

Introduction

The Regional History Project conducted nine oral history interviews with George Barati from January to August, 1991, to supplement and illuminate the diverse materials contained in the George Barati Archive which he donated to the University Library in 1991. The interview sessions were held in the Barati home in Soquel, California.

George Barati, a distinguished cellist, conductor, and composer was born in 1913 in Győr, Hungary, and has lived in the United States since 1938. He graduated from the Franz Liszt Conservatory of Music in Budapest in 1935 and was awarded the State Artist Diploma in 1938. Barati came of age musically during a unique period in the cultural life of Central Europe between the world wars. During the 1930s he was a member of the Budapest Concert Orchestra where he played under the most celebrated conductors of his era including Klemperer, Walter, Weingartner, Furtwängler, Richard Strauss and Mascagni. Solo artists who appeared with the Concert Orchestra during this period included Cortot, Thibaud, Heifitz, Szigeti, Schnabel, Bachkaus, Giesecking, and Horowitz. As a young music student in Budapest he participated in the varied musical activities of that cosmopolitan city, where he was a founding member of the Pro Ideale Quartet, and studied and performed with Bartók, Dohnányi, Kodály and other eminent faculty members at the Liszt Conservatory.

Barati's commentary on this unique milieu and the musical tradition in which he was steeped imparts a sense of the vital ambiance in which his musicianship was formed. His devotion to the nineteenth century repertoire coexisted with his immersion in the new and then radical music of Bartók, Dohnányi, and other less

well-known twentieth century composers. His descriptions of Bartok's unique piano technique or the rigors of conservatory training convey a real sense of the life of a music student during this heady period.

Barati settled in the United States in Princeton, New Jersey in 1938. He joined the faculty of the string department at Westminster Choir College, and later taught cello at Princeton University where he studied composition with Roger Sessions from 1938 to 1943. He also played string quartets with Albert Einstein during regular informal chamber music evenings while he lived in Princeton.

After the War, in 1946, Barati settled in San Francisco where he was a member of the San Francisco Symphony during the tenure of Pierre Monteux. He was also a member of the California String Quartet and founding conductor of the Barati Chamber Orchestra of San Francisco from 1948 to 1952. Barati also began to achieve recognition for his own compositions at this time; Pierre Monteux programmed *Configuration*, an early Barati orchestral work, and his chamber works were given public performances in San Francisco as well.

From 1950 to 1968, Barati was music director of the Honolulu Symphony and Opera. During this period he also began an extensive international conducting career which included guest and visiting conducting appearances with some 85 orchestras on five continents, including Japan, Europe, and Latin America.

In 1968 Barati returned to the states where he became Executive Director of the Villa Montalvo Center for the Arts and conductor of the Villa Montalvo Chamber Orchestra, in Saratoga, California. From 1971 to 1980, he was Music Director of the Santa Cruz Symphony.

In addition to his conducting career he was a juror for the Mitropoulos Competition for Conductors from 1957 to 1970, and participated as a juror for both the Metropolitan and San Francisco Opera Competitions. His honors and awards include the Doctor of Music, *Honoris Causa* from the University of Hawaii in 1955; a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1965-66; the Ditson Award in 1962; and the Naumberg Award for Composition in 1959.

Barati discusses many of his myriad musical activities during the postwar years, including his co-founding of the Berlioz Society, collaborating with James Michener in the writing of a libretto for an opera based on Hawaiian themes, and his active social life during his years in Hawaii. He also describes a typical year in his life as an international conductor, travelling from continent to continent. A chapter entitled "That Jungle Called Musical Life," includes his comments on changes in the working lives of conductors and orchestras, and the pressures of commercialism as they affect orchestra programs and musicianship.

Barati devotes several chapters to his evolution as a composer, citing his earliest influences and the sorts of problems he has approached as a composer of orchestral, chamber, and solo instrumental music. He also has many insightful comments on the state of contemporary American and European music.

The nine interviews comprising this volume were transcribed verbatim and edited for continuity and clarity. The manuscript was edited by the interviewer and returned to Barati for his additions and corrections. In the first third or so of the edited transcription he rewrote sentences or added written inserts to clarify his original spoken narration, portions of which were either inaudible or hard to decipher. He made numerous small changes and additions to the manuscript, and spent much time checking the spelling of Hungarian names and places, all of which have been incorporated into the finished volume. Barati also kindly loaned us the Ansel Adams photograph which we have included as the frontispiece for this volume.

Special thanks and appreciation go to Irene Reti, the Project's Editorial Assistant, for her numerous contributions as editor, transcriber, and colleague in a challenging project. Reti spent many hours checking the spellings of the dozens of musicians, composers, conductors, and compositions mentioned in the text, and strived for accuracy in the index to the volume. Her care and attention to detail in the many tasks involved in this volume's publication made its completion possible.

The Barati Archive is the first music archive given to the University Library. This oral history project was undertaken at the request of Marion Taylor, head of Collection Planning, in order to enhance the archive by having Barati provide an

historical context for the materials which document his career as composer, conductor, and cellist. The research, interviewing, and publication of this memoir were supported by the University Library and by additional private funds donated to the George Barati Oral History Project.

Copies of this manuscript are on deposit in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; and in Special Collections, McHenry Library, University of California, Santa Cruz.

This manuscript is part of a collection of oral history interviews on California and Santa Cruz history, and on special topics which enhance the collections of the University Library. The Project is supported administratively by Marion Taylor, head of Collection Planning, and Allan J. Dyson, University Librarian.

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