



~ Part 37 ~

Reflections on a Common Theme

Music in the Valley

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CLOUD COUNTY

Sustaining Community Through Music

by Joan Nothern

A chord, built with the voices lifted from each community, becomes the music in the valley. Glasco's contributions are seen and heard in its unique traditions that weave weeks and years together.

At the piano, Phyllis Struble, age 96, accompanies hymn singing during Wednesday church services at the Nicol Home. She has done this for 30 years, and she knows the favorite hymns of many, many people, often recalling them as she plays each week.

Beginning in 1976, an invitation was extended to all who wanted to sing, to come to a series of rehearsals at the Methodist Church, Glasco. Twice a year, this inclusive choir prepared for Christmas and Easter, prepared a gift of music for the community. It is with anticipation the community begins each holiday together, gifted with the Christmas and Easter Cantatas.

Diana Mills has directed this chorus for all of these years, with the exception of only seven. In addition to the Glasco performances, the chorus goes to the Nicol Home in Glasco, and Hilltop in Beloit, taking their musical offering to the residents.

For young people, music, especially songs, can also be a means of introducing and remembering the grown-ups in the community. This is the premise of the "Story to Song" project conducted over several years with musician/educator Aaron Fowler. He worked with 4th through 8th grade students in Glasco Grade School, guiding the process of interviewing community members, the merchants and mothers, druggist and doctor, farmers and veterans, and then helping the students shape the stories to song. They performed the songs for the public, honoring the persons whose stories were being told. This treasury of songs continues to be heard.

A final note. Dr. Claude Harwood demonstrates the power of music. After retiring from medical practice 30 years ago, he decided to learn to play the violin, and he began a different kind of practice! His success is celebrated each Tuesday morning as he plays with the Fisher Creek String Band at the Corner Store. Music truly does create and sustain community in Glasco.

OSBORNE COUNTY

Music in Our Schools

by Carolyn Williams

It's always interesting when there's a déjà vu element when we begin to think and write. That is really the case when we speak of music here in the valley. There doesn't seem to be much music here except in our schools. That's what I'm going to write about.

A generation ago there was a family by the name of McReynolds who were very gifted musically. One young man, Danny, married and moved off to Concordia where he worked as a Registered Nurse. He continued to be involved in anything musical as did his wife Sheila who was a gifted pianist/organist. With parents like that their children had no choice but to become involved in all things musical.

However, it didn't seem that would be the case with their three girls. Each of them chose a different path for their life's work. The older girl, Kelly, determined to be a veterinarian. As she continued her classwork, she married and gave birth to a fine healthy son. Just a few months short of his first birthday, he died of SIDS, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Naturally, the parents were devastated and classwork suffered. Kelly chose to lay out of school for a short time and during this time she felt called to return to college and major in music. This she did and graduated in instrumental music.

After graduation, she looked diligently for a teaching position that would support her and her husband. Finally, she “came home” to Osborne County where her parents had lived as children and teenagers.

She has just completed seven years teaching at Osborne High School, earning numerous awards with her band members and soloists. Often when she conducts the twice-yearly band concerts, she gives a little speech dedicating the current concert to her son who with his death gave her the encouragement to continue her music education.

Music has sustained them through these ten years since Maverick’s death. We are all blessed by her family. That’s how music is, it can sometimes “soothe the savage beast within us.”

ROOKS COUNTY

Stockton’s Claim to Musical Fame: The Fuller Story

by Susan D. McFarland, Rooks County Museum Coordinator

Pursuing obituaries in the museum’s collection, it becomes clear that music played an important part in the life of the early pioneers of Rooks County and beyond. Music of all kinds filled the air. In Stockton the odds were pretty good a lot of the music was filled by the talents of Lorenzo Dow Fuller and his small musical family.

Mr. Fuller’s obituary appeared in the Hays Daily News, June 2, 1963, and it is a full and complete obituary. Lorenzo was born in Troy, Alabama, in 1872, the seventh child of William Handy and Amanda Fuller, who were freed slaves. Poverty and his skin color denied him an education in Troy until he attracted the attention of a Troy doctor. The doctor’s wife insisted Lorenza study with her children, along with doing household chores. It was during this time his dreams of a future containing good books, music, and gracious living were formulated. All of this ended with the death of his mother, severing ties with the doctor’s family. He moved to Cameron, Texas, to join an older brother, Frank. He took with him a mouth harmonica, banjo, and plenty of courage.

While in Cameron he became a barber, a profession which he practiced all of his life. He also became a member of the Cameron Baptist church and his faith became an integral part of his daily life. After Cameron came Pueblo, Colorado, where Lorenzo collected instruments and produced shows of his own. While in Kansas City he bought a harp and learned to play it to the extent he always opened his show with a classical selection on it.

Interestingly enough, and important to his story, when he and his brother George opened a barber shop in Coffeyville, Kansas, his shop was located next door to a printing press. He turned his interest to learning a new skill: the operation of the presses and writing. He produced his own newspaper, *The American* (a copy of which is in the archives of the Kansas Historical Society) which was distributed throughout the African-American community.

In 1896 he married Earnestine Wallace and encouraged her to study singing and prepare for a stage career. Their only child, a daughter named Mabel, displayed considerable musical talent of her own. A few years down the road, he returned home to find his barbershop business was failing and Earnestine and Mabel gone, seeking her own career. He picked up and left Coffeyville, year unknown, roaming all over the Midwest. He would perform and pay the bills by passing the hat afterwards. One of the towns he visited was Stockton, Kansas, where he stayed with Captain Giles Green in 1913. In 1916 he married Effie Green and she became an integral part of his show. Their son, Lorenzo Dow Fuller, Jr., was born in 1919, and the traveling show “wintered” in Stockton from that point onward. He bought a printing press and set up a shop in his garage. He designed and printed Concert stationery and publicity posters, handbills, and program advertisements.

When age and health brought his traveling musical show to a close, he turned to outdoor work to earn a living. He fenced six lots around his home and raised hogs for market. He suffered a stroke in 1960 and died June 4, 1960, at the age of 88 years. The story is carried forward by his son, Lorenzo Fuller, Jr.

The résumé of Lorenzo Jr. is an impressive summary of a dedicated musician’s life. He was born at Stockton on March 22, 1919, and graduated from Stockton High School in 1935. He attended the University of Kansas and graduated with a degree in music. Among other accomplishments, he sang

with the University Orchestra, the first African-American student to earn a soloist position. He performed on college radio station KFKU. During the years 1941-1942, he gave concerts in Stockton and area towns in Kansas and Nebraska. Upon graduation, more than two thousand people showed up for his solo senior recital.

In 1942 he won a scholarship and attended the Julliard School of Music in Manhattan, New York, and went on to earn a Doctor of Music from Columbia University. In 1945 he gave a benefit concert for Stockton's Congregational Church, where he had played the piano when he was only 12 years old. In 1947 he was the host of a 15-minute musical series on NBC television, the first African-American to have his own show. In 1950 he hosted a radio musical series, "Van and the Genie," on WPIX, New York City, and broke racial barriers: it was the first show in the nation where an African-American man starred opposite a white woman. He and his co-star, Rosamond Vance Kaufman, marched in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, behind that year's Grand Marshall, Jimmy Durante.

In 1950 he was spending his third year in the Broadway show "Kiss Me Kate." He was a voice coach at American Theater Wing. He also was writing original songs for NBC-TV and special music for nightclub artists. On Sundays he was the radio soloist for the famed Riverside Church, New York, the only African-American in the congregation. He spoke several languages and played the harp, piano, organ, clarinet, drums, violin, guitar, and trombone.

In 1953 he came home to celebrate his birthday. He arranged music for an unpublished opera found in the effects of the late George Gershwin to go on the air on NBC, sponsored by the Ford Motor Company. In 1954 he went on a European tour with the leading role in George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess," going to cities like Paris and performing in the Soviet Union where he demonstrated his versatility by speaking to the audience in their native tongue and received a standing ovation as a response. He also toured South America.

He was promoted to chief announcer of the radio station where he worked and had a busy teaching schedule from 1957 to 1960. In addition he wrote a Broadway musical, arranged the music and appeared weekly on CBS television's "American Musical Comedy Theatre," worked as arranger/conductor for recording companies, filmed TV spectaculars for rebroadcast in Europe, and did broadcasts for the government in French, German, and Italian on special "Voice of American" programs on a regular basis. He came home for his father's funeral in 1960 and again in 1974 to attend professional art classes with his 95-year-old mother. In 2003 he returned for the last time to Stockton for a special tribute in his honor, where he played the piano for the patriotic finale song. He died January 8, 2011, in New York City. He had carried music from the Solomon Valley to the entire world.