

M.U.S.-icology 101

Lecture No. 1
Topic: *The Mussenger*, Vol. 1, No. 1

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Many of your professors can tell you about the history of this department. But by the very nature of University education, there are few people around this place who can speak about the Music Undergraduate Society prior to 1990.

This is where I come in.

When I returned to campus last fall, I noticed a lot of changes within a basically familiar environment. So the goal of this soon-to-be regular column is to shed some light (and some humour) on some of those observations. History buffs will be interested because, well, you're history buffs. The rest of you might find an amusing anecdote about your Junior High band teacher, or find out how much things stay the same over time. It might even give you an idea or two for the future.

Today's main topic is this particular newsletter, *The Mussenger*. This was Joe Slabé's baby (Joe currently teaches music at St. Francis High School). The concept behind the publication was that it should inform, promote, and entertain.

Take the first issue, for example. Over half of it was dedicated to reporting on recent concerts and events (e.g., a joint Music/Drama party, a graduate trumpet recital, the grand opening of the Jack Singer). There were a couple of articles promoting upcoming events and activities, updates on what first-years and student teachers were up to, an editorial from President Niall O'Rourke about the Saddledome, The Centre & The Bay, and some humour pieces. Here are just three of the one-liners from that issue:

New students seem to be settling in nicely, especially Sarah Jackson, who's been getting a lot of "orientation" from Ross McIntyre.

It seems Linda Brown's position with the CPO may be in jeopardy. Inside sources claim she has not been consuming her quota of beer.

Rock and Roll mogul Malcolm Edwards has reportedly been signed by A & M Records to "clean up their act."

Like I said, some things don't change (except Ross, of course; a wife and kids will do that for you). But looking at these jokes, I can also see some social

changes. The vast majority of students at the time would have "got" these jokes. Today, I'm not so sure that would be the case. "Why?" you may ask.

Well, I perceive that the overall comraderie, the *esprit de corps*, has all but evaporated over time. That is, there is no sense that we are a department; that everyone in the department supports everyone else; that *no one* is an outsider. Many current undergrads seem to focus on their significant-other-du-jour and a tight circle of friends for support and ignore the benefits of relating to the music student body as a whole.

I could list all sorts of possible causes: higher entrance requirements (thus attracting more "serious" students); the side effects of the "Me" decade; the larger student population; the idea of having a few "elite" ensembles rather than having a wide range of excellent ensembles (the same ones, actually) that fill specialized needs. But regardless of the causes, that day-to-day interaction between diverse musicians rarely surfaces.

As someone with a stronger academic side, I mourn the loss of this social element. University, to my mind, is about personal growth. The academics you can do on your own to a degree. But music is mostly a team sport, and circulating with a wider spectrum of players can't help but make you a better musician and a better person. (It certainly worked that way for me.)

I applaud current efforts by M.U.S. and the Faculty of Fine Arts to bring students in the various arts disciplines together. But the benefits of these initiatives are finite without similar efforts within our own department. I'd hate to see the U of C become like some music schools that are described as "cold" because of their internal segregation.

Which brings me back to the original *Mussenger*. That publication was Joe's effort to make the music students more of a group; to make them more aware of all the great things happening here. I guess this column has a similar goal. In upcoming installments, I will write about M.U.S. intramural sports teams and the infamous April Fools' Recital Hour, which as you may have noticed, are no longer "going concerns." My belief is that there are not enough bridges* being built. This column is my construction effort.

* This is not a comment about Jill, who in her own way is bowling, er, building bridges.

