

The MIKLÓS RÓZSA Society

“PRO MUSICA SANA”

Honorary President: MIKLÓS RÓZSA

Director: John Fitzpatrick

Associate Directors: Ken Doeckel & Mark Koldys

VOLUME I

SUMMER 1972

NUMBER 2

PROGRESS REPORT:

We have a high-minded desire to restrict these pages to musical matters and to keep the business in the background. But a moment's reflection will show that every member who shares our musical goals must concern himself with our survival as well. One depends on the other. Our initial series of announcements has brought more than one hundred requests for information. Each respondent has been sent a descriptive letter and a copy of the newsletter. To date, 44 have joined. It is a strong start but it falls short of what we need for a permanent base of support. The need for more publicity is clear; to date, only *Films in Review*, *Films and Filming*, and *Stereo Review* have carried our announcement. Any other publication, musical or cinematic, is fair game, and we urge our members to spread the word by any means at their disposal. The newsletter itself also depends on member support. We have a small supply of interesting material but it must be supplemented if we are to provide a balanced diet. You don't have to be a musical scholar to contribute (though we boast several among our members). We were rather embarrassed by several letters praising the erudition of the YOUNG BESS article. Its author never studied music and anyone with two ears and a tape recorder ought to be able to do at least as well. The trick is to listen carefully and then to describe the music itself and not just your own responses to it, however exalted these may be. Finally, there is our vaunted promise to make tape recordings available. This gets top priority in just about every letter we receive and understandably so--any true music lover would rather listen to a piece than read about it. But our resources, temporal and financial, are still strained to the utmost and the goal of 70 members must be met before we take on this new project.

There are legal rights to consider as well, especially Dr. Rózsa's own. Still, we are working on it and we hope to present something concrete in the next issue. Special thanks to Herb Norenberg of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan for becoming our first member and to Fred Paltridge of Portland, Oregon for an extra donation.

IN THE CURRENT JOURNALS:

The July *High Fidelity* will be a film music issue with an article by Elmer Bernstein and one by MRS member Ken Satak. We hope our readers will express their opinions to the editors. Bernard Herrmann continues to make news in England. The Winter *Sight and Sound* contains an interview in which he is more candid than either he or Newman had previously been concerning their collaboration on THE EGYPTIAN (surely one of the greatest of all film scores). And he is prominently featured in the next issue as well,

talking about Pauline Kael's controversial CITIZEN KANE Book. His comments on Mahler and Strauss will raise your eyebrows. And from the May *Films and Filming* we learn that Herrmann was to have given the John Player lecture at London's National Film Theatre on 11 June. We hope one of our British members will report in our next issue.

RÓZSA IN NEW YORK:

Dr. Rózsa gave our New York members quite a thrill recently when he stopped here on his way to his summer home in Italy. We had the honor of being his guests for lunch at the Russian Tea Room, next door to Carnegie Hall. The conversation was lively for a full three hours; Dr. Rózsa is, among other things, a great storyteller. The poor waitress never had a chance. It was 20 minutes before anyone even noticed that she was trying to take our orders. It would be impossible to record everything here. Gleanings are scattered throughout this issue and will be food for many future issues. Here are some of the most current items:

Dr. Rózsa had intended to use his *Mark Hellinger Suite* (*Background to Violence* had never been his title) for the coming "Filmharmonic" Concert but discovered that Universal had simply destroyed the music for its own films. Everything. Because of this cultural vandalism it is doubtful whether any copies of the score are still in existence.

The *Tripartita* is finished but no premiere has been announced yet. A Philadelphia performance in 73/74 is a possibility though. Future plans call for some choral works, perhaps something relating to the recent vandalism of the *Pieta* if a suitable text can be found.

Differences between Janos Starker and Philips records (over recording acoustics apparently) are the latest snags in plans to record the Cello Concerto. But the Piano Concerto should be recorded in conjunction with the Munich performance this summer. The "Filmharmonic" concert may also be recorded.

A new film score? If a suitable picture comes along and if the producer wants a real composer...

REISSUES:

The English record companies, at least, are finally coming to realize the value of the old classic soundtrack recordings. Last year, EMI reissued *Great Movie Themes* (MFP5232). It is an uneven collection, conducted by Rózsa, Savina, and Kloss (who died two years ago), but the exquisite treatment of the DIANE love themes alone is worth the price of the record. Now English Polydor is in the process of rereleasing many of the old classics in its MGM Silver Screen Soundtrack Series. Available now are: BEN-HUR (Vol. I) (2353030); KING OF KINGS (2353035); and EL CID (2353046). To follow are Vol. II of BEN-HUR, QUO VADIS?, IVANHOE/PLYMOUTH ADVENTURE/MADAME BOVARY, and maybe THIEF OF BAGDAD/JUNGLE BOOK. The new EL CID is a must even if you have the MGM disc because it contains 2:14 of music new to discs (for the death of Gomez and Chimene's subsequent grief).

Dr. Rózsa has no idea where this bonus came from! We hope that the other records have similar surprises and that Polydor will resist the temptation to provide phony electronic stereo.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

We omitted the opening (biographical) paragraphs from the Palmer article in the last issue because we felt certain that all our members were already familiar with certain standard references. We were wrong.

A comprehensive Rózsa bibliography is an enormous undertaking but, until one turns up, everyone should be familiar with the following sources:

Films in Review--Ken Doeckel's article (Nov. 65) is the most complete biography we know of. It contains an invaluable list of Rózsa's films, missing only SUNDOWN (41), portions of TO BE OR NOT TO BE (41) and BEAU BRUMMEL (54), and the three most recent films. FIR has also printed articles on Newman (Aug. 59), Herrmann (Aug. 67), Waxman (Aug. 68), Korngold (Feb. 67), Friedhofer (Oct. 65), Raksin (Jan. 63), and Steiner (Jun. 61). The magazine has carried a "Sound Track" column, sporadically up to 1963 and regularly since then. The quality of its criticism has been variable but it is the inevitable starting point for any research on film music.

Film Music Notes--This superb magazine ceased publication in 1958, which was a pity as that year was perhaps the apogee of American film music. Just think of what was being written: Rózsa's BEN-HUR, Newman's DIARY OF ANNE FRANK, Waxman's THE NUN'S STORY, Herrmann's VERTIGO. FMN missed those scores but its pages do contain much of value on the music of the forties and fifties. It can usually be found in the larger libraries.

Film and TV Music--Even more obscure than FMN, this publication (originally entitled simply Film Music) was perhaps the finest of all. It specialized in lengthy analyses of film scores, usually by the composers themselves, complete with extensive musical examples from the original scores. Highlights of its few years of publication include Rózsa's exhaustive article on LUST FOR LIFE, and Elmer Bernstein's even longer analysis of his score for THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

Grove's Dictionary--See this for a complete list of Rózsa's concert works.

The Max Steiner Music Society--This pioneer organization has published some valuable material in the seven years of its existence.

George Arents Research Library (Syracuse University)--This collection houses many of Rózsa's papers and manuscripts and is available for advanced research.

And now, we hope that our own back issues will be of some value to future researchers. They are available for \$1.00 each.

*

MIKLÓS RÓZSA'S CONCERTO FOR CELLO AND ORCHESTRA, Op. 32: a U.S. premiere,
by Mark Koldys

The unveiling of any new concerto is a newsworthy event, but the appearance of a new cello concerto is particularly welcome. With contemporary composers apparently concentrating on unusual instrumental combinations (there are concerti for tap dancers, harmonica, etc.), as well as a veritable plethora of piano and violin concerti, the "tenor" of the orchestra tends to be forgotten. Indeed, no instrument is more in need of some worthy 20th Century material. Very few contemporary works for cello and orchestra of concerto-length have been accepted into the "standard repertoire", and those that have are none too praiseworthy. Prokofiev's *Symphonie-Concertante* is a long, uninspired turgidity; Khachaturian's *Concert-Rhapsody* is typical "socialist realism" banality stretched to an absurd length; Shostakovich's *Cello Concerto* is no better than the garbage he ground out for films like *ZOYA* and *PIROGOV*. There do exist some worthwhile compositions in the genre (for example, the cello concerti of Milhaud and Barber), but they can

hardly be called "standard repertoire", having not proven popular with either artists or listeners. Beyond these works, the cellist is more or less stranded, and must resort to such overplayed chestnuts as the concerti of Boccherini and Dvorak, or Bloch's *Schelomo* (which is a contemporary work, but certainly not of concerto length or scope).

Perhaps all of this was in the minds of some of the audience at the Meadowbrook Music Festival on Thursday, July 2, 1970, as they awaited the end of Haydn's "Miracle" Symphony. Certainly many of them were thinking that if the rains would hold off long enough to allow the outdoor concert to continue, that would be miracle enough.

The Haydn Symphony finally ended, to little more than polite applause. The audience then awaited the appearance of soloist Janos Starker, certainly not knowing what to expect from what was, to them, the concert's unknown quantity: composer Miklós Rózsa. "The novelty at Meadowbrook last night was the American premiere of Miklós Rózsa's Cello Concerto..., (Rózsa), who moved to California in 1940 and has lived there ever since, is best known as a composer of movie music.... But he has also been able to successfully pursue [sic] a career as a serious composer as well. Every few years he writes a concerto, and somebody, like Heifetz, Piatigorsky, or Pennario, plays it." (Jay Carr, the *Detroit News*).

The form of the work is best described by its composer. "The first movement starts with a searching introduction, which leads to the passionate first theme (1). A second, more lyrical theme follows. The first theme undergoes many orchestral transformations and, after a difficult solo cadenza, the lyrical theme returns, leading to the main theme and an energetic coda.

"The second movement's brooding Hungarian theme starts with the solo cello, which grows in intensity when the orchestra joins in. Muted strings play the quietly flowing second theme and lead back to the opening in the woodwinds, which the cello develops. The movement ends broodingly, as it has started, on the pedal of the solo cello.

"The final movement opens with a light dance-like theme, but the second theme (2) is more robust and leads to a slow *mysterioso*. The first two themes return and, while the orchestra interjects the opening motives, brilliant solo passage-work by the cello ends the work." (Miklós Rózsa).

Perhaps the Meadowbrook audience was most struck by the work's morose quality: "There is nothing light about this Cello Concerto, modern in idiom, but by no means *avant-garde*. It seems to convey generally a feeling of melancholy and frustration. . . . Preceding each of its despairing climaxes, there is [sic] also, in all three movements, passages of eerie mysteriousness during which only the cello and celeste play." (Collins George, *Detroit Free Press*). "Despite its abundance of dazzling figurations, (it is) rhapsodic and even somber in character.... The orchestra plays a clearly subordinate part, underlining, punctuating, or acting as counterpoise to the cello." (Carr, *News*).

To those more familiar with Rózsa's concert music, the Cello Concerto surprised with its "bithemal" construction: each movement is based on the interworking of two themes, a curiously atypical form for Dr. Rózsa to employ throughout an entire concerto. Even more startling, perhaps, was the Concerto's middle movement, which taxes the interpretative powers of the soloist as fully as the virtuosic outer movements tax his technical resources.

With an almost Transylvanian spookiness about it in parts, it sets off the outer movements perfectly, and demonstrates that the work is not merely a show-off vehicle for the soloist.

It seems unlikely that anyone fully comprehended the work after one hearing, but, nonetheless the normally reticent Meadowbrookers clapped for over three minutes, with an obvious crescendo when the composer stepped out on stage. But the applause was as much for the performers: Starker's playing was brilliant. "Starker swivel-hipped his way through (the concerto's) challenges with stunning aplomb and an unfailingly keen-edged brilliance of tone and touch. He produced a remarkable range of colors and sonorities, and perfectly-centered, perfectly-equalized tones. His way of coolly ticking off subtlety after subtlety made for the most formidable sort of authority, and his finger-work and piston-like fore-arm fully lived up to expectations... Ehrling and the orchestra enjoyed one of their best nights in recent memory. Their accompaniment in the Rózsa Concerto was characteristically vigorous, and cleanly articulated." (Carr, *News*). Maestro Ehrling's lack of affinity for music of the classic and romantic eras is legend in the Detroit area, and his performance of the Haydn Symphony that opened the program simply added to the legend. But for the Rózsa, Ehrling whipped the Detroit Symphony Orchestra into a near frenzy, without sacrificing lyricism or subtlety. It was his accompaniment that made the U.S. premiere of the concerto a far better occasion (musically speaking) than the rather soddenly (and none too accurately) accompanied world premiere in Berlin.

On the subject of the work itself, soloist Janos Starker: "It's beautiful; it's a masterpiece". Detroit Symphony pianist Mischa Kottler: "Rózsa is a good writer; this is really a good piece". *Chicago Daily News* critic Bernard Jacobson: "Why must we have our intelligence insulted by such a trumpety piece as Miklós Rózsa's Cello Concerto?., .The only passages that make any impression are the devitalized echoes of Bartok, Prokofiev, and Janacek." Therein lies the truth concerning critical reaction to the work: the more famous the critic, the louder his jeers. We aren't implying that Mr. Jacobson is a musical Rex Reed, but one must question the critical standards that lead Mr. Jacobson to judge a work that harshly on the basis of one or two hearings. (Even more far-out: Jacobson's claim that Rózsa pilfered part of Shostakovich's *Cello Concerto* for his cadenzas.) Chicago's other critic (also reviewing a subsequent performance with Starker and Georg Solti) wasn't quite as harsh, but did make some cracks about "a soundtrack sound", and concluded: "I don't much care if I ever hear it again." (Thomas Willis, *Chicago Tribune*).

Detroit's critics were more restrained: "a tasteful and soundly constructed solo vehicle" (Carr, *News*); "It is impossible to say of a work of such complexity that one likes or dislikes it on the basis of one hearing. Like anything of similar magnitude, full appreciation can only come with greater familiarity." (Collins George, *Free Press*).

It is quite easy to say that any piece with a Hungarian sound is a "devitalized echo" of Bartok (by that standard Ravel is a "devitalized echo" of Debussy). But it is not so easy for a famed critic, faced with the task of giving His Opinion in time for the morning editions, to admit that he cannot totally absorb a complex and demanding composition after only one or two hearings. If critics follow Mr.

Jacobson's example and slam the work every time they can (Mr. Jacobson even stuck his irrelevant criticisms into a record review of music by a Soviet composer of no relation whatsoever to Rózsa!), if critics thereby succeed in killing the composition before it has been given a fair chance to live, then the loss will be not only our own, but also that of future generations. I personally feel that Dr. Rózsa's *Cello Concerto* will someday be considered the equal of his monumental *Piano Concerto*, and the superior of the *Sinfonia-Concertante* ("Double Concerto"), If it doesn't quite equal the *Violin Concerto*, well, what does?

musical examples:



*

ERRATA (Issue #1)

The misspelling of Honegger on p. 2 is ours, not Dr Rózsa's. Ex 3 in the Palmer article refers to the second half of the article which will be printed in a future issue. Mark Koldys should have received credit for the YOUNG BESS musical quotes. "Nostalgia" never did make it onto Budapest radio (political objections to the text). Two performers mentioned should have been called Erasabet Tusa and Joseph Suk,

*

Classifieds: (rate: members \$1 per line; non-members \$4 per line):

Rare Out-of-Print Motion Picture Soundtrack and Show Albums. Mint Cond. Rózsa, Steiner, Newman, Waxman, Herrmann, Friedhofer, North, Bernstein, Styne, etc. "ONLY THE BEST" Send 25¢ for Quality Catalog to ReCollections P.O. Box 197, Roselle Park, N.J. 07204.

CAPTAIN FROM CASTILE. Limited quantity of mint, factory-sealed copies of the Alfred Newman score, Mercury MG 20005, Newman cond. \$25 per LP. Will also trade. Send money order or trade info to Ken Sutak, address deleted.

*

LETTERS: reader reaction to our first issue was mainly favorable, but unstimulated to controversial comment...

I like it! It has simplicity, factuality, and no bombastic overstatements which I abhor. Christopher Palmer is a brilliant, young, Cambridge-graduated musicologist whose book on Musical Impressionism will appear shortly and who is working on an article about

filmusic for the new Grove's Dictionary. Miklós Rózsa (CA)

The most encouraging thing is its determination to change the course of filmusic. I recently wrote to Charles Schneer to that end as he is now embarked on producing Ray Harryhausen's latest epic fantasy in London. I urged him to hire Bernard Herrmann. The combined clout of our membership may be able to accomplish even more, Craig Reardon (Redondo Beach, CA)

*

IN FUTURE: articles on THE POWER, film music theory, a comprehensive Rózsa discography, and the four concerti.