

The Seed That Bore the Philadelphia Orchestra

How the Magic of a Young Pianist's Art Brought Quaker City Forces Into Being—A Second-Story Room, the Scene of the Symphony's Birth—The "Unique" Club, Germ of the Band—Merging of Rival Force—Its Growth to the Present Day

[Editor's Note—To-day the Philadelphia Orchestra, under Leopold Stokowski, is ranked among the finest of America's symphonic forces. The virtually unknown story of its humble beginnings some forty-two years ago is fraught with much interest. It was communicated to the writer by the piano player of the original Unique Orchestra, the germ of the present band, who is now a prominent painter. He has requested that his name be withheld.]

Forty-two years ago in a little second story room over a real estate office at Nineteenth and Oxford streets, Philadelphia, the note which sounded the origin of the Philadelphia Orchestra was struck on an old tin-pan piano.

To-day that orchestra is acknowledged to rank with the best in the country.

The present organization as it stands is twenty years old but before its actual inception there were many former musical clubs which directly contributed to its being. It is the first of these small, amateur groups of players that claims the distinction of beginning the Philadelphia Orchestra forty-two years ago.

Its origin was quite humble, even accidental. There was no thought of what was being started above the real estate

ent sort from that of forty-two years ago. He is an artist well known and loved.

He can sit still, which he very seldom does, and look at the fingers which started the Philadelphia Orchestra. Yet he wouldn't have you know his name for the world. It is quite doubtful whether many of his most intimate friends know the story.

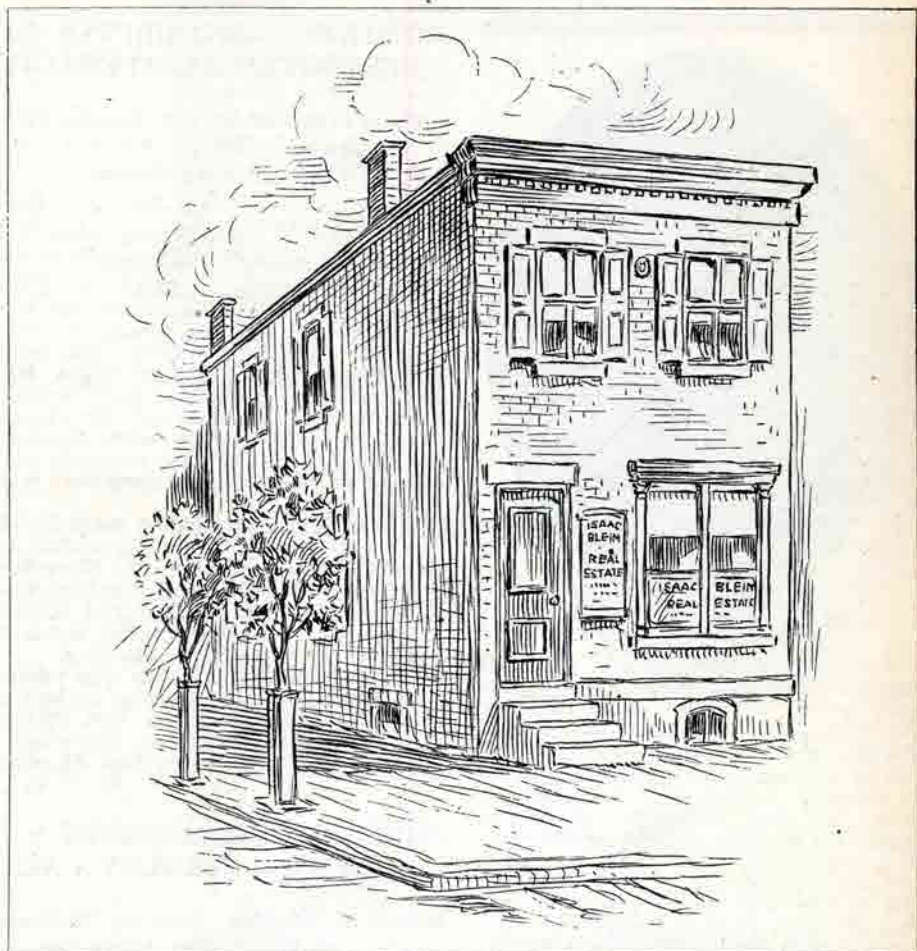
Here it is:

It was the fad among young men several years ago to form neighborhood clubs, organized with various purposes in view but mainly to correct the evils of corner loafing and bar-room indulgences. Many of these clubs stressed dancing, others card playing, literature or music.

Among the clubs there was one known as the "Unique," although the originators admit there was nothing particularly fitting in the name. Its members met in a single room, cheaply furnished with straight-back chairs, a center table littered with magazines, a few old pictures, a decrepit square piano and several thousand cubic feet of tobacco smoke.

Few Scattered Instruments

One day a certain new member made his appearance at the club and revived the old piano. The young man had a natural talent for music coupled with good training in the manipulation of the



Where the Original Unique Orchestra, Germ of the Present Philadelphia Orchestra, Was Started in 1878, at the Northeast Corner of Nineteenth and Oxford Streets. Based on a Description Furnished by a Surviving Member and Sketched from Memory by F. Cresson Schell

three or four more violins, a cello and a trombone.

Thus the "Unique" orchestra was gathered together piece by piece until the volume of sound was frightful. The survivors admit it. They played "Lustspiel," an overture heard occasionally now in amateur circles. They also tried the "Flower Song" but it was not popular because of its sweetness. The idea was to blow great blasts and scrape and pound, with all the brawn that the members possessed. They liked Cagliostro's Waltz, "Poet and Peasant," and others like them.

Soon the Unique orchestra came into such prominence that very few nights were not engaged in terrifying church socials, oyster suppers, strawberry festivals, and all the rest of the current attractions of that time. The members of the orchestra received their compensation in the form of all the food they could eat. It has been suggested since that it might have been cheaper to pay the orchestra in cash but evidently the idea never occurred to anyone then.

The Unique needed no advertisement. One rehearsal was sufficient to warn the whole neighborhood that the orchestra was in splendid form.

Sometimes the orchestra was engaged

to furnish a certain number of players for some function or other. In the event that the number called for was larger than the regular number of players, a few tried and trusty friends, barred from the ranks of the orchestra simply because they couldn't play any instrument, were furnished with fiddles equipped with shoe strings. They sat at the back where they could follow the motions of the regular fiddlers and the deception was never noticed.

The Unique continued its fearless career for several years. During that time it moved from the little room over Isaac Bleim's real estate office to the home of Harry Ellis, Nineteenth street below Oxford.

Rival Society Founded

Meanwhile a rival organization, more numerous in personnel, was started and played in the home of a Mr. Pincus in the vicinity of Eighteenth and Wallace streets. It soon became as well known as the Unique and eventually the two were merged into a combined orchestra boasting a membership of forty-five men. There was no piano in this combined band. The original pianist of the

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Academy of Music, Present Home of the Philadelphia Orchestra

office or how it would prove to be the germ of Philadelphia's great musical organization.

It all happened because of an old time-worn piano, for the most part out of tune, and a young man who had magic in his fingers to charm the small world around him. That same man to-day still has magic in his fingers but of a differ-

ent ivory keys. His efforts were at once greeted with enthusiasm. The whole club listened and became interested. Shortly afterward another member brought his violin. The two played duets, simple at first but later more complicated and pretentious. Soon another man brought his flute; another a clarinet and then followed in quick succession two cornets,

PIETRO CIMINI

CONDUCTOR OF CHICAGO OPERA ASS'N

Some of the opera houses where Maestro Cimini has conducted.

Comunale—Bologna
Costanzi—Roma

Reggio—Parma
Narodin Dom—Petersburg

Teatro Imperiale—Varsavia
Teatro Municipale—Odessa

"Cimini conducted both operas with his usual painstaking care."—Maurice Rosenfeld, *Chicago Daily News*, December 13.

"Pietro Cimini conducted, with admirable feeling for the undoubted loveliness of the score."—Farnsworth Wright, *Chicago Herald & Examiner*, December 17.

"The orchestra played pleasingly under the baton of Mr. Cimini."—Karlton Hackett, *Chicago Evening Post*, December 17.

"One very important reason for the success of the performance was the careful and poetic reading of the score given by the orchestra under Pietro Cimini's direction."—Farnsworth Wright, *Chicago Herald & Examiner*, December 6.

"Cimini conducted both operas and conducted very well."—Herman Devries, *Chicago Evening American*, December 6.

"Mr. Cimini conducted well."—Karlton Hackett, *Chicago Evening Post*, December 6.

"The playing of the orchestra under Mr. Cimini was brilliant. It was a performance to remember."—Karlton Hackett, *Chicago Evening Post*, December 7.

"Pietro Cimini conducted with efficiency."—Maurice Rosenfeld, *Chicago Daily News*, December 7.

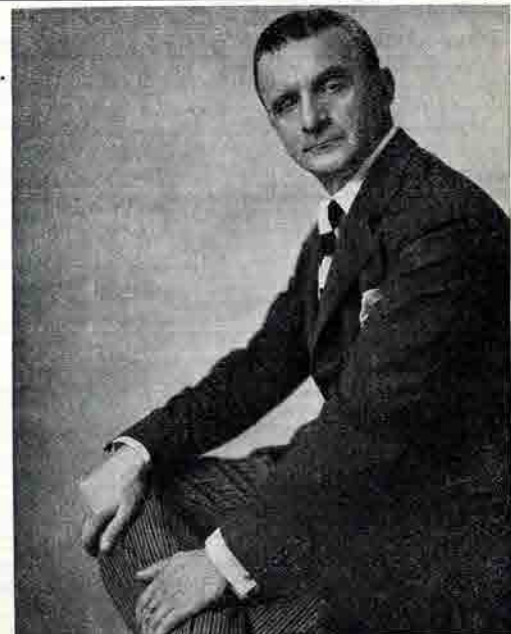
"Pietro Cimini conducting, kept his eye on the singers, and avoided disagreement between singers and orchestra. He kept the opera from dragging."—Farnsworth Wright, *Chicago Herald & Examiner*, December 2.

"Pietro Cimini as a conductor proved himself a leader equal to all the demands made upon him by the score."—*Minneapolis Morning Tribune*.

"Cimini proved himself a great conductor."—*St. Paul Daily News*.

"Cimini conducted the orchestra with a marvel of taste and expression."—*Springfield (Illinois) State Journal*.

"Cimini is a conductor of great vitality. The orchestra under his incisive direction was especially fine."—*Milwaukee Journal*.



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