

in fiscal and monetary affairs. In the greatest economic recession of the present generation, that which began in October 1973, it took twelve months for the majority of professional economists in the United States to recognize that a serious recession was going on. It took two more months—fourteen months in all—before the White House began to acknowledge that the very name “recession” might be appropriate. How is such long-term ignorance abated by a power, in an appointed group of “independent wise men,” to make fiscal and monetary changes, from week to week?

In respect to economic growth, presently attainable fine-tuning is a delusive reliance. In respect to economic justice, stabilizing income provision should be made entirely independent of the degree of success that any economic tuning may achieve. In this latter point, one is not dissenting from Meade but, as most often, agreeing with him. He is reassuring company.

Maestro

TOSCANINI. By GEORGE R. MAREK.
Atheneum. 321 pp. \$12.95.

Reviewed by EDWARD ROTHSTEIN

IN 1886, a nineteen-year-old cellist in a touring Italian orchestra was unexpectedly called to the podium before a performance of *Aida* to substitute for an absent conductor. It was Arturo Toscanini's debut. Over seventy years later, the night before he died, Toscanini might have been recalling that occasion when he awoke briefly from a coma to sing a phrase from the same opera. In the period between these two, vastly different, evocations of Verdi, Toscanini lived a life of imposing drama and musical achievement, which George Marek, a longtime personal acquaintance of the *maestro* and formerly the director of the classical record division of RCA, attempts to portray in this biography.

Toscanini lived the kind of life

for which biographers are grateful, but he has not been done justice in the biographies which have appeared over the last forty years, including the present one. Toscanini's personality was so strong, his influence so powerful, that worship weighs the writer's pen. Marek's book begins:

Toscanini said to Walter, his son, “Walter, if after my death you write my biography, I'll come and haunt you.” Then Walter asked me to do it; I felt I couldn't. I felt I couldn't because I loved him too much and I feared that what I had to say would turn out to be a monophonic paean.

Though what has emerged is still a paean of sorts, it does at times take on stereophonic dimensions, for Marek is aided, as well as hampered, by his subject's vitality and importance. Toscanini helped shape the operatic and symphonic worlds of this century. He conducted the world premiere of *La Bohème*, and the Italian premieres of *Siegfried* and *Salome*. He directed the Metropolitan Opera for seven years, La Scala for many more, and led the New York Philharmonic through ten legendary seasons; and, at the age of seventy, he began a career of seventeen years conducting the NBC Symphony, with which he recorded most of what now amounts to his objective musical legacy. These recordings were best-sellers in the 50's. Seven million people heard his radio broadcasts. No serious listener was untouched by his musical vision.

Marek draws from his own personal recollections, and those of others, to paint a biographical portrait rich in anecdote. The familiar stories of Toscanini's “tantrums” are told, but so are many others, paradoxical fragments which make the musical figure even more intriguing. Toscanini cheered at wrestling matches, and translated Shakespeare. He regarded his lifelong marriage as sacred, but he slept in many different beds. He was a musical rationalist, but a superstitious man.

The intensities of Toscanini's personality carried over to his pol-

itics as well; Marek's recounting of his struggle against Fascism is particularly moving. In the early 20's Toscanini had stood as a candidate for office under the Italian Fascist symbol, but this was a sympathy which quickly turned to hatred. At La Scala he refused to play the Fascist hymn or display a portrait of Mussolini. He was personally warned by *Il Duce*, he was assaulted, his passport was confiscated, his phone was tapped. Under the pressure of worldwide protest Toscanini was finally permitted to leave Italy for Germany, but he did not stay long. In 1933 he signed a cable to Hitler protesting the boycott of Jewish musicians, and withdrew from all performances. He donated his services as first conductor of the Palestine Orchestra. All through the war years he raised money in the U.S. for refugees from fascism.

Yet facts and anecdotes, however fascinating, do not in themselves make a coherent biography. Marek's book is an undisciplined portrait, and it leaves the reader with little organized understanding of a highly disciplined man, or his music. The loose, admiring narrative is frequently interrupted by speculations about musical genius and personality, and by stories about composers and performers. Even when Toscanini is dealt with, he almost gets lost in anecdote.

Marek further obscures Toscanini by employing a narrative style usually reserved for the biographical novel. Though his affectionate voice adds to the warmth and enjoyment provided by the book, it frequently clouds its subject with romantic and fictional overtones. Toscanini, Marek writes, when a boy in Parma, loved to “listen to the lazy music of the river, the provocative noise the bees made in the sun.” Did Toscanini once mention the appeal of musical nature or is this Marek's invention? We are not told. The same style is used even to communicate the nature of Toscanini's musical interpretation. When he conducted, “One felt as if one saw the first spring and walked in a pristine meadow.” Perhaps, but this brings us no closer to the music. For elucidation of the performances the reader needs

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Samuel Antek's *This Was Toscanini*, a musical memoir graced with photographs by Robert Hupka, and, at the least, B. H. Haggin's *The Toscanini Musicians Knew*, a book of recollections which, with Haggin's minimal intrusion upon his subject, recalls Toscanini's own methods. These books are superb portraits which bring the reader closer to Toscanini by revealing the source of his musical power.

EVEN in a book as diffuse as Marek's, it is possible to sense that Toscanini's life held a single unifying force, a theme, which also suffused his music. Alfred Einstein wrote, after listening to Toscanini conduct, "Greatest discipline becomes greatest freedom." The discipline was in service to the text and composer; the freedom was found in the artistic result. "He saw himself," writes Marek, "as the advocate of the composer, pleading the composer's cause, not his own." This was his gift to the 20th-century style, the subordination of self to art, replacing the romantic notion of self-expression in art.

The score was the ultimate arbiter; the composer's will was the ideal. Toscanini, to be sure, constantly reinterpreted that ideal. He listened to other interpretations, and he loved the conducting of his protégé, the young Guido Cantelli, but he was constant in his demands for absolute concentration and allegiance to the text. If he felt either quality was lacking his comments could be devastating. After hearing a Stokowski performance Toscanini wrote a letter which his son Walter fortunately intercepted: "Dear Maestro Stokowski: I have known two assassins in my life. One was Hitler, the other was Mussolini. You are the third."

Toscanini could be no less harsh with the orchestra. Broken batons, smashed watches, insults, and screaming were the signs of his frustration as he strove to mirror his musical ideas in the playing of a hundred disparate individuals. He was as hard on himself; after one outburst he dug his nails into his chest so hard that the wounds bled. The moments of musical beauty he achieved made the mo-

ments of anger seem all the more bizarre. Toscanini was not unaware of what he was doing. "*Cher Maître*," pleaded Landowska, "if I could but once play with you I would die happily." "*Chère Madame*," Toscanini replied, "don't play with me—and live happily."

Toscanini was a meticulous craftsman, with a perfect ear and memory, but his art was more subtle, and open to controversy. "Any *asino* can conduct—but to make music, eh? *Is difficile!*" "*Cantare*," he pleaded with the orchestra—sing, sustain. Those who played with him, those who have listened to him the most, point to this quality, the singing phrase, set in a context of elemental energy and clarity, revealing the composer's will. His critics maintain precisely the opposite, that his tempos do not allow the phrase to sing, that the craggy energy destroys the clarity, that in imposing his iron will upon the music Toscanini destroyed the content. It is difficult to mediate this debate, but the question of the

composer's will deserves some attention as it was the central motivation of Toscanini's life-project.

The meaning of that project is not as clear as it may at first seem, for even Toscanini's "ideal" interpretation of a work is in fact and at best an approximation, within the limits of musical notation, of what the composer heard in his mind's ear. Music, once written, takes on a life of its own. The text moves through time as a static work, but to be heard it must be retranslated into sound, filtered through the personality of an interpreter (who will necessarily transform it in keeping with his own physical and mental character) and the interpretive style of his era. That interpretive style exists for the listener as well. Who can listen to Beethoven with the ears of the early 1800's, ears which had never heard Brahms, Stravinsky, or Stockhausen? Historical influence works in both directions.

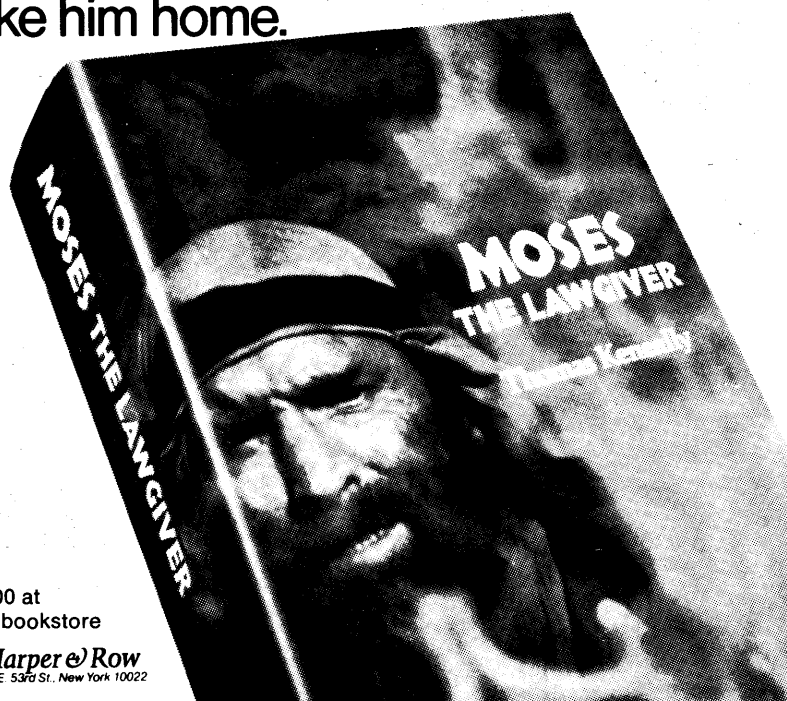
The modern conceptions of original instrumentation and "Ur-text"

editions—extensions of Toscanini's own goals of musical interpretation—must be seen in perspective. There are responsible and irresponsible performances in all styles, on any instrument. The critical difference is that between manipulation and revelation, between an egocentric reveling in musical prowess and the sharing of musical discovery. The latter was the secret of Toscanini's fidelity to text, the meaning of his discipline.

A great performance goes even further. It circumscribes the work with its own consistent laws, limiting it by presenting a *single* interpretation, but revealing it by showing it to be complete, unambiguous. It becomes both personal and universal. Artur Schnabel believed that the entire composition should be anticipated as one unit before being recreated by the performer, and should then be *exhaled* as though in one breath. This unitary conception is given form by the laws of interpretation which, once created, conceal themselves, for if they are attuned to the work, they become natural, part of the structure of the music; the work emerges as an artistic whole. This was the meaning of Toscanini's freedom.

This is also what can be heard in the RCA recordings. When we listen to Toscanini's performance of the Prelude and Love Death from *Tristan*, or to the *Missa Solemnis*, the Beethoven symphonies, or to Brahms and Verdi, we really hear that paradoxical freedom which arises out of the discipline of tempo and score. We hear the exhalation of the music, formed with an intensity it is difficult to ignore; most other performances pale in comparison. Toscanini had his weaknesses, but it is always possible, with him, to feel the dedication which was the foundation of every performance. His hand is of course recognizable—it would be impossible to conduct without interpreting, without transmuting the "in-itself." Frustration grows out of this circumstance but so does possibility, and Toscanini must have known that music's plasticity is also its virtue; it grants itself anew to each individual, both performer and listener.

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The difficulties of musical interpretation apply also to biography, for if in music the text must be translated into sounds, in biography the life must be translated into words. If the biographer wishes to reveal his subject, he must also give it form. And, as in music, personal whims must be disciplined. It is in this sense that Marek fails to reveal Toscanini. He pleases himself with numerous extraneous themes and melodies, and incessant *rubato*—a romantic effusiveness that contrasts unfavorably with Toscanini's lean style.

Toscanini did not wish his biography to be written, perhaps because he felt that it was the composer, rather than the conductor, who deserved the attention; he had said all he could in his concerts. Those sounds, unlike the compositions, have died, but we may be thankful that Toscanini's last bits of testimony remain on record.