

# The Hill was alive with the sound of...

Singing. For several decades, dating back to the founding of Nichols Junior College, vocal groups were a big part of the campus culture. Ensembles, such as the Glee Club, performed on campus, entertained the region and even took their talents to the airwaves. They were seen as ambassadors of good will for the college, united by a pure love of singing.

The first Glee Club was formed in 1931, drawing 37 members, but hit an immediate snag when fire struck Budleigh Hall, destroying their music and other materials. ("An impromptu rehearsal was held," reported the Budget newspaper, "but it was necessarily hindered by a lack of music.") Over the next decade, the Glee Club was recognized as an asset to Nichols. They performed at convocations, dances, and the annual Winter Carnival and at off-campus concerts, rotary events, church suppers, garden clubs, places such as the Worcester Art Museum and on WTAG radio.

The Glee Club rehearsed often in pursuit of perfection, which they often achieved, according to student reviews. Other times, practice didn't always make perfect, as in this 1956 depiction from the yearbook: "In the beginning, the sounds heard could not exactly be called music, but as the sessions wore on, the melody became discernable. The end result was most satisfying."

Some years, due to insufficient interest, the Glee Club went silent, but not singing. The Metronomes, a dapper octet comprising Glee Club members, made its debut at the Freshman Frolics in 1949. Later performance highlights included the Hotel Touraine in Boston, a sales convention at the famous Toots Shor night club in New York City, and a televised talent show.

One of the more celebrated vocal groups was the Nicholodians (spelled variously as Nicholodeans, Nicholodiens, and Nicholodeons). Formed in the fall of 1956,

the Nicholodians wowed audiences with barbershop melodies and modern swing, producing a tight harmonic sound. They became a favorite on and off campus, "spreading the name of Nichols across New England," at other colleges, nightclubs, private parties and social functions.

Then there was their appearance on the "Tonight Show Starring Jack Paar," a story retold by the late Reverend Paul Price '58 in a 2016 visit to campus with his wife: While taking a break from performing with the Glee Club at a school in New York City, a few of the Nicholodians toured NBC studios. Clad in their nifty vests, they caught the attention of Paar, who asked them to sing a few notes during the show. "It was very brief," recalled Price, "but we were hometown heroes when we returned to Nichols."

Throughout the '60s, the Glee Club performed predominantly with and at other colleges. As in previous years, they relished the opportunity to travel to all-female schools, such as Annhurst, Endicott and Mt. Ida, or sing with their female counterparts. In the words of a 1942 club member, these occasions "provided many pleasant associations with the opposite sex." The Nicholodians also stayed busy, typically as an octet, and formed a campus quartet toward the end of the decade, adding folk music to their repertoire.

From then, unlike Don McLean's "American Pie," it's difficult to pinpoint the day this type of music died on Dudley Hill.



*The Nicholodians, who made their debut in fall 1956, were often called back for many encores.*

Undoubtedly, music — and even singing — commanded its place and presence in campus life in the ensuing decades, but by the early '70s, formal vocal groups had all but reached a coda, save for yearbook evidence of a Glee Club in 1977 and Nicholodians in 1996, and talk of launching the Bison Singers in recent years.

It's also difficult to pinpoint why. Perhaps waning interest coincided with the emergence of other clubs at Nichols, especially those catering to professional activities, such as the American Marketing Association or Finance Club. Perhaps college glee clubs had passed their prime and only the most stalwart, robust, and historic choral groups, at places like Harvard and Yale, survived. Or maybe the enjoyment of music itself had become too personal an experience, appealing to a range of diverse tastes and delivered through earbuds.

Whatever the reason, the Hill still echoes with the memory of those intrepid voices, raised in song to the sounds of music. ♪