

for 20 years ago then

# WHENCE SHALL COME THE AMERICAN CONDUCTOR?

Evolution of Symphonic Leaders in This Country Must Wait Upon the General Establishment of American Opera Houses, Says Josef Stransky—For the New York Philharmonic Conductor Considers Operatic Experience a Prime Essential in the Training of the Symphony Interpreter—The Present Necessity of Seeking Practical Experience Abroad—Qualities of Mind and Personality That Enter Into the Making of a Successful Conductor—The Part That Study Plays

THE race of American symphonic conductors waits upon the general establishment of American opera houses. A paradoxical equation, if you will, but unassailable if you take the trouble to reduce it to its lowest terms. Not even the most patriotically disposed can, in all conscience, pretend that native *bâton-wielders* exist in anything like an equable proportion to the home-grown variety of singers, pianists, violinists. You can count the relatively prominent ones on the fingers of your two hands and probably end the enumeration with digits to spare. Yet there are not a few symphony orchestras between Maine and California and, if the truth were known, plenty of native aspirants to their leadership.

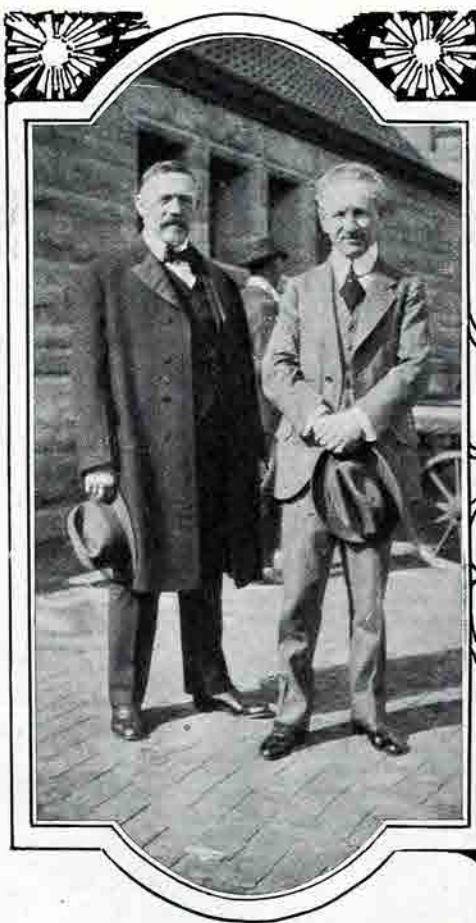
Moreover, the profuse migration of American students to Europe before the war included numbers whose purpose was to achieve eventual generalship of orchestral forces. And now when the combat has checked that *hegira*, there still prevails an idea that in Europe symphony orchestras of more or less account are holding out golden opportunities to these fledgelings and submitting their destinies to the tender mercies of their inexperience with the best grace in the world.

On these vain imaginings and in elucidation of the paradox just referred to, let Josef Stransky speak. The conductor of the New York Philharmonic was trained from the ground up, so to speak. He grew to mastery through an arduous apprenticeship, in which no trouble was slighted, no detail left to chance. And five years of residence, seconded by prolonged tours and a tireless study of American conditions and character have served to acquaint him with American artistic needs as well as to suggest the means of their fulfilment.

### Conducting for a Price

"The prospective conductor will, indeed, discover some orchestras in Europe," he declares, "perfectly satisfied to undergo his direction—that is, at such and such an amount per concert. All the concert orchestras in Germany are of this type. You hire them, make your program and conduct it. Or, if you are a pianist or a violinist, and desire an appearance as soloist with these orchestras, you can gratify your ambitions in quite the same way. You can even provide your own conductor. The prices are quite moderate. When I hear of such and such a person directing so and so many concerts of certain orchestras, and scoring great successes, I know just in what way to be impressed.

"To come to the point—if the gift of conducting is inborn (and I do not admit that one acquires it), the one and only way in which to develop it toward ultimate symphonic ends is, after completing the most rigid kind of theoretical training, to get a position as *co-répétiteur* in some small opera house. In the course of time, the opportunity to conduct some minor work will present itself. Then something of more importance and then something else. Gradually, as one gathers experience and manifests skill, larger duties along these lines will offer themselves. And when the young director makes the fact of his importance felt,



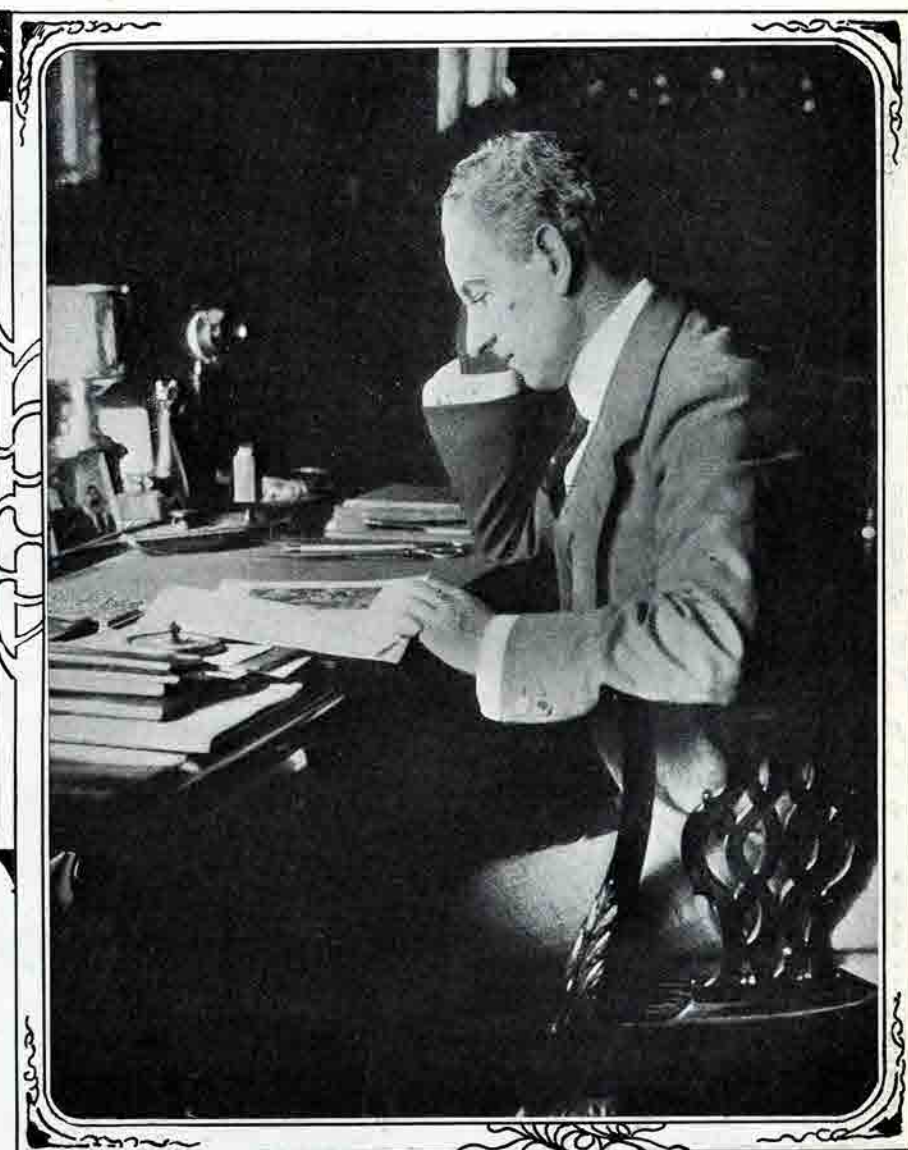
To the Right is Josef Stransky in His Study. (Photo © Bain News Service). Above, the New York Philharmonic Conductor with Felix Leifels, Manager of the Orchestra, "Snapped" On Tour.

he is not at all unlikely to attract the attention of those in a position to invite him to try his skill in concert. From then on to the goal of his ambitions his progress is along obvious paths. I never tire of pointing out that operatic experience is an absolutely indispensable prerequisite to true mastery and lasting success in the symphonic field. I know that there are several conductors to-day who have not had this training. But, far from disproving my theory, they merely demonstrate its truth the more persuasively.

"The authoritative orchestral leader must absolutely have acquired that dexterity in handling an ensemble of many component parts such as he encounters in opera. He must be cool, firm of grasp and absolutely master of himself and his resources. He becomes this to the fullest extent only through the hard training that the severe exigencies of operatic performances impose upon him. For in this it is really he who bears the heaviest burden and is the truly unifying factor in the whole production. I could tell of one prominent conductor whose fundamental training had been neglected in this particular, and who, when he was one day invited to conduct 'Fidelio' in Hamburg brought the whole representation to shipwreck, losing control of things absolutely the moment the curtain rose, and not regaining it despite the frantic efforts of *répétiteurs* in the wings to assist the singers.

### Necessity of Gaining Experience Abroad

"Now there is no reason in the world why Americans with an eye to the conductor's *bâton* should not stay in their own country to obtain that tutelage in theory and in composition, which they must have in the most ample degree before it ever becomes a question of actually directing anything. But, as matters stand in America, the prospective conductor must still betake himself abroad in order to enter the opera house, of which this country does not yet afford the necessary type or number. Nevertheless, as I just remarked, the question is not of *learning* to conduct—that you either can or cannot do. I myself always frankly tell those who want to study it that there is no such thing as studying it. I held the post of professor of orchestral conducting a number of years ago in the Stern Conservatory of Berlin, but found myself obliged to tell my pupils what I have just stated. 'You may come to all my orchestral rehearsals, watch me and try to learn from what you see and hear, and then



ask questions,' I informed them, 'for I do not see any other way.' My own training consisted in obtaining a thorough technical education from Fibich, Dvorak, Fuchs, Jadassohn and Bruckner; then I entered the opera at Prague and—just took to conducting.

"To the successful conductor the element of dominating personality is all-essential. The audience must react to it spontaneously. Nobody could be more unfortunate or more ineffectual than those conductors who work themselves up over a composition, but who, presumably feeling it themselves, lack the subtle power of conveying what they feel to their hearers or their orchestra.

### The Matter of Gestures

"It is a great error to imagine that intensity has to manifest itself in violence of gesture. Conductors of no account are much addicted to this. When I have rehearsed a number, when I have communicated all my wishes in respect to its interpretation to the orchestra and satisfied myself as to the execution of my purposes, I consider my share done. The concert itself brings, then, the inspiration of the moment—the sacred spark. Young conductors without experience and the older ones who never conducted opera waste a lot of gestures and perspiration,

which real masters spare. I never forget a characteristic episode with Gustav Mahler. A young conductor wanted my recommendation to Mahler for a second position at the Vienna Imperial Opera House. I thought highly of the young musician and complied gladly with his wish. I telegraphed at once to Mahler and in a few hours I received a telegram saying, 'Does he perspire while conducting?' Then he has no control over his forces. That was what Mahler wanted to indicate with his question, and I absolutely agree with him. I do not care for conductors who perspire as soon as they raise the *bâton*; they show a lack of self-confidence and in using enormous gestures (which, by the way, laymen call 'temperament') they are themselves driven by the waves of tone instead of controlling and mastering these."

A strong advocate of variety of intellectual pursuits for the musician, Mr. Stransky lived up to his own precepts this last summer by writing a book on modern German painting, being as profound a connoisseur of pictorial art as of music. Furthermore, the volume is in English, of which language the conductor was totally ignorant when he came here five years ago. It is to be published in the course of the present month. H. F. P.

## BOSTON OPERA OPENS IN SPRINGFIELD

### Début of New Rabinoff Artists and Conductor Made in New England City

(By Telegraph to MUSICAL AMERICA)

SPRINGFIELD, MASS., Oct. 9.—An audience that taxed the capacity of the Court Square Theater bestowed abundant applause upon the Boston-National Grand Opera Company this evening when it gave the opening performance of its second transcontinental tour. The opera was Verdi's "Rigoletto," which was followed by the "Prince Igor" Tartar ballet, in which the forty members of the Ballet Russe took part.

The same finish of ensemble that made so marked an impression during the New York performances last November was apparent to-night.

There was interest in the American début of the Russian coloratura soprano, Nadina Legat, who sang the rôle of *Gilda*, and the Italian basso, Virgilio Lazari, whose *Sparafucile* assumed the proportions of a vocal triumph. Mlle. Legat sang the "Caro Nome" with a pure tone. Her scales were evenly sung, and in every sort of florid singing demanded of her the voice showed true coloratura characteristics.

The opportunity of the evening, however, fell to George Baklanoff. He made the rôle of the hunchback jester one no less forceful dramatically than it was on its vocal side. The first appearance with the company of Fulgenzio Guerrieri disclosed a conductor relying completely upon his memory and securing excellent results.

Enrico Arensen, who was to have made his début as the *Duke*, became so hoarse during the first act his place was taken by Romeo Boscacci.