

THE ARTURO TOSCANINI SOCIETY

by

Michael H. Gray

For most people the mention of Dumas, Texas, serves only to stir faint memories of the old country hit, "I'm a Ding Dong Daddy from Dumas." But for a small, enthusiastic minority of record collectors and music lovers this small, quiet town in the Texas panhandle means the headquarters of an organization devoted to the perpetuation of the art and memory of one of the most famous musicians of our time--Arturo Toscanini. The organization is the Arturo Toscanini Society, or ATS as it is known to its members, and its creator, founder, and current president is Clyde J. Key, a man whose mission is the preservation of the recorded art of the Italian maestro.

The origins of this exceptional organization date back to Key's early high school days in Oklahoma, when his interest in Toscanini first developed, and to his work with the Sir Thomas Beecham Society, in which he became active after a tour with the U.S. Army in the early 1960's. Key's efforts with the Toscanini wing of the Beecham Society, combined with his contacts with other interested collectors, soon led to the planning of an organization devoted exclusively to the art and memory of Toscanini. This organization, long the dream of many collectors, finally became a reality in October, 1968, when incorporation papers were written establishing the ATS as a nonprofit, educational corporation with headquarters in Dumas, Texas.

Making the Toscanini Society more than a collection of underground tapes, records, and a letterhead required hard work--and money. The first of these was never in short supply. Since the beginning Key himself has produced the majority of the Society's documentary recordings, edited both the Maestro (the Society journal) and the membership bulletin, packed and mailed the Society's large volume of correspondence, and engaged in nationwide treks in search of new friends for the Society and new acquisitions for its archives.

Money, however, proved to be a more substantial problem. For the first few years Society deficits, caused when membership dues failed to cover the cost of operations, were made up from Key's own salary and from gifts from his family. A more substantial membership today allows the Society to be self-sufficient, and Key has given up his job to devote full time to it.

Complementing the Society's financial self-sufficiency has been its success in avoiding conflict with RCA, whose European affiliates are now engaged in an extensive program of Toscanini reissues. The logistical challenges posed by the headquarters' location far from established centers of musical activity or population have been overcome as well.

Supporting the vigorous efforts of Key himself in making the Society a successful operation is the membership of the ATS, whose dues make possible the Society's publishing and collecting activities. The Society now claims citizens of 43 countries as members, whose dues of \$35.00 per year entitle them to receive as a gift a series of Toscanini documentary recordings selected largely on the basis of membership requests. In addition to the recordings, members receive the Society membership bulletin and issues of the Maestro, containing program notes, articles, and special discographies. Special disc offerings, which in the past have included Toscanini's last appearance with the New York Philharmonic in a 1945 Pension Fund concert and his two appearances with London's Philharmonia Orchestra in 1952, are given to members for an additional contribution. Privileges of the Society are available to members only, and the documentary recordings are not for sale.

The basis for the Society's activities is the Toscanini Archives, founded around a core of eighteen large private collections which the Society acquired in its first years of operation. By far the largest part of the collection consists of off-the-air transcriptions of Toscanini's broadcasts in the United States and Europe--a collection of material second only to that collected by Walter Toscanini in the Riverdale Archives. Included in these ATS collections, for example, are all but two of the NBC Symphony concerts broadcast by Toscanini during

his seventeen years with the orchestra, as well as an astonishing number of broadcasts and concerts with groups as varied as the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, the Hague Residentie Orchestra, the Stockholm Philharmonic, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Palestine Orchestra. Counting duplications and performances by other conductors which have been acquired with the basic collection, the Archives now contain over 800 tapes and more than 1,000 transcription discs. Acquisition of new material continues through exchanges with other collectors and through gifts or purchases. Recent acquisition ventures, for instance, promise the addition of several transcriptions of CBS's New York Philharmonic broadcasts conducted by Toscanini in the early 1930's.

Transfer of all the Toscanini recordings has been made from the original transcription discs or tape to 1.5-mil mylar tape. Transfers of the performances of other musicians in the Archive have not yet begun. To reduce the danger of loss from theft, accident, or natural disaster, duplicates of the Toscanini recordings have been made and stored in separate locations.

Supplementing these noncommercial recordings is a complete file of Toscanini's commercial discs, many in multiple copies and in pressings from the United States, several European countries, and Japan. Included with these are a large number of programs, books, photographs, and articles which help complete the written record of Toscanini's musical achievements.

All collections at the Toscanini Archives in Dumas are open to the public. Since August, 1970, when the Society moved to its present headquarters, its services have been extended to over 150 interested individuals from the United States, Europe, and Australia. For the present a card file serves as an index to the Archive's collections, though this is supplemented by Key's own extensive knowledge of the collections.

To date the Society has issued a total of 59 discs, encompassing special membership editions for the years 1969 through 1973, several other series documenting individual NBC Symphony concerts, and two volumes commemorating the Beethoven bicentennial. Care has been taken

to avoid recordings already issued by RCA, or those which it indicates it has plans to release in the future. Included in the Society's prospectus for new offerings are a four-disc set of American music planned as a pre-Bicentennial celebration and a documentary of Toscanini's 1937 Salzburg Festival concerts with the Vienna Philharmonic in operas by Verdi and Wagner.

Plans for an organization like the ATS must, of course, be relatively short-ranged. In the works now are several publishing reprint ventures, an expanded program of NBC Symphony documentary issues which include most of Toscanini's concerts broadcast between 1937 and 1954, and a generous sampling of rehearsal records, for which there have been many requests.

Last, but by no means least, is the matter of the "Toscanini stereo," a facsimile, but an authentic phenomenon created by the synchronization of signals from two separate microphones employed by NBC engineers in relaying concerts from Studio 8-H during the late 1930's and 1940's. A combination of these signals, one used to feed Toscanini's concerts to NBC's networks in the United States and the other recorded with Spanish announcements for NBC's affiliates in South America, is employed to produce a semi-stereo effect. Thus far one tape, containing Copland's El Salon Mexico from a 1939 broadcast, has been created after a two-month bout with tape synchronization. The Society has promised a full disc of this Toscanini stereo, when and if more dual transcriptions can be located. Judging from the rather remarkable success of the organization thus far, can Toscanini quad be far behind?

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