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The Joint Archives *Quarterly*

Volume 29 Number 3

Fall 2019

Music at Hope: Continuity and Change Since 1866

By Marc Baer

This project began when I met with Chris Spencer and Jack Hyde in February 2017. They informed me of a collection of materials for a history of Hope's music department undertaken by the late professor of music Charles Aschbrenner. That meeting led to research I carried out in spring and summer 2018. My goal was a book, which I co-wrote with Allison Utting, class of '18.¹

In what follows, I discuss how the Department of Music became a department—because it's both a remarkable story and a window on how Hope College changed during its first 150 years. Along the way, I'll reflect on the efforts of some music faculty and students, the buildings which music called home, and finish with a town-gown relationship centered on making music.

Discoveries in sources produce questions historians did not know they were supposed to ask. I thought I knew the answer to a simple question: *When* did Music officially become a department? Answer: 1947. The deeper my co-author and I got into the archival sources, the clearer it was that the answer was wrong because the question was wrong. The question we should have asked was this one, *What* is a department? Or perhaps this one: *Why* did music become a department?

When I began college in the 1960s, I experienced first-hand what an academic department was. If I count my

undergraduate and Ph.D. years, I have worked in five different history departments, so I had built up a sense of what may be understood as *departmentness*. Thus, when I asked, when did Music officially become a department, I violated the rule I taught freshmen on the first day of

class: be very careful about reading the present back into the past. Let the past speak to you through documents.



The key moment came midway through the project when we realized “department” in Hope's early history was not fixed linguistically as I had assumed it was. It turns out that since 1866 at Hope College the term “department” has had many meanings. It referred to one of the divisions of Hope. Until the 1930s, Hope had a private high school—thus the preparatory department; the collegiate department was what we think of as

the college; and what was first called the theological department in 1885 became Western Theological Seminary. But “department” could also be a curriculum leading to certification, hence the “Normal Department,” which today we would label education. It could be gender-specific, thus “Female Department.” It could be an academic program that supported what we now call majors but were then termed courses, thus the Department of Biology provided offerings for the scientific course. To add to my confusion, as we'll see in

(continued on page 2)

From the Director



In this issue of the newsletter, you will learn more about the interesting history of the Hope College Music Department and why it has become so important to the college and the Holland community. You will also read about the experience of one of our student research stipend recipients, Allie Utting. Allie was given financial support to research and write with Dr. Marc Baer at the Joint Archives throughout the summer of 2018. This research support is crucial to students developing their critical historical research and writing skills as young people, and will benefit us all in the future.

Geoffrey D. Reynolds

Music at Hope (continued from page 1)

a moment, there could also be departments within departments.

Beginning in the 1880s, the college saw an ongoing debate about the role of music at Hope. In the 1890s, the discussion engaged John Nykerk, a young faculty member who although not academically trained in music was passionate about it. In the early twentieth century, Nykerk got President Gerrit Kollen to invite a part-time music instructor to attend a college faculty meeting to make a presentation.



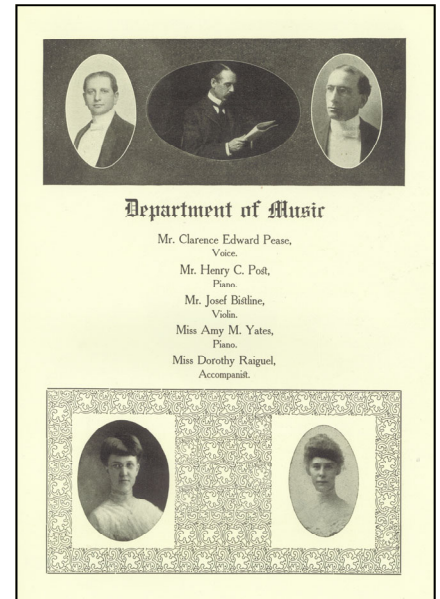
John B. Nykerk, ca. 1890

Mr. Post ... spoke very hopefully about the opportunities Holland offers for the development of a conservatory of music. He urged the desirability of establishing a definite course or courses both of vocal and

instrumental work and of determining on definite credits for such work. He explained what immediate facilities were needed in the line of a couple of studios or rooms and expressed the hope that soon there might be established a closer affiliation between Hope College and the work of his colleagues and himself in the direction of the establishment of a department of vocal and instrumental music.²

From that presentation what emerged at Hope was an entity, the College School of Music, a solution that in fact postponed a decision about whether to have a conservatory of music at Hope. Thus, during the first half of the twentieth century, "School of Music" and "department of music" were used synonymously.

The value of the arrangement is evident in the 1905 Hope faculty report to the college council (now Board of Trustees): "the College School of Music has, during the past year, almost doubled in attendance ... The school proves to be a very popular and useful feature of the College curriculum ... As a local advertising scheme, a faculty recital and a pupils' musicale were given during the past year."³ There were seventy-three students enrolled in the School of Music in 1905, fifty-three of them townspeople, the remainder Hope College or Hope preparatory school students. A decade later the *Milestone* made the value of the arrangement clear: "Hope's music department ... attract[s] large numbers of students from neighboring towns as well as from the city and college itself."⁴ The School was a cash cow, one not requiring the college to hire any full-time, resident, academically-trained music faculty.



1905 Milestone

An official publication designed to be sent to prospective students pitched the school as a remarkable and affordable opportunity.

It is a source of gratification to report that the School of Music is beginning to occupy a large place in the program of the student body. Hope College has always offered the highest type of instruction in the several *departments* [emphasis added] of Music, and the present Faculty is no exception to this rule. ...

The students at the College are showing a manifest interest in matters pertaining to musical appreciation, and all possible is done to foster a distinct musical atmosphere. Two splendid Glee Clubs, one for the young men and the other for young women, are meeting weekly An excellent orchestra has been organized under the conductorship of Mr. Bruno Meinecke. These several organizations will appear in concert at intervals throughout the year, and special effort is being used to produce programs of unquestioned merit. With the wealth of material that the College possesses the outlook is most encouraging.⁵

This was wonderful propaganda—but very little of it was true. None of the music faculty were full time, or

resident in Holland, except Meinecke, the orchestra director—who was in fact a professor of Latin. The excellence of Meinecke’s orchestra may be judged from a 1919 *Milestone* photograph.

In 1925, the college made the decision to create a music major via a new degree, the Bachelor of Music. That year the *Anchor* announced, a little too enthusiastically, “A most capable faculty has been secured,” and “the conferring of the degree of Bachelor of Music [has] been a great forward step in the history of Hope College.”⁶

The only problem was the same difficulty that had existed since 1866 regarding music: the absence of any full-time faculty dedicated to the music program. Of the



Men's Orchestra, 1919

eight faculty listed in 1925, John Nykerk didn’t teach music and the remaining seven were part-time instructors, few of whom lived in Holland—and thus drawn to outside interests. Two years later, four of the seven were gone.

As a result, the program would not have been sustainable in the best of times, and with the coming of the Great Depression, Hope College found itself in the worst of times. In the 1930s, the Board of Trustees decided to maintain the music major but eliminate the Bachelor of Music degree, and to close the preparatory school, which had been an important source of students for the School of Music. The School was wound down in 1940, and thereafter in college publications it was replaced with the term, “department.” But the language problem persisted. As late as 1945, President Irwin Lubbers used the term “College School of Music” in a letter to a music faculty member, perhaps a subconscious holdover from the time he was a Hope student.

By the end of World War II, the music program at the college was barely hanging on—at one point comprising three part-time faculty. In the Hope graduating class of 1945, numbering sixty-four, there was just a single music major.

In 1946, the college’s administration added a sixth faculty working group, the Music Committee. This was not still another synonym for “department” but was created to “further the development of music on the campus and to handle the problems that pertain to the Music Department of the college.”⁷ Music professor Robert Cavanaugh chaired the committee, but it included

non-music faculty. Thus, even by the standards of that time Music was still not a typical academic department—if it was a department at all. That was to change between 1946 and 1950.

In 2002, Charles Aschbrenner interviewed his former colleague, Jantina Holleman, who arrived at Hope in the fall of 1946. As she recalled, holding the 1947 *Milestone*, “We didn’t have a true department, although this is called the department of music in this yearbook. Nevertheless, it wasn’t really an official music department. We had a music committee, which met once a month.”⁸

The first official source indicating that there was a modern department of music is in the 1950 Board of Trustees minutes: “In view of his current leave of absence to continue his studies at the University of Michigan it was VOTED to inform Mr. Cavanaugh that he will be appointed head of the department of Music upon his return to active duty next fall at the salary commensurate with that position.”⁹



Charles Aschbrenner, 2000

When did music officially become a department? The answer is, we don’t know. In important ways student demand—as we’ll see in a



Jantina Holleman, ca. 1950

moment, Hope students were always making music as well as requesting academic opportunities to make more and to earn college credits for some of their efforts—and key faculty—especially John Nykerk and Robert Cavanaugh—had over several decades willed the department into existence.

Thereafter, as a department, Music went from strength to strength. First, the faculty issue was solved. As chair, Cavanaugh began hiring academically-trained, full-time faculty. Secondly, the matter of space for the department was solved. From about 1900, Music had bounced around from building to building. The program was first housed in Van Raalte Hall, then in Voorhees, then in Dimnent Chapel, and then in now-forgotten buildings such as Columbia Hall and Walsh Hall. Practice organs and pianos were located wherever a spot could be found (such as the basement of Graves Hall). Then, in 1956, Music moved into the first purpose-built building in the department’s history, the Nykerk Hall of Music. Readers who remember the building might compare what they recall with what went before: a practice organ on the landing by the balcony in



Robert Cavanaugh, ca. 1960



Nykerk Hall of Music

Dimment, or the tiny office of Curtis Snow, to the south of what is now the choir loft in Dimment—hired in 1929 as the first full-time music faculty member—now used to store cleaning supplies. Third, the identity issue was solved. In 1958, the department applied for and received accreditation by NASM, the National Association of Schools of Music, and thereafter led the effort to reinstitute the Bachelor of Music degree—significant because a first-rate faculty in an exceptional building called for a professional major alongside the liberal arts B. A. in music.

A thesis emerged part way into the book project: music made the department, not the other way around. From 1866, long before there was anything like a modern department, music was everywhere at Hope. Every student group, such as the YMCA and YWCA, but especially Greek organizations regularly sang. Annual occasions such as graduation, Arbor Day, the Day of Prayer, May Day, Homecoming, and the Pull saw either instrumental or vocal music, or both. There were annual competitions, such as the All-College Sing and the Nykerk Cup. Every time a new building was dedicated, a new president installed, or a dignitary visited Hope there was music. Students initiated ensembles, such as vocal quartets,¹⁰ but frequently there was spontaneous singing, such as fraternities serenading outside Voorhees when it was an all-female dorm.

Why was music everywhere at the college? In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century era, Hope students, as with undergraduates across country, learned to play instruments and to sing at home and in school. In 1936, the musical abilities of the 152 incoming Hope freshmen were surveyed: seventy per cent could sing, while over sixty per cent could play at least one instrument.¹¹ No wonder that students were making music all the time, everywhere. It was an important component of their identity.

Clearly, the department organized some of this music, e.g., performances of Handel's *Messiah*, since early in the twentieth century a fixture on campus just before

Christmas, and then beginning in 1941, Christmas Vespers. Each year there were scores of recitals by faculty, students, and guest artists. Like the pageants held every decade between 1916 and 1966 or performances during Tulip Time, these were for and often with the



Madrigal Singers, late 1950s

local community—the city of Holland and beyond. But the most important force at work in the college's first century was students. Historically, making music at Hope College should be understood as a bottom-up rather than top-down process. This helps explain endless editorials in the *Anchor* in support of making music a department, a major, and a set of opportunities. Hence the thesis: music made the department.

In this, students found faculty who shared a passion for institutionalizing the music program, beginning with John Nykerk in the 1890s through Curtis Snow in the 1930s and Robert Cavanaugh in the 1950s-70s, and to the end of our story. The faculty hires of the 1950s and sixties produced a critical mass of professionals, who performed and taught at the highest levels, represented by music department chair Stuart Sharp's phrase, "the performing professor."¹² Predictably, being professionals, they responded to national rather than local expectations, embodied in the NASM accreditation, thus taking over from students—most of whom were not music majors—the organization of music on Hope's



Hope College Pageant, 1916

campus.

On some occasions what appear to be causes turn out to be effects. This move toward a top-down direction was related to the declining musicality among college students. Anecdotally, we can comprehend this is in a little survey I conducted. I wondered about the decline in singing among the college's fraternities and sororities,



Wilfred Curtis Snow,
ca. 1930

which led to the demise of the All-College Sing. I asked four female and four male alumni who had been Greeks to recall their organization's song. The two poles were represented by James Bultman, '63, who when I surveyed him asked whether I would like him to sing the Frater song, and a member of the class of 1994 who could not recall whether the Cosmos had a song. A recent national survey reported on participation in college ensembles of just under fifteen

per cent of students. Why this was the case is revealing: the student respondents sensed they didn't have the time.¹³ I take this as code for, "We choose to spend our time doing other things." In one generation making music had for most college students ceased to be an important part of their identity.

Finally, a few words need to be said about the relationship between the music department and the Holland community. The town-gown relationship centered on music was terrifically important—beginning before Hope was even chartered as a college. Once again cause and effect are elusive. Was the musical scene in Holland due to the inherent musicality of its citizenry, as historian Robert Swierenga believes?¹⁴ Or was it the presence of a vibrant music program at the college? It is safe to say that for decades after 1866, the college depended on townspeople for the making of music on campus. Before 1900, members of the Holland community frequently supplied the music at Hope's graduation exercises. To enhance Hope College music ensembles, community members were often included—Vespers is the example readers would be most familiar with. And the reverse is true: the Holland Symphony Orchestra invited Hope students to join it.

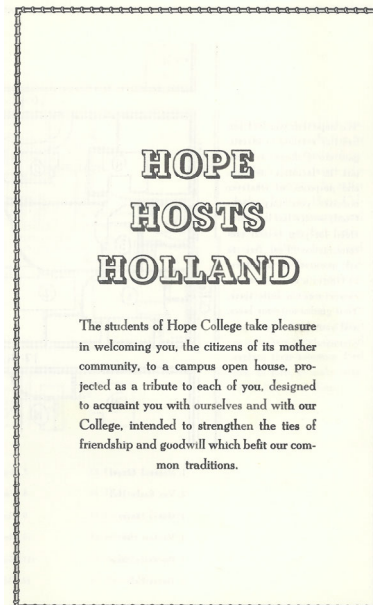


Frater Frolics, 1941

Through the diaries of Mildred Schuppert, class of 1931, there are glimpses of Hope students participating in the musical life of Holland churches. Schuppert faithfully recorded in her diary each of the occasions when she or other music majors performed. Schuppert herself played

the organ for First Reformed Church, Hope Church, Third Reformed Church, and the Methodist Church on more than a dozen occasions between 1929 and 1931.¹⁵

Decades later, Harley Brown, '59, sang in Hope Church's choir, served as choir director for Fourth Reformed Church, and performed in *The Red Mill*, a popular operetta staged for a Tulip Time audience by the music and theatre departments.¹⁶



Might it be the case that this town-gown relationship is unique in the landscape of American higher education? Consider two occasions this past January. On a Saturday evening in the Concert Hall of the magnificent Jack Miller Center, hundreds of Hollanders enjoyed a piano recital given by a music faculty member. The following morning at my church, Pillar, a gifted Hope music major played her violin as a member of the worship ensemble. These two events represent thousands of such performances during the college's first century and a half, pointing to a nexus of faculty, students, churches, and community.



Mildred Schuppert,
ca. 1950

If we were to ask ourselves, as I was asked by the woman sitting next to me in the third row at the piano recital, what would it be like if Hope College were to be moved to another town Holland's size? Would there have been such a crowd that night, or would there be a Vespers? My answer that evening was that over the past 150 years the local culture, the quality and quantity of Holland area churches' vocal and instrumental music, and the college's music department, have supported each other in making remarkable music.

Having discussed continuity in the story of music at the college, I'll end with change. When I presented my research at a music department colloquium this past spring, I finished with an experiment. I played part of an interview with Barbara Timmer, which concluded with a piano performance of the *Alma Mater Hymn*, written by Robert Cavanaugh. She had played it as a freshman in the very first



Harley Brown, 1958

Christmas Vespers, on December 7, 1941. In the decades that followed, when they heard the music Hope audiences would have instinctively begun singing the words. On this occasion my audience did not. Having read this essay, readers may reflect on why that was the case.

Endnotes

- ¹*Making Music: Hope College's Music Department, A History* should come out later in 2019. For Allison Utting's reflections on the project see *Joint Archives Quarterly* 29, 3 (Fall 2019).
- ²Minutes of the Collegiate Faculty, 6 Dec. 1904, H88-0335, Joint Archives of Holland, Mich. (hereafter JAH).
- ³Annual Report of Hope Faculty to the Council, Minutes of the Collegiate Faculty, 18 Apr. 1905, H88-0335, JAH.
- ⁴*Milestone*, 1916, 83.
- ⁵*Hope College Bulletin*, Nov. 1919; see also *Milestone*, 1916, 84 for the "departments" of piano and harmony, violin and voice.
- ⁶*Anchor*, 14 Oct. 1925.
- ⁷Faculty meeting minutes, 4 Feb. 1946, H88-0335, JAH. For music as a problem see *Intelligencer-Leader*, 20 June 1941; Annual Meeting Minutes, 14 June 1950, Board of Trustees Papers, H88-0246, JAH.
- ⁸Charles Aschbrenner interview with Jantina Holleman, 2002, Oral History Project folder, Music Department Papers, Box 4, H88-0378, JAH.
- ⁹Minutes of the Executive Committee, 12 Jan. 1950, Minutes 1945-1955 folder, Board of Trustees Papers, H88-0246, JAH.
- ¹⁰See, e.g. *Milestone*, 1916, 88.
- ¹¹Faculty Meeting Minutes, 5 Nov. 1936, H88-0335, JAH; cf. Sondra Wieland Howe, *Women Music Educators in the United States* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2014), chs. 3, 7-8.
- ¹²*News from Hope College*, Apr. 1978.

ALMA MATER HYMN

Robert W. Cavanaugh

Hail to our Al - ma Ma - ter! Hail to our Var - si - ty!

Stead - fast as the an - chor ev - er in our loy - al - ty; _____

Hail to the Orange and Blue! — Firm may our mot - to be!

"Spe - ra in De - o." Hope! Our Var - si - ty.



¹³Roger Mantie and Jay Dorfman, "Music Participation and Nonparticipation of Nonmajors on College Campuses," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* No. 200 (Spr. 2014): 41-62; see also Dimitra Kokotsaki and Susan Hallam, "Higher education music students' perceptions of the benefits of participative music making," *Music Education Research* 9 (2007): 162.

¹⁴Robert P. Swierenga, *Holland, Michigan: From Dutch Colony to Dynamic City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), iii, 20.
¹⁵1927-29 and 1929-34 Hope College Diary folders, Mildred Schuppert Papers, Box 1, W94.1183, JAH.
¹⁶Scrapbook, Harley D. Brown Papers, H18-1999, JAH.

About the author:

Marc Baer is Professor Emeritus of History. He served his department as chair, the college as interim Dean for Arts and Humanities and is currently interim chair of the Department of Music. Making Music: Hope College's Music Department, a History will be his fourth book.

The Historian as Detective

By Allison Utting



Milly Schuppert, 1932

Summer 2018. A photocopied image from the 1932 Hope College Milestone Yearbook in one hand and a cold metal railing in the other, I quickly climbed a series of concrete steps in the tower of Dimnent Chapel. The stairway, unknown to me until a few days prior, led up to

a small room furnished with old wooden planks, the chapel's original chime clock, and a series of electrical boxes. I raised the photograph so that it was level with one of Dimnent's emblematic stained glass windows and scanned for any familiarities. It was not a match. Dr. Baer, professor emeritus of history, sighed behind me, "That would have made a great story."

While a treasure hunt through Dimnent did not yield the remains of a lost organ practice room, the summer of 2018 did reveal many great stories. It was the summer I agreed to join Dr. Marc Baer in co-authoring a book about the history of Hope College's Music Department, a department with which I had no affiliation besides my introduction to music course freshman year. While the newness of the subject matter made me slightly apprehensive, the opportunity to work with Dr. Baer did not. A beloved professor, Dr. Baer had been instrumental in bringing me to Hope and was always a source of support and confidence during my time on campus. I was equally excited by the opportunity to work as a real historian. As a history education major, I believed tackling this project would prepare me to teach the skills of an historian to my students in a more authentic way.

Committed to the project, I could not have anticipated the challenges and overall fulfillment it would bring. In my time at Hope, I had written plenty of history papers that had required primary source analysis. However, I was not prepared for how tedious, and at times, utterly frustrating, it could be to sift through, for example, ten years' worth of Board of Trustees' meeting minutes looking for the proverbial smoking gun to help confirm your claim, only to discover that there may not even be a smoking gun. Or perhaps, stumbling upon a random pamphlet in a scrapbook that completely changes the narrative you have been writing. Yet, there was eventual gratification. No longer was I just writing a paper on a predetermined topic for my professor's eyes only. I was

a historian, working to bring to light a history that would otherwise continue collecting dust in the basement of the archives. This brought an element of thrill to the experience. Analyzing hundreds of college documents dating back to 1866 also brought an immense amount of pride to this, now, Hope alumna. The meaning I had attached to certain spaces and traditions on campus was amplified as was my connection to generations of Hope students before me. Thus, it was not the proverbial "power of music," but the *story* of music at Hope that brought both excitement and meaning to my life.

And the end of the story? Climb the stairs to the balcony landing in the south tower of Dimnent, a space whose only purpose now is an entry to the Chapel balcony. In the summer of 1930, Professor Curtis Snow and three students carefully reassembled a Kimball organ here, the



Allie Utting and Marc Baer conducting research in the Joint Archives of Holland reading room, Summer 2018

one pictured in the 1932 *Milestone*. Like a good detective, a good historian never gives up her quest, a lesson I learned the summer of 2018.

About the author:

Allison Utting graduated from Hope College in 2018 with a degree in social studies secondary education and a minor in history. She is a resident of Grandville, Michigan, and currently teaches eighth grade United States History at Byron Center West Middle School in Byron Center, Michigan.

The Joint Archives of Holland



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Esther Snow and the Women's Glee Club, 1949