

The First Concert

From the book *100 Seasons, The Plymouth Philharmonic Orchestra 1913-2015*

By Judy Fosdick

The temperature never reached 32 degrees on December 28 that year. It was impossible to hear a weather forecast on radio in Plymouth or its surrounding towns. It was 1913 and the first commercial radio broadcast wouldn't take place until 1920.

G. Herbert Clarke gathered his baton, his musical scores, and slid into his winter overcoat, and gloves. He left his house at 20 Summer Street in Kingston, walked to the trolley, and arrived at the high school building in Plymouth at around 2 PM. At 3 PM, Clarke, a violin teacher and piano tuner, would conduct the amateur musicians he had recently recruited for what would be the premiere performance of the newly formed Plymouth Philharmonic Orchestra.

The program included the Overture from "The Beautiful Galatea" by Suppe, Morceau Characteristique, "The Dawn of Love" by Theo Bendix, excerpts from a new comedy opera (1912) "The Firefly" by Frimi, two pieces by Gillet, and ending with the "Coronation March" from the Opera "The Prophet" by Meyerbeer. Two days earlier, on December 26, 1913, the Old Colony Memorial predicted, "Every lover of good music will be glad to have the opportunity to hear this class of music, and there is no doubt but what a big audience will be present to enjoy the program." That was G. Herbert Clarke's hope for his new orchestra.

The conductor and his musicians may have been anxious as they tuned up for the concert. This was a group of musicians who enjoyed the fellowship of making music together, but they were not professional musicians. They were adults and high school students who had taken music lessons in school or from Clarke, or played in a community band. Clarke took a gamble on what to play. Audiences can be finicky. But records indicate that the music touched the hearts and minds of all who attended. The

audience showed warm appreciation for the hard work of the musicians and their conductor. On January 2, 1914, *The Old Colony Memorial* reported, "It was a pleased crowd which left the building and now they are inquiring when the next concert will take place."

Those who attended the 1913 concert could not predict that 100 years later the Plymouth Philharmonic Orchestra would perform concerts for appreciative audiences. This first concert marked a commitment to serving the community with classical music that the towns of Plymouth, Kingston, Duxbury, and later many other South Shore communities have supported through fluctuating economies and unpredictable social winds of change.

Today *the Phil* presents exceptional music throughout the year and offers countless enriching musical programs to the South Shore. It is an orchestra that is as connected and committed to the community today as G. Herbert Clarke intended it to be on that cold winter day over 100 years ago.

Sources:

Beyond Plymouth Rock, America's Hometown in the 20th Century Volume II, A Welcoming Place, "Classic Music for Plymouth" by Robert Knox, pp.104–109, The Plymouth Public Library Corporation, 2010, Plymouth, MA

Old Colony Memorial, December 26, 1913; January 2, 2014 microfilm from the Plymouth Public Library

<http://www.timeanddate.com/calendar/?year=1913&country=1>