

Dorati to Detroit?

By Tom Zito

National Symphony conductor Antal Dorati, whose ties with Washington's orchestra have been frayed by acrimonious dealings with its board of directors, is being sought by the Detroit Symphony as its music director.

"There is an indication that they would like to have me," Dorati said yesterday in a telephone interview from his home in Zug, Switzerland.

Detroit Symphony staffers said yesterday that Dorati, music director here since 1970, was being offered "a mandate with substantial funds and control" to turn the symphony "into an internationally renowned orchestra."

Robert B. Semple, chairman of the Detroit Symphony's board of directors, said yesterday he could neither confirm nor deny the reports "at this point."

"Hold your horses," Semple added, "because it certainly would be a wonderful thing."

Dorati's first major tiff with the National Symphony board came last year with the announcement that he would be replaced as music director (beginning with the 1977 season) by Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich—an announcement made without Dorati's consultation while he was in Switzerland. In December, again while Dorati was in Switzerland, the orchestra members were informed by letter that Dorati's long-planned European tour with the orchestra was being cancelled as economically unfeasible. Earlier this year the board announced that it would not renew its contract with orchestra managing director William Denton.

In a letter to National Symphony members before their August trip to Greece's Athens Festival (a trip almost completely subsidized by the Greek government), Dorati wrote:

"Please remember that this professional trip is, in a way, like the Par-

1976

Washington
Post
1976
Sep. 9.

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thenon—a ruin, a ruin of a well-planned complete tour. It also became a ruin the same way as the Parthenon: by ignorance."

Dorati, 70, said in an interview in Athens that his replacement "did not hurt me very much. I am an old man and beyond being hurt by such things. Life goes on. There are other orchestras to work with. But this trip meant so much to the orchestra members, and it cut very deep into the heart. And to dismiss Bill (Denton) in such a way. Terribly unprofessional. A real stab in the back."

A conductor of world-wide prestige who also directs London's Royal Philharmonic, Dorati is almost universally considered to have substantially upgraded the National Symphony. He enabled the orchestra to record with the prestigious London label and has himself become wealthy from royalties on hundreds of records made around the world—records that compose one of the largest discographies of any conductor.

Although many had expected Dora-

ti's contract as music director to be extended through 1980, the orchestra board's decision to hire Rostropovich forced Dorati to move earlier than he preferred into the emeritus position of principal guest conductor. He will conduct six weeks annually for the next three years, while Rostropovich has a two-year contract requiring 10 weeks annually.

Like Dorati here, Detroit Symphony conductor Aldo Ceccato will end a three-year term as music director in May, 1977. Ceccato was preceded by Sixten Ehrling, who was music director for 10 years. Before Ehrling, Paul Paray also served as music director for 10 years.

"Whatever happens," Dorati said yesterday from Switzerland, "my work in Washington as principal guest conductor will undoubtedly remain the same. It's a big chess game (regarding negotiations in Detroit). This is a complex question and we are so many thousands of miles apart that we cannot discuss it intelligently. The thing I am most concerned with is making a good orchestra, but I do not like to talk about the future."

