

# **FAMILIAR TALKS ON MUSIC**

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Familiar Talks on Music by Mary Kimball Kutchin

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**MARY KIMBALL KUTCHIN**

**FAMILIAR TALKS  
ON MUSIC**





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June 1918—

**FAMILIAR TALKS  
ON MUSIC**

MARY KIMBALL KUTCHIN



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OF  
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## PREFACE

As a member of The Wednesday Club of San Diego, it devolved upon me to lead a class in Musical Interpretation, during the season of 1915-1916. These five Familiar Talks on Music are the result of the performance of my club duty.

The lecture on the Dvorak and Tchaikowski symphonies was given at the request of the Women's Board of the Panama-California International Exposition, on Thursday evening, April 20th, 1916, in the California Building, just before the concerts of the New York Symphony Orchestra, on April 22nd and 23rd. I have included it here in compliance with the wishes of many of my friends.





## FAMILIAR TALKS ON MUSIC

## I

## WHAT MUSIC IS

**I**T IS difficult to speak of music without indulging in platitudes, yet in all platitudes is the germ of truth. But when we say music is the universal language we use a mere figure of speech—a platitude without the usual germ of truth—for, in the first place, music is not universal either as a practice or as an appeal, and, in the second place, it is not a language. The word language means with all races tongue or speech, and in the production of music, per se, the tongue is not used—merely the lungs or bellows, the vocal cords or instrument, and the pharynx or sounding board; the tongue (*langue*, *lingua*, *lengua*) is the instrument of articulation, and music is inarticulate. In that fact lies its wide appeal—it means nothing to those who are tone deaf, and all things to those who can hear and recognize it. Tone deafness is the inability to distinguish musical pitch, and to the tone deaf there is consequently no difference between music and noise—the difference between a musical sound and noise is merely a difference in vibration. In music the vibrations are periodic or regular, in noise the vibrations are non-periodic or irregular; a slight difference in degree to make such a great difference in kind.

Ethnologists say that song came before speech,

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which means merely that inarticulate sounds were made by our human ancestors before articulate ones. That these sounds resembled song or music is impossible. Prehistoric man emitted his voice on different pitches, each ejaculation having a primitive meaning, just as an infant does at present. The infant expresses quite a range of emotions in his primitive way—hunger, pain, contentment, anger, pleasure; and while all his ejaculations are inarticulate, they are recognized by his mother, and perhaps to her they mean music, but they hardly do to the unprejudiced auditor.

It is a strange thing that the more civilized man becomes, the more monotonous and less musical his speech is. We actually now eliminate all inflection, and English, the most generally used of all languages, is at the same time least agreeable and the flattest to listen to—in other words, the very least musical. The Continental peoples still speak more or less musically; they use various degrees of pitch and a wide range of inflections; the Chinese language is said to be largely a matter of inflection, the vocabulary being very small and each word having many meanings, conveyed entirely by inflection and pitch. These qualities give a force and color to speech, altogether lacking in English.

Of course, the first music was produced by the human voice. It is the original instrument and man never has been able to improve on it; it is still and always will be the most delicate and beautiful of all instruments, and it possesses a power of appeal to which even the tone deaf are susceptible, although the fact that it is usually allied to words enhances its appeal to the un-