

We Meet Again Tonight, Boys

The Fall of 1923 marks not so much the birth of the Fordham University Glee Club, as its rebirth. Organized choral singing had been a part of Fordham since the earliest days of St. John's College. There was, for example, the "Saint Cecelia Glee Club" of the eighteen-fifties, a group which performed at religious and academic gatherings at Rose Hill. Later, sometime in the eighteen-nineties, a group known as the "Fordham Glee, Banjo, and Mandolin Club" was born. Numbering about thirty, it was the largest club on campus. Its members played stringed instruments ranging from violins and double basses to five-stringed banjos, and sang songs of the period. While none of its programs have been preserved and the present Glee Club cannot recreate its sound, the white tie and "tails" worn by the Club today, as well as the maroon sash, were first used to distinguish the Glee, Banjo, and Mandolin Club and serve today as a reminder of the Club's distant origins.

The Club as we know it today had its beginnings in a small group of singers who enjoyed blending their voices in part-singing at Benediction. Late in 1923, under the direction of W. Kenneth Baily -- then an undergraduate at Fordham College -- and the leadership of Rev. James T. Hayes, S. J., The Fordham University Glee Club began active preparations for its first concert.

The occasion for the Club's debut was a Saint Patrick's Day concert scheduled for March 16, 1924. Considering the size of Fordham at the time it is surprizing that no less than fifty-eight men appeared on stage that night. The program went from "The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls" to "O'Donnell Aboo" and featured as tenor soloist John Finnegan of St. Patrick's Cathedral.

The Glee Club's maiden effort was a successful one. The New York Musical Courier commended the "excellence of singing" of the Club whose members sang "brightly and with vigor". There was, it reported, "every reason for Fordham University to feel gratified at the result of this plunge into the field of music." This opinion was certainly no surprise to the reviewer from the Fordham Ram who reported -- a full week before the Club's initial performance -- that "the Glee Club ranks with the best among American universities in artistic merit."

The Fordham Glee Club embarked immediately on an energetic series of performances throughout the New York area and met with astounding success. Within a few months the Club had performed on nearly a dozen stages, including New York's Aeolian Hall. The following news report suggests the popularity of the young Club:

"The Fordham Glee Club has scored success in a series of successes with concerts held at Carnegie Hall and their host of Brooklyn admirers will be out in force Sunday evening to enjoy the program

arranged for the occasion. The Glee Club will make the trip from the University in a fleet of motorcars and arrangements for a police escort have been made to insure their arrival on time.

As the Fordhamites wend their way over the Manhattan Bridge to the theatre, the Sperry Searchlight, the greatest light of its kind in the world, will pick out their cars and light their way along Flatbush Avenue.

Arrangements have been made with members of the Fordham Alumni in Brooklyn to entertain the members of the Glee Club following the performance."

The popularity of the Club as a campus activity is reflected in the Glee Club Constitution as distributed to Club members late in 1924. It restricted membership to 100 students, none of whom could be freshmen. The membership was to be divided into two groups, Class A and Class B, and only the members of Class A were qualified to appear in concerts with the Club. While the Club was to be primarily a student-directed activity, the Constitution specified that the faculty Moderator was a member of the Board of Directors and stated, among other things, that a member could be dismissed from the Club for failure to attend two meetings "unless excused by the Moderator."

Under the leadership of Father Hayes, the Club began a series of out-of-town concerts soon after it came into existence. During Easter week of 1924, for example, the Club traveled to such exotic places as Norwalk, Connecticut and Scranton, Pennsylvania. The latter trip was taken by private railroad car and when the Club arrived in Scranton it sang for an audience of more than 2,000 in the sold-out Capital Theatre. The following week the Club went by bus to Sing Sing Prison where, the New York Journal reported, it made "the initial appearance of any college glee club before the inmates of the prison." The reaction of the Club's first truly captive audience was not reported by the Journal.

Among its other "firsts" in these early years was the Glee Club's participation in the Intercollegiate Glee Club Concert at Carnegie Hall in 1925. Chosen over several other clubs in an elimination competition, the Glee Club became the first Catholic university to participate in what had been an Ivy League event. The songs on its portion of the program included the "Fordham Marching Song" which had been written by two Club members, James J. McCabe, '26 and James F. Breslin, '27. While the Glee Club did not succeed in defeating its more experienced competitors that year, its school song was afforded an enthusiastic response by the Carnegie Hall audience.

In 1927, following the graduation of its student director, the Club's call for a full time director was answered by Fred-eric Joslyn. Born in Boston, "Doc" Joslyn came to Fordham at the age of 41 after studying at the New England Conservatory of Music with several years' experience as a choral director.

He brought to Fordham not only his experience, but a fine baritone voice which was sometimes heard in concert, and always well-received. The Ram reported in 1931 that "Mr. Joslyn pleasantly surprised the audience by singing "Secrets" in an appealing baritone while conducting the Glee Club which was humming the accompaniment. His romantic rendition of this love song so captured the audience that he was forced to take several bows." (In 1968, in his last appearance with the Club, Doc Joslyn was again persuaded to sing "Secrets" accompanied by the voices of the Club members and alumni. Though 82 years of age, he gave a rendition which was moving and remarkably strong.)

But it is not for his singing that Frederic Joslyn is remembered by hundreds of Fordham alumni; it is for his ability to provide a link between generations of Fordham graduates and for the warmth and strength of his character that Doc Joslyn is loved and remembered by those who knew him as students and returned year after year to sing again with him at the Town Hall Concert.

Throughout the nineteen-thirties the Glee Club, under the direction of Doc Joslyn and Rev. Theodore T. Farley, S. J. continued to schedule its concert activities in a way which remained unchanged for forty-five years. Beginning in September with the Mass of the Holy Spirit, the Club performed perhaps a dozen concerts at nearby stages and womens' colleges and culminated its saeson with the Annual Town Hall Concert. In between were such on-campus events as Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, and off-campus events involving bus or train trips to nearby cities. Father Farley always insisted that the institution sponsoring the Club plan a dance or reception for the Glee Clubbers after the concert, and was known to have joined with his counterparts at the womens' colleges in matching dancing partners on the basis of height and age.

Thus, Father Farley's role as Moderator of the Club came to mean more than that designation might suggest. To the men of the Club, he was a counselor and a friend as well as a man whose musical opinion was to be respected. To the alumni, he became a symbol of college days at Fordham, and for the dozens with whom he kept a regular correspondence, a link with fellow alumni. Father Farley also handled much of the ongoing business of the Glee Club: arrangements with bus companies and hotels, scheduling of concerts, fund raising, and alumni relations -- a task which he embraced with vigor. He was called upon to handle discipline problems involving Club members, although there were those on the faculty who felt it was difficult for Father Farley to believe that one of "his boys" could ever create any problems.

The year 1934 marks the birth of the "Double Quartette", forerunners of today's "Ramblers of Rose Hill". (The group through the decades has also been known as the "Senior Octet", the Varsity Quartet", and the "Junior-Senior Ensemble".) While the Club's concerts had always featured vocal and instrumental soloists, the introduction of the Quartette marked the first appearance of a club-within-the-Club. Comprised of juniors and

seniors, it performed folk and novelty numbers more suited to a smaller group. Like today's "Ramblers", its members performed at informal student and alumni gatherings as well as at Glee Club concerts, helping to bring the Club's music to a larger segment of the Fordham community and the name of Fordham to many outside that community.

The Glee Club, according to the Maroon, was one of the few organizations on Rose Hill which "kept the spark of campus life" aglow during the years of World War II. Like the University itself, the Club's size diminished during those years. But under the leadership of Fr. Farley and Doc Joslyn, it remained active. During the 1946 season when the Club was at its smallest, a plea was issued to the alumni asking that those who had sung with the Glee Club in their student days return to sing at the Club's first Town Hall concert since 1943. A large number responded to this call and the Club's ranks were swelled to eighty-four at a most memorable demonstration of alumni support. By 1948, the Club's Annual Concert (held that year in the Grand Ballroom of the Plaza Hotel) could be presented entirely by undergraduates, eighty-two in number.

Membership remained at about this strength throughout the fifties. The number of concerts given annually again began to grow as did the number of trips taken by the Club. Such events as the "Fordham Clerical Alumni Dinner" appeared on the Club's schedule along with the more traditional concerts. Judging from this 1952 New York Herald Tribune review, however, the sound of the Fordham Glee Club remained the same:

"The Fordham Glee Club is a male chorus of unusual force and power. What it does, it does well. Spirit, energy, and the whole range of college-choir sentiment are available to the Fordham members; and since Mr. Joslyn continues to train men soundly, their work is always a pleasure to encounter."

This was written on the occasion of Doc Joslyn's 25th Town Hall concert. Five years later he retired from active directorship of the Club, although as "Director Emeritus" he returned annually until his death in 1968 to direct the Glee Club and alumni in the singing of the Fordham songs at the Annual Concert.

During the Joslyn years, the Glee Club saw the growth of an active alumni association which has continued to lend its support to the Glee Club and Fordham. The Glee Club is unique at Fordham by reason of the existence of this alumni group. Its support has been reflected in such tangible monuments as the Campus Center's Music Room, built with funds donated by Glee Club alumni, and the Father Farley Memorial Bursary, a continuing scholarship used to defray the costs of training Jesuit seminarians. The alumni's support in terms of contributions to the University and attendance at Glee Club concerts are also significant.

In 1957, Doc Joslyn was succeeded as director of the Club by James B. Welch who, appropriately enough, had sung under his predecessor while an undergraduate at Fordham. Following his graduation from the College in 1936, Jim Welch had among other things

acquired a graduate degree at Columbia, served abroad during the Second World War, and founded the Welch Chorale, a recording and concert group specializing in polyphonic religious music.

If Doc Joslyn was a father to the men of the Glee Club, Jim was an older brother. He disliked being called "Mr." Welch ("Jim" was his preference) almost as much as he disliked the nickname "the Bear" which he acquired soon after taking over the Club. Jim Welch strongly believed that comradery was important to good glee club singing, and so devoted much effort towards promoting a fraternal atmosphere at rehearsals and post-rehearsal parties. His apartment in Manhattan and his cottage in the Berkshires often served as sites for parties or rehearsals, and many who sang in the Club during those years will recall the sight of Jim Welch mixing a pitcher of Perfect Manhattans with one hand and directing a chorus of "John Peel" with the other.

Alumni will best remember Jim Welch for introducing a wide range of musical selections to the Club's programs and for reintroducing the Club to the major concert halls in the New York area. Under his direction the Club members soon became used to preparing major choral works: Masses by Mozart, Haydn, Charpentier, and Byrd, the Requiems of Brahms, Faure, and Mozart or the Gloria and Magnificat of Vivaldi, to name a few. The names of contemporary composers began to appear on the Club's programs with regularity and many Glee Clubbers learned that the sounds of Copeland, Pelouquin, or Peeters could be as pleasing as those with whom they were more familiar. In an era when Fordham had no Fine Arts program whatsoever, the Glee Club served many as a vehicle for becoming acquainted with "serious" music.

It was during the Welch years that the Club returned to the stage of Carnegie Hall where it had last appeared in the thirties. This was in 1961 when the Club was joined by the Glee Club of the College of New Rochelle (also directed by Jim Welch) for a performance of the Mozart Requiem with the Ars Nova Orchestra. The critics' reviews were favorable, and the clubs returned the following year to perform the Brahms Requiem.

The Glee Club of the mid-sixties also participated in a number of premiere performances. Its 1964 performance of C. Alexander Pelouquin's Symphony of Praise, for example, was the first appearance of that work in New York. The Club, accompanied by the "Fordham Symphony" presented the first American performance of the De Profundis by William Ferris at a John F. Kennedy Memorial Concert in 1964. And in 1967, members of the Club participated in the premiere of Richard Yardumian's Mass, Come Creator Spirit, which had been commissioned BY Fordham to commemorate its 125th Anniversary in 1965. The Mass was later recorded by RCA Victor.

Members of the Glee Club during the Welch years will not forget the many happy hours spent on buses between New York and Boston, Washington, Newport, and Albany. They will remember the futile efforts of Father Farley to enforce the Club's uniformly disregarded no-liquor rule or "curfews" in the Parker House Hotel, or the sight of a dozen nightshirt-clad Ramblers entertaining late night passersby on the steps of the Capital Building in Albany. And they will look back on such things as the Director's "trade-

mark" -- the use of a ballpoint pen for a baton -- or stories of how, accustomed to dressing at the last minute, he rushed onto stage on occasion with footprints across the back of his "tails", or his white tie facing the audience and his collar facing the stage.

In September, 1965, Club members and alumni were saddened by news of the death of Father Farley who had retired as Moderator of the Club earlier that year after thirty-seven years as a friend of the Glee Club. For hundreds of Glee Clubbers, a concert was never really over until Father Farley had uttered "Good job, fellows" in the dressing room, and a Spring semester was not really over until he had reminisced with them over a drink at the annual banquet and outing. And a trip back to Rose Hill was not complete without a visit to Father Farley, who always remembered.

Father Farley's place as Moderator was taken by the Club's present faculty advisor, Rev. Frederick J. Helbig, S. J. Father Helbig is himself a former Glee Clubber, having sung second tenor in the years prior to his graduation from Fordham College in 1931. He brought to the Glee Club a great love and knowledge of music and of the Glee Club and a warm sense of humor. Of no less importance to many a Club member is Father Helbig's uncanny ability to locate the best restaurant in any town -- no matter how small -- the Club finds itself in.

The late sixties saw, along with the arrival of a new faculty advisor, three different directors. Following Jim Welch's departure from Rose Hill in 1967, the Club was directed for a year by Mr. Peter J. McCarthy, a former Marine, and a most energetic leader. Mr. McCarthy left after a year at Fordham to pursue graduate studies in Washington, D.C. He is currently teaching at the University of Delaware. In its 1968-1969 season, the Glee Club was directed by Mr. George Seuffert, longtime director of the University Band. During that year the Glee Club and Band gave a rare joint concert, and the "Ramblers" began to play a larger role in the Club's concerts. Off campus, too, the "Ramblers" began to expand the scope of their activities, and through Mr. Seuffert's introductions sang on several occasions at Gracie Mansion.

The Glee Club's present Director, James L. Kurtz, took over as Director of the Club in 1969. A graduate of Juilliard, Dr. Kurtz received his Master of Arts degree from Harvard, and his Doctorate from Brandeis University. He has also served as Composer in Residence for the Portland, Oregon school system as part of the Ford Foundation Contemporary Music project, has received a Danforth Teacher's Grant, and is a member of the faculty of the University's Fine Arts Department.

The above paragraphs can, of course, tell only a part of the story of the Fordham University Glee Club. Certainly, no one forgets the rarities, the little foibles of Glee Club life which are as memorable as the songs that are sung: the baritone in 1924 who took off his pinching shoes on the stage of Collins Auditorium and left them there as he filed off, or a recent Director giving a cue to a tenor soloist mid-way through the Haydn Paukenmesse only to realize that the tenor had missed the bus to the hall.

These living memories, and hundreds more, are the reason for the Club's pervading spirit, and they have been successful in linking its eras. Tonight the Glee Club relives these memories and pledges a renewal of their bond through song.