

# Dorati: Clear Direction

1971

By Paul Hume

Antal Dorati has been at work with the National Symphony Orchestra for around three months. It would be premature to expect or to claim any startling changes in the orchestra in that time. Symphony orchestras evolve over a fairly long time, regardless of the direction of their growth.

But Dorati has given clear and strong indications of the direction he hopes to take both the orchestra and—more importantly—its audiences in the few concerts he has conducted since taking over the post of music director. These are to be seen not only in the music he has already played, and the manner of its playing, but in that which he has announced for the orchestra's first season in the Kennedy Center.

The quietly dramatic presentation of the finale of the *Holidays Symphony* by Charles Ives, which came unheralded by any advance publicity, last week brought Constitution Hall something new and welcome in the way it lifted the concert far above the ordinary routine. It was without fanfare. More significantly, it was wholly compatible with the spirit of the music.

The fourth and last movement of the "*Holidays*" is called "*Thanksgiving and/or Forefathers' Day*." As it reaches its final pages Ives asks for a chorus to sing a single verse of the hymn, "*O God, Beneath Thy Guiding Hand*." As the time for the choral entrance neared, I was wondering where the singers were. But at just the

right moment, without the slightest touch of gimmickry, members of Norman Scribner's Choral Arts Society began to file down the center aisle of Constitution Hall from the back.

They were dressed in the street clothes in which they might go to work or to church or school if they lived in Ives' hometown of Danbury, Conn. They looked as Ives' friends and neighbors in that town must have looked when they stood up to sing that hymn in the church where he was once organist.

But Dorati had more than a single purpose in mind when he planned this presentation of the music. Not only did the chorus sing without the formal flourishes of coming out on stage, but it sang to every corner of the hall, so that the music flooded the place and entered directly into the listening ears as if from a large, surrounding space. It was theater. It was magic. And it was the very embodiment of the spirit of Ives.

This is the kind of electric moment we need in our concerts. The shouts that came from the back and front of the hall easily surpassed any other response Dorati has aroused in his first concerts here.

*Wash. Post*

Feb. 14-1971

Not every concert offers this kind of opportunity. When you have an overture, a violin concerto, and a symphony, all from the standard repertoire, there is neither need nor point in seeking some novel way of presenting them. But we do need and long for and heartily welcome the heightened sense of drama that Dorati is obviously happy to create when the music and the occasion are right.

With this feeling or new ideas, it is easy to imagine that Dorati will not fail to make of Haydn's "Creation" something more than a stand-up oratorio evening. And when he comes to "Elektra," by Strauss, the possibilities for dramatization entirely within the framework of the Kennedy Center's new concert hall are unusually exciting.

Meantime, if Dorati is still mulling over what music would be best for the opening of that concert hall, I would vote for, among other things, a repeat of Ives' "Thanksgiving," done in the same manner as it was last Wednesday night.

