

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE MAYNARD FINNISH SOCIALIST CHAPTER'S "IMATRA BAND"

(Written by conductor Louis Koski in "Raivaaja" Festival Issue, July 1924)

The Maynard Finns as well as those living elsewhere, have their good as well as bad features, but now during the festivities, we'll keep the skeletons locked away and speak only of our best achievements; and such a one is the "Imatra Band".

It was founded on September 22, 1898. This honor falls to the musical veteran, Hugo Kajander, who served as its first conductor and then as a faithful and enthusiastic player for a decade. The band was founded to "awaken interest and promote the musical activities among the young". The band operated independently for about eleven years.

This writer was introduced to "Imatra" about five years after its inception. If we compare an early photograph to the one taken last year, we first notice that "Imatra" has shaved its beard ---no! More humorous things have occurred --- having existed for a quarter of a century, it has been regenerated. To tell the truth, most of its members could scarcely produce a mustache, even if they prayed to heaven.

It goes without saying that I have stayed faithful to those ideals of its founder; it has and still does brutal educational work among the young.

A second interesting change is its outward appearance. It was originally made up of brass instruments, now it contains almost all of the instrumentation of a "military band". I can add that only Finnish persistence and the desire to learn kept the Imatra gang going in the early years. One was a good player only if he could read the music without fingerings and blessings to the one who could play his part without sour notes --after serious practicing.

The current members and especially the young can get continuing education from private lessons, being supported by their parents and thus advance rapidly. Oh, for the tweeting that says "nothing will come of the kids born in this country" --- the writer firmly believes most of the Imatra youngsters will continue the work of the Imatra that was founded twenty-five years ago. A danger lies in that the most gifted like Väinö Kauppi, (he is also the result of the musical interests of the Maynard Finns, being today a soloist in the Edwin Franco Goldman Band) who leave their home town and turn professional, leaving gaps that it will take years to fill. In any case, we can brag to folks from other Finn towns: "Look! Maynard sends out great musicians, not just bales of woolen cloth!"

In June, 1909, the Imatra Band joined the Finnish Socialist Chapter and has been one of its liveliest departments ever since. Its current membership is thirty. During the last twenty-five years its conductors have included men who have led Finnish bands throughout the United States, some of them having passed on.

Two founding members are still with us in the ranks: John Huikari, tuba; Oscar Saari, trombone.

The local chapter also has an orchestra which has been existence for two years. With the exception of the strings, all other players are Imatra musicians. On the vocal side, there is a mixed choir of thirty voices, put together just a few months ago. I must admit that singing has not been one of our strong points, the days of the past choruses were rather shaky.

The above mentioned are the musical activities of the chapter. In addition to them, the Finnish churches have choirs. The communist group also has an orchestra, a chorus and some sort of band. More important in the independent "National Band", a musical educator for their youth with about the same size of membership.

Finally, if I were to make an inventory of the Finnish pipers, it would create an ensemble of about seventy-five. What a red-hot glow would result if they could find a way to blow on the same embers!

Our music at home is of the American style: a piano, a gramophone, a radio, that is what hurtles through the air. Our daughters practice the piano, the wives fool with the gramophone, while the husbands sit about with a button in one ear, twisting the radio dial, and hearing, every now and then ---pure music ---until Billy Sunday occasionally interrupts, damning us to hell.

Now Maynard's Finnish musical amateurs! Raise up your orangeade or your ginger-ale bottles ---that's what you should drink in the hot weather. So raise the bottle and let us sing, arise and sing in honor of the young musicians. The song is a bit old but we can all remember it. "Yes, We Have No Bananas" ---that's it, boys. Then we will remove our hats and let out a triple "Long Live" to the founders of the band. Then we'll raise a toast to all the Maynard music enthusiasts. Now that I have exhausted my Finnish vocabulary, we will drain the last drops from our bottles, get the tin-eared to join us and we'll shout fortissimo: 'VIVE LA BANDA IMATRA", our first musical endeavor!

For "Imatra Band"

L. Koski