

Antal Dorati

By Alan M. Kriegsman

Antal Dorati, the conductor who will take over the reins of the National Symphony this fall as its new music director, is so convinced of the orchestra's potential for excellence that he's already boasting about the glorious earful we'll get during the coming season.

"I don't know why I'm so cocksure," he says with a broad, sunny grin; "but I am.

"There's enormously good material in this orchestra," he insists. "The orchestra itself doesn't even know how good it is—they have no idea. But soon, they will hear the fine sound they'll

be making and they'll learn and then the people of Washington will learn to be proud. And that, in a nutshell, is our job."

The ebullient, 64-year-old musician, his speech still distinctly tinged by his Hungarian upbringing (he's been a U.S. citizen since 1947), was in town yesterday for a brief stop between guest engagements. He had come from Tanglewood and was headed for Detroit's Meadowbrook.

"For my first season in Washington," he said, "my primary concern will be with the quality of the performances. To a degree, I will be more interested in how we are playing than in

what. Mainly, I would like to see the orchestra develop a tremendous pride in its own work."

At the moment, Dorati is not contemplating any changes in the orchestra's makeup. "If changes eventually seem necessary, I'd like to see them come, not from me, but from the orchestra itself, sensing its own needs. The present players are fine, as far as I can tell now; the section leaders, the first desk men, are especially good."

The improvements Dorati has wrought over the years in such orchestras as the Dallas and Minneapolis Symphonies, London's B.B.C. Orchestra and the

Stockholm Philharmonic have given him a formidable reputation as an "orchestra builder," a conductor who can hone an ensemble to a brilliant polish and cause it to transcend its best past efforts. But he disclaims any magic in the process, and even shrugs off personal credit.

"I don't do anything special. I have no 'method.' I simply try as honestly as I can to make nice music—and next week, to make better music. Besides, if the National Symphony becomes a better orchestra while I'm here, I won't have made it so. An orchestra always makes itself what it is."

In two months, Dorati will

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be returning to Washington for a week of intensive rehearsals in preparation for the season's opening pair of concerts, Oct. 13 and 14.

The opening work of these initial, all-Beethoven concerts will be the same composition—the Eighth Symphony—with which Dorati began another concert with the National Symphony 33 years ago. It was an appearance that marked his professional debut in the United States. "I remember it well," he says. "Ricci (the violinist Ruggiero Ricci) was the soloist, and I still recall a mistake we made together."

A week after the opening

concerts, which will also include the Ninth Symphony, Dorati will introduce some of the unusual repertoire which may help to deflect the orchestra from its former, ultra-conventional path in matters of programming. The concerts on Oct. 21 and 22 will start off with an early Haydn Symphony, No. 12 in E Major, Dorati suspects it has not been performed in America before). Also included will be Frank Martin's Concerto for 7 Winds and Bartok's "Miraculous Mandarin" Suite. On the same program, the Soviet pianist Novitskaya will be heard in the Tchaikovsky Concerto No. 1.

On the question of whether he contemplated any radical new policy in the matter of rare or contemporary works, Dorati quipped, "revolutions are best avoided by evolutions. I would rather be part of a natural evolution.

"I myself," he continued, "will stop short of the most extreme of today's experiments, simply because I cannot even read such scores, and at my age, I don't think I should be expected to learn a whole new 'alphabet.' If any of my younger colleagues, as guest conductors, wish to go in this direction, I'll give them every encouragement. I think you'll find that I will go pretty far out on a limb myself, too."

Later in the season, Dorati will perform a number of pieces from the standard orbit that either the National Symphony has not played before or Washington has not heard before. These include the Richard Strauss tone poem, "Thus Spake Zarathustra" (of "2001" fame), and the Dvorak Sixth Symphony, for example. In February of next year, Dorati is also scheduled to conduct an all-American program.

Will he program some of his own music? "Not for the time being, but eventually, I would hope. With my own music, I always wait until I am asked—but I never wait to be asked twice!" A composition pupil of Bartok and Kodaly, Dorati has two symphonies, a cantata and a host of chamber pieces to

