

**What
every young
musician**

Should Know

A CONCISE AND MODERN VOLUME REVEALING
THE INSIDE OF RADIO MUSICAL TECHNIQUE

by
**MEREDITH
WILLSON**

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Foreword

There are available so many fine textbooks relative to harmony, theory, counterpoint, composition, arranging, et al, that it would seem that any book of mine, embracing any of these subjects, would be (apologies to Ring Lardner) carrying coal to New Castle, Pennsylvania. However, the youthful American mind sometimes finds it difficult to absorb from a textbook the answers to certain practical problems of today's music, such as:—

How can you make a printed arrangement sound like a special? What are some simple rules for segueing from one chorus to another? With the modern instrumentation consisting so largely of brass, how can the strings be used most effectively to blend with saxophones, trumpets and trombones? How do you write a drum part? What are the signs used in a radio studio? What are the definitions of some of the new musical terms which have been born in the popular orchestras of the day?

I have dealt with these and other related questions in a sort of casual every day discussion that should be easily read and understood. I've tried to eliminate any textbook approach in the style of writing.

Meredith Willson

Biographical Note

Meredith Willson was born in Mason City, Iowa, May 18, 1902⁷. Shortly afterwards at the age of four weeks, he hummed a rather pleasing obligato to his nurse's contralto rendition of "Sweet and Low." At the age of five he had already started the study of the piano. Six months later his musical ability was clearly recognized when he began to improvise *agitados* and *mysteriosos*.

Like most boys at the age of eight, Willson succumbed to the fascination of the snare drum. Thence to assorted banjos, mandolins and ukuleles, interspersed with the high tenor roles in the local church choir, until adolescence commenced playing fast and loose with the vocal cords. When he was ten, Willson turned from high vocal notes to the flute (not to be confused with the piccolo). He directed the local orchestra when he was twelve. With the proceeds he purchased a silver piccolo which was accidentally sat on. This latter was traded in for a wooden piccolo shortly thereafter.

When he was fourteen, Willson first visited New York but returned to Iowa and was graduated from high school two years later. Anxious to continue his musical career, he returned to New York and enrolled in the Damrosch Institute of Musical Art. After studying the flute with George Barrère, he then joined Sousa's band. At seventeen he married his childhood sweetheart, meanwhile continuing his studies with Henry Hadley, Mortimer Wilson, and Bernard Waganaar.

His first theatre engagement was in the Rialto, under the baton of Doctor Reisenfeld. Then came symphonic work with the New York Philharmonic, playing under Mengleberg, Furtwaengler, Toscanini, and most of the other contemporary conductors and composers, including Stravinsky and Respighi. The next three seasons were spent with the New York Chamber Music Society, and by this time he had nineteen published compositions for orchestra. In 1928 Willson started conducting and a year later entered the radio field. He has been Musical Director for the National Broadcasting Company's Western Division since 1932.

Listed among his important compositions are: "Symphony No. 1 in F Minor," first performed by the San Francisco Symphony, under the composer's direction, April 19, 1936; "Radio City Suite," first performed by Dr. Frank Black with N. B. C. Symphony in 1935; "Song of Steel," first rendered by John Charles Thomas in 1934; "Parade Fantastique," first presented by New York Philharmonic, under Van Hoogstraaten, in 1930 and many others.

Preface

The purpose of this preface is to enable me to state clearly my loathing for a certain device that frequently clutters up many otherwise lucid books about music. I refer to that rude, impudent, interrupting, irritating thought breaker-upper known as the footnote.*

As a matter of fact I have the sneaking suspicion that nobody reads prefaces anyhow so I will throw you a curve and discuss my preface under the heading of

* *This is the first and last footnote you will encounter in this book.*

CHAPTER ONE

A blood curdling scream escaped the white lips of voluptuous young Amanda Whittlebottom. Before the scream dies away I will hurry into my reasons for writing this book and what I hope to accomplish thereby.

You may now forget about Miss Whittlebottom, as she occurred in the foregoing lines merely to trap you into actually starting to read this short volume.

I was asked to write a book dealing generally with the principles of good musicianship, conducting and arranging, together with certain other specific bits of information relative to the modern orchestra. I am not going to do that at all.

What I am going to try to do is to put down some practical information referring to the popular studio and dance band combination of today, that to my knowledge has not previously been set forth. I'll discuss various ways and means of making a printed orchestration sound like a special arrangement; the most effective grouping of the various sections of the orchestra in the studio; simple principles of modulations and segueing from one tune to another; and the problems of a string section in the modern orchestra and how those problems can be overcome. There are chapters devoted to the signs and signals used in the radio studio, and the modern vernacular of the present day musician. Other matters that have been taken up many times before in sundry text books such as the actual elemental technique of the baton and the range of the orchestral instruments will be pointed out with, I hope, clarity and simplicity.

Inasmuch as I have tricked you into this foreword by erroneously labeling it Chapter One, Chapter *Two* is in reality Chapter One. Chapter Three becomes Chapter Two, and so on. In order to quiet your nerves if this numerical illusion should disturb you, consider for a moment the many office buildings with their ground floor numbered One. The next floor then is identified as the second story, which it is not. Seriously, I hope this little building of mine will be of some small service to you who are about to inhabit it for a while.