

philharmonia orchestra

TURANGALÎLA PREMIÈRE

Original radio voiceover:

The work which is being introduced today is the world première of a new symphony by Olivier Messiaen. This is a symphony in ten parts which the composer has entitled the *Turangalîla-symphonie*.

Anthony Fogg, Artistic Administrator, Boston Symphony Orchestra:

The legacy of commissions of the Boston Symphony is probably one of our proudest achievements. When you look at the works that were created for the orchestra either through the Koussevitsky Music Fund or through the orchestra's own commissioning programme, it's a little like the history of music in the 20th century. The work was commissioned not by the Boston Symphony itself but by the Koussevitsky Music Foundation. In that period the BSO was doing these weekly NBC broadcasts of rehearsals, about 30 minutes. At the final rehearsal for the work, he came and spoke to the audience.

Original radio voiceover:

Dr Koussevitsky, who is attending the rehearsal today, is anxious to say a word or two about this work to you.

Anthony Fogg:

We don't have much documentation about the first thoughts of Messiaen, at least in correspondence with the Boston Symphony, about the nature of the piece. He was already conceiving these large cyclic pieces with a number of movements all thematically inter-related, and in a way *Turangalîla* offered him the opportunity to explore sonically those ideas in a much larger canvas.

Serge Koussevitsky:

I cannot say much because I haven't studied profoundly the score, but my opinion is this symphony, after *Le Sacre du Printemps*, is the greatest composition composed in our century.

Anthony Fogg:

In giving the commission to Messiaen, he in almost an unbelievable way set no limits. He said the work could be written for whatever forces Messiaen decided to write for, it could be of any duration, and he could deliver it whenever it was completed.

Serge Koussevitsky:

This symphony is new in every way, in melodic line, in harmonical structure, in form.

Anthony Fogg:

There are some fascinating documents around the creation of *Turangalila* in the Boston Symphony's archives. Messiaen is in this letter asking that the orchestra engage the services of this young French pianist, Yvonne Loriod, who he regards as not only the premier interpreter of modern composition but also the pianist who knows his music the most. Messiaen also very curiously a number of times in the letter asks about the living allowance that he is to receive, and he says that they must have a minimum of \$10 per day for the 25 days that he will be here with the Boston Symphony. He writes out the figures and does the calculations three times, and then after he signs the letter at the end there is a restatement of the need for this.

Serge Koussevitsky:

I want to ask the public to have more patience and to listen to this symphony.

Anthony Fogg:

Well the reviews of the first performance were extremely mixed, but mostly negative.

Voice over:

The real heroes were Mr Bernstein and the gentlemen of the orchestra, for they must have put in many hours of exhausting effort with this tricky and futile work.

In the two or three million notes that Mr Messiaen put to paper, the only offence is to the ears.

Serge Koussevitsky:

Have patience, and listen with your own interest, if you really love the music.