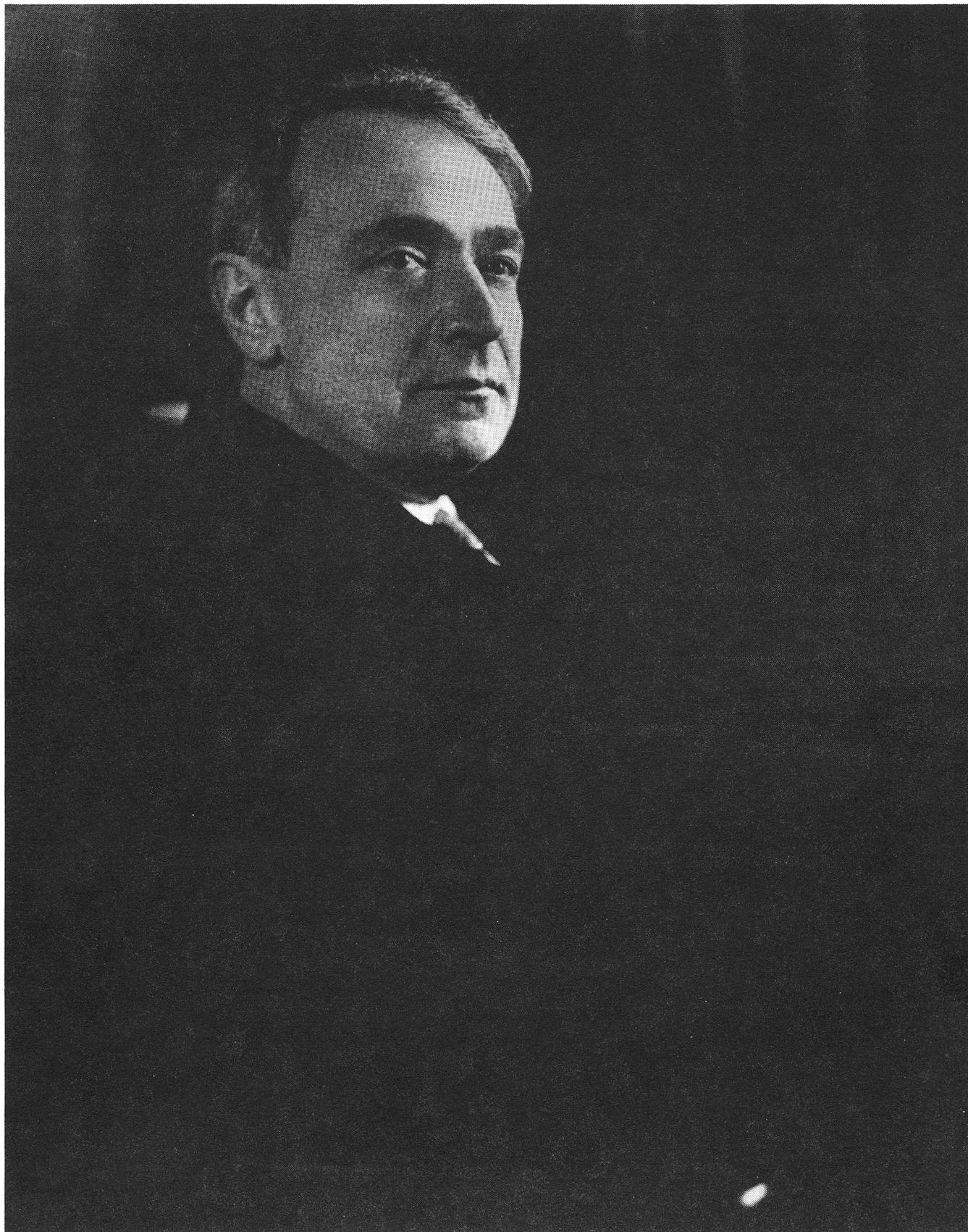


KOUSSEVITZKY
Recordings Society



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

It began with a discography. During January 1985, I sat down with a variety of reference works--primarily program listings from Ed Young's **Koussevitzky Legacy** radio series--as well as my own record collection and began to piece together a listing of Serge Koussevitzky's commercial recordings. Later, looking over that first draft, I was struck by the paucity of American music among Koussevitzky's recorded repertory. Although an avid champion of the American composer throughout his tenure in Boston, he recorded only a handful of their scores.

But there was enough music -- much of which has never been recorded by anyone else -- to make a fascinating, albeit short radio program. The result, entitled **Serge Koussevitzky and American Musical Independence**, aired nationwide on the American Public Radio network that summer. As work on the production progressed, I began to regret that there was no active Koussevitzky Society upon whose resources I could draw. Toscanini, Stokowski, Reiner, and Beecham -- all lesser, though important lights to my way of thinking -- had already been honored by Societies of their own. Thus, the next step was almost inevitable.

Many people have helped enormously in the establishment of the Koussevitzky Recordings Society. Robert M. Stumpf, President of the Leopold Stokowski Society of America (LSSA), spent a great deal of time on the phone with me and also sent several long letters explaining how the LSSA came into being. Certainly, I would not have had the courage to move forward with plans for the KRS without his aid and counsel. Ann Lanteigne, a Huntsville-based attorney, prepared our Articles of Incorporation and answered my seemingly endless legal questions, all without any form of monetary compensation. Mary Barnhart, CPA, also of Huntsville, has prepared all of our tax returns and helped us in our successful attempt to attain tax-exempt status, again "gratis".

Mary Rodman, of Boston's WCRB Productions, distributor of the Boston Symphony broadcasts as well as the little-known **Art of Serge Koussevitzky** series, has been tireless in her support of the Society. As many of you already know, she has been answering all of our correspondence for the past several months. In addition, she has spearheaded the search for a home for the Society's archives, helped to find funding for our oral archive and recording projects, and served as liason with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Several others deserve our thanks for their donations of time and experience: Vice President Wayne Blackwell, Treasurer Katherine Godell, KUSC's Dave Letterman (who helped launch our oral archive project), Nicolas Slonimsky, Kenneth DeKay, Vincent Schwerin, Richard Sebolt, John Emery, Brendan Wehrung, and Edward D. Young. Finally, undying thanks to Leonard Bernstein for keeping the Koussevitzky spirit alive in his many recordings, concerts, and lectures.

Our Society has grown slowly and several ambitious projects are planned for the coming year. We intend to expand our oral archive project by interviewing several of Koussevitzky's closest associates. Of course, as a recording society, it is our intention to issue recordings of our own in order to bring some of Koussevitzky's finest performances back into the catalog. We are just now beginning this process, which will ultimately involve negotiations with both the Boston Symphony and RCA, as it is the policy of the KRS not to issue any so-called "pirate" recordings.

However, we can and will make copies of Koussevitzky's commercial recordings available for broadcast to public and fine arts radio stations. If a station in your area is interested in airing any of these recordings, please have them get in touch with us. At the same time, we are working with Edward D. Young as he prepares to re-distribute an updated version of his 52-week radio series, **The Koussevitzky Legacy**. These programs, which include virtually all of Koussevitzky's commercial recordings, should be available to stations throughout the country beginning this fall. Updates on these and other Society projects will be published in future editions of this newsletter. - TOM GODELL

KOUSSEVITKY RECORDINGS:

A Guide to the 78 rpm Originals and Their LP Reissues,

I. Beethoven / Brahms / Tchaikovsky / Khachaturian / Copland

The name of Beethoven appears high above the stage of Boston's Symphony Hall, centered on the proscenium. This exalted position was also representative of Koussevitzky's worship of Beethoven as the standard by which all others are measured. It is appropriate that his first recording sessions included a symphony from **The Nine**, number **Six**. This recollection of rustic scenes was recorded December 18-19, 1928, when **Pastoral Symphonies** of another type were more common. Issued only on a 78 set (M-50, 10 sides; all numbers unless otherwise noted, are Victor label), the performance is too good to be damaged by the tubbiness of the early electric sound, and could still be reissued. A tantalizing LP fragment appears on the 75th Anniversary of the Boston Symphony collection (SRL-12-11), along with a fragment of the double-bass performance of the **Minuet in G**, accompanied by Pierre Luboschutz, as recorded in September of 1929, and issued whole in a 78 set (LE-1) and on an LP (LCT-1145).

Unable to record in the United States from 1931 through 1934 (except for one work in concert), Koussevitzky made three sets with the London Philharmonic in the latter year. Beethoven's **Third**, to many, is effective in the first two movements but does not sustain this level in the last two (M-263, 12 sides); the **Fifth** lacks even the first repeat and comes off rather stiffly (M-245, 9 sides, with a dazzling finale from the Haydn 88th as filler). Both are lessened by the orchestral playing, not up to Beecham's own best, and wooden sound. Under the pseudonym "Stratford Symphony Orchestra" came Camden LP reissues (CAL-102 for #3; CAL-103 for #5) which increased the damage by using inferior materials (especially in the early pressings) and adding a false echo with a quick, phony reverberation hiding many of the two's virtues. Ironically, these LP's now fetch exorbitant prices second-hand!

In Boston, Koussevitzky added the **Eighth Symphony** on December 30, 1936 (M-336, 6 sides). At the time it was noted for bringing the exposition repeat to records; its current virtues are in its energy and gruff wit. A good transfer to Camden LP (CAL-157) is, like most others, under the name "Centennial Symphony."

Pleased with the success of the concert recording of Bach's **St. Matthew Passion**, Victor also captured the December 3, 1938 performance of the **Missa Solemnis** and issued it in two volumes (M-758/759, 24 sides). Expected flaws in ensemble and balance are overshadowed by the rare opportunity to hear a BSO concert of the thirties and the Koussevitzky shaping of a lengthy work. Jeanette Vreeland, Anna Kaskas, John Priebe, and Norman Cordon are his typically Non-Celebrity soloists (compare those in Toscanini's broadcast two years later), with the Harvard-Radcliffe choral forces (directed by G. Wallace Woodworth; another "initial," E. Power Biggs, is at the organ). On the same day, a strong reading of the **Second Symphony** was begun, to be completed to satisfaction on April 12, 1939 (M-625, 7 sides). The LP transfer (CAL-157, with the above-mentioned #8) is a success.

Another recording hiatus (this due to union troubles in the industry) prevented sessions between mid-1940 and mid-1944. One of the works made to celebrate the ban's end was the **Fifth Symphony**, recorded with the heavy reverberation common in Symphony Hall recordings of the time, in this case adding to the weight of a weighty performance. Far more successful than the London set, it nevertheless remained unissued for five years, at which time it (DM-1313, 8 sides) was hailed by magazine reviewers as evidence of the deepening insights gained by Koussevitzky in his last sessions. This unique reading (still, alas, with no opening repeat) was reissued on LM-1021 by itself, then combined with **Egmont** (below) on CAL-405 (using true credits) and the fine British issue CDN-1001 (which claimed that they were recorded in 1949!).

A similarly successful remake, the **Eroica** of October 29 and 30, 1945 (DM-1161 and vinylite V-8, 12 sides) contained fresh memories

of the Roosevelt memorial performances of six months earlier. Even by Koussevitzky standards, this is notably passionate music making, yet not the granite sort as heard in the Fifth. Both LM-1145 and CAL-404 are worthy transfers, but the British VICS-1497(e) was disfigured by rechanneling into bogus stereo.

From Beethoven's incidental music, the **Egmont Overture** has a little trouble in the brass but captures the nobility of the score superbly. After making this recording of April 2, 1947 (12-0288, 2 sides), Koussevitzky repeated it in a film made at Tanglewood. The studio version was made to fill a 12" side in LM-6001, later taking part of a 10" one in LRM-7021 and filling the **Fifth** on CAL-405 and CDN-1001. The soundtrack apparently has never been "pirated."

Tanglewood's only studio sessions held in the shed (along with the **Bolero**), those for the **Ninth Symphony** yielded substandard sounding sides (chorale finale on August 6, 1947; first two movements on the 12th; third into the fourth on the 13th). However, the playing (especially low strings, always a Koussevitzky strength) is at an exalted level. Robert Shaw directed the Berkshire Festival Chorus, the soloists being Frances Yeend, Eunice Alberts, David Lloyd, and James Pease. Issues on 78 (DM-1190, 16 sides), vinylite (DV-12), and 45 rpm (WDM-1190) sound less murky than the LP set (LM-6001, 3 sides).

Far fewer Brahms recordings were made, possibly due to the competition by Stokowski and (in the Second) Monteux, plus Koussevitzky's lack of many concert opportunities. Curiously, these are the recordings most readily available in recent years.

The Fourth Symphony was a difficult one to capture to his satisfaction, and is the only work which took three sessions over two seasons (**La Mer**, from the same sessions, came close). The 1938 sections, on November 30 and December 3, have sounded much fuller than that on the fuzzy sides made November 8, 1939: this is true of the original 78s (M-730, 9 sides). The late transfer, on LM-2902 or in the 3-LP set VCM-6174, was well worth the wait.

Of the two concerto recordings with Jascha Heifitz, the Brahms (M-581, 9 sides) is less pressed than the justly famous Reiner remake, and the benefits are considerable in the beautifully shaped orchestral solos. 1939 was a notoriously bad year for RCA sound, but LCT-1043 transferred the April 11 performance well, while the still available set ARM4-0945 is even warmer.

Recorded sound in Symphony Hall improved in 1945, the January 2 date producing a remarkably beautiful **Third Symphony** (M-1007, 8 sides) of uncanny grace. It was issued on LM-1025, later on MCV-523 in Italy and in LVM2-7510 (a double album) in England.

Probably the most familiar of Koussevitzky reissues, the **Academic Festival Overture** of April 2, 1947 (12-0377, 2 sides) carried originally a dedication to Princeton University for its Bicentennial. Appearing on a 10" LP of overtures (LRM-7021), it was revived with the **Fourth** (LM-2902 and VCM-6174), as well as on a British anthology (OPO-1002).

In addition to the studio Brahms recordings, another **Violin Concerto** appeared on the Canadian Rococo label (RR-2100), this a performance by the piteously neglected Efrem Zimbalist, from the concert of March 30, 1946. Just short of his fifty-seventh birthday, this Auer pupil (who obviously chose to avoid the recording studio) gives a dramatic reading, as well as the lie to the claim that Koussevitzky was entirely inflexible with his soloists: compare the differing accompaniments, each appropriate to the soloist's character. Sound quality here is solid and bright.

Koussevitzky was a natural conductor for Tchaikovsky -- not because the two had been contemporaries and compatriots, but because the rich textures and unabashed emotion in the composer's works ideally matched the conductor's approach to all music. At the close of his second season of recording, Koussevitzky made his sole studio version of a signature piece, the **Sixth Symphony**. Due in part to its early recording dates of April 14, 15, and 16, 1930 (M-85, 10 sides), in part to the competition from the Hollywood Bowl version by Stokowski, it never received an LP reincarnation.

This is particularly annoying, for the individuality of the performance comes closer to the score than the revisions of Stokowski or the extremes of Mengelberg. Some of the old-school style (string portamento in particular) is retained and seems especially appropriate.

Of the two recordings of the **Fourth Symphony**, the more energetic is the one from May 4 and 6, 1936 (M-327, 9 sides). A slight demerit is earned by the fact that the repeated section of the scherzo is truncated so that the movement could be contained on one side. The damage is slight. Camden's transfer (CAL-109) suffers from a bit of electronic echo throughout and indifferent side joins, making the 78 set perferrable. This edition contains, as filler, the "Waltz" from the **Serenade for Strings**, also part of a single (11-8727, with Grieg); good LP issues include a quartet of shorter works (CAL-155, with a Goossens **Rosenkavalier Suite**), the "Great Artists at Their Best" anthology (CAL-336), and both editions of volume three of the "60 Years of Music America Loves Best" classical series (LM-2574). This side was recorded May 8. On December 28 of this year came the celebrated set of **Romeo and Juliet** (M-347, 5 sides). An issue on LP (LCT-1145, later on the LVT series) was coupled with Koussevitzky's doublebass solos; otherwise, it has been supplanted by a superior British transfer (in the set LVM2-7510).

The first post-ban recording, the **Fifth Symphony**, is another victim of distant recording which made the 1944 sessions too reverberant. However, this performance, caught in two sessions on November 22 (M-1057, 12 sides), is one of Koussevitzky's grandest. Aside from dissenters who find it too grand (it was dismissed as "sheer hokum" by one critic), enthusiasts often use this as a "demo" of Koussevitzky's art. The original LP (LM-1047) yields to the later (LM-2901 or set VCM-6174), which shows that side joins can be done almost imperceptibly.

1946 brought **Francesca da Rimini**, the much maligned tone poem, in a sincere performance which did not have the cheapness some have believed to be inherent in the score; it also did not remove a huge section of the **Inferno**, a wretched cut made by many others at the time

(and, alas, revived by Zubin Mehta this year). The April 19 recording (DM-1169, 6 sides) was given a smooth transfer (CAL-159). This same year yielded concert performances of two symphonies: the **Sixth** on February 9 and the **Fourth** on October 22 (both in SID-730, a 2-LP private set on the Bruno Walter Society label). Worthy as the performances are, both are substandard in sound: the **Sixth** has flutter and long muffled sections, while the **Fourth** is all but ruined by a ludicrous echo worse than the worst RCA mutilations. Processing otherwise is fine, making the error all the more inexplicable.

Valedictory Tchaikovsky recordings begin with the second studio version of the **Fourth**, begun on April 26, 1949 (DM-1318, 9 sides). Although RCA was recording with magnetic tape, their backing of 45 rpm records led them to record in pieces as usual. This caused inexcusable pauses in the LP edition (LM-1008) as first issued, but later pressings under the same number fixed those in the second and fourth movements (though the first remains sloppy as late as a "shaded dog," orange label pressing). Otherwise this is one of the finest reproductions of sound Koussevitzky ever enjoyed. Sometimes slower than the 1936 version, the remake nevertheless loses no power or smoothness. The scherzo (uncut this time) was remade April 27, when a new filler waltz was recorded as well -- a version never on LP, in spite of the many LP transfers of the earlier.

The entire **Serenade** at last was preserved on August 16, 1949, this time in Tanglewood's more reliable Theater Concert Hall (DM-1346, 7 sides). The loveliest portrait of the Koussevitzky string sound, it received a worthy reissue as LM-1056, later LVT-1027 (same matrices). If any of his Tchaikovsky recordings is indispensable, this is it.

Khachaturian made a single appearance in the Koussevitzky discography, but this is among the most treasured of recordings. William Kapell lived long enough to make only five concerto recordings, the first of which is Khachaturian's, here sounding far more musical and substantial than one could expect. It did not come easy: a 4-1/2 hour session on

New Year's Day, 1945, came to nothing. A second, on April 19, 1946, produced the issued records (M-1084, 8 sides) in 3-1/2 hours, with time at the end for two Sousa marches. Koussevitzky was later criticized for over-inflating the accompaniment, but his sober approach works well, especially with the immeasurably able Kapell. One might regret the absence of the Flexatone solo in the second movement, but this might be considered part of the sobriety. In the score, this saw-like British instrument (used already in Schoenberg's **Variations** and **Moses und Aron**) imitated Armenian folk sounds. Ironically, this solo was dismissed by some conductors as "too Hollywood" long before Rozsa made the similar use of the Theremin a Hollywood tradition.

The recording's history on LP is varied, its critiques instructive. First issued on a decent early LP (LM-1006), it was reissued with two solos and a concerto fragment on "The Unforgettable William Kapell" (LM-2588), its sound made harsh and confused, with a metallic rattle in the piano tone (similar to some Horowitz recordings of the era). I find no criticism of the sound in any reviews, nor do I find any kind words about the supposedly lessened quality of the new digital remastering (AGM1-5266). This is a baffling outrage, for the new version is a miraculous re-vivifying. One example may serve as proof: the descending piano passage before the last reprise of the second movement's main theme. In LM-2588, the section is a confused rattle; in 1006, it is the sound of a piano, with suspended cymbal entering; in 5266, the piano notes are distinct while the cymbal is heard in a crescendo playing throughout the passage! One could welcome many more such "indifferent" 78 remasterings.

Of the Koussevitzky recordings of American composers -- far too few to suggest the vital part native works played in his programming -- the three Copland sets were the most influential. First, on December 1, 1938, came **El Salon Mexico** (M-546, 5 sides, with Stravinsky), a piece which made Toscanini miserable with its shifting meters. Koussevitzky gave it such an infectious lilt that the wind players all but danced in their seats, causing

a conductorial tantrum when he saw contagious liveliness as disrespect. This delightful set never deserved the destroying echo added to the LP (LCT-1134) which has remained, unnoticed, in the British Victrola (VIC-1211) and the recent American Victrola (AVM1-1739). Only the 78 set is really worthwhile. The same three LPs did better by his second Copland set, the October 31, 1945 performance of the full orchestra suite from **Appalachian Spring** (M-1046, 6 sides). Some discomfort is provided by horn burbles and other technical accidents, but the playing still remains lyrical and exciting in a unique style. In its first copies, the 78 set contained an attached booklet, with a page on the composer and six pages with photos of the original Martha Graham ballet.

On the two Victrola LPs, the first two works were joined by his third Copland recording, **A Lincoln Portrait**, from February 7, 1946. Somewhat better sound comes from the 78 set (M-1088, 3 sides), which provides the bonus of the Gettysburg Address (without accompaniment). Melvyn Douglas is the perfect vocal counterpart for Koussevitzky: his delivery is not the worshipful or scholarly type often heard, but a fiery, fervid, accusatory oratory (though it's hard to agree that "Lincoln was a quiet man" after this!). Its first LP was another Collector's Treasury issue (LCT-1152), an odd assortment with Sibelius, Faure, and Stravinsky, all with shrill, tinny sound which needs adjustment for natural reproduction.

It is a pleasure to note that this guide is soon to be outdated. An alternate Tchaikovsky **Fourth**, the concert performance of the 1949 edition, is soon to be issued on a noncommercial label, coupled with a "new" work, the **1812 Overture**. Also, RCA is considering a digitalized reissue of LM-1008 (also Tchaikovsky's **Fourth**), with the editing improved (as it is in the digitalized Sibelius already issued). Accompanying it will probably be **Francesca**, or a combination of the untransferred **Waltz** and Rachmaninov's **Vocalise** and **Isle of the Dead**.

The next installment in this series of articles will include French composers, other Russians, and Sibelius. -- RICHARD SEBOLT--

INTERVIEW WITH NICOLAS SLONIMSKY

Los Angeles 11/2/85

Standing at the information desk in the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles during the annual conference of the Association of Music Personnel in Public Radio, I nervously asked, "Has Nicolas Slonimsky arrived yet?" From behind me came the beautifully accented voice of the 91-year-old phenomenon: "So, you pronounce it properly!" Thus began a conversation on the pronunciation of Russian names, the art of music, and Slonimsky's early years in America with Serge Koussevitzky that would continue through lunch and end, after his hilarious speech to the AMPPR membership, with a formal forty-five minute interview.

A composer, conductor, and writer on music, Slonimsky was born in St. Petersburg, Russia on April 27, 1894. At the Conservatory there, he studied piano with his aunt, the venerable Isabelle Vengerova. Beginning in the 1930's he actively championed the music of Ives and Varese, conducting numerous first performances of their works in Europe, the United States, and on records. Further, he has been responsible for several significant musical reference works, especially **Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Music and Musicians**. His whimsical attitude to life and art is obvious in his writings (even in such "serious" works as **Baker's**), his compositions, and especially in his lectures and conversations.

Slonimsky has frequently described himself as "a failed **Wunderkind**." In fact, **Failed Wunderkind** is the title of his soon-to-be published autobiography. "In that book," he told a Washington Post reporter, "the sky is the limit; I tell terrible stories about everybody." Slonimsky served as Serge Koussevitzky's secretary from 1924 to the spring of 1927, and thus has many not-so-terrible stories to tell of these years. Perhaps the most striking thing about Slonimsky's recollections was their clarity. He spoke of the events of the 20's as if he were describing things that had happened only yesterday--**TOM GODELL**

TG: I wonder how you first became acquainted with Serge Koussevitzky?

NS: Very simply, I used to accompany singers in Paris in 1922. Yes, and I accompanied a Russian singer named Mozhukin -- not well known -- and Koussevitzky came to that concert. I mean, he was just one of the many Russian musicians in Paris. He was not THE great Koussevitzky, not yet. Everybody knew his name, but he was not that kind of an absolute inapproachable celebrity.

After the concert he went to congratulate the singer, and he asked me whether I would be available to play piano for him, that is, to read the scores, because he used learn scores by having a pianist play the score while he beat time. So, naturally I was absolutely thrilled by this offer. By all means, of course.

So, he invited me to lunch the next day. I went to his villa near Paris, and he tried me out, and I was alright, and so he hired me. That was in Paris, 1922. That was before his engagement in Boston. And so I was with him in Paris for a year off and on, and then I went to Rochester. I got a job there, and I went to Rochester in November 1923, and that was my first American engagement.

Then, Koussevitzky again invited me to Boston, and I came to Boston, and he asked me if I would want to be his secretary as well as pianist because, of course, his English was non-existent, and his French was very poor, and he needed someone to type out his letters and so forth. Now again, I was delighted even though I had a job in Rochester which payed very well, \$3,000 a year. Now, don't forget, that was 1923; it was like \$60,000 now.

But I immediately agreed, and in the spring of 1925 when Koussevitzky was already engaged in Boston, I joined him in Boston and together we went to Paris. On the **Majestic** of course -- no planes at that time. So we worked it out, and I did whatever I could. Immediately I got all kinds of friends, and I also accompanied orchestral players whom Koussevitzky wanted to engage. So I was a convenience because I could read at sight

fairly well, in fact very well. So he could use me as an accompanist to those musicians, as a translator, and so forth. And so everything was hunky-dory.

Then we returned to Boston, and I became very friendly with the Boston men, of the orchestra. And so it went until about 1926 and 27. Then difficulties developed because I tried to get along on my own, and Koussevitzky felt that I was sort of his property, like a serf, you know, in old-fashioned Russian estates. I mean he didn't spell it out, but he felt that my time and my loyalty belonged to him. I mean, when other conductors came, I was very friendly with them, and so forth.

TG: He didn't like that?

NS: He didn't like it at all. So he felt that I was just disloyal to him. Then there was a problem about his changing programs at the last moment, and I was the middle-man, you see, because I was giving the programs to the program annotator, who was at that time the formidable Philip Hale, and he felt that I was making a joke of his changes of programs.

TG: Koussevitzky felt that way?

NS: Koussevitzky felt that way, or suspected something. He said to me, "You know, every time you speak to Philip Hale and give him the programs, for some reason he smiles. What are you telling him anyway?" He was suspicious. He couldn't understand English, but he was suspicious of it.

So I said, "I'm not telling anything, but I just assure him that everything was alright." But actually I would say about the possibility of a certain piece being performed; I mean, staying on the program. I would say, "I can give a clean bill of health to this particular composition," and so on. I used such ways.

He finally decided to hand those programs, after I wrote them out, to Philip Hale and to his assistant, himself, because he didn't like my being too comradely, too friendly with all those people. I mean, he just suspected something was going on. Nothing was going on, except that really I was given to jokes. I was always that way.

TG: Did Koussevitzky not have much of a sense of humor?

NS: He had none! Zero! His sense of humor was sometimes he was telling stories that had no humorous content. Abram Chasins was in Tanglewood in 1942. Abram Chasins was helping him in the ornaments of Bach which he [Koussevitzky] conducted, and Koussevitzky was no scholar in that matter. And Chasins met, while walking he bumped into a singing teacher who had tremendous ornaments in front of her, and she asked him, "Well, how are your little ornaments coming along?" -- I mean Bach ornaments. So he said, "OK, and how are yours?" indicating her breasts.

So this was told Koussevitzky, and Koussevitzky thought it was hilarious. He was telling this joke to everybody, except he had garbled it somewhat, and he would say, "You know, Chasins met that woman, and you know she has great things, so she asked him, 'How are your agrément?' and Chasins answered, 'Fine und how are you?'" -- ruining the whole thing. So then somebody, I think Bernstein or somebody, heard it, and he was asked what the hell was going on, because Koussevitzky garbled it totally because of his ignorance of English or anything. This was his sense of humor.

And he was unable to learn names, whether French, English, American, anything. So he would refer to a certain composer who lived in Cambridge, he would say, "Well, that friend of yours who never washes, he always has dirty hair." So I had to guess whom he meant. Everybody was a friend of mine. I mean he would point out a 'friend' as if I'm responsible for imposing them on Koussevitzky.

And then there was this episode. He was supposed to play **Flivver Ten Million** by Converse. Now at that time Ford has his Ford number ten million. So he [Converse] composed a piece for it, and Koussevitzky himself handled this program. So then in the afternoon, after the morning rehearsal, the librarian of the Boston Symphony Orchestra calls me up and says, "Say, what happened to Koussevitzky's program? He's not playing **Flivver Ten Million**, and we invited Henry

Ford and so forth. (I mean Henry Ford, of course, didn't come, but we're making a big deal of it.) What's happening?"

So I said, "What do you mean, he's not playing it? We rehearsed it only yesterday!"

He said, "No, it's not on the program."

So I said, "What else is it? I'll come to Symphony Hall immediately." So I went to Symphony Hall. Koussevitzky always slept in the afternoon.

So I went to Symphony Hall, and they said "Yes, this is what it says: it's Carpenter, **Adventures in a Perambulator.**"

So I said, "We don't even have that score. Where did you get it?"

The assistant to Hale said, "I got it from Koussevitzky."

"You got it from Koussevitzky?" I said, "Koussevitzky wouldn't be able to say **Perambulator** in a hundred years."

"But he said it. Carpenter."

I said, "Look, Carpenter -- Converse, sounds absolutely the same to him. You mean to say he actually said those words?"

So he said, "No, but you see I showed him, was it this [here Slonimsky made a pushing motion] and he said yes. I said, 'Was it **Perambulator?**' so he said yes."

"Well, of course, if you showed him this [a pushing motion], he meant it was the **Flivver Ten Million.** And Converse or Carpenter . . ."

So he said, "What are we going to do?"

I said, "Just ignore the whole thing. Keep that **Flivver Ten Million**, and don't say a word to Koussevitzky."

That's his sense of humor. I mean, had he found out he would have been furious, particularly my part of it because in a way, you know, I exposed his ignorance and so forth.

TG: I wonder, you mentioned what is kind of a lack of a sense of humor and some of the recordings where I would expect more humor to be present--Prokofiev **Classical Symphony**--seem to be somewhat dry.

NS: Yes, no humor whatsoever. But, of course, he was a great animator. You see there is a French word animateur. So he could make that orchestra play. And the concertmaster of the Boston Symphony said, "He does something that we know is absolutely wrong, and yet we follow him enthusiastically." That is the secret of his performance.

When Munch came, who had sense of humor, and he could speak English, French, German, everything, but he was concerned with his own affairs. He liked to eat bouillabaisse, which the wife of the second trumpet player prepared magnificently. So, when it was 12 o'clock in the morning, he thought of the bouillabaisse and not of what he was conducting, of the music. And so, at 12 o'clock he would stop in this regard and said "Well, you know this piece; we don't have to rehearse," and then he would rush off to have that bouillabaisse.

And so the oboe player who was really furious at Koussevitzky because Koussevitzky constantly picked on him, he said, you know, he said in French, "**Nous commençait regretter Koussevitzky**" -- "We are beginning to regret Koussevitzky." Because they were musicians, they liked to be [treated with respect], but Munch said, "It's all right. You know this piece, and I know it. Never mind." So there was a drop. And Koussevitzky had that magic.

TG: You said, in an interview on Jim Svejda's **Record Shelf** program, that, when Munch came in, it sounded as though "there was something dead in the orchestra."

NS: Exactly. That's exactly what I said. I say, there was something that, ah, that excitement was missing.

TG: And yet it came back as soon as Koussevitzky came back for a guest conducting engagement.

NS: Yes, yes. So the conclusion is that

alright, so Koussevitzky didn't know this, didn't know that, but he had magic. And this magic that I knew very well, even though I knew his faults. Usually faults of elementary education.

TG: Elementary musical education?

NS: Musical and also general education.

TG: One of the things you alluded to earlier, you say that you were hired initially to help Koussevitzky learn orchestral scores. Could he not read an orchestral score?

NS: Oh yes he could, but he was getting mixed up. Of course, he was an orchestral musician. He played the double bass in orchestras. Of course, he knew the scores, but he couldn't follow all this, and he made sometimes ludicrous mistakes which were simply extraordinary.

He had a way of approaching me which I didn't like. He praised me the way, let's say, a landlord would praise his serf in ancient Russia. He said, "Oh yes, he's a mathematician. He's a piano player. He knows everything. He has perfect pitch," praising me beyond the skies to others. So they began to say, well, rumors spread that I was really teaching him or doing something because of his own exaggeration.

And then, Olin Downes wrote a terribly tactless article in the **New York Times** entitled, "False Rumors About Koussevitzky's Lack of Technical Knowledge." This is the most terrible thing to do. It's like "false rumors about the president's wife sleeping with his secretary." You know, you don't say those things, you see. Because they'd say, well wait a minute, there are no such false rumors about Toscanini or Stokowski or anybody else.

TG: And yet, I wonder, was Koussevitzky's musical knowledge any different from his contemporaries. Did Toscanini have more technical knowledge? Did Beecham have more technical knowledge?

NS: Beecham had tremendous technical knowledge. Of course, he was confused and so

forth, but Beecham edited classical scores. Now, Koussevitzky did write his **Double Bass Concerto**, but it was actually arranged and written by Gliere. Koussevitzky just contributed a few main themes.

I could never find out just how much Gliere was responsible for it, because I could never find one [the original manuscript]. I even asked Gliere's family in Moscow whether the manuscript existed in their possession, but no it wasn't. And Koussevitzky's manuscript did not exist in his handwriting. None of his pieces. This does not mean he was not capable of writing a whole score, which doesn't matter. He was a conductor. He was not a composer.

TG: Another thing that we read about is that you helped Koussevitzky in another way, and that is taking some of the more rhythmically complex music, the **Rite of Spring**, and rebaring . . .

NS: I rebarred it completely because he could not change from five to three and four and so forth. So I suggested [it] to him, when we spent a whole summer in Biarritz in 1923, working on that score. I played it from the two piano, four-hands arrangement made by Stravinsky himself, and I found that he [Koussevitzky] was counting five with a plus like, "Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, ugh!" So it came out six instead of five. So he called it 'luftpause'. But it was no luft-pause; it was just wrong.

He couldn't do it, so I rebarred this **danse sacrale**. He at first said, "Well, we can't change Stravinsky's rhythms." So I said, "Nothing will be changed. Just your down beat will be changed, which will not affect anybody." Then he tried it and everything worked. He said, "It's wonderful. Alright, show me what you did." I did very enthusiastically, and he conducted my arrangement to the end of his days.

Then Leonard Bernstein came to the orchestra and started conducting the way Stravinsky wrote it, but they had it all rebarred in my way. So he said, "What's going on?" And the musicians told him what was, so Leonard Bernstein took down all those changes,

and in a matter of minutes he could conduct it all because he was Leonard Bernstein, and nothing was wrong with his mentality and so forth. Leonard Bernstein wrote me about it a year ago for my birthday, and he reminisced about it, when he found that score that is forever there in the library of the Boston Symphony Orchestra with my rebarring.

And so Koussevitzky praised me again beyond all belief. He said that it's a mathematical feat of skill. It was nothing. It was just adding fractions, but to him adding fractions was a miracle.

TG: Wasn't Stravinsky quite upset by it all?

NS: No, no. As a matter of fact, some twenty years later he himself rebarred this thing. And, of course, I never told about this to anybody, but the rumor spread, and then Koussevitzky accused me of spreading the rumors. Now, that was very unpleasant, because, well there were all kinds of things which I report in my autobiography, in full detail. And finally I was fired.

TG: You were fired for what? Was there a reason?

NS: Yes, insubordination and there was another thing that happened, that I was interviewed among other secretaries of famous people in a feature article in the **Boston Globe**. This article quoted the president of the United Fruit Companies saying, "My secretary knows more than I do," meaning that he relied entirely on his secretary. And there was my picture in the middle of us, and the Governor's secretary's picture to the left of me, another secretary to the right of me, and the banner headline was, "MY SECRETARY KNOWS MORE THAN I DO."

Now, I knew that Koussevitzky never took the **Boston Globe**, that he always read the **Boston Herald**, if he could read it at all. And I'd said nothing. But, then, somebody reported it to him, and Koussevitzky could understand that this was something, and that my picture was in the middle. So he gave me hell. He said, "Look what you said."

So I said, "It's not what I said. You can read here," and I asked Mrs. Koussevitzky who

could read. She said it's a quotation from the President of the United Fruit Company, had nothing to do with me; what I said was all in great praise of Koussevitzky. But he didn't believe that story, and so he said. "Well, if it's not you, then your manager put your picture in the middle of the paper.

So I said, "Nobody puts a picture . . ."

He said, "Well, why is your picture in the middle?"

"Because," I said, "it was full face and the others were in profile."

He said, "Either you or your helpers . . ."

I said, "You don't do that at the paper."

And then he did something. The **Boston Herald** published an article about him in which it said "Mr. Koussevitzky's conducting was not as hysterical as some Russian conductors might be expected to conduct works by Tchaikovsky."

So Koussevitzky couldn't read it, but he had constipation so he sat on the john for a very long time, and he tried to figure it out. He saw the word 'hysterical' which was the only word he could understand. And so he came out and he said, "Did you read this review?" So I said, no. I mean, my way was just to deny everything. He said, "Look, this guy says that I was hysterical."

"No, he says you were not like others."

So he said, "But the very idea that I could have been!" So he said, "Take a letter."

I said, "Alright."

"Dear Mr. Hale." And I remember that letter. "I am depriving Europe of my art. I'm giving all I have to your city, and you allow your assistant, your underling to use the word 'hysterical' in connection with my concert. I expect you to fire this man forthwith."

So I read it, and he looked at me and said, "Not a peep out of you. I don't want to hear anything. I'll just sign it, you just

put a stamp on it, mail it, that's all you'll want to do." And so I wanted to say to him, this was America; this was not Russia.

But then I went to Mrs. Koussevitzky, and I said, "This letter may produce public scandal." You don't write to the editor of the paper telling him to dismiss an assistant because he dared [to use a certain word]. Of course, he dictated to me in Russian; I wrote in English.

And she said, "You must have irritated him somehow."

I was to be blamed. So I said, "No, he wanted me to do this, and I am bringing it to you just to save his reputation."

But after that things got pretty bad, because he became suspicious of everything I was doing. Occasionally [during rehearsals] he would ask whether something was alright, and then I would point out about something, and he would say, "Now you couldn't have heard that. Here I was with the score at the podium; you tell me that something was wrong, sitting in the hall without the score, so it's a bluff." But, of course, it wasn't a bluff -- it was an educated guess on my part. Well, anyway, it became worse and worse, and finally we came to the parting of the ways.

TG: When was that?

NS: That was in the spring of 1927.

TG: Did you ever reconcile at any time before his death?

NS: No, there was no reconciliation, but after his death I wrote a very laudable article about him for the *Saturday Review*, and the manager of the Boston Symphony Orchestra wrote to the editor of the *Saturday Review* that it was a very noble gesture on my part, considering the treatment that Koussevitzky gave me.

TG: Were you yourself conducting at all in Boston during any of those years?

NS: Oh yes.

TG: Do you think he was jealous of that?

NS: No, that was much later. And I conducted the Harvard University Orchestra. Ha, jealous of what? No, no. As a matter of fact, at one time he wanted me to be his assistant conductor, and he tried to teach me how to conduct the *Alpine Symphony* [by Richard Strauss], but I was not prepared, and so fortunately I didn't go. No, heavens, that was out.

TG: Later on there was some considerable jealousy, I believe, when his nephew Fabien Sevitzky came to America.

NS: I mean his nephew, first of all, was a god damn fool. Of course, he had some of Koussevitzky's sort of glamor, and wore a long overcoat and so forth.

I knew stupid conductors, but I don't believe I ever met anybody more stupid than Fabien Sevitzky. And, of course, Fabien Sevitzky wanted to conduct the *9th Symphony* [of Beethoven] at the end of a season. Koussevitzky happened to be conducting it practically across the street, you see, at Symphony Hall. His nephew had a little orchestra called People's Orchestra, which was not to be compared remotely to the Boston Symphony. And so Koussevitzky told him to cancel that performance. And he said, "Why should I cancel it? You conduct your way, I conduct mine."

"Your way? How dare you lift your baton over a Beethoven Symphony! Out!" He threw him out.

And then after Koussevitzky died, Fabien Sevitzky sued the estate, that is the second wife of Koussevitzky, for not giving him part of the estate or something, and then not even inviting him to the funeral and so forth. Then, of course, he had to withdraw that suit which was too ridiculous for words. He was the greatest god damn fool I ever met.

TG: And yet he did, on occasion, come up with a very fine performance; some very fine recordings of Tchaikovsky's early symphonies in Indianapolis.

NS: Yes, well, he managed. I mean, he was not totally ignorant of music, because after all he was an orchestral musician. He also played the double bass, and there was trouble

in Russia because his manager advertised Fabien Koussevitzky double bass performer, but "Fabien" was very small letters, so people thought they were hearing Serge Koussevitzky. So Koussevitzky summoned him and said, "All-right, you are no more Koussevitzky, just cut out that 'Kou' and be 'Sevitzky.'"

TG: Well, that kind of thing still goes on today. We see paperback books, "by the author of *The Godfather*" in huge letters and then down below we see that it's a different book.

NS: Yes, but at least it's the same guy named Puzo. I mean that is a different story, but this was deliberately trying to capitalize on Koussevitzky's fame. So poor Sevitzky then had a symphony orchestra in Florida, and then he was dismissed from there, and he circulated 100 letters to various symphony orchestras declaring his availability, and the answer was zero, not one. Then he went to Europe, at that time when you could hire an orchestra and pay for a performance. He went to Europe, and he died during a rehearsal in Athens.

TG: At the time when you were serving as Koussevitzky's secretary, had you yet discovered the music of Ives and Varese?

NS: No, heavens no.

TG: Because I was curious that, of all the American music that Koussevitzky championed and conducted, he never once played a score by Ives.

NS: No. Aaron Copland tried to sell that, an Ives score to Koussevitzky, and Koussevitzky looked at it and said, "I don't understand a thing about it; can't play it." Aaron Copland really tried, too. That was long after I left.

TG: Did Koussevitzky feel the same way about the twelve-tone composers, the Viennese School?

NS: Yes, he never conducted Schoenberg.

TG: Just couldn't understand where it was going?

NS: He said, "I don't understand this music," so he played early Schoenberg, but he just couldn't understand it. Schoenberg asked me

why Koussevitzky didn't play his works. So I said because he can't understand this thing at all, it didn't sound to him. So he said, "Er spielt doch Brahms!" -- "But he plays Brahms!" In Schoenberg's mind, if a person played Brahms then he could play Schoenberg. I mean, that's characteristic of Schoenberg's idea about his own music.

TG: And, I think, a valid characterization, too.

NS: Well, yes. Now, but not forty years ago.

TG: Koussevitzky is generally regarded as one of the great dictators of the baton, and he is mentioned along with Toscanini and others. What was he like in rehearsal? Was he really that kind of an iron-fisted dictator?

NS: No he was not iron-fisted. He was just impolite, crude, and unpleasant. It's different with Toscanini. Toscanini heard every note there was, but Koussevitzky didn't. Koussevitzky told me that he lacked perfect pitch. In one of our frank conversations he said, "If I had your sense of pitch, your memory, and your knowledge, I would be the greatest conductor in the world." But he exaggerated it.

And he didn't care for Toscanini. He said once to the orchestra during a rehearsal, "Toscanini is just a good, second-rate, provincial opera conductor in Italy."

TG: You also, during those years, accompanied Koussevitzky in a few double bass recitals.

NS: Yes. Not a whole recital, but just a little something when he received his honorary degree at Brown University. He said, "I cannot speak English, but I'll play for you," and I accompanied him.

TG: Could you characterize his double bass playing for those who've never heard it?

NS: It was as great as anything could possibly be imagined. It was like a beautiful cello.

TG: And he was over fifty years old at the time and had not played the bass for many years.

NS: Well, it doesn't matter because he played the bass in his younger years, and he was just turned fifty when he played that.

TG: You mentioned earlier about the Gliere-Koussevitzky connection with regard to the *Concerto*. Did Koussevitzky talk much about those original compositions of his?

NS: No.

TG: There was something that Aaron Copland has said a couple of times on a couple of different occasions, that he felt one reason why Koussevitzky was such a great champion of living composers, not just Americans, but all living composers, was that he was something of a frustrated composer himself.

NS: No, he was no composer at all. He couldn't be a frustrated composer because he could not compose, period.

TG: And yet there are several pieces. Are you saying that Gliere wrote all of these?

NS: No, the little, dinky gumdrops that he wrote, which are poor imitations of Dvorak.

TG: Why then do you think that Koussevitzky championed new music so avidly?

NS: He championed new music because he did have one precious quality. He knew good music when he confronted it, as in the case of Scriabin, whom he supported, whom he picked up when Scriabin was in desperate financial straits in Switzerland. He went to Scriabin. He gave him money, because by that time he married his rich second wife, and he had his own publishing house, and he published Scriabin, and he performed Scriabin. He saved Scriabin from obscurity.

TG: He toured up and down the Volga river with Scriabin as soloist.

NS: Yes, absolutely, and then they quarreled because Scriabin wanted more money. Scriabin asked Koussevitzky, "Why do you pay me only a hundred roubles?" So he said, "Because you are not worth more than a hundred roubles." And Scriabin was a Messiah! And so he

couldn't take it, because he thought he enabled Koussevitzky to reach the heights, but Koussevitzky thought the other way around.

TG: Given some of the limitations of Koussevitzky's art that you've talked about, his inability to handle some rhythms, beating time in five, his not having perfect pitch, to not hear everything that went on in the orchestra, and given the concentration today in schools, teaching conductors all of this technical material, what can a young conductor now, what could he learn from looking back at Koussevitzky, the recordings and the career?

NS: He could learn nothing, because one doesn't learn this power of animation. I like the word animation because it isn't genius or anything.

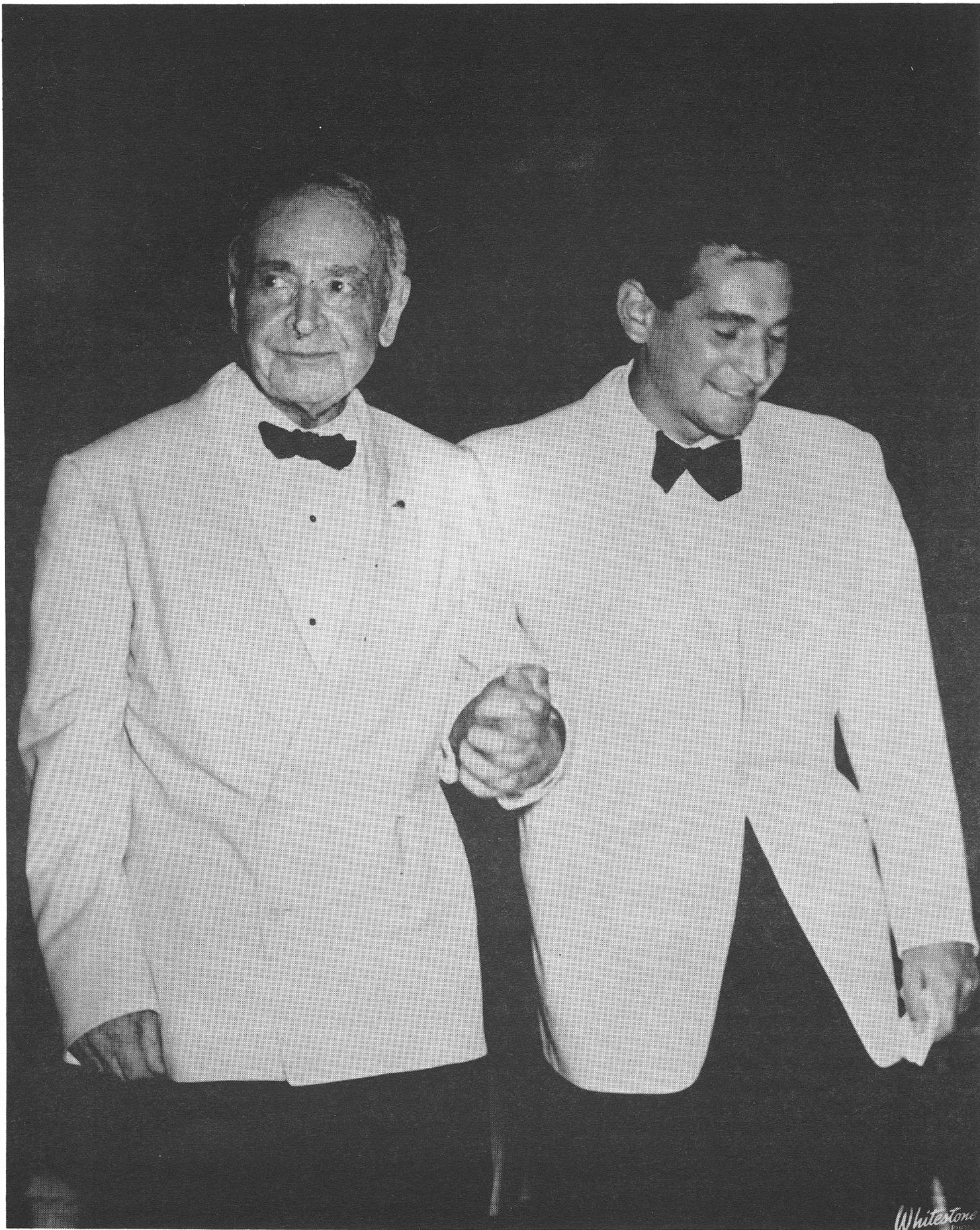
And, Toscanini could not conduct Stravinsky. He got all mixed up conducting *Petrouchka*. Toscanini could not conduct in 5/8 either. I mean, straight, this kind of 5/8. Of course, he could conduct Tchaikovsky's *Sixth*; that's a different story. But Toscanini could not even understand music by Copland, never mind Ives or Varese.

TG: Is there anyone who has that power of animation that you know of?

NS: Well, Toscanini in a different manner, and Karajan to a certain extent, and Furtwaengler, and several others.

TG: Among the younger conductors perhaps?

NS: Well, of course, Bernstein is the usual guess, but it's a different type of thing. Bernstein perhaps knows too much. You see there is such a thing as knowing too much. Because, Bernstein is really a renaissance man of conducting and composing, and composing in the popular vein and serious vein. This is what I say in my dictionary. I say there is no precedent to it. Mahler was of course a composer, but he did not compose popular music. But Bernstein has everything.



BULLETIN BOARD

In an effort to fully document his career, the Society would appreciate any and all available information regarding extant broadcast-live recordings of Dr. Koussevitzky. The following information would be appreciated: the date of the broadcast-performance, works played, a general statement as to the quality (condition) of the recording, the source of your information, and the location (institution, private collection, etc.) of the recording. This is obviously a large project. It is our hope that frequent updates will be published in the Newsletter. Please forward all correspondence for this project to: Dr. Karl F. Miller, Historical Music Recordings Collection, Fine Arts Building 3.200, University of Texas, Austin, TX 78713

BOOK REVIEW

Paul Tortelier: A Self-Portrait in Conversation with David Blum. Heinemann, 1984. 270 pp.

This is a difficult book with which to deal. Tortelier's views on music and musicians attract while his views on society, politics, and other such matters are either so naive or ill-founded as to be quite worthless thus creating an annoyance at the inordinate amount of space given to them.

The text is presented in the form of a conversation which seems wholly unnecessary but does not intrude unduly. The appendices include a listing of Tortelier's compositions, a discography (without recording dates), and the music and the text of his **May Music Save Peace**.

As in the case of so many other books by or about musicians this one, too, covers biographical details, family affairs ad nauseum, musical life, the musician's views on all sorts of subjects about which he knows little or nothing and as to which he has absolutely no expertise, rather more musical analysis than the average reader will want, and rather less musical analysis than the average musician would like. So, on the one hand the text offers every reader something while on the other it will probably offer most readers rather less than they had hoped.

What is interesting is the European or continental view of musicians in which Tortelier (like Claudio Arrau) does not accept Toscanini as the highest power in musical interpretation, unlike the view which emanates from so many volumes by American or British musicians. Seemingly, the Atlantic Ocean and the English Channel are more than mere geographical features.

Inasmuch as Tortelier played for three years with the Boston Symphony under Koussevitzky and also with the Paris Conservatory Orchestra under Charles Munch, this volume offers some interesting views and comments on both Koussevitzky and his successor in Boston.

Although I found the book a disappointment as a whole, I would have been sorry to have missed it because of what it contains on Tortelier's musical world. - KENNETH DEKAY

-15-

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