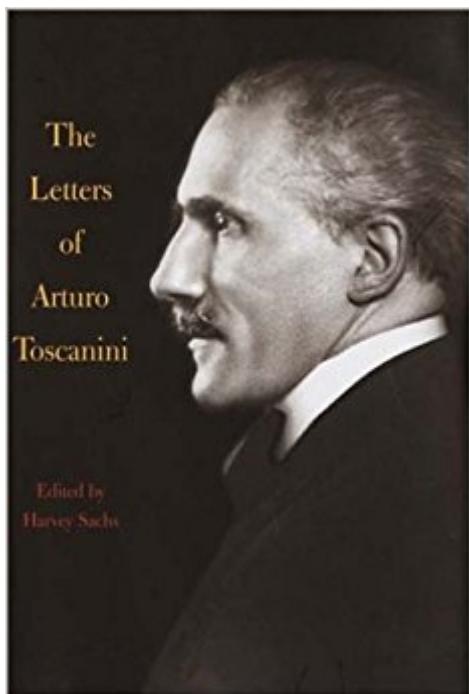


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The Letters Of Arturo Toscanini



Synopsis

A major event in the literature of music—*the first significant collection of the letters of Arturo Toscanini*. Toscanini (1867–1957) was one of the most celebrated and influential symphonic and operatic conductors in history. With his amazing ear and photographic memory, his sense of moral imperative and iron will, he raised the standards of orchestras and opera companies to previously undreamed-of heights. He conducted the world premieres of Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* and Puccini's *La bohème*, *The Girl of the Golden West*, and *Turandot*. His sixty-eight-year conducting career began before Verdi had completed *Otello* and lasted into the era of televised concerts and stereophonic sound. He headed such ensembles as *La Scala*, the *Metropolitan Opera*, the *New York Philharmonic*, and the *NBC Symphony Orchestra*. Yet he never wrote a memoir, or even essays for publication, or granted interviews. Now we are brought closer to him than we have ever been—in seven hundred letters, well over ninety percent of them previously unpublished in any language. The letters are vivid and impassioned. They reveal a complicated man, often angry and unhappy, who was also capable of great generosity of spirit, self-irony, and humor. They show the depth of his musical knowledge and insight, and shed much light on the musical life of his time in Europe, in New York, and throughout the world. There is fascinating correspondence with his wife and children, and with colleagues and friends, and he writes, as well, about his affairs and erotic adventures. He expresses particular vehemence when talking about his active opposition to fascism and Nazism. Of Mussolini, for instance, he says: “Open all the prisons—you won’t find a delinquent or a criminal who is more of a delinquent, more of a criminal, than that ignoble animal!”*The Letters of Arturo Toscanini* is a revelation of both the maestro and the man. With 7 photographs.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

When Sachs wrote the standard biography of the great conductor (Toscanini) 20 years ago, he said that Toscanini's letters were "relatively few and often uninformative." Years later Sachs unearthed hundreds of communications from Toscanini held by members of his family, private collectors and official archives. This collection, meticulously edited and spanning Toscanini's entire working life from a letter of apology for an infraction at music school in Parma when he was 18 years old to the last feeble scratchings of a very old man in 1954 helps fill out a picture of this formidable personality in his very own words. That is particularly valuable as Toscanini (1867-1957) left no memoir, shunned interviews and was notoriously private for so public a figure. While everything that became familiar about him is here on extravagant display (e.g., his perfectionism, his ill temper), the impression that emerges above all from these pages is one of enormous vitality. A player in political events of the day, his stern anti-Fascist stance put him at odds with many fellow musicians and ultimately exiled him from Bayreuth, Salzburg and eventually his beloved Italy, ruled by what he called "the great Delinquent" (Mussolini). He was also sexually voracious, and some of the most remarkable letters here are his passionate ones to Ada Mainardi, wife of a celebrated cellist, whom he pursued avidly through his early 70s, when she was half his age (and she was only one of countless liaisons). It goes without saying that as an observer of the musical scene between 1890 and 1950, the man who actually conducted the premiere of *La Bohème* has remarkable riches to offer. This will be catnip to music lovers. (Apr.) Forecast: Toscanini has never lost his hold on the public imagination. Wide review attention, as well as the sensational nature of some of the material here, should ensure sales above what such a volume might normally inspire. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

The author of a biography of Toscanini (1867-1957), Sachs has now compiled and translated this valuable collection of the complete letters of the great maestro. The letters are arranged in seven chronological sections, beginning with a schoolboy's apology to his headmaster to a near-deathbed thank-you note. Sachs provides helpful commentary that places the letters in their proper context. Toscanini was well known for his impeccable musicianship, photographic memory, passionate interpretations, choleric temper, and principled positions on the political and social issues of his day,

and his remarkable personality shines forth from virtually every page. What may surprise readers is the frequency and intensity with which he discusses sexual matters, almost always in letters to his mistresses. Readers may be amused by how often Toscanini swerves in midparagraph from the flowery prose of a passionate lover to a scathing diatribe about a mediocre composer or poorly prepared singer. Carefully researched and edited, this collection will greatly advance the cause of Toscanini scholarship and entertain lay readers interested in knowing more about the man and his times. Recommended for all collections. Larry Lipkis, Moravian Coll., Bethlehem, PACopyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Arrived in perfect shape. Thank you

A cache of love letters is included in this book of letters for purposes of attracting readers who are drawn to the current (personal) mode of biographies. Sachs was right in stating that Toscanini would be against their publication. They contain matters of prurient and highly personal interest. The other 20% of the book contains fascinating data relating to musical and political matters. There is a discussion by Toscanini of a work I never knew he adored, the Bach Mass in b minor. I wish he had conducted and recorded it. These matters alone make the book worthy. The sexual matters disfigure it. Shame on Harvey Sachs. I know that this is how things are done today, in the guise of people's sexual behavior being germane, however it is not.

I loved this book. Toscanini's writing style is so direct and passionate. His love of music and his worship of its icons permeates the book and his ever-present desire to do them justice (even at the expense of dealing with musicians not meeting his exacting standards) make this a fun read. As a musician I can relate to the exhaustion of rehearsals and the exaltation he felt after a great concert and in the midst of musicians in which he had respect. The hundreds of letters to his mistress are amazing, written in the most ardent and intimate manner. (One feels that one knows her, too, from osmosis). They are speckled also with his reflections on aging and their age disparity, of his concertizing, of his passionless marriage, of his disappointment/disgust with emerging regimes of his time. I found even the most mundane details of his everyday life are somehow also interesting. The commentary from the author is nicely formatted so that it is easy to skip over details which have no familiarity to the lay reader.

What will floor a Toscanini fan here is the revelation that the old man's emotional life was much

more intense than anybody realized. The majority of the book is taken up with love-letters to one woman, although this affair only went on for 10 years or less; the outpouring of adoration, obsession, and eventual anger is stunning. There are certain performances of his about which we've customarily said, hmm, this one is relatively expressive--it turns out Toscanini confesses to his true love that while he conducted Tchaikovsky's 6th tonight, he was thinking only of her, and wept at such-and-such a passage, and even kissed the locket with her picture during the performance...so much for "literal" music-making! Although some letters are not always interesting (in the sense that his culture was not all that broad--this is not a book from which you'll learn a lot about arts & letters, performance practice, or even about music in general), and some letters will definitely make some people squeamish, they present a quite different picture of the conductor as primarily passionate, rather than primarily angry. You come away from the book, as you do from his best performances, amazed at his honesty and phenomenal intensity.

This is an obsessively edited great book about, and by, an obsessively great man and great conductor. Of greatest interest to those also obsessed by Arturo Toscanini, but of great interest to anyone who wants to enter the mind of the greatest conductor of the 20th century. That's a lot of "greats", but they're well-deserved. Toscanini writes with passion, grace, lyricism, eroticism, and political insight. Mr. Sachs, the brilliant Toscanini biographer, has edited this book in a way that makes it an autobiography. Buy it!

Sachs' editorial comments provide fascinating insights into the world of opera and Toscanini's role in it. Beyond the minutiae of the Maestro's life and passions, however, this book provides an intriguing perspective of world events during the first half of the 20th century.

I was prepared for true revelations which didn't come through in the letters, found precious little I didn't already know.

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