

Marie Kroeger

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## **The Federal Music Project in Denver 1935-1941**

The Federal Music Project (FMP) was one of the Federal Arts Projects, which were, in turn, part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The Federal Arts Projects were created during the New Deal era to provide work relief for unemployed writers, artists, musicians, actors, and other theater workers. The five arts projects, including the Federal Music Project, were established in the Fall of 1935.<sup>1</sup> With the onset of World War II the need was greatly lessened and the FMP ceased to function in 1941.<sup>2</sup> Even though the Music Project was fully active for about five years, and was established in forty-two states and the District of Columbia,<sup>3</sup> it has received much less scholarly attention than the other projects. This is partly because it escaped charges of Communist infiltration and other congressional criticism aimed at the Writers or Theater Projects, and it left no physical reminders such as murals on post office walls, as did the Arts Project.

The need for such a program as the Federal Music Project can be traced back to before the stock market crash of 1929, when technological changes, such as the development of movies with sound, the phonograph, and radio, brought on sudden and massive loss of jobs for musicians. In 1928 the first films were produced with a sound track. With sound films, one orchestra in Hollywood replaced hundreds of orchestras in theaters around the nation. Theater owners could pay once for an elaborate sound system<sup>4</sup> and never have to hire a musician again. By the end of 1931 more than fifty percent of motion picture musicians had been displaced by the introduction of the sound film.<sup>5</sup> The use of live music in theaters continued to decline, and by late 1935 when the WPA Federal Music Project began, thousands of musicians qualified for relief, and unemployment for them was now chronic.

There is every reason to believe that the musicians of Denver shared this plight and that at least half of theater musicians were unemployed. By 1931, thirty-seven of the forty-four theaters in Denver were wired for sound, and two years later all were.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that musicians were never employed in the theaters which showed sound films, but general economic hard times impelled theater owners to reduce their budgets by cutting live music.<sup>7</sup> Symphony orchestras were also hard hit and the number of concert bookings were reduced by about one third. Music schools and private music teachers had fewer students, and public schools cut back in the arts—as it seems they always do during hard times.<sup>8</sup>

Musicians in New York and other large cities attempted to help themselves. In March 1930 when Denver's Denham Theater decided to go with "canned" music and twenty-five more musicians were put on the relief roles, Denver, too, took action. The musicians' and stagehands' unions decided to operate their own theater "for the sole purpose of providing employment for members of both associations."<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the union venture, which gave work to fifty-six unemployed Denver stage hands and musicians, only lasted from April 20th to June 21st, 1930.<sup>10</sup>

In another attempt to aid the unemployed musicians of Denver, a benefit concert was given in the City Auditorium in November 1932. The conductor from New York and the violin soloist from Denver donated their services, but the orchestra made up of Denver musicians was paid. The proceeds went to the relief fund of the local musicians union.<sup>11</sup> Denver had a semi-professional symphony, the Denver Civic Orchestra, formed in 1922. During its early years about half of the nearly 100-piece orchestra were members of the union, which allowed these members to play with the DCO amateurs. All members of the orchestra attended three rehearsals a week, played six concerts a year, and were paid an honorarium of \$5.00 per concert. In 1934, forty-three professional musicians, who continued to play in the Civic Orchestra, joined together to form the Denver Symphony Orchestra. This new professional orchestra paid union wages for three concerts a season.<sup>12</sup>

The limited professional opportunities and the attempts at self-help would clearly never be enough to solve the problems of the unemployed. The new Roosevelt administration believed in "work relief" programs rather than placing the unemployed on the dole. In 1935, when the WPA was authorized, it was recognized that all types of workers needed aid, and the Arts Projects were created. Nikolai Sokoloff was chosen to lead the Federal Music Project. His European background, "classical" training, and experience as conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra resulted in a program whose goal was to encourage the highest standards of musicianship. The emphasis was on performance with little stress upon music education or music as an amateur activity.<sup>13</sup>

The Federal Music Project in Colorado had units in Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo. This article will focus on Denver, where there were more, and larger performing organizations, but not necessarily more performances given.<sup>14</sup> The Federal Music Project was established in Denver on December 2, 1935.<sup>15</sup> The first director of the Colorado project was Ivan Miller, followed by Horace Tureman, Denver conductor and educator.<sup>16</sup> The Colorado units endorsed the national goals "to open employment to all needy but capable musicians" and "to employ directors who are progressive and anxious to develop the project as well as themselves."

Denver's own initial goals included:

1. The organization of a symphonietta which would perform music especially written for this type of ensemble;
2. The creation of a symphonic band to serve as an example for public schools and colleges;

3. An attempt "to eliminate careless musicianship caused by years of unemployment."<sup>17</sup>

Nearly as soon as the FMP was established in Denver, six ensembles were formed and giving concerts. This ambitious beginning included:

- Concert Orchestra (45 members) Fred Schmitt, conductor
- Symphonietta (17 selected from the orchestra) -Waldo Williamson, conductor
- String quartet (selected from the orchestra)
- Symphonic Band (40 members) - Ivan Miller, conductor
- Dance Orchestra (14 members) - in cooperation with the Federal Recreation Project
- Male vocal group (13 members)<sup>18</sup>

During the first six months of the FMP in Denver (December 1935 May 1936), sixty-four performances were given to a total audience of 25,660. The Concert Orchestra performed in halls as large as the City Auditorium and as small as the ones in schools, hospitals, and churches. The String Quartet was reported to be the most popular of the performing ensembles. It appeared in schools, libraries, churches, art galleries, colleges, clubs, and hospitals. The Symphonic Band was welcomed in places as varied as the County Jail and Fitzsimmons General Hospital. With the coming of warmer weather the band gave outdoor concerts in the Civic Center. The Denver project also included an organist, Herbert Houze, who played in different churches in Denver and Golden, Colorado.<sup>19</sup>

The Music Project continued its ambitious performing schedule, even as circumstances beyond its control forced it to change and adapt. The Music Project was a government program and subject to all the political and economic pressures of any other program at both the national and state level. The Colorado FMP had no control over the quota of relief or non-relief musicians that could be employed. As a result, the number of ensembles and the instrumentation of those ensembles continued to change, primarily because of decisions made in Washington.

All the musicians certified for relief and in need of work could not be employed by the Music Project, therefore an audition process was established. As Harry Hopkins, the chief administrator of the WPA, said: "The administration has no intention of fostering incompetence, and every applicant is examined by audition boards of established musicians in his community to determine whether he should be aided as a musician or helped to another livelihood."<sup>20</sup> To avoid conflict of interest, the audition boards were composed of local musicians with no FMP affiliation.<sup>21</sup> The fact that the unemployed musician had once made his living as a musician or been a member of an organization such as the American Federation of Musicians was not enough to fulfill the requirements as established by Sokoloff and

supported by Hopkins. Political and professional pressures made it difficult to maintain a consistently high standard, but, during his term as director, Sokoloff was known for doing so.<sup>22</sup>

At the audition, instrumentalists were expected to play passages from the standard literature for their instrument and to sight-read a passage from a little-known work. Typical selections for symphony musicians were:

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| Violin   | Rimsky-Korsakoff, "Caprice Espagnol"<br>Brahms, "Symphony no. 4"  |
| Cello    | Wagner, "Tannhauser Overture"<br>Rossini, "William Tell Overture" |
| Trombone | Wagner, "Ride of the Valkyries"<br>Berlioz, "Hungarian March"     |
| Tympani  | Special exercises composed by Alfred Friese. <sup>23</sup>        |

Not every area had the same standards; they were generally higher in the larger cities. Placing the most competent performers was important, but maintaining a balanced ensemble was also a consideration.

Several times during the Denver project, the performance ensembles were subjected to a major reorganization. The first occurred in December 1936, when all people having relief status were re-evaluated. As a result, nine on the Denver project were discharged and twenty-six were placed under consideration for discharge. The Denver unit reported that of the twenty-six, "most are the best men." At the same time, Denver was up against a quota reduction of seventeen. Until they knew who they would lose and what instruments they would need to replace, they could make no plans.<sup>24</sup>

The Concert Orchestra formed when the project was first established was a casualty of the reduction. For the next six months, January through June 1937, the major performing ensembles in Denver were a Symphonietta and Concert Band.<sup>25</sup> In answer to a request from Sokoloff, Tureman supplied the instrumentation for these two ensembles<sup>26</sup> (Figure 1).

July 1937 brought the second major reorganization this time caused by the resignation of the band director, Fred Schmitt, and "20 of our most capable musicians."<sup>27</sup> The city of Denver had awarded a private contract to Fred Schmitt to furnish a band for concerts in the city parks during the eight-week summer season. The FMP band was so crippled by the loss of these men that no further concerts were possible, and it had a similar effect on the Symphonietta, since six of the band men also played in the Symphonietta.<sup>28</sup>

Two weeks after the loss of the twenty band men, the Denver units were advised that their quota would be reduced by twenty-three. A loss of three more brought them down to their quota. The remaining musicians of the band and Symphonietta combined to form a Concert Orchestra of about forty-five members. It is no surprise that the instrumentation was far from ideal, with not enough strings and too many clarinets and brass. Little could be done about

**WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
OF COLORADO  
FEDERAL MUSIC PROJECT  
MAY 1937**

**Instrumentation of Units of the Colorado-Federal Music Project**

| <b>DENVER CONCERT BAND</b>     | <b>DENVER SYMPHONIETTA</b>         |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Conductor: Fred Schmitt</b> | <b>Conductor: Waldo Williamson</b> |
| 2 Flutes and Piccolos          | 10 Violins                         |
| 1 Eb Clarinet                  | 2 Violas                           |
| 14 Bb Clarinets                | 3 Cellos                           |
| 1 Oboe                         | 2 String Basses                    |
| 4 Saxophones                   | 2 Flutes                           |
| 3 Cellos                       | 3 Clarinets                        |
| 3 String Basses                | 1 Oboe                             |
| 7 Trumpets                     | 1 Saxophone                        |
| 4 French Horns                 | 2 Trumpets                         |
| 2 Trombones                    | 2 French Horns                     |
| 1 Bass Trombone                | 1 Tympani                          |
| 1 Euphonium                    | 1 Piano                            |
| 2 Tubas                        |                                    |
| 1 Bass Drum                    |                                    |
| 2 Snare Drums                  |                                    |
| 1 Tympani                      |                                    |

**Note: In the two Denver Units, the above is the CONCERT INSTRUMENTATION. There are 14 instruments assigned to the band who also double in the SYMPHONIETTA and there are 6 assigned to the Symphonietta who also double in the BAND.**

|                            | Assigned instruments | Concert Personnel |
|----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| <b>DENVER CONCERT BAND</b> | <b>45</b>            | <b>50</b>         |
| <b>DENVER SYMPHONIETTA</b> | <b>18</b>            | <b>31</b>         |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>63</b>            | <b>81</b>         |

**Figure 1. Instrumentation and explanation of doubling in letter from Tureman to Sokoloff.**

it at the time, since there were no certified relief string players available. Waldo Williamson, who had conducted the Symphonietta since its founding in December 1935, resigned. The conductor of the newly formed Colorado Concert Orchestra was the bassoonist and conductor, Robert J. Organ. Although the size and name of the orchestra changed, from then on, the Denver project always had an orchestra.<sup>29</sup>

In the next few months, as musicians moved off the Music Project, whether for private employment or other reasons, it became possible for Fred Schmitt to be reassigned. He returned to the FMP as conductor of the orchestra and was able to bring eight of his men back with him. A serious effort was made to bring about a better instrumental balance. Nine musicians who were considered "less capable" were transferred to other work projects. The copyists unit was closed and those positions were added to the orchestra. String players were becoming available and were hired to fill the open positions.<sup>30</sup>

In December 1937, the instrumentation of the Colorado Concert Orchestra had grown to fifty members, and it was announced that it had been possible for them to assign a "very capable organist, who was able to secure use of one of the new Hammond Electric Organs." The orchestra believed they were the only unit in the country to be using one. The organist was Porter Heaps<sup>31</sup> (Figure 2).

In January 1938 the Colorado Concert Orchestra gave a concert in the Denver Municipal Auditorium. The Denver musicians union cooperated and paid the expense of newspaper advertising. Perhaps as a result, they were able to attract an audience of some 1,800 on the same day that the Junior Civic Symphony had given an afternoon concert in the same auditorium, and the National Western Stock Show was in town. This concert was a real opportunity for the orchestra to show off the new electric organ which they used throughout the program.<sup>32</sup>

#### COLORADO CONCERT ORCHESTRA

|   |                 |   |                         |
|---|-----------------|---|-------------------------|
| 8 | 1st Violins     | 2 | French Horns            |
| 6 | 2nd Violins     | 4 | Trumpets                |
| 2 | Violas          | 3 | Trombones               |
| 4 | Cellos          | 1 | Tuba                    |
| 3 | String Basses   | 1 | Tympani                 |
| 2 | Flutes          | 2 | Drums                   |
| 3 | Clarinets       | 1 | Traps and Effects       |
| 2 | Oboes           | 1 | Piano                   |
| 2 | Alto Saxophones | 1 | Electric Organ          |
| 1 | Tenor Saxophone |   | Conductor: Fred Schmitt |
|   |                 |   | Total 50                |

Figure 2. Instrumentation from Narrative Report, December 1937.

Nikolai Sokoloff, Director of the FMP, visited Denver in late April. While there he appointed Fred Schmitt the new full-time State Director of the FMP for Colorado with the understanding that Schmitt would continue as conductor of the Colorado Concert Orchestra. Schmitt replaced Horace Tureman whose position had been part-time.<sup>33</sup>

Tureman and Schmitt, both Denver natives, were well trained, experienced musicians who had studied in Europe and had extensive conducting experience. Horace Tureman had studied in Chicago and in Paris with d'Indy. During the time he served as State Director, Tureman also taught theory and composition at the University of Denver, and was the conductor of the Civic Symphony and the Denver Symphony.<sup>34</sup>

Fred Schmitt was a graduate of the Dresden Royal Conservatory. While there he appeared as violin soloist and as conductor with the Dresden Philharmonic. He returned to the United States and was, for a short time, the concertmaster of the St. Paul Symphony. Later he was conductor of large orchestras for Paramount Publix theaters in New York, Chicago, St. Louis, etc. When the elaborate concert productions in the movie theaters were discontinued, he was unemployed for a year. In 1935, the FMP in Denver provided his next job as conductor of the FMP Concert Orchestra.<sup>35</sup>

When Fred Schmitt became the State Director in 1938, he worked to secure a much better balance in the orchestra's instrumentation and to employ the best possible musicians. He transferred some members of the orchestra to other work units, some to other orchestras (such as the one in Pueblo), and filled these positions with more capable people. He tried to get the city of Denver to employ the same number of musicians it usually hired for its summer band, but he wanted them added to his FMP orchestra to create a ninety piece orchestra which could then furnish music in the evening in the park. He almost succeeded, except for what he called "influences which seemed greatly opposed" caused the city to let the contract very hurriedly for the usual band.<sup>36</sup>

Summer brought the opening of Elitch Gardens, home of the famous Elitch theater. Elitch's had presented fine symphony concerts for many years until 1933, when it became too expensive. The last conductors to appear there had been Henry Hadley and Rudolf Ganz. When Fred Schmitt suggested to Elitch's that the FMP orchestra present a series of free symphony concerts in the theater, the management was happy to assume all the expenses, so that once again Elitch's could be a place to hear symphonic music, attend the theater, or visit the zoo<sup>37</sup> (Figure 3).

The concerts were successful until the fifth week, when the stage sets, needed for the theater production, could not be removed and replaced between the afternoon symphony concert and the evening theater performance. The Civic Center then became the site of the orchestra's weekly evening outdoor concerts.<sup>39</sup> At one of these concerts in late July, Harry Hill, the news editor of KVOD, became so impressed with the orchestra that he wrote to Harry Hopkins,

# The Colorado Symphony Orchestra

FRED SCHMITT, Conductor

— SOLOIST —

MISS JEANNE CARROLL, CONTRALTO

## Elitch Theatre---Elitch's Gardens

West 38th Ave. and Tennyson St.  
DENVER, COLORADO

THURSDAY, JUNE 30, 1938

3:00 P. M.

### PROGRAM

- 1 —  
Overture to the opera "Il Guarany".....Gomez
- 2 —  
"L'Arlesienne," Suite de Concert.....Bizet  
1. Pastorale  
2. Intermezzo  
3. Menuet  
4. Farandole
- 3 —  
Prelude to the Opera, "Tristan and Isolde".....Wagner
- 4 —  
"Danse Macabre," Poeme Symphonique.....Saint-Saens  
Solos for Violin played by Mr. Richard Sears
- INTERMISSION
- 5 —  
Selections from "The Student Prince".....Romberg
- 6 —  
"Symphony No. 5, in E Minor, Op. 64".....Tschaikowsky  
Part II, "Andante"
- 7 —  
"My Heart At Thy Sweet Voice".....Saint-Saens  
(From "Samson and Delilah")  
Soloist, Miss Jeanne Carroll, Contralto
- 8 —  
"The Ride of the Valkyries".....Wagner  
From the Music-Drama, "Die Walkure"

PRESENTED BY  
WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION  
FEDERAL MUSIC PROJECT  
DR. NIKOLAI SOKOLOFF  
Director  
FRED SCHMITT, State Director

Figure 3. Program by Colorado Symphony Orchestra, FMP, at Elitch's Gardens, June 30, 1938.<sup>38</sup>

the head of the WPA. Mr. Hill had been out walking, heard the music, and went to investigate. He reported “an audience of some 3,000 sitting absolutely entranced [and] very busy just listening.” He claimed he had never seen such an audience. He promised to do all in his power as the news editor of KVOD “to make this excellent organization known from coast to coast.” A share of local boosterism, no doubt, but his letter shows how he was captivated by this orchestra.<sup>40</sup>

Fred Schmitt not only sought every opportunity for live concert performances, he also began to seek opportunities for radio broadcasts by the orchestra. The technology that had earlier caused fear of unemployment the musicians now used to their advantage. The concerts at Elitch’s Gardens and the evening concerts in the Denver Civic Center were broadcast in part. The practice of broadcasting at least a part of their concerts continued from then on. At one point there was a group of twenty-six players from the orchestra known as the “Denver WPA Radio Orchestra.” They performed on a program called “Colorado WPA Highlights.” In all, there were over one hundred broadcasts of Federal Music Project concerts from Denver, and about one third of those were over KOA,<sup>41</sup> a station strong enough to be heard throughout the Rocky Mountain and Plains States. It was reported to have been heard as far away as England, Australia, and Alaska.<sup>42</sup>

In the fall of 1938, the Denver orchestra grew to about seventy members.<sup>43</sup> Plans could now be made for a real tour. The Washington office agreed to a contract which allowed Arthur Oberfelder, a well known impresario, to make all the business arrangements. He agreed to pay all costs, such as transportation, as well as pay a small percentage to the orchestra. Audiences were enthusiastic; some were hearing an orchestra for the first time. Unfortunately for Oberfelder and the orchestra, the tour was not a financial success, in spite of its being a musical one.

The tour began on Monday, October 24th, lasted two weeks, and included nine towns and cities plus a major concert in Denver. The first week they traveled north from Denver to Fort Morgan, Fort Collins, Boulder, and Laramie, Wyoming. They returned to Denver for a Saturday evening performance at the City Auditorium. The next week the orchestra tour turned south to Rocky Ford, La Junta, Lamar, Trinidad, and into New Mexico for a concert at the Schuler Auditorium in Raton. In each town the orchestra usually gave two concerts, one in the afternoon, designed for school students, and one in the evening. The town’s high school auditorium often provided the site. At the concerts for children, Fred Schmitt, the conductor, would give a short talk about the music, and the members would demonstrate various instruments<sup>44</sup> (Figure 4).

The first concert of the tour was in Fort Morgan. The Fort Morgan Times used such phrases as “orchestra gave a highly-finished performance” to “highly appreciative audience who too seldom have the opportunity to hear such a well-trained organization,” and Porter Heaps’ “performance on the Hammond electric organ was one of the highlights of the program.”<sup>46</sup>

## THE FORT MORGAN JUNIOR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Presents

THE COLORADO SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA

Fred Schmitt, Conductor

Works Progress Administration Federal Music Project

Dr. Nikolai Sokoloff, Director - - Fred Schmitt, State Director

High School Auditorium, Fort Morgan, Colo., Monday, Oct. 24, '38

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## PROGRAM

1.  
"SYMPHONY NO. 8, In B Minor".....Schubert  
(THE UNFINISHED SYMPHONY)  
I. Allegro Moderato                      II. Andante con Moto
  2.  
"SYMPHONY NO. 1, In D Minor" Opus 42.....Guilmant  
For ORGAN and ORCHESTRA. Soloist: PORTER HEAPS, Organist
  3.  
"DANSE MACABRE" .....Poeme Symphonique..... Saint-Saens
- INTERMISSION
4.  
"LES PRELUDES".....Symphonic Tone-Poem.....Liszt
  5.  
"PRELUDE TO LOHENGRIN" .....Wagner
  6.  
SOLOIST: PORTER HEAPS, Organist  
(a) "Grande Waltz Brilliance" .....Chopin  
(b) "Ma mere L'Oye" .....Revel  
Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant Les entretiens de la Bella et de la Bete  
Lalderonnette, Imperatrice des Pagodes.
  7.  
OVERTURE TO "TANNHAUSER".....Wagner  
Mr. Heaps Plays the Hammond Organ Exclusively

-:-

## INSTRUMENTATION AND PERSONNEL

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>1st Violins</b><br>Ben Alex<br>• Elizabeth R. Avdlette<br>• Ruth Skelly Bello<br>• Helene O. Essman<br>Thos. A. Herbert, Jr.<br>• Dorothy Helen Milne<br>Riley Moore, Jr.<br>• Catherine M. Phelps<br>Leonard Poladsky<br>Charles G. Romeo<br>Edmond O. Scheffler<br>Richard Sears<br>George Smaldone<br>Roy H. Werrell | <b>Cellos</b><br>Benjamin D. Baylis<br>Frank John<br>Alfred Koven<br>David Nussbaum<br>• Dorothy Wells Whitaker<br>Lorenz E. Wurtzebach     | <b>Trumpets</b><br>Frank M. Jacoe<br>Fred J. Lara<br>Clifford R. Lutes                       |
| <b>2nd Violins</b><br>Max Berman<br>• Virginia A. Blake<br>Jack M. Bohman<br>John F. Gilbert<br>William A. Roeth<br>George F. Russell<br>Richard M. Schwartz<br>Herbert G. White   | <b>Basses</b><br>Andrew M. Arellano<br>Norman H. Bevill<br>Paschal C. Guerrieri<br>Alexander F. Horst<br>Carroll Martin Kob<br>Ray E. Moore | <b>French Horns</b><br>Gordon A. Dayton<br>D. L. Frankfather<br>Roy Haines<br>Harry A. Mesch |
| <b>Violas</b><br>Robert R. Becker<br>• Grace S. Cape<br>Edwin J. Klalber<br>• Arline M. Klein<br>George E. Sandell<br>Ross Spencer   | <b>Flute and Piccolo</b><br>Verne E. Richfield<br>A. Benton Stuart  | <b>Trombones</b><br>Everet R. Beckman<br>William W. Ericke<br>Gustav A. Forter               |
|  | <b>Clarinet</b><br>Beryl W. Brewer<br>Pete Tarantola  | <b>Tuba</b><br>William H. Glanville  |
|  | <b>Oboe</b><br>• Beverly I. Opp   | <b>Organ</b><br>Webster C. G. Jones  |
|  | <b>Bassoons</b><br>William Davis Evans<br>Robert J. Organ   | <b>Tympani</b><br>Stephen J. Halpin  |
| PORTER HEAPS, Soloist  |   | <b>Percussion</b><br>Herschell R. Hooper<br>Walter R. Whitmoyer                              |
| ROBT. J. ORGAN, Asst. Conductor  | W. H. BURNAUGH, Dist. Supervisor  | <b>Librarian</b><br>Joseph O. Jones  |
| Tour Direction: Arthur M. Oberfelder, 1636 California St., Denver  | EDW. P. FLANNERY, Agent-Cashier   |  |

Figure 4. Program by Colorado Symphony Orchestra, FMP, at Fort Morgan, Colo., October 24, 1938.<sup>45</sup>

The positive expressions used in the Fort Morgan paper were repeated by others throughout the tour. However, there was one embarrassing incident, and one town's newspaper seems to have taken a political position.

After the orchestra's appearance in Rocky Ford, the Pueblo Star Journal reported that "at least one of the orchestra members spent the night at the city jail, where Patrolman Fred Wright booked him for drunkenness." The same newspaper story reported that "a wave of resentment was noted in La Junta." Townspeople were said to be upset because they felt they had paid three times to hear the orchestra: 1) by paying taxes to support the WPA, 2) by paying admission to the concert, and 3) by lodging or feeding the musicians. Also certain "information" or "misinformation" about how the gate receipts were divided provoked alarm.<sup>47</sup> When these stories made their way to Washington, Sokoloff sent a questioning telegram to Schmitt. Schmitt responded that, as agreed to in the contract which Washington had approved, Oberfelder had made all the arrangements. When in La Junta, they had heard no criticism and had been "courteously received and provided for." He explained that "the Pueblo Star Journal must have received a great deal of misinformation, and, being a strong Republican newspaper opposed to WPA, deliberately printed and falsified the actual facts." He reminded Sokoloff that the tour date was just prior to the general election, and he believed there was a political motive behind the attack on the FMP orchestra. As for the Rocky Ford incident, Schmitt admitted that it was unfortunate but true. He explained that the musician who had been put in jail for drunkenness had only been an orchestra member for a short time and was now discharged. For Sokoloff, these explanations cleared up both situations.<sup>48</sup>

The tour was over sooner than had been planned, for Oberfelder chose to exercise his right to withdraw from the contract.

After the tour ended, the Colorado Symphony Orchestra was reduced to sixty-one musicians, and its name was changed to the Denver Federal Orchestra. However, with the cooperation of the local musicians union, they began a very successful series of regular weekly Sunday-noon "pop" concerts at the Broadway Theater. The series lasted for fourteen weeks.<sup>49</sup>

From then on the orchestra's busy schedule regularly included a major role during National Music Week and playing summer evening concerts in the Civic Center to crowds of thousands. The Colorado FMP claimed to give the only legitimate summer symphony concerts between St. Louis and the West Coast.<sup>50</sup>

In September 1939, the Federal Music Program was transferred to state control. The transition from federal to state caused some disruption, and no concerts were given in September. Otherwise, the switch seems to have had little negative effect.<sup>51</sup> The concert schedule returned to normal, and the WPA orchestra gave an elaborate Christmas Eve concert in cooperation with a chorus of high school students. They performed in the lobby of the Denver Municipal Building, where a system of amplification carried the music across the

Civic Center. Another set of loud speakers was installed on the roof of a downtown hotel, so the music could be heard in the business district. In addition, a radio station broadcast the concert throughout the state. Fred Schmitt, believed that nothing like it had ever been attempted anywhere in the United States.<sup>52</sup>

The successful Christmas Eve concert encouraged them to do Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in another joint performance with the high school chorus during Music Week (May 1940). They repeated the Mendelssohn in June with professional singers (and some of the high school students) for the State Convention of Methodist Churches. The performance was also open to the public.<sup>53</sup>

By July 1940 the orchestra was greatly reduced in size and had lost quite a number of important players in the first violins, including the concert master.<sup>54</sup> At a state conference which discussed the various problems confronting the Public Service Division of the WPA, Fred Schmitt proposed a move toward a Music Project that would focus on more than symphonic music and his initiative apparently found favor. With community service as an acceptable goal, seventeen musicians from the FMP coordinated their services with the Recreation Division to provide a square dance in Denver's Washington Park.<sup>55</sup>

In September, at another conference, Fred Schmitt proposed that all musical activities now being done separately in the various divisions of the Community Service Section be consolidated within the Music Project.<sup>56</sup> In November, he took an inspection trip through the southern part of the state and discovered that the music teachers in the WPA Educational and Recreation Departments felt quite isolated and were anxious for the support of the Music Project.<sup>57</sup>

The economic and political situation was changing, but the Music Project's focus never left the performance of music. As December 1940 approached, plans were again made for a performance of the orchestra with the high school student chorus. During Christmas week they performed *Messiah*, their last such concert. In 1941 the Music Project came to an end and performing organizations, which had struggled to achieve some continuity and balance, were disbanded.

It is difficult to measure the value of the FMP, but we can look back and try to assess how well the Music Project met its stated goals. The basic purpose of all WPA programs was to provide employment. The Music Project's purpose was to provide employment to professional musicians. In Denver, Music Project workers were required to work ninety-six hours a month, divided into two periods of forty-eight hours each, and they earned \$93.00 a month. The conductors received somewhat more. When Fred Schmitt began as conductor in 1935 his pay was \$130.00 a month. In December 1936 it was raised to \$150.00 a month.<sup>58</sup> The musicians employed by the FMP were able to maintain and, in many cases, improve their skills in anticipation of the day when they would no longer need to have the government as their employer. It was expected that the many well attended, free concerts would build greater public interest and so create a demand for the musician in the future. Because

the war years were so disruptive in many ways, it is difficult to draw a direct line from the FMP orchestra of the 1930s to the Denver Symphony of the 1940s and 1950s. However, many of the musicians in the Denver Symphony had also played in the FMP orchestra, and one can suggest the Denver Symphony might not have had available to it so many experienced orchestral musicians had it not been for the Federal Music Project.<sup>59</sup>

## NOTES

1. The official documents of the Federal Music Project are included in Record Group 69 of the National Archives, Washington, D.C. References made to *Narrative Reports*, *Narrative Report Summary*, *Employment Reports*, *Performance and Attendance Reports*, *Press Clippings*, *Programs and Schedules*, and State Series 651.311, found in this article, describe materials which are part of RG 69, WPA, FMP Files housed in the National Archives. No FMP document records were found in the Denver Public Library, Colorado Historical Society Library, Colorado State Archives or the National Archives' branch in Denver.

2. The Art projects were announced August 2, 1935 and approved by President Roosevelt on September 12, 1935. The Historical Records Survey became an independent project in October 1936. William F. McDonald, *Federal Relief Administration and the Arts* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969), 129-131, 214.

3. It was officially terminated July 1943, (McDonald, 617).

4. Nikolai Sokoloff, *The Federal Music Project*, (Washington, 1936), [3].

5. The cost was about \$15,000. Maurice Mermey, "Vanishing Fiddler," *The North American Review* 227, no.3 (March 1929): 304.

6. "Effects of Technological Changes Upon Employment in the Amusement Industry" *Monthly Labor Review* 33, no. 2 (August 1931): 2.

7. *Colorado Year Book, 1931*, p.331; *Colorado Year Book, 1933-1934*, p.407. By 1938 the silent film had disappeared from all theaters in Colorado. *Colorado Year Book, 1937-1938*, p.429.

8. In 1932, musicians employed in Colorado moving picture theaters earned an average of \$50.00 per week. *Colorado Bureau of Labor Statistics, July 1, 1930 to July 1, 1932* (1932), 43.

9. Grace Overmyer, "The Musician Starves," *American Mercury* 32 (June 1934): 224-231.

10. *Rocky Mountain News* 20 April 1930.

11. *Colorado Labor Advocate*, 27 March 1930; *Rocky Mountain News* 29 March; 20 April; 21 April 1930. Hebron Charles Kline, *A History of the Denver Theatre During the Depression Era, 1929-1941* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver, 1963), 64.

12. The conductor was Emil Hilb, and the violin soloist was David Eisenberg. *Rocky Mountain News*, 20 November 1932, p.4.

13. James Michael Bailey, *Orpheus on a Roller Coaster: a History of the Denver Symphony Orchestra*. (M.A. thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 1991), 5-7; "The Civic Symphony Orchestra" in *The Lookout from the Denver Public Library*, v.1, no. 1.: "Music in Denver and Colorado" (January 1927): 54-56.

14. McDonald, 605. In Denver, more than half of the performances given by FMP organizations, were given in public schools for the students. R.G. 69, WPA, FMP Files, *Narrative Reports*, Colorado.

15. The FMP was established in Colorado Springs on December 9, 1935 and in Pueblo on January 31, 1936. *Narrative Report Summary*, Colorado, June 12, 1936.

16. Correspondence to and from Miller confirm his position as State Director of the FMP during most of 1936. Tureman was appointed State Director of the Colorado FMP as of January 15, 1937. Paul Shriver (State Administrator, WPA, Colorado) letter to Ellen Woodward (Assistant Administrator, WPA, Wash. DC), January 4, 1937. R.G. 69, WPA State Series 651.311, Colorado. [WPA State Series 651.311, Colorado, hereafter cited as (SS 651.311)]

17. *Narrative Report Summary*, Colorado, June 12, 1936.

18. There were also several music copyists and teachers. *Narrative Report Summary*, Colorado, April 4, May, and June 12, 1936; RG 69, WPA, FMP Files, Employment Reports, March–April, 1936.

19. The date, location, and estimated attendance were reported for each performance. The Concert Orchestra gave 14 concerts to 11,550; the String Quartet gave 31 concerts to 4,520; the Symphonic Band gave 7 concerts to 8,950 and the organist gave 12 concerts to 640. [Concert reports] December 1935 - May 1936. (SS 651.311)

20. Harry Hopkins quoted in Janelle Jedd Warren Findley, *Of Tears and Need: The Federal Music Project, 1935-1943* (Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 1973), 84.

21. Findley, 85.

22. Sokoloff was director of the FMP from 1935 to August 1939. McDonald, 614-615.

23. George Foster, "Record of Program Operation and Accomplishment; the Federal Music Project, 1935-1939; the WPA Music Program, 1939-1943," (1943), 170, quoted in Cornelius Baird Canon, *The Federal Music Project of the Works Progress Administration: Music in a Democracy* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1963), 48.

24. *Narrative Report Summary*, Colorado, January 15, 1937.

25. R.G. 69, WPA, FMP Files, *Performance and Attendance Reports*, Colorado, and *Employment Reports*, Colorado, January - June, 1937.

26. Tureman letter to Sokoloff, May 17, 1937. (SS 651.311)

27. Tureman letter to Sokoloff, October 27, 1937.

28. *Narrative Report*, Colorado, July 1 - November 1, 1937; Tureman letter to Sokoloff, October 27, 1937. (SS 651.311)

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Narrative Report*, Colorado, December, 1937.

32. *Narrative Report*, Colorado, January, 1938. Program included Mendelssohn's *Concerto in G minor*, Beatrice Lessin piano; Massenet's "Meditation," Catherine M. Phelps, violin. R.G. 69, WPA, FMP Files, *Press Clippings*, Colorado, unidentified newspaper, 1938.

33. *Narrative Report*, Colorado, April, 1938; Schmitt's appointment as Director was effective as of May 15, 1938 at a yearly salary of \$2700. As conductor, his salary had been \$1800. Memorandum to Ellen S. Woodward, May 10, 1938. (SS 651.311)

34. Tureman letter to Sokoloff, October 26, 1937. (SS 651.311)

35. Statement from Fred Schmitt, May 16, 1938. (SS 651.311)

36. *Narrative Report*, Colorado, May, 1938.

37. *Ibid.*

38. R.G. 69, WPA, FMP Files, *Programs and Schedules*, Colorado.

39. *Narrative Report*, Colorado, July 1938.

40. Harry Hill letter to H. Hopkins, July 26, 1938. (SS 651.311)

41. *Narrative Reports*, Colorado, March 1938 - July 1940; *Performance and Attendance Reports*, Colorado, May - June 1937, April 1938 - April 1940.

42. Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 160.

43. *Employment Reports*, Colorado, October - November, 1938.

44. *Narrative Report*, Colorado, October - November, 1938.

45. *Programs and Schedules*, Colorado. The programs shown in Figures 3 and 4 are representative of the orchestra's repertoire which tended to be in an accessible style. Programs often included excerpts from larger works and those with programmatic content, such as opera overtures and tone poems. The Symphonietta did perform some works from earlier periods, such as works by Haydn, Mozart, and Boccherini. There was no special attempt to perform American composers, though the Symphonietta did perform works by its conductor, Waldo Williamson. The band programs were typical of the period and included arrangements, transcriptions, and marches.

46. *Fort Morgan Times* (Colo.) 25 October 1938.

47. *Pueblo Star Journal* (Colo.) 3 November 1938.

48. Schmitt letter to Sokoloff, November 14, 1938, in response to Sokoloff's telegram of November 12, 1938. (SS 651.311)

49. *Narrative Reports*, Colorado, December 1938 - April 1939.
50. *Narrative Report*, Colorado, August 1939.
51. *Narrative Report*, Colorado, September, 1939.
52. *Narrative Reports*, Colorado, October - December 1939.
53. *Narrative Reports*, Colorado, May - June 1940.
54. Because of reductions in the state quota, Denver area employment declined to fifty-one, and it was necessary to close the Pueblo and Colorado Springs units. *Narrative Report*, Colorado, June 1940.
55. *Narrative Report*, Colorado, July, 1940.
56. Fred Schmitt attended "as a special consultant for the teachers of music who are now employed by Adult Education and Recreation." *Narrative Report*, Colorado, September, 1940.
57. *Narrative Report*, Colorado, November 1940.
58. Tureman letter to Sokoloff, August 10, 1937. (SS 651.311)
59. A comparison of the orchestra personnel listed on a program of the Denver Symphony for the 1941/42 season, and the program of the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, FMP, concert of October 24, 1938, show that about one third of the FMP orchestra members played in the Denver Symphony.