

## Book Review

***The Great Orchestrator: Arthur Judson and American Arts Management* by James M. Doering. Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2013. 274 pp. ISBN: 978-0-252-03741-2.**

The field of arts management has surged over the past fifty years as arts organizations have sprung to life throughout every corner of the country and training programs have proliferated in our colleges and universities. But while arts managers have become skilled practitioners and an entire academic field of study has grown up in about twenty-five years there has been little serious exploration of the history of arts management or managers. James M. Doering's recent biography, *The Great Orchestrator: Arthur Judson and American Arts Management* is a much needed contribution to our knowledge of this history and should become required reading for aspiring classical music managers.

Arthur Judson was born in 1881 in Dayton, Ohio and while there is little known about his early life it is clear that music became his passion at a young age. He earned the money he needed to pay for violin lessons and by the time he was nineteen his musicianship was recognized with a teaching position at Denison University in Granville, OH. By 1902, and with only a high school education, he was appointed full professor of music and by 1904 he was dean of Denison's Conservatory of Music, a fact that must place him among the youngest leaders of a music conservatory in the history of education. While at Denison, Judson launched his first foray into producing music events for the community, creating an annual music festival featuring local musicians and singers and booking the Cincinnati and Chicago Symphony Orchestras for festival engagements. Judson's ambitions, however, could not be satisfied as a small town college professor and rural impresario and like so many artists before and after, he made his way to New York City.

Life in New York for an artist with a young family in tow (although Doering does not give us any insight into how and when Judson acquired a wife and child) was then, as it is now, a challenge of survival.

Judson made ends meet not through the violin but through his pen; he was hired as a reporter and columnist for the influential and widely read concert music magazine, *Musical America*. It was as a writer covering classical music in New York and beyond that Judson began to think critically about the performance, the audience and the economics of the classical concert industry. As Doering states, “The magazine gave him an opportunity to explore the concert climate around him, contemplate how it worked, and share his thoughts with others . . . through these articles, Judson’s profile as a music manager begins to take shape.” (30) His writing years of 1909 to 1915 proved to be fertile ground for Judson. He wrote 180 articles during this time, returning again and again to the theme of music and business. “He seems to have been particularly fascinated by the ways that musicians could learn from the business community (perhaps not surprisingly, given his own struggles to find musical work). At the same time, he also wrote about the challenges musicians face in interpreting audience responses. He struggled to understand how musicians and the audiences interact.” (32)

Judson’s articles for *Musical America* and other publications paved the way for his transformation from critic to professional music manager. His critiques of the concert music industry were widely read and despite the fact that Judson had no formal training and little practical business experience, in 1915 he received and accepted an offer to join the Philadelphia Orchestra as its manager; greased perhaps by the eight admiring articles he wrote about the orchestra’s young conductor, Leopold Stokowski. His nearly twenty-year collaboration with Stokowski not only brought the Philadelphia Orchestra to the top tier of international ensembles, it also brought Judson into contact with the era’s great instrumental and vocal soloists. With the blessing of the Orchestra board Judson launched a modest program of chamber music concerts featuring Philadelphia Orchestra musicians. The success of the enterprise led Judson to form the Chamber Music Association of Philadelphia to manage and promote small ensemble concerts and tours. Ever the opportunist, Judson further parlayed his relationships into yet another career as solo artist manager. Starting with only eight artists, Concert Management Arthur Judson in time became

a leading classical artist representative for both American and international soloists. Through the 1920s his artist roster, his network of presenters and his reputation grew.

The 1920s also brought with it the age of radio. The challenge of working with new media was as exciting and profound in the early radio age as it is now in the age of social media and apps. In the early 1920s Judson recognized that the infant radio broadcasting industry would be a force in classical music. In 1923 he created a radio music fund to support concert broadcasts with contributions from the public. The fund ultimately failed but it led Judson to presage cable and home box office services of 50 years later when he wrote, “Everyone can listen in on the radio and you can’t get people to keep on paying for what they can get for nothing. The only solution to the problem, I think, is the perfection of some device for limiting the radio audience. They are working on it now in the laboratories. It will enable them to limit the listeners to subscribers who are willing to pay for concerts.” (86)

More fortuitous for Judson was his scheme to book the artists he represented within a network of independent radio stations that had blossomed in the mid 1920s. This led to the creation of the Judson Radio Program Corporation in 1927 and a partnership with the Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting System, the former providing the musical talent and the latter producing the radio broadcasts. But Columbia soon became disenchanted with the project and spun off the broadcasting venture, leaving Judson as sole proprietor of yet another business – newly christened as the Columbia Broadcasting System. Without adequate financial resources to support the new company Judson sought out a moneyed partner and found Philadelphia millionaire William Paley. Bill Paley would eventually buy out Judson and become the legendary head of CBS. Judson would become the second largest shareholder in the network and in time, a very wealthy man. Despite their break-up, Paley and Judson also formed a subsidiary of CBS to manage the classical roster of broadcast artists, Columbia Concerts Corporation. The business was forced to spin off from CBS in 1941 as part of a legal action against the network and it

became Columbia Artists Management, Inc., with Judson as president. Judson continued as the head of CAMI until 1946 and CAMI continues to this day as one of the leaders in international artist management and touring.

Running a major international orchestra and a variety of entrepreneurial music businesses would seem to be more than enough for even the most energetic and accomplished of managers -- but not for Arthur Judson. In 1922, the New York Philharmonic asked him to take the management helm of the financially struggling orchestra and with the consent of the Philadelphia Orchestra board of directors he became the manager of both. That Judson was able to manage two major orchestras and various for-profit enterprises and avoid conflicts of interest and the perception of self-dealing is testimony to the sterling reputation that Judson built within the music industry and the degree to which boards of directors, sponsors and artists trusted him. Doering notes that

As Judson's empire grew and the lines blurred between his managerial interests, Judson became even more vigilant about maintaining the bonds of trust he had cultivated. For example, in the mid-1930s, soon after Columbia Concerts was formed, Judson revamped the soloist selection process at the Philharmonic to preempt concerns that the ensemble was becoming a shell for Columbia Artists. He implemented a policy whereby the principal conductor chose the soloists through a multistep process that kept management out of the loop until after the board had approved the final soloist list. This process was well understood internally and was one of the reasons the Philharmonic could stand so strongly behind Judson . . . . (221)

Much of Doering's biography recounts Judson's relationships with orchestral conductors and composers; a who's who of 20<sup>th</sup> century classical music, including Arturo Toscanini, Bruno Walter, Otto Klemperer, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Darius Milhaud, Igor Stravinsky, and a young Leonard Bernstein. Using personal letters and documents from the archives of the New York Philharmonic, Doering examines in detail the sometimes turbulent growth of the Philharmonic and the revolving door of conductors who held the podium in New York during the 1930s and 40s. Judson oversaw the successful maturation of the Philharmonic during these years and guided the orchestra as it weathered the economic effects of the Depression and World War Two, the changing tastes of the New York audience, two mergers with other

New York orchestras, and a particularly difficult relationship with conductor Artur Rodzinski, who was principal conductor during the early 1940s.

But what may be even more extraordinary in this story is how the issues of classical music management that were confronted by Judson in the 1920s through the 1950s still resonate for today's arts managers and aspirants. Judson's concerns with the tension between programming new work, catering to the audience's taste for the tried and true, and ensuring adequate earned revenues will sound quite familiar to the modern manager. So too will his efforts to strike a balance between endowment and general operations fundraising and between subscription and single ticket sales. He struggled with rising costs and structural deficits in the orchestra's balance sheet and sought new revenue streams from subsidiary rights and royalties to help achieve financial stasis. Judson realized that the manager's role is often one of diplomacy, particularly when dealing with difficult programming decisions and artistic egos. He was a successful arts entrepreneur well before the concept became coin in arts management training programs, he pioneered the use of new technologies in the arts, and he advocated for government support of the arts when few thought it a proper role of government.

Ultimately, it was Judson's success and power in the music industry that led to his fall from leadership with the Philharmonic. He resigned in 1956 in response to the board's concerns that Judson's for-profit affairs created a perception of conflict of interest and their determination that the orchestra's manager be free of such entanglements. Judson spent the next 12 years in artist management, retiring in 1968 at the age of 87. He died in 1975. We discover precious little about Judson's private life; Doering tells us the documentary evidence is slim in this regard. But what we read in Doering's otherwise detailed and engaging biography is a window into early 20<sup>th</sup> century arts management, a facet of performing arts history that occupies precious little space in library stacks. Arts managers and students will not only enjoy this read but they may also recognize themselves in Judson's story.

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