

Chelm's Philharmonic¹ Symphony² Orchestra³ Ensemble⁴ by Philip Fishl Kutner

It all started down by the river when Beylig was discussing the merits of her mishpokhe with Zisl while they were washing the family clothes. It was a beautiful Wednesday morning and the clothes would be hung to dry in the hot afternoon sun.

Just as in previous Wednesdays each would brag about their relatives. Who knows how much was truth and how much was embellished. It seemed that both had second cousins who played in the Great Warsaw Symphony Orchestra.

It didn't end there, for when the women went home they discussed the days events with their families at the supper table. Naturally the husbands told of their talented cousins. When the women met at the river the following week, they had new information to share.

It was too good to keep it a secret and soon all of Chelm was chatting about the great musical talent in their families. If the cousins were musically gifted, then naturally the Chelm children had to possess some of this in their blood (genes).

When the topic of discussion had gone from just the women washing at the river banks of the Uherka River, to the blacksmith shop, to the grinding mill and even following minkhe services, it was time to bring it up to the Chelm Shtot Council.

Everything was done fairly at Chelm Shtot Council meetings. Both sides always were given equal time. "Will all those who wish to speak in favor of Chelm having a Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra Ensemble please stand on the right, and those against it stand on the left." So spoke the mayor. Eleven women rose and stood on the right. None stood on the left.

"To be fair to both sides will each speaker talk for no more than ten minutes." So spoke the mayor.

After almost two hours of speeches, the mayor said, "Since no one is against Chelm having a Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra Ensemble, we shall have our own music band."

So it was decided--Chelm will have its own Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra Ensemble. Musicians would not be a problem, for there were many *talented* children in Chelm. What was not immediately available was the instruments on which the children could perform.

After much thought it was decided that the Chelm Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra Ensemble would be all-natural. There would not be any new musical instruments that would be purchased in a music store in Lublin or any of the other *big cities*.

Having examples from each of the different music instrument types was important, so it was decided to have three each—winds, percussions & strings.

There was a group of klezmorim in Chelm that played at weddings. Their instruments (accordion, balalaika and violin) would be the core of Chelm's Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra Ensemble.

"Let's use the shofer" interrupted Kolye the Cantor. "It's not used most of the year and we already have it. Besides Shimonele already knows to how to blow it." Thus the horn section was started

Kolye's wife Gitele helped by suggesting that gragers would be a natural addition for the percussion section.

Another percussion instrument was Pareve Peysakh Pot Lids. Milkhedike and fleysshedike pot lids could not be used in case they were mixed up.

Hymie's daughter Hinkele said that her brother Heshy has a harmonica, and that he could play it.

"That gives ma an idea," said Ruvn. "I have a pair of children's rattles. They make a lot of noise."

"That gives us only 8 instruments and only 2 strings," whispered Fishl der Fayfer.

"You're right added Feygele di Fonfete," in her funny voice. "Fishl, why not whistle? All you need is your mouth."

"Mame doesn't let me fayf." was Fishl's response. "She says that nice Jewish boys don't whistle."

To this very day Chelm's Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra Ensemble has only 8 musicians.

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¹Philharmonic: Appreciating music, of or about a symphony orchestra, a symphony orchestra.

²Symphony: Written for a symphony orchestra, a concert by an orchestra, harmonious

³Orchestra: A large group of musicians playing, the front section of a theater or the main floor.

⁴Ensemble: A small orchestra