

KOUSSEVITZKY

Recordings Society



by Tom Godell

Letter from the President

It has been fascinating to read reviews of Koussevitzky's work over the past 20 years to see just how significantly critical opinion has shifted in the conductor's favor during that time. In Great Britain appreciation of Koussevitzky is greater than at any time since his death. As *The Gramophone* noted this past February, "It is only recently that the recorded legacy of Serge Koussevitzky has been getting the attention it deserves." They went on to describe Koussevitzky as "a great, if unorthodox, talent". In this country, recognition has been much slower in coming. For example David Radcliffe, author of the *American Record Guide's* "From the Archives" column, has been very negative concerning most Koussevitzky reissues to date; his high praise for the recent BSO Classics CD (excerpted on p. 10) represents a refreshing change of pace.

In this issue of our *Journal* we are proud to present for the first time anywhere a previously unpublished article written by Serge Koussevitzky. Credit for this important discovery belongs to Vincent Schwerin, who sent us a copy of the brief essay "Music and Christianity" several years ago. Reading it again reminded me that Koussevitzky was a very perceptive writer on musical matters whose work in this vein is almost completely unknown. An overview of the conductor as author begins on p. 5

Two CDs of Koussevitzky's concert performances have just been released on the Music & Arts label. CD-963 holds the suddenly popular Rachmaninov Third Concerto, played by Vladimir Horowitz. Koussevitzky conducts the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra in this 1950 concert. The disc is filled out with Tchaikovsky's First Concerto played by Horowitz and Steinberg. CD-981 (available in Europe only owing to the oppressive and unnecessarily strict enforcement of the BSO's copyright in the U.S.) includes unforgettable performances of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Russian Easter Overture*, Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony, and Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. The Shostakovich is of particular interest because of the conductor's astoundingly slow tempo in the moderato second movement (it runs an unprecedented 13:46 in this recording!). After corresponding with the composer, Koussevitzky adopted a more conventional tempo in his commercial recording of the Symphony.

Mark Obert-Thorn is preparing two further Koussevitzky CDs for release in 1998. The first is an all Richard Strauss disc with *Till Eulenspiegel*, the 1947 *Don Juan* (by far the best of Koussevitzky's two commercial recordings of the piece), and *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Then comes a Russian program consisting of Shostakovich's Ninth (the RCA recording this time), Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini*, and the 1947 Prokofiev *Classical* Symphony. Meanwhile, Michael Dutton informs us that his company has issued Koussevitzky's recordings of *Harold in Italy* and *Till Eulenspiegel* on CDAX 8015. Alas, I have not been

able to obtain a copy of this disc to compare the transfer with Biddulph's issue of the Berlioz).

John Graves contacted us by e-mail recently with the following request: "I am researching the Scottish American baritone Fraser Gange, who sang several times with Koussevitzky and the BSO during the 1927-1932 period, including a Brahms Festival, a Bach Festival, the American premiere of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, and even a double-bass recital in October 1929 in which Koussevitzky, Gange, and pianist Pierre Luboshutz appeared together. I wonder if you might have any information whatsoever on Fraser Gange." I checked the standard references on Koussevitzky. Moses Smith mentions only the 1929 recital, while DeWolfe Howe reports (in his fascinating book *The Boston Symphony Orchestra 1881-1931*) that Gange appeared with the BSO fourteen times during the 1927-1931 seasons. If you can add anything to the story of Gange and Koussevitzky, please contact the Society at our address on the back page. Another e-mail request came from a new member of our Society, Christopher Page. He is curious about Koussevitzky's 1949 performance of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* at Tanglewood. If you have newspaper reviews or personal reminiscences of this concert, please send them to us.

Cover photo courtesy of the Boston Symphony Archives. Thanks to Bridget Carr and the Archives for their kind assistance in the preparation of this issue of our Journal.

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A Musical Revelation: Koussevitzky Interview in Atlantic Monthly

There have been statements to the effect that Serge Koussevitzky could not read a musical score very well. This is not only ridiculous but quite misleading. When one listens to the many recordings that the conductor made with the Boston Symphony, one is aware that Koussevitzky is in complete control from start to finish.

That Koussevitzky could indeed read music is proven conclusively in an interview that appeared in the Atlantic Monthly issue of December 1936. Sylvia Dreyfus visited Symphony Hall to attend a rehearsal. The BSO was playing the Beethoven Seventh. She reports:

In the next section of the interview, Ms Dreyfus discusses Koussevitzky's career from its beginnings in Vishny-Volochok. Then he asks Dreyfus about a Taneyev Symphony, and what impression it made on her. The interviewer writes:

My answer to this question is of no importance. But it is characteristic of Koussevitzky that he had asked it. He wants to know how listeners, young, old, intellectual, emotional, are affected by a performance. I have heard him question a sixteen-year-old boy about his impressions of a composition and listen with keen serious-

analyze and comprehend the intention behind a score. Through study of musical theory, harmony, counterpoint, composition, he learns the theoretical mechanics of music."

After this Koussevitzky digressed to comment on the physical aspects of conducting—whether one needs a score on the podium or not. Then he mentions how he planned concert programs:

"Variety in the general character and intensity of the compositions saves a program from monotony and anti-climax. Finally, a well-balanced program contains a suitable combination of classical, romantic, and modern music. We should always include modern compositions. Music is a living, growing art; we cannot refuse a careful performance and a fair hearing to the composers who are working in our own time."

The final section of the interview is the most compelling since it finally reveals Koussevitzky's method of score study. Ms Dreyfus describes his study beginning with a mention of the Bruckner Seventh Symphony on his music stand.

The only marks on its pages were the blue-penciled *fs* and *ps* and the bold crescendo and diminuendo arrows with which Koussevitzky occasionally enlarges the printed symbols in order to see them more readily when conducting.

He then discusses the Roussel Fourth Symphony:

"Look at this first page. It happens to be very simple. When I was young—a hundred years ago!—I would study that music first horizontally, line by line, then vertically, measure by measure, to make sure that I had missed nothing. Then I would read it all together. Now, naturally, I no

Koussevitzky does not know the meaning of the expression 'cut-and-dried'

Though it is a familiar piece of the orchestra's repertoire, it is not treated to a cursory or cut-and-dried rehearsal. Indeed, Koussevitzky does not know the meaning of the expression 'cut-and-dried'. His attack upon the composition is fresh and spontaneous, and he works on this symphony with the sharpest concentration.

Sometimes, with a gesture, he stops the music, indicates the number of measures to be repeated, and continues with the playing. "No!" he shouts to the erring violins. "No! Da! Da! Da-da-da-Da!" He sings, stressing the rhythm in strident tones. When the violins have achieved the desired result, the work proceeds. For three hours I listen, watching the conductor as with infinite care he works out the brilliant pattern of his musical conception.

ness to the reply. He likes to find out the reaction of the musically untrained mind; in discussing musical matters with the elect, he may wander in fields forever barred to the uninitiated, but he has sincere respect for the opinions of those, who, though lacking a background of musical education, listen eagerly to music.

Koussevitzky then proceeded to discuss conducting from its origins as well as the requirements for a conducting career. He asserts:

"Our hypothetical young conductor is still in need of training. He will find, in the first place, that a thorough study of musical theory is indispensable. He must understand composition—that goes without saying—even if he has no talent for composing. So he not only understands how to read a score, but can more readily



Koussevitzky conducting the Boston Symphony (photo courtesy of Edward D. Young)

longer study separately the horizontal and the vertical, for I hear it in my mind at the same time.

“Occasionally, when the dissonances are so sharp that I do not trust my mind’s ear to hear them accurately, I play a few measures on the piano. Then the work begins—the work which is required before the music can be brought to life by performance. I study, study, study. I study the notes, and I contemplate the purpose of this piece of music; then I finally arrive at a point where I feel that I realize what the composer wished to say, what is the true meaning of his music.”

While discussing score study, Koussevitzky went on to comment about the composer’s ‘thought’:

“It is an error common to many whose musical education is

incomplete to think that everything lies in the printed page of a composition... There is more to a score than the simple ability to read it will reveal. Tempo is retarded to clarify modulations, to reveal harmonic beauties of certain passages; accents are emphasized to point a phrase and make it more expressive. These liberties are accorded the interpreter by the composer.”

Koussevitzky remarked that he once had difficulty with a Sibelius symphony and wrote the composer for clarification about a certain tempo marking. Sibelius responded that “The right tempo is as you feel it.” Koussevitzky concluded the interview thus:

“Now in the interpretation of Beethoven, whose opinion we cannot ask, certain passages are played in such a way because that

is in the true tradition of Beethoven, even if there is not mark to indicate it. What the conductor has to study is how to interpret the composer’s idea. So, when I speak of playing a passage ‘in the tradition of Beethoven’, I do not mean the traditional way in which Beethoven has always been interpreted, but rather in the style of Beethoven, as Beethoven would have desired it.

“A knowledge of the background—historical, musical, even personal—is required for a complete understanding of the work of a composer. Only when armed with all the knowledge available is the conductor ready to present a legitimate, authoritative version of a piece of music. And beyond that actual knowledge is the instinct, the intuition, which guides the conductor to a true interpretation.” ♦

Serge Koussevitzky on Music

What follows is a summary of the various articles written by Serge Koussevitzky, using the conductor's own words wherever possible. Thanks to Ed Young, Vincent Schwerin, and Scott Colebank of the Rachmaninoff Society for bringing these fascinating publications to my attention. If there are any other extant examples of Koussevitzky's writings, please let us know about them so that we may include them in future issues of this Journal.

⇒ *Concerning Interpretation*. Written upon receiving the degree of Doctor of Laws, conferred by Harvard University on June 20, 1929. Translated from the Russian by Nina Bechtereff.

Koussevitzky begins his first published essay by tracing the relationship between music and poetry: "Such a confection is surely well-founded, for at the beginning poetry and music formed a united and indivisible whole." Yet he notes a significant difference between the two arts: "Music which does not sound appears to be a dead world and loses its significance; its meaning dwells only in the tonal realization. Verses which are not even read (let alone not pronounced) do not lose their active power, but keep in a mysterious manner the ascendancy of poetry." As a result of the need to be performed and heard, music gave birth to the art of interpretation, "a second and auxiliary art which poetry does not know at all."

Despite his repeated claim that interpretation is "secondary", he nonetheless sees a lofty role for the interpreter. In Part II of his paper, Koussevitzky states that the most important aim of the interpreter is "the creation of a contact between the author and public". Further, "Good interpretation leads the public to one denominator, seeming to make homogenous the mixed crowd, bringing it to one level of receptivity. The impression is that the mass is transformed into one single listener." But the interpreter must go even further to achieve his "great victory", he must induce a complete catharsis. After this catharsis, "awaking from his musical sleep, the listener faces reality, which takes a new shape, an unusual one. As if the world had partly changed, life possesses a new value. A spiritual enrichment has taken place. For the interpreter this is the highest reward, the highest step to which interpretation may ascend."

The period instrument crowd would do well to listen to Koussevitzky's thoughts on 'historic' performances: "There is no solid basis to the argument that this or that style of our period coincides with previous performances. It is always a matter of guesswork and conventions. The quality of a stylistic performance always depends not so

much on traditions as on the sagacity and culture of the interpreter himself... An interpreter, who possesses a style of his own, creates his performance by uniting past traditions in the shape they reached us with the technics of our time. Neither Bach's nor Beethoven's tempi and dynamics are in accordance with our tempi and dynamics, and to copy servilely the previous performance would mean to retard modernity forcibly and artificially, achieving only dullness; for it is not possible to turn life backward. In a performance of classical works, seeming sometimes free, the departure from the past serves more to transmit the character and meaning of the work than a servile imitation of the past."

In conclusion, Koussevitzky asserts again the importance of the role of the conductor, not merely in the realm of music, but in society as a whole: "The musician interpreter causes the fusion of all the manifestations of the modern man's activity, out of which modern culture is built. Being a painter, he is at the same time an organizer

*"...an organizer and an
educator in the world of the
beautiful..."*

and an educator in the world of the beautiful. He belongs to those happy promoters of mankind who help to vanquish everyday gray existence, lifting it to the ideals towards which life tends."

⇒ *Poetry and Music; Musical Interpretation; and Some Remarks About American Orchestras*. From the proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, September 1938

This apparently derives from a public lecture, for the text makes it clear that musical examples of Beethoven and Weber were played on a piano and subsequently discussed by the author. The first page of this article is virtually identical to the beginning of "Concerning Interpretation", even down to the quotes from poems of Verlaine and Pushkin. Having repeated his demonstration of the kinship of music and poetry, Koussevitzky continues with a history of the art of conducting and interpretation which, he argues, "is still very young". While Koussevitzky acknowledges that "decadence in musical interpretation in some countries grew to such proportions that not only were the lights and shadings distorted, but the form itself was lost" he quickly adds that "we have a

great deal of evidence... that musical performers have a right to interpret compositions freely." This right, he argues, derives from the composer himself. He cites several examples.

He then goes on to outline a concept that obviously had great importance to him in his life work: "Personally, I believe that a composer, when creating a work, transfuses it not only with his musical power, but also with the entire meaning of his life—the essence of his being. That is why we can and we must find a 'central line' in the creation of every composer. What is the central line of a composer? It is the meaning of his life and ideals, which he brings to us through the medium of his music. With Bach, the central line is religion. Bach came to glorify God. And we find in his entire life his praise of God, exaltation of heaven and divinity. Haydn's line is joyfulness, humor, which he wants to share with others. We feel it in every symphony, in every minuetto and allegro... Let us take Beethoven. His central line is transcendentalism: he reflects universal emotion in music. When Beethoven grieves, he grieves with the world; when Beethoven is joyful, it is universal joy; when he feels a tragedy, it is a world tragedy... Here emerges the truth of interpretive art. When the artist-interpreter is able to perceive the inner meaning, the central line, of a composition, he will find in himself the right and illuminating emotion to perform it."

Koussevitzky's explanation of the high standard of orchestral excellence in America in his time should serve as a word of warning to performers and music lovers today: "I shall take, for example, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, one of the oldest in Europe. How many concerts did that orchestra give in the course of one season under the leadership of a great conductor? In its most brilliant period, the Berlin Philharmonic gave ten concerts with Nikisch conducting. The remaining concerts were led by different and indifferent conductors." Is this not the same unfortunate situation we face today, with music directors devoting only a fraction of their time to the orchestra they have been chosen to lead? Have we not seen in St Louis under Slatkin and Seattle under Schwarz the excellence that can be achieved when a conductor devotes the lion's share of his energy and enthusiasm to a single orchestra?

Koussevitzky concludes: "It is a mistake to think that musical life in America develops only because of America's wealth. This is wrong. Musical life in this country grows because there is the need for music. That need for music today has an explanation: men seek an outlet for their best and deeper emotions, and they find it in music. For, music is the recovered word of true feeling, liberated from the banality, hypocrisy, and cruelty of life. Music is to help the souls of men. It is the pure language, regenerating, like the mountain air."

☞ *The Emotional Essence of Brahms*. Atlantic Monthly, May 1942

Vincent Schwerin contends that this article, as well as the companion piece on Debussy which followed, "reflected the long years of study and performance of both composers' work". This is perhaps an overstatement. Koussevitzky's arguments are occasionally vague and not always consistent with the truth. Consider his claim, at the beginning of this article, that "in this epoch [1907-12] Brahms was completely forgotten." Perhaps this was true in Russia where Koussevitzky lived and worked at the time, but even a cursory examination of the Boston Symphony's programs of the era reveals that Brahms's orchestral works were all played quite regularly in those days. It's doubtful that Boston was unique in this respect.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to disagree with Koussevitzky when he contends that "Brahms was the musician who stood closest to Schumann... I think that the memory of the tragic fate of Schumann played a tremendous role in the life and creative work of Brahms. Schumann perished

*"Let us conquer darkness
with the burning light of
art."*

because he was unable to cope with the chaos which was gradually overwhelming him and which in the end destroyed both his reason and his will. The madness of Schumann remained in the memory of Brahms all his life. His music, for all its outer resemblance with Schumann's, with which it was impregnated, in reality became, as it were, the antithesis to Schumann's."

He continues: "Brahms repeats nothing of that said by his predecessors, and his music speaks entirely of something else. She is austere, chaste, is clothed in simple garb, and does not speak grandiloquently. Oh no. If she can be reproached with anything at all, then it is rather with an excessive modesty and reserve. After the neurotic sensuality of the romanticists, Brahms made music pull itself together and return to practical reality; but for Brahms this reality was not such as it had appeared to the first-line romanticists, the creators and founders of the romantic school. Brahms ennobled this everyday reality."

Koussevitzky sums up his assessment of Brahms with words that could also be used to describe his own life and work: "His religion was music and only music, and service to it was the sole and high meaning of his life."

⇒ *Debussy: The Resurrected Pan*. Atlantic Monthly, June 1942

One month after his strangely compelling Brahms article, Koussevitzky returned to the pages of the Atlantic Monthly for a discussion Debussy's art. His words convey an obvious nostalgia for the pre-world war era: "Let us first remember that Debussy is now also dear to us because his music has become for us a memory of the world in which it originated. If we recollect that the appearance of this music was in the full sense of the word a discovery of a new world, some kind of new promised land of which, before Debussy, we could only have a vague intimation and which he presented to as an amazing reality, we are saddened by the thought that this world has ceased to exist and that we can no longer say we live in it. Whether the world in which we now live is better or worse is another matter, but there can be no question of the fact that it is not the same. The riches of the world that was discovered by Debussy are enormous, but they are now squandered, exhausted. This is, of course, in line with the fate of our whole culture. We have to admit, however, that with the changed world not a new name has appeared in music equal in importance to that of Debussy..."

In the preceding article, Koussevitzky had compared Brahms with Cezanne. Now he draws a parallel between Debussy and another painter: "Raphael brought heaven back to earth... Debussy did something of a similar nature in music." Debussy's gift to music was to deify and revive nature, to celebrate in his work water, air, sky, and earth. Thus he reflects "Pan's multicolored and multivoiced hymn of nature."

Following a somewhat lengthy discussion of religion and how man comes to know God through creative work, Koussevitzky sums up Debussy's work in these words: "He has a contemplative attitude towards the world, the realization that everything in the world is temporary, everything perishes, everything passes. Debussy knows that one must not be consumed by passions. This is the reason for the absence of tragedy in his music. Of course, Debussy grieves and grieves often over all that is fragile and perishable in the world, because he has pity for everything—otherwise he would not be an artist—but he remains only on the border of tragedy. Debussy's mysticism consists in the fact that he contemplated life and death with equal calmness of soul, and in that lies his great wisdom."

⇒ *Music in Our Civilization*. New York Times, January 17, 1943. From an address given by Koussevitzky at a Town Hall symposium devoted to music for our armed forces which had been presented during the preceding week.

Koussevitzky was deeply affected by the tragedy of the Second World War. The results burst from the crackly acetate recordings of his impassioned wartime concerts (especially his apocalyptic reading of the lowly *1812*

Overture) and may also be found in this moving, inspirational talk: "Hordes of unholy forces have attacked, invaded, and imperiled our life. As never before do we realize that art and culture are a stronghold against the aggressor and his devastating, demoralizing forces."

For Koussevitzky art was just as important and valuable a weapon as any tank or bomb: "Of all the arts, music is a powerful medium against evil and destruction. It has the power to heal, to comfort, and to inspire. In these stormy, perilous days it is the mission of art to protect the fundamental values for which our armies are fighting, to shelter the ennobling, everlasting treasures of art, to maintain the high standard of morale, of culture, and thought."

His final words on this subject are every bit as inspirational today as they must have been to the fortunate readers who first encountered them 54 years ago: "Let us write hymns of freedom and victory; compose marches to vanquish the foe; let us proclaim hatred for despotism and destruction; let us sing the song of love for mankind and faith in the ageless ideals of independence and democracy. Let music become the symbol of the undying beauty of the spirit of man. Let us conquer darkness with the burning light of art."

⇒ *What Is America's Musical Future?* Musical America, February 1944. Reprinted in the BSO program book for the concerts of April 21 & 22, 1944. As told to Alice Berezowsky.

Koussevitzky realized that artists could not rely on government support: "Throughout past history we can see that not a single democratic government ever busied itself to do something real in art for the people." Instead, he suggests, "The organized people must give themselves what they want." He suggests, for example, that each union worker contribute a dollar per year in support of the arts. "The result would be democratic in the highest sense, because art would be supported by the people and controlled by the artists, who could thus give to their fellow members of society the most precious thing in life next to bread: nourishment for the spirit." It is unfortunate that no union leader—not even the formidable head of the Musician's Union, James Petrillo—took up the conductor's challenge.

In a theme that he would sound again in his Life Magazine article, Koussevitzky passionately and wisely called for arts education for all: "If we want to develop musical art in America and produce perhaps as great a genius as Beethoven, we have to give the great body of people the same elements of musical education, the ABC of music that the professionals acquire... Not every child who learns to read and write will become a dramatist or poet. Not every child who learns arithmetic will become a banker: nor every child who studies geography a world traveler or explorer. But the elements of reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography are necessary to their living.

So, too, are the elements of music for their spiritual living!”

Koussevitzky also confronts an issue that plagues the musical scene in America to this very day—our cultural inferiority complex: “Many musical Americans ask me to tell them what is lacking in our musical scheme of things and what harmful practices I would eliminate if I could. I will tell you what is lacking: confidence in our own artists. We in America must have confidence in our composers and performers. The audience must stop thinking that the best artists come from the outside world.”

Koussevitzky then recapitulates a theme which he first introduced in “Poetry and Music”, though it is stated more concisely and powerfully here: “The greatest mistake made by musical authorities, and through them, the public, is the use of that meaningless phrase ‘Let the music speak for itself’. This is a harmful idea and paves the way for mediocrity. It is entirely wrong because the performing artist, no matter how near he is to the composer’s heart and soul, cannot present music otherwise than through the medium of his own temperament and understanding.” Amen!

Koussevitzky the prophet emerges toward the end of the article, as he attempts to predict what will happen in music following the end of the war: “I believe that the center of music will be in two countries: Russia and the United States. The fresh young desire for better and greater things and the rich possibilities for their realization are only in those two countries. They will dominate all cultural life.”

⇒ *American Composers*. From *Life Magazine*, April 24, 1944.

In this article (as told to Alice Berezowsky who “put Dr Koussevitzky’s words in consistent English”), he describes the state of classical music when he came to America—“Its pulse was very, very weak”—and how he endeavored to change that situation through his championship of composers such as Edward Burlingame Hill, George Gershwin, and Walter Piston. Koussevitzky was surprised to learn that the latter had composed only one orchestral work. “I asked him why he hadn’t composed another. ‘Why should I?’ he replied. ‘Nobody would play it.’ ‘I would,’ I said. Four months later Piston brought me a suite for orchestra. Not all of it was good, but the second movement was extraordinarily fine. I performed it. A year later he wrote another new work, a much better one in every way. We played that one, too. Piston wrote a third work, a concerto for orchestra. With that concerto he established his name as one of the leading composers in America.” It was a pattern Koussevitzky would repeat again and again with Roy Harris, William Schuman, and especially Aaron Copland. Despite occasional carping by

critics and subscribers, Koussevitzky could state proudly: “I stuck to my policy always to build my programs like a sandwich—at least two pieces of bread with something new in between.”

Koussevitzky freely acknowledged that some listeners found all this new American music difficult to comprehend: “Nearly always when I play American works, people come to me and say: ‘Yes, the composer has a fine command of orchestral technique, but he has nothing to say. His music doesn’t touch my emotions as Mozart’s or Beethoven’s or Tchaikovsky’s.’ The composer of today reveals in us different emotions than the composer of yesterday. Americans have tremendous energy, extraordinary gaiety, a passionate love for freedom of thought and activity. The American composer must express new facets of the fundamental emotions.”

Koussevitzky was very distressed to learn that composers in this country could not always support themselves with their creative work. Consider his pointed remarks about David Diamond: “Now he earns his living playing in the Lucky Strike All Time Hit Parade Orchestra. I say this is an outrage. Such a gifted American composer should not have to earn his livelihood in this way. America should not permit it!” Diamond, however, didn’t share the conductor’s low opinion of his job. Indeed, he welcomed the opportunity to collaborate with great popular singers like Frank Sinatra. In the interview with Diamond that appeared in Vol. III, No. 1 of this *Journal* he retorted, “I’m sorry that Koussevitzky felt it was demeaning. His was a 19th century, romantic attitude that the composer was up there in Valhalla with the gods, so that’s not what you were supposed to do.”

Still, Koussevitzky used Diamond’s situation as an opportunity to insist that the time had come to find a better way to support our composers: “We must take measures to insure that coming generations will not in turn blush for our failure to accord justice to our creative artists. A far-reaching and wise plan must be worked out to establish a permanent composers’ fund which will cover the essential and immediate needs of the living American composer... Each of them is bringing something to the art of music. Sometimes a single man has one single word to say in all his life and that one word may be as vital as all the lifework of a genius. We need that word!” (Koussevitzky employed nearly identical words in the *Musical America* article above.)

Koussevitzky brought the discussion to a close with an issue very dear to his heart: “The principal question in music is how best to bring it closer to the people. The artificial barriers between the initiated and the uninitiated must be broken down. The truly spiritual essence of music which stands high above the level of amusement and diversion must be brought to the general consciousness.”

continued on back page

Music and Christianity

While Serge Koussevitzky is primarily remembered for his tremendous 25 year tenure in Boston, he was also an eloquent writer on matters musical. The following undated paper was discovered among the Olin Downes Collection, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries. At the top of the first page the title Music and Christianity appears. This was apparently penciled in by Downes himself. Under this, Downes has identified Koussevitzky as the author. This hitherto unknown work receives its first publication in this Journal through the kind permission of the University of Georgia Libraries.

Vincent C. Schwerin, Jr

The development of musical art is closely linked with the development of the spiritual life of mankind. But because the spiritual life of ancient human societies was little developed, music as an art is inconceivable in prehistoric times. Music as an art cannot be an expression of obscure sensations. On the contrary, its purpose is to reflect, as in a mirror, all the problems and ideas which agitate mankind. It requires, therefore, perfect harmony with the moral and intellectual life of humanity.

Musical art appeared and ripened later than all the other forms of art. Centuries elapsed before mankind, having satisfied its daily wants, learned to rise above its everyday aspirations and to feel the need of another higher world of ideals and of the embodiment of such a world in art.

Music acquired from nature as a means of expression only disembodied sounds which had to be brought into a certain coordinated relationship before they could be used as suitable material for even the most simple musical speech.

Not being an object of invention or scientific discovery, not caught

from nature, but rather inherent to man, music to express itself made use of the sound of the human voice probably much earlier than of any artificial musical tool.

The excellent musical author Johann Adolph Schiebe says: "Vocal music had already been in use in Paradise, as Adam and Eve undoubtedly could in no other way than through song praise the day of their creation." This pronouncement should be understood in the following way: the primary element of song—expressive exclamation—as the closest and most eloquent means of expression of human emotion by far preceded not only any musical

musical pattern for the divine worship he established. Hebrew music, however, up to the days of David remained in an extremely primitive state. Beyond doubt the Hebrews had their own definite melodies. This can be inferred from the presence of various inscriptions on the Psalms which actually had no relation whatever to the text, but which in all probability indicated commonly known melodies to be used in the execution of the Psalms.

The Greeks were the first to study music as a free art. Although the music of the Greeks, which consisted of sacred songs and hymns, was also religious music, the religion of the

The religion of the Greeks was a true embodiment of poetry and art

tool, but also any more or less developed, figurative human speech.

Even at the time when the music of outstanding cultured peoples of antiquity reached the stage of a science with a firm mathematical and philosophical foundation its development as an art was inconceivable.

Even the first centuries of Christianity, which had such a strong influence on the enrichment and development of the spiritual life of mankind, were unable to overcome the obstacles restricting the free progress of musical expression.

According to the natural course of events, singing preceded instrumental music by many centuries.

Moses, probably during his stay in Heliopolis, came to know Egyptian religious hymns which might eventually have served him as a

Greeks was in itself a true embodiment of poetry and art.

The gods descended to earth in all their magnificence and lived among men and in their imagination as beings of unfading beauty, such as they first originated in the imaginations of poets and sculptors. Like men they engaged in sculpture, poetry, singing. Music was the common property of the public and, guarded by it, contributed to its ennoblement and delight. According to Plato and Aristotle music was a necessary requisite of good education and upbringing.

The period of greatest development in Greek music is considered to be from the second half of the VI century B.C. Its decline began with the rise of the Roman Empire. During the period of Roman Emperors the role of music was

degraded to that of a servant of luxury, vanity, and immorality. It lost completely that ethical, morally-ennobling influence, which was considered to be its attribute by men like Pythagoras, Aristotle, and Plato.

The revival of musical art took place on the basis of Christianity. Gradually developing on this new basis, music reached a greatness quite unknown to ancient peoples. From the festive Greek celebrations in honor of art and the gods, from under the magnificent vaults of the

temple of Jerusalem, it passed into the dark catacombs—shelter for divine worship of the first Christians. And there, devoid of all glitter and luxury, it strengthened the spirit of the Christian community and its devotion, and consoled the faithful in their persecutions and hardships.

Gradually musical art came to the realization of its high destination. Just as the spiritual life of man acquired an unprecedented width and depth from the surge of new ideas and doctrines of Christianity, so

a completely new and great future was opened to music.

The spiritual world of man, regenerated and enriched by the influence of Christian ideas, found in music its own independent means of expression, its own musical language, expressing heartfelt reverence, strength of faith and depth of emotion. From this source music received a new living impulse and inspiration. And music has a full right to the name of Christian Art. ♦

Reviews of Recent Koussevitzky CD issues

☞ Tchaikovsky 5th with Berlioz, Debussy & Corelli (BSO 441122), by David Radcliffe from *American Record Guide*, January/February 1997

To meet Tchaikovsky and Berlioz on their own outrageous terms requires a certain kind of personality, and that Koussevitzky had. The finales of the Tchaikovsky and the Berlioz are ravishing, the latter in particular the *ne plus ultra* of harmonious cacophony. Koussevitzky is known as a colorist, but it is his tempos and phrasing that make these performances so exceptional.

☞ Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Rachmaninov & Koussevitzky (Biddulph 45), from *Gramophone* February 1997

The opulent gravitas of Koussevitzky's Boston Symphony in what must still have been relatively unfamiliar music is remarkable even by today's standards [Shostakovich 8th Symphony, first movement only]. Listen for example to the extraordinary control he exerts over the violins' melodic lines; the apparently incongruous portamentos actually heighten the intensity of expression. Or try the symphony's very opening: Koussevitzky clearly understands how best to bring out those juddering seismic shocks from his cellos and basses. The conductor's splendid readings of Rachmaninov's *Isle of the Dead* and *Vocalise* are not much more familiar... Here again is great depth of tone and perhaps unexpected seriousness of manner which places the performances in a class of their own. Koussevitzky's tempos can be frenetic in the larger work and yet every phrase is attentively shaped.

☞ Hanson Symphony 3 plus shorter works by Fauré, Liadov, Moussorgsky & Rimsky-Korsakov (Biddulph 44), from *Gramophone*, March 1997

Koussevitzky's reading (of the Hanson) is intensely committed. Obviously he captures the work's Sibelian

inheritance, but he also establishes the individuality of Hanson's sound-world, building the finale steadily to its final climax with gripping concentration. The Boston musicians respond to a man. It is a great performance by an interpreter who has absorbed the score into his own musical consciousness before making what is clearly a definitive recording. The Biddulph transfer is remarkably good and satisfyingly balanced: one soon forgets any sonic inadequacies, so compelling is the music-making.

☞ From Tom Godell's contribution to the *American Record Guide's* Tchaikovsky Overview of July/August 1997

More than 50 years after they were etched into wax, Koussevitzky's classic Tchaikovsky recordings still pack a tremendous wallop. There's a sense of discovery and wonder at every turn—not to mention a raw emotional power that's paradoxically coupled with patrician nobility and refinement. His tempos are all over the road, yet they've been so carefully chosen that the music flows naturally and with inexorable logic. Climaxes are titanic, explosive.

☞ Beethoven *Missa Solemnis* (Pearl 9282) by Robert Cowan from *Gramophone*, July 1997

None of the soloists is especially well-known, but Koussevitzky's broad, emphatic conducting pays high dividends, especially in the fugal sections of the Gloria and the more dramatic episodes of the Agnus Dei. The exultant outburst a couple of minutes into the Sanctus is given to the solo soprano rather than to the chorus—a thrilling if somewhat eccentric option (it sounds almost like Wagner), and one that I've never heard taken before. The Kyrie is a little slow to settle, but viewed as a whole the performance has much to teach us. The coupling is a viscerally exciting account of the *Eroica* Symphony, dating from 1944. Again, the transfer is excellent. ♦

by Robert Ripley

Henry Freeman Interview (BSO Bassist 1945-67)

Stockbridge, Massachusetts
July 21, 1992

RIPLEY: Henry, when and where were you born?

FREEMAN: I was born in New York City on April 18, 1909

Did you come from a musical family?

My father was born in England, and his family must have been musical, but when he was six years old, the whole family got on a brigantine bark sailing ship and went to Australia. I think it was that idea of spreading the culture to Australia. He grew up there and became quite a cornet soloist. He used to play in Town Hall with an organist. The organist went to London, and a year later he wrote to my dad and said, "You've got to come to London and be soloist at Alexandra Palace," which he did. After that he joined the Grenadiers Guards Band as a cornet soloist. He didn't like that, and he came to America.

He worked in New York City in the silent picture days—big orchestras they had in those days—and he got into a big wrangle with the union, because they weren't getting enough. He was playing at the Strand Theater at the time, and they had a big strike, and he was one of the leaders. It ended up that they formed Local 802. The old local was cut out, and the strike leaders were put in jail for two or three hours. He got really a bellyful of music and union, and, as I grew up, he would let me have no music lessons, although obviously I was very interested and talented.

My next to last year in high school my brother was graduating, and Sherman Klute, who was director of music in the public schools in Rochester but played trumpet as substitute next to my dad in the Eastman Theater said, "Harry, there's a bass going to waste up in the music room. Why don't you let your son play?" So that's what happened. I got hold of the bass and took to it like a duck to water. At the end of a year I went and played my D major exercises at Eastman School and got a scholarship. Two hundred dollars for everything.

This was your senior year in high school?

My first music lessons.

And in less than a year you were able to enroll at Eastman.

Well that's the way it was in those days. At Christmas of that first year at Eastman School I played on a Christmas carol act in this vast Eastman Theater, just a fiddle and myself and four singers. From that the assistant concertmaster hired me to play bass in the pit orchestra in the Regent Theater in the silent picture days, and at eighteen years old I was getting 61 dollars a week, which was a lot of money. I bought a Lincoln touring car.

And you were going to school at the same time.

Yes, and playing in the Philharmonic, too.

You had a lot of work in Rochester.

It was enough so that I had saved five thousand dollars before I got married, and that was a lot of money in those days.

*“When the chance came
to play for Koussie, I
jumped at it”*

Ulcers kept me out of the army. In 1943, Willy Page was going into the army. Willy wrote to me. He was nine years younger than I was, and he had already got in the Boston Symphony through Hanson and Koussevitzky. Willy tells in this letter that he was on the train to New York from Boston. And there on the train, Koussie sent for him to come—he had a club car all to himself. George Judd, the manager, was sitting there, and Koussie said, "Ve need somebody. You're going in the army. Have you got anybody that can play like you do?" And Willy recommended me. So Willy called me and told me that I can have the job for the duration without an audition. When the chance came to play for Koussie, I jumped at it, but I said no to have it temporary. I wanted it yes or no and not wait for two years when Willy came out of the army. So I got a telephone call to meet Koussevitzky at the St Regis Hotel at twelve noon the next day.

In New York. This is such a typical story, of auditions in his hotel room.



Koussevitzky with Frances Yeend at Tanglewood (photo by Mitchell, courtesy of the Boston Symphony Archives)

Imagine, with a bass! So I got on the train, got down to New York, Grand Central Station, walked along the concourse with a bass on one arm and a suitcase in the other. Got a cab, which was a Skyview cab, and it was pouring down rain, and I stuck the scroll of the bass out the roof of the cab.

How old were you then?

Thirty-three. So I went up to my room and practiced a little bit—this was the night before—and found that I needed a stool. I always practiced with a stool. I went scouting around the neighborhood, looked for a stool, couldn't find one, but in the lobby was an American Airlines desk, and there was a stool behind the counter. So I asked the fellow, "May I borrow that?" "Sure." I got up to my room and tried it, and I needed two telephone books to make it the right height. So I walked into Koussie's suite—

You were in the same hotel? He couldn't hear you practicing?

No, he was on the eighteenth floor. As I was waiting to go in at noon, Charlie Smith had just auditioned. He came out and had won a job. I went in. Dr Koussevitzky was amazingly small. On the podium, he looked like a giant. But very cordial, very kindly. I said, "Dr Koussevitzky, may I borrow your two telephone books?" He said, "Vy?" I said, "Well, I found out in my room it's just the right height." He said, "You stay in this hotel?" That was already a plus.

So I gave him a list of the things I could play from memory: Beethoven Fifth, Beethoven Ninth, *Heldenleben*, so on. He said, "You know the whole symphony from memory?" I said, "No, just the scherzo and recitative." So we started in. He said, "Play the scale of A major, three octaves." I said, "Dr Koussevitzky, I can tell you right now, my fingerboard only goes up to G-sharp." He said, "Young man, don't talk, just play." So when I got up to the G-sharp, I crossed over on the D string on the A harmonic. He smiled and said, "That's a clever trick. All right, play E major." So I went through that, and I had to follow his beat and so forth and ended up with an E-flat harmonic minor and E major arpeggio very fast. After that I played the scherzo of the Beethoven Fifth. He said, "Very good, but it should be stronger." I said, "Oh, you want it louder?" I reached in my apron, put some more resin on it, and I ripped it out. He said, "In my day in the Bolshoi, they couldn't play that fast." Then I played the recitative and after the recitative, he said, "This must be from a thousand miles away," so I got right up on the fingerboard. I played *Heldenleben* and three or four other things.

When I went in there and give him the list, I had the Dragonetti concerto, and he said, "Vere is mine concert?" I said, "That's a very difficult piece, and I had only overnight to get ready." But at the end of my list I had his *Chanson triste*—"Ah, okay"—so at the end of all this playing he said, "Now my *Chanson triste*". I played that

through and at the end he came over, put his arm around my shoulder, and said, "I must have you in mine orchestra. You're a fine, strong player." I said, "I will see Hanson and try to get out of my contract." He said, "Hanson will be here this afternoon at four. You come at four-thirty." So I waited for Hanson, who didn't show up, and I had to go up to Koussie's suite. We were sitting there, me on one sofa, he on the other. I said, "Dr Koussevitzky, I was so excited this morning that I forgot to talk about salary." He jumped! So we were negotiating a raise right away when Hanson came in, who refused to help me at all.

Even in front of Koussevitzky?

He wouldn't do anything to help me. This is the relationship I had with him—terrible. Anyway, I went back to Rochester. I had to write and tell Mr Judd I couldn't make it. That's when they hired Portnoi. So for two years I marked time in Rochester, and they made another place for me in the Boston Symphony.

So you couldn't fill Willy Page's temporary—

No, but when Willy came out of the army we had ten basses. The didn't want ten. Some of the stages couldn't accommodate ten.

But Koussevitzky honored your audition.

During the Pops of 1945, George Humphrey took me over to the opera house where Fiedler was putting on *Arthur Fiedler at 4:30 Sunday Afternoon*, a regular radio program for about 45-50 players, and I was introduced to Fiedler. He said, "Why don't you come on right now?" I said, "I'd like to, but I can't." When I got home, I thought, "Gee, that was stupid", and I called Mr Judd. He hemmed and hawed and said, "Oh, well, why don't you come on." And I came in the middle of the Pops season, waited for my bass to come, and there it was standing in the doorway when Fiedler came in one evening. Fiedler said, "Oh, your bass is here. You want to play? You got a tuxedo?" I said, "Yeah." Went on the stage without a rehearsal. The next morning we were recording.

So you started in the Pops.

Raichman, the first trombone, who wasn't supposed to be in the Pops, leaned over and said, "I saw Koussevitzky yesterday, and I told him what a fine bass player you are. He said, 'What are you doing playing Pops?'" Theodorowicz, the concertmaster, came over and said, "You shouldn't be on the last stand. There are some very weak players out in front. You should move up." I sawed wood there for quite a while before I started moving up.

This was 1945?

1945. We played the Esplanade concert that night when VJ was declared, and there was a tremendous crowd there. On the way home, I stopped at a gas station, filled up the gas tank, didn't need coupons or anything, all of a sudden. August 1945. But the next year I went to Tanglewood.

Tell us your recollections of the Koussevitzky years. What was your first impression?

You can imagine, with that audition, how I revered Koussevitzky. The whole family did. He made it for the Freeman family. He took us out of Rochester. Both boys ended up at Milton Academy, both went on to Harvard on national scholarships. So it was wonderful. It was Koussevitzky who made it possible. Here I was, just a youngster in Rochester, playing any old gig, and he said, "I must have you." In rehearsals with Koussevitzky there was never a dull moment. It wasn't tense.

It was always exciting. He gave as much in rehearsals as he did in concerts.

When my teacher in Rochester died, I bought his Dodd bass. This is a massive English bass, with a tone like a knife. We were playing a Sibelius symphony, maybe my second or third year there. In the last movement the basses are sawing away, syncopated against the trumpets. Koussevitzky looked at me, and he cut me out. He pointed at the trumpets. He could hear that bass coming through. Another thing happened the first time we played the Tchaikovsky Sixth Symphony. It starts with the basses. I was going to play my B up on the D string so I could make a nice smooth connection to the F-sharp. He looked over during the rehearsal and said, "Young man, please stay in the simple positions." Quite a guy. He knew the bass, you know. When Munch came—he was just a wonderful human being—if there was a mistake and he made it, he'd point to himself right in the middle of the concert.

Tell us more about Koussevitzky.

When he retired he told the trustees he could not go on with the schedule at his age unless he had some help, and he wanted Bernstein, "And if you don't let me have Bernstein, I will resign." They accepted his resignation. He was furious. He was an institution. He was there for twenty-five years. The concerts were always sold out, very exciting, the reviews were ecstatic. He was upset. He came back later as guest conductor and recorded the Sibelius Second Symphony. I had occasion to go up to the Green Room because Bob [Freeman's son] was at that age going to Tanglewood as an oboe player, and I went to talk to him about it. He said, "Tell me, what has happened to the discipline in mine orchestra?" There was Cioffi and Gomberg asking him [during rehearsal], "Is this an F-sharp or—?" The rule in Koussie's day was you don't answer unless he asks you three times. You keep quiet. If there's a wrong note, you go look at the score, but don't waste time. He was insulted.

I learned that as a student at Tanglewood.

"Stop the talk" is what he would say. Later on they called us the "Orchestra of Aristocrats", and that was true in those days. Then when we went on tour, we would leave Boston in special cars on the train for Pittsburgh for a concert the next night so we would be completely rested

when we played our concert. They took care of us like we were very important. One time Koussevitzky said, "You play from the instrument from which is the price five cents."

What's the background of that?

He was criticizing the basses. Or he would say, "I know very well what is the trouble" and he would take his first finger, because you have to stretch that first finger in the half position or you'd be sharp. Or else he would say, "It smells of management." Then one time we were broadcasting live rehearsals. It was supposed to be extemporaneous, but John Burk, the program annotator, had written out a speech for him because his command of the English language was atrocious. We were playing along and all of a sudden he stops. Puts on his half-glasses. "I was reading in the Bible the other day. In St Paul he said you must play with the spirit—" and went on like that for quite a while.

I had a two-year contract when I went there. The advice was, "Stay away from Koussevitzky. Don't even say hello. He doesn't want to talk." But at the end of two years I went up to the Green Room and said, "Dr Koussevitzky, my contract is running out. How has my playing been?" "Splendid. Fine." I said, "Well, how about a promotion?" "Who will I put back?" "It isn't really that. I want a raise." "You tell management I said so." I got ten dollars out of that. Every year after that I go up to see Mr Judd and get another raise.

You went in in '45 and Kouss retired in '49. So you had four years. His last four years.

We became very close to Olga Koussevitzky at the end. She came to Rochester when Bob was there as director. Warm association.

Then Munch came. What a difference.

When we went to New York with Koussie, we had those programs gilt-edged rehearsed and played and played. So when we came to New York there were no surprises. You know the story of when we went to New York with Munch? Munch didn't like to rehearse. Anyway, we went to New York and had an acoustical rehearsal on the stage at Carnegie Hall for a concert that night. Munch came on the stage with an armful of scores and held up *La Mer*. "Anybody want to rehearse *La Mer*?" No. "Anybody want to do so-and-so?" He picked up the score, and we'd play a few bars. "The Boston Symphony, you must play the tone!" and walked off the stage. That was the rehearsal. Many times we'd come walking up Westland Avenue to go to rehearsal and meet some of our colleagues going back. "Rehearsal canceled!" But when he did Bach Passion music or when he did French music, boy, you couldn't touch him. He loved my playing and, although I was probably on the third stand by then, he always gave me the beat, like I was the leader.

Transcribed by Diana Cook. This interview was used by permission of the Boston Symphony Archives.

The Stokowski Sound: Scheherazade

Tchaikovsky: *Nutcracker* Suite (1934); Ippolitov-Ivanov: In the Manger (orch. Stokowski) (1934); Glazunov: Dance Orientale from *Scenes de Ballet* (1927); Rimsky-Korsakov: *Scheherazade* (solo violin: Alexander Hilsberg). Philadelphia Orchestra. CALA 521.

For those who skip to the last line first: this CD is possibly one of the single most important ones a Stokowski fan should own. It presents the Maestro and HIS orchestra at their peak. The sound is wonderfully captured by Mark Obert-Thorn. Now back to the regular review.

a certain point of separation in time of recording, comparison becomes increasingly difficult. On the other hand, the other three are close in time. Oddly, the least listenable is the one from Disney. You would think that using the newest technology available at the time that the *Fantasia* release would sound best. Actually, if you want the *Fantasia* Sound, this 1934 will be better. I do not know how (I almost typed 'who') it got screwed up, but these Disney discs are simply not listenable. The 1926 recording, in comparison with the others, is a lot more listenable than the Disney, but not as magical as this

about a week later—I finally finished transferring those sides. Then I listened to the whole thing while making a dub. I still have that cassette, and I confess I fell in love with this recording due to the time I put into that job. I recalled thinking that the whole thing was as if Stokowski was rehearsing to make this for *Fantasia*. The swoons in the strings are more accentuated, as if they are leaning into the phrases, than in his 1927 recording.

Well, anticipation was high as I put this CD in the tray and pressed the play button. So often memory proves to have been false and things aren't nearly as good as recalled. This time, however, everything was as good as I remembered; in fact, it is better! As early as 20 seconds into it, you can sense that this *Scheherazade* is more theatrical than other recordings, even by Stokowski's standards. The orchestral entry after the opening violin solo is perfectly timed; then come the swooning strings. The use of portamento in this recording is greater than in any of his others. Hilsberg has a darker, more mysterious sound than in the other Stokowski recordings. Attacks are sharper than any of the others. The sound is fuller than in the 1927 recording. Once your ears adjust, there is a nice sound stage with depth to it and clear placement of instruments. The sound is warm with air around the music and a natural decay to the sound. The opening of the second movement is riveting, an underlying tension sleeps in the music. The solo bassoon melody, answered by the oboe, is delicate and dark. In fact, all of the solos in this recording are wonderfully captured by Mark Obert-Thorn's excellent work. On to the final movement. Here the tension builds as Stokowski strings the music taut, then tauter until the final release which hits like an orgasm. Long after the violin's last whisper, the music lingers like an afterglow.

This Scheherazade is more theatrical than other recordings

Leopold Stokowski loved Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic suite and the *Nutcracker* and recorded them both five times in his long life. There is also a CD from a live performance of *Scheherazade* with the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1962. If the length of this essay is devoted more to *Scheherazade*, it is simply because I prefer that piece. In fact, I happen to love it, especially in Stokowski's hands.

The *Nutcracker* is Stokowski's second recording. In writing this review I listened to the 1926 recording, the 1939 *Fantasia* CD and the 1973 LPO recording (the 1950 one is not currently on CD). I discarded the LPO recording as a referent because the technology separating the recordings is almost 40 years. To a certain extent it is not possible to separate the recording process from the performance itself. The two are so inherently related that a symbiotic synergy exists between them. So, after

CALA release. The sound on the earlier releases is dryer but provides a slightly more detailed ambiance, which is particularly telling in pizzicato moments. Over-all, however, this 1934 recording is the best historic Stokowski recording. It has it all: excitement, warm sound, as if they were rehearsing to make *Fantasia*.

The two fillers are icing on the cake, or perhaps more accurately between the cakes. This is vintage Stokowski transcription and performance. The earlier recording sounds a bit more grainy, but that is to be expected. Let's be honest, you won't buy this disc for these pieces, but it's nice to have them.

Some years ago, a member of the L.S.S.A. wrote and asked if the 1934 *Scheherazade* had ever been transferred to LP. I told him no, but promised to make him a cassette from the society's 78s. Well, many hours later—many, many hours later;

What we have here is the Philadelphia Orchestra and their creator, Leopold Stokowski, in top form. The reproduction of that occasion is little short of amazing. Let's remember that by 1934 Stokowski and HIS orchestra were the best in the world, according to no less than Rachmaninov. The soloists are names people bring up as evidence that there was an Age of Giants in classical music: Hilsberg at violin, Bloom on English horn, Kincaid, Mason Jones, and I fear I have probably left out others that I am ashamed I missed. By this time the Philadelphia Orchestra and Leopold Stokowski lived in a symbiotic relationship. This recording of *Scheherazade* captures that moment.

How does this recording stack up with all his others? Well, four studio and one live recording are (or were) available on CD. Leopold Stokowski first conducted *Scheherazade* with the Cincinnati Orchestra on February 18 and 19 in 1910, at the age of 28. (For this information and much other in this essay I am thankful to John Hunt's *Discography and Concert Register* available from the Leopold Stokowski Society.) His first recording of the entire piece was in 1927 (now on Biddulph WHL10). There were some acoustic takes from various sections, the earliest in 1919. A look at the comparative timings of the CDs in our collection is interesting:

	<u>1927</u>	<u>1934</u>	<u>1962</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1973</u>
I	9:10	10:07	9:17	10:03	8:33
II	10:19	11:10	11:02	11:40	11:17
III	8:49	10:14	9:57	11:52	11:21
IV	10:56	12:05	12:01	12:06	12:02

As can be seen, timings for the first movement are all over the place. Second movement timings are consistent in '34, '62 and '73, but several seconds slower in the Phase 4 issue. The third is, again, all over the place, but the fourth movement is fairly close in all but the '27 recording. The fact that the '27 recording is much faster is due to the necessity of getting the piece on two sides rather than three.

How do they compare otherwise? Well, the soloist is one important factor. In 1927, the soloist is not named. I have done some research and am unable to confirm anything. The concertmaster for the 1927 season was Mischa Mischakoff, but that is no guarantee that he is the soloist. Stokowski regularly shifted the responsibility for that position. To complicate matters, Stokowski did not conduct the Philadelphia Orchestra in the 1927-28 season, except for recordings made. So, the possibility that it was the concertmaster is even more open to question. Whoever it is, it is exciting, but the slightly dryer sound on this recording results in a sound which is thinner. Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra did record the first movement of *Scheherazade* in May of 1927, but the later, October take was used for the release. Who was the soloist there? (Also, the May recording is more expansive, at 9:58. Frankly, I prefer the earlier recording for several reasons. So the Biddulph disc is definitely worth having to listen to Stokowski in rehearsal.) Finally, I worked on the assumption that Stokowski had probably played the piece in public several times in 1927 as a kind of rehearsal for recording. In fact, he programmed it only once, in January, but there was the May recording, which probably used some rehearsal time. Still it could be argued that apparently they went in cold and made it. It is certainly exciting.

As a segue, the CALA 1934 recording of *Scheherazade* has on its cover a reproduction of the art work on the 1927 set of 78s. (With, alas, no reference to the soloist.) After that point, contrast rather than comparison is the main thing to notice. Any notion that once you've heard a Stokowski recording you've heard them all is belied with these two first efforts. Alexander Hilsberg, in 1934, plays as if he is making love to his instrument. It is full of passion. The closing moments of the final movement are achingly beautiful. The recording here is fuller than in '27. Interestingly, again, there are not any particularly more frequent live

performances prior to this '34 recording. Well, really, I think you know I happen to love this recording and that it should be in everyone's collection. While slower than '27 it still has sharp attacks, and, God, I love the portamento.

On to 1962. There is no mention of the soloist on the CD, but thanks to Mark Obert-Thorn I found out that the concertmaster in '62 was Anshel Brusilow (but, again, that is no guarantee he is the soloist—though it is likely). Note that the first movement in this live performance times in close to the '27 recording. In fact, the timings here provide evidence of how Stokowski might have played it when live in Philadelphia. The sound is okay, but nothing special. It seems to be monaural but it does have some ambiance that suggests early stereo. Why doesn't the Philadelphia Orchestra market this and the other Stokowski '60s performances? I'd love to hear their Sibelius 4th. Overall, while this is an exciting performance, the sound mitigates against an unqualified recommendation. Besides, how would you find a copy?

On to the final two recordings, both of which are on CD. The 1965 Phase 4 recording was my first. I don't know why I picked that LP. At the time classical music was new to me. For some reason, though, it was the recording I purchased when I added my first *Scheherazade*. The CD transfer is pretty rugged, with a woolliness around the loud passages. It is, however, better than in a boxed set issued a few years ago by a book company. That one tamed the edges and the performance. I was stunned at how so different a remastering changed the impact of a recording. I am anxiously awaiting the new issue and have my fingers crossed. (By the way, back in the day of LP I used this Stokowski recording to test out speakers to see if they could handle the closing of the second section.) Eric Gruenberg is the soloist, and he is in the same league with Hilsberg. This is one of the finest recordings of the piece ever, even better than the 1934 recording, because of the added

continued on back page

Revealing Stokowski: Anthony Morss Interview, Part III

Koshkin-Youritzin: Since you used the term “spirituality” earlier, let me ask you this: in terms of essential interest on his part, was Stokowski more interested, do you think, in achieving spiritual force in his work or sensuousness?

Morss: This is the second major point I’d like to make about him. I always felt that he was more concerned with the sensuous part of it. The physical world of sound was magical to him. He was like a child with a box of toys that way. He was also a master magician with it. And my one criticism of Stokowski is that he was at his best in music which was not the most profound. He did some profound music well, of course; no question, but he was more in his element in works demanding the sonically amazing. And his concern with enormous instrumental and orchestral power as well as color, was, I thought, perhaps a limitation in approaching the more spiritual aspects of the repertoire. For instance, one of his favorite concepts was the primitive. And one of his highest phrases of praise about anything was that it was “wonderfully primitive.”

Of course, his 1929-30 version of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring with the Philadelphia Orchestra is magnificent.

True, and he was he was fascinated with pagan cultures of all sorts, all of the music that dealt with primitivism: it was all the more extraordinary in that Stokowski himself was such a thoroughly hyper-civilized individual. His fascination with the primitive seemed almost perverse, but that had to do with what was new and beyond his usual experience. So, “wonderfully primitive” was one of his highest phrases of praise, and another of his most cherished concepts—one which he really relished (and you could tell this by the way he pronounced the phrase)—was that of “controlled confusion,” what appeared to be random, but was in fact part of a larger plan.

This brings up interesting possible parallels with the visual arts. Did he ever speak to you about favorite painters?

We never spoke about that.

Or styles?

We did speak about theatrical things, though, and he himself was obviously a man of musical theater. He told me that he had done 19 performances in a row of *Wozzeck*. One of the most interesting aspects of that to him was that he worked with Robert Edmond Jones, who was a great stage designer and stage director. They had refined things to the point where in the scene where Maria is rocking the child in the cradle, they had actually done away with the child altogether, the stage was so dark. By the time Robert Edmond Jones was finished with it, it was totally mesmerizing theater. Stokowski told me that the score was so difficult that it absorbed all of his energies.

He conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra in many performances in the Philadelphia Academy of Music—this is in the spring—and after the old Metropolitan Opera had finished its season, they came to the Met with the whole production and did several more performances there in New York. I believe that this was the first production of *Wozzeck* in the United States, and altogether there were 19 straight performances of it. I said, “Now, of course, you have so mastered that incredibly difficult score and gotten your way really into the heart of it, that I wonder: have you performed it often since?” He replied, “I never wish to conduct the score again.” I was shocked! “But why not?” I asked him. “Because after 19 performances of *Wozzeck*,” he said, “I felt unclean.” Unclean.

That’s very interesting!

I asked him what he meant by that, and he wouldn’t elaborate. He said, “Just unclean.” Actually, in retrospect, it’s perfectly obvious. When Beecham decided that he wanted to do *Wozzeck* because it was such an important and well-composed piece, he took two weeks off in the country to study the score. His friend, the critic Neville Cardus, went to meet him at his country hotel, and when he knocked on the door of Beecham’s room, he heard ‘Un bel di’ coming out of his piano. When Beecham opened the door, Cardus said, “But, Tommy, what are you doing playing Puccini? I thought you were here to study *Wozzeck*.”

Beecham answered, “I never wish to hear the piece again in my life. I have decided that I cannot really conduct any piece that does not promote love of life, and, indeed, pride of life, and this piece is sheer death.”

That’s fascinating.

That’s what Stokowski was reacting to. *Wozzeck* is thrilling, it is gripping, it is profound, and it is so dispiriting that after 19 performances he felt he just never wanted to hear the music again.

But, I have almost always gotten a great sense of spiritual uplift from Stokowski’s performances. Not just because they were good, but there was something...

There is a sense of enormous vitality, the delight in the beauty of the music.

And refinement of tone, certainly. What would you think would be the greatest performances that he’ll be known by, recordings that you can think of?

Well, that’s hard to say. One of the greatest performances I ever heard him do was on his 90th birthday—

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90th or 91st birthday. It was his farewell performance with the American Symphony. I had noticed that in recent years he had been on and off; and he'd been looking very old, but I went to this because it was to be his last performance in the United States. It was all Wagner, and it ended with the Immolation Scene from *Götterdämmerung*.

That was one of the greatest performances I have ever heard in my life. He was really on: he was at his greatest, the orchestra sounded simply magnificent, and there was an immensity, grandeur, profundity, and thrill to that performance which I will never forget.

I think another one of his absolutely extraordinary performances is with Rachmaninov, in the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini.

Yes, and that is amazing. And, actually, also I would say his symphonic synthesis of *Boris Godunov* is an incredible piece of work. He was a great Slavophile. He was very, very proud of being Polish on his father's side. Indeed, that leads me to an interesting discussion. Stokowski

*“In fact, I don’t smoke and I don’t drink,” After a short pause:
“There is a third, isn’t there?”*

claimed that he was born in Poland and brought to London at an early age. He came to believe that. Well, in fact, he was born in London, his father was Polish—and poor—and I believe his mother was Irish. I think his father was a cabinet maker, a carpenter. But I also was told by Wendy Hanson that when Stokowski was married to Evangeline Johnson, she would take him around Europe, show him all the grand portraits of the nobles in the museums, and tell him that she had discovered that they were actually his ancestors. Then she would go around by herself and inquire who they really were. He came to believe that, and so when I worked with him I observed that he always had the red ribbon of the French *Légion d’Honneur* in his buttonhole. He had it in absolutely every coat he owned. I once asked him about that, and he said he wore it because he had had several ancestors who had fought at the Battle of Waterloo, and they all had it; and so, as an act of family solidarity, after he had been awarded it, he wore it also. Well, I am not sure that any of those ancestors were really his. But he came to believe that.

He understood Polish, of course, but couldn’t speak it. And so the Polish accent which he occasionally adopted was completely false, and nobody could ever confront him on it. Most of the time when he spoke, his was the voice of an Englishman who had spent most of his life in

the United States. There was a slight residue of English there. But there were certain words which were always pronounced in German fashion, because, in addition to being a Slavophile, he was a great Germanophile. And he larded his everyday speech with German words constantly. A triangle was always a “tree-angle”; a bass clarinet was always a “bahss claree-net”; the orchestra was always the “orc-hes-tra,” and a microphone was always a “meecrophone.” He would use German words when he couldn’t immediately think of the English equivalent, and then look to a companion for the translation.

Once, when speaking to the composer Ned Bartow and me, he suggested we form a society and give an award each year. We wouldn’t have to incorporate: we could run everything from our apartments. But the awards should only be given to people of real *Leistung*. He looked at me questioningly because Ned didn’t know German. “Real achievement,” I said. He nodded. But, beyond that, if life got sticky in the rehearsals—as it did with the Symphony of the Air, because the percussion section began to misbehave and play around with the people on stage, toss

things back and forth and miss entrances—the Polish accent got very thick indeed. And he started referring to his friend Basil Rathbone as “Basseel,” which Mr Rathbone found very funny indeed. He said, “He knows perfectly well that my name is Basil. For goodness sakes, we have recorded *Peter and the Wolf* together!”

But things were getting difficult, so life got very, very Polish indeed, and it led to the one time that I ever saw him lose his temper—quite justifiably. I was backstage; Red Buttons had been throwing a banana back and forth, and it got into the percussion section—and they reached down and threw it back, thereby missing the umpteenth cue. At that point, Stokowski absolutely went ballistic. He exploded; he screamed and waved his arms around as if fighting off a swarm of angry bees. His normally rather white face grew bright red, and his accent changed to pure Cockney. That was very, very surprising. He shouted that he was leaving them—“Get another conductor!”—and he stormed off. That seemed to be the end, and the orchestra thought I was going to have to be the conductor for the rest of the rehearsals and the performance. I said, “Well, we needed a break about now, and I think Maestro was annoyed; my guess is that he is going to be back on the podium in 20 minutes.” And he was.

This was very interesting, though, because Stokowski almost never lost his temper. He almost never raised his voice, and he almost never laughed out loud. He had a wonderful, diabolical sense of humor, but it was very deadpan, and I only saw him lose his reserve once. I must tell you that story because it’s absolutely delicious. Stokowski came to dinner at the Bartows. After dinner he was waxing expansive and talking about something that was “wonderfully primitive.” This particularly wonderfully primitive thing happened to be a mass funeral of

important people in Bali that he had attended when he was there. Two or three important people had died, and they were all buried together. The funeral ceremonies involved huge high funeral pyres with dancers dancing around the pyres while the fires burned, waving swords and inflicting surface wounds, flesh wounds on themselves, so that they were dripping blood. His description of these people shrieking and howling and dancing around the fire dripping blood was just so exotic and wonderful. Mrs Bartow had not been paying any attention to this, being absorbed in inwardly gloating over the success of the dinner up to then. Suddenly she joined in, asking, "Oh, are they all Catholic?"

And Stokowski made a great effort to keep from bursting out laughing; you could see him getting control of his face with great difficulty. He answered gravely, "No madam, they had their own religion. It was a mixture of Buddhism and a few local things." Then, being embarrassed for her, considering that she had put her foot in it—though she wasn't embarrassed at all—he plunged into Catholicism. He said, "I was raised a Catholic myself, but now I'm just as anti-Catholic as I can be."

And Mrs Bartow, who came from an aristocratic Boston tradition and whose sole acquaintance with Catholicism derived from a whole lot of cheery Irish servants, said "Oh, I think they're cute." At which point, Stokowski threw back his chair, threw back his head, and delivered himself of an absolutely roaring belly laugh, as did we all. But that's the only time I ever saw him laugh. Usually, his humor was faintly sinister, totally deadpan. A perfect example: at the first meeting that we sat down to talk about the Orff score, when he came back from Europe after I had been playing the piano during all the rehearsals for the actors, he said, "At this point, I think I will make a *rallentando*."

I replied, "Oh, yes, Maestro, there is indeed one written there."

And he looked down at the score and said, "Well so there is. Well, I will make it even if it is written in the score." And I had a rather uncomfortable laugh with him, because that was typical Stokowski humor. It was funny, not on two levels, but on three: —he would do it even if it were written in the score; translation: he would have done it even if it had not been there. So, he was making a joke, and yet he was deadly serious at the same time. Similarly, once when I was helping Wendy Hanson move a trunk into Stokowski's basement, it turned out that Stokowski and I were the only ones capable of carrying this trunk; he was well on his 70s, and I gave him the easy end. It was quite a heavy trunk, but he lifted it perfectly well. We took it into the basement, the doorman having conveniently disappeared when he saw the heavy lifting approaching. We went up to Stokowski's apartment afterwards, and he provided us with white Port—he had the strangest taste in liquor. He loved sweet drinks, liqueurs, fruit and brandy—white Port, and then tawny Port...

Lush, like his sound!

Yes!

And intoxicating!

Then I think Raphael Puyana, the harpsichordist who had arrived, offered him a cigarette. Having accepted the cigarette and having it lit up without a word, he then said, puffing away with a glass in each hand, "Oh, no thank you, I don't smoke." And we looked at him. He continued, "No, I don't smoke. In fact, I don't smoke and I don't drink." After a short pause: "There is a third, isn't there?"

One of the most extraordinary things about Stokowski was, of course, that fact that he was a famous showman, and he had the ability to tickle the press and generate publicity by doing outrageous or fascinating things that had to be noticed. He obviously reveled in all of that, just the way he reveled in impressing and wowing an audience, and sharing with them thrilling music-making on what I thought was for himself a rather impersonal level. Perhaps I was misreading his outward calm in performance, because he regularly had trouble getting to sleep after concerts. However, Stokowski did not enjoy being recognized on the street. He loved his privacy. He was quite extraordinarily devoted to that, whereas a lot of movie stars exist for the waves and the handshakes and all the small-time adulation. To Stokowski that was extremely boring. He loved to use fame as a device for meeting people he wanted to meet, like Frank Lloyd Wright, whom he considered very, very interesting. And yet he did not like, for example, signing autographs; he hated to have people to make a fuss over him in restaurants, and he would ask for a table out of sight, and if they insisted on seating him in the front, he would leave the restaurant. He did that at *Les Ambassadeurs* in London.

It makes very good sense, though.

Yes, I think it makes sense, and I think he had a right to his privacy. Also, he had a very funny attitude about autographs, having been asked to sign so many of them. He said he would not sign autographs for anybody older than—I forget what it was, maybe it was eight or nine years old; he thought autographs were kiddie stuff. He would sign them for kiddies, but there was a catch to that one, too: you had to say his name, and whatever you said, that was what he signed. At one point, two little girls came round and said, "Oh, Mr Tchaikovsky, can we have your autograph?" He said, "Certainly," and signed "Piotr Ilyitch Tchaikovsky"! So perhaps that was his way of getting back at the vulgarly curious.

Could you comment on Stokowski's versus Koussevitzky's attitudes towards soloists and guest conductors?

Koussevitzky had plenty of soloists. But his attitude towards them was that, whereas, before he came, soloists were perhaps the major draw, Koussevitzky insisted that now the orchestra was going to be the principal attraction, and soloists would be hired only insofar as they were appropriate for the concertos which the orchestra wished

to program. And I think that is dead right. There are small orchestras which are able to exist only because of the glamour of the visiting soloists. I think that Stokowski was a better accompanist than Koussevitzky.

I certainly have never heard a greater dialogue between orchestra and soloist than in the Rachmaninov-Stokowski performance of the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini.

It's a wonderful performance! As far as guest conductors are concerned, I don't know what Stokowski's attitude was. I know that Koussevitzky's view on guest conductors was that they tended to upset his own very strict routine, and that he preferred to have few of them. He also preferred to have them as much as possible in his own tradition—conductors who would not disturb him, for Koussevitzky would too often come back after a guest conductor and say, "What has happened to my orchestra?"

Before we conclude, would you like to say something about Stokowski as a ladies' man.

Well, he was a famous ladies' man. I understood that he got a lot of the society gals in trouble in Philadelphia, and then, of course, laughed and had no intention of marrying them. A plain Boston lady and her husband once invited him to dinner; I knew that older couple quite well. Stokowski said to her, "The trouble with you is that you have no sex appeal at all," and she laughed, "Well, I know that!" Just plain, basic, Boston style, you know, and he took delight in the fact that, having been brought up in the end of the Edwardian era in England—where the establishment was extremely pompous and stuffy—he could do and say outrageous things and get away with them. He was living life according to his own precepts, and they were really very different from those of the world surrounding him. That's one reason why he didn't criticize other people and other conductors. They could do what they wanted, because he wanted the freedom to do what he wanted to do. And certainly he was said to be a menace to the ladies and his secretaries, on into his eighties. But the ones who were close to him truly, truly adored him. Wendy told me that he really wanted to be in a position where he needed nobody. That led him to be a consummate manipulator of a lot of people, because, of course, he did need them.

He was enormously helpful towards people. He certainly helped me—he recommended me for two posts. One of them was the Rochester Philharmonic. The board there didn't do anything about it; having asked for his recommendation, they then didn't get in touch with me. But the other post he recommended me for, I got, the Interschool Symphony, a far lesser post. He was very good to me, he wrote me wonderful letters of recommendation, and he would recommend me when other people asked him to recommend young conductors. I know that he helped many, many people start their careers—both instrumentalists and conductors. I got on with him extremely well. I found him the easiest boss to work for whom I'd ever had, because all you had to do was try to please him and think up all the ways that you could do that, and he was enormously appreciative. A very nice

man to work for, totally different from Leinsdorf and Schippers, for whom I also served as chorus master—beasts to work for—thoroughly disagreeable people. Stokowski was said to be the great egoist, and yet he was the easiest man to get along with, and the easiest great man whom I was ever around.

A far greater conductor than Leinsdorf and Schippers! So many truly great people are actually easy to deal with!

Exactly. Leinsdorf, however, was a fascinating mind. And he was, I think, much more interesting to talk with than he was to listen to conducting. If you read his books, they're interesting; his conversation was absolutely absorbing. He was an autodidact to whom it was very important that you knew how much he'd read and how much he remembered—which was near total recall. He was very bright, and I did enjoy talking with him, although I didn't enjoy his personality.

But I did relish Stokowski as a personality. He was wonderful company. And yet, having decided that I really liked him a whole lot, one day, I looked at those ice-blue eyes, and I realized that he looked at me, at best, as a flower which needed watering, and that there was an essential distance between us. He had few close friends; basically, he wanted to be absolutely independent, and he would help people, but it was like watering the flowers.

Something just occurred to me. If one feels, as I do, that his performances—again, take Tristan, but other pieces too—are extraordinarily seductive, it is important to remember that the act of seducing is not necessarily an act of totally communicating with someone.

No. It's an act of manipulation.

It's manipulation, with, of course, a distance involved, and a certain calculation.

Yes, and he was so incredibly intelligent that he was very, very good at that. You have made what seems to me an outstandingly perceptive and profound observation about Stokowski. I observed in his later years that there was a pose of wisdom, repose, and understanding, and that some of it was real, and some of it, again, was a theatrically assumed pose.

We talked earlier about the aspect of profundity in Stokowski. In fact, I remember what we discussed once about Rachmaninov performing with Stokowski.

Oh, that was fascinating when the two of them got together. First of all, they were a fabulous team, and one of the reasons for that was that Stokowski was a great conductor and had created an instrument whose tone quality and virtuosity appealed enormously to Sergei Rachmaninov. He loved the Philadelphia Orchestra under Stokowski and under Ormandy both, and, as you know very well, recorded three things with them as conductor...

Glorious performances...

...revealing that he would have been—he was, indeed, a great conductor.

I think his Isle of the Dead is one of the greatest performances of anything I've ever heard. Totally superhuman.

No question about it. I asked Stokowski what it was like dealing with Rachmaninov. And I asked if it was true that he was so sad because he was in exile from a country he loved so deeply and could never return to. Stokowski said, "Yes, and even if he could go back, it would have to be pre-1917 Russia." So that was gone, absolutely finished. Then Stokowski said he had asked Rachmaninov, after rehearsal with him of one of his piano concerti, if everything was all right. Rachmaninov had replied, "Good, but more trumpets." And Stokowski related, "So I pulled out the trumpets." Notice the way that that's phrased; it's like an organist pulling stops. At the next rehearsal, in Stokowski's case all that he would require was a look at the trumpets, or a single hand gesture; he wouldn't have had to say a word. So the trumpets were bigger. And so, after that rehearsal Rachmaninov said only two words: "More trumpets."

Then, in the third rehearsal, Stokowski really got the trumpets going. So he asked Rachmaninov, "Is everything all right now?" And Rachmaninov, deadpan as always, answered, "Very good, but not perfect until trumpets red in the face."

Now, in the great performance of the Rhapsody, who led whom, do you think? Who was in charge?

Well, I think there's no doubt who was in charge.

Rachmaninov, obviously.

Members of the Philadelphia Orchestra stated that Stokowski, who was effortlessly in control of everything, was visibly in awe of Rachmaninov, and they said that he was the one soloist who put the fear of God into Stokowski—and that, they said, took some doing! Well, you can imagine—I've told you already that story about Rachmaninov pushing Koussevitzky off the podium in a rehearsal of one of his own concerti and saying, "No, this way!" and conducting the orchestra and getting it right. And, similarly, when he was rehearsing with Furtwängler...

You mean Rachmaninov performed with Furtwängler?

Yes, yes! They played together!

I didn't know that!

Yes, in Berlin.

There's no recording of that, is there?

No, not that I know of.

That would be fascinating.

But what happened was that Rachmaninov was scheduled to start the rehearsal of his piece at 11:30, and Furtwängler was busy rehearsing his profound German interpretations. Time went on, so Rachmaninov simply sat down at the piano and produced several crashing chords. Furtwängler turned around, astonished, and Rachmaninov said, in German, "My rehearsal begins at 11:30." Furtwängler was the most eminent musician in Germany; as far as Rachmaninov was concerned, nobody was going to cut short his rehearsal time.

Of course, Rachmaninov was very disciplined and very punctual, and very organized.

Yes. That's right. And he was the kind of man who was so enormously expansive and so unbuttoned with his close friends—all of whom adored him—but who treated the rest of the world with a very cold sense of detachment, which was surprising for someone whose music is so incredibly vulnerable and emotional, and, really, so sensitive and personal. But that was his demeanor, his

"Stokowski could do and say outrageous things and get away with them"

distance—he went by the clock, and you'd better play along. His personality was such that he was obviously monolithic. The authority, the musical authority represented by Rachmaninov when he strode on stage must have been matchless. So any conductor—and after all, if you're a conductor dealing with a great composer who is playing his own piece, and is the greatest piano virtuoso in the world—how are you supposed to handle that?

And a very great conductor himself.

And a very great conductor himself!

Had to be a pretty humbling experience!

I'd like to speak of one aspect of Stokowski's personality which no one's ever mentioned, and that is the implications of his Wagnerism. Because, as I have said, Stokowski was more than a great interpreter of Wagner, a great lover of Wagner; he was a Wagnerite, with everything that goes with that. Now, there is a fascinating scholarly book called *The Mind and Heart of Love*—by Father Martin Cyril Darcy, who was the great English Jesuit intellectual—which is a discussion of medieval literature with specific reference to the troubadour tradition. Darcy got going on this because of Denis de Rougemont's book, *L'Amour et l'occident*, which came to inquire how it was that a tradition should grow up of

medieval chivalry in which the troubadour had to fall in love with a married lady. Everything had to end very badly. They'd have their affair, but it always had to be cloaked by night, and end in shame and death, and the perfect story of this is *Tristan und Isolde*. Tristan and Isolde had to break every single social, religious taboo of their society, all of the strongest ones, in a feudal society, in order to fall in love. They do, and the result is a search for night, a search for secrecy, a search for death, a search for a way out of this world. It is love-haunted, death-haunted, and the Wagnerians almost always have *Tristan* as their favorite work, as, indeed, Stokowski did. It was his absolutely prime, favorite personal piece. That represented the highest pitch of music-making in his whole life.

I'd like to point out that this is a particular cast of mind, and it has produced over the centuries a type of personality so extraordinarily individual that, apparently, there can only be one of them. In fact, they are a whole strain. Stokowski was one of the most unusual and distinctive personalities that I, certainly, have ever known. It's almost impossible to think that there could be anybody who would share his characteristics, but, indeed, there have been quite a number of them. These Tristan-Wagner types are always of superior intellectual attainments; there's always a considerable distance between them and the rest of humanity. They usually have the opinion of themselves as misunderstood, or not fully understood, geniuses. They have great ideals, but these ideals tend to be divorced from personalities. They tend to be rather ruthless towards any individuals who get in the way of realizing these ideals. And their personal lives tend to oscillate between unnatural austerities and wild profligacy. Such was Wagner himself; Nietzsche, although he broke with Wagner over Wagner's fascination with Christian myth, was very much this way himself. I was describing this Wagnerite personality to a singer many years ago who said, "Well, how could you know my teacher? You're describing perfectly the famous choral director at Eastman." He was apparently a great manipulator of people, a very bright man, and a very distant, rather cruel man in his way. Now, I never knew Stokowski to be cruel; I never knew him to be paranoid, and, yet, his intellectual affinities—musical affinities—the general cast of his personality—are absolutely type-cast as Wagnerian. This came out not of the standard Christian tradition, but rather out of the Catharite heresy in southern France which was brutally crushed in the late Middle Ages by the church as an extremely dangerous heresy, which indeed it was. The whole Catharite or Albigensian culture, which produced the troubadour tradition, was destroyed, because the Cathars believed this world was really so evil that you couldn't find happiness here, and if you did, you'd lost all your chance of eternal life. Thus you had to get involved in something that was bound to end very, very unhappily in this world, which meant that, basically, you were lonely and you kept to yourself. And Stokowski, in his position of wanting to need nobody, wanting to be totally self-sufficient, is perhaps in that line.

Charles O'Connell, A & R man for RCA Victor and later Columbia Records—who admired Stokowski enormously and knew him very well—said that Stokowski had as his constant companion someone who was totally absorbed in everything he was doing and thoroughly enjoyed all his activities; that companion was Stokowski himself. He was his own best friend and really didn't require many other people around. He did require people to do practical things for him, and he had a few who absolutely adored him, who tended him, and kept him as much as possible away from the world. They were only too interested to plant knives in your back if they detected the slightest hint of anything less than total devotion to the great master. Of course, many of the great conductors were surrounded by sycophants of that nature. They shone by reflected light alone, and they were very jealous about their position of keepers of the access to the great man. There were lots of people around who acted this way to great conductors, and that's one of the prices that is paid for great celebrity. Furtwängler was a man, by the way, with a remarkably few close friends. He loved to take long walks in the country by himself, whistling and singing his pieces, going into his inner life, and, so, although he was a benevolent person, he did not make a great many close friends. He spent too much time studying how to stretch his own imagination to the fullest dimension of the masterworks he was contemplating.

That's interesting. I wonder if great musicians have as their closest friends great composers with whom they commune.

Yes.

Dead or alive!

Yes, exactly!

And these are great minds and great spirits with whom they are communicating.

That's right. The severity of the mental gymnastics that composers especially have to go through is such that most of their energies are taken up in this alone, and there's not much time left over for everyday life. Mozart was one of the few exceptions to that. He was an enormously gregarious person with a genius for friendship. Maybe that's because composing came to him more easily than it came to a whole lot of other people! You think of Beethoven's writing down in his notebooks that he finally got the counter-subject of the fugue at 2:30 in the morning—caramba!, expletive deleted; he finally got it; thank God; here it is!—and it cost him blood. Mozart would simply sit down and go into a trance, and these pieces would appear and rationally complete themselves while he was involved in a kind of contemplation. But a great many of the great musicians and conductors—and, of course, soloists!—spent so many hours a day practicing. They're just dedicated to their instrument, and ordinary, everyday life can't intrude; otherwise, they can't perform. Although a conductor doesn't have to master an instrumental technique, he has an enormous quantity of repertoire to master.

Sure, and to be on the wavelength of the composer, and to try to do that composer justice.

Yes, it means a real immersion of one's mind and personality and every single mental and spiritual faculty into the repertoire to be presented as faithfully and profoundly as possible.

Returning to music and art critics, I think that they ideally do the same thing—try to commune with the spirit of

the particular work that is being judged, in order to see, and communicate to others, its true value.

That's absolutely correct. Yes, because all of the scholarship in the world is unavailing if you haven't fought your way into the heart of what the communication means on the personal and spiritual level.

Transcribed by Cynthia Koshkin-Youritzin

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Book Reviews

⇒ *Within These Walls: A History of the Academy of Music in Philadelphia*, by John Francis Marion. Academy of Music, 1984

This is a most interesting and enlightening volume and a very readable one, to boot, but I warn you that it is hard to find. Passing over the long history of the Academy, its financing, its ownership, and the myriad of figures (musical, operatic, political, social, patriotic, and the list goes on endlessly) who were part of the building's history is palpably unfair to the author, but to this reviewer, for obvious reasons, it is the story of the Stokowski years that is the highlight of this volume. The author has done a superb job of bringing to life those glorious, contentious, and, for many, never-to-be-forgotten years when Stokowski and his Philadelphia Orchestra made music, technical advances, electronic discoveries, controversy, and headlines!

Stokowski came in 1912; in 1915 he gave two weeks of Philadelphia "Pops" concerts; in 1916 he gave Philadelphia, alone, nine performances of the Mahler's Eighth Symphony. In 1917, he became Dr Stokowski. By 1921, he had started scolding his audiences for coming late, leaving early, and other faults as he saw them. In 1924 there was a new decor and new lighting. Supposedly, the old lights hurt the conductor's eyes, and as he was extremely sensitive to color, he sought colors which did not jar his psyche. And in 1925, there was the "Band of Gold", which received high praise. His children's concerts are given considerable attention by the author, as well they might, for children were always Stokowski's devoted admirers—and for very good reasons.

In 1927-28, Stokowski took leave to seek relief from a shoulder injury and to alleviate neuritis in his right arm. Upon his return the audiences for his regular Friday afternoon concerts caught more hell for rustling their programs, whispering, shuffling their feet, and generally not giving the music full attention. Yet to such an audience on October 4, 1929, he announced that on October 6 the orchestra would be broadcast, thanks to WGY in Schenectady, New York and the sponsor, the Philadelphia Electric Storage Battery Company (maker of Philco radios—do you remember them? I do!). And there were other Stokowski innovations or experiments, some

lasting, some fading into oblivion. All of these and more are detailed by the author who shows a fine knack for establishing the mood surrounding these experimental activities. In addition, it should be noted that the author has included some very interesting interviews with individuals who well remember various aspects of the Stokowski years.

Then came the time of his departure, which extended over several years. These were the years of *One Hundred Men and a Girl* made in Hollywood, but recorded in Philadelphia; the years of *Fantasia*, much of it recorded in the Academy; and the last Stokowski concerts with *His Philadelphia Orchestra* in the spring of 1941. Mr Marion's story of the Academy goes on to its conclusion in the 1980s, but 1941 marked the end of the Stokowski era, which will be remembered by many as unique in the annals of American classical Music.

As noted, the book is hard to find, but no admirer of the art of Stokowski should neglect to seek it out. It is well worth the effort! Nor should it be forgotten that the author has written a very readable history of an historical Philadelphia landmark, which was there before Stokowski arrived and after he departed—though it was Stokowski who brought to it an era, and aura, of excitement which only he could create and maintain.

⇒ *Boston Symphony Orchestra: Charcoal Drawings of its Members with Biographical Sketches*, by Gerome Brush. Printed for the Orchestra, 1936

This volume will certainly be of great interest to those wanting to know more about the history of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. It contains 109 charcoal drawings, dating from the mid-1930s, of the conductor and members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The very brief biographical sketches give the reader (viewer?) a better idea of where the members of the Orchestra, as then constituted, came from. It certainly amazed this writer when he noted how many of the musicians were native-born Americans, something that all the writings about the French characteristics of the orchestra did not at all indicate. This is not an easy volume to obtain, but to those interested in the Orchestra's history, it will be well worth searching out. ♦

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☞ *Interpreting Music*. Atlantic Monthly, August 1948

Parts 1 & 2 were taken verbatim from "Poetry and Music". Only the final section is new. In it Koussevitzky traces the evolution in the standing of the musician over the past two centuries from entertainer and servant, to the romantic era "when the musician finds himself wrapped in a cloak of exclusiveness and adorned with a halo of the privileged", up to the present day, where we find that the greatest artists are also great men. As examples he cites Paderewski, "the musician-patriot, statesman, and aristocrat of the spirit" and Albert Schweitzer, "the musician philosopher, scientist, and humanitarian". He continues: "The advent of such men announces a new era in music, an era where outer perfection, brought to a definite point of attainment, does not suffice; where a new dimension is sought—the infinite fourth dimension which rests with and within us."

The wise conductor offers sage advice to young musicians. Today's crop of mindless virtuosos would do well to heed his words: "When a student decides to become a musician, let him first take counsel with himself. Does he possess the true gift and qualifications that give him a right to step upon the stage where thousands of eyes watch him and thousands of hearts beat in anticipation of the message he is to bring through music and his art? Will he, indeed, open the gates of heaven and let the people experience ecstasy—were it for an infinitesimal moment; or will the gates stay closed and heaven remain a promise unfulfilled?"

To those musicians who are driven by ego and avarice alone, the conductor's final statement in print should serve as a powerful wake-up call: "As one chosen by destiny and richly endowed by nature, the artist must have a sense of obligation toward those who are denied these riches. It is for him to repay nature and to offer his

gifts to humanity, in all humility of heart, as an act of gratitude for the grace bestowed upon him."

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dimensions stereo provides. It is the slowest of all of them, but damn I love it. Attacks are sharp, portamento is used, but more sparingly than in '34. You really ought to look for the older CD issue on London in cutout bins. Hold off on the new Phase 4 issue until I get a chance to review it. The previous re-release of the Beethoven 9th was a disaster.

Finally, 1973. This recording was released on an early RCA CD, but the opening 2:00 were in monaural. It also appeared in some kind of *Twilight Zone* CD, the story of which is on the Leopold Stokowski Society's CDiscography. The sound in the latest RCA incarnation is warmer, less wooly. Gruenberg, however, does not seem as involved this time. The attacks are less sharp, things sound more rounded. The London issue can be tiring on the ears, unless you watch the volume level. This is not a problem with the RCA issue. Still, I'd love to hear how this might be transformed if we were to get a 20-bit re-issue.

Well, the purpose of this essay was not to make any recommendations for your purchase. I have tried to clearly lay out the comparisons and contrasts in the various Stokowski recordings of *Scheherazade*. I would strongly encourage you to get the CALA issue. This is one of the most important historic issues, period. For Stokowski aficionados it is a must. If you want stereo you'll probably have to wait for a reissue of the Phase 4 disc, since I think the older one is no longer available. If you find it in a cut out bin, snatch it up. The RCA disc is only available as part of a 14-disc set at the moment, so that will likely dissuade some people (don't let it, the set is invaluable).

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 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, William Schuman, and Antonio de Almeida 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 publications for that year. Back issues of our Journals are also available. For a complete list, contact the Society at the above address.