

KOUSSEVITZKY Recordings Society

Vol. III, No. 2
Society News

□ Welcome to our first fall newsletter. Just as we were about to go to press, we learned that two compact discs, including all of Serge Koussevitzky's commercial recordings of music by Sibelius, are scheduled for release on the British Pearl label early next year.

Disc one will include *Tapiola*, "The Maiden with the Roses" from *Swanwhite* and the matchless 1935 Symphony #2. Disc two features the 7th Symphony (with the BBC Symphony), *Pohjola's Daughter* and the Symphony #5. Mark Obert-Thorn, who is preparing the transfers, advises us that if sales go well, Pearl will probably issue more Koussevitzky CDs.

We are attempting to arrange a special discount for KRS members with Pearl's U.S. distributor. Look for the details in our March newsletter.

□ The second volume of Vivian Perlis's Copland biography will be issued later this month. *Copland: Since 1943* (\$29.95) is published by St. Martin's Press.

□ David Diamond's Second Symphony has been recorded by Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony for Delos Records. It should be available next spring. Schwarz became interested in the work after hearing KRS Vice President Ed Young's tape transfer of the Koussevitzky/BSO broadcast premiere.

□ A reunion of all Berkshire (now Tanglewood) Music Center alumni has been scheduled for 1990. The entire Tanglewood season will be devoted to special memories from the program's 50-year history. For more information, write to TMC Reunion, Symphony Hall, 301 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02115.

Interview with Thomas Perry

When young Tod Perry was looking for ways to improve his musical skills during the summer of 1940, Randall Thompson asked, "Why don't you go to Tanglewood?" With a scholarship arranged by Thompson, Perry became a member of the Berkshire Music Center's first class. Six years later, he was appointed Administrator of the Music Center and in that capacity helped Koussevitzky reorganize the school in the wake of WW2. In 1954, he became manager of the BSO. This conversation with Perry was recorded at Tanglewood on August 23, 1989.

Tom Godell: I'm interested in your memories of the first year of the Berkshire Music Center.

Tod Perry: The school at that time was set up—well it still is set up—in two divisions: the pre-professional division and the consumer division. Koussevitzky had the idea that

music involves the people who write it in the first instance, the people who play it—which was the primary concern of the Boston Symphony because that's what it does—but it also involves all the people who receive it, and the music is better received by people who know what it's all about. So part of the Berkshire Music Center the first year was for people who wanted to be better listeners. I got into that division because I had no musical qualifications to speak of.

I sang in the chorus for the [Bach] B Minor Mass under Koussevitzky, and I wrote fugues with Paul Hindemith. Mostly I was involved in the opera department. Herbert Graf was the head of the department at that time. I found myself doing that because I enjoyed the stage. So I pushed scenery around, and my wife sewed costumes and all that sort of thing. I found myself taking part as a dancer in the chorus—a hidden part of my past.

TG: What was it like to sing in the chorus, performing the B Minor Mass under Koussevitzky?

TP: It was a very Koussevitzkian performance. It would get into criticism nowadays because I think it was probably an impure style, but it was very effective. It was the style that was then in fashion. It was very big; we had a huge chorus, the whole orchestra, everybody. And it was a big, rich rendition of it.

We were trained for the chorus by G. Wallace Woodworth, late of the Harvard Glee Club. We had innumerable rehearsals and then went to perform with the Boston Symphony. It was a very important business, and we were very serious about it. As far as I know, it was a good performance. I was so preoccupied with getting in there when I was supposed to get in that I don't know how the performance went.

TG: So you spent the summer of 1940 here as a student, and it wasn't until 1946 or so that you returned to Tanglewood.

TP: In 1946 [following WW2], the school was brought back into being. I went to work for the Boston Symphony [after serving in the Navy during the war]. My first job was in two parts. The first part of it was to resurrect the Berkshire Music Center, which had been suspended for two or three years, and then to tour with Koussevitzky—just to shepherd him around from place to place when the orchestra was on tour.

TG: How did you go about putting the Berkshire Music Center back together?

TP: We really started from scratch using this very capable, very well thought out model of the first three years of the Berkshire Music Center. At that time, there were an awful lot of people coming back from the war. Remember the GI Bill? There were just quantities of applicants. They all wanted to come; they were all anxious to.

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Koussevitzky and Piatigorsky: An Affectionate Look

by Terry King

It was the greatest fortune of my student years to be associated with Gregor Piatigorsky. My first encounter with him in the famed master classes (then at the Music Center Academy, Los Angeles; later at USC) hit me like the ominous light of truth one experiences only in dreams. It was my honor to be his assistant for a time and to be called his friend. The fatherly affection I have toward him often reminds me of the affection he expressed toward Koussevitzky, and, although of different stations in life, I feel it is of value to share some of these memories. The loving interview with John Barwicki (Vol.II/1) inspired me to do so.

Piatigorsky always referred to Koussevitzky with the most affectionate nostalgia. He was fond of sharing purposeful anecdotes in his teaching of us—to enliven the obvious need of an interpretive personality that, at the same time, must render the music with a sense of magic. That was an integral part of the world of the composer's muse, and it is a part of the highest attainments of interpretation.

The first recollection of Koussevitzky—via Piatigorsky—that I remember was his way of describing the phrase; the searching for words that were not there (and in a sense, limiting anyway), and the intuitive understanding that must be there when communicating a sense of anything worthwhile to another human being. "It must be... more... more... ah... we try again." Invariably it was better. I think that this (something not described precisely, but there nonetheless) has to do with what Masters and Johnson called true communication, "the exchange of vulnerabilities."

The second recollection concerned the sense of special honor, uniqueness and almost childlike naivete that Koussevitzky expressed regarding the performance of great music: "Tonight we play Brahms 4th Symphony! What a masterpiece! Do you know it? What a wonderful work!" This is powerful—the feeling that each performance was a kind of premiere. "It came to me," says the creator. The humility towards "it" is always profound, no matter how often one performs or experiences anything important or to what source one attributes the "it."

Piatigorsky and Koussevitzky performed a large body of repertoire together, most notably Strauss's *Don Quixote* (12 times from 1931-1948), such standards as Boccherini (1), Mozart-arr. (2), Haydn (6), Schumann (7), Saint-Saëns #1 (4), Brahms's *Double* (1) and Dvorák (2), as well as important twentieth century works including Bloch's *Schelomo* (2), Hindemith (6), Berezowsky (3), Prokofiev (3), Dukelsky (3) and Milhaud #1 (3). The Berezowsky, Prokofiev, Hindemith and Dukelsky works were all premieres. It is a pity that Piatigorsky and Koussevitzky never made any commercial recordings together as they were very close and shared so many historical events. Piatigorsky had no hesitation describing him with fatherly attachment and with the love one imagines it accompanies.

They first met in Moscow in 1917 or so when Koussevitzky was a guest conductor with the Bolshoi Ballet Orchestra. Piatigorsky had recently won the competition for the first cello position at the unheard of age of 14. Shortly afterwards he formed a trio with Issay Dobroven (the famed conductor as pianist) and Mischa Mischakoff (the future concertmaster of Toscanini's NBC Symphony) and gave recitals with Zeitlin and other prominent Muskovites. During that time Piatigorsky also premiered the *Ballade* by Prokofiev and gave the first Russian performances of the Debussy Sonata and the Ravel Trio.

In his marvelous autobiography, *Cellist*, Piatigorsky described his first encounter with Koussevitzky: "In addition to ballet and opera, the Bolshoi Theater also had symphony concerts with guest soloists and conductors. An unusual feature of these concerts was that the orchestra sat in the pit as in opera, while the soloist was behind the orchestra, alone on the stage. The soloist for this concert was Romanovsky, who played the Grieg Piano Concerto during the first part of the program. I don't know what happened, but by the end of the first movement Koussevitzky and Romanovsky lost each other. Romanovsky ended the long struggle unexpectedly by dashing from the stage, leaving the orchestra and Koussevitzky to finish the movement alone. Koussevitzky, enraged and in full view of the perplexed audience, pointed at me as if I was the cause of the disaster. Following the hastily arrived-at intermission, I not only refused to participate in the rest of the concert but demanded an apology. It is strange that such an absurd beginning should have resulted in a life-long friendship, but it did."

Another incident recalled in *Cellist* occurred while Piatigorsky was working on the Castelnuovo-Tedesco Concerto with Toscanini in 1935. Having returned to his hotel from a piano rehearsal with Maestro, Piatigorsky found a telegram from Koussevitzky. "It's a question of life and death that you give with me in Boston the world premiere of the *Concerto Lirico* by Berezowsky. All arrangements for the performance, which is in two weeks, have been confirmed by your managers.' I knew Nicolai Berezowsky from Moscow, as I knew Koussevitzky from my youth, but did not know the concerto. Before I could call Boston to decline the engagement, the telephone rang and there was the voice of Koussevitzky. 'Say yes - promise - I love you - say yes.' I listened for a long time. His irresistible pleading weakened me, and my arguing that I couldn't learn the concerto in such a short time was of no avail. 'You will like the concerto. It's not a bit difficult for you. Please promise.' 'Do you recall what you said about promises?' I asked. 'What was it?' 'You said that you are weak enough to make promises but strong enough not to keep them.' 'Grisha, it's no time for jokes,' he reprimanded. 'You must play Berezowsky. You will.' After a heavy silence I heard myself: 'I will.'

"I trusted Koussevitzky's judgement, and I knew that Berezowsky was a fine musician. Yet there was no end to

my annoyance with myself for agreeing to play a work I had never seen. I thought that such improvised extra engagements could happen in Tokyo or South America and elsewhere, but not in the United States. But rules were never dictated by a country where Sergei Alexandrovich Koussevitzky resided. The obstacles to his ideas were swept away and rendered helpless by his overwhelming will to build monuments to music, which already in his lifetime were proof and testimony of his efforts. His enthusiasm and unflinching intuition paved the road for the young, gave encouragement to old masters who were in need of it, and inflamed the masses to spur him to go on building. He not only discovered composers; he performed them and published their works. He created orchestras and publishing houses, foundations, schools, and festivals, and he fought for Americans in America, for Frenchmen in France, and for Russians in Russia. One saw him in a rage and in tenderness, in outbursts of enthusiasm, in happiness, and in tears, but no one saw him in indifference. Everything about him seemed elevated and important, and his every day was a festival. His life was a perpetually burning need to communicate.

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Every performance was a unique experience of supreme importance to him, and even the thought of music itself generated excitement and eagerness that were attached to him to his very last day. His friends were the elect or his adopted sons and daughters, and everyone entering his house entered the Promised Land. He was drawn by everything ‘exceptional’ from his childhood on, and grew exceptional himself. He demanded only the extraordinary, and no one could give him less. His praise was Immensity and in turn he received twofold. Words like ‘A fine performance’ after the concert would be an insult if they were not said with a choked voice of emotion or a trace of tears. There was no shortage of those voices, tears and embraces. It’s true that there were people who declined his requests, who refused their support, but this they communicated through a messenger, cable or letter, for no one could resist when confronting him in the flesh. It was not so much the nature of his requests as the manner in which he presented them that caused such insurmountable difficulties in not giving in. I loved him as he was, and that was not little. He had a magical gift for transforming even trifles into an event of urgency, because to him there were no trifles in matters of art. He was often attacked and criticized of ignorance and excessive vanity, but one saw those very critics flatter him to his face. Highly susceptible to any form of praise, he received flattery joyfully and unmarred by suspicion of a false note.

“My thoughts were interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Berezowsky. Blond and youthful, he had a smile on his face and a score in his hand. He had also a suitcase. ‘Are you going somewhere, Nicky?’ I asked, embracing him. ‘No, I came here to stay. The time is short; my concerto is long. We can’t waste a minute. I was so happy to hear from Sergei Alexandrovich, while you were still on the boat [the Atlantic crossing], that you wanted to play the concerto. I had to make some finishing touches in a hurry.’

“He established himself in my room and I looked over the score and played it through. Late at night I was still playing, and he was jotting down my suggestions. Lying in the dark I could not sleep. The two concerti were running and bouncing in my head. ‘Oh, those giant twins—I am in labor,’ I groaned to the snoring Nicky. The somber colors of the beginning of the Berezowsky Concerto threateningly gathered over me like a mass of slow-moving clouds. The orchestration of bassoons, bass clarinets, and low strings thickened the atmosphere as I laboriously tried to visualize the pages. But the further I advanced, the clearer and freer the music seemed to flow...

“There were several engagements to fulfill, and by the time I came to Boston I had learned the *Concerto Lirico* and looked forward to hearing it with the orchestra. I was happy to be with the Koussevitzky’s and to stay in the room they always kept ready for me in their house.

“On our way to Symphony Hall, Koussevitzky said, ‘We will begin the rehearsal with the concerto.’ I wondered if Nicky had arrived from New York, as he promised. I could not find him. Instead, there was his wife, Alice. I spotted her in the hall the moment I entered the stage.

“What a morning! Mistakes in the parts and in the score seemed unsolvable. So were the *tempi* and the dynamics. The musical Alice, with her own score, was not too helpful a deputy. The long rehearsal was like swimming in muddy waters. I finally lost my tact and control of myself. It is painful to recall my behavior and my rage and my walking off the stage, swearing and insulting everyone. But above all, I am ashamed of having hurt Sergei Alexandrovich. This was a black morning of my career, and only Koussevitzky’s forgiveness and understanding made it possible to go on with the rehearsals and concerts. Nicky, like many other composers, would not miss being present at the concerts to take a bow. He said that he was happy with the performance and with the reception, and, as for myself, after a successful concert I am incapable of bearing any grudges. But following the repetition of the program in New York, I never played the work again.

“With maddening schedules on tour, I have often lost track of actuality... Straining one’s head for exact dates and places of my meetings with Prokofiev, Stravinsky, Milhaud, Martinu or Hindemith would be useless if at that time I had been studying the music of others... At times I imagined having first met the awkward and outspoken Prokofiev in the house of Koussevitzky in Boston, or in Paris after a sonata recital with Horowitz, but most likely it was in Berlin [in the mid 1920’s], when I played his early Ballade with him and urged that he write a cello concerto...

"We corresponded about the concerto. Prokofiev's letters were astonishing. They would read, 'dr gr,' (dear grisha) and so on, his signature being 'sr pr' (sergei prokofiev). Proud of his consonant abbreviation system, he ignored the difficulties it presented to his correspondent. (In crass contrast Stravinsky's letters were written with painstaking exactitude, in an orthodox Russian style.)

"Finally he completed the first movement. I received the music and soon we began to discuss the other movements to come. The beginning of the second, which followed shortly, appeared as excitingly promising as the first. 'Even so,' said Prokofiev, 'it will lead to nothing. I cannot compose away from Russia. I will go home.' I thought that the decision had come to him not lightly. Soon, with his wife and two little children, he was set for departure.

"When the manuscript of the concerto arrived, Prokofiev was back in Russia and communication with him concerning the concerto became extremely difficult. The first performance of it took place in Boston under the direction of Sergei Koussevitzky. The many problems we faced with the composition were hardly solved by a word from Prokofiev: 'Do whatever you find necessary. You have *carte blanche*.'

"The performance went well in Boston [1940] and the response of the audience was gratifying. A few days later in New York, where we repeated the work, the affair turned for me into a mild nightmare. At one point in the second movement, through some inexplicable mishap, the orchestra took a tempo four times faster than indicated. There was no time to reflect as I, as if by a jolt of lightning, attacked passages that even at the right tempo were extremely rapid. I don't know if anyone of the press or the audience noticed what happened, but how I came through it alive remains a mystery to me to this day."

In my student days, Piatigorsky gave me much of his older clothing to wear (as well as countless other kindnesses). A few years later I told him that I still had all the clothing he gave me. He smiled and said he also saved all the clothing

Koussevitzky gave to him. I liked the feeling of that. I am reminded of Bernstein's pre-concert ritual of wearing and kissing the cufflinks Koussevitzky gave him.

I do hope some Koussevitzky-Piatigorsky performances will show up someday. I am told some do exist. They would be glorious to hear.

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Terry King is cellist with the Mirecourt Trio and has made many recordings both as soloist and member of this internationally acclaimed ensemble. Cellist was originally published by Doubleday, NY 1965, and republished by Da Capo Press in 1976.

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And housing them! Good lord, what a job! We also enjoyed something called war surplus. I remember, I went out and bought a school bus painted dark blue, tents—hospital tents we used as a cafeteria—and double-decker bunks galore to house the students.

TG: Did you work very closely with Koussevitzky in this process?

TP: Well, he didn't care much about double-decker bunks, but he was passionately interested in the school. He was very much interested in the musical part, in the recruitment of the students, where they came from, how good they were, and how we could help them. A lot of these people just had to drop their musical training and go off to war. So he was very anxious to help them any way we could.

He was also interested in the evolution of the music center, for its development into a major American musical institution, which it has now become. But he was very determined, aggressive maybe, to see that this happened... He had rather grand ideas, so we had to apply a little moderation. But it was a pleasant working relationship. I enjoyed it.

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