FABIEN SEVITZKY
PAPERS, 1939-1971

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Re-processed by

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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
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Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 8 manuscript folders

COLLECTION DATES: 1939-71

PROVENANCE: Mrs. Nancy Simpson, Indianapolis

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:


ACCESSION NUMBER: 1983.0415

NOTES:
Fabien Sevitzky was born Fabien Koussevitzky in Vishnii Volochek, Russia, near Moscow on September 30, 1893. He later shortened his surname to avoid confusion with his uncle Serge Koussevitzky, also a well-known conductor and double bass virtuoso.

As a boy, Sevitzky intended to study violin or piano, but won a scholarship for the study of double bass at the St. Petersburg Imperial Conservatory of Music. He graduated with honors in 1911, and was the institution's first recipient of a gold medal for double bass. His ensuing musical career was interrupted by the First World War, but he returned to Moscow after the Revolution in 1917. He was forced to flee Russia for Poland in 1922.

In Poland he met and married soprano Maria Dormont. After the couple performed a concert tour in South America and Mexico, Sevitzky joined the Philadelphia Orchestra in the fall of 1923. By 1928, when he became a citizen, Sevitzky had realized that he wanted to conduct and so resigned his position in Philadelphia and moved to Boston. There he organized and conducted a number of the world's leading orchestras, and was invited to guest conduct several American orchestras, including the Indianapolis Symphony.

It was a result of this concert that Sevitzky was appointed conductor of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra in 1937. He extensively reorganized the ensemble and staged concerts in Indiana's principal cities, in addition to arranging numerous radio and recording engagements. While music director of the symphony, he followed a self-imposed rule of programming at least one American work in each concert. When events such as an all-Beethoven or all-Russian program made this impossible, Sevitzky planned an all-American program for a subsequent concert. He selected these American works by reviewing hundreds of compositions each year.

Sevitzky was particularly interested in creating a musical adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's Mowgli stories with Indianapolis author Booth Tarkington, a friend since the composer's arrival in the city. Sevitzky also promoted the creation of American works by ardently supporting young musicians and composers. One such activity was his involvement in directing the Limberlost summer music camps in LaGrange, Indiana. Although sometimes criticized for establishing erratic tempi and engaging in arguments with the Indianapolis Symphony governing board, Sevitzky is credited with the transformation of a local ensemble into a major symphony orchestra of national standing.

Sevitzky left Indianapolis and its orchestra in 1955 in order to become the conductor of the University of Miami Symphony Orchestra, later called the Greater Miami Philharmonic. In 1956 he and his first wife divorced, and in April 1959 he married former Indianapolis Symphony harpist Mary Spaulding. Fabien Sevitzky died of a heart attack on February 3, 1967, while in Athens, Greece for a concert tour.

Sources: Text copied and edited from original collection guide
SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Fabien Sevitzky Papers consist primarily of business correspondence from musicians, writers, and politicians, as well as between Sevitzky and his secretary Farell Wagner.

The general correspondence folder is arranged chronologically, and includes letters from Vladimir Golschmann; Ray Elin; Frederick A. Stock; Paul V. McNutt; Artur Rodzinski; the Maharajadhiraj of Patiala State, India; Hans Kindler; Ferdinand Schaefer; Reginald Stewart; and Sir Ernest MacMillan.

Correspondents with four or more letters are arranged alphabetically in individual folders. The most abundant collections of letters are those related to Booth Tarkington and Farrel Wagner.

The Tarkington folder includes 17 pieces of correspondence, mostly letters from Tarkington to Sevitzky discussing the Mowgli project. They also discuss the Second World War, other news of the day, and personal activities. Other correspondence between Tarkington and individuals involved with the Mowgli project is also included in this folder.

The Wagner folder comprises 53 letters and cards, mostly from Sevitzky to Wagner. They discuss travel plans, performance engagements, communications with business associates, and personal activities. There are additional business letters from Wagner to other parties, and several letters to Wagner from Maria Sevitzky and Mary Sevitzky.

Also included are a folder of invitations to musical performances and receptions, and an essay by Tarkington titled "Indiana, Indianapolis and the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra." The essay discusses and praises the development of the arts in Indianapolis, and at the end includes several pages of remarks on the Symphony's history by Dr. G.H.A. Clowes, then president of the Indiana State Symphony Society.
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