

"NON-MILITANT, SENTIMENTAL . . ." *

JOHN PEATMAN

MUSIC is an essential ingredient of morale, both for civilians and men in arms. That is not debatable. The questions are, how much, what kind and when.

As to the kind of music that is essential, a number of opinions have been ventured recently. For instance, and especially, about what is wanted by men in the service. Byron Darnton, the late *New York Times* correspondent, on June 23, 1942 wired a dramatic testimonial to the morale value of music for the boys from "somewhere in Australia." What the American soldiers want, he said, is music — "hot jazz and also more highly regarded items." He quoted a squadron commander of the American Air Force: "Music is swell for these kids. They ought to have more of it. If somebody at home wanted to do something for the boys who are fighting in this war they would see to it that every squadron had a first class phonograph and records so that there would always be available good hot jazz and classics. There is no better morale builder."

Station KFEL of Denver, Colorado, in June 1942 published results of a survey made at Lowrie Field, the local service center in Denver, and at other gathering places of military personnel. Although no figures are quoted, the survey is emphatic on the subject of what the men in the Army listen to: loud, fast, modern tunes in the morning to help them wake up; a little romance, solid bands, solid vocalists, preferably females, novelty tunes; for the evening their tastes vary, but "good" music such as "classical" compositions, symphonic orchestras, or operas are a rare choice. "They want 'gutbucket' swing by the masters."

Phil Spitalny, commenting on his experiences after visiting many Army camps for his weekly Sunday broadcast, presented a somewhat different picture in *Variety*, January 1942. He was impressed by the soldiers' interest in standard hymns such as *Abide With Me* and *Lead Kindly Light*, and also reported that *Celeste Aida* was liked a lot better than *Daddy*. Spitalny,

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of course, refers to the pre-war period in the history of our armed forces. But it is likely that any discrepancies in these three reports are partly due to the fact that the tastes of men in arms vary as do the tastes of civilians. It is also important that Spitalny refers, at least partly, to music the soldiers like to join in *singing*, while the two other reports are about music that is *listened to*. And further, impressions of what generally characterizes a group will vary from observer to observer.

In October 5, 1942, *Broadcasting Magazine* published a summer survey made by the Army's Special Services division, of the radio programs liked and disliked by a cross-section of 3,286 white soldiers in the ground forces of fifteen camps from coast to coast. This revealed that popular tunes – sweet or dance – ranked first, 97 per cent indicating favor and only 3 per cent "dislike." News, comedy, sports and variety are next, followed by a second class of popular music, swing – hot, scat, and jive – which ranked sixth, with 62 per cent "liking" and 16 per cent "disliking." Old familiar music is seventh, 57 per cent for, and 16 per cent against; hillbilly and western, tenth (42 per cent "likes" and 33 per cent "dislikes"). Classical (symphony orchestra, opera and "serious" music) takes the lowest position, with 35 per cent "dislikes" and only 32 per cent "likes."

Radio has now addressed itself to the service man's needs for relaxation by shortwave broadcasts of many popular programs to all parts of the world, as well as through special entertainment series directed to them at home.

But music in war may serve three distinct functions. As relaxation and entertainment it provides a temporary escape from the physical and mental exertion of the day. It may also build morale during work, whether in a factory or in a military camp. Experiments over the past twenty years have shown that the introduction of appropriate music for a half-hour during the low output period of the morning and afternoon improves work in routine job situations.

Finally, music may serve the distinct purpose of "inspiration." And this leads to the question of current "war" songs.

By "Hit Parade" standards, there had been only a few very popular war songs up to September 1, 1942. As shown below, ten of the thirteen war songs which appeared on the Hit Parade between January 1, 1941, and September 1, 1942, came on after Pearl Harbor. One was played first on the Hit Parade in November, 1941, and was still on in January, 1942. Thus, eleven of a total of 54 songs broadcast in the first eight months of 1942, or

20 per cent of the various songs on the Hit Parade, were war songs. (All songs were classified by that name in which the lyrics make a reference to the war or the war situation, even those with only a slight war flavor such as *Madelaine* and *The Shrine of St. Cecilia*.)

CHRONOLOGY OF WAR SONGS ON "YOUR HIT PARADE"

January 1941 to September 1, 1942

SONG	TYPE	Date of First Hit Parade Broadcast	Total No. of Weeks on Hit Parade
My Sister and I	Non-Militant, Sentimental	May 3, 1941	14
Till Reveille	Non-Militant, Sentimental	Aug. 2, 1941	15
Madelaine	Non-Militant, Sentimental	Nov. 29, 1941	4
White Cliffs of Dover	Non-Militant, Sentimental	Dec. 13, 1941	17
Shrine of St. Cecilia	Non-Militant, Sentimental	Jan. 10, 1942	10
Remember Pearl Harbor	A March, "With Spirit"	Feb. 14, 1942	4
She'll Always Remember	Non-Militant, Sentimental	Apr. 4, 1942	2
Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree	Non-Militant, Novelty Song	Apr. 25, 1942	12
Johnny Doughboy Found a Rose	Non-Militant, Sentimental	May 9, 1942	15
Three Little Sisters	Non-Militant, Novelty Song	June 6, 1942	9
This Is Worth Fighting For	Militant Morale Song	June 27, 1942	3
He Wears a Pair of Silver Wings	Non-Militant, Sentimental	July 18, 1942	7 [Still at top of list on Sept. 1, 1942]
I Left My Heart at the Stage Door Canteen	Non-Militant, Sentimental	Aug. 8, 1942	[Still 3rd on list on Sept. 1, 1942]

Psychologically, most of the war songs up to September, 1942, were non-militant songs of romantic escape. *There'll Be Bluebirds Over The White Cliffs of Dover*, for instance, came to the Hit Parade on December 13, 1941, the week-end after Pearl Harbor. It was a sentimental ballad for "the peace ever after, tomorrow when the world is free" and proved to be the biggest hit of the season with sales of more than half a million copies of sheet music. A song like *My Sister and I* - a non-militant war ballad, was nostalgic for a "tulip garden by an old Dutch mill." *Till Reveille* was the first of the "sweetheart" type of war songs to get on the Hit Parade. *She'll Always Remember* described the love of a mother for her son now in the Army; up to August 24th, four and a half months after its first ap-

pearance on the Hit Parade, it had sold only 34,685 copies of sheet music.

Only two of the total of thirteen war songs could be classified as songs of "patriotic inspiration." *Remember Pearl Harbor* was pseudo-militant, but *This is Worth Fighting For* – still popular in September 1942 despite its brief initial career on the Hit Parade – was a war song of the inspirational, non-escape type. Although it was in ballad tempo and the lyric developed a sentimental theme, the final message was nevertheless clear-cut and to the point:

Didn't I build that cabin?
 Didn't I plant that corn?
 Didn't my folks before me
 Fight for this country before I was born?
 I gathered my loved ones around me
 And I gazed at each face I adore
 Then I heard that voice within me thunder
 This is Worth Fighting For.

Recent war songs of patriotic inspiration such as *Any Bonds Today*, *Arms for the Love of America*, and *The Army Air Corps* as well as old favorites, *The Marines' Hymn*, *anchors Aweigh*, *Caissons Go Rolling Along* and *Over There* have enjoyed some popularity.

However, these songs are definitely for singing and not for dancing. And when we recall that the average band broadcasts dance music, and not in 2/4 time as during the last war, it is perhaps not so amazing that we have few "hit" songs of the patriotic "inspirational" type.

We should point out further that there is a very select class of hit songs which may fall outside the Hit Parade group. These are the "big hits." They are the songs which are whistled, hummed and sung by all kinds of people, whether or not they dance, buy sheet music or recordings. As this article is being written, *Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition* promises to enter that group.

Of course, no one can force a spontaneous war hit like the late George M. Cohan's *Over There* in 1917. A "business as usual" attitude is blamed by some for the scarcity of successful war songs. Publishers and band leaders are reluctant, it is said, to try out anything new when, as *Billboard* pointed out in August 1942, "they've already got a system which rings the bell every time." However, Jack Robbins, head of the Feist-Miller-Robbins group, publicly asserted his willingness in *Variety* last August, to publish

"any ten songs selected by the OWI or by a committee of the top ten dance maestros and outstanding vocalists . . . and donate everything to the USO." The publishers tend to blame the band leaders, claiming that they are afraid to put on a good fighting song because of possible unpleasant comment, as, for example, when a dancer asked a band leader after the playing of *This Is Worth Fighting For*: "Well, why don't you get into uniform and fight then?" Band leaders say that the public isn't ready for blood-and-thunder, that the tempo of stirring fighting songs is no good for dancing and that the ballroom generally seems a poor atmosphere for arousing patriotism.

The Office of War Information seems to have two objectives in this field, according to *Variety*, July 22, 1942: "To get, if possible, the desired kind of lyrical support for the war. Failing that, at least to check the kind of drivel that might handicap the fighting and winning of the war." Songs of regretfulness, of homesickness, about a happy return, about sitting tight, are considered neither desirable for home consumption nor for our soldiers. This is also the point of view taken by the British government.

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In any study of our scarcity of successful war songs, it is relevant to point out that the American background for and participation in World War II differs from the picture of World War I. The present younger generation grew up during the washing of the 1917 and 1918 linen: many were educated in the skepticism of the 'twenties and 'thirties. Also World War I was a war with thousands of *marching* men. This time there are few parades and so far, fewer psychological signs at home of a burning zeal to do or to die. There is a grim determination to see a nasty business through, but this is not the spirit which finds utterance in song. It is an attitude which seeks not inspiration, but escape and relaxation through words and music. The purveyors of music have met this entertainment type of need. Psychologically, however, the question remains whether music alone can also inspire burning faith and fighting zeal. It is only when the seeds of these things are in the souls of men, that they can be cultivated with word and song.