

# Symphony Psychology, as Viewed by Sokoloff

Leader of Cleveland Forces Describes Reactions of Players to Various Audiences—The Stimulus of a New York Performance—How Familiarity with Its Auditors Leads Orchestra to Lose Fine Sense of Art—Best Work Done Away from Home

THE reaction of an orchestra to certain types of audiences, and the influence of a change of locale from time to time on the spirit of the organization, have been made the subject of careful study by Nikolai Sokoloff, conductor of the Cleveland Symphony. Mr. Sokoloff, while in New York on his way home from Europe, declared the problem was one of psychology.

"Continual playing before the same audience, or the same type of audience, is bad for the players, and equally bad for the conductor and for the musical welfare of the community," he declared.

"I always have held that a great symphony orchestra is an art institution dedicated to the service of the community in which it exists just as a great picture gallery should be. You will find that this attitude toward orchestras is more marked in the provincial cities of America than in New York, where the two great symphonic bodies have existed for so long that they are more or less taken for granted or looked upon as a prima donna who gives a recital once or twice a week. This could be largely obviated if they would spread music abroad throughout the community. The Chicago Symphony has done this. They play all over the city in all kinds of places, and by taking a trolley, you can hear an orchestral concert almost whenever you want. In this way the love of orchestral music, and what is equally important, the understanding of it, is diffused throughout the community.

## Dangers of Familiarity

"From the standpoint of the orchestra and its conductor, if the concerts are always given for the same audience at the Thursday concerts and the Sunday afternoon concerts, the players and their leader 'get the feel,' so to speak, of their listeners, and know in advance how they will react to this number or that, with the result that effects being taken for granted, the performers make no especial effort and soon fall into a sort of routine that is poisonous for them and stultifying to their listeners.

"But take your orchestra on tour, especially to New York, and see what happens! By common consent throughout the



Nikolai Sokoloff, Conductor of the Cleveland Symphony

country, it is agreed that New York sets the seal of approval on things artistic in general and music in particular. Hence orchestras come to New York not entirely to give the metropolis the pleasure of hearing them, but because it makes every individual in the organization sit up and try to play a little better even than his best. This reacts too on the people at home, and if New York likes the work done by their orchestra, naturally they appreciate it all the more. At times in the past, the New York critics have been annoyed at more music being brought into their city but they do not seem to feel that way now and they are realizing that their opinion is of national value and that they are treating the concerts nationally.

## Play Best Away From Home

"I know when I was a boy of seventeen, playing in the Boston Symphony under Gericke, what a stimulus it was to come to New York once a month for a concert. We all tried to play our very best because we realized that we were making music for a community where the standard was high and the audiences very sophisticated. I am therefore in a position to know from the inside, as an orchestral player as well as a conductor.

"I want to say that those years as an unidentified fiddler in that great body have been of inestimable benefit to me. Most conductors, even the greatest, have played in orchestras, Nikisch, Toscanini, Bodanzky, Stock, Monteux, to mention a few. You get the inside point of view and you learn the repertoire. In my Boston Symphony days, I always carried pocket orchestral scores of the works we were rehearsing and when there was a pause, I would whip out my score and

make notes. Sometimes my criticisms were the opposite of what Gericke thought and oftentimes they were exceedingly foolish, but in several cases, in the light of later experience, I have found them to be not so bad and have adopted them in my playing.

"Then too, if you are a player in an orchestra you have the supreme advantage of close companionship with the men playing other instruments than your own. You can't play them all yourself but from the other players you can learn to understand the instruments far better than if you simply read about them in a book. I remember in one particular number, the flute had difficulty with a trill. The composer had not entirely comprehended that construction of the flute and had demanded the impossible in marking a trill at that particular place. The flautist showed me exactly what was the trouble. I have never forgotten the circumstances and when we play that piece I never expect my flautist to trill at that point.

## Psychology in Conducting

"An orchestral conductor in these days of analysis of everything, has to be very much of a psychologist as well as a musician. He has to comprehend the psychology of each and every one of his men and the collective psychology of his audiences. He has not only to go to his rehearsals and conduct but he has to find the best market for his wares and to develop the musical taste of the people he plays to. Furthermore, he must know the best way to do all these things. But this is one of the greatest joys, this and building up an orchestra as I have done in Cleveland, creating not only the music but the instrument that makes it.

"An interesting fact in regard to building up an orchestra is that so large a proportion of our best players are now Americans or at least players whose entire experience has been gained in America. The attitude of conductors to American composers and American players has changed considerably. Personally, nothing gives me greater pleasure than to play a work by an American and I am always not only on the lookout for these but anxious to get hold of them. The war did more for music in America than it did in other countries and for the orchestral player especially.

## Building Up an Orchestra

"Before 1914 the greater proportion of men came from abroad and the woodwind players, almost without exception, were French or Belgian. Now many of them are Americans. I started my orchestra in 1918, the very worst time possible. Experienced players were hard if not impossible to get. There were many players who were technically equipped but totally ignorant of orchestral routine. Well, I had to do the best I could and I must say it is a matter of pride the way these men came up to time. Given their chance and placed in positions of responsibility, ninety per cent showed them-

selves worthy of the trust placed in them and having been given their chance, they made good.

It is no longer necessary for the player any more than the conductor, to have had his previous training in some tenth-rate German opera house. If they have capability it is no longer necessary to have the *cachet* of European experience. My own training was received entirely in America as was that of the conductors of both the Philadelphia and Chicago Symphonies.

"I brought back very little new music from Europe. It seems to have been a bad year for some reason or other. Last year was a fruitful one, but although I looked over a considerable amount of new works by composers of various nationalities, I found little that was of any great interest. I am giving 111 concerts during the coming season. We play in Cleveland for twenty-eight weeks and for five weeks on tour and at certain festivals. On our tour we play in numerous cities in the South and also in New York. I am naturally anxious to please New York for the reasons I have set forth. We shall do our very best, you may rest assured." JOHN ALAN HAUGHTON.

## CHICAGO MUSICIANS RETURN

Rollin Pease, Carl D. Kinsey and Herbert Gould Prepare for Season

CHICAGO, Sept. 5.—Rollin Pease, baritone of the vocal faculty of Northwestern University School of Music, has returned from a month spent at Chautauqua, N. Y., where he made a number of appearances as soloist. Before going to Chautauqua Mr. Pease taught in the University School of Music summer term at Evanston, giving more than 110 lessons a week for most of the six-week period. Mr. Pease has various concert dates for the coming season, beginning Nov. 7, when he will sing "Elijah" with the Apollo Club.

Carl D. Kinsey and his wife and family are returning from an extended Western tour, during which they visited Yellowstone Park, Portland, Seattle, Victoria, Vancouver, Lake Louise, Glacier, and other places of interest. Mr. and Mrs. Kinsey will be in Chicago the second week in September.

Herbert Gould found the woods of Northern Wisconsin an ideal resting place. He has just returned and will be heard in the noon musicales in Lyon & Healy's Recital Hall. K. C. D.

## Walter Charnbury Sails for Paris

Walter Charnbury, New York pianist and coach, left Sept. 3 for Paris where he will spend the coming winter in musical research work and teaching and will also appear in concerts and recitals. During the past season, Mr. Charnbury completed piano parts to several violin sonatas of Beethoven, Mozart, Grieg and other smaller pieces for the Duo Art. Mr. Charnbury's "Water Sprites" has been accepted by the Duo Art and will be included in their list as played by the composer.



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