AN OBJECTIVE STUDY OF THE PRODUCTION PROBLEMS
ENCOUNTERED IN THE PREPARATION AND THE
PRESENTATION OF A CHORIC PERFORMANCE
OF SONS OF THE PRAIRIE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Speech
Indiana State Teachers College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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June 1949
The thesis of Herbert Adrian Rehner, Contribution of the Graduate School, Indiana State Teachers College, Number 625, under the title An Objective Study of the Production Problems Encountered in the Preparation and the Presentation of a Choric Performance of "Sons of the Prairie" is hereby approved as counting toward the completion of the Master's degree in the amount of 8 hours' credit.

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Date of Acceptance 2 June 1949
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with pleasure that I acknowledge the assistance of the members of my thesis committee, Professors: Robert W. Masters, Mary Reid McBeth, and Clarence M. Morgan.

I am also indebted to Miss Ruth Butts for assistance and many suggestions, and to Miss Eleanor Forsythe for her aid with the choreography; I appreciate as well the help given me by Mr. James Boyle, Miss Anna Baldwin, and Mr. Robert Loy, and I am particularly indebted to the personnel of the verse speaking choir.

H. A. R.
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CHAPTER ONE

THE INTRODUCTION AND THE PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

In the field of speech comparatively little has been done as yet with choral or verse speaking. It is a relatively undeveloped field, with few text books, with few authorities, and without any set rules concerning the manner in which choral speaking should be presented.

Because so little is known about choral speaking, it seemed logical and advisable to try to determine some of the basic fundamentals concerning a field of speech that can be valuable in helping to form good speech habits.

Within this work the author has tried to formulate some rules, to present solutions to several problems and to show the step by step procedure in preparing a choral speech program for public presentation. In working with the long narrative poem, "Sons of the Prairie", the author of this thesis was able to form an almost perfect interpretation of the words owing to the fact that the poem used was the work of the writer.¹

The basic personnel for the experiment was a class in verse speaking composed of thirty-five students and taught by Miss Ruth Butts, which met at Indiana State Teachers College during the winter term of 1949. Most of the members of the class were speech majors; this made it an ideal group with which to work, and should by no means be considered unusual, as adequate speech background should be provided before a student elects work in choral speaking, due to the stress placed on good diction and enunciation.

The writer was able to satisfy his own curiosity on many points and was able to find many short cuts to a more complete interpretation by the trial and error method. It is hoped that other pioneers in this very important field may profit from this work, and it is hoped that they will find as much pleasure by working in choral speech as the author was able to do, both in the classroom exercises and in the public presentation of the choral drama, "Sons of the Prairie".
CHAPTER TWO

THE TYPE OF MATERIAL AVAILABLE FOR THE EXPERIMENT

A verse choir is simply a group of people speaking either alone or in unison for the purpose of producing some certain effect desired by the group as a whole.

It may be composed of people who devote themselves to this work for years or it may be composed of people who do work in choral speaking for the sheer joy of it.2

About the only thing that a director needs to be concerned with during the early stages of work with a speaking choir, is to decide how large a group he needs. This depends a great deal on the type of material being presented, the size of the auditorium, and the strength of the voices used.

For the production which this thesis describes, it was necessary to use as many voices as possible so that the story would carry to the audience with little difficulty and so that an enormous energy and loudness could be brought forth whenever the interpretation of

the lines seemed to warrant such procedure.

For the needed volume and power thirty-five voices were considered to be adequate; so the entire class in verse speaking was used for the project.

Each person selected a poem, which he thought would best give evidence of his vocal quality, and prepared it for reading. As this poem was presented to the class, the vocal quality, tone, range, and power of each individual was rated. Then, the group was divided into four major divisions: dark men, dark women, light men, and light women. When these divisions spoke, they would stand so that the dark voices were directly behind the light voices, as those with less power should be placed closest to the audience.  

The voices were called "dark" because of their quality, which was usually rather heavy and because their projection was very strong. Naturally, the "light" voices were so designated because of the speaker's softer quality and their inability to project as well as the stronger vocal group.

The next step was the consideration of the type of material to use for this experimental production. The very fact that the whole project was to be an

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3 See Figure Number 1, p. 72.
objective experiment indicated that we would have to pick something which would lend itself to experimentation, both in the dramatic and interpretative sense. After careful consideration it was decided to adapt one of the authors own narrative poems called "Sons of the Prairie"^4 for the project. This poem had to be greatly enlarged from the original version and it had to be arranged for solo and group speaking.

When the adaptation was completed, it was found that the poem told a fairly complete story of the development and the establishment of civilization upon the plains.

In order to balance the important historical points in the story, and to equalize the dancing interludes, the period of the great Gold Rush was placed after the occurrence of the war between the states. It is an author's privilege to exercise poetic license in such cases as did Browning in some of his poems; Also from the standpoint of the production this was necessary because the Civil War was meant to be the half-way mark, and something more was needed to fill the second half. The Gold Rush was thus enacted at a time which was actually historically incorrect. This

point did not alter the telling of the Western Develop-
ment, nor did it hinder the understanding of the story.

Because the first version of the poem was pro-
tected by copyright secured by the publishers of Pastime of Eternity, their permission to present the poem as choral drama was requested and permission was granted.\(^5\)

After consideration of the material it was found that an interpretative ballet would probably add to the understanding of the work and so it was decided to use eurythmics throughout the production.\(^6\)

Before the work was adjusted for choral arrange-
ment it was set forth in the following manner:

At first there was nothing.
Only the low wind as it rushed o'er the hills;
And the scorching sun
As it beat out its mirages on the grass.
The deep, dread snow that lost its use,
Making the cold more desolate in its winter's glare.

Then with a huge shaggy beast,
With its short stubby horns,


\(^6\) A class in Modern Dance instructed by Miss Eleanor Forsyth was used for some of the dances.
Came the red men;
Civilization was born on the prairie!

Need is the want that makes men kill what is useful.
The buffalo were many and the Indians few,
So all went well.
Then far from this stretch of fantastic earth,
Far to the East in three tiny ships,
Men came to seek the riches of a new found pearl.
Westward was the cry.
The Latins saw a shaggy beast,
As they fought their way across the sands,
Hating both!

Out of the far Atlantic shore
A white race moved in from the sea.
They had a look of wonder,
And the first, deep seed of love
Was formed in their eyes.
Out of the huge white clouds that formed
On the distant horizon,
Out of the dirt and the grass
And the low rolling, sweltering hills,
Out of the earth
And into the world of air and men
Came the sons of the prairie!

The sons of the prairie
With a low, hoarse cry,
Filled with the triumph of birth,
Rush on the land with their shouts and their hopes.
Seeking only to learn,
Seeking now to learn they wait,
Learning better how to wait
For the years to come when they'll seek to live.
But for now all is peace,
Mingled with the pride and the joy
They feel for the prairie.

The long rolling slumbering earth;
Climb to the rises and see the grass covered plain,
Swelling like a mighty ocean,
Lapping its waves at the very sky.
This is the heritage;
It burns bright in the men's eyes,
In the quick easy movements of their arms,
And their long, long strides.
These tall strong youths,
Filled with the knowledge of youth,
Seeking and searching and always loving their prairie.
The seasons of the year on the plains
Give forth a whole lifetime of understanding.
The very silence of its vast stillness
Tells the story of man's beginning.
Silence is a music in its own right.
The pulsating beat of the earth's heart
Is more clearly heard,
In the voices of the wind,
The singing of the rain,
The shrieking of the hail
As it falls in balls of glistening ice,
Striking the hard, stark ground,
Trembling into tiny chipped diamonds.
It is the beginning and the end;
It is the truth and the promise;
It is the hope and the need;
It is the prairie!

The long, slow trains of wagons move now,
Straight across the plains.
They plunge into a place not seen before,
The eyes of men open strangely
With its new sights
Burned forever into his mind,
By the ever blazing sun,
The ever blowing winds.
Faces become red,
Lips seem cracked,
The pores of the skin close their doors
To the new sights.
But the wagons creep on and on,
Into the fiery setting sun.
Always he seeks her resting place,
Building his domain on her doorstep.

Have you listened to the beating of a far away drum?
Do you know the thrill it gives?
The demand it makes?
With this great West as the drum
The nation now beats with the fearful hammer of war!

Out of the lushness of a Southern clime
The drums sound softly;
Then as the men answer with their heartbeats,
The drums set fire to the prairie of man's reason!
Now comes the fearful test of war!
War with its lust, its greed, its damnation.
War does not take the old and the useless,
Nor does it take the hypocrite, the traitor or scoundrel,
They do not go.
From the life-blood of a great nation,
War takes the virile youth of the downy skin,
With laughing eyes,
And wide quick-moving nostrils.
It takes the unruly hair and the treble voice.
Brother against brother;
Father against son
For something only few understand.
So the prairie rested while the war raged
In its bitterness and in its hate.

Upon the rhythmic rays of the sun
Word was sent that peace had come!
Peace had come.
Peace with its carpet bags,
Its Negro congresses, its hooded whites.
Peace with its hate and its ruin and its woe.
The President has been murdered!
Murdered?
At Ford's Theatre--he's dead!

This was the peace,
This was the beginning of the end.
The end of slavery,
The end of the South,
The end of a way of life.
The end of a man who tried,
Who tried to live that all might live in peace!
This peace that now had come!

As the years passed the men of destiny
Had pushed their way to the very end
Of that Western soil by the calm sea,
Where sailors say
No rougher water rests upon an ocean bed.
In the state of the Great Bear,
In a town with a mill for a name,
A word was sent,
Whispered,
Conferred,
Talked,
Shouted,
Shrieked,
Screamed,
GOLD! GOLD! GOLD!

The Middlewest lost whole towns,
Neighbors packed a few belongings and were gone.
By thousands they put their ruts into the plains.
The dust, the storms, the drought, the Indians,
All tried to halt the rush,
But at last, the prairie, weary of fighting man,
Gave up herself to him,
Letting him stream to seek secluded stores
Of shiny sin!

The years passed;
As the character of man has changed,
So has the prairie;
As the character of the land has changed,
So has the prairie;
As the character of the world has changed,
So has the prairie!

But listen:
Hear the last, long-drawn-out drum?
It is the death knell of the prairie.
Of the prairie—that alone?
If only of the prairie
Then would we be sure of hope.
What if it is the knell of more than that?
What if the sea of grass has passed in us as well?
But man is master of his fate,
The master even of his hell.

The sons of the prairie have passed and gone.
The land they fought for, restless lies,
Calling its sorrow to the listing wind,
Sending its summons up to the skies!
CHAPTER THREE

ORGANIZATION OF MATERIAL

Several different styles and several different arrangements were worked out with emphasis on solo parts and sometimes on choral speaking, and finally after trying them all, it was decided to use those portions which sounded the best.

For the most part the solo voice took only those portions of the story dealing primarily with philosophy, whereas the choir itself was concerned with presenting the narration.

The lines of the poem were broken down very carefully and arranged so as to give the best possible effect; thus, the opening passages finally went like this:

Dark Voices: At first (pause) there was (pause) nothing.

(The music came up in the background; Number 6 of "The Pines of Rome". The speaking continues with this music as a supporting background. The spots pick up three figures kneeling, one on each side of a girl and one behind. These figures represent the Maiden.

7 See Glossary p. 79.
Prairie and The Sons. The lights come up very faintly blue)

Dark Girls: Only the low wind (draw out those last words) as it rushed (quickly) o'er the hills!

Dark Boys: And the scorching sun (this next with emphasis) as it beat out its mirages (pause) on the grass.

Light Voices: (Enunciate and stress each word) The deep, dread, snow that lost its use, making the cold more desolate, in its winter's (pause) glare.

(The entire choir building gradually on these next lines must show power and strength and reach its maximum volume on "civilization")

Choir: Then (pause) with a huge shaggy beast, with its short stubby horns, (pause) came the red men. (Loudly) Civilization (pause) was born (pause) on the prairie.

A policy of "trial and error" was followed constantly for the arrangement of the whole work, and the final decision was reached only after every variation of delivery had been tried.
It was possible to see which portions had to be given by one voice and what should be presented by the choir as a whole.

Many changes were made as rehearsals progressed, but the best way to indicate how the production version was established is to take the poem and break it into segments as we actually used it. Then, the explanatory version will be followed by a complete technical explanation. Thus, after the above opening passages, the poem continued:

First Man: Need is the want that makes men kill what is useful.

(Deliver this with no particular feeling, but enunciate and project clearly for a good understanding; this applies to most of the individual lines)

Second Man: The buffalo were many and the Indians few.

Solo Voice: So all went well.

(This next choir speech is built slowly. It gradually increases in volume and is delivered in a jerky manner)

Choir: Then (pause) far from this stretch of fantastic earth (pause) far to the east in three tiny ships, (pause) men came to
seek the riches of a new found (pause) pearl.

(The story so far is simply that there was nothing in existence on the prairie at the very beginning. There were certainly elements—the wind, the sun, and the snow. However, the buffalo finally arrived and with them came the Indians and so civilization, of a sort, was established. The Indians killed only for food and shelter and there were so many buffalo that there was no trouble. But across the seas came the early Spanish Conquistadores. They realized the vast potentialities of this new land and started to exploit its riches)

(Half of the choir now establishes a background chant, half-singing "Westward—Westward" and the other speeches are delivered over this chant) 8

All Boys: (Loudly) Westward (pause) was the cry!
(Pause) The Latins saw a shaggy beast
(pause) as they fought their way across
the plains (pause) hating both!

(The men now take up the same chant alone, so that it will be in contrast with the girls)

All Girls: (Softly and with perfect enunciation)
Out of the far Atlantic shore (pause) a
white race (pause) moved in from the sea.

8 See Music on pp. 84-85.
(Pause) They had a look of (with wonderment in each voice) wonder. (Pause)
(Stress each word in the following series)
And the first (pause) deep seed of love
(pause) was formed (pause) in their eyes.

(Men in the choir build their chant of "Westward" and gradually let it fade out completely. There is a moment of hushed silence; the record has been faded out and the lights start slowly to come up with reds, blues, and spots)

Choir:

(Starting in a very hushed voice and building so that the last line is at top volume) Out of the huge white clouds that form on the distant horizon. (Pause) Out of the dirt and the grass and the low rolling, sweltering hills (pause) out of the earth and into the world of air and men (pause) come the sons of the prairie!

(As each "out" is given one of the figures (boys) rises and starts to sway in rhythm with the music which is once more playing. The boy on Stage Right comes up on "Out of the huge white clouds, etc." The one on Stage Left comes up on "Out of the dirt and the grass, etc.", and the one back of the Maiden Prairie rises on "Out of the earth, etc." They dance as the various elements already described, the Sun, the Wind, and the Snow move about the Prairie and try to get her to come to life. The music reaches a climax and
slowly the Prairie does start to breathe. The Sons hoist her on their shoulders and carry her around the stage and finally place her back on the stage. She rushes about the stage and about the Sons filled with the joy of birth and they at last engage in her wild rejoicing and pick her up once more and bear her in triumph off the stage while the elements dance with happiness at having the Maiden Prairie with them at last. As the lights change, new music begins, Record Number Five)

Second Man: The Sons of the Prairie with a low hoarse cry, filled with the triumph of birth, rush on the land with their shouts and their hopes.

First Women: Seeking only to learn, they wait, learning better how to wait for the years to come when they'll seek to live.

Third Man: But for now, all is peace, mingled with the pride and the joy they feel for the prairie.

(The lights change again and the spots in front of the choir pick up the ballet which tells of the understanding of the Prairie for her new life. She is thrilled by all of the elements, the mountains, the trees, the songs of the birds; finally, she is overcome and rushes in happiness from the stage while the Sons kneel and wait for the years that are to come. Now, half of the choir sings "Searching, seeking", as a background to the spoken word which follows)
The long rolling, slumbering earth.
(Pause) Climb to the rises and see the grass covered plains, (pause) swelling like a mighty ocean (pause) lapping its waves at the very sky.

This is the heritage. (Pause) It burns bright in the men's eyes.

(Emphasize) In the quick (pause) easy movements of their arms, (pause) and their long, (pause) long strides.

These tall young youth, (pause) filled with the knowledge of youth, (pause) seeking (hit) and searching and always loving their prairie!

(The entire choir now joins in singing "Searching, seeking". They build it, and then let it fade very slowly. The lights fade with the singing and then start back up on the next speech)

The seasons of the year on the plains Give forth a whole lifetime of understanding. The very silence of its vast stillness Tells the story of man's beginning.

(In a hushed voice, hitting each word)
Silence (pause) is a music (pause) in its own (draw out and clip off sharply) right!

(The choir now starts a two part chant with half of the people saying "Beat, beat, etc.", and the other half with "Pounding, pounding, pounding, etc."). They gradually divide in half until only part of the choir is doing the background chant, then the other part of the group delivers the next lines)

**Choir:**

The pulsating beat (pause) of the earth's heart (pause) is more clearly heard.

(The choir as a whole stops its chant and only five women continue with these next few words)

**Women:**

In the voices of the wind
The singing of the rain
The shrieking (make it shriek!) of the hail, As it falls (hit each word) in balls of glistening ice,
Striking the hard (pause) stark ground, (pause) Trembling (pause) into tiny chipped diamonds.

(The background of "Beat, beat" and "Pounding, pounding" comes up once more)

**Choir:**

(In a heavy matter-of-fact voice, full of power) It is the beginning and the end;
It is the truth and the promise;
It is the hope and the need;

Solo:  It is the prairie!

(The lights change now and become blood red. The sound of heavy drums can be heard in the distance. The choir starts and initial chant and then goes on with the story)

Choir:  There were many things (pause) on the prairie:
Clouds.
Grass.
Hills.
Rocks.
Mountains.

There were many people (pause) on the prairie.
White men.
Latinas.

(Strike each word with equal emphasis)
And there were Indians! (All of the choir members fold their arms in Indian fashion)

Solo:  From this land you pushed me;
Took my wigwam and my horses;
Took my people and my tribe;
Took my sons and all my daughters;
Made me old, and worn and broken;
I, the Indian, proud, but broken!

(With all of the lights red the men now execute an Indian dance which symbolizes their life, their pushing back and their eventual defeat and disappearance from the prairie. Drums and chants are the only music. Half of the girls and half of the boys now start a chant with the girls doing the first two lines and the boys doing the last two)

Girls: Into the sun, into the sun.
Boys: West we go, west we go.

Choir: (This chant continues as the rest of the choir speaks) The long (pause) slow (pause) trains of wagons moved on. Straight across the plains.

Solo: (The chant softens) they plunge into a place not seen before; the eyes of men open strangely with its new sights, burned forever into this mind, by the ever blazing sun, the ever-blowing winds.

Faces become red, lips seem cracked,
Girl Singer: Here is the prairie,
Here is my home.
Here will I stay,
Nevermore to roam.
Here is the prairie,
And here I belong,
Here on the prairie,
Here on my home.
(Chorus) Roll on wagon,
Roll on wagon,
Roll on wagon,
To my prairie home!⁹

Choir: But the wagons creep on and on,
Into the fiery, setting sun;
(urgently) Always man follows the sun.
Always he seeks her resting place,
Building his domain on her doorstep.

(The background gradually lets its chant die out, and one girl sings while the rest of the group follows)

⁹ See Music on pp. 84-85.
(The choir joins in and all sing this last chorus very loudly. Then almost immediately they plunge into "Oh, Suzannah" and on the second verse one of the men shouts "Let's have a dance!" The choir rushes off the platforms and all sing and two groups of four dance a square dance. When the round of dancing is completed, the man calls them to "Roll the Wagons" and the choir takes its place while singing the chorus of "Roll on Wagon". Now, as the lights change to a deep blue, the choir starts the next section)

Choir: (Chanting) In my Father's house are many mansions,
A place where each man may in safety dwell.

Men: (Very deliberately) Some went west for land;

Light Voices: (In the same manner) Some went west for money;

Women: (The same) Some went west (pause) for (pause) God!

(The choir now hums the verse and chorus of "Dear Land of Home" from "Finlandia" while a solo voice says:) 

Solo Girl: Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place for generations, before the mountains were brought forth--or ever thou hast formed the earth and the world--even from
everlasting to everlasting--thou art God!

(The choir swells so as to come in as loudly as possible. Then, when this humming is over the solo woman goes ahead with the reading)

Solo Woman: (In a light and gay voice) There were other religions, too. There were the (pause) pain killers!

Man: (Shouting) Are you saved, brothers and sisters?

Choir: Yes, Lord! Amen! Brother, yes!

Man: There is one not saved?

Choir: Who? Speak up! Amen!

Man: It is a (pause) woman!

Choir: Oh unhappy day! Woe--woe--woe! Forgive her Lord!

Man: Yea verily--she is forgiven for the Lord is merciful!

Choir: (Singing loudly) They's washed in the blood and saved by grace,
Safe from sin and shame and disgrace;  
They fell by the way--but they turned to  
Gaud to pray.  
And they's saved by the blood of the  
Lamb.

(Waving his hands and shouting) Saved!  
Saved! Go and sin no more!

(Choir sings chorus of "Roll on Wagon",  
and then repeats some of the earlier  
lines)10

But the wagons creep on and on,  
Into the fiery, setting sun.  
(Stress all of this) Always man follows  
the sun;  
Always he seeks her resting place,  
Building his domain on her doorstep.

(The lights will be full red now and as  
the choir builds on "Into the sun, west  
we go", the music comes up and the choir  
leaves the stage. The Civil War then  
occurring with the dancers portraying in  
movement the happenings of the war.11  
The lights start to be red now and the  
choir continues with the background.  
Then as a drum sounds offstage they all  
join together with a loud "Boom". They

10 See Music found on pp. 84-85.  
11 See Ballet description on pp. 59-60.
do this three times and each time all of
the lights on the stage go off and then
come back on)

Choir: Have you listened to the beating of a
far away drum?
Do you know the thrill it gives (urgently)
The demand it makes?

(Building gradually louder and with more
deep quality)

With this great west as the drum,
The nation now beats with the fearful
hammer of (shout) WAR!

Girls: (Softly) Out of the lushness of the
Southern clime
The drums sound (pause) softly!

Boys: (Building loudly) Then (pause) as the
men answer with their heartbeats (pause)
the drums set fire to the prairie of man's
reason!

(Background of girls come in with a chant
and song of "Oh-o-o, Oh-o-o")

12 See Music on pp. 84-85.
Men: Now comes the fearful test of war!

First Man: (With obvious sincerity) War with its lust, its greed, its damnation.

Woman: War does not take the old and the useless.

Third Man: Nor does it take the hypocrite, the traitor or scoundrel—they do not go.

Solo: From the life-blood of a great nation, War takes the virile youth of the downy skin With laughing eyes, and wide, quick-moving nostrils. It takes the unruly hair, and the treble voice.

First Man: Brother against brother.

Woman: Father against son, for something only few understand.

Choir: So the prairie rested (pause) while the war raged (pause) in its bitterness and in its hate!

(As the entire choir joins in on the
background the "Cloudburst" in the "Grand Canyon Suite" comes up and they quickly leave the stage. The dance shows the start, the conflict, and the aftermath of the war. As the war ends, the people rush back onto the stage shouting and start singing "When Johnny Comes Marching Home". After two lines of this song, half of the choir sings "The Battlehymn of the Republic". After two lines of this, the choir starts to sing both songs over again--half doing one song and the other half the other song. They both end so that they can all join in with the singing of the "Glory, glory" chorus.

When Johnny Comes Marching home again,
Hurrah, Hurrah!
We'll give him a hearty welcome then,
Hurrah, hurrah!
The men and boys will all turn out,
The laddies they will laugh and shout,
And we'll all feel gay,
When Johnny comes marching home.

Mine eyes have seen the glory
Of the coming of the Lord,
He is trampling out the vintage
Where the grapes of wrath are stored.
He has losed the fateful lighting,
Of his terrible swift sword,
His truth is marching on!

13 See Ballet description on pp. 59-60.
Glory, glory hallelujah,
Glory, glory hallelujah,
Glory, glory hallelujah,
His truth is marching on!

(As the lights become more bright in color, the choir hums the "Glory, glory" chorus and the speaking continues)

Man: Upon (with exhaltation) the rhythmic rays of the sun, word was sent (pause) that peace had come!

Choir: That peace had come!

(Sbackground: each division comes up with 'peace, peace, peace' then all PEACE!)

Solo: Peace had come! Peace with its carpet bags, its Negro congresses, its hooded whites.

Man: Peace with its hate and its ruin and its woe!

Woman: Peace with its death and its murder.

First Man: The President has been (pause) murdered!

Second Man: Murdered?
Choir: Murdered?

Second Man: At Ford's Theatre—he's dead!

(Now comes the dance of mourning, symbolizing the nation's grief at the death of Lincoln. Life must go on so the nation tries to carry on, even in supreme sorrow)\(^\text{14}\)

Solo: This was the peace. This was the beginning of the end. The end of slavery, the end of the South, the end of a way of life. The end of a man who tried, who tried to live that all might live in peace—this peace that now had come!

(Lights fade to blues and music comes up to back these next words)

First Man: As the years passed, the men of destiny had pushed their way to the very end of the Western soil, By the calm sea, where sailors say No rougher waters rest upon an ocean bed.

Choir: (Quietly then building, doing what each word says)

\(^{14}\) See Ballet description p. 60.
In the state of the great bear,
In a town with a mill for a name,
A word was sent,
Whispered,
Conferred,
Talked,
Shouted,
Shrieked,
Screamed,
GOLD! GOLD! GOLD!

(Background comes up with "Stop them, stop them, try to stop them")

Man: (Quickly, as are all of these speeches)
The Middlewest lost whole towns.

Woman: Neighbors packed a few belongings and were gone!

Solo: By thousands they put their ruts into the plains.

Girls: The dust,

Boys: The storms,

The Girls: The drought,

The Boys: The Indians,
Solo: The years passed.
As the character of man has changed,
So has the prairie;
As the character of the land has changed,
So has the prairie;
As the character of the world has changed,
So has the prairie!

(Background of "Boom, boom")

Choir: All tried to halt the rush,
But at last, the prairie (pause)
Weary of fighting man (pause)
Gave up herself to him.
Letting him stream to seek secluded
stores (pause)
Of shiny (pause) sin!

(Ballet once more in bright colors both
in lights, costumes and movements
symbolizing the finding of gold and
what happened to the men) 15

(The lights go dim and drums and the
"Oh" 16 chant is heard; the music comes
up Number Six of "The Pines of Rome")

Solo: The years passed.
As the character of man has changed,
So has the prairie;
As the character of the land has changed,
So has the prairie;
As the character of the world has changed,
So has the prairie!

(Background of "Boom, boom")

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15 See Ballet description p. 60.
16 Music for Chant on pp. 84-85.
But listen!
Hear the last long drawn-out drum?
It is the death-knell of the prairie!

First Man: Of the prairie—-that alone?

Second Man: If only of the prairie,
Then would we be sure of hope.
What if it is the knell of more than that,
What if the sea of grass has passed in us as well?

Solo: But man is master of his fate;
The master even of his hell!

(As Number 6 of "The Pines", plays from the beginning the Maiden Prairie and the Sons come on stage and dance the Finale)17

Choir: (With rising volume and power)
The sons of the prairie have passed and gone;
The land they fought for, restless lies;
Calling its sorrow to the listing wind,
Sending its summons (pause) up (pause)

17 See Ballet description p.61.
to the skies!

(Final music, Number 6 of "The Pines", and the end of the ballet)
CHAPTER FOUR

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

With a cast as large as this one the ordinary technical problems took on a larger importance than is usual. Most important was the need of a physical plant large enough to accommodate all of the cast and the dancers and to provide room enough for the technical crews to adequately carry on their duties.

A gymnasium was considered, and rehearsals were even held for several days in such a location; but the acoustics proved to be so unpredictable that we were forced early to abandon that plan.

After serious thought and inquiry, the Department of Speech decided that there might be enough interest from the townspeople to warrant a public performance, and so it was decided to present the drama as an experimental production in the Sycamore Theatre. Because Dorrance and Company of Philadelphia controlled the rights to the original poem, no admission could be charged, and this meant that all production costs would have to be kept to a minimum.

However, through the generosity of the Sycamore Players and their director Dr. Robert W. Masters, the
play was given an adequate and above average technical front, and was presented under the sponsorship of this dramatic group.

The vast organization of the Sycamore Players was placed at the disposal of the author, crews were organized by the technical director of the Players, and the basic technical needs were outlined. It was decided to use only a simple setting and to allow the lighting changes to set the mood and change the set.

The stage of the Sycamore Theatre is quite shallow, and there is almost no space on either side back of the proscenium opening for either equipment or actors. This complicated the placing of the crews and the dancers waiting to come on stage.

A simple, but effective, method of blocking the actors off stage was decided on, and the rehearsals were carried on with this arrangement in mind.18

Because of the many light changes, a backdrop painted white was used so that the colors might be changed more efficiently and easily. Two strip lights were used to light the bottom of this drop and the third border strips were used to light the top of the drop. The second border lights were red and blue

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18 See Figure Number 2, p. 73.
as were the X-ray lights. Three attic or beam spots were employed and six baby spots at the front of the stage in the teaser position were also used. Flood lights were used off right and left stage to illuminate the dancers' faces.\(^{19}\)

It was decided to place the choir on three risers at the back with two leg risers on each side and in this manner practically the entire visible width of the stage area was used. The choir was thus placed in two lines with the dark voices behind the light.\(^{20}\) These risers were painted black so as to absorb light, and the masking teasers and flats were also in black.

As rehearsals progressed, the director found that it would be necessary to direct the group throughout the actual performance; so a speaking stand was placed on the auditorium floor directly in front of the speaking group. The choir had no difficulty in seeing the direction and this made possible a perfectly cued and timed presentation which otherwise would probably have been impossible.

When the matter of costumes had to be decided on, the group was in a rather difficult position.

\(^{19}\) See Figure Number 3, p. 74.

\(^{20}\) See Figure Number 1, p. 72.
The Sycamore Players had not done a production in which a chorus line had been employed for several years; so there were virtually no costumes available. The women of the chorus should have been dressed in long tight-fitting leotard tops and ankle length skirts of blue and grey colors. The cost of the clothes proved to be too high; so the plan to completely outfit the girls' ballet had to be abandoned. About thirty women were selected from two physical education classes in modern dance and they provided their own leotards and short colored skirts. These did little more than suggest that an attempt at costuming had been made, but the soaring production costs made this arrangement obligatory.

There were five men in the men's dancing group, and their costumes needed only to be basic and suggestive of the soil and the ancestry from whence they had sprung; so dungaree pants and white knitted shirts were used. Rope cord was used to tie the pants and sandals, and they wore black socks.

These five men, because of available rehearsal time, took over the burden of most of the dances. The women appeared in only two of the sequences, doing only one alone.

The Maiden Prairie wore a costume especially
designed for her by the author made of georgette and satin, both in blue. It gave the appearance of a flowing movement and made her seem to be rather ethereal. This costume was the only one which represented any expenditure of money, but its effect was so good and so necessary to the understanding of the ballets that it proved to be well worth its cost.
CHAPTER FIVE

DAILY REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

The total amount of time to be spent by the verse choir amounted to ten weeks, and with this in mind the following schedule was prepared and proved to be very effective.

Monday, January 10

Each student presented and read a poem to the class which he or she had already prepared. In this way the different voices were divided into heavy, light, and medium.

Wednesday, January 12

The students were grouped together after a fashion and spent the day going over simple exercises and vocal blendings. The importance of correct breathing was pointed out, and work was done on several breathing and vocal exercises.

Thursday, January 13

21 The college classes at nine o'clock do not meet on Tuesday, so few rehearsals were held on this day.
The entire poem, "Sons of the Prairie", was read to the class by the author, but little or no explanation was given at this time as to what the poem actually meant. Each member of the class was asked to type a certain number of copies of the work so that all members might have a complete script with which to work.

Friday, January 14

The whole choir was rearranged so that they would be in better working positions and in approximately the same positions that they would assume when they finally started standing on the platform.

The first few lines were presented and the group worked on enunciation and articulation more than on a general effect. The day ended with more work on vocal exercises and breathing control.

Monday, January 17

More of the poem was presented and the group was divided into sections, so that part work might be developed. All people were still using their scripts.

Wednesday, January 19 to Friday, January 28

The poem was presented a bit at a time with background effects being gradually worked in. By
Thursday, February 3

More work was put on the first half without the use of scripts and with the music background.

Wednesday, February 2

A wire recording was made of the choir and played back to them so that they might see what tones were lacking and to check on enunciation and articulation.

Monday, January 31

The author spent this entire period taking the poem line by line and giving an explanation of the meaning of all of the words and of each verse. After this explanation, a recording of the music was played so that the choir might have an idea of probable pausing and general mood that would be established by use of the music.

Wednesday, February 2

A wire recording was made of the choir and played back to them so that they might see what tones were lacking and to check on enunciation and articulation.

Thursday, February 3

More work was put on the first half without the use of scripts and with the music background.
Friday, February 4

The entire first half was worked on with music and without scripts and with the choir standing on the stage.

Monday, February 7, to Friday, February 25

There was constant and detailed work on the second half of the poem, working out all of the lines with background chants and working also with music.

Monday, February 28

The cast started to work in the theatre today so that the people could get the feel of the stage, going through the entire poem each time we met.

Tuesday, March 1

At nine o'clock we worked with the choir in the theatre with music. At ten o'clock we worked with the women's ballet and at one o'clock and four o'clock on the men's ballet.

Wednesday, March 2

At nine o'clock we worked with the choir in the theatre; at one and four o'clock with the ballet groups.
Thursday, March 3

The same procedure; at nine o'clock with the choir and at one and four o'clock with the ballet groups.

Friday, March 4 to Thursday, March 10

The above arrangement was repeated.

Friday, March 11

The choir met at nine o'clock for rehearsal and at one o'clock the entire cast, both ballet and choir met to work out the complete pattern of action.

Saturday, March 12

A complete dress rehearsal was held from seven o'clock until ten-thirty o'clock.

Monday, March 14

The choir rehearsed at nine o'clock and a performance was presented at four fifteen. An evening rehearsal was begun at seven and lasted until eleven o'clock.

Tuesday, March 15

The entire cast met at six o'clock for a complete run-through of the show and it was presented for
its initial and only official performance at ten minutes past eight o'clock.
CHAPTER SIX
PROBLEMS

The foremost problem of the entire production was that of trying to adjust all of the schedules of the people in the cast for regularly appointed meeting times outside of class. Most of the people were not theatre majors, and because of their lack of training in rehearsal technique, they did not realize the necessity of meeting during the evening or of being exactly on time. When these things finally became apparent to them, the production was ready for performance, so much time was wasted.

The show was presented on the stage of the Sycamore Theatre. For the past two years the stage has needed new drapery; last year the drapes disintegrated completely. Because the show depended on depth, another means had to be found for masking; this was solved by using ordinary standard flats painted black.

It was difficult to meet with the large cast, both choir and ballet. The two groups seemed to feel that their hours should not be wasted listening to the other people rehearse, and this took time to explain. Actually only three complete rehearsals were
possible, and only one with the entire cast present. The use of members of the cast from a department other than speech proved more of a hindrance than an aid because of their inability to rehearse with the class. However, the production did smooth out, and without the co-operation of the modern dance classes the dances probably would not have been possible.

Other than the difficulty of meeting with the cast, the fact that the show started timing about fifteen minutes short during the final rehearsals, caused some concern. As the people became more used to the lines, they gradually speeded up and the extra time which seemed to be available was lost as the newness of working on the stage disappeared. Thus, it was necessary to add lines and interludes at the last moment and this caused, naturally, a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding on the part of both the speakers and the dancers.

A new dance was added, and a new speaking sequence, a reaction in motion by the choir was included, and many other single lines were inserted for the prime reason of making the show longer.

Working in the small workshop theatre, it was not possible to tell how all the people were actually projecting; but the first time the cast worked in a
large auditorium, they could not be heard at all; and so it was not possible to work in the comfort of a small room from that point on.

If one member of the cast was absent, the whole group seemed to notice it. If the records were not played, the people tended to forget their speaking cues, and if a solo part was read by a substitute, the whole show suffered during that rehearsal.

During this year there were four or five separate groups using the theatre for rehearsals and productions, a fact which complicated our own rehearsal schedule. Often meetings would be called, but when the actors arrived, another group would already be in possession of the stage facilities. This delayed our time of beginning and often produced an undesirable psychological effect.

It was also rather difficult to find a suitable place for the loud speakers, as it was desired that the music be loud and full so as to suggest a complete orchestra in volume and richness of tone. Eventually this technical consideration was solved by placing the speakers directly in the middle behind the front teaser on the first free batten.

Unfortunately a concert of the Wabash Valley Music Series was scheduled for the same night as the
final performance, and it was feared that this conflict would seriously diminish the size of the theatre audience.

Other small problems came up from time to time, such as janitorial service, heat and the expense of using full lighting; but the adequate size of the technical staff and the co-operation of all the performers made these difficulties negligible.
CHAPTER SEVEN

USE OF MUSIC

In order to properly sustain the mood for any length of time, it was found necessary to employ different passages of music that would lend strength to unusually long spoken passages.

At the very beginning the only accompaniment for the dancing was drums both snares and kettles, but as the dancing progressed, this medium was found to be lacking in total effect and so records were substituted.

This brought about a search for correct music and finally after scores of albums had been considered and discarded, the tone poem "The Pines of Rome" was discovered and the music from the entire album was found to be almost perfect. The only portion not provided for by this work was the Civil War sequence. A portion of McDonald's Symphonic Suite, "My Country At War" was selected for this; however, when Miss Eleanor Forsythe decided to use her modern dance classes for this number the music was changed to the "Cloudburst" from "The Grand Canyon Suite" by Grofe.

Drums were not entirely neglected, as they were used often in the background to denote the beat-
ing of the Prairie's heart, and again as the drums of war during the War Sequence; they were used to advantage also during the Indian Dance, when they provided the only music.

The importance of correct music in this production could not be too highly rated as it furnished the mood at the beginning of the show and kept the audience keyed and primed as to what was to come next. Often after the choir had exerted itself to an unusual degree the music either relaxed the listeners or made possible their continued interest because of its volume or its penetrating tones.

During the early rehearsals music was used as background to practically all of the speeches, both those of the choir and those presented as solos. But before long, the music was found to be detracting from the speaking itself and so it was used only infrequently. 22

The author found that the massed voices can produce a music of their own and their effect is greater if it is not mixed with that produced by instruments. The two mediums seem to clash and do not blend to the degree that is found between a singing and an instru-

22 See music cues, pp. 14-36.
mental group. Probably the different keys and the constant use of the scale is the disquieting factor. Harmony is sometimes called an agreeable blending of tones, but this is not possible between the choral group and the orchestra as they seem always to be at variance with each other.

The ideal arrangement would seem to be to have a singing group supply the needed music and the speakers talk when they were needed, as the difference in the human voice is not so great nor so shrill as that found in the instruments.

If music can be used only to produce mood, a great deal will have been accomplished, and this one factor is extremely important to a production like this one which has no scenery and uses only lights to produce the physical mood changes. With sound as a helper the psychological changes are possible at a swift rate, and at a rate that could not be possible in any other manner.

The author was extremely fortunate in finding music so perfectly suited to the needs of the dances and was able therefore to devote more time to the choreography than would have been possible or warrant-ed had the music not fitted so completely.
CHAPTER EIGHT

USE OF EURYTHMICS

After it was decided to use eurythmics to aid in the interpretation of the poem, it was necessary to spend quite a bit of time preparing the choreography for all of the dance sequences. The classes in modern dance decided to do only one number, portraying the war between the States and for this number they used music already mentioned in the preceding section. The author assumed no responsibility for this dance and spent all of his time on the other sequences.

The dances in their order were:

1. The Dance of Creation
2. The Dance of Understanding
3. The Retreat of the Indian
4. The Dance of the Pioneers
5. Westward, Ho! Ballet
6. The Civil War Ballet
7. The Dance of the Gold Rush
8. The Finale

These dances, in the opinion of the author, touched most of the important points of the Westward Development. They showed, as did the spoken word, what the Western movement really was.
In addition to these dances certain movements were used from time to time by the choir. For instance, during the interlude of the Indians, the choir members, on their last word before the dance, folded their arms; occasionally to signify the passage of time or the lack of narration they changed position on the platform, using various symbolic walks and intermingled crossings.

Each of the dances will be taken up in detail, since this was the most important and consistent use of movement in the production.

The Dance of Creation

This is very important because it is the first dance in the ballet. It starts the movement and expresses the beginning of life, so far as the prairie is concerned.

The Sons are swaying in movement to the music showing that there is life in their veins, but they are really only existing, not living. Finally by their constant pleading, and with the help of the wind, the sun, and the snow, the Prairie comes to life, and the Sons are able to move; for now they are really alive.

The Prairie rushes about the stage to show that she is all-enveloping—the whole stage is her domain
and then she returns to the Sons and calls them to her side. They rush to her and in triumph lift her high above their heads and carry her in joy about the stage; the elements all join in the glad dance and all rush hither and yon trying to express their eternal contentment. The Sons carry the Prairie to the side of the stage and gently let her down. She leaps high into the air and goes from the stage; the Sons, after a moment of contemplation follow her, and the elements withdraw to their respective places upon the vast plains.

Dance of Understanding

In this dance the Prairie rushes upon her land with a desire to learn and to know about her new life. She brings the Sons with her, but they stand quietly at the back of the stage while she rushes from side to side. She sees a group of flowers and bends to touch them. She sees some small trees and tries to hold them in her hands. In the distance the mountains loom, and she stretches forth her hands to them. All is lovely to her and as the sun rises she rushes among the men and drags one of them out of position to dance with her. His arms encircle her protectingly, and then he returns to his place. She follows him, and momentarily exhausted she rests while the men kneel at her
feet. The sun comes and goes, and in the distance she hears a tiny bird singing its haunting melody. She rushes to find him and after searching fruitlessly she at last is able to see him and is so full of the joy of living that she swings into the arms of one of the men and is whirled around and around. When she is quiet, she looks once more at her beloved land and then darts quickly off the stage. The men kneel quietly, and slowly wait for the many events that are to come.

The Retreat of the Indian

The Indians are pushed back more and more until finally they are forced to make a last stand. They pray to their ancient gods and even adopt some of the white men's ways of war, but they are defeated in a last final effort and start to leave the land of their fathers. They resist no more and go quietly to their fate which is eventual destruction and extermination, shown by the withdrawal of all of the men from the stage as the dance slowly concludes.

Dance of the Pioneers

On their way into the setting sun, the pioneers often stopped to sing and dance a bit. The plaintive strains of "Roll on Wagon" comes to the audience, and
then the rousing "Oh, Suzannah" is heard and the men and women break from their platforms and start to dance a square dance. The rest of the group help them with clapping hands and whoops and yells. The head teamster calls for the wagons to move, and the group breaks and returns to the long, slow journey to the West.

Westward, Ho! Ballet

Across the risers at the back of the stage the people start to move into the West. They go in a never ending line, always toward the sun which shines full on their faces. The Prairie is able to see that destruction is inevitable, and she tries to stop their movement. Unable to do so, she summons the Sons to her, and they also try to stop the rush. Finally, in desperation, they make one more concentrated effort, but it is futile. One of them drops to the ground as a symbol of their inability; he is helped up by the other men and they present themselves to the Maiden in abject humility. However, she is all-forgiving and bids them rise which they do. They help her to the middle of the stage and then leave her as she pleads alone on the stage to the world to understand what is happening; she then exits quickly.
The Civil War Ballet

In this dance the Prairie rushes forth onto the stage in bewilderment and in terror. Realizing that there seems to be a war coming she withdraws to the back of the stage to wait for other happenings. Scouts from each side appear and summon their respective sides out for battle. The women of both sides are appealing with their minds to their men for peace, but to no avail. The battle starts and the North is victorious. Then the men start the long homeward journey. One after another they find their wives and are happy. One woman cannot find her husband and sinks to the ground. He comes to her and lifts her into his arms and carries her off the stage. Then as "Glory, Glory hallelulah" sounds in the distance, the whole group of dancers becomes excited and rushes onto the stage to dance in joy and celebration of the coming of peace.

Dance of the Gold Rush

A prospector finds some gold and calls to his friends. They bring friends of theirs and finally more and more people appear. All of the people are excited and all of them start to dig for gold. Two of the men find a lot of it and dance in happiness. One after another all of the people find gold and
leave the stage in a state of exuberance.

The Finale

The Prairie is resting and waiting now. The war, and the years of fighting, and the constant search of all the people for gold and riches have left her somewhat disillusioned. Still there is hope for the future and she comes on the stage to unite the Sons once more so that together they can prepare for what is to come. They lift her high on their shoulders at the end of the ballet while all of the elements are singing and dancing with the whole universe joining the prayer for a good and lasting life to come!
CHAPTER NINE

FINAL REHEARSALS AND PRODUCTION

Because of the previously mentioned conflict with a civic music number, it seemed probable that we would have a very small audience; also because so many people would be attending the concert it seemed logical to perform the show more than once. It was decided to present the production at four o'clock on the afternoon of the day before the scheduled performance. This, in actuality, would amount to a dress rehearsal and the cast and crews were encouraged to think of it as such.

At the final rehearsals everything was checked carefully, and the show was rehearsed at least twice each rehearsal. Conditions were the same as they would be for the actual production, in so far as it was possible to make them. There was only one dress rehearsal, and this was simply for the purpose of taking pictures for Life Magazine, which had requested them.

The evening performance was scheduled for eight o'clock, but it was actually presented at eight fifteen. The entire performance, including the ballet, was rehearsed directly before the show. Members of the cast rested for about forty-five minutes before going onto the stage, but they were encouraged to move about
and talk as much as possible, so as to have their voices limber and natural in sound.

The technical crews functioned smoothly, and the choir responded to every direction. An encore was prepared, and it was presented. The entire performance lasted about an hour and ten minutes.
CHAPTER TEN

QUESTIONNAIRE

The objective study of this report concerns itself with a questionnaire which was given the spectators with their programs. Each was asked to fill a questionnaire and return it to an usher. They indicated the opinions of the people who witnessed the experiment, and definite conclusions could be drawn from the reports that appeared on the questionnaire.

In answer to the first question:
Would you care to see more of this type of dramatic work?

97.52% said "Yes".
1.16% said "No".
2.32% said "Indefinite".
This indicates clearly that the experiment in choral speaking seems to have been popular with the general public.

The next question was:
Did you follow the story?
79.94% said "Yes".
1.18% said "No".
18.88% said "Indefinite". With almost 80% following the story, it can be assumed that the story is told with enough clarity so that the majority of an audience is able to follow the plot and the events in their logical order. It is desired to make the happenings obvious enough so that the other 20% will be able to examine the story and find something in it as well.

Next:
Did the ballet add to your understanding of the story?
77.25% said "Yes".
9.27% said "No".
13.69% said "Indefinite".

On the next question:
Did you like for the people to speak in small groups rather than together as one large choir?
28.35% said "Yes".
57.75% said "No".
13.65% said "Indefinite".

Would you have preferred more scenery:
21.40% said "Yes".
74.90% said "No".
3.21% said "Indefinite".

Would you have liked more complete costuming?
57.49% said "Yes".
38.15% said "No".
4.36% said "Indefinite".

Did you like the use of the lights?
95.84% said "Yes".
4.16% said "No".

Would you have liked music all of the time?
23.32% said "Yes".
73.14% said "No".
3.18% said "Indefinite".

Would you have liked more sound effects?
30.45% said "Yes".
67.20% said "No".
2.10% said "Indefinite".

Would you have preferred more solo speaking?
24.48% said "Yes".
64.26% said "No".
11.22% said "Indefinite".
After the performance only one critical review was issued, and it was published by the Terre Haute Advocate in its Friday, March 18, 1949, issue when Floyd Boyer wrote in his column, The Lancer:

Tuesday evening, in the Sycamore Theatre, Indiana State's Sycamore Players presented the choral drama, "Sons of the Prairie", written and directed by Herbert Adrian Rehner. "Sons of the Prairie" was an adaptation utilizing singing and speaking choruses, solo speakers and singers, a corps de ballet and recorded music. Presented on three stage levels before a simple blue backdrop and relying for mood changes solely upon lighting, the production was enormously effective.

Written first as a poem and published by Dorrance of Philadelphia, "Sons of the Prairie" essays a narrative panorama of the development of the American West from prehistoric times up to the discovery of gold at Sutters' Mill.

There were flaws in Tuesday evening's production. One might have wished for more vivid colors and costumes, some of the dance symbols were hackneyed, the choreography was somewhat off as the Civil War sequence preceded the discovery of gold, but these were minor imperfections in an otherwise stimulating, at times rousing, experience.

Particularly impressive was the sensitivity and discipline of the speaking choir. The massed voices, nicely balanced as to male and female, responded to Mr. Rehner's direction with all the beauty and variation of nuance of a fine organ. The diction, often a disappointing factor in vocal groups, was excellent with every word clear and effectively projected.

Among the soloists, Bill McDonald and June Bratt performed with a high degree of skill as did Shirley Lexier in the dancing role of the Maiden Prairie.

The production of "Sons of the Prairie" was a brave undertaking and if the truly thunderous
applause of the large audience meant anything, it was an undertaking that paid off. The entire company, as well as the various unit directors: Miss Gladys Rohrig, technical supervisor; Miss Eleanor Forsythe, dance director; Alan Summers, sound technician; Bill Rogers, light technician; and Miss Ruth Butts, production supervisor, and their staffs, may take a well earned bow.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

GENERAL SUMMARY AND REMARKS

One over-all conclusion that can be drawn from this presentation is that people seem definitely interested in this type of dramatic work.

From talking with students in the class in verse choir it is obvious that the individuals feel they gained a great deal of knowledge about enunciation and articulation from doing the actual work; because most of them plan to teach, they felt they had gained a knowledge of how to produce a verse choir program.

With these two things in mind it would seem that education and entertainment could be accomplished at the same time, and thus the requirements of both these aims can be adequately taken care of.

In undertaking a verse choir production many things must be remembered; the very fact that there are many technical considerations, many people in a choir large enough to be heard in a public auditorium, and other mechanical considerations makes for the necessity of long-range planning. It was found by the author that there is no substitute for adequate planning of rehearsal time and the use of rehearsal
halls. The value of the extra time it takes for advance publicity and extra practice time cannot be too highly emphasized.

Although the author was extremely worried during the rehearsals, because of the short running time of the play, several competent community theatre directors informed him that the running time of one hour was sufficiently long, and that a longer performance might have tired them. It is obvious that after an hour an intermission is needed so that the people might relax, and so that the audience can rest their eyes and keep from becoming strained.

The use of lights is very important, and the correct handling of them definitely turned the performance from an ordinary show into something that was classed, by most observers, as unusual and interesting.

Scenery is not needed to sustain interest; this is shown by the fact that an audience will be attentive to any type of dramatic performance as long as it has worth and says something of value. Thornton Wilder's experimental bare stage play "Our Town" was accepted without question, and the audience accepted "The Sons of the Prairie" in much the same manner as Wilder's

23 Mr. L. Zaff Rogers and Mrs. Lillian Masters.
24 Comments from Questionnaire, pp. 64-69.
One of the most important things learned from this experimental production, was that the verse choir had fun and learned by doing. All of the dancers, speakers and singers, without exception, seemed to be genuinely pleased with the showing they were able to make. It would seem to the writer that any production which allowed students to learn in a lasting and effective manner, is well worth the time spent; if the press reports, the comments from the audience, and the reaction of the choir is any basis for judgment, then the ten weeks time devoted to the preparation of the choric drama, "Sons of the Prairie", was certainly time well spent.
FIGURE 1

THE POSITION OF THE CHOIR ON RISERS
FIGURE 2
THE MASKING OF THE WINGS
FIGURE 3
A DIAGRAM OF LIGHTS
BIBLIOGRAPHY
BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS


B. PERIODICAL ARTICLES


Lund, M. G., "Reading Together," Scholastic, 36:21-22, April 8, 1940.


Van Duyn, M., "Call Your People, America," Scholastic, 44:151, February 21, 1944.
Glossary

Attic Lights---The lights secured from the ceiling or as the name implies "from the attic"; they are used to illuminate specific areas of the stage.

Baby Spots---The small lights that hang from the front part of the stage that are used to illuminate certain areas of the stage floor.

Batten---The long steel pipes hung from the files in a counter-weight system, and to which scenery and lights are fastened.

Blocking---When applied to flats has to do with the masking of certain areas of the stage proper.

Choreography---The origination and execution of certain dance steps or dance patterns.

Flats---The large canvas-covered wooden frames that serve as walls, outside foliage, and other "solid" material on the stage.

Flood Lights---Large lights that throw a large area illumination upon the stage.

Leotard---The tight fitting costume worn by ballet dancers to facilitate their movements.
Levels---The platforms used to give extra height to the stage setting.

Risers---This is really the same thing as a level.

Strip Lights---The long strips of lights that are used for floor and sometimes ceiling illumination of the stage.

Teasers---Masking units, either flats or curtains, to prevent the audience from seeing certain areas of the stage.

Wings---All of the stage area not seen by the audience.

X-Rays---Large open lights hung from a batten illuminating the whole stage area.
APPENDIX B.

WRITTEN COMMENTS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE

"Fine, especially the speaking choir".
"Very good!"
"Could not follow all of the symbolic dancing--probably my fault."

"Quite a group of us came in from St. Mary's and we found the performance stimulating. Please, please give us more."

"I liked Sons of the Prairie very much and was glad that I had an opportunity to see it. I thought that the effects were remarkably well balanced; the dancing was lovely; and the dramatic poem has considerable depth and contains a great many good lines. I should like to see the production again."

"The 'Indian Ballet' was difficult to interpret, no definite leading action. The use of leotards alone was good. It's a wonderful thing though--I like it!"

"Unusual and very entertaining. It held your attention without being tiresome."

"I'm unable to properly describe my enjoyment--good work!"

"It is all wonderful!"

"Quite different--I like it very much."

"Very interesting; very different; really kept everyone, students and all amazed."
"It was very beautiful, effective and well directed."

"I thought it was magnificent and it held me every minute."

"The philosophy was excellent."

"It was good."
Appendix C.

Picture of the Choir
APPENDIX D.

MUSIC FOR THE PRODUCTION
SEARCHING-SEEKING

SEARCHING SEEKING, SEARCHING SEEKING

WESTWARD-WESTWARD

WESTWARD WESTWARD, WESTWARD WESTWARD

OH - OH

OH-------H, OH------H

WORDS AND MUSIC BY HERBERT ADRIAN REHNER — ARRANGED BY JAMES BOYLE
THE
SYCAMORE PLAYERS

PRESENT

SONS OF THE PRAIRIE
(A Choral Drama)

Written and Directed
by
Herbert Adrian Rehner

Under the Personal Supervision of
Miss Ruth Butts

Dances Staged By
Miss Eleanor Forsythe
and
Mr. Rehner

The Sycamore Theatre
March 15, 1949
8:00 O’Clock P.M.

APPENDIX E.
COPY OF THE PROGRAM
SONS OF THE PRAIRIE was adapted for this presentation from the narrative poem of the same name which appears in Mr. Rehner's new book of poetry "Pastime of Eternity," and used tonight with permission of the publishers, Dorrance and Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
STORY BY SCENES

OPENING - Choir, First Man, Second Man, Solo.

NARRATION - Choir

** * * *


** * * *

INTERLUDE - Second Man, First Woman, Third Man

** * * *

"Dance of Understanding" - Maiden Prairie, The Sons

** * * *

THE SEEKING - Choir, First Man, Second Man, Woman, Solo, Choir, Woman, Men, Third Man, Fourth Man, Five Women, Choir, Solo.

DISCOVERY - Women, Men, Choir, Solo, Choir

** * * *

"Westward Ho! Ballet" - Men of the Ballet, Women of the Ballet

** * * *

THE CIVIL WAR - Choir, Women, Man, First Man, Woman, Third Man, Solo, First Man, Woman, Choir

** * * *


** * * *

THE PEACE - Solo, Choir, Solo, Man, Woman, Solo, Women, Men, Choir, Solo

THE GOLD RUSH - First Man, Choir, Man, Woman, Solo, Women, Men, Choir

** * * *

"Dance of the Gold Rush" - Men of the Ballet

** * * *

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE - Solo, Man, First Man, Second Man, Solo, Choir.

** * * *

FINALE - All people of the ballet and the choir.

APPENDIX E.

COPY OF THE PROGRAM
INDIVIDUAL PARTS

BILLIET

The Maiden Prairie----------Shirley Lexier
The Sons------------------John Ferguson
                  Bob Long
                  George Shields
The Wind-------------------Betty Skelton
The Snow-------------------Flora Ann Buzash
The Sun-------------------Jo Ann Jiles
The Prospector-------------George Shields
Singer---------------------June Bratt

SPEAKING

Solo----------------------Bill McDonald
First Man------------------James Lawler
Second Man----------------Don Williams
Third Man-----------------Don Hike
Fourth Man----------------Doug Spurrier
First Woman---------------Sally Cass
Woman----------------------Emily Henley
Man-----------------------G. Robert Allen
NOTE: This evening's performance tries to show the gradual development of the prairie lands, and it attempts to convey a feeling to the audience of the vastness, the grandeur and the beauty of the almost limitless grasslands.

With the use of the spoken word, music, and an interpretative ballet, the players express their love, their curiosity, and their emotional thoughts toward the plains.

As the story begins there is nothing yet created; then, the spirit of the prairie gradually comes to life and through the movements of the ballet, we see her start to breathe and finally, to walk about, to ask of other worlds and other happenings. The story tells too of the coming of the white man, of the Indians, of the climate on the plains—things like the sun, the snow and the wind, and it continues its narration by speaking of the Spanish conquerors, the early Western movement, and the first pioneers.

With word, dance and music we learn of the Civil War and how it affected the plains. Then, with the coming of the peace, we see the gold rush, and the men of the ballet portray this in dance. Next, the story leads us to a philosophical mood and asks, "What will happen next in the world?" The story closes with all members of the cast taking part in a finale which expresses a note of hope for the prairie and for all the world.

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Technical Director——Gladys Rohrig
Sound Technician—— Alan Summers

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