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Mary Davenport Engberg: Pioneering Musician in a Bachelors' Frontier

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Abstract
Many women in the United States encountered resistance to their involvement in orchestral conducting and public instrumental performance—both solo and ensemble—in the early twentieth century. Mary Davenport Engberg (1880–1951), however, became involved in the developing musical culture of the Pacific Northwest without encountering opposition based on her gender. In 1911 Engberg founded the mixed-gender Bellingham Symphony Orchestra, which she conducted until she became the conductor of the Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra in 1921, and she also performed extensively as a violinist in Seattle and along the West Coast. She was the director of an influential music school in Seattle and cofounded the Seattle Civic Opera Association in 1932. Engberg's life and accomplishments reveal the effect of regional differences in the experiences and reception of women in American music. An understanding of her contributions leads to a better appreciation of the varied roles played by women in instrumental music throughout our country's history.

In 1904 Mary Davenport Engberg (1880–1951) returned to her hometown of Bellingham, Washington, a small city ninety miles north of Seattle, after pursuing her musical education in Europe. Having debuted as a violin soloist in Copenhagen and performed in London and Berlin, she was acclaimed in New York upon her return[1] and soon became well known on the West Coast as a violin soloist. Within a few years of her return she was conducting an orchestra in Bellingham and teaching violin at the Normal School there. By the 1920s Engberg had moved to Seattle and was serving as the conductor of the Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra, facilitating its transformation from an amateur to a professional ensemble in 1923. In 1932, in addition to her teaching, solo performances, and chamber music pursuits, she cofounded and conducted the Seattle Civic Opera, the only opera company in Seattle at that time.

Mary Davenport Engberg was born at a time when the violin was first becoming an accepted instrument for women in the United States. Although formal vocal training for women was widely accepted during the nineteenth century,[2] instrumental training was more rare: Female instrumentalists were expected to play only those instruments that allowed them to maintain a "delicate and decorative

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[1] See *New York Press*, quoted in "Mrs. Engberg Will Appear on Normal Lecture Course," *Bellingham Herald*, 3 November 1906.

[2] Adrienne Fried Block, "Women in American Music, 1800–1918," in *Women & Music: A History*, 2nd ed., ed. Karin Pendle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 206–8.

appearance."[3] Camilla Urso (1842–1902), a renowned French violinist, began to break down these stereotypes when she first toured in the United States in 1852. Urso championed the violin as an instrument for women and quickly became an inspirational icon for young women aspiring to play music. Maud Powell (1867–1920), the celebrated U.S. violinist of the late nineteenth century, saw herself as continuing the model that Urso pioneered.[4]

Although some female violinists rose to prominence in the late nineteenth century, the place of women in classical musical performance remained severely limited by societal gender expectations.[5] The number of women engaged in formal musical training in the United States grew steadily into the early twentieth century, but most of these women remained amateurs. Women, in short, were largely expected to keep their musical interests in the home: They were not permitted to play in professional symphony orchestras with men, and those who attempted a solo career frequently had to overcome great obstacles.[6] Adrienne Fried Block, for example, tells of the extraordinary honor Urso received when the members of the Harvard Musical Association "presented her with a written testimonial that declared her the equal of the best male violinists"—and yet she could not play in that orchestra.[7]

In the era before the Second World War, many women who wanted to perform in ensembles sought out or created all-women orchestras.[8] Beginning in the 1870s on the East Coast of the United States, these "Lady Orchestras," as they came to be called, were usually conducted by women, and they sought to overcome prejudices, including the stereotypical belief that women did not have the strength and endurance for extended public performance. These orchestras faced difficult decisions and criticism with regard to instrumentation, however. With few exceptions, if they omitted instruments "improper" for women (such as brass, string bass, or bassoon), the orchestras were criticized as incomplete; yet if competent women played those parts, the ensemble was described as undignified.[9] As late as 1932, a startled review of Ethel Leginska's New York conducting debut with the National Women's Symphony Orchestra conveys a typical attitude: "Where Miss Leginska found them all [the female instrumentalists] can only be conjectured. . . . [She] had

[3] Beth Abelson Macleod, "'Whence Comes the Lady Tympanist?' Gender and Instrumental Musicians in America, 1853–1990," *Journal of Social History* 27/2 (Winter 1993): 292.

[4] Karen A. Shaffer and Neva Garner Greenwood, *Maud Powell: Pioneer American Violinist* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988), 16, 138–39.

[5] For more on this issue, see Judith Tick, "Women as Professional Musicians in the United States, 1870–1900," in *Anuario Interamericano de Investigación Musical* 9 (1973): 95–133; Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, eds. *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Carol Neuls-Bates, ed. *Women in Music: An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996); and Christine Ammer, *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2001).

[6] Macleod, "'Whence Comes the Lady Tympanist?'" 292; Block, "Women in American Music," 199–201; Shaffer and Greenwood, *Maud Powell*, 270–71.

[7] Block, "Women in American Music," 207.

[8] J. Michele Edwards, "North America since 1920," in *Women & Music: A History*, 2nd ed., ed. Karin Pendle (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 359.

[9] J. Michele Edwards, "Women on the Podium," in *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting*, ed. José Antonio Bowen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 225; and Macleod, "'Whence Comes the Lady Tympanist?'" 298.

eight double basses, all women, and evidently no novices. Only one of them used an Italian bow, the other seven went at it full-fisted. . . .Where, when, and why do women take up horn? . . . [Where] do you get a female tuba player? And whence comes the lady tympanist?"[10]

The rise of the "Lady Orchestras" also provided the first opportunities for women conductors, such as Ethel Leginska (1886–1970) and Emma Steiner (1852–1929). Caroline Nichols (1864–1939), a student of Julius Eichberg, who in his teaching post at the Boston Conservatory was widely known as an advocate for female instrumentalists, founded the all-women Boston Fadette Orchestra in 1888. For ten years thereafter, the Fadettes grew and established a strong reputation, and by 1898 they were touring the United States and Canada performing symphonies, opera excerpts, overtures, and folk arrangements in a variety of venues.[11]

Yet even as reviewers and audiences accepted female conductors for all-women orchestras, barriers remained for those women who wanted to conduct mixed-gender ensembles.[12] A few women, such as Leginska, Antonia Brico (1902–89), and Frédérique Petrides (1903–83), started out with great successes in all-women orchestras and then fought for positions with mixed orchestras throughout the mid-twentieth century,[13] but they were successful only in the short term, and even today conducting remains largely closed to women in its highest ranks.

Mary Davenport Engberg's accomplishments with her mixed-gender orchestras in Bellingham and Seattle were therefore highly atypical. Furthermore, no evidence remains suggesting that her endeavors were ever questioned based on her gender, nor do any reviews of her solo or conducting performances compare her to male musicians. This remarkable situation might well reflect the progressive climate of the Pacific Northwest, which made the region uniquely suited to fostering the career of such a pioneer. Mary Davenport Engberg's story, which I have reconstructed through interviews with family members and examination of newspapers, letters, and concert programs, is integral to forming a more complete picture of the varied roles of women in instrumental music throughout our country's history, and it suggests that the issue of antifemale prejudices is more complex and regionally specific than previously assumed.

Women in the Pacific Northwest

The Pacific Northwest was initially primarily a bachelors' frontier, a land ripe for exploration, trapping, logging, and development of cities and trade routes. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, as increasing numbers of families came west,

[10] "When Women Blow Horns," *Literary Digest* 113 (2 April 1932): 19–20 as quoted by Macleod, "'Whence Comes the Lady Tympanist?'" 298.

[11] Judith Tick, "Passed Away Is the Piano Girl," in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 331.

[12] Edwards, "Women on the Podium," 234.

[13] For further discussion of the rise of women in conducting, see Carol Neuls-Bates, "Women's Orchestras in the United States, 1925–1945," in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 349–69; and Neuls-Bates, *Women in Music*, 253–72.

the women found themselves tasked with creating and building the community institutions they desired. They formed clubs as a means of coming together to establish schools, libraries, hospitals, religious aid groups, and other institutions required to meet the perceived needs of their communities.[14]

Because the communities of the Northwest were constructed by women of various backgrounds working together over a relatively short span of time, the Northwest emerged as a progressive place in terms of attitudes toward women. A vibrant labor movement in Seattle offered working-class and middle-class women the opportunity to collaborate on issues of women's suffrage and employment. There were "colorful clashes" over women's right to work "regardless of marital status, to enjoy economic independence, individual development, and personal autonomy,"[15] but ultimately the Northwest offered prospects for professional women in a variety of fields, and, as Sandra Haarsager documents, many "came to the Northwest to pursue what they saw as greater opportunities to use their skills" and fewer restrictions than they might have faced elsewhere in the country.[16] Women in the West could vote as early as 1896 in Idaho, 1910 in Washington, and 1912 in Oregon; and with the election of Bertha Knight Landes in 1926, Seattle became the first large city in the United States to elect a woman as mayor.

Social improvement continued as the underlying theme for many women in their civic participation even after the initial community building had taken place. Landes's winning bid for mayor, for example, was built on a platform of temperance and social change. Harriet Overton Stimson (1862–1936), a devoted arts patron, helped found the Seattle Symphony Orchestra in 1903 and later provided financial assistance to Nellie Cornish in establishing the Cornish School for the Arts in 1914. In 1907 Anna Herr Clise (1866–1936) organized a group of women to fund what would become the Seattle Children's Hospital, after the death of her son alerted her to the need for quality medical care directed specifically toward children. During the Great Depression, Hazel Wolf (1898–2000) emerged as an articulate advocate for social justice; she later sparked Seattle's first environmental movement.[17]

In Seattle, as elsewhere in the country, this quest for the betterment of the community provided a rationale for many of the women's groups in the arts. Seattle boasted a Ladies Musical Club (LMC) that was founded in 1891 by twenty-four musically trained women, with the intent of promoting the arts and

[14] Sandra Haarsager, *Organized Womanhood: Cultural Politics in the Pacific Northwest, 1840–1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 6–10, 37–43. The tradition of women's clubs began in the 1820s, when women in New England founded "maternal clubs" for the purpose of discussing child rearing.

[15] Maurine Weiner Greenwald, "Working-Class Feminism and the Family Wage Ideal: The Seattle Debate on Married Women's Right to Work 1914–1920," in *Women in Pacific Northwest History,* rev. ed., ed. Karen J. Blair (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 103.

[16] Haarsager, *Organized Womanhood,* 17.

[17] For more information on these and other women in Washington, see David Brewster and David M. Buerge, eds., *Washingtonians: A Biographical Portrait of the State* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1988); Susan Starbuck, *Hazel Wolf: Fighting the Establishment* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); Mildred Andrews, *Seattle Women: A Legacy of Community Development* (Seattle: YWCA, 1984); Nellie Cornish, *Miss Aunt Nellie: The Autobiography of Nellie C. Cornish,* ed. Ellen Van Volkenberg Browne and Edward Nordhoff Beck (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964); and Doris H. Pieroth, "Bertha Knight Landes: The Woman Who Was Mayor," in *Women in Pacific Northwest History*, rev. ed., ed. Karen J. Blair (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).

cultural life of the developing city by supporting women who had been musically trained in their youth but who had given up music when they married; of assisting the development of women who were pursuing music professionally by offering scholarships and interest-free loans for higher levels of music education; and of bringing music to the community for all citizens to enjoy.[18] By 1950 twenty-two members of the Ladies' Musical Club were also members of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.

The belief in music as a tool that can improve the community drove Mary Davenport Engberg as well, as she tirelessly trained enough musicians to found the Bellingham Symphony Orchestra and later the Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra and Seattle Civic Opera. She believed that it was not enough for a community to engage touring artists—although she acknowledged that such outreach was certainly important. Rather, she believed, members of a community needed to play music themselves in order to internalize it, understand it, appreciate it, and be affected by it. Engberg often explained that "a community's musical standards are determined by the music it makes for itself,"[19] and her contribution to, and involvement in, the music of the Pacific Northwest enabled the communities she lived in to do just that.

"Mary Laura Cornwall": Youth, Education, and European Study

Madame Davenport Engberg,[20] as she was called throughout her adult and professional life, was born Mary Laura Cornwall, daughter of pioneer George A. Cornwall, on 15 February 1880.[21] Her birth reportedly took place in a covered wagon[22] near

[18] As of 1909, 131 clubs were registered in the nationwide Federation of Women's Musical Clubs. For more information on the history of these clubs, see Fanny Morris Smith, "The Work of Our Women's Musical Clubs," *Etude* (July 1909): 490–91; Karen J. Blair, "The Seattle Ladies Musical Club, 1890–1930," in *Experiences in a Promised Land: Essays in Pacific Northwest History*, ed. G. Thomas Edwards and Carlos A. Schwantes (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 124–25; and Mrs. Joseph B. Harrison, "The Ladies Musical Club: Its Civic Functions," from the Commemorative Program of the Golden Anniversary of Artist Concerts 1900–1950 (Seattle: Ladies Musical Club, 1950), 17, 21.

[19] Mary Davenport Engberg, as quoted by Esther W. Campbell, *Bagpipes in the Woodwind Section: A History of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra and Its Women's Association* (Seattle: Seattle Symphony Women's Association, 1978), 14.

[20] Sources, including letters and documents written by Engberg herself, are inconsistent with regard to whether there should be a hyphen between "Davenport" and "Engberg." In citing original sources I have reproduced the name as it was given, but in my own text I have chosen to consistently omit the hyphen.

[21] Mary Davenport Engberg's birth date has been established through comparison of the 1880 Federal Census, which records her age at four months, with the 1927 edition of *Who's Who in Washington* State and a family genealogical record, both of which list her birth date as 15 February 1880. Because Engberg's *Seattle Times* obituary supplies no birth date but simply states that she died at the age of seventy, several subsequent tributes (e.g., *Bellingham Herald*, 25 March 1990 and 29 March 1998), incorrectly assume her lifespan to have been 1881–1951. Given a birth date of 15 February 1880 and a death date of 23 January 1951, the obituary is correct that she did indeed die at the age of seventy, one month before her seventy-first birthday. See A. Engberg, *Familien Engberg's Stamtavle* (Copenhagen: J. A. Hansens Bogtrykkeri, 1927), a genealogy of the Engberg family now in the possession of Patricia Engberg, granddaughter of Mary Davenport Engberg, Enumclaw, Wash.

[22] Many posthumous press releases mentioning Engberg include this legend about the covered wagon, but I have been unable to find any substantiation (or contradiction) for this story in sources

Spokane, Washington, as George Cornwall and his wife were completing a move into Washington Territory.[23] Although not much is known about this journey, the family was certainly of pioneer stock and spirit. Engberg's paternal grandfather was the Rev. John Adamson Cornwall of Arkansas, who arrived in Oregon Country in 1847 with the Colonel William H. Russell party as the first group of white settlers in that area; a handwritten memoir by George's brother, John Hardin Cornwall, recalls that the Donner family separated from them south of Oregon and endured a notoriously perilous winter in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.[24]

In 1883, following her mother's death from a measles infection, Mary Cornwall was adopted by Richard and Cynthia (Moore) Davenport of Mount Hope, Spokane County.[25] The Davenports were an older couple when they adopted the young girl and apparently had no children of their own. With the Davenports, Mary moved to the Bellingham Bay area around 1890, where she was brought up. Richard and Cynthia Davenport apparently provided Mary's early musical training on the violin, both before and after their move to Bellingham, although no records survive identifying her early violin teachers. According to a 1906 review of one of Engberg's recitals, she first played in public at the age of twelve and was known in the area as a child prodigy even before that time, receiving mention in the press and fond attention from the citizens of Bellingham.[26]

After Mary's 1899 marriage to Henry Engberg (1864–1942),[27] a Danish immigrant and successful pharmacist in Bellingham, the couple departed for Europe so that Mary could study in the renowned musical centers there (see Figure 1). They traveled first to Copenhagen, where she studied with Anton Svendsen (1846–1930) and had her European debut in 1903, when she played for the king and queen of Denmark. After leaving Denmark, the Engbergs traveled to Berlin, where she studied at the Berlin Hochschule with Carl Halir (1859–1909), then the second violinist in the Joachim Quartet. She appeared as a soloist with the Berlin Philharmonic, London Symphony, and Copenhagen Symphony and became known as

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contemporary with Engberg's life. See "Mary Davenport-Engberg, Music Conductor," *Bellingham Herald*, 25 March 1990; "1914: Renowned Violinist Conducts in Bellingham," *Bellingham Herald*, 4 March 1999; and "Leader of the Band: Bellingham Conductor Made History," *Bellingham Herald,* 15 March 2001.

[23] In the 1927 edition of *Who's Who in Washington State*, which Engberg had among her possessions (now owned by Patricia Engberg, Enumclaw, Wash.), Engberg's birth mother is identified as Mary Messinger, but the 1880 Federal Census records refer to "Pheebe C. Cornwall" as the mother of four-month-old Mary. Engberg's own birth name is most often given as "Mary Laura Cornwall," but her marriage license uses "Mamie Laurie." See "Engberg, Davenport (Mary Laura Cornwall)," *Who's Who in Washington State,* vol. 1 (Seattle: Arthur H. Allen, 1927), 83; and the 1880 Federal Census Records for Spokane, Wash., http://ancestrylibrary.com. Bellingham Public Library, Bellingham, Wash., accessed 10 September 2007.

[24] This handwritten memoir, dated 1900, was in Mary Engberg's collection when she died and is now owned by Margaret Berge Price of Seattle. The *Seattle Times* obituary of 24 January 1951 identifies the Rev. J. A. Cornwall as Engberg's father, but the dates and census records do not support that claim.

[25] *Who's Who in Washington State*, 83; Mae E. Dennis et al., *Pioneers of the Columbia* (Colville, Wash.: Greenwood Park Grange, 1965), 72.

[26] "Mrs. Davenport Engberg," *Bellingham Herald*, 20 January 1906.

[27] Henry was born Heinrich Christian Engberg on 28 December 1864. See A. Engberg, *Familien Engbergs*, 14, as well as "Funeral Rites Are Held for Henry Engberg," obituary, *Seattle Times*, 12 December 1942.

Figure 1. Mary Davenport Engberg, early 1900s. Photograph courtesy of Patricia Engberg.

the "young Bellingham violinist" because her calling cards always bore her home address, even while she toured in Europe.[28] The Engbergs' first child, Hans Paul Kruckow Engberg, was born on 12 February 1901 in Copenhagen, and Henry split his time between his family in Denmark and his business in Bellingham.

In the fall of 1904, after five years of study abroad, Engberg returned to the United States, stopping in New York City to give a recital at Mendelssohn Hall,[29] which prompted favorable critical review. "One will never forget how she makes

[28] "Mrs. Davenport Engberg"; Faculty List, *Klipsum,* yearbook of the Washington State Normal School, 1915–16, Western Washington Libraries Special Collections, Bellingham, Wash., 29.

[29] "Mme. Davenport Engberg's Recital," *New York Times*, 20 November 1904; display advertisements, announcement of Mme. Davenport Engberg recital, *New York Times*, 25 November 1904.

[her violin] sing in Bach's G-string aria or Wilhelmi's 'Ave Maria,'" wrote an anonymous reviewer. "For quality of tone, excellent interpretation, and brilliant bowing, this young artist has few equals and there is no seeking after effect in her playing. She puts into her expression the very soul of the composer. Mrs. Engberg is an artist of exceptional power and magnetism."[30]

Engberg's second child was born on 15 July 1905, which likely explains the interval of time between her return from Europe in the late fall of 1904 and her first public appearance in Bellingham in February 1906. Nevertheless, her recital on 9 February brought the largest audience of the winter to Beck's Theater, and the *Bellingham Herald* published a series of articles in the days before her recital to prepare the community for the event. One column presented a short history and description of the violin, including details about Engberg's own instrument; another described the difficulty of the numbers she would perform; and a third announced that the recital would be very technical, but "so interwoven with beautiful and melodious themes that everyone, no matter how little he may know about music, will enjoy them."[31] The morning paper on the day of the recital bore a flowery poem by Ella Higginson, a Northwest novelist and poet, celebrating Engberg for leaving to go overseas and returning to her home "with greatness robing [her]":[32]

To Mrs. Davenport-Engberg

Thou that went from us, sweet and unafraid,
To work alone, afar,
With lifted eyes and courage undismayed—
Led by one pure, high star;

Thou has come back to us, still young and sweet,
One of the world's queens now,
With greatness robing thee; kings at thy feet;
And laurels on thy brow.

This is the miracle by genius wrought!
One rises rapt, sincere,
Whose soul with God's own passion-fire is fraught,
To speak his message clear.

Engberg's Bellingham Career and the Formation of the Bellingham Symphony Orchestra

After her successful debut recital in Bellingham, Mary Davenport Engberg continued to perform often in her hometown, throughout the Seattle area, and with

[30] The *New York Press*, as quoted in "Mrs. Engberg Will Appear on Normal Lecture Course." Another review of the New York recital also praised Engberg's facility with the bow, but noted that nervousness caused some left-hand fumbles which might otherwise have been avoided. "Mme. Engberg Plays Violin," *New York Press*, November 26, 1904.

[31] "Enjoyable to All: Mrs. Engberg Program Contains Most Difficult Numbers," *Bellingham Herald*, 8 February 1906. Also see "Her Repertoire without Limit: Mrs. Engberg Masters Most Difficult Violin Numbers," *Bellingham Herald*, 7 February 1906; and "Uses Violin Made in 1637: Mrs. Engberg Plays Instrument of Fabulous Value," *Bellingham Herald*, 8 February 1906.

[32] "Poet Pays Tribute to Great Musician," *Bellingham Herald*, 9 February 1906.

orchestras along the coast. Her performances continued to be received with high regard: "Mrs. Engberg's exquisite playing is too well known to need further comment," wrote one reviewer.[33] In addition to her many engagements as a performer around the Pacific Northwest and her work as a teacher through the music school she started in her home, Engberg became immersed in the community musical organizations and events of Bellingham. The Young Women's Christian Association records indicate, for example, that Engberg taught a class there in the spring of 1907 as a means of attracting young women's interest in the association. She was active in the "Bellingham Bay Musical Amateurs" club, and in 1916, when it became an official member of the Federation of Women's Musical Clubs, she served as a charter member and part of its program (performance) committee for the first year.[34]

Engberg wanted to have a larger influence in her community than simply as a performer and teacher, however; she sensed her community needed an orchestra. In 1909, after playing with an unnamed "leading Coast orchestra," she became convinced that she herself could lead such an orchestra. "I could get up one that at any rate could not be any worse than the one I had played with," she wrote eight years later, "and withal I felt confident of making a far better one, at least my orchestra should play in tune!"[35] In this 1917 retrospective article, Engberg revealed that bringing good music to the community was, for her, an ethical obligation:

> From the Symphony Orchestra radiates all other forms of music in a community; from its roots spring every variety and form of worthy effort along good music lines. . . . Its influence has a cleansing effect on musical taste and it establishes standards by which people can gauge things; they do not so easily fall prey to fads and crazes which so often sweep our primitive country. . . . Our country is sadly in need of a cleansing wave of good music and every conscientious musician should add his or her efforts to make that wave as powerful as possible.[36]

In 1911 Engberg began the work of recruiting orchestra members and teaching students to play the instruments for which there were not yet players. The story is told best through her own words and those of a reporter from the *American Reveille* in an article published before the orchestra's premiere concert on 3 May 1912:

> Interest in the approaching concert to be given by the string orchestra at Beck's theater on the night of May 3, for the benefit of the Mount Baker club, is divided between the concert itself and the organization that will produce the music. With thirty-four pieces in the orchestra, the music-loving public undoubtedly has something of unusual merit in store in this concert.
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> The concert will be in [the] charge of Mrs. Davenport-Engberg, who has organized the orchestra and has been the moving spirit in bringing out the large number of musicians and their accomplishments on the difficult instruments. When seen by a reporter for the

[33] "Engberg-Higginson Concert," *Bellingham Herald,* 1 October 1908.

[34] Bellingham Women's Music Club administrative records, Minute Book 1917–19, Collection of the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, Bellingham, Wash. See also Lottie Roeder Roth, ed., *History of Whatcom County* (Seattle: Pioneer Historical Publishing Company, 1926), vol. 1, 685, 691.

[35] Mary Davenport-Engberg, "How to Start a Local Symphony Orchestra," *Etude* (May 1917): 309.

[36] Ibid.

> American-Reveille and asked if the orchestra is to be a permanent organization Mrs. Engberg said:
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> "Yes. I have been met everywhere with so much good-will and enthusiasm from the musical people of the city and members of the orchestra that its future is assured and I am sowing seed constantly, so I can replace any members that may drop out. I am especially proud of the violas, cellos, and basses."
>
> "But," insisted the reporter, "I did not suppose there could be found enough performers on such instruments in a city the size of Bellingham."
>
> "You are perfectly right," continued Mrs. Engberg. "As a matter of fact, up to a month ago there was just one viola in the city, and this was never used. When I suggested getting up a big string orchestra everybody asked me what I would do for violas. I answered them by saying that we would send for some instruments and then make someone play. I chose as the victims five excellent violin players, who, after two weeks' application on the tenor [*sic*] clef to find out just what they could do, developed into still better viola players. So the first obstacle was removed.
>
> "As to the cellos, Mr. Stone has been a lone missionary here for years on that most beautiful instrument. But in the last six months there have been so many converts that it is safe to say that within a short time the instrument will become very popular. There are six excellent cello players at present in the orchestra, old experienced players they are, who needed the chance to bring out their hitherto dormant accomplishments. Numerous others have taken up the study of the cello with Mr. Stone, who will later join the organization.
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> "Then the double basses, I am proud of them. The people of Bellingham have never heard one here except those with the Damrosch Modest Altschuler Russian symphony. There has been one at the Normal [School] for some time, but with no one to play it. Mr. Ludwig has owned one but the occasion to use it has been lacking until this orchestra was formed. Then those basses were brought out, dusted and rosined up and put to work.
>
> "I prophesy a big surprise for the people of the city when they hear the orchestra."[37]

The work was tedious at first. Engberg gave private lessons on the orchestral parts to each member of the string section to teach unity of phrasing and articulation, because the musicians were not yet experienced enough to glean small details from the demanding rehearsals. One friend described her as "an outspoken perfectionist who would deliver tongue-lashings to whip the amateur musicians into proficiency."[38]

The students worked hard too. In her 1917 article Engberg recounts a humorous story of the young orchestra members' struggle to learn Jules Massenet's *Scène Pittoresque*, for which she gave many private lessons:

> It so happened that during this time a carpenter was doing some work for us in the basement directly under my studio, work which kept him busy about a week at odd times. In the meantime he worked at other places[;] on Friday morning upon making his appearance to finish up he inquired of the maid, "What is that queer piece that everyone in town is playing anyway? Now, I have worked here nearly a week and I have heard nothing but that same crazy piece played by everybody that has been here; then the other day I went over

[37] "Talented Musician Is in Charge of Plans for Mt. Baker Concert," *American Reveille* (Bellingham, Wash.), 28 April 1912.

[38] Marci Whitney, "Seattle Women's Pursuits Varied," *News Tribune* (Tacoma, Wash.), 15 August 1976.

> to the other side of town to repair a door sill and somebody in that house was playing the same piece. After I got to bed the other night somebody in the next house struck it up and stuck to it till midnight, and last night I went down to the Y.M.C.A. reading room to read in peace and quiet and, upon my soul, I hadn't been there ten minutes before a whole big orchestra struck up the same piece. . . . It seems as if everybody has gone crazy over music and it certainly is crazy stuff they play."[39]

The carpenter soon "caught the bug himself" and became a regular audience member at the orchestra concerts.

The excitement in the town preceding the premiere concert, given as a benefit for the Mt. Baker Club and its efforts to promote tourism and exploration of that mountain near Bellingham, was considerable, and the press coverage exceeded that of Engberg's homecoming recital in 1906. One article aimed to educate the public on the nature of an orchestra, and another instructed the community on concert etiquette.[40] There was some discussion as to whether the music would appeal to the public. To this concern Engberg provided an eloquent response:

> Our program, while being made up of some of the finest numbers written, will be of such a melodious and tuneful nature that everyone will enjoy it. The idea that the public out here cannot appreciate the so-called classical music is not the fault of the public, but of the performer who attempts something he cannot handle, and makes a muddied botch of it. When they are not well received, as a result they retreat under the excuse that the public can't appreciate classical music. I say the people here are capable of appreciating anything that the people of New York can, if it is played here as it is there.[41]

Another columnist was quite direct in appealing for attendance: "There are several reasons why you should be present tonight. You will get half a dozen times your money's worth: you will aid the Mt. Baker club in its work directly and you will encourage the artists who are giving their work to a good cause and help in building up a musical atmosphere in this city which it has unfortunately lacked."[42]

The concert on 3 May 1912 filled the 2,200 seats of Beck's Theater to capacity. Audience members traveled as far as the ninety miles between Seattle and Bellingham, including twenty-two University students who were given half price tickets because of the "great educational value" of the music.[43] According to reviews, audience members were "spell bound"; critics were effusive in their praise. The *Bellingham Herald* reported that the concert "proved to be even better than advertised and was successful in every way. . . .The conductor herself is of a race of artists whose music expresses thought and whose technical feats are accomplished without effort. Her masterful playing together with her ability as an instructor and leader enable her to produce results that are nothing short of marvelous."[44]

[39] Engberg, "How to Start a Local Symphony Orchestra," 310.

[40] "Music Lovers Offered a Rare Treat," *Bellingham Herald*, 2 May 1912; "Famous Numbers in Concert Program," *Bellingham Herald*, 30 April 1912.

[41] "Talented Musician Is in Charge of Plans for Mt. Baker Concert."

[42] "Tonight's Concert," Announcement of the Premiere Performance of the Davenport Engberg Orchestra, *Bellingham Herald*, 3 May 1912.

[43] "Music Lovers Offered a Rare Treat."

[44] "Huge Crowd Is Entranced by Music," *Bellingham Herald*, 4 May 1912. In the citations of Engberg that were published in the latter half of the twentieth century she is always credited with being the

Figure 2. Advertisement for the second concert of the Davenport Engberg Orchestra. *Bellingham Herald*, 14 November 1912. Used with permission, *The Bellingham Herald.*

The orchestra's second concert took place on 15 November 1912 at Bellingham's Metropolitan Theatre (see Figure 2). This time the ensemble attracted national attention, as seen in a review in the *Musical Observer*:

> So perfect was the work of the orchestra and soloists, so charming the selections rendered and so thoroughly delightful the entire evening that the audience of more than a thousand which packed the house unanimously departed proud of the fact that Bellingham could justly boast of a symphony orchestra superior to similar organizations in many cities of much greater population. . . . So complete has been [Engberg's] success that it is seldom an orchestra capable of playing in such perfect harmony and of rendering such difficult selections with so much ease and charm is heard today. To Mrs. Engberg too high praise

"first woman conductor of a symphony orchestra in the world." This statement is inaccurate; women such as Caroline Nichols of the Boston Fadette Orchestra were conducting all-women orchestras when Engberg was a child. If superlative titles need to be given, I have not found any documentation of a woman conducting a mixed-gender orchestra before Engberg founded her ensemble in Bellingham in 1911; so she might indeed be "first" in that category. (The Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra under Engberg's leadership was also mixed-gender.)

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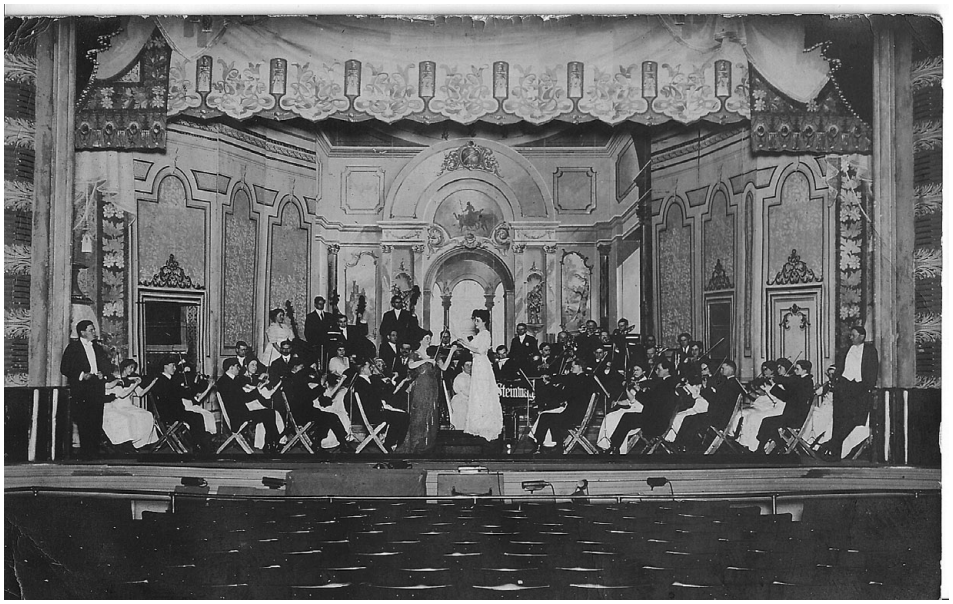

Figure 3. Maud Powell performs with the Davenport Engberg Symphony Orchestra with Mary Davenport Engberg conducting, 24 January 1913, Metropolitan Theater, Bellingham, Washington. Photograph courtesy of Patricia Engberg.

> cannot be given for directing the individual efforts of the musicians toward a common goal with such success.[45]

Consistent with the local reviews, the national coverage did not conceal its surprise at the quality of the performances occurring in Bellingham under Mary Engberg's baton.

After the success of the initial two concerts, Engberg decided to expand the orchestra's programming to include nationally recognized artists. The first opportunity came when Maud Powell toured the West Coast in the winter of 1912–13, coming to Bellingham because there was an orchestra with which she could play.[46] Powell soloed with the Davenport Engberg Orchestra on 24 January 1913 (see Figure 3). The concert included a potpourri of violin solos with piano accompaniment, orchestral pieces, and Wieniawski's *Souvenir de Moscow*, for which Powell and the orchestra joined forces. By this time the orchestra had grown to forty-five players, about half of whom were women, and rehearsals for this high-profile event were reportedly intense. "'Now if you make a single mistake at the performance,' Mrs. Engberg flat out told her players, 'I solemnly vow to run right out through the door at the back of the platform!'"[47]

[45] Concert review of Davenport Engberg Orchestra, 15 November 1912, *Musical Observer* 7/1 (January 1913): 1004.

[46] Shaffer, *Maud Powell*, 291–92.

[47] As told by Maud Powell in "'Go West, Young Musician!' Maud Powell Advises," *Musical America* (29 March 1913): 5. Program information from "Success of the Davenport-Engberg Symphony Orchestra," *Musical Observer*, March 1913.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752196311000174 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The concert went well, however, and with the largest advance sale in the history of the orchestra, there was a sizeable and enthusiastic audience. Powell delighted the players by praising their ability and said that "through the work and devotion of one woman that town [Bellingham] has an orchestra on which it may well pride itself."[48] Impressed by Engberg's zeal for music in the community, she commented to a reporter from the *Bellingham Herald*: "The one great fault of American artists in every line of art, especially music, is that they hesitate to throw their soul and emotion into their work. . . . Mrs. Engberg has risen above this inherent tendency, as is shown by the results of her work."[49] In turn, Bellingham residents saw Powell's performance as a credit to the town: "To get an artist of such renown as Maud Powell to consent to play with an orchestra is a guarantee itself that the work of the orchestra is of real merit."[50]

After this milestone concert, the orchestra continued to thrive. George Hamlin (1869–1923), a well-known operatic tenor from Illinois, performed with the orchestra on 2 April 1913, and by the fall of 1914, at the beginning of the orchestra's third season, the size of the ensemble had increased to eighty-five members, with all instruments covered except for oboe and bassoon. Players for these parts were hired for each concert. Repertoire included, among other works, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, Dvořák's *Carnival Overture*, Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*, and Saint-Saëns's *Danse Macabre*.[51] The orchestra continued to be self-sustaining, covering its costs through the revenue from ticket sales. Engberg's husband Henry served as the orchestra's manager and arranged to have the stenographic work for ads and programs completed without charge at his pharmacy. Engberg herself accepted no remuneration for her work as music director; the family was apparently able to live well off her earnings as a teacher and the income from Henry's pharmaceutical business.[52]

By the beginning of the sixth season, however, the orchestra had accumulated a $500 deficit (equivalent to approximately $10,000 in 2010) as a result of rising expenses and the costs of purchasing music. Consequently, in the fall of 1917 a board of directors was formed to guide the orchestra's activities, and a committee was appointed to raise funds. The group now adopted the name "Bellingham Symphony Orchestra." Frances Larrabee, widow of Charles X. Larrabee—who had amassed a fortune through entrepreneurial work in real estate, mining, and timber—paid off the deficit and became president of the orchestra's board. Miss Frances S. Hays, formerly Dean of Women at the Washington State Normal School, assumed the managerial work from Henry Engberg, and the orchestra took up

[48] "'Go West, Young Musician!'" 5.

[49] "Orchestra Gets Praise from Violinist," *Bellingham Herald*, 25 January 1913.

[50] "Maud Powell to Appear with Orchestra Tonight."

[51] "Continued Success of Mme. Davenport-Engberg," *Musical Observer*, March 1914; "Symphony Orchestra Will Give Concert Tonight," *Bellingham Herald*, 4 December 1914. A large number of the modern tributes to Mary Engberg list the 4 December 1914 concert as the first concert of the Davenport Engberg Orchestra. There is no evidence as to how this error originated; many articles from local and national periodicals cover the founding of the orchestra in 1911 and its first two seasons.

[52] A detailed description of the orchestra's finances can be found in Engberg, "How to Start a Local Symphony Orchestra," 310.

headquarters in the Bellingham Chamber of Commerce building.[53] The orchestra, now independent and on stronger financial footing, was poised to continue its work even when the Engbergs moved to Seattle in 1920 to pursue greater musical opportunities.

During her residence in Bellingham, Engberg wrought great changes in the musical climate of the city. Looking back over her time with the Bellingham Symphony Orchestra, she noted: "[When I returned from Europe] there were not more than fifteen people in our home city who played anything. Now music students, especially violin[ists], are so numerous that Mr. Carl Faelten, a well-known Boston piano teacher, who spends his summers with us, remarked that anyone was conspicuous here if they did not carry a musical instrument."[54]

Her aim, she noted in 1917, was not wealth or personal fame, but the betterment of the community:

> As a few parting admonitions I would urge those interested in the development of our country to TRY STARTING AN ORCHESTRA FOR YOURSELF WHERE YOU ARE! MAKE YOUR MATERIAL! Buy all unusual necessary instruments, music; dig up out of your own pocket for whatever is needed and do not stop and wait for someone to help you, and when you have gotten it started, keep it up in spite of every obstacle (there are always plenty) and remember—no one has ever attained anything worthwhile without working for it and even sacrificing for it sometimes. Do not feel bad if your efforts are misunderstood and unappreciated. Your aim should be higher than to win appreciation—then you will never feel disappointed when it is lacking. Go straight ahead if you know you are right and be comforted in the knowledge that it is better to do things and make mistakes than to stagnate and do nothing. After awhile if you live up to a few of these suggestions you will begin to see the results of your efforts and a taste of the satisfaction in seeing music grow where all was silent will repay you for all the effort, time and money you have spent.[55]

From 1912 to 1919 Engberg also taught on the faculty of the Washington State Normal School (later Western Washington University). There she had fifty violin pupils, directed the school orchestra, taught courses in piano accompaniment, and served as head of the instrumental music department. When the Engberg family left Bellingham, Engberg's student Albert Bensen took over her place both as violin teacher at the Washington State Normal School and as director of the Bellingham Symphony Orchestra.[56]

Mary Davenport Engberg and the Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra

In 1920, after a family tour of Europe, the Engberg family moved to Seattle to pursue greater musical opportunities for Mary (see Figure 4). The family took up

[53] Mary Davenport Engberg, Bellingham Symphony Orchestra letterhead used for a letter to Caroline and Laura Engberg, 26 January 1918; Engberg, "How to Start a Local Symphony Orchestra," 310.

[54] Engberg, "How to Start a Local Symphony Orchestra," 309.

[55] Ibid., 310.

[56] See Mary Davenport Engberg, Letter to Albert Bensen, 5 June 1928, Unprocessed archives of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, Seattle, Wash.; and Program of the Davenport Engberg School of Music, "Artist Students in Concert," Mme. Davenport Engberg, Conductor, Metropolitan Theatre, Seattle, Wash., 28 October, no year, unprocessed archives of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.

Figure 4. Notice of Madame Engberg's move to Seattle and advertisement for lessons. Seattle Symphony Orchestra concert program, 28 January 1921. Used with permission, Seattle Symphony Library & Archives.

residence at 1702 Belmont Avenue, a grand mansion in the Capitol Hill district. Engberg again began a music school in their home, and Henry opened a surgical supply store in downtown Seattle.[57]

The Seattle Symphony Orchestra, which was originally founded in 1903, had a rocky history fraught with financial troubles. From 1911 to 1918 the orchestra's existence was tenuous, with only occasional concerts given under the leadership of John Spargur, who had been concertmaster under the previous conductor, Henry Hadley. In 1919 there was a rejuvenation of support for the orchestra, and a fundraising committee was re-formed. Prospects seemed bright, and the orchestra committee officially appointed Spargur as music director. He led one successful season before doubt began to spread again "as to the possibility of securing adequate support for so large an organization,"[58] and the 1920–21 season was never completed even though the musicians were willing to continue the season without pay. In spite of a

[57] Margaret Price, interview with the author, 10 January 2008. Margaret (Berge) Price's sister, Gladys (Berge) Engberg, was the wife of Paul Engberg, Mary Davenport Engberg's eldest son. During her years as a student at the University of Washington, Price lived with Engberg at her home in Seattle on the weekends.

[58] Edward Sheppard and Emily Johnson, "Forty Years of Symphony in Seattle, 1903–1943," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 35/1 (January 1944): 23.

Herculean fundraising effort led by Nellie Cornish and the Seattle Ladies' Musical Club, the 1921–22 season was canceled completely. The orchestra entered a period of dormancy that lasted until 1926. [59]

Upon her move to Seattle in 1920, Engberg sensed a need for increasing the expertise of orchestral players in the city and approached the American Federation of Musicians' Local 76 with the idea of forming a training orchestra. Her model was a similar organization in Chicago.[60] The union agreed to allow her to utilize some of its members in her ensemble as long as all were unpaid, and Engberg's "Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra" was born in the spring of 1921. The orchestra had a membership of approximately ninety male and female players.

The new Civic Symphony held its first concert on 24 April 1921 at the Metropolitan Theater. The program was fairly eclectic but not simplistic, including Ponchielli's "Dance of the Hours" from *La Giaconda*, Beethoven's "Egmont" Overture, and Victor Herbert's *American Fantasia*, among other works.[61] Reviews of this debut performance were positive. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* said, "The orchestra has reached a stage of progress proving it to be a valuable community asset as a means of inculcating a wider local appreciation of the best in music, an influence to promote the cultural advancement of Seattle."[62] Engberg herself was also praised for her efforts: "The reception accorded was an enthusiastic one and was as much a personal tribute to Mme. Davenport-Engberg, conductor, whose untiring efforts have resulted in bringing together an excellent musical organization, as it was to the contributing artists themselves."[63]

The Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra continued to achieve substantial success and served as the only symphony in Seattle when the Seattle Symphony Orchestra failed to reorganize in the fall of 1921. In the summer of 1923 Engberg again approached Local 76, this time proposing to form a professional symphony orchestra of union musicians, in addition to her amateur orchestra.[64] The union again complied, and on 7 October 1923 a *Seattle Times* article announced that during the ensuing season Engberg would conduct two orchestras: one amateur, and one professional, the members of which received remuneration at Local 76's pay scale. "For the last three years," the announcement read, "the Seattle Civic Symphony has taken gifted amateur students, semiprofessionals, and some professionals, all volunteers serving without remuneration, and the group has shown such progress that many Seattle musicians have felt the time ripe for a professional orchestra

[59] "Seattle's Women, through the Untiring Efforts of Nellie Cornish, Save City's Symphony Orchestra from Disbandonment [*sic*]," *Musical Courier*, 11 November 1920; Campbell, *Bagpipes in the Woodwind Section*, 14.

[60] Minutes of the Local 76 board meetings, 23 March 1921 and 5 April 1921. Also see Everhardt Armstrong, "Music and Musicians," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 24 April 1921. I am indebted to Gregory Dziekonski of Seattle for providing me with these sources and alerting me to the union's role in Engberg's work from 1921 to 1924. Gregory Dziekonski, Letter to the author, 11 June 2010.

[61] "Civic Orchestra Heard in Concert," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 25 April 1921.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Minutes of the Local 76 board meetings, 21 August 1923.

similar in type to that in Portland, and the new professional Civic Symphony is the result."[65]

The new orchestra, composed of approximately sixty-five musicians, some of whom had previously played in the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, took on the old name "Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra." This group would constitute the top orchestra in Seattle, bringing in renowned soloists and offering a five-concert series in its first year. Arnold Krauss, a well-traveled violinist who had previously played in the Cologne, Bucharest, Chicago, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, and Los Angeles Symphony Orchestras, was secured as concertmaster. The amateur orchestra became known as the "Seattle Civic Symphony Auxiliary Orchestra," recruiting mainly from among gifted students in the city.[66]

The first concert of the new Seattle Civic, which took place on 4 November 1923 at the Metropolitan Theatre with Mme. Frances Alda as soloist, generated enthusiastic reviews, stimulating interest for their second concert, scheduled for 25 November. For the second performance Engberg engaged Efrem Zimbalist as soloist. In addition to performing the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, Zimbalist played a set of solo violin works by York Bowen, Tor Aulin, and Pablo de Sarasate. Seattle music aficionados were pleased that the orchestra could attract such impressive soloists. Even before the concert the *Seattle Times* commented: "In bringing an artist of Zimbalist's stamp to Seattle the management has shown a fine regard for its patrons who have come to expect the unusual from this foremost of the city's musical organizations."[67] The concert was so well attended that the 1,650-seat theater was completely filled, and potential audience members had to be turned away at the door for lack of space.[68]

Meanwhile Engberg continued to receive attention for her own determination and perseverance. "To Mme. Davenport-Engberg, who organized and directs the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, great credit is due," stated an article in the *Musical Observer*. "Its present capabilities clearly show the vision she possesses, and her power to impress that vision upon others."[69] The same commentary stated that the orchestra "promises to be one of the finest orchestras on the coast," and that Seattle musicians considered it possibly the best musical ensemble of which Seattle had been able to boast.

The season continued with a third concert in January, and in March Engberg and the musicians of the Seattle Civic Symphony donated their services in a children's concert on 16 March 1924 at the Arena.[70] The orchestra season concluded with

[65] "Symphony Orchestra Formed: Will Give Winter Concerts," *Seattle Times*, 7 October 1923.

[66] "Orchestra to Open Season November 4," *Seattle Times*, 28 October 1923.

[67] Ibid.

[68] "Orchestra to Play 'Pathetique' Next," *Seattle Times*, 23 December 1923.

[69] "Mme. Davenport-Engberg, Only Woman Leader of Symphony Orchestra," *Musical Observer* (February 1924): 51. What this article refers to as "the Seattle Symphony Orchestra" is really the Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra. In press articles from the time, those two appellations are used interchangeably to describe the Civic Orchestra, although it is clear from Local 76 union minutes that the latter was not considered a replacement for the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. See Local 76 board minutes 1923–26; and "Musician and Playgoer," *Town Crier* (Seattle), 13 November 1926.

[70] "Children's Concert Today: Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra Will Present Program at the Arena," *Seattle Times*, 16 March 1924.

two concerts in the spring. The 6 April 1924 concert featured Boris Malsky, a lyric baritone, and Wasili Gromakovsky, dramatic baritone, in opera arias with orchestral accompaniment. The orchestra also performed Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*. On 4 May audiences heard pianist Ossip Gabrilowitsch, conductor of the Detroit Symphony, perform Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto.

During the 1923–24 season the Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra was so well received that an additional concert was requested,[71] but even so, Engberg did not continue conducting the professional orchestra after the season was complete. Minutes of Local 76 board meetings throughout the winter and spring of 1924 indicate that the orchestra was on unstable financial footing.[72] A 1924 article in the *New York Times* regarding the Seattle Symphony's troubled history also implies that the Civic Orchestra had to disband for financial reasons.[73]

A New Season: The Seattle Civic Opera and Other Musical Pursuits

Although her tenure with the Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra had ended, Mary Davenport Engberg did not fade from Seattle's musical life. In addition to continuing her own solo performances and serving as a piano accompanist for many Seattle musicians, Engberg formed a string quartet in 1925 that performed around Seattle and in the surrounding areas, including in her old home of Bellingham.[74] Playing second violin in her quartet was Maurice Leplat, who had studied at the Conservatoire National de Musique de Paris; the violist was Victor Tolpegin, a Russian immigrant who was formerly the concertmaster of the Petrograd Symphony. To play cello, Engberg tapped Gordon Hartshorn, who had previously held the principal chair in the Seattle Symphony. Their first concert was 18 February 1925 and included Tchaikovsky's first string quartet.[75]

Engberg continued to teach extensively in her elegant, gray granite home at 1702 Belmont Avenue, directing the "Davenport Engberg School of Violin" until her death in 1951 (see Figure 5). Staffed by Engberg and a group of assistant teachers, the school offered lessons in violin, viola, cello, piano, and string bass, as well as courses in music theory, composition, instrumentation, and piano accompaniment. Ensemble playing was emphasized for all the students, who had the opportunity to participate in chamber groups of various sizes, as well as in an orchestra under Engberg's direction.[76] The "Little Symphony," as the twenty-five-member orchestra was called, focused on the performance of concerto repertoire in order to give the

[71] Program of the Seattle Civic Symphony Orchestra, Mme. Davenport-Engberg, conductor, 25 November 1923.

[72] Minutes of the Local 76 board meetings, 3 January 1924 through 6 May 1924.

[73] "News and Comment of the Current Week in Music," *New York Times*, 31 August 1924.

[74] Although Engberg was involved with the Women's Musical Club in Bellingham throughout her adult life there, I have found no evidence that she joined the Seattle Ladies' Musical Club. Perhaps she felt her time was better spent working toward professional performance and teaching engagements.

[75] "String Quartet to Feature Musical Society's Program," *Seattle Times*, 15 February 1925.

[76] Mary Davenport Engberg, "Davenport Engberg School of Violin," advertising pamphlet, Seattle, Wash., n.d., collection held by Margaret Price, Seattle.

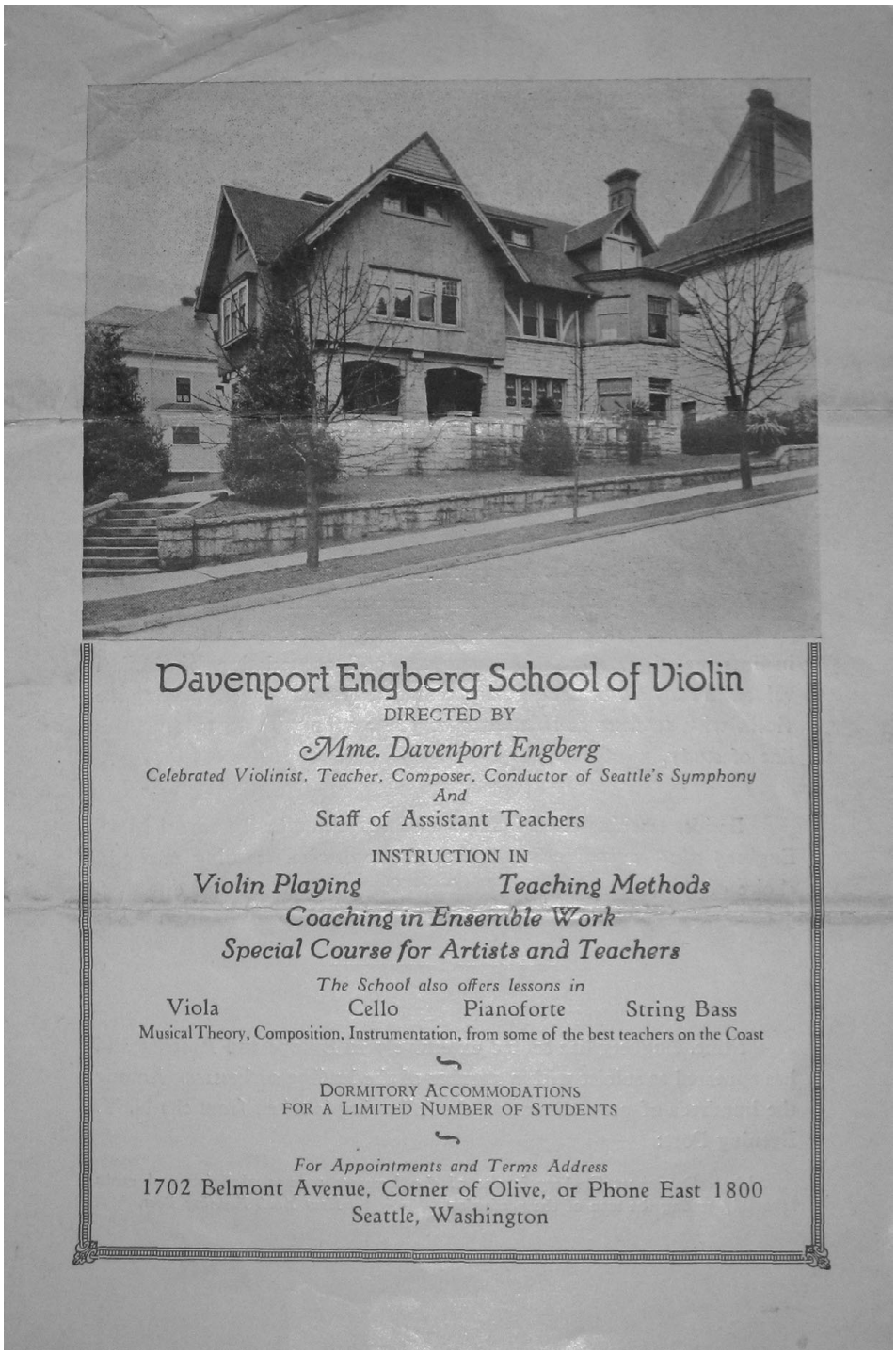

Figure 5. Front cover of a "Davenport Engberg School of Violin" advertising pamphlet. Seattle, no date. Courtesy of Margaret Price.

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students experience performing solos with orchestral accompaniment and also accompanied the Ladies Lyric Club Chorus, which was directed by Mary's eldest son, Paul.[77] The instrumental ensemble may have been exclusively a string orchestra, although Engberg never mentions arranging concerto repertoire to omit the wind parts. It is conceivable that she could have procured woodwind and brass players to join her own students.

Engberg was in high demand as a teacher. In 1937 the national periodical *Music and Musicians* noted that "the Engberg School of Music with its teaching schedule nearly already booked up anticipates a busy summer season. Students from many points of the United States are coming to study and coach with Mme. Engberg and Paul Engberg, director of Seattle Civic Opera Company."[78] In a 1965 interview, Paul recalled the vital importance of teaching for his mother, who developed a reputation for her ability "to aid young and aspiring talents."[79]

Many of Engberg's violin pupils went on to perform in other parts of the country, and some developed successful musical careers. Catherine Wade Smith, for example, appeared twice with the Chicago Symphony under Frederick Stock, and Albert Bensen became the head of the violin department at the Bellingham School of Music and the conductor of the Bellingham Symphony Orchestra.[80] Mildred Ebey Robinson won a scholarship to the Chicago College of Music, and Wilma Wills played for many years in the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.[81] Anita Lipp gave her debut recital in New York City on 2 April 1948 to great acclaim by critics and continued to perform there through 1950.[82] Twice, Engberg's students won the biennial contest of the National Federation of Music Clubs: Catherine Wade Smith of Bellingham in 1925, and Emily Bentley Dow, a sixteen-year-old from Seattle, in 1927.[83]

In 1932 Engberg and Paul founded the Seattle Civic Opera, after Paul had studied voice and performed operatic roles in Copenhagen, Berlin, and Vienna. Their goal for the opera society was to use local talent to produce grand opera, and to that end they recruited a board of directors to advertise and raise funds. Paul recruited and trained the singers; his mother rehearsed and directed an opera orchestra made up of musicians from the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.[84]

[77] See "Pupils Appear with Orchestra," *Seattle Times*, 17 February 1924, and "Lyric Society Will Present Spring Event," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 14 April 1935.

[78] "Mme. Engberg Presents Artist Student," *Music and Musicians* (April 1937): 7.

[79] Paul Engberg, interview with Galen Biery, 8 December 1965 (cassette recording, Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Western Washington University, Bellingham, Wash.).

[80] "Pupils Appear with Orchestra"; "Artist Students in Concert."

[81] Engberg, "Davenport Engberg School of Violin."

[82] "Anita Lipp Scores in Debut Recital," *New York Times*, 3 April 1948; "Opera and Concert Programs of the Week," announcement of Anita Lipp recital, *New York Times*, 12 November 1950.

[83] "News and Comment of the Current Week in Music," entry reporting that Emily Bentley Dow won the National Federation of Music Clubs Contest (references Catherine Wade Smith as well), *New York Times,* 1 May 1927.

[84] Information about Paul Engberg and the founding of the Seattle Civic Opera Association is gleaned from the author's interview with Patricia Engberg, 13 October 2007, and from clippings in Patricia Engberg's family collection.

The first opera the Seattle Civic Opera produced was Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, performed on 23 June 1932 at the Moore Theater. Paul Engberg himself sang the role of Wolfram von Eschenbach, with his brother Ralph taking the part of Hermann, the Landgrave. The other lead singers were drawn from music schools all over the city, with the aim of giving as many students as possible an opportunity to participate. This performance, as well as all subsequent ones under the Engbergs' direction, was sung in English.

The Seattle Civic Opera Association produced three operas each year into the mid-1930s, when it reduced that number to two. Rehearsals took place twice each week, and all the work was done on a volunteer basis, with costs being covered by fundraising. Even the Engbergs received no remuneration.[85] Only two operas actually brought in a profit; because the Engbergs wanted the productions to have wide exposure in the community, 600 of the 2,000 seats in the Moore Theater were regularly reserved for students and sold for less than 25 percent of the regular admission fee. Engberg directed the opera orchestra for two seasons, after which she handed the baton to Paul, who served as musical director until he was succeeded by Gustav Stern in 1944.[86]

Even when Engberg was no longer conducting the opera performances, she remained involved in the productions by sewing costumes, helping backstage, and hosting receptions in her home. In fact, Engberg was celebrated in Seattle for her social entertaining as well as her musical activities; the society pages of the newspapers record many buffet dinners and post-concert dessert parties when a new show opened.[87]

Throughout the 1930s, Mary and Henry Engberg's resources diminished as they neared retirement. Unfortunately they had speculated in real estate and therefore lost a large sum of money in the Great Depression; so Mary sold some of her finery and took in boarding pupils to supplement their income.[88]

Henry Engberg, who was sixteen years older than his wife, died on 10 December 1942, just three weeks shy of his seventy-eighth birthday.[89] Paul and Ralph Engberg took over the Engberg Surgical Appliance Company, but neither enjoyed the business, and it ran into trouble as its products became outdated. Rather than updating the business, Ralph and Paul let it dwindle and fail.

Despite her declining financial situation, Mary Davenport Engberg maintained her sense of aristocratic poise as she aged. A tiny woman with large clear eyes, a fine complexion, and deep red hair (even on the wig she wore later in life), she maintained a youthful appearance well into her sixties. She carried herself with a noble manner and commanding presence both on and off the stage. Engberg had a demanding personality; as a former violin student said, "She had to be a little overbearing with people to get what she wanted. She would tell a person off like a

[85] Margaret Price, interview with the author, 10 January 2008.

[86] "Grand Opera by Seattle: Civic Group Opens Ninth Season of Productions in English," *Newsweek*, 23 December 1940.

[87] "Many Entertain at Opera Performance" and "Tito Schipa to Be Guest at Reception," clippings in albums owned by Patricia Engberg, Enumclaw, Wash., n.d., and "Mrs. Engberg to Entertain Opera Star," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 16 December 1947.

[88] Margaret Price, interview with the author, 10 January 2008.

[89] "Funeral Rites Are Held for Henry Engberg."

man would."[90] Emma Backus Constans, a violinist in the Seattle Civic Orchestra, remembered that "she whipped us into shape with a no-nonsense attention to music."[91] Margaret Price, younger sister of Engberg's student and daughter-in-law Gladys Berge Engberg, remembers Engberg with both fear and admiration: Price was intimidated during the weekends she spent in the Engberg home while studying at the University of Washington in the late 1940s but was simultaneously impressed by Engberg's ability to be gracious, charming, and very engaging.[92]

In addition to her musical pursuits—she taught private lessons right up to the end of her life—Engberg took time for domestic activities. The family owned property in the Stanwood, Washington, area, and on the weekends they went out to their "farm" to tend livestock, grow vegetables, and enjoy the break from city life. Engberg gardened extensively in the yard of their Belmont home, and recreational trips to the mountains to fish and hike continued even in her later years (see Figure 6).[93] In Seattle, Engberg was a member of the American Association of Penwomen, the Soroptimist Club, and the Daughters of the American Revolution, and toward the end of her life she spent a great deal of time with her young grandchildren.

Legacy and Import

Mary Davenport Engberg died of a heart attack outside her home in Seattle on 23 January 1951. There were no public funeral services, and it seems that this absence of ceremony accelerated her rather quick disappearance from the collective memory of Seattle. Because Engberg was cremated, there is no grave to act as a memorial, and in 1965 her grand house was replaced with an apartment building in Seattle's changing south Capitol Hill neighborhood. Although Paul Engberg initially kept all of his mother's recital gowns, programs, and newspaper clippings, they too were eventually destroyed. The Seattle Symphony's financial turmoil and instability, which continued into the 1930s, and its lack of a permanent home until the 1990s, meant that the orchestra did not maintain an archive, and its records of the symphony's activities in the early 1920s are poor.[94] When Engberg's name is mentioned today, it is only in the context of the occasional Women's History Month tribute in the newspapers, or in a history of the Seattle Symphony, and these acknowledgments tend to brief and riddled with factual inaccuracies.[95]

[90] Steven Winn, "Seattle's—and the World's—First Woman Conductor," *Argus* (Seattle), 19 December 1975. Physical descriptors are from "Mrs. Davenport-Engberg" and recollections of Margaret Price.

[91] Emma Backus Constans, "Frontier Cosmopolite," *Argus* (Seattle), 9 January 1976. Constans wrote as a letter to the editor in response to Steven Winn's article "Seattle's—and the World's—First Woman Conductor" in the 19 December 1975 issue of *Argus*. Winn alleges that at one rehearsal, upset by a missed entrance, Madame Engberg slapped a musician across the face. In response, Constans writes, "I cannot remember in any rehearsal that I attended, and I missed very few, that a member of the orchestra was slapped, punched, or otherwise manhandled by Madame Engberg."

[92] Margaret Price, interview with the author, 10 January 2008.

[93] Ibid., and Patricia Engberg, interview with the author, 13 October 2007.

[94] See Campbell, *Bagpipes in the Woodwind Section*, 19. I observed the state of the records from the 1920s when I used the Seattle Symphony Orchestra's unprocessed archives.

[95] For example, "Mary Davenport-Engberg, Music Conductor" lists an incorrect birth date for Engberg and incorrectly credits her with being the only female conductor in Europe or the United States. Both of these errors are repeated in "Profile: Mary 'Madame' Davenport Engberg," *Bellingham*

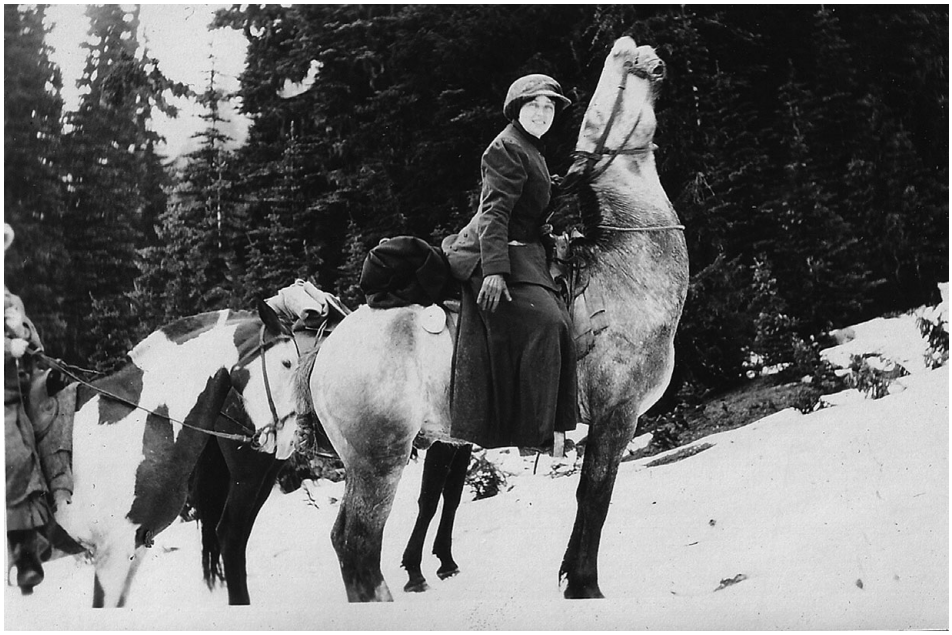

Figure 6. Mary Davenport Engberg riding a horse on Mt. Baker in Washington's North Cascade Mountains. Date unknown. Photograph courtesy of Patricia Engberg.

When Maud Powell praised the musical development Engberg fostered in Bellingham, she viewed that community as a microcosm of the progressiveness that she saw in the West.[96] As Powell told *Musical America*:

> The fact is that they have their own standards, their own very particular ideals in the West and they do not necessarily coincide with those that prevail here. I feel convinced that the proper place to look for the great American composers and works of the future will be the West. . . . Musical progressiveness is not equally distributed. I find many of the newer Western communities more prone to advance than [elsewhere in the United States]. . . . Through the work of one woman [Bellingham] has an orchestra on which it may well pride itself.[97]

Mary Davenport Engberg's career is representative of that independent Western mind-set. In addition, as a woman who sought to fully pursue her varied talents, she was fortunate to live in a community that welcomed her efforts with more openness than she might have encountered elsewhere. In fact, I have not uncovered a single recorded instance of Engberg's work being disparaged as a result of her gender.

Herald, 29 March 1998, along with an incorrect date for the organization of the Bellingham Symphony Orchestra. In "This Week in History: Engberg Leads Symphony," *Bellingham Herald*, 2 December 2001, Donald Whisenhunt states that Mary Engberg was the only female conductor in the world. "Local News," *Seattle Times*, 24 April 2008, repeats the "only female conductor" statement and asserts that the Seattle Symphony Orchestra disbanded in 1920 (the date was actually 1921) and that Engberg reorganized it only one year later.

[96] "'Go West, Young Musician!'" 5.

[97] Ibid.

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That other influences may have aided Engberg's career is undeniable. Although she received pay for her teaching engagements, both at her own School of Music and at the Normal School in Bellingham, her career was unquestionably assisted by her husband's financial support, which allowed Engberg to study in Europe after their marriage and then conduct her various ensembles without remuneration. Engberg moved in the higher circles of society in both cities, and these connections likely resulted from and assisted her pursuits.

It is also possible that Engberg's traditional domestic life while she had young children in Bellingham may have played a positive role in the public's perception of her during that phase of her career. Immediately after praising Engberg's playing and announcing an upcoming recital, for example, the *Bellingham Herald* noted that "Mrs. Engberg is a most devoted mother to her children."[98] This statement, unrelated to the substance of the concert announcement, may reveal that the commentator, and possibly the *Herald*'s audience, was more comfortable with the unusual inroads Engberg made into traditionally male roles because these forays were balanced by conventional family values.

Significant with relation to Engberg's Seattle legacy, although not to the importance of her career, is the question of Engberg's relationship to the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. Engberg's Civic Orchestra was not a continuation of the Seattle Symphony—it was formed before the disbandment of that organization in 1921, and Local 76 made a formal distinction between the latter and Engberg's orchestras. It is even possible that Engberg's early Seattle career was bolstered by the trouble the symphony was experiencing concurrently. Today, however, the Seattle Symphony Orchestra *does* claim Engberg as a former music director. Throughout the orchestra's 2003 centennial celebrations Engberg was touted as an example of the orchestra association's progressiveness in having had a female conductor, although research reveals that she never actually worked for the organization. This modern narrative is revisionist history at best, and the way in which the Civic Orchestra has been viewed by the Seattle Symphony throughout the past century begs further investigation.[99]

Within only a few years of her death, physical reminders of Engberg's life were gone, but her contributions to the development of the region's cultural history remain as evidence of her career. Driven by a philosophy of social improvement and of the power of music to better a community, she created many musical opportunities for citizens of the Pacific Northwest, she demanded quality playing from the musicians in her ensembles, and she achieved acclaimed performances. The professional careers attained by many of her students, the continuing influence that the Seattle Civic Opera Association has had on its scholarship beneficiaries, and the continuing presence of professional and amateur musical activities in Seattle and Bellingham, Washington, are varied testaments to this legacy, claiming for Engberg a significant place among the pioneers of music in the Pacific Northwest.

[98] "Mrs. Engberg to Appear on Normal Lecture Course."

[99] See "Local News"; Melinda Bargreen, "In the Conducting World, Where Are All the 'Chicks with Sticks'?" *Seattle Times*, 23 May 2010; and centennial brochures from the unprocessed archives of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra.

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