

—Ewing Galloway.

Howard Hanson: "The public knows what it likes, but it can like only what it knows."

## Why American Music Needs Pioneers

HOWARD HANSON

WE ARE accustomed to accept without challenge the facile statement that music is a "universal" language. Perhaps it is; but it is also a complex and difficult language when it employs a vocabulary beyond the monosyllabic variety. Aural concentration is difficult even for the musician and infinitely more difficult for the layman. This may explain, at least in part, the amazing stagnation which characterizes much of our musical repertory. The same symphonies, sonatas, operas are performed over and over again, perhaps because the public can seemingly stand almost endless repetition before reaching the saturation point. (There is some evidence that in the case of certain works osmosis has finally begun to take place!)

Conversely, since the acceptance of a new musical composition by the general public is dependent upon repeated performances, the status of contemporary music is highly vulnerable. A new symphony may be played by one of our major orchestras for an audience of a few thousand people. This performance may be followed by performances in other cities. It may indeed be performed by so many orchestras that it comes to be regarded as a "successful" work; and yet it has in fact made only a first impression upon a few thousand people. If the work has the beneficent aid of radio it may reach many times that number

of listeners. However, unless the work is repeated, not once but many times, the chance of its becoming sufficiently familiar to insure its general acceptance by the public is slight. Since at least in the symphonic field, too many conductors are avid collectors of "first performances" the prospects of repeated performances of new works are not bright.

IF, ON the other hand, our hypothetical symphony is recorded and made available to the general public its status is greatly altered. It now has a fighting chance of making its way to popular acceptance. Not only may it now be purchased by the individual record buyer, an increasing number of whom are becoming interested in contemporary music, but it may be broadcast in hundreds of radio symphonic hours over the country. It may be heard many times by many thousands of people, some of whom will come to know it well and accept its message as something quite as important to them as the music of the past.

This is especially true of the younger generation of music lovers. In many cities where I have conducted American music I have talked with young people after the concerts and have been amazed at the extent of their acquaintance with my own music and the music of some of my contemporaries such as Roy Harris, Aaron

Copland, Samuel Barber, and others. They discuss this music with an ease and assurance which can come only from a knowledge of the music itself. In some instances they have come to know this music through self performance, but in most cases their knowledge has come from repeated listening to recordings.

The history of the recording of the serious music of the composers of the United States has been a stormy one. Recording is a comparatively new art-science and a good part of its early history had to do with the overcoming of technical-mechanical difficulties—a battle against the vagaries of sound transmission, resonance, and the like which is still being carried forward. The early recorded repertory was, perhaps naturally, not highly experimental in a musical sense but was confined largely to the recording of the accepted repertory. Since the concert stage was itself not greatly concerned at that time with contemporary American music the recorded repertory reflected this condition. As late as the Thirties, many outstanding works of distinguished American composers were still absent from the record catalogues.

When I assumed the directorship of the Eastman School of Music in 1924 it was with the understanding that one of the important objectives of the institution should be the development of the musical-creative forces of the

country. This implied not only the teaching of young composers and the setting up of an orchestral "laboratory" for the performance of new works, but also the propagation of American music through performance and publication.

In the Thirties it became apparent that the greatest single medium for informing the American public of its own music was being neglected. A careful survey of the orchestral repertory over a fifty-year period showed that there were many works by American composers which had been performed by the majority of the symphony orchestras of the country, but comparatively few had been recorded. Therefore in 1939 the Eastman School of Music embarked on a recording project whereby certain of these works should be made available in recordings.

A beginning was made with American composers of prime historic significance: John Knowles Paine, George Chadwick, Edward MacDowell, Charles Martin Loeffler, Charles Skilton, and Charles Tomlinson Griffes, composers whose works were generally unavailable in recorded form. Works by important younger composers such as Leo Sowerby, Aaron Copland, Bernard Rogers, Burrill Phillips, William Grant Still, Wayne Barlow, William Bergsma, and others were also recorded. The response from the public was gratifying. The interest of record buyers became apparent in the most practical manner, through the evidence of record sales.

The first blow to this project came with the ban on all recordings by the American Federation of Musicians. A recording program of this type is necessarily a long-range project and to be ultimately successful must have continuity. Twenty-seven works had been recorded when the ban became effective and though these recordings demonstrated their value the sense of continuity was temporarily lost. Hardly had the ban on recording been lifted when the scarcity of labor and the shortage of materials brought on by the war made immediate resumption of the project impractical. The recording companies fell back upon a highly restricted diet and any further advance was for the time at an end.

The conclusion of the war brought to the recording industry, as to all other industries the familiar problems of reconversion. The available stock of American recordings previously pressed had, for the most part, been sold. The recordings disappeared from circulation if not from the record catalogues. This past year, however, has shown evidence of a renewed interest in American recordings. Old

recordings are being re-pressed and re-issued. New recordings from both Columbia and Victor of works by Bernstein, Blitzstein, Copland, Randall Thompson, Piston, and others have begun to appear. Within the next year the Eastman School will resume its collaboration with Victor in the recording of American music. These developments may all be regarded as signs which give us reason to hope that much of the significant American music may eventually be available in recordings.

As to the direction which these



recordings will take, I can only express my personal hope that neither the composer of the past nor the composer of today will be neglected. There are still American composers of the past whose music is comparatively unknown to the majority of music lovers. Even so important a

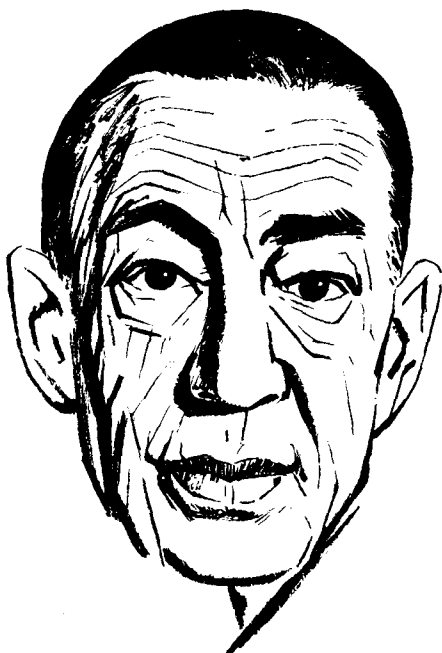
work as Horatio Parker's "Hora Novissima" has, so far as I know, never been recorded. Indeed I know of no work by this important figure in American music available in recordings. This is but one of many instances of our neglect of the distinguished figures of our musical past. In the field of contemporary music there are many significant composers who are entirely unrepresented in recordings. At the same time some of the most important works of our best-known composers are still unrecorded. To cite but one example, among the compositions awarded the coveted Pulitzer prize, only one has been recorded.

That recordings are of primary importance in the propagation of American music cannot be doubted. The music public may know what it likes, but it can like only what it knows—and knows well. There is evidence for the optimistic belief that this fundamental philosophy is gradually being understood and accepted. With its acceptance should come a new opportunity for the American composer, and the possibility that the United States may choose at the cross-roads the direction which leads to creation; that our country, too, may make its own contribution to the world's store of beauty from which she has so long been a borrower.

## American Music on Records

### *A Recommended List*

- Barber: "Adagio" (Toscanini and the NBC Orchestra, V-11-8287)  
 "Symphony No. 1" (Walter and the Philharmonic-Symphony, Columbia Set X252)  
 Bernstein: "Jeremiah Symphony" (The composer conducting the St. Louis Symphony, V-set 1026)  
 Copland: "Appalachian Spring" (Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony, V-set 1046) "Lincoln Portrait" (Rodzinski and the Philharmonic-Symphony, C-set X266)  
 Foote: "Suite in E" (Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony, V-set 962)  
 Griffes: "Poem" for flute and orchestra (Howard Hanson and the Eastman-Rochester Symphony, V-11-8349) "By a lonely forest pathway" (Eleanor Steber, V-10-1071)  
 Hanson: "Symphony No. 1" (The composer and the Eastman-Rochester Symphony, V-set 973)  
 Harris: "Quartet No. 3" (Roth Quartet, Columbia set 450)  
 Ives: "Barn Dance" (Nicolas Slonimsky and the Pan-American Orchestra, New Music Quarterly No. 1013)  
 MacDowell: "Concerto No. 2" (Jesús María Sanromá, with the Boston "Pops" Orchestra conducted by Arthur Fiedler, V-Set 324)  
 Piston: "Incredible Flutist" (Arthur Fiedler and the Boston "Pops" Orchestra, V-set 621)  
 Schuman: "American Festival Overture" (Hans Kindler and the National Symphony Orchestra, V-18511)  
 Still: "Scherzo" from Afro-American Symphony (Stokowski and the All-American Orchestra, C-11992)  
 Taylor: "Through the Looking Glass" (Howard Barlow and the CBS Orchestra, Columbia set 350)  
 Thomson: "Plow that Broke the Plains" (Stokowski and the Hollywood Bowl Symphony, Victor set 1116)  
 White: "Five Miniatures" (Fiedler and the Boston "Pops" Orchestra, V-4429).  
 I. K.



# RACHMANINOFF:

**"I Am Here..."**

CHARLES O'CONNELL

**R**ACHMANINOFF was invincibly convinced of the rectitude of his musical ideas and with the most implacable determination would enforce them upon his colleagues. Where he could not do this with reasonable amiability on both sides, he simply wouldn't play. This, as he told me himself, was why he would not play with Toscanini, and I think it is fair to infer that the same reason accounted for the extreme rarity of his appearances with Koussevitzky. He preferred Ormandy to anyone, though he collaborated successfully and in the most friendly fashion with Stokowski. Ormandy has always been the delight and Stokowski the terror of soloists, but Rachmaninoff was not one to be terrified. I remember once when he had been called for rehearsal at eleven in the morning, he appeared with his customary punctuality and found Mr. Stokowski in the midst of rehearsing a Tchaikovsky symphony. Rachmaninoff, who in spite of his apparent *sangfroid* had a very sensitive nervous system, paced up and down off stage for perhaps three minutes while Stokowski continued to rehearse; then, as if suddenly coming to a conclusion, he ambled out on the stage, sat down at the piano, and

banged out a few thunderous chords in the middle of Stokowski's Tchaikovsky. The conductor, of course, stopped the orchestra immediately. Rachmaninoff, looking up at him with a face of stone, rumbled in his basso-profundo, "The piano is here; I am here; it is eleven o'clock. Let us rehearse." The maestro meekly obeyed.

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Socially Toscanini can be, and usually is, charming and gracious either as host or as guest. His conversation concerns little but music, and tends to develop into a monologue, not so much because he insists upon having the floor as because others would as a rule prefer to listen to him than talk themselves. If he is in a pleasant mood he is very easy to entertain, and you'll usually find him before long in animated and perhaps exclusive conversation with the most attractive lady present. He can make a flattering gesture with lordly grace, and accept one in quite the same manner. He is completely conscious of his importance, and accepts tributes to it with the most disarming simplicity. Occasionally he asserts it. In one instance, related to me by Dr. Bergman, husband of Kerstin Thorborg, and himself an opera singer and manager, the maestro evidently wished to subdue a certain star tenor in a Swedish opera house, but was some-

what handicapped by language difficulties. He finally turned to Bergman and shouted, "Ask that man if he knows who I am, and tell him to get to hell off the stage." Bergman did as commanded, and the tenor drew himself up to his full height and shouted just as violently, "Tell him yes and no." Toscanini discharged Adriatic lightnings from his eyes, then suddenly laughed and proceeded with the rehearsal.

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In a conversation one night at his house at Gladwynne, near Philadelphia, I was indiscreet enough to tease Ormandy about his claims to violinistic virtuosity, and succeeded only in eliciting stronger claims. Finally Gene, somewhat nettled, offered to show me, and I took him up on it. He excavated a violin—and a beautiful one too—from an old trunk in his bedroom, tuned it, tucked it under his chin, and said with a malicious gleam in his eye, "What will you have?" Actually I didn't want any fiddling at the moment, and thinking I could call his bluff safely I suggested the Bach Chaconne. I know no music for the violin that so thoroughly and cruelly exploits the resources of the instrument and still remains noble and profound music.

Mr. Ormandy without hesitation dug into that instrument and gave a performance that, under the circumstances, was dazzling. I knew he hadn't played for years. I knew of course that he must have been at least a good violinist, but I wasn't, up to that moment, convinced that he had ever been a great one. I am now. I have heard performances by current geniuses of the instrument that weren't as good as Gene's. It wasn't perfect, to be sure; who ever played the Chaconne perfectly? But it was sure and sound and brilliant and thoughtful; even the man who quietly joined us while Gene played concurred in my opinion. He can play the Chaconne too. His name: J. Heifetz.

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One night at dinner in Serge Koussevitzky's home, then in Brookline, the conversation turned, as it will among conductors, to the subject of conductors. Perhaps I should say it turned *around* the subject of conductors, for, in fact, it never got very far from that (to conductors) inexhaustible topic. Another guest, a Russian who has a particularly warm devotion to Koussevitzky, rather unctuously held forth on the thesis that Koussevitzky is a conductor of integrity, of intellectual honesty — in a word, not only an honest musician, but the *only* honest conductor. As the panegyric progressed in length and

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