

**FORGOTTEN ARTISTS**  
**An occasional series by Christopher Howell**  
**24. TIBOR PAUL (1909-1973)**

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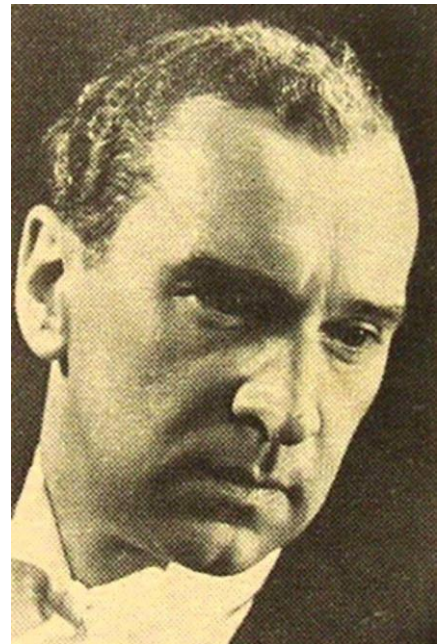
One Hungarian leads to another. Did not George Mikes, author of the hilarious “How to be an Alien”, develop the theory that “everybody is a Hungarian”? In the wake of my article on Carl Melles, a reader who has enriched the Forgotten Artists series with useful advice and recordings asked if I remembered anything about another Hungarian émigré, Tibor Paul.

To tell the truth, my only memory came from the late 1960s, when newsagents’ racks were swamped with LPs selling at ten shillings or little more. I remember noting – but not buying – a Fontana LP in which a selection of Brahms Hungarian Dances and Dvořák Slavonic Dances were played by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra conducted, respectively, by Tibor Paul and Karel Ančerl. Since so many of those dirt cheap LPs had pseudonymous performers, I rather supposed that Tibor Paul was an invented name. It is, after all, the sort of Hungarian-sounding name you would come up with if you needed one in a hurry. About a decade later, after I had moved to Italy, I saw his name in the Radio Corriere conducting one of the RAI orchestras and thought, well, he must be real, then. If I had been based in Australia or Eire, I now see, I would have known better all along. The BBC Genome site suggests that he was a rare guest with UK orchestras.

The item I saw in the Radio Corriere was almost certainly Viotti’s 22<sup>nd</sup> Violin Concerto, in which Paul accompanied Franco Gulli. This item, which RAI repeated frequently in the 1970s and 1980s, was the centrepiece of a concert, given on 19 February 1964 but seemingly broadcast only on 23 November 1965, by the Orchestra Alessandro Scarlatti di Napoli della RAI. It opened with Bartók’s Divertimento and concluded with Reger’s Variations on a Theme of Mozart. It appears to have been Paul’s sole appearance with a RAI orchestra. Though plenty of Italian collectors are interested in Gulli, I have not so far located a copy of this concerto, let alone the rest of the programme. I have, however, heard enough – just about – to suggest that this conductor was an artist who deserves further investigation. The fullest account of his career, from which I have drawn my basic information, is found in the Australian Dictionary of Biography<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Early years in Hungary**

Tibor Paul was born on 29 March 1909 in Budapest. He studied piano and woodwind instruments and, presumably, conducting at the Franz Liszt Academy. His teachers included Kodály, Scherchen and Weingartner. In 1930 he founded the Budapest Concert Orchestra, on 9 November 1935 he married Maria Penninger in Budapest – they had two sons. Around 1939 he began conducting an orchestra of his own, became involved in film music – Durium Products Corporation and the Hungarian Film Institute – and joined the staff of the Budapest National Theatre. By 1945 he was principal conductor of the Hungarian Broadcasting Corporation.



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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved here: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/paul-tibor-11352>

The most famous exodus from Hungary – that which saw Carl Melles' departure – took place in 1956 when the Soviets marched in. Communism had already established itself in Hungary, however, in 1948, and by ominously undemocratic means. So a first wave of post-war Hungarian emigration was led by those who preferred not to wait for Soviet-inspired communism to show its true colours. Those wondering whether to go or stay may also have weighed up their likely professional prospects under the new regime. Artists who worked through the war in state posts were not necessarily Nazi sympathizers, but could all too easily expect to be treated as if they had been. I have described elsewhere in this series how the newly installed communist government in Romania compelled Jonel Perlea to remain in exile. Whatever, Paul preferred to leave.

### Switzerland – Australia - Ireland

His first stop was Switzerland, where he did some work for Swiss Radio and at the Berne Opera House. From there he moved, in 1950, to Australia. Before a year had passed, he was working with the New South Wales National Opera and guest conducting for the Australian Broadcasting Commission. In May 1953, for example, he led performances of "Carmen" in Newcastle, New South Wales, with Margaret Elkin, Ronald Dowd and the veteran Harold Williams in the cast. Later the same year, in August, he conducted performances of "La Bohème" in Yarralumla, Australian Capital Territory. Ronald Dowd was again among the singers. In 1954, he joined the staff of the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music as teacher of conducting and was principal conductor of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust Opera Company in 1954-55. His appearances with the Elizabethan Trust included "The Bartered Bride" in Adelaide in November 1957. He obtained Australian nationality in 1955.

All reports agree that Paul had a fiery temperament and often found himself at loggerheads with those above him. When we read, in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, that "he regularly corresponded with (Sir) Charles Moses, the general manager [of A.B.C.], asking to be given more concerts", the suspicion is that the letters would have made lively reading. There is no doubt that Paul worked hard for the A.B.C., conducting all over Australia and strongly promoting the work of Australian composers. Nevertheless, he was obliged to round out his income by seeking engagements in Western Europe. In 1959 he left Australia for Europe and was principal conductor of the Radio Eireann Symphony Orchestra from 1961 to 1967 and director of music for Radio and Telefis Eireann from 1962 to 1967. Here, too, he upheld the cause of Irish composers though, as we shall see, not all of them felt he did enough.

There is no doubt that Paul thought big, aiming to raise not only the standards but the profile of the RTE Symphony Orchestra. Among the major names he persuaded to visit Ireland, pride of place goes to Igor Stravinsky, who conducted the Symphony Orchestra, the RÉ Singers and the RÉ Choral Society in June 1963. The first part of the programme was given over to *The Fairy's Kiss*, which Robert Craft Conducted. After the interval, Stravinsky led performances of the *Chorale Variations 'Vom Himmel hoch da komm' ich her'* and the *Symphony of Psalms*. Stravinsky and his wife Vera made the most of their trip, squeezing into a mere two days visits to President Éamon de Valera at Áras na Uachtaráin, the James Joyce Tower in Sandycove and the Monastery of Clonmacnoise in County Offaly. On leaving, he declared, "I will come back to Ireland, if not to make music then to make a holiday", but this never happened<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://tonerquinn.com/2016/02/02/when-stravinsky-came-to-dublin-in-1963/>

Towards the end of 1966, Paul took the orchestra to London to make their first appearance in the Royal Festival Hall. As we shall see below, there were some grumbles over the works chosen. At the time of his dismissal, he had been attempting to arrange a North American tour. Again, there was not the unanimous support from the home authorities one might have supposed.

There is, indeed, a suspicion that Paul, from the height of his position as conductor of the only professional symphony orchestra then operating in the Irish Republic and head of the national broadcasting company too, was setting himself up as a sort of general Kapellmeister for the entire country. If challenged, he might have remarked that he was only filling a vacuum, but obviously, jealousies of various kinds were aroused.

Still, the first results were certainly positive. He was a co-founder of the Limerick Choral Union<sup>3</sup>. Joined by the RTE SO, this choir – still going strong – made its debut on 4 May 1964 with a gala performance of Mozart's Requiem in St Mary's Cathedral, Limerick. The soloists included Veronica Dunne and Bernadette Greevy. Following their 1965 performance of Kodály's Te Deum, Paul declared that a recording of the occasion would be sent to the composer<sup>4</sup>. After his farewell performance, in 1967, of Beethoven's Missa Solemnis, Paul "paid tribute to the Choral Union as the best amateur choir he had ever conducted, emphasising its superbly innovative spirit, when he pointed out that for five years he had tried to persuade many of the Dublin choirs to perform this work, considered to be the greatest challenge to any choir, but to no avail"<sup>5</sup>.

Another choir with which Paul worked was Our Lady's Choral Society, Dublin. This body had a notable relationship with Barbirolli but in 1966, for their 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary celebrations, Barbirolli was unable to attend. At their main event, Paul conducted a performance of Berlioz's Grande Messe de Morts<sup>6</sup>.

As Eire's one professional orchestra, the RTE SO also played for the Dublin Grand Opera Society. This enabled Paul to bring his operatic experience to Ireland. In November 1963 he conducted "Tristan und Isolde". Soon after, he returned for "Parsifal" and "Le Nozze di Figaro". The critic from "Opera", while unimpressed by the productions, noted of the former that Paul gave "a glowing and flowing realization of the score, and the orchestra responded magnificently indeed", while in Figaro, "again Tibor Paul conducted with superior control"<sup>7</sup>.

### **Paul and Irish composers**

A striking event was the performance of Brian Boydell's cantata "A Terrible Beauty is Born" at Dublin's Gaiety Theatre on Easter Monday, April 11 1966. This work had been specially commissioned by the RTE as part of the commemorations of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1916 rising. The RTE SO under Paul were joined by the soloists Veronica Dunne, Bernadette Greevy and William Young, the narrator Conor Farrington and Our Lady's Choral Society<sup>8</sup>. In the first part of the concert, Paul conducted Beethoven's Eroica Symphony. The conductor's insistence that the RTE should support Irish composers but not to the exclusion of all else, even on an occasion such as this, provides a clue to the disgruntlement that was growing in some quarters.

<sup>3</sup> The history of the Limerick Choral Union is more fully related here: <http://archive.li/xuGNk>

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.limerickcity.ie/media/bands%2065.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See <http://archive.li/xuGNk>. According to Wikipedia, Paul also conducted their performance of Janáček's Glagolitic Mass in 1968. Given that the 1967 Missa Solemnis was his farewell appearance, this claim needs to be checked. The LCU site referred to does not say who conducted the Glagolitic Mass.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.olcs.ie/wp/about-us/barbirolli/>

<sup>7</sup> Opera, March 1964.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.tcd.ie/library/1916/a-terrible-beauty-is-born/>

A younger composer who received support from Paul was Seóirse Bodley<sup>9</sup>. Even before taking up his RTE appointment, Paul had conducted Bodley's "Salve, Maria Virgo" in Limerick on 13 October 1960. On 15 June 1962, he premiered Bodley's Divertimento for string orchestra. Paul repeated the work on several occasions and one of his broadcast performances is discussed below. Bodley soon embraced a far more modern style but, undeterred, Paul conducted the first broadcast performance and the first public performance of his Webern-oriented Chamber Symphony no. 1 on 6 October 1964 and 7 February 1965 respectively<sup>10</sup>. Bodley's song cycle to texts by W.B. Yeats, "Never to have lived is best", was commissioned by the RTE for the Yeats centenary. Paul conducted the first performance on 11 June 1965 with Veronica Dunne as soloist. Bodley was again chosen to represent Ireland at the UNESCO International Rostrum of Composers 1966 and the cycle was broadcast on 6 March 1967<sup>11</sup>. A further work by Bodley, "Configurations", the fruit of the composer's experiences at Darmstadt and specifically influenced by Stockhausen's spatially disposed "Gruppen", was given by Paul on 29 January 1967.



An occasion of some historical importance was the presentation, on 17 March 1965, of RTE's first television opera, "Patrick", by A[rchibald] J(ames) Potter. Potter (1918-1980), a representative of the older generation who had studied with Vaughan Williams, therefore became the first Irishman to compose a television opera. He was not, however, the first Irish composer to do so. The BBC's third television opera, shown in 1957, had been "Blind Raftery" by Eniskillen-born Joan Trimble, who became the first woman composer anywhere to write such a work. The idea of a television opera on an Irish subject was the fruit of the RTE's fledgling enthusiasm and it had been commissioned in 1960, before Paul's appointment. As the dates show, the path was not easy. Though the composer had delivered the work punctually, in spite of some delay by the librettist<sup>12</sup>, some four years passed before the opera was ready for showing. Rightly or wrongly, Potter was convinced that the delay was due to Paul's evil machinations.

The readily availability of Professor Zuk's exhaustive thesis on Potter is naturally a great boon, but it does carry the risk of assuming that all Irish composers felt the same way about Paul as Potter did. It is clear from Zuk's pages that Potter was insecure to the extent of paranoia, and that his confrontational tendencies were fuelled by an ongoing battle with alcoholism.

Potter took particular umbrage to a statement by Paul, in an interview with the Irish Times<sup>13</sup>, that "much as I admire the enthusiasm at all concerts here, I find it absent whenever Irish works are played". This, for Potter, represented a vitriolic and unforgivable attack on Irish composers in general and himself in particular. Even ten years later, long after Paul had departed from Ireland, he was still inclined to return to the issue. And yet, taken in context, Paul's comments do not appear unreasonable.

<sup>9</sup> Information, unless otherwise stated, from Gareth Cox: Seóirse Bodley, Field Day Publications, Dublin, 2010

<sup>10</sup> Previously, Bodley himself had conducted the work under the auspices of the UNESCO International Rostrum of Composers.

<sup>11</sup> Information from the Italian Radio Corriere of that date.

<sup>12</sup> All the following information is obtained from Zuk, Patrick (2007): A.J. Potter (1918-1980): The career and creative achievement of an Irish composer in social and cultural context, Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2911/> 71-78).

<sup>13</sup> "Talking to Tibor Paul", Irish Times, 20 January 1962, quoted in Zuk, *ibid*.

*Q. Insofar as you can gauge taste by audience reaction, what works does the public seem to enjoy most?*

*A. I have found that people loved Beethoven, did not care very much for Tchaikovsky, but were very appreciative of Bruckner and Mahler. One thing, though, I must remark upon: much as I admire the enthusiasm at all concerts here, I find it absent whenever Irish works are played.*

*Q. How do you explain that?*

*A. In one sentence. No man is a prophet in his own country, especially while he is alive. I have only to look to my own country, Hungary, where Bartok was only really appreciated after his death.*

*Q. What is your opinion of Irish composers? Do you think there is talent here?*

*A. Yes, and real talent. But a composer cannot develop if his works are not played.*

Probably, the real issue was not “Irish music” but “contemporary music”. A general tendency among audiences to reject post-war contemporary trends in music was hardly limited to Ireland. Moreover, given Paul’s advocacy of the Darmstadt-inspired Bodley, one wonders if he had fallen prey to the “Glock syndrome” then prevalent at the BBC – a tendency to judge contemporary music, not on its merits, but on its inaccessibility and dissonance. Potter, as a senior composer in a conservative vein, may have seemed old hat. Still, the interview hardly suggests an anti-Irish bias.

A second episode that aroused Potter’s bile centred around the RTE SO’s visit to the Royal Festival Hall, London, in late November 1966. The opening salvo was fired when Peter Haley-Dunne, London correspondent to the Irish Times, wrote a letter to his paper protesting that not a single work by an Irish composer was on the programme. The reason, Haley-Dunne understood, was that Paul had commissioned four works from four Irish composers, with a view to including one of them, and not one of the composers had delivered his work on time.

Though no names were given, the ever-susceptible Potter had some cause to fear that his name might be perceived as among the late-deliverers, for in June 1966 he had in fact received – at last – a commission from Paul and the RTE to write a 15-minute orchestral piece. There had been no suggestion, however, that it might be played in London that same year – it was intended for the 1967 season and was delivered on time for its first performance on 13 March.

Potter accordingly wrote to the Irish Times in typically belligerent tones:

*“... your correspondent Peter Haley-Dunne quotes a statement to the effect that 'Works were commissioned from four Irish composers, but were not completed in time.' I believe this statement to be a lie, but will retain an open mind until the precise details are known. Will Mr Haley-Dunne please specify who these four composers were who were commissioned to write works for the November concert in London”<sup>14</sup>.*

Potter’s letter was not the only one. Seóirse Bodley also wrote, pointing out that four new works had indeed been commissioned from four Irish composers, including himself, but for the 1966-7 RTE season. Nothing had been said about a possible performance in London. His own piece, “Configurations”, had been scheduled for performance on 29 January 1969 and the score would be delivered on time.

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<sup>14</sup> Irish Times, 5 November 1966, quoted in Zuk, *ibid*.

Haley-Dunne took it upon himself to investigate further, and on 15 November reported that he had received a letter from Paul stating that five composers – Boydell, O’Riada, Victory, Bodley and Potter – had been invited to write a work for the London concert. Of these, Boydell had declined because of other commitments, while the others had failed to deliver on time<sup>15</sup>. The music critic of the Irish Times, Charles Acton, obtained a copy of Paul’s letter to Haley-Dunne and sent it to Potter. Potter did not keep it, so we only know from Acton’s accompanying note that it contained the phrase “Up to today I have heard nothing from Mr. Potter”<sup>16</sup>. Potter took up his pen once more:

*My previous letter (1. T. 9/11/66) suggested that Mr Haley-Dunne had been the victim of lies. His latest (1. T. 15/11/66) would seem to confirm it. ... Neither in January 1966 nor at any other time was I either 'asked' or commissioned to compose a work for the RTESO London Festival Hall Concert either by Mr Paul, or by anyone else. ... These are the facts: who says to the contrary is a liar and may expect to be treated as one*<sup>17</sup>.

Following this, Potter received letters of support from Brian Boydell and Haley-Dunne himself, who now believed he had been “the victim of lies – systematic ones at that!”

In this case there seems little to say in the defence of Paul, who had probably intended the London concert all along as a means to impress Londoners with his interpretations of the standard classics, rather than a showcase for modern Irish music. After all, even without troubling to commission a new Irish piece, there must have been numerous eligible works written over the previous decade by the five composers in question, and others, which could have been played. It has to be concluded that Paul, faced with criticism, sought to backtrack and cast the blame on others. In the process, he was steadily alienating at least two generations of leading Irish composers.

But the bad blood between Paul and Potter seems to have started with “Patrick”. As we saw above, this television opera had been commissioned in 1960, before Paul’s arrival. He therefore found himself obliged to take over a project begun by others. If he had found a splendid opera sitting on his desk, no doubt all would have been well. According to Dr. Zuk’s very thorough analysis, he found an opera that was stifled at birth by a risible libretto and which, musically, only occasionally showed Potter at his best. Though we do not actually know if this was also Paul’s opinion, we do know that he enraged Potter once again by telling him there was “not sufficient trained talent at present available in the country” to permit of a successful realisation of Patrick for television. This may have been a “white lie”, intended to let the RTE off the hook and cut the losses by simply performing the opera in concert. Potter would have none of it:

*Appoint me as manager, office boy - call it what you will - in charge of the production of Patrick as a television opera ... I will then see to the production of the work within the year. ... In case any of your distinguished overseas advisers should feel sceptical about the ability of a mere native to perform such a task I would remind them that, until they actually tried it, no-one ever believed that those Egyptians could ever run the Suez Canal*<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Irish Times, 15 November 1966, quoted in Zuk, *ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> The following private letters to and from Potter are held in the Potter archive and are quoted in Zuk, *ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> Irish Times, 23 November, quoted in Zuk, *ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> This exchange is found in a memorandum among the Potter papers, quoted by Zuk, *ibid*, so we do not actually know



Needless to say, the offer was not taken up, but in the end the original project was maintained. The leading Dublin music critic, Charles Acton, declared the TV premiere “a landmark in Irish music”<sup>19</sup>, but the opera never reached the stage and the filmed version was shown only once more, in 1971. It would be interesting, if only historically, to see it. Apart from the opportunity to hear how Paul actually conducted it after all the furore, the presence of Bernadette Greevy in the leading female role should prove of interest.

All the same, Paul’s stranglehold on Irish music making was creating increased friction. It is not really surprising if the decision was made to ease Paul out by appointing Gerard Victory as director of music at the RTE, while keeping Paul on as principal conductor of the RTE SO if he would accept this new arrangement. Almost needless to say, Paul was deeply upset. Matters came to such a head that his case was discussed in the Irish Parliament, the Dáil Éireann, during a debate on the Committee on Finance from 25 to 27 October 1966<sup>20</sup>. I have tried to make the following account brief, but those less fascinated than I am by political machinery should perhaps skip to the next section.

### **Paul and the Dáil**

In truth, it was not the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, Mr. Joseph Brennan, who raised the matter. His speech was a masterly piece of political claptrap, offering vague assurances that all was well on every possible front but while avoiding anything that might be called the nitty-gritty. The opposition spokesman, Mr. Maurice E. Dockrell, knew his job too, and when discussion turned to the Radio Telefís Éireann budget, he complained of two shocks. The first, the resignation-dismissal – nobody seemed to know quite which – of Eamann Andrews, had gained greater publicity. The second was the

*“very burning question of the decision of the RTE Authority not to renew Mr. Tibor Paul’s contract and the manner in which that information was conveyed to him. ... We are dealing with somebody who is a very outstanding musician, a man who has been here for the past six years and who has done a great deal for the Radio Symphony Orchestra. ... Mr. Tibor Paul has played his part, a very big part, in bringing it up to the pitch of perfection it has reached at the moment”.*

*“No reason was given”, Mr. Dockrell continued, “as to why the contract of this musician was not being renewed”.*

Furthermore, complained Mr. Dockrell, he was informed of the decision a mere six months before lapse of his present contract, while

*“in the classical concert music world, ... a musician lives at least 12 months ahead. He is booked for concerts; he has to study scores”.*

On top of all that, Mr. Dockrell concluded, Paul was handed his black spot minutes before he was to conduct a concert.

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<sup>19</sup> Irish Times, 19.3.1965.

<sup>20</sup> The entire debate may be read at

<http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/debates%20authoring/debateswebpack.nsf/fulltextsearch?readform>

*“The letter was marked ‘Urgent and Personal’. He guessed what was in it and so he did not open it until after the concert. The man collapsed and was taken to a nursing home<sup>21</sup> and is still in that nursing home. That is the effect a thing like that can have on an artist”.*

Mr. Dockrell had another matter for complaint.

*“The Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra was offered a contract in America by a very well known and important American agency, namely, Columbia Artists’ Management, Incorporated. ... an engagement in America to take place in the autumn of 1967”.*

Mr. Dockrell here interpolated mathematical calculations to show that the terms proposed by Columbia Artists’ Management would have more than covered the expenses of the tour.

*“It would have meant an enormous amount of free advertising for Ireland, for our music ...”*

At this point Mr. Brennan evidently felt it incumbent upon him to show he was awake and listening. Two words would do.

*“Irish music?”* he queried.

More than this was needed to stop Mr. Dockrell in full flight.

*“Some of the music played by our orchestra would be Irish. However, this would be appealing to a wider audience than an audience wanting just Irish music. There would be Irish music and the great classical compositions that are the birthright of all musicians in every country in the world. ... That would have been a very great thing for Ireland”.*

Alas, Mr. Dockrell concluded, the last telegram from Columbia Artists was not even answered. Nor, that morning, were Mr. Dockrell’s objections – the debate veered off into other no less contentious matters. The following morning, too, was dragging to its end before Mr. Brennan woke to the name of Tibor Paul once more, this time from Deputy James Matthew Dillon, who thundered:

*“How in the name of commonsense and humanity can anyone explain to me or to anybody else the alleged fact that the final notice of the termination of Mr. Paul’s contract was given to him on the Royal Dublin Society’s premises, three minutes before he began to conduct a concert? Why was that done? Is it true that it was done, can the Minister tell us?”*

Fairly well awake by now, Mr. Brennan blandly remarked that

*“When the Deputy hears the whole story, he will understand”.*

Had the opposition got their man cornered? Mr. Brennan was a consummate politician who knew well that, while an outright refusal will arouse howls of protest, an outright statement of willingness will take the wind out of the enemy’s sails. The “whole story”, indeed!

*“Are we going to get it?”* asked Deputy Seán Dunne incredulously.  
Mr. Brennan: *“Yes”.*

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<sup>21</sup> Eibhlin Mac Máighister Gede states that he was hospitalized with a heart attack – see Liffey Green Danube Blue, Merrion Press, Co. Kildare, 2016.



It sounded too good to be true.

*“From the Minister?”* gasped Mr. Dunne.

Mr. Brennan: *“From somebody”*.

Later in the day they had recovered sufficiently to return to work, but it was not until the following day that Mr. Brennan attempted, reluctantly – *“because it is not part of my duty”* – to justify his position. His first words were distinctly patronizing:

*“.. I appreciate as much as anybody the work Mr. Tibor Paul has done during the past six years. ... Until this happened, I found nothing but the highest regard for the man concerned, with, as any human being must experience, a share of criticism too. That is human. He has been here six years and I think we looked after him well. Looking at the records, I thought we looked after him very well”*.

On the matter of Paul’s contract and its (non-)renewal, he had this to say:

*“He was not on a continuous contract during that time. This contract had been changed time and again. He came in September, 1961 and the first contract which was due to run up to April, 1963, was replaced by one from April 1962 to March, 1964, and was followed by others from April, 1964 to March, 1966, and April, 1966 to 31st July, 1967. Then I read in the paper one day that he was dismissed with a two lines notice in a letter which was handed to him just as he was about to go on to the platform for a concert in the RDS. ... the “two-line letter of dismissal” consisted of two pages and 45 lines ... It was not a dismissal; it was notice of the termination of a contract which ends in July next in its present form. This letter offered different terms. It proposed to divorce the directorship from the conductorship which I personally agree with. ... This letter made a fairly generous offer for a continued renewal of contract on a conductorship basis for the gentleman in question for ... the two concert periods in 1967-68 and 1968-69. ... but with all the accusations that have been made and the manner in which this has been approached by this gentleman, I question whether he is now suited to be retained in any capacity. If we take a man in here, and he does a good job, and we treat him well over six years at least, we have the right to terminate his contract. ... The fact that it has been handled in the way it has been must necessarily give those in a position of responsibility second thoughts as to whether this man is suitable to be retained at all”*.

Regarding the abrupt manner in which the letter was delivered, Mr. Brennan denied that it had come to Paul as a shot out of the blue. It

*“was a sequel to discussions which had taken place already. I understand the man himself expressed the desire to have the particulars before the end of the week”*.

On the matter of the lost American tour, Mr. Brennan offered some comments with a nasty undertow to them:

*“This is described as a prestige tour. ... but I question the amount of prestige which the orchestra would have with a foreign conductor and a high percentage of the players non-nationals playing classical music in America. ... The real purpose of the Symphony Orchestra is*

*to encourage Irish artists to maintain the highest possible standard in the music world and to give encouragement to Irish composers and arrangers”.*

This raised a general point, with which Mr. Brennan concluded:

*“Some people have said that this gentleman found a musical wilderness here when he arrived in the country. That is not fair to the great conductors who preceded him and who did a magnificent job of work. When this gentleman arrived here, we already had the Light Orchestra, the String Quartet and the Radio Eireann Choir. We also had the Symphony Orchestra. It is not fair to write down the work of these conductors, some of whom have since gone to the top in the music world”.*

Perhaps some clarification is in order. The RTE Symphony Orchestra – subsequently the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland and now the RTE National Symphony Orchestra – was founded in 1948. Before Paul’s appointment in 1961, it had worked mainly with guest conductors, including such illustrious names as Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt, Jean Martinon and Sir John Barbirolli. Its only permanent conductor, from 1953 to 1956, had been the Croatian Milan Horvat. I have no information as to the proportion of Irish-born players at any time in its history, but the only Irish-born conductor in its history has been Colman Pearce, who had a short tenure (1981-1983). However, Paul’s successor as principal conductor, Albert Rosen, originally an Austrian-born Czech, had acquired Irish citizenship. As we have seen, the Irish composer Gerard Victory was appointed director of music to the RTE.

So nationalism was seemingly one issue – the separation of powers was possibly made in the knowledge that an eligible Irish musician was available for one half of Paul’s duties. Effectively, Paul was offered the chance to continue as conductor while control over what he conducted and artistic planning in general went to Victory. While Paul’s relations with Victory are not known, we do know that he expected to boss the show. He was described by John Bowman as “a disgraceful bully”<sup>22</sup>. When Paul’s younger compatriot, János Fürst, formed the Irish Chamber Orchestra, Paul did everything possible to block the new band by preventing players from his own orchestra from taking part. “I didn’t like him,” Fürst said of Paul, “but the man changed my life in more than one way. You don’t have to like somebody to admire somebody”<sup>23</sup>.

A wider reading of the entire debate – that is to say, not just the parts dedicated to Paul – reveals a more general division of opinion between the two political parties as to how far government should interfere with the running and operations of the national radio and television network. Not exactly an issue confined to Ireland or to the 1960s.

As to the things unsaid, a tribute to Albert Rosen by Charles Acton<sup>24</sup> maybe says much by implication.

*It was to all our great joy, in the chaotic days following Tibor Paul's departure, that RTE's head of music, Gerard Victory, appointed Albert as principal conductor of the RTE Symphony Orchestra (as the NSO was then known). Our orchestra (and we) needed a conductor who would train this band of fine musicians and make it into a good, coherent body which would sound with one unified disciplined,*

<sup>22</sup> John Bowman: BROADCASTING: Window and Mirror - RTÉ Television: 1961-2011, The Collins Press, quoted from review in The Irish Times 29 October 2011.

<sup>23</sup> The Irish Times 6 January 2007.

<sup>24</sup> The Irish Times 26 May 1997

*warmhearted voice, with its own collective personality, in any sort of music under any sort of visiting conductor. That was what Albert did.*

*At its beginning Jean Martinon made it a good orchestra. Tibor Paul made it an orchestra that our often philistine leaders recognised as a national asset that could not be ignored - and gave it a pride in its own self. Albert gave it and its individual members a warm hearted personality which it never lost, in spite of official neglect and seemingly nonexistent direction.*

An orchestra needs a permanent conductor. A prolonged period with guest conductors, as happened with the RTE SO before Paul, may not result in a wilderness, but will produce severe ups and downs, according to who is guest conducting and how he handles it. A period of bullying under Paul – who was dubbed “Two-bar Paul” in Australia since he stopped the orchestra every two bars in rehearsal – doubtless pulled their socks up no end. But there comes a time when enough is enough, the orchestra wants to stand on its own two feet and play. The time was ripe for a more democratic leadership such as that of Rosen, though it is doubtful whether any credit for understanding this is due to Mr. Brennan and his government colleagues. A further crisis was caused in 1966 by the creation of the Ulster Orchestra. A good many RTE players promptly moved up north. Further evidence, presumably, that they were tiring of Paul’s dictatorial methods. Paul’s response, a recruitment drive in Europe, starting with his own native Hungary<sup>25</sup>, would not have endeared him to nationalist opinion.

### **Back to Australia**

So Paul was off again. In 1968 he was invited back to Sydney by the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. In 1969 they put on an ambitious programme of opera, “Opera ’69”, across Australia. The principal conductor was Carlo Felice Cillario, but Paul conducted multiple performances of “Boris Godunov” in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney, and of “Un Ballo in Maschera” – or rather, “A Masked Ball”, evidently all performances were in English – in Canberra, Sydney and Brisbane. The remainder of his career was mainly spent in Australia, with occasional European visits. As we shall see below, he was a consistent, if not frequent, presence in Paris from 1960 to at least 1970. He became conductor of the Western Australian Symphony orchestra in 1971 and on 26 January 1973 inaugurated the new Perth Concert Hall (right), conducting the combined West and South Australian Symphony Orchestras<sup>26</sup>. The concert opened with a specially composed Choral Fanfare for large orchestra, large chorus and 9 additional trumpets by James Penberthy (1917-1999)<sup>27</sup>. Paul died at his home in Wahroonga, Sydney on 11 November 1973.



Paul’s Australian years have been completely dwarfed, in this account, by his shorter period in Ireland. This has depended on the material available – maybe some Australian reader can help? But we are bound to wonder – did he not bruise Australian composers’ susceptibilities in the same way? The answer may lie in the relative sizes of the two countries. In the Irish Republic, there was at that time no other professional organization which could commission new pieces, or to which a composer might submit his work. Therefore, whether or not Potter was really snubbed by Paul – and the jury

<sup>25</sup> See Máighister Gede, *ibid*.

<sup>26</sup> Information retrieved from <http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/pdf/ephemera/pr109601970.pdf> 3 October 2017

<sup>27</sup> Information retrieved from <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/20260368?selectedversion=NBD8102397> 3 October 2017.

must remain out on this – the fact was that Paul, through his double-pronged appointment with the RTE, represented Potter’s only hope of getting a hearing. Any Australian composer who felt Paul unhelpful could realistically turn to a fair number of other conductors and organizations.

### Official recordings



Paul’s only official recordings, so far as I can trace, were made for Phillips with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra in sessions beginning on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1959. Some of these, as I noted at the beginning, floated around in bargain basements on the Fontana label in the late 1960s. A Hungarian theme is common to all the works chosen.

In **Brahms’s Hungarian Dances 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 10**, Paul assays a highly manipulative approach, with all the “gypsy” inflections we tend to hear from subway buskers. This is not so easily managed on the orchestra and we can only marvel at the total unanimity with which Paul has them turn every corner. Such an approach is inevitably a

demonstration of podium control and I do not retract my admiration, expressed elsewhere in this series, for an artist like Hans Swarowsky who keeps to the relative straight and narrow, emphasizing the purely musical value of the music. Objections to a freer approach notably diminish, however, when it is brought off so well that the mastery does not obtrude.

In **Liszt’s “Les Préludes”**, too, Paul is highly rhapsodic, milking every moment in a way that put me in mind of Silvestri. Indeed, I put Silvestri’s Philharmonia version on immediately afterwards and there were many similarities between the two, both in the interpretative method and the ability to get an orchestra to follow it. Once again, I do not gainsay the virtues of a more “classical” approach, but if you do not agree, Paul no less than Silvestri should be your man.



In the **Hungarian Rhapsodies nos. 1 and 2**, I hand it to Paul totally. There is not just verve and colour – I have never heard these pieces reveal such poetry, even mystery. The orchestral response to every wayward turn is once again amazing.

**Bartók’s Two Portraits op.10** is an early work, seldom played because not especially “important”. Paul finds a passion, colour and atmosphere that elevates the first, especially, to the level of great Bartók.

### Other recorded evidence

**Alfred Hill's String Symphony no. 13**, arranged from his String Quartet no. 9, was issued privately on LP in a series dedicated to Australian composers by the Australian Broadcasting Commission. It was coupled with the same composer's String Symphony no. 12 conducted by George Tintner. The strings of the West Australian Symphony Orchestra play in both works.

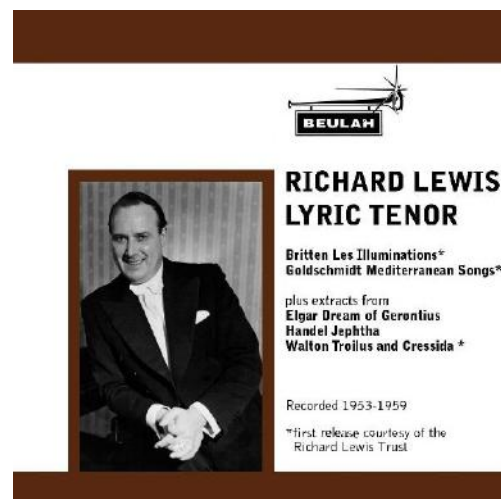


Paul proves here to be one of those conductors who could play a fringe work in such a way as to make you think he had lived with it all his life. His interpretation is very flexible, but he knows exactly how to shape and shade each movement so as to give it maximum character, while keeping the overall structure in sight. He brings to life perfectly a piece that could easily sound very bland. There are occasional hints that this was not the world's greatest orchestra, but the odd dodgy intonation counts as nothing against the singing quality and the overall mood of bittersweet nostalgia – not entirely dispersed by the teasing charm of the third movement – that Paul extracts from it.

Much the same could be said of the Irish composer **Seoirse Bodley's Divertimento for Strings**, which can be heard on YouTube in a live broadcast by the strings of the RTE Symphony Orchestra. It sounds very well apart from a tape hiss that I quickly forgot. It shows that Paul had a flexible, responsive string section in his RTE days and again, he plays the work as if he has known it for so long, and played it so often – presumably this was not so – that interpretation comes naturally to him. What he cannot do, in this case, is persuade me that it is all worthwhile, though Bodley writes very fluently and has some interesting textures at times. Irish readers will slaughter me for saying this, but I could not help thinking it sounded very English, somewhere between Berkeley and Tippett on a rainy day. It should be remembered that Bodley's work soon took a very different direction.

A wretched little two-and-a-half minute snatch of **Tchaikovsky's "Valse des Fleurs"**, played by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and included on a curious compilation called "Music for a Perfect Wedding", is quite interesting enough to make one hope it comes from a complete "Nutcracker", or at least the suite. The rather slow tempo with which the waltz – shorn of its introduction – starts has a slightly ominous, mysterious tread. What follows, very well phrased, maintains an air of gentle nostalgia rather than festive high spirits. Not quite the thing for a perfect wedding, but promising Tchaikovsky.

A more significant memorial to Paul's work in Australia is a 1957 performance of **Britten's "Les Illuminations"**, in which the tenor soloist was **Richard Lewis**. The performance was given in Melbourne, with Paul conducting the Victoria Symphony Orchestra<sup>28</sup>. The recording is clear but with some distortion on Lewis's heavier notes. Those who find Peter Pears's timbre too strangled to compensate for his artistry will surely welcome Lewis's fuller tone, though he, too, has a looser vibrato than one might wish. Paul conducts with a good deal of point. Since the tempi seem perfectly gauged to Lewis's voice, and in the absence of any other recorded



<sup>28</sup> Issued on CD by Beulah (1PD37). At the time of writing (29.10.2017), it is available only on iTunes.



performance by Lewis, there is no reason to suppose that Paul had anything to do with the fact that this, at 25' 09", could be the slowest performance on record. The Pears/Britten takes 22' 16"; Pears with Colin Davis live at the Concertgebouw in 1966 has a virtually identical timing. This may be a natural consequence of Lewis's fuller timbre, though we can hear, as early as the violin solo that concludes "Fanfare", that Paul was inclined to tweak the music towards Mahlerian post-romanticism. Despite Britten's later insistence that the cycle should be sung by a tenor – it was originally sung by the Swiss soprano Sophie Wyss – my own favourite is Suzanne Danco. Backed by Ernest Ansermet's magical, and unromantic, ear for texture, this 1953 Suisse Romande performance is a wonderful celebration of light and, incidentally, possibly the fastest ever, at 20' 22". Again, the tempi may be a consequence of a light vocal timbre and an easy technical fluency. There is no sense of hurry, any more than there is any sense of heaviness in the Lewis/Paul version.

Well worth seeking out is a performance of **Gottfried von Einem's Symphonisches Szenen op.22** which Paul gave in Paris with the National Orchestra of the ORTF on 11 April 1968<sup>29</sup>. By reputation, von Einem was a purveyor of dry post-Stravinsky neo-classicism, but you have to wait till well into the third of the three movements before you find anything like that. Much of the rest harks back to Bruckner, with occasional invasions of more abrasive harmonies. The meeting point between the two extremes seems to be Korngold, or even Eric Coates I thought, as one of the melodies continually promised to launch into the Knightsbridge March. It's rather engaging, more so in the hands of Paul than in the commercial recording released on Signum by the Frankfurt Philharmonic Orchestra under Nikos Athinaios. The Frankfurt performance is scrupulously prepared, but takes two-an-a-half minutes longer and tension is lost at various points. Paul, once again, shows his ability to interpret a rare piece as if it is everyday repertoire. He finds an easy dialogue between the various elements of the score and never loses sight of the overall shape. In particular, abetted by a fruity old-school French horn player, he makes a gorgeous moment out of the coda to the second movement, an episode that sounds bland indeed under Athinaios. Paul also fires things up more at the climaxes.

### Hidden treasures

All the recordings discussed so far can be found with a little effort. They are sufficient as pointers to an artist worth investigation. Wholesale investigation might prove disappointing, of course. However, subterranean rumbles suggest that a few collectors in the know are hoarding some remarkable broadcast performances by their unsung hero. One such collector-in-the-know has enabled me to hear, but not to keep, a few of his treasures.

In a concert given in Paris in 1970 by the Orchestre Philharmonique de l'ORTF, Paul conducted **Mozart's 33<sup>rd</sup> Symphony** and **Beethoven's 3<sup>rd</sup>** – the "Eroica". In between, **Miklós Perényi** played the **Schumann Cello Concerto**.

After a slightly uncertain start, the Mozart suggests that Paul's alleged habit of rehearsing the music two bars at a time was not unproductive. Indeed, Paul anticipates HIP ideas in his way of treating the music as a series of tiny thematic cells, each beautifully shaped in its own right. Overall line becomes a secondary interest, but in fact Paul, while allowing a certain amount of flexibility, does not lose sight of the structure. The second movement is beautifully caressed – maybe too much for some. Yet, when we hear a pianist applying this sort of flexibility to a slow movement from a Mozart sonata, we think nothing of it. It is harder to get a whole orchestra to do this and not every conductor tries. The minuet and trio have a pompous lilt that makes one smile and the effervescent finale really takes off. If Paul bullied the players at rehearsals, he seems to have become a different man on the night. Paul

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<sup>29</sup> Available for download, at a modest price, from [www.ina.fr](http://www.ina.fr).

also anticipates more modern practice in having the wind very much to the fore. There is more colour here than early Mozart is often given credit for.

Not far back in this series of articles, I praised a performance of this symphony under Jonel Perlea, so how do I feel now? Perlea works from the opposite premise, I would say. That is, he starts from the overall line, then phrases from within it. There is a steady grandeur that has its own validity, especially when Perlea does not allow it to get heavy. He is notably slower than Paul in the finale. This took some adjusting to, but there is a graciousness to Perlea's finale that is attractive on its own terms. All the same, my first point of comparison next time a performance of this symphony comes up will be Paul.

The same fine qualities can be heard, writ large, in the "Eroica". Paul's detailed rehearsing means that every moment is positively shaped and thought out. Frankly, Paul had me reflecting that many performances, by comparison, hardly seem conducted at all. This results in a certain flexibility in the outer movements, and a few wilful touches such as the schmaltzy upbeat to the trio of the third movement. Nevertheless, Paul has the overall shape well in sight and builds things up marvellously, helped, once again, by luminous textures – no trace of Teutonic heaviness here.

If Paul could be flexible in his tempi, in the great funeral march of the second movement he holds things more shatteringly steady than almost anyone I have heard. There can be few performances in which, at the return of the funeral march theme after the heroic central section, the conductor does not find himself going considerably faster than he was at the beginning and has to claw back. Furtwängler and others, indeed, made a virtue of the heaving ritardando on the descending scale by the cellos and basses that brings back the strings' E flat threnody. Performances that manage to hold steady here – because they have not gained tempo in the middle of the movement – are usually performances that were faster than usual from the beginning. Two conductors who brought this swifter approach off without sounding superficial were Boult and Krips. Paul, though, is fairly slow, yet succeeds in holding his tempo without any sense of doggedness. Enormous passion wells out of the music. It sets the seal on an "Eroica" that stands with the best.

Oddly enough, it is Perényi, then only 32, who gives us a lesson in how too much concentration on detail can hold up the line and compromise the overall shape. There is much intimate musing, and Paul accompanies well, but it is not a performance to convince us that this is not one of Schumann's weaker pieces.

Ten years earlier, in 1960, this time with the Orchestre National de l'ORTF, Paul conducted some slightly later music. In the first part, **Pierre Barbizet** played **Bartók's Second Piano Concerto**. He delivers the first movement with gay Parisian verve – I never imagined this music could sound like Poulenc. Unusual but rather nice. Paul enters into the free-reined whistling spirit of the pianist's conception. He then gets some marvellously hushed, yet intense pianissimo string playing in the second movement. This time, the central section sounds its usual barbaric self. So, on the whole, does the finale but here, if we are not to be given a new slant on the piece, we need the kick that someone like Kocsis so readily found. Barbizet sounds a bit lightweight. Paul gets colourful and exuberant playing.

It is **Brahms's First Symphony** that is the chief interest, nevertheless. It is an enthralling performance and pretty unlike anything to be heard since the 1930s in its rhapsodic, generous-spirited agogic freedom. Here as in Mozart and Beethoven, we realize that Paul has meticulously shaped each individual phrase. But, with a large-scale romantic symphony, he is much more inclined to allow the



single episodes to settle into the tempo that allows maximum expression for each moment. The overall structure is treated dramatically, as in a Wagner opera, rather than classically-symphonically with a constant tempo as a backdrop. After a broad, but warmly fulsome as opposed to starkly pounding, introduction, the first movement Allegro is driven urgently, the tempo then slackening gradually over the course of the second subject till it almost reaches a standstill. Yet Paul's control of the surging and ebbing tensions is so absolute that I was carried along with him. The second movement begins very slowly indeed, with every note weighted and pondered. Inevitably, the music moves on in the central section far more than with most conductors but again, Paul makes his manipulations remarkably seamless. The closing pages are dwelt on lushly. The third movement is rather faster than we often hear, with the trio driven fiercely onward. Towards the end, Paul slackens the pace – long before Brahms actually asks for this. "Authentic" or not, it is a memorable touch. And so to the finale, with the inevitable speedings and slackenings. I would draw attention only to the central climax, where the "bell" motive, originally heard from the horn, is hammered out, first syncopated then in a gigantic crash followed by calm. No one except Hermann Scherchen has actually managed to play this absolutely in tempo – Leinsdorf came close. Otherwise, even supposedly strict-time conductors like Boult have to yield something here. But Paul's pacing, first drawing back, then driving through the syncopated chords, then holding back again, is very subtly managed.

A performance like this, so antithetic to post-war ideas about how Brahms should be played and yet so warmly and convincingly Brahmsian, compels us to reconsider our notions of how Brahms is to be interpreted. We do know that he walked out of a performance under Hans Richter because it was too rigid in tempo. We do not know, obviously, just how straitlaced it really was, nor can we know just how flexible Brahms's favoured Steinbach actually was. Probably, it is the gramophone that has killed this sort of performance – it is hardly desirable, after all, to hear such spontaneous inflexions frozen by repetition till they cease to sound spontaneous. But then, Paul was giving a once-off, he was not giving a performance to be preserved for all time. I can only conclude that, if you keep a straight performance for reference, from time to time you should give yourself a treat and be reminded by someone like Paul that there can be another side to Brahms.

More Brahms came in 1969, when Paul conducted the **Tragic Overture** and the **Fourth Symphony** with the Orchestra Philharmonique de l'ORTF. These were studio performances – no audience present but played straight through without subsequent correction of the various fluffs. The method is similar, with the Tragic played for drama rather than symphonic logic. This piece, which can sometimes seem over-long and lugubrious, responds very well to Paul's alternating fire, warmth and expectant tension.

Paul manages to be wholehearted and richly sumptuous in the outer movements of the symphony without overdoing it – on the whole this is a less controversial performance than that of no. 1. The *Atempausen* in the third movement that are what most people remember about Klemperer's recording are here too – and make more sense than they do in Klemperer's otherwise straight rendering. Paul practically gives us a dialogue between two tempi. It works remarkably well. Interestingly, in the slow movement Paul chooses a slow tempo and holds it absolutely steady – as he did in the "Eroica". Detail is lovingly moulded and the orchestral colours – including the vibrato still typical of Parisian wind-playing – are richly savoured.

Since I compared Paul's Liszt with Silvestri, it was rather revealing to listen to Silvestri in Brahms's Fourth (NHK SO 1964). It becomes clear that they are similar only where egotistic posing is part of the music's fibre. In Brahms, Paul manages to sound natural, whereas Silvestri interposes himself

wilfully at every stage. With poor orchestra playing to boot, Silvestri's must surely be one of the worst performances of a Brahms symphony ever given.

Another concert with the Orchestre Philharmonique de l'ORTF, this time from 1966, adds to our perceptions of Paul. The evening opened with **Mozart's Symphony no. 35 – "Haffner"**. The Haffner is, of course, wider-ranging in content than Symphony no. 33 which I discussed above. On the other hand, it is the slightest of the "last six" and tends to get played that way. Paul, by giving maximum character and due weight to every single moment, even at the expense of a certain fluctuation in the tempi, shows that there is much more in it than we often hear. The shifting tempi may disturb some. Personally, I found that Paul took me with him. The same can be said of the finale, which has enormous fizz, but also finds time for moments of relaxed grace. The second movement began too fast and chirpy for my taste. Perhaps Paul thought so too, for the central section is graver and the original music returns a little slower – to better effect. Such miscalculations can obviously occur to people who do not conduct like robots. The minuet is rather slow and phrased with an exaggerated grace that I found somewhat arch. But for the outer movements, and especially the first, the performance is valuable. This is a style of Mozart interpretation we can usually hear only through the crackle of 1930s sound.

This was followed by **Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto** in which the soloist was **Jean-Paul Sevilla**. **Sevilla** (b.1934) is a French pianist of Spanish descent whose career has been mainly spent in Canada. His few recordings have concentrated on the French repertoire and I can believe he would be effective in this for his sound is warm, luminous and never hard. In Beethoven, even the most serene Beethoven, more drama would be welcome. For the student of Paul, the most interesting thing to note is that, faced with a soloist who plays it straight, he makes no attempt to impose his own freer ways. Indeed, he thinks himself into Sevilla's interpretation very well. It is interesting, at least once, to hear the middle movement played, not as the usual confrontation between Orpheus (the piano) and the wild beasts (the orchestra), but as an integrated line.

The concert concluded with **Richard Strauss's "Also sprach Zarathustra"**. Strauss seems to have been another composer who brought out the best in Paul. He is fairly lush – Kempe was tighter – but textures are clear and the music never loses a sense of direction. There is some rich, warm phrasing in the slower movements, the dance episodes are schmaltzy without overdoing it and there is terrific fire in the climaxes. Quite a conductor.

Moving ahead to mainstream 20<sup>th</sup> century moderns, in 1971 Paul conducted a **Stravinsky** programme in Paris with the Orchestre Colonne: **The Fairy's Kiss (suite)**, the **Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments** and the **Firebird Suite**. The soloist in the concerto was **Georges Pludermacher**. Any fears that Paul might romanticize this music are quickly allayed. The Fairy's Kiss is given with the right cool elegance, the melodic lines expressive but moulded within a constant rhythmic background. The element of ritual, a threatening presence at the back of even Stravinsky's lighter works, is subtly present. Over and above this, I find the performance engaged my emotions more than this music usually does, and I am still puzzling over why this should be.

One drawback is the orchestra itself. The Orchestre Colonne slipped from the radar of international, or even local, recording companies after the 1950s and were not in good form. The many exposed wind solos, those for the horn in particular, remind us that this piece is harder to play than it sounds. On the credit side, though, at a time when the internationally prominent French orchestras were fast losing their characteristic French sound, the Colonne players still offered piquant wind vibrato. Authentic or not, this lends an agreeable sepia colour to the Concerto. And indeed, it may well be

authentic, since Stravinsky wrote the work in Paris in 1923-4 and first performed it there. Pludermacher brings an attractive jazzy verve, rather than brittle neo-classicism, to the outer movements. He sculpts the melodies finely in the middle movement and again, without any trace of undue romanticism, the performance engaged my emotions more than usual.

So it is with the Firebird. There is a sense of ritual menace at the opening and later, while there is colour and fire, there is also a sense of latent, suppressed passion. I can only say that Paul seems to have known better than most where Stravinsky's heartbeat lay. As noted above, *The Fairy's Kiss* was one of the works played during Stravinsky's visit to Dublin in 1963, at Paul's invitation. That part of the concert was actually conducted by Robert Craft, but doubtless Stravinsky sat in on the rehearsals and Paul would hardly have missed the occasion.

A final trio of undated Parisian performances – I think from the late 1960s or early 1970s – helps flesh out the picture. With the Orchestre Colonne, there is **Mozart's 41<sup>st</sup> Symphony – "Jupiter"** and the suite from **Bartók's The Miraculous Mandarin**.

The opening of the Mozart will raise some eyebrows – the gentle answering phrase (bars 3-4) goes at a quite different tempo from the smartly rapped-out opening challenge (bars 1-2). Even though I was getting used to Paul's ways, this brought me up short. Nothing else in the movement is so extreme, but it is clear, once again, that Paul shapes each phrase to the maximum effect – and he does so exquisitely – while allowing it the tempo that seems natural to it. The structure is then built up by drama and contrast, not by simple continuity. Since Mozart's own structure is sound, Paul's approach works. I am not suggesting that strict-tempo performances are wrong, or even that they are not preferable, but, to those ready to be open-minded, Paul demonstrates that there can be other ways of playing Mozart.

With the second movement, there should be no quarrel. The tempo is broad but steady, the phrases beautifully drawn. This is as nearly sublime as anything can be when played by such a fallible orchestra. The minuet, too, is slow, but without the pomposity I found in that of the "Haffner". It is beautifully poised and, yes, sublime. The finale builds up without exaggerated tempo fluctuations. A "Jupiter" to open one's eyes.

Returning to that first movement, an opening like that was, I thought, something you were more likely to hear pre-war. But from who? Not from Richard Strauss, who played it in tempo. Nor from Bruno Walter, whose slight relaxation would have upset no one. Post-war, I was intrigued to find Fricsay beginning on these lines, if to a lesser extent. Less surprisingly, Stokowski (American Symphony Orchestra, 1971) draws out the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> bars to suggest self-parody. Rather more significantly, Harnoncourt treated the first movement in a manner similar to Paul. So was Paul harking back to an earlier manner or anticipating a later one?

The "Miraculous Mandarin" is very sharply characterized and has some terrific moments, not least the final dance which draws a sort of collective gasp from the audience. Paradoxically, it was here, rather than in Mozart, where I found Paul's insistence on detail – and on the sheer nastiness and luridness of the quieter sections – resulted in some loss of momentum. Maybe because this is, after all, a ballet score not a tight symphonic construction like the "Jupiter".

Lastly, **Richard Strauss's "Tod und Verklärung"**, with the ORTF Philharmonique, provides further demonstration that Paul was a master Straussian. As with "Zarathustra", he spreads himself compared with Kempe, but he never loses his way, textures are clean and the music's progress is

charted unerringly from the groping beginning through the massive climaxes to the radiant, but not sentimental, conclusion.

It is clear that Paul, while never holding a post with a French orchestra, carved out a certain niche for himself in Paris. Other broadcast performances, which I have not heard but which probably exist in the ORTF archives, include Mahler's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony (1959), Richard Strauss's "Ein Heldenleben" (1962), Britten's "War Requiem" (1963, with Harper, Sénéchal and Cottret) and Dvořák's 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony (1964). Concertos of potential interest include the Brahms Violin Concerto (1962, with Poulet) and the Schumann Piano Concerto (1964, with Fleisher).

A few Paul performances are also conserved by Dutch Radio. These include Bach's Suite no. 1 (1963), further performances of Mozart's Symphony no. 33 (1963), Schubert's 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony (1963), Brahms's 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony (1961), Wagner's "Das Liebesmahl der Apostel" (1961), Weiner's "Carnival" (1963) and Egk's "The Temptations of St. Antony" (1963, with Helen Watts)<sup>30</sup>. The emergence of the Richard Lewis performance of Britten's "Les Illuminations" from Melbourne suggests that the ABC might hold some interesting material.

### Final thoughts

Eibhlin Mac Máighister Gede, widow of Lászlo Gede, a Hungarian flautist who made his home in Ireland just after Paul had left, tells us that Paul was

*... your stereotypical sensitive, passionate artist, given to outbursts and furies and a perfectionist. Yet he had touches of genius and brilliance too ... With his movie star looks, tallness and sleek black hair, he had women swooning in the front rows ...<sup>31</sup>.*

In 1963, Cyril Kelly was a student at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. Fifty years later, he recalled the indelible impression Paul created when he brought the RTE SO to record a choral version of "Finlandia" with the College choir.

*Tibor Paul ... was tall, of aristocratic bearing and autocratic demeanour. A native of Hungary, his explosive temperament and his swift, sabre like movements, suggested a lineage back to the legendary Hussars of his homeland.*

Such a man could hardly travel around Ireland in a common or garden Morris, Austin or Ford.

*Prominently parked in the college car park, his flamboyant Studebaker... and, boys-o-boys, was it spellbinding. Our reflections in the gleaming hubcaps showed gaunt, gaping fatheads.*

Rehearsals, Kelly recalled, "were hazardous, like sweating dynamite", but when the performance came,

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<sup>30</sup> Information from this site:

<http://in.beeldengeluid.nl/collectie/search/?q=&publiclyViewableResultsOnly=false&digitalViewableResultsOnly=false>. It would appear from the site that copies of this material can be ordered, but attempts to do so meet the brick wall of their insistence that the music of Brahms – for example – is still protected by copyright. Dutch copyright laws must be rigorous not to say unique.

<sup>31</sup> Eibhlin Mac Máighister Gede: Liffey Green Danube Blue, Merrion Press, Co. Kildare, 2016.

*Tibor Paul, a jet-black swerve of tails and dazzling breastplate, sprang onto the podium, inclining imperiously in our direction. Immediately, baton aloft like a lightning rod, he smote the silence ...<sup>32</sup>*

A tiny scrap of mute footage, taken for an RTE news report, allows us to glimpse Paul in action in 1962. Women's tastes change over the years and I daresay the Dublin colleens of today would need a very different look to get them swooning. What we do see is that Paul wielded a rather long baton with exemplary, unfussy clarity. What really counts are his eyes – watchfully and coldly penetrating to the back of the orchestra. It was surely these that got the results<sup>33</sup>.

Though we have fewer accounts of Paul's work in Australia, we do know that Stuart Challender was inspired to become a conductor after being taken by his father to hear a performance of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony conducted by Paul<sup>34</sup>.

Nevertheless, as Máighister Gede points out, there was a downside.

*Tibor's manner – arrogant and temperamental – often did not endear him to his colleagues. He was territorial about his players too and hindered them engaging in freelance work ... It was not uncommon for him to berate and rebuke them in front of their colleagues, much to their chagrin. His high-handedness resulted in many musicians, including his compatriots, leaving the orchestra, disgruntled and disenchanting<sup>35</sup>.*

Janos Furst described him as

*"... a conductor of the old school who modelled himself on people like Reiner and Szell, an authoritarian to the extreme," and a man "who could not take a single tiny word of criticism ever passed on him. He disciplined the orchestra without a question. He built programmes, he opened up doors".<sup>36</sup>*

Even A.J. Potter conceded that

*when he could eventually be persuaded, threatened or otherwise got to the stage of demeaning himself so much as to conduct an Irish work, he really did hammer out a good job on it ... But it was such a job to make him<sup>37</sup>.*

A dissenting note comes from Dr. Zuk in his thesis on Potter. Commenting on a reel-to-reel tape of Paul's premiere of Potter's Concerto for Orchestra, he notes that

*Paul's tempi are excessively cautious ... one wonders what [Potter] privately thought on relistening to this thoroughly lacklustre account of his score, with its ragged ensemble and persistently poor intonation: the strings are particularly culpable in the latter respect, their*

<sup>32</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.rtaireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/RTAISummerIssue18.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Visible at the RTE site: <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2017/0929/908418-radio-eireann-proms/>

<sup>34</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.revolvy.com/main/index.php?s=Stuart%20Challender>

<sup>35</sup> Eibhlin Mac Máighister Gede, *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Irish Times 13.2.1998

<sup>37</sup> AJP to Marie Whitty, 1 June 1972, quoted in Zuk, *ibid.*

*tuning being so approximate as to obscure completely the distinctness of the harmonic progressions in many passages, particularly in complex divisi textures*<sup>38</sup>.

I have not heard this tape, but Zuk's criticisms seem too precise to be dismissed. Since all the recordings discussed above point in a different direction, I can only remark that, in early 1967, the RTE SO was gutted by defections to Ulster, so maybe had a large number of pickup players. Also, Paul was in his last season following his much-publicised dismissal, and he had not long recovered from a heart attack. Perhaps the Potter performance was not representative of his best work in Ireland.

Exile, forced or voluntary, and its effects on an artist, has been a theme common to many of the Forgotten Artists in this series. Paul's compatriot Carl Melles reacted by practically negating his Hungarian roots to become the most Austrian of Austrian Kapellmeisters. This got him a niche in Vienna, where he appeared regularly with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, the Tonkuntsler Orchestra and the Radio Orchestra. It got him a footing on some of Europe's top podiums – the Vienna Philharmonic, the Berlin Philharmonic, Bayreuth, La Scala – though these prestige organizations did not usually call him back. He appeared with practically every major soloist then on the European circuit – evidently word got around that he was a safe pair of hands who would rock nobody's boat.

All the recorded evidence I have heard points to Paul being a far more interesting and individual artist than Melles. Nevertheless, his career was practically limited to areas – Australia and Ireland – that were off the international radar. The only exception, as we saw above, seems to have been Paris. No Vienna Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, Bayreuth or La Scala for Paul – not even once. Despite the excellent recordings he made with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra in 1959, he conducted this orchestra in concert only once – on 4 February 1967, when he led them in Tchaikovsky's Caprice Italien, Nutcracker Suite and Fifth Symphony<sup>39</sup>. His appearances in Holland, mentioned above, were limited to two years. Even RAI which, in the days when it had four orchestras, would usually find space for anyone reasonably competent, gave him the one concert and never called him again. Interestingly, the soloists in his Paris concerts tended to be local names or, like Perenyi, at the beginning of their careers. The suspicion is that, in many cases, he terminally ill-treated the orchestra or its management.

Mention of Reiner and Szell may lead us to wonder whether Paul might not have done better in the USA. I would suggest not. Apart from their despotic tendencies, Reiner and Szell were essentially "modern" – that is to say "strict time" – interpreters. They were well matched to the American post-Toscanini concept of what a conductor should be and do. It is both surprising and unfortunate that discussion and criticism of Paul has ignored the real reason for seeking out his work. For all the ballyhoo he created in Ireland, what remains today, if you can find it, is a manner of interpretation that harks back to a pre-gramophone past. Paul is only superficially similar to sheer manipulators such as Mengelberg and later Silvestri. He is able to convince the listener – or at least this one, and I am by nature inclined to admire the purist approach – that his is a warm and natural



<sup>38</sup> Zuk, *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> It was most unusual for the VSO to give a programme only once. Two days earlier, they had given a programme under Swarowsky but unfortunately, the VSO's usually very detailed searchable database does not tell us what works were given. Nor, for that matter, do they tell us what was played on 10 February 1967 when Milo von Wawak conducted. One wonders if both gentlemen were replacing an indisposed Swarowsky.

response to the music. Not many could do this. I hope to examine, as this series of articles evolves, some other artists of similar inclinations. One such might be Bruno Maderna. In certain moods, and on certain occasions, and in certain composers, Peter Maag could be spontaneously free. Just possibly, Francesco Mander may belong to this discussion.

It is unfortunate, of course, that the most significant Paul performances I have discussed remain irrevocably locked in collectors' closely guarded *caveaux*. Presumably INA, which has published the von Einem piece, could make available all of Paul's Paris broadcasts, at a minimal price, if they thought there would be any interest in them. Let us hope this article will stimulate such an interest.

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