

THE HUNTER COLLEGE

25 YEARS . . . development



Professor Norman Singer

by *Richard Robbins*

In the office of the Hunter College Concert Bureau hang sketches, signed photographs, and posters attesting to the fact that in the twenty-five years of its operations, the Bureau has, through its concert series, presented many of the greatest artists of all time. Properly speaking the current anniversary refers to the twenty-fifth season of the Saturday Night Recital Series which was developed through the foresight and determination of Dr. Benno Lee and in later years the dedication of Mr. Norman Singer.

The project was begun by Dr. Lee who was born in Cairo of a Turkish mother and an Hungarian father. As a boy he moved to Vienna where it was expected he would become a banker as had others in his family. Instead, he was attracted by Vienna's musical world and he later became one of the city's leading impresarios. When the Nazis took Vienna, Dr. Lee was imprisoned in a concentration camp, suffering greatly. After the war he came to the United States where the great singer Lotte Lehmann introduced him to the then President of Hunter, Dr. George Shuster, who was probably the first to see the value of drawing audiences to the new Assembly Hall. With the support of Mme. Lehmann and cellist Emanuel Feuerman the first season began in 1943-44 with a lecture by Thomas Mann and concerts by Vladimir Horowitz, Yehudi Menuhin, Jan Peerce and Mme. Lehmann.

As one looks over the roster of artists who have appeared in the Saturday Series for the past twenty-five years, it is difficult to think of great artists who are absent from this list. After the first season Ezio Pinza was added along with Heifetz and Alexander Kipnis. In 1945 the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Bruno Walter appeared, and the 1946-47 season added such luminaries as Milstein, Rubinstein and Marion Anderson. In the 1947-48 season Dr. Lee expanded the series to ten concerts and the next season added two more concerts in which he brought back most of the artists from the previous five years. New in 1950 were Hunter College alumna Regina Resnik along with Francescatti, Bjoerling and Melchior. Each year the series saw the addition of great names to those who returned to Park Avenue and there were frequent extras—a New Year's gala or an occasional lecture.



Yehudi Menuhin

HUNTER ALUMNI QUARTERLY

CONCERT BUREAU

. . . determination . . . dedication



Regina Resnik as "Klytemnestra"

While this series has earned great acclaim and has contributed enormously to Hunter College's name, still it represents only one of many kinds of music-making—that of the great star whose artistry may very often become more important than the music itself. Until the time of Benno Lee's death in 1961, the Concert Bureau itself was essentially an autonomous structure within the College, with its activities neither integrated nor coordinated with the other branches of the College. Nor did it reflect in any degree the opinions and judgments of the Department of Music. There were other important musical activities in the College—the Choir gave winter and spring concerts; the Hunter College Opera Association had made a very important place for itself in the musical world in New York. Consequently, in the process of seeking a replacement for Dr. Lee, it was decided to reorganize the Bureau's structure, at the same time expanding its scope.

The first step in reorganizing the Bureau came with the appointment of Professor Norman Singer. A native New Yorker, Mr. Singer is a graduate of Cornell, where he spent two years at law school, and a period as Russian fellow under a grant from the Council of Learned Societies. Then after a spell in the army, he entered Columbia graduate school for work in sociology and psychology. He joined the faculty of Juilliard (the academic division), was invited to help organize the Aspen Music Festival School in 1954, and stayed on for eight years as dean and director. He came to Hunter in 1962 and expanded the Saturday Series into a full program of Theatre, Dance, Chamber Music, Contemporary Music, Cinema, Children's Theatre and a wide range of special events in addition to the solo recitals, so that by its 25th year, the Bureau sponsored 110 events.

He came with the conviction that the College ought to be of service to the community. "I like to do things that can't be done in other places. It's up to us to take a chance on them. Financially, of course, I have to make ends meet. As a college concert bureau, I don't have to make money, but I can't lose money." As it turns out Mr. Singer does considerably more than make ends meet: the concert bureau supports the Hunter College Choir and orchestra, makes up some of the deficit of the opera workshop, and offers scholarships under the Benno Lee Scholarship Fund.



Artur Rubinstein

SPRING '68



Marian Anderson

Of all Mr. Singer's particular concerns, however, one stands forth among the rest: a concern over the predicament of contemporary music. "Contemporary composers just aren't getting the attention they ought to have. I am trying to break through whatever mold modern music has fallen into. We want to get to the people who've given up going to concerts because they are bored." With this philosophy in mind Mr. Singer along with composer/critic Eric Salzman premiered a new series "The New Image of Sound" on November 30 to add another in the longline of sold-out events at Hunter. Two pieces were heard: VERSES & CANTOS by Eric Salzman and LABORINTUS II by Luciano Berio. Both works were quite different to the eye and ear. The Salzman piece was written for voices and instruments with electronic extensions. The Berio work was just as much a theatrical as a music piece with the students of the Juilliard School of Music collaborating with Dennis Davies and Rhoda Levine, the Musical Director and Stage Director respectively. Up and coming in this series will be the Chicago Contemporary Chamber Players, Gunther Schuller and the Charles Lloyd Quartet. Indeed the audience will not be bored; they will probably return again and again, not because it's just an evening out but because the modern concert-goer enjoys being entertained and above all educated. The Voice of America is broadcasting these concerts abroad.

With the responsibility of an administrator, Mr. Singer is also quite aware of the difficulty in obtaining tickets for certain events and so once again he rose to the occasion by instituting a new policy where tickets can be obtained the same day of a performance although the event might have been otherwise sold out



Alexander Kipnis

in advance. This year the concert bureau has been holding back 5 percent of the house capacity for each concert for those who do not wish to buy subscriptions or for those who are not sure they will be in town or if they will be able to attend that day. In essence, 100 tickets go on sale at 9:00 A.M. the day of an Assembly Hall performance and 35 tickets to a Playhouse concert. "Concert going has become an effort for a lot of people," Mr. Singer said recently. "There was a time when you could decide to go to a concert and get the tickets on the same day. Now it seems everything is on a subscription basis and so with this new policy one can drop by any day there is a concert and get good seats." This new policy has worked well for the first half of the season and New York City might see the other concert halls follow along behind Mr. Singer next year as once again the Hunter College Concert Bureau leads the way for other colleges and concert halls throughout the land to follow in the footsteps of a "pacesetter."

Mr. Robbins —

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