

AMATEUR CHAMBER MUSIC PLAYERS

15 WEST 67TH STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10023

Annual News Letter — May 1966



The October 29th Surprise Appreciation Party for our Secretary, Helen Rice, to which the whole A.C.M.P. membership was invited, was a memorable occasion. Hundreds of you participated in the event by your wonderful letters, your contributions, and over three hundred of you by your actual presence.

We have persuaded Helen to let us use this Newsletter to describe the party, including quotations from the tributes of the evening, and excerpts from the letters which arrived from all over the world.

After the invitations went out last June (addressed by members meeting in small sociable groups), the letters began to pour in, many accompanied by dinner reservations and contributions. As the letters arrived, we began to realize how much our association has meant to many, many people. Especially heartwarming were the letters which came from outside the United States, a number of them written in languages other than English. The tributes took many forms; prose, verse and drawings, and were as individual as the members who sent them.

Incidentally, chamber music players are not only among the nicest people in the world, they are also the best secret-keepers! To have over 6,000 people keep a secret so well is a real tribute to our membership.

A beautiful handmade leather portfolio, embossed in gold (see cut on back of dinner program) and large enough to hold all the letters, was presented to Helen. This was made possible by your contributions to the dinner, as were also the flowers on the tables, the handsome programs, the flags decorating the

speakers' table, and the exquisite illuminated frontispiece for the portfolio. (N.B. The balance from the dinner has been donated to our treasury. See Treasurer's report.)

On arriving at the dinner, guests were greeted at the door and were given name tags and seating lists. The reception made it possible for members to greet old friends and make new ones before the dinner.

At an appointed time the guest of honor made her appearance with a host and hostess who were "taking her out to dinner." A beautiful lei of white carnations (sent by air from a member in Hawaii) was presented to Helen at the door. There was a very festive air as she moved among the guests, greeting old friends with surprise and pleasure. Many of those present were known to her only by correspondence, and it was delightful to see their mutual pleasure at meeting in person. This group included couples from Israel, Portugal and Venezuela, who received a particularly warm welcome from the other guests.

After the reception, people moved into the dining room where they were seated at tables for 18 or 20. On the dais, in addition to Helen, were our chairman, Samuel P. Hayes, who acted as Master of Ceremonies, and the four speakers, all friends of Helen's of long standing. Before introducing the speakers, Sam asked the guests to rise by geographical areas; those from the east, the midwest, the west, and finally those from outside the U.S.A. The last group received a most enthusiastic round of applause.



We quote below from the speakers of the evening. Catherine Drinker Bowen's talk is given in its entirety. She was the principal speaker, and made the presentation of the portfolio of letters to Helen.

As this news letter goes to press, some of us in New York had the pleasure of meeting and playing with Monsieur Jean Regnault de Beaumont, President of L'Association des Musiciens Amateurs in France.

I wonder how many of you who have reached the age of say, fifty, are asked the question I have been asked now for many years. Strangers ask it, and old friends not seen in a long time. "Do you," they say, "still play the violin?"

Perhaps this is a way of inquiring politely if one finds oneself well, or if one has commenced as yet to disintegrate. In Seattle, Washington, about fifteen years ago, I was sitting in the front row of a college auditorium, waiting to go on stage and lecture about history. A man came down the aisle and tapped me on the shoulder. He was in a hurry. He told me he had come from one of the islands in the lake, a long way off, and that he had read my little book, *FRIENDS AND FIDDLERS*. "I can't stay for your lecture," he said. "I just came to ask one question: *Mrs. Bowen, do you still play?*"

I said of course I did. The man shook me heartily by the hand, said that's all he wanted to know, and disappeared up the aisle. I wonder if that man is a member of our society. I hope he is.

Out of mercy to our friend Helen, I am talking now about chamber music in general terms, but terms which I believe lie within the experience of most of you. . . . One thing I must mention, one by-product of chamber music playing which now enhances my suburban domicile. Not long ago one of our members, Carleen Hutchins, the viola maker, came to Haverford and hung the most enchanting object against the ceiling of my hallway: a *mobile*, made of the shells, the outside rims and shapes of violins, violas, and the fill-in parts of F holes. She said they were leftovers from her workshop. The mobile is suspended and balanced from the sticks of two violin bows. At the slightest breath of air it turns lightly, with grace and dignity. It is perfectly enchanting. I invite any of you, passing by, to come and see it. And I owe this, too, obliquely to Helen, for it was she who introduced me to Mrs. Hutchins.

Helen Rice! It makes me very proud to stand before all these players, and testify to what you have done for music and for all of us. To you, more than anyone, the A.C.M.P. owes its continued existence. I have been a guest in your house when chairs and tables overflowed with newsletters to be mailed, problems about addresses and about recalcitrant members who did not send in their names. I know the hours of hard labor you have put in on our behalf, from here to Jugo Slavia.

Tonight we honor not only your hard work but your inspiration, the drive, the generosity of that quiet attractive invincible and staunch personality.

THE GUEST OF HONOR

The Dinner Committee has asked me to write out what I said on that unique occasion. This would appear to be a very simple request, but for me that evening was so extraordinary, so unexpected, so absolutely wonderful in every way, that I was somewhere up in the clouds — perhaps in those regions where one hears the Music of the Spheres — and I have not even yet completely returned to earth! Therefore, if I leave out some things I said, or add others, you must forgive me.

I grew up in a household of chamber music, my father being a lawyer and an amateur cellist passionately fond of playing chamber music. Incidentally, he was the legal advisor of the Kneisel and Flonzaley Quartets, and was also on the Board of the New York Philharmonic and of the Juilliard School. At a rather early age I was drafted to play second violin, which I remember doing very badly indeed! The others were mostly professionals, with the exception of my father, who, though never a good cellist, knew the literature intimately. I felt very inadequate in this company. One evening when things were unusually bad, my father looked at me in despair and asked, "WHY don't you count?"

I was slow to catch fire, and didn't truly enjoy playing chamber music until I was in my mid thirties and found myself playing with others at my own non-professional level. Someone asked me at that time how often I played, and that particular week I had played eleven times! I was making up for lost time.

It was in 1946 that Leonard A. Strauss wrote to friends of his, setting forth the plan for an association of amateurs such as ours has become. Among the people who received the first round of letters was Catherine Drinker Bowen, whom he knew as the author of *FRIENDS AND FIDDLERS*. She in turn suggested my name. I thought it a marvelous idea, and the following year (March 1947) several of us met with Leonard Strauss when he came to New York on one of his business trips. By that time I had already found so much pleasure, or should I say joy in playing chamber music, that it did not take much persuasion to make me agree to become secretary of this new venture. My own early opportunities had so enriched my life, that I hoped this new association would help to open up the same possibilities for others. How well I remember my mother at that first meeting. She was indeed an astute lady, and after everyone had gone, she shook her head and said, "You don't know what you are getting in for!"

And indeed I did not! None of us in those early years had any idea that the National Association of Amateur Chamber Music Players, as we called it then, would grow and blossom

as it has. Nor had we any thought of its becoming international. When in 1950 I received very nice letters from Dr. Carlos Vollenweider and Mr. Fred Fehr, both of Buenos Aires, asking to join our association, I answered politely that we had no members outside of the United States, but would be pleased to keep them on our mailing list. They became actually our first overseas members in 1954, and what a long way we have gone since then!

By way of conclusion, let me quote Thomas Whitney Surette, one of the first musicians and educators in this country to take an interest in the musical public and the amateur. I once asked him whether he thought that any other group of people enjoyed their avocations as much as we amateurs enjoyed participating in chamber music. He paused for a moment and then answered that he thought not, enumerating that playing chamber music was "physical, sociable, intellectual, emotional and spiritual."

Since the dinner I have learned quite a lot about what went on behind the scenes — the many, many hours spent by the Dinner Committee and others among you, culminating in the festivities on October 29th. How can I ever thank all of you, and most particularly our treasurer, Ruth McGregor, who took charge of sending out the invitations and handled all the return mail? Twice a new home had to be found for the dinner, when the first two choices proved to be inadequate as to size.

Then all those touching letters! I was so moved the first time I read them through that I was undone. I shall treasure them always.

The A.C.M.P. has widened my horizon tremendously, both from a musical and from a human point of view. I owe it a very great debt, and come back again and again to the same conclusion — that it was an imaginative and wonderful idea in the first place.

Helen Rice

Following are selected paragraphs from the hundreds of letters received by Helen for the portfolio.

JOHN MONTGOMERY—Cambridge, Massachusetts

To describe the Amateur Chamber Music Players as an organization is to make an implicit criticism of all other organizations. Both its purposes and its procedures put them all to shame. ACMP does not merely approve the minutes of the last meeting, but savors the minutes of every meeting; it does not merely discuss resolutions, but achieves them for each item on its agenda; it does not pass motions, but performs movements; its leadership does not have to be elected, and then challenged or followed, but is a function of the requirements of each situation; membership in it comes not by application but by practice; it does not seek consensus, but harmony. When you add that the only politics that have to be played in order to achieve priority is between two fiddlers who can compromise by exchanging seats, the reproach to all other organizations is all the greater.

After I had the pleasure of meeting the Secretary of the ACMP, I began to realize that in this case the shadow of the woman is almost greater than that of the institution. But it is unfair to think of you as casting a shadow; rather it is a radiance. I am proud to have basked in the radiance on many occasions, and hidden behind your shadow as well (upon the occasion of a false entrance or note). It is impossible to hail the organization and not its guiding spirit, and I enthusiastically hail them both.

PAUL CHANCELLOR—Pennsylvania

Another thing I like is that the ACMP is casual and democratic, For its members are equally at home playing in palace, barn, and attic —

And they play in combinations that you might call morganatic. You may find a fiddler loyal

To the royal

Playing with a cello

Who is just a regular, home-grown fello.

And to join the ACMP you don't have to have a name like Jascha H or Rudolf S or Gregor P.

You only have to be known as simple A or B or C — or even D.

If you have a reasonable amount of musical technique

You can be an earl, a bourgeois, or a beatnik.

And in the ACMP it makes no difference if one group plays the *Grosse Fuge* very well in Tasco

While another group in Liverpool plays it Allegro con fiasco.

(And apologies to Ogden Nash)

ALFRED RUSSELL—London

For a complete stranger coming from Europe, where, alas, the arts of hospitality seem largely to have been forgotten, the ACMP was truly a wonderful introduction to musical life in America. It was also the first time that I got off a bus and on to a string sextet!



Left to right: Samuel P. Hayes, Helen Rice, Catherine Drinker Bowen.

VIRGINIA APGAR (Excerpt)

Helen, you'll never know the power of that directory. On my many travels all over the world, I cut out the listing for the state or country where I am going and tuck it into my handbag. But Tennessee is on the back of South Dakota, so you now send me two directories. I've played with members in Alaska, Hawaii and Israel, just to mention a few. Recently, in Coronado, California, an enthusiastic doctor member from Phoenix got us three "engagements" for the same evening! We resolved it by pooling all the instruments and players in the same place. . . .

JAY ROSENFELD (Excerpt)

Helen is unique in the sense that she is an individual cultural exchange, and her quiet influence extends over the face of the whole earth.

I knew Helen's parents — Edwin was a mine of musical information and erudition and of artistic judgment — Margaret the most gracious woman I ever remember meeting. . . .

Of the many times Helen and I have played together, I recall particularly those evenings when Mrs. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge was there, and the impressive appearance she always made. In spite of the fact that she sponsored and organized the world's finest quartets, her love of chamber music was so genuine that she never was surfeited by its repetition, even in amateur circles. . . .

The following quotation from Tolstoy seems to describe Helen and her devotion to the A.C.M.P.:

"Joy can be real only if people look upon their life as a service and have a definite object in life outside themselves and their personal happiness."

RUSTIN McINTOSH (Excerpt)

To H. R. from an Impartial Observer*
(Apologies to the *Ancient Mariner*)

It is a chamber music fan,
And he calleth Helen Rice.
"By thy fiddle strong, to play with thee
Would certainly be nice."

One wants an orchestra to join
(His ego is quite swollen);
Another needs a cello
For his, alas, was stolen.

And when the telephone abates,
The postman makes his round.
The mail is here, the mail is there,
The mail is all around.

So blessings on thee, Helen,
From all who share thy joy,
And from each ardent player
Who doth thy lists employ.

*Millicent Carey McIntosh

CATHERINE DRINKER BOWEN

Ladies and Gentlemen. Friends of chamber music, friends of Helen Rice!

What an occasion this is, and what a party! How could anything be pleasanter than all of us meeting to honor Helen? Last spring, when this dinner was planned as a surprise party, I was deputed to write to Helen from Pennsylvania, where I live, and to inquire casually if she could play quartets at her house next October 29th in the evening. This seemed to me the wildest venture. Surely Helen knew that I am not one with a calendar requiring the making of such engagements four months in advance. But I wrote, any way. Helen replied with entire, and engaging innocence. But of *course* she'd save that evening, she said, and how delightful to make sure of it with four months to spare between!

Let me say that I have known Helen for nearly 30 years. And for nearly thirty years we have played chamber music together in all kinds of combinations, good combinations and — not so good combinations. (Helen is very charitable.) Tonight I am the final speaker in this symposium. And by now our guest of honor is tired of hearing her name, besides which she is by nature the last person to sit easily and listen to eulogy. So for my ten minutes — I was asked to speak for twenty and I shall speak for ten — for these minutes I am going to talk about Helen, and also about chamber music within and without our society.

When I was young and foolish I did not like that word, *amateur*. I thought of it as synonymous with not trying hard enough, synonymous with not being willing to take the personal risks your professional takes, or to make real sacrifices in order to attain real competence.

But I was wrong. A half century spent with music has proven it. There are persons whose lives touch and influence many other lives. Helen Rice, without ever turning to professionalism, wholly in an amateur capacity has enriched the lives of many, many people. Incidentally, one of the things I am fondest of in her A.C.M.P. Directory is the listing of grades:

- A: Excellent
- B: Good
- C: Fair
- D: Etc.

Now, just what does Etcetera mean? Isn't it wonderful? Surely its value lies in its vagueness, like the value of certain phrases in the United States Constitution, which were purposely left vague by the Founding Fathers — elastic words, capable of conforming to future circumstance.

When I first knew Helen, she was living on the Bryn Mawr College campus, in some kind of unnatural capacity as Warden of Rhoads Hall or something equally unsuitable. What she really was doing was teaching Bryn Mawr College to play chamber music. In those days, music simply had not taken hold at Bryn Mawr. Helen's was a voice crying in the wilderness. But she succeeded. She organized chamber music and got those girls to playing. If anyone could do it, Helen could. I lived close by and observed the proceedings for three years, including the afternoon when we were to play piano quartets for a summer school session and found the best piano locked. The best piano was for solos, it devolved. The second best, tuned or untuned, would do for ensemble.

I wish I had kept track of the places where Helen and I have played together. We have played in Connecticut and in New York, in Bryn Mawr, Haverford and Merion — along what is known as the Maine Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad. We have played in Stockbridge, Massachusetts and in Tyringham. The list could go on and on. When Helen telephones me to come somewhere and play, I can no more resist than I can resist breathing. Always, afterward, I come away from these sessions feeling I have learned something. Learned to use less bow in the rapid passages, learned how to play those measures in the Mozart d minor, where the second violin repeats the sextolet figure.

From time to time I have had the privilege of playing with Helen and Ruth McGregor and Mariana Lowell Barzun, all members of our Association. The night before, I can't sleep because I am nervous, they're such good players. The night after, I don't sleep because I am so happy.

And may I say also that I have played quartets with Helen at times that were fateful and unhappy for me. My mother died at the age of 86, after a life fulfilled. The evening of the day she died, Helen's quartet, of which I was a member, happened to be playing just around the corner. I telephoned to ask if I might come and play as usual. I said I could not think of anything more comforting — or more congenial to my mother's memory, for she had loved chamber music.

You will forgive me for mentioning anything so personal, and for speaking of sad times in so gay a company. But the playing of chamber music is for many of us, so deep an experience, a spiritual release so effectual that perhaps it is well to speak of it in serious and emotional terms.

WILHELM FREYHAN—Israel

Wenn es sich Helen Rice zur Aufgabe gemacht hat, Kammermusik-Liebhaber in der ganzen Welt zu sammeln, sie anzuregen und eine musikalische Vereinigung besonderer Art zu schaffen, so hat sie hiermit eine ausserordentliche Leistung vollbracht. . . . Ebenso wie die Religion, so kann auch die Musik die Menschen edler und sittlicher machen.

EDOUARD WAHL—Switzerland

C'est aussi pour nous l'occasion de vous dire combien nous vous sommes reconnaissants de l'initiative que vous avez prise, il y a presque vingt ans. Nous avons fait la connaissance de musiciens amateurs venant non seulement des Etats-Unis, mais de pays très divers que l'Autriche, l'Allemagne, les Pays-Bas ou Israël.

Malgré la difficulté que nous avons parfois à nous comprendre, nous avons toujours trouvé un lien spirituel dans notre commun amour de la musique et restons en relations avec quelques-uns d'entre eux.

Ces liens, chère Helen, c'est vous qui les avez tissés, et vous pouvez être fière d'avoir ainsi contribué à plus de compréhension et d'amitié entre les hommes de toutes nations.

ROBERT E. DURAND—Haiti

Nous avons toujours pensé qu'un rapprochement fraternel d'hommes de toutes nationalités était possible par la pratique de la musique, applanissant ainsi toutes différences de langue, de race et de religion. Quelle belle oeuvre de compréhension humaine que l'A. C. M. P.!

Son extension sur les cinq continents est due, sans conteste, au dévouement et au dynamisme de son remarquable Secrétaire, Miss Helen Rice.

As people were collecting their coats before going home from the dinner, one of our members was heard to say with a smile, "At least 50 string quartets have been immobilized tonight." However, there was also a busy interchange of names and addresses, and we are sure that many new chamber music groups were born that evening.

We again thank all of you who made possible this tribute to Helen Rice, who singlehandedly has made our Association grow and thrive.

The Dinner Committee

The following article appeared in the NEW YORK TIMES Music Section on Sunday, November 7th, after Helen was interviewed:

IN HONOR OF AN AMATEUR

By RAYMOND ERICSON

It did not seem like a musical occasion. The speakers at a dinner nine days ago included the president of the Foreign Policy Association, two doctors and the author of best-selling biographies. Congratulatory telegrams arrived from a justice of the Supreme Court and a book publisher.

Yet the banquet's guest of honor was a musician — an amateur, at that. She was Helen Rice, known to thousands the world over as secretary of the Amateur Chamber Music Players. As one who helped to found the organization 18 years ago, Miss Rice has since been the unpaid worker who compiled its more-or-less annual directory. This now involves correspondence with approximately 6,000 amateur musicians in 65 countries. It was thought time to honor her for her services.

A few days later, Miss Rice was more eager to talk about the joy her work gave her than about the dinner, although, as she said, "It made me very happy, of course." A slender, cheerful, gray-haired woman, she asked almost immediately, "Do you play chamber music? You don't have time? What a pity!"

For those as yet unacquainted with the A.C.M.P., it is designed to give amateur musicians away from home a way to get together with other amateurs and make music. The organization's directory lists by country, state and city the names of such players, giving addresses, telephone numbers, what instruments they play, how proficient they rate themselves (Excellent, Good, Fair, "Etc.," or Professional).

About her work, Miss Rice said: "My bedroom in my New York apartment is literally my office. We have no dues. We do ask for voluntary contributions. Now I have a paid secretary

to handle the great amount of routine. Our first directory appeared in 1949; it listed 1,200 Americans. Our latest includes about 4,500 Americans and 1,500 members abroad."

An occasional A.C.M.P. newsletter to members quotes from enthusiastic letters about wonderful experiences travelers have had meeting other players — a New Yorker in Scandinavia, a German in Brussels, a Pennsylvanian in Taiwan. Miss Rice feels that anyone who loves to play chamber music is bound to be nice. She herself plays the violin and viola, and she was looking forward to a session that night with an Israeli couple on a visit to this country.

And who were the speakers at the dinner honoring her? Samuel P. Hayes was the Foreign Policy Association president; Virginia Apgar, who devised the Apgar score for babies, and Rustin McIntosh were the doctors; Catherine Drinker Bowen, the author; Abe Fortas, the Supreme Court justice, and Henry Simon, the publisher — amateur chamber-music players all.

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Excerpts from article appearing in TIME, December 24th, 1965.

FOR THE JOY OF IT

. . . The compulsion of amateur musicians to get together for an evening of chamber music is all but irrepressible. An Army officer's wife one day was approached by a stranger who noticed a telltale mark on her neck: "You must play the violin. Would you like to join our group?" A Boston doctor, hearing a man whistling a Mozart theme on the street, whistled back and soon had a date for duets. One desperate violinist pinned notes to trees in his neighborhood.

Today, fortunately, there is a more organized way for these weekend musicians to seek one another out—the Amateur Chamber Music Players. . . .

Though a member may play badly, the only real requirement is that he play gladly. Dr. E. A. Baker of Edinburgh, Scotland, says that his listing of "violin-D" means that "my talents lie rather in making coffee," but he offers "room with piano, stands, refreshment and car parking. . . .

Membership ranges from Foreign Policy Association President Samuel Hayes (violin-B) to a Manhattan night elevator operator (cello-B) who held wee-hour sessions in the coal bin of his building. . . .

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FINANCIAL REPORT

Financial Report submitted by the Treasurer,
April 1, 1966

Balance (reported in May 1965 News Letter)	
April 1, 1965	\$ 4,862.26
Contributions: April 1, 1965 to April 1, 1966	5,185.32
Balance from Special Account	111.47
Oct. 29 Dinner—(see text)	
	\$10,159.05
Expenditures Itemized	
Printing	\$ 2,209.76
Postage	1,608.70
Paid secretarial help	1,964.75
Room rent for storing files	180.00
National Music Council Membership	100.00
L'Association des Musiciens	
Amateurs (Paris)	32.27
Miscellaneous (telephone, stationery, supplies, etc.)	149.60
Total	\$ 6,245.08
Total Expenditures from April 1, 1965 to	
April 1, 1966	
	\$ 6,245.08
Balance on hand, April 1, 1966	
	\$ 3,913.97