

Folklore Society of Greater Washington

Report to Executive Board

May 9, 1965: A delegation from the Folklore Society of Greater Washington met with members of the Philadelphia Folksong Society at the home of Lee and Tossi Aaron in Philadelphia. Representing the Washington group were John and ^{Gi}Jenny Dildine, Chuck and Nan Perdue, Sol and Helen Schneyer, and John Eberhardt. Members of the Philadelphia group included Lee and Tossi Aaron, Robert Seigel, David Bas^{kin}~~can~~, and others.

The discussion generally centered around the growth, development, and problems of the Philadelphia group, although we made a small contribution of our own. This report will be directed towards the Philadelphia experience.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUMMARY

The Philadelphia Society is approximately nine years old and has a membership of about 175. Membership dues are \$6.00 for individual members and \$ 7.50 for family members.

The Society incorporated last year as a result of the financial risk imposed by the festivals. Until that time there had been no need to acquire corporate status. Some consideration had been given to the question of whether the Society should be incorporated or the festival should be incorporated as a separate organization. The decision to incorporate the Society was motivated by the wish to avoid having the tail wag the dog. Whether or not this has actually

been achieved is a problem. The Society is run by its officers and a board. The board is apparently quite large--on the order of ¹⁵~~20-30~~ members. Programs are the responsibility of the Program Chairman--a position which has been held for some years by Kenneth Goldstein.

PROGRAM

The Society mounts three types of programs--its regular meetings, concerts, and the festival. These will be discussed separately.

Regular Meetings

Meetings are held on the second Sunday of every month--officially starting at 8 p.m. but actually starting at 8:30 p.m. The program format has been standardized by this time and consists of an initial ^{1 to}~~1 1/2~~ hrs. of material planned ^{invited} by the Program Chairman, usually by an inside artist, occasionally (at least once a year) by a local member of the Society.

An intermission follows in which refreshments are served, in turn followed by a period of group singing. If there is any business to conduct, presumably it will be conducted after the intermission. Meetings close at 11 p.m.

The Philadelphia group is fortunate in being able to hold its meetings at International House regularly, and they pay a standard fee of \$25.00 a month for the privilege. In addition, they budget \$100 a month for performing artists.

Admission is free to members, \$1.00 to non-members, and 75¢ to students. Nine meetings are held during the course of the year.

Concerts

Up until this year the Society presented one or two concerts a year. In the early years the performers were usually drawn from the membership of the Society.

This year for the first time a series of seven or eight concerts was presented, consisting of artists made available by the Newport Folk Festival Series. (Incidentally, the administration of the Folk Festival Series seems to leave something to be desired. A ~~Bohemian~~ ^{Bahamian} group was presumably scheduled for the weekend of May 15th, and, it appeared, a day or two before our meeting, that the Newport people had neglected to obtain visas for the group and they might or might not be able to attend).

On balance, it was felt that while the series was an artistic success, it was not a financial success. Attendance at individual concerts ranged from 75 to several hundred. Individual concerts paid their own way, but the series as a whole did not. Since the Philadelphia group is in a happy fiscal situation, this was not a critical problem for them, but it would be for us.

The concerts have usually been held in the auditorium of the Philadelphia Art Museum, which permits them to charge admission. In previous years, the Philadelphia group has earned money on their concerts, but apparently not in impressive amounts.

Festival

The most significant aspect of the festival is that it has become a major source of income for the Philadelphia group. The first festival was undertaken

about five years ago and budgeted initially for \$1,500. Actual cost was closer to \$3,700. At the time the festival was planned, they had a cash balance of approximately \$600. Last year the festival cost about \$15,000, and it is being budgeted for a like amount this year. Profit last year was on the order of \$8,000, of which they contributed \$2,000 to the Folklore Department of the University of Pennsylvania and retained the remainder for operating capital.

Mounting the annual festival has obviously become a major project for the Philadelphia group, requiring a great deal of time and effort. Equally obviously, despite whatever artistic merit the festival may have, it has not produced a substantial increase in the membership of the Philadelphia Society.

Running the festival requires a staff of approximately 150 people--most of whom are not members. They are volunteers and are paid only a small allowance for their transportation to Paoli, and lunches.

There seems to be a marked difference of opinion within the Society regarding the festival. One group feels that it has become too large and perhaps too commercial (although this word was not used during the discussion). They would prefer to see a smaller, more intimate festival which is less concerned with its drawing power. Another group feels that the festival permits them to earn enough money to support other activities, and that apart from any other issues, this fact is enough to justify it.

It is the hope of at least some members of the board that they will be able to (1) earn enough from the festivals to provide a kitty which would permit them to produce them with an absolute minimum of financial risk; that is, to

have enough money available so that even if it rained for the entire three days they would still not wind up owing any money; (2) use some of the funds to produce the smaller, more intimate kind of festival, which some members desire, without having to be concerned about mass appeal and without requiring the operation to be self-supporting.

PUBLICATIONS

The Publications budget of the Society amounts to approximately \$250 a month, of which \$150 is for printing and the remainder for postage. They have a third class bulk mailing permit, and so far have been unsuccessful in their attempts to obtain a second class permit. Despite their official IRS status as a non-profit organization, they seem not to meet the Post Office criteria for non-profit organizations. We may well have the same problem.

Their mailing list includes approximately 3,500 names. They winnow this list annually by means of one 5 cent mailing to cull out bad addresses. Also, once a year they circularize addressees beyond a ³⁰~~100~~(?) mile radius around Philadelphia to ascertain their interest in continuing to receive the Society's materials. For some reason, they do not use address plates, depending on paste-on labels. It is not clear why.

"Tune Up" originally started as a newsletter. In the course of time, they decided to become more ambitious and to produce a more journal-like publication. The concensus was that this has not been successful, largely because of their inability to obtain appropriate material. At the present time there is strong sentiment to return to a one-page newsletter format.

*Ad revenue \$60-\$70/month. \$50 for full page,
\$30 per 1/2 page, \$15 per 1/4 page*

MISCELLANEOUS

Programming

As has been indicated, the group has depended largely on Ken Goldstein to organize their programs. This is true of the festival as well as of the regular meetings and concerts. We received the impression that by and large he does what he feels is appropriate with little control by the executive of the organization. Obviously, he has been able to do a satisfactory job--his extensive acquaintance in the field of folk performers has been extremely useful. Also, ~~since he frequently arranges for recording dates in Philadelphia, he~~ ^{recording correlate} ~~also attempts to have these dates coincide~~ with Society meeting dates and is often able to convince the recording artists to appear for the Society. It was also clear that the Philadelphia group will face a significant problem if Goldstein leaves the area.

Publicity

The Philadelphia group has found paid newspaper ads to be a relatively unrewarding form of publicity. They depend primarily on "Tune Up" and on posters, which are distributed in what they feel to be strategic locations around the city.

Managers

In general, their experience with managers (agents) has not been too good. Some managers are straight forward, in a negative way, making it clear that they are in business to make money for themselves and for their clients, and they did not, therefore, recommend to their clients that they perform for an organization of this type. Not a very happy situation, but at

least you know where you stand. Other managers are often unreliable, making commitments which they do not keep or offering arrangements which may change without notice. In general, the recommendation of the Philadelphia group was that performers be contacted directly when this is at all possible rather than by going through their managers.

Program Suggestion

It was suggested that we might consider the possibility of a mutual exchange of one program each year. That is, a group from Washington would prepare a program to be presented in Philadelphia, and a group from Philadelphia would come and do the same for us. This sounds like a good idea, and if the board approves, well worth following up.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Despite the age of the Philadelphia group and the major success which they have achieved in their festival, they have had, and still have, organizational problems which are very similar to our own. In their early days, they were perhaps even worse off than we are, since at one point Bob Seigel indicated that as president, he occasionally "appointed" other officers. Our own problems may ^{have} be a unique flavor but they are apparently not fundamentally different from anyone else's.

We will eventually have to face the issue of money. They solved this by means of the festival--an effective solution which may or may not be the best. It obviously presents a number of other problems.

The Philadelphia group has never applied for grant support, and this may, after several years of stable operation be a possible alternative for us.