



Once upon a time, in the long ago of 1917, the Student Council of Hunter College felt "what Hunter urgently needs is a new activity — something that will promote college and class spirit — something every student in the College can join if she wants to." Two staff members of *Bulletin* (precursor of *Arrow*) reporting on the first intercollegiate newspaper conference held at Poughkeepsie, spoke glowingly of Vassar's step singing. This was the germ of the idea which produced Hunter's songfest.

The Birth of Sing

Weeks of feverish excitement followed. Class rehearsals were held in secret, guards at the doors. The Class of 1918 offered a prize of a baton to the winning class. On Friday, May 11, 1917, SING was born. No scenery. No props. Each class had its own color received as freshmen and proudly worn for four years — blue, green, orange or red. Costumes were simple, stressing the class color. Each class had its own idea; there was no central theme until many years later. Cavaliers, prisoners, centurions and farmers could compete against each other one year. Another spring it might be the House of Peers, musical notes, minstrel men and gnomes.

Sing: Something Simple

All four classes met on the field of combat — the floor of the chapel in the now razed Old Building. Although songs had been rehearsed carefully, spontaneity dominated. After each of the scheduled songs — Class, Comic, Alma Mater and Miscellaneous — there was a mad dash for the piano stool that decided which class could respond first. Quips were composed on the floor and volleyed back and forth. Signs flashed to instruct the class which song was to be the answering boost of a sister class or the knock for rivals.

Sing Moves

Then in 1924 the overloaded horseshoe balcony of chapel sagged alarmingly and it was decided Sing had to move away. Central Opera House (now the home of WNEW-TV), Carnegie Hall, Madison Square Garden (which echoed maddeningly to the choruses), Roxy's, Radio City Music Hall, even the Metropolitan Opera House (oh, the hundreds of Hunterites who can brag, "When I sang at the Met.") were temporary settings for Sing. In 1941 Sing returned to College and was held in the Assembly Hall of the new Park Avenue Building.

Sing: Spectacular

But over the years Sing had changed. The class song and the college song were dropped. ("Fame" was the Alma Mater song of the Class of 1925 in its senior year. It was adopted as the college song informally in 1926 and, despite recent

protests against it, has not been replaced.) Original music was out completely. All that remained of Sing became brittle, banal, topical musical trivia. In 1928 the first Sing booklet containing the words of the class songs was sold to the audience. (Let those who strove for secrecy shudder.) Public dress rehearsals were instituted. (Oh, horror!) Costumes became more ornate, covering less of the wearer, and only girls with the most shapely legs made the first row. Special effects were sought. Stylized gestures were incorporated. Sing became more and more spectacular and less and ever less the all-college activity its originators had hoped for and which the College still needed.

Student Reaction

A metamorphosis had taken place: the form had changed; the purpose was lost. The general student body was turning away from Sing. Sing leaders when looking for chorus members were told, "This isn't important enough to make time for." "I feel silly somehow, going around chanting things when I should be doing my work." This was quite in contrast to the twenties when leaders had a waiting list of classmates who yearned to participate but for whom there wasn't space.

Even the presence of the boys, which might have boosted attendance, was ineffectual. The veterans who were at College in 1949 worked on committees. Later they actually sang in the chorus — never very many, but at least some. The first male sing leader made his appearance in 1952. But this was a weak transfusion for a dying tradition.

And Then There Was None

Sing 1960 could not materialize. Central Sing Committee in April when it cancelled this event felt it was performing a mercy killing. The death of Sing was caused by an apathetic, yet more sophisticated, student body.

It is to be regretted that the one tradition which had been truly Hunter's is no more. Some feel its demise was long overdue. Others feel its disappearance might be temporary and that wishing will bring it back. College is not just the classes students attend. The extracurricular activities furnish some of the fondest memories alumni retain and cherish. Certainly the spirit of wit, song and camaraderie which was Sing warmed the heart of many a Hunterite for many a year.

Sing was spread by Hunterites to the camps and schools at which they taught. Echoes of Sing live on elsewhere. Perhaps Sing, phoenix-like, can rise again at Hunter.

[This article has been compiled from reminiscences of Rose Sigal Golomb, president of the Class of 1918; Beatrice Kohn Weinberg, leader of the Class of 1922; Edna Robinson Musnik, leader of the Class of 1925; Augusta Truell Wollheim, leader of the Class of 1927; Marion Bader Greene, leader of the Class of 1930; Bitzi Solomon, leader of the Class of 1960 and Ronnie Ernest, Central Sing Coordinator 1960.]