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*Dorati:  
An  
Impressive  
Six  
Years  
At the  
Helm*

*By Paul Hume*

Antal Dorati will christen the National Symphony Orchestra's 46th season Tuesday night as he begins his final season as music director of the orchestra. He will return next season with the title of principal guest conductor. There is no finer tribute to Dorati—as a conductor of superb taste and technique, as an orchestra builder of proven achievements or as a program designer of superior invention—than to consider the position of the National Symphony today as it faces a highly promising future and looks back on an impressive six years under Dorati's leadership.

Before Dorati came to Washington, it would have been out of the question to think of the National Symphony as the orchestra with which to present the U.S. premiere of one of the major works of Olivier Messiaen. And the idea that the NSO could follow up that impressive premiere by recording "The Transfiguration" would have brought open derision from experts in the field, except for the immediate improvements worked in and through the orchestra under Dorati's knowing ministrations.

Another exciting high point in the Dorati years was the moving performance of Luigi Dallapiccola's tremendous opera, "Il Prigioniero," which, like the Messiaen, was recorded shortly after its Kennedy Center hearings. The superb quality of those works and their National Symphony recordings have been widely attested to in record reviews both in this country and in Europe, where they have been greeted enthusiastically with no



1971

dissenting voice. Indeed, of the first four NSO recordings made under Dorati's baton on the London Records label, three won top awards, an extraordinary accomplishment that points to both the repertoire and its performance.

Dorati is far too canny a man with audiences, however, to over-emphasize new music at the expense of the old, the familiar and the beloved. And it is a further testimonial to his leadership that his performances and his recordings of such standard works as those of Tchaikovsky and Wagner have been highly praised.

From the time he began directing the orchestra, Dorati has made very few changes in its personnel, a fact that now gives him a special pleasure as he points out that the "improved" orchestra is composed largely of the same players with whom he began.

His method of raising the orchestra to a higher level of playing has been to try to help each player play his best, something Dorati was firmly convinced was not happening when he took over. He also determined to make a part of the regular repertoire of the National Symphony many great works of orchestral literature which he found, to his astonishment, had never been played by the NSO.

Dorati also made it a policy to bring Washington guest conductors and soloists who had not been heard here before, thus aiding in his overall plan to enlarge both the repertoire and playing style of the orchestra.

An external factor that played a large part in his decision to come to

Washington, and which has made its salient contribution to the orchestra's enhanced reputation, as it has to the entire musical scene in this city, was the fact that the Kennedy Center was to open a year after Dorati assumed the direction of the orchestra.

As Washington's music lovers currently celebrate the Kennedy Center's fifth birthday, it must be pointed out that by the mere physical fact of moving into the Concert Hall of the center, the National Symphony immediately sounded perceptibly better than it ever could in Constitution Hall. To the far finer acoustics of the new hall was at once added the public's keen interest in hearing "its" orchestra in the new center.

It is beyond the boundaries of the imagination to think that Mstislay Rostropovich could have been engaged as the National Symphony's new music director, to succeed Dorati in a year, had the orchestra not had the special guidance in technical matters, the encouragement as fellow musicians and the particular insights in repertoire which it enjoys with Dorati. His great nights on the conductor's stand will be remembered for many years, during which we sincerely hope he will continue to visit us. The season he is about to open is by no means a farewell, but rather a change of status which, predictably, will bring Washington even nearer to the best of all possible worlds orchestrally. Dorati's worth stands unassailable. Rostropovich's future could hardly gleam more brightly. And the National Symphony has both.

