

ALBERT STOESSEL AND THE AUDITORIUM
FESTIVALS
(1933-1940)

*"To Honor the Services in War of Her Sons and Daughters and to Nourish in Peace
Their Spirit of Sacrifice, a Grateful City Erected This Building."*

THE dedication of the Worcester Municipal Auditorium, new home of the Worcester Musical Festival, was a series of magnificent spectacles. There was a four-day civic festival beginning Dedication Day, September 26, 1933. A special edition of the *Telegram* was issued, the front page of which contained pictures of members of the Municipal Memorial Auditorium commission.

They were chairman Charles L. Allen, Mayor John C. Mahoney, Hamilton B. Wood, Harry G. Stoddard, Matthew P. Whittall, Alderman Harold D. Donahue, Councilman Thomas F. Dean, City Engineer Ralph G. Lingley, and superintendent of public buildings, Willard Hedlund.

Wallace W. Atwood, president of Clark University, delivered the dedicatory address, and the Auditorium was filled with personages from all walks of life, even to Governor Joseph B. Ely.

There was a parade of 7,000 persons, with 38 floats, 127 trucks, and 50 passenger cars. Every denomination was represented, from the Boy Scouts to Grand Army veterans, from Girl Scouts to Gold Star mothers, from dog-drawn wagons to 10-ton moving trucks, from small-boy drum majors to full brass bands.

The dedicatory concert of September 28 was a memorable event. There was a chorus of nearly 1,000 (it has never been equalled in size on the Auditorium stage), representing 72 churches and other organizations, and there was a symphony orchestra of 100.

Prominent local musicians were numerous present. Alice Erickson played violin solos—soprano soloists were Vesta Wik Thyden and Mrs. J. Frederick Donnelly; the conducting was shared by Arvid C. Anderson, Clifford F. Green and J. Edward Bouvier; the orchestra was conducted by Daniel Silvester and Albert W. Wassell; the organists were Walter W. Farmer, James A. Gow and Clifford F. Green; accompanists were Mrs. J. Vernon Butler, James A. Gow and Albert Erickson.

There were many features about the new edifice that thrilled the populace. There was the huge stage—116 feet long, 44 feet deep, and 44 feet high—there was the seating capacity of 3,500, with the Little Theater's additional 750—there was the tremendous 88-voice organ with 136 speaking stops and 6,719 pipes. Walter Howe had drawn up the specifications for the organ's mechanical parts, assisted by Hamilton B. Wood and Aldus C. Higgins, members of the Auditorium commission, with Lucius Briggs and Frederic C. Hiron, architects who designed the building, as consultants on the physical appearance of the exterior of the organ.

Comments were filled with the impressiveness of the structure. Willard Clark, music critic from Springfield, was amazed by the maze of corridors: "I was lost several

times," he said. "What a magnificent building this is. Springfield folks have heard about it, but they haven't any idea. No sir, they haven't any idea."

Albert Stoessel remarked: "This is certainly a glorious sight, and a great hall. But there is one thing that I really miss—that old painting of General George Washington!"

The seventy-fourth Festival (October 2-7, 1933) became a veritable pilgrimage for musicians from near and far. Among the celebrities present were Ernest Hutcheson, pianist; Thompson Stone, conductor of the Handel and Haydn Society in Boston; Albion Adams, secretary of the New York Oratorio Society; Dr. Arthur E. Bestor of the Chautauqua Festival; David Stanley Smith of Yale School of Music; Daniel Gregory Mason of Columbia University; Mrs. Edward MacDowell; and Mrs. Thomas A. Edison, widow of the inventor, who was the guest of Mrs. and Mrs. Albert Stoessel.

The following view was expressed by the *Telegram* in reporting the Festival's opening concert:

"Old, yet new, the Music Festival entered its 74th year last night. Since that generation which preceded the Civil War, it has met the tide of time and buffeting of circumstances.

Always it has been a city goaded with civic pride that has carried it on, for it never can be a self-supporting institution."

The Festival opened with Stoessel's "Festival Fanfare and Chorale," specially composed for the opening of the seventy-fourth Worcester Music Festival in the new Municipal Auditorium. William Place, Jr., music critic for the *Telegram*, described the work as follows:

"Scored for full orchestra, it was splendidly developed and in the lyric portion with chorus, the composer introduced an intriguing motif, in which Mr. Stoessel called forth a composite melding of the orchestra and vocal units that only the composer could bring to such a realization—a fitting dedication number indeed."

"Dedicace," a sonata in one movement for organ, by Walter Howe, was the program's second offering—the composer was soloist. This work was one of the two compositions to be awarded the Skinner Organ Prize in 1929.

One portion of the Festival that was close to Albert Stoessel's heart was the Children's Concert on Wednesday afternoon. This was the eighth year of these children's concerts which Stoessel inaugurated in 1925. They were a cherished part of the Festival for him because they combined two things that were precious to him—children and music.

The first children's chorus had been organized by Charles I. Rice and later, Arthur J. Dann, supervisor of music in the public schools, continued the project. Children's choruses from the public schools had sung in Pierne's "Children's Crusade" in 1915, 1916, and 1929; in Hadley's "Ode to Music" in 1917 and 1919; in Hadley's "Resurgam" in 1924; and in Pierne's "The Children at Bethlehem" in 1931.

Stoessel, in a brief address at the Children's Concert, said to the youthful audience: "We must be grateful for so beautiful a building for we can bring so many more young people to our concerts, although we think of Mechanics Hall with longing memories. So many of the children who went to these concerts have grown up. We hope some of them began their musical careers from inspirations of those early children's concerts."

While Stoessel intended these concerts primarily to give the children of Worcester