

THE TMCO AT 75—AN ANNUAL RITUAL OF RENEWAL

by Michael Nock

Written in 2015 in honor of the 75th anniversary of the Tanglewood Music Center

Since Serge Koussevitzky founded the Tanglewood Music Center in 1940, two orchestras have mirrored one another from opposite sides of the Tanglewood grounds. Two orchestras: one, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, born in 1881, the other born freshly every summer. For eight weeks each, they play concerts in the same open air, under many of the same batons, and with the same dedication. Their constituents eat together in the cafeteria, swim together in the lake, and even occasionally drink together in local bars. They inhabit the campus together, the younger players immersed in the sounds of the elder, the elder infusing the younger with their depth of knowledge and musicianship. This exchange requires deliberate, calculated instruction, but one also imagines a sort of involuntary osmosis. Whatever the alchemy, the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, an assembled patchwork of young musicians from across the country and beyond, quickly forms itself into a cohesive whole, whose energy and insight belies its recent incarnation and temporary nature.

The quick coalescence of the TMCO has been an annual event: Theodore Bloomfield, a horn student in the early days, noted “how Koussevitzky, within only three weeks, wedded an orchestra largely unfamiliar to him into a homogenous instrument of his will and galvanized it into performances of electrifying intensity.” In 1942, Robert Lawrence of the *Herald Tribune* was astounded by the results that Koussevitzky “achieved with a student orchestra exactly five weeks old.” Jay Rosenfeld, then music critic for the *Berkshire Eagle*, found the orchestra exhibited “not merely precision, but an understanding expressed by taste and finesse, [in] a performance of zestful vigor and tender, graceful molding.” Andrew Pincus, who writes for the same paper today, reported in 1986 that under Leonard Bernstein “each section blended with the others until the ensemble sounded like a great organ.” So complete and quick is the TMCO’s transformation that James Oestreich of the *New York Times* wasn’t sure exactly which orchestra he was listening to on a 2008 recording of Dvorák’s Symphony No. 8: “[It was] maybe the best version of the work I had heard. The finale was delivered cleanly at a blistering pace; the ending was hotter than hot. Nice work indeed from the Boston Symphony. Except that it wasn’t the Boston Symphony. When I looked again, I saw that it was the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra.” That was the first TMCO concert of that summer.



Serge Koussevitzky on the podium with the TMCO, ca. 1948

Aaron Copland recalled Koussevitzky's dream of founding "a summer school under the aegis of a symphony orchestra...to find a way for...experienced musicians to pass on a lifetime of experience to the young aspirant." In a 1940 advertisement for the inaugural session, Koussevitzky knew this would be a great enticement: "The rehearsals and concerts of the Boston Symphony will provide a rare opportunity for close observation of the work of a great orchestra, [to] draw from us the essence of the knowledge we have gained in our years of work." Koussevitzky's original vision for instruction by members of the BSO has endured for seventy-five years. At no other festival or summer music program in the world does a major symphony orchestra take up permanent residence and assume such an active role in the instruction of emerging musicians.

In the early years, a single mimeographed sheet of paper indicated the weekly schedule for the TMCO: Mondays were occupied with sectional rehearsals led by members of the BSO, and rehearsals of the full orchestra each morning for the next three days culminated in a Friday-evening concert. Theodore Giddings, a Lenox native who spent some time observing the orchestra in 1942, noted how BSO faculty members "were of a tremendous help to the orchestra...tipping it off [as to] what to expect from Koussevitzky."¹ Still today, the first full rehearsal for each orchestral program is preceded by sectional work and master classes with members of the BSO. And still today, the commonality of conductors—both the BSO Music Director and the internationally

¹ In 1942, with the start of U.S. involvement in World War II, the BSO did not give concerts at Tanglewood due to gasoline rationing. Koussevitzky personally funded the activities of the TMC so that it could continue, and that summer the TMCO gave a memorable U.S. concert premiere performance of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7, *Leningrad*. The TMC did close for the remainder of the war, reopening in 1946.

renowned guest conductors of the BSO who cross the lawn to conduct the TMCO—creates a synergy between the two ensembles. As former BSO concertmaster and TMC faculty chairman Joseph Silverstein noted, the TMCO is “being measured by the standard that’s being set on the other side of the lawn by the BSO.” To frame it differently: the two orchestras are in orbit around the conductors with whom they are both working, but more importantly they are also in orbit *together*, in a tandem movement that allows an easy transference of energy and knowledge within a collegial space. That energy goes both ways: BSO principal trumpet Thomas Rolfs (TMC 1978) said that working with TMC Fellows “helps keep me practicing, because I hear how great these young players are, and it is really an inspiration to me.”

Koussevitzky always stressed that Tanglewood was *not* a conservatory: “The Music Center is designed to place special emphasis upon those aspects of musical education concerned with collective performance. It will thus supplement rather than duplicate the training in the established schools, where...attention is centered primarily upon developing the technical equipment of the individual.” Or, as Rolfs puts it: “It’s about the musical community, about playing in groups and in ensembles.... It’s not about practicing for four hours and then having a lesson and then practicing more. It’s about playing. It’s real-world experience.”² BSO principal bassist Edwin Barker (TMC 1975): “I had been to other festivals, but Tanglewood showed me what it’s like to play in a professional orchestra, because the student orchestra there *is* a professional-level orchestra.” And the critical mass of talent in the TMCO creates a kind of chain reaction. BSO associate principal horn Richard Sebring (TMC 1979): “My colleagues in the horn section and in the entire orchestra were so good...it raised my *own* level.” For Sebring the learning process began at the audition: he recalled when Gunther Schuller and BSO trumpet player Roger Voisin insisted he not read from the music when playing the Mozart Third Horn Concerto: “I learned the value of getting off the page and just playing the music. That was a defining moment for me.”

That the TMCO has the skill to meet the demands of maestros accustomed to the BSO and other world-class orchestras demonstrates that members of the TMCO are emerging artists poised to enter the profession. BSO assistant timpanist Daniel Bauch (TMC 2001/2002) affirms this: “When I give a master class or do a coaching, I am not really coaching students.... These guys are a few years away from being my

² Real-world, professional experience can sometimes come unexpectedly at Tangle-wood. In 2012, I received a call from BSO personnel manager Lynn Larsen. Andris Nelsons—who would soon be named the BSO’s next music director— was rehearsing the BSO in Ravel’s *La Valse*, but minus a trumpet player. Lynn knew the TMCO was rehearsing in Ozawa Hall: could he borrow a Fellow? I snuck onto the stage, grabbed the player sitting third trumpet, and zipped him across campus in a golf cart. Five minutes later he was playing among his older colleagues, where he remained until the missing BSO trumpet materialized. That Fellow, Stuart Stephenson, went on to become principal trumpet with the Atlanta Symphony.

colleagues.” Forty-three TMC alumni are currently on the BSO roster, several of whom won their job within a few years of having been a TMC Fellow. The fact that so many members of the BSO have shared the experience of the Fellows they coach only strengthens the bond between mentors and students.



Aaron Copland with Tanglewood students and faculty, including Koussevitzky and Lukas Foss, at opening exercises.

The musical fellowship of the TMCO is amplified by personal camaraderie. A sign that used to hang over the Theatre-Concert Hall—the elegantly rustic Eliel Saarinen building in which the TMCO played until Ozawa Hall opened in 1994—read “The Orchestra that Plays Together, Stays Together.” The dual connotation of “play” is no accident. Group recreation of TMC Fellows is integral to the Tanglewood experience. Post-concert parties at Miss Hall’s School (where most of the Fellows are housed during the summer), hikes up Monument Mountain, beers at Five Chairs, and similar amusements have through the years provided much needed respite and release from the demanding routine. The Stockbridge Bowl, the lake just down the hill from campus, has long been a place of communion for members of the Tanglewood community (for the students, during both daytime and nighttime hours). Harvey Wolfe (longtime cellist with the Cleveland Orchestra), recalled his time as an eighteen-year-old student in 1952, “lying on the dock in the Stockbridge Bowl, chatting with Bernstein and his pregnant wife.” It’s

not uncommon today for Fellows to wear their swimsuits under their clothes, dash down after a TMCO rehearsal for a swim, and return in time for the afternoon session.

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The conducting program has naturally been inextricably linked with the orchestral program. Student conductors gain practical experience by leading the TMCO, sharing the podium with more experienced conductors who guide them in their efforts and lead the more substantial repertoire. Bernstein was one of five conducting students in 1940, along with Lukas Foss (another future dean of American musical life). The first twenty years saw such other notable conducting students as Claude Frank (ultimately better known as a pianist), Eleazar de Carvalho, Seymour Lipkin, and in 1951 Lorin Maazel, who at twenty-one years old was given the honor of conducting the *Symphony of Psalms* as the final piece on the first Koussevitzky Memorial Concert. 1958 was a banner year, with the class featuring Claudio Abbado, Zubin Mehta, David Zinman, and Gustav Meier. Also, from 1940 until 1963, in addition to the handful of student conductors who were given the chance to lead the TMCO—the “active” conductors—there were anywhere from fifteen to *fifty* auditors of the conducting program, rounding out the student body for weekly classes in score analysis, conducting technique, and solfège. In some cases the eventual fame of the auditors surpassed that of the active conductors, as with Christoph von Dohnányi who was an auditor in 1952 and Herbert Blomstedt who was in 1953. Auditors in the early days also sang in the festival’s chorus and even enhanced the orchestra’s numbers; composer John Harbison, a conducting auditor in 1959, also played viola in the TMCO.

Through the end of the 1960s, conductors who led the TMCO and mentored the conducting students were essentially members of the immediate BSO family: Copland as chairman of the faculty; BSO assistant conductors like concertmasters Richard Burgin, and, later, Silverstein; those that made the leap from student to faculty in just a few years, such as Bernstein, Carvalho, Howard Shanet, Walter Hendl, Foss, and Lipkin; and, of course, the BSO music director. After Koussevitzky’s death, Charles Munch led the TMCO once each summer during his twelve-year tenure as music director, but took a less active role in educational and administrative aspects of the TMC. His successor, Erich Leinsdorf, charged by the BSO board with reinvigorating the program, assumed leadership of the BSO in 1962 and the TMC in 1963, and took quite the opposite approach.

According to Silverstein, “Leinsdorf was a constant presence for eight weeks, sitting in on orchestra rehearsals whenever possible. In Tanglewood he was able to indulge his fantasies about the music world and music education. The energy that Leinsdorf

contributed stayed with the TMC for a long time.” In seven years Leinsdorf succeeded in elevating the standards of the TMCO, enacting more stringent admissions procedures and also hosting various symposia and musicological seminars, expecting a higher level of “informed” performance from his musicians. He streamlined the conducting program, doing away with the auditor class and accepting only a core of active Conducting Fellows. He also reduced the podium time of conducting students, giving the orchestra more educationally valuable time under more experienced hands, and less time feeling like a laboratory for instruction (Eugene Ormandy notably led the TMCO in 1963).³



Erich Leinsdorf conducting the TMCO in the Theatre Concert Hall, ca. 1966

With a higher caliber of students, Leinsdorf pushed the orchestra to tackle more challenging repertoire, especially dramatic works that involved the TMC vocal students (the opera department that had been in place since 1940 having recently been shut down). One of his most notable concerts was a 1969 concert performance of Berg’s *Wozzeck* with both the TMCO and TMC vocal students; other summers featured performances of Ravel’s *L’Enfant et les sortilèges*, Act I of Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung*, Stravinsky’s complete *Pulcinella*, and Schoenberg’s *Glückliche Hand*. Leinsdorf also established, under the leadership of new faculty member Gunther Schuller, a dedicated Festival of Contemporary Music, expanding and focusing new music activities at

³ Of his first experience teaching in the conducting program, Leinsdorf wrote: “When I began my first season...in 1963, I found in my conducting seminar twenty-eight candidates admitted by the previous regime’s screening process.... I asked, without scores for reference, in how many symphonic movements Brahms had used trombones. What followed resembled an auction rather than a seminar. Bids flew from all sides.”

Tanglewood. He also *mandated* the TMCO's participation in FCM so that every instrumentalist was guaranteed exposure to challenging contemporary music, a focus for which the TMC has since been known. The most famous conducting student of Leinsdorf's era, Michael Tilson Thomas, thrived in this newly invigorated area of new music. After his summer as a Fellow in 1968 he continued to lead the TMCO for several years as a BSO assistant, and later associate, conductor; he returned last summer to lead the TMCO in the final concert of FCM.



Conducting student Michael Tilson Thomas, ca. 1969

It was Leinsdorf, too, who in 1964 permanently established the practice of the TMCO combining with the BSO in side-by-side seating to close out Tanglewood On Parade (TOP), the annual gala concert that benefited the TMC, a yearly tradition since 1946. (The two ensembles had played side by side before, actually, in 1940 and 1941 at the Allied War Benefit concerts, precursors to TOP.) There is no more explicit manifestation of the spirit of Tanglewood than the sight and sound of TMC Fellows sharing stands with their counterparts in the BSO.

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After Leinsdorf, leadership of the TMC passed to what has been referred to as the “troika.” Seiji Ozawa and Schuller were both named TMC Artistic Directors—Ozawa more of the Festival as a whole and Schuller of the school—and Bernstein was named Advisor. In 1973 Ozawa became music director of the BSO. (William Steinberg, music

director between Leinsdorf and Ozawa, took no interest in the TMC.) One story of Ozawa's first arrival at Tanglewood as a student in 1960 has an apocryphal ring to it: he landed at Logan Airport not speaking any English and holding a sign that said "Lenox, MA." He had been discovered after an encounter with a Finnish-American diplomat by the name of Piltti Heiskanen, who happened to be a friend of Olga Koussevitzky's. He wrote to her: "I discussed [Ozawa] for over an hour with Lorin Maazel.... He said that Mr. Ozawa is particularly talented and...that he knows of no better place anywhere to learn conducting than at Tanglewood." Munch, too, was keen to bring him to Tanglewood, afterwards considering him a protégé.



Then BSO Music Director Seiji Ozawa leads the TMCO in 1984.

Ozawa led the TMCO forty-one times from 1971 to 2004, more than any other conductor. In the late 1990s, toward the end of this tenure, Ozawa would solidify his legacy, restructuring the TMC in order to rededicate the members of the BSO to their roles as teachers. But for his first ten years or so, he had eschewed a strong role as a teacher or as steward of the TMC, leaving this to Schuller, who had become the sole TMC artistic director in 1973, and then Leon Fleisher, who succeeded Schuller. Ozawa once remarked that he "did not know enough yet" to teach, and one does not frequently find his name on the schedule of conducting classes in the 1970s. Still, he was naturally interested in providing opportunities for young conductors at Tanglewood, and documentary footage from 1977 finds him at the break of a TMCO rehearsal, surrounded by conducting students at the podium, going through his markings in the score.

Ozawa's presence as a teacher increased in the 1980s. By this time the auditor program for conductors had been reincarnated as a "seminar" and the classes had moved up the hill, to the parlor at the Koussevitzky mansion, Seranak. Two pianos served as the "orchestra," and the instruction of the classes was divided among Ozawa, Bernstein, guest conductors, and Gustav Meier, who headed the conducting program from 1980 to 1997. (A BBC documentary from 1984 provides a snapshot of work during the period, not only in the Seranak classes, but in TMCO rehearsals as well: Ozawa works with a student on the specificity of gesture required to keep an orchestra from slowing down, on simplifying his technique, and on breaking bad habits; Kurt Masur coaches a student leading the TMCO to achieve line, phrasing, and expressivity, all while bellowing out the themes and barking accents, sometimes right in the young conductor's face.) A seminar-style practicum with reading ensemble has endured through the years, first under Robert Spano—who began his work with the TMCO as BSO assistant conductor and became head of conducting activities in the late 1990s—and now under current conducting program coordinator Stefan Asbury (TMC 1990), who runs a two-week program for roughly six conductors each summer.



Seiji Ozawa and Leonard Bernstein teaching in a conducting class, ca. 1981

Throughout the Ozawa era one begins to find a greater diversity of names—and names of great stature—among those that conducted the TMCO. There were still mainstays such as Bernstein and Ozawa, Schuller and Fleisher, and faculty members like

Silverstein and Meier, but from the late 1970s through the 1990s, in the age of the jet-set conductor, there was a greater incidence of BSO guest conductors taking a turn with the TMCO: Colin Davis, Neville Marriner, Masur, Roger Norrington, André Previn, Simon Rattle, Mstislav Rostropovich, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, and Klaus Tennstedt have all conducted the orchestra, in most cases more than once. The internationally renowned soloists appearing with the BSO, too, began to cross over to perform with the TMCO, including Emanuel Ax, Barbara Bonney, Alfred Brendel, Yo-Yo Ma, Midori, Itzhak Perlman, Peter Serkin, and André Watts. In the 21st century, under Ellen Highstein's leadership as director of the TMC, conductors such as Herbert Blomstedt, James Conlon, Christoph von Dohnányi, the late Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, and Bernard Haitink have been frequent collaborators with the TMCO. And the 2015 performance of Mahler's monumental Eighth Symphony with new music director Andris Nelsons suitably marked both the TMC's 75th anniversary and the beginning of a new era.



BSO Music Director Andris Nelsons leads the TMCO in a 2015 performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 8 to mark the TMC's 75th anniversary.

One of the most important figures in TMCO history, however, was not a conductor at all. Harry Shapiro, a retired BSO horn player hired by Koussevitzky, became the TMCO Manager in 1977. For twenty-five summers the orchestra would greet him daily with a unison "Good Morning, Harry." He served as mentor and friend to the TMCO, offering words of encouragement and support at every turn. BSO member Rob Sheena (TMC 1983) recalls: "I was assigned to play English horn.... I had never played it before and I

didn't own an instrument.... Harry came up to me and said 'you're going to get a job.' Ten years later I won the English horn job in the BSO." Richard Sebring attributes the standard of professionalism in the TMCO in part to Shapiro: "He was very demanding, yet nurturing, in a tough-love kind of way." He recalls a two-hour lesson, after which "[Harry] wouldn't take a nickel...the only thing he wanted...was to mentor someone." Shapiro passed away in 2014 at the age of 100.

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Of all TMC alumni, none looms as large as Bernstein. Passing on the spirit of his mentor at the 1951 Opening Exercises—the first since Koussevitzky's passing—he imparted the founder's ideals of "devotion...consistency of approach...being true to one's self...the joy of participating in one's success, and the wonder of humility before beauty and the absolute." Bernstein's work with the TMCO overflowed with positivity and enthusiasm. Andrew Pincus recorded the way in which he approached rehearsal: "The students are always 'great,' 'terrific,' or 'beautiful' as they play. He only wants them to be more great, terrific, or beautiful when he asks for a correction or an adjustment." He never lost the spirit of his student days, appearing at post-concert parties at the dormitory, reveling until dawn with the orchestra members, cigarette and adult beverage in hand. In 1990, to celebrate the TMC 50th anniversary, an end-of-season tour of Europe was planned with Bernstein. The tour books were printed, but the tour never occurred: he passed away that fall.

Bernstein's final performance with the TMCO was a legendary rendering of Copland's Symphony No. 3 that lives on in Tanglewood lore. But that is only one of myriad TMCO performances that linger on in the collective memory. Most anyone who has been at Tanglewood regularly, even for a short while—alumni, patrons, musicians, and staff alike—will have a few stamped into his or her musical recollection, and I am no exception in the mere sixteen years during which I have been fortunate enough to work at the TMC. Just as exciting, however, has always been the first TMCO rehearsal: the moment when the orchestra plays its first notes together, already beginning to coalesce in culmination of a year's worth of planning. Koussevitzky said that "a creative act, when truly creative, is always a mystery." Surely this element of mystery must be at play, too, in whatever it is that makes each TMCO, in its short lifespan, singular among the orchestras of the world.

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Leonard Bernstein works with the TMCO ca. 1958