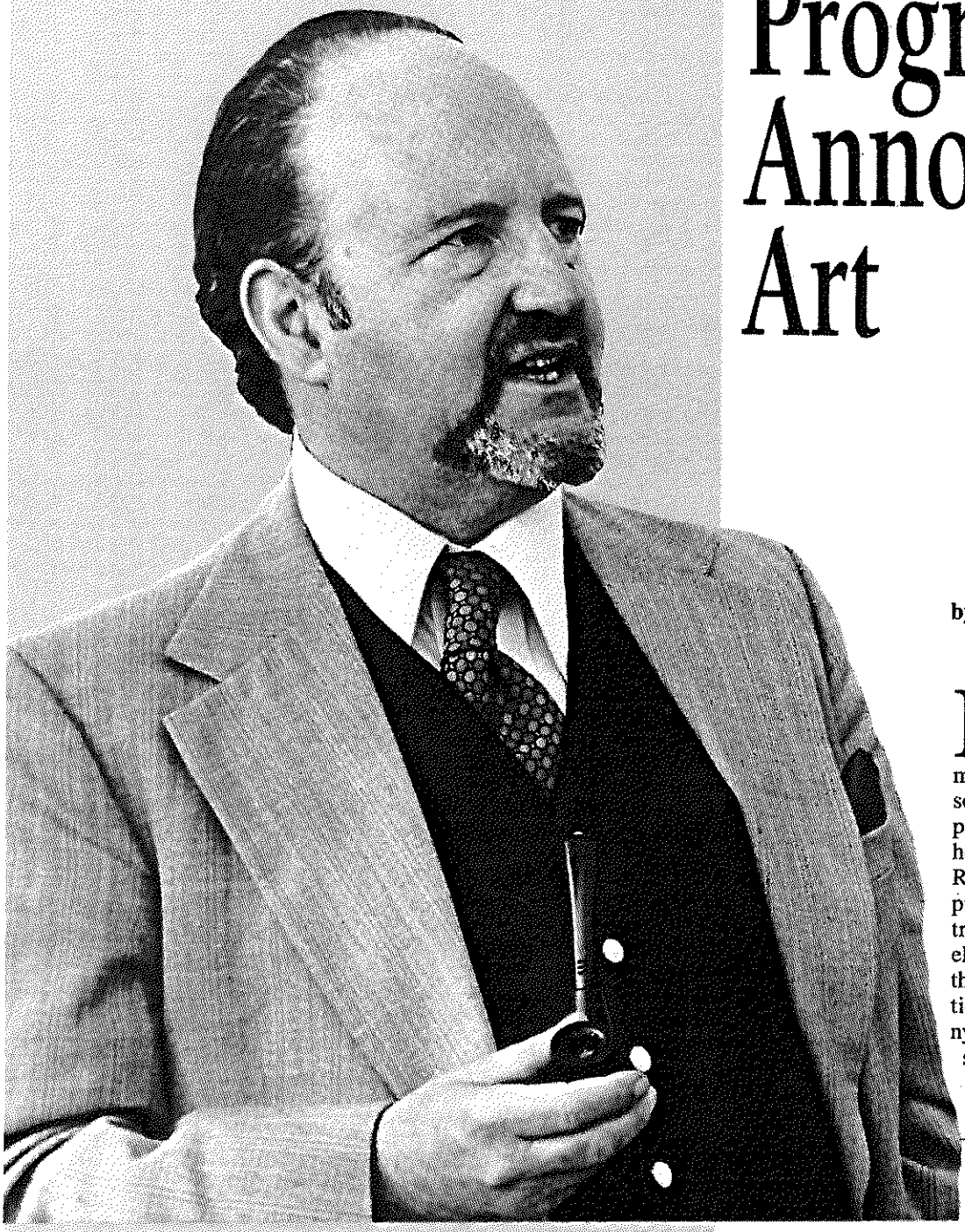
Klaus George Roy and the Program Annotator's Art



by Elizabeth P. Kirk

In the orchestral world, applause is normally reserved for performers; the kudos don't usually extend to administrative staff. Last April, however, some of the country's foremost concert program annotators got a rare chance to honor a colleague, when Klaus George Roy celebrated his 30th anniversary as program editor of The Cleveland Orchestra. The congratulatory letters were an eloquent testament to Roy's standing in the profession. Michael Steinberg, artistic adviser for the San Francisco Symphony, cited him as "the reason I became a symphony program annotator." Mary Ann Feldman, senior editor and music adviser for the Minnesota Orchestra,

A Cleveland-based business and feature writer, Elizabeth P. Kirk researched and wrote The Cleveland Orchestra's 1981 book Severence Hall: The First Fifty Years.

FROM CHICAGO, HOME OF THE WORLD'S FINEST SYMPHONY, AND HOME OF THE BLUES, EMERGES A JOYOUS FORM OF AMERICAN MUSIC, CHAMBER BLUES.

CORKY SIEGEL AND THE CONSORTIUM STRING QUARTET

"Some of the most innovative and accessible 20th Century music I have ever heard."

Kaye Lavine–
Producer of Public Television's "Great Performances"

"Resounding triumph"

Howard Reich–
Classical critic for the Chicago Tribune

Corky Siegel
Harmonica/Pianofvocals–has recorded 16 albums, including 2 for the prestigious Deutsche Grammophon label. He has performed works for such artists as Seiji Ozawa, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the New York Philharmonic, and he has performed and composed works for Arthur Fiedler and the San Francisco Symphony. His music has been choreographed by 4 different international ballet companies and for the 1988 Olympic men's figure skating competition.

The Consortium String Quartet
The quartet was chosen to perform with Aaron Copland in a special presentation of "Copland Plays Copland," and have also performed individually for the Bolshoi Ballet, American Ballet Theater, Joffery Ballet and Music of the Baroque.

Arnold Roth*–Violin–Concertmaster with the Chicago Opera Theater, the Chicago Ballet and William Ferris Chorale*
Florentina Ramniceanu*–Violin–Concertmaster of the Chicago Theater, Principle violin of the Chicago Opera Theater. Winner of numerous international competitions including the Weimar International Franz Liszt Competition in E. Germany, soloist with Symphony Orchestras world-wide*
Daniel Strba*–Viola–Freelancer, performs regularly with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra*
Felix Wurman*–Cello–Chicago Lyric Opera, winner of numerous international competitions, studied with Jaqueline Du Pré*

Corky Siegel continues to perform a repertoire of "Symphonic Blues" works world-wide as an exciting symphonic guest soloist.

The National Symphony

"Siegel is a phenomenon."
WASHINGTON POST

The New York Philharmonic

"The audience did not merely like it, the audience loved it."
THE NEW YORK TIMES

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wrote that "even as a fledgling program annotator, I savored your commentaries as a model for what I aspired to do."

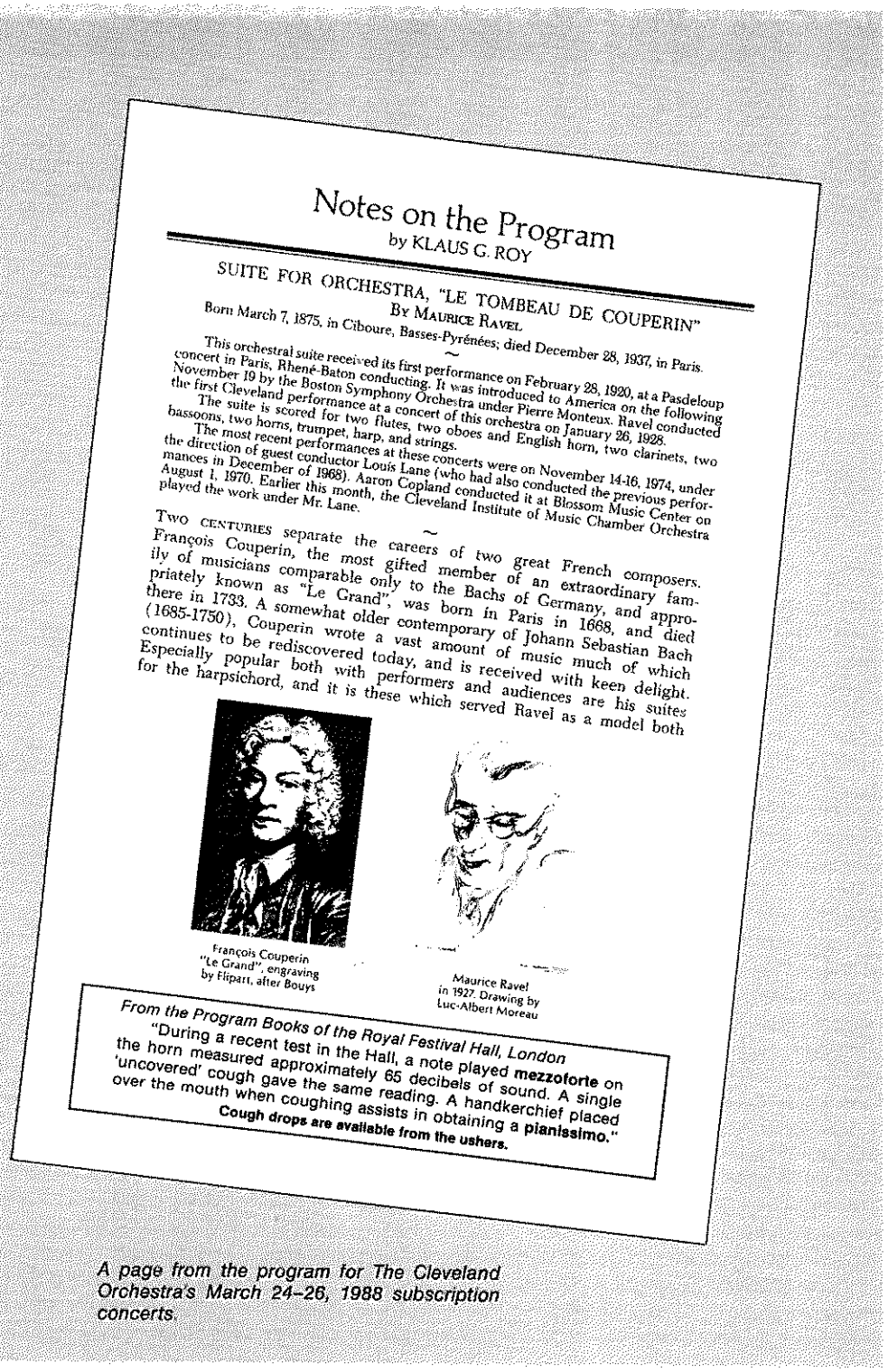
Yet program annotation has been but a single facet of Klaus George Roy's career. Listeners to Cleveland Orchestra broadcasts recognize Roy as the urbane interviewer of today's top conductors and performers. Cleveland Orchestra audiences know him as a witty, informative pre-concert lecturer. Students at the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Cleveland Institute of Art think of him as a teacher. To performers he is probably better known as a composer. And the concertgoing public can claim acquaintance through Roy's *Stagebill* and *Stereo Review* articles, his liner notes to some 200 recordings, and 400 articles of music criticism in *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Perceiving music from the diverse viewpoints of critic, musicologist, lecturer, teacher, music librarian, composer, and program annotator has given Roy's program writing unusual scope. His retirement from the Cleveland Orchestra last May has meant the loss of a unique voice in annotation.

What was his routine at The Cleveland Orchestra? Visitors navigating the labyrinthine corridors of Severance Hall's basement to reach the Program Office were rewarded with a view of subdued efficiency. The peaceful atmosphere belied the occupant's nerve-wracking schedule. Klaus George Roy was both editor and program annotator—responsibilities that are usually shared at large orchestras. With Associate Editor Timothy Parkinson, he wrote, edited, and put the program book together.

Recalling a particularly trying week in the 1987–88 season, Roy says "We were working separately on five different programs: the 17th program (Britten's *War Requiem*) and the 18th program for the following week; a Friday matinee, with totally different material, different conductor, and different soloist; a Friday evening chamber concert; and a Sunday afternoon performance by Murray Perahia in the Great Performers Series. I also had three radio interviews to do. *And* the phone kept ringing. Sometimes you wonder where your head is. Those days are pretty mad."

The madness didn't stop at 5:00 p.m., either. Roy did most of his listening and score-reading at home. On pre-concert lecture evenings, he might leave for his nearby Cleveland Heights home at 6:15, only to return to Severance Hall by 7:20.



Notes on the Program

by KLAUS G. ROY

SUITE FOR ORCHESTRA, "LE TOMBEAU DE COUPERIN"

BY MAURICE RAVEL

Born March 7, 1875, in Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées; died December 28, 1937, in Paris.

This orchestral suite received its first performance on February 28, 1920, at a Pasdeloup concert in Paris, Rhené-Baton conducting. It was introduced to America on the following November 19 by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Pierre Monteux. Ravel conducted the first Cleveland performance at a concert of this orchestra on January 26, 1928.

The suite is scored for two flutes, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, trumpet, harp, and strings.

The most recent performances at these concerts were on November 14-16, 1974, under the direction of guest conductor Louis Lane (who had also conducted the previous performances in December of 1968). Aaron Copland conducted it at Blossom Music Center on August 1, 1970. Earlier this month, the Cleveland Institute of Music Chamber Orchestra played the work under Mr. Lane.

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TWO CENTURIES separate the careers of two great French composers. François Couperin, the most gifted member of an extraordinary family of musicians comparable only to the Bachs of Germany, and appropriately known as "Le Grand", was born in Paris in 1668, and died there in 1733. A somewhat older contemporary of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), Couperin wrote a vast amount of music much of which continues to be rediscovered today, and is received with keen delight. Especially popular both with performers and audiences are his suites for the harpsichord, and it is these which served Ravel as a model both

François Couperin "Le Grand", engraving by Flipart, after Bouys

Maurice Ravel in 1927. Drawing by Luc-Albert Moreau

From the Program Books of the Royal Festival Hall, London

"During a recent test in the Hall, a note played **mezzoforte** on the horn measured approximately 65 decibels of sound. A single 'uncovered' cough gave the same reading. A handkerchief placed over the mouth when coughing assists in obtaining a **pianissimo.**"

Cough drops are available from the ushers.

A page from the program for The Cleveland Orchestra's March 24–26, 1988 subscription concerts.

"For someone who likes to goof off, this is a foolish way to go about it," he remarks. "By nature, I would love to be lazy—I just haven't had the chance!"

What motivated him to pursue this punishing schedule? Part of the answer lies in his penchant for living life on the front lines, being involved, being an activist. "When someone asks me to do something, I'll say 'yes, yes,'" he admits. Another explanation is Roy's insatiable urge to teach. In his work as an annotator, music librarian, critic, and teacher, "I'm always trying to tell people something that interests me. I want to share what I know, to say 'What do *you* think of this?' I'm a compulsive teacher."

He has always been a master at integrating his abundant interests and activities. Orchestra audiences would share a discovery that he had made teaching the week before. Students' questions would often stimulate him. New insights and explanations would crop up in class. "Students have a way of coming to the crux of a matter that we professionals often have lost," he explains. If there was a television program on science, a show at the Art Museum, or a timely magazine article, Roy would attempt to weave it into his

annotations. His Cleveland Orchestra programs are larded with pithy editorial notes.

A Viennese Love of Culture

The seeds of scholarship and teaching were sown early in Roy's life, during a childhood spent in the rich cultural milieu of pre-World War II Vienna. Love of learning and the arts came naturally. His father was a writer, poet and book publisher, his mother a painter, puppeteer, and potter. The family thrived on "arts of all kinds: musical, visual, and literary." This environment shaped his life. It also helped bridge upheaval as the family fled the Nazi threat when Roy was 15.

He arrived in the United States a year later, in 1940, with no clear career direction. "My father tried to convince me *not* to go into music," he reflects. "He said it was a hard life, and the chances of getting a good job were not the greatest. My father said 'You have a gift for languages. Why don't you study languages and literature, and teach?' I considered this advice and decided against it." He entered the College of Music at Boston University in 1941 as a piano major. "History–musicology–and writing about music became my interest."

Roy received a bachelor's degree from Boston University in musicology, and a master's degree from Harvard University. The years following graduate school brought opportunity. At the request of his teacher and mentor, Karl Geiringer, he returned to Boston University as a faculty member and music librarian. It was during this same period that he became a seasoned writer on music, logging seven years as a critic for *The Christian Science Monitor*. In 1952, Roy approached Columbia Records about a job. He didn't get one, but the following year Columbia hired him to write recording notes on a freelance basis. It was this contact that eventually brought Roy to Cleveland: he was writing notes for some Cleveland Orchestra recordings at the time the orchestra was searching for a new program annotator.

The position was both a godsend and a challenge. "I was an absolute novice in this branch of the art," he says. "I was already a professional writer, but the scary part was what you might call 'having to put on a performance every week.' Writing and editing a program is not so terribly different from being out on stage."

Music is an intensely personal medium for Roy. As a writer and educator, he knows that the best way to spark interest is by taking sides, so it's hardly surprising that he expresses definite opinions in his program notes.

When interpreting a composer's intentions, he speaks from firsthand experience. "Being a composer makes me listen differently to certain pieces, even those by Beethoven and Schumann. It gives me insight into 'Why does Schumann do this here?' I understand why he would transform a theme in this way, because it is what a composer would do."

His practice of taking sides in his annotations has not escaped comment. "George Szell once told me, 'You are doing the critic's job in this note.' Mr. Szell questioned my being so directly evaluative, because he said it was not my job. I said 'I acknowledge that you are, in principle, right; but I find writing that does not take sides–that is only factual–is most times ignored. I am *eager* to have people argue with it! Like Donald Francis Tovey, I'd rather take some risks.' Szell said, 'Well, if you feel that way about it, go ahead.' Since he read everything I wrote, he commented on it very sagely."

Each program is peppered with cogent quotes. Roy's sources range from Irving Kolodin to Carl Nielsen, Thomas Mann to George Bernard Shaw. The quotations are used in hope that they will "in a flash, give an image that you may not find in the program itself–something that stands out.

Being factual is just the first step in writing a program note. To Roy, "part of the art of program note writing is to get it out of the realm of the truly academic." The program is an educational tool in the sense that it reaches beyond music analysis and artist biography. "It is an attempt to broaden and deepen people's awareness." Music cannot and should not be separated from the world in which we live.

Roy is constantly alert for parallels between art and contemporary life. Take The Cleveland Orchestra's 1987–88 performance of excerpts from *Khovanshchina*, for example. Mussorgsky's opera describes the battle between the old Russia and the new, when Peter the Great tried to modernize his country in the 17th Century. Roy included a note saying "Surely there is a parallel to our own current history, when Mikhail Gorbachev, acting as a 20th-Century Peter the Great, is attempting to convince his nation of *'glasnost'* and *'perestroika'*–and meeting with a less than enthusiastic response from some of the 'old believers.'"

Like other creative art forms, program annotations reflect their creator. Though Roy insists that his work differs little

from that of his colleagues, the Cleveland programs bear the stamp of his inimitable style. Sometimes this is manifested in editorials. When the orchestra played Britten's *War Requiem* last March, Roy was moved to write on a subject that had had a great effect on his own life: "I commented on what Wilfred Owen, who wrote those poems, might have felt after his death in World War I—'the war to end all wars'—had he known there would be a second world war and that we would be debating how to avoid a third. It leads to a rather personal piece of editorializing on my part, but it gets people to think about what they might otherwise not think about."

Giving Music a Human Face

The format of The Cleveland Orchestra's current program book is a hybrid. It blends Roy's modifications with the layout inherited from his predecessor, George H. L. Smith, a follower of John N. Burk. When he became program editor in 1958, Roy saw little reason to change a format that worked. But his style *has* transformed it, as have the practical demands and technological advances of later years.

Nothing has changed the program so dramatically as what Roy refers to as "the onset of offset," in the early 1970s. Suddenly he could enhance discussions of music with art and photography. Illustrations for the *War Requiem* program include not only photos of Britten and the smouldering shell of Coventry Cathedral, but also two of Daniel C. Brown's paintings, "The Road to Calvary" and a "Crucifixion" depicting a wartime Passion.

Roy also initiated the use of original art on program covers. His lifelong interest in art is reflected in cover selections appropriate to Christmas and other special programs. Works by about 30 Cleveland artists have appeared on the orchestra's program covers.

Quotations are another important addition to the format. Each program is peppered with cogent quotes. Roy's sources range from Irving Kolodin to Carl Nielsen, Thomas Mann to George Bernard Shaw. The quotations are used in hope that they will "in a flash, give an image that you may not find in the program itself—something that stands out."

"In cognizance of the fallibility of man," Roy also instituted a column called "Corrections for the Last Program." "People have fun with it, because we don't bother with obvious things like a misprint; we mention something really crazy like a misspelling of Haydn's name

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So You Want To Become A Program Annotator?

If he were asked, Klaus George Roy would have several bits of advice to offer aspiring program annotators:

1.
The first thing that comes to mind is Virgil Thomson's response when someone asked him "How do I become a music critic?" He said "It's simple. Study music and learn to write." That's it in a nutshell, because it also applies to program annotating.

2.
You could expand on Thomson's response not only by saying "learn to write," but also "learn to communicate with the people who read your copy." Many people are good writers, but not necessarily great communicators with a variegated public. Your program note has to reach them all, somehow.

3.
It's useful for you to be a performing musician—it gives you a feeling about what it takes. It's useful for you to be a composer. The most important thing, to me, is what you might call "general culture": to read science, to read politics, to be aware of sociological matters, and to know as much as you can about the art.

4.
Assume the concertgoing public will know some basic terminology, but if you mention crab canons, then be prepared to explain what they are.

5.
Study music not only to understand what makes music go. I know people who are superb musicians in a limited area; they are superb instrumentalists or they are excellent Baroque music scholars. But very few of them are widely educated people who know *all* of music.

6.
Be interested in everything. Be interested in people.

7.
Be always concerned that what you are saying is expressed clearly, with enough life in it so that people will not stop in mid-sentence.

8.
Listen to other people's advice. Quote other people when they have said something you can use. I know some people who never quote.

9.
Check and re-check your facts. Never be content with the first information you get. If you discover that there is the possibility of a mistake, admit it. And if you make claims, be ready to acknowledge that a fact may not be a fact.

10.
About consistency, I say to beginning annotators, "Don't worry." You may not go so far as to spell Prokofiev two different ways in a single program note, but if you want to spell it with a "v" one week, and with two "f's" the other week, go ahead. Moussorgsky: how many spellings have we had? Six. So what are we going to do? Let's not worry about irrelevancies like that.

11.
Cultivating a good memory is useful—to have the chemistry of your brain cells click in when you need them. If you think of a comment, and you wonder where you would find this item, it helps.

12.
The most important thing of all, perhaps, is never to be satisfied with what you do. The other day, I had the "Eroica" Symphony written in 1903–04, instead of 1803–04! I'd reread this a dozen times, and it was *still* wrong. You can't beat your own system—you are bound to make mistakes. George Szell said it best: "it is a good thing for a young man not to be entirely convinced of his own infallibility." Perhaps it is a good thing for a man of any age.

ROY
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as 'Hadyn.' That gave me a chance to describe the many spellings of Haydn's name in his own day." These personal touches added pleasure to a job that was already Roy's métier.

What will he miss most in his retirement years? The answer always comes back to *people*. In 30 years with one of the great orchestras, Roy encountered some very remarkable individuals. "I'm not overwhelmed by famous people," he confesses, "but to talk quietly in a radio interview with Yehudi Menuhin is a little mind-boggling, when you think that this man made his debut with us at the age of 13 playing the Beethoven Concerto, and here he is 70!"

The memories have become a treasured—and an active—part of Roy's life. He cannot drink Scotch without being reminded of Igor Stravinsky. "Stravinsky used to fortify himself with a sip of Scotch before rehearsals and performances, which he got out of a silver flask from his briefcase. One day, when I was waiting for him to go on stage, he saw me standing there, and stopped. He handed me the cap, bowed, and I took the first sip of Scotch. He took the next sip from the silver cap, then slowly, slowly, he made his way to the podium. He was an old man, 82; he could hardly walk. Stravinsky went out on stage, raised his arms, and fireworks broke out!"

Working on a regular basis with the orchestra's conductors and performers has been rewarding both personally and professionally. Roy is friends with Lorin Maazel, Pierre Boulez and Louis Lane, and was friends with Szell "up to a point." But the orchestra's current music director holds a special place in his regard. "I will miss talking on a regular basis with Christoph von Dohnányi. He's a marvelous man. He is also a fine scholar, a man who thinks about music, reads about music, who studies, who is *honest* about music. You can talk with him about *anything*. I've gotten along with all of these people, but Dohnányi is special."

Retirement will bring fewer deadlines, but not necessarily more leisure. Roy will continue to teach at the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Cleveland Institute of Art. Newspapers will still carry his latest social and political commentaries. He will remain a "cultural activist," serving on the boards of various arts institutions. Putting his compositions in order will certainly be a top priority. "I have lots of things that are publishable, but I haven't had time to do anything with

them," he says. Perhaps Roy will do as he says—"be lazy, sleep long, play a lot of tennis, then do a little work." Certainly he and his wife Gene, a music theory teacher and former professional bassist, will travel and see more of their children. "I don't expect to be bored."

Program annotation has been an excellent outlet for Roy's talents as a writer, scholar, and teacher. It has provided a focus for his energies and a platform for sharing his great thirst for knowledge. In some respects, program annotation has been an ideal profession for someone who claims to be a generalist. "I don't have it in me to be a full-time anything," he says. "Everything interests me, with the exception of Wall Street economics."

It is impossible to separate Klaus George Roy's life from his career or separate the phases of his professional involvement. They are one. "The thing I find most crucial is that you've got to be a whole person. You've got to be alive today, involved in the arts, in this city, and say 'yes' when people want something. When you say 'yes,' you take part. In the work itself, you come out as an *'artiste engagé.'* S