

# 1964 Choir Performs in USSR

September 22, 1964

In the midst of Mock Convention frenzy, the College Choir returned from a six-week spring tour that carried it through most of western Russia, to the gates of the Kremlin itself. The 60-member group and its director Robert Fountain performed in all the major Russian cities, and many of the minor ones, as well as in Rumania. The itinerary included concerts in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and Odessa.

The concert series presented by the choir was the first part of a two-year cultural exchange jointly sponsored by the Soviet government and the US State Department. The purpose of the exchange is to establish stronger contact between the publics of the two countries. Many of the

smaller cities visited had never hosted an American artistic group before.

## Chosen from Recordings

The choir was chosen by the State Department on the basis of taped concert recordings. The choice of the choir was a considerable honor — only four groups were sent to the USSR, and all the others were professional organizations. The tour itself was under State Department auspices. The Soviet cultural ministry did its part in promoting the exchange by smothering the choir with ecstatic reviews via Tass and Pravda. The College contributed by reducing academic loads for choir members.

The real support, however, came from the Russian audiences themselves, who filled every

concert hall to overflow capacity and often acknowledged the choir with rare standing ovations. Choir members later stated that a real rapport was established on the personal level hoped for by cultural exchange planners, both at the concerts and during free times.

Choir members noted that meetings with Soviet student groups were highly successful, as Americans and Russians conversed in four languages. Politics, naturally, was a primary discussion topic, although students also exchanged views on education. An interesting note was the amusement of the Russians when they heard about the social rules system found in American liberal arts colleges. Russians apparently have much more social freedom than their American counterparts.

# Five Choir Members Defect, Request Asylum in Kremlin

March 27, 1964

Five members of the College Choir defected to the Soviet Union last night, seeking political asylum within the Kremlin walls, Radio Moscow announced late last night. The State Department officially confirmed the Soviet report at 3:58 p.m. (EST).

The students, whose names are being withheld pending notification of relatives and housemothers, told Communist Party officials that they were disenchanted with the social atmosphere of American campus life. They expressed interest in the USSR's cooperative movement, according to an article in this morning's edition of Izvestia.

A student leader of the Choir told newsmen that the defectors had access to a top-secret dossier, detailing architect's drawings of X-shaped construction sites within American communities of a "defensive nature." Another source reported that he understood them to be more "offensive"

than defensive.

Political analysis on both sides of the iron curtain feel that this information, if revealed to the Russians, could even further reduce the gap between Americans and Russian standards of living, and could lead to serious setbacks of American influence in the re-examining nations.

Soviet Premier Khrushchev, vacationing at his Black Sea Villa could not be reached for comment. The New York Times Moscow correspondent reported that he was working feverishly on a revolutionary new "Ten Year Project" to replace the government's ailing "Five Year Plans."

President Carr told reporters that he would "dearly miss a handful of those smiling faces walking into Thursday assemblies" for the rest of the year.

On the bright side, however, he noted that, with the five defections, the College surpasses the previous annual record holders, Harvard with four, and Oxford with three.

1993

# Midori's musical intensity amazing

Tom Dickinson  
April 30, 1993

Very seldom in life do we ever really experience music.

I'm not talking about notes played correctly and in time with a general sense of phrasing. I mean music, as a language which defies description, that bares itself before the soul in its dignified simplicity. So when music is spoken with such an astonishingly eloquent voice as that of Midori's, it is simply breathtaking.

Yes, in case you missed the hype, Midori, accompanied by pianist and Associate Professor of Piano Robert McDonald, played Tuesday night at Finney Chapel, as a replacement in the Artist Recital Series for the indis-

posed Sanford Sylvan. And play she did. Stravinsky writes, "the first condition that must be fulfilled by anyone who aspires to the imposing title of interpreter, is that he [she] be first of all flawless executant," and the execution by both performers this evening was phenomenal. Midori, playing the 1722 "Jupiter" Stradivarius, played with golden tone, faultless intonation, superb rhythmic clarity and astonishing legato and dynamic control. McDonald accompanied her beautifully, and the rapport between the two was excellent.

Midori, for those not familiar with her, is a twenty-one year old virtuoso violinist from Osaka, Japan. Her mother started her playing the violin at the age of two,

and in 1982 she came to New York where she studied with Dorothy DeLay, Jens Ellermann and Yang-Ho Kim. She made her debut in the same year with the New York Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta at the company's New Year's Eve gala concert. She has had an amazing international career, and has established herself as one of the preeminent artists of our time. In 1992 she established a foundation to bring classical music and artists to children who would have no other exposure to music otherwise.

The concert began with Schubert's D major Sonata for Violin and Piano. Wonderfully expressive on stage, she plays with a very physical style which draws the audience into her world. The

first piece, the Schubert, was played very sensitively. The interplay between Midori and McDonald was terrific, each taking and relinquishing the theme with grace and efficiency. In the Andante, we received our first real taste of Midori's utter command of both line and dynamic control. She took the musical line from forte to piano to pianissimo at will without ever losing the clarity or context of the phrase. But the best was still to come.

Beethoven's A major Sonata for piano and violin was simply amazing. Midori played with an unbroken musical line throughout each of the movements. The transitions between scherzando and legato sections were not so much transitions as a continua-

tion of a musical idea. In the first and second movements in particular the concentrated intensity of the musical line was otherworldly. After the first movement the audience just let out a collective sigh. After the concert, Midori talked with me about her new foundation geared to bring music into the lives of children. She plays between 30 and 40 concerts at various schools and hospitals around the country for the foundation. "Our philosophy is to use music as a vehicle to promote education as a whole."

"I want to show children that we artists are human too," she said, "that we laugh and smile like everyone else. I hope they can see this and know that they can accomplish something too."

1963

# Stravinsky in Oberlin



Igor Stravinsky, guest conductor for the Contemporary Music Festival in honor of his works, leads the College Orchestra and Choir in a practice session Wednesday for their performance in the Contemporary Music Festival last night.

Photo courtesy of the Oberlin College Archives  
Photo caption from the March 22, 1963 issue of The Oberlin Review

Steven J. Anderson  
March 22, 1963

Igor Stravinsky is a great man. His influence on music and on the cultural world is inestimable. For more than fifty years he has been a guiding light and a center of musical activity throughout the world. And, what is more, Mr. Stravinsky has been in Oberlin. Our privilege is very great indeed. We are certainly fortunate to be able to hear one of his greatest works (the Symphony of Psalms) as he conducts it. A parallel, even though obviously anachronistic, would be the opportunity to hear Beethoven conduct his Eroica Symphony. This event concerning Oberlin is of the first magnitude.

I had the personal pleasure of interviewing Robert Craft, the

brilliant conductor who is touring with Mr. Stravinsky and who often acts as spokesman for the great composer. I found Mr. Craft to be exceptionally articulate and musically informed. I have never spoken with anyone possessing superior knowledge or intelligence in music. I had submitted numerous questions the previous day, thus giving both Mr. Stravinsky and Mr. Craft time to peruse them at their leisure.

The opinions that I received from Mr. Craft are those held by and relayed from Mr. Stravinsky himself.

My first question was about education. Mr. Craft informed me that Mr. Stravinsky had never taught either privately or with an institution and that his own scholastic days are of course well

behind him. However, Mr. Stravinsky holds the opinion that a musician, as well as a person interested in the liberal arts, needs a liberal arts education. He cannot stand a musical "boor" who vigorously and obviously asserts his ignorance of the world around him.

I then asked if Mr. Stravinsky believed that institutionalized education could impair the creativity of a composer or a performer. Mr. Stravinsky believes that restrictions can be detrimental to the sensitive musician. He believes that academic dogmas can hamper the creative spirit. However, if the student can, within academic restrictions, open his mind to new ideas and not close himself within the protective academic shroud, it is possible for creativity to be stimulated through study.

I asked Mr. Craft for Mr. Stravinsky's opinions concerning the relative importance of talent, as opposed to hard work in the creative arts. Mr. Stravinsky believes talent to be an absolute necessity, with a pre-requisite of intelligence. He rarely, if ever speaks of musical intelligence. He expects it to be present before there can be an acknowledgement of talent. He believes that students must keep their minds open to the new musical orders and learn from them. He believes a composition student should not mimic another composer's style but rather study it and naturally evolve a style of his own.

Discussing electronic music, Mr. Craft mentioned that Mr. Stravinsky was at one time highly inter-

ested in this new art form. However his disappointments with the many unsolved problems of the medium made him lose interest in it. He expressed a mild disinterest in the French "musique concrète" which he believes to be a "dying art." Since Mr. Stravinsky has lost interest in electronic music, he could not say what he thought to be a possible solution for it.

The subject then naturally turned to a discussion of serial music. Mr. Stravinsky holds the opinion that music can be overly contrived (serialized) so as to elude intention of individual points other than the master plan. In this sense he believes this type of music, still advocated by the French composer Messiaen, to be somewhat aleatoric. He thinks that there is, however, less emphasis on total serialization today, as there is toward pure aleatoric music such as that advocated by composers like John Cage. He believes that Cage may be fooling himself with his ideas, but nevertheless he has acted as a catalyst for many European composers who possess enormous compositional techniques, such as Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen.

Mr. Craft pointed out that Mr. Stravinsky is greatly pleased to be in Oberlin. He felt that attending rehearsals has been a great revelation for him. I might add that Mr. Stravinsky was totally generous with his time attending even rehearsals for some of the less important works to be performed. In all he spent at least twelve hours at rehearsals, which was approx-

imately six times what he was committed to spend. He was exuberant over the orchestra's apparent enthusiasm at performing his "Flood" excerpts. He was especially pleased that even the youngest girls seemed to enjoy performing the work. He was very impressed with the quality of all the performances and rehearsals he heard and was highly complementary to individual performers.

Contrary to common opinion, Mr. Stravinsky is still composing. He just completed a work for baritone and small orchestra (39 pieces) on March 3 of this year. He then plans to turn to the composition of another purely orchestral piece which has no definite ideas of form or program. Incidentally, Mr. Stravinsky has great admiration for much programmatic music and considers "The Flood" to be as programmatic as Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition." After Oberlin, Mr. Stravinsky goes to New York after which he will tour Europe with Robert Craft until June. This summer he will be in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to compose and have a vacation from traveling. In November he and Mr. Craft will tour India. In December they will return to New York and in January 1964 they will tour with the Philadelphia Orchestra for five concerts.

Oberlin is certainly grateful to have had the opportunity to honor this great composer. He has shown himself to be a great human being, warm and friendly, always willing to give advice and highly appreciative of the praise we give him.