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Toscanini and the Myth of Textual Fidelity

By Linda B. Fairtile

Changes in the public perception of performing artists make for fascinating study. There once was a time when the Three Tenors were considered mere mortals. And there once was a time when a conductor, Arturo Toscanini, was considered the living embodiment of the composers whose music he performed. Largely through the efforts of the press and the National Broadcasting Company, Toscanini came to be known as the only musician with the integrity and modesty to perform a composition exactly as it was notated in the musical score. Thanks to the existence of recorded performances, as well as the reminiscences of some of his colleagues, many people now realize that Toscanini's reputation for absolutely literal fidelity to the printed score was largely a media creation. Still, for a segment of the music-loving public the name Arturo Toscanini continues to call to mind the lofty pursuit of textual fidelity.

Toscanini seldom discussed his musical philosophy publicly, preferring instead to rely on spokesmen of often-dubious credibility. Rather than refuting the legends that sprang up around him, he carried on his work seemingly oblivious to the spread of the textual-fidelity myth. And yet there was a time, early in his career, when the question of exactly what was written in the score assumed great importance.

In 1898 the thirty-one-year-old Arturo Toscanini conducted the first Italian performance of Giuseppe Verdi's *Quattro pezzi sacri*. While studying the score of the Te Deum, Toscanini had been troubled by a passage in which he felt that a *rallentando* was necessary, despite the lack of any overt indication in the score. When he performed the piece at the piano for

Verdi himself, Toscanini added the *rallentando* at the appropriate point. Rather than correcting him, Verdi praised Toscanini's musical insight, explaining that if he had written the word *rallentando* over the phrase in question, an insensitive conductor might have overcompensated, slowing the passage unnecessarily. Instead, Verdi relied on the instinct of the true musician to recognize the need for a subtle relaxation of tempo.

Some fifty years later the critic Olin Downes reported that when Toscanini re-told this familiar story, he acknowledged that his behavior had contradicted the gospel of textual fidelity. Nonetheless, the conductor continued, the interpreter's taste and intuition ultimately control the outcome of a performance. If true, Downes's revealing anecdote fails to account for the possibility that, for Toscanini, Verdi's unwritten *rallentando* might well have been part of "the letter of the music." Although the word does not appear at the critical point in the score, to a sensitive conductor versed in Verdian performance practice, those notations that do appear – the melodic shape, the harmonic progression, the phrase structure – indicate a slowing down of tempo almost as surely as a verbal indication. Nonetheless, Downes's story represents a grudging admission that the printed score, in and of itself, may not have been Toscanini's sole concern.

It is not news that Toscanini's reputation for absolute fidelity to the printed score was little more than a public relations myth; this has already been asserted by numerous critics, scholars, and performers, based on both personal experience and the inexact evidence of recordings. Now that Toscanini's annotated

scores are available for study at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, it is possible to investigate exactly which elements of which compositions he altered, and, perhaps more importantly, to come closer to understanding the musical philosophy that permits a performer to impose significant alterations on the works in his repertoire and still maintain that he is at the service of the composer.

The dissemination of the textual fidelity myth was first and foremost an American phenomenon, which reached its apex in the early 1950s. Like many myths, however, this one had roots in the reality of a distant place and time: the Italian opera scene at the turn of the twentieth century, as Arturo Toscanini, the thirty-one-year-old artistic head of Milan's Teatro alla Scala, fought with every ounce of his considerable will against what he perceived to be low musical standards and arbitrary traditions. To those who questioned his right to toss aside decades of accumulated performance customs he offered the musical score as the final authority.

Criticism of Toscanini's earliest performances at La Scala tended to focus on his perceived inflexibility in matters of tempo as well as his opposition to both encores and traditional cuts. Each of these issues, of course, relates directly to the topic of textual fidelity, but it was apparently not the intention of Toscanini's early critics to discuss that issue explicitly. Rather, their concern was preservation of the status quo, a tradition in which the performer's authority often trumped the composer's. An exceptional journalistic employment of the phrase "the composer's intentions" appears in an 1899 review of Toscanini's first performance of Verdi's *Falstaff*. Significantly, the phrase is employed to argue against Toscanini's interpretation. In the words of Alfredo Colombani,

I know that performing at such accelerated tempos is approved by him [Toscanini, who is] more capable than all others of expressing the composer's intentions. But this assurance does not convince me, because the detail upon which I believe I must insist seems to me to be precisely one, which is less easily realized by the composer of an opera and by a collaborator who knows it well.¹

In other words, Colombani believed that neither the composer nor the conscientious conductor was the final authority on certain matters of performance practice.

In the early years of Toscanini's career his celebrated appeals to the letter of the score were a weapon against what he perceived to be sloppy and self-indulgent interpretation. As both his artistry and his celebrity grew, the concept of musical literalism took on a life of its own, becoming a trademark by which he was known even to those who were unaware of the campaign that he had had to wage in earlier years. What had begun as a means to an end within a specific performing tradition eventually ossified, with the help of the press, into all-purpose dogma. Regardless of what he actually did, Toscanini became known as the only conductor selfless enough to perform exactly what was written in the score, no more and no less.

Even as he arrived at the Metropolitan Opera in 1908, Toscanini's reputation was established in the American press, thanks in large measure to the journalist Max Smith. Typically, Smith saw textual fidelity as the principal feature that distinguished his idol from other conductors, writing that Toscanini

has no sympathy with the trend of modern conducting, as exemplified by Nikisch, who not only shapes his readings to suit his individual taste, but actually presumes to change the orchestration set down by the composer. His [Toscanini's] all-absorbing ambition is to reproduce music in a way absolutely true not only to the letter, but to the spirit of the creating mind.²

Implicit in Smith's statement are both a condemnation of those performers who tamper with aspects of a musical composition and a corresponding endorsement of literal fidelity to the score. According to this journalistic simplification, it is textual fidelity, or its lack, that determines which of two fundamentally irreconcilable musical interpretations – the composer's or the conductor's – emerges in performance.

Samuel Chotzinoff, an accompanist turned music critic who would later become NBC's Music Director, described Toscanini's faithfulness to the

score in terms of both mathematical precision and almost supernatural personal affinity:

Mr. Toscanini is literally a slave to the composer, carrying out his every intention, measuring his scale of the gradations of sound with a ruler on the score. What makes Toscanini the greatest conductor alive is that he follows the composer from the marks on the score back into the realm of ideas which gave them birth...The "Eroica" and the grandiose Fifth Symphony of Beethoven were subjected last night to a treatment which included a strict adherence to the printed scores, a divination of the exact ideas in the composer's mind represented by them, and Toscanini's genius for orchestral analysis and co-ordination.³

Once again, Toscanini is declared musically – and perhaps even morally – superior to his colleagues by virtue of his compulsion not simply to observe the composer's written instructions, but to follow them back to the very moment of artistic creation. In *Arturo Toscanini* (New York, 1929), biographer Tobia Nicotra pursued this concept to the point of absurdity, claiming that Toscanini "steeps himself in the composition – breathes the very air that Beethoven breathed, thinks the very thoughts that Beethoven thought."

In 1937 Toscanini assumed the direction of the NBC Symphony, a new radio orchestra assembled to rival CBS's broadcast concerts by the New York Philharmonic. As Joseph Horowitz notes in *Understanding Toscanini* (New York, 1987), in the years prior to the NBC Symphony's creation, broadcasters had been engaged in an ongoing debate over nothing less than the very purpose of radio programming, a controversy that pitted the interests of entertainment against those of mass education. One result of this debate was the marriage of recreation and instruction in radio programs that provided guidance in the understanding of fine literature and music. NBC's "Music Appreciation Hour," hosted by conductor Walter Damrosch from 1927 through 1942, was one such effort. Complete with accompanying workbooks and written tests, the "Music Appreciation Hour" sought to teach children about the composers and works that make up the musical canon. Other radio programs aimed at adult listeners pursued similar goals.

Although the NBC Symphony's broadcast concerts were not as overtly pedagogical as the "Music Appreciation Hour," they nonetheless embodied RCA president David Sarnoff's philosophy of radio as a vehicle for self-improvement. Toscanini's leadership of the NBC Symphony, and his reputation for textual fidelity in particular, were put to good use by the popular education movement. According to Joseph Horowitz, the textual fidelity issue was a useful tool in the service of music appreciation. By anointing a single, "correct" performance of each musical work, chosen by virtue of its faithfulness to the printed score, the champions of music appreciation transformed complex works of art into neatly packaged commodities that listeners could acquire for their intellectual trophy cases. Toscanini's public image suited this purpose, since he was believed to be the only performer both willing and able to provide a literal translation of the composer's notation into idealized sound.

Like most celebrities, Toscanini received a great deal of mail from his admirers. Many of these letters illustrate that listeners to the NBC Symphony broadcasts wholeheartedly identified him with the ideal of textual fidelity. One young New Jersey fan, clearly influenced by what he had heard and read, praised Toscanini for being one of the few conductors to perform compositions exactly as they are written; in the next sentence, this ardent fan admitted that he knew next to nothing about music. So strong was the public's belief in Toscanini's reputation for literalism that when confronted with evidence to the contrary some were inclined to doubt the musical text itself rather than the interpreter. A fan from Delaware asked Toscanini about what he believed to be a misprint in his own score of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. What other explanation, the fan reasoned, could there have been for a divergence between Toscanini's performance and the printed music?

In *Reflections on Toscanini* (New York, 1991), Harvey Sachs notes that the conductor's interpretations of individual compositions often changed over time, an understandable circumstance considering the extraordinary length of his professional career, but also a sign that his ideas about any given musical work were not fixed and absolute. For those who

never heard a live Toscanini concert, recordings are the chief means of acquaintance with his art. Although dozens of Toscanini's performances are available on disk, most were made during the final third of his sixty-eight-year career, and their sound quality is sometimes compromised by the original recording technology. Fortunately, another means exists to examine Toscanini's performing habits, and the textual fidelity question in particular, since his personal library of musical scores is available for study in the Toscanini Legacy, a collection in the Music Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts (an inventory of these scores can be consulted online at http://digilib.nypl.org/dynaweb/ead/music/mus-toscanin/@Generic__BookView).

In a 1926 concert review Olin Downes wrote that Toscanini's scores contained no conductor's markings, but this statement, made by a devoted admirer, is not supported by the evidence. Of the approximately 1,500 orchestral scores in the Toscanini Legacy, over a third contain annotations in the conductor's hand. Many are routine clarifications of the printed instructions or technical notes pertaining to the act of orchestral direction. Other markings, however, directly contradict Toscanini's reputation for strict adherence to the printed score.

For the purpose of this study, I have divided the annotations found in Toscanini's scores into three categories of increasing musical significance; these categories are based on the four levels of modifications identified by Gabriele Dotto in his study "Opera Four Hands: Collaborative Alterations in Puccini's *Fanciulla*."⁴ In my analysis, I identify type-1 annotations as any modifications of dynamics, articulation, bowing, phrasing, and tempo. These sorts of changes, in many cases, would probably pass unnoticed in performance for all but the most perceptive and informed listeners. Type-2 annotations include orchestrational adjustments that either reinforce or thin existing instrumental textures, or transpose individual instrumental passages into a different octave. These changes, often obvious in performance, nonetheless draw upon material that is already present in the score. Type-3 modifications, which are

the most radical changes, involve the introduction of foreign material into a composition, either by inserting a completely new instrumental figure into the orchestral fabric, by substantially rewriting an existing melody, or by adding entire musical passages of the conductor's own invention. Deletions from the score that affect its phrase structure or harmonic character also qualify as type-3 annotations.

In general, many of the markings in Toscanini's scores seem to reflect historical or stylistic considerations. Compositions from the 18th century — for example, Haydn's 88th Symphony and Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante in E flat* — tend to contain type-1 annotations only, suggesting that for works from the Classical period, Toscanini felt that slight adjustments of the printed dynamics, articulation, tempo, and bowing were the only changes necessary. More recent compositions that show a certain affinity with the Classical style, such as Mendelssohn's *Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream*, also reveal annotations exclusively of the type-1 variety.

Type-2 annotations, especially those that augment or reduce the existing orchestration, are most evident in works from the 19th century. Often Toscanini seems to have considered the gradual improvement in instrumental technique between that time and his own. It is not uncommon to find an expanded viola part, for example, in the scores of Beethoven and Brahms. Passages in which the violas had originally been playing in unison with other string instruments, only to drop out when the part's technical demands increased, now contain Toscanini's instructions to play continuously, suggesting a belief that these composers had been forced to compromise based on the insufficient ability of their performers.

Technological advances in instrument construction also seem to have played a part in Toscanini's artistic decisions. Solos that were originally divided between two different woodwind instruments, ostensibly owing to one instrument's weakness in certain registers, can become in Toscanini's scores duets for both instruments playing simultaneously,

sometimes producing surprising timbral effects. Finally, parts for trumpets and horns are greatly expanded in Toscanini's annotated scores of early 19th Century compositions, reflecting improvements in valved brass instruments. None of these annotations is likely to shock a musician today, but they certainly contradict the way that Toscanini's interpretations were typically represented in the press.

Other type-2 changes in Toscanini's scores have more obscure motivations. In many instances, he appears to have brightened the overall orchestral sound by adding flutes, piccolos, or other higher-pitched instruments to the existing texture. Scores as diverse as Brahms's Hungarian Dances, Mendelssohn's "Italian" Symphony, and Ravel's second *Daphnis et Chloe* suite contain such annotations. At the other extreme, he also thickened the orchestration of certain passages by adding mid-range and lower-pitched instruments. Again, a variety of compositions exhibit this type of modification, for example, Brahms's Third Symphony, Liszt's *Les Preludes*, Schubert's "Great" C major Symphony, and Respighi's *The Pines of Rome*. An interesting annotation almost completely erased from Toscanini's score of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony sheds some light on this activity. At rehearsal letter C in the fourth movement's development section Toscanini wrote in his score "Mengelberg makes the third trombone play with the contrabasses. Why? It is evident that Beethoven did not want it." Toscanini himself rarely supplemented the bass instruments in Beethoven's scores. To him, Mengelberg's apparently unmotivated addition of the trombone, an instrument whose construction remains basically unchanged since Beethoven's time, seemed not only unnecessary, but also contrary to the composer's wishes.

Type-3 changes – extreme modifications of melody, harmony, and structure – are relatively uncommon in Toscanini's annotated scores, but when they do appear their purpose is seldom clear. One such instance occurs in the final movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (see Example 1). As the development section moves to a close,

Beethoven assigns a variant of the movement's primary theme to the woodwinds and brass, over a dominant pedal. An ascending triplet motive in the piccolo complements this melody. While Beethoven employs the piccolo triplet twice, Toscanini adds a third statement that ascends to a high B. It is unlikely that practical concerns prevented Beethoven from adding this third triplet himself, since he gave the piccolo numerous repeated and sustained high Bs over the next several measures. While the composer believed that the symmetry of two piccolo triplets was sufficient, Toscanini apparently disagreed.

Toscanini seems to have brought a unique approach to 20th Century compositions, of which there were more in his repertoire than some critics are willing to acknowledge. In many cases he was personally acquainted with the composer, who was often young enough to have been his son, or occasionally even his grandson. These conditions seemed to foster a less than reverent attitude towards the composer's intentions. For example, in a score of Bernard Wagenaar's Second Symphony, a piece that begins in C major and ends in D-flat major, Toscanini not only inserted a transposition that forces a C-major conclusion on the work, but he also instructed the composer to make the change permanent. It could be that as he passed into old age Toscanini felt a responsibility not only as a performer, but also, to an extent, as a guardian of Western musical tradition. Such an attitude, coupled with a feeling that some modern composers were following the wrong path, might have emboldened him to carry out musical alterations more extreme than those that he had made as a younger man.

Further insight can be gained from a detailed look at Toscanini's written modifications in the scores of two compositions, one that was central to his repertoire, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and another that lay on the periphery, George Gershwin's *An American in Paris*. Beethoven was one of the composers with whom Toscanini identified most firmly. Over the course of his career, he performed Beethoven's music hundreds of times, often in concerts devoted exclusively to his works. Forty-two Beethoven compositions are represented in the Toscanini Legacy by over one hundred individual

Example 1: Beethoven, Symphony No. 5, movement 4, mm. 133 - 138

Piccolo (written pitch) Toscanini adds:

Example 2a: Beethoven, Symphony No. 9, movement 1, mm. 133 - 138: original orchestration

Example 2b: Beethoven, Symphony No. 9, movement 1, mm. 133 - 138: Toscanini's modifications

scores, and the Ninth Symphony alone exists in six different annotated copies. It is in the works of Beethoven, then, that we can readily observe Toscanini's performance aesthetic in action. Only a fraction of the Toscanini Legacy's scores contain dates or other indications of when they might have been used. It is virtually impossible, therefore, to match these scores of Beethoven's Ninth with the dozens of performances that Toscanini gave the work between 1902 and 1952. In addition, the well-known fact that he rehearsed and conducted from memory means that what was heard in performance may have sometimes depended less on the markings in a particular score than on his powers of recollection or on spontaneous decisions made in rehearsal. Still, he continued to acquire and annotate scores of compositions that he had already performed on numerous occasions, indicating that for Toscanini the act of studying and thinking about a musical work remained essential to the re-creative process.

Of the Toscanini Legacy's six annotated scores of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, three are full-sized and three are miniature scores. Given Toscanini's notoriously poor eyesight, it is tempting to assume that he used the miniature scores in the earlier part of his career; indeed, one of these is dated October 11, 1902, six months after his first performance of the work. In general, the miniature scores contain far fewer annotations than their full-sized counterparts. This statistic is misleading, however, since it is harder to write anything of substance on the miniature scores' tiny musical staves.

My assessment of Toscanini's approach to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, is confined to the first movement, as it appears in a single miniature score dated October 1902, and in two of the full-sized annotated scores, identified in the Toscanini Legacy as items A41 and A42. All three of these scores contain numerous type-1 annotations, and the full-sized scores have quite a few type-2 changes as well. Most of these appear in the movement's exposition and recapitulation, which is not surprising, since the woodwinds and brass play almost continuously throughout the development section, leaving little opportunity for Toscanini's orchestrational

additions. The score identified as A42 is by far the most heavily marked. On several occasions, Toscanini fills gaps in the horn parts with material borrowed from the trumpets, and then fills gaps in the trumpets with material from the horns. The overall effect is an intensified brass sound, with a reinforcement of the pitches typically assigned to these instruments, usually components of the tonic triad. This score also exhibits an expanded viola part, in some cases doubling the first violins, and in others, the cellos. At one point Toscanini redistributes the violin and viola material so that the melody is featured more prominently (see Examples 2a and 2b). The cellos twice venture into viola territory, and on one occasion in the exposition they reinforce an arpeggiated figure in the bassoons.

Other significant type-2 annotations are found in the closing group in both of the full-sized scores. Although the flute and oboe play a countermelody in octaves in measure 142, Beethoven is briefly forced to disrupt the symmetry out of concern for the flute's limited range, so that the melodic fragment in the oboes

Example 3a



becomes

Example 3b



in the flutes. Toscanini's annotations in each of the full-sized scores offer a different solution, both designed to avoid the flute's awkward melodic skips. In score A41 he rewrote the flute line so that once it drops down to the lower B-flat, it stays in that octave, continuing in unison with the oboe.

Example 3c



In score A42 he simply gave the flute the high G and B-flat that it probably would have had if the instruments in Beethoven's day had been capable of producing the latter pitch.

Example 3d



The miniature score dated 1902 is comparatively free of markings, perhaps owing to its size, or to the fact that Toscanini apparently used it early in his career. A few octave doublings of the first trumpet part by the second trumpet are the only notable type-2 annotations in this score. Taken as a whole, Toscanini's modifications to the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony are largely concerned with supplying musical fragments that the composer himself might have demanded had his performers been capable of playing them.

Toscanini's modifications in his score of George Gershwin's *An American in Paris* reveal a different approach. With the NBC Symphony Orchestra he performed this work in 1943, and again two years later; a recording of the 1945 performance is available commercially. Many of the markings in Toscanini's score of this composition probably reflect two specific conditions, namely, the composer's reputed inexperience as an orchestrator and the conductor's relative unfamiliarity with a jazz-influenced musical idiom. The score contains numerous markings in Toscanini's hand. In addition to the usual type-1 modifications of dynamics, articulation, and the like, his annotations reflect numerous reinforcements of existing string and woodwind lines, in other words, type-2 changes. The percussion section, a critical part of Gershwin's orchestra, also attracted Toscanini's attention: more than once, he gave the snare drum the task of strengthening an important rhythmic figure. The final 16 measures of *An American in Paris* have been completely reorchestrated; by redistributing both melody and harmony Toscanini achieved a brighter instrumental sound than is manifest in the original ending. Perhaps to reinforce this transformation, he changed Gershwin's expressive indication of *grandioso* to the more objective tempo indication *Largo ma non troppo*. The overall effect of Toscanini's alterations to *An American in Paris* brightens and homogenizes Gershwin's variegated orchestral sound.

The most surprising and musically significant of Toscanini's annotations occurs in the final six measures, where a series of orchestrational substitutions produces an alteration of the existing harmony. Over the concluding F-major triad is heard a final statement of one of the work's most prominent melodic motives. In Gershwin's own setting, a countermelody played by the third alto saxophone and first trombone adds an E flat to the harmony – in essence, producing a dominant-seventh chord on F that resolves irregularly through E natural to F

Example 4a, Gershwin, *An American in Paris*: original orchestration



Example 4b, Gershwin, *An American in Paris*: Toscanini's modifications

eliminates this colorful harmonic effect altogether: the third alto saxophone simply plays the main melody while the first trombone participates in the F-major triad. The irregularly resolved seventh simply disappears from both Toscanini's annotated score and his 1945 recording of the piece. It is tempting to imagine that Toscanini, ever vigilant, could not tolerate so blatant an appearance of an improperly resolved seventh chord.

Contrary to his American reputation for literal adherence to the printed score, Toscanini actually modified details both large and small in many of the compositions that he performed. Can it be that he was really just as willful and ego-driven as those conductors to whom he was so often judged superior? How would Toscanini reconcile the evidence of his annotated scores with his identity as the humble servant of the composer? The answer to these questions may lie in a particular combination of Italian and German performance practice symptomatic of Toscanini's aesthetic blend of these two cultures.

The popular conception of the performer's task, clouded as it is by the textual fidelity issue, conditions an audience to assume that an orchestral conductor simply translates the printed score into physical gestures that are "read" by the musicians under his or her control. Nothing more is expected, much less required. In reality, the performing tradition from which Toscanini emerged had quite a different concept of the conductor's responsibilities. When he led his first performance in 1886, the idea of a baton-wielding conductor at the head of an opera orchestra was a relatively recent innovation. As late as the 1870s, some Italian ensembles still adhered to the time-honored tradition of divided direction, whereby the first-chair violinist led the performance only after the *maestro*, usually a keyboard player, had made all the musical decisions in rehearsal. This clear separation of the two roles — time-beater versus interpreter — is reflected in the terms used to describe their respective duties: the Italian word *direzione*, meaning "direction," was applied to the first violinist's work, while the word *concertazione*, a complicated term indicating the act of preparing a performance, referred to the *maestro*'s responsibility. When both roles were assumed by a single person — the conductor — these two functions became part of his job description. And it must be remembered that composers, often conductors themselves, were well aware of the situation.

While the conductor's time-beating responsibilities are easy to comprehend, the preparation of a performance — the activity expressed by the Italian word *concertazione* — is somewhat enigmatic. Italian music dictionaries offer a variety of definitions for this term, from the *Dizionario artistico-scientifico* of 1872, which simply states that it is a synonym for "rehearsal," to the detailed explanation offered one hundred years later by the *Ricordi-Rizzoli Enciclopedia della musica*:

Concertazione is the work of gradual study during rehearsals for the purpose of preparing a performance. It essentially consists of controlling the precision of the textual reading, the suitability of technical solutions for the requested dynamic and timbral effects, the equilibrium between sounds or between the various parts or voices, their coordination or subordination in an agogic unity and, the most valuable goal, making individuals aware... of the reciprocal functionality of their actions the attainment, that is, of that spontaneous understanding that is called harmony. No limits are placed on the methods and objectives employed in the pursuit of one of these optimum performance plans.⁵

During a conference held in 1967 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Toscanini's birth, the eminent conductor and scholar Gianandrea Gavazzeni gave an example of the modern, colloquial use of the term *concertazione* with regard to Toscanini's subtle modification of a passage from Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*. His statement succinctly illustrates this second, often misunderstood responsibility of the conductor:

Consider the case of the four unison horns in [Act III of] *Un ballo in maschera*, something which has become such a part of tradition that even though that modification is not inserted into the performance materials, today when one prepares ["quando si concerta"] the opera it is enough just to glance at the horns and they already understand that they are to play the bassoons' and cellos' figure in unison at the moment when the lots are drawn. Toscanini correctly considered this moment [in its original orchestration] to be weak, while the four horns in unison lend a dramatic timbre that otherwise could not be obtained.⁶

It may be that Toscanini himself contributed by his example to the flexible, modern definition of the term *concertazione*.

Given this historical context, and perhaps even justification, for Toscanini's alteration of many of the scores in his library, it remains to determine why he made the types of changes that he did. Certainly, as others have conjectured, the acoustics of the spaces in which he performed may have induced him to implement certain orchestrational changes. The possibility of such a practice is suggested by Olin Downes's review of a Toscanini concert at the old Metropolitan Opera House:

Particularly grateful, under the acoustical conditions, was the Latin genius for clarity and beauty of tone and for exact sonorous proportions. It has been remarked more than once in these columns that the Metropolitan Opera House does not and is not expected to furnish the ideal environment for an orchestral concert. The tone, when the orchestra is on the stage, loses a measure of its resonance, richness, and glow. The different choirs of instruments become clear-cut strands of sound in place of the fusion and shimmer that usually arise from the fortunate combination of instruments. Climaxes are likely to lose in roundness and splendor. The remarkable thing last night was the beauty and the body of tone that Mr. Toscanini achieved.⁷

Later in life Toscanini's acoustical ideals seem to have undergone a transformation. His well-known preference for the notoriously dry NBC Studio 8H, site of most of the NBC Symphony's concerts, has mystified many critics. It may be that some of the orchestrational changes in Toscanini's scores result from his association with this performing venue.

While acoustical conditions may have convinced Toscanini that orchestrational modifications were needed in certain compositions, they do not explain in a comprehensive way why a conductor who allegedly put the composer's interests first would believe that he had the authority to overrule that same composer's own notations. Considering the types of annotations that he made, as well as his recollection of the influences on his early career, it seems likely that the theories of Richard Wagner were the basis of Toscanini's interpretive practice. Wagner wrote two treatises that are of special interest to conductors. The first, *On Conducting*, appeared in 1869, while the second, *On the Performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony*, was published in 1873, after Wagner conducted that work to celebrate the laying of the cornerstone at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. Both essays systematically explain Wagner's goals as a conductor and offer examples from the literature to illustrate how those goals might be attained.

It may seem unlikely that Wagner, a colossus of German music, would have had such a strong influence on a fiercely patriotic Italian conductor, particularly since that conductor had pursued his musical

training at a time when his country was experiencing an anti-Wagnerian backlash. Wagner's theories, however, provided Toscanini with answers to the artistic problems that had been plaguing his first efforts as a conductor. Andrea della Corte, a music critic who knew Toscanini during his tenure at La Scala, has written of a conversation that he had with the conductor in 1924. According to della Corte, at the onset of his career Toscanini endured years of frustrating on-the-job training, as he struggled to achieve in practice what he could only imagine while studying musical scores. Although the young Toscanini clearly recognized the failings of other conductors who vacillated among imprecise tempos, beating time with neither authority nor sensitivity, he could not find a viable alternative. For a time he believed that the composer-conductor Giuseppe Martucci, an advocate of metronomically rigid tempos, might be the mentor who could show him the way. In the words of della Corte,

Toscanini listened to Martucci, he studied him, he followed him, but he did not succeed in *feeling* like him. An overpowering desire for freedom, for relativity, for warmth disturbed him. Certain pages, certain passages, especially by Beethoven — these he would have wanted more intense, more animated, more supple. He studied, thought, and rethought.⁸

Della Corte goes on to report that it was Wagner's essay, *On Conducting*, that gave Toscanini consolation and the courage to pursue his ideals. Like Toscanini, Wagner had rebelled against routine musical interpretations. The passion and vitality that he had found while studying orchestral scores seemed strangely absent from most of the performances that he attended. In his own work as a conductor, Wagner adopted a number of practices that enlivened his own interpretations. One of the fundamental tenets of Wagner's conducting philosophy was to allow the *melos* — the melody — to determine the tempo, shape, and pacing of a performance. He clearly admired the Italian approach to music. Indeed, Wagner's praise of instrumentalists trained in the Italian tradition, for whom "playing an instrument well means making it sing,"⁹ later found its parallel in Toscanini's own mantra, "cantare, cantare."

Critical assessments of Toscanini's Wagner interpretations, in particular, focus precisely on their melodic character. Unlike the sometimes-meandering readings of Wilhelm Furtwängler, perhaps his chief musical rival, Toscanini's performances exhibit a concern for the melodic phrase as a whole — its shape, its direction, and its place in larger units — an approach that sometimes led him to adopt unusually quick tempos.

But it was not simply in matters of musical pacing that Wagner had an impact on Toscanini's performance aesthetic. Wagner's concern with the orchestral sound itself — its clarity, balance, and elasticity — was intimately bound with his emphasis on the melody. Here, too, Wagner's experiences made an impression on the young Toscanini, who put his recommendations to the test. Again, in the words of della Corte,

This attempt made use of technical research that Wagner, too, had found indispensable, since in order to sing well one must first refine the sound, render it beautiful, malleable, sure, one must know how to weigh and to measure out . . .

It is in Wagner's essay, *On the Performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony*, that we find direct evidence of his influence on Toscanini. Wagner's practical knowledge of "how to weigh and to measure out" shines through every page of this treatise. Among his recommendations for the performance of this difficult symphony are specific restorations of trumpets and horns that had dropped out of the musical texture for apparently technical reasons, instrumental reinforcements of certain inaudible melodies, and rewritten melodies that Beethoven seems to have been compelled to distort for reasons of limited instrumental range. Toscanini adopted each of these suggestions, and several more concerning the vocal parts in the final movement, for his own performances of the symphony. While other conductors, such as Gustav Mahler and Felix Weingartner, created their own reorchestrations of the Ninth Symphony, Toscanini preferred to follow Wagner's advice.

Wagner's justification for the many changes that he imposed on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony can be summed up in his rationale for ordering melodic doubling in the Scherzo:

In deciding such matters the point at issue is whether one is willing to put up with performances in which the composer's intentions are temporarily obscured or prefers to take the steps most likely to do them justice.

In short, Wagner felt that Beethoven was the victim of circumstances, both internal and external, that prevented the ideal realization of his musical conception. There seems little doubt that this assumption was behind the majority of Toscanini's alterations to the works in his repertoire. Perhaps it was Wagner's dual identity as a composer and a conductor that gave him the authority, in Toscanini's eyes, to sanction the necessary alteration of other composer's scores.

How, then, are we to judge Toscanini's modifications of the musical text? As any performer can attest, absolutely literal fidelity to the printed score is impossible, simply because musical notation is inadequate to capture every nuance of a living, breathing composition, and is unable to anticipate every condition under which a performance might take place. Certainly, it makes sense to look at Toscanini's annotations in light of their overall musical significance. Sacrificing the scrupulous observation of printed dynamic markings in order to make a particular passage "work" is hardly a major artistic distortion. Similarly, reinforcing the orchestration of an important melody so that it does not get lost in the overall texture is not necessarily a crime against the composer. About wholesale additions or deletions of material we might be less forgiving, but these types of changes are comparatively rare in Toscanini's scores.

Perhaps what ultimately mattered was Toscanini's motivation. The combination of his Italian musical heritage and Wagnerian aesthetic convinced him that the highest service that a conductor could render was to impose certain types of musical changes whenever he sensed that a composer's artistic conception was threatened. In his mind, there was nei-

ther egotism nor hypocrisy in his actions. The textual fidelity myth, while it lasted, helped to forestall questions about the fluid relationship between composer and interpreter. Now that it has been dispelled, the true and significantly more complex record of Toscanini's achievements is free to emerge.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Corriere della sera*, 12-13 March 1899.
- ² *Century Magazine*, March 1913.
- ³ *New York World*, 2 February 1927.
- ⁴ *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 42/3 (Fall 1989).
- ⁵ Franco Melotti, "Concertazione," *Ricordi-Rizzoli Enciclopedia della musica* (Milan, 1972).
- ⁶ Fedele D'Amico and Rosa Paumgartner, eds. *La lezione di Toscanini* (Florence, 1970).
- ⁷ Olin Downes, "Music: Arturo Toscanini Conducts," *The New York Times*, 2 February 1927.
- ⁸ *Toscanini visto da un critico* (Turin, 1958).
- ⁹ "On Conducting," translated by Robert L. Jacobs in *Three Wagner Essays* (London, 1979).

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