

SING ALONG WITH SYPH
(Originally published March 1963)

From the Venereal Disease Division of our own county health department comes an interesting report on a nice bit of recent epidemiological work. On investigating the contacts of several new cases of syphilis that appeared last month, the venereal disease workers unearthed a total of seventeen new, early infections. All seventeen cases appeared soon after a choral performance by a very active group of spiritual singers who were in Columbus for a one night stand. Further checking revealed that previous, brief, spiritual performances by the same talented group in Baltimore and Houston produced five new cases of syphilis in Baltimore and seven in Houston. Follow up work is still going on.

Reports in numerous medical and lay publications indicate that the resurgence of venereal disease is a nationwide problem. During the 1930s and 1940s, after years of intensive educational campaigns and far-reaching programs of prevention and treatment, venereal disease seemed to be well under control; with great advances in diagnosis and therapy, and the success of the antibiotics, much of the fear about the once-dreaded diseases was removed. As a result, interest in venereal work lagged, educational campaigns withered and complacency set in.

At present, ignorance, along with a general, lowered tone of public morality, and the prevalence of sexual promiscuity among the teenage and young adult sets have contributed to the alarming rate increase in the incidence of syphilis since 1957. There is now a whole new generation that does not quake in its boots at the possibility of contracting venereal disease and to whom the words gonorrhea and syphilis have little or no meaning.

While it is likely that many new cases of venereal disease are being contracted now to the accompaniment of the earthy rhythms of rock and roll via transistor radio, the spirochetes have demonstrated that they can also respond to spiritual music with a religious fervor, as they did after the recent, local songfest. A lot of the audience got more than just religion last month.