody else's. It is simply all tune. It is not, it is true, quite the sort of tune we get in the "Swanee River." It is much fuller of vitality and movement. It is old-fashioned, too, and has to be read with great care for its rhythmical and phrase values; but it is tune, just the same and the student who has developed a liking for Bach's tunes has gone a very long way toward the foundation of a musical taste.<sup>55</sup>

At the time he was writing, the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra was in the throes of what its historian has called "The Reign of the *Pathétique*"<sup>56</sup> and Ferguson could not resist comparing this "sensation-seeking" craze of the public over the Tschaikowsky symphony with the "simple issues of love and life and death" of Bach. Out of this contrast and out of his own love of the music, he concluded.

Within the last twenty-five or thirty years the interest in Bach's music has grown enormously. We are beginning to see that he does not stand aloof from our twentieth century, but comes close to it: close to what lies under the sham and veneering of our civilization: close to the realities of our lives, which are not much different from the realities of his. And we are coming to see what a tremendous insight his honest, clear soul gave him into these things. It is not, thank heaven, going to be safe for a musician



not to know his Bach, and I think we cannot do better, in making his acquaintance, than just to go in and take pot luck.<sup>57</sup>

As soon as Ferguson was appointed to the University of Minnesota staff in 1913, he began to study assiduously to, as he said, “turn myself—still with no immediate guidance but my own observation—into what had seemed to me the pattern of a university teacher.” By 1915, he had proved his worth and became Instructor in Music, not just Piano, but of Counterpoint, Composition, and Music History—in the latter, he developed strong ideas not so much about the material of history but how best to introduce that complex subject to a student, especially a cultured person, who wanted to understand the significance of music history in its relationship to the humanities.

I mastered the formerly obscure Oxford History of Music, especially Wooldridge’s two volumes, and, with considerable collateral reading managed to shape my course perhaps tolerably. I am, indeed, almost thankful that I had to do this by myself, for while I remained ignorant of a good deal of the materials which musicology was beginning to assemble, I avoided the pedantic methods and view-points that were also being inculcated. I had been convinced by the history I had studied at the University of Wisconsin and my own further reading, that the sources of history, however fundamental, were not the substance of history as the beginning student needed to see it, but were vivid illustrations of the “point” toward which they led; and that an over-all grasp of the movements toward democracy in politics and towards humanism in literature were the real objectives of the ordinary man’s effort in living and hence of his history.<sup>58</sup>

At the same time, he initiated a year’s course devoted to Bach, Beethoven, Wagner and Brahms, his hero-musicians, composers who were able to write small motives filled with meaning. A good example might be two fugue themes by Bach, both from the first volume of the Well-Tempered Clavier.



Fugue Theme in A-flat Major and Fugue Theme in B Minor

In the first case, a motive progresses quite evenly over the “rest tones” of the tonic chord in major mode with a slight extension to the active tones on either side of the dominant—surely an evocation of magisterial calm which appears all the more steady against the faster sixteenth-notes. In the second case, we have a motive which also progresses in even eighth notes but in minor mode, thereby more fraught with tension and affliction. Then the rest tones of the tonic chord are soon forsaken for various active tones which become the beginning of two-note chromatic descents of the “sigh figure” so often associated with grief and suffering. In this case, faster moving figures are presented more as episodes and with some relief in the major mode that relieve the intensity of the fugue subject.

It was in motives of this sort that Ferguson saw the emotional message of music made plain for the listener. He sometimes referred to these as equivalent to the motto in literature, much meaning in little space. He was fond of the maxims of de la Rochefoucauld and would quote them as an example of how a few words might convey a large thought—though he acknowledged with a wry face in his later years, that “old men like to give good advice because they can no longer set bad examples!”<sup>59</sup> Ferguson’s recognition of the emotional meaning of motives did not stop with the simple identification of the motive itself but moved on to consider how the motive was used in the texture and formal structures of the composition, how the motive acquired different contexts and how its basic character might be modified in ways that suggested more than one single primary meaning.

As he assumed a larger role in the Music Department, he also took over a greater role in the general university community with “An Apology for Music-Study in a University,” a manifesto much more palatable to the faculties than any of Harlow Gale’s earlier pronouncements. Ferguson freely admitted the quality that made music suspect in the Academy.

The sensuous value of music is the one most immediately and generally recognized. It is also the one most largely responsible for music’s disfavor. We are not quite far enough from Massachusetts to grasp with any boldness the distinction between the sensuous and the merely sensual.<sup>60</sup>

He felt that while the purposefulness of poetry, painting and sculpture were admitted yet “of music, literary men and scientists are suspicious.” All too frequently it seemed that music lacked the “thorough and comprehensive methods which characterize the usual university course.” Ferguson, himself, conceded that “the usual methods of music-study are hopelessly incapable of giving the student any adequate idea of music...these methods fail because

they lack the latitude, the organization and the opportunity for comparative study which only a university can offer.”<sup>61</sup>

He exposed for the dons and students his own view of the principal resource of music.

The music student who pursues only the mechanical side of his art is like the French student who would look up all the words of a passage from *Le Cid*, and fail to see any significance beyond the words themselves. At least the French student could deal with words of fairly definite meaning where “the student of notes must construe these into an aesthetically coherent musical phrase—a task immensely hampered by the simultaneous operation of a very elaborate muscular activity—before there can be any question of emotional expression—which is the real musical meaning—at all.”

Most mechanical instruction, Ferguson thought, had best be done outside of the university although some of that should be admitted to serve Huxley’s demands “that a man’s body should be the ready servant of his will, and do with ease and pleasure all the work that, as a machine, it is capable of.” The real purpose lay elsewhere.

The work in a university school of music must be of a different standard. It must deal extensively with the theoretical side of the art, and must give large consideration to the humanity of it. Music must be presented primarily as literature: it must offer its own contribution to the criticism of life.<sup>62</sup>

Toward this end, the student must “have contact with the best that has been said and thought in the world.” This involved the music considered “best” by the leaders of the cultured generation.

But if Bach has uttered the undoubting faith and the spiritual unity of the German people emerging from the horrors of the Thirty Years’ War; if Mozart has pictured the elegance and the unconscious superficiality of the eighteenth century; if Beethoven has sounded the first mighty enthusiasm for the democratic ideal, and Brahms the soberer realization of the later time that democracy is not as simple as it looks; if music has said not more than this, it is a historical source not to be despised. If it has shown in the hands of the romantics, a variety of humor and pathos and of pure lyrical ecstasy that makes it the fit companion for the songs of Heine and Goethe, of Chamisso and Mörike; if in the colossal imagination of Richard Wagner music has shown a power and a subtlety of dramatic characterization which Richard Strauss and other moderns have developed into something approaching a wordless music-drama, then the student of literature may look to music for an expression of a part of the high tradition of the race.<sup>63</sup>

An entertainment tradition reigned on college campuses—banjo and glee clubs flourished—alongside the “high tradition” to which the student might aspire. At this point in his quest for the secret of musical expression, Ferguson had to admit that “I see this in music, but I cannot prove that it is there.” He found the university an ideal testing ground, a great laboratory where each day brought challenge and response.

Now secure in his university appointment and passionately devoted to his quest for the meaning of music, Ferguson could fulfill his personal hopes. On 25 July 1915, Mr. and Mrs. John A. Folsom announced the engagement of their daughter, Miss Arline Calista Folsom, a fine violinist,<sup>64</sup> to Mr. Donald N. Ferguson and they were married 4 September 1915. The Fergusons had four children, Donald John,<sup>65</sup> David Lee,<sup>66</sup> Mary Barbara,<sup>67</sup> and Griselda Alice,<sup>68</sup> all of whom went on to distinguished careers often with extensive musical accomplishment.

## V. The Quest Deepens

In 1917, Ferguson became conductor of the student orchestra and enlarged his history course to include accounts of “primitive systems and early Christian modal and harmonic developments.” For a man who listed his hobby as “classical languages,” this delving into Greek and Latin sources was a joy—a delight not always shared by his students who sometimes found it tough going to begin a year with the ancients. Ferguson exercised his Latin in his daily trips to campus via streetcar—the result of this being a blank verse translation of the *Aeneid* which he did for his family.

Beyond the linguistic fascination, he also found in these classical writings on music an understanding of the evolution of his beloved counterpoint. In 1918, he was made Assistant Professor. In 1920, after several years of studying Bach’s music together with his students, he enlarged his counterpoint course by adding a second year of Advanced Counterpoint covering double counterpoint, canon, and fugue, techniques used by Bach. These intricate textures, where voices could change position and where the composer had to be able to think quickly and accurately what the horizontal and vertical combinations are, delighted Ferguson.

In many ways, his prose style developed on a similar basis—sentences brimming with qualifications and amplifications which yet formed a perfect fabric required by an logical mind. His speech, fashioned similarly with parentheses, amplifications, and circumlocutions, never lost the focus that he sought with logical certitude and evident glee. Despite these complexities, necessary for the discussion of serious topics, his style was often lightened by

common expressions that brought the whole matter “down to earth.” We have seen above that after discussing Bach in a scholarly way, he recommended to teachers they could not go wrong and might well just try “pot luck” in choosing pieces for their students. At times like this, when he resorted to the vernacular, his eyes took on a special gleam. Such a combination of probing and common sense may stem from his Scottish background learned from his father, mother and grandfather who had that mixture of thought and practicality which has often been noted in that northern land and which made the Scottish universities open to more new ideas than their English counterparts. Fergie knew the Scotch dialect well, another facet of his linguistic ability. He sometimes amused his children by that or by small phrases of Welsh. His students, on the other hand, remember his recitation of Edward, the subject of Brahms’s fourth ballade. Scattered throughout his books and program notes are many examples of translations which he made in lieu of less-acceptable current ones. In some cases this resulted in little gems such as his version from the Provençal of Bernart de Ventadorn, *Can vei la lauzeta mover*.

When I see how the lark, in song,  
Goes winging 'gainst the sun's bright ray:  
Forgets himself, and falls headlong,  
His heart to sun-sweetness a prey—  
Ah! then, of him whose joy I see,  
What envy doth my soul inspire!  
I marvel that not instantly  
My heart should melt for sheer desire.

Alas! I boasted all awrong  
How skilled I was in love's soft way:  
I cannot cease for her to long  
Who love with love will not repay.  
My hear, my mind she takes from me,  
My very self, my world entire,  
And taking, doth to me decree  
But longing and a heart on fire.

He could be mightily amused by linguistic jokes such as the graduate student who took as a thesis that Bayard Taylor’s translation of *Faust* was not as good as the original—with a hearty laugh he confided that he did not think the student had proved the point!<sup>69</sup>

As he became more aware of the glories of music of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, he blended this knowledge with his continuing devotion to French literature, a combination that found expression in a study of the music of the

literature, a combination that found expression in a study of the music of the troubadours, singers of courtly love in 12th and 13th-century France. He completed graduate work in French and received the M.A. from the University of Minnesota in 1922 with a thesis on the rhythm of troubadour music. In this thesis, he maintained that the learned system of rhythmic modes could not be applied to troubadour music but that poetic and speech rhythm of the provençal language must have governed it, an anticipation of modern scholarship which reached similar conclusions only much later (Appel 1934 and Van der Werf 1972).<sup>70</sup>

## VI. Sudden Illumination

The attentive reader has undoubtedly by this time been impressed by the number of times Ferguson spoke of “science.” In 1915, he had stated, “Practically all university work has been compelled, by the development of the physical sciences, to adopt a method fundamentally scientific,”<sup>71</sup> a understandable conclusion not only in regard to the physical sciences but also to the biological sciences developing after the impact of evolutionary doctrine and of the psychological sciences maturing out of philosophy into something which could be objectively verified.<sup>72</sup>

Ferguson sought to find the “scientific basis” of good tone and the shaping of musical ideas at the piano—as he had suggested to the piano teachers as early as 1911. He was forced to admit that the pianist could only change dynamics but not tone color except by the use of the damper pedal. The “science” of the instrument only allowed the hammer to be thrown at the string in varying degrees of speed. And yet by adjusting the dynamics of a musical melody to indicate its basic rhythm and its character, something of beauty could be created. As a consequence of his developing thought, he published in 1924 “The ‘Secret’ of the Pianist’s Beautiful Touch” in *The Musical Quarterly*,<sup>73</sup> the leading national journal, one year before Otto Ortmann published his book-length *Physical Basis of Piano Touch and Tone* based on the same concept that piano touch resulted solely from control of dynamics and of rhythm, at the time a disputed matter.

Oscar G. Sonneck was then the editor of that magazine, and I had quite a correspondence with him over it. He didn’t believe my thesis—it can be stated in the one sentence in which I understand Josef Hofmann once put it, “piano playing is all rhythm and dynamics”—but was glad to publish the article which he thought was well-written.<sup>74</sup>

Ferguson explained the purely scientific basis for production of sound at the piano, the absolute fact that the pianist could do nothing more than control

the speed of the piano hammer to make varying degrees of loudness together with a shift in tone color through the use of the sustaining and *una corda* pedals—and then considered what that meant in practice.

...detached sound can under no circumstances be regarded as strictly musical. Musical sound has not only its physical value, but possesses also values due to its position in schemes of melody, harmony, and form; and this value of meaning is something independent of the physical value of the tone in the scientific sense, though the two are so blended in performance that no analysis could be enough to separate them.<sup>75</sup>

He continued explaining how dynamic emphasis, inflection, phrase rhythms, and agogic arrival might serve to make musical sense and concluded that the performer informed by the exact scientific means at his disposal ultimately must free himself from “consideration of fingers and keys,” and can only make beauty through “the illimitable regions of the imagination.”<sup>76</sup> This blend of science and a mental image harks back to the poetry of Prof. Giese.

Some land of leisure where Apollo sings  
Forever 'neath the tall moon-silvered trees  
Till night is steeped in music and the things  
Of earth are merged in heavenly harmonies.

As these ideas about the scientific and imaginative matters of “touch” were gestating, Ferguson continued his quest as to “how melody and rhythm express ethos.” Since he eventually turned to psychology for the answer, we might well inquire whether his answer was in any way related to the work of Harlow Gale. The two men knew each other well. Both were members of Koehler’s Art League. They were drawn together, apart from their intellectual interests, by the fact that their birthdays were only a day apart, Gale’s on June 29th and Ferguson’s on June 30th. Around 1911 they began a joint celebration of these events with a “binge” of chamber music.<sup>77</sup> Gale wrote thus of Ferguson:

As a pianist he is naturally interested in the classical musical literature for his chosen instrument, but he is fortunately so far better educated than most musicians that he not only uses his piano as a means to know the best music, but he is also deeply in love with our whole rich heritage of chamber music. As this happens to be my strongest penchant in life, this regular festival for our common circle of musical friends has come to be a chamber music party.<sup>78</sup>

They chose the Sunday morning closest to the birthdays and began their first session around 11 AM, pausing for a festival dinner and later for a Bohemian supper finishing their music around 11 PM. The group of about 30 music

lovers—some 12 auditors and 18 performers—gathered in Gale’s “Stubia” combination study and music den. After a couple of hours of Brahms and Schubert, the company adjourned to the shade of the Oak Tree which Gale thought a replica “on a miniature scale, of the ideal intermissions amid the pine woods about the Bayreuth Wagner temple,” a place free from “dissipation, expense, display, envy, jealousy” proclaiming “pure joy in the highest music, heightened by the sympathetic enthusiasm of one’s nearest friends” such as had been found in the “youthful home of Mendelssohn, in the three homes of Robert and Clara Schumann, in Dr. Billroth’s Vienna villa with Brahms’ presence at many a first production of his chamber music works, in the Rhine Haagenhof near Honnef where Brahms and his friends played for three days all the chamber music that Clara Schumann had loved and from which she had just been separated.”

After the Gale-Ferguson repast neath the oak, they adjourned to the university music building.<sup>79</sup> Here, with the piano added to the ensemble, Dr. James Davies, German professor and music critic, might sing a dozen Schubert songs or the group might revel in the Brahms Liebeslieder which had been introduced to the cities by Ferguson. At a celebration in the 1920s, original compositions by Herbert Elwell, Theodore Elwell, Ross Lee Finney, and Ferguson became the focal point of one section of the festival.<sup>80</sup>

It is inconceivable that two men so closely allied, Gale so voluble and Ferguson so intent on his quest, should not have discussed their views on the ultimate values of music. Their attitudes supported one another, Gale, a psychologist with intense devotion to music, and Ferguson, a music lover with strong scientific interests. Gale’s program notes for musical occasions show the same concern for the expressive features of music that would mark Ferguson’s for the Minneapolis Symphony. To take one example, here is what Gale says about the opening movement of the Schumann Piano Quintet.

The glorious opening chords and virile stirring rhythm always bring a burst of joy to their players and hearers. Then how magically all softens down, the piano sounds gently and ritardingly the intimation of the second theme, which is sung with longing rapture on the deep-voiced D string of the cello, with answers from the rich viola, twice starting from an ascending pitch until the third start takes it off the ground in a flight of ecstasy, from which height the melody dips pulsating downwards over two octaves to blissful content. This longing is so gripping that the second theme has to be repeated right over again before it can give way to the pent-up first theme and repeat back from the beginning. Then with what magical power the intimations of the opening theme are interwoven thru the development for five pages until it is impossible to hold it all back any longer and it burst out full-fledged again, only to be followed by a tranquil version of wonderful poetical



effect. Of course this tranquility naturally leads to the second theme again in its repeated form, and the whole famous movement then mounts to one of the strongest climaxes in all chamber music.

This excellent description by a man of sensitivity only lacks reference to the musical elements—items essential to Ferguson—which convey the “flight of ecstasy,” the “blissful content,” or the “longing rapture.”

Their ideas progressed along tangential lines and at times even crossed. Yet we have but one confirmation that they did exchange ideas. In an article in *Foolschap* in 1920, Ferguson set out to discuss the question of modern music. While he addressed the technical matters of harmony as it developed through the ages and while he noted that some of the moderns had brought discord, an important element in music, to the “point where it loses all suggestion of contrast of intensity,” it was to the expressive side of music that he turned his attention. In beginning his discussion, he referred the reader to Gale’s essay on musical education of two and one-half years previous.

Mr. Harlow Gale has published an excellent discussion of this side of the question, and comes to the well-established conclusion that music has ultimate value in proportion as it expresses the finer and nobler or the baser and weaker emotions which lie at the roots of human character.<sup>81</sup>

There seems to be no record however of Gale’s opinion regarding Ferguson’s discovery of the elements of musical expression. Gale may have suggested some psychological investigation but Ferguson was quite curious enough on his own to delve into many fields. It appears that he arrived at his own conclusions in a flash of insight independent of Gale. As he was studying for the examinations for the master’s degree, he studied many subjects and

read with the interest which I am sure it must have evoked in every reader, William James’ two volumes on the Principles of Psychology. I realized from that reading something of the process of emotion as nervous tension and motor outlet; and one day it struck me that the nervous tension was possibly portrayable by the tonal tensions of music, and the motor outlet by its rhythm. I began to look into music of significance in that light; found that it seemed to illuminate the imaginative process which created the masterpieces I had been dealing with in my new course; [Bach-Beethoven-Wagner-Brahms] and have spent the rest of my life in trying to formulate a general hypothesis of musical structure in accord with that notion. It was of course a pretty sketchy notion; I was no psychologist, and was but an amateur historian, and I wasn’t able to convince the more scholarly students that my notion was sound.<sup>82</sup>

After trying out his ideas with his students, he sent a statement of those thoughts to Oscar Sonneck, editor of *The Musical Quarterly*. who, having read it “with my head in my hands” found it “quite unsuitable” for the quarterly.<sup>83</sup> Ferguson then approached the public with his “notion” at the Music Teachers National Association Convention at St. Louis in 1925. There he tried to define three concepts clearly: 1) the psychological basis of emotion and the musical elements which seemed to convey 2) the “nervous tension” and 3) “motor outlet” which were the components of emotion.

The James-Lange psychological theory had suggested that for an emotion to arise, one must first perceive some circumstance, second there must a bodily nervous state, and third there would be a real or imagined motor outlet of the nervous energy in the body.<sup>84</sup> According to James, “the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the existing fact, and our feeling of the same changes as they occur *is* the emotion.” According to Ferguson, the bodily “nervous state” might be represented in music by height and depth of the melodic notes, the relationship of these notes to a central tone such as a tonic, and the relationship of these to the harmony. The “motor outlet” might be represented in music by various rhythms, fast or slow, free or impeded, accentual or non-accentual motion. A simple idea but one with ramifications.<sup>85</sup>

Up until this point, musicians had explained the effects of music more by intuition, such as Gale employed in his program notes, while philosophers had argued the case in a more precise manner but always had considered music solely in its own terms and not on a psychological basis. Eduard Hanslick, music critic of Vienna, had voiced the most extreme views in his essay “On the Beautiful in Music” published in 1854. He made the flat statement that music could not express emotion and found in music only “tone in formal motion” and a “sounding arabesque.” This was one of the first salvos in a dispute between the supporters of “classic” music such as Hanslick and the adherents of a “new” music such as Liszt, Berlioz, and Wagner.

Now Ferguson moved the argument out of these speculative and controversial realms into the realm of science—a comparison of the components of bodily emotion with parallel elements of music.<sup>86</sup> As psychology had in the preceding decades moved away from its mother, philosophy, and into a branch of science, just so musical aesthetics, through Ferguson’s insight, might move away from its mother, philosophy, and into the realm of psychology.<sup>87</sup>

Though Ferguson’s discovery did indeed arise from science, it cannot be considered truly scientific because it lacks precise terminology—particularly an exact vocabulary for emotion. Though “love” could be considered an emotion, yet the qualities of love are difficult to assess in simple language

though not in more involved poetic language<sup>88</sup> It was also necessary that one truly *listened* to music and not just *heard* it as background. It is hardly necessary to say that he did not envisage listeners trying to label a set of emotions as a musical selection unfolded though such identification might take place in recollection after the music had stopped or perhaps even before in some type of analysis.

His theory remained quite simple—the emotions roused by music are not simply whims of the moment or purely “musical” emotions but are analogous to human emotions aroused by situations in life. People recognize the message of music not randomly with helter-skelter reactions—mistaking a Sousa march for a funeral march—but with approximately the same reaction. If this were true, then music could exhibit some of the stability of literature which can itself bear various shades of interpretation even while the general purport holds. Music could convey a thought—albeit an emotional one. Music could have its realms of literature based upon a common ground of understanding. It could in Prof. Giese’s words allow the “chill orb of Science” to complete its cycle “in the gracious world of dreams.” Wisely, Ferguson always referred to his hypothesis as a “theory” even though it could be demonstrated to his satisfaction through many examples

By 1927, Ferguson considered his ideas sufficiently advanced that he could institute a graduate course, *The Basis of Musical Expression*, which until his retirement became available to both music and philosophy students. As he deepened his thoughts on the elements of expression, he began to see the ramifications for performance and for music history.

## VII. Fruits of a Sabbatical Year

Ferguson’s importance to the Department of Music became more and more evident and especially in the teaching of composition. By the time he had formulated his theory and presented it as a graduate course in 1927, he became eager to know how his “theory” might apply to works of the future. As a child he made up little pieces at the piano, as a university student he had begun the compositions that he would work over with Holbrooke in London, as a teacher in Minneapolis he encountered the First School of Minnesota Composers and in the Minnesota Music Teachers found a group that gave yearly concerts of music by local composers. At the university, he worked with Carlyle Scott, the chairman of the music department, who promoted composition among his harmony students. In the twenties, Ferguson judged the Minnesota composition entries for the first class at Fontainebleau and became mentor to a group of outstanding students including Ross Lee Finney,

Herbert Elwell, and Celius Dougherty. Ferguson's own compositions had been programmed from time to time in the Twin Cities.

Now styles were changing rapidly and while the symphony conductors presented a certain amount of "modern" music, it could not compare in amount with what would be available in Europe. Consequently in 1929, Ferguson, now a full professor, and his congenial colleague, Abe Pepinsky, a gifted violinist-violist with special interests in the scientific background of musical sound,<sup>89</sup> decided it would be essential to take a sabbatical year in order to study the latest trends.

The support of a sabbatical half-salary made a leave difficult for Ferguson and his family. Just at that moment, an opportunity arose. Robert Owen Foster,<sup>90</sup> a native son of Minnesota, poet and philosopher, friend to the musicians of the First School of Minnesota Composers, and owner of a musical instrument store, offered a prize of \$1,000 for theme music for the Majestic Radio Hour. Ferguson submitted an entry and won the prize making a worry-free year possible.

Pepinsky chose Berlin and Ferguson chose Vienna. Neither found exactly what he sought. Pepinsky was able to get a good background in the history of musical instruments. Ferguson at the University of Vienna found that the courses he followed were conventional or elementary for one of his experience: Psychology and Aesthetics of Wagner's Dramas, History of Dance, History of the Orchestra, and Musicology with Robert Lach and Alfred Orel, a course on Modal and Mensural Notation with Rudolph von Ficker, a course on Bibliography with Robert Maria Haas, and a course on Problems of Byzantine Church Music with Egon Wellesz. The concerts of Vienna offered some challenge. Within that season, the Bartók Fourth String Quartet, the Prokofiev *Suggestion diabolique*, the Mahler *Lied von der Erde*, Hindemith's *Spielmusik*, as well as works by Ernesto Halffter, Alfred Casella, Josef Marx, and Karol Szymanowski were performed. At the university he became acquainted with Egon Wellesz, a prolific composer and early disciple of Schönberg. In concerts he had the chance to hear Webern's *Symphonie* and Schönberg's *Suite, Op. 29*. In Vienna, the modern style revolved around the dodecaphonic school. The greatest event of the year was the successful Viennese premiere of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*. Ferguson found that his view of music did not accord with the strictest form of twelve-tone writing—he always excepted Berg whom he found impressive—primarily because those composers tried specifically to make every note of the scale of equal importance thereby denying any possibility of a hierarchy of values among tones.

Ferguson, considering his choice of Vienna as "a mistake, of course," reacted again as he had on previous occasions—disappointed with the musical scene

presented to him, he explored more deeply his own resources. His convictions led him to a concept of music that revolved around how “musical thought” evolved through the ages, how melodies displayed a variety of scalar patterns but always with relation to a certain *principal* note, how harmony also was built on *relationships* between chords—in short, almost the exact opposite of what Schönberg was proposing when he proposed that all 12 possible tones of the scale should be used in succession with no particular emphasis on any single note.<sup>91</sup> Propelled then by his reaction against atonality and by his own view of tonal relationships, Ferguson began toward the end of his Viennese stay to write a book of musical history, *A History of Musical Thought*.

Ferguson and Pepinsky returned to Minneapolis for the 1930-1931 scholastic year. Both found themselves busier than usual, Pepinsky in the writing of a large chapter on musical instruments for Ferguson’s history and in work on his college degrees, Ferguson in writing program notes for the Minneapolis Symphony and completing his *History of Musical Thought*. Students by 1933 had that history in their hands in two large mimeographed volumes. Ferguson had written this history for his own classes without thought of publication but Professor Krey, well-known historian of the Renaissance, suggested that it should be published and F. S. Crofts brought it out in 1935.

We might expect Ferguson to incorporate his “theory” of expression into this history and indeed promptly in his introduction he announced that musical thought was “a complex vehicle for the suggestion of ideas of beauty and emotion.” Before one could understand these ultimate goals one had to discover “the principle according to which musical sounds are organized so as to make sense.” These organizational principles, however, required an enormous amount of detail, particularly for earlier music from the Greeks to the glories of sixteenth-century polyphony. Such detail could sidetrack the reader who might conclude that Ferguson was unconcerned with the ideas of beauty and emotion. One astute reviewer, Scott Goddard of the distinguished journal, *Music and Letters*, actually believed that Ferguson had set out only to discover musical organization and then changed his view when he arrived at the Monodic Revolution.<sup>92</sup> It was, in fact, just at this crucial turning point in history that Ferguson began to write more about “outside influences,” events and attitudes that brought forth new emotions and how the composers of *both* the preceding and succeeding eras expressed these emotions. As he put it, “purely musical thinking is of no great use to the world, which insistently demands that music shall be more than a mere combination of pleasing sounds.”<sup>93</sup>

As Ferguson moved into what historians call modern history, that is from the seventeenth century on, he included biographies because he believed quite literally in Buffon’s maxim, *le style est l’homme même*, style is the man himself.

These biographies, however, led always to an assessment of how that particular composer wrote expressive music. For Monteverdi and his first opera, *Orfeo*, for instance, he wrote:

In directness and intensity of expression, this music, written only eight years after the performance of Peri's "Euridice," shows a profundity of truly musical imagination which is as remarkable as any single evidence of such qualities in the operatic music of later periods. For the composer is no longer fulfilling the dry and really academic task of fitting tones to words, merely to intensify their declamatory force. It is now not the mere imitation of nature—the avowed objective of the cultured but not deeply musical theorists—but the immediate suggestion of an actuality of feeling only dimly conveyed by the words, for which the substance of music, in its new homophonic form, is used. It is Monteverdi, therefore, who prevents musical thought, thus newly wedded to drama, from losing its true value of expression, and who at the same time preserves and greatly extends its new and essentially individual form of utterance.

Such perceptive summaries could only come from a mind that had absorbed and pondered music for many years. Ferguson, just over fifty years of age, penned many such gems, each arising from his own experience and retentive mind. In his classes, he never used notes and yet such insightful statements poured forth orally with the same eloquence as within the written word.

If there were any negative comment about his history, it would have been that the book was too detailed. The student, and even occasionally the reviewer, might be overwhelmed. The early reviews spoke of "ample dimensions," "all there is to be said on the subject of music," "stupendous proportions," and "exciting details." Such descriptions had little effect upon Ferguson because he knew full well that a wealth of material was still untouched but also because, as he told me, most undergraduate courses do not make enough detailed demands upon the student whereas most graduate courses frequently offered only details without reference to the broader picture. Consequently his undergraduates were not spared the complexities of the art. Nor were they spared the problems of bridging the gap between generations, for Ferguson, like Willa Cather, realized that the world "broke apart" after World War I and that the cultured generation had quite a different background than the students of the thirties and forties—not as severe as the gap in the eighties when one could no longer assume that the general cultural tradition included the word "psalm" but a gap, none-the-less, that made the student less receptive to Ferguson's measured sentences and pondered thought. Yet even the dullest student found at least a dim recognition of the nobility of his chosen art.

Several times Ferguson boldly used the word “progress”—not to imply that all of the preceding centuries existed solely to arrive at some pinnacle. Such a height could only be a Utopia, a no-land, in his eyes. Instead he wanted to comprehend music and musics as they were part of life—past, present and future. He considered the “modern spectacle, if disconcerting, nevertheless far from discouraging”<sup>94</sup> even as it labored in the aftermath of war.

Some years ago there was a very great war. Millions of men, on both sides, entered that war with their hearts full of high convictions, in the belief that proportionate good was to emerge as a result of their sacrifices. That good, as yet, has not emerged. We are even ashamed to refer to the ideals with which we entered the war, so far have they been besmirched by the conduct of nations and men since the Treaty of Versailles. We no longer know what our spiritual enthusiasms are. We are almost convinced, by the disastrous outcome of the great struggle, that we have no enthusiasms. Our modern music, in consequence, does not know what it is trying to do. Never before has it been required of music to express, in supreme language, a state of spiritual apathy.<sup>95</sup>

He recognized that as a result artists have set out to destroy the old “perhaps in the hope that destruction itself may generate rebirth.”

To one who has perused the history of musical thought, that hope appears deluded. It is not that the old is sacrosanct. No real return to the methods of the past has ever been made—not even in the opera, whose professed ideal was the reconstitution of Greek drama.<sup>96</sup>

What he doubted was the validity of “progress in negation.”

Great music is the offspring not of apathy but of enthusiasm. Some twentieth-century Berlioz will one day write a Brobdignagian satire about the galvanic grinning which, for a decade and more, we have mistaken for an evidence of joy; about the brutality which we have thought to be sternness; about the cold absorption in forms and processes which we have taken for a state of exaltation. When we know again what living means, when we dare once more to confess our ideals, the musicians of tomorrow will shape them for us in language which is both new and simple.<sup>97</sup>

Brave words! But not some pronouncement of a latter-day *Candide* but more the conviction that we might, like Mr. Anthropus gazing on a glacial age, survive by the skin of our teeth.

The book came on the market at the moment when a number of other histories were being published.<sup>98</sup> His text won wide approval because it presented a viewpoint, not just a summary, and because it could serve the student as a compendium for reference. It established Ferguson’s world-wide

reputation and held an important place in teaching through at least 1959 when a third edition was published.

Ferguson found yet another opportunity to address the past as it existed in the present and the present as it pointed toward the future. Upon his return from Europe, he was offered the chance to write program notes for the Minneapolis Symphony, a task eagerly accepted. He could never refuse a chance to hear live music. For the less-familiar works he could attend rehearsal in Northrop Auditorium, the new home of the symphony, just across the street from his office. He had several excellent models in mind, two English annotators, Donald Tovey and Ernest Newman (whom he quoted rather frequently) and Philip Hale of Boston who had begun his career in 1901.

Eagerly Ferguson addressed “that mass of listeners who perhaps share but one thing in common: an instinct for music, which to [him] is not a rare faculty at all, but simply a species of common sense.”<sup>99</sup> At the beginning of this new career, he could hardly foresee that he would continue these “helpful comments” for thirty years nor that a major portion of the notes might form a book, *Masterworks of the Orchestral Repertoire*, yet another vehicle for his “theory” and for his outreach, not merely a “prideful record of local accomplishment.”

Impossible as it would be to measure his influence—the thousands of students who studied *The History of Musical Thought* over some thirty years, the untold number of listeners who read his program notes throughout thirty seasons of four to five months in an auditorium seating over 4,000 plus the others throughout the country who read the notes in collected volumes within their own libraries, the number of teachers who read the history or heard his addresses to learned societies, and the number of his own students, the number of radio listeners who heard his discussions of operas—we can safely say that if Gale thought himself to be a voice crying in the wilderness, Ferguson was the daily worker in the vineyard who taught the workers how to care for the crop. He helped untold numbers of people to rise from a listening experience in which music was considered something pleasant—in the background—to those who paid close attention and deepened their experience over time.

#### VIII. The Bach Society

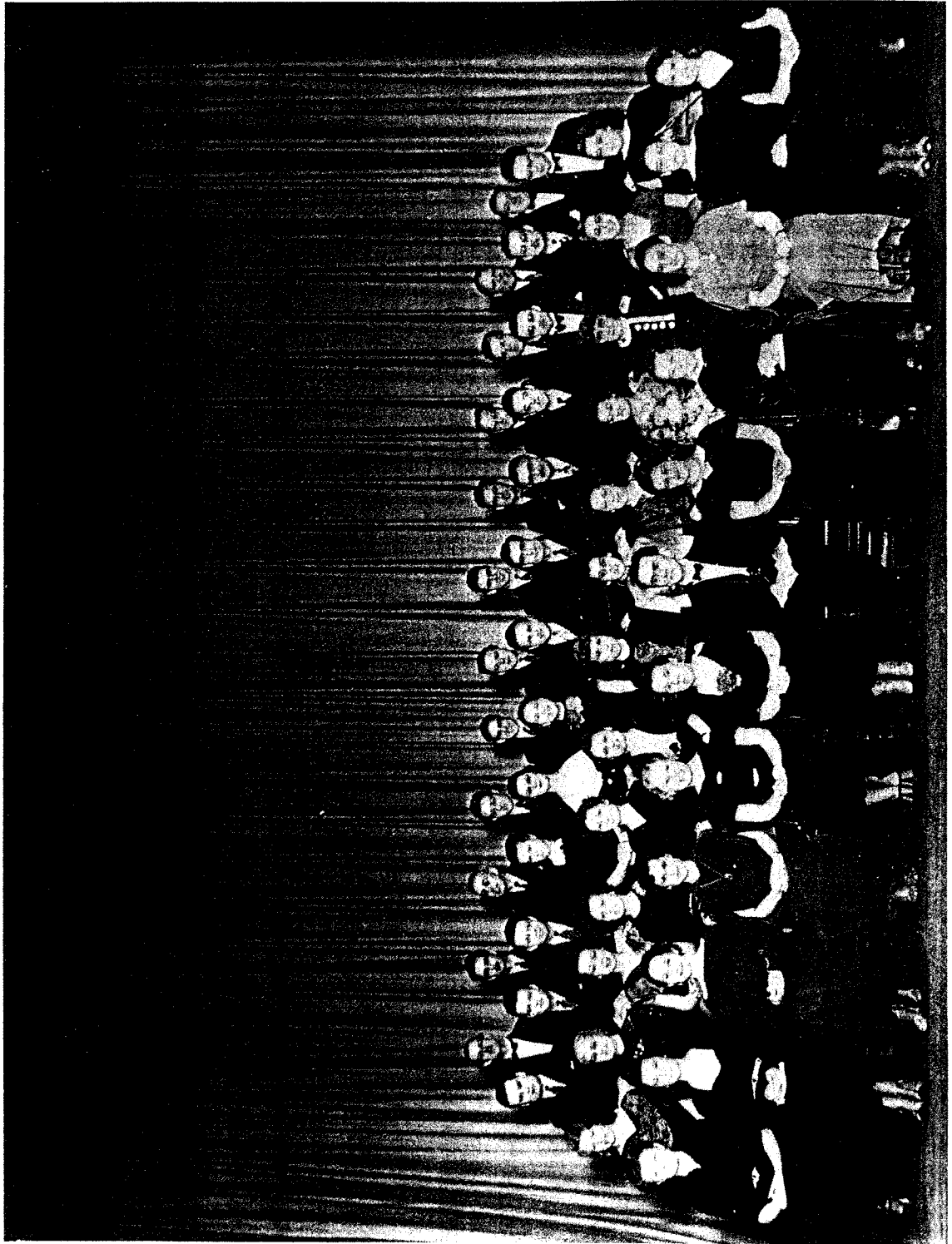
Though *The History of Musical Thought* contained an extensive record list, Ferguson remained intolerant of the standards of recorded sound in early recordings. More than that, he distrusted recorded performances that were, all too frequently for him, antiseptic, devoid of the spirit that marked live performances. He preferred the live piano to the scratchy phonograph. One



day in 1933 after he had illustrated the Bach cantatas in his class according to his report “rather feebly at the piano,” some members of Phi Mu Alpha and Sigma Alpha Iota suggested that the two fraternities prepare a Bach work under his direction. Though he considered himself only an amateur conductor, he “assented with alacrity.”

We chose “God’s Time is Best,” which was available in Schirmer; I copied the orchestra parts out of the Bach Gesellschaft Edition, and we did the “show” in what was then the “library” of Scott Hall (now the offices). It went famously, with Kate West, a beautiful contralto, for soloist and a tenor (I forget who) almost as good. The “success” was great enough so that the singers wanted to do another cantata, and we chose “Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis.” This time we did it in the auditorium and the place was well filled. The performances were less good, for some of the singers weren’t too eager for Bach. But, Kate West, propagated the notion of a Bach Society.

There had been in the country since 1898 one major Bach Society, the Bethlehem Choir of Pennsylvania. In the year of 1933, Albert Riemenschneider of Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio established his annual Bach Festival in order to present the major works in a four-year cycle. Ferguson’s effort became finally organized in 1934 and continued up till his retirement in 1950.<sup>100</sup> It caused some resentment in its early phases when it



An early Bach Society Chorus

appeared that the Bach Society might be in conflict with the University Chorus. A clever solution resolved this impasse. The Bach Society met each week for rehearsal and then near the end of the year held an “open rehearsal” to which the public was invited. In the first year of these annual open meetings, 1934, the society performed the Mass in B Minor and in the succeeding five years performed *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, the Magnificat, *Wir müssen durch viel Trübsal*, and the St. John Passion.

Gradually, the program, the so called open rehearsal, became filled with other contributions until it became in 1940 a festival week in Northrop Auditorium instead of the small Music Auditorium. The society attracted singers and instrumentalists from the community and from the symphony as well as from university students. One evening featured the university organist, another the Collegium of instrumentalists, and a third, and fourth for vocal compositions. Periodically they gave the major works, the Mass in B Minor and the St. John Passion, as well as the above-mentioned cantatas plus *Gottes Zeit* and *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, most of the Brandenburg Concertos and other concertos, suites, and the flute overture. Anyone who attended a weekly rehearsal soon realized that this was for the singers and for Ferguson, a renewal of faith in Bach’s music, a mutual offering on the altar of musical expression, something to be savored each week and leading to a sharing with the audience. He had felt himself turned inside out at his first hearing of the B-Minor Mass. His audiences in later years had much the same “turning inside out” as his Bach Society assembled on stage in silence until he stole on to the stage in silence—following his experience in London—raised an arm, and the gigantic chord of B-minor and the fugal Kyrie swept through Northrop Auditorium. For the student, such as I, it was one of the most moving musical experiences of a lifetime.

Ferguson believed that each line of the intricate counterpoint should resound not only with the organizational sense of the music but also with its implied image, its feeling. As one listened, one did not hear exaggerations and twistings of the musical fabric to create emotional crises or purple patches. The music was respected.<sup>101</sup> The character was respected. Without the character he considered the music lifeless. At one of the rehearsals of a Bach composition by the Minneapolis Symphony under Eugene Ormandy, the director stopped the orchestra to make a suggestion and then finished by saying, “Of course, I’m no musicologist.” Ferguson, seated alone in the darkened auditorium, was heard to remark just loud enough, “Neither was Bach.”

Ferguson used the fruits of musicological research but he did, however, have little patience with the examination of minutiae if they were presented alone with no connection to history or performance. Despite several expositions of his

theory to the musicologists, none seemed to take up the thought and carry it to its conclusion. Ferguson found it difficult to understand why so many seemed to be undertaking research for its own sake. He knew full well that at the beginning of a topic, the researcher might have little or no idea of the ultimate benefit of his toil, but at the same time, he insisted that the researcher at the end of his effort, must make a case for its value.

The preparation of major Bach works led Ferguson to reconsider his basic theory. His attention turned to the question of “What is a musical idea?” At the end of December 1941, he stepped before a national audience of musicians, teachers, and musicologists to speak upon that topic. His opening words, those of a cultured man capable of closely-reasoned thought, addressed what he considered to be his lasting contribution to musical discourse.

My interrogatory title is essentially a demand for two definitions: first, that of an idea in general; secondly, that of an idea whose substance is musical. To describe that curious intracranial activity which we call an idea is properly the task of a philosopher, rather than of a mere musician. But for our immediate purpose, permit the mere musician to propose the following: *an idea is at once an image and a valuation of experience.*<sup>102</sup>

He quickly admitted that “all communication is fragmentary in substance” and that such a communication as a sentence, itself a combination of design and meaning, must be completed by the mind. So in music, tone and rhythm could be completed in the mind by sentiment or by the music’s design. Often it seemed that some listeners valued only the sentimental and others only the abstract and each claimed that only one of these views could be correct.

This seems to me no more than artistic asceticism—the needless and harmful obedience to a rule of poverty and chastity. Sentiment is not incapable of design, nor design incapable of sentiment.<sup>103</sup>

Music, he was convinced, “does not well delineate physical experience” but often the “more significant part of an idea,” that which is emotional. Now psychology had accurately defined emotion: “A nervous tension, the immediate nervous response to the external physical experience; and a characteristic motor impulse or act which is the inevitable outcome.”<sup>104</sup>

The musical art was a “composite of tone-relations exhibiting every degree of tension or its opposite” and with a “motion so fluid that any physical body, by comparison, seems to move with lumbering angularity.” There remained no reason why the tensions of music could not be peculiar to the tensions of a particular emotion nor why the motion of music should not be the “motion impulse which these tensions evoke.” Consequently, he found in music “an

image of familiar reactions, reactions that occur within us as we encounter obstacles and wars and friends and gods.”

Other media of expression set forth the things themselves, and from this delineation or image we deduce our own valuations. Music sets forth something very like the valuations of our images, from which, if we will, we may deduce the concrete image of the experience...its presentation is often so vivid as to equal the sudden and complete revelations of meaning which are the high contributions of metaphor to linguistic communication.<sup>105</sup>

As he closed, the distinguished audience rose in a standing ovation to a man who had, in the space of some thirty minutes, solved what had been a discussion ever since Aristotle posed his Problem 29: “How is it that melody and rhythm express ethos?” This moment marked the zenith of his career, a helpful answer to an old dilemma.

In the teens and twenties, ragtime, jazz, and the international “modern style” began to push the community into a new age of music, a blossoming of fresh experiences heard on radio, in vaudeville, movies and concerts. Minnesota remained at first only slightly touched by these changes. Yes, the music teachers had to decide whether they would teach ragtime or not, the organists whether they would prepare their students to play in the theaters, and the “classical” composers had to somehow modify their cultured style to accord with the increasing appeal of Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky whose major scores came into the Minneapolis Symphony repertory in volume after the First World War.<sup>106</sup> Gradually, during the Ormandy years of the symphony (1931-1936), certain Slavic pieces were performed though not enough to satisfy John J. Becker who maintained what was often a solitary voice calling for change.<sup>107</sup> The real pivot point came after 1938 when Mitropoulos took over the directorship of the Minneapolis Symphony and performed works of Schoenberg, Berg, Krenek, Hindemith, and other composers including those of the young musicians in the area. Feelings ran high and at times Mitropoulos found a large segment of his audience missing at the conclusion of an evening—but they always returned because the music, both conservative and daring, was performed with such excitement that one did not wish to miss any opportunity. This involvement with the contemporary styles intensified in 1943 when Ernst Krenek settled in the community at Hamline University. Not long after, James Aliferis took over the University of Minnesota chorus and became another active member of the local chapter of the International Society for Contemporary Music. Soon we were hearing prepared pianos and lecture-recitals by Henry Cowell as well as a striking setting of the Santa Fe Timetable by Krenek. Aliferis, a hard-edged modern, could not even stand

Scandinavian furniture which he considered too soft in its sloping curves—in performing Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, the male chorus was just below the stage made up to look like a series of skulls, all of them at the same height, while on stage the only scenery was two pedestals, all a fitting counterpart to a certain austerity in the music.

What Ferguson had sought in 1929—in what direction is music of this day moving?—now became reality. What Vienna had not supplied came to his own community. Years later in looking back at the “great changes in musical idiom” and the “battles of the theorists,” he easily acknowledged that “the victory is unquestionably with the moderns.”<sup>108</sup> This did not mean that he sided with the dodecaphonists. Several of Krenek's students attended Ferguson's classes and in discussions of musical expression brought dissenting voices and lively discussions. Ultimately, Ferguson maintained his older outlook in regard to atonality but not to other contemporary facets. He said—with tongue in cheek—“The ideal of liberty and equality among notes (as unattainable as among humans) has not, indeed, brought about untroubled fraternity among composers.”<sup>109</sup>

As Ferguson approached his mandatory retirement at age 70 from the University of Minnesota in 1950, he felt the urge to not only further elaborate his basic theory of musical expression but also the desire to share with others his approaches to piano, chamber and symphonic literature. In regard to his theory, he realized that a fine idea might often languish in obscurity not so much because of lack of import as for the haste and changeableness of the world.<sup>110</sup> He was convinced that musicians and historians would find in his ideas a type of healthy relief from something like that “dried preparation, a lifeless embalment of knowledge” that George Eliot remarked of Mr. Casaubon and which has been known to infect others.

In 1940, just before his standing ovation at the joint meeting of the American Musicological Society and the Music Teachers National Association, he had already prepared a mimeographed volume, *The Elements of Musical Expression*, for his classes.<sup>111</sup> From 1947 through 1967, ages 65 to 85, he brought out seven books beginning with a summation of his thoughts on certain works of the piano repertory, *Piano Music of Six Great Composers*,<sup>112</sup> a study of Beethoven, Chopin, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Debussy. The following year, he published the second edition of his *History of Musical Thought* in which he incorporated some of the “almost phenomenal growth of musicological interest in America since 1935 and especially the work of Gustave Reese in *Music in the Middle Ages*.”

## IX. Retirement

His change of position in 1950, when he became head of the Music Department of Macalester College in St. Paul, did not slow down his writing. Rather, although he had there a staff almost as large as the university's (if we count the adjunct teachers) yet the student body was smaller and he found himself released from some of his previous recurring duties—numbers of piano and composition students and the direction of the Bach Society. He continued to write program notes for the symphony which never became a task for him but an extension and deepening of his most vital interests. These matters of his deepest concern are evidenced in *Masterworks of the Orchestral Repertoire*, *Image and Structure in Chamber Music*, the third edition of the *History of Musical Thought*, three books on the repertory but also incorporating his ideas on expression, and a fourth volume devoted to his theory, *Music as Metaphor*, a fine statements of his thought (though involved in aesthetics and therefore removed from his original psychological simple basis).

In 1959 he retired from Macalester College and the following year, after thirty years, gave up writing program notes. This retirement was not a retreat from battle. In 1967 at age 85, he again addressed the music lover in *The Why of Music* and, in the ensuing years, as he approached 100, he started yet a further volume, *The Forgotten Purpose of Music*.<sup>113</sup> It was to include certain exercises designed to sharpen the listener's perception. Even at that age, he still employed his usual method—write a chapter, revise, throw away, and begin afresh<sup>114</sup>—a procedure only possible to the intellectually and linguistically gifted but not one designed to finish a volume at age 100.

In these latter years, Ferguson became somewhat restricted in his enjoyment of live music. He first noticed a hearing loss when at the beginning of the Unfinished Symphony, he heard the entry of the basses and then found the treble instruments coming in a different key. Still despite this distortion of his actual hearing, his imaginative hearing was not impaired and he had enough music "in his head" to take care of many hours. If something special came along, he found that he could still get enough (plus a bit of mental readjustment) to appreciate the music and the artist. When Fischer-Dieskau gave one of his last recitals, Fergie was seated in a front row where he could savor once more the marvels of the Schubert Lied.

When he achieved ninety in 1972, the Minnesota Orchestra, which he had first known as the Minneapolis Symphony in 1903, gave a special concert dedicated to him. Still further along, when in October of 1983, age 101, ground was broken for a new School of Music building, Ferguson was on hand with the ceremonial shovel. By common consent, the new building was christened

Ferguson Hall. He, himself, thought rather long and hard about this name. He feared that the School was moving in the direction solely of professional technique and was losing its liberal arts roots—however, he finally allowed the use of his name with the hope that some of his cherished ideas might still prosper.

Gradually his customary vitality ebbed especially after his wife's death a little more than a year before his. He passed away 11 May 1985 just over a month short of his one-hundred and third birthday. His memorial service included some of his favorite music and the following statement which I had written for an earlier occasion.

In our classes and lessons with Donald Ferguson, the facts could have been supplied by a functionary; the attitude, the viewpoints (and not so incidentally the standards of language, literature and logic) were Fergie's. He delighted in the techniques which led to well-wrought textures and structures. He rejoiced in music's entertainment and social values.

But ultimately, music, for him, exceeded these values; it could be a literature that sang of the human heart. This view was pursued with sensitivity and intellectual vigor, not with treacle and sentimentality. Together we examined the aesthetic arguments and tested them against a twofold analysis, technical and emotional, of masterworks. The history student examined the developing "thought" of a great composer. The piano and composition student examined the relative power of each note, the shape of every music idea, the total structure and meaning.

Such teaching laid the foundation of a lifetime of music making, of devotion to an art we saw "whole," an art exceeding pastime and good fellowship. This synthesis remains the most important item of our years together. Today we remember Fergie not in embarrassing adulation but in a much more profound way—from hour to hour in our daily work, in our music.





Ferguson at an advanced age discussing his ideas

## List of Works

MSu = Music Library  
University of Minnesota  
MSuar = University of  
Minnesota Archives

## Songs

Ms. or Print	Title	Dedication & Date Publisher	For	Location
Ms	The House Beautiful Poem by Gottfried Hult "Night, Open Thou the Door"		Mezzo-soprano and orch.	MSu score & parts, 4 hand & 2 hand piano scores
Ms	Evening Landscape Prose Poem by Fiona MacLeod "By dim mauve and dream-white bushes of lilac"		Mezzo-soprano and orch.	MSu score & parts
Ms	White Pearl Poem by Keats "Asleep! O sleep a little while, White Pearl"		Bass voice and orch.	MSu score & parts 4 hand piano score
Ms	Five German Songs for Contralto Voice with Pianoforte Accomp. Wanderers Nachtlied (Goethe) "Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh"  Die schlanke Wassperlilie (Heine)  Der Brief (Heine)  Wanderers Nachtlied (Goethe) "Der du von dem Himmel bist" Das Mädchens Elfentraum  (Heine) "Durch den Wald im Mondenscheine"		contralto & piano	MSu
Ms	An Indian Serenade		1906?	
Ms	Venetian Serenade		before 1921	
Ms	Cradle Song		before 1921	MSu

## Orchestral Works

Ms	America, A Dream Tone Poem for Grand Orchestra	1907 under tutelage of Josef Holbrooke	orchestra	MSu score & parts 2 hand & 4 hand piano reductions
Ms	Symphonic Waltz	1922	orchestra	MSu score & parts

Ms	Three Dances Waltz Habenera Spook Dance	1921	small orch.	MSu score & parts 4 hand piano score
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## Chamber Music

Ms	Improvisation		violin & piano	MSu
Ms	Untitled composition	for radio performance	4 violins	MSu
Ms	Quintet in F Minor		string quartet & piano	MSu
Ms	Trio		violin, viola, cello	MSu
Ms	Sonata		organ	MSu

## Choral Music

Ms	Two Canons a 3 Verbum caro factum  Improperium	Comments on composition of these canons	SSA & piano accompaniment Violin, Bass and Organ	MSu MSuar
Ms	Dishevelled and in Tears, Go, Song of Mine Poem of Guido Cavalcanti (1250- 1301) translated by D. G. Rossetti	Chorus Pencilled notation DNF	SSAATTBB a cappella	MSu score & parts octavo score with piano reduction

## Books

*A Brief Introduction to Musical Thought. Together with special chapters on the development of instruments and instrumental literature, by Abe Pepinsky.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota [1933] [mimeographed] (University Archives)

*A History of Musical Thought.* New York: F. S. Crofts, 1935.

--- 2nd edition. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948.

--- 3rd edition. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959.

*Image and Structure in Chamber Music.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964.

*Masterworks of the Orchestral Repertoire; a Guide for Listeners.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954.

*Music as Metaphor; the Elements of Expression.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1960.

*On the Elements of Expression in Music.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1940 (mimeographed)

*Piano Interpretation; Studies in the Music of Six Great Composers.* London: Williams and Norgate, 1950.

*Piano Music of Six Great Composers.* New York: Prentice-Hall, 1947.

*The Relation of Melody to the Poetry of the Troubadours.* Unpublished Master's Thesis, 1922.

*A Short History of Music.* New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1943.

*The Why of Music; Dialogues in an Unexplored Region of Appreciation.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969.

#### Articles

"Piano Teaching," *Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Convention of the Minnesota State Music Teachers' Association* (1911), pp. 42-46.

"Plan for the Examination of Teachers of Music," *Musician*, v. 18 (1913), p. 598.

"Bach," *Minnesota Music*, v. 1, #5 (1914) pp. 27-31.

"An Apology for Music-Study in a University," *The Minnesota Magazine*, v. 22, #2 (1915) pp. 38-44.

"Report of Committee for Standardized Course," *The Music News* (Chicago), 13 July 1917, pp. 20-21.

"Novices Discover Elusive Values in Music, Provoke yet Defy their Critical Analysis," *Minneapolis Tribune*, 7 January 1923.

"The 'Secret' of the Pianist's Beautiful Touch," *Musical Quarterly*, v. 10 (1924), pp. 384-399.

"High School Credit for Outside Teaching of Music is Defended," *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, 31 May 1925.

"How Can Music Express Emotion?" *Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association*, Series 20 (1925), pp. 20-32.

"Music Education or School Authority?," *Northwest Musical Herald*, v. 1, #2 (1926) p. 5.

"To Music Lovers, Great Artists are Divinely Inspired Priests," *Minnesota Alumni Weekly*, v. 26 (1927), p. 392.

"The American Composer and the Market Place," *Northwest Musical Herald*, v. 3, #2 (1928) p. 7.

“European Impressions,” *Northwest Musical Herald*, v. 5, #3 (1930), pp. 17-18.

“The Relation of Theory to Musicology,” *Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association*, Series 31 (1926) pp. 221-227. [Reprinted in Pamphlet Form, 1936]

“An Unexplored Field in Musicology,” *Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association*, Series 34 (1939), pp. 206-214.

“Music and the Democratic Idea,” *Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association*, Series 35 (1940), pp. 104-111

“What is a Musical Idea?” *Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association*, Series 36 (1941), pp. 113-120.

“What does Music ‘Say’?” *American Music Teacher*, v. 12, #2 (1962), p. 24, 36.

“The Nature of the Musical Image,” *Centennial Review*, v. 9, #1 (1965), pp. 115-134.

“Reply to Virginia B. Fortino, Emotion and Music Structure,” *Centennial Review*, v. 10, #1 (1966) pp. 93-94.

“Has Art Lost Vitamins as Well as Fat?” *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, 7 August 1966, [Guest Column, “As I See the Arts”]

#### Reviews

Philosophies of Music History, by Warren D. Allen. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, No. 2/3 (1941), pp. 126-127.

History of Musical Instruments, by Curt Sachs. *Journal of American Folklore*, v. 55 (1942), pp. 177-180.

#### Program Notes

Historical and Analytical Notes on Compositions Performed by the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, 1930-1960

Program Notes for the University Artist Course, 1948-1972.

#### Special Lectures

“Music and the Democratic Idea,” Phi Beta Kappa Lecture, University of Minnesota, 31 March 1950.

“Music in a War-Mad World,” Convocation Address, Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota, November 1950.

“The School of Experience,” Cap and Gown Day Address, University of Minnesota, 18 May, 1950.

Several tapes of lectures and interviews are on file in the Audio Library

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<sup>1</sup> Ferguson, *Piano Music of Six Great Composers* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1947) p. 306. This book is dedicated to his former student, Celius Dougherty, who became accompanist to the famous singers of the world and who is noted for his composition of songs [manuscripts of the songs are now in the University of Minnesota Music Library].

<sup>2</sup> Donald had 2 brothers, Harry and Bert. Harry became a dentist in Minneapolis and Bert a lawyer in Milwaukee. See *Who's Who in Minnesota*, 1958 Centennial Edition.

<sup>3</sup> The word *waaban* meant “dawn” and *waabang* meant “tomorrow” and its variants in this extensive family of languages. The name became known to English-speakers principally through the writings of Henry Schoolcraft and later of Longfellow who in *The Song of Hiawatha* used it as the name of the East Wind, the wind of the dawn. In the First School of Minnesota Composers, Willard Patton wrote a group of ten songs entitled *Wabunheim Blossoms*, a curious mixture of the Indian term with the German *Heim* [home], and James A. Bliss in his collection *Hiawatha Songs* wrote a *Wabun (The East Wind)*.

<sup>4</sup> They left Liverpool 15 April 1850 for a voyage of 21 days, then took a steamer to Milwaukee, followed by a 65 mile journey to their new land.

<sup>5</sup> Ferguson’s handwritten autobiography, 12 r. The material on his home town, education, and musical qualities is taken from this source now in the possession of Donald John Ferguson with a copy in the possession of Mary Barbara Ferguson Spake. The autobiography is written primarily for his family. I have drawn upon it primarily for its musical references and with respect for its more personal thoughts..

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 13 v.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 v., 15, 16 r.

<sup>9</sup> *The Piano Girl*, etc.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 v. and 19 r.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 r.

<sup>13</sup> He performed major portions of this recital again the next year, 14 June 1905, after some ten weeks of study with Hans Bruening (his later opinion was that he played terribly because of nervousness).

<sup>14</sup> A worship of democracy and country marked many people of the cultivated generation and became for them one of the “noble ends” of which Giese spoke. See Laudon’s essays on Bruenner, Shawe, Avery and Patton.

<sup>15</sup> Ferguson’s situation closely resembled that of his future department chairman, Carlyle Scott. Scott, the son of a businessman of Scottish descent sent his son to a business school, Lyndon Institute, where young Carlyle encountered a gifted and inspiring piano teacher. After a year as an accountant in his father’s business, Carlyle went off to Leipzig to study piano and eventually, against his family’s hopes, made music his life’s work. It was not until well into the 1920s that Scott could say that music as a profession was beginning to attract men.

<sup>16</sup> Ferguson autobiography, 29 r. and v.

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<sup>17</sup> Wilma Anderson Gilman, “Remembrances” an album compiled by her son-in-law. She had left Minneapolis in 1896 to study with Arthur Van Dooren in Belgium. Her words were “I was expected to have one Bach invention by memory each lesson, and I took two lessons a day. I cordially hated Bach at that time. No one bothered to tell me about counterpoint or what made Bach inventions interesting.”

<sup>18</sup> Ferguson autobiography,

<sup>19</sup> When, after his retirement from the University of Minnesota, he became head of the music department of Macalester College, he found himself in charge of a class that had been learning counterpoint “by the book” and as he was writing counterpoint fluidly at the board, a student voice came from the back row, “Oh, you can’t do that!”—a story he related with glee.

<sup>20</sup> Nicolas Slonimsky, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 5th edition (New York: G. Schirmer, 1958) p. 726. Holbrooke (1878-1958) wrote a goodly number of operas, symphonies, and symphonic poems as well as a quantity of chamber music. He wrote *Contemporary British Composers* (1925) and was generous in his support of colleagues.

<sup>21</sup> “I arise from dreams of thee,” these are the words that Shelley wrote to the tune of Mozart’s duet, *Al, perdona al primo affetto*, from *La Clemenza di Tito*.

<sup>22</sup> Ferguson, *Autobiography*, 39r.

<sup>23</sup> Austin (1872-1952), sang in opera at Covent Garden, the Beecham Opera Company, and at the main choral festivals. He also was known as a composer.

<sup>24</sup> Newspaper clipping, Ferguson file, University of Minnesota Archives.

<sup>25</sup> Felix Harold White (1884-1945), another self-taught musician, composer of several large works as well as numerous songs, was a close friend. The two lived in the same lodgings and shared their music and ideas.

<sup>26</sup> He later recounted how that lifted him to a completely different level of consciousness—conversation between Ferguson and Earl Rymer, a former student of his who became one of the eminent piano teachers in the Twin Cities and who taught at the University of Minnesota and his own School of Music. Rymer was known as a master improviser. Ferguson tells in his autobiography of improvising and keeping up well at the second piano with van den Berg at the first piano. He accomplished this despite his lack of absolute pitch (which both van den Berg and Earl Rymer possessed).

<sup>27</sup> Later *Sir Henry Wood* (1869-1944), one of the great conductors who performed widely when not conducting the proms. Among others, he was much attracted to the Boston Symphony Orchestra and became the first British musician to conduct the New York Philharmonic. He came of a musical family and participated in family musicales from age 6.

<sup>28</sup> *The Musical Times*, as quoted by Percy A. Scholes, *The Mirror of Music, 1844-1944* (London: Novello and Oxford, 1947), p. 195. For those curious to see the aspect of the hall, see *ibid.* Plate 22 opposite p. 193.

<sup>29</sup> Ferguson *Autobiography*, 32 r. and p. 33 r.

<sup>30</sup> Covent Garden existed as a theater as early as 1732. The name is derived from the thirteenth-century Convent Garden of the Monks of Westminster. It is in the vicinity of the great wholesale fruit and vegetable market of



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London and it teems with workers speaking Cockney. At the time of Ferguson's residence, it was under the control of a Grand Opera Syndicate.

<sup>31</sup> William H. Pontius, who had been president of the Iowa State Music Teachers Association and conductor of a Dubuque chorus which sang and competed at the St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904.

<sup>32</sup> Ferguson, "A Nonagenarian's Memories of our Orchestra," *Symphony, Magazine of the Minnesota Orchestra*, ed. Mary Ann Feldman, Volume 3, No. 7 (Season of 1973-1974) p. 241.

<sup>33</sup> Lachmund (1857-1928), born in Missouri, studied at Cologne and later in Weimar with Liszt for some three years and left one of the finest accounts of Liszt's teaching. Johnson, a graduate of the Royal Conservatory in Stockholm and a composer is the subject of Chapter 13. Hermann Zoch, graduate of the Royal Conservatory of Leipzig was resident in Minneapolis for about a quarter of a century and gave some seventy different recitals covering the major works of the piano repertory before he returned to Germany in 1905 only to be caught in post-wartime privations.

<sup>34</sup> This guild hall, located at 89 South 10th Street, still exists today in a modified form, divided into offices and shops. Part of the second floor recital hall served for many years as the workshop of Mathias Dahl, violin maker. The Handicraft Guild, growing out of the Chalk and Chisel Club which claimed to be the oldest arts and crafts society in the U.S., was incorporated 23 April 1905 and was dissolved 4 September 1918 after which it merged with the University of Minnesota 12 April 1919 as a new Department of Art Education. The Joseph Kingman family built the Guildhall beginning around 1905 with classes and studios operating in 1907. It served public school teachers well as a place where they could learn the crafts required of them. From 1914 on, the Guild incorporated Music Education in its offerings at first under T. P. Giddings, Supervisor of Music in the Minneapolis Public Schools, and then under Josephine Ann Stringham, his assistant. Information from the Minneapolis Collection of the Minneapolis Public Library.

<sup>35</sup> Myra Hess's admonition to extraneous action was, "Don't leak!"

<sup>36</sup> Ferguson Autobiography, 55 v.

<sup>37</sup> Ferguson Autobiography, 72 r.

<sup>38</sup> Ferguson, *Piano Music of Six Great Composers* (Minneapolis: 1947, University of Minnesota) p.

<sup>39</sup> Ferguson, "The Piano Teacher and the Musical Public," *Reports of the Minnesota State Music Teachers Association*, 10 (1911), p. 43.

<sup>40</sup> The term derives from Wagner and that composer's term of the "complete art work."

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>45</sup> There had been some cooperation between the United States National Music Teachers Association and the British one. Mr. Calixa Lavalée of Boston was a delegate to the 1888 meeting of the British group. For an account of the

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British organizations, see Percy A. Scholes, "The Profession Organizes Itself," *The Mirror of Music, 1844-1944*, (London: Novello, 1947), Vol. 2, pp. 721-739.

<sup>46</sup> By 1914 California, Ohio, Illinois and New York were working on plans and many states in the Northwest were looking to the Minnesota plan as a model.

<sup>47</sup> On Giddings, see Charles Maynard McDermid, *Thaddeus P. Giddings: A Biography*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Michigan, 1967). Giddings and Earl Baker wrote about the program in his *High School Music Teaching*, (Appleton, Wisconsin: 1922), Chapter 7.

<sup>48</sup> This system continued throughout Ferguson's tenure in the schools through 1916 and then that of Gertrude Dobyns, his successor, until 1918. In Dobyns' years it was expanded to encompass a program of original composition for high school students which continued, unique in the nation, for many years under J. Victor Bergquist and Harry Ranks until with the departure of Ranks in the 1950s, the program dwindled and died.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Ferguson as printed in McDermid, p. 201.

<sup>50</sup> Heinrich Hoevel, a violinist and nature-lover is the subject of Chapter 6. Woodruff, organist and choral director was for many years the director of the Apollo Club, the longest-lived men's choral society of Minneapolis.

<sup>51</sup> MMTA had relied upon the *Western Musical Herald* published in Des Moines and Chicago for news of the Minnesota group. Apparently no copies of this journal have survived.

<sup>52</sup> For further information and short biographies of these musicians, see Robert T. Laudon, *Minnesota Music Teachers Association, The Profession & the Community* (Eden Prairie: by the Association, 2000).

<sup>53</sup> Ferguson, "Bach," *Minnesota Music*, Vol. 1, #5 (September 1914), p. 27.

<sup>54</sup> Ferguson, *Autobiography*, 99 r. His audiences in later years had much the same "turning inside out" at concerts of Ferguson's Bach Society.

<sup>55</sup> Ferguson, "Bach," *Minnesota Music*

<sup>56</sup> John K. Sherman, *Music and Maestros*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1952), pp. 117-150. The critic Harlow Gale finally refused to attend a concert when this was programmed but wrote a review anyway!

<sup>57</sup> Ferguson, "Bach," *Minnesota Music*

<sup>58</sup> Ferguson, *Autobiography* 76 r. and v.

<sup>59</sup> One of the most famous of la Rochefoucauld's maxims. The same "thematic incisiveness" in Bach's music is found in Bukofzer's study where he compares the rather formless and repetitive themes that Bach used early in life with the "sturdy and gestic" themes of his later work. See Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era*, (New York, W. W. Norton, 1947) p. 277.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39. The reference to Massachusetts is to the Puritan tradition that was evident in the earlier members of the Gale family who brought New England ideas to Minnesota. Harlow Gale had already gone beyond those ideals.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

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- <sup>64</sup> She studied with Heinrich Hoewel, a student at the Cologne Conservatory of Ferdinand Hiller, the director of the conservatory and of the violinist Gustav Hollaender (1855-1915), himself in turn a pupil David and Joachim.
- <sup>65</sup> Yale graduate, Professor of Surgery, University of Chicago.
- <sup>66</sup> Vice-president of International Diversified Services and cellist.
- <sup>67</sup> Public school music teacher, choral director, and writer of program notes.
- <sup>68</sup> Dancer and dance teacher.
- <sup>69</sup> At times, I laughed along with him at a particularly abstruse Latin joke that I did not understand at all.
- <sup>70</sup> "The Relation of Melody to the Poetry of the Troubadours," unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Minnesota, 1922.
- <sup>71</sup> Ferguson, "An Apology for Music," *The Minnesota Magazine*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (November, 1915), p. 39.
- <sup>72</sup> See the comments made in 1950 by Ferguson's one-time student, Ross Lee Finney, on the fallacy with which science had taken over the humanities, in "The Composer and the University," *Thinking about Music, The Collected Writings of Ross Lee Finney*, ed. by Frederic Goossen [another Ferguson student] (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1991), pp. 4-10.
- <sup>73</sup> *The Musical Quarterly*, 10 (1924), pp. 384-399. This publication, the first by a Minnesotan in *The Musical Quarterly* since Harlow Gale's in 1922, was in part responsible for his promotion in 1924 to Associate Professor. R. Buchanan Morton, another Minnesotan, wrote later on the topic, "Tone Production," *Northwest Musical Herald*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (August 1929), pp. 4-5.
- <sup>74</sup> Ferguson Autobiography, p. 83 v. He returned to this theme of the pianist's touch frequently. In 1947, he discussed the matter succinctly in the first chapter of his *Piano Music of Six Great Composers* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1947).
- <sup>75</sup> "The 'Secret' of the Pianist's Beautiful Touch," pp. 390-391.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 399.
- <sup>77</sup> Two accounts (one from 1920 and the other undated) of the festivals survive, one in the Ferguson collections and one in the Gale collection of the University of Minnesota Archives. Both are written by Gale after World War I which had interrupted the celebrations and after the birth of several children had made full participation of both men impossible.
- <sup>78</sup> Gale, "A Birthday Music Festival," Gale files in the University of Minnesota Archives, typescript, p. 1.
- <sup>79</sup> Or as Gale suggested before a new building was erected in 1922, really a Purgatory intermediate between Hell and Heaven.
- <sup>80</sup> Herbert Elwell and Ross Lee Finney, at this time students of Ferguson, later were acknowledged as distinguished American composers.
- <sup>81</sup> Ferguson, "The Question of Modern Music," *Foolsap, The Minnesota Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (April, 1920) p. 44.
- <sup>82</sup> Ferguson, Autobiography, 82 v. and 83 r.

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<sup>83</sup> Ferguson, *Autobiography*, 84 verso.

<sup>84</sup> Ferguson, "How Can Music Express Emotion?" *Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association*, Series 20 (1925), pp. 20-32.

<sup>85</sup> This simple idea had also many possible objections which cannot be argued here but would require a whole volume or more. The reader is referred to Ferguson's books and essays.

<sup>86</sup> Ferguson got understanding and encouragement from Karl Lashley, then with the University of Minnesota Psychology Department—a man who was discussing brain research with Harlow Gale—and who was later to become one of the distinguished researchers in that field. None of the psychologists seemed eager to investigate further. Karl Spencer Lashley (1890-1958), whose studies had been in biology, bacteriology, and finally in zoology and psychology, was a member of the Minnesota staff 1917-1926. He eventually became Research Professor of Neuropsychology at Harvard University.

<sup>87</sup> Previous attempts by psychologists had explained much of the process of hearing, what the Germans call *Gehörpsychologie*, but had not yet been able to make an exact connection between compositions and emotional response.

<sup>88</sup> Ferguson, "How Can Music Express Emotion," p. 22 and in greater detail in *The Elements of Musical Expression*.

<sup>89</sup> Pepinsky was born 3 December 1888 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He studied in the Louis Victor Saar at the Cincinnati College of Music and Henri Marteau at the Königliche Hochschule für Musik, composition with Dr. Paul Ertel, viola with Alexandre Petschnikoff. He played solo viola in the Blüthner Orchestra and the Berliner Philharmonie. He played in the St. Paul Symphony and taught at Macalester College and the Northwestern Conservatory before joining the University of Minnesota staff regularly after World War I. He secured the B.A. (1931) and M.A. (1932) with majors in Physics and minors in Mathematics at the University of Minnesota. He received the Ph.D. (1939) in Neurophysiological Acoustics from the State University of Iowa. At Minnesota he frequently taught a course in The Physical Basis of Music.

<sup>90</sup> Foster was born in what was to be Minneapolis 7 December 1858. He was educated in the public schools and attended the University of Minnesota for two years before opening his business at age 19. Extremely successful and well-liked, he served as president of the National Piano Association, president of the Minneapolis Retailers Association, and as President of the Evergreen Club, the honorary society of Minneapolis musicians. He died 15 July 1939.

<sup>91</sup> In the first chapter of his *History of Musical Thought*, Ferguson asserted the primacy of a sense of tonic even as he refused to agree to a "mid-Victorian attitude" in regard to this matter. He believed that "militant atonalism" was subsiding as indeed it did throughout most of the century. At the same time, serial composition remained a viable technique for many who did not espouse a doctrinaire approach.

<sup>92</sup> *Music and Letters*, 16, pp. 161-162, "There exist plenty of Histories of Music (which is what this one is, and at the same time one of the best of its kind) but no History of Thought in Music. If such a book is to be written, then Mr. Ferguson has evidently the right gifts for the task."

<sup>93</sup> Ferguson, *A History of Musical Thought* (New York: F. S. Crofts, 1935), p. 171.

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<sup>94</sup> *Musical Thought*, p. 504.

<sup>95</sup> *Musical Thought*, p. 505.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Musical Thought*, p. 506.

<sup>98</sup> A history by Theodore Finney [a one-time Ferguson student] was published a few months after Ferguson's. Near the same time Scholes *Columbia History* and Landormy's history appeared.

<sup>99</sup> Mary Ann Feldman, "The Annotator as Critic: The Minnesota Orchestra Program Notes of Donald N. Ferguson," *Student Musicologists at Minnesota*, 5 (1971-1972) ed. Johannes Riedel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, College of Liberal Arts, Department of Music, 1972) p. 5. Feldman is the present annotator for the orchestra. Her article is a lively and perceptive account of the 30 years of Ferguson notes.

<sup>100</sup> The Bach Society continued on under other conductors and gradually began to expand its repertory beyond the works of the Leipzig master.

<sup>101</sup> The placement of the organ high in the ceiling of the auditorium made its use controversial. All too often it did not play the role of a true continuo instrument.

<sup>102</sup> Ferguson, "What is a Musical Idea?" *Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association*, 36 (1941), p. 113.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>106</sup> Even then, the works chosen did not reflect the total output of these composers. Debussy tended to be represented by *The Afternoon of a Faun* and *Clouds*, Stravinsky by *The Fire Bird* and *Petrouchka*, Schoenberg by *Transfigured Night*. The *Bellman* with articles on Russian dancers and singers had already created curiosity about the "new art" in 1916.

<sup>107</sup> The *Northwestern Musical Herald* in the 30s became more and more an organ for his cause. On Becker, see D. C. Gillespie, "John Becker, Musical Crusader of St. Paul," 42 (1976) and his Doctoral Dissertation of 1977 (University of North Carolina).

<sup>108</sup> *History of Musical Thought*, 3rd ed. (1959), pp. ix-x.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Such is even more the case in the present "information explosion."

<sup>111</sup> This has not been published. Perhaps more than any other of his works, it answers the objections that might be raised against his theory. It is also an involved and difficult work.

<sup>112</sup> New York: Prentice-Hall, 1947. This was issued in England by Williams and Norgate, 1950.

<sup>113</sup> This projected book never reached a definitive beginning. I read several versions of the opening. None satisfied him.

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<sup>114</sup> When he was given honorary membership in Phi Beta Kappa at the conclusion of his university career, he told me that he threw away approximately 40 drafts of his speech before he got a version that suited him. He gave a special lecture the next year on “Music and the Democratic Idea” and when introduced admitted slyly that he had only made Phi Beta “last year.” He also delivered the Cap and Gown Day address the year of his retirement. Later, Macalester College gave him an honorary doctorate which had to be awarded posthumously a few months after his death.