

Symphonies For Small Fry

A benevolent Pied Piper, Alfred Wallenstein attracts hundreds of Los Angeles youngsters every week with no lure except good music

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR COLLIER'S BY JOHN FLOREA

EVERY Saturday during the winter season, when most kids are playing games, some 2,300 Los Angeles youngsters forsake their usual week-end haunts and troop eagerly into the Philharmonic Auditorium to spend an hour listening to the weightier works of the great composers, as played by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. During this hour, they pay close attention to the music, applauding lustily and spontaneously, and emerging, as one fourth-grader expressed it, feeling that they have had "more fun than at two cowboy movies."

The same attitude apparently prevails among the countless other children who hear these "Symphonies for Youth" concerts through more than 400 stations of the Mutual Broadcasting System in this country, Hawaii and Canada. The mail response is heavy and highly laudatory.

This enthusiasm for the symphonic masters among the younger set is a tribute not only to the universal appeal of the music, but also to the uncompromising approach of Alfred Wallenstein, the man principally responsible for bringing the music to the attention of children.

Wallenstein has directed the concerts since their inception, shortly after he became conductor of the Philharmonic in 1943. From the start, he set a tough standard for the programs: He determined to avoid, so far as possible, the somewhat lightweight "children's selections" which usually characterize such concerts, concentrating instead on precisely the same music offered to adult concertgoers. To lead his juvenile listeners through the intricacies of these compositions, he presents an informal and lucid commentary before each number. Another feature aimed at sustaining youthful interest is a musical quiz in which contestants drawn from the visible audience answer questions submitted by the radio listeners. The prizes are government bonds.

The Philharmonic's leader was born in Chicago 52 years ago—which makes him one of the youngest major symphonic conductors in this country,

and one of the few who were born here. Witty and unpretentious, he becomes intense when discussing music. Of his children's concerts, he says:

"Music has rightly been called the 'universal language' of mankind; as such it rates just as important a place in our education system as the three R's. I like to think that the 'Symphonies for Youth' represent an investment in the cultural future of our country which will return dividends when the millions of children who listen to the concerts today become the concertgoers of tomorrow."

Wallenstein's method of achieving this goal has received an enthusiastic response from adults, as well as from children. From 1945 through 1947 the magazine *Musical America*, in its annual poll of some 700 radio editors, asked them to name their choice for the best musical broadcasts of an educational nature. *Symphonies for Youth* placed second the first year, and first for the two following years. In addition, the programs have been consistently singled out for praise by parent-teacher organizations all over the country.

The 13-week series, which starts this year on January 20th, is jointly supported by the Los Angeles public-school system, the County Board of Supervisors, the Southern California Symphony Association and the Los Angeles Junior Chamber of Commerce. Basically intended as a music-appreciation course for local school children, the programs are worked out so as to complement classroom work, with special instruction supplements issued to teachers before each concert. "Briefing" concerts are presented twice a week over a local radio station and piped into the schools, to prepare the students for the selections they will hear on Saturday.

Despite this sectional emphasis, approving letters continue to arrive from children all over the country. One of Wallenstein's favorites is a note he received from a very young lady in Texas who, unbeknownst to her, seemed to be developing into a devotee of Johannes Brahms. She requested several numbers, among them the "Bronze Lullaby."

Youngsters flock around the high-school doors before a concert. Busses which brought them are lined up for half a mile

Wallenstein frequently visits classrooms to answer questions posed by the students. William Hartshorn, school system's supervisor of music, is at the piano

The conductor also sponsors informal chamber concerts at his own home. His wife is at his right; the musicians are all school children





Debussy selection draws rapt attention. Conductor Wallenstein says kids make appreciative audience, respond wonderfully to music

Wallenstein and his wife, Virginia, met in Chicago. They were attracted by a mutual love for dogs and Mozart

National Music Council picked Wallenstein for its annual award this year, citing his efforts on behalf of native-born composers

On each program a panel of children is selected to take part in a musical quiz. The winners get U.S. bonds; listeners who submit questions get records





ROBERT J. LEE

Everyone knew Old Man Redik was "not right," but Pete wasn't afraid of him

The Rich Old Man

OLD MAN REDIK was a city hermit. His cave was a tar-papered shack on the outskirts of the town, and if you looked inside you could see that it held nothing but a pile of newspapers which was Old Man Redik's bed, and another pile of the junk he collected in the knapsack he always carried slung over his shoulder. There was no table, no stove, no chair, no sink in Old Man Redik's cave.

Every day of the year, whether the sun shone or the rain rained or snow covered the ground, Old Man Redik walked all day out of doors. He walked with his old-man's combination of shuffle and toddle; shush-shush-shush, his feet stirred the dust or the mud, whichever it was. His fluffy white beard reached nearly to his waist, and his white, curly uncut hair was gathered in by a careless string at the back of his neck. His hat was black felt with a high crown, and in summer he wore a long white cotton coat and in winter a long black woolen one.

Old Man Redik did not wash, but he was Pete's friend. The friendship dated back two years to the time when Pete was six and his kitten was hit by a car. Pete sat on the sidewalk beside his kitten and cried. Suddenly Old Man Redik was standing over him and looking down. Pete felt a little tremor of fear for it was common knowledge that the old man was "not right." But it was silly to be afraid of an old, old man with such bright blue eyes.

"What are you crying for?" the old man asked in a high, sweet voice.

"My cat," said Pete, snuffling.

The old man looked at the kitten lying in mock sleep, its fur already flattening to its small body.

"Was this here a healthy cat?" the old man asked.

Pete nodded.

"Eat his food good? Climb trees? Sit in your lap and purr?"

Pete nodded again, his tears growing in volume.

"Then what you crying for?" the old man asked again.

Pete gave a mighty gulp and tried to think. "I'm crying because I can't have him any more."

The old man nodded slowly. "Long as you know why you're cryin', why, cry then. But don't tell

yourself no lies, boy." He walked on past Pete, his knapsack flapping against his coat; a few feet up the road he stopped and came back. "Your cat is dead, boy," he said seriously, "but cats ain't dead." . . .

Pete was eight now, almost nine, and he knew enough to keep his friendship with Old Man Redik a secret. At first he had tried to share it with his family. He'd burst excitedly into the house, holding up the blue feather or the cocoon or the perfectly round, pink pebble. "See what Old Man Redik gave me!" he would say.

"Throw it away, Peter," his mother would order him sharply, the harsh words sounding odd in her gentle mouth. "Wash your hands." Then she would talk to him, searching for words. Of course they were to love everybody, but Old Man Redik—he was too much for her. "I want you to stay away from him entirely," she would say at last. "He's so dirty. He—he smells so bad."

"He doesn't smell nearly as bad as some dogs I know," Peter would answer, bewildered. He would be ashamed, then, to go on and explain to her how the feather was from a blue jay, who eats the eggs and babies of other birds but who evens it up by fighting hawks and owls.

SOMETIMES while Pete and his father and mother were sitting at breakfast, Old Man Redik passed the window. He had a curious dignity, looking at no one, his coat flapping about his feet in their stout boots.

"Tch-tch-tch," Pete's mother would say, shaking her head. "Look at him, now. He's just standing, staring into space, staring at nothing."

It would have done no good at all for Peter to tell her that Old Man Redik was looking at the Goodmans' fir tree, the only one in the block.

"They cut 'em all down to make their factories with," the old man had said. "But even they"—with a contemptuous glance toward the houses where mothers peeked from behind curtains to be sure the old man did not speak to their little children—"even they had to leave one to look at. You start at the trunk, boy, and then move your eyes

slow, see how the shape of it goes up and up—and the color of it. If your eyes is ever tired, that's what that tree is there for. To rest 'em."

Having rested his eyes, Old Man Redik would go on about his business of picking up papers and string and bits of scrap iron, and Peter's mother would sit drumming her fingers on the clean tablecloth, her eyes resentful.

"It's not fair," she would probably burst out, "that decent people pay their taxes and keep their places clean, and then some old man like that—some dirty old beggar—can roam the streets, spreading germs and—and lice, probably."

"I don't know what can be done about it," Peter's father might answer, getting into his coat. "He's way over eighty, and time and again one person or another has tried to have him committed to an institution where they'd clean him up and take care of him. But he's got a little money in the bank, and there's not a thing anybody can do so long as he doesn't commit any crime. And so far as we know, he never has."

ON a bitter night in the late fall Peter and his parents were driving home from the early show. When they rounded a corner near their house, they saw a little crowd hovering about a figure that lay in the street. Cars were parked along the curb. As they drove slowly by, Peter put a hand on the door handle. "Let me out," he said loudly. "It's Old Man Redik lying there in the street. Somebody hit Old Man Redik."

His mother reached over and held his wrist in a firm grasp.

"Never mind, son," she said gently. "It's no place for you. There's nothing you can do. It was bound to happen someday."

Peter sat trembling, his mother's hand holding his arm, until his father put the car in the garage and they all got out; then he ducked under her arm suddenly and ran as fast as he could, with her voice trailing him down the street.

He came to the small crowd and pushed his way violently through, butting stubborn people with his head and kicking one person who would not move. Old Man Redik lay in the street. Somebody had thrown a car robe over him and someone else had put something under his head. His eyes were shut and he looked alone and discarded. Peter reached for one of his hands, his dirty, tough, old-man's hands.

"It's me," he said in Old Man Redik's ear.

The old man opened his eyes; the bright blue of them was dimmed and there was in them a flash of fear. "They're going to get me, boy," he said in a whisper. "What can I do?"

"Can't you get up?" asked Peter.

"Can't feel my legs," said Old Man Redik.

Peter looked up hopelessly at the faces crowding around. One man was saying over and over, "I couldn't see that black coat, you know I couldn't see it. I couldn't see that black coat." Everyone looked impatient, disgusted, harassed at being called out into the night for this old, old man. Peter wanted to shout: He didn't do it on purpose—What are you so mad about?

He turned back to Old Man Redik. "You could—" he began, and then he stopped, because he had been going to say: You could die, sir. But in this crowd the words seemed stark and wicked. But Old Man Redik smiled faintly, and the ghost of a chuckle escaped his lips through his beard. "You're right, boy," he said. "I think that's just what I'll do. Been thinking about it for quite a spell now."

Then Pete's mother and father were there, and the ambulance too; and when the men lifted Old Man Redik, Peter knew that he was dead.

They walked home silently, past the Goodmans' fir tree, past the place where the kitten had been hit by a car. Peter went up to his room. "Wash your hands, Peter!" his mother called after him. He opened his bureau drawer and took a little box from beneath his underwear and socks. Carefully, neatly, he arranged the contents on top of his bureau—the feather, the pine cone, the beetle, and all the other common perfect gifts. His lips moved as he recited to himself the things Old Man Redik had told him about each one. There was a thought he was trying to remember, and after a while he did.

Old Man Redik is dead, thought Peter, but good old men are not dead.

THE END