

## BORIS KOUTZEN

1901 - 1966

The sudden death of Boris Koutzen on December 10, 1966, removed a vigorous participant from the American musical scene—and an esteemed colleague from the ranks of Vassar College. Mr. Koutzen was a member of the Vassar faculty from 1944 until his retirement in June 1966. As those who knew him well might have predicted, his was not a typical retirement, for he continued to maintain his usual heavy schedule of composing, conducting and teaching. His death came just a few hours after he had conducted a dress rehearsal with the Chappaqua Orchestra which he had founded in 1958.

Born in Uman, Russia, in 1901, Boris Koutzen appeared at age eleven as violin soloist with the orchestra at Chersson. At seventeen he won a nationwide contest for the post of first violinist of the Moscow State Opera House Orchestra. He also became a member of the Moscow Symphony Orchestra directed by Serge Koussevitsky. After studies in violin with Leo Zetlin and in composition with Reinhold Glière he was graduated from the Moscow Conservatory and went to Berlin where he made his professional debut in 1922.

He never returned to Russia but in 1924 came to the United States with, to quote him "just enough money in my pockets to join the Musicians' Union." He not only joined the union but almost immediately embarked upon the multifaceted career of violinist, composer, conductor, and teacher which was to be his life. He became a member of the Philadelphia Orchestra which was then at its zenith under Leopold Stokowski. And he joined the staff of the Philadelphia Conservatory of Music where he was head of the violin department, director of the ensemble program, and conductor of the orchestra. He remained with the conservatory for thirty-seven years and with the Philadelphia Orchestra until 1938 when he became a charter member of the elite N.B.C. orchestra which was being assembled for Arturo Toscanini. He married Inez Merck, a pianist, who like himself was descended from a long line of musicians. Their children, George and Nadia, cellist and violinist respectively, continue the musical family tradition. During his initial season with the Philadelphia Orchestra Boris Koutzen conducted that group in a performance of his first symphonic composition. Frequent concert tours of the United States increased his stature as a violinist; and a BORIS KOUTZEN (continued)

steady stream of compositions in almost every medium won him wide acclaim as a composer. His symphonic works, for example, were performed by virtually every major American orchestra - the Philadelphia, Boston, N.B.C., Chicago, Cleveland, San Francisco and New York to name but a few - and by many foreign groups. His Second String Quartet won the award of the Society for Publication of American Music

and his symphonic poem "Valley Forge" won the Juilliard Foundation award.

Vassar began to benefit from this extraordinarily rich and varied background when, in 1944, Boris Koutzen joined the faculty to teach violin. His total dedication to the highest ideals of his art, his warmth and wit, his inspiring teaching, and his understanding won him the immediate and enduring respect and affection of his students and colleagues. He immeasurably enriched the Vassar musical climate by his many appearances as solo violinist, in chamber music with his colleagues and others, and in performances of his own compositions. Within a few years after his arrival his violin students had so grown in number and in skill that he was able to organize the Vassar Orchestra which greatly extended the training and experience available to students. No one who came to hear their first concert in 1948 was prepared for the high level of their achievement. And with each successive year the group seemed to surpass its earlier goals. Generations of Vassar students will never forget his Wednesday afternoon orchestra rehearsals, where, through a combination of chicanery, cajoling, and sometimes, sheer terror he made the members play better than they were able, and opened for them the door to a great and lasting musical experience. Upon the occasion of his retirement, his colleagues and guest artists presented in his honor a concert of his own compositions and cited his "distinguished service to music at Vassar." Under Mr. Koutzen's last will and testament the Music Library is to receive as a legacy, his complete manuscripts and sketches which will be of great use to future students and scholars and will serve as a testament to one who loved Vassar and was beloved.

Respectfully submitted,

Betty Churgin

John Deschere

Donald M. Pearson

Homer Pearson

Earl Groves, Chairman

XVII 120-121