

INTERVIEWS: JM

RWS		<i>Long</i>
CRF	MAR -1 '56	<i>Long</i>
EFD	MAR -2 '56	<i>EFD</i>
CB7	MAR -7 '56	<i>CB7</i>

Leopold Stokowski

Telephone

February 20, 1956

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In reply to a letter addressed to S in Houston, Texas, S telegraphed his telephone number in New York and JM arranged to call him there at his apartment, 1125 Fifth Avenue, later in the day.

JM told S in confidence of the possibility of getting consideration of some grants along agreed on lines toward encouraging the performance and recording of music by living composers. In starting this conversation, JM had said that experience with the Louisville Commissioning Project had led the officers to feel that commissioning was not the thing. S immediately intervened to say that in his opinion four things were essential toward this general end: (1) Few composers can make a living, and whenever possible their livelihood must be augmented by commissions; (2) repeated live performance by performing organizations of high quality was essential; (3) work should be recorded by such organizations as promptly as possible after it had been given a concert hearing, i.e. while it was "hot;" (4) such work should receive as wide an international hearing as possible. JM naturally at this point said that these were essentially the components that the Humanities officers had in mind, and proceeded to outline possibilities in more detail. Concluding this passage of the conversation, JM said that he would like to put a hard question: music of living composers is now getting more of a hearing than perhaps could have been anticipated a short time ago; was RF assistance of this kind needed? Emphatically, yes, S replied. Was it needed to overcome resistance to the programming of new music by orchestra managers and orchestra boards? Not so much that, S replied, as to provide performance for new music which the public would like.

The present difficulty as S sees it is that too much music by living composers which has been performed often as a result of commissioning, has too little to say. There is to his knowledge a great deal of current composition which has meaning for present audiences. It seemed to him that the choice of works for performance by conductors under the procedure outlined would provide encouragement for the performance of this kind of music as contrasted with what composers may want heard, and which too often lacks public appeal. For this reason, S felt, the procedure proposed was eminently desirable at this time.

S said that he would be only too glad to submit a proposal on behalf of the Houston orchestra and thought it very probable that the total cost to the Foundation could be reduced by some local contribution. In fact, he very much liked this provision of the plan. He had determined never again to accept the conductorship of any given orchestra, but when he

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was asked to go for three years to Houston, he became aware of what strong local support there was there for the development of a first rate orchestra, and in effect, contracted to build one for the community. His backers there, more cotton than oil people, are people of wide international experience and with a keen sense of quality. They have gone along with him in including contemporary music on programs, though with some reluctance. In this situation, even a small grant from the RF would be influential in confirming his policy and very probably in making the financial support of living music "the thing to do." In short, this seems to him in general a timely and strategic move, likely to have considerable effect in securing a wider and continuing hearing for music by living writers.

In general procedure, S had one important reservation: to him there is something psychologically wrong about commissioning work for junior orchestras, particularly from his experience with the National Youth Orchestra. He believes that younger groups respond surprisingly well to the challenge posed by the supposed difficulties of contemporary work. If one can say to them "this is hard even for the Boston Symphony," they rise to the occasion. In S's opinion, younger groups would be equally quick to take psychological offense at a work which was written down to their capabilities. JM said that this was an important point and that S had been the first to raise it.

In general, S's advice was for a trial operation, and the officers would do well to put the emphasis on orchestral works. In this he would urge, remembering that there are in effect five orchestral zones in the country: (1) the East, for Boston through Washington; (2) the northern Middle West, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Minneapolis; (3) the central Middle West, Kansas City and St. Louis; (4) the South; and finally, the West Coast. Assuming for the sake of argument that Houston might represent the South, what other orchestras might represent the other zones? For the East, the choice was obvious in the first round, Philadelphia or Boston; for the northern Middle West, Cleveland, Chicago, or Minneapolis; for the Central zone, probably Kansas City; for the Pacific zone, either Los Angeles or San Francisco, though both orchestras at present leave a good deal to be desired on grounds of quality. If Canada were to be included, it would constitute a sixth zone, with the foremost orchestras being those of Montreal, Toronto, and (surprisingly to JM) Vancouver.

In conclusion, S said he would welcome a chance to submit a proposal for Houston and it was agreed that JM would let him know as promptly as possible whether one would be accepted. He will be travelling a good bit for the balance of the season but can always be reached through his secretary at 1125 Fifth Avenue, unlisted telephone number: Atwater 9-3689.



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