

# KOUSSEVITZKY

Recordings Society



Tom Godell

## Letter from the President

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Koussevitzky Recordings Society, Inc. In 1986, we set out with two goals firmly in mind: to increase awareness of Koussevitzky's art among the general public and to more fully document his extraordinary career. I believe we have been successful in both endeavors. Your support and encouragement over the past decade has made it all possible. Thank you. We begin this year with 110 members—more than at any time in our history. This is due in large part to our on-going alliance with the Leopold Stokowski Society of America. Welcome to all the LSSA members who have chosen to join us as members. I sincerely hope you enjoy what you find in these pages. Your comments—not to mention your contributions to this Journal—are always welcome.

According to Mark Obert-Thorn, several new releases of Koussevitzky material are pending. Most exciting of all is the first commercial release of Koussevitzky's breathtaking account of the 1st movement from Shostakovich's 8th Symphony. That Biddulph release will be filled out with Prokofiev's *Romeo & Juliet* Suite #2 (already issued by RCA!), Rachmaninov's *Isle of the Dead* and *Vocalise*, and two previously unpublished double-bass solos from Koussevitzky's first (September 1928) session. Biddulph's Tchaikovsky set (with Symphonies 4-6) and the Russian/French/American program that we announced in our last issue will both be out shortly. Also on the horizon are the *St. Matthew Passion* (Biddulph), *Missa Solemnis*, and Brahms Symphonies 3&4 (both of the latter from Pearl).

Meanwhile, Obert-Thorn is at work on the fourth and final volume of Pearl's series devoted to Stokowski's complete electrical Wagner recordings with the Philadelphia Orchestra. The disc is scheduled for release in England this summer, and it will include the *Rienzi* Overture (1926/7), the *Tannhäuser* Overture and *Venusberg Music* (1929/30), the Prelude to Act III of *Die Meistersinger* (1931), and the 1932 recording of Stokowski's Symphonic Synthesis of *Tristan und Isolde*—in an arrangement quite different from his 1935/37 remake.

With this issue, we welcome a distinguished new contributor: Jerome P. Harkins. He is a graduate of Fordham University in New York with a Ph.D. in statistics. Harkins is an experienced writer and editor who, in the early part of his career, wrote comedy and drama for television in addition to a series of profiles of leading artists and scientists. He is an active amateur musician, founding member of Support Live Music, Inc., and a director of the National Choral Council. He is currently working on a biography of Serge Koussevitzky. While all biographers from Boswell (and probably long before) to our own time have seen fit to denigrate the work of their predecessors, Harkins has good reason to be wary of Moses Smith, whose infamous Koussevitzky

biography appeared in 1947. Harkins's intriguing article about Smith appears on page 7.

And, sadly, we note the passing of RCA's Jack Pfeiffer, who died on February 8, 1996, aged 75 years. Pfeiffer was a man of enormous integrity, and he commanded unprecedented respect among even his most commercially-minded colleagues at RCA/BMG. For example, it was Pfeiffer who insisted that Pierre Monteux's delightful recordings of suites from Delibes's ballets *Coppélia* and *Sylvia* be included in RCA's monumental *Monteux Edition*. When his superiors balked at the idea of adding yet another disc to an already large box, Pfeiffer insisted. "Either you include the Delibes," he told them sternly, "Or you can take my name off the project." They quickly relented, and the Delibes recordings are one of the greatest treasures in that distinguished collection.

The obituaries that appeared after Pfeiffer's death mentioned many of the great musicians with whom he worked: Heifetz, Horowitz, Rubinstein, Stokowski, and Reiner to name just a few. Conspicuously absent from all these lists, however, was Serge Koussevitzky. Yet it was a young Jack Pfeiffer who helped record the Russian's final sessions in Boston in November 1950. Pfeiffer made sure that Koussevitzky was represented in RCA's *Legendary Performers* series, and to the end he fought for the creation of a *Koussevitzky Edition* by RCA. I had hoped to interview Pfeiffer and preserve his reminiscences of Koussevitzky, but somehow we never found the time. Jack Pfeiffer will be missed by all music lovers—especially those with a passion for historic recordings.

Thanks once again to Yana Davis for his invaluable help in preparing this issue for publication.

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## Arthur Berger—Koussevitzky: An Evaluation

This interview first appeared in the *Boston Arts Review* in January 1975, edited by Richard Burgin, Jr. It is reprinted here by permission of the editor. Our thanks to Richard Benson of New York City for calling this excellent publication to our attention—ED.

*Boston Arts Review: In retrospect, Mr Berger, how would you evaluate Koussevitzky's contribution to music in America?*

**Arthur Berger:** For my own part, I should say that I appreciate Koussevitzky more now than I did during his lifetime, and I should like it to be kept in mind, as a qualification to all my remarks, that on balance I retain a very favorable impression with regard to his total contribution. Despite some of the positivistic tendencies of our time, I still believe that it is in the nature of the arts for there to be valid decisions that are incapable of absolute proof. Thus, as a musician with my own criteria it was natural for me to take exception to some of Koussevitzky's musical decisions. Usually this was not to his liking, and in my capacity of music reviewer I had a number of occasions to put my reservations on record and to become aware in one way or another of his intolerance of criticism. This was true not only when I was in close proximity, serving a stint in my youth on the wonderful old *Boston Transcript*, but later when I was critic in New York on the *Sun* and the *Herald-Tribune*.

In my capacity as composer, on the other hand, I now become more and more aware that he was a big man, and that there is no one of his stature and influence who is currently dedicated as he was to the cause, to the sheer crisis of survival, of the American composer. He made Boston a tremendously exciting place, not only by bringing leading creative musicians here for performances of their music, but also by aligning himself with the creative musical talents of the Boston region and by recognizing that their cause

was also his. Boston is much the poorer today, since the Symphony has almost totally abdicated this responsibility. The argument that audiences are not interested in the orchestra assuming such responsibility would not go down at all well with someone like Koussevitzky. He would have found ways to make them interested. For when I say he was a big man, what I mean is not only that he looms as one in my mind because of his dedication to the cause of new music, but that his having been a big man was itself a condition of his being able to implement this dedication.

*Are you talking about charisma, about the quality that a movie star has?*

Charisma helped Koussevitzky do many of the things he got done. If it's something that can be cultivated, I would not put it past him to have deliberately cultivated it, because he felt he needed it simply to get things done. I refer to the way he so obviously *seemed* to have contrived his public image and to make a special point of maintaining his autocratic stance. It has often been observed that Koussevitzky was not a first-rate technician, but he overcame this problem with his tremendously strong personality and his stringent demands. Charisma, needless to say, is a very useful weapon when it comes to making demands. He was following his intuitions about the way things should be—about certain refinements of performance, beautiful sounds, polished execution. Whether or not one credits him with technique, it would be hard to deny that he had the ability to demand these things—to demand, among other things, simply the rehearsal time necessary to their achievement and the disciplined response of his instrumentalists to his own requests.

*Are these the kinds of demands Toscanini made?*

Yes. But Toscanini also had the technical capacity, and if he too demanded rehearsal time, it was

sometimes to worry the same limited number of standard pieces to such an extent that one critic, Virgil Thomson, found himself—if I remember correctly—lulled to sleep by the perfection of the machine. Koussevitzky did distort the composer's intentions at times, but the distortions were deeply felt, and his own intention of the music came across beautifully.

*Did these distortions have something to do with Koussevitzky's lack of technique?*

They could have. I once reviewed several recorded versions of Copland's *Appalachian Spring* and pointed to certain passages where the music slowed up in a manner that suggested Koussevitzky may have had some difficulty in counting, in maintaining the tempos, where there were certain rapid metrical changes. But despite this, and notwithstanding the fact that the Koussevitzky version was an LP reissue of an old 78 rpm recording, his was still the best.

*It's interesting to hear a composer say that distortions benefited a piece.*

That's not what I mean. The point is, there were so many other things to compensate—not least of all, a real conviction. There are times when I prefer a performance with conviction—one that projects, that gives a sense of real involvement on the performer's part—to one that is accurate but otherwise routine. Something that puts us at a tremendous disadvantage as composers is the tendency of many performers to play our music as if it were a duty, often simply because they have been engaged by a modern-music group to prepare it for a single occasion. You cannot expect to convey a love of the music to an audience if you don't play it as if you care for it. The music itself not only has to compete with the towering masterpieces of Bach, Mozart, etc., but with marvelous performances of these works—performances not only infused by the

performer's love of the music, but rendered secure and authoritative by virtue of the long period of acquaintance and preparation. Compounding the whole dismal situation is the fact that the composer has to content himself with the fleeting occasion of a first performance which is not followed up by a second, since all too often the reason for programming new music is its news value, i.e. to get an advance notice and to attract a reviewer to the concert. The critical nature of this whole matter has made such a profound impression that a group has recently been formed in New York under the rubric Da Capo Players with the express aim, as its name implies, of giving repeat performances of new works.

Now to come back to Koussevitzky, I suspect that on some level he knew or sensed that his espousal of new music had promotional possibilities. But I believe his interest in this music was genuine, and may very well have been nourished by his own unfulfilled aspirations as a composer. From what I have said in my passionate outburst about the plight of the present-day composer—the American composer in particular—vis-à-vis public performance, it should be evident that a statistical survey of how many new works a conductor premieres is not a sufficient indication of his contribution to the advancement of contemporary music. Koussevitzky's achievement rests on far more solid ground—on his decisive role, for example, in ushering a composer like Aaron Copland to the forefront of American music. To accomplish this entailed more than a few sporadic premieres that would take the form of going through the motions of paying obeisance to new trends and that would be inspired by the motives of a PR nature. There were repeated performances, well-prepared and offered with strong conviction.

At the same time there was a PR aspect that was interpreted by some observers as a purely self-seeking device on Koussevitzky's part—especially if they did not share the belief of some of us that Copland was then, and still is perhaps, our

foremost American composer. I refer literally to the PR tactics he would use in announcing to fellow musicians and the press that a new symphony of Copland's, for example, was “dee gree-atest” symphony of our time, when a week later he might characterize a new symphony by Shostakovich in precisely the same words. It is not surprising that some people should have become cynical with regard to his pronouncements, and that he should have been suspected of using his efforts on behalf of new music as a means of bolstering his own position. But what seems so much more important in all of this is the fact that in place of the apathy that invests many a performance of a new composition, he surrounded it with the aura of an exciting and significant event. If he exaggerated in his statements, it was because he was impulsive and believed them when he made them, carrying on very much like the prima donna that he certainly was.

*You have not quite made it clear whether you yourself suspected Koussevitzky of using his support of new music to “bolster” his own position. Would you care to commit yourself further on this matter?*

Well, I'll attempt to make myself clearer by putting it this way. Big public figures like Koussevitzky naturally become cloaked in the outer trappings of the myth that has grown around them. Without denying his important contribution to the advancement of new music, I should like to suggest at least some ways in which we may exaggerate it. It is not for me to say to what degree he was himself responsible for the exaggeration. But I do know it is a factor among those who tend to detract from him.

Let me first say that when we exalt Koussevitzky in the towering and unique role as savior of the American composer we by implication succeed

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*“Koussevitzky carried on very much like the prima donna that he certainly was.”*

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I remember a time when a rapidly rising young protégé of Koussevitzky was in the audience to hear the latter present a citation to Howard Hanson. Since the young conductor no doubt fancied himself worthy of the appellation, he was quite surprised to hear his mentor salute Hanson as “dee gree-atest” American conductor, and immediately confronted him after the ceremony with the greeting, “How could you say such a thing?” Koussevitzky replied, “Well, you know, I was carried away.” I venture to say that Koussevitzky's protégé, who has since that time had a meteoric rise as both conductor and composer, may later have been thinking of this typical Koussevitzky retort when he set some of these very words for a song in a successful Broadway musical.

in dwarfing, even eclipsing, Dimitri Mitropoulos, who also played a certain role. Ironically, he ultimately played a lesser role, perhaps, because he lacked Koussevitzky's capacity to elevate his public image. Better public relations would not only have enabled him to support new music on a scale comparable to that of Koussevitzky's but would have helped him maintain the very minimum conditions for giving it any support at all—namely, the continued occupancy of his post as conductor of the New York Philharmonic-Symphony.

In all due respect to Koussevitzky, it should be pointed out that he recognized a kindred spirit in Mitropoulos, he befriended him, and aided him in establishing himself as a

conductor in this country. At the same time, however irrational and unfair it may be, whenever Koussevitzky is lauded to the skies for his contribution, some of us inevitably think of Mitropoulos, whose name is scarcely recalled for anything whatever—even for his years as a conductor of standard repertory. I am, of course, biased, since Mitropoulos was one of my benefactors. By the same token, this puts me in a position to pay tribute to his sincere and zealous support of musical creativity.

The circumstances of the commission he gave me are revealing. Around 1950 he was present at a concert of chamber music which included my early Quartet for Woodwinds—a work of 1940 in a style then current which is labelled neoclassicism for want of a better name. It was the first work of mine, I believe, that he had ever heard, and he was sufficiently impressed to tell me so at the intermission and to ask me right then and there to write a piece for him to premiere with the Philharmonic—stipulating quite substantial financial terms. Now, it was well-known that Mitropoulos's leanings were in the direction of the atonal and serial composers who were in, or stemmed from, the twentieth-century Viennese tradition. So my immediate response was, "You can't possibly mean it. This piece is in C major!" But he assured me he recognized quality and craftsmanship regardless of the idiomatic terms in which they were couched. I still could not take this informal, impromptu offer seriously, having been inured to so many empty promises from conductors and virtuosos who were prompted by the excitement of the moment and the social occasion. But he kept his word. I understand he took the money for such commissions out of his own salary, and while some of the press coverage—to put it in almost indecently crass terms—may have made the investment worthwhile (the premiere of my *Ideas of Order* had a spread in *Time*), the attention he gave to new music, especially to the Viennese school, was very likely

something that contributed to the unpopularity that led ultimately to the termination of his contract. You see, he did not have the PR skills for dramatizing the adventurous components of his programs.

*Your reminiscences of Mitropoulos prompt us to bring up the name of Boulez. We hope you don't mind if we interrupt your recital of what you consider the "exaggerations" in the Koussevitzky saga. Isn't Boulez doing quite a lot for new music, and, in contrast to Mitropoulos, succeeding in dramatizing it with his "rug" concerts and such events as his recent Ives mini-festival?*

I cannot too strongly emphasize that the Gallup poll method of determining how much a conductor does for new music is not reliable. The epithets *new, modern, contemporary* are used very loosely in musical circles, and it is not unlikely to find an orchestra's statistical tally including someone like Satie, whose innovations date back to the 1880s. Now Boulez is a musician of the top rank, and he is intelligent and enlightened, so that the least we should expect from him is a recognition that there is a large accumulation of twentieth-century masterpieces which are by now qualified to be included as a matter of course in the standard concert repertory—even if some of these, for example, a work as old as Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Pieces of 1909, are still disturbing to some ears. Boulez is smart enough to realize that there is still resistance to this music, and I'm thoroughly sympathetic to his use of promotional methods to put it over. But it should be clear after what I have said that I'm talking about music *here and now* and an involvement with it.

Mitropoulos's involvement was obvious from the lively interest in my work in progress, which I showed him. Also, at lunch between rehearsals, he timidly suggested that perhaps it was not such a good idea for me to have interrupted a certain lyrical line in the strings. I explained that it was not an interruption, but a means of siphoning out a salient sonority to dwell on it, much as one might

italicize or draw out an important phrase in a sentence. Whereas some conductors might peremptorily make the cut over all the objections of the composer, Mitropoulos said he would try it his way at the rehearsal and I could judge whether or not it would be better. He did not do this at all, and after the rehearsal I asked him why he had not done so. He said that in terms of his own indoctrination this type of music was new to him, and with the help of my explanation he had been able to apprehend its nature better. On another occasion he *did* spend over an hour of rehearsal time reorchestrating a passage of the music of one of my fellow composers. Nowadays, this sort of thing is unheard of, as far as I know. I was equally struck by how much Koussevitzky was also involved when I read Copland's account (in the "Tanglewood Symposium", reprinted in Vol VIII, No. 2) of how Koussevitzky would have him come and stay at his house when a Copland premiere was being prepared.

So much for involvement. As for the *here and now*, let me take them in reverse order. Boulez has declared that symphony audiences should absorb the traditional twentieth-century tendencies before being exposed to the newest music. There is something in this, but audiences are not monolithic. He is less of a pioneer in this domain than he seems to think. I found a certain condescension on his part when he brought us Berg's Three Orchestral Pieces (1914) with commentary on an NET program in the spirit of one bringing culture to the natives. Mitropoulos had brought us this work as one of the high points of his career. Boulez's delinquency in satisfying the criterion of the *here* may be traced to the obvious circumstance that he is heavily involved in activities abroad. Moreover, early in his Philharmonic career, he wrote for the *New York Times* a bitter denunciation of the music currently being written in America. This nicely took him off the hook, though he is doing a certain amount in his chamber series,

*Perspective Encounters*, with members of the Philharmonic.

Among Stravinsky's last pronouncements was advice to today's composers that in view of the public situation in music they would do well to go "underground", and indeed many of them have. I cannot believe Boulez knows what is being written in the country well enough to make such a blanket condemnation of it all, since so much of it is inaccessible. But even if he were right, any improvement must come from within, as a result of performers and critics ferreting out the promising manifestations and encouraging them. Nor am I referring to the trends that disguise vacuity with pseudo-dramatic appurtenances, gimmicks, and, as in "conceptual" art, all sorts of anecdotal matter that replace tones. A new art form may evolve from all this, but it hasn't yet, and it will not be an extension of musical tradition.

It is much too pat to assume that so many of us whose musical judgement on traditional music is respected when we hold forth as teachers in the university (which for better or worse is now our haven) are engaged in nothing but composing worthless academic pieces. Boulez would certainly be very surprised to hear me say so, but in writing off current American music in one indiscriminate bolus he is not very different from Harold C. Schonberg of the *Times*, who writes off the whole of twentieth-century music, including the remarkable creative contributions that Boulez himself has made.

*We had no idea the matter had so many ramifications. Please return to your observations on the aspects of Koussevitzky's contributions that—according to some—may be exaggerated.*

In the light of my digression, it is brought home to me more than ever that even after we've deflated some of the Koussevitzky myth, what he *did* accomplish is much more than anyone is accomplishing now. I have said that Mitropoulos leaned towards

the atonal and serial composers, and such a leaning is considered all the nobler since their music had less audience appeal. I also made it clear that he tried to be catholic—namely, by showing genuine interest in music like mine, when it was quite different from what I'm writing nowadays. Koussevitzky remained during most of his lifetime quite unreceptive to the towering innovations of the Viennese triumvirate: Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg. The consequence of this was not only a conspicuous absence of their music on his programs, but a persistent disdain of those American composers who could trace their musical ancestry—even if only in the remotest way—back to the Viennese school.

seemed especially unrewarding because he probably found most of the music unsympathetic to his temperament".

In an ideal situation there would be no reason why any conductor should be made to feel it incumbent upon himself to perform music that is unsympathetic to his temperament. Ideally, taste should not have to be arbitrated by conductors and performers in power, but the emphasis should be upon disseminating music of different tendencies for which sympathetic interpreters would be found in each given instance. Koussevitzky's blind spot, when all is said and done, need not be held against him. What seems ironic, however, is that he should be vaunted to the skies as the guardian

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*“Ideally, taste should not have to be arbitrated by conductors and performers in power...”*

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It was during my years as a graduate student at Harvard in the 1930s that I was fortunate to be in the area for the two rare instances when Koussevitzky ventured to make a foray into the heart of the atonalist camp. Characteristically enough, it took the form of performances of music by Alban Berg (the Violin Concerto and the suite from *Lulu*), for of all three members of the school, he is easily the most accessible, by virtue of the strong dramatic nature of his music and a less rarefied harmonic palette. In his biography of Koussevitzky, Moses Smith suggests that the explanation of Koussevitzky's attitude toward the music of the Viennese school was that "it was more difficult than any with which Koussevitzky had previously had to do", but he quickly adds that the necessary pains he would have to take "must have

angel of the contemporary composer when the favors he bestowed were so partisan. During the years when he was at his height, I had a certain affinity with the tendencies he espoused. But I can quite understand why those who never had such affinity find it very curious indeed when he is placed on such a pedestal for his contribution to the advancement of new music.

As a curious corollary to all of this, there is a resentment that some of us harbor because of a certain conviction that would be hard to substantiate—namely, that he not only influenced the course of American music by virtue of the composers he encouraged, but that he also influenced their music by setting before them as a

*Continued on page 22*

## The Moses Smith Problem

Anyone familiar with the life of Serge Alexandrovich Koussevitzky (1874-1951) knows two big things. First, although now largely forgotten, he was probably the most broadly influential classical musician of this century. Second, 45 years after his death, he still needs a serious biography. Two attempts were made during his life—one a paean to his genius by his friend Arthur Lourie<sup>1</sup> in 1931, and the other a vicious attack on his competence and integrity by the critic Moses Smith<sup>2</sup> in 1947.

The story of the Smith opus and the lawsuit it sparked has been well documented elsewhere<sup>3,4,5,6,7</sup>. By any reasonable standard, the book is a hatchet job, an early example of what is now almost its own literary genre, the attack biography. When the court ruled that its “...many depreciatory statements [are] invariably followed by ameliorative observations of unreserved praise,” it displayed not only a penchant for circumlocution but also an appalling insensitivity to rhetoric. Like Marc Antony’s description of Brutus as an honorable man, Moses Smith’s compliments are disingenuous.

*Koussevitzky* employs innuendo, indirection, and nitpicking<sup>8</sup> to paint a portrait that is both personally and professionally venomous. It is an important book only because it has become, by default, the standard source on Koussevitzky. To a writer seeking to rectify this situation, Moses Smith has proven to be an enigma and an increasingly seductive by-way. Who was he? Why did he feel the way he did about his subject? And—irresistibly—who were his sources?

*Smith*. Moses seems to have been born in Chelsea, Massachusetts on March 4, 1901, one of the five children of Fred and Rebecca Haifetz of that city. There is no record of his birth<sup>9</sup> and no record of a name change, but he was Moses Smith by the time he entered Harvard with the class of 1921. The lack of documentation, even in Boston, was not uncommon; it is consistent with other meager evidence hinting at a poor but hard working Jewish family seeking to better its lot. In any event, Smith graduated with an A.B. in music and subsequently spent two years at Harvard Law. He married Ethel Singer Robinson, and in time they had two daughters.

Smith became a wholesale shoe salesman at some point after college and began writing music reviews for the *Boston American*. In 1934, he succeeded the well known critic HTP (Henry T. Parker) at the prestigious *Boston Evening Transcript* where his reviews of Koussevitzky’s concerts were generally favorable. He left Boston in 1939 to take a position in New York as Music Director of Columbia Phonograph Company, a position he held until 1942. In that capacity, he tried to recruit Koussevitzky and the BSO away from Victor. This probably would have been a good move, but the negotiations were unsuccessful. In 1942, his friend Richard Henry Dana III

was drafted, and Smith agreed to manage his company, Music Press.<sup>10</sup> By then, and before he began work on *Koussevitzky*, Smith had become afflicted with multiple sclerosis. Before the end of the war, he retired, confining himself thereafter to finishing the book and writing a handful of freelance articles for major magazines. He died in Roxbury, Massachusetts on July 27, 1964, the day after what would have been Koussevitzky’s 90th birthday.

Thirty-one years after his death, I placed an Author’s Query about Smith in *The New York Times Book Review* and received replies from six people who had known and worked with him after 1939. Interestingly, they did not appear to know each other. All spoke highly of him, using such adjectives as kindly, scholarly, courageous, compassionate, erudite, and delightful. Together, their letters make a persuasive case, even if his book is deficient in all these traits. The inescapable conclusion is that we are dealing with a work that is out-of-character, a “pen breathing revenge” wielded by a sorely aggrieved human being. Koussevitzky no doubt touched a raw nerve, something I believe he was well skilled at.

*The Sources*. In his acknowledgments, Smith tells us that most of his sources, “...must remain anonymous for obvious reasons.” Such “Deep Throat” disclaimers must always and everywhere put readers on guard. In the present instance, however, it is not difficult to draw up a list of suspects. We are looking for at least two people<sup>11</sup> who had apparent access to information and a reason for disparaging Koussevitzky. But anonymous vengeance is never fully satisfying. Thus, the anonymity of Smith’s sources suggests they still had something to fear in 1947. The prime suspects are Nicolas Slonimsky, and Fabien Sevitzy and his first wife, the Polish soprano Maria Dormont Koussevitzky.

In the case of Slonimsky, a man who breathed meaning into the word *polymath*, we have what amounts to a confession: “To my horror, Smith intended to use some rather juicy tales about Koussevitzky that could have come only from me. Yes, the facts were there, but I told Smith he would betray our friendship by reporting them. To this Smith declared in all solemnity: ‘Nicolas, you cannot censor history.’”<sup>12</sup> The problem is that Nicolas never tells us what juicy tales could have come only from him; he merely regales us with the one story he was most worried about—the one he persuaded Smith to withdraw! He fails to tell us why he was so worried about that particular morsel vis-à-vis any of the others, nor is it clear why he still feared Koussevitzky.

The complex relationship between Koussevitzky and Slonimsky is beyond the scope of this essay but it lasted little more than five years from late 1921 to the spring of 1927. Thus, anything said by Slonimsky to Smith about Koussevitzky’s life before or after that would have been

hearsay filtered through two decades of memory and animus.<sup>13</sup> This might not have deterred Slonimsky who loved gossip and was a world class *raconteur*, but I suspect that Smith would have drawn the line at repeating it whole cloth. For the more intimate “niggles,” he probably relied on someone closer to the family—one or both of the Sevitzkys.

Fabien Sevitzy, Koussevitzky’s nephew, was by no means the lout described by Slonimsky<sup>14</sup>, and his wife was no shrew. Both were accomplished musicians, well thought of in their communities, and both had distinguished students. Both, too, were closer to their modest roots than Koussevitzky, who wholeheartedly adopted the manners and mores of his aristocratic in-laws. Over the years, the relationship between the two families deteriorated until, in the end, Sevitzy unsuccessfully challenged his uncle’s will.

The Sevitzkys arrived in the United States the year before Serge and Natalie, and the nephew seems to have come with a burden of family bitterness far heavier than warranted by the usual cause ascribed to it. The uncle’s insistence (in 1908 or thereabout) that Fabien shorten his last name may have been inconvenient or even unkind, but it was hardly unreasonable. Fabien’s father (Adolf, I think) seems to have resented Serge’s departure and later success and probably was the original source of the bad mouthing that was repeated to Smith. But the stories were the kind of family mythology that all biographers are familiar with: real grievances multiplied over time by misfortune and repetition. Oral histories compiled by Soviet musicologists tend to support Koussevitzky’s version of disputed matters.

One can easily forgive Slonimsky who no doubt took a lot of guff from the haughty maestro, and one can readily understand the family foibles that might lie at the heart of Sevitzy’s stories. It is more difficult to understand Moses Smith, gentleman and scholar. He must have known his sources were tainted, and it must have offended his sense of history to pass on distortions and fabrications. Yet he did some mudslinging of his own. For example, he is critical of Koussevitzky for “forgetting” his Jewish origins until the rise of Hitler. But there is no evidence that Smith was any more mindful of his own Jewishness—before or after 1933. (In contrast, one of Smith’s brothers served as President of Combined Jewish Philanthropies, a forerunner of the United Jewish Appeal.)

We are left trying to imagine the psychology that shaped Smith’s hostility, a response so strong that it overcame the habits and values of a lifetime. We are left, too, with Koussevitzky, who could be charming, but did not always choose to be. He seems to have been driven by his own devils, not the least of which was a morbid fear of being judged incompetent. When Koussevitzky’s insecurities came together with Smith’s, they produced a book that serves the memory of both poorly.

## References

- <sup>1</sup>Lourie, Arthur, *Serge Koussevitzky and His Epoch* (translated from the Russian by S.W. Pring), New York, Knopf, 1931.
- <sup>2</sup>Smith, Moses, *Koussevitzky*, New York, Allen, Towne & Heath, 1947.
- <sup>3</sup>Koussevitzky v. Allen, Towne & Heath, Inc., et al., 68 N.Y.S.2d 779 (March 4, 1947).
- <sup>4</sup>Goldovsky, Boris, *My Road to Opera*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1979, pp 362-365.
- <sup>5</sup>DeKay, Kenneth, “Koussevitzky and His Biographers.” *Journal of the Koussevitzky Recordings Society*, II:1, 1988, pp 3-6.
- <sup>6</sup>Godell, Tom, “Koussevitzky in Writing.” *Journal of the Koussevitzky Recordings Society*, II:1, 1988, pp 13-14.
- <sup>7</sup>Slonimsky, Nicolas, *Perfect Pitch: A Life Story*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1988, pp 105-106.
- <sup>8</sup>Smith himself (op.cit., p. 339) characterizes at least some of his “reservations” as “perhaps niggling.”
- <sup>9</sup>Letter from the Office of the City Clerk, City of Chelsea, May, 1995.
- <sup>10</sup>Personal communication from Marilyn Sacks, April 11, 1995.
- <sup>11</sup>There does not seem to have been any single person whose relationship with Koussevitzky covers both the early (pre-Bolshoi) life and the Boston years. The only relative other than Fabien available to Smith at the crucial time would have been Olga.
- <sup>12</sup>Slonimsky, op.cit., p. 106.
- <sup>13</sup>Slonimsky is not always reliable when it comes to basic facts about Koussevitzky. In *Perfect Pitch* (p. 107), for example, he has him buried at Serenak and winning \$1 in “moral damages” in his suit against Smith. In the Godell interview cited below, he refers to Olga as Koussevitzky’s second wife. She was his third. Some of this is mere carelessness but the “moral damages” is pure imagination. There is no such thing, and Koussevitzky did not win even a Pyrrhic victory. He was and remains buried in the graveyard of The Church on the Hill (Congregational) in Lenox, Massachusetts.
- <sup>14</sup>Godell, Tom, “Interview with Nicolas Slonimsky.” *Journal of the Koussevitzky Recordings Society*, I:1, 1987, pp. 6-13. Slonimsky characterizes Sevitzy as the stupidest conductor (or perhaps the stupidest person) and “the greatest god damn fool I ever met.” You can get away with that sort of thing when you’re as old and as smart as Slonimsky was, but it does create problems for succeeding laborers in the same vineyard. It is amusing and one can wish Slonimsky had expanded on the theme, but it is simply not credible. Sevitzy built several fine orchestras including that of Indianapolis.



## Heroes

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*In 1993, National Public Radio's Performance Today series asked several famous Americans to write and record essays about their musical heroes. Among those who responded to this request was U.S. Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun. Society member Vincent Schwerin heard the broadcast, and was delighted to learn that Blackmun counted Serge Koussevitzky among his heroes. Performance Today Producer Benjamin K. Roe provided us with a copy of Justice Blackmun's essay, and generously gave us permission to reproduce the text here. I hope you find it as inspirational as I did—ED.*

Music, of course, is a language common to all the world. It overruns geographical boundaries and reaches beyond local accents. It inspires both the poor and the wealthy. Emotions and dreams are common for all of us, of whatever stature or prominence each may or may not attain.

When I was asked by *Performance Today* to name a musical hero, I initially was hesitant. When one thinks of the great composers and of the great performers of this and prior decades, one is confronted with the fact that there are so many from which to choose. So many have contributed, each in his own way, to what we accept as significant music and as outstanding musical performance, and so many have helped to create and build, for the enjoyment of this and future generations, the musical heritage that the world possesses.

So when it was suggested that I select a musical hero, I finally turned away from trying to decide between Beethoven and Mozart and Handel and Chopin and Liszt

and César Franck and all the other great composers who have reached me, and between Caruso and Lily Pons and John McCormack and the renowned singers one has heard or heard about, and the great orchestras and conductors of the past and of today, and Heifetz and Rachmaninov and Horowitz and Paganini and other performing artists, and decided, instead, to look at my own experience. This, of course, is a personal and intimate approach, which perhaps is not really indicated or in very proper taste.

chambers a signed photograph of Carreño. I always assumed that, being an artist of so long ago, the photograph would mean little or nothing to anyone else. A concert pianist/physician friend from Berlin, however, walked into my chambers one day, saw the photograph, and exclaimed, "Carreño!" I was astonished. But she knew.

Mother, I know was disappointed that I did not have anything in the way of musical talent. I loved music, however, and I love it today.

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### *Koussevitzky listened and said, "Magnifique, but pleez, vonce again"*

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My mother, by any measure, was musically inclined. She had as her next older sibling a brother named Harry. I never knew him, for he died a year before I was born. He apparently was a person of distinct musical accomplishment. He composed and studied piano in Berlin under a renowned Brazilian, a woman named [Teresa] Carreño [1853-1917]. They were about to leave Berlin in June 1907 for a joint concert tour of Australia when my uncle Harry contracted pneumonia and died within three days. My mother never fully recovered from or accepted that death of so promising a musician. It was natural then, I suppose, that I be named after him when I came along in 1908 as the firstborn in our family. I have hanging in my

As a sophomore in Harvard College in 1926, my roommate, who had a fine bass voice, insisted that I try out for the Harvard Glee Club. I did, and to my surprise, passed the quartet trial, though with the lowest possible grade for admission. It was a happy result, for I stayed with the Club for six years, the rest of my way through Harvard College and Law School. The director at that time was Archibald T. Davison, who, in my estimation, was a great choral director. He demanded perfection, faithful attendance at the thrice-weekly rehearsals, and led us into musical experiences I shall always cherish. The Harvard Glee Club was not the normal College Glee

*Continued on back cover*



by Kenneth DeKay

## Koussevitzky—As the Rodzinskis Saw Him

Artur Rodzinski was a superb conductor, if not a great one, and he was exceptionally fine as a builder of orchestras, but above and beyond his professional attainments he was a unique “character”, both inwardly and outwardly. And he has been fortunate in that he has been remembered in print in an excellent volume written by his widow, Halina Rodzinski—*Our Two Lives* published by Charles Scribner’s Sons in 1976. If you haven’t read it, you are missing something!

Rodzinski’s most significant years in the United States covered his tenure with the Cleveland Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic (then known by its far more distinguished appellation: the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York) and his might-have-been years with the Chicago Symphony. During this period of his prominence Rodzinski came into frequent contact with Serge Koussevitzky, not for musical reasons but because he, like Koussevitzky, loved the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts.

Koussevitzky treated Rodzinski with much the same attitude he showed toward other conductors of prominence in matters musical and professional, but this did not prevent the two men from establishing a degree of personal rapport which was unusual for Koussevitzky.

In May 1937, the Rodzinskis sailed for Europe. Fellow passengers on the S.S. Paris were Nadia Boulanger, Igor Stravinsky, and the Koussevitzkys, along with Olga Naumova, naturally.

Koussevitzky was Stravinsky’s opposite: he had a fine, if somewhat childish sense of humor, and was friendly almost to garrulity. He dressed in the latest sports clothing (knickerbockers, shooting coat, and golf cap) for his morning strolls around the deck, even though he strode with the solemnity of a Russian Grand Duke in an Easter Procession. Natalie and Olga attended to him as if he were the Tsar himself. I thought it all very funny, but only because I recognized myself doubled in them, for I waited on Artur just as obsequiously. “Koussie” passed the time talking to Artur about the Berkshire Festival, which he had just begun in Lenox, Massachusetts.

By 1939, Rodzinski had become a Berkshire “summer farmer” during his summer vacations.

The Berkshire Festival lasted only two weeks in those days. The Koussevitzkys—Serge, Natalie, and her niece Olga—just then had no home of their own in the region, and when Artur went on the road that summer to earn money to feed the goats, Koussie and his two ladies came to stay with us. I remember that visit well, since it brought me closer to those people I

so enjoyed. I particularly relished conversations with Koussie. He had a way of making a lady feel naughty but good all the same. One day, on his way to a rehearsal after breakfast, he said, “I have the same feeling of anticipation as if I were going to a rendezvous with a gorgeous woman.”

He accompanied me to Tanglewood that summer to hear a young soprano who was said to have an exceptional voice. A petite black girl modestly walked on stage and stood in the bow of the piano. I do not recall what it was she sang, but I cannot forget the impression she made on everyone. Many members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra were present, along with the Koussevitzky clan and a few friends. Everyone I knew was in tears, as was I. Koussie exclaimed, “That is a voice from heaven, the most beautiful I have ever heard!” He was also captivated by her impeccable musicianship, and set about helping her establish a career. Later, when Dorothy Maynor became a treasured friend, that first encounter still remained strongly imprinted in my memory.

While staying at our house, the Koussevitzkys went hunting for a place of their own. Madame Koussevitzky was able to find, at a reasonable price, a large mansion on a hill just above Tanglewood with a superb view of the lake. They moved in later that summer, and we gained a new permanent neighbor.

Those who claim credit in one way or another for Bela Bartók’s Concerto for Orchestra are legion—apparently everybody was willing to spend Koussevitzky’s money—but it should be remembered that no mater who claims credit in any degree, it was *still* Koussevitzky’s money that financed the commission. Mrs. Rodzinski’s version goes like this:

Bela Bartók, who had come to America’s shores a sick man, destitute, and with no public, appeared as soloist with Artur in a performance of his splendid Second Piano Concerto. Even now a difficult work for audiences, its rendition by Artur and Bartók brought critical respect. Cleveland’s critics knew that they had been in the presence of a great musical personality, but, for they all grasped of it, his music had to wait for another generation to be appreciated. Theirs was an opinion the audience seconded, and, alas, the evaluation was only too true. In death Bartók found recognition and that was long after leukemia, penury, and the thought of leaving so much great music unwritten had caused him so much suffering. Many musicians had quietly contributed to the man’s support. Koussevitzky, at Artur’s suggestion, commissioned the Concerto for Orchestra, little realizing that a modern masterpiece, deceptively witty and charm-

ing and bursting with vitality, could come from a dying man's pen.

Still the summer farmer, Rodzinski had taken up with Moral Rearmament (though his wife was not so crude, with Rodzinski it was, indeed, "one damned thing after another!"). The summer of 1941 was another madhouse in the Berkshires as Mrs Rodzinski notes:

Despite all this change taking place, the hosts of refugees, and MRA people who took over the farm, and a number of guest engagements, Artur still found

### Koussevitzky's early efforts on behalf of Bela Bartók

In *Bartók Remembered* (edited by Malcolm Gillies and published by W.W. Norton in 1990-91) an excerpt is quoted from *Composers, Conductors, and Critics* by Claire R. Reis of the League of Composers (Oxford University Press, 1955). A portion of the excerpt from the Reis book refers to Serge Koussevitzky's early efforts on behalf of Bela Bartók and his music. It is quoted below. Incidentally, the Reis volume is highly recommended for those interested in the American musical scene as it was in the 1920s and 1930s.

"When Dr Koussevitzky suggested in 1925 that Bela Bartók might write a new work for the League which he would like to conduct in a world premiere in Town Hall, Bartók had very quickly sent us a new work for chamber orchestra and vocal quartet called *Village Scenes*. This was in the early days of the League, before we had found the means of raising money to pay for commissioned works. Bartók undertook this labor out of his respect for Dr. Koussevitzky, and as a generous gesture toward his unknown colleagues in the League of Composers across the ocean.

"At the time (February 1927) very little of his music had been played in this country. Dr. Koussevitzky even repeated *Village Scenes* at the close of the program; it was a delight to see that almost the entire audience was sufficiently interested to stay, vigorously applauding the repetition. It gave me a feeling of confidence that evening—there was a public eager to know the work of a great man."

Kenneth DeKay

time to study, plan programs, and attend Koussevitzky's concerts or rehearsals at Tanglewood. Actually, his was a mandated attendance, for if Artur was not present, Koussie wanted to know, "Whyyyy?"

It was thanks to Koussevitzky and Tanglewood that another of the many rewards of that summer came to us. Dorothy Maynor, the young singer whose audition had so moved me the year before, was to appear there with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Knowing the trouble she would have with the area's hotels, we invited her to stay with us. Dorothy took to our madhouse life, and what had started as admiration on my part grew into a life-long friendship. During her career there were many slights and open insults Dorothy had to bear silently. Her suffering and her talent fused together into the superlative artistry still richly alive on a handful of recordings. It is evident, too, in the Harlem School of the Arts, which Dorothy's determination saw grow in New York as a means for black youths and adults to express themselves in the languages of music, theater, and painting.

The next summer it was something else. And since this illustrates the professional relationship between Koussevitzky and Rodzinski, as between Koussevitzky and numerous other conductors (Reiner and Goossens, for example), we quote from Mrs Rodzinski at somewhat greater length:

At the Berkshire Festival that summer, Koussevitzky was to give Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony its American concert premiere. He was peeved when he discovered that the Russians had assigned the actual "first" to Toscanini and the NBC, and that Maestro would broadcast the new, much-anticipated war symphony two weeks before his own concert. He was really put out, and yet not: this very long composition for a huge orchestra arrived in manuscript on microfilm, and it took time to have it photographically enlarged. Koussie always had trouble learning new works in score, much less in such condition. (He would have a pianist play each work he studied until he was its master.) Thus Maestro's radio premiere was a mixed blessing. Koussie would be able to hear the composition and follow it with the score. But a dreadful electric storm came up that Sunday afternoon, and the transmission from New York was interrupted by static and thunder claps.

The telephone rang: "Artur, can you hear anything?" Serge asked.

"Nothing," my husband replied. Artur suspected that the old man was happy with the storm. At least no one local had followed the performance, and his would indeed seem the premiere. On the other hand, however, Koussie gained no knowledge of the score.

In a few days a flat package came in the mail. Artur took it from the postman and told me to call Serge.

“Ask him to come over immediately,” he said, “and bring his score for the Shostakovich.”

In minutes, a black, chauffeur-driven limousine pulled up to our front door. “Artur, what happened?” Koussie asked breathlessly.

“Nothing special. I just received a recording of the symphony—Toscanini’s performance.”

The two men closeted themselves in Artur’s room to listen. They emerged, tremendously impressed by the work. “But how did you get it?” Serge asked. “Never mind—but the recording is yours. Take it home.”

Koussevitzky was stunned. “Nobody did such a thing for me, ever,” he said. “Aaartooooor, you are my best *freund*,” he added, near tears. He was able to learn the score in time for his performance.

My husband often did such things, but his reward was the act itself, for few of his colleagues reciprocated. For a fact, Koussie, in spite of his promises of engagements at Tanglewood and other proffered courtesies, never repaid Arthur’s many kindnesses. He once did get around directly to inviting Artur to lead a summer concert, but the program he offered was not to my husband’s liking, and he knew it would not have enough effect on the audiences. Serge did not much care for other conductors as conductors. When he would have bouts of insomnia, the first Madame Koussevitzky told me, she gave her husband valerian drops, rubbed his brow and wrists, and told him what a terrible musician Toscanini was. Then he would quietly fall asleep. He would often say, “If I am tired and don’t feel like making programs, I use Rodzinski’s—they don’t fail.”

Subsequently, Rodzinski left Cleveland (which then engaged Erich Leinsdorf who was then euchred out of *his* job after being drafted) for New York where he re-built a thoroughly dispirited Philharmonic only to become involved in a bitter dispute with Arthur Judson who ran, or thought he ran, almost everything musical in New York and everywhere else. So, it was off to Chicago where Rodzinski and the Board of that orchestra could not see eye-to-eye. Rodzinski was hardly a charmer, but it must be remembered that in New York he had the public support of Virgil Thomson of the *New York Herald-Tribune*, while in Chicago he had the public support of Serge Koussevitzky.

We also visited with Koussevitzky and his second wife while in Phoenix. Natalie had died, and Serge had married her niece, Olga. They kept a small house there for Koussie’s winter vacations. Indeed, Koussie first came to Arizona at Artur’s suggestion, fell in love with the climate and landscape, so totally unlike anything a Russian would ever have known, and decided to make Phoenix the antipodes to Tanglewood.

The conductors talked over the New York and Chicago blow-ups, and Serge was sympathetically indignant, as any conductor might well have been. On his way home, Koussie was interviewed at the Chicago airport by Claudia Cassidy. A friend mailed us a copy of Serge’s supportive statement:

If you ask me what is to be done I can see one outcome only. Let those who brought about this issue have the courage to apologize to Rodzinski and ask him to continue his wonderful work and musical directorship of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

In all large institutions, the position and functions of every member or group are distinctly understood and outlined. Thus in the realm of musical art, the responsibilities of a symphony orchestra are shared by the board of trustees, the conductor, and the manager.

Yet what happened in Chicago? One has the impression that the trustees of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra *exercise a dictatorial power and act as though the orchestra belonged to them rather than to their city and community at large*. Their action with regard to Artur Rodzinski is shocking and unethical. It is of course within the power and rights of the trustees not to renew a contract with the conductor. But to announce in the newspapers in mid-season that the conductor had been dismissed—that is, that his engagement would “terminate” at the end of the current season—is brutal and a great injustice because it is detrimental to the conductor and may affect his future life and career.

Rodzinski is a conductor of the first rank and his success in Chicago is a proof that the public as well as the orchestra not only accepted him but also admired him.

I quote the statement in its entirety, not only because of the generosity of spirit shown—something rare among the conducting kind—but also because it was Serge who, in saying these things, explained the Chicago problem more clearly than even we had earlier understood it. The words emphasized above went to the heart of the matter.

It is well worth noting that while Serge Koussevitzky spoke out publicly in support of Rodzinski, not one of the motley crew which had so prominently and publicly condemned the Board of the Chicago Symphony for offering the post of Music Director to Wilhelm Furtwängler came to the support of Rodzinski in his dispute with the very same board!

Of course, Artur Rodzinski is seen in this book through the very loving eyes of his widow. Would we want it any differently? Her book is well worth seeking out even now. ♦



## The Stokowski Sound

There is scattered news of Stokowski releases. Neither RCA nor Pearl have any scheduled plans for releases in 1996, but we can hope. Nonetheless, there are several new discs I want to review for you.

Let's start with EMI's latest FDS series, *The Orchestra* and *Landmarks of a Distinguished Career* on CDM 65614. The cover of the disc has the two titles in the reverse order from the above, but the contents are in the order listed in this article. You may know that Stokowski recorded *The Orchestra* as a kind of introduction to various aspects of classical music. Each selection was supposed to represent some aspect of the orchestra (ex. percussion, strings, etc.) in an attempt to educate people. There are some rare items on this disc: Harold Farberman's *Evolution (Part I)*, Vincent Persichetti's *March from Divertimento for Band*, and the only commercial recording of Stokowski performing the Ravel transcription of *Pictures at an Exhibition* ('Hut on Fowl's Legs' and 'The Great Gate of Kiev'). There are other interesting items in this disc, but I do wish that EMI had included all of the second LP (*Landmarks*) instead of only five pieces and omitted some of those from *The Orchestra*.

Unfortunately, my expectations and hopes have been further dashed by the transfers. The sound here is thin and lacking bass. What is really tragic about this is that it didn't have to happen. I first had fears when I listened to Barber's *Adagio* on this new disc. I went to our collection and got out the earlier CD release with this in it (47521 with Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* and Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night*). That earlier release is much better. The sound has a fullness, richness, and firm bass line, none of which are on this disc. What happened? I wrote to Ed Johnson about this release. He informs me that the problem is that EMI went back to the original tapes, not the tapes

which were adjusted and approved by Stokowski. As Oliver Daniel pointed out in his tome *Stokowski: A Counterpoint of View* Stokowski was always "meticulous in his attention to detail" (p. 680) and EMI should have gone to the tapes Stokowski approved. What we have here is *not the Stokowski Sound*!! I hope we can manage to see that this problem is taken care of when EMI issues its next batch of Stokowski recordings (I was told it would be in the Spring of '96).

This is not the first time this problem has crept up. I mentioned a similar debacle in another article reviewing all of EMI's latest releases when EMI issued its FDS recording of Holst's *Planets*, recorded with the L.A. Philharmonic. That same problem plagued the sound on that disc, but an earlier release (on their Seraphim series) is much better (look for that one). While I know that the latest technology allows producers to literally change the sound from the original release, and while Robert La Porta has good intentions, the discs should reflect what Stokowski wanted.

The next CD is of some interest, but there are certain reservations. It is a two disc set titled *Great Conductors in Rehearsal*. Disc one has Serge Koussevitzky rehearsing Liszt's *Faust* Symphony with his Boston Symphony Orchestra. Then there is Victor de Sabata rehearsing four pieces with, I assume, the same orchestra, but the notes are not completely clear on this matter. Disc two has Leopold Stokowski rehearsing the San Francisco Symphony in excerpts from *Boris Godunov*, in Rimsky-Korsakov's version. N. Rossi-Lemeni is the soloist. This is followed by the *Russian Easter Overture* (sans bass) and then movements 2-4 of Brahms' Second Symphony. There is no mention of dates, but a quick check in Oliver Daniel's book confirms that these rehearsals took place when Stokowski was guest

conducting in 1952. The disc is completed with two rehearsals with George Szell conducting the same orchestra. The disc is available only directly from Michael Thomas c/o Archive Documents 5A Norfolk Place London, W.2 1QN England. (Phone number is 0171 723-4935). I did not sample the non-Stokowski items and so cannot verify if the same problems affect the other rehearsals.

First, the good news. Stokowski can be easily heard and there are some fascinating moments. I have always found it interesting to compare Stokowski's rehearsals with those of others. I mentioned in another article that listening to Bruno Walter was irritatingly insightful. Walter would suddenly halt the orchestra when there seemed to be no reason. He would then sing what he wanted and have the orchestra replay the music. He would do this until they'd get what he wanted. *Then* you could hear why he stopped them.

Stokowski does not stop the orchestra as often. When he does it is to give instructions ("fade, fade...don't cut.") and then move on. He also shouts instructions *as* they play ("No! No! Piano, piano!") and effects the change. At one point in the Brahms rehearsal he stops the orchestra and says, "I want to go down there, cellos, and listen to see if it sounds the way it really should" (you hear his walking) "because you're a little back there." Then he has the orchestra repeat the passage. Stokowski pinpoints parts he apparently feels are most important and has the orchestra jump from point to point. Often Stokowski just has the orchestra play and seemingly effects changes with his looks and movements.

The main drawback, and it will be more or less major based on your own feelings about the matter, is that the CD was made directly from

acetate discs and there is a *lot* of wow and flutter. It makes it difficult to really hear him achieve the Stokowski Sound. Despite my qualifiers, you may want to add this interesting disc to your collection.

Music & Arts (PO Box 771, Berkeley, CA 94701, 510-525-4583) has just released Stokowski's 1963 LSO Mahler 2nd. Rae Woodland is the soprano, Janet Baker, mezzo soprano. (M&A 885). I praised highly an Intaglio (where have they gone? the same place as Arkadia?) compact disc of this performance. This release is offered in even better sound!! Most likely some reverb has been added to the tape, but there is almost a stereophonic quality to the sound. The bass is more firm and the whole thing more agreeable.

In fact, here is a summary of the critical review I gave this disc. I sat down and listened to Music & Arts disc. As usual for me, I was using the Beyerdynamic headphones. After getting a sense of the sound through listening to most of the first movement and then spot checking other movements, I turned to the Intaglio disc. A few moments of listening to the first movement convinced me that there was a significant difference in the sound. I put the Music and Arts disc back on and began listening. Yep! This sounded better. I took a pen to make notes. The next thing I knew, the symphony was over. I looked down at my notes. All I had written was: "Stokowski's is not a *Jewish* Mahler—listen to the oboe—but it is Mahler. Approximately 6:30 into the Third Movement the sound breaks up for a moment." That's it. It was one of those evenings where, after having had that kind of listening experience, I didn't want to hear anything else that night.

I think that one of the things to remember when you happen to specialize in something like a particular conductor's work, is that no matter how much you personally happen to like that artist's interpretations, the conductor is not infallible. I have heard three different Stokowski Mahler *Resurrection* Symphonies. I have heard different

transfers of this particular one. The bottom line has to be that the conductor has tapped some essence of the music. If his interpretation is just a subjective one, then it is not a valid one. Stokowski seems to tap the essence of the Mahler 2nd better than in the other two recordings with which I am familiar. In case the point has been lost: **GET THIS DISC.**

I was reading an article in the January *Gramophone* about Debussy's *Images*, and it piqued my interest in the piece. So, I pulled out the recordings in my personal collection, which includes Pierre Monteux with the LSO on Philips, and Bernard Haitink, in a two-fer set on Philips which contains some of the finest recordings of Debussy you'll ever hear, and *Ibéria* a la Stokowski. I'd recommend the article in *Gramophone*, especially the discussion of the different movements.

Anyway, author Jonathan Swain recommends three recordings of the entire piece and also discusses recordings of just *Ibéria*. I listened to all of those mentioned and, frankly, the Stokowski is the most sensual of them all. In fact, both Monteux and Haitink pale by comparison. The thing that kept coming to my mind, however, was that this particular recording is one of the finest examples of *Stokowski* of them all. Both the sound and interpretation are classic Stokowski. The other items on this disc (EMI 65422) are Debussy's *Nocturnes*, Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole*, and Ibert's *Escales*. If you do not already own this disc, get it!! It represents the best of Stokowski in every sense of the phrase.

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**LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI:** The Philadelphia Years. Dvorák: Symphony #9, *From the New World* ('35). Weber: *Invitation to the Dance* ('28). Saint-Saëns: *Danse Macabre* ('28). Liszt: *Hungarian Rhapsody #2* ('28). Moussorgsky: *Khovantschina: Intermezzo* from Act IV ('28). Philadelphia Orchestra. Mono. Gramofono: 2000 # AB 78552

The *Stokowski Sound* was famous and infamous, but there *was* a Stokowski Sound. You never hear that of the other "golden era" conductors. The less said about a Toscanini Sound, dead and dry, the better. While other conductors had a definite personality in their music making, it was not as distinctive in sheer 'sound' terms as Stokowski.

I had the pleasure, a few years ago, to talk with Maestro Walter Hendl, who had worked with Stokowski when they were both at the New York Philharmonic. I asked Walter how Stokowski got "the sound". He told me that it began in the double basses (of which Stokowski always had a plethora). Then Stokowski would bring it down through the cello through to the other strings. This created an organ-like sonority, a rich tapestry on which to paint his masterpiece.

Stokowski also had a tight control over the recording process. I will go into that in more depth below in my review of the Stokowski/Tchaikovsky CDs on Philips. He had almost complete control over what was and was not released. The point is that, especially when wanting to hear a Stokowski recording, the CD you select should incorporate the "Stokowski Sound". If the company releases just anything, not taking care to make sure that such a sound is inherent in the master, then you are not really listening to a Stokowski recording. These thoughts, and more, came to mind while I listened to the Gramofono disc.

I heard about these discs from Mark Obert-Thorn, who had seen them in the local record shop. I hesitated buying a review copy. My experience with Nuova Era/Phonographe, also a "made in Italy" series, had been off-putting. Anyway, I came across a this copy in Toledo and the Stokowski-scholar in me made it necessary I review it.

I took the disc home and began by listening to the 1935 Dvorák 9th. It is essentially the only game in town if you want that particular performance. (There was one put out by



the Japanese Stokowski Society some years ago, but it has never been readily available.) The sound was good, better than the JLS, but something seemed wrong. Then I got out the two-disc set on Phonographe (#PH 5025/26) for some A/B comparison. No doubt, the Gramofono had it all over the Phonographe. The former has more detail, the latter sounds like the recording was made with the orchestra in another room.

Then I got out the Biddulph CD that had some of the same music. The first is *Leopold Stokowski Conducts French Music* on WHL 012. It contains the *Danse Macabre*, as above, but also a *Carmen* Suite,

Philips "The Early Years" *Leopold Stokowski*. Tchaikovsky: *Capriccio Italien*; *Eugene Onegin*: Polonaise & Waltz; *Nutcracker* Suite (London Philharmonic); *Francesca da Rimini*; Serenade for Strings (London Symphony). Stereo. Philips 442-735 (2CDs)

This is a marvelous release!! I got the set and simply enjoyed the experience, forgot to write a single word. This is my personal favorite *Nutcracker* (trust me, I got this in January and to like the *Nutcracker* so soon afterwards is some kind of record). The transfers on both discs provide a warm, full sound, better than a Tchaikovsky "Best Of" release a few years ago that contained the

master, play it inside a church and re-record it with this added reverberation!!

Stokowski was probably the first conductor to take an active interest in the recording process. He collaborated with Bell Labs in the first experiments with stereophonic sound (when will those see the digital format??). Then Stokowski and Disney created *Fantasia*, originally released in NINE channel sound. Later there were the London/Decca Phase Four experiments. The fact is that Stokowski was continually involved in the recording process and went so far as to say that 'recordings will one day sound better than live performances.'

The Stokowski Sound was as much a part of the Maestro's involvement in the recording process as was his work with the orchestra. He kept tight control over what was issued, rejecting takes that were not to his satisfaction. The above example of manipulation of the recording is but one.

Ed sent me photo-copies of Stokowski's typed, and a couple hand written, instructions regarding altering a master tape. The notes reflect Stokowski's attention to every detail in the recording. They are taken from his comments related to the RCA release of the London Symphony Bach/Stokowski recordings:

#### *Chaconne*

Figure 4: Flute - first note louder  
Before 6: G natural (last note)  
louder on bassoon

2 after 7: Top E on flute - not clear

Figure 9: Flute - first note louder

Figure 12: Oboe - first note louder

" 19: Oboe - first note louder

3 after 24: Oboe - B flat louder

Figure 32: Ensemble poor: horn plays quaver-notes too early (not together with flutes: another take?)

Figure 35: English horn: first note louder

Figure 52: Flute: first note louder

Figure 58: The quaver before figure 58: someone plays an open

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## *The Stokowski Sound was famous & infamous, but there was a Stokowski Sound*

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*L'Arlésienne* Suite #1, the Bacchanale from *Samson & Dalila*, and the *Carnival of the Animals*. The transfers are by Mark Obert-Thorn. The other is titled *Stokowski Conducts Dvorák* (even though less than half of the disc contains Dvorák), with the 1927 *New World*, WHL 027. It has the *Hungarian* Rhapsody but also Chopin/Stokowski music, and Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances*.

Ward Marston did the transfers here. The difference was stunning. The Gramofono issue was revealed as being dry (the *last* thing you want in a Stokowski Sound). The Biddulph recordings had more atmosphere and an almost stereophonic cast. *This is the Stokowski Sound!!* If you want to hear what Stokowski wanted in the recordings he released, have your local dealer get the Biddulph discs and don't waste your money on this release. This is one of those cases where there ought to be a law.

Serenade and *Capriccio*. (There's no indication that this is a new mastering, nor of any difference from the earlier release. I A/B'd the discs several times in various sequences; there *is* a difference.)

You may have some difficulty finding these discs. A member of the Society sent me a set he got at Tower Records as a "Special Import". According to the New York branch of Philips there are no plans to make the series generally available in the U.S. It is worth the effort, however, to add these to your collection. It is a Five Star set.

As a form of segue, I was offered some inside information about these recordings. Ed Johnson, arguably the finest Stokowski expert in the world today, and I have been corresponding about the Stokowski Sound. He informed me that Stokowski was unhappy with the original master tape. He had the engineers take the

string: If possible use another take: if not try to soften by lowering the level at this point.

There are similar extensive directions for the rest of the recordings and the Brahms 4th Symphony. The phrase that appears most often is "more reverberation".

I believe this "sound" that Stokowski produced, especially the sense of reverberation, is a direct result of his beginnings as an organist. Have you ever sat at an organ and played for just a little bit? The experience is one where reverberation literally stimulates your whole body. What Stokowski could not capture in the recording studio, he learned to add in the mixing room.

movement of Beethoven's *Moonlight* Sonata; Chopin's Prelude in E Minor; Franck's *Panis Angelicus*; Tchaikovsky's Andante Cantabile and (a first release) *At the Ball* (with Marjana Lipovsek, mezzo-soprano), Debussy's *Clair de Lune & La Cathedrale Englouthé*, and then culminating with Rachmaninov's Prelude in C-sharp Minor.

While a few minor labels have issued all-Stokowski discs, this is the fourth from a major company. (Let us not forget CALA's releases that include a Stokowski transcription. You really ought to hear the Requiem of Borodin on CALA 1011!!!) There is one on Telarc and two on Chandos. If you want more information on those contact me. Anyway, I

that the Philadelphia Orchestra and their conductor are on a *much* higher musical plain than the others. Sawallisch's attacks are sharper, his rubato less studied. The Philadelphia Orchestra itself sounds like the magnificent orchestra that Rachmaninoff averred was the best in the world.

Finally, I recall a conversation with Rob LaPorta, of EMI, who first told me about this release over a year ago. He told me that he had been at one of the recording sessions and, 'it was as if the spirit of Stokowski was over the proceedings.' I can say, amen.

On another note, the Philadelphia Orchestra will be led by Riccardo Chailly in 1996. He will conduct, and later record, the Mussorgsky/Stokowski *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

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## Stokowski conducted the U.S. or world premieres of over 200 works

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This is why, again, it is vital to the person hearing a Stokowski recording that it honestly reflects what he was creating. To merely go back to original tapes is not enough. You have to go to the tapes Stokowski authorized.

There may be honest disagreement as to how faithfully a recording reflects the Stokowski sound. What cannot be argued, however, is that some recordings do not have it. I submit for your consideration the contrast between the Grammfono and Philips CDs discussed above. Get "The Early Years"!!!

EMI has just released a recording of Stokowski Transcriptions with the *Philadelphia Orchestra* and Wolfgang Sawallisch conducting!!! (55592). The disc includes: *Sheep May Safely Graze*, *Wachet Auf*, *Ein feste Burg*, *Toccata & Fugue* (of course); Boccherini's Minuet, the first

had thought to make this an article discussing which of the four has won "the Stokowski Sound" award. Well, as I like to say, "oh, well."

The *sound* difference between this latest disc and the others is significant. The earlier discs had a boomier bass but one that also had a reverberant aspect to it. The EMI is not drier, but it is more firm. And the percussion leading up to the fugue in the *Toccata & Fugue* will knock you out. The other thing is that the EMI sound provides us with more detail ... and lovely it is. Finally, the EMI provides more front-to-back perspective. Still, I am glad I don't have to live with only one of these discs. They all represent the Stokowski sound in different aspects, much like a diamond looks different, but similar as you look at it from different aspects.

There is one other significant difference. It is immediately apparent

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### □ Contemporary Music

Martin: *Petite Symphonie Concertante* ('57). Stokowski's Symphony Orchestra. Stereo. EMI Matrix 65868 (Coupled with Toch's Third Symphony and Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*, both with William Steinberg and the Pittsburgh Symphony.)

Thomson: *The Plow that Broke the Plains* ('46). Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra. Mono. RCA Gold Seal 68163 (Coupled with the composer's recording of *Four Saints in Three Acts* from 1947.)

Shostakovich: *Symphony #5* ('58). Stadium Symphony Orchestra of New York. Stereo. Everest 9030

These discs are listed in the order in which they were released (in February/March of 1996).

Stokowski conducted the U.S. or world premieres of over 200 works. They range from the Elgar Symphony #2 (Cincinnati, 1911) to Brian's 28th Symphony (New Philharmonia, 1973). This thought crossed my mind as I began to review these recordings. Here we have prime examples of Stokowski's efforts to

promote "new" music. We also have prime examples of what can happen to it.

Shostakovich, of course, is now considered one of the great composers of the century. Martin and Thomson, to be frank, are not. Still, these discs have much to offer and contemplate.

Let me begin with the Thomson. I do so because I consider this disc a memorial to Jack Pfeiffer, who passed away just a couple of days after sending me this CD. He was also involved in its issue on compact disc. It is part of RCA's celebration of the centenary of Thomson's birth. It is also odd for two reasons. First, these are historic issues and that is, in itself, especially in the case of Thomson, rare. Second, this historic release comes wrapped in a package that in no way would catch the attention of someone interested in historic releases. The cover features four figures that look like voodoo dolls in some kind of gummy-like locale. The contents, however, are of interest.

I will not offer my opinions on the *Four Saints in Three Acts* conducted by the composer. Frankly, I don't like it, but I don't like a lot of vocal music. The Stokowski recording of *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, however, is more than just interesting. First of all, the sound is remarkable for its time. In fact, it is the best sounding Hollywood Bowl Symphony recording that I have ever heard! There is absolutely NO surface noise, and it makes me wonder if they had used an early form of tape. There is no information on the disc regarding the remastering, but I later found that it was done by Ward Marston (he was not credited because he did only the Stokowski recording). Ward has done a remarkable job. The lack of surface noise reminds me of the work of Michael Dutton, but Ward's transfer has more air around the music.

Stokowski also recorded this work in stereo with the Symphony of the Air (Toscanini's NBC Symphony after the network jettisoned them). The comparisons are interesting. This

1946 recording sounds more like a movie score (as well it should) whereas the later recording is more 'symphonic'. It is also obvious that the Symphony of the Air is a much better orchestra than the Hollywood Bowl ensemble. But the Hollywood brass can't be beat, and that orchestra seems to have a better feel for the jazz in the fourth movement: 'Speculation (Blues)'. So, this is more of historical interest for Stokowski fans and, I would guess, admirers of Thomson. But how often are these pieces recorded today? Will we see some tribute recordings?

The next disc contains the music of Frank Martin: *Petite Symphony Concertante* (it should have added, for harp and harpsichord to differentiate it from the later version of the piece). This was recorded with HIS Symphony Orchestra, an ad hoc group of musicians drawn mostly from the New York Philharmonic. The sound here is another lesson in Stokowski manipulating the recording to achieve *his* sound. The orchestra itself usually numbered only around sixty players. By adding reverberation to the tape, Stokowski was able to get it to sound like a much larger body, especially in the strings.

The piece opens up reminding you of Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night* (as well it might, since Martin admired Schoenberg) and in places it also sounds a bit like Poulenc's *Harpsichord Concerto*. It is very pretty, but I can't say it is great music. In fact, I would recommend this disc primarily for the Steinberg recording of Toch's *Symphony #3*. I do not understand why the Toch *Symphony* is neglected today. It has an oriental flavor in the first movement that brings to mind Shostakovich. This is the first CD incarnation of the Martin.

Now we turn from two composers who have become little more than footnotes in the history of 20th century music to one of the greatest musicians from our time. Dimitri Shostakovich's *Fifth Symphony* was first recorded by Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1935. Stokowski performed the work many

times in concert. One of those occasions can be heard with the London Symphony in 1964 on Music and Arts 765 (it has also been released on IMP's BBC series just recently, but I have not heard that issue). He recorded it in stereo with the Stadium Symphony of New York (the New York Philharmonic in summer garb) in 1958. This recording has been previously released by Philips and Price Less.

I gave away the Philips disc some years ago. The CEDARing process sucked all the air and life from the recording. The Price Less disc was much more full and reverberant. In fact, its opening grabs you by the throat. I used that release for comparison and found it interesting.

The Price Less disc has a more powerful opening and that is not just a matter of a higher transfer level. After that, however, it is all to the favor of this Everest release. The engineers have done a wonderful job of remastering this recording. There is much more of a 'front-to-back' sense of the sound. Details abound that are buried in the haze of the Price Less disc. There is an intimate, almost chamber-music like quality to the performance. In every way this release is more involving and one of the best efforts by Everest/Vanguard/Omega to date. The memory of Bert Whyte has been proudly served with this release.

Now the bad news. There is no coupling with the disc, and I know that it is a mid-price issue. For those of you who love Stokowski, this disc is a must. For those who love Shostakovich, it is one of the finest performances, and the sound will compare with any all-digital release. Unfortunately, some people will simply note the 44 minute duration and look elsewhere. That is too bad; they will have missed a great performance.

For the sake of it, I also compared this recording with Stokowski's first one with the Philadelphia. That is on a two-disc set coupled with the First and Seventh Symphonies (Pearl 9044). The remastering of the Fifth is

by Mark Obert-Thorn, who did the work for the LSSA when we issued the LP some years ago. Naturally, you can't expect the 1939 recording to have the kind of inner detail of the stereo recording, but you might be surprised at how much music Mark was able to find in those 78s. The Philadelphia Orchestra is obviously far better than the New York Philharmonic of 1958. The sound is darker, but not more sinister, than in the Everest recording. The orchestra's attacks are sharper and more crisp. On the other hand, the strings in the Everest recording are more articulate and poignant. I would not want to be without either, but I have to say that for repeated listening the Everest is involving in the best sense of that term. It sucks you into the performance and leaves you sighing as each movement comes to a close.

"Today is the good old days" read the sign over the pipe shop I frequented in the '70s. When these recordings were made the composers were alive and working. Stokowski liked their music enough to record his feelings. I look at all the contemporary music there is on orchestra programs compared with just a few years ago. How much will the contemporary become *contemporary*. I am not passing any judgements, but I do know which of these discs I'll most likely reach for most often.

Later: and in fact have. I just recently received a copy of this Symphony on EMI with Mariss Jansons conducting. Jansons's interpretation is more swift than Stokowski's and is an exciting one. I found myself breathless at the climax in the first movement. The finale has all of the 'in your face' irony mentioned in *Testimony*. This is a hollow victory.

Stokowski's interpretation is pre-*Testimony*, but really better than the Jansons. The remastered sound on this disc is more involving than the EMI. It is almost as if Stokowski has been listening to Shostakovich Quartets and saw this symphony in that light. The interplay of the orchestra catches my attention again and again. There is more *oriental*

atmosphere here than in any other interpretation. The strings have more of a poignancy than the Oslo Philharmonic. In all, this is my favorite recording of this masterpiece, and arguably one of the best ever.

unflattering. Still, half a loaf and all that. London did issue Debussy's *La Mer* on a medium-priced disc and *Scheherazade* on another (both with other couplings). Those sounded better than the *Weak end Classics*, but

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## *These recordings sound better than the LPs and involve you completely in Stokowski's Sound*

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### □ Stokowski & Phase Four

Tchaikovsky: *1812 Overture* ('69), Royal Philharmonic. Moussorgsky/Stokowski: *Night on Bare Mountain* ('67), London Symphony. Moussorgsky/Stokowski: *Boris Godunov*: Symphonic Synthesis ('68), Suisse Romande Orchestra. Tchaikovsky: *Marche slave* ('67), London Symphony. 443 896

Moussorgsky/Stokowski: *Pictures at an Exhibition* ('66), New Philharmonia. Scriabin: *Poem of Ecstasy* ('75), Czech Philharmonic. Stravinsky: *Pastorale* ('69), Royal Philharmonic. Stravinsky: *Firebird Suite* ('67), London Symphony. 443 898

Wagner: *Ride of the Valkyries, Dawn & Siegfried's Rhein Journey, Siegfried's Death & Funeral Music, Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla, Forest Murmurs* ('66), *Die Meistersinger Prelude* ('73) London Symphony. 443 901

Most of this material has been previously issued. It first appeared from Japan, licensed from Decca and issued on the King label. Those discs were available only in Japan, but a few found their way over to me. Those remasterings were superior to the *Weekend Classics* series issued in this country. That issue of the Wagner music was particularly

the latter was really coarse. Still, the *Scheherazade* was better than a remastered issue available in a four disc box set from Lincoln Center that made the performance actually sound dull.

All this by way of putting these discs into perspective. I am going to help those of you who choose to scan articles by letting you read the last line now. *If you have been disappointed in the past, that time is gone. If you want to wallow in beautiful music, especially Wagner, snap these up.* Now back to the reviews. I have listened to all of these discs, the Wagner several times. These recordings sound better than the LPs and involve you completely in Stokowski's Sound. Another thing the engineers have done is to keep the tape rolling at the end of each piece. This adds a few seconds to each track, but also adds more of the music as it fades (while not exclusively his, this was a Stokowski trademark and part of *his* sound). In fact, there is more air around all the sound now, not like the *cheaper*, earlier releases. Stokowski was intimately involved in the recording process from the days of acoustic 78s up to late stereo (he just missed the digital age). Listening to these discs you can now hear why Stokowski was excited by the whole Phase Four technique. While earlier

releases are stereo, these are more. I have spent a lot of time re-listening to these discs, especially the Wagner.

I once asked Sylvan Levin if he thought that Stokowski had any regrets. Sylvan didn't hesitate to say that he thought Stokowski wished he had the chance to do more opera. Listening to this disc of excerpts from the *Ring* makes me wish he had done a cycle. Unfortunately, that was not to be, but this disc gives an idea of just what we might have had. This is Technicolor Wagner. Every emotion is wound tight as a drum and let loose in a torrent. The *Ride* swirls you along, the *Forest Murmurs* are haunting.

The *Meistersinger* Prelude is not from the studio sessions that are on the rest of the disc. It was taken from a live concert celebrating Stokowski's 60th anniversary concert with the London Symphony in 1973. It, along with the rest of the program, was part of his first LSO concert. (Might we hope for a release of all of those items, too? Could the cover include the wonderful portrait of Stokowski that was featured on the LP?) Stokowski produced an effect with the melody that I have never heard before or since. That phrase seems to pass around the orchestra, swirling and singing. That I am certain is a result of Stokowski's sense of *relief* in the orchestra, and not a gimmick in the studio (this was a *live* performance, after all).

Now I turn to the *Pictures* disc. I have long argued that Stokowski's transcription is not necessarily better than Ravel's, but it *is* more *Slavic*. This is apparent from the outset as the 'Promenade' is announced by the

lower strings rather than a trumpet. Stokowski did not orchestrate 'Tuileries' or 'Marketplace at Limoges' because he believed they were written by Rimsky-Korsakov and not Moussorgsky. The closing 'Great Gate of Kiev' includes a gong at about 30 seconds into it that sounds like it must have been rung by Quazimodo. Later in this movement the chimes bring in snowflakes dancing around the city. It doesn't get any better than this.

Despite several attempts, I am not fond of the Scriabin *Poem of Ecstasy*, but am certain that Stokowski's colors would have pleased the composer. The Stravinsky Pastorale is pleasant, but short.

Now we come to the *Firebird*. Stokowski must have loved this piece. He recorded it eight times, more than any other single piece he took to the studio. The first was an acoustic one in 1924 (how's that for championing new music?). The London recording was his last and greatest. The phoenix rises from the ashes in a splendor that reminds you this was a ballet, too. As the final section opens, the strings glow like embers under a black night. This is my personal favorite recording by Stokowski. You can hear it in the background on my answering machine.

Some years ago, a friend had me over to listen to music together. He had just bought a new digital LP of the *Firebird* (with Eduardo Mata, I recall) and wanted to show it off. I took the London LP with Stokowski. After listening to his record, we put on mine. Bill began to shake his head and mutter, "*The Stokowski sounds better.*"

The third disc under discussion is more of a pot boiler. The *1812* is typical Stokowski, full of wonderful effects like the Russian Anthem suddenly ushered in at the close of the piece and the dying away of the bells. The main piece of interest on this CD, however, does not fit into this category, and is most interesting. Stokowski staged *Boris Godunov* in part in Philadelphia. It is said that this opera was perhaps Stokowski's favorite. He made his *symphonic synthesis* in 1936.

You have to remember that much of the *new* music introduced by Stokowski was at that time merely 'unknown' rather than 'contemporary'. This was why he prepared his Bach transcriptions. Through recordings Stokowski was able to introduce countless numbers of people to Moussorgsky's opera. My personal favorite recording of the complete opera is Claudio Abbado's on Sony, though I think that being introduced to it through Stokowski didn't hurt at all.

I can't wait for the rest of the Phase Four recordings to come out. As mentioned, we can look forward to *La Mer* and the finest *Scheherazade* by anyone, anywhere, anytime. Then there are Elgar's *Enigma* Variations, the Bach transcriptions with the Czech Philharmonic, a lovely Franck Symphony, the Beethoven Fifth and Seventh, and several shorter pieces. I have only one regret. Discussions were underway for Stokowski to record Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in Phase Four. For some reason, however, Stokowski got upset and left Decca before that project was realized. Bummer.

*Continued from page 6*

persuasive model the gorgeous Boston Symphony Orchestra tone and his own Romantic leanings toward the broad symphonic style. One might easily suspect Copland of having tailored his Third Symphony to the Koussevitzky-BSO manner, since a sinewy leanness is more characteristic of the manner we have come to admire so much as defining his individuality. At the same time, it would be a mistake to overlook Copland's long-standing regard for Mahler, which might also have been a deciding factor.

As for the other prominent figures in Koussevitzky's stable—Walter Piston, Roy Harris, and William Schuman—the imprint of Koussevitzky and the BSO on their music seems more plausible, if only for the superficial reason that they have distinguished themselves as composers in the broad symphonic tradition.

There is nothing surprising or unprecedented about composers tailoring their music to the performers for whom they write. I recall one composer who was quite elated by the Koussevitzky rendition he had received, but at the same time he commented, "the air was so thick you could cut it with a knife". It is not surprising that the next time he wrote a piece for the BSO, he would bear this rich, full sonority in mind.

*In the list of composers you mention it is surprising not to find the name of Roger Sessions. Surely he had distinguished himself as a composer of full-scale symphonies. What about Sessions?*

In the total of 181 American works presented by the BSO from 1924-1946—some of them conducted by Richard Burgin or the composers themselves—there is only one Sessions work, his early Symphony in E minor. So I think you have put your finger on the sore spot, if you will forgive me for degenerating into cliché.

I have already indicated Koussevitzky's attitude towards the Schoenberg school and its progeny. Through a

vast oversimplification, Sessions was considered in some circles as the American representative of the Viennese school, just as so individual a composer as Copland was considered to head the forces on the other side of the imaginary barriers—to the extent that he was even at one time dubbed the "Brooklyn Stravinsky".

Now Sessions is not a serial composer nor is he even strictly speaking atonal. And I think his music would have lent itself eminently to the BSO's sonorous refinement. But there is an aspect of his music that he shares with the Viennese school in that it does not give up its secrets easily. Music of this sort requires a special effort on the part of both performers and listeners, as well as the confidence that such effort, through repeated performances, will be rewarded. However, speaking as one who has written at least some music that in some circles is thought to be not easily accessible, I think it is a mistake to elevate difficulty into a unique value.

Whether because of his temperamental preferences or his technical limitations, Koussevitzky did not advance the cause of such music. But if he did no more than substantially contribute to the establishment of a Copland or a Piston on the American scene, he devoutly deserves our thanks. For when all the pros and cons are tallied, it may very well turn out that he did more than anyone before or since to counteract the deplorable musical inferiority that causes us to bow and scrape before the most mediocre foreign talents—creative or otherwise—while our own musicians struggle to survive in limbo.

I regret having to end on such a chauvinistic note, but in a country where creative music gets such sporadic government subsidy, the main sources toward which we can look for support are powerful figures who are passionately dedicated to it.

*Isn't this an enormous degree of power to invest in one individual?*

As I said earlier, composers do not relish the fact that conductors and players have so much power to arbitrate taste, even if it is admitted that they play an important role as disseminators of our music. Koussevitzky was an aristocrat not only in manner, but in the way he expected us (the composers) to pay court to him.

Although he assumed that we would regularly attend his subscription concerts, musicians are at times too absorbed in their own music making to need or be capable of absorbing the music making of others. And though his programs usually offered new music that attracted us, there were some that we preferred to skip. Nonetheless, our presence in the green room after the concert was *de rigeur*.

When I was at Harvard I was on the periphery of a few young composers who were within his orbit, and on such occasions we would arrive to pay our obeisance when the concert was over. I remember especially the wintry nights when we would vigorously rub our hands together to remove the traces of our defection from the concert for that moment when he would shake our hand. This sounds like fawning before the maestro. But the anecdote goes a long way towards encapsulating my nostalgia for the Koussevitzky interregnum. He cared—it was important to him—that the composers were there.

But in answer to your question, what I'm trying to say—and what has been implied by my ambivalence all along—is that as long as the socio-musical structure is what it is now, we rely on powerful figures to advance our cause, and it is better when they really have our concerns at heart. Someone with catholic taste, or several figures with different tastes, are naturally preferable. But it's far better to have one figure like Koussevitzky than to have none at all. ♦

## Letters to the Editor

I have to [respectfully!] disagree with your assessment of my new transfer of the BBC Sibelius 7th. The version I did for Pearl five years ago was done at a time when I was filtering highs to a greater degree than I do now. Also, back then I was using dbx noise reduction on my tapes to cut down on tape hiss. This had two side effects: it dulled the highs further, and it added a “pumping” sound whenever music would emerge from relatively quiet background. (Listen to the opening of the second movement of the Sibelius 2nd on that same Pearl set to hear what I’m talking about.) I ditched dbx when I found that so much more of the original sound could come through if I left it off; and the noise-to-signal ratio with 78s more than compensated for the additional tape hiss. In addition the new transfer for Biddulph was put through CEDAR declipping (not de-noising, like Dutton), and you’ll notice that the very end of the Sibelius 7th is a lot cleaner on the Biddulph vs. the Pearl. (Both transfers, by the way, came from the same set of shellacs.) I went back and did an A/B comparison of the two transfers, specifically concentrating on the side joins (which you’d written were “not nearly as seamless” as those on my earlier attempt). To my ears only the side 3 to 4 join is more noticeable in the Biddulph than in the Pearl, and then only marginally. In addition, there seems to be more bass in the Biddulph version.

Your comment about the 78s used in the “Complete HMVs” set being “much noisier than average” may lead people to think that they were transferred from traditionally crackly HMV shellacs. In fact, the two Beethoven sets and the Sibelius came from excellent copies of the most quiet pressings ever made of these items (c. 1935 Victor scroll-label “Z” pressings in “screwback” albums for the Beethovens, and an early Victor “gold” label pressing for the Sibelius.) What you’re hearing, I think, both on this set and on Ward Marston’s transfers of the 1928 SK/BSO recordings, is that both of us are filtering less and letting more of the original sound come through than we used to. (The trade-off between greater presence and increased surface noise is, admittedly, a fine line to walk.)

Mark Obert-Thorn

*The editor responds:*

*I was perhaps too harsh in my judgement of Mark’s latest transfer of the Sibelius 7th. He is quite right in pointing out that the Biddulph issue has substantially less pop and crackle in the symphony’s closing moments. Moreover, the new transfer has considerably more presence. The bass is fuller and richer on Biddulph, though that is a double-edged sword, because it also means that some lower frequency noise is accentuated—such as the loud, irritating “thump” at 7:50. I’m glad to learn that Mark uses CEDAR only for declipping; other reissues I’ve heard that employ CEDAR to remove noise sound sterile and dead. I should have been more specific in my comments on the side joins. There’s only one that’s more audible (to me) this time around—the transition from side 2 to 3 at 7:45 on Biddulph. It sounds abrupt here, like an old-*

*fashioned razor blade tape edit. On the Pearl disc there’s a imperceptible crossfade at this point. Alas, I find the edit between sides 3 and 4 equally audible on both CDs.*

I have before me Vol. VIII, No. 2, the Fall 1995 issue, in which my old school-mate from Curtis, Bob Ripley, states that he recalls no BSO members playing in the orchestra at Tanglewood in 1942. That orchestra comprised only scholarship students, primarily from Curtis, Juilliard, Eastman, and the New England Conservatory. However, its constituency was planned before anyone knew that Dmitri Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony required two brass sections, eight horns, six trumpets, and six trombones. We didn’t have that many players. I played first trumpet in that work, and immediately next to me, on my right, sat Mr Valkenier, First Horn of the BSO. Directly behind me sat the First Trombone, Mr. Jacob Raichman. There may have been others. Events of fifty-four years ago can be easily forgotten.

Sincerely yours,  
Harry D. Peers

### Koussevitzky and the Houston Symphony

In his profile of the Houston Symphony Orchestra, Joseph B. Schmoll writes that in 1935 “... the American Ernst Hoffmann was hired as the next conductor. He had been recommended to Houston Symphony President Walter Walne by Serge Koussevitzky in Boston...” Hoffmann, whom Schmoll describes as “one of the chief proponents and builders of the Houston Symphony Orchestra”, served as the Orchestra’s Music Director from 1935 to 1947.

In his *Leopold Stokowski, A Profile* (Hawthorn, 1979) Abram Chasins writes of Hoffmann’s appointment: “The orchestra came of age in 1936, when Serge Koussevitzky highly recommended an exceptionally gifted and cultured young conductor, Ernst Heinrich Hoffmann. A modest leader possessing solid musicianship, the ability to develop balance, tonal quality, and precise ensemble, Hoffmann attracted to the opening concert an audience of thirty-seven hundred, which, writes Roussel, ‘found reasons for greeting the new conductor with more than merely courteous interest.’ He remained in charge for eleven years, the longest tenure that any conductor has ever held in that post.”

The Roussel whom Chasins quotes is Hubert Roussel, longtime music critic for various Houston newspapers, who authored *The Houston Symphony Orchestra, 1913-1971*, from which the quote is taken.

Kenneth DeKay

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Club. College songs were not in its repertoire. Its music generally was classical. We had the good fortune to act as a backdrop for the Boston Symphony Orchestra and to perform many of the great choral compositions designed for orchestra and chorus.

Serge Koussevitzky, the conductor of the Boston, of course, was at his prime then. I shall always remember when he came to our rehearsals before some concert and listened and said, "Magnifique, but pleez, vonce again" in his soft accent. And there were performances with Toscanini and Stokowski and almost all the great conductors of the first third of the 20th century. Singing at the Metropolitan in New York, in Philadelphia, and, of course, in Symphony Hall in Boston were experiences I remember in detail.

Thus, in a sense, "Doc" Davison and Koussevitzky were musical

heroes for me. This does not serve to lessen other musical figures in my calculus. I name these two only because they affected me personally at a time when the normal other pressures of college and the law school experience—working my way through, trying to maintain my place in a competitive endeavor, and getting ready for the world outside the academic environment—were all about us. They were strenuous but happy days, and music was a supportive force.

Mrs Blackmun and I, in our courting days, went regularly to performances of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. That was the era of Ormandy and Mitropoulos and, later, Dorati. Pleasant memories.

I have been concerned of late, and have said so publicly on more than one occasion, that I sense that many young people today do not

have "heroes" in their minds and background. I often have asked the question, when I speak to college or law students, as to who are their heroes. Many times I get a blank stare in response, as though having a hero was unfashionable and something to avoid. Others give names drawn from curious categories—the tight end on a professional football team, or a professional basketball player.

By "hero", I do not necessarily mean a person of great prominence or political accomplishment or military prowess, though those are natural reference points. I do mean someone, perhaps of no celebrity status whatsoever, who has meant something to the individual as a role model and person to respect. We need heroes in this life. And how many there are in the field of music! That is just another reason why music is so important for all of us as we move along through our allotted days on this earth.

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## **About the Koussevitzky Recordings Society, Inc.**

The Koussevitzky Recordings Society was established in 1986, and it is dedicated to the preservation and dissemination of the recorded legacy of Serge Koussevitzky. The Society is a non-profit corporation staffed entirely by volunteers. Our Board of Directors consists of President Tom Godell, Vice President Victor Koshkin-Youritzin, Secretary Karl Miller, and Treasurer Louis Harrison. Members of the Society's distinguished Advisory Board are Antonio de Almeida, Alexander Bernstein, Martin Bookspan, David Diamond, Harry Ellis Dickson, Charles Dutoit, Mrs. Irving Fine, Lukas Foss, Karl Haas, Richard L. Kaye, and Gerard Schwarz. Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, and William Schuman were Advisors during their lives.

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 these bi-annual journals, which include interviews from the archive, articles about the conductor, and book reviews.

To become a member and receive our publications, send a check or money order in the amount of \$18 to 1211 W. Hill Street, Carbondale IL 62901-2463. 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 publications are also available. For a complete list, contact the Society at the above address.