KOUSSEVITZKY
Recordings Society

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Tom Godell

Letter from the President

Several new Koussevitzky CDs have appeared since our last Journal. There isn't sufficient space for complete reviews, but I can tell you that Mark Obert-Thorn has done an outstanding job with the transfers of the Brahms 3rd and 4th Symphonies on Pearl (9237). The latter recording was begun in 1938, but not completed until the following season. The earlier sides have greater clarity and presence, which makes it utterly impossible to cover up the side joins—though Mark has done as well as possible under the circumstances.

Another technically flawed recording is the Tchaikovsky 5th. Obert-Thorn (Biddulph 34/5; with Symphonies 4 & 6 as well as *Romeo*) and Ward Marston (BSO Classics, review p. 11) have dealt with the problems in radically different ways. Obert-Thorn used the 45 rpm issue of the slow movement because it does not have the unwanted vibrato that plagues the 78s. Marston employs the 78 rpm master discs—"not shellac copies", the booklet proudly proclaims—except for the Valse. For reasons not explained in Brian Bell's otherwise comprehensive notes, Marston used a tape copy of the masters made in 1948. In the Valse, the Biddulph sounds muffled and distant compared to the crystal clarity of this BSO disc. On the other hand, the 45s Biddulph chose for the slow movement have far less surface noise than the hissy, swishy, and worn masters on BSO. Thus, for once it's good to have two different issues of the same recording—though one wishes that these two companies had somehow collaborated on a single disc with all the virtues of both!

Two other Koussevitzky CDs have just been issued by Biddulph. WHL 044 has the Hanson 3rd (an unusual choice by Koussevitzky; he had far more compelling contemporary American scores in his repertory by this time) coupled with an odd, but very welcome assortment of short Russian and French miniatures. WHL 045 holds the first commercial issue of the opening movement (here incorrectly labeled as "II") of the Shostakovich 8th Symphony. It's a harrowing reading that makes all subsequent renditions of this music seem tame. The rest of the program is all-Russian. The Prokofiev *Romeo & Juliet* Suite needlessly duplicates RCA 61657, but, as compensation, we have two never before released double bass recordings from 1928. Koussevitzky's Sibelius 7th made its *third* appearance on CD in EMI's 7-disc set devoted to "The Art of Conducting: Great Conductors of the Past" (65915). This collection also includes recordings by Nikisch, Weingartner, Furtwängler, Szell, Stokowski, and Bernstein.

The next BSO Classics release will have the Beethoven *Egmont* and Brahms *Academic Festival* Overtures, the Schubert 5th, and Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* Overture and *Parsifal* Prelude to Act I with the *Good Friday Spell*—all from April 1947, except for the last item. Since BSO Classics is the *only* source that has access to Koussevitzky's last commercial recordings (not to mention his matchless concert broadcasts) it's good to know that they are finally planning to make at least some of this material available. Pearl is preparing an all-Beethoven program including the Boston *Eroica* and complete *Missa Solemnis.* Biddulph will shortly release an all-American disc of Copland, Randall Thompson, and Sousa.

Three new Stokowski discs are also pending. The first two are from Pearl: a Russian program by the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra including Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* and the first issue of a live Rachmaninov *Isle of the Dead;* and a "Spanish" disc consisting of works by Falla, Albeniz, and Bizet (*Carmen* Suite). Finally, a new Cala disc brings together the Schubert *Unfinished* (All-American Youth Orchestra) with the Brahms First and Wagner *Forest Murmurs* (Hollywood Bowl).

The U.S. Postal Service will honor four conductors next year as part of its on-going "Legends of American Music" series. Likenesses of Arthur Fiedler, Leopold Stokowski, Eugene Ormandy, and George Szell will grace these stamps. Notice anyone significant missing from this list? Are we disgruntled yet? In any event, four composers will also be honored: Samuel Barber, Ferde Grofé, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, and Charles Ives.

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by Martin Bookspan

Robert Ripley Interview

Tanglewood, July 31, 1993

Martin Bookspan: *When did you become a member of the Boston Symphony?*

Robert Ripley: I became a member of the Boston Symphony in 1955. It was Munch's sixth or seventh year.

You were at Tanglewood in the summer of '42?

Yes, I was. Also in '41.

So you were practically at the very beginning of this institution. You were a student studying with whom? Bedetti?

No, I was at the Curtis Institute. I was a student of Bedetti in high school, before I went to Curtis. From '37 to '40 I studied with Bedetti.

So you grew up in the Boston area?

Not exactly. We lived in New Hampshire then. We *had* lived in the Boston area prior to that.

And Bedetti for many years was the principal cellist of the BSO under Koussevitzky, when it was basically a French orchestra. When you came to Tanglewood in '41 and '42, of course, you were under the aegis of Serge Koussevitzky What do you remember of him as the Artistic Director of Tanglewood?

Well, he was an immense presence, to begin with. Of course, he had this tremendous reputation as a conductor. The students—well, everybody—venerated him. They either venerated him, or they were afraid of him. But he was the supreme boss. I mean, he was God here, as he was at Symphony Hall. I remember at the opening exercises some speech he gave to the students, and it was just so inspiring, you know. I don't remember all that he said, but it just fired you up for the whole thing.

He was able to do that even though his spoken English was about as broken as it could be, but he wrote in English wonderfully. '41, as you said, that was just the second season of the Berkshire Music Center, as it was known then.

It was the end of my first year at Curtis. Of course, Bedetti was here, coaching the cello section, so I worked with him. From that, I'll tell you a little story about Koussevitzky.

We were in the main house, the cello section, working with Bedetti on something at the very beginning of the season, and it was in the evening. And there came this very timid knock at the door, and Bedetti says, "Come in." Nothing happens; he opens the door and yells, "Come in!" And it's Koussevitzky! *[Imitating Bedetti:]* "Oh, oh, come in!" He was all over himself with obeisance to his master! And so, we rehearsed in front of Koussevitzky, and Bedetti was so nervous about it, so uptight—Koussevitzky says, "Sounds very nice."

As a former bass player, did Koussevitzky have anything insightful to impart to the cello player?

I don't think particularly, specifically. He just had this immense, heartfelt musicianship which he imparted to *everybody*. To the strings, he would say, "Don't play vith fingers of vooden"—don't play with wooden fingers. It just exuded from him all the time. And rehearsals were as keyed up as concerts for him. He never let down for anything. Any time you were playing music, it was an event.

Back to Bedetti for a moment. I had the privilege of attending many of the Koussevitzky concerts in about the last eight or nine years of Koussevitzky's tenure with the orchestra, and, of course, Bedetti sat right under his nose. Bedetti, I would say, eighty-five percent of the time, looked up at the face of Koussevitzky as he was playing, and there was such a look of awe and reverence and respect on his face. Those were qualities that Koussevitzky sometimes inspired, but the other side of it was, as you said, fear.

Yes. Now, I have interviewed a number of retirees from the orchestra who had played with Koussevitzky. To a man, so far, they have told me, "The orchestra was afraid of him, but *I* was not afraid of him." I have yet to find the ones who were afraid of him!

Do you remember some of the repertory you played with Koussevitzky in '41?

Oh yes, I certainly do. Of course, Koussevitzky didn't work with us that much in '41.

Then it was Lenny [Bernstein]?

Oh yes, it was Lenny as a student and Thor Johnson and Robert Whitney and Richard Korn.

Korn later went on to conduct the National Orchestral Association in New York, and he died a rather early death.

We would play under the student conductors, and Koussevitzky would sit out in the shed listening and correct or whatever. Korn was a rather stiff, straight-laced, proper person. You wouldn't have thought that Koussevitzky would have chosen him for a student conductor, because he was just so stiff, and almost like a puppet. He got up on the stage and said, "Good morning. My name is Korn," and we proceeded. Koussevitzky stopped him and said, "Korn! Korn! Here must be the most *formidable* crescendo!" So we started to play again, and Koussevitzky stopped him. "Korn! *Told* them, Korn! *Told* them!" So, Korn says, "Well, you all heard what Dr Koussevitzky said!"

You know the famous story of Irving Fine, don't you?

Oh, yes. Can I tell that? I was there! I was sitting in the shed. Yes, as a student! The Boston Symphony

Orchestra was rehearsing something by Irving Fine—I don't remember what it was—and he was conducting. Koussevitzky was having him conduct it. And Koussevitzky was sitting out in the shed, as usual, and they finished that. Koussevitzky walked down the aisle, nodding his head, a smile on his face, and he said, "Fine! Fine! That vas *awful!*" We thought he was commending him for it! That's a famous one.

'42 was the year of the concert premiere of the Shostakovich Seventh Symphony, which happened a few weeks after Toscanini and the NBC played the American premiere.

I think it was the following week. I remember we all knew there was this sort of tussle between Koussevitzky and Toscanini as to who would get the first performance, and Toscanini won in the sense that it was *audible* first, but through the radio. So, this didn't count as far as *Koussevitzky* was concerned: *we* did the first concert performance.

Well, you know why Toscanini got the radio—well, what was the premiere? Because of NBC dollars. NBC put up the money and got the rights.

Nonetheless, we did it, and we were all tremendously keyed up about this thing—it was all in manuscript—and a *long* piece. So, we rehearsed it a lot with Koussevitzky, and I remember him describing the scene. He was very imaginative, you know, as to what the music meant; there was this sort of plaintive, sentimental tune in the slow movement. I don't remember anymore where it was, but he said, "You know, this is like the little old mother sitting at home thinking of her son off in the war, and she is knitting." That was the way you were supposed to imagine as we played. This sort of thing, he was great at.

Let me ask you this, because generally orchestra musicians don't respond too kindly to talk from the conductor on the podium. How did you fellows and ladies respond to that sort of instruction, if you will, with Koussevitzky?

With *him?* Well, as I said, he was God Almighty. If he stopped to tell us something, we were just all ears for whatever it would be. Of course, his English, you couldn't understand a lot of it. I remember him saying often, "Don't play like a yapparat!" And I thought he's saying, "Don't play like a parrot"—don't just copy things. No. He was saying, "Don't play like an *apparatus.*" I found out later!

But you really took the message out of, for example, that illustration that you just told us about, that here's a mother knitting for her son who's off to war, and it gave an extra dimension to the playing.

Well, I think so. But he was just so inspiring. As I said, he never let up. Every minute was just full of purpose and emotion and drama. I mean, rehearsals were exhausting.

I was principal cello through the whole summer of '42, and, sitting right under his nose, you know, his sweat would drip on me and on the music. And there was something obscure in the slow movement of the Shostakovich Seventh as to the clef. We didn't really know whether it was bass clef or tenor clef. Cellos play in both, you know. So I thought, well, here I sit; I have to ask him. It's my job to ask him. So, I mustered a great deal of courage, and said, "Dr Koussevitzky, four bars after letter C (or whatever it was), is it bass clef or tenor clef?" And he stopped, and he looked at me, and he *glared* at me, and he said, "Don't make conversation vith me! Vhat kind of discipline is this? Ve have no de time for conversation! What if de whole orchestra made conversation vith me? I am sure Mr Bedetti did not teach you that!" I felt like crawling inside my instrument. It was horrible!

We had an intermission just after that, and as Koussevitzky was leaving the stage, he turned around, and pointed at me and said, "And *you!* Don't make conversation vit me!" In case I'd forgotten! Bedetti was out front, and he came up saying, "Ah, you see, you see!"

"... This is what I have to put up with all year long."

I've interviewed Roger Voisin. He came into the orchestra very young. His father was already in the orchestra, as you know, and he was only 18 or something, and they were very close to the Bedettis. Roger said, "You know, when I came into the orchestra, Jean Bedetti told me, 'Be careful, Roger; don't ask him anything. You think he will understand, but he does *not* understand.'" If I had known that ahead of time, I wouldn't have done that.

How did you solve the dilemma?

Well, Stanley Chapple came up to me and said, "Don't worry about it. I understand. I'll take care of it. It'll be all right." Stanley Chapple was a wonderful man, an Englishman who was doing choral work at Tanglewood, and he was sort of troubleshooter in general for everything, mainly for Koussevitzky. So, the next time we rehearsed this thing, Koussevitzky turned to the section, didn't look at *me*, looked at the section down the line, and said, "And the cellist, change-ed back the key"—key meaning clef—"change the clef back." From *what?* We still didn't know. We never got an answer. I don't know what we played. I don't know whether it was right or wrong.

Well, you know, this gets sort of to the heart of what I have always considered to be a bum rap that Koussevitzky took: that he was not terribly well-educated as a musician. And I'm sure that's absolutely not the case. He certainly would have known what clefs to play in and what distinct problems any player in the orchestra might have faced where technical matters were concerned. Does that square with your experience?

Yes. Although apparently he never really learned to read a score very well, you know. And it's to his immense credit that he persevered in introducing new material when he couldn't really read it. Very complicated scores were being written in those days, of course. And he had a pianist—at first Nicolas Slonimsky—

play the scores for him until he learned them. Sanroma did the same thing later on. I think that's an immense plus for him, that he would bother to do that—it's tremendous. Nobody else did, and there are things in the repertoire now which wouldn't exist—like the Bartók *Concerto for Orchestra*—if he hadn't pursued that course. But, you know, Koussevitzky may have known a lot more than he could express well in English. Maybe he knew what the clef was—he didn't say bass clef or tenor clef; he just said, "Change-ed back!"

I'll tell you a couple of other little things that happened in rehearsals. Once, he stopped and grabbed his face and said, "A *bee* has bit me!" And all the lackeys scrambled to get alcohol or whatever for Koussevitzky's bee sting! They finally came and fixed him up. It was kind of funny.

Another time he wanted a red pencil to mark something, and big scramble to find a red pencil. He had a blue pencil. He was just standing there, quietly waiting for someone to bring a red pencil, and he said, "You know, I must have red. I cannot see blue. Everyone is crazy in his own way, and so am I."

Oh, my! That's a dear little story. I can't resist saying, you know, there used to be a harpsichordist named Yella Pessl. If he had wanted a yellow pencil, I wonder what problems that would have caused?

They'd have gone out and paid her way to come to town. *[Imitating Koussevitzky:]* "What you are doing here?" Oh, dear!

By the way, even though I came in Munch's seventh year, most of the talk among the men was still about Koussevitzky. This used to infuriate Munch because he was constantly being compared to Koussevitzky in the press, you know, and by the players. And he knew that. He was as different from Koussevitzky as you could get. The men loved him because he cancelled rehearsals and was very easy-going, and so forth. But, one day, he blew up. Munch would blow up at the slightest provocation, or no provocation; you would never know what would tick Munch off. One day, I don't know what it was, but he said, "I am *sick* and *tired* of always *Koussewizky! Koussewizky! Koussewizky!*" And then he beamed and said, "Ah! Come. Play."

Well, you say they couldn't have been more different. Of course, that's true in their preparation of programs. Koussevitzky would rehearse everything right down to the last...

Oh, yes, and he would always stop at the same places, make the same criticisms, but the orchestra sounded marvelous.

"Just to see Koussevitzky come on stage was an event."

My aunt had a season ticket for the Friday afternoon concerts, and I would go down for lessons. My lessons were Saturday morning. I'd get out of school at noon on Friday up in New Hampshire, and my mother would drive me down, and we'd stay at my aunt's. She would have been at the concert Friday afternoon. She would come home from Koussevitzky's concert walking on air, just floating, and she'd say, "It was simply marvelous." We don't hear that anymore, Marty.

Once in awhile we went a day early, if I was on vacation or something, and go "rush" Friday afternoon. Fifty cents in those days. Of course, in my mother's day, when she was there in 1918, it was twenty-five cents.

Yeah, when I started to go rush it was thirty-five cents, and all of us in the rush line were incensed when it went up to fifty cents.

Oh sure. I suppose. Anyway, so we would go rush, and Aunt Ethel very generously let me sit in her seat, and the first time this happened was the Tchaikovsky Fourth Symphony. This was in 1937 or '38, I guess. I remember her seat was 4H, way off to the right where I could get a perfect shot of Koussevitzky's profile, you know. And I was all excited, of course. I was what? About 15 then. Just to see him come on the stage was an event. They had very high risers, and back a little bit, so he'd walk around behind the risers and right across the front of the stage to the podium, remember?

And it took him about two minutes to do that.

Yes! My impression was, he's walking as though he's made of glass, and if you should touch him he would just shatter apart. I don't know if it was an act or what, but it sure was effective. And he stood there at the podium and he started over here looking at the violins, and he slowly moved his head and looked at the entire orchestra, all around the circle to the violas, and then he went back to the middle, and his face was already beet-red, and that vein was showing in his temple, and everybody thought he was going to die from it. And he held his baton like this and just went POW—straight out without any preparation to the horns, you know, at the beginning of the Tchaikovsky Fourth. I tell you, I mean, never in my life before or since have I had such an experience.

I had exactly the same experience, Bob. Mine was in 1940. That was the year of the centennial of Tchaikovsky's birth. So, for the last three subscription concerts, Koussevitzky paired a

Beethoven symphony with a Tchaikovsky symphony. Beethoven Four, Tchaikovsky Four; Beethoven Five, Tchaikovsky Five; Beethoven Six, Tchaikovsky Six. And that Tchaikovsky Four, exactly as you describe it: POW! The sound that exploded!

And from then on, of course, I was just transfixed by him. He was making all kinds of sounds apparently with his mouth, and shaking his head and I thought, gosh, is he trying to stop the orchestra? Is it all wrong? It was just unbelievable. And I finally came to realize the orchestra is his instrument, and he is playing that instrument. Of course, that's a cliché in a way, but I mean, I had never heard it before, and that's just exactly what struck me.

I was an usher in Symphony Hall from '43 to '46, and so not only did I hear the Friday-Saturday pairs, but also in those years there were Sunday afternoon and Tuesday afternoon concerts. So, there were times when I would hear the same program four times, and each time was an extraordinary event.

I've been told a couple of anecdotes about Koussevitzky's English over the years, particularly this one. When they were recording, he would say, "Mr O'Connell!"—Charles O'Connell was the recording producer/engineer—"Mr O'Connell! How many long the time that vas?"

I loved Koussevitzky's English!

And once O'Connell or somebody made a suggestion to Koussevitzky, and he said, "You vill take care of de apparat; I vill take care de music." Well, you don't hear that anymore, either.

No. I, in my usher days, sneaked into the Hall during a recording session, when finally the Khachaturian Piano Concerto was being recorded with Kapell, and at the end of the session they had some time left over. I don't think they had this planned, but, with time left over, Leslie Rogers brought down two Sousa marches, Semper Fidelis *and* Stars and Stripes, *and Koussevitzky started off on* Semper Fidelis. *The recording director then was Richard Gilbert, and, after one take—I was way up in the second balcony, so nobody could see me—but I heard Dick Gilbert on the intercom tell Koussevitzky, "Dr. Koussevitzky, that was wonderful, but our equipment can't take the percussion. Would you please cut them back?" And I could hear Koussevitzky grumble, "All right, ve do." Those Sousa marches were part of a series when RCA was still in the 78 rpm business. They produced red vinyl discs. Koussy's* Till Eulenspiegel, *the Debussy* Afternoon of a Faun, *and these two Sousa marches were issued on red vinyl 78s.*

He was famous for conducting *Stars and Stripes.* In those days we had Russian war relief—what is now *Tanglewood on Parade*—and there was some band that came up. He conducted *Stars and Stripes* with this band. Oh my goodness, it was so thrilling, you know.

"Bessie! You are not together, and I will not mention any names, Mr Juht!"

When he first started recording, he made the men stay on the stage to listen to the playbacks. Of course, management had to pay for that. The players got no intermission time they were entitled to. That went by the board pretty quickly! But he wanted everybody to be there and participating.

Interesting. Bob, having had this growing up experience with Koussy and the BSO, it must have been a great day in your life when you became a member of the orchestra.

Oh, it certainly was. Of course, it was always my dream to join the Boston Symphony, and I never thought I would. Getting into Tanglewood was the next best thing. But I joined the Cleveland Orchestra. Oh, I should tell you about that, because it happened up here, and I must say, other than that one incident about the clef...

"You should not make conversation..."

Yeah. But he was very kind to me after that, and he knew that I was going to Cleveland. Between things on stage, he would talk to us about who was going where, what students were going to do after the summer. He said, "Will you go to Cleveland?" I said, "Yes." "Fine orchestra; fine conductor."

Artur Rodzinski.

So, I auditioned for Rodzinski up here. The audition ended with Rodzinski saying, "Well, you've been recommended very highly; will you take the job?" I didn't have to do any sight reading, so that was nice. So, I started in Cleveland with Rodzinski. I left the orchestra in two weeks. There was an Air Force Captain developing a symphony orchestra in Florida. So, I only stayed two weeks, but my name was on the program as a member of the orchestra serving in the Armed Forces.

So, when the war was over, we were informed that anybody interested in going back to Cleveland should call up Dr Szell. I did, and I went back and played with Szell for nine years. And that was like nine years of the most superb conservatory that you could ever attend. Szell was a born teacher. If you paid attention in the rehearsals, there was an awful lot to learn. It was just a tremendous experience, and I was so green. I hadn't done that much orchestral playing, really. Tanglewood, and two weeks in Cleveland, and then three years in the Glenn Miller orchestra.

I came back to Cleveland pretty scantily prepared for Szell. I called him up, as I said. My hands were sweating just dialing his number at Park Avenue. I was living in New York at the time, right after the war. And he said, "Oh, yes; Mr Rip-*let*!" He knew; he had all the names. "Don't be impatient. Mr Vosburgh [the manager] will return to Cleveland shortly and send you a contract." So, stupid fool that I was, I said, "Well, don't you want to hear me play?" He said, "No, I don't think that will be necessary." By law, they had to take me back as long as I had five fingers, and I could do the job.

But, back to Koussevitzky. I went to a Boston Symphony concert in Cleveland, and Szell was there. I went with Jake Krachmalnick. He was assistant concert master of Cleveland at that time.

Then he went to Philadelphia as concert master.

He was a colleague of mine at Curtis when I was there. So, after the concert, Jake and I went out with Richard Burgin, which was very nice. We had a nice, wonderful time with him. We were driving home through the center of Cleveland, and stopped at a red light, and this big Cadillac pulls up beside us, and it was Szell. And, so, Jake rolled down the window, and Szell rolled down the window, and Jake said, "We just spent an hour with Richard Burgin." And Szell said, "Well, I just spent an hour with Koussevitzky. Now, I wonder which was better off?" Then the light changed, and we went on.

The next morning in rehearsal, Szell had the cello section completely re-arranged, lined up like soldiers. In Cleveland, somehow, for some reason, it was kind of scattered; one stand this way, another that way, like that. But, he came in and said, "You know, this is the way the Boston Symphony has it, and it sounds marvelous." So, that was the only reason why the cellos sounded so good, because they are lined up in a straight line? I mean, really! For an intelligent man like that, he couldn't see that it had something to do with the personality of the conductor.

Szell spent two weeks with the BSO in '44, and I remember them as though they were yesterday. Ruth Posselt played the Lalo Symphonie espagñole. *Szell did his own orchestration of the Smetana E minor* From My Life *Quartet; Schubert Nine; William Grant Still* In Memoriam for the Colored Soldiers Who Died in the War. *And I think that those were the only two times, two weeks, that Szell ever conducted the BSO.*

That's too bad. I was always wishing he'd come while I was in the orchestra. After I left Cleveland, they would come to Boston, and I would see him and talk to him.

But, now, Koussevitzky. Let's see, what more can I say? There's this one story. Did you know of Ludwig Juht?

Yes. The bass player.

Wonderful bass player, and a big, big man; he was Finnish. One time, apparently, Koussevitzky said, "Bessie..." of course, he was always interested in the basses, since he was a bass player and he called them "Bessie" for bass. "Bessie, you are not together, and I will not mention any names, Mr Juht!"

I remember [Jacobus] Langendoen, third cellist, principal cellist of the Pops then. Wonderful man, beautiful man, sweet man. He was still in the orchestra when I came; he'd been there 33 years. I've been here 38 now, and I thought, "33 years! My gosh!" He was there before I was *born*!

He also did a lot of arrangements for the Pops.

Yes, right. *Flight of the Bumblebee*, for one—which we still play. I remember him telling me, "You know these rehearsals with Koussevitzky are so hard and fearsome, and we would go out at intermission and get called back, and be standing outside in the sun on nice days, and we'd say, 'Oh, do we have to go back to *that?*'" But they knew they had something. For all the griping, for all the fear and for all the unpleasantness, they were very proud of what they were doing. Nobody denied the fact that he made the orchestra sound absolutely great.

And I think each individual player had such a tremendous commitment and feeling of pride, and you know you were saying before that we don't get the kind of inspiration from conductors today that Koussevitzky gave us. I'm afraid the contemporary orchestra musician also doesn't have that kind of commitment, a feeling of an institution of which he is proud to be a member.

Because it isn't. Conductors are all over the world now, with the jet. I don't know if Koussevitzky would have done that if he could have. I can't speak for him. He might well have, but he might well *not* have, because it was *his* orchestra. It was like his family, and he was interested in the things that players did. It wasn't all just beating them over the head, you know. He'd talk to them other times at intermission or trips or things and ask them about their families and help them when they needed help. It was his life, that orchestra. He rarely conducted any other during that time. He did conduct the New York Philharmonic once.

In its centennial year. That was the only American orchestra he conducted during his 25 years with the BSO.

There you are. Of course, it wasn't that easy to get around then. His dream was always to take the orchestra to Europe. Unfortunately, that never did happen for him. But, that's the thing today. There is no real cohesiveness like that anymore in the orchestras. It's a thing of the times.

In the summer of '42, there was a piece with some little oboe cadenza. I forget what the piece was. A fellow named Koblentz was playing. I remember that name. Koussevitzky was conducting him, and he was playing this cadenza, and it didn't go right. So Koussevitzky was trying to tell him how to do it, and he says, "Vell, I vill help you; I vill not condooct. You play." So, he did it without conductor, and the guy still had trouble. And Koussy says, "I vill help you more. I *vill* condooct!"

Another time the bass drum was not to his liking. He says, "No boom. No boom. *Boooom!*" I am gesturing here when I say this as though he were going right through the drum.

And of course, there is that famous instruction that he gave to the triangle player: "Triangulo, you vill play with us, not vith yourself!"

We did the Shostakovich Fifth with him, as you know. And this was an immense event for us, too. You know how it ends—with the timpani and bass drum. Well, in the concert, they were not together! And, so, the next rehearsal, Koussevitzky's looking around the orchestra and says, "Fine, fine performance—except for *you!"*—pointing at the bass drummer—"Yes, spoilded me the whole piece!" The poor guy.

Harry Dickson collected Koussevitzky sayings.

Oh yes, and so did Langendoen in his folder. I hope that still exists. Koussevitzky would give instructions, and Langendoen—very carefully, studiously, apparently correcting his part—was writing down the funny things that Koussevitzky said. So, sometimes you'd turn to Brahms's Second and the next page, here'd be this Koussevitzky-ism at the top of the page.

But Koussevitzky was very nice to the student orchestra. Really, he was tremendously proud of what we were doing, all in all. Except it's easy to isolate the little incidents, and make people think that he was terribly mean to us. He was not. He was very, very kind to us.

And, of course, the music-making, for those of us who experienced it, was marvelous. I can imagine what it must have been like playing *it. Absolutely an ineradicable memory.*

He wanted to take the orchestra on tour in September after that summer, but not enough people could stay. They couldn't work it out. It was too bad. It would have been sensational. Anyway, it was tremendous, a unique summer in that regard. I was very, very fortunate.

Anything else, Bob?

I remember, one more funny story about Koussevitzky which illustrates in a sense the *fear.* Eugene Lehner, superb violist who came from the Kolisch String Quartet, was in the orchestra with Koussevitzky, and the violas sat on the outside edge of the stage at that time. Apparently, Lehner was sitting on the outside of his stand, and they were playing away in a concert, and on an up-bow Lehner let go of his bow by accident and it flew out into the audience. Lehner just kept on looking as though he was bowing—without his bow—because he didn't want Koussevitzky to see that he had stopped playing. He didn't dare stop playing, even though he didn't have a bow!

—Transcribed by Cynthia Koshkin-Youritzin

Influence of Jazz in American Music Greatly Over-rated, Says Koussevitzky

Young America is today before the blossom-time of its musical history, and a native school of composers is emerging with astounding rapidity.

But jazz as a vital factor in the evolution of American music is tremendously overrated, and is merely an external element which will only add to the American musical consciousness, without being a primary thing.

This is the radical impression brought back to Paris by M. Serge Koussevitzky, famous Russian modernist conductor, who has just returned from America after eight months of triumphant wielding of the baton in the principal cities of the United States.

"There is a tremendous musical movement in the United States," M. Koussevitzky told a *Tribune* reporter yesterday. "America is hungry for music and this desire for music is developed in a way never to be met with in Europe.

"Jazz has not the importance we usually connect with American music. It is not the last word that great country will have to show in new rhythms."

Speaking of American composers, M. Koussevitzky expressed himself as astounded at the creative force now being exhibited in the United States.

Deems Taylor, Aaron Copland, Alexander L. Steinert and the late Charles T. Griffes are among the composers, who, in his opinion, are best expressing the American idea with accents never before heard.

"I cannot say that I have been particularly impressed with the work of the men who seek to express merely the external elements of the American scene," he continued. "Noise? We have noise in Europe, too. Noise is not a prerogative of America...

"I find, on the whole, that Deems Taylor has the American spirit more emphatically developed than any other composer there. His *Through the Looking-Glass* is a masterpiece. My personal opinion is that he has all the elements that—we might say—distinguish the American character from the European: great flexibility and a certain youthfulness.

"I am particularly attached to Aaron Copland's work. Although in a purely technical way he has not yet reached perfection, I might say that he has enormous talent, a deep culture is felt in his music ... and his emotions, for those who can follow, are profoundly stirring.

"He has used jazz rhythms in a curious way—in a movement deeply tragic, which gives a remarkable impression."

Eugene Jolas
31 May 1925

This item originally appeared in the Paris Tribune. *It was reprinted in* The Left Bank Revisited: Selections from the Paris Tribune, 1917-1934 *edited by Hugh Ford. Thanks to Kenneth De Kay for brining it to our attention—ED.*

by Kenneth DeKay

Book Review

***The Goossens: A Musical Century* by Carole Rosen.**
Northeastern University Press, 1993

This volume is recommended. The Goossens family deserves the recognition this book gives them. However, we still are in need of a full-scale biography of Eugene Goossens III. While this volume devotes a considerable amount of space to his career, one volume cannot cover an entire family and still find room for a complete study of its most enigmatic figure.

As regards the professional relationship between Eugene Goossens and Serge Koussevitzky, this volume offers some intriguing bits and even raises some questions which seem never to have been answered—at least not in print.

In 1923, Eugene Goossens III came to Rochester to share with Albert Coates the podium of the newly formed Rochester Philharmonic. In 1925, Goossens became the Orchestra's Music Director. In 1926, he was invited to guest conduct the Boston Symphony. A sense of humor, all too often lacking in his writing, shines forth:

> After his three concerts in Boston with an orchestra which he found "second to none in the world", he telegraphed his parents on 6th February 1926: "Boston was colossal triumph. Please deny rumour am succeeding Koussevitzky next season."

"Please deny rumour am succeeding Koussevitzky next season"

In 1932, Goossens was in his early years with the Cincinnati Orchestra.

> Among the twenty soloists allotted to him for the 1932-33 season, only the pianists José Iturbi and Harold Samuel, the incomparable Bach player, and a return visit from Nathan Milstein made any impact on his memory. He was disappointed with Göta Ljungberg when she sang an excerpt from *Judith* (27th and 28th October).
>
> "Yes, it is a pity that Ljungberg was not in better voice, but like many other operatic sopranos, including Jeritza, Lily Pons, and others, she gets stagefright on a concert platform. Singers are a nuisance at symphony concerts anyway, and I shortly intend to discontinue using them here.
>
> "I think I told you that Koussevitzky was here recently. He repeated again what he already hinted at on previous occasions, that he was keeping the Boston Orchestra warm for me as a successor and requesting that I should not sign any new contract here in Cincinnati longer than a period of a further two years. I believe that Koussevitzky is quite sincere in all this, and it's nice to feel, such being the case, prospects connected with one of the three big Eastern orchestras are rosy for the future.
>
> "By the way, I notice that Barbirolli is now indulging in splash advertising in the American musical papers. Mr B is obviously out for an American job, but I am afraid he is doomed to disappointment for they simply don't exist. It has taken me ten years to get where I am at the present moment and it is hardly likely that an inexperienced chap like Barbirolli could suddenly step into a rosy job here."

Events were to prove Eugene wrong in his assessment of both Koussevitzky and Barbirolli. In 1936, when Toscanini resigned from the New York Philharmonic, Arthur Judson arranged a guest engagement for Barbirolli, as a result of which the virtually unknown young man was confirmed as Toscanini's successor. Judson enjoyed a position of unrivalled power, since he was both manager of the orchestra and of the leading artists' agency.

The conductor's father, Eugene II, lived 91 years until 1958, and Eugene III kept up a constant correspondence with his father whenever he was away from England. Following another visit to Cincinnati by the Boston Symphony, Goossens wrote to his father that he accompanied Koussevitzky to the train station:

> "He [Koussevitzky] was heartbroken when I announced that I would not take supper with him in the dining car. His affectionate demonstrations towards me that evening were even embarrassing. The sight of two conductors in fur coats embracing in full view of everybody in our new and gorgeous station was too much for the local natives. He still reiterated the assurance that he was keeping the Boston Symphony warm for me and definitely invited me next season (if he still remained the conductor of the orchestra) to conduct for a fortnight during his vacation in January 1936. *Nous verrons!"*

> Eugene was disconcerted by the engagement of Boult to conduct in Boston during Koussevitzky's 1935 vacation, but decided that was a quid pro quo for the latter's guest concerts with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. It was not until December 1937 that he was finally disillusioned regarding Koussevitzky's promises. "It appears that Mrs K lost all her money in the stock market crash of '29, with the result that, not having regained it in subsequent years, K is compelled to remain on with the orchestra and earn his bread by the sweat of his brow until the end of his days or thereabouts. It seems that he has so many dependents in Russia, France, China, and elsewhere that he cannot afford to give up the job and retire."
>
> In the event, Koussevitzky did not relinquish the Boston Orchestra until 1949, by which time Eugene had been in Sydney for two years.

If anyone can shed any light on the effect the stock market crash and the subsequent prolonged depression had on the Koussevitzkys' finances, we would very much like to share that information with our readers.

Reviewing the musical scene, as well as the conductor's own fortunes, Rosen writes of Goossens in 1938:

> After seven years in Cincinnati, Eugene felt that he had to make a determined effort to improve his status. He had renegotiated his contract to allow him to accept autumn engagements in England and a greater number of guest engagements during the 1937-38 season in America. In April, he broke the news to his parents that the annual summer holiday he so much enjoyed in England would be interrupted.
>
> "You will be surprised to hear that I have been offered engagements in Philadelphia, Chicago, Portland, and the Hollywood Bowl from the period of the middle of July to the middle of August. This offer came from Judson, my manager in New York. Quite frankly I am in no position to refuse this available series of dates. The publicity value is something which cannot be overestimated. The psychological moment has arrived when I have got to take every worthwhile and dignified engagement possible over here in order to build towards a possible change in 1939 for another city.
>
> "With the glut of alien conductors flooding this country, particularly the Jews, not even the conductor of a big permanent symphony orchestra is in a position to turn down summer engagements."
>
> He was still convinced that Boston would grow tired of Koussevitzky and that the summons would at last come for him to replace him.
>
> He realized that he also had to keep his name before the public in England but was not very sanguine as to the opportunities open to him. The news that Beecham was increasingly incapacitated through rheumatism or gout caused him to reflect to his father: "With TB out of the picture, the BBC will automatically absorb all musical activity in England and leave it an arid desert so far as new personalities are concerned. It seems unlikely Boult would impair his position by inviting any serious prima donna conductor to head his orchestra except, of course, the inevitable Toscanini. Outside the BBC there are no musical powers which can seriously affect the situation in England for the better, for Wood has a limited public and Harty is, it seems, out of the running. Where would I fit into this picture, unless the directors of the Philharmonic, in Beecham's absence, elected to hand me that particular orchestra with full powers to do as I pleased with it? Short of this, nothing would induce me to change my professional place of residence."

About four years later, this is how Goossens saw the musical scene in the United States:

> "Changes in the American orchestras are immanent," he wrote to his father on 29th December 1942. "Stock, the conductor of the Chicago orchestra, died recently and someone will have to be found for that place. This morning it was announced that Rodzinski of Cleveland was to be made permanent conductor of the NY Philharmonic—Bruno Walter to act as guest conductor for about two months of that time. This finally puts Barbirolli out of New York, and he will doubtless either receive that worst of all orchestras, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, or spend his time guest conducting.
>
> "I don't envy Rodzinski his new post, nor do I envy the men who have to play under him. Both are tough and hard-boiled, and I imagine there will be scenes as soon as operations begin next season. Rumours that Koussevitzky is finally giving up Boston are going the rounds, but as this rumour is ten years old, I don't put much stock in it. Personally I have come to the conclusion that it's much better to be connected with one of the good orchestras in the middle west (like mine) where one has one's own way and a constant public. The salary may not be great, but the strain on one's shoulders is considerably less, so far as work is concerned, than if one is connected with one of the 'big three' (Boston, New York, Philadelphia)."
>
> Eugene had reached a crucial point in his career. Because of his health problems he had to husband his physical resources; he had lost the dynamic energy and emotional resilience of his youth. As he approached his fiftieth birthday, he no longer sought out orchestral challenges. He preferred the security of Cincinnati and his acknowledged position in the community as musical supremo. He realized the advantages of an orchestra which he moulded, during the twelve years of his tenure, into a reliable and responsive musical entity.

Goossens left Cincinnati to serve as director of the New South Wales Conservatory of Music and conductor of the Sydney (Australia) Symphony Orchestra in 1947. After an ignominious end to his Australian career, he returned to England and eventually to the recording studios in his last years. Contrary to a family tradition of extreme longevity, Eugene III died in 1962 at the age of 69, after being plagued by ill health for many, many years. ◆

by Louis Harrison

Review: BSO Classics, "The Sessions of November 22, 1944"

Producer Brian Bell has released the second compact disc on his *BSO Classics* label (441122), their first devoted exclusively to Serge Koussevitzky and documenting "The Sessions of November 22, 1944." This welcome collection includes Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5, Berlioz's *Roman Carnival* Overture, Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun,* and one rarity, the first authorized release of Corelli's Suite for Strings arranged by Ettore Pinelli. The disc is a production of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The digital transfers are by Ward Marston.

Unlike the first *BSO Classics* release which included Karl Muck's BSO acoustic records and Koussevitzky's initial 1928 sessions with the orchestra, this disc has a more modern sound, which, though not quite *New Orthophonic* high fidelity, is particularly kind to the strings. This is most evident in the third movement of the Tchaikovsky, the Debussy—first issued on a red vinyl 78—and especially the Corelli, where the lush string arrangement reveals more about Pinelli than Corelli.

In his informative notes Bell tells us that Marston's transfers are taken from 78 rpm masters in the RCA archives, with the exception of the third movement of the Tchaikovsky, which comes from a 1948 tape copy of the master and which was used in producing the 45 rpm release of the symphony. As Bell says, "As honest and faithful a reproduction as possible from the original masters was desired."

Marston has given us an honest reproduction of the masters, reflecting both their original virtues and faults. The faults are clearly evident in the Berlioz. I assume the original engineers and/or their equipment could not cope with the full force of the orchestra, so climaxes are frequently distorted. Also the recording was cut off before the final chord of the overture was finished, making for a disconcertingly abrupt ending. The second take was originally released. One wonders how the first take sounded. Bell notes that Marston added a small amount of reverberation at the conclusion of the overture, the only tampering evident in the processing.

Comparing this transfer of the *Roman Carnival* with that of Mark Obert-Thorn (Biddulph WHL 028), I'd say that the reverb neither adds nor detracts from what was essentially a technically flawed recording. The Tchaikovsky has also recently been issued on Biddulph (WHL 034/35) in a set that includes the composer's last three symphonies as well as *Romeo and Juliet* and the waltz from the Serenade for Strings, but a copy of that release was not available for comparison.

> *... a souvenir of one day in the life of a great orchestra ...*

This compact disc reminds us once again what a magnificent orchestra Serge Koussevitzky was leading some twenty years into his tenure with Boston. Virtually all of the records from the sessions are first takes except the Berlioz, the Debussy (takes three and two respectively for the two sides of the recording), and the first side of the Tchaikovsky (take two). The two sessions and four hours of recording time on November 22, 1944 produced some seventy-four minutes worth of approved music—enough to fill this generous disc.

Due to union regulations it would be impossible today to record this amount of releasable material in the space of four hours. In 1944 it was due to the union that this session took place at all. Brian Bell's notes discuss in some detail the long conflict between the management of the non-union Boston Symphony Orchestra and the American Federation of Musicians, a conflict resolved when the orchestra joined the union on November 25, 1942. The AFM had kept the BSO off the radio since 1938 and out of the recording studio since 1940.

The head of the union at this time was the outspoken and infamous James Cesare Petrillo. While a photo in the album booklet makes him look like comic relief in a Gershwin political satire, Petrillo was a powerful tyrant who took on not only the BSO but the government and the public. Petrillo called a recording ban that prevented any new commercial records from being produced from mid-1942 until the major companies agreed to his demands. The ban affected all recording artists, from Serge Koussevitzky to Spike Jones. One wonders what Boston Symphony recordings might otherwise have been made between 1940 and 1944.

November 22 is traditionally celebrated as St. Cecilia's Day. "The Sessions of November 22, 1944" thus pays tribute not only to Serge Koussevitzky and his orchestra, but to the patron saint of music and musicians. This compact disc is a souvenir of one day in the life of a great orchestra and a fine addition to the growing body of Koussevitzky reissues. ◆

by Robert M. Stumpf, II

Maestrino: The Stokowski Legacy

Music for Strings. PURCELL: Hornpipe. BACH: Aria from Suite #3; *Mein Jesu, was für Seelenweh befällt dich in Gethsemane.* HANDEL: Tamburino. GLUCK: *Dance of the Blessed Spirits;* Lento; Mussette. BOCCHERINI: Minuet. PAGANINI: Moto perpetuo. BORODIN: Nocturne. TCHAIKOVSKY: Andante Cantabile. RACHMANINOV: *Vocalise.* TURINA: *La Oracion del Torero.* BERGER: Rondino Giocoso. His Symphony Orchestra. 1957-8. Stereo. EMI 65912

SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphony #11. Moscow Radio Symphony. 1958. Monaural. Russian Disc 5028

SHOSTAKOVICH: Symphony #5. London Symphony. 17 September 1964 live performance. Stereo. BBC Radio Classics 15656 91542.

Russian Masterworks. RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: *Russian Easter* Overture. TCHAIKOVSKY: Humoresque. STRAVINSKY: *Firebird* Suite. PROKOFIEV: March from the *Love for Three Oranges.* TCHAIKOVSKY: Symphony #4. NBC Symphony. First three items 1942; the rest from 1941. Monaural. CALA 505, produced in conjunction with the Leopold Stokowski Society.

BACH-STOKOWSKI: Toccata & Fugue, Prelude in e-flat, *Geistliches Lied,* Chorale Prelude, Chorale from *Easter Cantata,* Passacaglia & Fugue in c.* BYRD: Pavan. CLARKE: Trumpet Voluntary. SCHUBERT: *Moment Musical* #3. CHOPIN: Mazurka in a. TCHAIKOVSKY: *Chant sans paroles.* DUPARC: *Extase.* RACHMANINOV: Prelude in c-sharp. *Czech Philharmonic 1973. London Symphony 1976. Stereo. London Phase Four 448-946

TCHAIKOVSKY: *Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty* excerpts*, *Romeo & Juliet.* *New Philharmonia 1966. Suisse Romande Orchestra 1968. Stereo. Phase Four 448-950

Stokowski Rarities. TCHAIKOVSKY: *Sleeping Beauty* excerpts*. LIADOV: 8 Russian Folk Songs. *His Symphony Orchestra 1948. Philadelphia Orchestra 1934. Iron Needle 1334.

It seems that people are beginning to appreciate Stokowski's contributions to the art of interpretation and recording. A recent issue of the *New York Times* contained a lengthy article about the Stokowski Legacy, written by Bernard Holland. Mr Holland maintained that while the Stokowski Sound may be anathema to the 'period' people, it is heaven to the rest of us. The number of Stokowski transcriptions being performed increases. Chandos, with Mathias Bamert conducting (he worked with Stokowski in the American Symphony Orchestra in the '60s), has released Stokowski's transcription of Moussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and other Moussorgsky transcriptions. With the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1996, Riccardo Chailly will perform and record the same Moussorgsky/Stokowski *Pictures.* This should make for an interesting comparison. Sawallisch has recorded, with the Philadelphia Orchestra, a CD of Stokowski transcriptions on EMI. That recording has the spirit of Stokowski all over it. Then we have this extensive list of releases since my last essay.

Starting from the top, the EMI release is a wonderful document of the Stokowski Sound. Rob LaPorta has made a tremendous effort to ensure that this release is as warm and full as the original LPs. Taken from two separate discs, this compilation offers the material in chronological order. The Stokowski Symphony Orchestra was an *ad hoc* group of New York musicians, largely taken from the New York Philharmonic. It was a small body, but Stokowski used recording techniques to the hilt to make it sound like a full orchestra. His notes indicated several places where he asks for "more bass". The music here may not qualify as *'great',* but it is beautiful and relaxing. Throw away those New Age, Feel Good discs. This release is fulfilling and makes for a wonderful evening's music.

I initially thought this Russian Disc CD of the Shostakovich 11th would face stiff competition from the wonderful EMI issue of the same piece. The Russian Disc is monaural, but the sound is full and reverberant. EMI's stereo sound really is better. The main problem with the Moscow recording is that the audience provides consumptive contributions and the percussion section suffers from dropsys, which makes it impossible to listen to this disc with headphones. It is better through speakers, but still a bit of a trial. Yet this *performance* is so different from the Houston one that you really should add it to your collection. The Russian orchestra and Stokowski produce a Shostakovich 11th that crackles and is more earthy, raw, and elemental. The brass, in particular, are more menacing and the whole thing has a more sinister atmosphere than the Houston recording. On the other hand, the Houston recording is more poignant. I would not want to be without both.

The story behind this live performance is interesting. Stokowski led the U.S. premiere of Shostakovich's 11th with the Houston orchestra on 7 April 1958. EMI recorded it in sessions between 9 and 12 April. This recording utilized a new instrument created either by Stokowski, for Stokowski, or with the work of Stokowski and the Allen Organ Company. Stokowski had long been unsatisfied with the lower register of the double bass and wanted to enhance it. When possible, Stokowski would reinforce the sound with an organ, as he sometimes did in New York. The Allen Organ Company created a keyboard instrument (looking not unlike a Casio keyboard) that was placed within the orchestra so it could not be seen. This had the same effect as if he had the organ pedal underline the bass and give it more resonance. I have been told that if you have a subwoofer this effect can be clearly discerned.

Shortly after the recording sessions, Stokowski left for a tour of the Soviet Union. As usual he took a ship and train for the trip—no planes for him. He performed the Shostakovich 11th in a Kiev concert in May. This Moscow recording was taken from his next appearance on 7 June 1958. Shostakovich was in the audience and was called to the stage at the close of the performance. We know that Stokowski and Shostakovich corresponded and met several times over the years, but I have come across no evidence that any such meeting took place prior to this concert. The encore was Barber's Adagio for Strings. That performance can be heard on Music and Arts CD 787 (call 510-525-4583) coupled with recordings of Messiaen, Ives, and Britten.

As I said earlier, this live performance has a sinister air to it not in the Houston one. Is it possible that Stokowski, while riding through the still desolate countryside, scarred by Hitler's armies, realized the horror in the symphony as well as its poignancy? Did he talk with Shostakovich? Did the orchestra bring to bear its own interpretative insights and Stokowski flowed with them? I know that Stokowski rehearsals tended to stop only for his corrections; sometimes a whole movement might be played. Perhaps in rehearsal Stokowski heard this and kept it.

It is fascinating to listen to these Stokowski performances. Each gets increasingly weird.

Stokowski made the second ever recording of the Shostakovich 5th with the Philadelphia Orchestra on 20 April 1939. That recording is currently available on a two-disc Pearl issue (GEMM 9044). It has also just been issued on a single disc, coupled with a Shostakovich 6th led by Stokowski from Michael Dutton. I have not heard the latter, but his other issues have earned high praise from the press (though I do not like them). You really ought to hear the Philadelphia recording. Stokowski and the orchestra bring out an oriental flavor that is not evident in other recordings. Stokowski's second recording was made in stereo for Everest with the Stadium Symphony of New York in 1958. That has been superbly remastered and released on CD (Everest 9030). That recording is full and rich. Both, however, pale by comparison with the BBC Radio Classics recording by the London Symphony. Consider the first movement. Stokowski takes the LSO through it in 14:27 whereas the Philadelphia performance logs in at 16:38 and the Everest at 16:05. Timings are not the only measure of a performance, but in this case they give an idea of the excitement in the LSO recording.

This LSO performance has been available on other releases, most recently on Music and Arts CD-765. That CD included Moussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain* from the same concert. It also had a live performance of the Stokowski *Pictures* with the BBC Symphony from 23 July 1963. The sound on that disc was very good, but there was some tape hiss. This BBC Radio disc is marginally superior to the Music and Arts release. However, sometimes a slight difference renders a significant result. For example, when Salome removes that last veil! The removal of the hiss and the fact that the tapes are ever so slightly clearer adds more body and depth to the whole recording. You can play this BBC disc at a louder level, one that makes the M&A disc unlistenable. The result is much more involving sound with more detail, like the oboe at 2:00+ into the first movement. This BBC disc also includes an excellent account of Shostakovich's Symphony #1 with Jascha Horenstein conducting.

One part of the Stokowski legacy has been somewhat neglected in issues of recordings over the years. I cannot recall a single Stokowski NBC Symphony performance issued on LP until the LSSA did so ten years ago. Our second LP contained this Tchaikovsky 4th Symphony, but that was marred by the fact that the engineer made an error and cut the master using non-Dolby instead of Dolby A. Besides, this new CALA issue brings this performance to CD in a better transfer with wider distribution. The Tchaikovsky 4th is the main reason for getting this release, so how does it stack up?

This was the second of three Stokowski recordings of the Tchaikovsky 4th. His 1928 Philadelphia recording is available in an excellent transfer by Mark Obert-Thorn on Pearl GEMM 9120. The final recording was in stereo with the American Symphony Orchestra in 1971 and can be had on Vanguard Classics OVC 8012. Of the three, this NBC performance is the most exciting. It is not just the timings that indicate this, it is also a result of sharper attacks. It is as if Stokowski had heard the metronome steeple chases that Toscanini got from this orchestra and decided to tap the virtuosity. This recordings also does sound better than the earlier release, with more body to it.

It is fascinating to listen, progressively, to these Stokowski performances. Each gets increasingly weird. The 1928 is actually a very good Tchaikovsky 4th. In fact, if you want a Tchaikovsky 4th by Stokowski, this is the one. The NBC performance starts to pull the music

Continued on page 22

by Victor Koshkin-Youritzin

Revealing Stokowski: An Interview with Conductor Anthony Morss

Anthony Morss was born in Boston, studied at Harvard, and, while still a student, was chosen by Leopold Stokowski to be his Chorus Master and Associate Conductor with the Symphony of the Air. (For a more thorough summary of Morss's career see Vol. VIII, No. 1—ED.) *Last June he recorded the complete orchestral works of the American composer Nevett Bartow with the Orchestra and Chorus of the Slovak Radio; a compact disc of these performances will be published in approximately one year on the Master Musicians Collective label. From the time of his youth, Morss knew Serge Koussevitzky personally, and the Spring 1995* Koussevitzky Recordings Society Journal *carried a lengthy interview which I did with Morss. This issue presents the first installment of a multi-part interview with him about Stokowski. —V. K.-Y.*

Koshkin-Youritzin: *How did you come to know Stokowski, and what was your relationship with him?*

Morss: I knew his personal secretary, Wendy Hanson, a very attractive English girl from Huddersfield, through my friends the Bartows, who happened to meet her at a Stokowski concert. They struck up a conversation and became very close friends. Eventually it turned out that Wendy knew Stokowski was looking for a young assistant to be chorus master, rehearsal pianist, librarian, and backstage conductor at the Empire Music Festival in northern New York State, in Ellenville, New York, in the Catskills. The orchestra was the Symphony of the Air, which was Toscanini's old NBC Symphony, reformed as a cooperative group. She recommended me; I went to be interviewed by Stokowski, and he accepted me. My official position, I thought, was pretty grand for a graduate student: I was labeled Associate Conductor.

I will never forget my first interview with him. I went at night to his apartment on Fifth Avenue, which was filled with pictures of himself, and, indeed, a clock that he had himself constructed that was very unusual and interesting. When I was ushered in to meet him, he was on the phone, transatlantically, as it happened; then he began a most extraordinary drama of miming for me to come in and sit down, and hello, and how are you, all the time carrying on quite a different transatlantic conversation. It was a real *tour de force.* I remember being appalled at his appearance; I knew him only from the glamour photographs of the Philadelphia days. Stokowski was in his mid-70s at that point. For years he had looked almost twenty or even thirty years younger than his age. For example, when he made that film *A Hundred Men and a Girl* with Deanna Durbin and Adolphe Menjou, he was 59. And he looked about 35 in that picture. I saw it a couple of times, and I was amazed.

But by the time I met him he had turned into an old man. He'd gotten a little jowly, and that day he hadn't shaved; the only light in the room was on the desk where he was sitting, and it was coming from below. It illuminated his face like the lighting of a *Dracula* movie. His hair was wild and white and uncombed, and he was wearing an electric-blue sportshirt a couple of sizes too tight for him. The whole effect, I thought, was just grotesque. He was not the man I was expecting to see, and yet he was recognizably the same person. However, he was very gracious. We talked about this, that and the other, and in came Basil Langton, the director of the *Midsummer Night's Dream,* which we were going to do, in the musical version by Carl Orff. Orff was a good friend of Stokowski's, and Stokowski had a very great interest in doing this piece. He had already performed Orff's *Carmina Burana* many times with enormous success; it was one of his greatest specialties. He was very eager to conduct the first performances in the United States of the *Midsummer Night's Dream.* Basil Langton was in charge at least of the dramatic part of the Empire Music Festival and had engaged Stokowski to conduct it. We were talking about the play, and Stokowski was looking at the score, which is of course in German—that wonderful translation of the Shakespeare by Ludwig Tieck and A. W. Schlegel—which allowed Shakespeare to become as popular in Germany as he was in England. I came to know this translation very well in the course of the rehearsals; it was just as good as the original! That's a very unusual thing to be able to say about a literary masterpiece. Some sections in German were better; some sections were not as good as the English; many were just as good, but on balance, it was equal. Stokowski, at one point, was talking about the word "sterblich," and searching for the English equivalent, which I supplied as "mortal." He was glad that I knew German; he was also pleased that I had played the part of Oberon myself and was thus quite familiar with the original English. And so, that was my first meeting with him. I returned home feeling completely exhilarated.

Then I set to work as the rehearsal pianist with the group of actors, which included Nancy Wickwire, Basil Rathbone, Alvin Epstein—splendid actors like that. Unfortunately, Red Buttons, as Bottom, was hopelessly miscast by Basil Langton on the theory that the clowns in Shakespeare's time were the equivalent of modern TV comedians, and therefore you could hire a modern TV comedian to do a Shakespearean clown. Typical of his way of thinking! He had very grand ideas which sounded intellectually provocative, but he hadn't thought through any of them, and the result was that he could never decide which of the passages were in and which were cut. We had a three-hour play, with only two hours to perform it in; every day

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Victor Koshkin-Youritzin is a Professor of Art History at the University of Oklahoma

he changed his mind about the cuts, which of course drove the actors up the wall. Later, he drove the musicians up the wall, too, because the parts had to have different cuts in them constantly, and I stayed up half of the night changing cuts in forty different parts. Eventually, Dr Hugh Ross, who had prepared the chorus which I was conducting in the performances, came to me and said, "Look, this can't go on. We've got to do something."

We went to Stokowski's hotel, and he said, "Gentlemen, I know why you've come. Now, I want you to tell me the parts of the piece that you think should be put back in, and I have my own cuts I insist on being restored. We will make up our minds once and for all. And we will also stop this nonsense about Basil Langton not being able to decide whether the costumes are to be those of ancient Greece or of Athens, New York, or whether we are going to play it as a gloss on the Grace Kelly-Prince Ranier operetta wedding in Monaco." The poor costumer, Ruth Morley, had been required to bring three different sets of costumes up to Ellenville, and nobody had even mentioned ancient Greek.

Stokowski finally put his foot down and said, "It's going to be ancient Greek, and that's the end of it. These are the cuts, and no more changes." The actors had been praying for somebody like Stokowski to put his foot down. Hugh Ross said nervously, "Of course, technically, Basil Langton employs us all." Stokowski rejoined, "You may have wondered why I have let this man dither and make so much confusion up to this time. The answer is that I am basically a very unreasonable person, and I enjoy disguising that fact from time to time. But now, egged on by you two, the truth is coming out." We all had a good laugh, and when Langton said, "Well, he officially outranks us all," Stokowski said quietly, "I shall insist, and that will be all." And it was. The actors—and, incidentally, the musicians—all of us breathed a huge sigh of relief, as Basil Langton shrugged his shoulders and asked plaintively, "What can you do when you are dealing with a prima donna?"

There was a lot of tension between Stokowski and the orchestra. I was privy to that, because my clarinet teacher was the first clarinet in the orchestra, David Weber. He had arranged for me to stay at the same pension as the first desk players in the orchestra, so I got to know them extremely well.

They were an extremely congenial bunch of people, including the concert master Daniel Guilet, and the first viola, Emmanuel Vardi, who later became a close friend and invited me to be the associate conductor with his own orchestra, the West Hempstead Symphony. The players were very ambivalent about Stokowski, though they themselves had invited him to conduct them: the orchestra was self-governing.

Now, this was the Symphony of the Air.

The Symphony of the Air, yes.

And this was when?

It was the summer of 1956. They were a very quarrelsome, contentious group of people: during their democratic meetings, apparently, the decibel level was such that they could be heard for about two miles around. But individually I found them all perfectly delightful. I remembered them saying, "Oh well, we know it's Stokowski, but, please, a little bit of respect—a little bit of respect!" Of course, Stokowski was such a different personality from Toscanini.

I would be intrigued by your comments comparing the two of them or revealing what people were saying about the two.

They universally revered Toscanini. Toscanini was the kind of man who had very, very keen ears, was a good note detective, and insisted on an absolutely scrupulous adherence to the score in most cases. Stokowski was continually rewriting scores, which no doubt was the basis for Toscanini's characterizing Stokowski as an *assassino.*

Incidentally, Toscanini's assessment of Koussevitzky neatly summed up all the criticism leveled at Koussevitzky over the years, with the grudging admission of his accomplishments. "Such a bad conductor!—(plaintively) and the orchestra plays so well!" I was astonished to learn that Toscanini considered Furtwängler his only genuine rival artistically.

While Stokowski had an incredible ear for tone quality and for which individual musician was playing just how loudly and just how well, in the process of hearing all of this a lot of wrong notes would escape him. In theory, conductors try to hear everything that is going on in the music; in practice, it is not surprising that they hear best those musical elements which are most significant to them personally. I fixed up some confusion of clefs on the bass clarinet in the first rehearsal, very quietly. Also, at one point, Stokowski complained that there was a whole trumpet section that was missing in the parts and that the office should call back to Germany for them. I realized that what he was looking at was a bunch of three differently pitched triangles, and I silently came up beside him and made the sign of the triangle in the score. The orchestra ultimately got wind of that. They were rather disrespectful, and, yet, ultimately they saw Stokowski as such an important conductor that they asked him to become, in effect, the music director of the orchestra, which he was for awhile. He gave them prominence, critical attention and fame—all the things they wanted. He made some recordings with them, too, and they did some marvelous work together. So it was an ambivalent relationship: he was considered something of a musical outlaw, but an enormous talent. And, of course, that's exactly what he was. He was a genius.

Well, he got extraordinary results with them, and in many ways things that Toscanini never could get or wanted to.

That is right. I knew the work of the NBC Symphony extremely well—as we all did—through their recordings and broadcasts, and also knew that they played with a very polished, rather dry, very clean, scrubbed sound, not at all opulent, but as an extremely fine orchestra. Then to hear Stokowski turn them into the Philadelphia Orchestra with a single gesture of his hand—that was perfectly amazing. It showed, of course, that the orchestra was made up of excellent musicians and would respond to the personality of any strong conductor who was put in front of them. And yet their entire reason for continuing their existence was that in 17 years at NBC, Toscanini had created a tradition which they wished to further; they wished that the tradition not be lost. And here they were working with a man who was of a very different artistic orientation and who could change them instantly into the old, lush Philadelphia Orchestra, eliciting all the wonderful colors that Toscanini, in fact, wasn't interested in.

How do you think Stokowski actually did that?

He did it exclusively with gesture. It was his personality and the fact that his sound was an emanation not only of who he was, but of also the gestures. When I worked with him, I could see the quality of his hand motions producing tone out of thin air.

It would have been interesting, perhaps, to film him without sound, almost as a mime.

Fortunately, there are several films of him, especially in *Great Conductors of the Past,* that wonderful two-hour Teldec video, which shows Stokowski at his most glamorous and also at his most characteristically physical, as far as the conducting gestures were concerned. There was no show: all of the gestures were there for the production of sound. He was a great showman, to be sure, but the gestures were all business, and so, by the way, were his rehearsals. Nobody was ever bored in the Stokowski rehearsals. In the first place, he talked almost not at all, which surprised me extraordinarily. I expected him to talk sound and voluptuousness and string portamentos and all that sort of stuff. Not a word of it. The only technical directions he ever gave, to my knowledge, were to the percussion section. And he was extremely exact about that. He owned a whole lot of exotic percussion instruments himself. He had no hesitation about telling a player that he should warm up the tam-tam before he hit it just to make sure it was vibrating slightly, hit it about two inches below the center, after collapsing the left knee as in a golf swing, and then raise the beater and leave the instrument free to sound. I came to know Stokowski quite well, and at one point I asked, "Maestro, how much do you charge for tam-tam lessons?" He smiled and said, "I am very expensive. Not even Rockefeller can afford me."

"Stokowski's gestures were so specific that you really couldn't do anything but what he wanted"

Several times I saw him and heard him give exact instructions to various percussion instruments as to exactly where and how to hit. But to the strings, winds, and brass he would do nothing except go back to letter A or letter C, or whatever it was, and then he would work them over with his hands until the sound materialized—the gestures were so specific that you really couldn't do anything but what he wanted. They were amazingly commanding. One of the notable things about his rehearsal technique was that he would say "Letter C" and immediately start to conduct. I have had occasion many times to criticize orchestras for taking too much time to find rehearsal letters. As I have said, when I worked with Stokowski, he just announced the letter, and instantly everybody had to be there.

If they weren't there the first time, boy, were they there the second time. They learned to be as quick as jackrabbits. He saved himself a lot of rehearsal time that way, and he would go back without explaining why he was doing it, because his gestures were so extraordinarily sound-specific and phrasing-specific that unless you were blind and insensitive you just couldn't help but be drawn under the spell of the gestures.

The only other person whom I ever knew who had such incredible physical magnetism in the creation of sound was my own teacher, Leon Barzin. He picked it up from Toscanini, who had an incredibly eloquent stick, though what he asked for was often less than tonally glamorous. The men of the Symphony of the Air, indeed, told me that Toscanini was not interested in tone quality, that he was insistent on intonation, on phrasing and styling, but that he never talked about tone. Actually, I heard him do so once on a rehearsal tape. Stokowski didn't talk about tone either, and he was very much interested in it. He achieved it simply by his gestures.

Now, what about Koussevitzky's gestures?

Koussevitzky's gestures were extremely elegant. They were also very dignified. They also seemed to do exactly what the intentions of the music required from an emotional standpoint. But they could be difficult to read; he needed a lot of rehearsal, so that he could get his results from painstaking explanation and fervent exhortation, really high-voltage inspirational pep talks. Also, one noticed that when he got excited, not only did his face turn purple and the vein on his forehead engorge, but his mouth would go "pom, pom,

pom!" He was just projecting, living the music like crazy. Stokowski never did any of that dramatic perspiring. His face always appeared to me serene, but the gestures were enormously eloquent, and he was projecting enormous power the entire time. He didn't have the kind of hyper-emotional demeanor that Koussevitzky did. Although I must say that Koussevitzky never got carried away to the point where it looked overdone. It was always superbly artistic, whatever he did. I think, though, that was perhaps a result of Koussevitzky's not having the ability to communicate so exactly from the stick.

But I can assure you as a conductor that you use the best stick technique you can, and at the moment when you know the orchestra is with you, you simply act physically out of sheer instinct. You do things that you hadn't planned to do, and suddenly everybody connects; everybody knows what you want. You don't really have to think what you're going to do after you reach a certain level of technique. I was astonished to observe Stokowski in so many truly passionate performances and to see that he seemed to be, in his face, completely serene. It was amazing to me, because he could have the orchestra absolutely bursting with passion.

There's an interesting statement by Harold Schoenberg in his book, *The Great Conductors.* I'm quoting here: "Stokowski got more sound out of the music than others did. The other great conductors could get more music out of the music."

Well, Stokowski was primarily concerned with tone, color, and quantity of tone. I asked him, for example, why he seated the orchestra so differently from everybody else. By the time I came to work with him, he had all the strings on the left side of the orchestra, and all the winds on the right. He had, I think, the first stand of cellos right in front of him, but all the other strings were on the left. Of course, Toscanini always had the second violins to his right and the first violins to his left, et cetera. That was the old European tradition. And, eventually, starting with Sir Henry Wood and Stokowski, the second violins moved over on the left with the firsts, and the violas and cellos were on right. But Stokowski, by my time, had them all on the left. I asked him why. He said, "It's extremely simple, because all the 'f' holes of the string instruments are then pointing out toward the audience and you get a very appreciably greater quantity of tone." He was right.

That's absolutely logical.

Sir Henry Wood, of course, had loved quantity of tone, and he had a simple rule of thumb that the more strings that you had, the better it sounded. So Stokowski achieved a much greater volume of sound by having all the 'f' holes pointing directly out to the audience. He made numerous experiments in seating the orchestra, how high the risers should be; when he did the Bach Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor in his own transcription, he liked to have the basses on high risers, so that wonderful bass sound came through. That was a reflection of his start as an organist; you have enormous quantities of sound to play with in any good organ.

Yes, I was going to ask you about that, since he was an organist at Saint Bartholemew's in New York. So you feel that was an essential part of his background along with his interest in the violin?

Yes. I understand that he, as a teenager, played violin in various small orchestras in London. And, certainly, the way he treated strings made them sound their very best, which usually is the mark of somebody who has an inside knowledge of the instrument.

A propos of strings, how would you compare, for instance, Koussevitzky and Stokowski as colorists and in their treatment of the string section?

They were both supreme colorists. Of course, Koussevitzky knew strings intimately from the inside, and he was not above saying to the double basses, "Play so that you get a vibration of exactly 80 pulsations a second." I once watched him at a rehearsal of the Brahms First—after he worked over the bass section and had not gotten what he wanted—leave the podium and go down and speak to them as a group. I don't know whether he actually showed them what to do with their instruments. But I do know he left the podium and went down and spoke to them very fervently and privately, and came back, and then finally it was perfect. Stokowski, as far as I remember (and I attended hours and hours and hours of his rehearsals), never gave specific instructions to the strings except not to bow together. He was insistent that they have free bowing, except in certain points when they had to be a certain way. "Anything you want, but here, down-bow," he would say. The reason for that was that if you're dealing with a good orchestra, he thought that each string player would suit his own convenience and would have the sense not to wind up at the tip of the bow when you are playing fortissimo. This freedom would also disguise any bow changes, so that you would have an endless, seamless line. Well, in some music that's wonderful. On the other hand, in Mozart and Haydn you really want everybody bowing the same way, because you want

> *"Stokowski never gave specific instructions to the strings—except not to bow together"*

those phrases to be carefully and identically demarcated. Although Stokowski was not known for his work in that repertoire, I remember hearing him do a Mozart *Jupiter* Symphony with the Symphony of the Air, in which two things struck me as extraordinary. First of all, he used the entire string section, which was getting to be old-fashioned even in those days. Nonetheless, he managed to get them down to a truly Mozartian dimension, and everything was beautifully phrased in Viennese style. I enjoyed the performance immensely, and I was extremely surprised, because I had not expected him to be able to give a stylistically satisfying account of that kind of repertoire. I was wrong!

I would like to talk about Stokowski's approach to new music. It is well known that he had one of the largest repertoires of any conductor who has ever made a career, and that he was also one of the most helpful conductors toward new composers and, incidentally, performers. He helped a very great number of young people. He had, it was said, a fetish about youth; he loved to associate with young people, and he was himself amazingly young late in life. And when he did age, seemingly overnight, 10 or 20 years in appearance, he, of course, perfectly hated it. I well remember the dripping scorn and sarcasm with which he used to pronounce the phrase "senior citizen." He loathed the idea of himself in that category.

With good reason!

Yes. Now Stokowski, of course, was always dealing with new music. I had heard that Ormandy hired people to winnow through the enormous piles of scores that were sent to him, because he just hadn't the time to read them all, and he wanted to eliminate the obvious failures. I asked Stokowski if he did that himself, and he said, no, he didn't feel that he could do that, because he was always afraid of some assistant's dismissing out of hand a crude, primitive genius like Moussorgsky, who was enormously original but who wrote in such a way that might well have struck a normal score reader as being illiterate. Stokowski was searching for that kind of rugged individuality, and he couldn't trust any other person not to miss a rough-hewn genius.

Is this something that is at all widely known in the profession?

I don't know. I don't know how conductors who are heads of major symphony orchestras ever get the time to deal with the pile of scores that are sent to them, because they have so many obligations with the standard repertory. They are obliged to take some notice of what's going on around them in composition, but there are so many new scores, and the new ones are famously difficult to read. Therefore, where do they find the time?

I asked Stokowski, for example, how, as a very busy conductor—obviously still learning his repertoire in Philadelphia as a young man—he managed to do so many wonderful orchestral transcriptions. He replied that his approach to that was to look over the organ piece and decide which orchestral colors he wanted—and, of course, the organ pieces he knew well because he was an organist. He would then make pencil marks in the organ part indicating these basic orchestral choices, his ground plan. He said whenever he had a few spare minutes, it was like a lady's piece of needlework: you could do a few stitches and then go and do something else, and then go back and do a few more stitches the next day, because the ground plan was so clear that you were, at that point, just filling in the notes. Then, at a given stage when the basic colors were established, you had to think what the fine points were going to be. But mostly, if the basic decisions were made, it was just a question of finding the individual five or ten minutes here and there for the immense manual labor of realizing your annotated intentions. I thought that was astonishing, too.

My own experience is that when repertorial obligations are very pressing, I have the idea that I don't really ever deserve a moment's rest. But he managed to find the time to create this very considerable body of work with an enormous number of notes written out, because he was always dealing with a large orchestration. And he did that little bit by little bit. It was like a mosaic, laid one or two tiles at a time.

Well, to return to his approach to new music, he was always doing new scores, and some of them, of course, in a style that he could understand, that everybody could understand. Others were extremely experimental, and very difficult to read; of course, nobody could be on top of all of that material. It was just impossible. My own teacher, Barzin, said to me that one of the things that he admired about Koussevitzky so much was that Koussevitzky could take so many new scores and, not being a wonderful score reader himself, fudge through them at rehearsals; but then he would come home, think what could be done with them, and bring his brilliant interpretive originality and understanding to these pieces, which he and the orchestra had had great difficulty getting through. By performance time he could really make something out of them as world premieres. Barzin admired that enormously.

Stokowski could do the same thing, but, inevitably, if you do as much new music as Stokowski did, you can't be on top of every detail. There was talk in the orchestra about that. I well remember discussion about a time when Gunther Schuller was still playing horn and at one point played in Stokowski's orchestra. Stokowski was doing a twelve-tone piece, and Stokowski, by the way, did not have perfect pitch. I found that out working with him.

How interesting.

I don't know whether Koussevitzky did or not, as I wasn't that close to him, but I do know that Stokowski did not. He did have a good sense of pitch, naturally, but with twelve-tone music, which sounds, most of it, so discordant, you really have to possess almost a perfect memory and perfect pitch. It is the sort of thing that

Lorin Maazel has. Maazel says, "I don't know how anybody without perfect pitch does contemporary music." Stokowski did a lot of it without perfect pitch. Well, Gunther Schuller, who knows the twelve-tone style inside out, piped up during rehearsal and said, "The bassoons are lost." Stokowski looked up, and the bassoons got back together; then Schuller put up his hand and said, "The cellos are in the wrong clef."

Stokowski said, "I am the conductor here! Out!" And that was the end of Gunther Schuller in that orchestra. At a given point you just have to decide who's boss, and that's the end of it. Still, Stokowski has to be commended for understanding so very much of the new material that he did. After all, he conducted the world premieres of not dozens but hundreds of works!

His attitude toward music criticism was very interesting. At one point I had conducted a premiere of a piece which I liked very much indeed; the newspapers had found it nothing special, and I was truly stung. As a matter of fact, I have just recorded that piece, and I still think it is magnificent. Anyway, I told this to Stokowski. He was spending a weekend at the Bartows' place up in the country.

Is this Nevett Bartow's Mass that you are talking about?

Yes.

It's a beautiful piece, which I heard you conduct with the Symphony of the Air. It was extraordinary.

Anyway, Stokowski's reaction was absolutely amazing to me. He said, "If you pay any attention to anything the critics say, you're making a fundamental mistake. If they say that you're no good, and you can't conduct, and then you're so depressed you can't work, but then if they say you're wonderful and you're not, you get a swelled head and then you can't learn. So, if you take my advice," he continued, "you'll never read another newspaper review as long as long you live. I haven't read a music criticism in 40 years."

Do you think that was true, what he was saying?

I think it may very well have been. He said, "As far as I am concerned, the whole thing is just a racket." That's what he told me.

But that's fascinating coming from somebody who was so renowned at seeking publicity...

And generating publicity.

Yes, absolutely.

He said that the whole business of writing music criticism was just a racket. Then I asked him, "How do you find out what's going on in the musical world, if you never read any reviews?" His reply was that he depended on certain close friends whose judgment he trusted. They told him if such and such a thing was worth hearing and such and such a performer was worth hearing.

They, too, were critics. They were, of course, functioning as critics.

They were, but not professional critics. He knew them, and he knew their musical judgment, and therefore he trusted them more than he trusted anybody who wrote for the newspapers and the magazines.

One of the people upon whom he depended was Oliver Daniel, the head of BMI. And there were a few others. But he also said that if all of his friends told him that so-and-so was very good, he was moderately interested to hear the artist, but if half of his friends told him that so-and-so was fabulous and the other half of his friends told him that the same person was terrible, then he had to go and hear it, because he himself was such a controversial artist. He got a lot of critical brickbats in his day as well as many raves.

Did he have thick skin or not for taking criticism?

Well, it's hard to know whether he would just never admit to being nettled by criticism, but I think he was nettled by it to such an extent that he consigned all of the critics to perdition and resolved never to read another review again.

But there may be a principle involved there too, because if somebody allows another person to evaluate him, then that person's suddenly in control, whether the evaluation is positive or negative.

I do recall that when Zubin Mehta was Music Director of the New York Philharmonic, he got a lot of negative reviews. After awhile, he said he made it a principle never to read the reviews, whether they were good or bad, because he said he just couldn't afford to go out on stage with a black cloud over his head.

That makes very good sense. I think there exists a psychological phenomenon whereby if somebody gives up his own self-evaluation and confidence in his own judgment and gives that over to somebody else, then he automatically becomes a slave of that other person's evaluation; he then risks living passively in fear, because the possibility of being praised one day and damned the next can makes him feel like a yo-yo helpless on a critic's string.

Let me give you a very sound principle for evaluating music criticism, and I am sure that Stokowski would agree with me very heartily. Any critic who likes your work is wise, insightful, and a moral crusader. And anybody who does not like your work is nasty-minded, mean, deaf, and probably perverse.

It's a good survival mechanism.

Yes. And I have found it to be generally correct! In my own case, I have received a lot of good reviews, but when I was beginning and didn't think the performances were that good, I didn't think we deserved them. I was glad in some ways to get them, because they had good publicity value. But, when I didn't like the performance myself, I wasn't convinced at all when the reviewers said we were good. And if I thought

Continued on back page

by Robert M. Stumpf, II

Sylvan Levin: 1903-1996

Sylvan Levin passed away on 10 August 1996. For many of you his will be a name that means little. This is your loss. He was one of those musicians who touched many people, like a favorite high school or college teacher. They weren't famous, but they were influential. I would like to begin this obituary by quoting from the *New York Times* of 16 August.

> Sylvan Levin, a pianist and conductor who served as Leopold Stokowski's associate at the Philadelphia Orchestra and the New York City Symphony, died Saturday at his home in Great Neck, Long Island. He was 93.
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> Mr Levin first became known to audiences as a concert pianist, appearing regularly with the Philadelphia Orchestra. In 1932 he was the soloist with that orchestra for the American premiere of the Ravel Piano Concerto in G, with Stokowski conducting. He worked closely with Stokowski for many years, serving as his assistant conductor.
>
> Mr Levin was born in Baltimore. At 12 he won a scholarship to study piano at that city's Peabody Institute of Music. He continued piano and conducting studies at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, where he later served on the faculty.

The *Times* obit also discusses Sylvan's work with the Philadelphia Grand Opera, his founding of the York (PA) Symphony Orchestra, and his tenure as Musical Director of WOR radio in New York. From 1954 to 1956, Sylvan led the European and South American tours of *Porgy and Bess* sponsored by the State Department.

I first met Sylvan in a phone conversation in the Summer of 1983. I had been a member of the Leopold Stokowski Society in England for a few years. I kept wondering why there wasn't an American branch of that Society and wrote them about that possibility. I offered my services, but never got an answer. One day I read their latest newsletter and noticed there was an American representative of the Society, Sylvan Levin. It said he lived in New York, so I called information, and, lo and behold, he had a listed phone number. I remember the opening of our conversation.

"Mr Levin, you don't know me. My name is Bob Stumpf, and I have an idea concerning Stokowski that I would like to discuss with you."

"Well," he replied, "start discussing."

I told him that I felt there should be a Stokowski Society in the U.S. and that I was willing to work to help get it started. He told me to get a charter and call him when I had one. If I could do that he would get help from some of the major conductors to support the Society. I did. He got Eugene Ormandy, Leonard Bernstein, John DeLancie, and Zubin Mehta to act as Honorary Advisors to the Society. With that, the Leopold Stokowski Society of America was founded.

As I started putting together a journal, I realized we needed a name. Sylvan had sent me a photo Stokowski autographed to Sylvan. At the time Sylvan was working on preparing the Philadelphia Orchestra for the American premiere of Berg's *Wozzeck.* Stokowski was on vacation and many letters went back and forth between the two men. One tribute of thanks was this photo inscribed, "From the Maestrino to the Maestro." I suggested we call the journal *Maestrino* and Sylvan heartily agreed.

The name had a double meaning. In addition to the obvious play on words, Sylvan was very short. In fact, I towered over him and am only 5'4". While Sylvan may have been short, there was nothing small about him. One detail I noticed when we first met was that his hands were inordinately large. His exuberance was also strong and constant. He had a zest for life and music.

His small apartment in New York housed a grand piano in the back room. Here he taught many students, and talked with Bernstein, Ormandy, Mehta, and others. The walls of his apartment were studded with photos of Rachmaninov, Stokowski, and others. He was quick to laugh and to anger.

In 1988 he attended a Stokowski Forum in Columbus, Ohio. Several people made presentations, including Sylvan. At lunch a music critic was at Sylvan's table talking about recordings. After listening for a while, Sylvan blew his top and upbraided the critic for knowing nothing about making music and ruining the careers of promising musicians with reviews that reflected a basic stupidity about the world of music making. Needless to say, the critic ate crow for desert.

I have two prized possessions from Sylvan. One is an autographed photo of the two of us standing together. The other is a collection of photocopies of all the letters Stokowski ever sent to Sylvan. One of my promises to him, and one I shall now fulfill, was to write an essay about the correspondence, which I will have ready for the next issue of this Journal.

Without Sylvan's help there would never have been a Leopold Stokowski Society of America. As an assistant conductor to Stokowski, a conductor in his own right, a teacher and advisor, he wore many hats. Sylvan Levin may go down as a footnote in the musical history of American performances, but his influence was much greater than that. ◆

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around, and the tempos and attacks are sharp. The ASO one is pure Stokowski. If you want to hear a *Stokowski* Tchaikovsky 4th, the last one is the one to have. The strings throb with melancholy, and, while it is the slowest of his three recordings, it is not lethargic at all.

The *Firebird* Suite is the next major item on this CALA issue. Stokowski recorded this piece more than any other—eight times in his life. The first was an acoustic recording in 1924 (soon to be issued with all Stokowski's acoustic recordings on Pearl). I have not heard that recording, but have listened to the 1929 and 1935 Philadelphia recordings, this NBC one, and the 1967 London Phase Four.

The 1929 recording would be my pick for a historic recording of the piece. The opening is sinister and eerie. The sound in this Ward Marston transfer (on *A Stokowski Fantasia,* Pearl 9488, with the Bach/Stokowski Toccata & Fugue, Tchaikovsky *Nutcracker* Suite, Dukas *Sorcerer's Apprentice,* and Moussorgsky/Stokowski *Night on Bald Mountain*) is clear, has body, and heft. There is a natural decay around the music as it fades (not cut to the bone as in Dutton's remastering). There is excellent, delicate detail. At the opening of the finale the feathery strings give the embers a shimmering glow. This performance is the fastest. Compare its 18:37 to 22:17 with the LSO in 1967.

The 1935 recording can be heard, again remastered by Marston, on Pearl 9031 which includes Liadov's Eight Russian Folk Songs in addition to Stravinsky's *Petrouchka,* Pastorale, and *Fireworks.* The timings here are virtually identical to the 1929 version. The playing or recording here, however, is slightly less articulated. Music tends to be more homogenous. The result is less electrifying.

The NBC Symphony on CALA is, like the Tchaikovsky 4th, even more exciting than the Philadelphia ones. Still, the sound is not as detailed as in the 1929 recording, so that some of the music is buried. However David Hall, in the 1943 edition of *The Record Book,* commented:

> Mr Stokowski must have a special affection for this music, in that this is the fourth electrical recording he has done of it. Those with the Philadelphia Orchestra (Victor M-291) and the All-American Orchestra (Columbia M-446) are still current in the record catalogs. It's a pleasure to say that this new version tops all of its predecessors in respect to both performance and recording. In fact this is the best recording job yet accorded the NBC Symphony Orchestra.

This last point is one of the most interesting things about this CALA release: comparing the recordings made in 1941 and 1942. The earlier ones, including the Tchaikovsky Symphony, were recorded at the Cosmopolitan Opera House in New York while NBC improved the sonics in Studio 8-H. These Stokowski improvements included installation of panels to make the studio more reverberant.

I have heard Toscanini recordings from this source and cannot listen to them; they are dry and harsh to my ears. Well, the Opera House may have been better, but contrast it with the later recordings in Stokowski's studio. The *Firebird,* recorded in 1942, has much more body. Listening to this you can hear what Stokowski could do with music, and you can hear part of the Stokowski Legacy—the Stokowski Sound. This disc is worth listening to just for this reason.

Jump ahead to 1967 and really hear what Stokowski could achieve. The Phase Four recording utilized techniques where Stokowski could go into the recording booth and completely transform the music into what he wanted. This recording (recently released on the Phase Four line, 443-898) is my personal favorite. It is the slowest, but also has an inevitability about it and *Sto*pendous body. The front-to-back perspective will rival any all-digital release. The finale's embers really are glowing. At the close, the Firebird dives to the depths of being, then soars like some Zarathustra over humankind.

The two Phase Four CDs arrived just as I had to get this ready for the press. Let me say that, once again, Decca/London has done a phenomenal job of reproducing these recordings. They are every bit as warm as the LPs, while offering the added detail of CD. Nobody could do Tchaikovsky better (or worse?) than Stokowski. These discs will afford immense listening pleasure.

I have listed the Iron Needle release only as a "buyer beware". This is another Italian disaster. The Tchaikovsky sounds like it was taken from a noisy LP. The Liadov is better, but most likely pirated (or 'Xeroxed' as Fred Maroth calls it) from the Pearl release. The Stokowski Legacy is not served by releases like this. It is recordings this inferior that led Stokowski to decide to get involved in the recording process itself. Avoid this and Gramophono, etc.

I think that the two most interesting discs I came across over the past several months are the Russian Disc and CALA. Writing about the Shostakovich 11th and comparing it with the EMI release taught me a lot about Stokowski's art. I had forgotten about his *invention* and was thrilled to find proof of it in my talks with Stuart Warkow.

The Stokowski Legacy is, in part, due to the conductor's work with technology to help create the Stokowski Sound. This was further appreciated listening to the differences between recording venues with the NBC Symphony. The Stokowski Sound *is* the Stokowski Legacy. He achieved this not through some trickery, but through an appreciation and knowledge of music making and recording. If only recording producers today could match that. ◆

Letters to the Editor

I strongly disagree with Kenneth DeKay's positive evaluation of *Our Two Lives* by Halina Rodzinski in the Spring issue of the Society's Journal. When the book was released in 1976, I was overjoyed. Biographies of conductors (other than Toscanini and Fürtwangler) are rare birds, but here was one about a favorite conductor of mine. My ecstasy turned to dismay, however, when I started discovering errors in the book. Three examples:

When Mrs Rodzinski is discussing the temporary break between her husband and Toscanini over an understaffed performance of Scriabin's *Divine Poem* in 1938 (p. 190), she claims that the manager of the NBC Symphony was Phil Spitalny! Phil Spitalny was famous for being the leader of "all-girl" dance bands. Leopold Spitalny was the manager of the NBC Symphony.

On pages 264-5 she talks about Josef Hofmann and his alcoholism. Granted Hoffmann's alcoholism affected his work, but according to her it had completely incapacitated him by February 1945. Hofmann's appearances with the New York Philharmonic beginning on February 15, 1945 were indeed cancelled due to his being "indisposed", but a little over a month later, on March 24, 1945, he gave a recital in Carnegie Hall that received a superb review by Olin Downes in the *New York Times.* Hofmann's last New York appearance was a recital on the eve of his 70th birthday in 1946. Again it received a glowing review in the *Times.* But we can see for ourselves how "incapacitated" Hofmann was after February 1945. Sometime after the end of World War II, a film of a typical *Bell Telephone Hour* radio program was made. Hofmann appears and plays Rachmaninov's Prelude in C-sharp minor and the last movement of Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto. (The Rachmaninov is available on the Philips video, *The Golden Age of the Piano.)* This film was surely made after August 1945 because while the studio announcer is giving a talk about advances in the transmission of telephone signals over the years, he prefaces a discussion of the field of wireless transmission by saying "after the war". Granted, Hofmann may not have been at the peak of his form at this time, but he certainly was not living on skid row as Mrs Rodzinski would have us believe.

Finally, at the beginning of Chapter 43, she describes in some detail a January 1952 performance of Beethoven's 7th Symphony by Toscanini that never took place! Toscanini performed the 7th Symphony of Beethoven on November 10, 1951. On January 12, 1952, he performed Beethoven's 6th Symphony.

I will be the first to admit my lack of knowledge about music in general and Artur Rodzinski in particular, but my position is that if an "amateur" like me spots errors like this, how many other errors are there that I don't know about? My feelings in this regard echo those of Mr DeKay regarding *Bernstein: A Biography* by Joan Peyser. On page 6 of Vol. II, No. 1 of this Society's Journal, he stated that he doubted Peyser's version of Serge Koussevitzky's resignation as Music Director of the Boston Symphony because of "her track record throughout the book". And were does Peyser say she got the story of Koussevitzky's resignation? Why, from Halina Rodzinski! (*Conversations About Bernstein,* William Westbrook Burton, p. 47). To add insult to injury, one of our fellow members, William Trotter, has included Peyser's story in his recent biography of Dimitri Mitropoulos, *Priest of Music.*

And, by the way, do you think Halina could have been one of the sources for Moses Smith? The Cleveland Orchestra and her husband made all of their Columbia recordings together while Smith was the company's Music Director, so one must assume that Smith and the Rodzinskis' were acquainted. Koussevitzky supposedly lived with the Rodzinskis' in Stockbridge until he bought a home there and after that they were neighbors. Mrs Rodzinski would not have wanted to be named as a source in Smith's book, because when it was published in 1947 her husband needed all the friends he could get—he had just been fired as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic and had yet to take over the Chicago Symphony. And, interestingly enough, she may have had an ax to grind against Koussevitzky. On page 215 of *Our Two Lives,* Mrs Rodzinski says, "...Koussie, in spite of his promises of engagements at Tanglewood and other proffered courtesies, never repaid Artur's many kindnesses." I think this gives real food for thought.

Sincerely,
Radcliffe L. Bond
Miami, Florida

P.S. About the only thing I don't like about the Society's Journal is that nothing is said about the great photographs. How about giving your readers some information on when and where they were taken?

The Editor responds:

I doubt we'll ever know for certain who Moses Smith's sources were. Certainly Mr Bond's speculations are as valid as any that I've heard.

As to the photographs in the Journal, I wish we could be more specific. The items in our most recent issues have come from the Library of Congress—which received all of Koussevitzky's papers after the death of his widow Olga. They have several boxes of photos, all unlabeled and undated. Some were clearly taken at Serenak toward the end of Koussevitzky's life (Vol. IX, No. 1, p. 10). A few were obviously shot at Tanglewood (same issue, p.14). For the rest, we'll simply have to rely on our members. If you recognize the date or location of a photograph in any issue of this Journal, please let us know!

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the performance was good, when the reviewers found something to criticize, well, I would listen, but I knew myself, in my heart, when the performance was really satisfying.

Well, sure; a great artist does.

By the way, Furtwängler, who was such a great artist, would actually stoop to quarreling with critics who disagreed with his interpretations. He would write them long letters, and he would call them up, and he would dress them down. He didn't make any friends that way. Koussevitzky occasionally used to do the same thing.

Did in fact either of them ever change a critic's mind? Get an apology or a reevaluation?

In fact, what usually happened was that that created entrenched animosity. So, in fact, it's a very, very poor idea. Beecham was once at an English Arts Council meeting where one of the board members suggested spending some of the government's money to set up a chair for music criticism. "Look here," growled Beecham, "if there is going to be any chair for critics, it had better be an electric chair!"

Stokowski would have applauded that sally. He and Beecham had once done a joint tour and gotten along famously. Stokowski used to say that Beecham had the greatest natural capacity for leadership he had ever seen in a conductor. The two were certainly in agreement about criticism.

I found myself that many of the critics whom I have dealt with in the various arts, tend to be rather aloof. But critics have to be thick-skinned, in a sense, and not open to any kind of dialogue, I think just as a protective device. It's a very difficult thing to be a critic, of course—somebody who is truly a good, objective, dedicated, ethical critic.

And many of them choose not to have any close friendships with celebrated artists, precisely because they want their freedom to be able to tell the truth as they see it and not try to have to protect their friends. And I think that's probably a pretty sound plan.

I believe there is only one way in which you can effectively attack a critic, and I did so once in Saragossa, Spain, where I was conducting the orchestra, and got him discharged from his post: it was by pointing out to his editor a whole series of factual errors about music which he had written in his column. The editor said, "I knew the man was acerbic and negative toward the whole orchestra, because of his friendship with the previous conductor (who had been ousted by the orchestra). I didn't realize, though, that he was so ignorant and downright wrong." But it was his ignorance which got the man discharged, not his venom.

That's one of the few times that the conductor won—it is, in general, not a good idea to engage the critics in any kind of controversy unless they are factually wrong, because you don't win, and they almost always have the last word. Stokowski's attitude was simply to shake the critical dust from his feet and never, never pay any attention to it.

—Transcribed by Cynthia Koshkin-Youritzin

About the Koussevitzky Recordings Society, Inc.

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

The Society is involved in a variety of projects, including the creation of an "oral archive" of conversations with those who knew and worked with Koussevitzky and an archive of the conductor's recorded performances. The activities of the Society are highlighted in these bi-annual journals, which include interviews from the archive, articles about the conductor, and book reviews.

To become a member and receive our publications, send a check or money order in the amount of $18 to 1211 W. Hill Street, Carbondale IL 62901-2463. Memberships run from January to December. Those who join in the middle of the calendar year will receive all the publications for that year. Back issues of our publications are also available. For a complete list, contact the Society at the above address.