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National Service and Operatic Ambitions: Arthur Nevin's Musical Activities during World War I

On 18 October 1917 Arthur Nevin reported for duty at Camp Grant outside of Rockford, Illinois, to begin what was surely one of the most arduous undertakings of his musical career. He had been recruited by the U.S. Army's Commission on Training Camp Activities to serve as the cantonment's song leader, a position responsible for instructing nearly forty thousand soldiers-in-training in the art of community singing. Soon thereafter, at a Saturday matinee on 5 January 1918, Maj. Arthur Nevin (wearing his army khakis) conducted the world premiere of his one-act opera *A Daughter of the Forest* at the Chicago Opera Company. Such simultaneous yet disparate musical endeavors are characteristic of this composer's career path as he sought both to serve his country during wartime and to capitalize on performance opportunities afforded by the increasingly patriotic bent of the nation's artistic scene.

This case study of how one composer charted a career during World War I offers a compelling frame through which to examine key facets of

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the American experience. Nevin's story weaves together several crucial issues that characterize musical life at the time, including the cultural hierarchy of competing genres, the professional obstacles confronting composers, and the search for creative outlets that might offer lasting societal and artistic impact. In sum, his diverse activities form a portrait of a musician pursuing a career of recognizably contemporary outlines. During this period, Nevin engaged across a spectrum of style idioms, from Tin Pan Alley popular song and community music to opera. He filled a diverse array of music-related roles, including songwriter, conductor, teacher, essayist and correspondent, concert organizer, logistics manager, and army officer, all while struggling to find success in the medium at the center of his compositional career: American opera. The challenges were not one but many, demanding a multiplicity of aptitudes and an endless supply of novel solutions.

Arthur Nevin (1871–1943) was well equipped for these undertakings. He possessed an impeccable musical pedigree, having trained at the New England Conservatory and studied during the mid-1890s in Berlin under Karl Klindworth and Engelbert Humperdinck. His brother, the late Ethelbert Nevin (1862–1901), remained a household name thanks to the success of “Narcissus” and “The Rosary,” a piano character piece and an art song, respectively. Arthur had tackled seemingly insurmountable musical barriers before. He was, after all, the first American composer to have had an opera produced by a top-tier European company when in 1910 the Berlin Royal Opera, under the baton of Karl Muck, staged *Poia*, a work based upon a Blackfoot tribal legend.¹ After the unwelcome reception of *Poia* and bruising reviews from the German press, Nevin returned to the United States and began building a reputation for himself within the community music movement. Inspired by nationally recognized leaders like Peter Dykema and Arthur Farwell, Nevin organized at the grassroots level, with Kansas serving as his field of operations.² In 1915 he joined the faculty of the University of Kansas, where he was responsible for establishing a statewide music program. As a report to the Music Teachers’ National Association explained, “It was his duty to organize, drill, and, if possible, put upon a permanent basis community choruses throughout the State of Kansas.”³ In his first year and a half, Nevin conducted thirty-four community sings, led nearly seventy rehearsals, presented twenty-one lectures about community music, and established twelve new choruses across the state. In total, he founded thirty-five choruses by 1920, the year his position in Kansas ended. His repertoire was ambitious, including Théodore Dubois’s *Seven Last Words of Christ* and selections from Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* and Bizet’s *Carmen*. He concurrently sought to maintain his connections to the East Coast centers of the community music movement (and likely escape the perils of an isolated midwestern existence) by guest conducting the community

chorus in New York's Central Park and directing the MacDowell Colony Chorus each summer.⁴

Nevin's work in Kansas was a resounding success. As Frances Garside reported to readers of the *Etude*, "Now all of Kansas sings as it plows and sows and reaps, and it plows and sows and reaps as never before." Nevin received the credit for this accomplishment: "[He] has carried the gospel of music all over his beloved State under every adverse condition. He has traveled through snowstorms to hold community 'sings' in country schoolhouses, and he has gone without food and sleep some-times in serving his ideal. But the result has been worth the sacrifices, for all of Kansas is happier now because it sings."⁵ The element of moral uplift suggested in Garside's commentary resonates with the underlying principles that motivated the community music movement. According to Peter Dykema, the movement aimed "toward truer brotherhood and spiritual awakening through mass singing—an effort to liberate the spirit of the people through self-expression in song, and add to growth in unity of thought and feeling, which is the foundation of individual and national strength."⁶ Arthur Farwell expressed similar sentiments: "When groups and crowds of people throughout the country come together regularly to voice themselves in song, it is beyond human power to estimate the extent of the force which has been launched. An individual song is potent in its magical effect upon the listener, upon his sentiments, his emotions, his aspirations, his will. But the song of the nation is powerful beyond all knowing or dreaming."⁷ For both men, community singing must be more than an entertaining pastime; it should help to build a stronger, more unified nation. As the editor of the *Musical Monitor* explained, this potential was premised upon the notion that community singing stoked "an inherent, human instinct for expression of the inner life of man, enduring regardless of the advent of all mechanical devices for pleasure—the automobile, motion picture, etc." Even as "a widespread love for good music has been created by the Talking machines," the passive act of listening to the phonograph cannot begin to satisfy "humanity's instinctive desire to express itself in music by performance."⁸ Choral singing was understood to be the requisite outlet for such expression because only through a collective effort could the desired benefits accrue. As Garside explained, again in direct reference to Nevin's work in Kansas, this was "because no man can sing with the man standing next to him, and feel hostile toward that man; because the world needs a better spirit of accord, and greater sympathy and kindness; . . . and because music is the only factor that can bring a better feeling about."⁹

There is nothing particularly new in recognizing that music making can be a powerful agent of change, nor is it surprising that the human voice would be the chosen medium. Community music is yet another iteration of similar movements in the United States that include *Sängerbunde* and

Singing Schools, among others.¹⁰ Moreover, community music is just one front of a much broader progressive reform effort that was brought to its apex by the approaching war, particularly under the oversight of the War Department's Commission on Training Camp Activities. As historian Nancy Bristow explains, progressive leaders seized the opportunity to advance their cause by "beginning with the troops," using "education, recreation, and repression to create crusaders worthy of the American cause and capable of sustaining the campaign for national uplift after the war." They offered "a comprehensive social vision" that aimed to achieve new "national standards, replacing the multitude of American cultures with a homogeneous one."¹¹ Given the moral uplift and unifying potential attributed to community singing, the commission was eager to investigate if the activity could help build a more cohesive fighting unit. Arthur Farwell again played a central role. He was tasked with organizing a trial run of army mass singing at the Officer's Training Camp in Plattsburg, New York.¹² His affirmative report convinced the commission of the usefulness of mass singing.

At that time, there was much concern for the moral well-being of the men entering the army's training cantonments, especially the fear that the trainees would all too easily fall into the vices of drinking, gambling, and prostitution if not kept adequately occupied and morally reinforced. As Chairman Raymond B. Fosdick explained, the commission's efforts represented "the method of attack by the War Department upon the evils which are traditionally associated with camps and training centers." Fosdick understood that "it is not enough merely to set up '*Ver-boten*' signs along the roadside, to forbid troops doing this or that," but rather that alternatives must "give the men something positive to take the place of the things we are trying to eliminate."¹³ As stated in the commission's own literature, its primary task was "to re-establish, as far as possible, the old social ties—to furnish these young men a substitute for the recreational and relaxational opportunities to which they have been accustomed—in brief, to rationalize, as far as it can be done, the bewildering environment of a war camp."¹⁴ Even as the commission recognized the importance of maintaining the social fabric within the cantonments, the goal to train effective soldiers never faded from the forefront of the commission's concerns. Fosdick was adamant on this point: "Our fundamental aim in all this work is to create a fighting machine. We never lose sight of that. You cannot have a fighting machine unless the men composing it are contented, and you cannot have men contented if you rob them of all the social contacts to which they have been accustomed."¹⁵ If contented men and stable social contacts were the goal, then community singing would be a perfect complement to the other outlets and activities already planned, including sports, boxing, theatrical entertainments, foreign-language classes, and reading rooms.

The suggestion that singing should be a part of this array was not accepted without objection. Fosdick noted that he faced “considerable opposition from some of our hard-headed old Indian fighters down in the War Department, but they are being converted.” The results spoke for themselves. As Fosdick explained, group singing was “the most popular thing we have tried thus far. The men are crazy about it, and the officers, too, because they see the effect on the spirit of the troops. . . . You can-not imagine the effect that songs have on the morale of the troops.”¹⁶ In order to send a “singing army” to France, the commission announced it would “appoint . . . song leaders in the various camps and cantonments. The plan is to extend this work until every camp in the United States is supplied with a competent leader. Appropriations for this activity have been approved by Congress.”¹⁷ Singing was formally added to the army’s official training regimen on 26 April 1917, and the first song leaders received their orders in mid-June 1917, with additional appointments or release replacements continuing through the Armistice.¹⁸

The adaptations necessary to retrofit community singing for army purposes were minimal—a shift of tone and emphasis rather than of design. Whereas community music aimed toward the moral uplift of a neighborhood, city, state, or nation, army camp singing would instead primarily strive to boost morale and build camaraderie. The National Committee on Army and Navy Camp Music oversaw the project. In the words of Chairman W. Kirkpatrick Brice, the committee’s goal “was to express a new attitude in training an army, to attack the training in a democratic spirit, to respect the rank and file as human beings, to provide them with as much civilization as possible, and build as lofty idealism as possible while they were learning a barbarous, difficult, dehumanizing, dangerous, bloody trade.”¹⁹ Again, these words echo the aspirational tone of the community music organizers, but now mass singing had to prove itself in a context where the stakes were much higher. The committee could not deny the challenge that lay ahead; committee members viewed this opportunity as “an heroic test of the community-music ideal.”²⁰ Yet their faith in the power of music—of singing, in particular—conveys a remarkably optimistic outlook, second only to their sense of patriotism and national duty. As the committee’s assistant director, Frances F. Brundage, wrote, “Over and above the obvious side of the military training, the imagination of American youth was finding itself and fusing itself by all the laws of silent alchemy into the great soul of America. Vague, sensitive, and groping as it was, it demanded its own medium of expression, and the most far-seeing of the commanding officers recognized at once that in singing alone they could find the true superdiscipline for this new spirit.”²¹

Camp Grant, the site of Arthur Nevin's assignment, was situated along the Rock River near the southwestern corner of Rockford, Illinois. Construction occurred between June and October 1917 at a cost of around \$7 million (\$130 million in 2016, adjusted for inflation). The camp itself occupied 1,600 acres; the entire reservation used for training purposes spanned approximately 5,600 acres. The camp's more than 1,500 buildings could support a maximum capacity of nearly 43,000 troops. During the war, Camp Grant primarily prepared infantry replacements and hosted an officers' training school. It served as a demobilization center and rehabilitation hospital for wounded soldiers after the Armistice. The first trainees arrived in early September 1917, shortly after the camp's commanding officers had reported for duty.²²

As the army began seeking song leaders for each of the nation's cantonments, Arthur Nevin must have seemed like a particularly prestigious candidate, given his established reputation in both the community music and operatic fields. The *Graduate Magazine* at the University of Kansas proudly reported that their music professor had been "summoned by the Government" to conduct "a lifesized community chorus."²³ In fact, his entire family was embarking upon wartime service commitments. According to the *Musical Leader*, his wife and two sons had already arrived in France: "Mrs. Nevin has been appointed head of the bacteriological department of a large Red Cross hospital, the first woman to be appointed to such a position. The sons, Hardwicke and Jack, will join the ranks of the American Ambulance Corps."²⁴ Both young men would go on to receive decorations for their bravery. Arthur signed his commission on 13 October, making him an army major; he reported to Camp Grant as its first song leader on 18 October 1917.

While Nevin's work in Kansas focused on establishing choruses of volunteer community singers and putting in place a framework to keep them operating in his absence, the singers at an army training camp were compelled to participate under direct order. In Kansas, Nevin would travel to conduct separate choruses widely dispersed across the state, whereas now he was responsible for training singers en masse. As Frances Brundage recalled, singing sessions "came to be recognized as an integral part of the training itself, scheduled officially along with target practice, bayonet schools, and other essentials of war-making." Song leaders were expected "to keep as their objective the needs of the soldier at the front, to strip the singing program of nonessentials and to put it in fighting trim."²⁵ The logistical complexity of arranging mass singing with the entire population of Camp Grant can hardly be overstated, yet Nevin rose to the occasion and met the challenge with aplomb. By the start of November, he had established a system that enabled every trainee and officer to attend a singing session at least once each week.

Nevin's own published writings and correspondence offer a rare glimpse into the methods of a camp song leader. Given the enormity of his task, he seemed particularly eager to share his insights into the logistical arrangements and pedagogical approaches necessary for running a successful army singing program. His first such account is found in an essay written for the newspaper *Trench and Camp*. Printed under the auspices of the YMCA's National War Work Council, the outer pages of the paper carried news of nationwide interest and were the same at each of the army's cantonments. The inner pages were prepared at local news printers, and thus the content of that section would vary from camp to camp.²⁶ Consequently, only soldiers reading the Camp Grant edition on 5 November 1917 would have encountered Nevin's headline, "Interest Is Shown in Camp's Mass Singing." (The complete text is included in the appendix.)

Recognizing his status as a relatively new arrival on the scene, the article provided a useful platform from which Nevin could introduce himself and his methods to the camp's population. His tone betrays an understandable anxiety to justify mass singing's purpose to trainees who might be potentially skeptical of this new addition to their regi-men. Indeed, Nevin's second sentence reminds his readers of what they surely already knew: "Participation and instruction in mass singing has been made a military duty in [t]his camp." He seems pleased to report that at his very first singing session in Camp Grant's YMCA Auditorium (see fig. 1), the 3,600 men present "seemed to have grasped the words and music [of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"] and were singing it with a good will" in nothing "but a few moments." Nevin notes how the response from the soldiers "has become more than encouraging[,] and when a regiment has become thoroughly familiar with the song[,] the volume of tone given forth is not only of tremendous strength, but has a spirit that shows interest." He insists that "when these men go to France[,] they will then even more fully appreciate the assistance this mass singing will be to them under all conditions."²⁷ Already, one can sense how Nevin had to fight to prove the legitimacy of his position. It was no easy task to convince the camp's residents that acquiring singing ability was worth the effort.

Nevin's article also includes a detailed logistical outline of how he intended to coordinate the camp's singing sessions and an explanation of how he would teach the men new songs. These comments bear quoting at length:

As there are to be approximately 39,000 soldiers in this camp, the mass singing has been divided into eight sessions and at each meeting the number of men singing ranges from 3,500 to 4,000. . . . In starting to train the soldiers on a new piece of music which they have



Figure 1. The YMCA Auditorium at Camp Grant: “Wherever American troops gather[,] the Red Triangle of the Y. M. C. A. goes to help safeguard the home ideals. Thousands of letters are written home from facilities furnished by them. Educational classes and amusements are conducted in each of the six buildings. Aside from this is the main auditorium where the men gather from time to time to witness boxing bouts and listen to lecturers of note on various subjects” (*Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois: Being a Pictorial History of the Miracle of the Illinois Canton-ment* [Rockford, IL: Photo Post Card Co., 1917], [16]).

not heard, I begin with the first ten rows of the men assembled. As these men are close to the piano, it makes it easier for them to hear and grasp the melody. In two or three trials, the song has become fixed to the entire assemblage, and with their voices added to the piano[,] that tune can easily be picked up by the remaining mass who listen attentively to the melody[,] and within five or six minutes[,] the whole 3,600 are able to join in and sing the work from begin-ning to end. Before many days have passed[,] this whole camp will be able to render from twelve to fifteen songs, as the same music is rehearsed by the different sections of this camp.²⁸

Nevin’s pedagogy might be characterized as a “trickle-down” approach to learning by ear, carried out incrementally but on a massive scale. Small groups of individuals gradually pick up a melody and its words. They act as human amplifiers, reinforcing the volume level. At last, an audi-torium full of soldiers has heard the tune often enough that they can all join in. The process then repeats with each successive contingent until the entire camp can theoretically sing as one.

By the end of the year, Nevin had established his position securely enough that he could strike a more optimistic tone when discussing his role at the camp with the Chicago-based periodical the *Reform Advocate*. He confidently describes how the singing that “is now being cultivated at the camps all over this country is going to do wonders for music. Already the American has ceased to consider music merely as an adjunct of artistic temperament. The soldier boy finds it a really necessary relief from the arduous studies and duties of the day in a military camp, and music has become a joy, not a joke nor a chore.”²⁹ Even if music making might not have been a chore for the soldier-in-training, Nevin’s duties grew progressively more onerous. Leonard Liebling, a columnist with the *Musical Courier*, corresponded with Nevin toward the end of his tenure at the camp. In response to an inquiry about his usual routine, Nevin obliged with this summary:

I arise at 6:30 a.m., go to my desk at headquarters, and answer scores of letters (no matter how trivial the communications, I acknowledge each and every one), examine from fifteen to twenty patriotic songs, then hustle to the two regimental bands (to be used for playing accompaniments for singing sessions on that day), and rehearse them. At 1:15 every day I have 3,500 men march up before me for a “sing drill,” and every evening at 6 from 4,000 to 4,500 men. Every Monday, massed band rehearsals (250 men), and every Tuesday at 3, 2,200 officers.³⁰

With his music program up and running at full force, Nevin was able to replace the relatively inaudible piano with a military band, even if this added yet another obligation to his already packed schedule of duties. Given the need to motivate such large numbers of potentially unin-terested, hesitant, or inexperienced choral singers, the selection of acces-sible and effective repertoire became an especially important task. Nevin likewise explained this aspect of his role to his *Trench and Camp* readers:

The songs used for these soldiers are those which the men themselves, in a way, suggest[,] and this I feel should govern the list of songs they now use. I am receiving numerous copies of music from all quarters, many of which are excellent, but it is impossible for me to use new compositions at present. The popular style is what the men want and they cry for songs that are favorites of the day[,] and to have successful singing one must respond to that style which has the general appeal.³¹

Clearly, Nevin was attentive to what sort of music the men were and were not interested in singing, and thus his repertoire primarily centered upon Tin Pan Alley popular songs. His willingness to follow the tastes of the troops, even to the point of potentially setting aside his own personal

preferences, was essential to the singing program’s sustainability. By compiling all of the song titles mentioned in Nevin’s own commentary, press reports on camp activities, sheet music advertisements that reference Nevin’s activities, and soldiers’ recollections of their time at the camp, it is possible to reconstruct a confirmed repertoire list that formed the core of Nevin’s singing sessions (see table 1).

It is likewise informative to compare Nevin’s repertoire list with the contemporaneous songsters officially provided to American army trainees. The extent of overlap suggests that Nevin’s selections are likely indicative of broader trends occurring throughout the cantonment system.

Table 1. Confirmed Songs in Arthur Nevin’s Camp Grant Repertoire

Song title	Music	Lyrics	Source	Songbook overlap
Battle Hymn of the Republic		Julia Ward Howe	a	d, e
Defend America	Arthur Hadley	Rufus Stickney	b	
Good-Bye Broadway, Hello France!	Billy Baskette	C. Francis Reisner and Benny Davis	a	
Illinois	Walter Howe Jones	Charles H. Chamberlin	a	
Joan of Arc	Jack Wells	Alfred Bryan and Willie Weston	a, c	d, e
Keep the Home Fires Burning	Ivor Novello	Lena Guilbert Ford	a	d, e
Over There	George M. Cohan	George M. Cohan	a	d, e
Poor Butterfly	Raymond Hubbell	John L. Golden	c	
Smile, Smile, Smile	Felix Powell	George Asaf	c	d
There’s a Long, Long Trail	Zo Elliott	Stoddard King	a	d, e
[“the splendid Stephen C. Foster Songs”]	Stephen Foster		a	d, e

Sources of verification:
a. Arthur Nevin, “Interest Is Shown in Camp’s Mass Singing,” *Trench and Camp*, Camp Grant edition, 5 November 1917.
b. Oliver Ditson ad in *Pacific Coast Musical Review*, 23 March 1918, 7.
c. Parke Brown, “1,300 Officers at Camp Grant Rank Cowards,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 November 1917. Repertoire overlap with official songbooks:
d. War Department Commission on Training Camp Activities, *Army Song Book* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1918).
e. Commissions on Training Camp Activities of the Army and Navy Departments, *Songs of the Soldiers and Sailors* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1917).

The majority of Nevin's confirmed song titles appear in at least one and often both of the principal song publications issued by the Commission on Training Camp Activities. The *Army Song Book* (1918) includes printed music for the vocal melody lines, while *Songs of the Soldiers and Sailors* (1917) provides song lyrics alone. (Links to online sources for all of the published sheet music discussed in this essay are accessible in the web supplement.)³²

One category of Nevin's repertoire consists of familiar national airs. "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" is the only such song verifiably confirmed, but Nevin likely also made use of "America" ("My Country, 'Tis of Thee"), "America, the Beautiful," and "The Star-Spangled Banner," as all four appear in both songbooks.³³ (Note that the *Army Song Book* pairs "America, the Beautiful" to a 1913 Will C. Macfarlane tune, rather than to the more familiar Samuel A. Ward melody.) The state song "Illinois" also belongs in this category.³⁴ Much like "America, the Beautiful," the first stanza of Charles H. Chamberlain's text sings the praises of the natural landscape, but from a regionally specific point of view:

By the rivers gently flowing, Illinois, Illinois, O'er thy
prairies verdant growing, Illinois, Illinois,
Comes an echo on the breeze,
Rustling thro' the leafy trees,
And its mellow tones are these, Illinois, Illinois; And
its mellow tones are these, Illinois!

Nevin noted that he conducted this number at what was perhaps his first public appearance as Camp Grant's song leader on 1 November 1917. A mere two weeks after his tenure began, Nevin's choir of trainees sang "Illinois" to honor a visit from the governor, Frank Oren Lowden. Another selection of songs, although not specifically patriotic in nature, is related to this "national airs" category. In his *Trench and Camp* article, Nevin remarks, "We also have in our collection the splendid Stephen C. Foster songs[,] which will soon be memorized, including the verses."³⁵ Although not named specifically, Nevin most likely used "My Old Ken-tucky Home," "Old Black Joe," and "Swanee River," as these three are included in both the *Army Song Book* and *Songs of the Soldiers and Sailors*. The bulk of Nevin's verified repertoire, however, consists of popular songs from Tin Pan Alley publishers. As one might expect, many of the most familiar wartime-related hit songs appear on his list.³⁶ Since Nevin looked to "the men themselves" for song suggestions, much of this music was already familiar to the trainees. Consequently, Nevin's task as song leader was to motivate *everyone* to join in the singing. March songs, unsurprisingly, make up the bulk of this category. "Good-Bye Broadway, Hello France!," "Over There," and "Smile, Smile, Smile" are all clearly cut from the same cloth. Such songs became troop favorites,

as Maj. Gen. Leonard Wood, the commanding officer at Camp Funston in Kansas, recalled: "There isn't anything in the world, even letters from home, that will raise a soldier's spirits like a good, catchy marching tune. . . . I have seen men toiling for hours through the mud and rain, every one of them dejected, spiritless, tired and cold, wet and forlorn, cursing the day they entered the Army, transformed into a happy, devil-may-care frame of mind through a song."³⁷ These songs were cleverly crafted to achieve such an effect. Their lyrics are unfailingly optimistic and boldly patriotic. Our soldiers, leaving Broadway behind, are "going to help [France] win this war," and "it won't take us long," since "Miss Liberty[']s light of freedom will guide us across the sea."³⁸ Wartime enlistment, as "Private Perks" discovers in "Smile, Smile, Smile," could give men a newfound sense of purpose and an excuse to "pack up your troubles in your old kit- bag and smile." Overseas service was such a fulfilling experience that upon his stateside return "he then set about recruiting, [telling] all his pals, the short, the tall, what a time he'd had," and smiling even more when "each enlisted like a man."³⁹ Likewise, George Cohan's lyrics urged Nevin's trainees to "pack your little kit, show your grit, do your bit," because "the Yanks are coming . . . and we won't come back till it's over Over There."⁴⁰ It is worth noting, however, that despite the suitability of these song lyrics for those passing through the cantonment system, any suggestion of the horrific realities of modern trench warfare that awaited them overseas is nowhere to be found.

Other songs selected by Nevin trace a more sentimental train of thought. "Joan of Arc," for instance, reflects upon the sadness of the oppressed French people, likening the American soldier to the historical heroine, who will "come lead your France to victory."⁴¹ "There's a Long, Long Trail," on the other hand, explores a sweetheart's unwavering faithfulness to her soldier when he departs for the front lines. In its 1915 second edition, this song spanned both the sentimental and the patriotic idioms; the sheet music includes an added "marching chorus published by popular request."⁴² "Poor Butterfly" relates as much to John Luther Long's short story or David Belasco's play as it does to Puccini's opera, despite the passing melodic quotation from Puccini in the song's verse. Whether the singers under Nevin's charge were familiar with any of those sources is largely irrelevant. Rather than focusing on the plight of the tragic heroine, they were presumably drawn to the song's portrayal of the American officer who teaches Butterfly "to love in the 'Merican way, to love with her soul!" and how she awaits his return, confident that "ev'ry day that passes makes one day less" until their hoped-for reunion.⁴³

In total, Nevin's approach to repertoire closely aligns with John Jacob Niles's observations about the musical preferences of American troops. In his 1927 book *Singing Soldiers*, Niles recognized that "the imagination

of the white boys did not, as a rule, express itself in song. They went to Broadway for their music, contenting themselves with the ready-made rhymes and tunes of the professional song-writers."⁴⁴ (There were no black soldiers at Camp Grant.) Yet while Niles attributes this trend to the soldiers' own tastes, it could alternatively indicate the impact of the community music movement's focus on singing *composed* music. In this context, a printed score serves as the authority for "correctness" of performance and expression, even if many of the singers are in fact learning by ear. The song leader's role was not simply to motivate sing-ing in general but rather to develop the skills necessary for the *accurate* realization of a song on the largest possible scale.

In addition to following popular taste, a song leader's repertoire selection could reinforce the reputation of certain songs among the civilian population too. Such was the case with Arthur Hadley's "Defend America." When Nevin chose to teach this number to his Camp Grant trainees, the publisher, Oliver Ditson, recognized that this would make for an effective marketing angle. An advertisement printed as far afield as the *Pacific Coast Musical Review* bragged that it was "sung with enormous success by our boys at . . . Camp Grant, Illinois, under the direction of Arthur Nevin, and at many other Military Camps."⁴⁵ This quintessential World War I-era "marching song" was in the repertoire of such well-known singers as Ernestine Schumann-Heink and David Bispham, in addition to Sousa's Band and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The lyrics sing exclusively of heroism and patriotism. The soldiers are "marching to serve Old Glory" because "it is our country's stern command." They are "American to the core," willing to sacrifice whatever it takes—"all ties we'll sever, rifle and sword we'll seize"—because "the Stars and Stripes forever must wave triumphant in the breeze."⁴⁶

Hadley's introduction opens with fanfare-like heraldry—an unmistakably patriotic call to arms. The vocal melody in the verse is notable for its passing quotation from "America the Beautiful": the rising scalar figure, sung originally to the words "the amber waves of grain," is here relocated to "New England's rocky shore," Hadley's home region (ex. 1a). This referential intertextuality continues, albeit more obliquely, in the closing phrase of the chorus, when the lyrics declaim the "Stars and Stripes Forever" to a melodic chromatic descent, echoing the transitional passage, which leads into that march's famous piccolo feature (ex. 1b). Hadley's debt to John Philip Sousa is likewise apparent in a fusion of the conventions of popular song and march forms: the song's chorus modulates to the subdominant, as would the trio section of a march. (Hadley also prepared a piano- solo "two- step march" arrangement that adds a strikingly Sousa- like "dogfight" strain in between two complete statements of the song's chorus.)⁴⁷ The thirty-two- measure refrain, in an A' A" B form, presents a thrice- repeated melodic hook—what one

might see as a “heroic” leaping major sixth—that would surely embed this tune firmly in the ears of Nevin’s soldiers as they went about their daily routine (ex. 1c).

For all the utility that Nevin found in the popular-song idiom, the European-trained, opera-composing side of him harbored more ambitious aspirations than what one hears in the era’s typical Tin Pan Alley number. Nevin’s ideal style for mass singing is exemplified by one of his

Example 1. Arthur Hadley, “Defend America: Marching Song.”

a. Melodic quotation from “America the Beautiful,” mm. 8–15.

mf

1. Now far and wide through - out our land
 2. Now from the fair Pa - cif - ic Coast

mf

Sounds an ur - gent bat - tle - call;
 To New En - gland's rock - y shore

b. Lyric and melodic reference to Sousa’s “Stars and Stripes Forever,” mm. 64–68.

ff

The Stars and Stripes for ev - er

ff

Sya -

(continues on next page)

Example 1. (cont.)

c. Principal melody of the refrain, mm. 41–48.

March - ing _____ to serve Old Glo - ry, _____

For - ward _____ to meet the foe! _____

own compositions, the unison chorus with piano accompaniment “Song of Allegiance” (fig. 2).⁴⁸ Nevin wrote the words and music near the end of his tenure at Camp Grant and dedicated the score to the camp’s commanding officer, Maj. Gen. Thomas H. Barry. The melodic line remains within a comfortable, easy-to-sing compass; it employs exclusively diatonic pitches, traces generally stepwise contours, and entirely avoids syncopation. The block-chord harmonization is nearer to hymnody than to Tin Pan Alley, while the harmonic vocabulary is notably chromatic, particularly when compared to the period’s style for popular songs. Nevin’s European training, after all, traces a direct path through his mentor, Engelbert Humperdinck, right to Wagner himself. Even the song’s publisher is indicative of this stylistic distinction. Whereas Nevin’s selected popular songs all came from Tin Pan Alley firms, “Song of Allegiance” was issued by G. Schirmer, a “High-Class Song Publisher,” to use E. M. Wickes’s contemporaneous terminology.⁴⁹

The score’s persistent dynamic markings and the expressive ebb and flow they imply are also worthy of note. Expressiveness was a foundational principle in Nevin’s aesthetic for community singing, as a 1916 description of work in Kansas makes clear. He explains that when rehearsing a chorus, he would have “each number sung several times with a different interpretation, which invariably creates a real interest

2
G. S. 8^{vo} Choruses
No. 6777

Dedicated to Major-General Thomas H. Barry

Price
6 cents net
(No Discount)

Song of Allegiance

Arthur Nevin
Camp Grant, 1918

With vigor (♩ = 100)

Unison Chorus *mf*

I cling to lib - er - ty, My creed, to hold the

Piano *mf*

faith Of my coun - try's faith in me; And fear no lu - rid

wraith. *cresc.* On, on to bat - tle's wrath And on - ward to the

cresc.

end! *ff* I'll march the loy - al path, What - e'er fate's mys - tic trend. *rall.*

ff *rall.*

28608 c Copyright, 1918, by G. Schirmer

Figure 2. First page of Arthur Nevin's "Song of Allegiance." The following page contains the second stanza of text set to the same music.

in the singers and [demonstrates] just what shading in compositions is capable of accomplishing."⁵⁰ Although it cannot be verifiably documented, assuming that Nevin did include this piece in his Camp Grant repertoire, one wonders how completely the composer could realize the song's dynamic and expressive potential, given the several thousand men whom he would be leading at any one time.

Nevin's lyrics, in terms of both content and vocabulary, likewise contrast with the optimistic Tin Pan Alley platitudes encountered above. The song's two stanzas read as follows:

I cling to liberty,
 My creed, to hold the faith
 Of my country's faith in me;
 And fear no lurid wraith.
 On, on to battle's wrath
 And onward to the end!
 I'll march the loyal path,
 Whate'er fate's mystic trend.
 On, on with vim and might
 With man to man en route.
 Onward to a freedom's right;
 No duty lies in doubt.
 On, on to victory,
 Though pang and plague assail!
 I'll drive for liberty,
 With valor and avail.

While Nevin's surety of victory matches that of the Tin Pan Alley tunesmiths, his formal prosody strikes a very different tone. Instead of the jolly braggadocio of Private Perks from "Smile, Smile, Smile" or the glib confidence found in "Over There," Nevin's lyrics recognize that this enterprise is dependent upon an unwavering "faith" in the ideal of American liberty. The song acknowledges the "pang and plague" into which his trainees are headed, even if "no duty lies in doubt." One can only "march the loyal path, whate'er fate's mystic trend" might await soldiers at the front.

* * *

Nevin's service as an army song leader comprises only one facet of his musical activities during World War I. While he was stationed at Camp Grant, he was also preparing for the world premiere performance of his second opera, *A Daughter of the Forest*, by the Chicago Opera Company. (For an extended overview of this little-known work, please see the online supplementary essay.)⁵¹ The work had been in progress and awaiting a production for nearly a decade. Had Nevin's initial plans for a premiere been realized, the score would have coincided with a momentous turning point in the history of American opera. New York's Metropolitan Opera Company had just mounted its first American score, Frederick Converse's *The Pipe of Desire*, in March 1910. A \$10,000 contest for a new American opera (ultimately awarded to Horatio Parker's *Mona*) was under way during 1911. Victor Herbert's *Natoma* received its New York premiere in February 1911. Around the same time, Nevin's work,

then known as *Twilight*, was being prepared for performance at the Met. Casting decisions had already been announced in the press. In an interview with the *New York Daily Tribune*, the composer trumpeted his hopes: “I am especially glad that American composers are getting a hearing in their own country,” he explained, “because it will show Europeans that we are not quite such ignoramuses as many of them think.”⁵² Despite Nevin’s eagerness, the Met production never materialized.

A new opportunity finally arrived in early 1917, when Nevin was in the midst of his community music activities in Kansas. Cleofante Campanini, manager and principal conductor of the Chicago Opera Company, had taken an interest in the composer and decided to present the premiere of *Twilight* as part of his 1917–18 season. Nevin spent the summer of 1917 at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, where he undertook final revisions and renamed the work *A Daughter of the Forest*.⁵³ The Chicago Opera Company would be a perfect home for Nevin’s score. It was the nearest major opera house to his base in Kansas, and it became even more accessible once Nevin relocated to Camp Grant. In terms of vocal star power, it yielded nothing to the Met in New York: Amelita Galli-Curci, Mary Garden, Genevieve Vix, Hector Dufranne, Gustave Huberdeau, and Lucien Muratore were all on the 1917–18 roster. The company’s repertoire likewise favored contemporary works over older staples and regularly introduced “novelties” to the Chicago audience. The 1917–18 season, for instance, offered eleven twentieth-century operas, three of which were world premieres (see table 2).⁵⁴ Campanini

Table 2. List of Twentieth-Century Scores in the 1917–18 Repertoire of the Chicago Opera Company

Composer	Work title	Date of stage premiere
Gustave Charpentier	<i>Louise</i>	1900
Giacomo Puccini	<i>Tosca</i>	1900
Debussy Jules Massenet	<i>Pelléas et Mélisande</i>	1902
Henry Février	<i>Pietro</i>	1902
Mascagni	<i>Ermanno</i>	1909
Wolf-Ferrari	<i>Riccardo</i>	1911
Zandonai	<i>Henry Hadley</i>	1911
Arthur Nevin	<i>Sylvio</i>	1914
Lazzari	<i>Azora*</i>	1917 (December 27)
	<i>A Daughter of the Forest*</i>	1918 (January 5)
	<i>Le Sauteriot*</i>	1918 (January 19)

* Chicago Opera Company world premieres.

Source: Data gathered from Davis, *Opera in Chicago*, 291–95.

was particularly eager to include new American works, noting in an interview with the *Musical Courier*, “I have . . . made it an object to see the best that I could of the native composer.”⁵⁵ Taken in total, the circumstances could hardly have been more auspicious for Nevin. *A Daughter of the Forest* would be staged by a company adept at producing new works as part of a season that included much modern music and in a context where conditions were primed for the acceptance of American scores. Furthermore, the three-singer cast featured only native English speakers. Soprano Frances Peralta, born in England but raised in California, created the title role (see fig. 3).⁵⁶ The Canadian American tenor Forrest Lamont sang the role of the Lover, while James Goddard, a bass-baritone from Tennessee, portrayed the Father. The composer himself, clad in his army khakis, took the podium. The company’s support of the troops extended beyond this opportunity for Nevin. Subscribers with unused tickets were asked to return them to the box office, where they, along with any other unsold seats, would be given away to members of the military.

Nevin’s score consists of a single act divided into three “pictures” with a libretto by Randolph Hartley.⁵⁷ The plot is set within an Appalachian forest in autumn during the time of the Civil War. The events unfold



Figure 3. Arthur Nevin and Frances Peralta preparing the title role in *A Daughter of the Forest*. LC-DIG-ggbain-25145, George Grantham Bain Collection, Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

over the span of a day, a night, and the next morning. The Father is a woodsman. He lives in a cottage alone with his Daughter, whom he has raised since her mother's death when she was a small child. In response to their isolation from the world, the Father has brought her up with a sort of pantheistic faith in the goodness of nature that is without a foundation in the moral expectations of society. The Daughter, however, has met a Lover. She is awaiting his return as the curtain rises, and when he appears they sing a lengthy love duet. Their bliss is interrupted by the sound of drums in the distance. It is the Lover's battalion about to depart for battle. He acknowledges his patriotic calling: "The land of my birth is crying / For the safety her sons may give / And content are the sons in dying / To know that our land shall live!" (25–26). Desire is too strong to be resisted, and the Lover embraces the Daughter as the stage lights darken and an orchestral interlude brings the first picture to a close.

The second picture takes the audience inside the Father's cottage that evening. He returns from hunting and notices the Daughter's absence, but he does not worry, assuming she must be distracted somewhere, admiring the beauty of nature. When she finally enters, he suspects she is keeping a secret from him. The Daughter admits to having met the Lover, yet the Father is overjoyed, because it is "Nature's noblest law to love, and thou art Nature's child" (50–51). The Daughter, however, is worried that she might lack a true understanding of motherhood, given that she grew up without a mother. The Father reassures her that motherhood "is the noblest state that woman knows" (52) but issues a stern warning that seems to contradict all he had previously taught the Daughter about nature and love: "Destroyed, aye, thrice destroyed is motherhood that hath not thro' the creed accepted holy wedlock rite; accurs'd, accurs'd is she of God, despis'd of men!" (57–58). The Daughter recognizes the consequence of these words. The Lover returns from drilling with his battalion, and the Daughter begs him to remain with her, but the Father again issues a stern pronouncement: "Before all else comes duty to our land. Our motherland who calls in her distress" (66). The Lover rejoins his unit, leaving the Daughter to her grief. Left alone, she comes to a stark realization:

The path that Nature would bestow me,
Can never know the sunlight or the stars
And so I may not tread the path of men
Lest I offend! Lest I offend!
I understand, at last I understand.
But Nature hath a highway all her own
That leads unto a land of endless peace.
One pays in toll just one last little sin,
And from all pain and sorrow finds release. (74–76)

She prepares to leave the cottage one final time. Closing the shutters and blowing out the candles, she takes her father's pistol with her on the way out the door.

The brief third and final picture occurs at dawn the following morning. An orchestral interlude depicts the awakening of nature, but as the stage lights begin to rise, the audience sees the Daughter lying dead beside a stream with the pistol at her side. The Lover enters, dressed in uniform, and comes upon her lifeless body. The Father soon appears too. Both men recognize their shared guilt in the Daughter's death. The Lover seizes the pistol and prepares to join her in death, but the Father prevents this rash action. To the sound of military drums in the distance, he reminds the Lover, "Thy duty lies before thee, there" (97). The Lover rushes off to rejoin the battle, while the Father remains, a solitary figure, alone in the forest.

Because Nevin was too busy with his song leader duties at Camp Grant to engage with the press, the Chicago papers devoted less coverage to the work than was typical for an opera premiere. Instead, one must turn to sources published prior to the abortive 1911 New York production for insight into the collaborators' intentions. Regarding the Civil War-era setting, Nevin explained that they initially "hesitated whether or not we should lay the action there, or during the Revolution or the Mexican War." Ultimately, the Civil War won by default, because "we thought that the bright costumes of Revolutionary times would be too great a contrast with the spirit of the drama, and because many Americans do not consider the Mexican War a very noble page in our history." The selected period also addressed Nevin's concern that he "could not write an opera about modern American life. It lacks color, and suggests high hats and evening dress. He who is able to operatize the silk hat may arrive, but I am sure his name will not be Arthur Nevin."⁵⁸ Such justifications aside, it may strike one as problematic to choose a plot setting through a process of elimination rather than from the basis of a compulsory artistic desire.

Given the opera's scenario, one might reasonably anticipate that Nevin would include quotations from characteristic Civil War-era melodies. Nevin's interviewer seemed to expect as much, asking the composer whether he had "introduced any typically American music" into the score. Nevin responded, "What is typically American music? I for one have never been able to find any. I have striven to write music to characterize my figures, to give color and atmosphere, to carry on my story, above all, to write music that is melodious. Melody should always be supreme. This is why I do not like Debussy, though I admire his wonderful musical talent."⁵⁹

It is not entirely apparent what Nevin meant by "music that is melodious," yet his ambitions as an American composer extended far beyond the simple idea of quoting familiar melodies to achieve "local color."

Indeed, his score is marked by an absence of anything that his Chicago Opera Company listeners, accustomed to Puccini's (or Massenet's, or Mascagni's) lusciously overripe vocal lyricism, would likely have perceived as memorably melodic. Nevin's idiom, in fact, is much closer to Debussy's *Pelléas* than his dismissal of the composer's style might at first suggest. Vocal lines generally are declamatory and of irregular lengths, with reiterated pitches and frequently awkward leaps of fifths or larger. The harmonic palette includes an abundance of chords colored with tertian extensions. Tonic cadences are often avoided, and through his persistent chromaticism, the composer stretches tonality to a not atypical late Romantic extreme.

In what is arguably the score's musical highlight—the Father's condemnation scene from the second picture (ex. 2)—Nevin creates an impressively sustained crescendo that extends for twenty bars over a measure-long harmonic ostinato. The ostinato reflects the Father's unwavering conviction in his beliefs, even if, once shared, they will ultimately destroy the Daughter. The persistent half-step alternation in the bass, between E-flat and D, suggests the implicit danger lurking beneath the Father's ideas. Again, the declamatory vocal line avoids any sense of melodic tunefulness, even while keeping to the pitches of a Lydian scale on E-flat. It grows ever higher in tessitura until the passage's final vocal pitch at last abandons the mode and reaches a climactic E-natural, supported by an ominous French augmented-sixth chord built upon B-flat that is allowed to linger as an unresolved dissonance. On the strengths of a passage such as this, the opera's subsequent neglect seems not entirely warranted.

Nevin's opera finally took to the stage on 5 January 1918. It shared the program with Jules Massenet's miracle-opera *Le jongleur de Notre-Dame*. The event received an unfortunately small share of media attention at the time. The long-awaited return of Mary Garden to the Chicago Opera Company had occurred the night before (in *Carmen*), while the day after the premiere, a controversy arose between the company's star soprano, Amelita Galli-Curci, and the director, Campanini, over whether or not she was contractually obligated to participate in the company's upcoming New York tour.⁶⁰ The two divas' activities, in this instance, seemed to draw the attention of the press away from the efforts of an American composer. When the reviews finally did appear, they were mixed at best. Felix Borowski, critic for the *Chicago Herald*, wondered why the opera "evoked so little excitement from the souls of those eager partisans of opera in the vernacular" before proceeding to dissect the weaknesses of plot and libretto.⁶¹ Frederick Donaghey's comments for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* are more substantive but still occupied only a single paragraph of his usual column: "[Nevin] is a good composer and a real patriot; and I should like to be able to say of his piece that it is an addition to the

Example 2. Conclusion of the Father's condemnation scene from the second picture of Nevin's *A Daughter of the Forest* (57–58).

De - stroyed aye; thrice de -

stroyed is moth - er - hood that hath not thro' the

creed ac - cept - ed ho - ly wed - lock rite Ac - curs'd ac -

curs'd is she of God de - spis'd of men!

mf *cresc.* *(sempre più marc. il bass.)* *ff*

8va

repertoire. It isn't. It contains some lovely, well-made music, not much of which is for the voice. . . . The 'book' was not better than any other homemade libretto so far exposed. Miss Peralta, Mr. Lamont, and Mr. Goddard did as well by the words and music as, maybe, any three singers might have done."⁶² Charles Watt, writing for the *Music News*, likewise praised the cast "for the artistry and the loving care with which they accomplished their tasks." He thought that Nevin "conducted very skill-fully" and complimented the composer's score for being "very original in sound, very beautiful in fleeting moments, and altogether *outré* for the most part." While he found "the flow of orchestration" to be "really wonderful, perhaps even as wonderful as that in *Pelleas and Melisande*," he worried that "no more unvocal score has ever been given any singer than that of the Father." The scenic design received special praise from Watt, who believed that "the play of special effects was splendid. The moonlight pointing out to the girl the location of the revolver on the cabin wall—the rising sun searching out the face of the dead girl on the ground—these and many more things were beautifully accomplished." Taken in total, Watt felt that the "very great and very enthusiastic [applause] . . . was amply deserved in every case." Nevin himself received twelve curtain calls. Yet Watt's cautious conclusion seems prescient in hindsight: "Let those admire it who will, but the prediction is that these will be few and that it will not come often again to performance."⁶³

In fact, subsequent performances numbered precisely zero. Nevin soon returned to Camp Grant to resume his song leader duties. Only the pre-miere had ever been advertised, so the work's reception apparently had no impact on production decisions. A rumored performance in New York while the company was touring in the spring of 1918 never materialized. Yet despite the audience's opening-night enthusiasm, an examination of the score makes it clear why the work failed to resonate with the times. Much about the world had changed between 1910, when Nevin and Hartley first conceived of the opera, and 1918, when the work was finally performed in the midst of the Great War. Nevin himself believed that "the story of the opera has to do with the struggle of a man between duty to his country and love for the girl he has betrayed, and consequently the patriotic note must be strong."⁶⁴ Yet the composer's hopes for achieving a "strong" "patriotic note" seem disappointingly removed from what one encounters in the work itself. As already discussed, Nevin's decision to omit quotations from familiar Civil War melodies eliminated one surefire way to develop a recognizably patriotic soundworld. Instead, offstage military drums and underlying march rhythms are the extent to which Nevin sought to portray patriotism through music.

The plot, likewise, seems out of step with the patriotic currents sweeping the national mood. Although situated during wartime, the opera's Civil War-era context is minimized to the point of generalness, appearing almost incidental (or irrelevant) to the onstage events. Conflict arises

from a contrived inflexibility (the Father's) and a mistake born of ignorance (the Daughter's)—neither of which seemed particularly pertinent to the kinds of decisions Americans were facing every day. Whereas the Lover and the Father both invoke a sense of national duty and reflect upon issues related to military service and the hardships of separation, their tone fails to convey the sense of uplifting hopefulness that listeners (including Nevin's singing soldiers at Camp Grant) could instead find in abundance in patriotic popular songs. As the opera ends, the Lover rejoins his comrades on the battlefield primarily to expiate his share of guilt in the Daughter's death. At Camp Grant, in contrast, trainees left behind their loved ones because they truly believed that their nation required their service. Moreover, the opera's unnamed and impersonal characters seem to navigate a merely *metaphorical* path through the challenges of love, faithfulness, duty, and obligation. Nevin's audience members, on the other hand, were grappling with the wartime *realities* of these same issues on a daily basis.

* * *

Back at Camp Grant, Nevin had to deal with realities of his own. The disappointment of an underwhelming opera premiere was only one of many frustrations at this point in his career. His continuing belief in the importance of his role could not diminish the challenges he faced, particularly a persistent skepticism toward the utility of singing training. Given the essential combat and survival skills required of a soldier, it is understandable that singing might be low on the priority list. John G. Little, Jr., compiler of a so-called official history of the army's Eighty-Sixth Division, which trained at Camp Grant, summarized the typical point of view: "The duties of the modern day officers had become indeed complex. They had enlisted to fight, said one, and here they had qualified in about everything except that. They had taught English to men of all nationalities, studied drawing and higher mathematics, sold bonds, written insurance, and attended singing school, and he was of the opinion that it was a high time they had a chance to be soldiers."⁶⁵ The officers proved the most problematic contingent among Nevin's charges. A columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*, Parke Brown, observed a particularly telling incident. In early November 1917 Brown attended one of Nevin's sessions with approximately thirteen hundred officers in attendance. His attention-grabbing headline accused the officers of being "Rank Cowards," while the subheadline teased, "All of 'Em Afraid of the Sound of Their Own Voices." As Brown reported:

When ordered to shout and yell they got red in the face and either hum or squeak like stage frightened children. Only about one in a thousand opens all eight cylinders and lets 'er go. . . . Arthur Nevin, singing director, started them off on "Smile, Smile, Smile," but only

about 3 per cent of the 1300 could be heard on “Private Perks is a funny little codger,” and it took eight times over before even a majority got in on the refrain. A “Poor Butterfly” was stepped on and “Joan of Arc” was martyred again.

Fortunately for Nevin, he had the full support of the camp’s commanding officer, Maj. Gen. Thomas H. Barry, who ordered that “the more rank a man has the more noise he should make.” Barry insisted that officers’ singing training would continue “until Mr. Nevin is satisfied and I am satisfied you can sing.”⁶⁶ This show of support likely inspired Nevin’s dedication of “Song of Allegiance” to General Barry. As noted previously, special singing sessions just for the camp’s officers became a regular part of Nevin’s routine.

The average enlistee took to mass singing more agreeably, yet Nevin struggled to ensure compliance with his instructions. When the army singing program began, Raymond Fosdick recognized that “the songs that these men sing are nothing classical; sometimes they can hardly be called exactly decent; but I don’t care what the men sing, as long as they sing something.”⁶⁷ Nevin, on the other hand, *did* seem to care, and the trainees soon recognized that this presented them with something of an opportunity. One unnamed soldier recalled what he considered to be “the most popular ‘war song’” in the camp: “The song became so popular . . . in fact, that it came near breaking up more than one of the famous ‘singing lessons’ at the Y. auditorium.” The anecdote shares the lyrics too—a parody text attributed to Bart Macomber, a well-known football star and occasional vaudeville performer:

When all our boys get over into France
We’re going to make the Kaiser do a dance; We’re
going to make him yell, and yell like hell, For the
good old U.S.A. (Yes, yell like hell.) Fight, fight,
fight for every yard;
Over the top, and hit their trenches hard; Then we’ll
roll those Germans in the sod,
Yes, by God!
Roll, roll, roll!⁶⁸

Macomber’s new words closely echo many phrases from the original, such that the source for this parody can be none other than “Washington and Lee Swing,” a familiar and frequently adopted fight song of the day.⁶⁹ With only minimal adjustments, necessitated most likely by simple misremembering, the lyrics are easily set to the tune (ex. 3). The pious morality of Nevin’s “Song of Allegiance” never stood a chance against the bawdy high spirits of this rousing number.

As if reluctant and disruptive singers were not challenging enough, the weather too seemed to conspire against the camp’s residents. John

Example 3. Bart Macomber's retexting of "Washington and Lee Swing."

When all our boys get o - ver in - to France We're going to make the Kai - ser
do a dance; We're going to make him yell, and yell like hell, For ___ the
good old U. S. A. I yell. (Yes, yell like hell.) So fight, fight, fight, for
ev - 'ry yard; O - ver the top, and hit their trench - es hard; And then we'll
roll those Ger - mans in the sod, Yes, by God! Roll, roll, roll! _____

Little recounted an especially bleak picture: "The winter of 1917–18 was a most severe one at Camp Grant, blizzard after blizzard sweeping down upon the cantonment, but it was not allowed in any way to interfere with the work. In the teeth of biting winds that froze ears, noses, fingers and toes, and in the face of cutting snow and sleet, the men were kept at their rigid training, although for weeks the mercury remained below zero, at one time reaching 27 degrees below."⁷⁰ Another *Chicago Tribune* reporter, one "Mme. X.," toured the camp in December 1917 and witnessed what she described as "the silent, grim, deadly earnestness of the business of war." At the camp's rifle range, she observed four thousand trainees at work, while "plumes of blue smoke rose from scattered campfires, whose flames quivered crimson against the russet and white of the winter landscape." At a break for lunch, "the soldiers strolled about, or lay on the ground, or stood in line, pannikins in hand, waiting their turn for grub. It looked like a scene from some opera."⁷¹ There is something both bittersweet and ironic in the thought that Nevin's failed opera would emerge against a backdrop that, at least to this observer, seemed both distinctively operatic and characteristically American in nature.

Ultimately, this burden of responsibility drained Nevin of strength. The massive scale of the operation proved unsustainable. Nevin explained, "Have you ever become overawed by masses? If so, you will realize that the feeling is such as to shoot a shiver down your spine when you see them coming; boots, boots, boots as far as you can see over the camp, and you saying to yourself: 'You've got to throw yourself out over that whole regiment and get them going.'"⁷²

His resignation on 31 March 1918—not even six months after he began—came only weeks after that of his trusted ally, General Barry.

The general also left the camp crushed in spirit. He had served in the army since the Spanish-American War, but the War Department deemed him no longer physically fit for overseas deployment, a decision that precipitated his departure. He would hold administrative roles in the army until his death on 30 December 1918.⁷³

Nevin, for his part, returned once more to the restful sanctuary of the MacDowell Colony. As the *Musical Courier* reported, "Major Arthur Nevin is recuperating after his exacting labors at Camp Grant, through such light farm occupation as haying and stacking oats; in the intervals adding to his many beautiful compositions."⁷⁴ Katherine H. Gatch, a short-term visitor to the colony, found him to be "so homely . . . [with] such a whole souled laugh and such beautiful musical hands" that she "liked Mr. Nevin at once."⁷⁵ Yet the long reach of the war managed to infringe upon even these most idyllic of circumstances. In his lyrics for "Song of Allegiance," Nevin had acknowledged the "pang and plague" of "battle's wrath," but he could not have known how personally he would come to bear their burden. Shortly after arriving at the MacDowell Colony, Nevin received news that his son Hardwicke, an ambulance driver, had been wounded. As the *Alexandria Gazette* reported, Hardwicke "has been recommended for the war cross with the palm [the French Croix de Guerre avec Palme] and for the military medal for heroism displayed in one of the recent battles on the French front." When his own vehicle became inoperable, he "offered his services as a stretcher bearer in the French legion. Though wounded by shrapnel in the back and arm and with a machine gun bullet in the same arm, he worked tirelessly, going without sleep for three days."⁷⁶

In his correspondence with Leonard Liebbling of the *Musical Courier*, Nevin shared a more personal account of Hardwicke's ordeal: "He was wounded at Soissons. It seems after three days of driving his ambulance with little rest, and the Germans still coming on, his oil gave out and his officer ordered the car blown up, rather than let it fall into the hands of the Huns. Hardwicke, being without a job, saw at the moment the Foreign Legions troop marching to the front to reinforce a weak point in the line." His injuries were in fact more problematic than what the press initially reported. His father explained, "He has eight shrapnel wounds, and . . . was yelling out in his delirium, through the night, horrors of the trenches; and during the day, glares with shining, glassy eyes."⁷⁷ Nevin was both powerless and isolated under the circumstances, as he considered himself too weak to travel to Europe. He could do nothing except wait for news from abroad and learn what he could from the experiences of others. Gatch observed how the composer bore these burdens: "Once I overheard Mr. Nevin asking about pieces of shell and shell wounds, and Mr. Ranke not knowing about his son told him how big they were and how ghastly the wounds and I could hardly keep the tears back at the look that crossed Mr. Nevin's face. He follows Mr. Ranke about so as

not to lose a word he says. Well, I seem to have strayed from Peterboro to the war, but it's here in this lovely woods just as it is everywhere else."⁷⁸ Even though he was never deployed overseas himself, Nevin's wartime experience must have shaken to the core his belief in community music's ability to improve humanity.

The war, his son's injuries, the challenges of Camp Grant, and the failure of *A Daughter of the Forest* clearly left Nevin at a low point in his career, despite the importance of the service he rendered to his country. Even as the brutality and destruction of the Great War contradicted the optimistic promises of the Progressive-era reformers, for the community music movement the wartime experience allowed for a broader expansion of mass singing than would have previously seemed possible. As the editors of a 1926 "practical guide" to community music recognized, "The work of the song leaders in the camps at home and abroad, and the effect of the music on the morale of the men in service were striking demonstrations of the social values of music. . . . The singing nation, the musical nation, is a stronger nation."⁷⁹ It is perhaps through his contribution to this success that Nevin's most lasting legacy resides.

Appendix

Full text transcription of Arthur Nevin, "Interest Is Shown in Camp's Mass Sing-ing," *Trench and Camp*, edition for Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois, 5 November 1917.

INTEREST IS SHOWN IN CAMP'S MASS SINGING Big Choruses Chant National Anthems and Popular Airs with a Will. BY ARTHUR NEVIN.

On Oct. 18 I reported at headquarters on the 86th division with credentials from the war department, commission on training camp activities, as leader of singing for the Camp Grant soldiers, and took up the direction of mass singing on that date. Participation and instruction in mass singing has been made a military duty in [t]his camp.

My first instructions in singing were given to the 343d infantry—3,600 men. The troops entered the Y. M. C. A. auditorium in strict military order and were ready to begin on their songs promptly at the time specified. This regiment has chosen for its own particular music "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and it was but a few moments before the entire command seemed to have grasped the words and music and were singing it with a good will.

As there are to be approximately 39,000 soldiers in this camp, the mass sing-ing has been divided into eight sessions and at each meeting the number of men singing ranges from 3,500 to 4,000. Included in the list of songs practiced are "Keep the Home Fires Burning," "Over There," "Good-By[e], Broadway; Hello, France," "There's a Long, Long Trail," "Joan of Arc," etc.

Sing for Gov. Lowden

Gov. Lowden visited Camp Grant Nov. 1, at which time the soldiers sang two numbers. They sang "Illinois" before his address and concluded the session with "Good-By[e], Broadway; Hello, France."

The songs used for these soldiers are those which the men themselves, in a way, suggest[,] and this I feel should govern the list of songs they now use. I am receiving numerous copies of music from all quarters, many of which are excellent, but it is impossible for me to use new compositions at present. The popular style is what the men want and they cry for songs that are favorites of the day[;] and to have successful singing one must respond to that style which has the general appeal. We also have in our collection the splendid Stephen C. Foster songs[,] which will soon be memorized, including the verses.

Men Show Genuine Interest

The interest in this singing has become more than encouraging[,] and when a regiment has become thoroughly familiar with the song[,] the volume of tone given forth is not only of tremendous strength, but has a spirit that shows interest. In starting to train the soldiers on a new piece of music which they have not heard, I begin with the first ten rows of the men assembled. As these men are close to the piano, it makes it easier for them to hear and grasp the melody. In two or three trials, the song has become fixed to the entire assemblage, and with their voices added to the piano[,] that tune can easily be picked up by the remaining mass who listen attentively to the melody[,] and within five or six minutes[,] the whole 3,600 are able to join in and sing the work from beginning to end. Before many days have passed[,] this whole camp will be able to render from twelve to fifteen songs, as the same music is rehearsed by the different sections of this camp.

The work is of tremendous interest and I hope that when these men go to France they will then even more fully appreciate the assistance this mass singing will be to them under all conditions.

NOTES

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1. For further information on the opera *Poia*, see Aaron Ziegel, "Making America Oper-atic: Six Composers' Attempts at an American Opera, 1910–1918" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011); and Steven L. Grafe, "Following the Old North Trail to Berlin: Walter McClintock and the Grand Opera *Poia*," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 60 (Spring 2010): 45–62.

2. See Helen Dykema Dengler, *Music for All: A Biography of Peter William Dykema* (Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, 1994); and Evelyn Davis Culbertson, *He Heard America Singing: Arthur Farwell, Composer and Crusading Music Educator* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992).

3. Harold L. Butler, "Report of the Affiliation Conference: Kansas," in *Papers and Proceedings of the Music Teachers' National Association at Its Fortieth Annual Meeting* (Hartford, CT: Music Teachers' National Association, 1919), 314.

4. Information compiled from Thomas Tapper, "Organizing and Working Out Community Music Ideas," *Musician* 22 (1917): 258; "Kansas Grand Opera," *Topeka Daily State Journal*, 17 July 1917; Edna Reinbach, *Music and Musicians in Kansas* (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1930), 41; "Community Chorus in Mall at Central Park," *Musical Monitor* 6, no. 1 (September 1916): 25; and "Community Music in Kansas," *Musician* 22 (1917): 499. This last source is particularly valuable for its account of Nevin's method for organizing a new chorus and sustaining its membership over time.

5. Frances L. Garside, "Corn and Chorus," *Etude* 35, no. 8 (August 1917): 547.
6. Peter W. Dykema, ed., preface to *Twice 55 Community Songs*, no. 1, "The Brown Book" (Boston: Birchard, 1919).
7. Arthur Farwell, "Community Music and the Music Teacher," in *Papers and Proceedings of the Music Teachers' National Association at Its Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting* (Hartford, CT: Music Teachers' National Association, 1917), 197.
8. "Community Music Department," *Musical Monitor* 6, no. 1 (September 1916): 27.
9. Garside, "Corn and Chorus," 547.
10. For a collection of studies examining related phenomena from around the world and throughout history, see Karen Ahlquist, ed., *Chorus and Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).
11. Nancy K. Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering during the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), xvii–xviii.
12. See Culbertson, *He Heard America Singing*, 184–92.
13. Raymond B. Fosdick, "The Commission on Training Camp Activities" (transcript of a speech delivered 15 December 1917), *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York* 7, no. 4 (1918): 163–64.
14. *Commission on Training Camp Activities* (Washington, DC: War Department, [1917]), 4.
15. Fosdick, "Commission on Training Camp Activities," 165.
16. *Ibid.*, 168.
17. *Commission on Training Camp Activities*, 15.
18. A lengthier account of how singing became an official army activity is in Frances F. Brundage, *Music in the Camps* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), 7–15; see 45–46 for a list of all the army training camp song leaders. See also E. Christina Chang, "The Singing Program of World War I: The Crusade for a Singing Army," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 23 (2001): 19–45.
19. Quoted in Brundage, *Music in the Camps*, 43.
20. *Ibid.*, 8.
21. *Ibid.*, 7.
22. Data come from "Camp Grant," Gjenvick-Gjenvik Archives, accessed 21 April 2016, <http://www.gjenvick.com/Military/ArmyArchives/TrainingCenters/CampGrant/>; and *Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois: Being a Pictorial History of the Miracle of the Illinois Cantonment* (Rockford, IL: Photo Post Card Co., 1917). See also Gregory S. Jacobs, *Camp Grant*, Images of America (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2003); and Illinois Writers' Program, *Rockford* (Rockford, IL: Graphic Arts Corporation, 1941), 87–100.
23. "University News," *Graduate Magazine of the University of Kansas* 16, no. 2 (November 1917): 47.
24. "Arthur Nevin to Give Singing Lessons to Rockford Rookies," *Musical Leader* 34, no. 16 (18 October 1917): 400.
25. Brundage, *Music in the Camps*, 9, 14.
26. Large collections of *Trench and Camp* newspapers in various formats—paper, microfilm, and digital—are held at the Library of Congress and at the University of Minnesota's Kautz Family YMCA Archives.
27. Arthur Nevin, "Interest Is Shown in Camp's Mass Singing," *Trench and Camp*, edition for Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois, 5 November 1917.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Nevin quoted in "Musical Matters," *Reform Advocate* 53, no. 22 (5 January 1918): 524.
30. Nevin quoted in Leonard Liebling, "Variations," *Musical Courier* 77, no. 2 (11 July 1918): 21.
31. Nevin, "Interest Is Shown in Camp's Mass Singing."
32. http://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/am/media/arthur_nevin/.

33. Nancy Gentile Ford suggests that the use of patriotic national songs also played a role in the effort to help “Americanize” foreign-born soldiers; see “Mindful of the Traditions of His Race”: Dual Identity and Foreign-Born Soldiers in the First World War American Army,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16 (1997): 44.

34. Various tunes are associated with the text of Illinois’s state song. Today, the text officially pairs with “Baby Mine,” a parlor song from 1875 composed by Archibald Johnston. While Nevin could possibly have used that tune, a 1901 melody by Walter Howe Jones seems the more likely candidate. The text and Jones’s music appear together, for instance, in the contemporaneous *University of Illinois Song Book* (New York: Hinds, Hayden & Eldredge, 1918).

35. Nevin, “Interest Is Shown in Camp’s Mass Singing.”

36. Two scholars have cataloged the period’s war-related popular songs: Frederick G. Vogel, *World War I Songs: A History and Dictionary of Popular American Patriotic Tunes* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995); and Bernard S. Parker, *World War I Sheet Music* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007). Vogel counts over 35,000 song and/or lyric copyrights placed during the period, many of which were never published commercially, while Parker’s listing contains 9,670 titles; neither author makes claims of completeness.

37. Quoted in Brundage, *Music in the Camps*, 10.

38. C. Francis Reisner and Benny Davis, lyrics from “Good-Bye Broadway, Hello France!” (New York: Leo Feist, 1917).

39. George Asaf, lyrics from “Smile, Smile, Smile” (New York: Francis, Day & Hunter, 1915).

40. George M. Cohan, lyrics from “Over There” (New York: Leo Feist, 1917).

41. Alfred Bryan and Willie Weston, lyrics from “Joan of Arc” (New York: Waterson, Berlin & Snyder, 1917).

42. Zo Elliott, “There’s a Long, Long Trail” (New York: M. Witmark & Sons, 1915).

43. John L. Golden, lyrics from “Poor Butterfly” (New York: T. B. Harms, 1916).

44. John Jacob Niles, *Singing Soldiers* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1927), vii.

45. Oliver Ditson advertisement in *Pacific Coast Musical Review* 33, no. 25 (23 March 1918): 7; see also Oliver Ditson advertisement in *Musician* 23, no. 12 (December 1918): 877.

46. Rufus Stickney, lyrics from “Defend America: Marching Song” (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1917).

47. The piano-solo version was printed in *Musician* 23, no. 2 (February 1918): 112–15.

48. Arthur Nevin, “Song of Allegiance” (New York: G. Schirmer, 1918).

49. See E. M. Wickes, *Writing the Popular Song* (Springfield, MA: Home Correspondence School, 1916), 171–73; the list in the appendix distinguishes between “Popular-Song Publishers” and “High-Class Song Publishers.”

50. “Letters Accepting Appointment on Advisory Board,” *Musical Monitor* 6 (1916): 28; Nevin had been appointed to the board of the Department of Community Music of the National Council of Women’s Organizations.

51. http://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/am/media/arthur_nevin/.

52. “The Civil War Furnishes Inspiration for Nevin’s Coming Opera *Twilight*,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 26 February 1911.

53. See Bertha Hempstead, “Society,” *Topeka Daily State Journal*, 3 February 1917; and “Kansas Grand Opera,” *Topeka Daily State Journal*, 17 July 1917.

54. Histories of the company include Edward C. Moore, *Forty Years of Opera in Chicago* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1930); Ronald L. Davis, *Opera in Chicago* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966); and Robert C. Marsh, completed and edited by Norman Pel-legrini, *150 Years of Opera in Chicago* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006).

55. Campanini quoted in Charles E. Nixon, “An Exclusive Interview with Cleofonte Campanini,” *Musical Courier* 74, no. 25 (21 June 1917): 25.

56. Born Phyllis Partington, the soprano variously performed under her birth name and as Phyllis Peralta, Francesca Peralta, and Frances Peralta; see also Jim McPherson, "Frances Peralta: The Met's Forgotten Prima Donna," *Opera Quarterly* 17 (2001): 662–78.

57. Arthur Nevin and Randolph Hartley, *A Daughter of the Forest*, piano-vocal score (Cincinnati: John Church Company, 1917). All subsequent page references are to this, the only published edition of the score.

58. Nevin quoted in "Civil War Furnishes Inspiration."

59. Ibid.

60. See "Galli-Curci and Campanini Argue as to N.Y. Season," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 January 1918; and W. J. Henderson, "Thanks Due Chicago Opera from New York Music Lovers," *New York Sun*, 17 February 1918.

61. Felix Borowski, "Opera in English," *Musical Courier* 77, no. 3 (18 July 1918): 30.

62. Frederick Donaghey, "Two Days with the Troubadours," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 January 1918.

63. Charles E. Watt, "Eighth Week of Opera," *Music News* 10, no. 2 (11 January 1918): 7, 10.

64. Nevin quoted in "Civil War Furnishes Inspiration."

65. John G. Little, Jr., *The Official History of the Eighty-Sixth Division* (Chicago: States Publications Society, 1921), 22–23.

66. Parke Brown, "1,300 Officers at Camp Grant Rank Cowards," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 November 1917.

67. Fosdick, "Commission on Training Camp Activities," 168.

68. Little, *Official History*, 78–79. Little authored the narrative that opens the book; this anecdote comes from the book's second half, in which various unattributed Camp Grant veterans submitted material to the author for inclusion.

69. For the published source, see Thornton W. Allen, Mark W. Sheafe, and Clarence A. Robbins, "Washington and Lee Swing" (New York: Thornton W. Allen, 1910).

70. Little, *Official History*, 24.

71. Mme. X., "Grim Business of War Glimpsed in a Tour of the Rockford Camp," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 9 December 1917.

72. Nevin quoted in Liebling, "Variations," 21.

73. For an account of General Barry's departure, see Little, *Official History*, 32–33.

74. "The MacDowell Colony in Wartime," *Musical Courier* 77, no. 12 (19 September 1918): 14.

75. Katherine H. Gatch to her family in Milford, Ohio, 17 June 1918. An annotated transcription of this letter is published online at the personal website of historian Milton Gatch, accessed 29 April 2016, <http://www.miltongatch.us/KHGMacDowell.pdf>.

76. "Virginia News," *Alexandria Gazette*, 11 July 1918. Prior to his deployment, Hardwicke was a resident of nearby Charlottesville, Virginia.

77. Nevin quoted in Liebling, "Variations," 21. Hardwicke Nevin would later publish poetry that reflected upon his wartime experiences; see, for example, the poem "Trenches," in *History of the American Field Service in France* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 3:253.

78. Gatch to her family, 17 June 1918.

79. Playground and Recreation Association of America, *Community Music: A Practical Guide for the Conduct of Community Music Activities* (Boston: C. C. Birchard and Company, 1926), 3.