

KOUSSEVITZKY

Recordings Society



Letter from the President

Once again we have received excellent news from Mark Obert-Thorn. A pair of new CDs are on their way from Pearl this spring. The first will include Foote's *Suite for Strings*, Harl McDonald's *San Juan Capistrano*, Copland's *El Salón México*, and two works by Roy Harris, the *Symphony 1933* and *Symphony #3*. The second disc honors the 100th anniversary of Prokofiev's birth and offers the 1929 *Classical Symphony*, both versions of the March and Scherzo from *The Love for Three Oranges*, *Lt. Kijé* and *Peter and the Wolf* with the ever-pompous Richard Hale.

Two compact discs from Biddulph feature Koussevitzky's recordings with Jascha Heifetz. LAB 018 couples Prokofiev's Second Violin Concerto with the Sibelius Concerto (conducted by Beecham) and the Strauss Sonata. By the time we go to press, LAB 041 should be available. It has the Brahms Concerto along with the Brahms Double Concerto (in a performance that also features Feuermann and Ormandy). The transfers of the SK items on both labels are by Mr. Obert-Thorn, who received such enthusiastic reviews for Pearl's two Sibelius CDs.

I recently discovered that Obert-Thorn's work is not exclusively confined to the Koussevitzky canon. His transfers of the 7th and 8th Dvorák Symphonies for Koch International are superb. The performances by Vaclav Talich and the Czech Philharmonic may be the best in the current catalog. Like Koussevitzky, Talich was a devotee of the legendary Artur Nikisch, and a good measure of Nikisch's brand of fire illuminates these recordings.

While we are on the subject of compact discs, a brand new CD from VQR (which, I am told, stands for Vogt Quality Recordings) features several of Koussevitzky's double-bass compositions. It is called "The Spirit of Koussevitzky," and the number is 2031. Gary Karr is the bassist with Harmon Lewis, pianist. VQR's address is P.O. Box 302, Needham, MA 02192; phone (617) 444-8687.

We are pleased and delighted to welcome two new contributors to our ranks this month. Jim Svejda, whose penetrating analysis of Koussevitzky's Sibelius recordings is featured in this newsletter, is the host of the *Record Shelf* series for American Public Radio. Svejda is also an author. His *Record Shelf Guide to the Classical Repertoire* is an indispensable guide to the best available recordings of some familiar (and not so familiar) classical works. It is also witty and vastly entertaining. I suspect that even those who detest classical music would enjoy this book. Jim's article is compiled from the scripts of his three radio programs which examined Koussevitzky's Sibelius recordings this past December.

Roland Nadeau is a distinguished professor of music at Northeastern University in Boston. He is a gifted and sensitive

pianist with many excellent recordings on the Northeastern label. In addition, Nadeau hosts the weekly NPR series *A Note to You*. His interview with Boris Goldovsky took place in the studios of WGBH in Boston on April 21, 1989. It was originally recorded for Nadeau's three-part series, "Serge Koussevitzky: A Life in Sound," which was broadcast over National Public Radio in June of last year.

Apparently, there will be no Koussevitzky Memorial Concert at Tanglewood this summer. Seiji Ozawa will direct three concerts in honor of the late Leonard Bernstein at the beginning of the season, including performances of Bernstein's own *Jeremiah* Symphony and Mahler's *Resurrection*. While Bernstein surely deserves a memorial of this kind, it is a shame to learn that the Koussevitzky concert has been discontinued. If you find this as disturbing as I do, please write the BSO!

Congratulations to Ed Young. His "Serge Koussevitzky: A Complete Discography" (ARSC Journal, Vol. 12 Nos. 1 & 2, 1990) has been selected as a finalist in the first annual ARSC Awards for Excellence in Historical Recorded Sound Research in the category "Best Research in Recorded Classical Music." The winner will be announced at the ARSC Annual Conference in Atlanta, May 16-18, 1991. Our Thanks to Mike Manning, Mary Rodman, the Boston Symphony, KUSC-FM, the staff of *A Note To You*, WGBH-FM, Rob McDougal and WCRB. Finally, we offer our heart-felt thanks to outgoing board members Ed Young and Katherine Godell. Their many years of support and assistance have been invaluable, and we wish them both well in all their future endeavors.

Tom Godell, President

Table of Contents

Letter From the President	2
Tom Godell	
Interview with Boris Goldovsky	3
Roland Nadeau	
Koussivetzky, Sibelius, and the Art of Recording	10
Jim Svejda	
Koussevitzky's Recordings	11
Vincent Schwerin	

Interview with Boris Goldovsky

The distinctive, richly Russian voice of Boris Goldovsky is well known to music lovers through his many years as a commentator for the weekly broadcasts of the Texaco-Metropolitan Opera. During the early years of the Berkshire Music Center, Goldovsky became a close associate of Serge Koussevitzky. Later, he detailed this relationship in a fascinating article titled "On Uncle Serge," which appeared in the January 1960 edition of the Atlantic Monthly. The article begins: "For many years, I knew Dr. Serge Koussevitzky only as a public figure... I had no reason to suspect that he was aware of my existence, and so I was understandably flattered when, in the spring of 1940, I received a letter from Koussevitzky with an invitation to direct the musical side of the opera department in his extraordinary summer school in Lenox..."

Roland Nadeau: Tell us a little bit about your original connection with Serge Koussevitzky. In the *Atlantic Monthly* you told a story about your father and the letter that you got in 1940 from Koussevitzky that surprised you somewhat.

Boris Goldovsky: Yes. I was in Cleveland at that time. I was at the head of opera at the Cleveland Institute of Music and the head of piano at Western Reserve University, and I had never met Koussevitzky. I had heard the symphony when they came to Cleveland and other places, and I admired his conducting and all that sort of thing. It was rather surprising, because my family knew him very well. My Uncle Pierre, the pianist, used to be his accompanist in the olden days when Koussevitzky would travel playing the double-bass. I still have a recording of that, with my uncle accompanying him. And my mother knew him well, but I had never met him.

RN: Your mother was the well-known violinist?

BG: Yes, my uncle was Pierre Luboshutz, and my mother, who kept her maiden name, was Léa Luboshutz. So that when I was asked to come to Tanglewood, I think it was the summer of 1939 or '40, I was a little surprised that

he had chosen me. Herbert Graf was then the head of the [opera] department, but I was put in charge of the music. I was head of the musical division of the opera.

RN: And you were surprised that you got this letter originally?

BG: Yeah, because I didn't know why he should give me such an important post.

RN: Why would he do that?

BG: Well, when I came to Tanglewood, and of course we met and there was tea, and I stayed after tea, and we were all alone, I asked him if I could talk to him, which was very easy for me, because I could speak Russian to him, and Russian was the one language that he really knew and spoke well. So I asked him, "How come, Dr. Koussevitzky, you have chosen me for such an important post? You know nothing about me." And he said, "You're wrong. I know quite a bit about you, but even if I didn't know anything about you, I would still let you do that. Because, if you're anything like your father was, then you will do a good job." I had no idea that he knew my father, because my father died when I was 13 years old in 1921, and now we were in 1940. I said, "My goodness, what did you know about my father?" He said, "I owe your father a great deal."

And then he told me a story which is not generally known, that when he was a young man, Koussevitzky was the leading double-bass player in the Moscow Opera House, the Bolshoi Theater, and he married a dancer. They didn't get along, and they separated. Then, when Koussevitzky fell in love with Natalie Ushkova who was a very rich lady and very much in love with him, they wanted to get married. He asked his dancing wife for a divorce, but she refused to give it to him. As he told it to me, when he sent a lawyer to see her, she horse-whipped him down the steps of her apartment. And then, according to what Koussevitzky told me, he asked my father for help. My

father was a lawyer, and it seems that my father was able to get the divorce, so that Koussevitzky could marry Natalie Ushkova. My mother told me later that it was done mysteriously through some half a million dollars that the Ushkov family gave to my father to pay off the first, but he didn't tell me that. Maybe he didn't even know that. Anyway he thought my father did him a very great favor by making it possible for him to marry his beloved wife, who at that moment was still alive. She died a year or so later. So that's what he told me, why I got the job, through my father.

RN: But he also said to you that if you didn't make good, you would not last long.

BG: Well, that was a general attitude. I don't think he told me that at that moment. I think it was his total approach to the Berkshire Music Center. He had a great advantage there, because contracts were made for just that one season, usually six, seven or eight weeks. And if the people did not satisfy him, they were not re-engaged the next year, so that he didn't even have to fire them. All he had to do was not to re-engage them. There he had a great advantage over other institutions who have to justify the fact that a person is not re-engaged.

In the course of the activities, his biggest problem was that he didn't understand other languages. Once, I think it was in connection with the opening of the new theater, Graf gave a speech to the audience and said, "This is so wonderful that we need not have any European traditions from now on; with these theaters and Dr. Koussevitzky we're going to have our own American tradition of doing opera." After this was over, I spoke to Koussevitzky in Russian of course, and he was very angry at Graf. He said, "How dare he say that we have to follow European traditions?" And I said to him, "Please Uncle Serge"—as I called him by that time, *Dyadya Seryozha*—"that's not what he said," and then I told him what he did say, and then he finally said, "Well, that's different. And anyway, all of you should know that

unless you deliver 125% you're not going to be re-engaged. And that means you, too."

RN: I'd like to go back just a bit, to Russia. Did you ever have a chance to hear Koussevitzky play?

BG: No, I did not go to any symphony concerts conducted by Koussevitzky. As a matter of fact, Koussevitzky's situation at that time in Russia was rather peculiar. People did not take him seriously. He was able, with his wife's money, to engage the best instrumentalists, and they would go down the river Volga in a big ship, and perform all that at every stop. My uncle, who was a part of this whole machinery, told me about it. So that Koussevitzky had lots of opportunities to practice conducting. But he had help of people like Slonimsky and my uncle, who would play the scores for him, and he would give cues to non-existing players.

RN: You mean Koussevitzky would give cues to non-existing players?

BG: You see, what he would do is this. He would study a score. In a big room in his place, in a hall, they would set the chairs where the various instrumentalists would sit, and then as my uncle or Slonimsky or whoever would play the score, he would beat the time and watch the score, and he was also pointing in the direction of where the various instruments would play.

RN: So he was rehearsing to become a conductor.

BG: Yes. He did all the rehearsing, and of course it took him a long time to become a conductor, and the Russians knew about it, and they didn't take him seriously. Later on, after he went to Paris and came to the United States, then he was already recognized, because he had a great deal of experience, and actually also in Russia he did some very fine performances, at least according to what people say. He had famous pianists, Scriabin and all kinds of people, playing their concertos under his direction. So he finally got the point about how one conducts.

Of course he had great gifts, also great weaknesses; but he had great

gifts, and he persuaded people that he was a great conductor. Of course, his personality was helpful to him. He was, in a way, a pupil of Stanislavski. That means he was not just a conductor, but he played the role of the conductor. He played the role of a great Maestro. You could see it when he would enter the stage. He would not just come on stage, the way people do. He would make a glorious, heroic entrance, you see. And in general he behaved like a hero in a warded cape and altogether.

RN: He was the autocrat of the podium.

BG: That's a good way to put it.

RN: Was he known in Russia at that time for bringing out and suggesting new works by the avant-garde?

BG: Yes, to some extent. I don't know exactly what the Russian situation was. I was a child and didn't pay too much attention to that.

RN: But his reputation is well known in that direction, and he continued to do that when he came to this country, particularly when he was working with you at Tanglewood.

BG: Well, yes, we will come to talk about that. That's very important. Actually that was not his initiative, that we did new works. His initiative was to commission new works from young people. And he had, of course, that wonderful Koussevitzky Foundation that made it possible for him to engage people and to pay their expenses and to give them fees. As a matter of fact, one of the earliest proofs of that was that he made it possible for Benjamin Britten to write *Peter Grimes*. Benjamin Britten would never be able to afford the expense of writing an opera if Koussevitzky had not underwritten it. So, in return for it, Koussevitzky demanded the right to the first production, first performance. Then he relinquished the rights so that it could be done in England; but, we at Tanglewood still had the first American production rights.

RN: Did you prepare that yourself?

BG: I did some of the preparation. I didn't prepare it all myself. This was the very first thing that Leonard Bern-

stein conducted, when he was still a kid. But I can tell you the reason why I was not in charge of that. You see, what happened was that in the first few years I became a little bit disappointed in the work of Herbert Graf, who was the stage director. And so I asked Koussevitzky's permission to have my own division in the opera department. I said, "Let Herbert do the big productions. I just want to work with students and give them special assignments and do scenes with them and other operatic things which are not the big productions." And Koussevitzky said, "All right." And so as a result I found fifteen or eighteen young singers, and brought them to Tanglewood and gave them assignments.

All of a sudden, about a week before the opening of the show—and that was the year when we were going to do *Peter Grimes*, actually Herbert Graf was going to stage *Peter Grimes*—Graf decided he wasn't coming to Tanglewood, because he had a chance to go to Hollywood. That was a very bitter pill for Koussevitzky to swallow. It seems that Graf managed never to sign the contract, and Koussevitzky was very angry. He said to me, "You see, now you are going to be the head of the department." He offered it to me before, but I wouldn't take it away from Graf. And I said to Koussevitzky, "I will be glad to be the head of the department, but I cannot possibly stage and work on *Peter Grimes*." He says, "Why do you say that?" I said, "Because I feel that I have certain obligations to the students whom I have brought here and to whom I have given assignments."

I suggested to bring somebody else to do the production of *Peter Grimes*, which they did from New York. It so happened that I unfortunately had to lose most of my own group because they didn't engage anybody to do *Peter Grimes*, so most of my own group was stolen from me. That is neither here nor there, but that is why I was not involved in the *Peter Grimes* production.

RN: Well, you did some original works, premieres of Mozart for example, as you went along, and you were there as the director of the opera for ten or twelve years.

BG: Well from then on you see, from '46, I was the head of the depart-

ment, and since I was there until '64 or something like this, almost for twenty years, I had a chance to do all kinds of unusual productions. You see, Koussevitzky knew actually very little about opera. He had conducted, as far as I know, only Moussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* and maybe *Eugene Onegin* of Tchaikovsky, although that I am not sure of.

So the procedure was, at some point, usually before the end of one season, in the winter, or something like this, I would go to Koussevitzky, and he says, "What are you planning as main production for this coming year?" I, in the meantime, may have fallen in love with Mozart's *Idomeneo*, and nobody knew anything about *Idomeneo* in those days in the United States. They didn't even know how to pronounce it; they didn't know anything about it. So I would say to Koussevitzky, "I'm dying to do Mozart's *Idomeneo*, which has never been done in the United States." He says, "What? What did you say? I have never heard that name." And I say, "Well it's a great work. It needs some editing, but it's marvelous." He says, "Do you really want to do it?" And I said, "Oh, yes." He says, "All right, you have *carte blanche*"—that's how he put it—"But remember our arrangement, if you can't please me 125%, that'll be the last thing you ever do here." We always operated on that basis. I would come to him and suggest something like *Idomeneo* or *Clemenza di Tito* or *Albert Herring*—of course he knew about that by Britten—or Paiseillo's *King Theodore in Venice* or things of which he had absolutely never heard of their existence, and so he would always ask that question, whether I was convinced that it was a great masterpiece, and then he gave me permission to do it.

RN: Did he ever come to you and say, "Boris, I've heard about this fantastic opera by Lukas Foss, would you like to do it?"

BG: No.

RN: It all came from you?

BG: Yes.

RN: What were some of the other interesting works that you wrote about? What was the piece by Lukas Foss for instance?

BG: Lukas Foss had written a very charming work, *Griffelkin*, which was done, I think, on television. Lukas Foss, who was then just a kid, I don't think he was more than seventeen or eighteen years old, was one of the pianists in my department and one of the conducting students, and of course a man of very great gifts. He suggested that we would produce it on stage with everything: scenery, costumes; and we did. Lukas conducted it himself, and it was a very great success. It is a charming, charming, work. It has a great misfortune. Lukas made it so difficult that even our wonderful singers had great difficulties learning it, and yet it is a wonderful story involving children. I

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felt it could be the next *Hansel and Gretel* of our generation, because it had such a wonderful appeal, as far as the story is concerned.

You see *Griffelkin* is a young devil who is sent into the world to do harm. But what happens is that he feels sorry for the children, and he does some good. When he returns to hell, they all punish him. They take his horns away; they take his everything away and send him back to the world. It's a wonderful story. But it was very difficult to produce and very difficult for the soloists to learn. I said to Lukas, "Why don't you make it easier, because as it is now, people will not want to produce it." "No, no," he says, "It's as easy as I can make it." Well nobody has ever done it since.

RN: Did Koussevitzky ever conduct any of your productions there? Was there something about the *Queen of Spades*?

BG: No, that's another story. Let me first tell you about how many different and unusual works we were able to produce, not only because he was willing to let us do it, but because Koussevitzky made it possible for us to do it, you see. I have known a great many men in music, many great conductors, many great pianists, many great singers, many great violinists. By and large, these people are interested only in their own careers, to do things which are good for *them*, to make money for themselves, and to become more and more famous.

Koussevitzky did not need money. He had all the money there was. And because of his princely or kingly attitude, he had people that he could call on the phone and, simply, when he wanted to build a new theater for us, he would just call somebody and say, "Joe, I'm putting you down for a quarter of a million dollars," and that was the end of it. So he could collect enormous sums of money, and his own money. He was the only great man whom I have ever met, and there were many, who was interested in young people—in young composers, in young performers, whether they were pianists, violinists or singers and would do anything he could to help them along.

As a result we had scholarships, as many as we wanted. By and large, every singer that was in the department was on scholarship. We could spend all the money we needed on scenery and on costumes and on this and on that. As a result, it was possible to produce works simply because they were worth producing, not because they would make a great success and things of that kind. In that respect, he was unique. He's the only man I have ever met who, in a way, owned the world. He could do anything he pleased. And if he liked something and he liked somebody and trusted people and liked their work, there was no end to what we could do if we were in such a position.

Fortunately for me, I think also because I could speak Russian to him, which was very important, because otherwise communication with him was very difficult, it was possible to accomplish extraordinary things and produce extraordinary works, things like *Idomeneo*, *Clemenza di Tito*, and works by Rameau, Paisiello, Chabrier, or Ibert, and of course, Grétry—things people in those days never even knew existed and had never heard, which was a great thing for us producers and for the conductors and for the singers to become acquainted with the repertoire which otherwise was simply non-existent.

RN: It was good for you, too.

BG: Oh boy; of course. It made all the difference in the world for me that I, all of a sudden, became a real connoisseur and was able to do research in this direction and other directions and do anything possible. Of course, I'm immensely grateful to him for that kind of attitude he had, that if the person he trusted wanted to do something unusual, then he got *carte blanche*, with the usual reservation of course that he had to produce 200% or whatever.

RN: Well, despite all of the *carte blanche* he had for his own activities and his own dreams and ideals, he seems to have needed constant reassurance. Let's talk about that.

BG: Well you know, it's a difficult thing to say, but you see the man had unusual strengths, but he also had great weaknesses. He was not really an all-around musician. There were certain things for which he simply was not equipped. Now, in a way, this is true of

A friend sang in the Harvard Glee Club. This group was recruited as part of the choral forces for a performance of Beethoven's 9th with the BSO & SK. During one of the rehearsals, after a stentorian outburst from this group, Koussevitzky rapped for attention, addressed the group said, "Young gentlemen, please, please do not give me more than you have got!"
Charles Christiansen
(Georgetown, Colorado)

all people. Everybody in the world is made up of strengths and weaknesses. And those of us who are smart enough admit our weaknesses. We simply say, "Well, I'm very good at this, and I'm very good at that, but I cannot do this, or I cannot do that."

In my own case, as a producer of opera, I was not good with color. I couldn't judge costumes or scenery or the colors. I would engage people. I would engage a scenic director and say, "This is yours. I trust you. Show me what you did, but don't ask my help, because I cannot help you." Or with costumes, the same thing: "You do it, and don't ask me to do things which are not mine." I mean, I have strengths. I can do this and this and this, but I can't do that. But for people of Koussevitzky's type, who want to be all-around geniuses, but know inside of them that they are not all-around, but only part-around, it is very difficult. There is an inferiority complex there without question. And so he always needs reassurance. He had to have people come after every concert and say how wonderful it was.

RN: You wrote about your sister Irene one time congratulating him, and it didn't work.

BG: No. What happened was that she came down for one of the weekends, and she heard the concert on Thursday night, and of course everybody had to go afterwards to tell him how wonderful it was, and then she went there on Saturday, and she said to him, "Uncle Serge, that's the greatest concert I've ever heard in my life." "Well," he said, "What was wrong with last Thursday?" See, that was his attitude, that he was always suspicious. And if, Lord forbid, you were not there after a concert, he knew it no matter how many people would come there to flatter him. I remember once I had to take my wife to the dentist, and I couldn't be there. Well, well, trouble!

You see one of his weaknesses was the fact that he could not imagine, just before he started conducting, the correct tempo for a piece. It is something that most musicians can do. Now he did many other things that we cannot do, but this was something that he couldn't do. So he would always have to start a piece and then sort of vacillate a little

bit, try this and that, until he finally got the right tempo.

RN: He discovered the tempo en route.

BG: That's right. Now, my uncle and aunt, the Pierre Luboshutz/[Genial Nemenoff duo piano team who played the Mozart concerto, the E-flat major one, with him several times always told me that when they started it, they had no idea what was going to happen. It was only gradually that it all happened. He then would talk to them afterwards, and he would sometimes say, "Well, we had a little swim today, didn't we? We swam around before we really found the right thing." Well, he would not admit it to anybody except to a few of his Russian friends, in intimacy. But the truth of the matter is that it is a fault, you know, and he was obviously aware of it.

Also he was wonderful in his conducting when it came to strings. But when it came to wind players, the situation was very different. His way, you see, of indicating the beat was very hazy, and that permitted the string players to sort of wiggle their way into the tone, which was sometimes marvelous, especially if there was a big chord in the beginning that was a pianissimo chord. They were all afraid to start, and all of a sudden this chord came out of nowhere.

RN: Materialized.

BG: That's right. Without any accent. But when it came to wind players, they can't do it. He always accused them of not being able to follow his beat, and when they finally did, he said, "You see, you see, you can do it. So why don't you do it right away?"

RN: He must have had problems with the percussion section then, the same thing.

BG: Well, he had problems with everybody. But he managed to maintain this extraordinary attitude. And I tell you basically how he accomplished it, or at least one of his methods, which was perfectly sincere. See, whenever he made music, and it didn't matter whether it was a first rehearsal or a sight reading rehearsal or a dress rehearsal or a performance, he created the

atmosphere, very definitely, that this was the most important event happening in the universe at that time. Now, that's a gift. See, you can't just do it; you have to believe it. And so he infected us all with that feeling, that we were all involved in something extraordinary.

RN: And you really felt it and believed it yourself.

BG: That's right.

RN: Not because you knew he wanted you to.

BG: No, no, no, no, no. You see that was the way. That was part of his ability to act. He was not only a great conductor, he was great actor. And a great actor can make you believe in the sincerity of what he communicates. There was no question about it. I don't know if he ever actually studied with Stanislavski, but there is no question that that was the Stanislavski point of view, that you have to really believe and that you have to convince yourself and others. And he was able to do it. There was no question about it. I mean, his influence in that respect was extraordinary.

I remember once after the first or second year, in one of the meetings of the faculty, I would say something like, "Of course, this problem will never occur, because from now on we know the routine." He said, "Never say that word in my presence, again. In my organization, there is no routine." Of course he obviously misunderstood what I wanted to say, but that reflects the fact that for him there was no routine. Everything was boiling hot. He was able to convince us of that, and that carried an enormous influence, no question about it. People would make fun of him behind his back about so many things where a tempo was concerned or his inability to do certain obvious things that anybody else could do. But when he was there, there was no denying it. Greatness was right there.

RN: You talk a good deal about the language problem in your article called "Oncle Serge," and in a way, after some time, you learned a technique yourself of becoming an interpreter and avoiding many mishaps and tragedies.

BG: Well, when I was there I was able to help. I mean, people would come to him and report something to him, and after they left, and I was still there, he would all of a sudden get angry and start accusing these people of all kinds of things, like the story I told you of Graf. But that happened quite often, and I had to persuade him that this was not what the people said. And he would always say, "Well, are you sure? Well, that is different." Well, it was dif-

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ferent because I was there. But there were many occasions when I was not there. So many people were fired or were in trouble, and they never realized why, because he simply did not understand English.

RN: Yet, his knowledge, I think your words are "a totally efficient, pure knowledge of Russian..."

BG: Oh, his Russian was excellent.

RN: Why couldn't he translate into say, German, French and English? That's very interesting.

BG: Well, you see, Russians are supposed to be linguists. For instance, I

am a linguist. That's right. I went to school in Russia, Berlin, Paris and Budapest.

RN: But you only speak six or seven languages.

BG: But that's not the point. I went to school in those places. That means I really learned the language. See, Koussevitzky never learned any other language. He went to a Jewish school when he was a kid and probably learned some Hebrew, which I don't know if he still remembered or not. But, otherwise, all he spoke was Russian. And he did not go outside of Russia until much later in his life. Also, you see, he was brought up in an environment in which foreign languages weren't spoken.

You're probably aware of the fact that in the middle classes in Russia, such as where I was born, my father was a lawyer and my mother was a violinist, there were certain rules. We had a German *Fräulein* who lived in the house, and so we spoke German all the time. And there was a French *Mademoiselle* that came two or three times a week and taught us French. And at the table sometimes we all spoke French, and sometimes we all spoke German, and so we became bi-lingual or tri-lingual, and that was taken for granted. English was actually my fourth or fifth language. I only learned English when I was seventeen or eighteen.

But Koussevitzky never learned any other language, and so it seems that it isn't so much the talent for languages, but the fact that one is introduced to foreign languages when one is a child. I find it is the problem also, in the United States. American children are not introduced to foreign languages. And later on they go to school, and they're given one lesson a week in French or German grammar, but that is meaningless, absolutely meaningless. Well Koussevitzky was simply brought up in an environment where foreign languages were not spoken, and what he picked up later was always a mix-up. So he would use combinations. He would say to the violinists in the orchestra, "You must be careful to change your bow so that *personne* knows"—so "no one" notices. Or "*My kinder*"—we were always addressed as "my children." So there was always a mixture of languages.

And he had great difficulties communicating. But his Russian, it so happens, was wonderful.

RN: Well, I go back now, to you. You developed a technique in bridging between Koussevitzky and the players, etc. You would, right then and there, translate in front of him both Russian and English.

BG: I didn't do it always, but I think you read in my article the fact that I did this. Unfortunately, I did this at the time when we were preparing a production of Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*. Koussevitzky—that was sometime in 1949 or 1950—decided that he wanted us at Tanglewood to produce *Queen of Spades* in English, because we didn't like to do things in languages that the students didn't know and the singers didn't know and the audience didn't know. So he commissioned me to make an English translation of it.

But he was going to conduct it, and when we were doing the preparation for it, there was a time when we had to have his advice, and so when this costume designer, Leo Van Witsen, decided to start preparing for the costuming of the characters, we all went to Koussevitzky to see what he felt about it. Now Koussevitzky may have had weaknesses, but getting dressed properly was not one of his weaknesses; that was one of his strengths. He was very aware of the best way of clothing and the way he appeared in public, the color and shape of the things he wore and other people wore. He was very costume-conscious, dress-conscious. So when we discussed the costumes for the *Queen of Spades*, for Lisa, the Countess,

Herman and all these people, Van Witsen would be taking notes.

I was afraid that there would be some misunderstanding there, and so I developed this technique to which you refer. No matter what Leo Van Witsen said in English, I would immediately translate into Russian. And no matter what Koussevitzky answered, no matter what the language was, I would immediately translate into *my* English so that Van Witsen could understand it. Then came that wonderful occasion when they were wondering, the two of them, what kind of color cape Herman had to wear. So we asked Koussevitzky, "What do you think," and he immediately said, "Oh, of course, dark *gris*." So I heard "dark green," and I said to Van Witsen "dark green," and Koussevitzky said, "How dare you. I didn't say dark green. I said dark *gris*," which is the French for "gray." Now you can feel the problem one encounters. He speaks in two languages, and you have to figure out which language you're translating.

RN: What about the famous mix-up of the terms "forty" and "forte" in the performance of Samuel Barber's *Air Force* Symphony?

BG: Oh, that was a wonderful situation. There came a moment, I don't remember the exact year, but it was during the war; it must have been 1942 or something like that, when the story as I remember it was this. Shostakovich had just written a symphony dedicated to the citizens of Leningrad, who suffered from the siege of the Germans. That was a famous piece, and it received a lot of publicity. Somebody in the defense department or war depart-

ment or whatever it is called, decided that if the Russians could do it, Americans could do it. And so there was a guy there who liked music and the Air Force, and he said, "I know what we are going to do. There's a fellow here who is one of our young privates who has a job here. I think he has to look through the choral music given to the singers. We're going to engage him to write a special symphony. We're going to call it the *Air Force* Symphony. If the Russians can do it, we can do it."

All of a sudden Sam Barber, who was a good friend of mine because we were both students at the Curtis Institute at the same time, was given this engagement to write a special orchestral symphony about the Air Force. And it seems that this Air Force major, or whoever he was, wanted to be sure that the symphony reflected some of the events in the Air Force. So it was some kind of programmatic symphony. Well, as you know, Sam Barber did not write program music, but after all he was made a sergeant or something like this and was taken away from this dreadful job of going through the choral music, and he was put on every single airplane available to show him what the Air Force is all about.

Then finally it was decided that to make this a real *Air Force* Symphony, Sam Barber would add a special instrument that would imitate noises made by radio, which were probably heard in the Air Force, and he would introduce it into the symphony. He put this as part of the slow movement of his *Air Force* Symphony. Now that the Air Force had really something to brag about, they were not satisfied with just having a little noise like this. They commissioned Bell Laboratories to construct a special instrument that could be made louder or softer. Also the pitch could be changed to higher or lower. All of sudden a new musical instrument was introduced.

I was sitting with Sam Barber when this piece was rehearsed for the first time, and Barber told me, "I'm very worried about what's going to happen when Koussevitzky hears this beeping instrument." And I said, "Why should you worry?" "Well you see how it is. Stokowski likes these electronic instruments, and whatever Stokowski likes, Koussevitzky hates, like they always

I was at a rehearsal once when I was about ten or twelve, and Koussevitzky was working over the violin section—I think it was on a Handel [work]. It was a soft, declining scale passage. He finally stopped in sheer exasperation and whipped a silk handkerchief out of his jacket pocket. Throwing it up in the air, he stepped back and watched it float to the floor. "There, I want you to sound like that!" He was really something.

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do. Anyway, one conductor always hates what the other one likes. So when he hears that, I'm afraid there will be trouble. And if he kicks out that instrument, then my career is very much in danger, as an army officer."

What happened was Koussevitzky rehearsed very carefully the first movement and started the slow movement. The moment the beeping started, he looked at the clock and said, "It's time for a rest. Let's have a 15 minute interruption." And so I decided to take advantage of it. I went with Sam Barber to the green room where he [Koussevitzky] was changing his shirt, and he always had a servant there by the name of Victor who was drying him and changing him. And I said to Koussevitzky, "Isn't that an interesting sound we heard? It seems to be so"—I don't remember the words I used—"ethereal or unusual." And Koussevitzky, who loved words, said, "No, no, no, no, no; not ethereal, not unusual. I'll tell you what it is. It is abstract. That's what it is. It's abstract. Now Barber," he said, "You have to make it more abstract. Because the way I heard it now, it's too loud. You have to make it softer, to make it more abstract. Why don't you go and tell the percussionist who plays this instrument, to make it more abstract, to make it softer."

Well Barber was thrilled, because, you see, all of a sudden the instrument has been approved of, but the question of a little louder, a little softer was not important. So we ran to the percussionist, and we looked at the instrument. It was adjustable from zero to one hundred, and eighty was loud, and sixty was also loud, so we decided to set it at forty. When the rehearsal resumed, Koussevitzky started conducting, and the beeping instrument started playing. Koussevitzky stopped and addressed the percussionist and said, "Now you're sure that you're not playing it too loud?" And the man said, "It's all right sir. It's at forty." Koussevitzky said, "I know it was marked forte, but I'm telling you I want it softer." The percussionist, who was unaware of all this, said, "Yes, yes, the composer, Mr. Barber, had just come and put it at forty." Koussevitzky became as angry as he could be. And when he was angry, he had some kind of a little vein here that started throbbing in his forehead, and he said, "Who is the conductor

here? Barber or me?" In the meantime, we were all rushing down to the percussionist to say, "Don't mention the word forty. Just say it's going to be softer." So, we saved the day that way. That's how the forty/forte situation developed.

RN: Going back to Tanglewood now, at one time, having been taught by Fritz Reiner at Curtis, you used a fairly large stick. Then, suddenly, for the rest of your conducting career, there were no sticks.

BG: I threw it away. That was very, very shocking. What happened was this. The first year at Tanglewood we didn't have a theater. It was built only for the second season. So when we decided to do Handel's *Acis and Galatea*,

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we decided to do it in the garden. We built a wonderful little stage there, and the singers were on the stage, and the audience sat in the garden and looked over that wonderful place with the lake in the background and the mountains, and the orchestra was hidden behind the bushes, invisible.

So I conducted this small orchestra, Handel's orchestra, behind the bushes. It was a little complicated, because it all depended on the wind. If the wind came from one direction, then I couldn't

hear the singers, and if the wind came from another direction, the singers couldn't hear the orchestra. Also there was the question of sunshine. When the sun was shining, the violinists refused to play because it would melt the varnish on their instruments. So we had to have people standing at each with umbrellas, and if the wind came up, we had to have somebody to hold the music and to turn the pages. Anyway, it was quite a production.

Fortunately for us, we were lucky. On the afternoon of that performance, it was fine. There was not too much sun; there was not too much wind. The singers could hear me, and I could hear the singers. It was a great success, and Koussevitzky was very pleased. But the point is, he did not see me conduct. He only heard the result, and he was very pleased. As a matter of fact, he suggested that we should repeat it the next afternoon, but I decided one miracle was enough, and I wasn't going to take any chances, so I talked him out of it. So, anyway, my conducting had been approved by the great man. He heard me conduct, and he did not complain. Hooray, hooray!

Well the next year, when we had the new theater, we decided to produce Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, which in those days was still something of a novelty. *Così fan tutte* was the last Mozart opera that reached the United States. I think the first American production didn't come until 1922 or something like that. Well anyway, as you know, there is an overture, and then it goes immediately into the cafe scene, and then there is a short intermission while they change the setting to the garden.

So I conducted the dress rehearsal, conducted the overture, and I noticed that Koussevitzky would come closer. You see when we built the theater in Tanglewood, we built it a little bit like Bayreuth. That means the orchestra sat pretty deep, and the conductor was not visible to the audience, and the players are not visible to the audience. To see the orchestra or to see the conductor a person had to come forward to the wall which separated this. And I noticed that Koussevitzky was peeking down and watching me conduct. So after the first scene was over, I jumped out of the pit, and I ran to him. He was sitting somewhere in the middle of the hall, and I

went to him, and I said, "Uncle Serge, please, if there is anything that you want to change, if you have any complaints, don't hesitate." I could see on his face that he was angry.

RN: The vein was pulsing?

BG: The vein was pulsing. He said, "Yes, yes. There is something very wrong. And it is all your fault." You can imagine my reaction to this. I said, "Uncle Serge, please I beg you, it is not too late. Tell me what it is. It is not too late

to change it, especially if it is my fault." He said, "Yes, that telephone pole, that terrible baton you use, aren't you ashamed of yourself? Throw it away and never use it again."

And it all of a sudden dawned upon me. You see I was using an instrument from the enemy camp. Fritz Reiner was obviously the enemy. One conductor is always the enemy of another conductor, and the idea that in *his* establishment, in *his* Tanglewood, in *his* opera house, *his* man Boris Goldovsky

would chose a foreigner's instrument to conduct his orchestra was an intolerable insult. Because you know what he had, he had a little stick that was held somehow half-suspended between the third and fourth finger of his right hand, and he conducted so that his stick was simply an elongation of his fingers. So I realized what I had done, and I said, "Please don't worry. I'm going to throw it away." ☺

Koussevitzky, Sibelius, and the Art of Recording

After all these years, the Boston Symphony still seems able to play the music like no other orchestra in the world; this in spite of the fact that they don't play it quite as often as they once did—but then, again, nobody does. For there was a time, not that long ago, when they were performed with nearly the same monotonous frequency as the Beethoven symphonies—throughout the 1950s, when they had already become accepted as modern classics, and at the height of their popularity in the years between the two World Wars, when they were probably the most frequently performed works of any living composer—thanks to the passionate advocacy of an extraordinary group of champions, the most electrifying of whom was also the last to take up the cause.

Serge Koussevitzky didn't begin conducting the music of Jean Sibelius until the late 1920s, and then—at least in part—because he was nagged into it by his friend, the music critic Olin Downes. And yet as his career wore on, Koussevitzky's name and the composer's became increasingly synonymous. At the end—in June of 1951—the dour, tight-

lipped Finn would say of his volcanic Russian friend, "I shall ever be deeply grateful to him for all that he has done for my art. His memory is unforgettable."

The American composer Milton Babbitt almost missed the world premiere of the Violin Concerto by his hero, Arnold Schoenberg, because of what else was on the program. Leopold Stokowski had scheduled the premiere for a Philadelphia Orchestra concert on December 6, 1940. But because part of the concert was to be broadcast, and because American radio was as hopelessly conservative then as it is now, it was decided at the last moment to switch the order of the pieces so as not to expose the airwaves to Mr. Schoenberg's new (and presumably disagreeable) piece. Milton Babbitt and his friends had taken their time getting to Philadelphia's Academy of Music, believing that the Schoenberg Concerto would be the second work on the program, not the first. (As it turned out, the young 12-tone composer never did make it to his seat, but heard the performance while seated in the aisle.) And it's not that Babbitt had anything against the other music

on the program—"But you have to understand," he would recall many years later, "These were the days when we all had Sibelius coming out of our ears...and other parts of our anatomy."

Today it is all but impossible to reconstruct the Sibelius fever which gripped the world fifty and sixty years ago. As late as 1957, the year of the composer's death, his symphonies were mentioned seriously with those of Johannes Brahms as being the most important written after those of Beethoven. Like any composer so lionized during his lifetime—though it is difficult to think of anyone other than Verdi who enjoyed such adulation while he was still alive—Sibelius' reputation plummeted precipitously in the years immediately following his death in 1957. One of the most vigorous debunkers, the composer and critic Virgil Thomson, started taking some pot-shots as early as 1940, when the Sibelius wave was still reaching its crest. Writing in the *New York Herald Tribune*, Thomson confessed, "I found the Second Symphony of Sibelius vulgar, self-indulgent, and provincial beyond all description."

(continued on p. 14)

Koussevitzky's Recordings: Bach, Ravel & Richard Strauss

BACH

Throughout the nineteenth century and well into this century, most conductors have presented Bach's orchestral music using a full ensemble. This weighty sonority is more suitable for Brahms and the other Romantics. However, Koussevitzky directed the Boston Symphony in recordings characterized by tonal levity, entirely avoiding an inflated sound. A photograph (below) of a 1950 performance of the B Minor Mass at Tanglewood clearly reveals the BSO numbering around sixty or seventy players plus chorus. The complete *Brandenburg* Concertos and Suites were recorded at Tanglewood's Theatre-Concert Hall between 1945 and 1949. One must definitely adjust to Koussevitzky's strongly individualistic readings, for they differ from other conductor's views of these oft-played works. Several movements have somewhat less traditional tempos; the current trend fa-

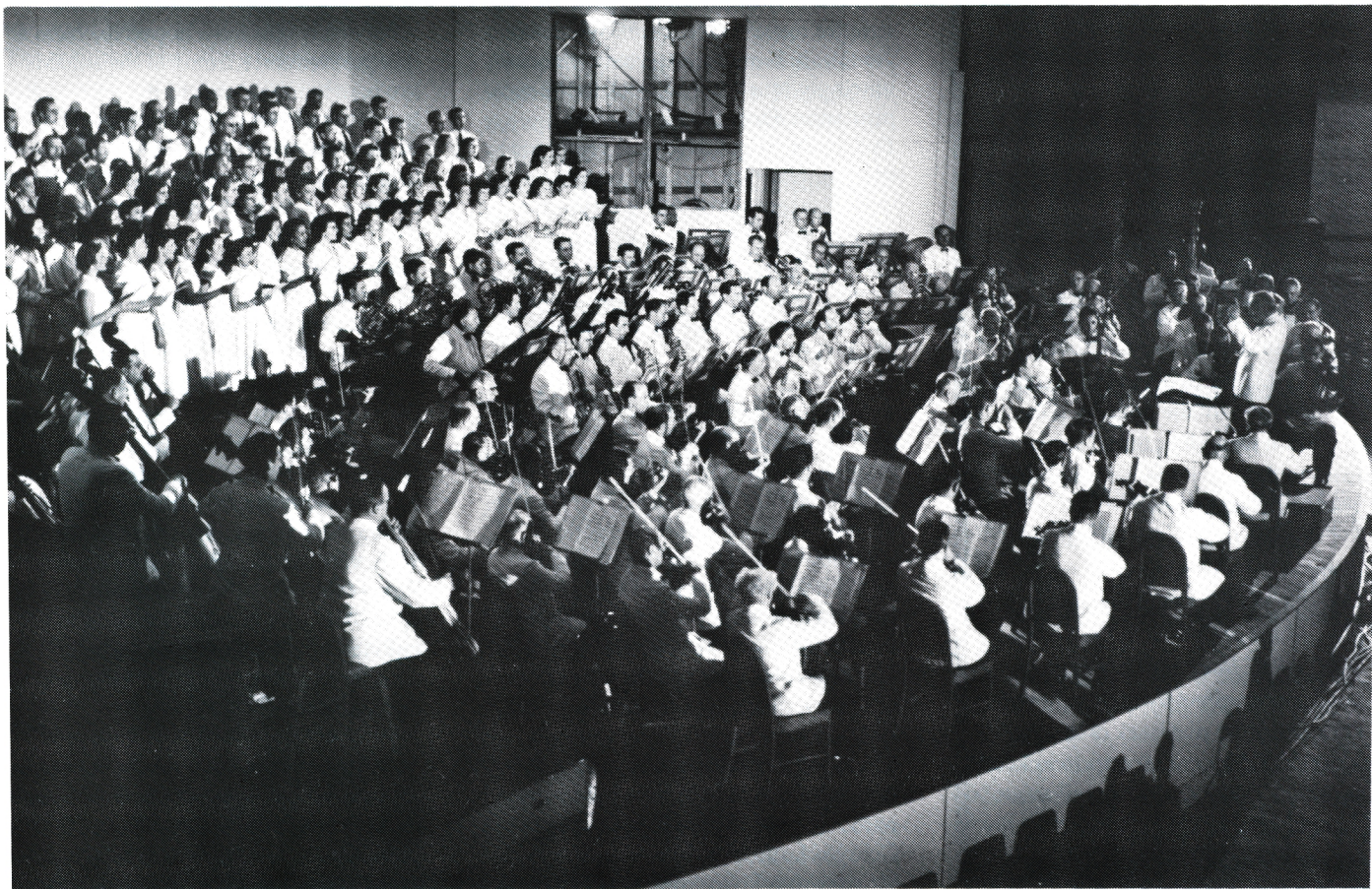
vors faster tempos and less expression. A wonderful vitality pervades the allegros, and the slow movements receive very warm, emotional treatment.

Brandenburg #1 was the last Bach piece recorded by Koussevitzky (8/17/49, RCA 78-rpm set M-1362; *An earlier recording of this work was made on 8/17/47 but never issued—Ed.*), although a year later he dedicated the Tanglewood season to the 200th anniversary of Bach's death. On the whole, this concerto is stylishly played with admirable spirit (especially note Richard Burgin's nimble violin solos in the third movement). The concluding minuet will surprise; the second trio moves considerably slower than the norm. In fact, it really drags here. Also, Koussevitzky's performance ends more grandly than Bach had indicated in the score.

The second concerto features Roger Voisin, BSO first trumpet, whose excep-

tionally brilliant solos are well balanced against the other instrumentalists (8/14/46; M-1118 coupled with #5). The third concerto displays Boston's incredibly agile string section. The Sinfonia from Cantata #4, *Christ lag im Todesbanden*, serves as a second movement. Apparently Koussevitzky thought this concerto needed a slow middle piece, and however the academics complain, this insertion is quite apropos. A somber mood is evoked which leads to a vivacious conclusion (8/14/45; M-1050, coupled with #4).

The fourth concerto highlights the artistry of flutist Georges Laurent. The arpeggios and other demanding passages are masterfully tossed off. Some purists may take exception to certain ritards near the close of the third movement. On the final side of the original 78 set, the popular Prelude from the Sixth Violin Sonata (arranged by Riccardo Pick-Mangiagalli) allows the BSO



Was SK's First *Boléro* Recorded in Stereo?

In 1984, two record collectors in California made a startling discovery. Steven Lasker and Brad Kay were comparing two similar Duke Ellington recordings made in 1932. The matrix numbers (scratched on the blank part of the disc near the label) were identical, except that one ended with the letter "A". At first they thought that these were different takes, but Kay noticed what he later described as "a difference in audio perspective." From this he concluded that these recordings were in fact the right and left channels of a stereo pair. Kay believes that the stereo effect resulted accidentally when engineers used two separate microphones to feed two different cutters which were recording the same performance.

An article describing this discovery appeared in the December 1985 edition of the *New Scientist*. Later, John Sunier presented several examples on his *Audiophile Audition* radio program. During the program, Sunier discussed the phenomenon with several recording engineers. Keith Hardwick of EMI said plainly, "I can tell you there is no truth whatever in this 'Californian idea'... and I have the authority for saying this from the engineer who was making these records." On the other hand, RCA's Jack Pfeiffer stated, "I found them to be accurately stereo. I checked them with an oscilloscope, and all the phasing is there, and there were directional characteristics to them... I was surprised and gratified to hear them."

But more recently Ed Young dismissed the concept of accidental stereo in his Koussevitzky discography, which appeared in the Spring 1990 *ARSC Journal*: "One can obtain a stereo effect by manually synchronizing the playback of any two identical monaural records [emphasis mine]... We are left with the fact that the only conclusions that can be reached in regard to the stereophon-

strings to be heard in a stunning version. This last is the only Bach recording (aside from the *St. Matthew Passion*) made in Symphony Hall, on October 31, 1945, during the same session as Copland's *Appalachian Spring*.

The fifth concerto (8/13&14/46), in a crisp reading, introduces the young Lukas Foss at the piano. His part is beautifully projected and the long first movement cadenza is a singular triumph. The sixth concerto, aside from a rough first side (the first half of the opening movement), is also a fine performance. One may favor a quicker pace for the last movement, although the slow movement gets a very eloquent reading (8/14/47; M-1211).

While we are on the subject of Koussevitzky's recordings of Bach concertos, there is yet another set of discs (CAL-174 reissued on LP by Turnabout, TV 34784) to be considered. The work in question is the Concerto for Orchestra in D, ostensibly by K.P.E. Bach. This concerto is not by Bach's son, but by Henri Casadesus! During the early 1900's, Koussevitzky heard this piece played by the Society of Ancient Instruments whose director was Casadesus. In the first movement, there is a passage straight out of a (J.S.) Bach two-part invention in B minor, inserted quite convincingly into the lead-back to the recapitulation. Even the *New Grove Dictionary* gives Casadesus credit for this composition.¹ At any rate, it's a very pleasant work, albeit written in the style of Bach. Koussevitzky's reading is most memorable; listen to the great slow movement and Louis Speyer's deeply moving English horn solo (12/22/37; M-559).

Some general remarks now on the four Suites for Orchestra. The performances are, each in their own way excellent, wholly characteristic of Koussevitzky's expansive and energetic response to Bach. One commentator stated that these readings were more Romantic than Baroque.² Even so, the conductor's approach works very well. The first suite, perhaps the longest, offers a well-molded ensemble. Especially like the overture and the way Koussevitzky sustains his conception throughout (8/14/47; M-1307 coupled with Suite #4). Suite #2 again brings Georges Laurent's flute wizardry back for a thorough workout. One can easily

imagine Koussevitzky's pride in his player; this is an object lesson for aspiring flutists who wish to undertake this work (8/14/45; M-1123, with #3). Suite #3 (8/13/45) is especially delightful. The strings dominate to telling effect. Richard Burgin emerges from the group during the overture and is in fine form. The well-known Air is beautifully done with a rather slow tempo. How many conductors today play the Air as if they wanted to get it over with? Suite #4 (8/14&15/46) is also very brilliant and colorful. I like the way each movement bounces along; note the swinging rhythm in the overture, followed by incisive trumpet and strings elsewhere.

In the spring of 1937, Koussevitzky led the combined forces of the BSO, Harvard Glee Club and Radcliffe Choral Society with vocal soloists (most notably baritone Keith Faulkner), harpsichordist Ernest Wolff, and organist Carl Weinrich in the *St. Matthew Passion*. The album comprised three bulky sets lasting nearly four hours. It's a very effective performance; the orchestra is in top form throughout. Listen especially for the poignant "Have Mercy Lord on Me." Contemporary critiques found that the performance was generally good, although the technical side is less than what one might have hoped for from a live performance. Some of the soloists are poorly miked due to the large number of people on stage, but they do come through, if from a distance.³ An English language text was used for this concert (3/26/37; M-411/12/13).

RAVEL

The music of Ravel was another specialty upon which Koussevitzky devoted much time. It is said that while the composer did not always agree with every detail of Koussevitzky's performances, he did state that the conductor's interpretations were "very good."⁴ Along with Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*, the Suite #2 from *Daphnis et Chloé* marked Koussevitzky's recording debut (11/15 & 12/20/28; 7143/4). According to David Hall, this version had dynamic qualities that compensated for its rather dated sound.⁵

Sixteen years later (and after several hundred playings), the Suite #2 was re-recorded in Symphony Hall (11/22&27/44 & 1/3/45; M-1108). From the initial sunrise scene to the furious *Danse*

generale, this reading ranks with Koussevitzky's greatest achievements. It is unique; just listen to the incredible ensemble and the hypnotic flute solos by Laurent. One minor drawback is the over-reverberation that clouds some passages during the final minutes. However, this detail aside, you should somehow acquire these discs and enjoy them fully.

In 1930, three Ravel works were transferred to disc: the ubiquitous *Boléro* (4/14/30, 7251/2), *Mother Goose Suite* (10/27&29/30; 7370/1), and *La Valse* (10/29&30/30, 7413/4). The first two were subsequently re-recorded in 1947 with much improved sound (*Boléro* 8/13/47; M-1220; *Mother Goose* 10/29/47; M-1268), although the 1930 sonics hold up rather well. The *Mother Goose Suite* shows Koussevitzky's wonderful sensitivity to the famous children's tale and his ability to persuade the BSO to recreate these imaginary vignettes. *Boléro* moves at a fairly steady pace, a generally respectable reading. *La Valse* gets a tremendous rendition. I like the ease with which the orchestra moves from one episode to the next.

Koussevitzky conducted *Rapsodie Espagnole* for the RCA engineers in the spring of 1945. (4/23&25/45; M-1200) The resultant recording is an awesome demonstration of the orchestra's growth as well as technological advance. The haunting third movement is miraculously conjured up—it must be heard to be believed.

Finally, the popular *Pavane pour une Infante défunte* was given a very fine reading which reveals more substance than ordinary modern performances (11/4&5/46; 11-9729).

STRAUSS

Only three of Richard Strauss's tone poems were recorded by Koussevitzky. The earliest set, *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1/22/35; M-257), marked Koussevitzky's return to recording activity for RCA after a four-year hiatus. (In the interim, the conductor recorded five items in England for HMV and the *Harris Symphony 1933* for Columbia.) When the six-record set reached the market in May of 1935, it was heralded as a new breakthrough in realistic sound reproduction. Having heard only the Camden LP (CAL-173) reissue, I suspect that

the original discs have much greater impact and presence. As for the reading itself, it is sublime. Koussevitzky transforms this work into an unforgettable occasion. The orchestra plays as if mesmerized by their director.

Till Eulenspiegel, which was also regularly programmed, received a fine representation (4/24/45; M-1029). A lively, humorous account, and, in the trial scene, overwhelming. For some reason, David Hall in the *Record Book*, placed this version last on the list and roundly criticized it as being "fussy."⁶ Perhaps it is, but I think it's also highly effective and successful. There is a passage during an early episode when a grand ritard occurs; other conductors take this part at strict tempo. Otherwise the reading is excellent.

Don Juan provided the BSO and Koussevitzky with a glorious field day. (10/29/47; M-1289) This, too, gets the maximum attention for its dramatic and lyrical values. The dashing opening is breathtaking in its phenomenal virtuosity. Then the famous oboe solo sings passionately during the love scene. I would rate this performance as one of the best that the Don has received on or off records. Here is yet another instance where our young conductors could learn from the old masters. Fortunately, the sound is remarkably faithful to the BSO; there is a great wealth of detail here. Aside from a session one month later in Carnegie Hall, this meeting would be the last wax pressing. In April of 1949 the BSO and Koussevitzky would begin recording on high-fidelity magnetic tape.

An earlier recording of *Don Juan* has had limited circulation, both as a Nieman-Marcus LP (DPM4-0210) and a BSO fund-raising compact disc (1989 Salute to Symphony, now out of print). The playing is nearly equal to the later version, except that there are moments when the BSO players sound absolutely worn out. This performance was recorded at the end of a lengthy session on April 19, 1946.

Many thanks to Ed Young who provided the author with copies of several of the above-mentioned recordings.

Vincent C. Schwerin, Jr.

ic authenticity of these record pairs are completely subjective ones derived from plain listening."

Regarding the synchronized playback of two identical monaural discs, Kay himself stated in the *New Scientist*: "If you then play the fake stereo on a mono system, it sounds terrible. You hear phasing effects—like a radio picking up two interfering stations. This is most definitely not the case with the plain and "A" takes that make up a stereo pair. The more accurately you get the two in synchronization, the better it sounds in stereo. And it sounds right in mono, too. I have found that some plain and "A" takes are the same when they used the same microphone to feed both turntables. You can't then get stereo."

The revelation that there may be accidental stereo recordings in RCA's vaults is especially interesting to Koussevitzky collectors, as both the second and third sides of his 1930 *Boléro* were eventually issued in both plain and "A" takes by Victor. Kay's tape of these two sides (as heard on Sunier's radio program) has all the openness and directional characteristics of true stereo, at least to my ears. Unfortunately, pairs of plain and "A" takes of *Boléro's* first side have never been located. However, there are pairs of another SK recording made on the same day as the *Boléro*: Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony (sides 3, 5, 6, & 7, in the Young discography.)

Tom Godell

Notes:

¹*New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Stanley Sadie, ed. 1980, vol. 3, p. 844.

²Warren De Motte, *The Long Playing Record Guide*, 1955, Dell: New York, p. 35.

³David Hall, *The Record Book* (International Edition), 1948, Durrell: New York, p. 274.

⁴Richard Burgin, Koussevitzky Symposium at Tanglewood, 1974.

⁵Hall, *The Record Book* (Second Edition) 1940, Durrell: New York, p. 98.

⁶Hall, 1948, p. 1184.

(continued from p. 10)

Sibelius' ultimate reputation will probably survive both the excessive vilification and the excessive praise. Yet that he could be characterized as a 20th century Beethoven is hardly surprising in retrospect, given the quality of the musicians who took up his work—beginning with that oldest and most indefatigable of his supporters, who also made the very first commercial recordings. While he was not as well-known as Hans Richter, Sir Henry Wood and Felix Weingartner—the other conductors of his approximate vintage who eventually took up the cause—Robert Kajanus did as much for his fellow countryman over a longer period of time than any Sibelius conductor ever would. At the age of 74, Kajanus was chosen—with the composer's enthusiastic blessing—to make the first Sibelius Symphony recordings with a pickup orchestra in London; underwritten by a grant of 50,000 marks from the Finnish government, the first installments of a projected complete cycle were made in May of 1930: the Symphony #1 in E minor, and the Symphony #2 in D.

Comparing the Kajanus recording of the D Major Symphony with the version that Serge Koussevitzky would make five years later is both fascinating and revealing; not only because Sibelius—as of 1930—had come to think of Kajanus as his ideal interpreter, but also to hear how far Koussevitzky (in his first Sibelius studio recording) seems to have strayed from that ideal. In the opening Allegretto, Kajanus' tempo is unusually fast—at times, almost uncomfortably so. Koussevitzky, on the other hand, is more broad, measured, and flowing—and unlike Kajanus, who slows up considerably to accommodate the big horn theme, Koussevitzky plays it relatively straight. In addition to a crispness, an airiness and an appealing "singing" quality that Koussevitzky brings to the interpretation—a quality which aids, immeasurably, in the projection of the long Sibelius line—the performance also captures more of the Symphony's mystery and drama than almost any recording ever has. In the Scherzo, the execution has a deftness and rhythmic bite that remain unique, even by modern standards. And in the finale, Koussevitzky cranks up the tension several notches higher than any conductor before or since. The climaxes

are as brilliantly built as any on record: inexorable, superbly terrifying, and crackling with a ferocious intensity.

Although Koussevitzky would record the most popular of the Sibelius symphonies again in November of 1950, some six and a half months before his death, and although the last of his Sibelius recordings would also become a classic, it is the earlier version of the D Major Symphony which, in its combination of freshness, electric energy and brooding power, remains unrivaled and unapproached.

Today it is all but
impossible to
reconstruct the
Sibelius fever which
gripped the world
fifty and sixty
years ago.

The composer's most enthusiastic English champion, Sir Donald Francis Tovey, also supplied some of the most colorful and perceptive mid-century analysis of his major works. It was Tovey who characterized the finale of the Violin Concerto as "a Polonaise for polar bears." And Tovey who described the unforgettable opening of the finale of another work as "a rushing wind, through which Thor can enjoy swinging his hammer." Needless to say, Tovey was dead on the money in drawing the parallel to Norse mythology; for in one way or another, all the music is touched by the legends which haunt the dark, snow-bound forests; yet as unmistakably Nordic as the music clearly is, it is also touched by something else: the typical Northern passion for the warmth of the South—in this case, a passion for a singing Italianate lyricism. The trick in finding the emotional heart of these works lies in recognizing their essentially dual nature; a love of craggy textures and laconic understatement, together with a soaring vocal line that would not

be out of place in a Puccini opera. While every successful interpreter has come to terms with this intoxicating cultural schizophrenia, Koussevitzky did it more convincingly than any other, perhaps because he, too, was a mass of exhilarating contradictions.

Among the first generation of great 20th century Sibelius conductors, Sir Thomas Beecham was Serge Koussevitzky's only serious rival; like Koussevitzky, Beecham brought a completely original point of view to Sibelius' music. (The composer admired both men enormously, and in fact promised both the first performance of the long-rumored, eagerly anticipated, yet never completed—if it was in fact ever begun—Eighth Symphony.) Beecham, who was not the most consistent Sibelius conductor—his first version of the Seventh Symphony is one of the most bungled recordings that any conductor of genius ever made—could be a magical one, as he was in his interpretation of the tone poem *Tapiola* that was made toward the end of his life. Only Koussevitzky's 1939 Boston recording can match its power and intensity; and Beecham's sensitivity for the subtle textures of the music only underscores the notion that Sibelius may have owed as much to Debussy as he did to Tchaikovsky.

Like the Beecham *Tapiola*, Koussevitzky's performance of that other Sibelius tone poem, *Pohjola's Daughter* seems every bit as sonically refined and cultivated, which is slightly amazing, given the faded 1936 recorded sound. In addition to the interpretation's startling dynamic range and variety of colors, it is the withering emotional impact of the playing that makes the recording unique: from the razor-edged string articulation—particularly that of the first violins—to the sense of utter desolation the conductor conjures up in the final bars; only Mahler and Shostakovich at their blackest seem capable of such inconsolable despair.

Given the obvious limits of mid-30s recording technology, the range of color that Koussevitzky was able to draw from the E-flat Major Symphony, recorded later that same year is—if anything—even more amazing. After an uncharacteristically shaky start—a few horn clams mar an otherwise extremely impressive performance of the epic first

movement—the performance quickly settles down to one of the conductor’s best. Amid the generally dark fabric of the opening *Allegro moderato*, the playing has an unusual delicacy and lightness of touch. The symphony’s second movement has a superb rhythmic swagger, together with a measure of sex and sensuality that make it both very Russian and very French. And in the tense, eerie, expectant opening bars of the final movement, it is doubtful that any conductor—before or since—managed to get such playing from an orchestra. In almost every recording of the Sibelius Fifth that has ever been made, the final bars—those emphatic, widely-spaced chords—present a serious problem. Played absolutely as written, they can almost seem like an afterthought; like something tacked on to make for an awkward, embarrassing end—or so it can seem in even a fine modern recording. While Koussevitzky doesn’t exactly tamper with the score, he allows less daylight between those final chords than any conductor on record. Strictly speaking, he *does* rush the tempo; and for once, the end of the Symphony sounds absolutely right.

Given the incredible pace of technological advancement—and after a certain point, technology, like population, grows exponentially, not geometrically—it becomes increasingly difficult to understand how so little can be accomplished with so much. With what would have seemed—a half century ago—the miracles of editable tape, digital mastering, multiple microphone arrays and recordings consoles of such complexity that they could have been used to control World War II aircraft carriers; to say nothing of a level of orchestral execution which is generally conceded to be unprecedented in musical history, the end results—more often than not—make one wonder why anyone would have thought it worth the trouble. Perhaps a giant leap backward is now in order: to the days of a single primitive microphone, slabs of spinning shellac, and a nervous orchestra which realized it was either get it the first time or forget all about it. Perhaps it was the nervous excitement, or the sense of occasion, or

simply the sheer novelty of the process that makes so many antique recordings seem so vivid, electric and alive.

Since absolutely every aspect of the recording process—from critical elements like fidelity of sound to amenities like the physical comforts of the recording studio—has improved, why haven’t recordings gotten better? They sound better, certainly; it’s now possible to hear more of the notes, to enjoy a more realistic representation of the sound of a tuba or a xylophone, to hear—with the proper high-priced audio equipment—a far closer approximation of the experience of a real, live, flesh-and-blood orchestra in an honest-to-goodness concert hall. The question remains—why are the overwhelming majority of commercial recordings so irretrievably ordinary, so numbingly dull? Perhaps because the modern recording process leaves out one critical element that made the business of music-making more than the *business* of music-making; that made it, instead, the joyous, thrilling, audacious, psycho-spiritual, physio-sexual experience that it once used to be.

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In a letter written to a friend in May of 1925—the year after Serge Koussevitzky became the music director of the Boston Symphony—the great ’20s newspaperman, iconoclast, and word-smith H.L. Mencken reported: “Some time ago I heard the Boston Symphony in New York under Koussevitzky. It was like meeting a beautiful woman of the year 1900—now middle-aged, simpering and hideously frescoed.” What

probably bothered Mencken—whose tastes in serious music were both highly evolved and extremely sophisticated—was a quality that had not been heard in an American orchestra before Koussevitzky arrived in Boston, and has never really been heard to such a degree since. Ironically enough, Mencken—the scourge of the Bible Belt and sworn enemy of all things puritanical—was something of a prude when confronted with unabashed sensuality. And more than any conductor of his time (including even a musical libertine like Leopold Stokowski) it was Serge Koussevitzky who was the sensual virtuoso; the architecture, the intellectual underpinning, the internal logic of a piece—these were things he left to his German colleagues and literal-minded time-beaters like Arturo Toscanini. For Koussevitzky, music was both a visual and tactile experience not unlike great painting, or even more to the point—great sex.

If there was a common thread which ran through the objections of the unbelievers—although by the early 1940s, Koussevitzky’s detractors had become few and far between—it was that his conducting, for all its color, drama, and temperament lacked intellectual depth. Even if this were true—which it wasn’t, entirely—Koussevitzky was at his best in music which didn’t require intellectual depth because it didn’t have much to begin with. If he was not at his most convincing in music of Beethoven and Brahms—in both, he tended to be overly cautious and uncharacteristically subdued—in things like the Strauss tone poems or the Tchaikovsky symphonies he had no real competition. And then, too, Koussevitzky’s primacy in other areas of the repertoire was never seriously challenged during his lifetime—in that flood of new music he commissioned from young American composers, and in those virtuoso orchestral display pieces that he had written for his own use: from that arrangement of a Russian piano suite he coaxed out of a Parisian friend, to that masterpiece of life-affirming exuberance he commissioned from a dying Hungarian.

If Koussevitzky's ultimate reputation will rest on his work on behalf of practically every important American composer of mid-century, and in his having had a direct hand in the creation of masterworks like Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*, the Ravel orchestration of Moussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, his efforts on behalf of Jean Sibelius were no less significant, since at the time Koussevitzky took up the cause, the Finnish symphonist's music was hardly a going concern. Strangely enough, Koussevitzky's relatively late conversion was apparently the result of a misunderstanding. The conductor, who was not an especially gifted score-reader and was never the most patient of men, seems to have dismissed Sibelius' music early on as being much too gloomy and dark for his tastes. Apparently, whatever reservations he may have had about the music's darkness quickly vanished, for not only did he cease to object to that quality, but actually began to revel in it.

With one possible exception, the most extraordinary of Koussevitzky's Sibelius recordings is the 1939 version of the tone poem *Tapiola*, the last and darkest of Sibelius' orchestral scores, which—in Koussevitzky's hands—acquires an unprecedented range of dark colors. From the stygian ruminations in the opening bars to the ferocious control the conductor imposes on the brass outbursts, the variations in shading, the subtle gradations of the color black that Koussevitzky reveals is

still, after all these years, amazing. By all accounts, it was also one of Sibelius' favorite recordings of his own music; again, after all these years, it isn't difficult to hear why.

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The new orchestra founded by the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1930 was only three years old when Koussevitzky appeared with it to lead a concert which included a performance of Sibelius' Seventh Symphony. Unlike most important conductors of the time, Koussevitzky made few guest appear-

ances, perhaps fewer than any conductor of his era. And although the personnel of the new ensemble was made up of some of the best men that the BBC could steal from other English orchestras—Sir Hamilton Harty's Hallé Orchestra of Manchester, probably the finest English orchestra of the day, was especially hard hit—the BBC Symphony was not yet the suave, cohesive, responsive orchestra it would eventually become.

Once, when Koussevitzky's friend and long-time Harvard Professor, the composer, Walter Piston offered one of his students a pair of seats to a Boston Symphony concert, the student asked, "But what is the program?" Piston, rather annoyed, snapped back that it didn't matter *what* Koussevitzky was conducting; the student could learn something even if it was the C major scale. One thinks of Piston's reprimand in listening to his performance of the Sibelius Seventh Symphony—which begins, as it happens, with a C major scale. From the pent-up power and emotion that Koussevitzky suggests in those opening measures, through the nervous energy of the strings, the burnished, medieval grandeur of the brass fanfares, this is still the most intensely committed performance of *any* Sibelius symphony ever committed to shellac, and one of the most blazingly intense recordings ever made of anything. And all this from a brand new orchestra in an actual concert of a piece barely a decade old led by a man who hated making guest appearances.

Jim Svejda

About the Koussevitzky Recordings Society, Inc.

The Koussevitzky Recordings Society was established in 1986, and we are dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of the recorded legacy of Serge Koussevitzky. The Society is a non-profit corporation, which is staffed entirely by volunteers.

The Society is involved in a variety of projects, including the creation of an "oral archive" of conversations with those who knew and worked with Koussevitzky and an archive of the conductor's recorded performances. The activities of the Society are highlighted in our bi-annual newsletters. These include inter-

views from the oral archive, articles about the conductor, and book reviews.

To become a member and receive our newsletter, send a check or money order in the amount of \$15 to P.O. Box 288, Boston, MA 02254. Memberships run from January to December. Those who join in the middle of the calendar year will receive all the publications for that year. Back issues of our newsletters are also available. For a complete list, you may contact the Society at our Boston address.