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Students Protest: Make Music, Not War

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PROTESTS

Students Protest: Make Music, Not War

The immediate reaction to President Nixon's televised announcement April 30, 1970, that American troops were entering Cambodia was one of disbelief. Hadn't the President just announced ten days earlier that 150,000 troops would be withdrawn from Vietnam over the next year? Anti-war groups had been lulled into inactivity by the unstated promise of an end to the war. Energy had been redirected toward solving the nation's environmental problems—and toward the year's final examinations. The announcement aroused peace groups on campuses all over the country—now joined by many moderates who felt they had been deceived and feared a widening of the war.

The despair over the invasion was intensified by the deaths of the four Kent State University students on May 4. The outrage and sorrow felt by many Americans at this senseless tragedy mobilized an even greater number to voice their protests. Young people were joined by adults, students by faculty and administration, and radicals by large numbers of moderates who were horrified by the killings. A national student strike was announced, and hundreds of colleges and universities suspended classes in an unprecedented action. On May 10, a quickly organized demonstration on the Ellipse in front of the White House brought an estimated 75,000 young people out to protest.

Although newspaper headlines emphasized the riots, demonstrations, and radical activities, a different kind of protest was being voiced on many campuses. Music students turned to their art to express their horror at the tragic events.

Kent State University student Curt Cacioppo, who had witnessed the deaths of his fellow students, dedicated his recently completed chorale to them. His account of the Kent State incident and his efforts to present his music to an audience in tribute to the students and to show that college students can be creative is reported in this issue of *Vibrations* (see story inside).

University and college music students on several campuses joined together to present concerts for peace. On May 17 the first of three concerts at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, presented *Children's Plea for Peace* by Alec Wilder. The composer used children's essays on peace as his text. Students at the school of music organized a second concert on May 24 to raise funds in support of a petition calling for the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Indo-China, drawn up by Arthur S. Goldberg and Gordon S. Black, both political science professors at the University of Rochester. A student jazz group also donated funds from their concert on May 27 to the petition drive.

Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, began its move toward musical protest when May 5, the day after the deaths of the four students, was declared a day of mourning and reflection. The faculty voted to cancel classes, and students were given the option of continuing their studies or receiving the grades they had at that point in their classes. Robert K. Carr, president of Oberlin, stated that a majority of students decided not to continue their regular classes so they could "give over their time, their energies, their commitments to new undertakings that would enable them to express their deeply felt and intensely serious concerns about the War . . . and about the civil and political disorders in this country."

On Wednesday, May 7th, a student meeting of the Oberlin College Conservatory was held to decide what they might do in response to the national crisis. At the meeting, Richard Miller, professor of singing, reports that "speaker after speaker rose to ask if there were not some way that a musician could use his craft as an expression of concern and dissent. Finally, one senior . . . suggested that a major Requiem work, utilizing chorus, orchestra, and soloists be prepared and presented as an anti-war expression." The excited students voted unanimously to accept the idea, and decided to present Mozart's *Requiem*. They asked Robert Fountain, dean of the Conservatory, to conduct, and he said, "I humbly and happily accept."

With the promise of meaningful action, the students and faculty joined in an immense effort to rehearse the music. Joseph Line, a junior at Oberlin, was quoted in the *Oberlin Review* as saying, "The rehearsal schedule, frankly, was insane. More than eight hours a day were spent in rehearsal, and as the material was new to the majority of the performers, we had to work from the bottom up."

They had as yet no place to present the *Requiem*, but many students felt the most appropriate place would be the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Arrangements were finally made through the director of the Cathedral to have

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about the service, I was told that Senator Kennedy was to speak there. I called Kennedy's office, which was on another floor in the same building. They said to come right up. I asked his secretary if there would be a place in the program for my music and learned that the Senator had turned his office over to several Kent students who were in charge of the service. Ultimately the decision would be made by them. I arranged for the students to give my piece an audition late that afternoon.

At 2 p.m. I met Mr. Stanton in the House Recording Studio where the chorale had its Washington premiere. When it ended, he said, "I'm humble. The President is a greater music lover than I and I know he would very much appreciate this." Mr. Stanton called the White House to make an appointment for me to present my score and record to Mr. Nixon. Unfortunately the President was at a press conference at Camp David. But Richard Cook, the legislative liaison man, assured us that the music would be rushed to him in a pouch. So the congressman had two of his secretaries drive me to the White House. There I met Mr. Cook and gave him the recording. He promised, "I'll see that this gets to the President safely." Stanton's secretaries then dropped me off at the Capitol Building, and I went to the office of the Democratic whip. My piece was enthusiastically received by the people in charge. They said it had a definite place in the Memorial Service.

We all went together to the New York Avenue Presbyterian church, where *An "Amen!" to Peace* had its first public performance. At the close of the service, the newspaperman asked if I had accomplished all that I had set out to do. I replied, "Even though I couldn't present it to Mr. Nixon in person, it's a greater fulfillment to know that an audience has received it."

On Saturday evening I was finally home. In hopes that my tribute had been safely delivered to the students' families, I fell to sleep. ☞

the Oberlin program squeezed into the many activities already scheduled for that weekend. Buses were donated, the college food service supplied food for the trip, and after several days of almost constant rehearsing, the Oberlin group arrived in Washington. Richard Kapuscinski, professor of violoncello, commented, "The whole performance was a real happening. I have the feeling that the *Requiem* gave many people who otherwise would not have been actively involved a chance to express their outrage through their art."

The 250-member choir and orchestra, composed of faculty and students, performed the *Requiem* Sunday, May 10, at 2:30 p.m. in the National Cathedral to an audience of over two thousand "as a memorial to those who have died for peace." Paul Hume, music critic for *The Washington Post*, said that "Oberlin spoke for hundreds of thousands of college students and their older parents and friends in the manner and profound awareness of their music making." Richard Miller described the performance as "an experience of reciprocal inspiration—conductor, chorus, orchestra, and soloists welded together in a strange mystical amalgam of musical and spiritual intensity. No one present in the National Cathedral . . . could escape the sense of urgency or the impact of solemn commitment conveyed by the group of young performers." Many students felt it was the most important musical event they had ever participated in.

On Wednesday May 6 the students at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston voted to support the national student strike. The faculty agreed, and canceled all classes, lessons, rehearsals, and performances. Many students, however, did not feel that the Conservatory should be closed down, but that it should be used as a forum from which to make an artistic expression in memory of the Kent State students and in support of peace. Their concern resulted in a perhaps-unique form of peaceful dissent: a music marathon. Beginning on Sunday, May 10, at 2 p.m. with a performance by the New England Conservatory Chorus, the peace marathon continued for twenty-four hours a day until the early morning of May 25. Over seven hundred performers—the faculty and students of the Conservatory, residents of Boston, and a few imports—combined their efforts to keep this musical protest for peace alive. Throughout the two-week marathon, violin, piano, flute, cello, percussion, string bass, and harpsichord recitals were interspersed with poetry readings, mass meetings, theater groups, lectures, political speakers, and even a mime artist, Rolf Scharre. Folk, rock, and protest music were mixed in with jazz, electronic music, and spirituals. With everything from rock to classical, musicians of all musical persuasions agreed on one thing—peace. The Berklee Jazz Ensemble presented a concert of modern jazz and big band tunes, and the New York Rock and Roll Ensemble gave a midnight show to a packed hall. The dramatic arts were well represented in *The Proposition*, an improvisational theater group, and the Brandeis University Guerrilla Theater, which made two appearances. Rock groups included the Fort Mudge Memorial Dump, Rab XBALBA, and Beep Loony Tunes. Madrigal groups, a snare drum duet, and opera scenes contributed to the almost endless variety. John Froines, a member of the Chicago Eight and a professor of chemistry at the University of Oregon, provided a political message one evening; a lesson in piano tuning and a lecture by John Heiss on electronic music, with tapes of Vladimir Ussachevsky, Milton Babbitt, and others, provided some music education. Gunther Schuller, president of the Conservatory, conducted an open orchestral rehearsal one day, and the Composers String Quartet held a recording session in concert. Members of the cast of *Hair*, doing several numbers from their show one morning at 2 a.m., drew the largest, most frenetic audience.

Craig Stinson, the music critic for Boston's *Publick Occurrences* described the event: "What is most appealing about the marathon is that it has brought together much of the best artistic talent from all over the city, and presented it in a manner that for geniality and relaxation has been quite unlike anything one ever encounters at ordinary concerts. Musicians and audience alike have been behaving in a refreshingly unpretentious manner, frequently rapping with one another about how or whether to do a particular number, whether a given performance was good or bad—and so forth. The marathon has given rise to a whole new style of public music making, and I, for one, have been enjoying it tremendously."

The experiences of Curt Cacioppo, the students at Eastman School of Music, the group from Oberlin, and all of the people who participated in the peace marathon at the New England Conservatory illustrate the concern and involvement of many music students. For those students who need alternatives to burning ROTC buildings and sacking administration offices, music offers a chance to make an eloquent, creative plea for peace and understanding.—SDG