

Interview With Victor Kolar

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"Praise is just as important as rebuke," was the sentiment expressed by Victor Kolar, former conductor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, in a recent interview. Mr. Kolar, although still a resident of Detroit, spends one day a week in Indianapolis teaching violin and conducting the Arthur Jordan Symphony Orchestra.

I was fortunate enough to be able to talk with him a few minutes before the orchestra rehearsal at the Jordan Conservatory Monday night. Ordinarily a person would feel timid in approaching such a famous conductor, but kindness and friendliness dominate his character.

While some conductors are rather domineering, impatient, and bitterly sarcastic in their treatment of the orchestra personnel, Mr. Kolar has a delightful sense of humor and an enormous amount of patience which endears him to every one of us in the orchestra. He practices his philosophy of praise being just as important as rebuke, and in so doing, he gets whole-hearted cooperation from the orchestra.

I learned that he was born in Budapest, Hungary, of poor parents. His father was a drum major in the Austrian regiment in Transylvania and also played the oboe. Wishing him to be a musician, his parents started his musical education at the age of six when he began studying violin. He showed such remarkable talent that Kubelik became interested in him and later paid his tuition to Prague University where he studied violin under Severk and composition under Dvorsk from 1900 to 1904.

I asked Mr. Kolar his reason for

emigrating to America and he replied, "I came to America for the same reason all refugees come, because it is a land of opportunity and freedom. I am just one of the crowd." This last expression is evidence of his humility, in spite of his international reputation.

His manner of conducting is very modest, for he believes that the conductor should be as inconspicuous as possible and that the music should be of paramount interest. During rehearsals, Mr. Kolar sits on a very high stool with his music in front of him, baton in one hand, and a pencil nearby. He makes no attempt at impressing people with his importance for he is always dressed very informally in a white wool sweater.

When a section of the orchestra does not play the proper "rheethm" (rhythm), he bursts into wordless song to illustrate the correct rhythm. If someone plays a sour note or some absent-minded player forgets to come in at the right time, he laughingly asks, "And who do you expect to play that part, a ghost?" He has a very interesting accent, but he has a marvelous use of the English language and he delights in using some of our latest slang expressions.

"One of the things I am most grateful for is that God gave me a sense of humor, for it is so needed in the world today," said Mr. Kolar. He concluded the interview by saying, "My greatest happiness has been gained from teaching young people the difference between good and ugly music." Perhaps his association with young people has kept the spirit of youth so alive in him.