



Reiner, Monteux, Markevitch—Duval, Poulenc

THE NEW YORK Philharmonic has rarely sounded better in recent years than it did at its first outing under the direction of Fritz Reiner in Carnegie Hall. It has not sounded exactly this way since seventeen years ago, when (1943) this master craftsman was last heard as its conductor. Despite his uninterrupted presence in America (in Pittsburgh, at the Metropolitan, now in Chicago) the news apparently did not travel to Fifty-seventh Street, where contracts (as well as contacts) are arranged.

The new news of Reiner is very much the same as the old news. Like others of his colleagues, Reiner enjoys the honorary status of "Doctor," with the difference that, in his case, it means one who ministers to sick orchestras and makes them well. The Philharmonic is far from ailing, but Reiner's presence was unquestionably a tonic. With his precise sign language to stimulate attention and his meticulous ear to adjust the instrumental responses, his Kodaly, Bartok, and Brahms had a sound both bright and mellow, airy yet substantial. No instrument had to fight its neighbor in order to be heard, in fulfillment of a cardinal principle of orchestral leadership: take care of the sound of the weaker instruments and the stronger ones will take care of themselves.

I wouldn't say that this program exerted either conductor or orchestra, but it had its points. Kodaly's "Variations on a Magyar Folk Song" ("The Peacock Flew") was new to the Philharmonic's repertory, though it was performed in Philadelphia under the composer's direction shortly after the war. The song itself is brief, becoming a kind of undercurrent to the chain-like sequence of variations evolved from it. Thus the effect is determined not by one or another of the eight-measure sequences, but by the larger groupings. The beginning ones are broad and assertive; then there is a reflective group, proceeding to some fanciful elaborations. In one of them, near the end, the orchestra spreads its "tail feathers" (brilliant "markings" are provided by piccolo, English horn, percussion, etc.) in aural counterpart of the peacock itself. That Reiner made the work likable as well as impressive is testimony to the balanced presentation it enjoyed. The Bartok of the "Miraculous Mandarin" (presented in dance

form at the City Center in 1951, a point ignored by the program notes) has some ear-gripping qualities and a shrewd sense of the macabre. Few men of our time know this idiom as well as Reiner, or apply themselves to it as productively.

Reiner's Brahms No. 2 was of an order of excellence that would command attention at any time, and it is increasingly a rarity today. Drawn on a large scale, it was marked by an attention to detail that suggested a tour through familiar terrain illuminated by a guide who knew every tree and stone intimately. When, lately, has a conductor dared to take the second theme of the first movement as broadly, or made it say as much? The coda, in which Brahms evokes the Schubertian spirit, was warmly turned, as low strings and high woodwinds sang joyously together. Not all the brass was on equally good behavior at the Friday performance, but it gave Reiner what he wanted in the finale—neither hurried nor overstated.

Whether 1875 was a good year for French wines, available records do not clarify; but it was a great year for French conductors, as Pierre Monteux reminded us at his latest appearance with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Within weeks of his eighty-fifth birthday, Monteux asserted a vigorous purposefulness that some colleagues unborn at his debut might cherish. Whether in the "Tragic" Overture of Brahms, Schubert's C major Symphony, or Hindemith's "Mathis der Maler," Monteux's way was the way of the music, neither more nor less. Doubtless Monteux has done his share of Hindemith, but this first encounter (for me) with the combination was a revealing one. Monteux took just as much of the famed Philadelphia color as suited Hindemith's impression of Mathias Grünewald's altarpiece at Colmar, touching in detail with brass and percussion. The performance had a blend of highlights and aural perspectives attesting to Monteux's ability to "focus" the orchestra's sound no less individually than Stokowski did a few weeks ago.

With Monteux before and Reiner after, the visiting Lamoureux Orchestra of Paris, under the direction of Igor Markevitch, was exposed physically to the kind of comparison that is customarily made only mentally. In its

performances of Gounod (Symphony No. 2), Messiaen ("Hymne"), Ravel ("Daphnis et Chloé" Suite No. 2), and Berlioz ("Symphonie Fantastique"), the orchestra showed some virtues also characteristic of Markevitch—animation, musicality, a refinement of purpose that is characteristic of French schooling. But the familiar works were not sufficiently well performed to vitalize them anew, the unfamiliar ones not sufficiently stimulating to validate their choice. Messiaen's early (1932) work has a degree of curiosity interest, but not much else.

FRENCH artistry was more admirably employed in the joint appearance of Denise Duval and Francis Poulenc in Town Hall during the same week. If the musical world may rejoice that Poulenc continues to write as well as he has lately, the composer may be thankful that he has so talented, secure, and spirited an interpreter as Mme. Duval.

Having warmed up on Debussy ("Air de Lia"), Ravel (excerpts from "Shéhérazade" and "L'Heure Espagnole"), and Gounod ("Viens, les gazons sont verts" and the "Faust" airs for Marguerite), Mme. Duval made a lively and invigorating experience of half a dozen choice examples of Poulenc's art, including the "Trois Poèmes de Villemorin" and an excerpt from "Les Mamelles de Tirésias." For a mere accompanist to rise and bow as often as Poulenc did might have been exhausting, but for a composer-accompanist each new burst of applause was contributory, eventually, to being airborne. In a time when composers are known by the systems they pursue rather than the results they achieve, it is refreshing to encounter a man who writes from impulse as well as calculation. Long may his ideas continue to flow.

As for Mme. Duval, she is an ingratiating adornment of the concert platform, as she must be of the opera stage. Slim, elegantly turned out, a past mistress of glance and gesture, she commands a bright voice of rather brittle quality—but she unquestionably commands it. Words and tone in the Poulenc sequence were practically indivisible, producing an interpretive totality that left very little to be desired. Whether it was the expressive "Au delà," the lilting "Air champêtre," or the intricate "Air de Thérèse," Mme. Duval was cleverly poised on just the right vocal foot for every step. Let us hope there will be a return "match," in which the Ravel-Debussy-Gounod warm-up will occur offstage, and only Poulenc will be heard on.

—IRVING KOLODIN.

White House

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President "ought to have the assistance of a council of personal advisers who represent every walk of life." This council "would meet at least once each month, a session to which the President would devote his full day to hearing brief reports from all members who felt the need of saying something."

This reviewer replies that to make the President a prisoner for a day a month to the mental meanderings of a cross section of the country—picked on purpose or at random, haphazard or scientifically weighted, with or without crystal balls—would result in pandemonium rather than panacea; just another futile exercise in group dynamics—and a new summit to "The Splendid Misery."

2. Symbols of Strength

By W. H. Lawrence, *Washington correspondent for The New York Times*.

THE EXERCISE of Presidential powers by men not elected to the White House long has constituted one of the more fascinating and controversial elements of the American governmental system. In book-length terms, it seldom has been dealt with; but now in "**The Invisible Presidency: The Behind the Scenes Story of Seven Presidential Confidantes from Hamilton to Sherman Adams**" (Rinehart, \$6.95) Louis W. Koenig, professor of Government at New York University, fills a part of the historical gap.

During modern times the three best-known Presidential assistants, wielding vast powers, have been Woodrow Wilson's Colonel Edwin M. House, Franklin D. Roosevelt's Harry L. Hopkins, and Dwight D. Eisenhower's Sherman Adams. Professor Koenig's volume sketches the lives and times of these men (and the personalities of the Presidents who shared their power with them), as well as four others who preceded them. George Washington had his Alexander Hamilton, Andrew Jackson his Martin Van Buren, Theodore Roosevelt his William Loeb, Jr., and FDR his Thomas G. Corcoran before Mr. Hopkins moved into the White House.

It is clear that the use of Presidential favorites to act for their chieftains is not a by-product entirely of the great growth of the nation and the increasing responsibilities of the Chief Executive as so many have believed: Alex-

ander Hamilton had such great authority with the first President of the thirteen tiny colonies that Professor Koenig has subtitled the Hamilton chapter "Operation Genius."

Most contemporary readers, of course, will find their chief interest in the story of Sherman Adams and how he operated the White House until his usefulness was ended by a scandal dug up by a House investigating committee. Here the author is much rougher on President Eisenhower than he is on Governor Adams, and his blunt description of the former's unwillingness to act as President—long before the first heart attack of September, 1955—will dismay many who voted for Ike in 1952 and again in '56.

These are sample quotations from "The Invisible Presidency":

In its dimension, Eisenhower's retreat from the highest office constitutes the greatest retreat in the national experience since the first battle of Bull Run. The role and power of Sherman Adams, by which the President made his escape, were conceived not by Adams, but by Eisenhower . . .

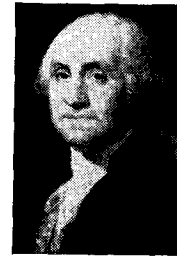
During his [Adams's] years with Eisenhower, he had provided direction and energy in an interval when leadership was badly needed. The President was ill, uninterested, aging and absentee as the nation faced the swelling challenge of Soviet power, the incalculable potentialities of the new scientific age, and the urgency of a creative social policy and an economy operating at high productivity. Within the limits of his power, Adams halted drift, faced problems and imparted vigor . . .

Adams suffered from, and eventually succumbed to, the hazards of unreviewed judgment. Far too often, what he did was in fact subject to no higher authority . . .

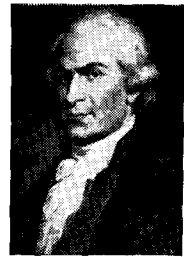
But Professor Koenig is sloppy about some of his facts, and this will, of course, affect judgments of many about the conclusions he draws. He remarks, for example, that while Governor Adams stayed away from the press, "his boss, President Eisenhower, made something of a record by holding more press conferences and answering more questions than any other Chief Executive in United States history." In his first seven years in office, Eisenhower held only 178 news conferences, far below the recent average. FDR, for example, held 337 press conferences in his first four years, 324 in the second term, 279 in the third, and eight in the few months of his fourth term.

When the professor blunders about things like that, it shakes one's acceptance of his version of other facts.

Presidential Seal of Approval



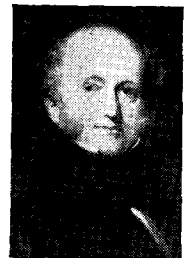
Washington



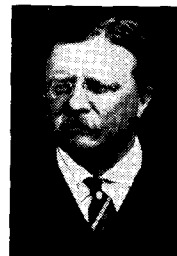
Hamilton



Jackson



Van Buren



Roosevelt



Loeb



Wilson



House



FDR



Hopkins



Eisenhower



Adams