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CAL WOMEN IN MUSIC

The Marching Band

IN 1972, THE EDUCATION AMENDMENTS ACT was passed and its Title IX required all universities receiving federal funds to provide equal access to both sexes to all campus activities. Immediately affected was the University of California Marching Band, which over its eighty-year history had never accepted women—even as majorettes, popular with other bands in the '30s and '40s. The required change was not made easily. Forrest Tregua, Associated Students executive director, was given a deadline by the university: Well, I thought I might have been the first [university employee] telling the leadership and the Bandsmen for the first time, but I learned that they had already known about it and there was a strong well-organized resistance already in place trying to find ways to circumvent the ruling. I was told that through its long tradition as an all-male organization, it would not survive the change. . . . We had many long discussions and arguments [and there were] some efforts behind the scenes to get people to see the need to do this. The university did not wish to put itself in the position of dictating, but on the other hand . . . risk large sums of money, even aside from the moral question.¹ The band's executive committee finally agreed to change the band's constitution.

But Tregua “had not anticipated some of the shenanigans that were to go on.” The band had always recruited by using a list of incoming freshmen with which to issue invitations to high school musicians. A big job for which the band leadership volunteered; “I thought this was great but this turned out to be a big mistake. When the list of those invited was made available to me, I discovered that there was only one female name on the list and actually it was a mistake. It was a young lady named Leslie.” Tregua had to have the whole list re-mailed and invitations to women were issued. Fifteen joined the band that year.

Answering the invitation and having an audition on arrival on campus were not all that the newly-accepted women had to go through before their first entrance into Memorial Stadium. Janet Franco, “Tenor Sax, 1973,” tells it like it was as she apprehensively reported for the FTP (Fall Training Program): “I think my feelings in walking over to the first practice, [were] probably a little low key because I had no idea what I was in for. . . . And I don't know how much I understood at that time, but I think there was probably a little something in the air, because this was, again, the first time that there were any women present on the practice field.”²

Organization into instrumental groups, meeting their teaching assistants, instruction in the traditional band high step, came next: “[a]nd pretty much, we just dug right in, we had calisthenics and we were running around the track. And my parents . . . were sitting in the bleachers . . . I remember my dad yelling, ‘Lean into it, Janet!’ as I ran around the track.”



The first woman drum major leads the band, 1984. *Courtesy of the Cal Band History Committee.*

Although the FTP days are described as “gruelling,” the giggles shared with the other female tenor sax made the whole process bearable.

When the interviewer asked her “What about the music?,” she responded: “My first feel for what the sound could be was at the Sunday evening music rehearsal . . . I felt I had just made the transition from high school band to college band because the sound was so powerful and it was an incredibly solid, big sound. . . . But I think what really carried me off was the first time I was part of the Cal band singing . . . I had to stop, because I had to listen. I was sitting right in the middle and the sound was just beautiful. What I think affected me most was when we were singing ‘Hail to Cal,’ and probably because of the depth of the harmony and the feeling . . . even at our first rehearsal . . . it was a very memorable experience, that first time hearing the Cal Band sing.” —C.B.



Band members learn high step form at FTP. Courtesy of the Cal Band History Committee.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Interview, August 1991, with Forrest Tregua, executive director of the Associated Students, 1959-1968, by N. H. Cheatham (Drum Major of the band, 1957). Excerpts from the interviews, to be subsequently deposited in the University Archives, are courtesy of N. H. Cheatham.
- 2 Interview, October 1996, with Janet Franco, member of the marching band, 1973, by N. H. Cheatham. Excerpts courtesy of N. H. Cheatham.

“We Don’t Have Any Women in This Band” *Barbara Leonard Robben*

Spring 1953. Immediately upon enrolling at Cal I made my way to the little building that housed the music department—now Dwinelle Annex—to sign up for the Concert Band. Mr. James Berdahl was just beginning his first semester at its director. “Oh!” he said when I sat down in his office, “we don’t have any women in this band.”

I had played in the band at every school I’d attended, and it was an important part of my plans to continue doing so! Mr. Berdahl was kind. He said it was a long-standing tradition at Cal to have a men-only band. He said having a girl present would upset the camaraderie of the group.

He actually was surprised that I had come to enroll. However, since the Concert Band was being offered for credit for the first time, it wasn’t fair, really, to deny a credit course to a woman. “But,” he said, “it wouldn’t be fair to the fellows to insert one girl into the organization: the fabric of the band would be jeopardized—and the lone girl would be at risk.” However, he said that if he could get enough female musicians to make it worthwhile to inconvenience the men, he would consider doing it. “Come back in two weeks, and if I can get three more ladies who will play, then I will have a talk with the boys and see.”

And so it came to be. The men were prepared in advance for our first coed rehearsal, and the women were told to expect a confrontation at the least, and perhaps worse. It failed to materialize, however. There was some resistance in the male ranks; but on the whole the fellows were very welcoming, and I made many lifelong friends among them.

We had a wonderful week-long tour of Northern California during Spring Break that year, playing two or three concerts each day, and the only noteworthy example of exclusion

was that we four girls could not ride in the band buses, but rode instead in a station wagon driven by two male volunteers. Oh, and at Folsom Prison we were not allowed to play, the thinking being that seeing a woman might incite the prisoners to riot.

The Marching Band was quite another story. It was a fall semester activity, totally voluntary and without credit. Women were not allowed to participate, nor was it even up for debate. I solved the problem in my own way by transferring to another university in the fall semester of 1953, the University of Washington. I played in their marching band and the sky did not fall. Their only requirement for girls was that our long hair be tucked up inside



Courtesy of the Cal Band History Committee.

our band hats. Then in spring 1954 I returned to Cal for the Concert Band season. Similarly, in the fall of 1954 I went to the University of Oregon, playing, as one might guess, in their marching band. And so on until eventual graduation from the University of California in 1960.

Meanwhile, I settled on geology and soil science as a course of study, where once in awhile I'd see another girl in Bacon Hall (which has since been demolished) but for the most part I was the lone girl in classes. The problem arose when it was time for the Senior Summer Field Study, a six week summer camp in the Sierra involving geologic mapping, and, presumably, some rowdiness. No girls. And yet the mapping was a requirement for graduation.

So I was assigned an area of ten square miles in Martinez and left on my own for housing, transportation, and supervision. The men had a camp, cooks, and professors. It does seem ironic that if the department were trying to protect a girl from the rigors of geologic mapping in the Sierra they would turn one loose elsewhere to do the identical activity unsupervised!

Opportunities for women have expanded, but there is one that I regret forfeiting. The men's track coach, the famous Brutus Hamilton, once invited any interested woman to train with the men's team. Although several turned out, I was not among them as I'd had a problem with shin splints and feared that if I presented myself and failed, it might jeopardize the chances of other women. In retrospect, I realize that pounding down from the Cyclotron on asphalt wearing those thin 1950s sneakers was what was causing the shin splints.

Do you know how people sometimes say that the world is going to ruin in the 1990s? I don't believe so. Looking back, I think we can chuckle at what has been deemed proper in the past, and at ourselves and wonder at how we dealt with the challenges. Undoubtedly there are women, and men too, wanting to do things not yet approved; some of them will push forward and accomplish what others only dream about.

“Men, Women and Song” *Arville Knoche Finacom*

By the time I was invited to join the Treble Clef Society in 1946, the women's singing group was more than fifty years old.¹ In the 1890s when ladies confined their vocalizing to soirees and recitals, David Loring, a prominent San Francisco musician, organized women on campus into the Women's Choral Society of the University of California. The group sang its way into student history with fall light opera productions at local theaters and spring con-

certs in the Greek Theatre, some of these accompanied by the University of California Women's Orchestra and the Women's Mandolin Club.

In the late 1920s, Treble Clef, as the Choral Group had renamed itself, and the Men's Glee Club formally discovered each other and never looked back. Although both organizations maintained separate identities and separate student managerial staffs, their major productions each semester were joint. Light opera was a popular venue. So were student written musicals, folk music, and light classics. Vocal music and shows were very popular well before the time of the ubiquitous personal sound system. Recordings were available on wax platters that required somewhat bulky in-home equipment to access. Radio was popular and by World War II the era of disk jockeys had begun. These radio personalities interspersed smart chatter among "Top 40" hits and other selections requested by listeners. During the 1930s and 1940s, movies were in their heyday and legitimate theater with its dramas, comedies, and musicals such as *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific* played not only on Broadway but in towns and cities across America.

On campus by the 1940s, Glee Club and Treble Clef held monthly mixers, informal concerts whenever half a dozen or so got together, and an appointments banquet, a formal dance and a Whing-Ding each semester.²

Although applicants had to audition and pass musical muster before invitations were issued, Glee Club and Treble Clef provided undergraduates with opportunities for orientation to university life as well as socialization with peers outside a classroom setting. Close ties to the Cal Band, an all male contingent at the time, and the University Chorus, a mixed vocal ensemble of serious singers, completed the whole-campus experience.

I have wondered if I would have the feel for Cal that persists had I not been part of Treble Clef. One particular memory is of candlelight caroling in December. We would meet on campus, move to the south side to serenade living groups there, walk along Gayley Road to sing for the men in Bowles and the women in Stern halls, and end up at the home of Robert and Carol Sibley north of campus. There, in front of a roaring fire in a room reminiscent of a baronial hall, he, at the time executive manager of the California Alumni Association, regaled us with stories of campus life in the 1920s and 1930s while she plied us with hot mulled wine. We sang for our treats and departed feeling we had just contributed, in small measure, to the continuing story of the university.

Then there were the trips to the Anchor, a steam beer establishment on lower University Avenue. We would end up there late at night after rehearsals and productions to rehash the performance and give the patrons the benefit of our musical talents.

Advertising our shows was never difficult. We passed out flyers, then sang a few bars for whoever would listen in



Invitation to join Treble Clef Society, 1946. Courtesy of the author.

Faculty Glade, at Sather Gate, or on the steps of Wheeler Hall, whose main lecture hall became both our stage and land-of-make-believe.

Converting Wheeler Hall to a theater was testimony not only to our imaginations but to the willingness of audiences to suspend credulity. For example, in the spring 1949 production of *H. M. S. Pinafore* Treble Clef appeared as “his sisters and his cousins and his aunts” moving up the aisles from the back of the hall and came on board singing “Over the Bright Blue Sea” as if we had just disembarked from a vessel moored alongside the larger ship.

Harrison Frankel, who reviewed the performance for the *Daily Californian*, liked the staging: “Despite the fact that the auditorium is far better suited for a lecture hall than a theater, the effect of this presentation was a highlight of the operetta.”³

Never afraid to publicize our talents as well as our productions, we were known to serpentine across campus singing snatches of songs from our current production. We would build interest by rehearsing informally outdoors, often at our staked-out tables in the Bear’s Lair or in Eshleman Court.



Wheeler auditorium stage with *H.M.S. Pinafore*. 1949 *Blue and Gold*.

In the late 1940s, campus configuration was much different from today. The Glee Club and Treble Clef offices and rehearsal room were on the second floor of Eshleman (now Moses) Hall along with the offices of Hammer and Dimmer and Mask and Dagger, the university’s student drama production groups. Downstairs were the offices of *Occident*, the student literary magazine, and the *Daily Californian*. Directly below the rehearsal hall and opening out into the court was the Band Room. Across the court, Stephens Memorial Hall housed the student store, the student government offices and the student lounge and restaurants. As all these activities were under the direction of the Associated Students of the University of California (ASUC), the interests of one were made the concern of the others, and led to such

things as front page announcements of Glee Club-Treble Clef productions, as well as prominent show reviews in the *Daily Californian*.

My four years at Cal paralleled the tenure of Walter Nollner '46, a teaching assistant in the music department who directed both Glee Club and Treble Clef. Walt's youth, coupled with his musical expertise, brought style and polish not only to productions but to social activities as well, in part because of his delightful English wife, Dede. An accomplished pianist, Walt could be coaxed to play Chopin or Liszt ("Turkish March" was one of our favorites) whenever a piano was available. As an arranger, Walt took into account the vocal qualities of the current groups and provided singing vehicles that not only showcased but enhanced natural talent.

Again, as reviewer Frankel notes, "The members of the two choruses (Glee Club and Treble Clef) went through their parts in excellent style, and with the cohesion one would expect of a professional chorus."⁴

Members of Glee Club and Treble Clef sang for fun, as the 1949 *Blue and Gold* said, "They love to sing."⁵ Among us there was little talk of musical careers. We knew the worlds of business, professions, and service awaited. But they would wait. Our college years were to be lived, and live we did.

With such close association, it is no surprise that Glee Club men and Treble Clef women would date each other and that those who dated steadily across the years would eventually marry. Pair-ups were expected for both the semester's formal dance and its Whing-Dings.⁶ The latter were end-of-semester bashes that lasted more than twenty-four hours. They included progressive dinners, all night movies, beach parties and, in June of 1949, an overnight to the ASUC Ski Lodge at Norden where most of the night was spent gambling in Reno, forty miles away.

But dates were not necessary for the monthly Friday night mixers nor the times when Glee Club and Treble Clef went to events together. I remember attending a Yale Glee Club concert in San Francisco which was followed by Glee Club and Treble Clef members taking the Yalies in tow to various night spots in the City including Roberts-at-the-Beach where we all sang "The Whiffenpoof Song" until the place closed at two in the morning.

It seemed that Glee Club was always performing—as fixtures at football rallies, as invited entertainers for visiting dignitaries, at Charter Day Banquets and alumni dinners, as song leaders everywhere.⁷ Treble Clef, too, along with being an integral part of Women's Day activities on campus,⁸ maintained an informal concert schedule, especially in the summer. Since many of us were commuters with homes in the San Francisco Bay Area, a few phone calls could bring a dozen or more of us together to sing for women's clubs and service organizations.

One performance at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital under the auspices of the Red Cross was especially moving. There, with lost limbs and vacant eyes, sat veterans of World War II seemingly bemused by our upbeat songs and stylish stance. At that time "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out of My Hair" from *South Pacific* was in our repertoire. The reward came at the end when we circulated among the men and they told us over and over how good it was to see real girls, not just nurses. Our hearts were full. There, but for a twist of fate, were men who might have become our friends in Glee Club since in those years most men's groups on campus had a heavy share of veterans. No wonder the men we knew who had experienced battle and looked closely at death could sing out their souls.

Glee Club-Treble Clef shows were always lighthearted. From *A Diplomatic Jester* (fall 1946) to *Something to Sing About* (spring 1950) the musical selections were designed to bring joy to both the singers and the audience. Humor was evident everywhere from show titles such as *Historically Singing* or *We Made Plymouth Rock* (fall 1947), a musical investigation

of the roots of American singing, to *It Ain't Necessarily Show* (fall 1948) that included a celebration of George Gershwin's music, especially his poignant *Porgy and Bess*.

Normally we did each show three evenings in a row, always in early December and early May. For the price of a ticket, sixty-five cents for ASUC card holders, eighty-five cents for everyone else, audiences were guaranteed a memorable experience.⁹ We got good reviews in the annual *Blue and Gold*: "Their spirit is unquenchable," "... their shows invariably pack Wheeler Aud," and "... provided University students with top rate musical entertainment."¹⁰ *Daily Cal* reviews were equally appreciative: "Men, Women and Song' is the most ambitious undertaking of Glee Club-Treble Clef and should add substantially to their reputation as a serious musical organization. Nollner's disciplined and balanced group is responsive to his high musical values."¹¹

Another quote: "It's great to have Glee Club and Treble Clef around"¹² expresses well the essential role student organizations played in the lives of many of us fifty years ago. Personally, although I wrote for campus publications and sang with the University Chorus, without Treble Clef my campus life would have been much poorer.

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T 1



Members of the cast of Glee club-Treble Clef's production, "It Ain't Necessarily Show," include, left toright: DIANE AAMOTH, DOTTIE TENNANT, MARGIE GLEASON, GENNY HENNESSY, ARVILLE KNOCHE, JEAN SHERWOOD and LILLIAN WILLIAMS. (See story page 11.) —ASUC Photo

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Men, Women and Song* was the title of the spring 1947 production by the Glee Club-Treble Clef. A history of Treble Clef was originally published by Arville Knoche, "Treble Clef Begun in '90s," *Daily Californian*, May 13, 1948.
- 2 1947 *Blue and Gold*, 74, 195-96.
- 3 Harrison Frankel, "'Pinafore' gets Top-Notch Treatment," *Daily Californian*, May 6, 1949.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 1949 *Blue and Gold*, 76, 173.
- 6 1950 *Blue and Gold*, 77, 162.
- 7 1947 *Blue and Gold*, 74, 195; 1950 *Blue and Gold*, 77, 161.
- 8 1949 *Blue and Gold*, 76, 173.
- 9 *Daily Californian*, May 1, 1948 (also December 1, 1948 and December 1, 1949).
- 10 1947 *Blue and Gold*, 74, 196.
- 11 Mel Novikoff, "Varied Music in Glee Show," *Daily Californian*, May 9, 1947.
- 12 Mike Fallon, "'The Judge Wore Black,' is Loud, Lusty Entertainment," *Daily Californian*, May 7, 1948.