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Cecil R. Fanning (1880-1931)

Cecil Fanning: Poet-Singer of Columbus

In Columbus's Mount Calvary Cemetery, in a corner of the large lot of the Thomas Miller family in Cathedral Section C, are a set of four tombstones belonging to the Fanning family. There are Richard (1846-1929), Cecilia (1850-1916), and Margaret (1878-1941). Each of these stones bears name, dates, and a verse from the Bible. And there is Cecil (1880-1931). Instead of a Bible verse, his stone carries the lines, "We pass through tribulation/To the Isle of Understanding" and a staff with a bass clef and

two notes:



Cecil Fanning sang before kings, but because he preferred loyalties to royalties, he is remembered today by only a few of the oldest natives of his home town. Our attention was attracted to him by the loving notes of remembrance left on his tombstone by his sister.

The mother of the little Fanning family was born Cecilia Miller, a native of Columbus, daughter of Thomas and Margaret Miller. Thomas was a wealthy man, one-time partner of Jacob Reinhard in the banking business, owner of the Friend (Main) Street horse-car company, and landowner for whom Miller Avenue was named. He was a generous patron of St. Vincent's Orphanage.¹ Thomas's mother was Hannah A. Gillespie of Brownsville, Pa., and through her the Millers were cousins of Mother Angela Gillespie, C.S.C., the Ewings and Shermans of Lancaster, and all their kin. Cecilia's oldest sister was matriarch of the mercantile Joyce family of Columbus.

The father was Captain Richard John Fanning of the U.S. Army. Born in Ireland in July, 1845, he was one of five siblings. The brothers lived in Cleveland and New York; the only sister was Sister Mary Gonzales of Montreal. Richard joined the Union Army at the age of sixteen and served nearly two years. In 1877 he served as clerk of the Ohio Supreme Court. He was commissioned Captain and Assistant Quartermaster of Volunteers at the outbreak of the Spanish American War and was Captain of the 41st U.S. Volunteers during the Philippine Insurrection, 1899-1901. He lived some years in Cleveland but died at his home on Oak Street in Columbus.

The older sister was Mary M. Fanning, who never married. She was a teacher and superintendent of the Columbus Kindergarten Association. As adults, she and Cecil made their home together.

Cecil was born in Columbus on November 28, 1880. He was baptized at St. Joseph Cathedral on January 2 by Rev. John C. Goldschmidt, chaplain of St. Vincent's Orphanage. He was confirmed at the Cathedral in 1894 with the name Raymond, the same as the second name given to him at his baptism. His early education was at St.

Joseph Academy, after which he attended the Columbus Latin School, a private school for boys at 441 E. Town St.

EARLY CAREER

In his school days, it was said, Cecil's predominant interests were theatrical and musical affairs. His vocal training was practically all with Harry Brown Turpin of Dayton, who, upon hearing Fanning perform with his beautiful baritone voice in Columbus in 1899, gave up his own singing career to train and accompany young Fanning.

Mr. Turpin was known throughout Ohio as an instructor. The tradition in which he taught was that of English music. He was the youngest son of James and Elizabeth Turpin, immigrants from England to Dayton, the father being a professor of music and the first teacher of music in Dayton, teaching both vocal and instrumental music to private pupils and in the public schools.²

H. B. Turpin maintained a studio in Columbus for many years but as Fanning moved into concert work, Mr. Turpin gave up his teaching and devoted himself to this, his most talented pupil, as coach and accompanist.³ From Turpin Cecil "received that glow of inspiration that guided him over more than a quarter of a century as student, artist of world fame, literateur, poet and master of the science of musical pedagogy."⁴

As early as 1903, at the age of 22, Cecil was resident soloist of the Columbus Orchestra and was a guest artist of other local musical societies.⁵ In 1906 he made his debut as a concert singer and spent two seasons on tour in the U.S. A review in the Toledo Blade described his "superlatively fine voice. It is rich, burnished, plastic and unerringly true--equal, seemingly, to any demand he may elect to make on it. Able to divine the musical essence and poetic meaning of his pieces, he is equipped also to convey them

completely to his listeners. Polish and refinement mark every manifestation of his artistry."⁶

In 1908 came his European debut, in London, and in the following year he sang before King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. Columbus was still "home", however, and in 1911 he appeared as a soloist at the Seventh May Festival of the Columbus Oratorio Society. In 1912 and 1913 he toured the principal countries of Europe, traveling under the sobriquet "The Poet-singer of Ohio." The German critics regarded him as one of the best of modern American singers. (Following one performance in Berlin, he and Mr. Turpin were returned to their hotel in Kaiser Wilhelm's automobile.)⁷

Over the next ten years, Cecil was in great demand all over the country for recitals and oratorios. On a tour of California in 1915 he was "considerably lionized by the Los Angeles smart set." Columbus was quite proud of him. The *Ohio State Journal* editorialized on May 15, "Mr. Fanning is one of our most delightful and attractive citizens. He does not much mix with the humdrum of life, for he dwells in a land of harmony, which fact gives to his life a grace and beauty that delights everybody he meets. His art in some way has steeped into his manners and put them in tune with his song. ... We hope wherever he goes people will say, 'he's from Columbus.'" At the end of 1915 he made his debut in New York. He "braved" the New York critics and held forth in a recital in Aeolian Hall. He was treated well by the critics on the daily papers and the debut was considered a success.⁸ On another occasion he and Turpin appeared with Walter Damrosch's orchestra in Carnegie Hall. They were with the Maine Musical Festival for four years. In 1917 and 1918 they again toured the Pacific Coast, including Canada.

Despite growing fame and demand, Fanning did not forget his home and family. The *Ohio State Journal* of May 30, 1916 noticed a social event at

the home of his great-aunt and -uncle and took the occasion to remark on his personality:

At an anniversary party at the delightful home of Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Tussing in Broad Street last Saturday evening, there were a dozen prominent gentlemen present, but we will mention only one and that was Cecil Fanning, who contributed so greatly to the interest and joy of the event. We refer to him because of his poetic and vocal excellence, which is an honor to Columbus. He has gained distinction throughout this country and Europe, because of his high culture along those lines. ... We regard him as one of the great poets of the day... But what goes along with this talent and culture is a personality that is thoroughly attractive. We know he will not like this praise, but it is our duty to tell the people what they have, that modesty has succeeded in hiding from public view. It is not always popular for one to set himself up as a poet, but Mr. Fanning doesn't set himself up. His divine gift is withheld, but in that little company of friends that night, it shone like a star. If we were called upon to pick out ten of the worthiest citizens of Columbus, we would put Cecil Fanning among them, because his triumphs have been in the world of the soul.

Fanning's poetry included several works. His text of "Sir Oluf" was set as a cantata by Harriet Ware. (New York: Schirmer, c. 1910. Denison University owns a copy.) In 1912 he published a book of verses, *The Flower-Strewn Threshold* (London: Constable, 1912; republished 1932 by E. P. Dutton, N.Y.) Many of these poems were set to music by him and other composers. He wrote a poem, "Impressions of California," to recite at a club in Los Angeles to conclude an illustrated lecture on Parker's opera, "Fairyland." It was published in the *Los Angeles Times* and reprinted in the *Ohio State Journal* of July 11, 1915. His text of "I" became opus 77 of Amy Cheney Beach (New York: G. Schirmer, 1916). His "A Sicilian Spring," an ode to nature inspired by a mythological legend, was set to music by Francis Hendricks in 1916 and "The Doe-Skin Blanket," written while at Crow Reservation, Montana, was set to music by Cadman.

"Fulfillment" was set to music by Lucille Crews (NY, Huntzinger & Dilworth, c. 1922). "Spring in Sicily" was set to music by the composer Berge and won the prize of the National Federation of Music Clubs in 1923.

Cecil wrote the text of a grand opera based on American Indian lore, "Alglala: a romance of the mesa"; set by Francesco B. de Leone and produced first in Akron (de Leone's home) in 1924 by the Cleveland Grand Opera Company. Fanning sang the baritone role. (It was published in New York by G. Schirmer, c. 1924.) The August 21, 1927 *Ohio State Journal* called this work "the longest-lived of the recent American operatic compositions." His last published work was the text of the sacred cantata "The Foolish Virgins" set by Marshall Kernochan (New York: Galaxy Music Corp., c. 1931).

In an era when European society looked down upon American musical artists, Cecil's enthusiasm for his profession and his art brought about many pioneering efforts for the recognition of American talent.⁹

COMMUNITY SERVICE

As the fires of the World War flared, Fanning was active on the home front to keep up the spirits of the community. On New Year's Eve, 1917 a welcoming party was held at Memorial Hall for all soldiers. Among the acts and musical presentations, Fanning sang "Keep the Home Fires Burning." In June of 1918 he assisted Elliott B. Henderson at a Booker T. Washington celebration held at Memorial Hall. In July, a Sunday afternoon "community sing" was held at Franklin Park, a splendid affair, a factor "in keeping alive true patriotism and national pride in the community." Fanning was an organizer of these local sings, which were becoming frequent, and was called "the soul" of the effort.

After returning from his west coast tour, in late November, 1918, he gave a farewell concert in

Memorial Hall and then left the stage for a time, to expand his community efforts to the national level. He went to New York, where he joined the War Camp Community Service. In this job he organized concerts for soldiers and community singing, for which he was decorated by the Service. He also worked with the girls of the Patriotic League, a unit of the Service.

In March of 1921 he summed up his experiences and indicated a direction for the country in an article in *Poet Lore* (Vol. 32, pp 149-152) titled "Recent Progress in Community Music and Drama." He noted the lack of development of the expressive arts (music, singing, drama, pageantry) in the smaller American communities and even some of the larger towns prior to the World War. An appetite for the arts was awakened in these communities by the communal music programs embarked upon during the war. He noted that by the fall of 1919 some 281 communities had decided upon war memorials in the form of community buildings, many of which would provide auditorium space that could be used for the arts. (In this, Columbus may have served as a model, for Franklin County's soldiers and sailors Memorial Hall opened in 1906 and at the time was the second largest hall in the United States in seating capacity, second only to Madison Square Garden.) Fanning closed his article by noting that Community Service (Incorporated) was taking over the musical work begun by the War Camp Community Service and that this new organization could assist communities in development of music programs.

LATER TOURS AND TEACHING

In the summer of 1920 he turned down an offer from the Metropolitan Opera House and, again accompanied by Mr. Turpin, went to England for a third time, to give a series of recitals. The *London Times* remarked that he had "made the greatest success of all the American singers this summer. ...In addition to a voice that always falls

gratefully on the ear, he has the variety of style that can keep us interested in a singer through the whole of a program. Like his compatriots, he has misjudged our English taste a little--some of the American songs he gives us hardly seem worth the attention of either a first-rate artist or his audience; but it is a satisfaction to see that he is always at his best in the best music."¹⁰ They also appeared before King George, Queen Mary, Princess Mary and thirty members of the Court of St. James at the American embassy in London.

After this tour Cecil devoted himself almost exclusively to teaching in Columbus and only incidental concert work on the local scene. His friend H. E. Cherrington thought, "...his great sense of personal loyalty perhaps circumscribed the larger reaches of his career. At one time he gave up a contract with possibly the greatest individual concert manager of that day and at another time surrendered a possible five-year contract with the outstanding recording company because he would not buy them at the price of giving up a life-long and valued associate [no doubt Mr. Turpin]. But of those things one never heard from Fanning, for he was not one to lament an occasional disappointment." "The arch-commercial phases of the concert work... did disturb him; and it must have worn his spirit to witness many lesser talents win places which his higher standards of art and of personal integrity denied him. He especially hated the necessities of publicity." Mr. Turpin retired about this time and Edwin Stainbrook of Columbus became Fanning's accompanist for his occasional outings.

As a teacher Fanning had a large following and devoted himself whole-heartedly to their interests. He took zealous care that his students first chose really worthwhile songs and then interpreted them with understanding. He emphasized fine diction in song and speech and had success in producing voices of all kinds, but especially baritones and coloratura sopranos.¹¹

He first taught in his own studio, in his home on Franklin Avenue, but in 1924 was engaged by the Marguerite Manley Seidel School of Music as supervisor of the vocal department, to teach master classes (with the assistance of Mrs. Winifred Dixon Sharp, one of his pupils).¹² In August, 1927 Dr. Grant Connell, president of the Capitol College of Oratory and Music (at 1076 Neil Avenue at Third) announced that Cecil had been added to the faculty of the voice department there. Accompanying him in joining the faculty were Winifred Dickson, instructor in voice, and Edwin Stainbrook, pianist and instructor in accompaniments. Fanning continued to give lessons in his own studio. He was named head of the voice department of the college, where his name loaned to the students a prestige that was much sought after. In 1928 the college granted him an honorary doctorate of music, the first such degree granted by the school.

Dr. Fanning was on the Board of the Columbus Teachers' Association, which was organized in 1930. In June 1931 he was teacher of phonetics at its summer school at the Southern Theater.

Fanning's studio on the second floor of his and Mary's home at 994 Franklin was described by his friend H. E. Cherrington: "There were many of the souvenirs of his world tours--statuettes, busts, paintings, beautiful bas-reliefs, an ikon of rare beauty just behind his piano and in front of it a large gold crucifix. He was a devoted churchman and a special example of that devotion was seen in the corner of his studio, where a candle of perpetual adoration burns before an actual bodily relic of St. Rita, his mother's favorite saint and his own. This was granted him in Italy by the sisters of the original St. Rita shrine, in recognition of his labors in their behalf."

His schedule during his last days seems to have been typical of his activities: an appearance at the Friday evening service at the Bryden Road



Cecil Fanning, apparently with his relic of St. Rita of Cascia

Temple, where he was soloist and choirmaster beginning about 1926; a Saturday afternoon stint as master of ceremonies at a tea given by the Columbus Opera Club; attendance at a Sunday musicale at the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, at which one of his students sang. He had lessons for several pupils scheduled for Monday evening. He planned a series of three recitals for the winter.

FINAL TRIBUTES

On December 7, 1931 Fanning died suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage at his and Mary's home, while he was resting in his room before dinner. ... "in death his face was singularly beautiful. Finely molded and sensitive, it... was so reposeful that it looked as if God had simply put His finger on him as he slept."

His funeral was at St. Joseph Cathedral, at a solemn requiem Mass. Honorary pallbearers were F. Stanley Crooks (Columbus musical artist), Edwin Stainbrook (music director of the

Columbus Opera Club and Fanning's accompanist), Dr. Grant Connell (president of the Capitol College of Oratory and Music), Robert W. Roberts (instrumental and choral director), Rabbi Jacob Tarshish, Karl H. Hoenig (director for several Columbus German singing societies), F. B. De Leone (composer & collaborator), H. E. Cherrington (newspaperman and admirer), Carl Fall, Earl Hopkins (Columbus violinist), Stokes McCune, Prof. Clarence Andrews, Frank Murphy, Gordon Rose, Paul Sebring, Harold H. Voelker (shortly thereafter active in Columbus opera), and Morris Shimony. Active Pallbearers were Raymond Buechner (a baritone active in Columbus opera), Walter Downey (vocalist with the Columbus Opera Club), Owen Hayes, Russell Hamilton, Frederick Hoffman (vocalist with the Columbus Opera Club), David Rabkin, and Robert Williams.

His students gathered at his home "to hold their own service of song in honor of their dead master. ...one of his most talented disciples, pupil and devoted friend for many years... said to the students that they must carry on as their teacher, himself one of the best soldiers, would want them to."¹³

The local newspapers had only the best to say of Cecil Fanning. According to the *Ohio State Journal*, "Dr. Fanning was distinctly a Columbus product. His first love always was Columbus and he frequently said that his native city was foremost in his mind in everything he did professionally." The *Ohio Jewish Chronicle* noted, "He was known to the Columbus Jewish community, not only as a wonderful musician but as the kindest of gentlemen and the finest of personalities. May God give our beloved friend peace and a glorious reward he so meritoriously deserved."

The most moving words, however, were placed on his tombstone by his loving sister:

He is dead, the sweet musician!
 He the sweetest of all singers!
 He has gone from us forever,
 He has moved a little nearer
 To the Master of all Music,
 To the Master of all singing!
 O, my Brother!" - - -

Has Columbus seen his like since then?

NOTES

- 1) For Thomas Miller, see the 1880 *History of Franklin and Pickaway Counties* by Williams Brothers, facing page 533.
- 2) *Centennial Biographical History of Dayton & Montgomery Co.*, 1897, pp 812-813

- 3) *Columbus Citizen*, 12/8/31
- 4) H. E. Cherrington, introduction to the 1932 Memorial Edition of Fanning's *The Flower-Strewn Threshold and Other Poems*
- 5) Marshall, George S., *History of Music in Columbus*; Columbus: The Franklin County Historical Society, 1956; 70, 78. This book contains many other references to Fanning.
- 6) *Ohio State Journal*, Feb. 25, 1926
- 7) *Dayton Journal* Nov. 19, 1937
- 8) *Ohio State Journal*, Jan. 9, 1916
- 9) *Ohio State Journal*, Dec. 8, 1931
- 10) *Ohio State Journal*, July 7, 1920
- 11) *Columbus Citizen*, 12/8/31. Cherrington, *op. cit.*
- 12) *Ohio State Journal*, May 18, 1924
- 13) Cherrington, *op. cit.*

Mt. Calvary Cemetery, Columbus Cathedral Section C, Lot Records, 1867-1926

(Continued, from Vol. XXVIII, No. 2)

92-C west
 p. 73, John Cullinan, 509 E. 5th Ave. [added later:] Portsmouth, O., 1872 Nov. 21, lot 92 west half. Grave: 1927 July 22.
 (Mother) Mary Cullinan Hageman 1867-1923
 John Cullinan jr. 1873-1927

93-C north
 p. 43, Bernard Lawler, 1872 Jan. 9, lot 93 north half. Graves: 1891 Sept. 17 child; 1895 March 20; 1908 July 27; 1910 April 21.
 Margaret V. Orr 1891 + 1910
 Catherine Orr 1869 + 1933
 James Orr 1862 + 1955
 L. A. Lawler "Barney" 1864-1937
 Elizabeth Lawler

93-C south
 p. 66, John Davy, "Now dead - see Cornelius Davy who lives near James Clahane W. Columbus." 1871 Dec. 20, lot 93 south half. Graves: 1876 June 30; 1910 Sept. 19; 1927 March 9.

John Joseph Davy Native of Ireland born March 17, 1812 died June 29, 1876 Requiscat in Pace.
 + (Nephew) Addison Vance 1907-1927

94-C east
 p. 280, ~~Richard~~ Hugh- Hubert Griffin, Hamlet St., 1873 July 3, lot 94 east half. Grave: 1873 July 3. "1894 March 19 Relinquished all claim to this lot on condition that above grave be not disturbed."
 p. 392, Thomas F. Murphy, 476 N. 6th St., 1894 March 19, lot 94 east half. Graves: 1894 March 19 child; 1901 Sept. 10.
 R. Griffin Died July 1, 1871 aged 35 years. Sleep on Father, thy work is done.
 Alice Murphy Oct. 25, 1885 - Mar. 7, 1894 R i P

94-C west
 p. 43, Mrs. John Foley, 1871 June 17, lot 94 west half. Grave: 1888 Feb. 1. 1/4 transferred to Miss Kerwan, p. 386.
 p. 368, Miss Margaret Kerwin, 34 N. 3rd, 1/4 transferred from Mrs. John Foley, lot 94 west.

Grave: 1904 Apr. 14.

Philip Kirwin

Margaret Kirwin

95-C

p. 144, Pierce Landers, 1867 June, lot 95.

Graves: 1891 May 30; 1897 Oct. 1; 1900 Oct. 22; 1903 May 13.

(Brother) Stephen Landers 1880-1900

(Brother) Edward Landers 1877-1891

(Brother) John Landers 1866-1874

(Brother) Peter Landers

(Brother) James Landers

(Brother) Thomas Landers

96-C east

p. 43, Thomas Dorsey, 1869 Sept. 17, lot 96 east half. Graves: 1881 June 8 child; 1889 Oct. 18; 1890 Jan. 23; 1897 Sept. 15; 1902 Feb. 18; 1925 May 19. [no stones]

96-C west

p. 76, John Hanlon, West Columbus, 1876 June 16, lot 96 west half. Graves: 1885 Dec. 1; 1886 Jan. 28; 1886 Nov. 13; 1889 July 7. [no stones]

97-C [and 98]

p. 144, Daniel McAlister, 1867 Jan. [blank], lot 97 C and lot 98 C north half. Graves: 1888 Sept. to transfer of body from Old cemetery; 1902 [?] Feb. 6.

Daniel McAlister 1837-1913 (Father)

Anne McAlister 1836-1898 (Mother)

Guy G. McAlister 1870-1948 (Father)

Adele McAlister 1872-1952 (Mother)

Madeline J. Knowlton + 1916-1985

Kathleen A. McAlister Gardner + 1894-1972

Edgar D. McAlister (Fathre) + 1863-1936

Barbara C. McAlister (Mothre) + 1871-1897

Infant Mary Gardner + Nov. 21, 1947

98-C south

p. 51, John Murray, 1869 May [blank], lot 98 south half. Graves: 1893 Apr. 13; 1905 Feb. 15 John Murray. [no stones]

99-C north

p. 274, Patrick Fielding, lot 99 north half. 3 graves sold see p. 423

p. 423, Thomas Shea, 108 North Park St., 1901 June 24, northwest quarter of lot 99-C. Graves: 1901 June 24; 1926 Feb. 3. [no stones]

99-C south

p. 87, James Mallon, Black Lick, 1870 Oct. 13, lot 99 south half. Graves: 1877 Feb. 6 child; 1879 Oct. [?] 3[?] child; 1896 March 27; 1901 Dec. 26; 1917 Feb. 10. [no stones]

100-C west

p. 404, Mary Connelly, 402 Spruce St., 1898 Aug. 1, lot 100 west half. Grave: 1898 Aug. 1.

+ John Kirchner 1872-1936

+ Maurice Vincent Kessler Ohio 1 Lieut 397 Field Arty 15 Div Febr. 22, 1882 - Nov. 8, 1936

Margaret Fahy Potts 1909 + 1937

HORSNYDER: Catherine 1890-1936

Harry 1884-1948

(To be continued)