



HOMELAND STORIES: Music and Meaning

Character Education

- To discern how music influences character development
- To appreciate the diversity of contributions that individuals might make
- To develop a balanced view of the positive and negative influences of the arts industry

Facts

- Canadian composer Ruth Lowe's song *I'll Never Smile Again* became a war time hit when performed by the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra with Frank Sinatra. It has been recorded more than 100 times
- Nine Canadian Victory Bond Campaigns raised 12 billion dollars during WWII
- Canada's full time Army had 4,261 officers and men at the beginning of WWII. Over the course of the war, the Army enlisted 730,000, the Air Force 260,000 and the Navy 115,000 personnel

Before the Reading

- Recently the music industry supported recovery in Haiti. List other causes the industry has supported.
- Young people often model their personal look on music stars or groups. For example, Madonna started a whole new look. Who are some music models for young people nowadays?
- Is music important to you? If so, what does it do for you?
- Can music change society? Why or why not?

HOMELAND MINUTES



Portia May White
www.blackpast.org

On White Being Black in WWII

She grew up with good role models. Her father served in the No. 2 Construction Battalion in WWI. He graduated from Acadia University as the first black graduate in 1906. Rev.

William White served with the rank of Captain, the only black chaplain in the British Army in WWI. During the Depression, Rev. White helped raise funds to establish vocational schools within churches in Nova Scotia.

Her mother Izie Dora White raised 12 children supporting her husband's Cornwallis Street Baptist Church and its choir where her children sang. One daughter was the organist; another daughter the choir director. The latter daughter Portia May White became an international celebrity.

Portia White (1911–1968) was blessed with an extraordinary voice. She took voice lessons at the Halifax Conservatory and sang devotional songs on her father's monthly radio program. Portia trained as a teacher at Dalhousie University and then took postings in schools in the Black communities of Africville and Lucasville. During the Depression she made \$30 a month.

Repeated outstanding showings in the Halifax Music Festival between 1935 and 1938 changed Portia's destiny. Given a scholarship to study with the renowned baritone and teacher Ernesto Vinci who had fled Nazi Germany, Portia began to sing as a contralto. In 1941 after a recital of European classics and Negro spirituals in Toronto's Eaton Auditorium, Edward Wodson of the *Toronto Evening Telegram* described her voice as a gift from heaven.

After the Eaton Auditorium coup Portia performed in concerts and on radio on programs, often in support of the war effort. Her younger siblings formed the "White Quartette" and regularly entertained the troops stationed in Halifax. Like her father and family, Portia wanted to serve.

Portia White's concert career was, however, limited by difficulties in obtaining bookings. Although black musicians entertained in cities across Canada they did so mostly in black venues. Before her success in March of 1944 at the New York Town Hall, NYC some concert

halls in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Ontario had refused to allow Portia to perform.

After a second New York Town Hall concert for a packed audience and with outstanding reviews, Portia was finally on course for a Canada-wide concert tour. She had a gruelling schedule and had to pay her own personal expenses, but, she was a concert soloist performing in traditionally white venues. In an article in the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, 27 April 1996, Portia was described as, "the singer who broke the colour barrier in Canadian classical music."

Portia May White lifted thousands of Canadians above the pains of WWII with the beauty of her voice. Her poised stage presence as she sang of overcoming suffering knew no colour barriers. Thus, while music during WWII entertained, provided escape, fuelled recruitment, bolstered Victory Bond drives and raised morale, thanks to Portia May White, it also changed the world, Canada's part of the world.

Reading #1 Music

*I'll never smile again,
Until I smile at you.
I'll never laugh again.
What good would it do?
For tears would fill my eyes,
My heart would realize,
That our romance is through.
I'll never love again,
I'm so in love with you.
I'll never thrill again,
To somebody new.
Within my heart,
I know I will never start
To smile again,
Until I smile at you.*

April 23, 1940, Tommy Dorsey recorded this song with Frank Sinatra doing the vocals. Ontarian Ruth Lowe had written the song in 1939 at her mother's apartment on 723 Bloor Street West in Toronto while grieving for her husband who had recently died during surgery. As the casualties mounted in WWII, Ruth's song captured the feelings of many wives and sweethearts. It became an international hit that attracted recording artists for decades.



Ruth Lowe
The Original Big Bands Database Plus

Music, as demonstrated by the reach of Ruth's song, played a pivotal role during WWII. As well as giving expression to the feelings of a generation undergoing incredible stresses, it entertained, promoted recruitment, helped sell war bonds, kept up morale and bonded the Canadian population with its military.

CBC Radio played upbeat songs that lifted the spirits of the nation. Songs such as *Accentuate the Positive*, *Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby*, *Roll Out The Barrel* and *They're Either Too Young or Too Old* got people's minds off their troubles. The sentimental songs such as *As Time Goes By* (from the 1942 movie *Casablanca*), *I Don't Want to Walk Without You Baby*, *I'll Be Seeing You* and, *We'll Meet Again* helped Canadians to know they were not alone with their feelings of loss.

Vibrant dance tunes diverted those on the home front allowing them relief from their war efforts and worries. Songs such as *Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy*, *G.I. Jive* and *Juke Box Saturday Night* brought people out to dance. A popular dance spot was the Palace Pier which opened in Toronto near today's CNE on June 10, 1941.



Sergeant Johnny Wayne and Staff-Sergeant Frank Shuster of the Canadian Army Show relaxing before a 1944 performance of their comedy show for personnel of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division in France
Library and Archives Canada
Ken Bell photographer

December 1942, CBC Radio started a weekly radio show called *The Army Show*. The skits and music, mostly created by the Canadian duo Wayne and Shuster, provided comic relief. Songs such as, *That's An Order from the Army* were popular Canada wide. *The Army Show* began touring army camps and urban centres across Canada in April 1943. The Department of National Defence, seeing the power of the performances, "conscripted" *The Army Show* and in December 1943, sent it overseas to entertain the troops.

All three branches of the military developed touring shows with talent from within their own ranks when they saw how important musical entertainment was to troop morale on bases across Canada. The shows frequently played to civilian audiences as well to offset production and travel costs. Radio shows spinning off the touring shows, emphasized recruitment and the sale of Victory Bonds.

The immensely popular *Meet the Navy* variety show featured 38 Wrens, 41 male performers and 27 musicians. Its two tours of Canada reached audiences totalling half a million people and raised \$300,000 for the Canadian Naval Service Benevolent Trust Fund. Queen Elizabeth, then Princess Elizabeth, congratulated the cast backstage after their performance at London's Hippodrome in the winter of 1943.

The Air Force mounted *The Blackouts* of 1943 a musical revue with a cast of 33. Their 1943 Western Canadian tour began in Yorkton, Saskatoon, went on to B.C. and then headed north to Annette Island, Alaska. It was seen by 70,000 Canadian and American servicemen and women before it headed overseas. The extreme isolation of many of the bases made for very appreciative audiences.

The Army and Navy leased sleeping and dining cars from the Canadian Pacific Railway for their cross-Canada tours creating their own mobile camps. The Air Force used trucks, station wagons and military planes and as a result, the RCAF could make it to more remote locations—not without its own problems. In a long rainstorm in the summer of 1944 near Whitehorse an RCAF entertainment unit was evacuated in the middle of the night as the runways flooded.



Meet the Navy programme cover
www.navy.forces.gc.ca

The Meet the Navy show had some transportation problems as well. In the fall of 1944 over 100 members of the cast and crew became violently sea sick when the 42 year old Canadian warship on which they were travelling rolled with the seas crossing the war zone from Nova Scotia to Newfoundland. It took three days before the show could go on.

As the popular larger national touring shows went overseas to entertain troops, the Armed Forces had new shows in the wings for the home front such as the Army's *About Faces of 1944* and the RCAF's *All Clear*. Recruitment, sale of Victory Bonds and morale remained key issues. The Armed Forces needed to deliver new patriotic musical entertainment to maintain Canadians' identification with the military.

Musical entertainment functioned actively on the local level for the same reasons—morale and bond drives. During his tenure as entertainment director for Defence Industries Ltd. (DIL), a munitions plant in Ajax, Harry Brock organized a full range of entertainment that included an evening with the dance band Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians and running a slate of home grown theatrical and musical events with performances by DIL's own Victory Singers. Brock brought in Hollywood movie stars Mary Pickford and Ralph Bellamy to assist with DIL's 7th Victory Bond Drive.

During WWII Canadians across the country appreciated entertainment relief whether it was brought to them by the three branches of the Armed Forces, the radio, dance bands or by local groups. Entertainment galvanized the nation around a cause and in the process created a new form of Canadian entertainment—a blend of music, Broadway, slapstick, satire and skits.

Thanks to thousands of Canadian men and women who contributed their talents, musical entertainment was *centre stage* on the home front during WWII in a way it had never been before. It "Ac-cent-tchu-ated the Positive" and led Canadian talents towards the international stage.

After the Reading

- List all the purposes music served during WWII. List all the purposes music serves today. What purposes does music serve for you? Is it helping you to build a positive character?
- What made Ruth Lowe's song an international hit? What makes a song an international hit today?
- What songs or entertainment raised morale during WWII? Are there songs that raise morale today? Why or why not?
- What was music used to sell during WWII? What does music sell nowadays?
- How did musical entertainment help Canadians to identify with their military? How do music acts today get people to identify with them?
- How did music get *centre stage* during WWII? How does it get *centre stage* today (i.e. get to be a household name)?

Extensions

- Research Wayne and Shuster and the Canadian influence on entertainment as it led through variety shows such as *Laugh-In* and *Second City to Saturday Night Live*
- By late 1940 the Canadian Army Command had 10 military bands with 27 musicians each and a bandmaster in place. They had strong horn sections, drums and sheet music. Compare and contrast the use of military bands with that of touring musical entertainment shows.
- Ruth Lowe's song *I'll Never Smile Again* captured many generations. List the 10 top songs that could be said to have influenced your generation. Be prepared to explain if these key songs have positive or negative messages for character development.

Sources

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