

# “Making the many-minded one”: Community Singing at the Peabody Prep in 1915

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In 1915, an extraordinary sequence of events positioned Baltimore at the vanguard of the burgeoning community singing movement. As a reporter for the *Evening Sun* put it in April of that year, “It begins to appear that all Baltimore has wanted to burst forth in song for a very long time, and that the city has been waiting for just such an opportunity.”<sup>1</sup> The community concert that provoked this comment preceded a hurricane of similar offerings, which ranged from gatherings in public schools to sing-alongs with the City Park Band to outdoor celebrations with dancing and motion pictures. The community singing craze in Baltimore grew from the tireless labor of a pair of ambitious women who developed and carried out community singing activities at the Peabody Institute Preparatory Division (hereafter “the Prep”). There can be no doubt that May Garrettson Evans, superintendent of the Prep, and Henrietta Baker Low, director of the Prep’s singing classes for children, transformed their city and the nation by advancing the causes of music education and community music, and the time has come for their story to be told. Both the women’s activities and their subsequent erasure from the historical record, however, can only be understood in a critical context that assesses the roles of class, race, and gender in early twentieth-century American society. This article will consider Evans’s and Low’s identities and ideologies as it examines their inauguration of Baltimore’s community singing movement.

## The First Community Concert

On the evening of Friday, March 5, 1915, “an informal gathering of young music students, their relatives and friends” assembled in the small East Hall of the Peabody Institute and sang familiar songs.<sup>2</sup> The singing was led by Henrietta Baker Low, who urged the assemblage to ever greater

musicality and spirit. A trained soprano, Mrs. Frank Mellor, took to the stage to offer vocal leadership, while the accompaniment was provided by the Peabody Junior Orchestra. The songs were chosen by the singers themselves out of *18 Songs for Community Singing*, which was distributed at the door. The numbers sung included “Annie Laurie,” “How Can I Bear to Leave Thee?,” “Love’s Old, Sweet Song,” “Old Folks at Home,” “My Old Kentucky Home,” and, to close, “America” (“My Country, ‘Tis of Thee”).

May Garrettson Evans, who organized the evening, refrained from advertising. She had been frustrated before in her attempts to start community members singing, so she took a tentative approach and kept her expectations low. Instead of announcing the sing in the local papers, as would become standard procedure from then on, she simply told her students, both at the Prep and at some of the local day schools, that there was to be “an informal evening of choral singing.”<sup>3</sup> It poured rain on the evening in question, but that did not prevent four hundred singers from arriving at the appointed time. In a letter to another would-be sing organizer, Evans describes that first gathering: “Half shame-facedly glancing at their neighbors, they responded a little feebly; but some of our students who had been singing the songs were present, and they boldly dashed in to help along the cause. Soon old men and women, young men and maidens, and a lot of little folk were raising their voices right lustily.”<sup>4</sup> The resulting press coverage was minimal—a single review in the *Baltimore Sun*—but those who had participated swamped Evans with letters requesting a repetition.

The fact that Prep students came to the rescue with their boisterous singing was no accident. It was the result of careful planning and assiduous work on the part of Evans and Low. To give an adequate account of their efforts, however, we will have to go back well before the birth of the community singing movement to the founding of the Peabody Preparatory Division by Evans in 1894.

### **Foundations: Evans, the Prep, and Music Reform Ideology**

May Garrettson Evans was born into a prominent Baltimore family in 1866 (fig. 1). She could trace her ancestors back (and did so with pride) to the British subjects who settled in Maryland in the mid-eighteenth century, and she kept a detailed record of their family crests and genealogies.<sup>5</sup> She was the fourth of eight children and, along with two of her sisters, forsook marriage to pursue a career in the arts. Marion Dorsey Evans, born next, would become May’s second-in-command at the Peabody Prep,



Figure 1. Portrait of May Garrettson Evans, taken in 1901. May Garrettson Evans Collection, Peabody Institute, Baltimore.

while Bessie Evans, the youngest, would later teach dance at the Prep and gain a reputation as a dancer, singer, and monologist. The other Evans girls were also artistically inclined, and did not completely abandon their work upon marrying: Mrs. Townsend Scott, née Helen Evans, became an acclaimed painter, while Florence Evans took to the stage as a young woman and married an actor.<sup>6</sup>

After an elite private education in Georgetown and Baltimore, Evans enrolled at the Peabody Institute as a violinist in 1886, and in 1889 she earned the Peabody Teacher's Certificate. She always downplayed her training and performance skills, telling reporters that she had "no particular talent for that instrument."<sup>7</sup> In 1888 she became the first female reporter at the *Baltimore Sun*, a position that provoked no end of curiosity and, some generations later, respect. Her gender made travel around the city difficult, especially because her mother was not always available to chaperone. Eventually she took to going out alone, armed with a stiletto that eventually sat on her desk at the Prep as a letter opener.<sup>8</sup>

It was Evans's position at the *Sun* that led to her founding the Prep, although in the many interviews she gave Evans always deemphasized her own initiative. The story, repeated many times throughout her career, goes as follows: One day, when Evans showed up for work at the *Sun*, the usual assignment was not waiting on her desk. In its place was a note that read "Hustle for news." She was interested in the welfare of the Peabody Institute and had long thought that a preparatory school would raise the standard for incoming students, so she headed over to speak with the director. After discussing her ideas with Asger Hamerik, director of the Peabody, she returned to the office and typed up an article titled "Preparatory Music School Talked Of"—without mentioning, of course, that she herself had done most of the talking.<sup>9</sup> During the course of her "hustling," however, Evans became interested. She created a proposal for just such a school and then suggested that either the Peabody Institute or the Peabody Alumni Association take on the project. When both organizations declined, she did it herself, with the assistance of her sister Marion.

The birth of the Prep was recounted dozens of times over the next three decades, often through an increasingly dense haze of nostalgia and idealism. Although the school was founded before the community music movement had come into existence, it was later reimagined as embodying all of that movement's ideals from inception.<sup>10</sup> Foremost of these was the Prep's reputed inclusion of all members of the community, without regard to skill or social status. The Prep was the first music school in Baltimore to offer musical instruction with no prerequisites, but it did not have substantial offerings for adults until eighteen years after it was founded. It was also not open to everyone; tuition fees had to be met, and black students could not enroll. At the same time, the school's success was not exaggerated, nor was Evans's industry.

The Peabody Graduates' Preparatory and High School of Music—so named because it was staffed primarily by graduates of the Peabody Institute—opened on October 1, 1894, in a house at 17 East Centre



*Figure 2.* This group photo in celebration of the Preparatory Department's twentieth anniversary was published in the *Baltimore Sun* on October 4, 1914. Note the predominance of women, especially among the founders seated in the front row, where May Garrettson Evans is in the center, with her sister Marion Dorsey Evans to her right. Henrietta Baker Low is second from left in the last row, and Virginia Blackhead—another community music visionary—is third from right in the second row. Archives of the Peabody Institute, 1857-1977, Peabody Institute, Baltimore.

Street, near the Peabody.<sup>11</sup> (fig. 2) Evans had initially planned to rent the unused rooms of the house to lodgers, but when about three hundred students turned up on the first day she found herself in need of more space and more teachers. She left her job at the *Sun* the next year to dedicate herself full-time to the school. Her success was due both to a carefully planned advertising scheme and to the need for a children's music school, which many parents had expressed to Evans. In 1898, Harold Randolph became director of the Peabody Institute, and he offered to annex Evans's school. The Peabody Preparatory Division, with Evans as Superintendent, came into existence.<sup>12</sup>

Annexation brought many benefits to Evans's school, such as additional funding, better facilities, broader advertising, and a direct channel to the Institute for promising students, but we cannot ignore Evans's position in this arrangement. In 1894, she conceived of the Prep and suggested that the men at the Institute bring it into existence. When they were uninterested, she did all the work herself and created a successful and

valued school. Once everything was in place, a man—Randolph—stepped in and offered to take over. And Evans readily accepted. She continued to head the Prep until 1929 and won many accolades, but she remained in a subservient role for the rest of her career. In addition, Evans always refused to take credit for her success. She described the events that led to the founding of the Prep as “accidental,” and her motives as “entirely unaltruistic.”<sup>13</sup> At the conclusion of a 1911 interview, she begged the reporter, “Don’t make me seem too egotistical. I hate to talk about myself, but you led me on, you know you did! Please soften it down a bit.”<sup>14</sup> When the same reporter asked her to explain the success of her school, she listed three factors—the real need for it, its democratic educational ideals, and the hearty cooperation among its teachers—but refrained from mentioning her own extraordinary administrative and marketing skills.

Evans’s behavior, both as a Peabody staff member and as an interview subject, was appropriate for a woman of her social standing. Her choice of career (education) and her driving ambition (social betterment) were also influenced by being a woman. Evans’s ideology, however, belonged to a larger sphere of thought that encompassed both men and women. She and Low might both be labeled as “music reformers”: a loosely coordinated group of energetic, optimistic, and patriotic musicians and educators who sought to make music available to all members of society. Music reformers belonged to the Progressive Movement of the late nineteenth century, and their ultimate goal was social reform.

Evans and Low’s activities in Baltimore both paralleled and influenced the work being done by music reformers more generally (I explored their missions, beliefs, and tactics in the second chapter of my monograph, *Everybody Sing!: Community Singing in the American Picture Palace*).<sup>15</sup> The two women were never wed to a single strategy; if a line of attack proved unfruitful, they would try another. Their goal was to spread a love for “good music” and to make it an essential part of everyday life, and they prioritized that goal over methodological bickering. Starting in 1914, Evans and Low encouraged community singing at the Prep, introduced it into public schools, and spread it to public parks and rural districts. They worked with children and adults, and they encouraged both active participation in music and passive appreciation in a large number of contexts. Although they often worked together, the two women were very different, as evidenced by their independent projects. Each had unique goals, and each had different methods of furthering those goals.

Evans’s commitment to the city and the conservatory knew no bounds,<sup>16</sup> but she had little interest in activities outside her community. Her music reform agenda, therefore, was geographically limited. She was also a self-effacing individual who sought to stay out of the limelight. She

put almost all of her energy into her administrative work, and never published her views on community music or spoke publicly about the activities she had set in motion. Even her letters are strictly factual; they explain what she did, but not why. We can therefore only guess at her motives. One oft-repeated statement can probably be attributed directly to her, that the movement in Baltimore “was inaugurated to stimulate interest in the singing of good, melodious songs, as a wholesome and inspiring influence in the home, the school, fraternal societies and miscellaneous gatherings in general.”<sup>17</sup> Compared to some of the claims made and ambitions outlined by other reformers, this is a modest thesis. At the same time, Evans was a modest woman; it is easy to believe that these were indeed her goals and justifications. Others also attributed believable motives to her, such as the claim that her interest lay in “bringing music into the home and making music a part of family life.”<sup>18</sup> But whether this represents a stereotyped interpretation of womanhood or Evans’s genuine ambition is impossible to say.

Low was quite a different character, and in many ways a more typical music reformer. She did not live in Baltimore but in New York City, and she had previously achieved national prominence as president of the Music Supervisors National Conference (MSNC). Low thought on a grand scale, and her concern extended to nearly every corner of the nation. She traveled constantly, addressing school boards, civic clubs, and fraternal organizations on the topic of community music. These lectures, which always included a practical demonstration of community singing, took her not only to parts of Maryland and New York, but to Tennessee, Virginia, and New Jersey. At one point she offered a ten-day course before a Teachers’ Institute in which she trained schoolteachers in general music education. Reports indicate that Low was responsible for community singing and for the founding of choruses—her ultimate goal—throughout the region.<sup>19</sup>

Low’s broad vision and evangelical zeal are best witnessed in her speeches and writings, which are numerous. In 1917, Low published her manifesto on community singing. She chose the *Peabody Bulletin* as her platform, but the document circulated far beyond the walls of that institution.<sup>20</sup> This manifesto, titled “Community Music in Baltimore,” was adapted from an address Low gave to the Music Section of the National Federation of Women’s Clubs in June 1916. It is easy to hear her voice in the document: she is aggressive, impassioned, and utterly convicted. After succinctly outlining the auspices under which community singing had been conducted in Baltimore—the Peabody, the city, the Baltimore County School Board, and various societies—and summarizing the accomplishments of each, she turns to her real concern: spreading the

movement throughout the country. She describes exactly how singing got started at the Prep, but only so that other music activists can repeat that success. At her most universal, Low offers a list of ten “deductions” made from her own experiences; she hopes that these conclusions and ideas will smooth the way for other organizers. In the list, Low includes the maxim that must have driven her own efforts: “A Community Singing Director should have an awful stab of his conscience every time he talks Community Singing instead of doing Community Singing.”<sup>21</sup> (It is unsurprising that Low should have directed her comments to a male audience: Most song leaders, especially those who conducted large-scale public events, were men. She would also have perceived men as having the power to shape the movement and broadcast her message.)

Earlier in the manifesto, Low outlines “The Aims of Community Music”—or rather, her aims, which were far from universal. Low praises the power of community music in “making the many-minded one,” but she refuses to accept this as an end in itself.<sup>22</sup> Instead, she insists that the leader must push his chorus “until they feel the much finer thrill of the *co-operative attainment of artistic beauty*.”<sup>23</sup> Low’s ultimate goal was to provide an experience of spiritual transcendence, made possible by the appreciation of great art, to Americans “of all classes and conditions.”<sup>24</sup> Low particularly embraced the assimilatory power of community singing, which “ought to be a means of bringing alien races into sympathy with American ideals and traditions.”<sup>25</sup>

Low also spoke frequently about her philosophy; she seemed eager to share her work with anyone who would listen. In one 1915 interview, she listed dozens of benefits that music could bring into the lives of children and adults: she described singing as “a glorious means of self-expression”; she praised music’s “power to rouse emotion, to inspire devotion for an ideal”; she suggested that community music be used “to develop that feeling of group relationship, of social solidarity, which is the civic spirit”; and she claimed that “the supreme function of music is as a social force.”<sup>26</sup> And, like most reformers, she condemned the home that is “stuffy with ragtime.”<sup>27</sup>

Low held both herself and her students—young and old—to a very high standard. For her, “good music” did not exist to gild one’s life; it had to be the pith of life. She offered a cutting caricature of the fake music lover in 1915:

I am attending an appreciation course in music, but the latest musical comedy finds me in line at the box-office; and when we gather in the living room at night somebody plays the popular hits. Pure tone is a very desirable thing either in speaking or in singing, but I applaud vigorously a



vaudeville act which exploits a performer singing doggerel in a raucous voice.<sup>28</sup>

If one truly loves “good music,” Low tells us, mere entertainment—for which there is no room in her world—will lose its attraction. This is a moral issue. “Not what I *know*,” she concludes, “but what I *love and practice in my life* determines my personality and that of my household.”<sup>29</sup>

The Peabody never issued a formal statement on the topic of community music, but in 1915 the *Peabody Bulletin* printed the mission statement of the Boston Music School Settlement, along with the observation: “This is a creed which might be truthfully subscribed to by such a conservatory as the Peabody.”<sup>30</sup> The comment is unsigned, but Evans was editor of the *Bulletin*; it is not impossible—especially considering the timing—that she inserted the entry herself. The Boston statement reads as follows:

We believe: In art for the masses; in giving children and adults an opportunity to learn, perform, and hear the masterpieces of music; in the development of personal and social resources through music; in the development of artistic talent in children of limited opportunity; in the value of education in music as a defense against the degrading pleasures and interests which abound in the congested districts of cities; in the spirit of social service which stands for the encouragement of what is best in children and adults without distinction of class, race, color, or creed; for the multiplication of opportunities to improve personal character and capacity and for the promotion of intelligent and effective citizenship.<sup>31</sup>

This thorough statement reflects almost every facet of the music reform agenda. It also reflects the values of Evans, Low, and other activists at the Peabody. We will now retrace the careful steps that led Evans and Low to their extraordinary success in the quest to get Baltimore singing.

### Music Appreciation at the Prep

Music reform ideology first entered the Prep in the form of a “musical appreciation” course, which met for the first time on October 23, 1912.<sup>32</sup> The object, which would be reiterated in the Peabody literature and newspaper accounts for some years, was to serve “those who have not time or inclination to take a special course, or else wish to supplement vocal or instrumental study by a broader acquaintance with musical literature in its various forms.”<sup>33</sup> All press materials made it clear that there were no requirements for entrance to this class, nor would there be examinations or outside work. The format of each class was to be a lecture recital, in which Virginia Blackhead would discuss music that was performed live

before the class. Blackhead was a graduate of both the Prep and the Institute, from which she earned a Teacher's Certificate in Piano in 1900; she usually provided the accompaniment for her appreciation lecture recitals. She worked closely with Evans in developing community programs, and replaced her as superintendent when Evans retired in 1929.

Blackhead's appreciation topics in the first year were mostly limited to vocal and chamber music, and in the inaugural season included "folksongs of Europe, glees, college songs, hymns, national anthems, operas, oratorios, and compositions for violin, piano, orchestra, etc."<sup>34</sup>

The first class meeting attracted such a large crowd that the course had to move from a Prep classroom to the Institute's lecture hall. Blackhead's inaugural topic was "an exposition of the American folksong, as represented by old Indian and negro melodies"<sup>35</sup>—an auspicious choice, given the significance of folksong to the music reformers and the ongoing conflict about what constituted "real" American folk music. Her decision to include Native American and African American voices positioned her in the ranks of reformers who sought—at least in theory—an all-embracing national culture. (Blackhead was certainly open-minded; less than five years later she lectured her appreciation class on "Rag-time, Classical and Popular"!)<sup>36</sup> Blackhead's second lecture turned to the folksongs of Ireland and Scotland, and it is likely that she discussed some of the very tunes that would become part of the community singing repertoire three years later.

Blackhead's gender is significant, for many of the music appreciation trailblazers were women. This was to be expected: music and education were two public spheres in which women were increasingly welcome, and women's clubs had introduced a large number of housewives to the world of civic service. Perhaps the most significant figure in early music appreciation was Anne Shaw Faulkner of Chicago, who gave pre-concert lectures, taught music appreciation, and wrote an early appreciation textbook, *What We Hear in Music* (1913), which accompanied a series of Victor records and was last revised in 1943.<sup>37</sup> Faulkner also presented several papers on music appreciation at national meetings of the MSNC and served as national chair of the Music Division of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.<sup>38</sup>

Faulkner had no immediate impact on the activities that took place at the Prep, but this brief account of her work provides a good picture of how the music appreciation movement functioned. To begin with, Faulkner was involved with two of the national organizations that backed music reform and without which it would not have been possible. The MSNC in particular played a crucial role in the spread of music appreciation and community singing. The organization was founded on a bedrock

of progressive ideals in 1907, and was steered for many years by another extraordinary woman, Francis Elliott Clark. Indeed, women outnumbered men in the early years of the MSNC, and several served as president, including Henrietta Baker Low in 1912–13. Clark was an aggressive proponent of music in the schools, but also sought to forge close relationships between the MSNC and the other national organizations concerned with music education, including the National Music Teachers Association, the National Federation of Music Clubs, and the Music Education Department of the National Education Association.<sup>39</sup>

Faulkner's work also introduces us to some of the potential audiences for music appreciation. She instructed two different groups of people: the adults who attended her pre-concert lectures, and the classroom teachers who read *What We Hear in Music* to guide their students through the course of Victor recordings. Although today we think of music appreciation as being a college-level course, it was at first directed primarily at schoolchildren. Most reformers agreed that this was the most productive approach, for children were easy to mold and, after they had taken to the material, would proceed to demand good music at home.<sup>40</sup> At the Prep, however, faculty were already providing musical instruction to a large number of children. What Evans wanted was to reach the adults of Baltimore and to introduce them directly to a better way of living.

The great success of the music appreciation course offered in 1912–13 resulted in the formal establishment of “music extension” work at the Prep the following year. Extension courses were open to any member of the public with the payment of a \$1 membership fee per course, and included appreciation of music (both afternoon and evening), singing classes (boys, girls, little children, children, and older girls), ear training, and elements of music. Blackhead taught appreciation and ear training, while Low directed the children's choruses. At that time, Low was serving as Supervisor of Music in the Baltimore Schools and had not yet married (she is listed as Baker in the Prep materials). Although Low moved to New York with her husband in 1914, she traveled to Baltimore at least two days a week for many years to continue her work both in the public schools and at the Prep. In the 1914–15 academic year, 1,112 “members” enrolled in extension courses at the Prep: solid proof that Evans had succeeded in her mission to connect with the Baltimore community.<sup>41</sup>

The music appreciation course, which enrolled about six hundred in the 1914–15 school year, appears to have always been the most popular.<sup>42</sup> It was also the best vehicle for spreading enthusiasm for community music beyond the walls of the Peabody. On March 17, 1914, the students in that class heard from a very special guest, Peter W. Dykema, who delivered a lecture titled “Music in the Community and the Home.” Dykema had

become Professor of Music at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in 1913, and was involved with all of the national music education organizations, serving as president of the MSNC four years after Low filled that role. Although Low was not involved with the appreciation classes at that time, Dykema probably came to speak at her invitation. The address was co-sponsored by the education committee of the Women's Civic League and widely advertised,<sup>43</sup> so it is likely that a large and enthusiastic audience turned up to hear his views on community music.

Although we have no record of Dykema's lecture, the advance press coverage indicated that he was going to address community singing. Most of the newspapers printed his colorful claim that the off-key hollering of the singer who could not carry a tune was useful in a big chorus, where it provided the same function as the mixer pipes in an organ and gave "virility, variety, and color to the great mass of tone."<sup>44</sup> Dykema's activities in the years immediately preceding his Baltimore visit, however, provide even better evidence of his investment in the community singing movement. At the 1913 meeting of the MSNC in Rochester, New York, Dykema had been appointed chair of a committee that was tasked with assembling a list of songs that every child should know. These songs would then be published in a standard version for use in classrooms across the country. It took the committee a number of years to complete its work, in part because the members had a difficult time whittling their list down to the desired twelve selections. Their first publication was *18 Songs for Community Singing*, which became available in late 1913.<sup>45</sup> (Low later hypothesized that this was the first time the term "community singing" appeared in print.)<sup>46</sup> The committee was disappointed with the small number of educators who adopted the song sheet in its first four months,<sup>47</sup> but the project would soon develop into the enormously successful *55 Songs for Community Singing* (1917), which sold over a million copies in a "Liberty Edition" during the war.<sup>48</sup>

The story I have just recounted is fairly well known, and these song books have not been ignored.<sup>49</sup> Low's role, however, has never been properly acknowledged. In 1913, Low was completing her term as president of the MSNC. At the Rochester conference, a paper was read on behalf of a Kansas music educator and community music activist, Frank A. Beach, who was unable to attend. In the paper, Beach observed that less than a third of all American children were provided with music education. To rectify this, he urged that the MSNC adopt a list of twelve songs to be published for wide circulation, and also that members "do missionary work" in rural areas to spread the love of music to otherwise deprived children.<sup>50</sup> The response to this plea was not positive: "The members of the convention laughed" in the face of such an ambitious proposal, and

derided Beach for his unrealistic idealism.<sup>51</sup> Low, however, retorted that “the suggestions were neither preposterous nor too idealistic for realization,” and demanded that a committee be formed on the spot to create the list of twelve songs, a task for which she permitted only ninety minutes.<sup>52</sup> She later wrote that Beach’s paper “completely revolutionized my ideas.”<sup>53</sup> The essay revealed to her that community music was too big for the schools to manage and required direct, persistent labor. At the 1913 conference, Low focused her energy on the first of Beach’s suggestions (the list of songs), probably because the goal was more clearly defined and more easily achieved. Only later would she take on the role of missionary. The existence of *18 Songs for Community Singing*, which was available for 5 cents by the end of the year, directly stimulated the work of Evans and Low in Baltimore, and it was the primary song sheet used at the Prep.

It is difficult to assess the degree to which Low encouraged Dykema and vice versa. There is little to indicate that they worked together directly, but it is clear they moved in the same circles and pursued the same goals. It is therefore impossible to say whether Dykema’s visit inspired the creation of a new extension course the following autumn, “Community and Home Music.” The title of the course echoes that of Dykema’s lecture almost verbatim, although the specific community groups invited to a preliminary meeting on Friday, October 6, 1914—“parents, day-school and Sunday-school teachers, social services workers, etc.”—suggest a more limited vision. At this meeting, Low was to deliver a lecture titled “The Child Voice and the Development of Music in Home and School,” a long-standing interest of hers. Then, if there was sufficient interest, the attendees would fix a regular meeting time for the course.<sup>54</sup>

Although none of the press materials make any mention of community singing, Evans herself claimed that the exclusive object of this meeting “was to start a class of adults interested in the development of community singing.”<sup>55</sup> Low described it as “a choral class for training directors of Community Singing,” a movement she believed must be led by the churches and Sunday Schools.<sup>56</sup> The initial gathering did suggest enough interest for a class, but when the first regular meeting took place on an evening of the following week only a handful of participants showed up. Evans and Low decided immediately to call off the project rather than allow it to “drag on under unfavorable conditions.”<sup>57</sup> All the same, they were encouraged by the enthusiasm of those who did attend and did not give up hope. Instead, Evans and Low decided to focus their efforts closer to home.

At this point, Evans had a revelation: “The way to start ‘Community Singing,’” she later wrote, “was to start the community singing.”<sup>58</sup> The

community she meant was the Prep community; if Evans could not get Baltimore to sing just yet, she could certainly get her own students to sing. Here Evans employed her excellent administrative skills once again. She met with all of the classroom teachers and asked each of them to require that their students purchase a copy of *18 Songs*. Once the books were acquired, the teachers were to spend a few minutes each class period singing or playing (in the orchestra classes) some of the familiar selections with their students. Evans reported the next year that the in-class community singing had a profound effect on the learning environment. As one teacher exclaimed, "It has put new life into the work."<sup>59</sup> Soon students were buying additional copies of the book for their family members to use at home, and community organizations and schools began to show interest in what the Prep was doing.<sup>60</sup>

While Evans was pressing the cause of community singing close to home, Low began to pursue the missionary work that Beach had suggested in his 1913 convention paper. She had served as Supervisor of Music in the Baltimore Public Schools until her marriage, and continued to direct ensembles and teach music courses in various Baltimore institutions.<sup>61</sup> This put her in an excellent position to do outreach. Low had left behind a healthy music program in the Baltimore city school district, but the suburban and rural schools that served children outside of the city limits were under the jurisdiction of the Baltimore County School District and offered no music education to speak of. In October 1914, Low met with the superintendent of Baltimore County Public Schools, Albert S. Cook, to discuss the state of music education and possibilities for bringing community singing into the classroom. He was enthusiastic, as were the other administrators she spoke with, but they reported a total lack of funds, no materials, and, worst of all, not a single music teacher on the payroll.

Low was not discouraged. She immediately arranged to meet each week with one of three groups of teachers, to whom she taught the selections contained in *18 Songs* by rote. The more ambitious of the teachers learned something about notation so that they could copy the songs onto the chalkboards in their classrooms. The students were then to copy the songs in turn and take them home, to share with their families and perhaps to try on the piano. Low even provided special arrangements of the songs for boys whose voices were breaking. Her limited-range edition overcame a serious problem, and mimeographed copies were quickly distributed in the schools. In this way, Low got community singing into the suburban schools despite the absence of materials and expertise. At the same time, she began planning for a series of community concerts at ten different suburban and rural schools. Interested neighbors, who perhaps had heard the children singing in their homes, would be invited to join in

the practice of community singing. This project did not get off the ground until late April, however, and that was after singing had been firmly established at the Prep.<sup>62</sup>

By early 1915, Evans and Low finally felt prepared to host a community sing at the Peabody; the format and success of the 5 March concert are described above. It is clear that the concert was neither a spontaneous offering nor merely the beginning of community singing in Baltimore. The groundwork was laid years in advance: Low's outreach ensured high community interest, while Evans's classroom singing guaranteed strong vocal participation. At the same time, the concert itself was but another step toward their ultimate goal.

### The Second Community Concert

Evans and Low were reassured by the success they experienced with their 5 March concert: the time for community singing had come. When they prepared for the Prep's second community concert, therefore, they pulled out all the stops. While there were no printed announcements for the March concert, save a concise entry in the Peabody calendar published for that month,<sup>63</sup> the second concert, scheduled for Monday, 26 April, was heralded by a whirlwind of unsolicited press coverage.<sup>64</sup> Notices began to appear in the various Baltimore papers at least nine days before the concert, and they uniformly exhibited great enthusiasm. Five days in advance, for example, the *Evening Sun* listed the various civic organizations—parents' clubs, women's clubs, settlement associations, and private schools—that had been clamoring for just such a community movement. The author also described the initial failures, the dogged perseverance, and the March success.<sup>65</sup> This narrative was frequently included in announcements and reviews during this period, although journalists usually credited Evans or Low for the enormous success of community singing—but not both.

Randolph also personally invited an exhaustive list of dignitaries to attend and take prominent seats on the stage, including Mayor Preston, the members of the Board of Park Commissioners, the members of the Board of School Commissioners, and the heads of various high schools and colleges.<sup>66</sup> In his invitation, he explicitly outlined the goals for the concert, reiterating a statement that was employed by Peabody representatives so frequently that its source cannot be determined: "The object is to stimulate interest in the singing of good, melodious songs, as a wholesome and inspiring influence in the home, the school, fraternal and social societies and miscellaneous gatherings in general—especially in the city parks in summer."<sup>67</sup> This unique tag referred to a greater ambition shared by

Randolph and Evans to which we will return later. Mayor Preston was not able to attend, but his apologetic letter to Randolph “voicing his interest in the fostering of the love and appreciation of good music in the community” was described in the press.<sup>68</sup>

Attendance was superb, and included most of the invited guests as well as citizens representing “all classes and ages.”<sup>69</sup> The newspaper notices had made it clear that every single citizen of Baltimore was welcome, whether they wanted to sing or listen. Singing, of course, was highly encouraged; a *Sun* article published on the morning of April 26 assured readers that “everybody will be invited to sing who is not deaf and dumb, or suffering with influenza and bronchitis.”<sup>70</sup> Income would also not hinder attendance, for entrance was free and no admission cards were required—an unusual arrangement that was widely advertised. The concert was moved from the small East Hall that had served on March 5 to the Peabody Concert Hall, which sat 1,200. Evans considered this to be the largest advisable size for community singing, since in a larger hall the song leader would not be able to communicate with all parts of the audience and “the personal equation” would be sacrificed.<sup>71</sup> All the same, the auditorium nearly proved inadequate: every seat and all standing space was filled.

Many observers gave specific accounts of the types of people who made up the “cosmopolitan audience” on that night.<sup>72</sup> One reviewer noticed many families, “whole rows of children,” and, to his surprise, a large number of men.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps most tellingly, another reviewer described the audiences as “not ‘highbrow’ in any sense of the word,” but rather “a great crowd of music-loving but musically uneducated people.”<sup>74</sup> Some of the punchier press releases that anticipated the concert—press releases obviously composed by Peabody staff, perhaps Evans herself—had emphasized the democratic nature of this occasion. “There will be no frills and nothing highfalutin’ about it,” reads one. “The concert is not for highbrows, but for those simple souls who like the wholesome, old-time songs and enjoy singing them.”<sup>75</sup> Because the Peabody was well known as a bastion of “highbrow” culture, Evans and Low sought explicitly to attract the common citizen.

The most complete description of the audience was provided by Evans herself, but unfortunately it is also probably the most fanciful. It appears in a letter that she wrote nearly four months later, after community singing had spread throughout Baltimore. In it, she addresses a woman in West Virginia who wanted advice on how to start community singing in her own town. The audience that Evans describes is certainly the audience that she hoped would be there; the description therefore



provides an interesting window into her progressive ideology, even if it sheds no light on the actual event:

There were all sorts and conditions of men, a genuine community indeed,—university and college professors, school officials, students, pastors, choir singers, rich and poor, young men with their sweethearts, worn and poverty-stricken fathers and mothers with whole broods of little children, here a bent and feeble patriarch or grandma, to whom the old familiar songs of their youth brought mingled tears and smiles. There were Protestants and Catholics, Jews and gentiles, Native Americans, and some so recently arrived from foreign parts that the English words meant nothing to them, and all they could do was to hum the tune.<sup>76</sup>

This great coming together of various classes and conditions of people (“Native Americans” refers not specifically to American Indians but rather to anyone born in the United States) was a progressive dream. Evans’s portrait of enthusiastic immigrants, humming American songs before they can even speak English, is especially powerful. Her remembered audience represents all types of desirable Americans united and homogenized through song.

Low’s recollection of the participants—which, like all other surviving commentaries, does not mention whether any African Americans were in attendance—is strikingly similar:

This was really Community expression, for the rich and the poor were there; the professional musician and the musically unlearned; the educated and the uneducated. One of the professors of the Conservatory sat next to an old woman who could not read English, but who poured forth all her soul in the German words when we sang “How Can I Leave Thee”! A woman from one of the poorest sections of Baltimore came with her husband, a working man, bringing five children, the youngest about five. “Oh,” she said. “I had so much pleasure to-night I cried, and nobody had to mind the children, for they could come and sing.”<sup>77</sup>

Low’s description of the elderly German immigrant is almost too good to be true, but the vignette is supported both by demographics and by a long review published in *Der Deutsche Correspondent*, Baltimore’s widely read German-language newspaper. Germans had first settled the area in the seventeenth century, and they participated in the founding of Baltimore in 1729. In 1915, German immigrants and their descendants made up about 20 percent of the population.<sup>78</sup> The *Correspondent* published a thorough, positive review of both the concert and the community music project as a whole. The reviewer expressed a heartfelt desire that Evans and

Low should succeed in spreading community singing to every corner of Baltimore. His highest praise was the claim that the singing at the Peabody was far superior to the singing of chorales in the German churches, which he described as “*weichlich und leblos*” (“effeminate and lifeless”).<sup>79</sup> The reviewer’s only criticism concerned the above-mentioned selection, “How Can I Leave Thee,” which he considered to be much more beautiful when sung in the original German.<sup>80</sup>

The singing was again accompanied by the Preparatory Junior Orchestra, reinforced by a few older players added to their ranks and Harold Randolph at the organ. Low directed from the stage, while three soloists—singers S. Taylor Scott and Mrs. Rudolph Shafter, and cornetist Raymond Feldmann—provided leadership and took occasional solo verses. Low impressed visitors with her “assertive, simple personality, a personality powerfully in earnest.”<sup>81</sup> She was not in the habit of allowing her audience to merely sing through songs and move on. Indeed, when the audience failed to render “Dixie” to her satisfaction she cut them off in the first stanza and berated them—although in her inimitable, endearing fashion. Low then rehearsed the number until she was pleased with it, only then permitting the selection of another song.<sup>82</sup> She also offered advice on singing well, made musical and interpretive corrections, and insisted that her pupils “sing with good common sense.”<sup>83</sup> Although her approach to community singing was idiosyncratic, it seems to have delivered good results. One witness reported: “The singing at the end of the concert was immeasurably better than it was at the beginning.”<sup>84</sup>

What they sang, of course, was selections from *18 Songs*, copies of which were provided at the door. The Prep supply was quickly exhausted, but Evans reported that singers were happy to share with one another.<sup>85</sup> Audience members who borrowed song sheets could choose to purchase or return them.<sup>86</sup> In the preceding weeks, however, the Prep had sold around 2,000 copies of *18 Songs* to members of the community, so it is likely that many brought their copy from home.<sup>87</sup> As at the previous concert, there was no program. Instead, attendees were invited to voice their preference for selections from *18 Songs*, while Low occasionally assigned a song or delayed the singing of a difficult number until later in the evening. On April 26, no one was immediately willing to make a suggestion. Low therefore offered a choice of four, from which “My Old Kentucky Home” was chosen by a large majority. The audience clearly knew the song well—one reviewer reported that they sang the chorus in four-part harmony.<sup>88</sup> The other songs sung were “Sweet and Low,” “Love’s Old Sweet Song,” “Old Folks at Home,” “Lovely Evening,” “How Can I Leave Thee?,” “Nancy Lee,” “Blow, Ye Winds,” “Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes,” “Dixie,” and “America.”<sup>89</sup> Franz C. Bornschein, who directed the

orchestra, later reflected that this array of selections “must have convinced the skeptical that America has her gems worthy of being classed as real folksongs . . . and cynicism certainly must have been dispelled from the minds of those who, heretofore, may have held that Americans, as a class, are incapable of real musical feeling.”<sup>90</sup> For Bornschein, the concert was first and foremost a demonstration of American cultural sophistication and depth, and it promised a great future for American music.

Although the orchestra and organ provided powerful support for the first part of the concert, they later dropped out to allow for attempts at unaccompanied singing. According to a reviewer, “The results were astounding. The singers retained pitch with considerable accuracy, produced a resonant and pure tone, and imbued a certain vibrant spirit into the songs, all of which made every one feel the throbbing joy of living.”<sup>91</sup> Evans and Low had demonstrated what they had long preached: untrained community members could make incredible music.

The effects of the concert were immediate and explosive. On March 5, Evans and Low had proven to themselves that community singing could be successful. On April 26, they proved it to all of Baltimore. This is the point, however, at which the division between public and private, between male and female, began to manifest itself. From here on out, “community singing” became several different things. Under the umbrella of municipal music, it was conducted in the public parks, with the City Park Band for accompaniment and a male song leader. At the same time, Low continued to develop community singing in the schools, while Evans incorporated it into classes, concerts, and celebrations at the Prep.

It was always Evans’s intent to hand over the reins. While many journalists rhapsodized over the success of the concert and its impact on municipal music, a colleague put the matter most succinctly. Franz C. Bornschein had directed the Junior Orchestra for both community singing concerts. It does not appear that he had any hand in planning the concerts, or even any particular interest in the project, but he certainly would have known what Evans was thinking. A few months after the April concert, he explained Evans’s purpose in *The Musician*, a national magazine for performers, music educators, and music lovers:

This concert was to demonstrate to the public officials of the Park Board, to the heads of the educational institutions, churches, clubs, associations, and to all public-spirited community workers just what influential effect good music, especially massed singing, has upon the community. The concert fulfilled its purpose; the outcome, in fact, was quite overwhelming.<sup>92</sup>

Evans was not trying to further her own community singing concerts, or establish any sort of monopoly on the practice. Quite the opposite. She wanted to prove the value of community singing so that others—a long list of others—would take over. The April concert was a magnificent advertisement.

### Singing in the Parks

Baltimore press coverage leading up to April 26 laid the situation bare: “Community singing in the parks is the object sought.”<sup>93</sup> In the week before the concert, several newspapers outlined the proposition that singing be incorporated into the already venerable band concerts that were offered in Baltimore’s parks throughout the summer. Public concerts dated back to the founding of Druid Hill Park in 1860. They quickly became a cornerstone of civic entertainment, and in 1900 the City Park Band was created with public funds.<sup>94</sup> By 1915, the band offered concerts every night of the summer from mid-May to late August, visiting each of Baltimore’s half-dozen parks and Fort McHenry. The programs were uplifting but accessible; they featured “descriptive numbers in combination with lighter airs” and were guaranteed to please “all classes of musical taste.”<sup>95</sup> The opening concert of the 1915 season, for example, featured the minuet from *Don Giovanni*, an excerpt from Mendelssohn’s *Lieder ohne Worte*, the Adagio lamentoso from Tchaikovsky’s “Pathétique” Symphony, “Siegfried’s Death” from *Götterdämmerung*, and a paraphrase of “Nearer My God to Thee.”<sup>96</sup>

The press exhibited a great deal of excitement at the prospect of park concerts incorporating community singing, but the reports always made one thing clear: the plan to add community singing to the program would only proceed if the Peabody concert proved the value of the activity.<sup>97</sup> The final result was neatly summarized in the 1915 Report of the Executive Secretary of the Peabody Institute: “The immediate success of the experiment encouraged the Park Board to endorse the suggestion that community singing be a feature of the park concerts, and the director of the Park Band was duly authorized to conduct the singing.”<sup>98</sup> However, a caveat remained. Even after the April success, authorization was only granted with “it being understood, of course, that the concerts be not interfered with by attempts to conduct the singing in case the response of the people is not prompt.”<sup>99</sup> Park concerts were a hallowed tradition, and the Park Board was reticent to accept change. Certain citizens were also not eager for change. In a letter addressed to the editor of the *Evening Sun*, one resident shared the “astonishment and dismay” that he felt upon

hearing that “the discordant howling of the mob” was to become a feature at park concerts.<sup>100</sup>

In angling for this outcome, Evans and Randolph left nothing to chance.<sup>101</sup> Randolph in particular served as an important liaison with community leaders, and it was he who personally invited each member of the Park Board to attend the April 26 concert. The most important representative of park music was the cornetist Raymond Feldmann, who was also assistant director of the City Park Band. Feldmann was expected to lead singing in the parks if the proposition went through.<sup>102</sup> As the *Evening Sun* put it, “If the Board of Park Commissioners decides to endorse community singing in Baltimore’s parks, it will require the loud, clear notes of a cornet to lead the singing.”<sup>103</sup> Feldmann’s presence at the concert, therefore, was vital. This was his opportunity to observe the activity firsthand, lead a few songs, and become an initiate of the community singing movement.

Evans had also conducted meetings, well in advance of the concert, with the men who held authority over park music. First she spoke with George Weems Williams, president of the Park Board. She suggested to him that the park was the most appropriate place for community singing, especially in the summer months. The practice had outgrown the confines of the Peabody and ought to be made available to a broader audience. Williams was supportive, but told Evans that he could not grant permission without the approval of the Park Board and, more important, Daniel Feldmann, director of the City Park Band (and father of Raymond Feldmann). Evans found that Feldmann “was more than willing, he was enthusiastic over the idea.”<sup>104</sup> He proposed to program several community singing selections for each of the park concerts, the words to which would appear in the *Baltimore Sun* the Monday before. Attendees could cut out the words and paste them in a book, eventually creating an album of “simple, melodious and clean songs that all Americans ought to know.”<sup>105</sup> Participants could also use *18 Songs*, from which the selections were drawn. Feldmann would arrange the band accompaniment for the community singing numbers himself, while his son would lead the singing on cornet. By April, everything was in place. Only the successful execution of the Peabody concert remained.

The first park concert to feature community singing took place at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 18, in Patterson Park, located in eastern Baltimore. The songs programmed were “America” and “My Old Kentucky Home”; in addition, “The Star-Spangled Banner” served as a concluding number for every concert. (On Sundays, the “Doxology” was sung in its place.)<sup>106</sup> The words to all three were published in the *Sun* on May 17 with instructions to clip them out and “join in the community

song exercises at the parks.”<sup>107</sup> The concert drew a “record crowd” to Patterson Park, and a reported 2,000 audience members joined in the singing (although older visitors struggled with “America,” which they did not know).<sup>108</sup> But participation was not limited to the programmed numbers: people also sang along whenever the band played a popular number as an encore to a more serious work, although unfortunately no song titles were recorded. “They seemed,” reported the *Sun*, “to take the community singing feature as a general jubilation.”<sup>109</sup> The program was repeated on Thursday, May 20, in Carroll Park, located across town, while every other evening of the week found the City Park Band performing a traditional concert, with community singing restricted to “The Star-Spangled Banner” or “Doxology.”<sup>110</sup> This model—one community singing program a week, offered in two parks—was carried on through the end of August.<sup>111</sup>

While singing in the parks primarily targeted an adult audience, music educators—directly encouraged by Evans<sup>112</sup>—were quick to take advantage of these concerts. Minnie A. Lang, Acting Supervisor of Music in the public schools, had attended the April 26 concert as one of Randolph’s special guests. She immediately procured copies of *18 Songs* for all of the schools in the city and saw to it that the music teachers taught the songs to their students, starting with “How Can I Leave Thee?” and “Lovely Evening.” This training was explicitly intended as preparation for participation in the park concerts; Lang even arranged for children to sing in the schoolyard, so that they might become accustomed to using their voices outdoors. Finally, the children were encouraged to teach the songs to their parents, a fundamental tactic of the music reformers that was already used by Low and Evans.<sup>113</sup>

In the midst of these park sings, an event took place that would later be remembered as “the start of municipal music” in Baltimore.<sup>114</sup> On Tuesday, July 13, 1915, community singing was conducted for the first time at the Washington Monument in Mt. Vernon Place, just outside of the Peabody Institute. In context, this seems an arbitrary marker for the birth of Baltimore’s municipal music program; singing in the parks had already been in place for nearly two months. One significant difference is that the Washington Monument concert featured the Municipal Band, not the City Park Band. The Municipal Band had been formed just the year before, and it was tasked with bringing music to all of Baltimore’s neighborhoods.<sup>115</sup> But press accounts suggest that the Municipal Band had already been conducting community singing, so this concert was not even a first in that respect.<sup>116</sup> Chroniclers may have been misled by bombastic proclamations in the press like this one: “The City Engineer announced yesterday that the program for the Municipal Band concert, at

which community singing will take place for the first time in Baltimore on next Tuesday evening, has about been completed.”<sup>117</sup> This statement is, of course, almost completely inaccurate.

All the same, the Washington Monument concerts are remarkable for many reasons. They were heavily advertised and very successful, and they exemplified the continuing collaboration between the Peabody and the city. These concerts also saw men take charge as community singing moved further into the public sphere. The Peabody was represented by Frederick R. Huber, director of the summer school and future heavy hitter in the municipal music scene: he held the post of Municipal Director of Music from 1918 until 1942.<sup>118</sup> Huber planned the concerts with Mayor James H. Preston and City Council president John Hubert. Low provided her services as song leader, but does not appear to have had a hand in the organization.

The stated purpose for these concerts was quite straightforward: the recent community singing activities had revealed that most people did not know the words to the songs; therefore, a few evenings of dedicated singing would increase familiarity with the words and improve community singing throughout the city. And, as words were so important to this project, the concerts offered an opportunity to address an emerging problem. Observers at the park concerts—including Evans—had noticed two weaknesses. The first concerned knowledge: participants were enthusiastic, but they only knew the words of the first verse or stanza, if that, and the singing quickly faltered. The words, of course, were printed in the *Sun*, but this proved sadly ineffective: the park concerts were held at night, and it was too dark to read.<sup>119</sup> Evans suggested to Huber<sup>120</sup>—who then suggested to the mayor—that this problem could be solved by making slides and projecting the words onto a screen.<sup>121</sup> The execution of this plan was assigned to city engineer H. Kent McCay, who positioned a screen at the base of the east side of the monument. It was promised that any participant on the block between Charles and St. Paul streets would be able to read the lyrics.<sup>122</sup> Huber also suggested that, since the projection apparatus would be in place, slides of various city improvements could be shown, so as to demonstrate to visitors—including the students who came to attend summer classes at the Peabody—the progress being made in Baltimore.<sup>123</sup> Mayor Preston arranged for the slides, and added some images of Baltimore’s “garden spots.”<sup>124</sup> These slides were replaced by motion pictures for the second concert on July 27.<sup>125</sup>

On July 13, a reported 20,000 participants (perhaps an exaggeration) showed up at 8 p.m. to join in the singing. The streets were closed around Mt. Vernon Place and five hundred camp stools were rented out by the city for the price of five cents. The Municipal Band accompanied the

singing—which was dedicated to the memory of Washington—and performed a concert of “attractive compositions.”<sup>126</sup> Cornetist Signor Vozello was advertised as a solo attraction.<sup>127</sup> The community songs included “Dixie,” “Old Folks at Home,” “My Old Kentucky Home,” “Annie Laurie,” and “The Star-Spangled Banner,”<sup>128</sup> and the singing was bolstered by five hundred students from the Peabody summer program, corralled by Huber for the occasion.<sup>129</sup> The repertoire, which continued to center on plantation songs, described inaccurately by Huber as “our negro melodies,” and European folksongs, was unremarkable.<sup>130</sup> The singers themselves, however, deserve extra attention.

The Washington Monument sing was perhaps the only event conducted under the auspices of the Peabody that was open to Baltimore’s African American population. Low later recalled “a group of little colored boys sitting on the curb apart and in clear, pure head tones joining in the chorus of ‘Suwanee River,’” the only reference she or Evans ever made to black participants.<sup>131</sup> Her observation was backed up in the *Baltimore Sun*, which likewise recorded the presence of “a group of negroes who sat on the edge of the fountain on the Monument street side of the square.” Incidentally, the *Sun* correspondent noted that African Americans favored “My Old Kentucky Home,” reporting that “they put their souls into the singing.”<sup>132</sup> It is not surprising that white observers should credit African Americans with a fervor for these songs, although black commentators who responded to the community singing movement in Baltimore found Stephen Foster’s plantation ballads highly distasteful.

While the stated goals of the Washington Monument event were modest, the successes attributed to it ranged far and wide. The reviewer at *Musical America* was taken with the “real American vim” and “true native response” exhibited by the singers.<sup>133</sup> He, like many, wanted to see the establishment of a national song tradition to equal that perceived to flourish in Europe. The *Sun*, on the other hand, responded in an editorial:

What a fine, democratic, inspiring performance that was around the Washington Monument, when the mayor<sup>134</sup> and city officials, the business man and clubwoman, the shop girl, the school teacher, the musician, the wage earner, all joined in singing such fine old songs. Such informal and free-for-all concerts in the open air are not only delightful for those who take part and those who only listen, but they make for human brotherhood, for better acquaintance and better understanding among all classes of citizens, for more neighborliness, for a better city sentiment.<sup>135</sup>

These remarks echo those of Evans and others when reflecting on the April 26 concert at the Peabody. Singing has the power, we are told, to



bring together people from all walks of life and transform them into a homogenized community.

### Evans and Low at Work in the Schools

While the city embraced community singing and organized large-scale public events, the women of the Prep continued to labor on behalf of the movement. At this point, however, their different ambitions for community singing came to the fore, and though Evans and Low never ceased to collaborate, they also began to pursue independent projects. For them, the April 26 concert was a point of divergence. Evans, as we have seen, became involved with singing in the parks, if only as a peripheral figure. For her, April 26 was about moving into the public sphere; singing in the parks was her ultimate ambition. Low, however, understood April 26 as the launching point for her own scheme, which she immediately put into action. She was at the public school in Roland Park—a planned community just to the north of Baltimore—on the night of April 27, where she conducted the first in a series of community concerts. Her stated purpose was to reach out to those who could not easily travel into the city. Roland Park was no doubt chosen with care as the first stop on Low's tour: this elite white neighborhood was not far removed from the city center and boasted some of Baltimore's most important citizens. Indeed, the choice of Roland Park seems more political than necessary; the community's upper-class residents had easy access to the Peabody via streetcar and did not need the music to be brought to them. The Roland Park concert was both an echo of the April concert and a model for those to come. Although "less elaborate" than the sing held at the Peabody (for example, the Junior Orchestra did not participate), it was conducted along the same lines: Low led informal singing, doubtless punctuated with advice and humor, from *18 Songs*.<sup>136</sup>

Low had started community singing in the Baltimore county schools in October 1914. The concert series begun in Roland Park was a continuation of this work, for Low's tactic was to invite community members into the schools where the children were already singing. She hoped that her ongoing activities would pique the interest of community members; at the same time, the fact that the children already knew the songs would improve the experience of every participant. Low made arrangements to offer ten community concerts in schools between April 27 and May 28, so as to serve the towns of Roland Park, Towson, Pimlico, Pikesville, Govans (two concerts), Overlea, Arlington, Catonsville, and Gardenville.<sup>137</sup> These activities were not covered in the Baltimore papers, but it is known that all ten concerts were conducted as planned.<sup>138</sup> Low reported in

August that her rural concerts attracted isolated farm dwellers who drove to the district schools to enjoy the singing, which was sometimes accompanied by lectures and motion pictures. To her great satisfaction, the concerts also uncovered “some remarkable voices among the country folk,” and resulted in at least one new student enrolling at the Peabody that fall.<sup>139</sup> Like many music reformers, Low was not satisfied just to get people singing; she wanted to see improvement among the least talented, and professional results from those with ability. Community singing was a gateway to loftier accomplishments. Low carried on with her rural sings until at least November 1916, when she was reported to have led singing in Hamilton.<sup>140</sup>

Evans took no part in these suburban and rural sings—perhaps because Low was capable of planning and conducting the concerts herself, but perhaps because Evans was preoccupied with community singing activity in Baltimore and at the Prep, which was clearly more important to her. On the administrative side, she formed a Bureau of Community Music at the Prep, which was available to answer any and all inquiries about community music.<sup>141</sup> After word spread of the community singing activities in Baltimore, she and Low were inundated with letters full of both questions<sup>142</sup> and advice.<sup>143</sup> Evans also supervised community singing in the parks. At the same time, she was making plans for new implementations of community singing at the Prep.

In September 1915, it was announced that the popular musical appreciation classes were about to resume, with two new features. First, a Friday night class would be added to the schedule. This was deemed necessary because many working adults were unable to attend the regular Tuesday afternoon class, and it was the mission of the Prep to make music education available to all white Baltimoreans. Second, community singing would be incorporated into the Friday meetings. The singing was to be led by Low, which explains why it was not also a part of the Tuesday meetings: she was only in Baltimore on Thursday and Friday. Once again, the press suggested that Low’s real ambition was to start a community choir.<sup>144</sup>

The first of these singing sessions was held on November 19, 1915, and Evans did her best to make it a success. She repeated a tactic that had helped to promote previous concerts: she invited a prominent political figure to “lend prestige and importance to the movement” by appearing on stage and joining in the sing. This time, however, Evans passed over the pool of local political celebrities and instead contacted Margaret Woodrow Wilson, the daughter of President Wilson and at that time the Acting First Lady. Wilson was also a noted singer and took an active interest in social reform. In her letter, Evans began by describing the success

of the April concert and reiterating its publicized aims: “to stimulate interest in the singing of good, melodious songs,” etc. She then explained her current plans “to develop, not only good community singing, but a good singing community”—an aim that she considered to be of national benefit, and that should therefore interest the First Lady. These plans included a repeat of the April concert (which never came to pass) and the new series of appreciation classes.<sup>145</sup> Unfortunately, Wilson had to turn down the invitation due to a previous engagement. She wrote a glowing response, however, and praised the “splendid thing” that Evans was doing for Baltimore.<sup>146</sup>

Even without Wilson’s presence, the new evening appreciation class and accompanying community sing appears to have been a great success. The lectures and sings were held weekly through March 17, 1916.<sup>147</sup> Though Evans described her goals in her letter to Wilson, the press was also eager to interpret her motives. One *Sun* columnist reported that Evans’s ambition was simply “to increase the interest in community singing in this city,” but also lauded the opportunity for “a big uplift” that the classes would bring.<sup>148</sup> Another commentator, writing from “A Woman’s Point of View” for the *News*, found these sings to have a profound Americanizing influence. After observing that “young folks” suffer from always having their entertainment provided, Winifred Wells got to the heart of the matter:

Community songs are sung—mostly American songs, like “America,” the “Star Spangled Banner,” “Way Down Upon the Suwanee River,” “Just a Song at Twilight,” and others that make us feel our Americanism and refute all those silly remarks about our being a nation divided in sentiment and made up of separate nationalities that have never become fully fused and amalgamated.<sup>149</sup>

For Wells—as for many music activists—community singing was about homogenization. Joining together to render a shared body of song (in English) could create a nation by reducing the perception of difference. Wells concluded that participation in community singing at the Prep, if done with appropriate fervor, could make anyone “both good and happy”—a state of being that it is the responsibility of the American citizen to achieve.<sup>150</sup>

### **Incomplete Narratives**

Interest flagged in Baltimore’s community singing program in 1916, but was roundly revived by the entry of the United States into the Great War

in April of the following year. This brief period of international conflict saw song leaders installed in military camps,<sup>151</sup> and extravagant patriotic musical events were staged around Baltimore and at the Peabody. In the 1920s, community singing spread across the nation, entering factories, department stores, club meetings, movie theaters, and municipal “Music Week” celebrations.<sup>152</sup>

Baltimore remained proud of its role as a major instigator of the practice, and city leaders soon began to tell the story of how their community had introduced community singing to a grateful nation; in his February 1918 address at the Peabody’s “Patriotic Song Festival,” Mayor Preston boasted that “Baltimore was the first city in the country to establish open-air concerts with community singing,”<sup>153</sup> a claim that was often repeated in the press.<sup>154</sup> Evans and Low, however, did not forget that it was their own vision and perseverance that was at the root of it all. With her typical self-effacement, Evans inserted an editor’s note at the end of Low’s 1917 manifesto:

It may be of interest to note that since the big “Community Sing” at the Peabody requests have come from various parts of the country—cities of the North, the South, the East, and the far West—asking for information and advice about the starting of community singing. And at a club meeting in Baltimore addressed by Mrs. Low, a stranger arose and said—“I feel that I must tell you of something that happened in Canada last summer. We had a band concert for the relief of soldiers overseas. On the program were two well-known songs marked ‘For Community Singing,’ and a foot-note read—‘It is hoped that all will unite in singing these songs and help the movement so beautifully begun in Baltimore, Md.’”<sup>155</sup>

This international report became part of Peabody lore and confirmed the extensive influence of community singing activities there. It also might be the closest that Evans ever came to boasting.

By the time Kenneth S. Clark finally penned the official account of community singing in Baltimore in 1932, Evans and Low had faded from public memory. Clark was commissioned by the mayor and City Council of Baltimore to chronicle the city’s municipal music program, and his volume, *Baltimore, “Cradle of Municipal Music,”* celebrated that city’s role as a pioneer in public arts. In the 25th Anniversary Edition of 1941, Clark fondly recalled the inception of Baltimore’s municipal music program:

Finally, one morning in June of 1915, the then Mayor, James H. Preston, received a visit at the City Hall from Frederick R. Huber, manager of the Summer School of the Peabody Conservatory of Music, who had come to him with a suggestion. It was to the effect that community singing concerts

be held on certain summer evenings at Mt. Vernon Place, opposite the Peabody Institute. The mechanism: The words thrown upon a screen and the Municipal Band playing the accompaniment. Mayor Preston said “Yes,” and, although neither of them probably knew it at the time, that was the start of municipal music, as such, in Baltimore.<sup>156</sup>

Clark’s account correctly positions community singing as the cornerstone of municipal music in Baltimore. As the song leader at Camp Meade, near Severn, Maryland, during the Great War, he was in a position to appreciate the activity’s significance. Clark was first called in to Baltimore to direct community singing at the Pageant of Flags of the Allied Nations in Druid Hill Park on July 4, 1918.<sup>157</sup> His involvement with Baltimore singing continued through the municipal “Lawn Party” events of the late 1930s.<sup>158</sup> Clark’s narrative goes wrong, however, when he names the architects of the community singing movement, for although Huber and Preston emerged as public leaders in mid-1915, they merely assumed control of a program that had been theorized, implemented, and popularized by Evans and Low. Clark effectively wrote the two women out of history, although my examination of reports from 1915 has revealed that they were not nearly so invisible in their own time; it was not until men commandeered and enshrined a project begun by women that the creators themselves began to fade away.

When Clark looked to the past, he was unable to see the women who had sparked the very activity about which he was writing. But it was not only Clark who suffered a blind spot. Evans and Low themselves were unable to see Baltimore’s African American residents, who in 1910 numbered about 85,000 and made up 15 percent of the city’s population.<sup>159</sup> In focusing their cultural uplift efforts on white Baltimoreans, Evans and Low were following the pattern that had been established by local progressive reformers in the late nineteenth century. Their labors also echoed and reinforced the segregated structures of their living and work environments. Baltimore’s population of African Americans, which increased rapidly after the Civil War, was by the early twentieth century largely concentrated in a few districts. Reformers expressed concern regarding the squalid living conditions that characterized these neighborhoods, but they soon retreated from attempts to address problems of poor sanitation, communicable diseases (especially tuberculosis), criminal activity, shoddy construction, and overcrowding.<sup>160</sup> Instead, they placed blame upon the residents themselves and coalesced around a strategy of legalized housing segregation that would prevent black Baltimoreans from moving into white-majority neighborhoods. The resulting legislation was first signed into law by Mayor J. Barry Mahool—a progressive—in 1910.<sup>161</sup>

Baltimore's ordinance served as a model for other cities looking to institute housing segregation until 1917, when a Supreme Court ruling ended the practice nationwide.<sup>162</sup> The ruling, however, did not serve to integrate neighborhoods in Baltimore or elsewhere. Mayor Preston, who had assumed office in 1912 and was an avid supporter of the ordinance, simply adopted alternative means of enforcing segregation, the most common of which was outright intimidation by city officials.<sup>163</sup>

The housing ordinance is of special interest because it was in effect for the duration of the community singing activities. Baltimore's short-lived housing rule, however, was but a cog in the machine of Jim Crow legislation that denied blacks access to public and private spaces and services for the first half of the twentieth century. Although the segregation of the city parks was never legislated, black Baltimoreans were steered to separate playgrounds, picnic areas, and tennis courts; it is therefore unlikely that they participated in the community singing activities described in this article.<sup>164</sup> The Peabody Institute was not integrated until 1949, when the first African American student was admitted following extensive debate among members of the Board of Trustees.<sup>165</sup> Before this, African Americans had limited access to Peabody faculty. In addition to private study, some were able to enroll in segregated, off-campus extension courses operated by the Prep, the earliest of which was a "Colored Teachers' Class" offered from 1924 to 1926.<sup>166</sup> Huber himself repeatedly used his position of authority to uphold segregation in Baltimore's musical establishments,<sup>167</sup> and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra barred black musicians until A. Jack Thomas mounted the podium in 1946 to conduct his own *Etude en Noir* (1939).<sup>168</sup> Baltimore's public schools were segregated until after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision<sup>169</sup>—a decade that also saw blacks' first access to golf courses (1951), theaters (1952), department stores (1953), swimming pools and public beaches (1955), and hotels (1957).<sup>170</sup> In this light, it is hardly a surprise that Evans and Low gave little thought to black Baltimoreans, who lived wholly separate lives.<sup>171</sup>

All the same, the activities set into motion by Evans and Low and documented by Clark did eventually benefit African Americans. Municipal music in Baltimore expanded rapidly to include an orchestra, bands, choruses, and, eventually, various "colored" ensembles, the first of which was established in 1922 for the purpose of "providing the colored sections of the city with special concerts by a band of musicians of their own race."<sup>172</sup> These "colored sections of the city" also participated in community singing, but it seems that the municipality provided them with a unique repertoire. Clark found that though African Americans were generally eager to participate, they refused to sing the songs of Stephen

Foster, “Dixie,” and other selections expressing nostalgia for the antebellum South. “It was found,” he reported, “that the group in general preferred to turn its thoughts forward in song rather than backward to that previous era.”<sup>173</sup> Clark might have arrived at this rather obvious conclusion without trial and error if he had perused the black press. Commentary published in the *Baltimore Afro-American* many years before community music was extended to the “colored sections of the city” assessed these songs as candidates for community singing in no uncertain terms:

“The Old Folks at Home” and “My Old Kentucky Home” must be modernized, and substitution made for the word “darky,” before they can be acceptable to large numbers of our people. It might have been true years ago, but it is not true now that “the head must bow and the back will have to bend, wherever the darky may go.” Of this particular part of the past we do not wish to be reminded, and should prefer if anything that the contrary rather than just this be stated. To the strains of “Dixie,” the confederate soldiers marched into battle. More than this the feeling is often that we should rather be anywhere else but “way down south in Dixie.”<sup>174</sup>

The author also firmly establishes black citizenship by dismissing “America” as a song that “does not belong to us”—a reference, I am certain, to the fact that the melody is shared with a patriotic British anthem.

Although educated black Baltimoreans registered some objections to the *18 Songs* repertoire, they were broadly sympathetic to the aims and means of the community singing movement. The above-quoted column was written in response to Dykema’s 1914 visit to the Prep. Although it is unlikely that African Americans were permitted to attend his lecture (a hypothesis endorsed by the fact that this column was published more than a year later), it is clear that black educators and musicians followed developments in community music with close attention. The *Afro-American* author describes community singing as an idea that “deserves more than passing notice and transitory cultivation. . . . It will mean a larger appreciation of rhythm and harmony, and eventually a nation of singers, who are able to express the best they feel in song.”<sup>175</sup> (It is worth noting that this author also fails to credit Evans or Low for the community singing “idea,” instead attributing it to their invited male speaker.) The author asks not that Foster’s plantation songs be removed from *18 Songs* but merely that they be “modernized,” at the same time exhibiting admiration for the European folksongs included in the volume. It thus appears that the black community was on the whole eager to embrace both the mission and Eurocentric repertoire that were set forth by Evans and Low. Unfortunately, there are few descriptions of community singing activity

within Baltimore's African American community—perhaps because the black press was preoccupied with social issues of much greater concern.<sup>176</sup>

In the end, Evans and Low succeeded in their ambitious goal to popularize community singing in Baltimore and to inspire similar movements across North America. Their work reflected and reinforced social norms—conventions to which they showed no sign of resistance. The women of the Peabody Prep stated on numerous occasions that their purpose was to serve the community, instill good values in children, and improve life in the home. It is no accident that these goals fell within the domestic sphere, nor that the Preparatory Division was staffed primarily by women. Binary gender roles become most evident when we contrast the public/outdoor spaces of the municipal sings (parks, city streets) with the private/indoor spaces of the Peabody sings (concert halls, day schools). Evans and Low, however, were concerned only with outcomes. After establishing an interest in community singing and assembling the necessary participants and materials, they graciously passed the reins into the public sphere, where men led the singing and, as we have seen, took the credit. Although it is their loss and ours that their vision for community music did not include all Baltimoreans, they must finally be acknowledged for establishing community singing as a popular practice.

### Notes

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169. David Taft Terry, “Dismantling Jim Crow: Challenges to Racial Segregation, 1935–1955,” *Black History Bulletin* 67, nos. 1–4 (2004): 14.
170. *Ibid.*, 16.
171. The women described in this study held complex attitudes toward African American music—and, presumably, the people from which that music derived, although the evidence is scarce. Blackhead’s 1912 lecture on the subject demonstrated her deep knowledge of and respect for African American music. Evans certainly approved the topic, and she or her sister Bessie—reputedly an expert on spirituals—might have contributed to the preparation of the lecture. Blackhead and Evans would continue to program and assist with lecture-recitals on the topic of African American music throughout the 1920s, as represented by programs and newspaper clippings in the May Garrettson Evans Collection. Their sincere efforts to share knowledge about this music with the community are complicated, however, by the fact that at least some of the recitals were delivered in blackface (“Special Recital,” *Baltimore Sun*, November 1929) and by Evans’s short-lived role in a 1932 comedic blackface radio program that she wrote and performed with her sister Bessie (“On the Air,” *Evening Sun*, 26 May 1932).
172. Clark, *Baltimore*, “Cradle of Municipal Music,” 33.
173. *Ibid.*
174. “Community Singing,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 19 June 1915.
175. *Ibid.*
176. See, for example, this mention of community singing as part of an Independence Day celebration for black Baltimoreans at Druid Hill Park: “Safe and Sane Celebration,” *Afro-American*, 1 July 1916, 1.