

KOUSSEVITZKY

Recordings Society



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Since the creation of our Society, I have endeavored to assemble an Advisory Board which would include several of Dr. Koussevitzky's closest associates. The Board is an informal organization, and its purpose is to identify priorities for the Society as a whole. Currently, the Board consists of: Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Harry Ellis Dickson, William Schuman, Martin Bookspan, Verna Fine, Karl Haas, Richard L. Kaye, and Steve Ledbetter. Three other invitations are still outstanding.

While the first four will require no introduction to most members, I would like to briefly introduce the others. Martin Bookspan is a broadcaster and record company executive. He hosted the broadcasts of the Boston Symphony in the 1950's and is well known today as the host of the New York Philharmonic concerts. His record company, Moss Music Group, is responsible for two very fine Koussevitzky discs: the Sibelius *Seventh* with the BBC Symphony and an album of shorter works, including the Arthur Foote *Suite for Strings* with the BSO.

Karl Haas is a pianist and educator as well as a radio broadcaster. Host of the nationally distributed *Adventures in Good Music* series, he recently devoted several programs to a history of music in Boston. Richard Kaye, president of Charles River Broadcasting, has been with Boston's WCRB for thirty-five years. He produces the broadcasts of the Boston Symphony and manages the orchestra's Transcription Trust — the owner of Koussevitzky's BSO air checks. Verna Fine is the widow of the distinguished American composer Irving Fine. Steve Ledbetter is the program annotator for the Boston Symphony. Our warmest thanks to our advisors for their support of the Koussevitzky Recordings Society.

At present we are negotiating with RCA for the right to reissue several of Koussevitzky's commercial recordings. The process has been a slow one, but should ultimately be very rewarding to us all. If possible, Society releases will be made available on both cassette and compact disc. The content of these releases has not yet been determined, and your suggestions are most welcome. We hope to issue the first of these recordings by mid-year. All members will be notified when they become available. Also, Richard Kaye advises us that the BSO intends to issue a number of compact discs for fund-raising purposes, including a live Koussevitzky performance of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*.

Many of our members will be delighted to know of the existence of the Alexander Glazounov Society. Glazounov's many accomplishments — as a composer, conductor, and teacher (his students included Prokofiev and Shostakovich) — are only beginning to be recognized thanks at least in part to the work of this Society. Their excellent newsletter contains interviews, record reviews, and a marvelous series of articles devoted to forgotten composers. For membership information, you may write to the Alexander Glazounov Society, 17320 Park Avenue, Sonoma, CA 95476.

Finally, as we were preparing this newsletter, we learned of the death of the legendary Jascha Heifetz. His passing marks the end of the Golden Age of violin playing. While Heifetz made many fine recordings during his long and distinguished career, I am especially fond of his matchless versions, with Koussevitzky, of the Brahms and Prokofiev concertos. Both are still available from RCA as a part of their *Heifetz Collection*. This newsletter is fondly dedicated to his memory.

Tom Godell

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- | | |
|----|---|
| 3 | Koussevitzky and His Biographers,
by Kenneth DeKay |
| 6 | Koussevitzky Recordings: A Discursive
Discography, by Richard Sebolt |
| 8 | Interview with John Barwicki, by
Tom and Katherine Godell |
| 13 | Koussevitzky in Writing, by
Tom Godell |
| 15 | Review of Artur Weschler-Vered's
<i>Heifetz</i> , by Richard Sebolt |
| 16 | Koussevitzky Bibliography |

KOUSSEVITZKY AND HIS BIOGRAPHERS

—Book Review and Commentary—

There were times when Serge Koussevitzky was his own worst enemy. If he did not encourage his friend, Arthur Lourié, to write an idealized, not to say idolized, biography, he certainly did not discourage the project. And between the two of them they created a Serge Koussevitzky who was at least as much fiction as fact. Those who are curious about that book should seek out *Sergei Koussevitzky and His Epoch* by Arthur Lourié (original edition, 1931 by Knopf; 1978 reprint by AMS).

Retribution for this literary sin was almost bound to come. Moses Smith, sometime music critic of Boston and sometime record company executive, felt compelled to write his version of Koussevitzky's life (*Koussevitzky*, by Moses Smith, published by Allen, Towne & Heath, 1947). In many ways the Smith book is more accurate than that by Lourié as to the basic facts of Koussevitzky's life, though the Smith book suffers from too many grievous faults to be taken seriously, let alone be considered definitive.

But once again, Koussevitzky overreached himself. Not content to suffer in silence the barbs and innuendoes of the Smith book, Koussevitzky tried to halt its publication and/or its distribution thereby giving the Smith book a notoriety it could never have achieved otherwise.

In an excellent essay on the matter in the *New York Herald-Tribune* of February 23, 1947 (reprinted in *Music Reviewed: 1940-1954*) Virgil Thomson, then the leading music critic in the United States, pointed out that both Smith's criticisms of Koussevitzky's lack of training for his conductorial role and Koussevitzky's contentions to the contrary missed the real point — that Koussevitzky had become a great conductor!

However, the controversy which Koussevitzky had stirred up had the unfortunate result of leading Thomson and all too many others to overlook the multiplicity of faults and flaws which pervade the Smith book. My most recent re-reading of the Smith book leaves me more certain than ever that the book was hastily written and edited badly, if at all. For example, one can only marvel at the disasters which the author delineates during his discussion (in Chapters XI and XII) of Koussevitzky's first years in Boston, and these become the more intriguing when one finds at the end of Chapter XII that "the orchestra had recovered its former prestige", "audiences flocked to the concerts in greater numbers than ever" and that Koussevitzky was now "an artist of the first rank" with his contract extended indefinitely. But one seeks in vain for an explanation of how this ill-trained conductor who, according to Smith, was so inadequate an interpreter of the classics and was

so inept in so many ways had managed at the same time to please the public and achieve artistic rank.

But hold. Turn to Chapter XIII and there one finds that it was not Koussevitzky's achievement after all — he was so bungling and inept that it was the orchestra which held everything together and saved him even as it restored itself. However, it is difficult to take these conclusions seriously because later on the author reverses his field and dwells on the efforts of the orchestra personnel to sabotage or subvert Koussevitzky once they became unionized. And even long before unionization entered into the matter Smith confused the issue for after having the orchestra save Koussevitzky from his inadequacies, he then pictured them as "soldiers in a harshly disciplined army" meeting the demands of their conductor.

Nor can one please a critic. At first, Koussevitzky performed too little Germanic music, then he played "too much Brahms." His seasons, almost all of them according to Smith as one proceeds through his book, were ill-balanced: too little of this, too much of that, works ill-chosen, and on and on. But this litany suffers from repetition and then suffers again when Koussevitzky is credited with his performances of new music and the resuscitation of much old music.

Time after time these inconsistencies, which seemingly stem from hasty writing and poor editing, give the appearance of Smith beating Koussevitzky with both ends of the same stick. And even in musical matters Smith often misses the boat. To prove his point about Koussevitzky's inadequacies, he cites Koussevitzky's reluctance to perform music written in the twelve-tone system, but this overlooks not only Koussevitzky's background in France where twelve-tone music was slow to take hold but also the influence of Aaron Copland on the selection of new music which Koussevitzky conducted.

Amazingly enough, Smith was also way off base in matters of recordings, in spite of his short career with Columbia Records, for he concluded his chapter on the unionization of the Boston Orchestra with a sentence that is so wrongheaded as to virtually defy logical analysis: "It (the orchestra's renewal of its recording contract in 1942) had an obvious advantage: the Boston Orchestra's long association with Victor remained intact." This is Smith's only reference to a deal which could hardly have been worse from the Orchestra's standpoint for it assured the Orchestra of continuing to be the "second team" for Victor when it might have become Columbia's "first team."

For years the Boston Orchestra had taken second place behind Victor's first team of Stokowski and his Philadelphia Orchestra, and now the stage was set for Victor to continue the subordination of the Boston Symphony to

its new first team of Toscanini and his NBC Orchestra. Of all the might-have-beens of the age of 78's and LP's the failure of Koussevitzky and his Boston Orchestra to be properly represented on records is perhaps that of greatest wonder. But faced with the opportunity to get to the top (for Columbia then turned to the New York Philharmonic in its transition years under Artur Rodzinski to supplement its work in Minneapolis and Cleveland and its miniscule efforts in Chicago) the trustees of the Boston Orchestra threw their chance away. To think what Koussevitzky and his Boston Orchestra might have done had they been Columbia's first team in the last years of 78's and the early LP era makes one wonder why Smith, who could damn Koussevitzky for the least flaw, was unable to take Victor to task, let alone point out the stupidity of the Boston trustees.

Throughout his book the author hammers at the point that Koussevitzky was not properly trained to be a conductor. As early as page 12, he begins his campaign though it is worth noting that while he gives his sources for much of Koussevitzky's student life at the Moscow Conservatory, he gives *no* source or substantiation for his assertion that "Koussevitzky's progress in theoretical subjects, however, was not so spectacular although here, too, he had good teachers." From that point on the author beats this particular drum long after it has become apparent to the reader that in every instance one of two things can be deduced: either Koussevitzky's early training was not nearly as deficient as Smith claims, or else Koussevitzky was able to overcome any deficiencies as his career developed, and not, as Smith suggests, only after he had been in Boston for several years. To prove his point (as least to his satisfaction) the author cites over and over again all sorts of highly imaginative opposition centering on "continuing prejudice because of his unorthodox training" or the opinions of "musically articulate persons," or supposed public discussions of Koussevitzky's inadequate training.

"Musicians' gossip backstage or dilettantes' chatter in the foyers of the concert-halls might frequently reflect on the quality of Koussevitzky's early musical training and its inadequacies for his present labors" is the kind of highly creative (or imaginative) writing the author uses in his seemingly endless campaign. One can *just imagine* the dilettantes at intermission discussing the first-half concert in terms of Koussevitzky's inattentiveness in harmony class at the Moscow Conservatory back before the Revolutions, but it takes a lot of imagination all the same.

It is barely possible that Smith's description (see Chapter XI) of Koussevitzky's first years in Boston is accurate, but a careful reading of what he writes and a consideration of what he omits leads to the clear conclusion that Koussevitzky's critics who are designated as "an articulate minority" are just that, articulate because they are

music critics with a place to print, and a distinct minority because the vast majority were obviously pleased with Koussevitzky's concerts and his rebuilding efforts though, of course, all they did was pay for their seats and not write for the papers. Had Smith emphasized, as he might well have, had accuracy been his primary intention, Koussevitzky's difficulties in adapting himself to a wholly new type of career stemming from the demands of the Boston Symphony season might well have been compared with Stock in Chicago, Stokowski in Philadelphia, or Damrosch in New York (though neither Mengelberg nor Toscanini for whom New York was never a full-time venture). Or Smith might have cited Koussevitzky's predecessors in Boston to show how the orchestral seasons had grown, the number of concerts increased, and like matters. Instead, all we read is that Koussevitzky was not properly trained for the job because his methods of preparation and procedure were different. The whole of Smith's discussion is not so much inaccurate as dishonest.

The author is very critical of Koussevitzky for failing to make Boston his permanent home and then, in a typical Smithism, cites a 1933 editorial from an unidentified newspaper criticizing "these worthies" who come to the USA to make money and then leave at once for Europe after making it; "these worthies" may or may not be orchestral conductors (for the reference could be as well to Gigli or Toscanini); the paper may or may not have been a Boston paper; and so on, but the editorial suited the author's purpose so why not quote it while not citing the source? Over and over again Smith writes as though Koussevitzky existed in a world of his own. He is criticized for his delay in becoming a US citizen, but Toscanini, who is used for comparison in musical matters, is never cited in more mundane matters such as citizenship.

Most annoying to this reader are the phrases which the author pulls out of the blue. Not content to say (on page 14) that Koussevitzky had attained his "immediate ambition of becoming an orchestral musician," the author adds "Beyond that he apparently was not concerned," a sentence which just hangs there as an unsubstantiated innuendo. That is the sort of thing which is not only poor writing but poor taste as well. But consider then that *two paragraphs* later, the author writes "With an exceptional instrumental talent, it was natural that Koussevitzky should not long remain content with the position of a mere orchestral musician." Such inconsistency is, unfortunately, not atypical of the next three hundred pages.

Another author might well have noted that Koussevitzky's orchestral tours of the Volga were ended with the coming of World War I, but Smith terms them "an insignificant casualty" for seemingly no other reason than his lack of taste. When Koussevitzky arrives in Boston, "Boston was but another rung on the ladder of his artistic career" — surely a most gratuitous comment,

and in the light of what Smith knew by the time of his writing, a somewhat inaccurate one.

Of Koussevitzky's double-bass playing, "a few disgruntled musical colleagues might say" that it sounded like poor cello playing. One might reasonably ask whether they *did* say that or whether the author was simply flinging around his two-edged sword so that every plus would have its minus. As in the case of his campaign against Koussevitzky as improperly and inadequately trained, the author constantly creates a minority which sides with him, that minority always being the "musically articulate" and/or certain music critics, while the majority is simply the public which turned out to hear and enjoy Koussevitzky's music making. On page 193, it is the critics and "the more knowing members of the audiences" who are complaining; presumably critics have a way of identifying "the more knowing" — by their agreement with the critics in all probability.

Comparisons may or may not be odious depending upon how they are used. The author in this case uses them selectively to suit his intentions. He brings in Rachmaninov as an example of a better trained musician, but when Koussevitzky leaves Russia, there is not a word about Rachmaninov and all the others who left Russia after the Revolutions. The author uses Toscanini when it suits his purposes, but when he is criticizing Koussevitzky on such matters as his annual programs, there is not a mention of Toscanini who rarely, if ever, conducted more than half a season with the New York Philharmonic. In fact, one could go on endlessly citing examples of Toscanini and other conductors who did exactly what the author criticizes Koussevitzky for doing. Of course, two or more wrongs do not make a right, but Koussevitzky had lots of company amongst his conductorial colleagues yet Smith, who knew this, never mentions it while criticizing Koussevitzky for this or that action.

Smith ends his book with a chapter entitled "A Critical Summing Up" which, written in 1946 or thereabouts, was done in an era when critics such as Smith seemed to think that all of the conductorial virtues resided in Arturo Toscanini. Today, we know better though there were a few critics, like Virgil Thomson, who knew better even then. (Incidentally, Smith quotes only one unfavorable comment by Thomson on Koussevitzky while managing to overlook any number of favorable ones, as readers of Thomson's reviews would realize full well.) But even leaving aside the effects of the period in which he wrote, Smith's conclusions fail to take into account a major factor: the public, especially in Boston where it really counted, took to Koussevitzky from the very beginning while it was a few critics and a small minority of the public who found him wanting. Of course, to Smith those critics were the best and that minority the most astute, but the fact remains that Koussevitzky was never in trouble with his public.

If Smith wanted to be critical in an honest fashion, there was plenty to criticize, but he even fails that test. He discusses Koussevitzky's work in espousing some American music (e.g. Copland, Harris, Piston) but not all (Sessions, Ruggles, and Ives among others), but he never comes to grips with the reasons why, anymore than he tries to clarify why twelve-tone music was neglected while other European music of the time was being performed. It was all too easy to call Koussevitzky "arbitrary or impulsive" but that was not the answer. If Smith knew the answer, he should have revealed it. If he did not, then he should have looked harder before he wrote his book.

When Smith gets into matters of the interpretation of individual works, he is entitled to his opinions (as are all of us) but nothing in the preceding 342 pages of Smith's book can persuade this reader that he need give any weight, let alone merit, to Smith's opinions.

In the final analysis Smith's conclusions collapse when he gets to specifics. He describes Koussevitzky's working with Alban Berg's *Violin Concerto*, credits Koussevitzky with a beautiful performance, and concludes that the conductor accomplished this "not with his head but with his heart and ears." Looked at coldly, such a conclusion is pure nonsense: many might hear and feel Berg's music, but without great ability one does not get an orchestra to mirror what one hears and feels.

Smith is no more successful when he seeks to take issue with Koussevitzky in the matter of the importance of the interpretation of music. Smith tries to draw analogies between music and other arts. But in his efforts to disparage Koussevitzky's intellectual defense of musical interpretation Smith falls into a trap when he cites literature, painting, and architecture as being analogous to music. Music does not "exist" except in performance while the other arts "exist." Even if one goes as far as Ernest Newman (who over the years carried the inconsistency of his views to ever new and higher ground if one reads his early and late reviews) and claims that the only true performance of music comes from a personal reading of the score, one must still seek to hear what does not "exist." Smith is simply wrong when he strives to separate music from its interpretation. And that really summarizes the basic flaw in his book. Koussevitzky may not have been a great musician but he was a great interpreter. This Smith refused to see.

Even allowing for all of its faults the Smith book still fails as a biography because there is so much the author does not tell us about Koussevitzky the man. After all the anecdotes and innuendoes on which Smith dotes, we still do not have any details about Koussevitzky's personal life: his first wedding ceremony, his divorce, his conversion, his second marriage service, his church attendance over the years, if any, his moral rectitude (for if it was that, he certainly differed from a great many of his colleagues who were womanizers of note, if

not fame), the funeral service and burial of his second wife, and on and on and on. So, one is forced to conclude that on virtually all counts, except glibness, the Smith book can only be deemed wanting.

Yet, the very existence of Smith's book has proven harmful to Koussevitzky. No longer in print (not listed in the 1987-88 *Books in Print*), it still served as a source for Joan Peyser in the writing of her thoroughly unreliable *Bernstein, A Biography* (Morrow, 1987) in which she not only womanhandles her facts and reaches some reverse, not to say perverse, conclusions but even credits Smith with being more critical of Koussevitzky than he actually was: after citing Smith's claim that Koussevitzky could not read a score "with any facility," Peyser later concludes that Koussevitzky could not read a score at all.

No doubt, in years to come writers will cite the errors in Peyser's book as facts just as she cites Smith's conten-

tions to suit her purposes. However, it is worth noting that Peyser never mentions the Lourié book on Koussevitzky even though that work is still available in reprint (see *Books in Print* for 1987-88).

Of course, the Smith book was written in 1946 or thereabouts and does not cover the most controversial aspect of Koussevitzky's career: his resignation as Music Director of the Boston Symphony. Peyser has her own version of that episode, but her track record throughout her book does not lead one to accept her version as the actual one. When Koussevitzky will be the subject of a new and complete (and hopefully accurate) biography remains conjectural. In the meantime, amidst the plethora of works on Toscanini and Stokowski, we are left with Lourié, Smith, and Peyser, a fate which Serge Koussevitzky certainly does not deserve!

Kenneth DeKay
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Koussevitzky Recordings: A Discursive Discography

A Guide to the 78 rpm Originals and their LP Reissues

□ Stravinsky

The first Koussevitzky recording also represents the first electrically recorded Boston Symphony session, the first sides since the ones by Karl Muck in 1917 and 1918, and the first to capture the full Boston Orchestral forces. It was, appropriately, a modern work which Koussevitzky published — the three-movement suite from *Pétrouchka*. Included were the "Danse Russe," "Chez Pétrouchka," (presumably with the orchestra's pianist), and the evening fair, ending with the concert coda, which also appears in the piano pieces.

Despite rather distant, tubby sound, the performance remains "new" and exciting, though some will not be pleased with the speed-up early on the final side. Only the first two sides were achieved at the first session (November 13, 1928). The next day produced the music from the fourth tableau. Its issue in the Musical Masterpiece series (M-49, five sides) also contained the pas de deux of Apollo and Terpsichore from *Apollon Musagète* (November 14, 1928). The side's ethereal radiance hasn't dated an hour in sixty years.

An unexpected tidbit made substantial by political overtones — Stravinsky's orchestral arrangement of *Song of the Volga Boatmen* ("Ay ukhnem," approximately) — was made when playing of the customary National Anthem was forbidden. Koussevitzky, who experienced the effects of the Revolution, and who had made legendary trips up the Volga River to bring orchestral music

to wondering peasants, finds worlds of meaning in his performance (December 3, 1938), one which achieved some fame as the filler for the first BSO Copland set (M-546, one side).

Stravinsky did not approve of Koussevitzky's individual performances (he approved of few indeed!), but had appeared as a soloist with him in early years. One of the concertos, *Capriccio*, was the only recording (March 19, 1940) Koussevitzky made featuring his immensely talented official pianist, Jesús María Sanromá. In its original version (later recordings use the revision made a decade after this session), the performance (M-685, four sides) has inherent historical interest as well as ferocious verve. Its LP transfer, on a strange portman-teau collection (LCT-1152), manages to be both anemic and screechy at once, an achievement but not a proud one; drastic reequalizing helps.

Koussevitzky enthusiasts should know that Sanromá annually recorded concertos with Arthur Fiedler from 1935 to 1940: Gershwin, MacDowell, Liszt, Mendelssohn, and Paderewski. Each has a story connected with it; those may be told later.

Between the vocal and orchestral sessions for the Koussevitzky Beethoven *Ninth* in the Tanglewood Shed, members of the BSO assembled in the Theatre-Concert Hall for a morning session of the *Octour* and an afternoon one for the Suite from *L'Histoire du Soldat* (August 11, 1947). Recorded with the credit "Berkshire Festival Ensemble" but issued as "Members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra," the recording (78: M-1197; 45: WDM-1197; *Octuor*: 4 sides; *Histoire*: 6 sides) was the only BSO set made during Koussevitzky's tenure to be conducted by someone else.

Protégé Leonard Bernstein, who did not remake these works while recording the Grove's Dictionary with the New York Philharmonic, conducts the superb instrumentalists of the era. Two *Histoire* sections are swapped, presumably due to side lengths (but they also appear in this order on LP), and the question of dynamics at the end is solved in an appropriately spooky way: the percussionist holds to the same low level in a chillingly indifferent manner. The *much*-delayed British issue (SMA-7014) was an improvement upon the original LP (LM-1078).

□ Schubert

From the opening notes, Koussevitzky's first recording of the *Unfinished Symphony* (May 6, 1936) is wonderfully rich in string sound, with a depth in the low notes seldom heard. It is possible to object to its swiftness (M-319, five sides) — so fast in the fast movement that it was reissued also as a single 78 (14117, two sides). Those who have heard too much of "Blossom Time" applied to this work, on the other hand, may be overwhelmed by its restless, even feverish quality. It is, to be sure, a unique reading. Its transfer to LP (CAL-106) is rather harsh, but not troublesome under the circumstances. The same matrix is found in a six-LP collection (CFL-104). Filling out the 78 set is a typical trimming of the familiar second ballet from *Rosamunde* (May 8, 1936) — it, like Stokowski's earlier version, ends prematurely and softly, but it's lovely while it lasts, and more robust than some performances.

Like the Brahms *Third* of the day before, the second version of the *Unfinished* (January 3, 1945) is among the best-recorded and warmest-delivered of the Koussevitzky series. A less-pressed performance (M-1039, six sides), also issued twice on 45 rpm (WDM-1039, six sides; ERB-11, 4 sides), it is more traditional but still dramatic. The LP transfers (10": LM-7; 12": LM-9032) came out quite well.

A highly-lyrical Schubert *Fifth* (April 4, 1947), recorded after two Wagner works, is a bit Wagnerian itself, but the plush treatment causes no bloated heaviness. Unfortunately, though there is no inherent flaw in the set (M-1215; I have not heard the 45 rpm set, WDM-1215), the LP version (CAL-106) earns the Grand Prix du Disquarde of Koussevitzky reissues: distorted, shrill, muddy, broken to bits in the first movement, coarse, grainy, and as close to useless as the poor defenseless original could have come. How strange that the worst Koussevitzky transfer was originally recorded exactly one year *after* the best one so far! A new version is desperately needed.

□ Fauré

Gabriel Fauré, one of the most unaccountably neglected of lovable composers, was unforgivably neglected in the Boston discography. Only now can we expect additions: a new Ozawa collection (1986) and issues of Munch broadcasts (1959-61). Of Koussevitzky's two Fauré titles, the *Élégie* (December 28, 1936) was issued as a 78 (14577, two sides; thanks to Edward Young for making this seldom-seen single available for hearing) but never on microgroove. Jean Bedetti's cello solo is a perfect match for his colleagues' satiny playing. (The BSO rerecorded this work in 1963, but only because then-principal Samuel Mayes funded the sessions. Perhaps Fauré needs a society, too.)

Pelléas et Mélisande, a suite of four pieces of incidental music for Maeterlinck's drama, was performed and recorded by Koussevitzky in an abridged version. Apparently he was in an unaccustomed pedantic mood, the only explanation seeming to be that Fauré had an amanuensis arrange the *Sicilienne* to his instructions. It is a shame to have lost out on the flute and harp solos (Defauw, in Chicago, did this movement *only*, about seven years later), and another shame that both the BSO program book and the original 78 set (M-941, three sides) identified the third and final section as the *Sicilienne*, adding insult to injury! However, the dramatically-charged performance (March 18, 1940) of the *Prélude*, *Fileuse*, and *Mort de Mélisande* are exceptional. Reequalization is necessary to tame the barely-adequate LP reissue (LCT-1152), one which threatens to lodge splinters in the ear.

Tentatively scheduled composers for the next segment include Rachmaninov, Sibelius, and Richard Strauss.

I am amazed that no one has written to disagree with any statement made so far (or for any other reason). Could I have satisfied a landslide number of record collectors, the most argumentative of acquisitive people? Comments are allowed! My own comments on the faults of the first segment follow:

□ The ubiquitous 1936 recording of the Tchaikovsky *Serenade Waltz* is also on CAL-282, a collection titled "Waltzes for Listening" which includes 78's by other artists. (I had it filed under Chicago, for Frederick Stock's *Symphonic Waltz*.)

□ British set LVM2-7510, which improves Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* noticeably over the LCT, does even better by the Brahms *Third*, which is far more vivid on the European set than on the LM. Somehow I dropped the phrase indicating that this is one of the very few performances which includes the exposition repeat, without adding significantly to the timing.

□ The Victor *Eroica* LP (LM-1145) — like the 45 set (WDM), the Mozart *Symphony #39 in E-flat* (LM-1141), and the Pierre Monteux *Le sacre du printemps* (LM-1149) — was issued at a time when RCA LPs were muffled badly. Just how drastic the treatment was can be heard now that RCA has issued a new CD (6529-2-RG) containing a digitalized *Sacre*. The coarse, opaque sound on 1149 is now similar to that of the Monteux *Pétrouchka*, despite the fact that the stereo work dates from 1958 and the mono from 1951. Since this is a low price series (I paid \$8.98), Koussevitzky records should be eligible for Glorious Resurrection. Meantime, the Camden *Eroica* (CAL) is by far to be preferred, the British LP (VICS) being adequate if it can be played in a mono mode.

□ For the sake of completeness: The Boston Beethoven *Fifth* was also issued as a pair of extended-play 45s (ERB-15), the Beethoven *Egmont* and the Brahms *Academic Festival* on a similar 45 counterpart of their 10" LP (ERB-7021), and the Beethoven *Eighth* as a side of a six-LP Camden set (CFL-104). British 78s and early European LPs will be included in a later, complete discography.

□ The Beethoven *Fifth* situation is not as simple as I had suggested. While the CDN is preferable to the CAL, the LM might actually be the choice one. The CAL is weightier, but close comparison reveals more clarity in the LM (such as the ascending string slashes during the end of the first movement). The 1944 sessions were too rever-

berant, so the "slimmer" Victor actually could be truer than the "imposing" Camden. In either case, if luck permits you to have or find one, be grateful for either.

□ Confirmation has been made that the sections of the Beethoven *Second*, Brahms *Fourth*, and *La Mer* which were recorded in 1938 are the ones with rich sound, while those sides not made to satisfaction are the ones with more distant and rather gritty, wooden string sound. One can only guess the reason, though a partial explanation would be change of microphone placement or use of inferior materials.

□ A good copy of the Camden *Francesca da Rimini* has revealed what a skip in a poor one concealed: the join between sides 4 and 5 is not done with skill. However, the LP has uncommonly good sound by Camden's standards.

□ Between the writing and publication last time, I found the list's only title I had not heard in full. It turns out that LCT-1145, which contains transfers of Koussevitzky's 1929 double-bass recordings, has a beautiful reproduction of the Beethoven *Minuet in G*. It's not the tidiest performance rhythmically, but the sheer sound should be heard by every bassist (and cellist) not given to suicidal fits of envy. Unearthly beauty.

Richard Sebolt

Interview with John Barwicki at Tanglewood, 8/16/87

Soon after our arrival at Tanglewood for the annual Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky Memorial Concert this past summer, we noticed that several members of the orchestra were wearing T-Shirts which read simply, "Barwicki/Boston Symphony/50 years." We soon learned that John Barwicki, colorful member of the Symphony's double-bass section, was retiring after fifty seasons with the orchestra.

Quickly, we made arrangements for an interview. Shortly before the Symphony's Sunday afternoon concert in the Shed, Barwicki parked his ever-present motor scooter in front of the press office. After warmly greeting us both, he settled down and shared with us his vivid memories of Serge Koussevitzky.

Tom and Katherine Godell

JB: He was the most remarkable person. He was not only a great conductor, but he was also one of the world's foremost double-bass players. On top of it all, he was the greatest artist-conductor. Now, remember, I say "artist-conductor," because that's what made him great.

He conducted the orchestra like a solo recitalist, like Rubinstein or Paderewski or Heifetz. He'd always come out with dignity and with such reverence. I thought for a moment that I was going to be in church, that there's going to be a service, that something's going to happen. And the audience had the same feeling.

He would dress so immaculately. I remember he was especially respected in Symphony Hall. After the orchestra tuned, the orchestra was very quiet, and all of a sudden, the lights would go down, and there was a complete silence, a dead silence. Everybody would just wait. He came out on the right side of the stage. The door would open and you could almost hear the audience say "Ahhhh . . ." So they watched how immaculately he walked around the stage. He never ran, but always walked dignified like an artist. He came around to the podium — don't forget he was a short man — and the podium was a bit high. There was no bannister around like they have now. Well, he'd come up there, took an appreciative bow, and the audience was so impressed with him. Then he turned to the orchestra. Now this is the most important part. He turned to the orchestra very quietly, and he looked everybody in the eye, all over. He took time to look all over the whole section to see everybody.

He had a special gift of conveying to the musicians the feelings of the composer along with his own artistic feeling. So the musicians had to respond and to reflect all the beauty that was in that piece so the audience could understand it. He conducted the orchestra in such a manner that he wanted his actions so that the audience could understand and feel what was going on. He was not an acrobat or one of those fellows that lost his ski poles going down the ski slope or some of the conductors that would come down to try to make a pianissimo to show their behind to the audience. That's an insult to the audience.

He respected us musicians and he gave us all the time and relaxation so we could perform the way he wanted it. He was such a great musician and artist because he studied the score, and he tried to picture what the composer had in mind. A composer many times would write his feelings. He'd write pianissimo, legato, or crescendo. But Koussevitzky wanted to find out what was behind all that. Oh, many a time he'd change things. So, he wanted to have that same response from the musicians.

He was not a fellow that was just like one of these computers — now this guy; oh, you come in here; come in there. But every time he had something to say, a phrase or anything, he would look everybody in the violin section in the eye; everybody. And you could feel his magnetism on us. To him the tone color and beauty of the music was very important. Not only that, he wanted the audience to feel the same thing and to see the musicians respond.

He had the basses lined up on the left side. There were ten of us, all in one line. The stands were not in front, they were all down. He wanted to see how we fingered, how we bowed, and he had an eye on every one of us. And every note the same thing. He had the cellos on one side there. The purpose was this: if you have the cellos like they are now and the basses right behind, an average concert-goer would have a hard time to distinguish the real color of the bass viol against the cello. Many a time it would be very effective. We would be on this side here and although we would have unison with the cellos, that was very difficult for him, but he was able to control us so that the audience could distinguish the difference in tone color. We'd make a pizzicato, and he'd motion to us, and you could hear that beautiful pizzicato or fortissimo or whatever.

One of the most difficult things to play was the scherzo of Beethoven's *Fifth*, because we are in unison with the cellos. The cellos are on the right, the basses against the wall. When we gave a concert at the Eastman School of Music one year, the critic could not give enough praise. He said it was a miracle to see the cellos and the basses, and the sound was unbelievable. But, he was able to get that result.

He was also very fussy about the tone of every instrument, because you see he was an artist himself. That's why I say he was an artist-conductor. He was renowned in Europe. Before he became a conductor he was a great virtuoso, but he never gave recitals in America. He was invited to conduct the orchestra in 1924. At that time the orchestra was a League of Nations. We had every nationality in it, the best musicians: Germans, Russians, French, English, Greeks, Polish, everything, all of it. So, these old-timers — all great musicians — didn't want to play for him. He tried hard, tried to make them play. It's difficult. He was almost getting discouraged. He says, "I don't think I want to come back to the orchestra anymore, but before I go, I'm going to give a special bass recital for the benefit of the Children's Hospital in Boston."

I remember I was very fortunate. I was still at the conservatory there. As a matter of fact, I started that year, 1929. I was lucky to get a ticket and hear that recital. Afterwards I wondered if I'd be able to get the same beautiful tone that he got from his instrument. That made a big impression on the entire orchestra and the people that heard it. The musicians said, "What a fantastic thing; he's a real genuine musician!" All of a sudden they all changed over, and they went with him. After that, he was so nice to us; he helped us. He said, "You see we make good music, people like us." So he was happy and he stayed with us. That was because the musicians could see that he was a real dedicated, honest-to-goodness musician.

There's a lot of secrets about making an instrument respond, any kind of instrument, whether a string instrument or brass, the color of the instrument. Let's give the example of a violin or a cello. There are all different styles, all different makes; they sound different. You could almost distinguish between a *mezzo* instrument and a very high-class instrument. But it was up to him to blend every color from all these instruments. That's why he was so fussy.

He had the orchestra on a high level, from the floor up to about four feet at the last, so he could hear and see and everything else from both sides — the violas, cellos, and then he had the basses up on top there and he had the timpani in the middle, the brass all there. He was very fussy about the tone of the brass instruments. The brass had to play with their instruments this way [up], not into the ground like some of these trumpet players. He wanted to get beauty of the tone. That was very important.

He was also very fussy about the tone quality of the percussion instruments. That was very unusual. Every instrument had to produce a musical sound, even if it was the triangle. The fellow would hit the triangle, he would say, "No, that sounds like a regular bell. I want to hear a tone out of that instrument." And the same thing with the gong. You think the gong just makes a bang.

Koussevitzky would say, "That's a noise! What kind of a tone is that?" All instruments had to have a definite, beautiful sound. He didn't want the ordinary sound, he wanted a beautiful sound.

We had a wonderful timpani player. That timpani player was a genius. He was an import from the Warsaw Philharmonic. Fantastic man. He used to play that timpani like a double bass. Oh, the tone! You wouldn't know it was a timpani. It was like a nice big bass sound. Well, Koussevitzky was very happy with that.

He was so concerned about us. He would call us *kinder*, children. Another thing I liked about him, he called us all one big family. He was so dedicated to the orchestra. He was like a father to us. Really, he was concerned about everyone. He never missed a rehearsal or a concert. He'd always look to be sure, smile and nod if it was fine. I noticed especially how hard he worked. At the rehearsal, even at the concerts, he used to perspire a lot. And his characteristic, you'll notice in some of his pictures, he had a vein on this side here and sometimes he was so involved in the music I would think, "I hope that vein doesn't burst."

He was so dedicated that he wanted to make sure the audience got every bit of this miracle of the piece that he was interpreting. No matter what it is, he wanted the audience to know exactly what was going on, and they did. Oh, the people used to love him. They used to come to the concerts; they admired him. He was not one of those fellows who would come up and grunt or groan while conducting the orchestra. He was very dignified. All his motions were magic. He wasn't like some of these conductors who have to go down to the floor to make a pianissimo. He was so graceful. The musicians don't have to have a slave driver. Who's he trying to impress? He won't impress the audience if he has to go down to the floor.

He was also very kind and considerate. I used to think of him like a father. He had the human touch. As a matter of fact, when I joined the orchestra, he invited me to play. I played. He said, "You played fine; now I want to see what you know in the orchestra." I knew what it was all about, so I was playing for him. He was very happy with me. He said, "I like the way you play." My teacher was the principal bass, Max Kunz, a very solid bass player. I think by this time I had already completed all his studies.

So now Dr. Koussevitzky said, "Don't tell anybody. Don't tell your teacher. You come to my home Sunday afternoon and bring your instrument." He lived in Brookline. I began to get the shakes. So, I brought my bass viol over. I started to play in his room there, passages from the symphony. Then he'd take my instrument and play. I said, "Maestro, what a different sound." So, he showed me the secret. The secret of, especially the string instruments, is the bow. That makes

the beauty. Everything is the control of the bow. If you haven't got that, you'll never be able to make that instrument sound. You won't be able to get the color of the instrument. You'll never get anything.

So he says, "Now this is the way you should do it. Now you take your bow and practice this thing so that you get complete control." I used the German bow; he did too. But, anyway it's the same idea, technique of the bow. You have to control that bow no matter which way you do it. Then, later on, after I had that lesson, I didn't say anything. Nobody knew about it. That's how he was interested in everyone. He had the human element. If he saw something that had potential, he wanted to help them along.

KG: He was a natural teacher?

JB: Oh, he had a special gift. Not only teaching. Or speaking about teaching, that's why he was so influential in establishing this music center for all these students. Years ago, even when I joined the orchestra over fifty years ago, he still was importing musicians from Europe. After we opened up this Festival here in '37, he thought it might be a good idea to get some of the American-born talent. There is beautiful talent in the United States. We should instruct them, help them.

The product you can see for yourself: there was Bernstein, Ozawa, Dutoit, all these conductors, all products of the Berkshire Music Center here. I remember Lenny Bernstein was one of Dr. Koussevitzky's first pupils when he had just opened up his conducting school. Even to this day about 15 percent of the members of the Boston Symphony are alumni of the Tanglewood school.

He would come in while the conductor was working. For instance, Bernstein would be rehearsing. He would be watching Bernstein, educating him. He'd go among the sections to look around and listen to the way they played. He was so dedicated. I mean, that was his life.

And speaking about dedication, now this is very unusual here. Years ago, he wanted always to conduct our orchestra. Always. So, we didn't have too many guest conductors. Once in a while they wanted to give him a little rest around Thanksgiving or Christmas, just about a week. I remember there was one time that Szell came over. Koussevitzky would come. He had a special seat in the first balcony, always on the right there near the stage. He would come in with his wife Friday afternoon to hear the concert. He would always observe the conductor and what was going on to see that the men were playing just like he wanted for that conductor. Oh boy, forbid Monday morning that he noticed something wrong at the concert. You had to be on your toes.

That was Friday. Of course, we repeated the concert that Saturday night. Lo, and behold, Saturday night there he was with his wife again all dressed up and listening to

the same program. This was unbelievable. I've never seen another conductor spend such effort, spend so much interest, not only in the music, but in the musicians. I remember that Szell made a remark. He was so fascinated by the tone of the orchestra, he said "I'm going to make my orchestra sound as good as yours," and by Jove he did. After Münch and Koussevitzky passed away, Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra became the top orchestra.

I tell you we had some excellent interpretations of music, unbelievable. He had the special gift of being able to convey the feeling of the composer. As a matter of fact, when we played Diamond's *Second Symphony* for the first time, Koussi was not too happy during the rehearsals. There was something wrong. So he says to Mr. Diamond, "Do you mind if I do some changes?" So he completely rearranged everything and when we played the concert Saturday, Diamond was sitting there dumbfounded. He came backstage to Koussevitzky and asked "Did I write that?" Koussevitzky said, "Of course that's what you wrote. I only interpreted what you wrote."

He always tried to find out the secret, what the composer had in mind. He said, "Gentlemen, we don't just play notes. We've got to make everything alive. It's got to be alive." I remember his interpretation of the *La Mer*, which is very expressive and very difficult to play. At the end is the Dance of the Waves. So he says, "I think what Debussy had in mind was to portray the way that the waves come rolling in when you stand on shore. So we make," he'd say 'make', "we make that effect." So the effect from the orchestra was that you'd swear that the wave would come right up into the audience. He was such a great interpreter of that music and of Sibelius.

He used to go every year to see Sibelius. He was the greatest interpreter of the Sibelius Symphonies because he went especially to Sibelius. He liked him. They'd discuss what he had in mind. Therefore he was able to get all the information from Sibelius, and he'd come and tell us exactly, and he'd be sure that that's what it was. He was one of the world's greatest conductors and interpreters.

It was a joy and a pleasure to see not only how he conducted, but he would almost put the whole audience under a spell. And he had us under a spell. As a matter of fact, when there was a small group playing a Mozart Symphony, instead of having ten basses we had four. So I said to myself, "I'm going to go up to the second balcony in Symphony Hall to see what the orchestra really sounds like." I was so taken up — I was listening attentively — that I froze. When I stood up I said, "Do I play with that orchestra?" I couldn't believe the beauty of what I heard. I said, "So that's how we sound!" On the stage we get the rough side, we don't hear certain instruments sometimes. With him we were able to hear a

lot of things, because the orchestra was not on the floor. We were up so we could hear every instrument.

After all, when you play an instrument you have to go along with the phrase, with the soloist. You have to match whether he plays pianissimo. Now some of these conductors will hollar at us "Pianissimo!", "Forte!" I say, "It's written there. What do you want? You conduct, and we'll play." But Koussevitzky would never do that. He was always a gentleman, always with graciousness. His fingers were magic.

I'll never forget the *Stars and Stripes*. Everybody at the Pops gets a chance to play *Stars and Stripes* under different conductors. When he became an American citizen, this was in the spring or early summer, because we had the Esplanade Orchestra, too. So they had a day for him. He conducted the concert outdoors on the Boston Esplanade, and I've never heard the *Stars and Stripes* played with such tremendous . . . Even the musicians said that what he was able to get out of that *Stars and Stripes* was unbelievable! I'll never forget that glorious performance. You could see the musicians; everyone was bowing their hearts out. Such a piece as *Stars and Stripes*, and he was able to do magic.

TG: And you can hear that in the recording of *Stars and Stripes*, too.

JB: Did we make a recording?

TG: Yes, and a very fine one.

JB: I don't get to hear that many recordings.

There was another time that I remember. We used to play for the war bonds, way back. He would be so generous. So we'd play a big concert in the Boston Gardens. There were about 25,000 people. It happened that the stage hands took our instruments and put them up there on stage. I came and everybody got on the stage and we were almost ready to begin. And I looked around and said, "Where's my bow?" So I sneaked out and Koussevitzky was about ready to come out. I said, "Sergei, they didn't bring my bow." He said "Go! Come on, you go!" I said, "Oh, no," because I knew what was going to happen. The minute I went out they thought I was Koussevitzky, and 25,000 people started to clap. I was shaking. Then I had to go to my place. When I turned around, he smiled. You know how he was. I loved that man. He understood everything there.

Oh, what a terrific man. I had some wonderful experiences, wonderful moments with him, really. I recall the tremendous way the orchestra sounded under his leadership. He was very proud of us. We were outstanding, the basses were all outstanding there. And not only that, no matter what it was — the violas, the cellos, everybody. He wanted to have the people enjoy as much as the musicians.

KG: I got the impression from Moses Smith's biography that Koussevitzky didn't get along that well with the orchestra.

JB: Well, these people have their own ideas, whether it was a little jealousy or something. We used to play in Chicago. There was a critic there. Everytime we played there the audience was crazy about us, and the critic would always pan us. It was so discouraging. I don't pay too much attention to the critics. That's why I don't read the criticism. I judge by the audience. Did they get something from how we played? I judge by the reaction of the audience, and not what the critics say. He may not feel good. He may not have had a good lunch or something, and he would start writing and start dreaming and not paying any attention to what's going on. These critics have certain points, because they have a chance to compare.

We had a good critic, the first one, Mr. Hale. He was non-partial. I didn't read too many of his criticisms, but he was very sincere and honest. But when we played good, we certainly did. We knew ourselves when we played good. We don't have to have it printed in the paper that we played well or we didn't play well. We know when we didn't play well, too.

TG: Koussevitzky conducted so many premieres of American works and new works. How did you and how did the members of the orchestra react to that? Was there ever a feeling that this was too much, that we should be playing more Beethoven or more Wagner?

JB: No, no. We went along no matter what piece we played. We enjoyed doing new works especially. We were so much interested to see what his idea of that piece is.

Koussevitzky was a leader; he was not a follower. So we didn't have many soloists that played with us. All the soloists had to play like he conducted. That was very important. If the soloist didn't interpret the piece along with his conducting, no sir! He was the master of that whole performance. The soloist had to blend in. His motions conducting meant everything. People watched his little fingers. He'd have a little wave, and you could feel a little crescendo. Every motion. The soloist had to play exactly what Koussevitzky wanted. We didn't have many. I remember the last time he played with Rachmaninov. That was one time Koussevitzky tried to please Rachmaninov. They would have a conversation in Russian. After all, Rachmaninov was a composer and a conductor, and he was playing the piano. He wanted to hear certain things.

The thing is, a conductor or interpreter on the stage is just like a poet. Here's a poem. I would read a poem, you'd read the same poem, another person would, and gee whiz, somebody says, "I don't get anything out of it." But you get a man that is a real poet, he could read

that. You say, "Is that it?" Yes, that's what it's supposed to sound like.

There were many times he'd have to change things around to suit his imagination, his fancy. All these marks are not so important. Fortissimo, up-bow, down-bow, and all that doesn't mean anything, because different halls have different acoustics. Therefore what may sound pianissimo in Symphony Hall, up in another hall in Rochester or Chicago may be too loud or not enough. So you have to watch him and listen to what he would say. That's why everybody had to keep an eye on him. That's what makes a great conductor.

TG: You were here for the first season of Tanglewood. What was that like?

JB: Well, the first season up here in Tanglewood, we played in 1937. We played to a small group. We had a little tent here, just a little ways from where the cafeteria is now. The tent held only just about two or three thousand people. We didn't have the facilities or the acoustics of Symphony Hall. We had to play more or less on a flat stage. So we did very well, the best we could.

Of course, one time I remember, as a matter of fact I think we were playing *Scheherazade* in one of the concerts, and at the very end where that boat is being smashed with the waves against the rocks, all of a sudden nature came in and started to help us out — thunder, lightening, and pouring of rain. So we just couldn't compete. We had to stop. The tent couldn't hold the water. Some of the people got soaked, and they decided next year, in '38, they started to build this stage here, this auditorium.

It was thrilling. I never realized that I would spend fifty years in Tanglewood. I have such wonderful memories of Tanglewood and all these years that have passed on.

TG: We hear so much about Koussevitzky's use or misuse of the English language. Was there ever a problem of his communicating with you or with the musicians about what he meant?

JB: No. There was no problem. The grammatical part was not perfect. He would say, "You must make better . . . you must make tone . . . a little more tone . . . I don't like what you do . . ." He used simple words in order to express himself. He would use a lot of words like, "That's noise . . . banal . . . this is ordinary sound . . . oh, I don't like it." He used foreign expressions. His English improved as the years went by. Later on he was able to speak very well, say towards his last ten years or so. We had no problem of understanding him whatsoever.

Let me get back to what a great musician he was. When he explained something, he would speak to the violins or cellos. He would never have our concertmaster stand

up and turn around to the musicians and say, "You play like this." The concertmaster, Mr. Burgin, never spoke a word. Koussi would just tell them, "*Kinder*, you have to play like this, and I want you to play with a little more feeling or a little pianissimo." He never would have the concertmaster stand up and make the musicians feel like a bunch of amateurs. He never did that. He was the boss. He wouldn't ask the concertmaster, "Well, how shall we bow? How do you get this kind of tone?" He told them how. He told everybody.

I played under him for thirteen years, and the rest of the time I played with other conductors. He was a man that I'll never forget. He was the man that gave me the opportunity. He was after helping anybody, especially the American-born.

My dad was Polish. He escaped from Russia years ago, came to America, and like the rest of the foreigners, he had to join up with the Polish group in Pennsylvania to work in the coal mines. He couldn't stand it and worked only a month or so. Then he made a few pennies, and he came to Boston. He was a barber. He pursued the business of barbering there, but he loved music. He was a violinist. When he was a kid he used to play violin.

Years ago he used to study violin privately with the assistant concertmaster of the Boston Symphony. I remember when my dad used to have to practice some of the violin concertos, he would have the church organist come down to the house and play the piano. When I was about eight years old, he said, "Son, I want you to study piano." So, I took up the piano. I had to play the piano in the evenings while the other boys were playing outdoors. I had to play with him when he got through at the shop, a couple of hours every evening. So, when I got to high school, I played piano for everything imaginable — chorus, orchestra, everything. The headmaster, Samuel F. Tower, was a fine gentleman. He loved to conduct an orchestra.

Then, he came to me and said, "John, you see that bass? I tried for eight years to have somebody come and play that and nobody wants it. But John, now is the time. The city of Boston is going to pay for your lessons, and so

you join up." I asked him to let me think it over. I thought if I could make that old man happy, I'll take it. After a couple of weeks, I was able to play the scales, and so forth. High school orchestras don't take much of a repertory. He was so pleased to hear that bass viol. So, I started right away. In the city of Boston we had six students there in one class and I was the only one left, and the city found out that they were paying for private lessons. So, that's how I got started on the bass viol. The whole thing was because I made that old man happy. That's my fairy tale.

I started way back in 1927. Then, in 1929, when Arthur Fiedler opened up his Esplanade concerts, well naturally all the symphony musicians were all gone to Europe, and Fiedler wanted a couple more bass players. My teacher asked him to give me a chance. So I had a chance to play with the first Esplanade Orchestra. From then until I joined the orchestra in 1937 I was doing a lot of professional work — playing with college orchestras, a civic symphony that opened up in Boston.

Of course, that was during the Depression. I had to do everything — radio work, opera, Hawaiian groups, and Jewish groups. It was very interesting. I played in a Chinese restaurant where we had three floor shows a day. I used to work for nine hours a day in 1932, and it was only 50 cents an hour. In a theater we played a Jewish show. I was in the pit, and we all had to be in Jewish form with the skull cap and everything. There was a chorus on the stage. The conductor was leading this Jewish opera, and all of a sudden the chorus got mixed up, and it didn't come out good. So the audience started to throw things at us. I was lucky. They were throwing apples and oranges, and I was able to hide behind the bass fiddle. That was a riot.

We used to have two radio programs, one after the other. We'd play from 12 to 1 and 1 to 2. So what we'd did, while the announcer was still making his final announcements, we'd get into a taxi as fast as we could. I had my bass fiddle with me, and we'd rush to the next station, and set up very quietly while the announcer was talking. We had so much fun. It was interesting. I have golden memories.

KOUSSEVITZKY IN WRITING

The state of written material about Serge Koussevitzky is, perhaps, not as bad as Kenneth DeKay suggests. Truly, the full-length biographies have their limitations, but there are several other sources that are quite interesting and useful nonetheless.

Before considering these other works, a brief word about Lourié. His *Sergei Koussevitzky and His Epoch* has been consistently underrated. The best portions of Smith's book were lifted almost verbatim from Lourié. It is surprising that Smith didn't get sued (by Lourié, that is).

Truly, there is a great deal of wide-eyed hero-worship in the earlier biography, and much unnecessary musing on the state of Russian music in the 20th century. In spite of this, Lourié remains an excellent, first-hand source for much of Koussevitzky's early life.

B.H. Haggin's *Music in the Nation* is another matter entirely. Haggin's idol, Donald Francis Tovey, once wrote, "I have read the complete, collected works of Edward Hanslick and have not found therein one scrap of knowledge of anything." While I haven't read all of Haggin's writings, it strikes me that, on the evidence of

this book, he could be described as the American Hanslick.

My assessment of Haggin is not based on his low opinion of Koussevitzky (he also disliked Heifetz, Horowitz, Rubinstein, Rodzinsky, and Stokowski), but rather upon his poor writing, inconsistency, intellectual dishonesty, and empty-headed judgements. For example, he complains about the "lack of variety" in Koussevitzky's programs, but never once mentions Toscanini's incredibly limited repertory.

When Haggin further states that the novelties in Koussevitzky's programs were restricted to the introduction of new works, he quite simply ignored the facts. The variety of Koussevitzky's programs was amazing, especially by today's standards. First of all, there were the many baroque works. Then there were the frequent performances of Mahler and Bruckner symphonies at a time when only a handful of specialists were presenting these scores. Koussevitzky *did* repeat works from season to season, in part to save precious rehearsal time for new compositions. Of course, no conductor (then or now) could continue in his post without performing the standard repertory on a regular basis. Haggin is simply being unreasonable here, as he is throughout the book.

Haggin fumes when Koussevitzky selects a tempo different from what is indicated in the score, but he blithely tells us that Toscanini is right no matter what tempo he selects. Haggin laments changes made in the score by a Stokowski or a Koussevitzky, while never once hinting that Toscanini was guilty of exactly the same crime.

In many ways, Haggin was the predecessor of Moses Smith. Many of Smith's "ideas" clearly came from Haggin, just as so much of his "research" was cribbed from Lourié. It is not surprising that Haggin lavishly praised Smith's biography in the pages of the *Nation*. But who, whether friend or foe of Koussevitzky, could agree with Haggin's contention that Smith's book is "essentially friendly" to Koussevitzky? Also, by comparing Smith and Leichtentritt, Haggin misled his readers. Dr. Hugo Leichtentritt's *Serge Koussevitzky the Boston Symphony and the New American Music* is not a biography. Indeed, most of his slender volume is taken up with information about the composers and works that Koussevitzky championed.

I have always found Moses Smith's *Koussevitzky* to be especially frustrating because it could (and should) have been the definitive biography. He knew Koussevitzky personally and had the opportunity to interview an enormous number of his colleagues. Instead, he used his book simply to embarrass and enrage Koussevitzky. This is even more surprising given Smith's glowing reviews of Koussevitzky's concerts while he was a Boston newspaper critic. No mention of Koussevitzky's

supposedly inadequate training can be found in any of the early Smith reviews that I have come across. To this day I have to wonder what changed his mind.

Nicolas Nabokov's *Old Friends and New Music* is a delightful book to read. Unfortunately, he tells us very little about Koussevitzky. In the chapter devoted to the conductor (which was also published separately in the February 1951 edition of the *Atlantic Monthly*), we learn far more about the genesis of Nabokov's cantata, *The Return of Pushkin*, than we do about the man who commissioned it. Chapters devoted to Diaghilev, Nijinsky, Stravinsky, and Prokofiev have much more to say about their subjects than this one. For example, Nabokov's portrait of Serge Prokofiev is more perceptive and penetrating than that to be found in the recent biography by Harlow Robinson. The whole is beautifully written and wonderfully entertaining.

Another book that is well worth reading is *Conductor's World* by David Wooldridge. In this volume, published as recently as 1970, Wooldridge examines the careers of most of the major conductors of the first half of the 20th century. He has his own thoughts on the controversial subject of a conductor's training: "No conductor of any distinction has owed his beginnings to the orthodox training of a conservatoire of music, and his subsequent success has always been in spite of rather than because of its insidious influences, which have perverted more real talent than they have laid bare." Wooldridge is a good source for the basic facts of Koussevitzky's life (without the flaws inherent in Lourié and Smith) and his defense of the conductor as interpreter is both powerful and persuasive.

While the biographical data provided by the above is more or less valuable, none of these writers have much to say about Koussevitzky the man. For that, the reader should turn to Leonard Bernstein's recent book *Findings*. This volume is a compilation of various Bernstein writings, drawn from his letters, television scripts, essays, speeches, and personal notes. What emerges is a warm and loving portrait of Koussevitzky, a generous and kind father-figure whose passion and dedication to his art was an inspiration to all his disciples. Even though Koussevitzky is not the subject of this book, Bernstein's love for his mentor pervades virtually every page.

A substantially complete Koussevitzky bibliography may be found on page 16. While many of these books are currently out of print, most can be obtained through your local library's inter-library loan service. Also, a good used book store may be able to help you to obtain copies of your own. Special thanks are due to Vincent Schwerin for his help in the preparation of this article and the bibliography.

Tom Godell

Jascha Heifetz, by Artur Weschler-Vered.
Schirmer 1986. 240pp.

Weschler-Vered obviously loves the playing of the world's most recognizable violinist, but enthusiasm isn't enough to sustain this collation. Although the sources for some of the reproduced writings by others are identified, it is impossible to tell where the credits start; most of these are from Israeli newspaper reviews or the Chotzinoff booklet provided with RCA LPs. These are difficult to trust, some being highhandedly rewritten: Chotzinoff's quote of "Don't worry" becomes suddenly "Not to worry"!

Just as there are *many* careless misspellings of names, from Ossip "Gabriellovitch" to Mario "Puzzo", there are many areas ignored. In the index, one finds twelve references to Toscanini and seventeen to Piatigorsky, but nothing *about* either. References to Koussevitzky, Munch, Reiner, Beecham, "Stokowsky" (four times), and "Eugen" Ormandy are as empty as those to Nat King Cole, Babe Ruth, and Mrs. Ronald (Nancy) Reagan. Some collaborators, such as William Kapell, don't rate a mention. Instead, Heifetz, as portrayed by Weschler-Vered, is isolated, aloof, and inhuman, interacting with no one, except when congratulating young players (he hands out photos of himself) or being disagreeable (all of Chapter 10) and believing his own publicity. When a revealing speck *does* surface (such as Sinatra's reported study of Heifetz's phrasing), no source is mentioned. The comment that Solti "spent only a few weeks of the season in Los Angeles" but "did an excellent job" in Chicago is an example of Weschler-Vered's woeful ignorance of the musical scene outside of his native land.

When Weschler-Vered issues an opinion, one is grateful that it occurs only rarely. He supposedly quotes in full

the Virgil "Thompson" review titled "Silk Underwear Music," but the first sentence is obviously out of context: "Mr. Heifetz' whole concert rather reminded me of large sums of money like that." Thomson criticises showy repertoire, lack of music with emotional significance, and coy Mozart style. In rebuttal to this "gross misunderstanding and misinterpretation" is a long explanation of Heifetz's refusal to wave his arms and make faces. What common ground do the two have?

Weschler-Vered also declares that the "one-sided opinion" of "Thompson" could be answered by Auer's "totally irrefutable" judgement of eighteen years before. (Fifty pages later: "Genius grows slowly and steadily.") To say that Heifetz's playing could be criticized only by Auer, the one "most familiar with its qualities" because he guided it, is like saying that only the director of a film is fit to review the actors' performances. Weschler-Vered's own "one-sided" opinions are easy to agree with, but the reasoning behind them is just pointless.

Since the book contains recycled information in unreliable form and a discography equal in "accuracy" to RCA's, as well as early pages bound in random order, the only temptation is a list of V-Discs in which "full catalogue numbers are published for the first time" — for all *six* of them, half without recording dates. Axelrod's *Heifetz* has far more information and a carload of photos, while the first notes Heifetz plays in the Beethoven, Brahms, or Sibelius Concertos will tell you more than can be found in this woeful heap of words.

Richard E. Sebolt

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In our continuing effort to document all aspects of the career of Serge Koussevitzky, we are attempting to assemble a list of all books which contain significant references to the conductor. So far, the following list has been compiled:

The Boston Symphony Orchestra 1881-1931, by M.A. DeWolfe Howe. 264pp. (Houghton Mifflin, 1931)

The Conductor's Art, by Carl Bamberg. 315pp. (McGraw Hill, 1965)

Conductor's World, by David Wooldridge. 379pp. (London: Praeger, 1970)

Findings, by Leonard Bernstein. 376pp. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982)

Gentlemen, More Dolce Please, by Harry Ellis Dickson. 162pp. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969)

The Great Conductors, by Harold C. Schonberg. 384pp. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967)

Old Friends and New Music, by Nicolas Nabokov. 243pp. (London: Hamilton, 1951)

Music in the Nation, by Bernard H. Haggin. 376pp. (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971)

Serge Koussevitzky, by Moses Smith. 400pp. (New York: Allen, Towne and Heath, 1947)

Serge Koussevitzky the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the New American Music, by Hugo Leichtentritt. 191pp. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946)

Sergei Koussevitzky and His Epoch, by Arthur Lourié. 253pp. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931)

Symphony Hall, Boston, by H. Earle Johnson. 431pp. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1950)

The Tale of Tanglewood, by M.A. De Wolfe Howe. 98pp. (Vanguard Press, 1946)

Tanglewood, by Herbert Kupferberg. 280pp. (McGraw Hill, 1976)

A Tanglewood Dream. (Koussevitzky Music Foundation, 1965)

Undoubtedly, there are other books that should be added to this list. Your contributions to this effort are most welcome. Please address them to Tom Godell, 1411 Pratt Avenue East, Huntsville, AL 35801.

Cover Photograph Provided By Boston Symphony Archives.

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