

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Who was Arthur Nikisch? This question was asked by the *Sächsisches Tageblatt* on 15 October 1955 in a report of a concert given in the Leipzig Gewandhaus to mark the centenary of Nikisch's birth and has been asked many times since in conversation with friends and colleagues as this study has progressed. It is a question that invites an answer.

Arthur Nikisch (1855–1922) is well known to historians of performance practice, to chroniclers of the art of conducting and to archivists of recordings. Beyond that, however, he is a sepia-tinted figure who has largely slipped out of historical memory. The primary reason is that, although he played a significant role in the early years of recording, he was active before the mechanical dissemination of music through the gramophone and terrestrial broadcasting became ubiquitous. The generation of conductors that came after, e.g. Toscanini, Furtwängler, Klemperer, Mengelberg, Walter, etc., benefitted from the introduction in 1925 of electrical recording; all left extensive legacies of recorded performances which are now readily accessible. Nikisch, on the other hand, can only be heard through the technical limitations and surface noise of the acoustic era. His few recordings, though invaluable as documents of historical performance practice, present difficulties to the listener and cannot be said to represent the best of his art. Why, then, is he of interest? Does he merit anything more than a footnote in the grand sweep of music history or does he have a wider significance? These are the questions this study sets out to answer.

In the course of this research, I have received unflagging support and generous encouragement from many. Firstly, however, I acknowledge with gratitude two earlier labourers in this particular vineyard whose published work has proved indispensable. The chapter on Nikisch in Raymond Holden's book *The Virtuoso Conductors* (2005) is a veritable mine of information on the conductor's career and activities. It has been the starting point for many of the investigations in what follows. Jonathan Brown's *The Great Wagner Conductors* (2012) is a compendium of primary source material on Nikisch's activities as a Wagner conductor. Both works are copiously referenced and thus invaluable as tools in tracking down sources which otherwise proved elusive. To these fellow researchers who have travelled this path before I express my profound thanks. My long-standing friend, supporter and

academic collaborator Chris Walton has generously provided additional source material as well as continued encouragement along what has often been a rocky path. Bryan Coxson's encyclopaedic knowledge of British newspaper archive sources has put me on the track of reviews and articles concerning Nikisch's activities in Great Britain. My Oxford colleagues Professor Balázs Szendrői, now of the University of Vienna, and Professor Philip Ross Bullock of Wadham College generously provided not only the linguistic expertise and personal investment of time necessary to navigate primary sources in Hungarian and Russian, but a great deal of enthusiastic support and good-humoured encouragement along the way. The sessions buried deep within some of Oxford's least accessible nooks and crannies wrestling with newspaper reports from Habsburg Budapest or Romanov St Petersburg were some of the most enjoyable, not to say entertaining, experiences of the entire enterprise. Translations from German are my own unless otherwise indicated. The librarians of Oxford's Taylorian Institute together with Martin Holmes, Alfred Brendel Curator of Music in the Bodleian Libraries, were indefatigable in overcoming the difficulties caused by Mr Putin's war in Ukraine in obtaining scarce source material from Russia. Music Faculty colleague Professor Laura Tunbridge warmly supported the project from the outset and made invaluable suggestions regarding the investigation into Nikisch's role as piano accompanist to the pioneering lieder recitalist Elena Gerhardt. My long-standing Oxford mentor Professor Peter Franklin and Dr Sanna Pederson of the University of Oklahoma have generously provided source material of which I was previously unaware. My friend and Wagnerian collaborator Dr Margaret Bent of All Souls College has given consistent encouragement and sound scholarly wisdom throughout, as she has done now for more than two decades. Arthur Reynolds, Chairman of the North American Branch of the Elgar Society, gave access to and freely lent items from his priceless collection of documents and objects relating to the life and work of Edward Elgar.

At a late stage in this study, I encountered the work of Dr Percy Leung, whose 2022 doctoral thesis 'The London Symphony Orchestra and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in the First World War: Musical Institutions, Cultural Identity and National Conflict in Britain and Imperial Germany' looks closely at the roles of the Berlin Philharmonic and London Symphony Orchestras at the time when Nikisch was active with both ensembles. Dr Leung's painstaking work, together with subsequent correspondence and conversations, helped put a good deal of flesh on the bones of Nikisch's role both before and during the years when Europe was engulfed by the First World War. Conversations with established conductors Lionel Friend and Peter Manning, together with aspirants John Warner, Henry Kennedy, Harry Sever and Joe Davies, have provided consistent encouragement in their desire to know more of one of the more elusive pioneers of their art.

Michael Middeke, Commissioning Editor of the Boydell Press, and his assistant Crispin Peet have suggested many beneficial changes of critical perspective as well as subtly keeping the project on track. I am most grateful to the anonymous readers of the initial submission and of the completed draft manuscript for invaluable comments and constructive suggestions for additions and refinements; also to copy editor Fiona Little for her rigorous scrutiny of the text. The final version is greatly improved as a result. Barry Millington, Philip Bullock, Balázs Szendrői and Percy Leung have kindly read and commented on draft chapters. St Peter's College Office, and especially the indefatigable Fellows' Secretary Anne Millard, have been generous to a fault in the giving of their time and expertise in the use of office facilities. My wife Pamela has not only compiled the index but has throughout applied Gerontius's 'uniform and gentle pressure' at times when I was not only anything but self-moving but in grave danger of submitting to an ever-increasing tendency towards indolence which in my case grows with passing years. Without her constancy and support this project would never have been begun, let alone brought to completion. To them all I express my profound thanks. All errors, omissions and other infelicities are, of course, my own.

Lastly, I dedicate this work with profound gratitude and lasting affection to James Lancelot, Paul Spicer and Robert Gower, my three 'friends for life', to whom I owe so much.

