

Cathy

THE ORCHESTRA OF TREE CRICKETS
PERFORMS EVERY EVENING

The all-pervading music of a September night is nature's orchestra which begins with the setting of the sun and plays through the hours of approaching dawn. This is a chorus of tree crickets in every garden, orchard and wooded lot around Portland.

A child's knowledge is generally tested by a list of printed or oral questions. How easy to test his love of nature by walking in the garden as night approaches during the late summer and fall and trying to distinguish the players in the omnipresent chorus of insects.

Who knows the master fiddlers in the diffused light of the September moon? No, they are not the tree frogs or the well known little black crickets that cheep like a chick and love a crevice among the clods. They are two species of tree crickets, ghost-like, dressed in pale green, almost white in color and less than an inch in length.

Yes, you must consciously stop and harken. The delightful, rhythmic music is so interwoven with the night. It might escape you like the all prevailing dim effect of the moon. Then harkening, you can single out two musicians in the chorus, the "whistler" with a clear, soft, unbroken note; the other we might call the "fiddler" for his notes pulsate, with a slight pause between, as regular as the beat of a human heart. You will notice that the key is high-pitched in both but varies a little in different individuals. Hundreds of players join the concert, yet all are in harmony.

Approach the bush or a branch of the tree and try to

locate one of these elfin musicians. He is right here. Then you turn the other ear. No, he's over there. He's like a ventriloquist. Press on your flashlight and if your eyes are keen, you'll see the little wings elevated or even bent forward. The inside edges rub together very much like a bow crosses the strings of a fiddle. You will be amazed that such a loud clear sound can come from such a tiny instrument. The membrane of the transparent wing is as taught as a drum.

Stranger than fiction, you will discover that the female of the species is silent. The male is a little artist that does not wander about seeking his lady love. He stands steadily at his own gate fiddling in the faith that his sweetheart will like his song and come of her own free will.

The little tree crickets each have six legs with slender bodies. The hind legs are shaped like those of a grasshopper. They are good jumpers. The male and female are easily identified because the female has a slender, round body and what looks like a thin, little tail which is called an ovipositor. With this she punctures a twig or a cane and deposits her tiny eggs. The male has flat, gauze-like wings resting on the top of his back. Both of them have long, slender antennae that move continuously like living threads.

At night when you slip into bed and draw up the covers, if you are a lover of nature, you are conscious of the throbbing of the cricket heart of September. It is a delightful, rhythmic, sleep-inspiring music, the most comforting of all the sounds of nature.