
EDITOR'S PAGE

Dan Bilawsky – *School Music News* Editor



APRIL IN PARIS, DECEMBER IN ROCHESTER

Drawing connections through musical seasons and reasons

In the spring of 1932, composer Vernon Duke was busy writing material for the Broadway musical *Walk a Little Faster*. One evening after work, over drinks at a restaurant on Manhattan's West Side, one of his friends, in the clutches of misty-eyed memory, uttered the phrase "Oh, to be in Paris now that April's here!"

As the story goes, there was a piano on the second floor of that establishment, and Duke took to its keys right then and there to develop the immortal "April in Paris." Yip Harburg later provided the lyrics, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Roughly two months prior and 250 miles north, a musical milestone of a different sort came to pass on a slushy winter's eve on the Syracuse University campus. A small gathering of educators formed what we now know as NYSSMA®. Our profession — and its place and organization in the state — would be forever changed.

Chronology and proximity aside, the aforementioned events are unrelated. And stark contrast is obviously evident in the pairing, since spring in The City of Lights and winter in Central New York couldn't be more different. Yet both are bound together — tangentially, of course — from a number of angles. More than nine decades after "April in Paris" was put to paper and our association took its first steps, each endures and holds a special place in music's broad cultural firmament.

I Never Knew My Heart Could Sing, Never Missed a Warm Embrace

All of Harburg's lines in that immortal charmer carry an obvious sense of idealization in their flow. But the pair that always gets me — the most universal and least geographically-tethered of the bunch — is most definitely this one:

*I never knew my heart could sing
Never missed a warm embrace*

Those words point right to the purpose — the real draw — in the theme. Yes, you can daydream about the specifics of a Paris spring — a river cruise on the Seine, a walk in the gardens, relaxing at a café, a leisurely stroll past the Eiffel Tower — but it's not so much about all of those pursuits as it is a universal feeling of joy tied to a state of being.

Harburg's words are endemic to the titular city but transferable to any time and place that holds deep appeal for the senses and soul. Some may harbor those same fond thoughts about Med-

iterranean beaches in summer; others may engage in woolgathering about a ride down the canals in Venice in early autumn or skiing in the Alps in winter, and so many of us pine for...

December in Rochester

It may never be romanticized in song like an April in Paris — blame the temperatures and overcast skies — but December in Rochester holds a special appeal for those who've made the trip. The weather, after all, can't cloud the beauty of our individual experiences and collective reality in that setting. It's pure magic in its own sweet way.

NYSSMA's Winter Conference — an educational summit, first-rate concert series, music expo and family reunion rolled into one —

is something to be treasured. Many may have taken it for granted prior to the pandemic, but the COVID pause and subsequent path toward its full return opened an avenue for reflection, to truly appreciate such a grand gathering on so many levels.

At conference, there are countless opportunities to grow on the professional development front: at workshops, through conversation, and in observation. Proud teacher moments abound with a full slate of thrilling showcase concerts and performances by our all-state ensembles. A wide variety of exhibitors present desirable wares and wheres: sheet music, instruments, background on university programs, information for student travel, leading-edge music software, NYSSMA® merch, music keepsakes and more. And let's not forget about the needed time to simply *connect*.

Amid the hustle and bustle of work and life, we rarely have the opportunity to pause, take a breath and catch up with friends and colleagues from across districts, in neighboring towns, from previous jobs or our college days. But in Rochester, it's there for the taking.

You might get together with a mentor at an engaging session, catch up with a peer over a plate at Dinosaur Bar-B-Que, share stories and laughs with old acquaintances, or make new friends while soaking up incomparable sounds and splendors. If you never knew your heart could sing or that you'd miss a warm embrace, you'll know it at and after the winter conference!

If your plans have been made, you have much to look forward to, and if they haven't, please know it's not too late. I hope you can make it! To borrow from the great Count Basie's dual endings on his famed "April in Paris" recording: One more time...one more once. I'll see you in Rochester. ||

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