Music was a core focus from the university’s beginning, as it was for Carnegie himself, who donated 7,689 organs to churches and municipalities, served as president of the New York Philharmonic Society, and helped to establish the Pittsburgh Symphony.

When Andrew Carnegie founded the Carnegie Technical Schools in 1900, he envisaged training all levels of workers for the steel mills of Pittsburgh. Architects would design walls raised by master masons. Engineers would fashion equipment created by machinists and operated by foremen. Painters and sculptors, whose purpose was “to apply art and design to industries,” would finish the buildings, and clothiers would create and care for the workers’ uniforms. All of these craftsmen, executives, and staff—men and women alike—would emerge from Carnegie Tech educated for a life of productive employment and civic participation in the burgeoning country. Founding such a school, he wrote in his essay “The Best Fields for Philanthropy,” was the best application of his philosophy of giving, where “the man who dies thus rich dies disgraced.”
first a railroad worker, then a steel industrialist, an ingenious investor, and the richest man in the world when he sold Carnegie Steel to J. P. Morgan to create U.S. Steel in 1901, Carnegie was in the end the premier cultural philanthropist of his age. With his millions, he created museums, institutes, foundations, prizes, endowments and libraries. His canny mind and thrifty values ensured his investments were sound—but they were not always intended for short-term yields, however practical the curriculum at the Carnegie Technical Schools. Despite his life in steel, the most difficult to manufacture yet most useful of all modern materials, Carnegie valued even more the matters of the spirit.

A MUSICAL LIFE

Andrew Carnegie was born in Dunfermline, Scotland, in 1835 to poor parents who immigrated to Pittsburgh when he was 12 years old, whereupon he quickly found his first job. Like millions of other poor immigrants, he expected a better life in America than had been available to his family in the Old World. The emerging rags-to-riches narrative of American history embraced education as the key to a better life. Carnegie thus treasured so greatly his own early opportunities to read in a private library that he built more than 2,500 public libraries worldwide to enable others to learn as he had. Yet Carnegie did not attend school after age 13 and seems to have felt disadvantaged throughout his life as he associated with educated scientists, businessmen, and heads of state. An inner sense of his background as a poor, uncultured Scottish child seems to have motivated him to work hard, read widely, and acquire a broad knowledge of the fine arts.

Throughout the 19th century, art—and music above all—was widely held to exemplify humanity's highest aspirations and noblest qualities, and even to open onto the transcendent properties of Beauty, Truth and Goodness. Music lifted one’s thoughts to a higher plane, far above the base materiality of this world. Knowledge of music was thus regarded as a sign of refinement and good character. By extension, cultural critics Matthew Arnold and Charles Eliot Norton preached the social utility of beauty, for what was good for the individual was good for society. Carnegie revealed his vision for elevating Pittsburgh through art in an 1879 letter to the President and Trustees of the Carnegie Institute:

Not only our own country, but the civilized world, will take note of the fact that our Dear Old Smoky Pittsburgh, no longer content to be celebrated only as one of the chief manufacturing centers, has entered upon the path to higher things, and is before long, as we thoroughly believe, also to be noted for her preeminence in the arts and sciences.  

As an art historian Kenneth Neal wrote, "According to the wisdom of the age, art was enabling, uplifting, at once an agent and an index of social progress.  " Despite these aspirations, backed by gifts of organs and concert halls, Carnegie’s commitment to music has come into question. His friend Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony, wrote that Carnegie’s “admiration for music in its simpler forms never crystallized into as great a conviction regarding its importance in life as that he had regarding the importance of science or literature.” He never, for example, pursued music lessons. Though he frequently led guests in song, he acknowledged that he was “denied much of a voice.” Music was, however, at the heart of his extraordinary life and philanthropic work, as it is now at the heart of the School of Music that bears his name. Among Carnegie’s most cherished childhood memories in Scotland were his father’s rich-voiced singing of ballads and his mother’s intoning the “gems of Scottish minstrelsy.” “Folksongs,” he wrote, “are the best possible foundation for sure progress to the heights of Beethoven and Wagner.” He was “awakened” to music while singing in a choir, where he discovered selections from Handel oratorios in the back of the hymnbook. “The beginning of my musical education,” he said, “dates from the small choir of the Swedenborgian Society of Pittsburgh.” Later he was astounded by Wagner: “The overture to Lohengrin thrilled me as a new revelation. Here was a genius, indeed, differing from all before, a new ladder upon which to climb upward.” He loved not only folksongs, choral music, and opera, but was also fascinated with instrumental timbres:

If I have one weakness more than another, it is for the harmony of sweet sounds. . . I met my fate in the famous Temple of Hoonan, in which is the most celebrated ‘gong’ in China. I struck it, and listened. For more than one full minute, I believe, that bowl was a quivering mass of delicious sound. I thought it would never cease to vibrate. In Japan I had counted one that sounded fifty seconds, and its music rang in my ears for days.”
and counting.

Alon Chancey Kelley (A'35) conducts a performance of the CMU Symphony Orchestra

A photo of the very first orchestra at CMU in 1913
J. Vick O'Brien, conductor

A group photo of the Kiltie Band
Richard Strange, conductor

A group photo of the Cameron Choir in front of the dean's office entrance
Max Peterson, conductor

School of Music faculty listings as of June 1, 1917
Carnegie invested in music education because he was convinced of the transformative moral and aesthetic power of music. He subscribed to the philosophy of education articulated by his friend John Stuart Mill, whose address at the University of St. Andrews argues that art "trains us never to be completely satisfied with imperfection in what we ourselves do and to: is ideal, as much as possible, every work we do, and most of all, our own characters and lives.” Mill’s insights that art is needed for the completeness of the human being because “it is the education of the feeling, and the cultivation of the beautiful” and he posits three branches of education: the moral, the intellectual, and the aesthetic.” Carnegie repeated these to equal categories in a later speech.

Our mills and factories are numerous, large and productive, but the material, indispensable moldering money itself, should only be the foundation upon which we build things spiritual… Not until the dollars are transmuted into service for others, in one of the many forms best calculated to appeal to and develop the higher things of the moral, intellectual and esthetic life, has wealth completely justified its existence.”

Again referring to Mill’s essay in his autobiography, Carnegie states that “The prominence he assigns to music as an aid to high living and pure refined enjoyment is notable. Such is my own experience.”

CARNEGIE’S INSTITUTES

The story of how Carnegie’s personal, philanthropic, and philosophical affinity for music was realized in the Carnegie Mellon University School of Music begins with the founding of the Carnegie Institute. Carnegie opened his “palace of culture” – a library, painting gallery, museum of natural history, and music hall – in 1895 at the entrance to Pittsburgh’s Schenley Park as “a library, painting gallery, museum of natural history, and music hall. 31 The Glee Club performed in Carnegie Music Hall in spring 1912. Less than a day after the first class of the Institute opened in 1906, 32 and the Kiltie Band, Tech Band and the Carnegie Tech Glee and Mandolin Club were partly replaced with tatties, first railroaded in 1905. By 1917, 17,1905 to choose the school

Like John White Alexander’s mural, “The Crowning of Labor,” Cutting, president both of Cooper Union and the Metropolitan Opera Company, declared that the Carnegie Institute expressed his esteem for education of the human race, as attained.”

If you believe this is the highest expression which the human race yet attained.”

Many are the youths of Pittsburgh, who through these will have their finer natures touched and attuned, the results being lifelong. I attach so much importance to music. I entertain not the slightest doubt, and Goethe’s saying should be recalled, that ‘straight leads from music to good’.”

In his capstone speech, with students of the Carnegie Technical Schools in attendance, he extolled the Pittsburgh Symphony as one of only three full-time orchestras in the United States (along with those in Boston and Chicago), declared it in good hands under the leadership of Emil Paur, and elaborated on the civic works of music.

Though the Carnegie Technical Schools were not part of his first president—Arthur Hammrich was commissioned to Carnegie by Robert P. G. Cutting, president both of Cooper Union and the Metropolitan Opera Company—Tchaikovsky’s visit made Tech Band and the Carnegie Tech Band, Tech Glee and Mandolin Club and students’ music.

Since 1947, Carnegie Mellon has been home to the New Music Ensemble, the ensemble that continues the tradition in the Carnegie Mellon School of Music (ISCM), at CMU. The ISCM presented concerts at CMU between 1944 and 1947. The concerts were held annually.

FACT:

Carnegie’s musical philanthropy carried on after who was conducting, to their home for dinner. There the hall’s inaugural concert, the Carnegies invited Tchaikovsky,

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had 156 members, and the Women's Glee Club had 34 members.96

With the laying of the cornerstone on April 25, 1912, the School of Applied Design (later the College of Fine Arts) at last had a home. Two years had passed since the Pittsburgh Orchestra had performed and the newly opened School of Music took up the task of providing music to the people of Pittsburgh, with the explicit goal that its graduates would soon populate a revived professional symphony. As a reporter wrote in 1913, “The new movement can in a way be said to be rising from the ashes of the old orchestra—of the two members of the Tech musical faculty—Mr. Malcherek and Mr. Dordener—were members of the Pittsburgh Symphony. They carry with them into their work an adequate conception of the principle of orchestra construction and a zeal for the reform of an orchestra such as will make and maintain a definite and high place for Pittsburgh in the estimation of the musical world.”97 A further fourteen years would pass between the opening of the School of Music and the resurrection of the renamed Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in 1926.

As with the Carnegie Institute, the Fine Arts Building’s sculptures and paintings appear to reflect Carnegie’s perspective that art improves a character and culture. Architect Henry Hornbostel and James Monroe Hewlett, painter of the interior fresco of the Great Hall, which was completed on March 8, 1917, may have modeled parts of the building after passages in Triumphant Democracy. As the book lauds the French Renaissance, so the building is modeled after a French Renaissance chateau. As it refers to St. Peter’s Basilica and the Taj Mahal in the same sentence, so the fresco presents them as neighbors. As it extols New York’s short-lived National Conservatory of Music as an important institution for democracy, so the art emphasizes democratic service. Both painted passages of music celebrate freedom: the folk-like “America” with its phrase “let freedom ring” is shown beside the Capitol Building. The fresco’s Pittsburgh color scheme of black and gold underscores the civic theme.

Civic responsibility and service to democracy is also written into the original seal of Carnegie Tech (reproduced in the fresco), which includes four ribbons labeled Science, Art, Character and Service. The art of music—art is “technic” in Greek—belongs in the technical institute because it was understood to build character and serve society. Accordingly, the school served the community by giving regular public concerts and performing at special events such as Carnegie Day.

MUSIC AT CARNEGIE TECH

The School of Applied Design took shape upon moving into the newly built Fine Arts Building in 1912. Its name changed to the Division of the Arts in 1918 and finally the College of Fine Arts in 1921. Its initial purpose was to instruct students how “to apply art and design to industries.”98 In preparation for the opening of the school, Acting Dean Henry McGoodwin suggested including a Department of Music, as he wrote to the Director of Technical Schools on April 11, 1911.

We believe that a Department of Music connected with the School of Applied Design would be in every way appropriate, if it offered courses leading to a high degree of technical proficiency; that the best place for such a department is in a school devoted to practical instruction in all the important fine arts. The musician is certainly as much a subject of technical training and as surely preparing for a technical vocation as is any other student of our school. There does not seem to us to be any very pertinent reason why music should be excluded from cooperation with the other arts in such a school.99

On April 1, 1912, however, McGoodwin expressed his despair over being unable to open the courses in music. “As deeply as I regret to abandon the hope of projecting a department of music in the near future there seems to be no hope for it, as there is no possible accommodation for it in our new building.”100 Immediately after opening the new building that fall, President Arthur Hammerschlag himself acknowledged that the School was unable to accommodate any growth. “The Department of Architecture has already reached its capacity. Growth during the next year must be restricted to improving the standards of admission as very few additional students can be provided.”101 The shortage of space was not addressed until 1916, when the north and south wings to the Fine Arts Building were added (whereupon the building was again immediately found to be at capacity).

Despite the lack of space, the creation of the Department of Music was announced in the newspapers over the winter holidays of 1912–13. This was immediately followed by the application of 75 men and women, which number has now grown to approximately 125.”102 Wrote C. Russell Hewlett, Dean of the School of Applied Design on March 8, 1913. “Of these 22 have been admitted to the day and 29 to the night classes, with results much in advance of what could have been hoped for by the most optimistic.”103

When the Department of Music opened its doors to student performers and music educators in 1912, J. Vick O’Brien (1876–1953), an accomplished composer from the Pittsburgh area who had studied in Germany with Engelbert Humperdinck, served as head, a position he held until June 1944. Beloved by students, staff, and faculty, O’Brien not only led the department and conducted the Student Symphony but also taught Harmony, Sight Reading, Counterpoint, and Composition. Early instrumental

The Kiltie Band played in the 1939 Sugar Bowl, where Carnegie Tech played Texas Christian University in New Orleans.

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ANDREW CARNEGIE’S SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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though he lived in Scotland and New York, he visited campus five times between 1907 and 1934. In April 1931, the Glee Club and Mandolin Club performed for him and 2,000 undergraduates greeted him in the Music Hall by singing the song “Hail Carnegie.” In 1934 the orchestra performed five times on Carnegie Day for Carnegie’s visit; a lecture by Jane Addams, for the Convention of the Music Supervisors, and on a special Orchestral Concert. These were among the first of countless concerts the School of Music would offer the music-loving public over the next century. On his final visit, on October 29, 1934, he attended the unveiling of the statue of Robert Burns that now stands between the Phipps Conservatory and Panther Hollow Bridge near campus. Bagpipers in full plaid and kilts accompanied the occasion with Scottish airs. The day before he left Pittsburgh, the 62-member Student Symphony of the New Department of Music played a concert for him in what is now Kresge Theatre, returning the service to him that he had done for them. He also met with students in an informal gathering, with one representative of a student group after another spontaneously thanking him for the opportunities opened by Carnegie Tech’s education. Together, Carnegie and the students sang songs accompanied by the organ. Then he left the campus for the last time, declaring the “meeting” an outstanding example of triumphant democracy. 77