

# Federal Music Project

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **Federal Music Project** (FMP), part of the Federal government of the United States New Deal program Federal One, employed musicians, conductors and composers during the Great Depression.<sup>[1]</sup> In addition to performing thousands of concerts, offering music classes, organizing the Composers Forum Laboratory, hosting music festivals and creating 34 new orchestras, employees of the FMP researched American traditional music and folk songs, a practice now called ethnomusicology. In the latter domain the Federal Music Project did notable studies on cowboy, Creole and "Negro" music. During the Great Depression, many people visited these symphonies to forget about the economic hardship of the time. In 1939, the FMP transitioned to the WPA Music Program, which along with many other WPA projects, was phased out in the midst of World War II.

## Contents

- 1 Background
- 2 Leadership
- 3 Objectives
- 4 State-level Implementation
- 5 Project Successes
- 6 Decline and Termination
- 7 References
- 8 Further reading
- 9 External links

## Background

In the grips of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed to sharply increase public projects in order to raise employment. This overarching strategy was known as the New Deal. Roosevelt realized the importance of the arts in American culture, stating that the “American Dream... was the promise not only of economic and social justice but also of cultural enrichment.” In July 1935 a New Deal program known as Federal One was created. This included five arts projects, including the FMP<sup>[2]</sup>. This project was the first where Federal money was used on culture.

The Depression had compounded a downturn in the fortunes of the American musicians. At the same time musicians were also being affected by advances in technology. Sound recordings were beginning to replace live musicians at functions and events.



"Midsummer Night Symphonies", Southern California Federal Music Project, WPA, ca. 1937

# Leadership

Dr. Nikolai Sokoloff was the director of the Federal Music Project. Before the Federal Music Project, Dr. Sokoloff was the conductor for the original Cleveland Orchestra from 1919-1933. Sokoloff appointed a staff of five Regional Directors, twenty three State Directors, and five administrative staff. In 1936, the Works Progress Administration also began to add on to the Federal Music Project. The WPA's didn't center towards original music. The next year Charles Seeger developed into assistant director of the project. After he became assistant director, many varieties of music became available. Seeger's ambition was for everyone to take interest in music, and become a part of it.

# Objectives

The primary objective of the FMP was to employ professional musicians from all over the country to perform as instrumentalists, singers, and concert performers. The Project also aimed inspire music appreciation by enabling access to live performances and by introducing music instruction in the classroom. Finally, the FMP sought to document musical activity in the United States.<sup>[2]</sup>

Even though the project was thought to be this picturesque, ideal, and perfect plan, there were still many challenging facets that occurred during its time. One of the more general obstacles the Federal Music Project had to go through was the types of culture going into the project. Sokoloff was predisposed to European classical music, and made that the focus of the FMP. There was a much lower priority placed on vernacular or American folk music. These Eurocentric tastes were in contrast to the "common man" ideology of the New Deal. Despite this national focus on classical music, regional and local implementations of the FMP revealed the diverse musical genres in early 20th century America. Live performances of African American and Hispanic music drew attention, as did efforts in several states to document musical traditions from ethnic minorities, spirituals, work songs and other folk music.<sup>[2]</sup>

# State-level Implementation

The Federal Music Program was particularly successful in New Mexico. Helen Chandler Ryan served as the FMP state music director from January 1936 until the project's end in 1943. She adapted the national program to meet the special musical interests of her sparsely populated state. She decided to devote much of the program to solo instruction in rural communities. Another concentration was the study of the diverse regional musical style created by blending European, Native American and Spanish American music. New Mexico's implementation of the Federal Music Program received praise for its diversity.<sup>[2]</sup>

# Project Successes

The Federal Music Project created lessons for adults who were underprivileged, and it created a musical program for children. The creation of music was more popular, and the appreciation for music arose. The amateur musicians became better, and there were more musical participants. The project formed new orchestras, singers, dancers, vocal groups, and vocal producers. The music project supplied performers and teachers of

music an occupation. It also created many new orchestral pieces of music. The project caught on so much in the 1930s that most schools had their own music program. In addition, it created something for people to do during the hardships. These musical concerts were either a very low cost, or they were free, allowing many who could otherwise not afford such luxury to attend.

## Decline and Termination

In 1939, the Federal Music Project's budget was cut. This wasn't the only decline in finances of New Deal programs; many other projects like the Federal Music Project saw their funding reduced. Congressional support deteriorated in the late 1930s, and the budget bill passed in June of 1939 reflected the reduced support. Sokolof had resigned the previous month amid debate over his preference toward classical music.<sup>[2]</sup> Also in 1939 the Federal Music Project was renamed. Its new name was the WPA Music Program. This didn't last long though. A year later the Federal Music Project/WPA Music Program was terminated. State music projects came to an end with the ending of the WPA on June 30, 1943.<sup>[2]</sup>

## References

- <sup>^</sup> "Encyclopædia Britannica, "WPA Federal Music Project." (http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/956692/WPA-Federal-Music-Project). Encyclopædia Britannica Online. 26 Sep 2009.
- <sup>^</sup> *abc def* Bellmore, Audra and Amy S. Jackson. "The New Mexico Federal Music Project: Embodying the Regional Spirit of Roosevelt's New Deal." *Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association*. 69, Number 1 (September 2012). ISSN 0027-4380 (//www.worldcat.org/issn/0027-4380)
  - "The U.S. Work Projects Administration Federal Music Project ." (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.natlib.scdb.200033720/default.html) The Library of Congress. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Sept. 2009
  - THE U. S. WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/music/eadxmlmusic/eadpdfmusic/mu2005.wp.0042.pdf) Library of Congress. Music Division. . Library of Congress Web. Library of Congress, 1999. Web. 26 Sept. 2009
  - Federal Music Project Poster (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/wpaposters/highlight6.html). N.d. Library of Congress. Library of Congress.Web. 26 Sept. 2009
  - "FEDERAL MUSIC PROJECT (FMP)." (http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/egd\_01/egd\_01\_00191.html) Novelguide. Oakwood Publishing Company, 2009.Web. 29 Sept. 2009
  - "Introduction." The WPA. Bienes Center for the Literary Arts" (http://www.broward.org/library/bienes/lii10202.html) Findlay, James A., and Margaret Bing, n.d. Web. 29 Sept. 2009

## Further reading

- Galván, Gary. *American Music*. 26, Number 4 (Winter 2008). ISSN 514-538 (//www.worldcat.org/issn/514-538) Unknown parameter |unused\_data= ignored (help)

## External links

- Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture - Federal Music Project (<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/F/FE003.html>)
- Composers' Forum, Inc. records, 1935-2002 (<http://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/mus18632.pdf>) Music Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Retrieved from "[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Federal\\_Music\\_Project&oldid=552375920](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Federal_Music_Project&oldid=552375920)"

Categories: [New Deal Projects of the arts](#) | [American music history](#) | [New Deal agencies](#)

| [Works Progress Administration](#) | [1930s in music](#) | [1935 in music](#) | [1935 in the United States](#)

---

- This page was last modified on 27 April 2013 at 04:45.
- Text is available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License](#); additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).  
Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.