

October 11, 2002

Ron Snow Interview with Klaus G. Roy,
Former Program Annotator for the Cleveland Orchestra (1958-1988) and speaker at the 1975
One World Day at the Hungarian Cultural Garden

RS: Mr. Roy what is your connection to the Cleveland Cultural Gardens?

KGR: Well actually it's a little tenuous Ron I don't have a direct connection with it. Except for one talk that I gave for the dedication of the Hungarian cultural garden in 1975. It was One World Day September 7, 1975 and they asked me to speak about Bartok, the great Hungarian composer, whose bust was being unveiled at that time at the cultural gardens.

I was working at Severance Hall at the time, editing and writing the programs for the Orchestra, so we had, of course, many Bartok performances. So really (Lily) Volosin, who was the president of the gardens at the time, asked me to come and speak on Bartok. The other possible connection that I have is that I was well acquainted with Mr. Leo Weidenthal, who was one of the moving spirits of the Cultural Gardens in its early days. Leo Weidenthal was a delightful old man whom I first met in 1958 when I came to Cleveland to work with the orchestra and our manager, Beverly Barksdale, who introduced me to Mr. Weidenthal, who provided us with a great deal with exhibit material for our Green Room shows. We had a room called the Green Room where people at intermission would come and see exhibits that we set up. And Mr. Weidenthal was a great collector and he lent us documents and pictures of various kinds that we showed at the time. So he introduced me to the concept of the Cultural Gardens and I got to know about them from him. Very nice man I don't know when he died but he was quite well along in years and, after the talk in 1975, Mrs. Volosin gave me a copy of the book about the Cultural Gardens (*Their Paths are Peace*) as a present. So that's the extent to the connection.

The other angle, the other aspect of my possible connection with the gardens is that I knew, very well, one of the sculptors who worked for the Finnish Cultural Garden. You probably know that the four busts that were in the cultural garden, all done by my friend, were all stolen over the years and some of them were stolen twice. They recovered one of them and I think they put it back up on the pedestal and it was stolen again. The gardens were vandalized quite often, as you probably remember. The chances are that these bronzes were just melted down for the metal and some of them were never recovered the second time. I have a picture here of the (Jan) Sibalius bust, which is quite gorgeous. The sculptor was Norman Poirier, who is now retired in Florida. He was a very distinguished Cleveland sculptor who was asked to do the four busts of distinguished Finns. Sibalius, of course, is the great national composer who is one, another one was a scientist by the name of Lenrot, and I forget the other two. But all of these busts were stolen and all that is left is the pedestal, unless they have taken that down. But we have at least that one picture that I often reproduce in the symphony program when we did works by Sibalius. So that as far as it goes is my tenuous connection with the gardens.

RS: Is there any reason that you accepted the nomination or was there any reason that you considering not doing the nomination to speak at the One World Day?

KGR: No, we at Severance Hall have done a great deal of music by Bartok and although I am not Hungarian it was sort of a natural thing for the garden's president, I think Mrs. Volosin asked me to speak. I had spoken many times at Severance Hall about this and that. And she may have known about me and just turned to me and see whether I would speak about Bartok, who I greatly admire and whose music I love very much. Here just to show you are some pictures of Bartok that were taken at Severance Hall in 1940 when he was appearing as soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra in his own Piano Concerto #2. And the great photographer Jeffery Londersman, who was then the official photographer for Severance Hall took these pictures, the originals are very large, quite sizeable. But, we reproduced them and used them often in the program. They are wonderful photographs. Bartok was then 59, He died in 1945, just five years after he played with the Orchestra. He was a great pianist himself and appeared in the United States as pianist numerous times. He lived in the United States from around 1939 on. He fled Europe when the war broke out because he detested the Nazi Regime, which soon occupied Hungary and he lived in the States. He lived in New York, unfortunately in considerable poverty, in that he was not that well known yet in the States. So they sometimes have a saying in order to be a successful composer you have to be dead. In a way that was true. Soon after his death in 1945, he became very famous in the States. But, in his last years he did have some success in very important performances. So, Mrs. Volosin may have known that I was a Bartok fan and that is why she asked me.

RS: Do you think he is a more significant figure for Hungary itself or for a Hungarian-American coming to America, having the values as freedom and to flee Europe because of the Nazi Regime?

KGR: Yes, well Bartok was as I said an ardent foe of the German Regime of the Time, which was about to conquer Hungary. In fact but it had been, his own country had been under the control of Admiral Horte, who was a sort of pseudo Nazi in the first place. So the country was already moving toward dictatorship, which he couldn't stand. There were other friends of his, among them the composer Zoltan Kodály, who also left soon after that to come to the States, but I think he remained in Hungary a little longer than Bartok. The third important figure was Ernoe von Dohnányi, who was the grandfather of the Cleveland Orchestra conductor Christoph von Dohnányi. Ernif was a well known pianist, teacher, conductor. He was very active with the Budapest Philharmonic. He remained for a while longer in Hungary.

His sympathies were not quite clear to everybody, but soon he left for the United States and became a professor at Florida State University, of all places. where he became the teacher of Joella Jones, who has long been our principal pianist with the Cleveland orchestra—principal keyboard in the keyboard section. So there is this connection with Cleveland. When Bartok came to Cleveland, he was introduced to the Hungarian Community, which at that time was centered around Buckeye Road in Cleveland. It was near Shaker Heights, that area of Cleveland and he was quite shocked by how little the younger Hungarians in that area knew about their own culture. They were by that time the second or third generation of Hungarians that had come to Cleveland, and their interests in their native culture was very limited to the shock to the people like Bartok who would have thought they would have national interest in their culture.

Cleveland, as you know, is an ethnically very diverse community and it has communities of Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Hungarians, and others spread all over the city. Some of them concentrated in various communities here. These ethnic subsections of the city do try to keep up their native European culture to some extent although they are Americans. I knew a lady for example who ran a wonderful Bakery on Buckeye Road. She was from Czechoslovakia originally, the Hungarian restaurants on Buckeye road, the Balaton for example which has moved to Shaker Square was a famous gathering place for Hungarians and the Gypsy fiddlers, who used to perform there, some of them well known for their music making. So Cleveland is very much enriched by its ethnic communities and when distinguished people from those countries come here they're usually introduced to those communities. That's how these connections were made. So Bartok is certainly an important personality in Hungarian Culture and it is a sad fact that most of the Hungarian community today knows more about Gypsy music than it knows about Bartok and Kodály, and Ernoe von Dohnányi. But that's the fact. Becoming Americanized has also meant the abandonment of their own native culture, that probably can not be helped.

RS: Would you be able to recall some of the memories you had at the speaking of the One World Day?

KGR: Well certainly I remember that the honorary chairman was then mayor Ralph Perk and the master of ceremonies was the Reverend Emery Uhas and the chairman of the gardens was Miss Lilly T. Volosin. I don't know how she pronounced her name. There were wonderful things going on. There was a presentation and posting of colors by the scout troops, the national anthem, the pledge of allegiance, the remarks by Sigmund Brinsky, the (CCG) president, and my talk. The unveiling of the bust of Bartok by Joseph Seles, who was the sculptor, greetings from the governor, the city of Cleveland, and a festival proclamation by Ralph Perk. Remarks by Miss Volosin, prayer by the pastor of the West Side Hungarian Reform Church. And then very amusingly it was listed as traditional Irish dancing. How it got in there I'm not quite sure. By the Masterson School. There was a Chiberon Solo of music by Bartok played by Alex Udvarie. The Udvarie's were very well known for their playing of the Chiberon, which is a national Hungarian instrument. They, both the old man and his son, often appeared in, with the Cleveland Orchestra in the Horianoch suite by Codi, which calls for Chimberon. There was the Hungarian Theatre and Dance Company of Cleveland. There was choreography by Estvan Chodi. They a number of dances and finally God Bless America and the retiring of the colors. The hostesses and hosts were the Cleveland Cultural Members in nationality and costumes. Which was very colorful indeed. So those were the events of the festival of One World Day, the 30th annual One World Day on September 7th, 1975. A very pleasant occasion indeed. I think there must have been other One World Days at other cultural gardens. It certainly would be wonderful to have them restored to their former glory. There was as I said a period of vandalism ruined quite a number of the gardens and I think the attempt now is to restore them to their former glory because that's something very very special to Cleveland, these gardens. And they need to be protected, they need to be restored, they need to have some sort of attention paid to them as it was in the old days.

This book is very handsome, the story of the Cultural Gardens told in great detail with

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4

many pictures. It is a book that is published in 1954. Published by the Cleveland Cultural Gardens Federation 1954. It should be updated at this point.