INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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The Colleague

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Dear Dick:

The frequently large gatherings at Ueno's impressive and modern concert hall are a mixed lot - elders and infants, students in the ubiquitous blue uniform, and sophisticates in evening dress - but they are all astonishingly attentive and appreciative of the music they hear. Unless a concert features a foreign luminary, however, few Western faces are to be seen. This season, there have been many guest artists including the Juilliard String Quartet, flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal, and the Warsaw Philharmonic; but the staple musical fare is provided by Tokyo's four major resident orchestras which are composed of almost one hundred percent native personnel. One of the exceptions has been the mainstay of the Japan Philharmonic for the past six years, concertmaster Louis Graeler, who played for many years under Toscanini. All the remaining positions in conductor Akeo Watanabe's organization are usually occupied by Japanese musicians, but this year there has been a slight departure from the norm, and the following remarks will try to reveal its human and musical import as well as the urgency with which it ought to be pursued.

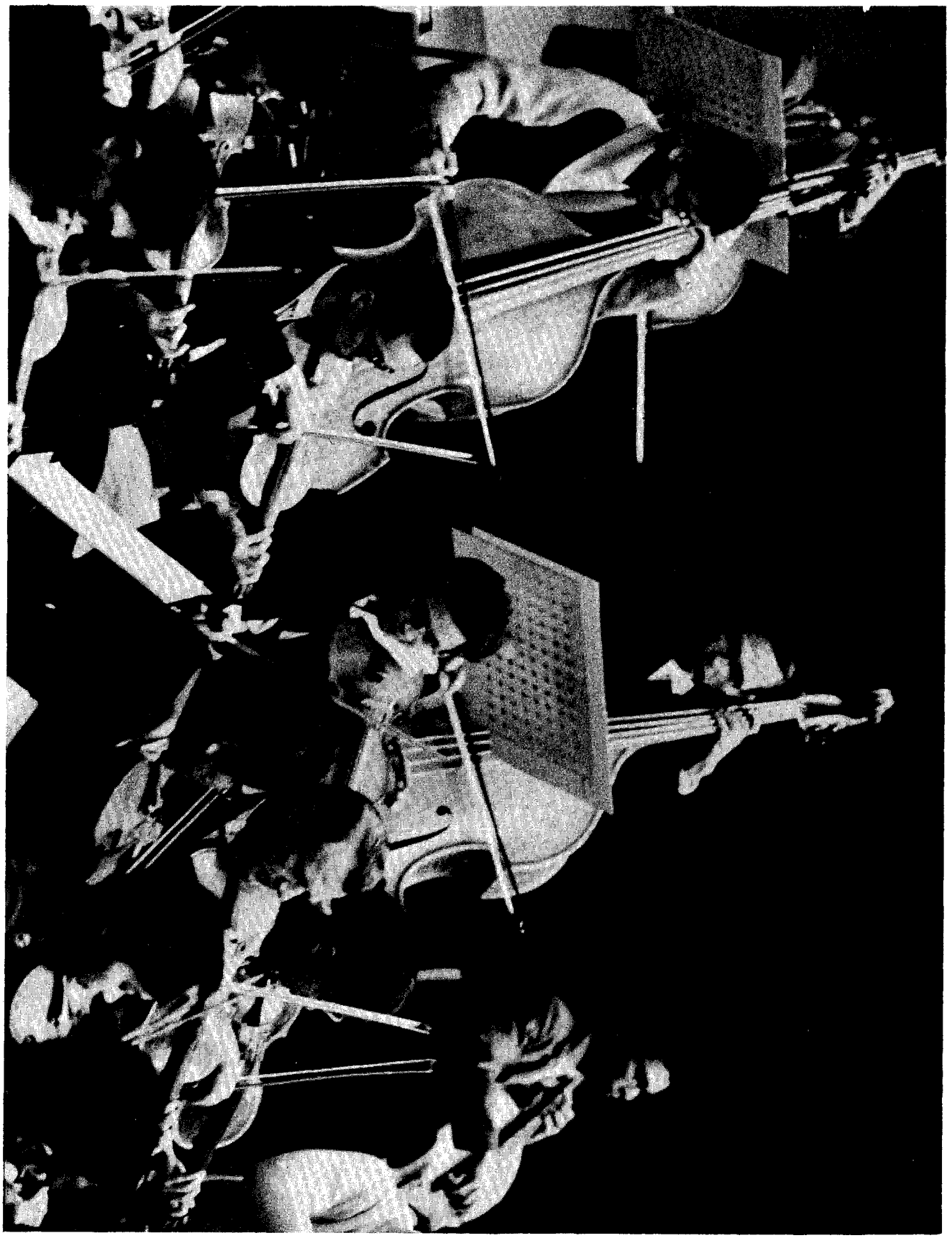
This season, two members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, cellist Richard Kapuscinski and violist Robert Karol, have been performing, rehearsing, dining, golfing, teaching, and enjoying contact with members of the Japan Philharmonic, while two members of the Japanese orchestra, Soichi Katsuda, cellist, and Konosuke Ono, violist, are concurrently in Boston for a comparable stay. Karol and Kapuscinski are family men with two and three children, respectively, but their Japanese counterparts are, at least temporarily, bachelors. Ono's wife, expecting their first child, was unable to accompany her husband, but both American families are in Japan. Reports, from both sides of the Pacific, confirm that the exchangees have been made welcome, and upon their separate arrivals here the two Americans were greeted at the airport by large delegations.

The idea for such an exchange was conceived by the Boston Symphony Orchestra's second-assistant concertmaster, George Zazofsky, about three years ago, and apparently emerged as a practical alternative to the academic sabbatical. Having obtained clearance from the players and management of the Boston Orchestra, Zazofsky approached the State Department where he received a surprisingly good reception. After the inevitable search for a proper category within which the exchange might be underwritten failed, the initiative was passed to a private foundation, the John D. Rockefeller III, which has a history of Asian investment. The program - centered on Japan by virtue of the particular interest of one State Department official - was subsequently discussed with the Rockefeller people in a "promising" atmosphere.

It was decided to limit the exchange, for the present, to the tutti string players (those other than the principal players within each section), because possible stylistic discrepancies could be absorbed more easily in the sound of the larger string sections. Of the thirty Boston Symphony men in the approved category, twenty-five were interested in going to Japan. The few who were not had compelling reasons. In Japan, as Graeler explained, everyone would have volunteered, so a deliberate selection was made by the orchestra's musical directors. There was, clearly, strong and widespread response to the plan on the part of musicians.

The foundation's decision was negative. They had already committed much of their yearly funds, and were, in addition, unwilling to support a project to which the Boston Symphony itself had not offered substantial aid. Objectively, at least, everyone's position was comprehensible: the State Department supported the idea but had no category through which to channel the principle of helping those who help themselves (a conflict between two of the possible foundation roles: initiating what is not and facilitating what is); and the Boston management probably felt that the program did not tangibly assist in their task of sustaining a great orchestra in a perilous field. In addition, they had just received a $2,000,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to which they were obliged to add $4,000,000, and this demand was absorbing their efforts.

As concrete hopes for underwriting began to fade, the prospect became less appealing to the musicians, and when the bleak realities were finally known, only three of the Americans still felt it was important enough to merit consideration. Two finally made the commitment to go, having been warned about the financial realities, but hoping, no doubt, that one of the several follow-ups would net some



Robert Karol with viola section

Richard Kapuscinski conferring with stand partner

relief. The State Department's offer, despite its professed bias for family participation, amounted, in the end, to one round trip ticket and 140 pounds air freight per musician.

For the single Japanese, the State Department's travel payment, their Japanese salary, and a ten dollar per diem supplement paid by the Philharmonic made their move financially feasible. There were, however, considerable psychological pressures. Their stake, as well as the Philharmonic's, is much higher than that of the Americans, and this fact was tellingly expressed in a recent interview I had with some of the Japanese orchestra members. As a group, they were frank in evaluating their problems and shortcomings, and direct in expressing confidence in their own potential. Several repeated slogans concerning Japan's excellence in imitation, but they plainly did not see this as a virtue, especially where music was concerned.

As bassist Makoto Ueda said, no Japanese orchestra can ever attain the highest rank until it has generated and realized its own concept of orchestral sound. Goals, however, can hardly be formulated in the absence of suitable examples. The first flutist, Soichi Minegishi, commented that the Japanese musician is caught in a dilemma by, on the one hand, his sense of urgency to learn, and, on the other, only brief and occasional contacts with foreign standards in operation. Too often, he feels, everything foreign is accepted simply because comparison is not possible. Judgment can only be exercised in the presence of alternatives. Conductor Watanabe is excellent, and enjoys the confidence and respect of his players, but his efforts alone could never result in the highest caliber of orchestral playing. A symphonic organization is a bewildering complex of psychological, musical, and social relationships, which an outsider can only roughly apprehend, but its quality rests finally on the musical capacities of its individual members.

The Japanese could not stress enough the importance of daily contact with American professionals. There, they can observe for themselves, over a wide range of situations, what the visitors do and how they sound, and can ask, as well, particular questions about technique and interpretation. Both Karol and Kapuscinski have a large number of students including colleagues, members of other orchestras, and young hopefuls from Tokyo's conservatories. As a further indication of its awareness, the Japan Philharmonic's management pays half of its members' lesson fees.

There is also - more subtle, but no less honestly admitted - the matter of the "inferiority complex" (sometimes graciously termed modesty). The American artist, having crouched so long in European style shadows, should understand very easily, and this expectation appears to be born out in the behavior of

the Boston Symphony visitors. Having the chance to confront sympathetic foreigners as individuals, and not just as skilled practitioners is an important structural experience for the Japanese musician. In this connection, it should be mentioned that concertmaster Graeler has been teaching here himself for many years, and has had an impact not only on his orchestra's musical skills but upon their attitudes, as my discussion with them revealed.

There is no question but that the two Boston Symphony members are liked as well as admired, and from this standpoint, it is fortunate that such strongly motivated men initiated the program. Though there was pressure from the violists for Karol to occupy first position in their section, he chose to remain at second stand where his Japanese counterpart usually sits. Surrounded, he is accessible. Kapuscinski is sitting in Katsuda's first chair cellist's position, and his section mates also ask frequent questions about fingering or bowing patterns. The members of the viola and cello sections have, in fact, taken to rotating seats so that each has an opportunity to play with the guest. Conductor Watanabe was pleased by Karol's attitude with regard to seating, and realizes, of course, that his orchestra will ultimately profit more from his players who visit America, and by the visitors' teaching, than from the temporary improvement in sound achieved by the addition of of first-rank American players.

The particular accident of a Japanese-American exchange could hardly have been more fortuitous. The language barrier is not serious, due perhaps to the United States occupation, and, in any case, Watanabe speaks fluent English. Culturally, things are also better than might be expected. As oboist Seizo Suzuki pointed out, French, German, and Italian musicians find communication and cooperation on musical questions difficult, because of their long and particular national histories. The American, however, grows up in the midst of a compound of national influences, and represents because of this at once the most unencumbered and catholic example. He has also, as mentioned above, a unique empathy with the emerging musical identity. It is amusing or unsettling - depending upon one's viewpoint - to contemplate the musical, linguistic, and psychological difficulties that would surely arise if exchanges between Western European and American orchestras were ever attempted (since attitudes and concepts of proper performance styles, especially among wind players, are so strongly characterized in European countries). Programs with some of the Communist countries (Russia and Poland, for example) might be, for historical and musical reasons, easier and more profitable, and the State Department is reportedly interested in this sort of expansion in the long term.

As has been suggested, the benefits which Americans can derive from exchange are far less tangible than those for the Japanese. They are, in fact, almost entirely personal. Karol

and Kapuscinski are both well aware of the potential of their situation and have taken its demands seriously. It is only fair to point out that this admirable state of affairs came about rather indirectly, and that future exchangees would have to be carefully screened and evaluated. (By whom?)

As individuals, the guests have been surprised and pleased by the degree of warmth and unity existing between the members of their host orchestra (and this quality is a striking and revealing aspect of Japanese society in general) and find the association enjoyable. Their families have suffered the inconvenience of life in communities which are not geared to their requirements, but have also had the benefits of sustained immersion in a foreign environment. The Japanese communities in which they live have also profited. Mrs. Kapuscinski has spent part of her time rewardingly, holding conversational English classes for orchestra members and neighbors, while Mrs. Karol has helped to marshal aid for physically handicapped Japanese. During the coming decades, such cross-cultural gestures could become increasingly determinative - particularly in Asia and Africa. It is ironic that new outlooks and methodologies are increasing the means for interpersonal and inter-cultural relationships even as they intensify the effects of economic imbalance and sponsor a numbing plethora of detail.

The musician in America is, of course, not without his own troubles, among which are money and personal dignity. The men in residence here are unquestionably deriving broad personal satisfaction from their position. Their skills and efforts have and will continue to produce tangible and intangible results. They have been welcomed as colleagues and respected as teachers (in the largest and best sense). String player Mutsumi Iwakuma explained, for example, that she had wanted for years to go to America for study, but had been unable to for financial reasons. Now she has the double privilege of study and cooperative activity and is obviously grateful. Few could remain indifferent to this sort of satisfaction, and it is a heartening picture, indeed, except for one factor which may force the program to cease abruptly after a first year which is a thoroughgoing success.

As noted above, Kapuscinski and Karol entered the program, which is nominally under the auspices of the State Department, without any financial guarantees other than a single round trip ticket. As it happens, nothing definite has yet come of the other attempts to raise support (except a fund of approximately $2000 made up of donations from individual trustees and interested persons), though Zazofsky's efforts continue. The Boston Orchestra has extended to each of its absent members a very considerable amount of money on loan, with which to supplement their salaries. Unfortunately, the expenses of renting and only rudimentarily furnishing a home in Tokyo

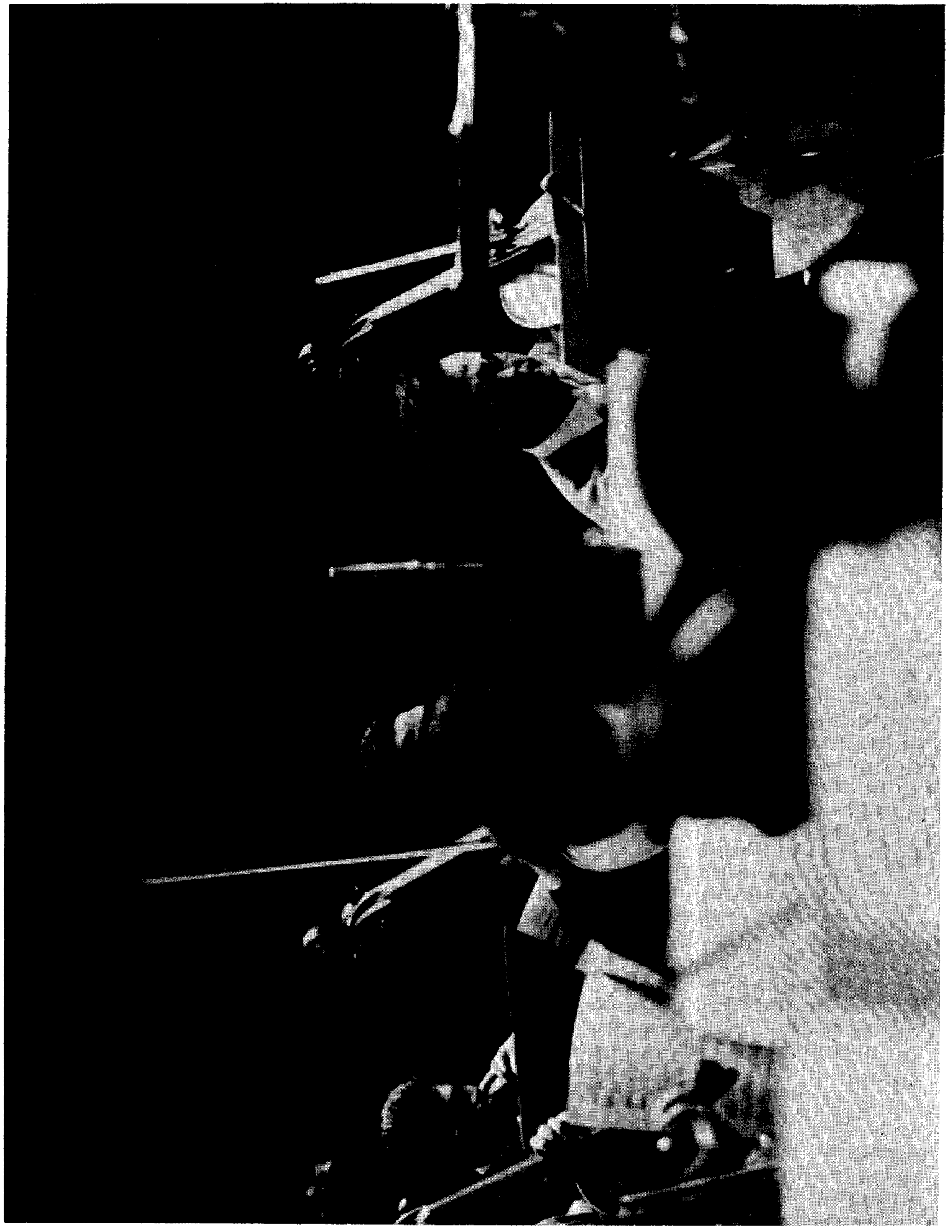
Karol demonstrates during a break

(which, incidentally, has an extremely high cost of even semi-Western living); sending children to private schools (because they are not Japanese taxpayers, their children cannot attend public schools); and trying, at least modestly, to reciprocate the many invitations and kindnesses of their colleagues who outnumber them 50 to 1, has been far greater than estimates suggested, and the available funds (including salaries and loans) will carry them only until mid-March. The prospect is for even greater personal debt, and, one would guess, a tarnish on the surface of the whole experience. Which one of their compatriots in Boston, or any other orchestra, is likely to volunteer for the exchange next season, knowing what before could only be feared?

The two Americans have been discreet about their problems, and as a result neither their true position nor the extent of their service to the exchange is known to the Japanese. They appealed to the State Department through the American Embassy here, but are at this writing without indication that help in any form is forthcoming. To some degree, musicians seem to be resigned to subsidizing their field, but how far should they go? How far should they be allowed to go? In whose interest is the exchange? What value is to be placed on it? Who is to support it so that it becomes a source of satisfaction to all instead of a personal sacrifice for a few?

These questions are important to the immediate comfort of the Karol and Kapuscinski families, and crucial to the prospects for continuing the program. It might be suggested that the responsibility lies with the Japanese government or orchestras, since they have apparent need; but the American government finds "cultural exchange" on the glamorous scale (not to mention amateur athletics) a worthwhile investment. Performing groups large and small are regularly dispatched abroad in return for foreign ballet companies, orchestras, soloists, and the like. These maneuverings are enormously expensive and of comparatively little lasting human value. They are grand advertisements. The sort of program that Mr. Zazofsky conceived and Messrs. Kapuscinski and Karol have made a reality would cost far less and provide more substantial returns. There is certainly a need for exchange at the level of the basic cultural unit, the family, particularly where cooperative activity is involved. There, at least, some of the artificialities and posturing seemingly inseparable from the high stakes of international diplomacy and business can be avoided. There may be other ways, but this one has already proven itself. One hopes it will - somehow - prosper.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the program described here is something which occurred to me while trying to assess its tangible merits. The element of personal satisfaction was evident, but one cannot dwell long on something so difficult to capture in words. More explicitly, there is an important distinction between the teacher and the practitioner. Here is an instance in which one can contrast two roles -



cellist Kapuscinski

the mentor and the colleague - as vehicles for the instillation of knowledge and self respect. For all the Japanese musicians' interest in technical skills, information, and example, the exchange's impact at the personal, human level has been profound. This is the foremost point. When so many of the world's emerging problems are certain to fall in the delicate area of knowledge transmission between the "have's" and the "have-not's," we should take careful note of such procedures, learning what would seem to be a clear lesson.

Sincerely yours,

Roger Reynolds

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