

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: IRVING LOWENS AND THE *WASHINGTON STAR*: THE VISION, THE DEMISE

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Irving Lowens (1916-1983) was a polymath who possessed an extraordinary intellect and boundless energy. A musicologist of first rank, he made seminal contributions to the study of music in America. Founder of the Society for American Music (formerly the Sonneck Society) and, through his affiliation with the Library of Congress, a leader in the mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century endeavors of the Music Library Association, he also contributed immeasurably to progress in American musicological enterprise. Having labored throughout his life as educator, composer, librarian, scholar, world traveler, *de facto* ambassador, and even chess player, Lowens is especially suited for designation as a public intellectual.

Self-described as “bookish,” Lowens was by virtue of long established habit an inveterate reader and writer. Having transplanted himself, by circuitous route, from his native New York City to Washington, D.C., he became a regular reader of the *Washington Star*, then newspaper of record in the nation’s capital. In December 1953, Lowens penned a letter to the editor praising the work of the *Star*’s new music critic Day Thorpe. Shortly thereafter, the Irving Lowens byline made its first appearance in the newspaper. Thus began a relationship that dramatically changed Lowens’s professional life, and ultimately helped to change, for the better, the musical landscape of Washington.

This dissertation chronicles the symbiotic relationship forged between Irving Lowens and the *Washington Star*, from its quiet beginnings through its years of achievement in supporting, upholding, and respecting concert life in the nation's capital, and, finally, to its sad dénouement. Chapter One, a biography, details Lowens's professional life as a music critic and his contributions to the performing arts in Washington, D.C. Chapter Two records the *Star*'s collaborative role as a force for musical good in the nation's capital. Chapter Three brings to light the *Star*'s struggle to survive amid the turmoil of changing times and changing ownership. Chapter Four outlines the circumstances surrounding Lowens's failed fight to maintain the *Star*'s classical-music coverage in Washington. Chapter Five demonstrates the power of Lowens's pen, even as he loses his battle for music at the *Star*. Although both Lowens and the *Washington Star* are long since gone, their legacy lives on in the current, vibrant culture that is musical Washington.

IRVING LOWENS AND THE *WASHINGTON STAR*:  
THE VISION, THE DEMISE

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## Preface

My interest in the press and its power to inform the course of classical music in America derives first and foremost from my work as a professional musician and music educator, concerned, as are many of my colleagues, for the future viability of our too-often-misunderstood art form. I also come to this project with a background in journalism, more as avocation than profession, but armed, nevertheless, with an affinity for the craft of criticism. Although never having met Irving Lowens, I knew of him by reputation and through my affiliation with the Music Critics Association. Early in my career, I was privileged to participate in one of the Association's Institutes for aspiring music critics, which Lowens had been instrumental in establishing and overseeing. An odd bit of serendipity led me back to his work so many years after this brief initial—and oblique—contact.

Although originally intending simply to effect an analysis of Lowens's critical writings, I discovered, as my research proceeded, that his story and the *Washington Star's* story were inextricably intertwined. One could be understood only within the context of the other. Having prior knowledge neither of the *Star* nor of the circumstances surrounding Lowens's position there, my research was akin to solving a giant jigsaw puzzle, but with no image to guide me. Diving headlong into this double-edged pursuit, I quite by chance uncovered a saga that, in turns, surprised, delighted and dismayed me. Once the pieces finally began to fit together, I determined that the saga must be told. I hope I have done equal justice to Lowens's memory and to that of his beloved newspaper, the once-mighty *Washington Star*.

Much of the material for this project derives from newspaper articles and correspondence. For the sake of consistency, I have chosen invariably to italicize newspaper

titles occurring within quotations, as well as in the narrative. I have otherwise retained the original form and substance of these passages.

Although most of the sources appear in typewritten form, some are handwritten, and, in isolated cases, not completely legible. A small proportion of the material available on microfilm, owing to inconsistencies in the microfilming process, was likewise difficult to decipher and, therefore, subject to some small interpretation as well. In such cases, I comprehended the sense of these isolated passages in part through close examination and in part through context. Similarly, in cases where dates of documents were not readily apparent, I was able to infer from the content the month and year, and, in some cases, the day of the items in question.

## Acknowledgements

This project rests upon the shoulders of many generous individuals, without whose support this work could not have been accomplished. First among equals is Professor Shelley Davis who, as advisor and chairman of my committee, inspired me to begin the research, who walked beside me during its many peaks and many more valleys, and who gave me that final, necessary push to cross successfully over the finish line. For his valued insights and his generosity in sharing them, I am deeply indebted. I also wish to thank the other members of my committee, Professors Olga Haldey, Richard King, Richard Wexler, and Lee Thornton. Their guidance in the completion of the final product was invaluable. Thanks go to the skilled library staff at the University of Maryland's Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library, most notably Bonnie Dopp, who provided, not only her time, talent and special knowledge of the Lowens Collection, but also her friendship and support throughout the endeavor. To Dan Fout, librarian at Frederick Community College, I am indebted for his help in securing, through Interlibrary Loan, masses of microfilm documents. Without the easy access to these sources that he provided, I would have been unable to complete my research. I give most grateful acknowledgement to Dr. Margery Morgan Lowens. Dr. Lowens kindly opened her home to me and allowed me full freedom to study Mr. Lowens's private and professional papers. She provided unbounded insight into the mind, spirit and history of her husband, and she generously provided her wisdom as a scholar, reading my draft with the same energy and attention to detail as would a member of my committee. Her vast knowledge of the subject, of musicological research and of scholarly writing helped me to polish the rough edges of my draft to a finer sheen. I tip my hat to Dr. Andrea Karfjin, whose insights in all things, including, not the least, the trials and tribulations of the writing life, kept my heart and mind

on track for the duration of this effort. Finally, I gratefully acknowledge my family and friends, who labored to keep my spirits on an even keel and nudged me forward when my resolve flagged. Thank you, one and all.

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## Introduction

In American culture, at least, classical music is in poor health. Its purveyors, for their musical labors, enjoy, at best, only meager financial support from either the public or private sectors: Its concerts too often attract undersized audiences, and its presence in public-school curricula has shriveled, if not all but disappeared.

A seemingly chronic condition, American apathy for the art form dates back at least as far as the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, or so worthy witnesses at the time would suggest. In 1852, the New York-based composer and critic William Henry Fry, Jr., embarked on a series of public lectures, the purpose of which was to educate the uneducated about “The Science and Art of Music.”<sup>1</sup> In the final presentation of this eleven-program series, which he underwrote with personal funds, Fry derided Americans for their intractable ignorance on matters musical and, in doing so, likely alienated the very audience he had in the previous ten lectures endeavored to inspire:

There is no taste for, or appreciation of, true Art in this country. The public, as a public, know nothing about Art—they have not a single enlightened or healthy idea on the subject . . . . As a nation we have totally neglected Art . . . . We will pay nothing to hear a sublime work of Art performed, because we do not know enough to appreciate it, and consequently such a performance bores us terribly.<sup>2</sup>

Writing in his magazine the *Smart Set*, the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century American *littérateur* and Baltimorean H.L. Mencken replicated Fry’s deposition on America’s musical ineptitude in 1919, when he declared, with equal disdain: “Of all the forms of the uplift, perhaps the most

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<sup>1</sup> See Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1964): 217.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

futile is that which addresses itself to educating the proletariat in music . . . . In the United States, the number of genuine music-lovers is probably very low.”<sup>3</sup>

Fry’s and Mencken’s warnings, Cassandra-like, although prophetic, have gone unheeded. Fast forward to the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to find classical music as a viable cultural enterprise, despite decades of purposeful evolution, once and again in clear and present danger. Whereas in the early years of its progress in America, as Mencken and Fry had stipulated, classical music may have faced the uphill challenge of audience ignorance, its current adversaries may be both prospective listeners and certain journalists of national repute and at least equivalent journalistic authority to Mencken and Fry. By their own acknowledgement, such professional molders of public musical opinion sometimes hold in contempt the very art form that they are beholden to cover and—one would assume—champion.

Having entitled his recent, award-winning<sup>4</sup> book on the subject *Classical Music in America: A History of Its Rise and Fall*, Joseph Horowitz, one-time music critic for the *New York Times*,<sup>5</sup> suggests that classical music’s days are now numbered, and, he claims, deservedly so. Writing in 2005, biases in full view, Horowitz diminishes the art form’s presumed prospects by defining it in the volume’s preface as “a mutant transplant” and “minority phenomenon” that has in recent decades been superseded by the more estimable popular styles:

A long and interesting period of decline [for classical music] ran its ineluctable course. As if by default, classical music ceded leadership in

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<sup>3</sup> See Mark Grant, *Maestros of the Pen* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998): 148 and 149.

<sup>4</sup> *Classical Music in America* was named one of the best books of 2005 by *The Economist*.

<sup>5</sup> Horowitz’s credentials include posts at the Eastman School, the Manhattan School of Music, the New England Conservatory, the Mannes College of Music, and a Visiting Professorship at the Institute for Studies in American Music at Brooklyn College. He served as a music critic for the *Times* from 1976 to 1980.

American musical life to genres more vernacular. Popular music proved the more significant, more distinctive American contribution. By [the 20<sup>th</sup>] century's end, the transplant too frequently resembled a potted hothouse product . . . potentially ripe for cross-breeding with the popular strains that had displaced it.<sup>6</sup>

Horowitz's up-to-the-moment, cavalier prediction of classical music's depleting shelf life follows in the footsteps of similarly indifferent end-of-days scenarios, voiced in the fading months of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by at least two of his former associates on the *New York Times's* music desk. One of the country's most influential newspapers, the *Times*, by virtue of the erudition of its critics and its wide national reach, arguably sets the print-media agenda for the coverage and criticism of classical music. As America approached the new millennium, this newspaper of national musical record endeavored to nudge the classical idiom closer to the edge of extinction.

One such nudger, the *Times's* then chief music critic Bernard Holland<sup>7</sup> called into question, in 1998, the legitimacy of the art form's appellation. Presaging Horowitz's language, Holland proposed that the "genre imperfectly called classical music" be designated, more appropriately in his view, "nonvernacular."<sup>8</sup>

Another of Holland's think-pieces from this period describes classical music produced in America, disparagingly, as "docile" and "compliant."<sup>9</sup> Herein the critic belittles the

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Horowitz, *Classical Music in America: A History of Its Rise and Fall* (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2005): xiii-xiv.

<sup>7</sup> Holland was chief music critic for the *Times* from 1995 to 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Holland, "Coexisting and Colliding the American Way," *New York Times*, May 31, 1998: Arts and Leisure, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Holland, "Pop Propels U.S. Music Out of Europe's Shadow," *New York Times*, April 5, 1999: B3.

country's classical musicians as "colonial dependents from the start . . . whose only desire was to bear the European standard."<sup>10</sup>

In a third column, weighing in *via* Charles Ives's "Emerson" Piano Concerto on the practice of restoring unfinished works, Holland scornfully compares classical-music enterprise to that of the auto industry. "Planned obsolescence," he opines, "works less well in classical music, which has invested the bulk of its holdings in the used-symphony and used-opera business, and has lots of trouble convincing listeners that the new models are any good . . . . [M]usical newness . . . has to be sought by going backward."<sup>11</sup> In the same article, he further describes musicologists and other transmitters of classical music literature in sarcastic terms, characterizing them as grave robbers with their "musicological shovels" scraping at coffins.<sup>12</sup>

Coincidentally or not, Holland's three articles align thematically with one written for the *Times* in the same period by Horowitz. Horowitz's piece tacitly, but unconditionally, endorses Holland's withering findings. Pursuing in embryonic form the populist themes of his later book, Horowitz construes the "late-20<sup>th</sup>-century collapse of separate 'classical' and 'popular' musical spheres" to be a *fait accompli* and declares as unassailable fact that "[f]or some time now, the canon of Western classical music has not defined what is musically best and most prestigious."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Holland, "Robbing Graves In Odd Search For the 'New'," *New York Times*, October 18, 1998: Arts and Leisure, 31.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Horowitz, "Music's Heavy Hitters in Abbreviated At-Bats," *New York Times*, April 11, 1999: Arts and Leisure, 31.

Within days of this essay's publication, critic James Oestreich, in tandem with his *Times* colleagues, gave the knife another twist in a review of Brahms's First Symphony, performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Likewise beating the drum of disdain, Oestreich led with a statement suggesting that without the boost of exceptional performances, mainstream classical repertory is no longer credible: "Those [his *Times* colleagues perhaps?] who call classical music irrelevant to the times may have a point . . . . With performances and recordings abundant to the point of excess, it takes something special for presentations of standard repertory to seem pertinent, let alone important."<sup>14</sup> Oestreich's critique of the performance then praised the conductor Bernard Haitink's interpretation, because it "made the work live, breathe and pulsate as if it had been freshly created."<sup>15</sup> Thus he implied the music of Brahms, despite its so-called irrelevance, to be indeed salvageable if placed in the right hands.

The anti-classical music ideology collectively espoused by these influential *Times* pundits has found its practical application within the borders of their host newspaper's current arts pages. On a sample Sunday<sup>16</sup> in the life of a *Times* Arts and Leisure section are featured two articles on classical music.<sup>17</sup> Together comprising one inside page of column space, they are augmented with a quarter-page jump and two, to be sure, amply sized pictures.

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<sup>14</sup> James Oestreich, "Haitink Leads the Boston In an Impassioned Brahms First," *New York Times*, April 17, 1999: A22.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> The edition for January 28, 2007. As an indicator of editorial practice, the Sunday edition reckons well, because it commands the highest circulation. One Sunday edition's column-space allocation might reflect only dimly a newspaper's *de facto* preferences for classical vs. popular music, but for the magnitude of the apparent disparity.

<sup>17</sup> See Arts and Leisure, *New York Times*, January 28, 2007: 31.

By contrast, the same day's coverage of vernacular music—to borrow the Holland/Horowitz nomenclature—holds pride of place. Three articles,<sup>18</sup> spanning more than twice the column space of their classical counterparts, boast two full inside pages, a sizable front-page teaser, nine pictures of varying eye-catching shapes and sizes and a concluding jump amounting to one-fifth page.

All five of the articles in this issue of musical concern are artist profiles. The two musicians on classical music's personality parade are composer Charles Wuorinen, current dean of America's serialist tradition,<sup>19</sup> and pianist Till Fellner.<sup>20</sup> Both articles serve as advances for anticipated performances, one in New York's Carnegie Hall, the other in Boston.

The two popular-music reports of greatest substance on this day profile, respectively, pop songwriter and producer Lee Hazelwood<sup>21</sup> and the Italian film-music composer Ennio Morricone.<sup>22</sup> A third, smaller piece, an interview with Grammy-award-winning, eclectic singer/songwriter Lucinda Williams, offers an annotated list, in her own words, of her favorite performing artists and their recordings.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Arts and Leisure, *New York Times*, January 28, 2007: 1, 32.

<sup>19</sup> Steve Smith, "Serialist Island Thrives," *New York Times*, January 28, 2007: Arts and Leisure, 31.

<sup>20</sup> David Mermelstein, "Hearing Things. The Wrong Kind Of Things," *New York Times*, January 28, 2007: Arts and Leisure, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Sia Michel, "One Last Walk for the Man Behind 'These Boots,'" *New York Times*, January 28, 2007: Arts and Leisure, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Jon Pareles, "The Maestro of Spaghetti Westerns Takes a Bow," *New York Times*, January 28, 2007: Arts and Leisure, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Lucinda Williams, "Playlist: A) Sexy, B) Loud or C) Dreamy? Try D) All of the Above," *New York Times*, January 28, 2007: Arts and Leisure, 32.

A scan of the *Times's* Arts and Leisure section for the following Sunday<sup>24</sup> suggests these findings to be more typical than anomalous. In this issue, only one article is devoted to classical music, a feature on Miami's new, multi-million-dollar Carnival Center for the Performing Arts.<sup>25</sup> Although, by virtue of its existence, the new edifice shouts in large type the strength of support for classical music in South Florida, the feature mutes this supposition with a column-inch yield amounting to approximately two-thirds page of copy and two accompanying pictures. Commercial music scores measurably higher, with a "Playlist" column surveying new releases<sup>26</sup> and a feature promoting the upcoming performances of Broadway superstars Patti Lupone and Audra McDonald in a revival of Kurt Weill's *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*.<sup>27</sup> A third feature, on the multi-disciplinary ventures<sup>28</sup> of singer/songwriter Joni Mitchell, earns the front-page teaser. Its jump, complete with seven pictures, fills another inside page.

To its credit, the *Times* devotes a large share of its February 18 Sunday Arts and Leisure section to the pioneering exploits of Miami Beach's New World Symphony,<sup>29</sup> an orchestra with a world-wide reputation for success in grooming aspiring professional

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<sup>24</sup> See Arts and Leisure, *New York Times*, February 4, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Tommasini, "Miami Vivace: New Arts Center Opens Its Arms," *New York Times*, February 4, 2007: Arts and Leisure, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Kelefa Sanneh, "Playlist: Friends, Feuds, Yelps, Sobs and a Swedish Nightingale," *New York Times*, February 4, 2007: Arts and Leisure, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Gurewitsch, "Broadway Babies Give a Grand Old Lady a Hand," *New York Times*, February 4, 2007: Arts and Leisure, 25. An article on the work of Kurt Weill might fall, arguably, under the classical-music rubric, but the *Times*, departing from its formatting choices of the previous week, indicates otherwise by omitting the word "classical" from its subhead for the page: Cf. Arts and Leisure, *New York Times*, February 4, 2007: 25; and Arts and Leisure, *New York Times*, January 28, 2007: 31.

<sup>28</sup> A triple play of popular song, visual art and dance.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel J. Wakin, "The Face the Music Academy: Can One Orchestra's Audacious Experiment Save Classical Music?" *New York Times*, February 18, 2007: Arts and Leisure, 1.

orchestral players. A sequel perhaps to its Carnival Center portrait—although not so stipulated—this *Times* feature is impressive in size and scope. Its opening teaser, enhanced with an explosively large picture,<sup>30</sup> covers over half of the section’s front page. The jump amplifies the topic with two additional pages of copy that are untarnished by advertising and adorned with eight additional pictures.

Such largesse in coverage for this noble orchestral enterprise is laudable, but for the feature’s incongruous headline and subhead, which offer up yet another variation on the *Times*’s overarching theme of classical music’s death by irrelevance: “The Face-the-Music Academy: Can One Orchestra’s Audacious Experiment Save Classical Music?”<sup>31</sup> Thus with stroke of predisposed pen, the editor, undermining the article’s explicit testimony to the contrary, begs the question of classical music’s survival—by posing it. The placement and prominence of these heads further imply that such notion will be fundamental to the story. In truth, only two sentences of the feature’s approximately 3500 words address classical music’s presumed need for salvation, but they suffice to dim the glow of a portrait otherwise blooming with the vitality of the New World Symphony’s spectacular endeavors:

At a time when classical music faces declining audiences and, some say, irrelevance, the sort of mission espoused by New World is seen as crucial. “For orchestras to survive in the current socio-economic environment,” said Henry Fogel, president of the American Symphony Orchestra League, “they’re going to have to mean something to people in the community who might never come to a subscription concert.”<sup>32</sup>

Shortly after the feature’s publication, the *Times* published two news stories contradicting this latest iteration of its anti-classical-music mantra. They reported that, at least by some

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<sup>30</sup> A closeup, wherein the reader beholds the bell of a trombone from the player’s vantage point.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

measures, the demand for recorded classical music is on the rise. In print on March 2, the first piece hints at the potential for selling classical music recordings *via* digital download; but the writer damns the encouraging data with faint praise:

[The New York Philharmonic's] first [download] release last March, of the last three Mozart symphonies, hit the iTunes's best-seller charts. Mr. [Zarin] Mehta [the orchestra's president and executive director] said that the orchestra's releases—six so far—have had a total of 12,000 to 15,000 downloads . . . . In an industry that sometimes measures top sellers in the hundreds, these numbers are large enough to be satisfying.<sup>33</sup>

The second article,<sup>34</sup> on the internet superstore Amazon.com's new venture into discount sales of classical-music compact discs, sends decidedly mixed signals about the genre's popularity with consumers. Reporting results of a survey conducted by NPD Group, a research and consulting firm, it claims classical sales to have “dropped last year by 28 percent, and . . . by 54 percent in five years.”<sup>35</sup> The report neglects to mention that sales of compact-disc albums, regardless of genre or style, have dwindled overall, in consequence of a consumer shift away from the more expensive compact-disc format and toward purchase of digital singles.<sup>36</sup> The piece then notes that, these disturbing statistics notwithstanding, Amazon has determined classical-music compact discs to be a market advantageous to pursue:

Amazon's new classical music Blowout store complements its core classical music offering, which has been in place since 1998 and features about 100,000 titles. With 2,000 deeply discounted CDs and a small but growing number of audio tutorials, the Blowout store is meant to be an introductory service of sorts for those who wish to build classical music collections, but are not willing to spend large sums on a genre they know little about. “It's an enticing way to try out something you might not otherwise

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<sup>33</sup> Anne Midgette, “Classical Music on Podium and Online: Orchestra Movements: 99 Cents,” *New York Times*, March 2, 2007: B1.

<sup>34</sup> Bob Tedeschi, “Amazon Seeks to Fill Classical Recording Niche,” *New York Times*, March 19, 2007: C-4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Jeff Leeds, “The Album, a Commodity in Disfavor: With CD Sales Falling, Labels Seek New Deals with Apple,” *New York Times*, March 26, 2007: C1.

want to take the risk to discover,” said Thomas May, Amazon’s senior music editor. Mr. May said Amazon’s classical music sales last year grew by more than 22 percent, making it one of the fastest-growing music genres on the site (Amazon does not break out separate revenue figures). The Blowout store will seek to feed that trend by offering most titles at 30 percent of regular prices.<sup>37</sup>

Comparative scrutiny of music coverage for the *Washington Post*, newspaper of record in the nation’s capital, yields equally spectral results. On a sample Sunday in its life,<sup>38</sup> the *Post*’s Arts section dedicates its entire front page to the presumed artistic potential of the popular video-sharing website YouTube.<sup>39</sup> Other topics warranting feature stories include a new Washington-area radio station, “George104,” that “took the place of classical WGMS last month and bills itself as the sounds of ‘the ’70’s,’80’s and whatever we [the new managers] want”;<sup>40</sup> the Washington-based Irish theater company Sola Nua and its founder-director Linda Murray, who directs the company’s operations from her home in Dublin;<sup>41</sup> “Quick Spins,” on downloadable new pop releases;<sup>42</sup> and, in the centerfold, a profile of photographer Martin Unkacsi, whose work is open for exhibit—in New York.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> See Arts, *Washington Post*, February 4, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Ann Hornaday, “Rules for YouTube: Make Art, Not Bore,” *Washington Post*, February 4, 2007: N1. This report earned two full pages of column space, including the Arts section’s entire front page.

<sup>40</sup> Marc Fisher, “Meet George, Kin of Jack and Bob. He’s the New (but Familiar) Kid on the Block,” *Washington Post*, February 4, 2007: N3. The report covers one-half page.

<sup>41</sup> John H. Tucker, “Issuing a Passport to Theater’s Irish Realm,” *Washington Post*, February 4, 2007: N4. This feature merited two-thirds page.

<sup>42</sup> Allison Stewart and Steve Knopper, “Recordings: Quick Spins,” *Washington Post*, February 4, 2007: N5. A piece spanning one-third page.

<sup>43</sup> Blake Gopnik, “Setting Life in Motion,” *Washington Post*, February 4, 2007: N6. This art review, complemented with six sizable pictures, covers a full page of column space.

By contrast, capital-city concert life in this issue merits one paragraph. In such meagre column-space, *Post* music critic Tim Page directs prospective listeners to an upcoming National Symphony Orchestra concert, led by principal guest conductor Ivan Fischer. Behind this brief calendar item looms the question of the NSO's leadership, with music director Leonard Slatkin expected to take his leave after the 2007-08 season. Fischer is the man who would be the NSO's next king, or so Page declares: "[Fischer] may be in line to replace the NSO's current music director, Leonard Slatkin . . ."<sup>44</sup> Surely a concert—and prediction—of such import to the future of musical Washington would warrant some further comment. Page dispatches the alert in three sentences.<sup>45</sup> In this entire Sunday edition, the *Post* deems no other classical-music news or views worthy of moment or inclusion.

The *Post's* edition for Sunday, March 4, follows a similar pattern, with a single notice in its pages alerting readers to another National Symphony Orchestra concert. Said concert "may well turn out to be the extraordinary NSO event of the year," as music critic Tim Page incongruously describes guest conductor Osmo Vanska's upcoming appearance with Washington's "hometown" orchestra.<sup>46</sup> This news merits, in the *Post's* editorial eyes, just two sentences of copy.<sup>47</sup> In a city bustling with concert life, no other current musical events are brought, in this issue, to the attention of the *Post's* Sunday readers, except within the confines of paid advertising.

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<sup>44</sup> Tim Page, "Classical Music," [no content-specific headline], *Washington Post*, February 4, 2007: N2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* The news item includes a picture of Fischer.

<sup>46</sup> Tim Page, "Classical Music," [no content-specific headline] *Washington Post*, March 4, 2007: N2.

<sup>47</sup> The second of the two sentences is three words long: "Don't miss it!" Why the concert qualifies as "extraordinary" and not to be missed, the reader never learns.

On March 25, the Arts section's cover story is a critical essay—a think-piece—on the film “300,” which *Post* film critic Stephen Hunter describes, sardonically, as “the largely computer-generated, comic-book-driven re-creation of the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 B.C. between a gazillion Persian invaders and a handful of Spartan grunts.”<sup>48</sup> The piece's opening teaser features a giant-sized image of a bloodied spear that, covering approximately three-quarters of the section's front page, swallows up precious column inches.<sup>49</sup> Classical-music reportage in this issue is to be found on the section's second page. Herein, a Question-and-Answer profile of opera director Francesca Zambello serves as advance notice for the Washington National Opera's production of *Die Walküre*, Richard Wagner's *Zeitgeist*-altering music drama.<sup>50</sup> For the wonders of Wagner and Zambello, the interview merits one-third page of newsprint.<sup>51</sup>

Thus classical music is attacked by friendly fire. As arts pages of such august newspapers as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* increasingly displace classical music in favor of its vernacular correlate, William Henry Frye, Jr.'s, predictive lament of so many years ago returns to haunt: America, “totally neglecting Art,” will hold “not a single

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<sup>48</sup> Stephen Hunter, “From Here to Thermopylae,” *Washington Post*, March 25, 2007: N1.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Daniel Ginsburg, “An Opera Director's Norse American Itinerary: Zambello Is Right At Home Setting Wagner's ‘Walküre’ On These Shores,” *Washington Post*, March 25, 2007: N2.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. Critic Tim Page's eye-popping review of the production suggests that it may have deserved much larger advance coverage than it received. Although devoting the first three paragraphs of his critique to the question of sur-titles for foreign language operas, Page described the performance in glowing terms: “The singing, at its best, was simply spectacular, world-class on every level. Indeed, I don't know whether the Washington National Opera has ever presented a more thrilling 70 minutes than Act 1, which featured the company's 66-year-old general director, Placido Domingo, as Siegmund and the wonderful German soprano Anja Kampe as Sieglinde in rapturous duet. Their voices -- fresh, lithe and lustrous -- easily filled the hall, but they never sounded strained, and there was none of that amped-up shouting that so commonly passes for Wagnerian declamation. A glorious teaming: Exactly what an operatic love duet should be.” See Tim Page, “WNO's ‘Walküre’ Takes Flight,” *Washington Post*, March 26, 2007: C1.

enlightened or healthy idea on the subject.”<sup>52</sup> Surely newspapers and their critics can do better, and, surely, should they do so, their efforts might strengthen this injured corner of America’s cultural heritage.

Perhaps another scenario: The time is the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the place, Washington D.C. The newspaper of musical record is, not, as it is today, the *Washington Post*, but the *Washington Evening Star*, and the action transpires in a civic milieu wherein concert life and its corollary activities are not peripheral to public discourse, but central. Gatekeeper for the discussion in the press is the *Star*’s chief music critic Irving Lowens. With intellectual powers at full strength, Lowens flings the gate of classical-music coverage wide open.

Irving Lowens began his career as a music critic in 1954 when he joined Washington’s *Star* newspaper as a free-lance contributor. Upon the retirement of Day Thorpe in 1960, he was appointed to the post of chief music critic, in which capacity he served until September of 1978. A prolific writer during these years, his critical *oeuvre* included, by his own somewhat conservative estimate, some 900 major Sunday features and 2700 reviews of concerts.<sup>53</sup> This magnificent total excludes the articles he wrote initially as a *Star* stringer, his voluminous free-lance contributions to such journals as *The Musical Quarterly*, the *American Choral Review*, *Hi-Fidelity/Musical America*, and the Musical Library Association’s *Notes*, his landmark contributions to scholarship in early American music, and miscellaneous book reviews, record reviews, and news stories.

During the nearly three decades of his tenure, Lowens witnessed and weighed in on major developments in the evolution of the arts that continue to shape America’s cultural life

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<sup>52</sup> See *supra*: 1.

<sup>53</sup> Irving Lowens, “A Critic’s Farewell: Of Music, Mirrors and News,” *Washington Star*, Sunday, September 3, 1978: B1.

today. He participated in the debate over the genesis of such important musical institutions as the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Wolf Trap Farm Park that now, forty years later, dominate Washington's musical landscape. His decade-long effort to secure popular—and Congressional—support for the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts earned him a place on the list of distinguished guests at the facility's ground-breaking ceremonies.<sup>54</sup> For the Center's grand opening in 1971, he was on hand both to interview the composer and then review the world premiere of Leonard Bernstein's now famous "Mass," commissioned for the occasion. Of his many articles in support of Wolf Trap, one was considered sufficiently persuasive to be written into the *Congressional Record*.<sup>55</sup>

Lowens's commentaries on the question of funding for the arts had nationwide ramifications. He took full advantage of his bully pulpit to argue for broad-based support for the arts,<sup>56</sup> to report and comment on governmental policies affecting the economic viability of artists,<sup>57</sup> and to publicize as well as appraise the efforts of arts endowment organizations, be they public or private.<sup>58</sup>

Lowens was a tireless advocate for American music and musicians. In addition to writing straightforward features that made news of trends in American music and reviewing

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<sup>54</sup> Lowens fired his opening salvo on behalf of a "cultural center" for Washington in an article entitled "Cultural Center's Role as Angel of the Arts," published in the *Star* December 13, 1959.

<sup>55</sup> "Wolf Trap Cultural Park Still has A Chance," *Sunday Star*, October 2, 1966, reprinted in *Congressional Record*, CXII (October 5, 1966), A5138.

<sup>56</sup> Irving Lowens, "Not by Bread Alone—Culture's Vital Need," *Sunday Star*, October 13, 1963: F5; and "The Money-Making Myth About the Serious Composer," *Sunday Star*, January 21, 1962: F4.

<sup>57</sup> Irving Lowens, "Congress Cuts, Ford Foundation Gives," *Sunday Star*, March 3, 1968: F2; "The Debate Continues on Subsidy for Music," *Sunday Star*, October 29, 1961: F4; and "Why Tax Reform Should Be Reformed," *Sunday Star*, January 24, 1971.

<sup>58</sup> Irving Lowens, "How Exxon Could Help U.S. Music," *Washington Star-News*, December 1, 1974: G1; "Endowment Grants—What's Meaning of All This?" *Washington Star*, May 16, 1976; and "Rockefeller Grant Helps Orchestras," *Sunday Star*, June 21, 1964.

dozens of performances and recordings by American composers, he was not above employing such unorthodox tactics as chiding audiences for their lack of interest in contemporary American works<sup>59</sup> or reminding arts-presenting organizations of their responsibilities to American music and musicians.<sup>60</sup> In one bit of serious mischief, Lowens devoted an entire Sunday think-piece to the sorry plight of the underpaid church organist and, for maximum impact, timed it to be run on Christmas Day.<sup>61</sup>

Notwithstanding his more or less natural inclination for affairs American, Lowens afforded disproportionate favor, in the bulk of his criticism, to no single topic or set of topics. For Lowens, an equal-opportunity commentator, any theme pertaining to music was worthy of coverage and comment. The wanderings of his pen took him to such faraway places as Switzerland, France, Greece, Romania, and Germany.<sup>62</sup> His more eccentric reflections encompassed such arcane subjects as musical philately, barbershop quartet singing and audience etiquette.<sup>63</sup> His former incarnation as reference librarian at the Library of Congress and his musicologist's turn of mind gave him license to explore remote facets of music history. They appeared in the *Star's* music pages beneath such eye-catching headlines as

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<sup>59</sup> Irving Lowens, "Encore Holds Crowd in Cathedral Seats," *Sunday Star*, May 28, 1961: C4.

<sup>60</sup> Irving Lowens, "U.S. Composers Heard, But Not Often Enough," *Sunday Star*, June 25, 1961, C4; and "It Still Takes Musical Success in Europe to Win Proper Appreciation in America," *Sunday Star*, November 25, 1962: n.p.

<sup>61</sup> Irving Lowens, "Our Needy Organists: Musicians Who Cannot Earn a Living," *Washington Star*, December 25, 1977: F1.

<sup>62</sup> Irving Lowens, "They Have Cheese and Watches and Fondues and . . .," *Sunday Star*, November 15, 1970; "Orchestra Hits Back at Culture Ministry," *Sunday Star*, January 30, 1966: D4; "An Hour with Antoniou," *Sunday Star*, October 12, 1969: D4; ". . . And a View of Romania," *Sunday Star*, March 7, 1971; and "Ailing Germany," *Sunday Star*, April 12, 1970.

<sup>63</sup> Irving Lowens, "Stamp Collecting for Music Fans," *Sunday Star*, September 19, 1965: K5; "Stamp Design Criticized," *Sunday Star*, October 4, 1964: E5; "Where Are the Old Barbershop Singers?" *Sunday Star*, July 16, 1961: C10; and "An Essay on Applause and Its Techniques," *Sunday Star*, May 5, 1963: C4.

“Mark Twain and the Waltz King,” “Handel Was the King of Musical Cribbers,” “Christmas Carols and their Origins,” and “Christianity and the Symbolism in ‘Parsifal’ .”<sup>64</sup>

Lowens’s egalitarian attitude even embraced pop and rock music, which he regarded as “an important aspect of musical life in our country.”<sup>65</sup> In keeping with this forward-looking view, he used his position as chief critic to direct the *Star* toward more systematic coverage of major pop and rock events.<sup>66</sup> Although this subject was ordinarily delegated to other writers, Lowens occasionally turned to it himself in such articles as “The Woodstock Thing: Was the Music Paramount?” and “When Pop Meets Classical.”<sup>67</sup> Ironically, he saw the proliferation of pop and rock articles, which his leadership engendered, come, in later years, to dwarf the *Star*’s coverage of classical music.<sup>68</sup>

Although essentially non-polemical in his musings, Lowens was an independent thinker who was unafraid to tackle controversial subjects. In a series of four articles that he wrote on the occasion of the New York Philharmonic’s festival in celebration of black composers, he put forward the controversial thesis that music written by black composers—in this case of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century vintage—could not necessarily be so recognized and condemned the practice of “ghettoizing” black music. His position could not have endeared

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<sup>64</sup> *Sunday Star*, August 16, 1964: n.p.; *Sunday Star*, September 3, 1961: B10; *Sunday Star*, December 24, 1961: C8; and *Sunday Star*, April 7, 1968: n.p.

<sup>65</sup> Irving Lowens, “A Critic’s Farewell,” loc. cit.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> *Sunday Star*, August 24, 1969: n.p.; and *Sunday Star*, August 16, 1970: C4.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

him to the sponsors of this series, who were engaging in the very activity that Lowens decried.<sup>69</sup>

Dora Romadinova, at the time a prominent Soviet music critic, credited Lowens with supplying the catalyst that secured permission for her to leave the Soviet Union and emigrate to the United States. Lowens's *Sunday Star* feature, "The Silence of a Soviet Critic: An Eloquent Voice Comes on Hard Times," exposed the professional mistreatment that she and her husband, owing to their perceived Western sympathies, suffered at the hands of the Soviet musical and political authorities.<sup>70</sup> Soon after the article ran, Romadinova and her family were released to the West. In a personal letter to Lowens, she gratefully acknowledged the pivotal role that this article played in bringing about her freedom.<sup>71</sup> After her arrival on American shores, Lowens penned a follow-up story, "A Soviet Music Critic Tells a Troubled Story," that included Romadinova's own powerful first-person testimony.<sup>72</sup>

Lowens's reviews were unfailingly objective. He had no particular axes to grind, nor did he allow personal relationships to color his opinions. In one especially unpleasant incident, a *Star* editor skewered a review that Lowens wrote on a work composed by the National Symphony Orchestra's conductor Antal Dorati. The scandalous headline "Dorati Should Stick to Baton,"—not written by Lowens—was followed by an equally sensationalistic lead that the editor had fabricated: "Conductor Antal Dorati dredged up an old

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<sup>69</sup> The four articles were "New York Philharmonic Celebration of Black Composers: A Time for Hearing the Unheard," *Washington Star*, August 30, 1977: C1; "MUSIC: A Quiz for the Unwary, Pros and Cons of Unfamiliar Black Works," *Washington Star*, August 31, 1977: C4; "CLASSICAL: It's a Night of Song for Black Celebration," *Washington Star*, September 1, 1977: C3; and "CLASSICAL: A Few Reservations About Drawing a 'Cultural Ghetto'," *Washington Star*, September 2, 1977: E5.

<sup>70</sup> *Washington Star*, Sunday, March 12, 1978: H16.

<sup>71</sup> Dora Romadinova, letter to Irving Lowens, n.d., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>72</sup> *Washington Star*, Sunday, August 27, 1978: F1.

piece by Antal Dorati, composer, for the National Symphony last night, and ‘The Way’ showed that Dorati should stick to the baton.”<sup>73</sup> Along with contrite apologies, Lowens sent Dorati the review, in the original typescript, with its purely fact-based opening: “Last night at the Kennedy Center, the National Symphony presented the local première of Antal Dorati’s dramatic cantata, ‘The Way.’”<sup>74</sup> The review’s remaining paragraphs, which correlate word for word with the original typescript, nevertheless leave no doubt in the reader’s (or Dorati’s) mind as to Lowens’s opinion, which was far from complimentary:

This is a troubling, not a comforting work . . . [U]ntil the final two of its 14 sections . . . I found myself more repelled than attracted by both the words and the music of ‘The Way’ . . . In all candor, I cannot say that I consider ‘The Way’ a successful work.<sup>75</sup>

In his letter of apology, Lowens underscored his uncomplimentary opinion, personally reiterating to Dorati that he “didn’t care for” the work.<sup>76</sup> Although the relationship may have been strained by this incident, Lowens remained steadfastly true to his convictions.

Irving Lowens was a critic who wrote the old-fashioned way—thoughtfully, persuasively, intelligently, and without fanfare. His work constitutes a powerful written record, recounting the striking story of a unique musical culture that existed in the nation’s capital during an era of conspicuous growth. Ever the optimist, Lowens was firmly convinced that the field of classical music, in all of its rich permutations, deserved documenting, and that, with vigorous representation, his readers would, as he did, come to develop a lasting

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<sup>73</sup> Irving Lowens, “Dorati Should Stick to Baton,” *Washington Star-News*, Wednesday, April 10, 1974: n.p., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>74</sup> Irving Lowens, Untitled. [Review] ts. April 10, 1974, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Antal Dorati, April 10, 1974, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

appreciation of its value. Such conviction proved accurate, at least temporarily, because, for most of Lowens's tenure there, the *Star* supported his efforts to make his reportorial dreams a reality.

In 1954, when Lowens found himself in the editorial arms of the *Star*, its journalistic influence was at its peak. At this time, the newspaper was famous for fostering broad-based local, national, and international reporting, and for giving its writers unobstructed license to explore their individual news beats.<sup>77</sup> Flourishing under so liberal and full-spectrum an editorial philosophy, Lowens recorded, monitored, critiqued, and encouraged the performing arts around the city, the nation, and the world. By virtue of his mission, his innate journalistic skill, his unique intellectual gifts, and his naturally gregarious personality, Lowens's professional reputation soared. In consequence, so did the *Star*'s, as the go-to newspaper for musical current events and criticism.

Sadly, this bountiful collaboration binding Lowens and the *Star* together for twenty-five years and helping to invigorate concert life in Washington—and in the nation—ended badly, but it gives the lie to the notion that classical music and concert life in America need be by definition irrelevant. As Joseph W. Polisi, scholar, performing artist, educator, and president from 1984 of New York's prestigious Juilliard School, professed optimistically in his landmark collection of essays, *The Artist as Citizen*:

[T]here are many issues that confront . . . performing artists that did not exist fifty years ago . . . . The arts . . . have been put in question as positive, or even important, forces in our nation and our culture. The assumption that the arts are essential elements of our environment as human beings has been

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<sup>77</sup> The *Star*'s reputation for comprehensive journalism and for devotion to its reporters was historic and longstanding. As early as 1903, the newspaper was extolled for "cover[ing] a wide political field to serve the national constituency formed by its readers" and for "treat[ing] the employes [sic] . . . so royally that they never desert the paper no matter what inducements a rival newspaper may offer." See Ralph M. McKenzie, *Washington Correspondents Past and Present: Brief Sketches of the Rank and File* (New York: Newspaperdom, 1903): 36-38 *passim*.

weakened by the extraordinary power of the media, the diminishing of our primary and secondary school systems, and the general perception that the arts are only for a tiny portion of our population who have not been buffeted by the spiral of poverty, crime, and disease that has torn into the heart of this nation.

I would contend . . . that this final assumption is totally false. In fact, it may very well be the arts . . . [that] can provide the stimulus and focus needed to energize this nation as we move into the next millennium.”<sup>78</sup>

Decades ago, Irving Lowens and the *Washington Star*, raising the bar on standards of press coverage for music, proved the verity of this contention. Following is their story.

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<sup>78</sup> Joseph W. Polisi, *The Artist as Citizen* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2005): 17.

## Irving Lowens and the *Washington Star*: The Vision, the Demise

### Chapter I A Critical Life

During World War II, when he was in his mid-twenties, Irving Lowens, pundit in embryo, sat before his typewriter, ostensibly to record an autobiography. A rash project for one so young, it began, not as might be expected, with recollections of a storied youth, but as a combative, if feckless, critique of America's cultural status quo.

Given the rambling title, "I FINALLY BEGIN[,] BECAUSE ITS [sic] GETTING PRETTY HARD FOR ME TO TAKE IT WITHOUT DOING ANYTHING ABOUT IT," the first chapter of this early and never-finished opus, written in callow rhetorical style, reads as an article of faith: The young Turk professes who he is, what he stands for, and what he opposes.<sup>79</sup> He also resolves that, his decidedly unsoldierly disposition and lack of fighting experience notwithstanding, nothing will deter him from waging war, like David against the Philistines, to defend the sacred icons he holds dear:

The time has come for me to declare war[,] too. I am not a soldier or even a war correspondent. That is pretty hard to believe in these days when every book that is published is written by either a soldier or a war correspondent. I am not even very warlike or a good fighter. I am slim, slight, bookish, and I love my wife, music, books, and the other arts and everything very much, but most of all my wife and music. But I am getting angry and sick and tired of it[,] because nobody seems to feel that the things I love are of any importance at all.

This is my attempt to fight back . . . .

But nobody is doing any real hollering about our own fakes and frauds. By fakes and frauds I mean those of you who feel noble in your breasts and who earn your living by sticking a knife in the next guy[,] and that includes a very large part of the population. I mean those of you who think you are cultured, but haven't the vaguest idea what culture is except the current Book-of-the-Month club selection or what some other guy picks out

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<sup>79</sup> [Irving Lowens, Autobiographical Essay], unpublished typescript, n.d.: 1-2. Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection. The first chapter was two pages in length. The second chapter, entitled "Before the Middle" and containing anecdotes from his youth, runs for another four pages.

for you so you can be cultured. I mean those of you who go to concerts on throwaways and then feel superior to the poor guy[,] because he has to paper his house. I mean more than ninety-nine percent of you who adore Toscanini or Picasso. I mean those of you who read the fashion and society news and who come out or make debuts or give parties to whom all the people who are anybody are invited and get their names in the paper.

These people own just about everything and what they don't own is owned by friends of theirs. I don't like them. Baldly speaking I thoroughly detest them.

As I said, this is my attempt to fight back.<sup>80</sup>

Bearing the character of a solemn oath, Lowens's talismanic statement propelled him forward to fulfill, inevitably, his manifest destiny. With words as his weapons, he spent the whole of his professional life fighting back against an unjust world that, as a bellicose young man, he had so self-righteously denounced for conspiring to thwart his desires.

In the early skirmishes, he targeted the enemy with spleen-venting letters to editors. For nearly two decades he was held back from his future, his attempts at a vocation eluding him. In 1961 and at age 45, he was finally brought to his true calling—music criticism. In part through serendipity and in part by design, Lowens was that year promoted from stringer to overseer for music news at the *Washington Star*, then the newspaper of record in the nation's capital. Perched at last in the catbird seat, he mounted in earnest his evangelistic crusade for the betterment of “music, books, and the other arts and everything.”

### **Prescient Beginnings**

Irving Lowens made his first appearance in the world on August 19, 1916, in a Bronx neighborhood of New York City, second-born son to Latvian immigrants Harry Lowens, a physician, and his wife, Hedwig. He served as loving brother to two siblings, Milton, the eldest, and a younger sister, Ruth. His family's means made possible a relatively comfortable childhood, which included regular summer retreats at a lakeside resort known as the Mohegan

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Colony. Founded in 1923 by the American Anarchist leader Harry Kelly, the Mohegan Colony was one of six communal settlements<sup>81</sup> located in Westchester County, New York, inhabited in the summer months largely by Jewish immigrant families who shared strongly leftist political and social ideologies. The Mohegan Colony in particular encouraged, along with the more traditional recreational pursuits, intellectual growth and political and social activism.<sup>82</sup> In his autobiographical essay, Lowens reminisced about those summer days spent on the banks of Mohegan Lake, where, in addition to the more customary pastimes of youth, he happily engaged in disputations of decidedly literary, intellectual and political bent:

I used to spend my summers in a place called Mohegan Colony. There, a group of simple and sincere people who called themselves Libertarians tried to create a tiny utopia forty miles from the heart of New York City . . . . My father, who was one of the original group, picked out an acre for himself . . . . We used to spend our evenings down at the tiny lake monkishly discussing Karl Marx, James Joyce, St. Thomas Aquinas and the virtues or lack of virtues of various girls and pieces of music. Sometimes we used to shout over the lake and listen to the echos [sic] come bouncing back to us and wonder about it . . . . Close to the shore was a giant oak tree that cast a giant black shadow on the ground and looked like Christ crucified. Sometimes we used to walk the few miles to the old quarry, abandoned and flooded, and stand on the high rocks and look at the molten silver . . . . It was a good school for us.<sup>83</sup>

Should his self-assessment be deemed credible, Lowens was “in the beginning . . . no genius [but] . . . more than ordinarily bright”<sup>84</sup> and particularly disaffected toward matters

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<sup>81</sup> The other five encampments were Golden Bridge, Followers of the Trail, Croton Park, Camp Three Arrows and Shrub Oak Park. See Baila Round Shargel, “Leftist Summer Colonies of Northern Westchester County, New York,” *American Jewish History*, 83/3 (September, 1995): 339.

<sup>82</sup> The Preamble to the Mohegan Colony’s Constitution reads, in part: “We are organizing this settlement in the hope that we may free ourselves and our children from at least some of the diseases of city life, to give free rein to our thoughts and ideals, to offer our children a libertarian education which will fit them to be fighters for a better world.” See Baila Round Shargel, “Leftist Summer Colonies,” op.cit.: 342.

<sup>83</sup> [Irving Lowens, Autobiographical Essay], op. cit.: 4.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

musical. Incorporated into the body of his erstwhile autobiographical reflections is the following anecdote that, although not an unusual childhood story, reveals his initial introduction to music to be far from propitious:

My mother insisted on giving me the customary piano lessons at the hands of one Mrs. Gries, a superannuated turnip from Victorian days who, when she had been a maiden[,] had taken music lessons as part of the accoutrement of a well-bred “gnädiges Fraulein” in the old country and who was reduced in this country to earning her living by taking pupils. As I remember it, she used to give me little pieces to practice from Lebert and Stark’s “Method” and count by banging a ruler on the side of the piano for me. I didn’t like music and I didn’t like her. I finally refused to take any more lessons when she said I had to have clean nails before she would give me any lessons. That was too much of a sacrifice. Then one day, I discovered that I liked music, and I have been chasing it ever since.<sup>85</sup>

At age nine, Lowens was taken by his mother on an extended trip to Europe, visiting, in addition to the Latvian capital Riga, his parents’ hometown, such diverse countries as Denmark, Poland, Estonia, Germany, Belgium, France, England and Ireland.<sup>86</sup> This European sojourn returned him to America fluent in French and German—he professed to speaking “better German than English”<sup>87</sup>—and enamored of foreign travel, an addiction he would feed for the rest of his life.

Regarding his adolescence, Lowens declared that he was a “pretty wild teenager,” who learned music “not in a class from a teacher, but by pecking out Frescobaldi canzone on an upright piano before know[ing] how to play a Clementi sonatina.”<sup>88</sup> A proclivity for

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> [Irving Lowens, *Autobiographical Essay*], op. cit.: 3.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. His instruction in German actually began in his parents’ household, where it was the spoken tongue. He went on to master, in addition to French and German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian. See Irving Lowens, “VITA,” July 1983, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>88</sup> Lowens made this statement in “MUSIC: Noah Greenberg’s Contribution Was a Great One,” an obituary written on the untimely passing of the legendary early music advocate and New York Pro Musica founding director, who had been a childhood friend. *Sunday Star*, January 16, 1966: D4.

Frescobaldi could hardly be called typical for a teenager, wild or otherwise, but it was most certainly indicative of a striking intellectual precocity. His impressive intellectual gifts were most noticeably revealed in the accelerated pace of his schooling—he graduated from Townsend Harris High School in 1931 at the tender age of fourteen<sup>89</sup>—and in his early mastery of that most intellectual of board games, chess. He established his prowess as a chess player by placing second in a city-wide high school chess tournament in New York and, in his youthful fervor, even considered tournament chess playing as vocation.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps the pinnacle of his incipient chess-playing career was an appearance in an exhibition match at the Manhattan Chess Club, where he battled Isaac Kashdan, a tournament player of international stature,<sup>91</sup> to a draw. Lowens was fifteen years old at the time.<sup>92</sup> Kashdan, also a chess prodigy, was twenty-six.

Although his parents dissuaded him from the life of a professional chessplayer, Lowens never lost his passion for the game of kings.<sup>93</sup> During the war years, while living in West Virginia, he entered the championship tournament of the Charleston Chess Club, handily winning every game. His spectacular performance of nine wins, no losses and no draws

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<sup>89</sup> Irving Lowens, “Curriculum vitae” [1956], Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>90</sup> Lowens’s intention to become a professional chess player was not idle fantasy. In his early teens, he competed head-to-head with then-world chess champion Alexander Alekhine and held him to a draw. (See editor’s note to Lowens’s article, “Bobby Fischer Books: His Game, Life,” *Sunday Star*, July 30, 1972: G1.) He publicly acknowledged his chess-playing aspirations in his autobiographical essay, *ca.* 1943, *loc. cit.*

<sup>91</sup> In 1928 at The Hague, Kashdan pushed the American Olympic Chess Team into second place, by earning the highest individual score. He returned to America with two medals, presented by the International Chess Federation: The team’s runner-up award, and a special award for his unsurpassed individual performance. See unnamed author, “Isaac Kashdan Back With Two Hague Medals,” *New York Times*, August 19, 1928: Sports, 131.

<sup>92</sup> [Unnamed author], “Kashdin Wins 16 Matches: Loses Twice in Farewell Exhibition of Simultaneous Chess Play,” *New York Times*, December 14, 1931: Sports, 24.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* Lowens continued throughout his life to keep himself current with the vagaries of the professional chess-playing scene. His 1972 article, “Bobby Fischer Books: His Games, Life,” was a Sunday think-piece published for the purpose reader enlightenment on the subject.

earned him, not only the tournament title, but also a special designation as the city's first "chess champion at large."<sup>94</sup> Lowens distinguished himself as a chessman yet one more time by winning, from a field of 637 entrants, both twelfth and thirteenth places in the 1949 Postal Chess Championship games. These standings were sufficient to warrant coverage in *Chess Review: The Picture Chess Magazine*.<sup>95</sup>

Lowens's robust intellectual capacities notwithstanding, settling on a career path came neither quickly nor easily. Although originally planning to follow his father into medicine, the idea of a profession in music surfaced in the fall of 1932, when he was sixteen and already in his freshman year at the City College of New York. Lowens began work on a music degree, but insurmountable financial obstacles tangential to the Depression stopped him abruptly in his tracks. About this aborted, academic trial balloon of his youth, he later ruminated: "The fees were high . . . and no scholarships were forthcoming, so I was forced to leave school after completing a year's work."<sup>96</sup>

In response to this disheartening misfortune, Lowens temporarily abandoned his musical aspirations, as well as his academic career, and gamely hit the road. Winding up in the North American heartland, he spent the ensuing eighteen months living the life of a vagabond. Nearly a decade later, he reflected back on those uncertain months spent adrift:

I decided to go the whole hog, and left home to seek my fortune in the middle west . . . . For the next few years I made my living in a wild variety of ways—ranging from work in the Montana beet-fields to teaching music on the WPA Adult Education Project. Among the jobs which I held down in these years were house-to-house canvassing for hosiery . . . various sorts of clerking and office-boying; factory-handing at Ford and Minneapolis-Honeywell . . . . I

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<sup>94</sup> Walt Crede, "Chess Board," *Charleston Daily Mail* [1943]: n.p., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>95</sup> Jack Straley Battell, Postal Chess Editor, *Chess Review*, letter to Irving Lowens, May 27, 1949, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>96</sup> Irving Lowens, [Autobiographical *Résumé*, ca. 1943], Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

also made a few stabs at writing for publication. I accumulated a small but choice collection of rejection slips, plus a few encouraging notes from *Esquire*, *Coronet* and *Story* . . . . After saving some money, I decided to return to New York and finish taking my college degree. Once in New York, I resumed the academic life, dropped writing, and concentrated on writing music.<sup>97</sup>

As these musings indicate, the prospect of a life in letters had fleetingly entered Lowens's consciousness during this itinerant period; but, for the time being, he disregarded its appeal to him and matriculated at Columbia University, where he earned his Bachelor of Science degree in music education in 1939 and, for another six months, continued with graduate work in music composition.<sup>98</sup>

For the next several years, Lowens mustered all of his efforts in the cause of composition, nurturing this aspiration as “whole hog” as he had his earlier pioneering pilgrimage into the American middle west. He worked diligently, not only at the craft of writing music, but also at the trickier business of getting it published and performed. Toward that end, he obtained employment in 1940 at G. Schirmer, Inc., one of the largest and most influential music publishing houses in America. Here he proposed to “learn the [composition] business from the bottom up.”<sup>99</sup>

If Lowens sought out Schirmer as a means to advance his compositional career—and, indeed, Schirmer and its affiliate The Willis Music Company placed several of his works into publication<sup>100</sup>—his service there may also have rekindled his interest in the written word. Although never progressing beyond entry-level positions in the two years he worked at

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> “Curriculum vitae” [1956], loc. cit.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Several art songs for voice and piano, including “Come Away, Death,” “Love is a Sickness,” “A Child This Day is Born,” “Sing, My Tongue, the Saviour’s Glory,” and “Peasants,” were published under Schirmer auspices,

Schirmer, Lowens resided in the editorial wing of the company long enough to assist with its well-known and influential periodical *The Musical Quarterly*.<sup>101</sup> He translated, from the French, a scholarly article on the Franco-Flemish Renaissance composer Hayne van Ghizeghem<sup>102</sup> and compiled what he described as an “analytical index”<sup>103</sup> to the publication.

Lowens’s affiliation with Schirmer and *The Musical Quarterly* may also have provided his first exposure to the work and influence of the American music scholar and librarian Oscar George Theodore Sonneck. During his tenure at Schirmer, from 1915 until his death in 1928,<sup>104</sup> Sonneck had aggressively supported, through publication, the work of such distinguished American composers as Ernest Bloch, John Alden Carpenter, Charles Thomlinson Griffes and Charles Martin Loeffler.<sup>105</sup> Decades later, Lowens paid tribute to Sonneck’s signal influence on his own efforts to further American music and American-music scholarship, when, as the founder of the Sonneck Society, he proffered and won support for the suggestion that the Society bear the eminent musical Americanist’s name.<sup>106</sup>

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with all but “Peasants” issued during Lowens’s tenure there. A choral “Laudate” was published by The Willis Music Company.

<sup>101</sup> Lowens served successively as stock clerk, assistant production manager and editorial assistant from May of 1940 to May of 1942. See *Curriculum Vitae*, loc. cit., and Irving Lowens, letter of application, unknown addressee, October 6, 1946, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>102</sup> Jeanne Marix, “Hayne van Ghizeghem, Musician at the Court of the 15<sup>th</sup>-Century Burgundian Dukes,” *Musical Quarterly*, XXVIII/3 (July 1942): 276-287. See also Lowens, letter and *résumé* to *New York Times*, April 3, 1946, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>103</sup> Irving Lowens [letter of application], unknown addressee, April 3, 1946, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>104</sup> Sonneck served as editor of *The Musical Quarterly* for the duration of his employment at Schirmer, as well as director of publications and, finally, vice president.

<sup>105</sup> W. Thomas Marrocco and Mark Jacobs, “Schirmer,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, vol. XVI (London: Macmillan Publishers, Ltd., 1980): 657.

<sup>106</sup> Raoul F. Camus, “From the President,” *Sonneck Society Newsletter*, vol. X (Spring 1984): 1. The Sonneck Society was renamed the Society for American Music in 1999.

He took full advantage of the opportunity to present Sonneck to his *Star* readership in 1973 on the occasion of the Library of Congress's exhibit commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the scholar's birth. His article praised this "neglected culture-hero" and "towering figure in American music" for his work as a "musicological archeologist who uncovered the rich musical life of eighteenth-century America."<sup>107</sup>

Acknowledging his spiritual forebear further, Lowens initiated and successfully saw to fruition publication of the book *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*,<sup>108</sup> the objective for which was to bring Sonneck's pioneering scholarship to public attention. In writing the foreword to the book in 1982, Lowens described Sonneck in reverential terms as "the father of us all . . . one of the finest of all American music historians . . . who has been grievously neglected and unjustly forgotten in the realm of historiography."<sup>109</sup>

### **Composer in Training**

Many of Lowens's musical compositions were written with amateur music-making in mind, a consequence of the performance outlets he found for himself, *vis.*, school musical ensembles, church worship services and amateur glee clubs. One of the earliest opportunities he managed to manufacture was at a community music school he co-founded in the heart of the Bronx with his new bride Violet Halper Lowens, immediately after leaving Columbia in the fall of 1939. The Amalgamated School of Music, as it was called, was true to its title in offering a diverse mix of classes to both children and adults. In the school fliers, Lowens billed himself, optimistically, as "Irving Lowens, Composer," and teacher of "Theory, Music

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<sup>107</sup> "A Sonneck Centennial," *Washington Star-News*, October 21, 1973: J10.

<sup>108</sup> William Lichtenwanger, "Irving and the LC Years," *Sonneck Society Newsletter*, vol. X (Spring 1984): 8.

<sup>109</sup> Irving Lowens, foreword, *Oscar Sonneck and American Music*, ed. William Lichtenwanger (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983): xi. Lowens also contributed a previously published, but extensively revised, Sonneck bibliography.

Appreciation, Chorus, [and] Madrigal Group.”<sup>110</sup> This ambitious undertaking provided its founder with an opportunity to compose music for a student operetta in four acts based on the Alice in Wonderland story. The work was premiered on the school’s last student recital, performed by the students under his wife’s direction.<sup>111</sup>

Among Lowens’s more successful ventures as a composer was one established through his affiliation with the Unitarian Church. In 1947, he fielded to the denomination’s Religious Arts Guild an idea that would, not incidentally, direct the church to serve as “a seminal force in the revitalization of music and [bring] it into the lives of the people.”<sup>112</sup> His project entailed commissioning and compiling into a collection works, written either for trained choir or for congregational singing, for the purpose of establishing “a body of new and excellent music that could be utilized with great appropriateness in a humanist service.”<sup>113</sup> He further submitted a lengthy list of American composers and music publishers who might be approached to contribute to such a task.<sup>114</sup>

Initially received with enthusiasm by the Guild, the proposal succeeded in its implementation only modestly, but it yielded for its architect estimable composition commissions, as well as performances in such worthy venues as the Metropolitan Conference of Unitarian Churches<sup>115</sup> and the American Unitarian Association’s Annual Junior Choir

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<sup>110</sup> Amalgamated School of Music Recital Program, Spring 1940, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>111</sup> Amalgamated School Recital Program, loc. cit.

<sup>112</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Ernest W. Kuebler, then-Director, Division of Education, American Unitarian Association, March 30, 1947, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Ernest W. Kuebler, October 16, 1947, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>115</sup> New York, New York, May 17, 1953.

Festival.<sup>116</sup> With the Unitarian minister Vincent Silliman, Lowens co-edited a published collection of vocal music, entitled *We Sing of Life*. An anthology of religious but non-sectarian hymns, the collection included fourteen pieces written by Lowens and 105 of his harmonizations or arrangements.<sup>117</sup> It also provided stimulus for Lowens's eventual scholarly interest in early American hymnology, which would become a lifelong pursuit.<sup>118</sup>

### **From Composer to Writer**

In the late 1930's, Lowens joined the National Association of American Composers and Conductors. Such affiliation brought the aspiring composer into the milieu (if perhaps at the perimeter) of many of New York's most influential musical *cognoscenti*, including such eminences among the Association's membership as Mrs. Edward MacDowell, Mrs. Horatio Parker, Vincent Persichetti, Charles Wakefield Cadman, who, for a short time, had been a music critic for the Pittsburgh *Dispatch*, Elie Siegmeister, Mrs. H.H.A. (Amy) Beach, Samuel Barber, Paul Creston, John Kirkpatrick and Olin Downes, music critic during this period for the *New York Times*.<sup>119</sup> It also brought Lowens face to face with a dismal reality at this time confronting virtually all living American composers—not just the young and untested ones, but also those living legends whom he might have encountered at Association functions—*vis.*,

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<sup>116</sup> May 25, 1952, unknown locale.

<sup>117</sup> *We Sing of Life: Songs for Children, Young People, and Adults*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.

<sup>118</sup> Lowens was instrumental in bringing to publication a facsimile edition of *Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music, Part Second*, a collection of American folk hymns compiled by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century music publisher John Wyeth. The edition (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964) was made from Lowens's own copy of the original 1820 print. The hymnal is part of an extensive collection of musical Americana, amassed by Lowens over a period of years, that he donated to the Moravian Music Foundation in the 1960's. Lowens's book *Music and Musicians in Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1964) contains several essays on early American sacred music. Reviewing it for the *New York Times*, Howard Hanson described the tome as "an encouraging sign of our growing cultural maturity . . . that we do recognize, at long last, the creative ferment that has taken place since the very beginnings of our country." See Howard Hanson, "Music Was Fine in Its Place," *New York Times*, January 17, 1965: Book Review, 6.

<sup>119</sup> Downes was a *Times* music critic from 1924-1955. He was listed as pianist on one of the NAACC's programs.

the abysmal lack of attention given their efforts by performing organizations nationwide and by America's concert-going public. As its bulletin stipulated, the Association's founding purpose was "to present American works whenever and wherever possible, securing the best interpreters available, creating interest in new American works on the part of orchestral conductors and generally advancing the cause of American music."<sup>120</sup> A second bulletin further stated that "the ideals of our Association continue to be not only the encouragement of the serious American composer and the co-operation of the orchestral conductor in his work, but also the closer contact of the composer with the layman, who necessarily forms the backbone of his audience and the final judge of his permanent significance."<sup>121</sup> Lowens would actively and aggressively address both of these overarching issues in American music and musical life when, as the *Star*'s chief music critic, he was afforded the opportunity so to do.

When Lowens left Schirmer, to "get into something more constructive as far as the war was concerned,"<sup>122</sup> he had by no means decided to leave composition behind, but his latent inclination toward opinion and editorial had already begun to assert itself. Lowens was still employed at Schirmer, in April 1942, when he penned his first public opinion in form of a letter to the music editor of the *New York Times*. The letter, appearing in the newspaper's "From the Mail Pouch" section, assailed none other than that most distinguished of American composers William Schuman on a topic close to Lowens's heart, the plight of America's aspiring and, in Lowens's view, largely ignored composers. His objection to Schuman's

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<sup>120</sup> National Association of American Composers and Conductors, *Annual Bulletin*, 1939, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>121</sup> National Association for American Composers and Conductors, *Annual Bulletin*, 1936-37, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>122</sup> Irving Lowens [Autobiographical Essay], loc. cit.

suggestion that a composition contest sponsored by the New Opera Company be open only to established musicians shows, in its lack of deference toward his musical elder, a decidedly youthful recklessness that would come to characterize some of his earlier criticism:

I would like to protest against William Schuman's letter which appeared in last Sunday's TIMES. Unwittingly, no doubt, Mr. Schuman shows a considerable amount of contempt for the young American composer . . . I have the greatest respect for Mr. Schuman's outstanding talent as a composer, and I feel quite sure that these same talents were much in evidence before he had become an American composer of renown . . . His counter-suggestion that the New Opera company commission works by composers who have already demonstrated their talents and abilities . . . shows a complete mis-understanding of the purpose behind the contest. This purpose . . . is not to patronize further those who have already arrived at that pinnacle where musical organizations would be willing to commission their work, but rather to discover new talents.<sup>123</sup>

The wartime position that Lowens took after leaving Schirmer was that of aircraft communicator for the Civil Aeronautics Administration. After training, he was posted first to Maine, then to West Virginia and upstate New York before proceeding finally to Washington, D.C., in 1947. The new job and its attendant relocations had a deleterious effect on his compositional ambitions. In the midst of his peregrinations, Lowens commented on this difficulty in correspondence with his former composition teacher Dr. Edwin Stringham, noting:

We have been settled here in Walden [New York] for about a year and a half, and have reached the point where we prefer country life to the blandishments of the big city, although we do miss the cultural vitality of New

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<sup>123</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to the music editor, "From the Mail Pouch: Another Viewpoint on Contests," *New York Times*, April 12, 1942: X6. Lowens's letter provoked a response from Schuman, who submitted his reply to the *Times*'s "From the Mail Pouch" column for April 19. Addressing the issue from another angle, Schuman opposed Lowens's opinion, pointedly, but also more decorously: "Has there ever been a contest which brought to light a previously undiscovered composer of outstanding talent? The number of first-line composers, past and present, who have won prizes is infinitesimal . . . [M]ost contests have status-quo musicians for judges. These men are hardly able to recognize a new path when, by training and experiences, they are steeped only in conventional molds . . . It is certainly not my intention to prejudge any works which may be submitted . . . I do wish to emphasize that commissioning the work would not only be more efficient but would be of greater aid to all composers. It would help to establish the principle of paying composers . . . for services rendered . . . Young composers could then look forward to bread with their glory. See William Schuman, letter to the music editor, "From the Mail Pouch: Prizes and Pay for Composers," *New York Times*, April 19, 1942: X6.

York. For some reason, my work as radio operator for the Civil Aeronautics Administration does not seem to be conducive to creative work in music. Of course, I have been doing some writing, but not nearly enough.<sup>124</sup>

Lowens's new work obligations with the CAA did not stop him from continuing his budding career as a writer of letters to the editor. A fiery and, at 750 words, loquacious opinion that he dispatched to the *Charleston Daily Mail* in 1943 renders undeniable his burgeoning interest in newspaper journalism and commentary. The letter, never published, excoriates an editorial criticizing another newspaper's coverage of hate-crime incidents against Jews in the Boston area. Not only does Lowens dispute in detail the editorial's claims regarding the facts of the case, but he boldly goes one step further and, in language blunt to the point of rudeness, lectures the newspaper's editor on his deficiencies in the craft of editorial writing:

Dear Sir: Certain statements in your editorial "Hysteria in Boston" published today seem to require further clarification and amplification. In ordinary times, such an editorial could be shrugged off as merely another example of that peculiarly inept and spineless thing which passes for editorializing and which is characteristic of American journalism at its worst. It is a model of what an editorial should not be. Unfortunately these are not ordinary times. These are times when men are dying on battlefields in order to rid the world once and for all of that pestilence which you scurrilously castigate PM for reporting honestly . . . . Your editorial is not only misleading, but also shockingly inaccurate in presenting the facts of the case . . . . For a newspaper in what you judiciously term "the tradition of English-speaking journalism," the performance of the Daily Mail is shoddy indeed . . . . Such carping criticism as yours of a courageous and fighting American newspaper is, to take a kindly view of the matter, evidence of an uneasy conscience. Yours truly, Irving Lowens.<sup>125</sup>

Lowens's impatience with the state of professional journalism surfaced again in yet another letter to the editor, written in 1946 for the readers of *Harper's Magazine*. Responding to

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<sup>124</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Dr. Edwin Stringham, posted from Walden, New York, April 13, 1946, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>125</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to editor, *Charleston Daily Mail*, October 22, 1943, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

an article ascribing blame for Nazism to the German citizenry as a whole,<sup>126</sup> Lowens castigated the author for his “muddleheadedness” in “yearning for an easy way out of a problem desperately complicated,”<sup>127</sup> and then brazenly proceeded to question the magazine’s probity in publishing the article at all:

[The] thesis that all Germans, regardless of political or economic viewpoint and background, past commitments and activities, are culpable to some degree for the tragedy of Nazism is symptomatic of contemporary impatience with reality . . . . It is to be regretted that Harper’s, with its great influence among intelligent Americans, saw fit to print and feature prominently an article so impatient of humanity, and so shallow. Mr. Hale, and others who think as he does, do not begin to scratch the surface in their search for answers and solutions. No one can understand the “German”—there is no such animal . . . . The reasons for social organization and the solutions to the problems of society must be searched for with greater assiduity. They are to be found deeply imbedded in the culture of civilization.<sup>128</sup>

In the mid-1940s Lowens began to face the likelihood that his ambitions as a composer would go unfulfilled. He unleashed some of his pent-up frustrations in a letter to the music editor of the *New York Times* late in 1945. The subject was music appreciation and the presumed failure of the broadcasting profession to meet its responsibilities *vis-à-vis* serious music, but in it the aspiring composer vainly searching for an audience begins to give way to the emerging music critic:

Dear Sir:

Apropos of Mr. Downes’s article “Should Critics Get Mad?” may I suggest the following situation as one worthy of his and other music critics’ righteous choler? . . . It would appear that Americans are still musically an illiterate people. Certainly, one of the reasons for this musical illiteracy can be found in a simple breakdown of the “Radio Concert” listings published weekly in the *New York Sunday*

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<sup>126</sup> William Harlan Hale, “Germany’s Deformed Conscience,” *Harper’s*, vol. 192, no. 1148 (January, 1946): 1-9.

<sup>127</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to the editor [unpublished], *Harper’s*, January 8, 1946, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

*Times* . . . . Casual scrutiny of the 23 concerts scheduled by the major New York stations shows that only 6 can reasonably be classed as “concerts”; most of the material . . . would certainly not be found in programs presented to the public on the concert stage . . . . Is it still not time to convince radio that Americans are adults, entitled to adult fare? Here is something for music critics to get mad about!

Yours truly,

Irving Lowens<sup>129</sup>

Lowens recorded 1945 as the year of his transition from serious music composer to serious music writer. In the prefatory narrative to a *résumé*, c. 1963, written for unknown purpose, he sardonically describes his final evolution into the literary field:

Irving Lowens, American musicologist, music critic, and librarian; born New York City, August 19, 1916, but vehemently denies being a New Yorker since he has spent most of his life trying to stay away from that inferno. Changed his mind after deciding to become a professional chess-player in high school, deciding to become a professional composer, the only possible career that could be less lucrative. Primarily self-taught as a composer, but finishing touches were added by Edwin A. Stringham, Howard A. Murphy, and Quinto Maganini. After some small successes, especially as a composer of art songs, decided in 1945 that he was not the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Schubert and abandoned writing music for writing about it. Has been at it ever since.<sup>130</sup>

Ever resilient, Lowens turned the still-festering wound of his failed compositional career into fodder for his first forays into journalism. Two articles on the travails of aspiring composers emanated from his pen in the mid-1940's,<sup>131</sup> one for the now-defunct, mass-market magazine

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<sup>129</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, November 4, 1945, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection. The letter did not appear in publication.

<sup>130</sup> Irving Lowens, “Biographical Sketch,” [ca. 1963] Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>131</sup> He also wrote at this time a short piece entitled “Your Child, Composer” that appeared in *Parent Magazine*. See Hope Stuart, letter to Irving Lowens, March 22, 1946, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

*Coronet* and one for the short-lived professional music journal *Musicology*.<sup>132</sup> The article for *Coronet*, “Contemporary Composer: Music’s Forgotten Man,” is a virtual—and at 4500 words, protracted—tirade, in which he bemoans the “appalling waste of the creative potential of mankind” caused by the inability of the composer to “support himself through the sale of [his] product.”<sup>133</sup> His rage and disappointment are only barely contained in these polemic pages, as he rails against both the victimized composer and an indifferent public:

In a civilization where worth is synonymous with money, where a composer who cannot earn a decent living despite his mastery in his chosen field is a failure, and a delicatessen owner who makes his five thousand a year despite his ignorance of anything that does not resemble a salami is a success, what is the inducement to creative effort? Except for such chimeras as the beckoning finger of fame, the only inducement is the composer’s inner drive, or, in other words, his bullheadedness. For the privilege of being stubborn, the composer pays a heavy fee to society. In the face of the apathy of the public, only those driven by the blind and inspired stupidity of genius or imbecility continue to write music.<sup>134</sup>

Lowens took a more reasoned approach to the subject in “The Composer’s Dilemma,” written for *Musicology* in 1946.<sup>135</sup> In this essay, the bone of contention remains unaltered, but the language is less inflammatory, the logic more persuasive, and the argument buttressed with a modicum of research. Now the fledgling pundit, Lowens begins in earnest to flex his critical muscles:

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<sup>132</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Manuscript Bureau, January 16, 1948, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection. *Musicology* was in operation between 1946 and 1949. His work for *Musicology*, which involved a regular column devoted to reviews of newly published music, constituted his first professional experience as a journalist/critic.

<sup>133</sup> Irving Lowens, “Contemporary Composer: Music’s Forgotten Man,” [ca. 1946], ts.: 1-2, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>134</sup> Irving Lowens, “Contemporary Composer,” op. cit.: 2-3.

<sup>135</sup> *Musicology* 1/2 (Fall 1946): 131-141. Lowens in fact submitted the article twice for publication in *The Musical Quarterly*, but then-editors Gustave Reese and Paul Henry Lang, respectively, rejected it, Lang going so far as to include some “friendly advice” regarding its content and approach. See letters from Reese, January 29, 1945, and Lang, May 24, 1945, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

It can safely be asserted that none of the serious American composers who have achieved recognition earn a living from writing music . . . . Our modern culture . . . seem[s] to be flatly inimical to genuine creative labor. The composer must contend with the deadening apathy of the average American; he must face the covert or open hostility towards the new and untried in the mind of the re-creative musician and the concert-goer; he must try to sell his wares and maintain his integrity in a market which pays a premium for mediocrity . . . . The budget of the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Society from fall 1930 through fall 1932 amounted to nearly two million dollars. Of this budget, \$3500, or less than two-fifths of one per cent, was paid out in *all* royalties . . . . In 1931 . . . the New York Philharmonic with Toscanini conducting performed a work by Abram Chasins, but could not afford to pay the composer a single penny. In 1936 . . . the Cleveland Orchestra took the precaution of advising conductors engaged for the Great Lakes exposition that *no* money was available for performance rights . . . . The writer, frankly, has no solution to the problem, and sees none in the immediate offing . . . . I cannot help but feel that one of the major sources of confusion in thinking about the composer's dilemma can be found in the lumping together indiscriminately of the problems of performance and compensation. It might help to keep them separate if it could be remembered that the performance itself is likely to be a pyrrhic victory for the composer. He is quite liable to find himself, although richer in spirit, considerably poorer in cash after having achieved it.<sup>136</sup>

In the waning years of the 1940s, Lowens continued sporadically to fan the flames of his compositional aspirations, if with considerably less ardor. He made grandiose plans with a collaborator to turn the Biblical story of David and Bathsheba into an opera,<sup>137</sup> a scheme that went little beyond the libretto-fashioning stage, and he secured performances for an orchestral piece, in locales as far afield as Arlington, Virginia, and San Francisco, California, receiving for his effort some modest critical praise in the press,<sup>138</sup> as well as commendation from that at the

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Lowens refers to this project and his collaborator, a Mr. Rudolf, in letters to his literary agent Hope Stuart on May 8 and June 16 of 1946. Both the letters and the opera libretto are preserved in the Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>138</sup> The piece, entitled "Variations on a Peruvian Theme," was given a glowing review by Irving Herman in "Arlington Symphony," *Northern Virginia Free Press*, January 23, 1948, n.p. Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

time grand panegyrist of American music and musicians, Howard Hanson.<sup>139</sup> Lowens failed, however, in an attempt in 1948 to win the prestigious Rome Prize Fellowship<sup>140</sup> in composition. This blow, as much as any other, may have been pivotal in persuading him of the ultimate futility of his enterprise.

Although Lowens left a career in composition behind, the unpleasant memories associated with those years of frustration simmered sufficiently close to the surface of his consciousness to erupt with full vigor when, more than a decade later, he had opportunity to speak out. When he found himself at the helm of the *Star*'s music department in 1961 and with power to choose unimpeded the topics of his think-pieces, he attacked the problem with missionary zeal. In the first year of his tenure as the *Star*'s chief music critic (January 1961 through January 1962), he found means to insert, into no fewer than ten Sunday think-pieces, discussion involving the plight of the contemporary composer in America.<sup>141</sup>

### **Scholarly Stirrings**

At the same time that Lowens was attempting to bring David and Bathsheba to operatic life, he was also heavily engaged in yet another grand design: The completion of a

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<sup>139</sup> Hanson and the Eastman-Rochester Symphony Orchestra gave the work its premiere at the Sixty-Sixth Annual Symposium of American Orchestral Music, October 18, 1944. See concert program, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>140</sup> Mary T. Williams, Executive Secretary, American Academy in Rome, letter to Irving Lowens, March 2, 1948, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>141</sup> The ten features, all appearing in *The Sunday Star*, were "A 'New Frontier' For Music, Too?" January 15, 1961:D4; "Which Comes First, Music or Personality?" April 2, 1961: F6; "Inter-American Music Festival," April 16, 1961: D11; "Season Is Finishing In Blaze of Glory," May 21, 1961: D16; "Encore Holds Crowd in Cathedral Seats," May 28, 1961: C4; "U.S. Composers Heard, But Not Often Enough," June 25, 1961: C4; "What is the Outlook for Music in America?" August 27, 1961: D10; "Modern Composers Lead in New Survey," July 9, 1961: F4; "Stravinsky Here To Conduct His Works," January 14, 1962: F5; and "The Money-Making Myth About the Serious Composer," January 21, 1962: F4.

comprehensive biography of composers in America.<sup>142</sup> This project may have been the first of his explorations into the field of musicology, the endeavor occupying his thoughts, if not his time, from as early as 1942.<sup>143</sup> In another letter to Stringham, Lowens characterized the venture as “an overview of American music in biographical sketches of prominent and not so prominent musicians for teenagers.”<sup>144</sup> Although eventually meeting the same unhappy fate as did his opera, it did result in a sizable manuscript with the working title, “Mortals and Immortals: An Informal History of American Composers.”<sup>145</sup> As the title implies, albeit obliquely, impetus for the investigation may have derived, at least in part, from his continuing quarrel with modern America over the neglect of its own composers, living or otherwise, and his wish to provide redress. In fact, the opening paragraphs of the biographical sketch on the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century composer Anthony Philip Heinrich<sup>146</sup> makes the case for just that suggestion:

One hundred years ago, New York and Boston, cultural centers of a brash, vigorous, clumsy, rapidly growing young America, were hotly

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<sup>142</sup> He mentioned his work on both projects, in virtually the same breath, in his letter to Hope Stuart, May 8, 1946, loc. cit.

<sup>143</sup> In a letter to Willis [last name unknown] of September 24, 1947, he writes: “Since 1942 I have been getting more and more interested in the historical backgrounds of American music . . . and I am about three fourths of the way through with a book on that subject. The forthcoming issue of *Musicology* will have one of the chapters from the book . . . .” A full text to the letter resides in the Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>144</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Edwin Stringham, April 13, 1946, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>145</sup> The manuscript’s table of contents lists nine completed biographical sketches, on Francis Hopkinson, William Billings, James Hewitt, Anthony Philip Heinrich, William Henry Fry, Lowell Mason, Stephen Foster, Louis Moreau Gottschalk and Patrick Sternfield Gilmore, and seven more that were projected, on Ethelbert Nevin, Victor Herbert, John Philip Sousa, Edward MacDowell, Charles Thomlinson Griffes, Charles Martin Loeffler and George Gershwin. The sketches of Gottschalk and Gilmore are not present in the extant manuscript papers. Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>146</sup> This sketch and two others appeared in print as periodical articles, all in the journal *Musicology*: “The Triumph of Anthony Philip Heinrich,” I/4 (Fall 1947): 365-373; “The First Matinee Idol: Louis Moreau Gottschalk,” II/1 (Spring 1948): 23-34; and “William Henry Fry, Fighter for American Music,” II/2 (Fall 1948): 162-173. He also published in *Musicology* during this period an article unrelated to early American music and musicians, “L’Affaire Muck: A Study in War Hysteria (1917-1918),” I/3 (Spring 1947): 265-274.

competing with each other in paying homage to a then living American composer whose name has since disappeared from memory. Even today, in our enlightened times, concerts consisting solely of music by a contemporary American composer are extremely rare and widely heralded events. Yet, in 1846, one Anthony Philip Heinrich completely conquered New York and Boston with his music, if not with his personality. Within the short space of six weeks, two concerts, both artistic triumphs for the man, were given before immense and super-enthusiastic audiences.

Heinrich, who was once seriously given the title of “the Beethoven of America” by the best critics of his time, and who was easily the most commanding figure as a composer in our country during the exciting middle decades of the nineteenth century, has been totally forgotten . . . . Nevertheless, he stood head and shoulders above his contemporaries.<sup>147</sup>

The pace of Lowens’s interest in research accelerated upon his 1947 relocation to the nation’s capital. If his dissatisfaction with American culture *vis-à-vis* contemporary music and musicians initially coaxed him toward the scholarly life, his intellectual curiosity could not resist the research opportunities presenting themselves to him at the Library of Congress, where he spent increasing amounts of time during the late 1940s and 1950s. In a letter to Felix Greissle, then Director of Publications for Marks Music, he extolled the virtues of the vast treasures that he had unearthed among the Library’s holdings. Pointing specifically to “the wealth of holographic material and rare printed music available at the Library of Congress,”<sup>148</sup> he remarked, as prelude to a publishing negotiation: “Much valuable early material has never appeared in modern editions and the fortunate presence here of such a large volume of autographs in the composer’s handwriting would enable someone to bring out extremely valuable Urtext editions.”<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Irving Lowens, “The Triumph of Anthony Philip Heinrich,” op. cit: 365-6.

<sup>148</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Felix Greissle, March 5, 1948. Lowens’s continuing correspondence with Greissle, including this letter and another written on March 12, concerned a specific project he proposed for a commercial venture, namely the publication of performing editions of music, manuscripts for which were housed in the Library of Congress collection. Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

A second letter, written to Greissle only a week later, not only describes in greater detail the magnitude of the Library's enormous musical assets, but also makes clear the extent of his own substantial investigations:

I spent a rather pleasant afternoon at the Library of Congress refreshing my memory as to the extent and value of their holograph[,] photostat and 1<sup>st</sup> edition catalogs . . . . The American mss. Are particularly rich and varied (the best collection in the world is here). Among the most valuable items, completely unobtainable and unknown, are 18<sup>th</sup> century chamber music, orchestral and vocal scores by our earliest (and too little known) composers. The facsimile collection is excellent and contains about 500 of the important mss., many of which have been destroyed or lost because of the last war. The 1<sup>st</sup> edition collection is very extensive, and includes nearly complete sets of the work of the standard masters . . . about 4000 items.<sup>150</sup>

Finally, correspondence with fellow scholar Harry Stevens, in September of the same year, finds Lowens's wide-eyed enthusiasm for his new pastime tempered with the recognition, not only that the Library's riches required thorough organization and codification, but that herein lay his labors:

[T]here are many lacunae in our knowledge of the history of American music, and until more intensive research in local sources has been undertaken . . . it will hardly be possible to write an adequate history of American music. My own ambition is to some day attempt this task. I have been particularly interested for the past four or five years in music in America during the nineteenth century prior to the Civil War. The state of our knowledge about this critically important period seems to me most lamentable.<sup>151</sup>

For the next decade and a half, a flood of scholarship streamed from Lowens's pen. Proceeding with his sacred task—all in his spare time<sup>152</sup>—of bearing witness to America's

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<sup>150</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Felix Greissle, March 12, 1948, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>151</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Dr. Harry R. Stevens, September 25, 1948, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>152</sup> Lowens continued to work full-time as an air traffic controller until 1955.

musical heritage,<sup>153</sup> he brought to light and placed into context numberless heretofore neglected manuscripts, imprints and rare miscellaneous documents that together constitute a sizable component of the early American musical tradition.<sup>154</sup> Lowens's research, which took shape as detailed bibliographic studies<sup>155</sup> and documentary investigations,<sup>156</sup> established his national (and international) reputation, particularly in the area of American sacred music of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In due course, his name became familiar to readers of such august scholarly publications as the Music Library Association's *Notes*, *Étude*, *The American Choral Review*, *The Musical Quarterly*, *The Journal of Research in Music Education*, *High Fidelity/Stereo Review*, and *The Journal of the American Musicological Society*.<sup>157</sup>

Lowens's credentials as a scholar and Americanist were thus firmly cemented when, in 1956, he made the decision to return to the academic arena for advanced study. In less than a year's time, he dutifully<sup>158</sup> completed a Master of Arts degree at the University of Maryland as a research fellow, in American Civilization. Going even further against the grain, he

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<sup>153</sup> One of his journal articles, on New England psalmody, in fact bearing the title, "Our Neglected Musical Heritage," attested to Lowens's mission and perspective on the status of American music scholarship at this time. See *Hymn* (Spring 1952): 49-55.

<sup>154</sup> Between 1946 and 1961 (the year that he began devoting full-time attention to music criticism at the *Star*), approximately fifty scholarly articles, in as many as fifteen different national and international journals or books, were published under Lowens's authorship.

<sup>155</sup> His bibliographic labors culminated in the (posthumous) publication of the landmark book *American Sacred Music Imprints, 1698-1810: A Bibliography*, an exhaustive, annotated inventory of over a century's worth of collections and sheet music editions, co-written with Allen P. Britton and completed by Richard Crawford. Worcester, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society, 1990.

<sup>156</sup> Among his seminal efforts in this regard are expositions on the Bay Psalm Book, John Tufts's *Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes*, the letters of composer Daniel Read, John Wyeth's *Repository of Sacred Music* and *The Easy Instructor* (the first American shape-note tunebook). See *Music and Musicians in Early America*, loc. cit.

<sup>157</sup> See "VITA," loc. cit..

<sup>158</sup> Lowens makes clear his ambivalence about the prospect of graduate study in a letter, written shortly after matriculating at the University of Maryland, in which he declares, "I have accepted an appointment as research

departed the hallowed halls of academe in 1959 without ever completing the Ph.D. that he had begun in 1957.<sup>159</sup> In Lowens's case, however, this emblematic rite of passage for scholars was redundant and unnecessary. An autodidact of first rank, he was, in the end, his own best teacher.

Lowens's premature—and ultimately permanent—departure from graduate study may have been precipitated in part by work on a project, unrelated to his degree, that had been ruminating in his mind for about a year. Initiated through the auspices of the Music Library Association, which was conveniently headquartered at the Library of Congress, the project may have helped to secure his first position in music. Late in 1958, in a letter of intent to then-Music Division Chief Harold Spivacke, he explained the purpose of the undertaking as:

[A] history of American music in sound. There is as you know no adequate representation of pre-20<sup>th</sup> century American music for such an educational purpose available on phonograph records at present. I hope to present a proposal for the setting up of an MLA committee to explore this idea at the Cleveland meeting of the MLA next month as well as a report<sup>160</sup> of just what American music is available on LP records.<sup>161</sup>

The MLA accepted Lowens's proposal and, to advance its implementation, formed the American Recordings Project Committee, with Lowens as chairman.<sup>162</sup> Whether by design or

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fellow in American Civilization . . . and I have given up my long struggle to stay out of the Ph.D. ranks." See letter to Albert T. Luper, October 10, 1956, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>159</sup> Completing his coursework for the Ph.D. between 1957 and 1959, Lowens also finished a dissertation, which, inexplicably, he failed to present to his examination committee. With funding support by the Scheide Foundation, the dissertation was published in 1976 by the American Antiquarian Society as *A Bibliography of Songsters Printed in America Before 1821* (Worcester, Massachusetts).

<sup>160</sup> The report to which Lowens refers, "The Curious State of American Music on Records," was later published in *Notes*, XVI/3 (June 1959): 371-6. See also Lowens, "The American Recordings Project Takes Shape," *Notes*, XVIII/2 (March 1961): 219-20.

<sup>161</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Harold Spivacke, December 31, 1958, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>162</sup> Other members of the committee included John Edmunds, H. Wiley Hitchcock, and Victor Yellin. The project was endorsed by the National Music Council. See Lowens's report, "The Recording Situation of American

happenstance, the project dovetailed surprisingly well with the Music Division's longstanding desire for a sound recording department that Spivacke was at that moment pressing with the Librarian of Congress, L. Quincy Mumford. William Lichtenwanger, serving at the time as Assistant Head of the Music Division's Reference Section, recounted the progression of events leading to Lowens's fortuitous appointment to that just formed department:

For some years, he [Lowens] was sequestered in Charleston, WV, but by 1947 he had managed to get himself transferred to . . . Washington, D.C. It was then that he began spending much of his free time as a reader in the LC music division exploring vast thickets of manuscript and printed sources in what is often sloppily referred to as "early American music." It was then, too, that the staff of the Music Division became fast friends with Irv . . . and came to admire him for his wide knowledge of music and for his good humor and quiet charm . . . . By the early 1950's Lowens was thoroughly at home in the Library of Congress. He would have dearly loved . . . to be at work there . . . . The staff would have dearly loved to hire him. From 1944 to 1956, however, the music division was unable to add any professional staff, and in fact lost one position to the budget-cutting Congress of 1947-49. By 1956 we had finally regained that position and had another to fill through retirement; but by then Irv was very slowly recuperating from his 1954 brush with death [a coronary attack, the first of seven]. The luck of the Lowens finally changed in 1959 when Frank Campbell left the Library of Congress to be assistant chief of the Music Division at the NYPL [New York Public Library]. Harold Spivacke . . . had for twenty years been scheming to initiate a sound recordings unit in the Music Division. Now he fought a nine-month war with the Librarian of Congress to get Frank's job description rewritten specifically for a sound recording librarian . . . . Mumford . . . finally approved a new job description . . . . Mr. Lowens became the first recorded-sound librarian specialist at the Library of Congress as of July 1, 1960.<sup>163</sup>

### Enter the Critic

Thus Lowens entered at last the ranks of the music profession and at his long-cherished Library of Congress,<sup>164</sup> first as sound recordings librarian and, less than a year later,

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Compositions," *National Music Council Bulletin*, XX/3 (Spring 1960): 9-10, and untitled press release, n.d., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>163</sup> Lichtenwanger, "Irving and the LC years," op. cit., 6-7.

<sup>164</sup> Lowens's attraction to the Library of Congress goes back at least as far as 1946 when, while still living in upstate New York and on temporary but involuntary hiatus from his Civil Aeronautics Administration job, he

as assistant head of the reference section.<sup>165</sup> A career in music was a goal that Lowens had persistently sought and patiently awaited for nearly twenty years.<sup>166</sup> When, a mere six months after joining the Library of Congress staff, he was offered the chief music critic's post<sup>167</sup> at the *Washington Evening Star*, this errant musicological hobbyist now boasted not one, but two incontestable occupations in his field of dreams.

Perhaps unable to choose between them, Lowens held onto both positions for well over five years, working days at the Library and nights and weekends at the *Star*. Although such double-trouble juggling of jobs, as well as the magnitude of the responsibilities that would later engulf him at the *Star*, severely curtailed his musicological investigations,<sup>168</sup> his many years wearing the scholar's mantle and his intimate acquaintance with the Library of Congress's vast musical holdings would come to invigorate the *Star*'s music pages, which, after his appointment, became increasingly punctuated with musicological perspectives. In his first year of tenure at the *Star*, Lowens found means to infuse his articles with the collective wisdom of such scholarly luminaries as Edward J. Dent, Winton Dean, Joan Peyser, and

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sought employment there. See letter to Director of Personnel, Library of Congress, October 11, 1946, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>165</sup> Lowens was promoted to Assistant Head, Reference Section on April 17, 1961. See Position Description, Optional Form 8, U.S. Civil Service Commission, Chapter P2, Federal Personnel Manual, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>166</sup> Correspondence of the 1940's and 1950's containing references to, or requests for specific guidance, in support of this goal include: Irving Lowens, letters to Felix Greissle, July 1, 1947; Willis [last name unknown], September 24, 1947; Mrs. Edwin Stringham, March 5, 1948; and Mr. Kirby [first name unknown], May 8, 1959, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>167</sup> For the first six years of his employment as the *Star*'s chief music critic, Lowens was not considered, technically, a full-time employee. He managed the newspaper's music department, as well as producing a full complement of articles and reviews each week, on retainer and, therefore, without the accrual of standard benefits. This circumstance would have negative ramifications some years later when he made a fruitless attempt to take early retirement. See *subter*: 75-76.

<sup>168</sup> Lowens continued to make regular contributions as a reviewer of books, music and performances to such journals as *The Musical Quarterly*, *American Choral Review*, and the Sonneck Society's literary organ *American Music* for the rest of his life.

Abram Chasins<sup>169</sup> and to instruct his readers on the finer points of such arcane topics (for the general reader) as *opéra comique*, *opera seria*, and the origin of the Christmas carol.<sup>170</sup> As his term in the critic's chair continued to evolve, Lowens expanded coverage of the scholar's domain, devoting entire Sunday think-pieces to, variously, important books on musical topics,<sup>171</sup> music scholars and scholarship,<sup>172</sup> and rare *minutiae* about composers and compositions that could be unearthed only by a musicological excavator of considerable acumen.<sup>173</sup>

Lowens's inveterate urge to advance his own ideas on an audience of some sort may have provided the means for his initial *entrée* at the *Star* newspapers. The appearance of Day Thorpe's byline in the *Star*'s music section, in December 1953, prompted Lowens to put to paper some of his early ideas about critics and criticism. Thorpe had been writing reviews for the *Star* for only a week when Lowens found himself moved to send a letter to the *Star* editors praising—and appraising—Thorpe's work. The letter's first sentence implies that Lowens's preference for the *Star* as a prospective employer may have been influenced by Thorpe, whose

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<sup>169</sup> In "Mozart's 'Idomeneo' For the Connoisseur," *Sunday Star*, February 5, 1961: D14; "Washington to Hear the Original 'Carmen,'" *Sunday Star*, April 9, 1961: D12; "New York's Cultural Center is Challenge," *Sunday Star*, May 14, 1961: C16; and "The Big Need for a New Magazine for Music Activities in This Area," *Sunday Star*, June 4, 1961: D14.

<sup>170</sup> "Carmen," loc.cit.; "Idomeneo," loc.cit.; and "Christmas Carols and Their Origins," *Sunday Star*, December 24, 1961: C8.

<sup>171</sup> See "Music Turns to Books for Summer Reading," *Sunday Star*, June 30, 1963: F4; "New Books on Music Bring Christmas Near," *Sunday Star*, December 8, 1963: F11; and "'Grove'—That Veritable One-Piece Music Library," *Sunday Star*, July 5, 1970: F1.

<sup>172</sup> See "Noted Musicologist [Anthony van Hoboken] to Deliver Lecture Here," *Sunday Star*, May 13, 1962: F7; "Westrup to Speak at Library Soon," *Sunday Star*, August 25, 1963: D4; "Three at Library Cited for Service to Music," *Sunday Star*, January 31, 1971: C8; and "Mistakes of Musical Scholarship (Or Why the Complete Works of Billings?)," *Sunday Star*, January 29, 1978: G6.

<sup>173</sup> See "Berlioz Refused American Tours," *Sunday Star*, October 30, 1966: D4; "MUSIC: Ben Franklin Writes Hopkinson a Letter," *Sunday Star*, October 20, 1968: D11; "Stravinsky's Ironic Ending," *Evening Star*, April 8, 1971: A13; "Why 'Mahagonny'?" *Sunday Star*, December 10, 1972: H1; and "How Verdi Stumbled Upon His Attila," *Sunday Star*, November 28, 1976: G14.

special qualities as a critic and writer held particular appeal: “During the seven years in which I have been following the music reviews as they appear in the Washington press,<sup>174</sup> I have rarely come across more literate and interesting columns than those by Mr. Day Thorpe in the *Star* during the past week.”<sup>175</sup>

Although citing none of Thorpe’s articles in particular, Lowens followed this lead with a paragraph of superlatives for Thorpe that served also to encapsulate, for the edification of Thorpe *et al*, Lowens’s conception of the ideal critic:

In addition to possessing a succinct and adult prose style, Mr. Thorpe is apparently gifted with the ability—all too rare—to react to a concert as if it were a genuinely exciting experience and not a chore; at the same time, he has demonstrated that he can evaluate both music and performance without indulging in either unbridled praise or undue censure. In short, here is a genuine music critic.<sup>176</sup>

Whether this letter was drafted with intent to bring his talents to the attention of Thorpe and the *Star* editors, ensuing events suggest it to have had that very effect. As Lowens recollected two decades later, in his final think-piece for the *Star*, Thorpe, after transferring to the music desk, “made a momentous shift in emphasis in the music department. His basic idea was that the Washington musical scene should be covered thoroughly. I was asked by him to help cover the waterfront, and I agreed with alacrity to do so.”<sup>177</sup> Thorpe officially

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<sup>174</sup> There were four daily newspapers operating at this time in Washington, D.C., including the *Post*, for which Paul Hume, as its music critic, held considerable influence and notoriety.

<sup>175</sup> Irving Lowens, letter, *Evening Star*, December 5, 1953, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> Irving Lowens, “A Critic’s Farewell: Of Music, Mirrors and News,” *Washington Star*, September 3, 1978: B1.

took over as the *Star*'s chief music critic on January 5, 1954.<sup>178</sup> One month later, Lowens's first assignment as a *Star* stringer was in print.<sup>179</sup>

Lowens's apprentice years at the *Star* were profitably spent. A high demand for reviews of classical music at this time netted him anywhere from fifteen to twenty assignments per month at the height of Washington's concert season.<sup>180</sup> This was an exhaustive schedule for a part-time stringer<sup>181</sup> also occupied, first with a full-time "day job" in air traffic control, and later with graduate studies at the University of Maryland. That he was amenable to so heavy a work load during his leisure hours offers abundant evidence of his earnest desire to make music criticism central to his professional life.

Because the *Star*'s explicit mission was to serve the local community first, and because Lowens, as last hired, ranked at the bottom of the journalistic pecking order, his beat as a critic during his debut year consisted primarily of concerts by local musicians and music groups, amateur and professional alike. In this early period, he regularly covered military band concerts, suburban orchestral and choral concerts, church-sponsored music series, presentations by area university music departments, high-school ensemble performances, and the ubiquitous musicales of the Friday Morning Music Club.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> [Unnamed author] "Miss Alice Eversman Retiring As Music Editor of *Star*; Served 21 years as Critic; Thorpe Named Successor," *Evening Star*," January 5, 1954: A6.

<sup>179</sup> Irving Lowens, "CU String Quartet Rewards Small Audience," *Evening Star*, February 9, 1954: A17.

<sup>180</sup> 1956 is a case in point. Fifteen reviews with the Lowens byline were published in January of that year, eighteen in February, twenty (his monthly maximum) in March and nineteen in April.

<sup>181</sup> As a stringer, Lowens was paid per article, the going rate at this time, \$10 per piece. See Irving Lowens, letter to Mr. Kirby, May 8, 1959, loc. cit.

<sup>182</sup> The Friday Morning Music Club was founded in 1886 to "promote musical culture among its members and the [Washington] community." It has since its inception sponsored weekly classical-music performances by both professional and gifted amateur musicians, as well as prestigious competitions for aspiring performing artists and composers. See the Friday Morning Music Club's website, <http://www.fmmc.org/>, accessed January 22, 2007.

High-profile performances seldom fell under Lowens's purview. He was privileged to review in his first year at the *Star* only six concerts by the National Symphony Orchestra. Of the fourteen singers whom he reviewed that year, only one, Victoria de los Angeles, boasted either a national or international reputation, and none of the many solo pianists that he heard, save Beveridge Webster, was well known beyond the District of Columbia. The steady stream of principally local coverage emanating from his pen had the advantage, however, of allowing him, not only to hone his critical writing skills, but also to draw allies from among Washington's musical movers and shakers, who would later become important partners with him in a shared mission to develop a thriving classical-music culture in the nation's capital.

In sum, during his first year of work at the *Star*, Lowens amassed a portfolio of eighty-nine reviews, penned between February and December of 1954. Shortly after publication of his December 20<sup>th</sup> review, of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church's Christmas concert, Lowens suffered his first coronary attack. This devastating and life-altering experience sidelined him completely for the next seven months. In deference to his illness, he forswore his critic's pen until June 1955.

In the time that remained to him as a *Star* stringer, Lowens was increasingly, if irregularly, given greater responsibility for some of the more significant concerts taking place in the Washington environs. The years 1955 and 1956 saw him deliver some thirty reviews of chamber music concerts to the *Star* readership. In addition to solo recitals for violin, viola, or cello—and even one for the viola d'amore—he took on appraisals of such sophisticated performing organizations as the Catholic University Arts Society, the Washington Chamber Music Society, the Krasner Chamber Music Ensemble, the Kroll Quartet, the Paganini

Quartet, the American University Quartet, the Juilliard Quartet, and the Budapest Quartet, at this time in residence at the Library of Congress.<sup>183</sup>

In 1955 and 1956 his assessments of the National Symphony Orchestra appeared more often as well, and he reviewed such internationally prominent artists and ensembles as pianists Dame Myra Hess, Walter Gieseking, Arthur Rubinstein, and Robert Casadesus, contralto Marian Anderson, tenor Jan Peerce, the New York City Opera, Herbert von Karajan conducting the Berlin Philharmonic, and soprano Leontyne Price. These lofty assignments boosted both his stature among Washington's musical elite, as well as his confidence as an up-and-coming public intellectual.

### *L'Enfant terrible*

Lowens's newly minted self-assurance verged precariously on the irresponsible when he reviewed, in 1955, a performance by soprano Margaret Harshaw with the National Symphony Orchestra. The result, not surprisingly, was a minor *succés de scandale*. Objecting to NSO Music Director Howard Mitchell's musical choices,<sup>184</sup> Lowens employed language bordering on the impertinent, when he remarked that the program "consisted entirely of ancient war-Harshaws" and was "extremely tactless."<sup>185</sup> He then compounded his affront by characterizing Harshaw in the most irreverent of terms:

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<sup>183</sup> The Budapest Quartet remained at the Library of Congress until 1962, when it was succeeded by the Juilliard Quartet. The Juilliard Quartet relinquished its resident status when the residency program ended in 2003. See "Budapest Quartet in Farewell Here," *Sunday Star*, March 25, 1962, C10; "Juilliard Replaces Budapest in Library," *Sunday Star*, September 30, 1962: F4; and Philip Kennicott, "Library of Congress to End Juilliard Program," *Washington Post*, August 23, 2001: C3.

<sup>184</sup> On a concert honoring the German ambassador and the Republic of Germany, Mitchell elected to perform music by the two composers—Richard Strauss and Richard Wagner—whose music had figured most prominently in Hitler's Third Reich.

<sup>185</sup> "Choice of Symphony's Music Questioned," *Evening Star*, October 27, 1955: n.p., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

Miss Harshaw—tall, imposing and blond [sic] this season—was the very picture of the typical Wagnerian soprano. She is no Traubel, however, and her Brünnhilde was something less than memorable vocally despite a striking, flame-red gown and plenty of histrionics.<sup>186</sup>

Lowens's inflammatory words caused a disturbance of proportions not far removed (in Lowens's view) from the notorious review of a vocal recital by Margaret Truman that Paul Hume had written for the *Washington Post* in 1950.<sup>187</sup> In a letter to his friend Sylvia Kenney, Lowens described the dubious affair and his callow recklessness with almost as much pleasure as concern:

Things came to some sort of climax two days ago, however, when Day [Thorpe] rebelled at going to an ordinary National Symphony Orchestra concert and asked me to cover it instead. For \$10, I went. I perhaps should have stayed in bed. The concert was dedicated to the Federal German Republic, and was all R. Strauss-R. Wagner. Surprisingly enough, the place was half empty—but then the soloist was Margaret Harshaw. Anyhow, I got to thinking, and the more I thought, the sorer I got. It was not only a supremely poor program, but also a very insulting one. Of all the 74,000 German composers around, why did Mitchell have to pick music only by the two Richards, who were, after all, the Nazi cultural Gods? Normally, I have no objection to an all Strauss-Wagner deal, but it seemed to me that it was in rather poor taste dedicated to the new German state. So—I said so (besides roasting Harshaw, who sang like a crow) in no uncertain terms. The review (which was, I was aware, pretty much dynamite) was showed [sic] to Day before it went upstairs. The night editor and the morning city desk passed it and apparently thought it was a pretty good story, because they didn't change a word. However, as soon as the first edition of the paper hit the streets, the telephones started ringing down at the Star—societyites, including Mrs. Shouse, violently protesting against saying that the National Symphony did anything in poor taste, etc. It got to the big boss very fast and he personally did a magnificent chopping job on my review, which appeared in very much

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Hume's notoriety was prompted by a letter that President Harry Truman abruptly fired off to him from the Oval Office on December 6, 1950. Described as "the most famous presidential letter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century," it denounced Hume for his "lousy review of Margaret's concert" and for writing "such poppycock . . . [showing] conclusively that you're off the beam and have at least four of your ulcers at work." Although Truman's letter was not printed in the *Post*, the *Daily News* ran a story on the incident. The piece was written by *News* critic Milton Berliner, to whom Hume had shown the letter prior to a concert at Constitution Hall on December 7. The story was picked up by wire services and sent to newspapers throughout the country. See Philip Kennicott, "When Harry Gave Him Hell," *Washington Post*, March 14, 2002: C1; and J.Y. Smith, "Critic Paul Hume Dies; Drew Truman's Wrath," *Washington Post*, November 27, 2001: B1.

emasculated form in all later editions. But, nevertheless, it did get into print and the people who are responsible for running the symphony saw it. As you can guess, there is quite a bit of talk about the review—I have even heard rumors that the State Department got all upset about it and asked to have it squelched . . . I don't imagine that it will be as big a stink as was caused by Paul Hume's review of Margaret Truman, but it should be at least a little stink, and it should be a conversation piece around town.<sup>188</sup>

This experience, with its attendant repercussions in the Washington music community, had a salutary effect on the formation of Lowens's journalistic integrity. Over a decade later, he used a Sunday think-piece, ostensibly announcing a national meeting of the Music Critics Association, as a pretext to expound on his ethical lessons learned. Of the entire 750-word feature, only the first paragraph actually pertained to news of the upcoming critics' meeting. Thereafter, he invoked the wisdom of the literary critic Leon Edel to drive home his message about criticism's ethical obligations. Edel's description of the "young critic," quoted *verbatim* by Lowens from an essay Edel had written on the subject, may well have reminded him, painfully as much as instructively, of his own mischief in his Harshaw-defaming days:

Many young critics are simply angry young men. They presume they know more, are more gifted and more capable of insight than those who do the writing. It seldom occurs to them that they may, in the progress of their criticism, scale a great imagination down to their own limited boundaries.<sup>189</sup>

Also included in this article of barely disguised self-reproach was Edel's strongly-worded admonition to critics to hold firm against the affliction of self-importance. Lowens

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<sup>188</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Sylvia Kenney, October 28, 1955. The fallout from the incident apparently chastened Lowens enough to restrain his rhetoric thereafter, as he acknowledged in a second letter sent to Kenney on November 7: "Since my ploy with the Germans, I have been a very good boy, reviewing concerts mildly with Olympian maturity and grace." See Irving Lowens, letter to Sylvia Kenney, November 7, 1955, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>189</sup> Irving Lowens, "Some Good Advice For Young Critics," *Sunday Star*, November 7, 1965: D4.

acknowledged that he routinely carried the entire essay around in his wallet,<sup>190</sup> so taken was he by the import of Edel's insights:

A young critic might give thought to the irrational impulses that make him want to rush into criticizing before he has lived a little of the life of art. This would be a first step toward understanding the dangers of conceit, arrogance, condescension. Repeat the word "humility" a dozen times a day. Keep a pencil handy to strike out pontifical words. Tell yourself that writers, painters, playwrights may sometimes be hurt by critics, but that they always go their own way; they create as they must; they are singularly indifferent to the counsel of criticism.<sup>191</sup>

### **The Journeyman Years**

In 1957, Lowens's reviewing responsibilities were enlarged to include most of the newly formed Opera Society of Washington productions.<sup>192</sup> Between 1957 and 1961 he was on hand for nine of the group's presentations, including stagings of several Mozart operas, as well as Verdi's *Falstaff*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, and Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. His affinity for the organization grew so strong during these years that, within a month after he was promoted to the chief music critic's desk, Lowens used the power of his position to promote the company, by launching a series of articles on opera and the Opera Society that would surely attract a sizable audience to its performances.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> That this fledgling critic's news beat include the Opera Society's early productions may have owed to editorial necessity, to safeguard objectivity. One of the Society's founders, at-the-time *Star* chief music critic Day Thorpe, could hardly be recruited to write reviews of performances by the group that he was instrumental in establishing. Later renamed the Washington Opera, the organization now boasts the title Washington National Opera, a privilege vouchsafed through a Congressional resolution enacted in March 2004. See "History," the website of the Washington National Opera, [http://www.washingtonnationalopera.org/info/ab\\_history.htm](http://www.washingtonnationalopera.org/info/ab_history.htm), accessed March 29, 2004.

<sup>193</sup> Lowens's review of *Idomeneo*, the Opera Society's production during this period, was, however, far from laudatory. Entitled "The Opera Society of Washington Offers a Mozart Failure" (*Evening Star*, February 10, 1961: D53), the article chided the fledgling company's "narrowly puristic attitude . . . [treating] the notes of a score as if they were holy and untouchable." The other articles in Lowens's series were "Mozart's 'Idomeneo' for the Connoisseur," *Sunday Star*, February 5, 1961: D14; "Opera Season Here Proves 'Sensational,'" *Sunday Star*,

Occasions for Lowens to write Sunday columns, wherein he could provide his own slant on issues of concern, were quite rare in this early period. It was not until late in 1955 that the first opportunity presented itself,<sup>194</sup> and from then until 1961, when he took over the critic's chair from Thorpe, he wrote on average only two or three per year.<sup>195</sup> One of the most significant of these was his 10 August, 1958, piece, "Foreign Lands Watch Cultural Center Bill,"<sup>196</sup> which marked the beginning of Lowens's long and aggressive advocacy for the establishment of what would become the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Given leave to comment formally on the subject on two more occasions while still a stringer,<sup>197</sup> Lowens penned no fewer than sixteen features in support of the project during its developmental years.<sup>198</sup>

Two of the four Sunday think-pieces written in the first month of his tenure as chief music critic in 1961 called for the conspicuous inclusion of music in the Kennedy administration's "New Frontier." One of the articles was sufficiently compelling to prompt

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February 12, 1961: D5; and "Opera Must Be More Than Social Event," *Sunday Star*, February 19, 1961: D4. He also publicized the *Idomeneo* production with a captioned picture, "Idomeneo Coming Up," January 29: D4.

<sup>194</sup> "Bach's B Minor to Test Choral Group," *Sunday Star*, November 6, 1955: E5.

<sup>195</sup> For the entire length of his employment as a stringer, from 1954 to 1961, the *Star* published only fifteen features with Lowens's byline.

<sup>196</sup> *Sunday Star*, August 10, 1958: E4.

<sup>197</sup> "Cultural Center's Role as Angel of the Arts," *Sunday Star*, December 13, 1959: F4; and "Other Cultural Centers Play Important Roles," *Sunday Star*, January 24, 1960: D8.

<sup>198</sup> The remaining thirteen articles are: "New York's Cultural Center Is Challenge," May 14, 1961: C16; "Cultural Center Launched," November 19, 1961: F4; "Bernstein Praises Cultural Center Plan," February 11, 1962: C10; "Our Cultural Center Frought with Peril," May 20, 1962: C10; "National Cultural Center Drive Gets Under Way Today," June 16, 1963: E11; "Center's Program is the Key Point," August 11, 1963: E10; "Not By Bread Alone: Culture Vital Need," October 13, 1963: F5; "Many Problems Need Study Planning Kennedy Arts Center," January 26, 1964: E6; "Need for Specific Program for Cultural Center Felt," March 29, 1964: F5; "Kennedy Center: How Will It Work?" November 29, 1964: C11; "Will Kennedy Center Second the Motion?" May 2, 1965: H5; "MUSIC: Cultural Centers à la française," April 9, 1967: D4; "Stevens Talks of Kennedy Center," May 28, 1967: D4.

then Senate Special Counsel Samuel Merrick to send it to New Jersey Congressman Frank Thompson, Jr., for his edification.<sup>199</sup>

During his honeymoon years with the *Star*, which continued for most of the 1960's, Lowens plunged into the duties of chief music critic with relish, hungrily covering five or six major concerts each week, meticulously researching his regular Sunday think-pieces and overseeing a sizable department of contributing music critics.<sup>200</sup> These vigorous years of enterprise afforded him the unparalleled opportunity, not only to bear witness to, but also to outline the debate surrounding the establishment of such major capital-area performing arts venues—in addition to the Kennedy Center—as Wolf Trap Farm Park and the Merriweather Post Pavilion. He was privileged to weigh in on the formative activities of such historic institutions as the Washington Performing Arts Society and the Opera Society of Washington. He also had license, by virtue of his position, to sound repeatedly the clarion call for improved governmental and corporate sponsorship of music, even as this issue was being hotly debated in Washington political circles.<sup>201</sup>

Lowens pursued an ambitious agenda regarding the breadth of the *Star*'s music coverage. As the following letter to the composer Robert Hall Lewis<sup>202</sup> illustrates, the *Star*'s

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<sup>199</sup> Frank Thompson, Jr., letter to Samuel V. Merrick, February 17, 1961 (acknowledging receipt of the article and an accompanying letter of January 31), Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection. The piece that Merrick sent was in all likelihood “Kennedy Urged to Open New Frontier in Music,” *Sunday Star*, January 29, 1961: D4. The other article that Lowens wrote on the subject was “A New Frontier for Music, Too?” *Sunday Star*, January 15, 1961: D4.

<sup>200</sup> This flurry of enthusiastic activity masked Lowens's loose employment relationship with the *Star*, which was still paying him only contractually for his services. Despite the responsibilities of his position, he was, as far as the *Star* was concerned, little more than a glorified stringer.

<sup>201</sup> See *subter* Chapter II: 144-147.

<sup>202</sup> Lewis had offered to contribute an article on a summer festival taking place in England in 1967. Lowens wrote this letter in response.

window on the musical world was wide, with coverage of musical current events from the farthest reaches of the globe routine:

The Cheltenham Festival sounds like a reasonably good possibility, although I'm afraid I'll have to go a bit light on outside pieces this summer, thanks to the Expo in Montreal, which will get covered three times—I just got back from seeing the Swedish Royal Opera there a few days ago—and with commitments already for the Hamburg State Opera (New York), Fromm Festival (Tanglewood), Britten 'Burning Fiery Furnace' (Caramoor), the Vienna Festival, the Salzburg Festival, Spoleto, Bucharest, Montreux, and Geneva. If the *Star* knew how internationally minded its music page is getting, I'd get my ears pinned back pretty fast! But when the Durham programs are announced, let me know what they are, and go ahead with a short piece (no more than 1,500 words, and preferably shorter) on Cheltenham.<sup>203</sup>

The distinctly international character of the *Star*'s music pages was fed in no small measure by Lowens's own wanderlust. Despite the ceaseless distraction of physical infirmity<sup>204</sup> and recurring bouts of depression,<sup>205</sup> Lowens consistently maintained a professional life heavily laden with activities that invariably put him in unfamiliar territory. In the course of a personal letter addressing the care of their ailing mother, he recounted to his sister Ruth an itinerary that took him, in the space of three months, to two foreign countries (on two different continents) and three states other than his own.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Robert Hall Lewis, June 11, 1967, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>204</sup> He suffered seven coronary incidents, four during his association with the *Star*, in 1954, 1969, 1972 and 1975. Lowens's last attack took his life in 1983.

<sup>205</sup> He candidly referred to his depressive episodes in correspondence over a period of ten years with no fewer than four colleagues and friends. See letters to Barbara Krader, September 14, 1966; Professor F.W. Sternfeld, University of Pittsburgh, March 9, 1968; Benjamin Lees, n.d., 1968; and Nicholas Tawa, December 22, 1976, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>206</sup> His itinerary, enumerated in this letter, included ten days in El Salvador, a week in Aspen, Colorado; nine days residency in College Park, Maryland; three days in Chicago, Illinois, and three weeks in Switzerland. Home for him was Reston, Virginia, during this period. Letter to Ruth and Bob [Mace], June 20, 1973, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

## Building Bridges

Lowens's penchant for travel found him, virtually every year, on the musical equivalent of a busman's holiday in some distant land, where he found means to drink in foreign cultures,<sup>207</sup> forge longlasting social and political connections,<sup>208</sup> lose himself in a particularly engrossing research project,<sup>209</sup> and return home to engage his readers with his take on the latest international musical happenings.

Many of Europe's finest festivals of summer found their way into the *Star's* music pages, *grâce à* Lowens, the peripatetic pundit. He wrote virtual travelogues about such historic landmarks as the Drottningholm Court Theater, Sweden's 18<sup>th</sup>-century opera house near Stockholm,<sup>210</sup> or Olavinlinna Castle, home to Finland's summer festival at Savonlinna.<sup>211</sup> His reporting of such festivals as those at Montreux, Switzerland,<sup>212</sup> and Bucharest, Romania,<sup>213</sup> also included assessments of their accomplishments as major international musical events and in-depth analyses of their programs and performances.

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<sup>207</sup> His wanderings took him, in successive years, to such disparate locales as Romania, Switzerland, Holland, Germany, France, Venezuela, Denmark, El Salvador, Finland, Sweden, Austria, and England.

<sup>208</sup> Of the many mutually beneficial ties that Lowens formed overseas, those in Romania and Switzerland held perhaps the strongest impact on the music pages of the *Star*.

<sup>209</sup> He succeeded in obtaining travel grants for overseas research from, variously, the American Council of Learned Societies, 1962; the Martha Baird Rockefeller Foundation, 1964 and 1967; the U.S. State Department, 1968 and 1970; and the government of Switzerland (*Pro Helvetia* Research Grant), 1964. He also received some travel funds from the *Star* and, in 1972, from the Kennedy Center to pitch to the International Musicological Society Congress in Denmark the initial idea for the Center's Haydn Conference, which, received by the IMS with equanimity, took place in 1975.

<sup>210</sup> "A Perfect Setting For Opera in Sweden," *Sunday Star*, August 7, 1977: G14.

<sup>211</sup> "A Festival in the Salzburg of the North," *Sunday Star*, July 31, 1977: H14.

<sup>212</sup> "MUSIC: Montreux 'Septembre Musical,'" *Sunday Star*, October 8, 1967: G16.

<sup>213</sup> "Musical Innovations at Romanian Festival," *Sunday Star*, October 1, 1967: D1.

Lowens's coverage in 1968 of the First International Film and Music Festival at Merida, Venezuela, took on the character of an investigative report, in consequence of an unexpected insurrection by students at the University of the Andes, where the event took place. As guest of the Festival's sponsors and the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, he traveled there, according to the Department of State's expectations, in order "to attend the various concerts and other activities of the festival and participate in a series of roundtable discussions on contemporary music with other critics from South American and European countries."<sup>214</sup> Both Lowens and the Festival participants, however, met with considerably more than they bargained for, as aggrieved students led boycotts that compromised the success of the concerts and disrupted the panel discussions with impromptu, incendiary speeches.<sup>215</sup>

Lowens's coverage of the affair was both thorough and dispassionate. He devoted over 2000 words to his *Star* feature,<sup>216</sup> praising the festival promoters for presenting "music-making of the highest quality" and coming "astonishingly close to realizing this seemingly impossible objective" of "bring[ing] the world's best to Merida."<sup>217</sup> Without ascribing blame, he also made note of the "direct clashes" taking

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<sup>214</sup> William P. O'Brien, Planning and Recruiting Officer, Staff for American Specialists, Department of State, letter to Irving Lowens, August 21, 1968. Inasmuch as the requested arrival date in Venezuela was September 19, Lowens was given less than three weeks notice to prepare for the trip. According to O'Brien's letter, he was the only American critic selected by the State Department for this venture. Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>215</sup> According to Lowens's account, the student insurgents had taken exception, in part, to the prohibitive cost of the tickets, which effectively excluded them from participation.

<sup>216</sup> One of Lowens's lengthiest think-pieces, "A Major Festival Is Held in Venezuela" was published, to the *Star's* credit, in its entirety. See *Sunday Star*, October 6, 1968: D12.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

place between some of the event's legitimate participants<sup>218</sup> as well as the "general atmosphere of antagonism between the students and the music festival," in which "one student after another took the floor for lengthy speeches with heavy political content."<sup>219</sup>

Whether for better or worse, Lowens's presence at the Merida festival won for its sponsors perhaps more-than-anticipated international coverage. In addition to his think-piece for the *Star*, articles on the festival with the Lowens byline appeared in the *American Choral Review*, the *Musical Times of London*, *Américas* (the journalistic organ of the Organization of American States), *Muzica* in Bucharest, and Sarajevo's *Zvuk*.<sup>220</sup>

Another effect of Lowens's Merida sojourn was a vision, for a "hemispheric conference of music critics" that began to percolate in his mind, while he was still on Venezuelan soil. Lowens broached the subject first with Merida festival director Dr. Oswaldo Vigas<sup>221</sup> and then with Dr. Guillermo Espinosa,<sup>222</sup> at the time Chief of the Music Division of the Pan American Union. Support for the project grew rapidly in Washington, ultimately including the participation of the Music Critics Association, the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Music Council, the National Music Council of the United States, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the

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<sup>218</sup> The participants he observed to be clashing were the composers Krzysztof Penderecki and Luigi Nono, who, according to Lowens, argued over the importance of the individual vs. the masses "in determining the character of a musical work."

<sup>219</sup> Irving Lowens, "A Major Festival Is Held in Venezuela," loc. cit.

<sup>220</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Dr. Oswaldo Vigas, October 21, 1968, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Dr. Guillermo Espinosa, Chief, Music Division, Pan American Union, October 21, 1968, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

Friends of the Kennedy Center.<sup>223</sup> The result was the First Inter-American Conference of Music Critics, which took place in Washington in May of 1973, in conjunction with the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of the inception of the OAS. The conference convened to “bring together . . . distinguished critics from Latin America with Canadian and U.S. critics to discuss the feasibility and the advisability of forming a new association to represent music critics throughout the Western Hemisphere.”<sup>224</sup> During the course of its plenary sessions, the Association was brought into existence, a constitution approved, and interim officers selected, among whom Lowens served in the capacity of Second Vice-President.<sup>225</sup>

At the same time that he was formulating his plans for the Inter-American Music Conference of Music Critics, Lowens was already heavily engaged in yet another effort to bring the ideas of music critics together. In this case, the vehicle was print: A proposed periodical journal devoted to American music.<sup>226</sup> Lowens sowed the seeds of this effort at an open meeting of the Music Critics Association and the International Music Council in September of 1968, where, in a speech to the assembled body, he described his vision of the publication to be:

A journal of the highest literary standards and the greatest musical interest, focused not only on American music but musical life in America . . . . We, as professional music critics, do not know what the rest of the world thinks about American music . . . . We as American music critics do not really know what America thinks of its own music. There is no central

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<sup>223</sup> “OAS Charter Feted with Music: Concerts Held; Music Critics Meet,” *Américas*, No. 25 (August 1973): 21.

<sup>224</sup> “OAS Charter,” *op. cit.*, 22.

<sup>225</sup> “OAS Charter,” *op. cit.*, 23. Lowens’s position as Second Vice-President was re-confirmed at the newly formed Association’s first congress, which convened in 1976, also in Washington. See untitled news item, *Evening Star*, May 24, 1976, n.p., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>226</sup> Lowens’s longstanding conviction that the term “American” refer to all countries of the western hemisphere, not just the United States of America, applied here.

source, national source, of information about American musical life . . . . It is partially to fill this gap that [the idea for] the American Music Digest came into existence.<sup>227</sup>

With the Music Critics Association behind it and with the beneficence of the National Endowment for the Arts,<sup>228</sup> the *American Music Digest* proceeded in its formative development full steam ahead with Lowens, as chairman of the magazine's board of directors, at the helm. In November 1968, he requested a six-months leave of absence from the *Star* in order to oversee preparations for the journal's imminent voyage into America's musical consciousness.<sup>229</sup> His letter of request, to *Star* publisher Newbold Noyes, reveals his soaring optimism for the project:

Dear Newby:

It seems I have a tiger by the tail. The prospectus of the American Musical Digest has been such a hit that I have been asked by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Music Critics Association to devote full time to superintending the birth of the magazine during the last six months of the [NEA] contract.

This all transpired very suddenly. Last Tuesday, Roger Stevens informed me that he would be recommending, in the most urgent terms, approval of a \$10,000 personal grant to me so that I could go to New York for six months to take charge. Despite the considerable inconvenience of such a temporary relocation, I agreed to ask for [a] leave of absence if the grant came through. On Thursday evening at the White House reception for the National

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<sup>227</sup> [Untitled] text of address, ts., September 10, 1968, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>228</sup> To get the publication up and running, the Music Critics Association was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant in the amount of \$100,000.

<sup>229</sup> Lowens's yearning for a publication about American music can be traced back at least as far as 1961, when he devoted a Sunday think-piece to "The Big Need for a New Magazine of Music Activities in This Area," *Sunday Star*, June 4, 1961: D149. In an article on the plight of American composers, written just three weeks later, he made the following remarks about the "curious state of music magazines in this country": "The two acknowledged old-time leaders, "**Musical America**" and "**Musical Courier**," are . . . suffering from growing pains . . . . Music educators are served by **Music Journal** (which also makes a fair stab at appealing to the general reader), **Music Educators Journal** . . . and **American Music Teacher** . . . . They are of interest to the average music-lover in approximate order of mention. A vastly improved magazine is **International Musician** . . . . This is now carrying quite a few readable articles . . . . Excluding record and scholarly magazines, that is about the roll call. And if you want to try an experiment which will quickly demonstrate just how widely they are read, try buying copies at your favorite newsstand." See "U.S. Composers Heard, But Not Often Enough," *Sunday Star*, June 25, 1961: C4.

Council on the Arts, Stevens advised me that the grant had been approved by the Council that morning.

Accordingly, I am formally requesting a six-month leave of absence, effective 1 January 1969, with this letter. Since Don Mintz is here full time and plenty of stringers are available, my absence through June shouldn't inconvenience the paper too much. Furthermore, I'd be perfectly willing to contribute occasional reviews or Sunday articles at space rates from New York. I'm sure the National Endowment wouldn't object, and I'd like to keep up some connection with the *Star* even though officially I'd be on leave.

Just in case Stevens' letter to you about this matter hasn't yet reached your desk, a xerox of the copy he sent me is enclosed.

Sincerely yours,

Irving Lowens  
Music Critic<sup>230</sup>

Lowens's leave of absence was approved, and under his direct supervision, the first issue of the *American Music Digest* rolled off the presses in April 1969.<sup>231</sup> In its realization, the *Digest* became a journal of commentary about American music and musicians, including both abridged and full-text versions of criticism culled from the mainstream press. It also collected together articles devoted to the state of music criticism in America, written by the critics' critics.

The *American Music Digest* was all-embracing in its scope, giving equal time and, therefore, equal validity to any and all styles of music. As John Ardoin, then-music editor for the *Dallas Morning News*, remarked, the *American Musical Digest's* strength lay in "keeping its broad-base approach intact, to cover Duke Ellington as well as John Cage, to realize the importance of Elvis Presley along with that of Gladys Kuchta, to offer a sense of heritage

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<sup>230</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Newbold Noyes, November 24, 1968, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>231</sup> The first full issue was designated a "pre-publication issue" and published as Vol. 0, No. 0.

along with history in the making, to share with us words about unfamiliar music as well as familiar artists.”<sup>232</sup>

Although the publication met with initial success, garnering for itself some 5000 subscribers in its first year of publication,<sup>233</sup> the fates granted it but a brief existence.<sup>234</sup> In November 1970, after having released six more issues, the *American Musical Digest* passed quietly into oblivion.<sup>235</sup> Having seen the handwriting on the wall—and required to return to the *Star* in July 1969—Lowens detached himself from the journal’s death struggles several months before it breathed its last. In a letter to *Digest* staffer Barbara Krader, written the previous May, he confided his grim expectations about the magazine’s future as well as his decision to let go:

I get more and more uneasy about the operation as a whole as time passes . . . . On the insistence of my cardiologist [Lowens had suffered another coronary attack late in 1969], I’m cutting back in extracurricular activities, which means that I tendered my resignation to the magazine as president of the corporation and chairman of the board. The ice the AMD is skating on seems very thin—that’s the view from 225 miles away, at any rate—and I can’t afford to either worry about it or work to remedy things. Hence my decision.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> John Ardoin, “Needed Musical Digest Born,” *Dallas Morning News*, April 26, 1970: C5.

<sup>233</sup> George Gelles, “MUSIC: A Critical Collage,” *Sunday Star*, June 28, 1970: C4.

<sup>234</sup> The *American Music Digest*’s non-profit status, its concomitant dependence on subscription and grant revenues for financial support, and its idealistic, but impractical, editorial policy prohibiting advertising within its pages doubtless contributed to its early demise. See *Digest* editor and publisher Gene Bruck’s foreword in the premiere issue, Vol. 0, No. 0 (April 1969), n.p.

<sup>235</sup> The National Music Council’s refusal to continue funding abruptly and permanently stopped the *Digest*’s presses. See letter from *Digest* Board Chairman Thomas Willis to members of the Board of Directors, November 14, 1970, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>236</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Barbara Krader, May 15, 1970, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

## Parting Ways with the *Star*

Ironically, Lowens's months of effort on behalf of the ill-fated *American Music Digest* also marked the beginning of the end of his up-to-then harmonious relationship with the *Star* newspapers.<sup>237</sup> The resignation of his (full-time) assistant Donald Mintz, upon the latter's appointment as Director of the Maryland State Arts Council, coincided with Lowens's return from his *NEA*-sponsored absence. The subsequent vacuum occasioned by Mintz's disappearance from the music department staff roster provided the catalyst for an escalating conflict between himself and the newspaper's editors, for which a workable resolution became virtually impossible. Lowens's frustrations are agonizingly obvious in the following extended letter, written in 1975 to his friend, the National Symphony Orchestra's then-conductor Antal Dorati:

The beginning takes us back to 1968, when . . . I was asked to take a leave of absence from the newspaper in order to . . . superintend the actual birth of the American Musical Digest . . . I returned . . . in September to be greeted by the news that Mintz would be leaving the newspaper in less than two weeks . . . .

As you can imagine, this left me in something of a pickle. Here, the music season was beginning; I had been away for some nine months; I would have absolutely no assistance within the paper. I immediately began bombarding the editor of the arts section (then Edwin Tribble, a bright, Southern, old-fashioned newspaperman, now retired) for an assistant . . . . The result was—nothing. Absolutely nothing was done. No one was interviewed, and the season began, and I carried everything (and there is an enormous amount of inside-the-house work that goes on in a newspaper of which the outsider is not even remotely aware) as long as I could, which was to December 1969, when I came down with my second coronary and found myself, one gloomy day, in the Washington Hospital Center intensive care unit.

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<sup>237</sup> Lowens was showing signs of general strain as early as 1966 when he precipitously left his position at the Library of Congress, owing to "a sharp disagreement on policy matters with Harold Spivacke and Ed Waters, and my basic conviction that the division was moving in the wrong direction." (See letter to Dr. Alan Fern, Library of Congress, April 30, 1976, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Collection.) During these middle years of the 1960's, his marriage to first wife Violet also deteriorated, culminating, after years of protracted legal difficulties, in their divorce in December of 1968. Shortly thereafter, Lowens entered into matrimony again, this time with fellow apostle of American music and Edward MacDowell scholar Margery Morgan.

I must concede that this did unnerve the *Star* a bit—and a hunt for a prospective music critic was quickly initiated. After all, there was no guarantee that I would even make it out of the hospital, much less back to the newspaper. It so happens that among the people I had named as possibilities to assist me was one George Gelles . . . .

The fact that the *Star* actually was looking for someone to help me was good for my morale; I made an uneventful recovery, and returned to work about six weeks after the coronary. At that time, I was introduced to Gelles for the first time, told that he had been the best candidate, and that he would be my assistant. My joy did not last long. It turned out that instead of his being my assistant, I turned out to be his. He flatly refused to do any of the housekeeping without which it is impossible to run an efficient music department in a large, modern newspaper. No letters were ever answered. Not only junk mail, but my personal mail, thrown into the waste-paper basket. He would go to lesser concerts (such as those at the Phillips and National Gallery) with poorly concealed ill-humor. He was totally unreliable in discharging responsibilities . . . .

Despite my rising complaints about Gelles, nothing was done until the opening of the Kennedy Center in September, 1971. The Music Critics Association was holding its annual meeting in the Center simultaneously with the opening, and since I was the chairman of the local arrangements committee, and there were some 85 critics from this country and Canada visiting, I had my hands full. One of the extras we scheduled was a press conference with Leonard Bernstein the morning after the premiere of “Mass” and, since I had reviewed it and was scheduled to preside at the press conference, I assigned Gelles to attend in behalf of the *Star* and cover the press conference for the newspaper. At the appointed time, word came down that Bernstein was simply too exhausted to make an appearance, and instead, was sending Maurice Peress, who had conducted. Whereupon, to my great astonishment, Gelles shrugged his shoulders, shut his notebook, and walked out of the room, leaving some 80 colleagues behind to ask questions about what was obviously going to be a highly controversial work. Fortunately, Ylida Novik<sup>238</sup> was in the audience, and I asked her to cover the press conference for the *Star*. It turned out to be very newsworthy, and she did a reasonably good job of it for an amateur . . . .

Because of the blow-up in the music department, Tribble was hurried into early retirement (if you can’t run the arts department, went the argument, we’ll find somebody who can), and his place was taken by the then editor of the *Star*’s since-failed “Washington” Sunday supplement, Harry Bacas.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> A Hungarian-born pianist, teacher and lecturer, living in Washington, who also served as a contributing critic for the *Star*.

<sup>239</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Antal Dorati, May 12, 1975, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

Lowens's relationship with Bacas<sup>240</sup> was inevitably combative, in Lowens's view owing to Bacas's "bias against the fine arts and his prejudice in favor of the mass arts."<sup>241</sup> His memoranda to Bacas on editorial issues are filled with complaints—some vituperative—as Lowens valiantly, but vainly, attempted to restore classical music to its premier position in the *Star's* arts section as well as to re-establish his own authority over editorial policies regarding music. Bacas's manner of editing copy, which tended toward the capricious, was one of the more annoying irritants against which Lowens protested with regularity, as the following (one-sided) exchanges abundantly demonstrate:

Dear Harry: Oh wow. I was slaughtered on Sunday—cut by 1/3 to 1/2. If space was the problem, why the enormously long review by Freed [Richard Freed, at the time a *Star* contributing critic, later a critic for the *Washington Post* ]? If my piece was the problem and it has to be cut that much to make it worth printing, I'd rather that it not run at all. What's left is certainly no improvement.<sup>242</sup>

Dear Harry: I don't know why, but there has been a rash of twiddling with my copy. I don't mind editing, when I can see the point, but the review I filed from Boston had three ungrammatical sentences edited into it plus one factual error. This couldn't have been a matter of space, because the review was not materially cut in size, and there was plenty of white space around it if a couple of lines had to be squeezed in. Unless there is a space consideration, or a matter of some . . . error on my part, I strongly prefer that my copy not be "improved."<sup>243</sup>

Re Thorpe's Mozart piece. I have no way of knowing whether or not it will interfere with my proposed 5 May piece since I don't know what he is saying. But it is a bit difficult for me to plan my columns if somebody else is

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<sup>240</sup> Bacas's position at the *Star* was assistant managing editor for culture and then editor, beginning in 1973, of *Portfolio*, the *Star's* Sunday arts section.

<sup>241</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Antal Dorati, May 12, 1975, loc. cit.

<sup>242</sup> Irving Lowens, memorandum to Harry Bacas, [March 17, 1974], Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>243</sup> Irving Lowens, memorandum to Harry Bacas, May 12, 1974, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

writing stuff on music which I haven't seen and which I don't know when [sic] it will run.<sup>244</sup>

Beyond his disagreements with Bacas, Lowens saw his effectiveness as a music editor jeopardized by the increasingly dire financial straits in which the *Star* found itself in the early 1970's. Such circumstances continued without relief for the remainder of Lowens's tenure at the newspaper. The cost to the music pages was an insupportable loss of column space, occurring, ironically, at a time when musical life in the nation's capital was experiencing rapid expansion.<sup>245</sup> In January 1973, Lowens was forced to issue to his entire music-department team (numbering at the time some nine stringers) a memorandum detailing the extent to which music would of necessity be curtailed in response to the new economic constrictions at the *Star*.<sup>246</sup>

There will be a general cutback in the number of pop and rock reviews carried by the *Star* . . . . There will be a general cutback in the number of organ recitals covered by the *Star* . . . . There will be a general cutback in the number of parish church music events covered by the *Star* . . . . Except in very unusual circumstances, amateur music-making will not be covered . . . . We will begin an experiment in covering the Phillips Collection and the National Gallery . . . . Instead of weekly reviews for each, one person will be assigned to attend all the concerts there for a month and then write a single article on THE MONTH AT THE PHILLIPS or THE MONTH AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY . . . . For the time being, that's it. I'd appreciate any ideas any of you might have for economies that will be painless and/or might be an improvement over our present way of handling things. Cheers—<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Irving Lowens, memorandum to Harry Bacas, [April 15, 1974], Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>245</sup> The Kennedy Center, which had opened to great acclaim in 1971, was prospering under the stewardship of the Center's Chairman of the Board Roger Stevens; and the Merriweather Post Pavilion (the National Symphony Orchestra's summer home) and Wolf Trap Farm Park, established, respectively in 1967 and 1971, had, in these years, also evolved into flourishing enterprises.

<sup>246</sup> The economic stringencies at this time resulted in part from indebtedness incurred by the *Star* when it bought the *Washington Daily News*, its competition in Washington's afternoon newspaper market. See *subter* Chapter II: 154-156.

<sup>247</sup> Irving Lowens, memorandum to *Star* music staff, January 28, 1973, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

Lowens continued his valiant struggle against the *Star*'s rising tide of financial woes and its destructive editorial policies toward music until 1975, when another episode involving George Gelles pushed Lowens beyond the pale. The story is best told in Lowens's own words, which appear further along in his missive to Dorati:

In the fall of 1974, [Gelles] requested a two-year leave of absence from the *Star* in order to take a position with the National Endowment for the Arts . . . . There were some things wrong with his request: (a) one must be a *Star* employee for five years before this provision of the Guild-newspaper contract can be invoked; (b) one cannot take leave in order to take another paying position; and (c) one year is the maximum leave that can be granted. Nevertheless, not having Gelles on the payroll meant the temporary saving of his salary, so the paper approved his request for one year, to everybody's astonishment. Then, to everybody's further astonishment, last February one day, Gelles showed up and asked for his job back at the *Star*, presumably disappointed at his work with the NEA. The *Star* did not have to re-employ him, since it is at the newspaper's option when he returns if he is on leave, but again, they saw a way to save money. Bellows [the *Star*'s new executive editor James Bellows] . . . decided to allow Gelles to return to the staff—but this time not as dance critic alone, but also as assistant music critic, thus enabling the newspaper to save the few thousand dollars a year it was paying to Larry Sears. Harry Bacas conveniently neglected to inform Bellows that there was anything but an “antagonism” between me and Gelles, and thus was given license to impose Gelles on me regardless of my feelings, and to fire Sears without cause since Sears, not being a regular employee, does not come under the protection of the Newspaper Guild. Indeed, with all Guild employees suffering dreadfully at the moment not only because of inflation but because of their voluntary acceptance of a four-day work-week at 80% of pay-scale, it was in their interest to try to work a Guild employee into the new spot—and Gelles is a Guild employee . . . .

It was at that point, with increasing pressure from publishers to supply them with books . . . and with increasing signs of some cardiac instability due to the incessant war over the way in which all music copy . . . is being butchered by incompetent and unsympathetic editors at the newspaper, that I decided I must leave the newspaper at least temporarily, if I was to survive the year.<sup>248</sup>

Thus began, in March of 1975, a year-long unpaid leave of absence from the newspaper, relieving Lowens, at least temporarily, from the ordeals associated with his job

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<sup>248</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Antal Dorati, May 12, 1975, loc. cit.

there and giving him opportunity to work on other projects. His leave, however, came at a price. Suddenly without income, he would be living for the foreseeable future an impecunious existence; and, with the *Star's* financial stability precarious, his career as a music critic was at risk. To the composer Robert Hall Lewis, he confided both his apprehensions and his relief, shortly after his leave began:

At the moment, I'm on leave (without pay) until next year to try to finish several bicentennial-connected books. I am resigned to starving to death without any salary or income, but at least I'll die happy. I cannot begin to tell you what kind of a crucifixion it is to work for an expiring newspaper with anti-intellectual (and sometimes, it seems to me, specifically anti-musical) prejudices.<sup>249</sup>

And to Donald Krummel:

Although gainfully unemployed, I'm quite gainfully employed (if you know what I mean) and quite content about seeing all our savings go down the drain at the moment. What will happen later? Who knows . . . . I'd give a pretty to know what I'm going to be doing a few years from now. The newspaper looks much like a dying duck—I doubt if it will survive until it's time for me to return in March. If a miracle occurs and it does survive, I hope to wangle some kind of early retirement as quickly as possible and then get on about the business of doing something I want to do.<sup>250</sup>

Although his hiatus was marred early on by a fourth coronary attack and a month-long recuperative period, Lowens took full advantage of his newly found leisure. In correspondence with the composer Karel Husa, he detailed a virtual litany of activities that would occupy his time and attention in the months ahead:

Much has happened—much to [sic] much to tell you about in a letter . . . . I have been appointed Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Studies in American Music and Visiting Professor there (Brooklyn College) for the 1975-76 school year; I am busily writing books, articles

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<sup>249</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Robert Hall Lewis, April 4, 1975, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>250</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Dr. Donald Krummel, Graduate School of Library Science, University of Illinois, June 3, 1975, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

and lectures . . . . I am now well recovered from a cardiac “incident” which sent me to the hospital for a few weeks in July and gave me a forced vacation for a month. I feel fine, and I’m working well. Tomorrow begins a Haydn Festival here which runs through 11 October and includes an international scholarly conference on Haydn research and several institutes for senior music critics on Haydn’s music. In the middle of this, I must fly to Toronto (26-29 September), return home, then fly to Montreal (2-5 October), then give a public lecture in the Eisenhower Theater (11 October), then attend the annual meeting of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester (15 October), then to the first annual meeting of the Sonneck Society in Middletown, Conn. (18-19 October), then to the annual meeting of the musicologists in Los Angeles (30 October-2 November). In my spare time, I write, and enjoy life.<sup>251</sup>

The Haydn Festival, to which the letter refers, was yet another Lowens-instigated project.<sup>252</sup> Similar to the earlier Inter-American Conference of Music Critics, it ballooned into a massive enterprise, uniting both Washington-based and international institutions with the common goal of establishing, according to Lowens, “a new pattern in American music-making, a pattern in which conductors, soloists, instrumentalists, scholars, and critics join together in cooperation to illuminate the work of a single master.”<sup>253</sup>

In league first with Roger Stevens and the Kennedy Center, Lowens secured the participation of the International Musicological Society and the presence of the Danish Haydn

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<sup>251</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Karel Husa, September 21, 1975, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>252</sup> In the Foreword to his book, *Haydn in America*, Lowens provides testimony unequivocally acknowledging himself as the originator of the idea: “It had been my dream . . . to bring together musicologists, performers, and music critics around a single great composer in an attempt to lessen hostilities among these traditional enemies, and in 1971, shortly before the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, I approached Martin Feinstein, executive director of the Kennedy Center, with my idea.” Irving Lowens, *Haydn in America, Bibliographies in American Music Number Five* (Detroit, Michigan: College Music Society of America, 1979): ix.

<sup>253</sup> Irving Lowens, nomination of Antal Dorati for the 1975 Cosmos Club Award, ts, n.d., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

scholar Jens Peter Larsen in the precedent-setting position of musicologist-in-residence.<sup>254</sup>

From this core collaboration developed, as Lowens told the tale:

[A] giant festival and international conference devoted to the life and music of Joseph Haydn which took place at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C . . . . Ultimately, more than sixty<sup>255</sup> Haydn experts from Austria, Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, Israel, France, Denmark, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the United States were brought together for eight days of discussion. The Music Critics Association sponsored two five-day seminars on Haydn which were led by Laszlo Somfai of Budapest and Paul Henry Lang and funded by the Ford Foundation. Some thirty Haydn symphonies, all twelve masses, two operas, seven concertos, three oratorios, and an unbelievable number of sonatas, trios, quartets, divertimenti, overtures, and arias were performed by the National Symphony Orchestra under Antal Dorati (who served as music director of the entire festival), the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Philharmonia Virtuosi, the Theatre Chamber Players, the Indiana University Opera Theater, the Yale Philharmonia, the Curtis Institute Orchestra, the Melkus Ensemble, the New Hungarian Quartet, the Amadé Trio, and the Juilliard Quartet and many others.<sup>256</sup>

The Haydn Festival was an unmitigated triumph, a grandiose masterpiece of design and execution, exceeding the expectations of all who partook of its musical pleasures. For Lowens, it also fulfilled a utopian dream “of a bright new world in which players, singers, musicologists, conductors, critics, and hearers felt themselves to be equal citizens in a musical world created by Haydn.”<sup>257</sup> That such lofty and idealistic sentiments as these appeared

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<sup>254</sup> The Kennedy Center sponsored Lowens’s trip to the International Musicological Society’s Eleventh Congress, August 25, 1972, in Copenhagen, to solicit that group’s support. He was the Center’s official emissary in this regard. See text of address to the Congress, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>255</sup> The festival-conference actually numbered ninety participants, including such eminent names in musicology beyond Larsen and Lowens as Karl Geiringer, Barry S. Brook, Charles Rosen, William S. Newman, Donald J. Grout, Andrew Porter, Jan La Rue, and Eva Badura-Skoda. Also in attendance were George Feder, Sonja Gerlach, Karl Gustav Fellerer, Horst Walter, and Günter Thomas of the Joseph Haydn-Institut of Cologne, Germany. See *Haydn Studies: Proceedings of the International Haydn Conference*, Jens Peter Larsen, Howard Serwer, and James Webster, eds. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981): 561-563.

<sup>256</sup> Irving Lowens, Foreword to *Haydn in America*, op.cit., ix-x.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

uppermost in his thoughts at this juncture may not be surprising, inasmuch as a “bright new world” of “equal citizens in a musical world” was precisely what had eluded him so completely at the *Star*.

Upon Lowens’s return to the newspaper in March of 1976, the pitched editorial battles resumed unabated. Even as editors changed, editorial policies did not, and as overall newspaper revenues continued to shrink, Lowens’s staff of stringers became too easily expendable. In due course, Lowens was left to report on the entire capital-area classical music scene with virtually no assistance. Frustration and weariness over this crushing burden circumscribe the following notes that Lowens wrote to his immediate superior at the time, the *Star*’s Style editor Mary Anne Dolan:

Dear Mary Anne: I hope you’ll forgive my annoyance, but if you check today’s NYTimes, you will find that Gelles has a long feature article on the Sunday music page. Is he working for the *Star* or the *Times*? Since I am reviewing up to six times per week, doing music notes, writing record reviews, writing Sunday columns, it does seem to me that every now and then he might conceivably do a music review for this newspaper when there are two events of some consequence taking place simultaneously. Or even so that I wouldn’t have to work up to 60 hours per week, which I have been doing ever since my return to the paper some six weeks ago. Best—<sup>258</sup>

Dear Mary Ann [sic]: Tuesday, 4 a.m. I really hope I can live through this month. Getting home every morning between 4 and 6 a.m. isn’t a joy, especially when my total work budget for the *Star* has been averaging, since my return last March, close to 70 hours per week. And I don’t got [sic] paid extra for night work either! Best—<sup>259</sup>

MAD<sup>260</sup>: Do you think there will ever come a time when I’ll be able to ask a stringer to do a serious music concert when I’m doing another? The Philadelphia wasn’t reviewed, because I was in New York at the opening of the Fisher Hall; Estes wasn’t reviewed because I was reviewing the UN Day

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<sup>258</sup> Irving Lowens, note to Mary Anne [Dolan], [April] 1976, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>259</sup> Irving Lowens, note to Mary Ann [sic] [Dolan], [October] 1976, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>260</sup> One wonders if Lowens used initials in this last memo with the obvious double meaning in mind.

concert in the same hall at 6 p.m. with Estes scheduled for 9 p.m., and there were already three reviews scheduled for that weekend to run on Monday without Estes. There are going to be many such conflicts coming up, and it will no longer be easy for me to even find a competent stringer, since my best ones are writing for the Post, and others have made different plans, now that they don't get any assignments. I do my best, but this sort of complaint is bound to increase as the season hots up. Best—<sup>261</sup>

The continuous rebuffs to his pleas for help nudged Lowens forward to find employment elsewhere, even if so doing signified the end of his career in journalism. At the time of the exchanges with Dolan, his job search was already well underway. Shortly after returning from his leave of absence, he entered into discussions with the Library of Congress regarding his candidacy as its Music Division Chief.<sup>262</sup> This unrepentant critic could not have endeared himself to the search committee, when he included in his letter of application an unsolicited appraisal of the Division's policies that was by turns blunt, censorious and uncompromising. The discussions, not coincidentally, fell flat:

It was my feeling then (and it remains my feeling today) that the Music Division, while servicing the needs of the Congress and the public, should concentrate its efforts on becoming a center of humanistic scholarship in music, and in supplying the country (and the world) with the basic bibliographical tools needed in order to progress historiographically, especially in the field of American music history. Instead, by the time I left the Division, the various foundations . . . and the concerts they supported had converted the Music Division into an appendage of a concert-giving agency. It is quite true that this is an oversimplification of the case, and that Spivacke in particular saw the Music Division as a place where every aspect of music should be collected—from manuscript, through proof, through first edition, through later edition—and he also viewed the matter of live performance as closely linked with the acquisition of manuscripts, both classical . . . and contemporary . . . and while the income tax law permitted composers to deduct the reasonable market value of their gifts of manuscripts to the Library, Spivacke's policies did result in the acquisition, at no cost, of great national treasures.

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<sup>261</sup> Irving Lowens, note to MAD, [October] 1976, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>262</sup> Lowens also sought employment, in 1977, at the MacDowell Colony. See Irving Lowens, letter to Conrad Spohnholz, General Director, MacDowell Colony, May 6, 1977, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

But at the same time, the reference and scholarly aspects of the Division's activities were somewhat neglected. I cannot remember a time when the Division has been adequately enough staffed to undertake a program centered on the sort of activity which characterized the regime of Oscar Sonneck, with its dozens of bibliographies . . . in which a reference librarian was encouraged, indeed expected, to produce meritorious scholarly work. Gradually, librarians were converted into ticket-takers, concert ushers, and general drones lacking any imagination. You will pardon me, I hope, if I point out that my experience with the Music Division as an occasional reader during the past decade has been most unfortunate. Service on a sub-professional level (deckhands and such) has been unbelievably poor, resulting in long, unnecessary delays, and the sort of reference work which characterized the Music Division during the years when Richard S. Hill was the head of the Reference section are no more than a dim memory.

In a phrase, I would urge a complete reorganization of the Division's purposes and directions, and a return to an earlier type of policy characteristic of the Sonneck and Engel regimes. A national library should not have its policies determined by the musical instruments it has acquired and by the concerts needed in order to keep them in playing condition.

Were I to return to the Music Division as its chief at this time, I would most surely devote my energies to such a task with the greatest vigor. Most cordially, [Irving Lowens]<sup>263</sup>

In the fall of 1977, Lowens began teaching at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore, Maryland, as an adjunct professor, one day each week. This at first tenuous connection to one of America's most prestigious institutions for the training of professional musicians led inexorably—and rapidly—to an offer. He was invited to assume academic leadership of the school. At the age of 62 and in the twilight of his professional life, Lowens, taking a leap of faith, left the *Star* for the groves of academe. Commencing September 1, 1978, he became the Conservatory's Dean and Associate Director.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Dr. Alan Fern, Library of Congress, April 30, 1976, loc. cit.

<sup>264</sup> Peabody Conservatory press release, "Lowens Named Peabody Dean," August 7, 1978, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

He departed the *Star* as much for financial reasons as for professional differences. He ruefully confided as much to his friends Herman and Sina Berlinski shortly before tendering his resignation:

I investigated my so-called pension with the *Star*. If I retire as of 1 September, I will be entitled to the magnificent sum of \$111.49 monthly. If I work for three more years, I will get \$139.65 monthly. Obviously, with this enormous sum to fall back on, I cannot afford to continue at the newspaper when Peabody is giving me a raise in salary of almost \$9000 per annum. So tomorrow, I will be giving my month's notice to the editor.<sup>265</sup>

Having resolved that resigning from the *Star* was the most prudent, and perhaps his only reasonable, course of action, Lowens headed into a new and challenging future. As the following correspondence implies, he did not leave the *Star* behind without registering one final and surely satisfying act of protest:

Tomorrow, I go down to the newspaper, walk into the editor-in-chief's office and tell him to go to hell. On 1 September . . . I become the Dean of the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore with a sizable raise . . . . It was something I simply couldn't turn down . . . . I have no illusions about how easy the job is going to be, but I've never run away from a hard job, and I don't intend to start doing so this late in my career. Wish me luck.<sup>266</sup>

Lowens's last article as the *Star*'s chief music critic appeared on 3 September, 1978. Released now from the bitterness and rancor that had passed between himself and the *Star* management, he was free, in this valedictory essay, to look back on his decades-long labor of love with wistfulness and affection:

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<sup>265</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Herman and Sina [Berlinski], July 21, 1978, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>266</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Dr. Alan Buechner, July 30, 1978, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection. These vehement sentiments were echoed, almost verbatim, in a letter to H. Earle Johnson written on July 31, indicating that Lowens may not have submitted his resignation until August 1: "Something new is coming into my life, and you are the first one I'm writing about it. Tomorrow, I shall go into the *Star* and tell the editor to go to hell. On 1 September, I take up my new duties and new responsibilities as the Dean of the Peabody Conservatory, and I hope to be much happier and more productive." See Margery Morgan Lowens, private papers.

Most of the time, writing for the *Star* has been one of the great joys in my life, and I can't say that I begin a different career without a feeling of deep gratitude to this newspaper for having endured my idiosyncrasies so patiently. It is with sincere regret that I contemplate a future in which I will no longer see *Star Staff Writer* beneath my byline.<sup>267</sup>

Lowens chose not to vacate the critic's chair without including some pointed and cogent remarks about the state of music criticism in America. He beheld, pessimistically, a future with significantly less newspaper reading by the American public and the virtual extinction of the newspaper music critic. His words serve now, as they did then, as a timely and oracular warning:

Newspaper reading is still an activity characteristic of an older, print-oriented generation. TV seems to be destroying the habit, substituting neatly packaged, half-hour doses of news headlines for the newspaper front page. The substitute may be insubstantial, but it seems to fill the bill.

Since the *Star* has developed a degree of financial stability, the balance between serious music and pop-rock has been much more equitable, but the space allotted to music as a whole continues to be minuscule in relation to the amount of musical activity in our community. That's the way the cookie crumbles.

Music critics must simply resign themselves to the fact that the primary purpose of printing a newspaper is not to report on musical events, difficult as that may be to swallow. Newspaper readers are interested in a number of other, admittedly less Olympian areas of human endeavor, and that's the way it's going to be from here on out, like it or not.

I hasten to point out that the *Star* is by no means unique in the manner in which the problems of musical coverage have been handled: The trend away from heavy coverage of the musical scene is the same throughout the country . . . .

If things continue to move in the direction they are going, it seems that a parting of the ways between newspapers and music critics is inevitable. In our time, genuine music criticism is, by and large, an interloper in the newspaper world—it is a square peg in a round hole.<sup>268</sup>

Although music criticism faded from Lowens's professional life, it never strayed far from his heart. During his tenure at the Peabody Conservatory, he developed, in collaboration

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<sup>267</sup> "A Critic's Farewell," loc. cit.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

with the Peabody Institute's Executive Director and former *Baltimore Sun* music critic Elliott Galkin, a graduate level degree program in music criticism, the first of its kind in the United States.<sup>269</sup> The curriculum, which was implemented only after his death in the fall of 1984, required, in addition to coursework in such areas as journalism, aesthetics, musicology and American culture, a newspaper internship and preparation of a portfolio of critical writings appropriate to the daily newspaper.<sup>270</sup>

The summer of 1980 found Lowens cloistered at the MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire's well-known retreat for artists, composers and intellectuals. With the training of music critics still at the forefront of his concerns, Lowens immersed himself in the preparation of a textbook and anthology on the principles and practice of music criticism.<sup>271</sup> Unhappily, both of these valued projects proved abortive. Peabody's curriculum in music criticism was eliminated in 1992, and Lowens's textbook on music criticism was never completed.<sup>272</sup>

Prolonged illness<sup>273</sup> impelled Lowens to retire from administrative duties at Peabody in September of 1981. He embarked thereafter on a year's leave of absence, in part to restore his health and in part to engage in research. In 1982, he rejoined the Conservatory, but as

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<sup>269</sup> [Unnamed author], "Peabody Conservatory News Release," *Sonneck Society Newsletter*, X (Spring 1984): 2.

<sup>270</sup> Catalog, *The Peabody Conservatory of Music*, Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, 1984. Student portfolios consisted of two think-pieces, two interviews, concert, record and book reviews, a research article and a response to the question, "What Criticism Means to Me." See sample portfolio, Peter Krask, *Portfolio of Writings on Music Criticism*, Master of Music in Music Criticism, Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, 1991. The curriculum allowed for a thesis as an alternative to the portfolio requirement.

<sup>271</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Violet Lowens, August 9, 1980, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>272</sup> The uncompleted textbook consists of a compilation of essays by major music critics on the art and science of criticism. See Margery Morgan Lowens, private papers.

<sup>273</sup> Lowens described to his brother and sister-in-law no fewer than six major surgeries in 1980 and 1981. Irving Lowens, letter to Milton and Ida Lowens, January 5, 1981, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

Dean Emeritus and honored member of the faculty. There he continued to practice the teaching arts, until his death, at age 67, on November 14, 1983.

Irving Lowens never successfully kicked the music criticism habit. The last year of his life saw him contribute, despite debilitating infirmity,<sup>274</sup> eleven articles to Baltimore's *News American*<sup>275</sup> and one to the *Washington Post*.<sup>276</sup> His final essay was a review of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.<sup>277</sup> Placed into print on October 9, 1983, it reached Baltimore readers just over one month before Lowens died.

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<sup>274</sup> Lowens was hospitalized three times in the last six months of his life, in May, June and October.

<sup>275</sup> "Zinman Conducts 'Heavenly' Concert, February 4, 1983: D4; "BOC Packs 'Em In With 'La Bohème,'" February 11, 1983: D1; "BSO Offers Violin Virtuosity and a Laser Light Spectacular," March 11, 1983: D1; "Lyric's 'Porgy and Bess' Has Classic Look," March 18, 1983: D1; "Latest BOC Offering Is a Confection of an Opera," April 22, 1983: D1; "Concerto an Uneasy Musical Alliance," April 29, 1983: D1; "Berg and Strauss Save an Otherwise Listless Night at BSO," April 29, 1983: D1; "Though Facilities Are Sterling, Schedules Don't Shine," September 18, 1983: C1; "Three B's Open BSO Season At Less-Than-Full Meyerhoff," September 30, 1983: D1; "Zinman And Other Musical Woes," October 9, 1983: C5. The now-defunct *News American* was, in the decade of the 1970's, Maryland's largest daily newspaper, boasting circulation numbers higher than the *Baltimore Sun*. It closed its doors in 1986. Lowens also wrote a review of the Eastman Philharmonia, David Effron, conducting, for January 15, 1983, which was left unpublished. See ts., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>276</sup> "First Hand: Festival of Music," *Washington Post*, April 29, 1983: B7.

<sup>277</sup> "Zinman and Other Musical Woes," *Baltimore News American*, loc. cit.



## **Chapter II**

### **Music Matters at the *Star***

For much of his tenure as music critic, Irving Lowens enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the *Washington Star*. He consistently delivered to the *Star*'s editors reportage of current musical events in Washington telescopic in its point of view, insightful in its analysis and erudite in its journalistic style. His signal success was achieved, at least in part, because it rested firmly on the bedrock of the newspaper's longevity, its lofty standing in the community, its long-time fiscal stability and its high regard for music, which Lowens surely fostered. Whether prompted by Lowens or not, the *Star*'s editors forged their editorial policies on the premise that music merited sustained and substantial coverage, equal to that given any other aspect of civic life in the nation's capital.

In the 1970s, when the fires of Washington's newspaper wars were stoked and the *Star*'s competitive advantage began to fade, the heretofore solid edges of that premise frayed. As the *Star*'s bottom line inexorably shrank, so, concomitantly, did its coverage of music news. The once-felicitous alliance between Lowens and his editorial superiors likewise deteriorated, rendering their relationship increasingly adversarial.

After the newspaper changed hands, its new leadership further withdrew support for matters musical, and the music critic's desk forfeited what little remained of its place in the *Star*'s journalistic firmament. With the struggle to safeguard his foundering music department now all but lost, a world-weary Lowens, having given nearly a quarter century of loyal service to the *Star*, retired from criticism, leaving Washington the poorer for it.

#### **Washington's Preeminent Newspaper**

When Irving Lowens set about the task in 1953 of finding employment for himself as a newspaper music critic, his choices were, by today's standards, bountiful. Serving the

Washington, D.C., environs at this time were no fewer than four daily newspapers: The *Post* and the *Times-Herald*, both of which appeared as morning editions, and the *Evening Star* and the *Daily News*, which competed for Washington's evening readers.<sup>278</sup> With six years to ponder his options (having been a resident in Washington from 1947), Lowens inevitably reached an inescapable conclusion: Washington's *Evening Star*, living up to its astral name, was easily the best newspaper in town—and by a wide margin. Among the four newspapers animating the nation's capital in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the *Evening Star* was the oldest in continuous operation and by far the most successful. By some accounts one of the leading newspapers in the entire country,<sup>279</sup> the *Star* was virtually impervious to all challengers in Washington's newspaper industry. That its presses could ever cease and the newspaper pass into oblivion was, in 1953, an inconceivable, if not laughable, idea.

At the time that Lowens presented himself to its editors, the *Evening Star* had been in existence for over a century, having begun publication in 1852. The paper's longevity and vitality might be attributed to at least two factors: Continuous ownership for most of its life by a single unified entity, the Crosby-Adams-Kauffmann family triumvirate,<sup>280</sup> and faithful adherence to the mission espoused by its founder Joseph Burrows Tate. As Tate had

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<sup>278</sup> Five newspapers served Washington in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, until the *Times* (founded 1894) and *Herald* (founded 1906) merged in 1939. Publication of the *Post* began in 1877 and the *Daily News* in 1921.

<sup>279</sup> See *subter.* 82-85.

<sup>280</sup> The *Star* was owned and operated continuously, in both managerial and editorial positions, by descendants of *Star* reporter Crosby S. Noyes, *New York World* Washington correspondent George W. Adams and Ohio publisher Samuel Kauffmann, all of whom had purchased the newspaper in 1867.

proclaimed in the newspaper's first edition, the *Star*, "[f]ree from party trammels and sectarian influences,"<sup>281</sup> would strive to:

[P]reserve a strict neutrality, and whilst maintaining a fearless spirit of independence, will be devoted in an especial manner to the local interests of the beautiful city which bears the honored name Washington, and to the welfare and happiness of the large and growing population within its borders. To develop the resources of the Metropolis—to increase and facilitate its mercantile operations—to foster and encourage its industrial pursuits—to stimulate its business and trade—to accelerate its progress in the march to power and greatness—these shall be the main objects of the paper . . . . Nothing shall be admitted into its columns offensive to any religious sect or political party—nothing, in a moral point of view, to which even the most fastidious might object. It is the determination of the publisher to make it a paper which will be a welcome visitor [sic] to every family, and one which may be perused not only with pleasure, but with profit.<sup>282</sup>

Tate's firmly held convictions remained a powerful force at the *Star*, shaping the substance of its news and editorial pages for the many decades to come. When the newspaper reached the century mark in 1952, the national weekly newsmagazine *Time* paid its respects to "The Old Lady Of Washington"<sup>283</sup> with an article making abundantly clear where the *Star*'s staunchest loyalties lay:

As the oldest, richest paper in Washington, the *Evening Star* (circ. 226,000) is the capital's only real home-town daily. While other Washington dailies vie for national prestige and influence, the *Star* acts as Washington's devoted housewife, fighting as hard for good garbage disposal in the District as for good government in the nation. Like any efficient housekeeper, the *Star* seldom wastes anything, every day prints almost all the 200,000 words that file into its city room over the AP wire. Although its coverage of the government, Capitol Hill and the world is more complete than any paper in the city, its neat, restrained columns (where liquor ads are banned) are jammed with reports on civic meetings, mothers' clubs, high school graduations and local bird life . . . . Ever since the *Star* was started in 1852, it has kept its eye

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<sup>281</sup> Joseph B. Tate, "Prospectus of the *Daily Evening Star*," *Daily Evening Star* [first edition: Vol. I, No. 1], December 16, 1852: 1. Although Tate sold his interest in the paper after only six months, his journalistic philosophy remained intact for the duration of the newspaper's existence.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> [Unnamed author], "The Old Lady of Washington," *Time*, LX/26 (December 29, 1952): 52.

on Washington . . . . Since the Washington Monument was just a stub then, it set out to raise money to complete it. The *Star* campaigned for street numbers on houses, modern jails, a closed sewage system and through railroads, and even bested the Pennsylvania Railroad in a fight to eliminate grade crossings.<sup>284</sup>

The *Star* boasted a reputation for extending undivided loyalty to its staff as well. *Time* reported that *Star* employees were “as secure as the paper” with no one “ever fired or laid off ‘except for very grave reasons.’”<sup>285</sup> Although history would one day give the lie to these claims, they must have seemed tremendously appealing to a cub music critic seeking a home for his byline.

*Time*’s encomium to the *Star* also included an affirmation of the newspaper’s fiscal hegemony over its competitors, this declaration made only one year before Lowens delivered himself to the *Star* editors for employment:

In advertising, the *Star* has long been one of the leading papers in the U.S., outranks the *New York Times* in ad lineage, and this year stands fourth among the nation’s papers (after the *Milwaukee Journal*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*). Its circulation in Washington runs second to McCormick’s<sup>286</sup> *Times-Herald*, but the *Times-Herald* has been slipping while the *Star* has been gaining.<sup>287</sup>

Having earned a name for itself as “that proper and long profitable old lady of Washington journalism,”<sup>288</sup> “one of the best of the nation’s metropolitan newspapers”<sup>289</sup> and

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> *Chicago Tribune* owner Colonel Robert M. McCormick, whose company at the time also owned the *Times-Herald*.

<sup>287</sup> “The Old Lady of Washington,” loc. cit.

<sup>288</sup> Chalmers M. Roberts, *The Washington Post: The First 100 Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977): xii.

<sup>289</sup> Bernard R. Deremer, “Here to Stay,” *Christian Standard*, September 17, 1995: 14.

“the best afternoon daily in the U.S.,”<sup>290</sup> the *Star* cast a giant shadow over its competitors in the capital’s daily newspaper market. Even its arch-rival the *Washington Post* praised it as “one of the most successful newspapers in America.”<sup>291</sup> In a final eulogy to the *Star* on its demise in 1981, George Beveridge and Mary Lou Forbes, two of its many still-loyal reporters, looked back nostalgically on “possibly the best of all afternoon dailies”<sup>292</sup> and its quite remarkable success story:

In a full-page 1941 notice to its readers, it [the *Star*] proclaimed a fact that today seems unreal: “For the past ten consecutive years, the *Star* has led all the nation’s newspapers in total advertising.” Its 1941 lineage volume substantially outstripped the number-two contender, the *New York Times*, and far exceeded any paper in Washington. A decade later its position of dominance still held. The *Star*’s 39 million lines of advertising commanded 40.2 percent of the total Washington market shared then by four papers. The *Washington Post*’s share in contrast was 24.7 percent, the *Times-Herald* 23.2 percent, and the tabloid *Washington Daily News* 11.8 percent. The *Star*’s weekday 1951 circulation stood at 228,774 against the *Post*’s 190,787.<sup>293</sup>

In 1954, when Lowens first began working at the *Star*, Beveridge and Forbes reported that the *Times-Herald*, “printing around the clock, was the city’s circulation leader by a slight margin over the *Star*. The *Washington Post* trailed in third place and the *Washington Daily News* was far behind. But the *Star*’s dominant advertising volume nearly equalled that of the other three papers combined.”<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> “The Old Lady of Washington,” loc. cit.

<sup>291</sup> [Unnamed author], “Salute to the Star,” *Washington Post*, December 16, 1952: 16. The statement, in its entirety, reads: “One of the most successful newspapers in America, business-wise, it has built this success on a deserved reputation for integrity and decency as well as honest and complete reporting.”

<sup>292</sup> George Beveridge and Mary Lou Forbes, “Publication of the *Star* Ceases Today,” *Washington Star*, August 7, 1981: A1. Both writers won Pulitzer Prizes in journalism while associated with the *Star*, Beveridge in 1958 and Forbes in 1959.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

Writing for *The Washingtonian*, the capital city's monthly lifestyle magazine, media analyst Joseph Goulden<sup>295</sup> reached a similar conclusion, commenting that at this time the *Star* "totally dominated Washington journalism. Its forty-two million lines of advertising made it the fifth largest newspaper in the nation. The *Post*, with twenty-five million lines, barely made the top fifty list."<sup>296</sup>

Having been dubbed, affectionately, the "Grey Lady" of Washington newspapers,<sup>297</sup> the *Evening Star* was not only the oldest and most successful daily in Washington, D.C., it was also, arguably, the most conservative. Newbold Noyes, the *Star*'s editor from 1963 to 1974, defined the paper's editorial point of view in a succinct statement made during an interview for Goulden's *Washingtonian* article:

The strategy of publishing in this town would obviously dictate that we carve out a moderate/conservative position somewhat to the right of the *Post*. It makes no good sense to compete with them as to who could be the brightest liberal paper in town. I strive to make the *Star* an enlightened, progressive, conservative paper rather than hidebound reactionary.<sup>298</sup>

The *Star*'s editorial slant, leaning perhaps further to the right than Noyes's reference would suggest, garnered its fair share of criticism. In his *Washingtonian* article, Goulden claimed that the newspaper to have been accused of:

[A]loofness from blacks; a gradualistic approach to civil rights more appropriate to Dixie than to D.C.; unblinking endorsement of hard-line Vietnam policies; toadyish friendship with incumbent administrations; in sum,

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<sup>295</sup> Goulden, a winner of the National Magazine Award in 1971, later became a director of the watchdog group Accuracy in Media.

<sup>296</sup> Joseph C. Goulden, "Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*? The Good Grey Lady is No. 2, and Not Really Trying Harder," *Washingtonian*, V/4 (January 1970): 28.

<sup>297</sup> Goulden incorporated the appellation in the title to his 1970 article in *Washingtonian* [above], as did Haynes Johnson in his *Star* tribute, "Sins and Glories," from "Washington *Star* Memories," *Washington Post*, August 7, 1981: C1.

<sup>298</sup> Goulden, "Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*?" op. cit.: 65.

a ‘respectable’ status quo conservatism, to the right of Rockefeller, to the left of the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>299</sup>

The *Star*’s advertising and financial acumen was easily matched by its signal success in the editorial arena. Conservative bias notwithstanding, the newspaper managed to attract to its editorial desks a multitude of outstanding journalists from all points of the ideological spectrum. Its contingent of reporters and columnists included such now well-known and award-winning names in the business of print and broadcast journalism as Jack Germond, Haynes Johnson, William S. White, Clifford Berryman, James Berryman, Edwin Yoder, James Polk, Jonathan Yardley, Miriam Ottenberg, Jay Carmody and David Broder.<sup>300</sup>

Carl Bernstein who, with fellow *Washington Post* journalist Robert Woodward, rose to national prominence in 1972 for breaking the notorious Watergate scandal that brought down the Nixon presidency, began his career in journalism, not at the more liberal-leaning *Post*, but at the conservative, grey-lady *Star*. Bernstein credited his early journalistic development to his years of employment at the *Star*, describing the newspaper, fondly, as “quite simply, the most wonderful place for a boy to grow up . . . . The *Star* had grit, lore, character, love.”<sup>301</sup> Serving as copy boy and dictationist there while still in high school, Bernstein commented that he left the *Star*, at age twenty-one, “a reporter.”<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Goulden, “Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*?” op. cit.: 33.

<sup>300</sup> Recipients of the Pulitzer Prize in journalism while writing for the *Star* were Johnson (1966), Yardley (1981), Polk (1974), Yoder (1979), Ottenberg (1960), Clifford Berryman (1944) and James Berryman (1950). Carmody was the *Star*’s drama critic when named Critic of the Year in 1956 by the Screen Directors Guild.

<sup>301</sup> Carl Bernstein, “The Dictationist,” from “*Washington Star* Memories,” loc. cit. Author, with Robert Woodward, of *All the President’s Men* (1974) and *The Final Days* (1976), Bernstein’s career in journalism later took him to ABC News, where he was Washington Bureau Chief and, as a correspondent, to *Time*.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

During her tenure at the *Star*, the nationally syndicated political columnist Mary McGrory won the George Polk Memorial Award, in 1963, and a Pulitzer Prize, in 1975. Strongly left-of-center in political conviction, she frankly and publicly criticized the newspaper's editorial page as "perfectly dreadful, dreadful. I don't like the point of view, the tone, anything about it."<sup>303</sup> Nevertheless remaining steadfastly loyal to the *Star* for thirty-four years, she participated valiantly "in the exhilarating struggle," as she described it, "to save the *Washington Star*, an afternoon paper, doomed almost by definition."<sup>304</sup>

McGrory's unwavering allegiance, and that of many other *Star* employees, may have derived in no small measure from the journalistic *carte blanche* afforded all reporters and columnists at the *Star*, however unorthodox their critical viewpoint or political creed. *Time* made special note of the *Star*'s "laissez-faire attitude" when it reported in 1968 that the newspaper's employees "are encouraged to express their personal opinions . . . . This keeps staffers loyal to their paper. Though some are lured away by higher salaries elsewhere, many stay. They know they will be backed up in whatever they say."<sup>305</sup> Remarkably McGrory, in tandem with her rancorous comment about the *Star*'s conservative editorial perspective, "I find irresistible the fact that I can write what I want to write, and it goes into the paper."<sup>306</sup>

The free-wheeling journalism that *Star* reporters were given leave to practice imparted to the newspaper a richly deserved reputation for peculiarity. McGrory characterized the *Star*, affectionately, as a "hothouse for eccentrics."<sup>307</sup> Haynes Johnson, who served the paper

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<sup>303</sup> Goulden, "Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*?" op. cit.: 68.

<sup>304</sup> Mary McGrory, "In the End, Terminal Optimism," *Washington Post*, December 26, 1999: C1.

<sup>305</sup> [Unnamed author], "*Star* Bright, *Star* Tonight," *Time*, XCI/4 (January 26, 1968): 46-47.

<sup>306</sup> Goulden, "The Good Grey Lady Is No. 2," loc. cit.

<sup>307</sup> "Star Bright," op. cit.: 47.

faithfully for twelve years, described it as a place “both beloved for its eccentricities and Dickensian characters and deprecated with gentle bemusement for its company-store air of paternalism, that art form flourished with special flair.”<sup>308</sup>

Given the robust array of musical activity energizing the nation’s capital during his tenure, Lowens had little difficulty fulfilling the *Star*’s explicit mission to serve the hometown constituency first. He was also more than equal to the task of keeping up appearances as a card-carrying *Star* eccentric. Although he devoted the bulk of his allotted column inches to such important issues confronting the Washington community as government and corporate support for the arts,<sup>309</sup> the plight of musicians in America,<sup>310</sup> the musical education of children<sup>311</sup> and the directions proposed and taken by Washington’s new and developing musical institutions,<sup>312</sup> he also allowed his thoughts to drift on occasion to such musical

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<sup>308</sup> Haynes Johnson, “Sins and Glories,” loc. cit.

<sup>309</sup> “We Spend Less on Arts Than Other Big Cities,” *Sunday Star*, June 11, 1961: D4; “The Debate Continues on Subsidy for Music,” *Sunday Star*, October 29, 1961: F4; “Hearings May Bolster Aid to Performing Arts,” *Sunday Star*, November 12, 1961: F4; “Music’s Fight for Life Has a Friend in Camp,” *Sunday Star*, April 8, 1962: E10; “How Exxon Could Help U.S. Music,” *Sunday Star*, December 1, 1974: G1.

<sup>310</sup> “The Rewards of Music Are Small Financially,” *Sunday Star*, April 23, 1961: D11; “Symphony Salaries: Where Do We Stand?” *Sunday Star*, November 5, 1972: G10; “About That Church Organist . . .,” *Sunday Star*, May 28, 1972: G8.

<sup>311</sup> “Music Educators Gather for Shop Talks, Clinics,” *Sunday Star*, January 8, 1961: F4; “All Children Respond to Musical Training,” *Sunday Star*, July 2, 1961: A18; “Do Music Majors Lack Good Schooling?” *Sunday Star*, June 24, 1962: C10; “Music in Residence for Our Schools,” *Sunday Star*, February 3, 1963: E10; “The Secret of Real Support for Music Lies in Schools,” *Sunday Star*, March 15, 1964: F6; “In Germany—Music Training for the Young,” *Sunday Star*, January 31, 1971: C8; “They Wanted To Stop the Music in the Fairfax Schools,” April 11, 1976: G18.

<sup>312</sup> “The National Symphony Orchestra Crisis,” *Sunday Star*, October 6, 1963: E5; “Many Problems Need Study Planning Kennedy Center,” *Sunday Star*, January 26, 1964: E6; “‘Opera Company of Washington’ and What It Might Accomplish,” *Sunday Star*, February 16, 1964: F5; “The Orchestra’s Future,” *Sunday Star*, May 10, 1964: A4; “Kennedy Center’s Music Plans,” *Sunday Star*, February 14, 1971: E4; “Wolf Trap: How’re You Gonna Get Them Out to the Farm?” *Sunday Star*, October 14, 1973: F1; “Whither Wolf Trap?” *Sunday Star*, April 4, 1976: G20.

oddities as musical philately,<sup>313</sup> barbershop-quartet singing,<sup>314</sup> the singular hobby of timing performances,<sup>315</sup> and audience etiquette.<sup>316</sup>

One think-piece in particular, occasioned by the newly opened Filene Center's first Fourth of July concert, found Lowens, not, as would be expected, extolling the virtues of the new facility and the United States Air Force Band's upcoming appearance there. Instead he daydreamed with his readers about the simpler musical pleasures of yesteryear, when band concerts opened with "Aida (pronounced Ada, like the girl's name)," the local barber delighted listeners by "triple-tonguing his way through the Carnival of Venice," firemen from neighboring towns, "dressed in brilliant colored uniforms and dragging behind them their house reels and hook-and-ladder rigs, marched behind their own town band," and a player "whose mouth was too large for good cornetting . . . was assigned to the tuba (pronounced tooby, like booby.)"<sup>317</sup> Lowens topped off his reverie with a prominently placed picture of himself, be-spectacled, with shirt-sleeves suitably rolled up, seated amid a throng of listeners in the bleachers of a bandstand and listening, allegedly, to a Fourth-of-July band concert in small-town America.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> "Stamp Collecting for Music Fans," *Sunday Star*, September 19, 1965: K5; "Stamp Design Criticized," *Sunday Star*, October 4, 1964: E5; "Music Joins Stamp Scene," *Sunday Star*, November 21, 1971: B5.

<sup>314</sup> "Where Are the Old Barbershop Singers?" *Sunday Star*, July 16, 1961: C10.

<sup>315</sup> "Offbeat Music Hobby: Timing Performances," *Sunday Star*, August 30, 1964: C4.

<sup>316</sup> "An Essay on Applause and Its Techniques," *Sunday Star*, May 5, 1963: C4.

<sup>317</sup> "MUSIC: The Bad Old Days," *Sunday Star*, July 4, 1971: D8. The Filene Center of Wolf Trap Farm Park opened its doors for the first time on July 1, 1971.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Parsed in the Press**

The *Star's*, to be sure laudable, hands-off policy toward editorial content had the potential of producing less than desirable results. On one hand, *Star* journalists were empowered to intrigue readers by the breadth of their ideas and the quirky and eccentric qualities of their writing. On the other hand, if an opinion were to verge on the antagonistic, the newspaper ran the risk of alienating the community it professed to serve.

In no way reluctant to advance provocative opinions of his own, Lowens was quick to defend both the credentials of the music critics who worked in his department and their freedom of expression, however idiosyncratic their ideas might seem to be.<sup>319</sup> His loyalty, however, was severely tested when the *Star's* editors hired George Gelles to assist him with some of the massive reviewing and reportorial duties that, prior to the opening of the Kennedy Center in 1971, were swamping the music department.

Gelles, then late (and in fairly quick succession) of Boston's *Globe*,<sup>320</sup> *Record American*, and *Herald-Traveler*, succeeded in arousing the hostility of Boston's musical establishment with reviews of the Boston Symphony Orchestra that were perceived to be contentious and mean-spirited. Gelles, "more vulnerable, being newer and younger," according to his mentor, then-*Globe* music critic Michael Steinberg, had been "fired from that job [music critic for the *Herald-Traveler*] . . . as the result of pressure on the *Herald's*

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<sup>319</sup> Lowens willingly stood firm against even such powerful complainants as the esteemed American composer Emma Lou Diemer, who asked that *Star* contributing critic Lawrence Sears be prohibited from reviewing concerts of her music. Lowens responded: "I cannot agree that Mr. Sears's work lacks expertise, objectivity, or discrimination, and since I can find no evidence of personal bias against you, I must respectfully decline your request." See Irving Lowens, letter to Miss Emma Lou Diemer, November 18, 1966, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>320</sup> Gelles served at the *Globe* as an intern.

publisher by the Trustees of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.”<sup>321</sup> Gelles’s alleged offense had been to denigrate unfairly then-guest conductor Seiji Ozawa, a leading contender for the soon-to-be-vacated post of BSO Music Director.<sup>322</sup>

Lowens was fully aware of the controversy in Boston and perhaps sympathetic to Gelles’s plight<sup>323</sup> when he suggested that the *Star*’s editors approach the then-notorious Boston music critic for a position in Washington. The suggestion proved to be a tactical error on Lowens’s part. One year after arriving in Washington, Gelles turned an acerbic pen on revered musical icon Jascha Heifetz, and the scandal that had erupted in Boston in 1969 was replayed, with equal fervor, in 1971 in the nation’s capital.

The flash point in Washington was a telecast recital, broadcast April 22, 1971, that featured the venerable Russian violinist. Although Gelles acknowledged Heifetz to be, significantly, “one of the last survivors of the Russian circle associated with Leopold Auer” and “a modern musician who has kept his art alive by commissioning new works,” he decried the violinist’s artistry as “but a shadow of its former self” with a technique that was “executed filthily,” intonation that was “usually wide of the mark,” a tone quality “made ugly by

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<sup>321</sup> Michael Steinberg, letter to Irving Lowens *et al.*, November 30, 1969, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Collection, Special Collections in the Performing Arts, University of Maryland Performing Arts Library, College Park. Steinberg had himself been recently pilloried for similar reasons by the self-same Boston musical establishment. Both episodes were considered sufficiently noteworthy to be covered by the *New York Times*. See John H. Fenton, “Staid Boston Symphony at Odds With Music Critics,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1969: 46.

<sup>322</sup> Of Ozawa, Gelles had opined in the offending review: “Seiji Ozawa has shrunk from a lightweight with charm and a real elegance to a conductor whose performances are technically inaccurate and emotionally indifferent . . . . [T]he current all-Stravinsky program is shameless in exposing his faults . . . . [T]he performance showed him uncommitted, unconvincing, far less good than he once was.” (From George Gelles, “Ozawa’s Conducting ‘Inaccurate and Indifferent,’” *Herald-Traveler*, November 22, 1969: 24.) Ozawa was signed as the orchestra’s music director in 1973.

<sup>323</sup> Michael Steinberg, *loc. cit.* Lowens had reprinted in the *American Musical Digest* an editorial about the controversy originally published in the *Nation*. Entitled “Cold Feet in Boston,” the writer Frank Peters decried the attacks on Gelles’s right to freedom of critical expression. See *American Musical Digest*, I/3 (December 1969): 7.

scratches and rasps” and “in matters of style . . . a primitive.”<sup>324</sup> He capped his contentious comments with the following paragraph that could not have failed to arouse Heifetz’s champions:

Heifetz primed his bow with chicken fat—with pure schmaltz—and not with resin. He made every composer a citizen of the Lower East Side, and forced styles as varied as Mozart and Prokofieff into the same maudlin mold.

By inappropriately coating his scores with an over-rich vibrato, a healthy number of slippery slides from one pitch to the next, and a heart-on-his-sleeve rhetoric, Heifetz robbed them of their individuality and distinction.<sup>325</sup>

Gelles’s offending review prompted members of the National Symphony Orchestra to close ranks against him. Their outraged letters to the *Star* editor—including two with, respectively, thirty-six and twenty-three signatories—amounted in effect to a miniature *guerre de plume*.<sup>326</sup> Among the barrage of verbal broadsides hurled at Gelles were remonstrances about his journalistic ethics:

Mr. Gelles chooses to insult one of the great performing artists of all time, Jascha Heifetz, using the vocabulary of a supermarket . . . [C]onfrontation tactics are not admissible in a situation where no debate is provided for. And muckrake journalism is hardly appropriate in the field of art. Mr. Gelles’ non-negotiable opinions require that the newspaper he serves be alert to his errors in taste and judgment when allowing him to represent them;<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> George Gelles, “TV Showed Mortality of Legendary Heifetz,” *Evening Star*, April 26, 1971: A16.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>326</sup> Milton Schwartz *et al*, letter to editor, *Evening Star*, April 29, 1971; Musicians of the National Symphony Orchestra, letter to editor, *Evening Star*, April 30, 1971; Robert Genovese, Clarinetist, National Symphony, letter to Charles Seib, managing editor, *Washington Evening Star*, May 5, 1971; Samuel Lowe, letter to editor, *Evening Star*, May 25, 1971; Milton Schwartz, letter to editor, Evening Star Newspaper Company, May 27, 1971, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>327</sup> Robert Genovese, *loc. cit.*

and denunciations of his qualifications as a critic:

We think Mr. Gelles is not competent to serve as a responsible music critic for a leading metropolitan newspaper. His recent highly personalized view of the Heifetz television presentation again demonstrates that . . . his remarks . . . are not perceptive enough to support the responsible role public music criticism must play in the perpetuation and future of the art form.<sup>328</sup>

The protestations in one letter, referring blatantly—and knowingly—to Gelles’s prior travails in Boston, demanded, in like manner, that he be fired forthwith:

We think you [the editor] are doing your subscribers a disservice by employing such a non-critic as the obviously ignorant Mr. Gelles. We would like to do what was done in Boston. Get rid of him!<sup>329</sup>

Dismissal proved not to be George Gelles’s fate. The *Star* editors stood by their wayward music critic;<sup>330</sup> but, swerving not at all from the newspaper’s founding principles, they also provided equal time to the opposing point of view. In May 1971 were put into print two of the harshest of the Gelles-bashing letters to the editor.<sup>331</sup> Honorable though it may have been, this course of action—imprudently perhaps—invited public scrutiny of the affair.

Such scrutiny arrived in the form of a rancorous polemic, appearing in the October 1971 issue of *The Washingtonian* and targeting Washington’s performing arts critical establishment. Entitled “The Road to Cultural Mediocrity, As Praised by Our Second-Rate Critics,”<sup>332</sup> the article, if not directly inspired by the Gelles incident, was without question

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<sup>328</sup> Musicians of the National Symphony Orchestra, loc. cit.

<sup>329</sup> Milton Schwartz *et al*, loc cit.

<sup>330</sup> Gelles remained at the newspaper until 1976. When Lowens took his year-long leave of absence from the *Star*, from March 1974 to March 1975, Gelles, to Lowens’s chagrin, was appointed his replacement at the chief music critic’s desk.

<sup>331</sup> The two letters appeared on the *Star* editorial page under the rubric, “George Gelles on Heifetz,” May 24, 1971: A10. See Milton Schwartz *et al*, loc cit., and Musicians of the National Symphony Orchestra, loc. cit.

<sup>332</sup> Ruth Leon, “The Road to Cultural Mediocrity, as Praised by Our Second-Rate Critics,” *Washingtonian*, VII/1 (October 1971): 66-68.

serendipitously timed; and its author Ruth Leon could hardly have been oblivious to the controversy.

Leon did not refer specifically to the conflict between Gelles and the National Symphony Orchestra players; instead, she lambasted the old-guard theater and music critics for criticism that was insufficiently discerning. She took aim first at Paul Hume and Richard Coe (music and theater critics, respectively, for the *Washington Post*), commenting, derisively, that they were “civic boosters, fund raisers, [and] theater builders—but no critics.”<sup>333</sup> She dismissed Lowens’s writing as lackluster and uninspired, declaring: “He may know his music, but he manages to communicate only that he has heard too much and is now bored.”<sup>334</sup>

Commending, on the other hand, the younger, second-tier pundits for their “tell-it-like-it-is philosophy,” Leon named George Gelles as one of her “three favorite local critics.”<sup>335</sup> She expressed frank admiration for Gelles’s credentials and critical acumen, suggesting that his criticism merited greater attention and respect than the *Star* editors seemingly accorded it:

Most of the time Gelles is stuck somewhere between the baseball scores and the golf handicaps . . . . But once you’ve found Gelles’s reviews they’re worth it. Clearly, unsentimentally, Gelles examines a concert or a dance recital with formidable knowledge (Gelles studied French horn at Juilliard and Manhattan, with degrees from Princeton, Berlin University, and Brandeis) and an objectivity sadly lacking in the older critics who are still agog that someone is actually performing Dance in Washington.

Unwilling to be satisfied with just anything that crosses a stage, Gelles frequently takes issue with Mrs. [Jean] Battey Lewis [the *Post*’s then-dance critic]. Of him she says, “I’m trying to choose my words. Well, he’s very *young*, isn’t he?”<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Leon, op. cit.: 66.

<sup>334</sup> Leon, op. cit.: 67.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid. The other two writers on Leon’s short list of favorites were Alan Kriegsman and Tom Zito, both music critics for the *Washington Post*.

<sup>336</sup> Leon, op.cit.: 68.

Leon also made an undisguised attempt to foment antagonism between Lowens and Gelles, perhaps to disparage Lowens's professional integrity. Her allegation that in "[o]ne typical week . . . George Gelles was reduced to screaming frustration by the news that he was to cover two high school concerts while Irving Lowens went to both the two major concerts by the visiting Cleveland Orchestra"<sup>337</sup> implied that Lowens misused the power of his position to suppress unfairly the voice (and, indirectly, the career) of the younger and, in Leon's view, more capable writer.<sup>338</sup>

Nor was this *The Washingtonian's* only riposte against the *Star's* policies *vis-à-vis* criticism of the performing arts. In its November issue, the magazine had the temerity to imply, in a report on changes in the *Star's* performing arts staff, that Leon's potent pen had provoked the reorganization: "In our October issue, Ruth Leon castigated the *Post*, *Star* and *News* for their weak criticism of the performing arts. Shortly thereafter the *Star* began shifting its critics around in a game of musical chairs."<sup>339</sup>

The report also released the information that, at Lowens's behest, Gelles had been removed from the *Star's* music staff and reassigned as dance critic, thus giving *The Washingtonian* opportunity to attack Lowens's integrity a second time. The magazine hinted that, because he was unhappy with Gelles's more captious approach to criticism, Lowens attempted to use his (presumed) influence to have Gelles ousted:

There have been other changes. George Gelles is no longer allowed to write about music. After number one music critic Irving Lowens wrote nicely

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Leon's admiration for Gelles had a salutary effect on his writing career. On three occasions in the year following her report, Gelles's byline found a home at *Washingtonian*. See George Gelles, "The Growing Up of the Opera Society," *Washingtonian*, VII/9 (June 1972): 56; "The Kennedy Center: What It Should Be," *Washingtonian*, VII/12 (September 1972): 62; and "Performing Arts: Washington Likes Its Orchestra," *Washingtonian*, VIII/1 (October 1972): 163.

<sup>339</sup> [Unnamed author], "Musical Chairs at the *Evening Star*," *Washingtonian*, VII/2 (November 1971): 13.

about Mass [the composition by Leonard Bernstein commissioned for the grand opening of the Kennedy Center] . . . and Gelles then wrote critically about it, Lowens demanded that Gelles be fired. Gelles keeps his job, but only to write about dance.<sup>340</sup>

In fact, aesthetic differences had nothing to do with Lowens's request to have Gelles fired. He took action against the younger critic, not because he believed the quality of his work to be inferior,<sup>341</sup> but because he had insubordinately refused to carry out an important assignment, namely, coverage of a press conference surrounding the premiere of Bernstein's *Mass*.<sup>342</sup>

Lowens's perspective on the nature of Gelles's newly reconstructed position at the *Star* also contradicted that of *The Washingtonian*'s article. What *The Washingtonian* had construed as a demotion, in order to silence, or at least subdue, a provocative critic, Lowens perceived as a subversive and summary dismissal of his complaint, which he believed to be legitimate:

When I got back to the newspaper, I was still so infuriated at Gelles's action that I walked into Noyes's [Newbold Noyes, the *Star*'s executive editor at the time] office and insisted that he be fired, on the basis that he had refused to carry out a news assignment which had been given to him . . . . Noyes assured me that from that time on, I would not have to cope with Gelles any more. But the ultimate solution turned out to be not a firing, but (to my astonishment) a promotion! It seems that Noyes was at that time negotiating quite gingerly with the Guild [Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild Local 35], with the major issue being the automation of the newspaper. Gelles, of course, went to the Guild and complained of mistreatment; the Guild went to Noyes and asked what was going on with Gelles. Then, rather than rock the boat with the Guild in regard to the larger issue, Noyes decided to remove the

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Lowens, in fact, made his respect for Gelles's freedom of expression abundantly clear in 1975 in his letter to the *Star*'s then-editor James Bellows, in which he commented: "It is true that I expressed no enthusiasm for Mr. Gelles's music reviews—but then there are rarely two music critics who agree about anything . . . . [H]e has the right (and the duty) to say what he wants to say and to say it in the manner in which he wants to express himself. That's what a critic is for." See Irving Lowens, letter to James Bellows, August 16, 1975, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>342</sup> See *supra* Chapter I: pp. 66.

Gelles matter from contention. He removed him from the music department—and made him the *Star*'s dance critic! So is history written! It is in this way that the *Star* became the second American newspaper to hire a full-time dance critic.<sup>343</sup>

### **Leading the Pack in Performing Arts Coverage**

Lowens's remarks suggest that Noyes's action *vis-à-vis* Gelles and his position at the newspaper was driven, not by editorial or job-performance considerations, but by political and financial expediency. As these events unfolded, the *Star*, historically Washington's most lucrative newspaper, was for the first time in its existence operating at a loss rather than a profit. This loss, amounting to approximately \$4.5 million,<sup>344</sup> was staggeringly—and embarrassingly—high, and the paper would continue to report operating deficits for another six years.<sup>345</sup> Coming to terms with the overall consequences of the paper's newer, more stringent economic circumstances must have been especially difficult for Lowens, because, during the previous decade of his tenure there, coverage of music in general and support for Lowens's work in particular had been extraordinarily good, perhaps even unprecedented for a daily newspaper in America.

From as early as the mid-1950s, the *Washington Post* had engaged in a prolonged offensive against the *Star*'s supremacy, after eliminating its own morning-market rival the *Times-Herald* in 1954.<sup>346</sup> Although the *Post*'s effort ultimately (and overwhelmingly)

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Roberts, op. cit.: 453.

<sup>345</sup> The *Washington Post* reported on the *Star*'s first profit year after 1970 in a news item entitled, "\$582,000 Profit Reported by *Star*," July 9, 1977: n.p. See *Evening Star* Clipping File, Washingtoniana Collection, District of Columbia Public Library, Washington, D.C.

<sup>346</sup> In an extraordinary act of chutzpah, the *Post*, trailing in circulation behind both the *Times-Herald* and the *Star* and suffering operating losses as well, nonetheless bought out the *Times-Herald* in 1954, giving it a monopoly in the morning market. For a detailed account of the purchase, see Richard T. Stout and Joseph Tinkelman, "Is Time Running Out on the *Washington Star*?" *Washingtonian Magazine* XVI/11 (August 1981): 205. According to the authors, the audacity of the *Post*'s buy-out prompted author Walter Lippmann (at the time a syndicated political

succeeded,<sup>347</sup> and despite competition from Washington’s other afternoon newspaper the *Daily News*, as well as from the *Post*’s counterbalancing morning monopoly, the decades between 1950 and 1970 saw the *Star* continue to enlarge its share of subscribers—and by a considerable margin. According to the United States Postal Service’s Audit Bureau of Circulation,<sup>348</sup> the *Star*’s circulation figures during this period increased by a robust sixty-eight percent.<sup>349</sup>

The newspaper’s long-time prosperity, buttressed by the security of so strong and loyal a readership, inevitably filtered down to Lowens and the newspaper’s music department. While a stringer for the *Star* (between 1954 and 1961) and for the first four years of his tenure as chief music critic, Lowens was paid (albeit per piece) for virtually as many reviews as he could write.<sup>350</sup> In 1966, the *Star* publishers felt sufficiently affluent to upgrade Lowens’s position to that of full-time (Guild) employee, making it possible for him to surrender his day job at the Library of Congress. In the intervening years between the establishment of his new, salaried position and the *Star*’s sudden and incontrovertible financial slide in the 1970s,<sup>351</sup>

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columnist for the New York *Herald Tribune* and winner in 1962 of a Pulitzer Prize in journalism) to congratulate the *Post*’s owner Eugene Meyer with the following telegraphed message: “Hurray for the canary that swallowed the cat.”

<sup>347</sup> The *Post* was in fact the only daily newspaper left standing in Washington when the *Star* finally closed its doors in 1981. The *Washington Times*, which began publication as a six-day-a-week newspaper, was established in the nation’s capital May 17, 1982.

<sup>348</sup> The Audit Bureau of Circulation is a non-profit organization established in 1914 to verify newspaper circulation figures that determine advertising rates.

<sup>349</sup> The *Star* reported to the Audit Bureau of Circulation a circulation of 226,072 in 1950 and 329,907 in 1970. The Audit Bureau’s annual statements of *Star* circulation figures are preserved in the *Evening Star* Clipping File, Washingtoniana Collection, District of Columbia Public Library, Washington, D.C.

<sup>350</sup> The going contractual rate at the time was \$10 per review, and, after 1961, \$25. Lowens regularly wrote five per week. See Irving Lowens, letters to Mr. Kirby, May 8, 1959, loc. cit., and Theodore W. Libbey, Jr., April 1, 1978, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>351</sup> Roberts, loc. cit. Roberts reported that, for the two-year period ending in 1972, the *Star*’s total losses stood at “close to \$15.5 million.”

Lowens was gradually afforded the budgetary means to maintain a staff of as many as two full-time assistant critics<sup>352</sup> and, in at least one banner year, thirteen stringers, all designated specifically for music news and criticism.<sup>353</sup>

The *Star* was equally generous, during these boom years, with its editorial coverage of music and the performing arts. On September 6, 1970, shortly after the National Endowment for the Arts had awarded a sizable grant to the National Symphony Orchestra,<sup>354</sup> the *Star* ran in its Opinion section an editorial applauding the award.<sup>355</sup> The writer,<sup>356</sup> reacting to National Symphony Orchestra Association then President Lloyd Symington's suggestion that an *additional* \$500,000 in annual governmental subsidy was still needed to keep the orchestra solvent, issued a fervid plea for public support of the arts that would today be anathema for so frankly conservative a newspaper:

The half-million annual government contribution thus envisioned [sic] is no great amount for the city's major employer to give to its major musical organization, following the practice of many public-spirited corporations.

But the federal government is much more than just the largest employer in Washington and its contribution ought to be considered also in

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<sup>352</sup> The music department was allotted a second full-time music critic beginning in the fall of 1966 and a third in 1968. Lowens's full-time assistant critic in 1966 was John Vinton. Vinton's tenure at the *Star* began as an internship arranged through the Music Critics Association and supported by a Rockefeller Foundation grant that Lowens had been instrumental in securing. Music department work schedules for 1968 list, in addition to Lowens, full-time music staff writers Donald Mintz and Theodore Price. In 1970 the full-time assistant music critics were Larry Barrett and George Gelles. See Irving Lowens, letters to Barbara Krader, September 14, 1966, and Alan Kriegsman, June 3, 1966. The letters and work schedules for the full-time music staff writers are preserved in the Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>353</sup> Between 1966 and 1969, the *Star* more than tripled its staff of contributing music critics. The part-time music staff in May 1966 consisted of four stringers. By 1969 that number had risen exponentially to thirteen. See Mark N. Grant, *Maestros of the Pen: A History of Classical Music Criticism in America* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999): 316; and Irving Lowens, letter to Jeremy Harris, May 2, 1966, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>354</sup> The *Star* reported that the grant amounted to \$250,000, to be matched by private donors.

<sup>355</sup> [Unnamed author] "Let Music Play," *Sunday Star*, September 6, 1970: C1.

<sup>356</sup> The editorial's author may have been Newbold Noyes, *Star* editor from 1963 to 1974, or Smith Hempstone, a member of the Noyes family, who was chief editorial page writer from 1970 to 1975. See "The Good Grey Lady Is No. 2," op. cit.: 33.

terms of its larger function. The plight of the National Symphony is shared by many other orchestras in the country and by almost all institutions in the other arts. In a very short time we are going to have to adopt the policy followed by all other nations in all other times in history, which is substantial state subsidy of the arts.

The endowment's life-saving grant to the symphony is a good occasion to begin thinking seriously about a change that will bring us into conformity with the practice of the rest of mankind and will profoundly enrich the lives of the people.<sup>357</sup>

The editorial's recommendation for the National Symphony Orchestra's fiscal stability was supplemented by a brief news item on the music page. It described an innovative union agreement between the players and management of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra that, through significant numbers of "run-out" performances in the Minneapolis community, increased the ensemble's viability for grant funding. Readership for this piece would necessarily have been small and specific, *vis.*, the players and management of the National Symphony Orchestra.<sup>358</sup>

The *Star* issue placing this editorial into print also included a lengthy feature on the Kennedy Center that appeared in addition to the regular Sunday music-page articles. Although not scheduled to open its doors for another year, the Center and the progress of its construction were deemed by the *Star* editors to be news of major consequence, warranting no less than front-page attention. Entitled "Workmen Polish Kennedy Center for Sounds of Culture"<sup>359</sup> and running to approximately 1,100 words, the article sat, complete with a sizable picture, on page one of the newspaper's A section, alongside such other noteworthy local,

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid. The editorial was placed, inadvertently one assumes, adjacent to a cartoon of a woman in conversation with a man, her balloon dialogue reading: "Of course, I'm interested in all of your crackpot, hairbrained, nitwit and stupid ideas, Edgar."

<sup>358</sup> [Unnamed author], "Deficit Gap Narrowed by St. Paul Group," *Sunday Star*, September 6, 1970: G4.

<sup>359</sup> The article, by Christopher Wright, appeared in the *Sunday Star*, September 6, 1970: A1. The accompanying picture was a wide-angle interior shot of one of the performing halls, showing it to be impressive in its grand design, if still unquestionably under construction.

national and international news stories as the election of Salvador Allende as President of Chile,<sup>360</sup> Vice President Spiro Agnew's efforts to unseat Democratic members of the Senate,<sup>361</sup> and obstacles to construction of Washington's then inchoate subway rail system.<sup>362</sup>

Putting a positive spin on the Center's construction-budget shortfall, the piece gives assurances, via a statement from then Kennedy Center board chairman Roger Stevens,<sup>363</sup> that the project is financially healthy, despite a \$2 million deficit:

After a decade of struggling for money, the center's backers are within \$2 million of the final sum--\$66.4 million. "We have enough money to finish the building," Roger Stevens, chairman of the center's [sic] board of trustees, says. "I know where I can put my hands on it and that's it."<sup>364</sup>

Following this statement is a vividly written description of the Center's acoustic and audience-serving virtues. It implies with some subtlety that the large sums of money designated for this project are being spent to worthy purpose, and that any additional contributions would surely be put to good use:

These days the builders' attention is going into little things—like the quality of a trumpet note in the concert hall, or the view from the end of the balcony in the theater . . . . The center's three performance halls are built into a great, marble box designed to block any intrusion from the outside, swallowing all noise in thick pads of insulation.

"There are planes going over us right now," Mullin [Kennedy Center administrator Philip Mullin] said as he opened a lead-lined, soundproof door from the silent balcony onto a hallway . . . . But noise insulation is not the only feature needed for good listening, and craftsmen are also working on devices to keep *other* sounds inside the center. High over the area where future opera

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<sup>360</sup> Jeremiah O'Leary, "Election of Marxist Indicates Vast Changes Within Chile," *Sunday Star*, September 6, 1970: A1.

<sup>361</sup> Paul Hope, "Agnew Hits Trail Thursday To Push GOP Senate Drive," *Sunday Star*, September 6, 1970: A1.

<sup>362</sup> Stephen Green, "Metro May Again Be Derailed," *Sunday Star*, September 6, 1970: A1.

<sup>363</sup> Founding Chairman of the Kennedy Center Board of Trustees, Stevens was appointed to his post by President Kennedy in 1961. In this capacity, he faithfully served the Center until 1988.

<sup>364</sup> Christopher Wright, loc. cit.

audiences will sit, plasterers on scaffolding carefully smooth a ceiling which looks like a giant water lily. Each immense, rounded petal is designed to reflect the notes of a soprano's voice and send them onto listeners below . . . [T]he ceiling will be covered with red damask and will look like a velvet jewel box, setting off a 50-foot crystal chandelier from Austria . . . [T]he walls are ready for their final touch – gold-painted wood panels, carefully angled to catch the softest tinkle of a bell . . . The three halls open onto an enormous foyer which runs along the river side of the building . . . Intersecting the riverside hall, known as the Grand Foyer, will be two great corridors leading to a concourse on the east side . . . [V]isitors will walk on red plush carpets between soaring white walls . . . If there is time for a cocktail or dinner before the performance, patrons can take the elevator to the rooftop and enjoy a sweeping view of the river from the table. Or they can pass the few minutes before show time walking along the roof garden, enjoying the breeze and the fountains high above the Potomac . . . [T]hese are no ordinary performance halls. This is the nation's cultural center.<sup>365</sup>

More favorable press was accorded Roger Stevens the following spring when the newspaper revisited the issue of the Kennedy Center's financial status. Ostensibly covering a fund-raising "preview for the socially prominent,"<sup>366</sup> which had occurred for the Center's benefit the previous evening, a *Star* news article allowed Stevens opportunity to defend once more his stewardship in launching the Center upon the national cultural scene:

Roger L. Stevens, board chairman of the center . . . began sounding more and more like the chief of a living institution. [Stevens said,] "I think the interest this event has generated clearly indicates an auspicious beginning . . . [I]t shows that the center will become a truly national institution which will command a nationwide following."<sup>367</sup>

The article also gave Stevens a public platform to counter criticisms about, among other concerns,<sup>368</sup> the Center's continuing fiscal problems, arising, so the writer Gus

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Gus Constantine, "The Center: 'Auspicious Beginning,' [So Says Roger Stevens]" *Evening Star*, May 28, 1971: C8.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid. Constantine reported that the Center's development had been "marked by controversies over its appearance, location, programming plans and finances."

Constantine related, “two years ago when construction costs soared and two strikes increased the original cost estimate,”<sup>369</sup> and for which Stevens, as chairman, was ultimately responsible. The optimistic sentiments that Stevens expressed echo those cited in the earlier story on the same subject:

He [Stevens] said funds raised from the [preview] event would enable the center to “move toward fulfilling its Congressional-mandated educational mission by making available low cost seats to segments of the public.” Stevens said the center now has enough funds to finish the building.<sup>370</sup>

The article’s endorsement of Stevens’s efforts was underscored with a head shot of the chairman that, covering the entire four-column width of the article, virtually doubled the size and, therefore, the prominence of the piece. The photograph’s caption, duplicating the text’s summary phrase, reinforced the point once again that Stevens’s financing strategies were successful: “ROGER STEVENS: Enough Funds to Finish the Building.”<sup>371</sup>

The September 6, 1970, issue of the *Star* included yet a third arts-endorsing article, a Sunday think-piece, that appeared in its entirety on the front page of the Arts section, thereby encouraging the reader not to drift prematurely from the story.<sup>372</sup> As the editor reiterated in a sidebar to the piece, the text of the article was an abridged version of an address given to the American Educational Theater Association by National

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid. Owing to the sizable construction cost overruns, Congress was forced in 1969 to allocate an additional \$12.5 million to the Center, which, at that point, was on the brink of financial ruin. See [unnamed author], “John F. Kennedy Center,” *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1969, Vol. 25 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1969): 235.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Michael Straight, “On the Importance of Public Support for Our Artists,” *Sunday Star*, September 6, 1970: G1.

Endowment for the Arts then deputy chairman Michael Straight.<sup>373</sup> The *Star*'s editors evidently thought the speech to be of sufficient moment to publish for the benefit of the general public.

Straight's point of departure was a conclusion reached by a panel convened to assess the performing arts: "The arts are not for a privileged few, but for the many; that their place is not at the periphery of society but at the center; that they are not just a form of recreation but are of central importance to our well-being and happiness."<sup>374</sup> He elaborated on this thesis by offering three recommendations: "[G]overnment backing, to reinforce other forms of support for the artists as they move back towards the mainstream of American life"; expanded exploration of "the means by which the artist reaches the audience"; and broadening "the concept of education in America . . . to include some grasp of our rich cultural inheritance and some experience, as a participant, in the process of artistic creation."<sup>375</sup> Inasmuch as public support for the arts constituted only one of the three elements in Straight's thesis, that the headline for the piece read "On the Importance of Public Support for Our Artists" reveals more about the *Star*'s strong editorial sympathies toward the arts than it does Straight's position.

When Antal Dorati joined the National Symphony Orchestra as its music director in October 1970, the *Star* greeted the Hungarian-born conductor's arrival on the Washington music scene with the same approbation that might have been afforded an important head of state. The occasion of Dorati's first rehearsal with the orchestra, taking place October 5, was given

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<sup>373</sup> Identified in the article as a novelist, playwright and former editor of the magazine *The New Republic*, Straight was also a self-confessed Soviet spy, serving in Washington from 1937 to 1938 under Britain's notorious and aristocratic KGB agent Anthony Blunt. After turning himself in to the FBI in 1963, Straight provided information that exposed Blunt to the authorities. Straight was deputy chairman of the NEA from 1969 to 1977. For further information on Straight's life, see his memoir *After Long Silence* (New York: W.W. Norton: 1983).

<sup>374</sup> *The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects; Rockefeller Panel Report on the Future of Theatre, Dance, Music in America*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965): 11.

<sup>375</sup> Straight, loc. cit.

conspicuous coverage, with a news story about the event appearing on page one of the newspaper's A section. The article included a picture of the *maestro* that, taken from a low angle and obscuring his profile in shadow, gave him the chiseled and imposing appearance of a larger-than-life sculpture on a pedestal. The article's author further emphasized Dorati's presumed charismatic bearing with an opening statement that read: "Antal Dorati took charge of the National Symphony Orchestra yesterday, his baton issuing crisp, authoritative commands, his words heralding the prospect of musical greatness."<sup>376</sup>

Garnering front-page placement as well was then assistant music critic George Gelles's advance publicizing Dorati's first concert with the orchestra.<sup>377</sup> This think-piece, serving as the cover feature for the October 11 issue of the *Sunday Star's* Arts and Amusements section,<sup>378</sup> carried with it not one, but two, arresting pictures of the conductor. Situated side-by-side at the top of the page and spanning the entire width of the newspaper, the photographs showed Dorati hard at work with his new band of players in preparation for the auspicious debut.

The title of Gelles's article, "Dorati Will Offer a Rich and Significant Opening," delivered an effusive prediction that was reiterated in its lead sentence: "If first impressions are among the most lasting, the imprint left by Antal Dorati's debut as music director of the National Symphony will be remembered for decades."<sup>379</sup> Placing particular emphasis on Dorati's ability to invigorate unseasoned orchestras, the article implied that the National

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<sup>376</sup> Gus Constantine, "Dorati and Symphony: Longtime Friends Reunited," *Evening Star*, October 6, 1970: A1.

<sup>377</sup> George Gelles, "Dorati Will Offer a Rich and Significant Opening," *Sunday Star*, October 11, 1970: C5.

<sup>378</sup> The *Star's* Sunday coverage of Dorati's debut in Washington was augmented further by a record review, also written by Gelles, surveying the conductor's recording career. See George Gelles, "RECORDS: Dorati on Disc," *Evening Star*, October 11, 1970: C8.

<sup>379</sup> George Gelles, "Dorati Will Offer a Rich and Significant Opening," loc.cit.

Symphony Orchestra required just such orchestra-building leadership and that Dorati's predecessor,<sup>380</sup> Howard Mitchell, may have been less than successful in this regard:

[A]lthough he's associated in most minds with the Minneapolis Orchestra, his first full-time job in this country was with the Dallas Symphony. Both groups gained in stature under his baton, and help [sic] him achieve his reputation as a builder of orchestras. This is why he was called to Sweden several seasons ago to become head of the Stockholm Philharmonic, and this is undoubtedly one of the reasons he has been brought to Washington . . . . It's an open secret that the local musical community hopes Dorati's engagement will herald a renaissance of symphonic music . . . . Denton [the orchestra's manager William Denton] reports that Dorati has already awakened new interest in town and spurred ticket sales, making a healthier box office than the orchestra had a year ago. This indication of public support is perhaps the best barometer one could hope for on the eve of the premiere. For Dorati needs all of us behind him as he starts what is possibly his most challenging job yet – infusing the National Symphony with new spirit, giving it artistic direction and a pride in its work.<sup>381</sup>

Dorati's debut, on Tuesday, October 13, was recorded, not only with the anticipated review by Lowens<sup>382</sup> (and an obligatory Woman's World feature on concert-goer reactions and the event's attendant social festivities),<sup>383</sup> but also with an editorial that trumpeted Dorati's coming tenure with the orchestra as the dawn of a "new era in Washington music."<sup>384</sup> Given equal billing in the *Star's* Opinion section with commentary on such important national and local issues as campaign finance reform,<sup>385</sup> the repression of intellectual freedoms in the

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<sup>380</sup> Dorati's predecessor was Howard Mitchell, who served as music director from 1949 to 1970. The orchestra's first music director, Hans Kindler, had founded the orchestra in 1931.

<sup>381</sup> Gelles, "Dorati Will Offer a Rich and Significant Opening," loc. cit.

<sup>382</sup> Irving Lowens, "Dorati and Orchestra Bring Exciting Opener," *Evening Star*, October 14, 1970: A19.

<sup>383</sup> Ruth Dean, "Kudos for Maestro Dorati: Symphony Goers Sing Praises After Opener," *Evening Star*, October 14, 1970: B1.

<sup>384</sup> [Unnamed author], "Music, Maestro," Editorial, *Evening Star*, October 14, 1970: A12.

<sup>385</sup> [Unnamed author], "Buying Public Office," Editorial, *Evening Star*, October 14, 1970: A12.

then Soviet Union<sup>386</sup> and recent District of Columbia appellate and superior court judicial confirmation hearings,<sup>387</sup> this short essay, as might be expected, stressed the concert's import as a symbol for cultural renewal in Washington. Quite unexpected was the writer's presumption in offering, if obliquely, some sanguine—and, doubtless, unsolicited—advice to Dorati on the direction his future programming choices should take for the benefit of his new home town. Given the critic's strong bias in favor of music by living American composers, that Lowens's considerable influence might be at work in these remarks is unarguable:

It was audacious of Dorati to open his career in Washington with Beethoven's Ninth, the most ambitious and complex symphony in the classical repertoire. Involving soloists and chorus integrated with the orchestral development of its themes, the Ninth is heard much too rarely. The audience at Constitution Hall seemed fully aware of its privilege and of the conductor's total confidence in himself and in the orchestra to begin with a work usually only approached after much preparatory work together.

The response was not only to the music but also to the promise implied in that choice. The new conductor has much that is solid to build upon, thanks to Howard Mitchell, under whose direction the National Symphony has become, appropriately, one of the leading organizations for the presentation of new music by American composers.

As musical Washington said so enthusiastically last night, "Welcome, Maestro: Play on."<sup>388</sup>

Oddly, the *Star* editors accorded Lowens's review of this landmark concert less than preferential treatment. They placed the article near the back of section A, where it was obscured by adjacent advertising. By contrast, *Washington Post* music critic Paul Hume's review of the same performance was situated prominently on the front page of that paper's Style section and accompanied by two photographs: A wide-angle shot of the capacity crowd

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<sup>386</sup> [Unnamed author], "The Delayed Dawn," Editorial, *Evening Star*, October 14, 1970: A12.

<sup>387</sup> [Unnamed author], "Judicial Compromise," Editorial, *Evening Star*, October 14, 1970: A12.

<sup>388</sup> "Music Maestro," loc. cit.

greeting Dorati for the Constitution Hall performance and a close-up of the *maestro* leading his new orchestra.<sup>389</sup>

Lowens pulled no punches in the opening paragraphs of his review. He called Dorati's program, Beethoven's Eighth and Ninth Symphonies, "standard fare" and conferred on the conductor's reading of the Eighth only faint praise: "If there was very little in the interpretation to which anyone could take exception, there was also very little in it that was particularly notable . . . . [I]t was evident that it [the audience] had not experienced the miracle it was hoping for and almost expecting."<sup>390</sup>

Lowens's commentary on the Ninth Symphony, by contrast, was virtually glowing in its admiration for the breadth of Dorati's musical mastery and the authority with which he controlled his performing forces:

[E]ven with the first phrases of the first movement, it was plain that a different order of music-making was taking place on the stage. Dorati cast the Ninth in the heroic mould, giving the long phrases the greatest breadth and nobility. And the lustrous sheen of the orchestra's strings, the incisive attacks of the brass and the winds, bespoke careful preparation . . . . The piece . . . came to a breathtaking climax . . . with the entrance of the chorus in the finale.<sup>391</sup>

The review's closing paragraph, including its aphoristic final sentence, artfully affirmed the primacy of Dorati's leadership with his audience and his orchestra, without overtly discrediting the work of the new music director's predecessor: "With this kind of beginning, one can truly believe that this maestro can indeed raise this orchestra to a more

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<sup>389</sup> Paul Hume, "A Warm Welcome For Dorati," *Washington Post*, October 14, 1970: B1.

<sup>390</sup> Lowens, "Exciting Opener," loc. cit.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

honored place among the country's symphonic ensembles. Well begun, in this particular case, may well be half done."<sup>392</sup>

Hume was at once less critical and less lavish in his praise of the concert than was Lowens. Hume's remarks placed considerable, and perhaps inordinate, emphasis on the arrangement of the performing forces, referring to it no fewer than three times in the course of the review:

The very first matter that came noticeably to my attention was the marked improvement in the tone, the attack, the feeling of precision . . . . But this may have been due to the fact that the entire orchestra was placed farther forward than usual . . . . This same matter of unusual seating was to take its toll during the evening as it made problems for distant sections of the orchestra to hear each other . . . . [T]he . . . solo quartet . . . took seats not in the customary place in front of the orchestra but rather directly in front of the chorus in back of the center players.<sup>393</sup>

Hume's concluding statements differed as well from those of Lowens in their markedly cautionary tone: "His grand hold was tremendous, his largest posture his best. It was a beginning that brought the audience to its feet shouting. But there are weeks and months ahead for us to come to know each other far better. The best should still be in the future."<sup>394</sup>

Notwithstanding the obscure placement of Lowens's review, the *Star's* heavy overall coverage of the Dorati appointment represents the zenith of a remarkable evolution in the newspaper's treatment of music and music news. The *Star's* heightened respect for the legitimacy of music within the community of ideas had taken place over a fifteen-year period that corresponded, not coincidentally, with Lowens's own rise to prominence as music critic

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Paul Hume, "Warm Welcome," loc. cit.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

of record in the nation's capital. If the Dorati coverage is any indication, music news in 1970 was big news at the *Star*. Such had not always been the case.

In 1955, the second year of Lowens's employment as a *Star* stringer, the National Symphony Orchestra celebrated another important milestone in its history, namely, the twenty-fifth anniversary of its inception. The *Star* bore witness to the event with coverage that would doubtless have been deemed insufficient by its own 1970 standards. Marking the occasion were, not six articles, which had been the case with the Dorati debut, but two: An advance by non-musician Harry Bacas that included reminiscences of the ensemble's inaugural performance in 1931;<sup>395</sup> and, on the day following the anniversary concert, a short review by Day Thorpe.<sup>396</sup>

To the *Star*'s credit, the advance was positioned on the front page of the B section and run with a picture of the orchestra's first music director, Hans Kindler. Thorpe's review, however, appeared in the back of the *Star*'s A section on a page otherwise devoted to advertisements of sundries and food products.

Shortly after Lowens was appointed chief music critic in 1961, the Spanish soprano Victoria de Los Angeles performed in a recital of considerable consequence at Constitution Hall.<sup>397</sup> Owing to her international stature, the soprano's appearance in Washington was momentous news to Lowens, as he made abundantly clear in the opening paragraphs of his review of her performance: "For me, De Los Angeles has long been the world's greatest singer. Somehow the exquisite purity of her voice, the fantastic subtlety of her musicianship

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<sup>395</sup> Harry Bacas, "Symphony Opens 25<sup>th</sup> Year Tonight; Was Praised in Advance at '31 Debut," *Evening Star*, October 19, 1955: B1.

<sup>396</sup> Day Thorpe, "First Concert Promises Great Symphony Season," *Evening Star*, October 20, 1955: A20. The review was approximately 400 words in length.

<sup>397</sup> Irving Lowens, "De Los Angeles Slips, Regains Vocal Magic," *Evening Star*, March 20, 1961: B15.

and the radiant warmth of her humanity combine to typify the very spirit of musical artistry. Everything she attempts, whether it be opera, art song or whatever, is awe-inspiring in its perfection.”<sup>398</sup>

The magnitude of this hallowed occasion, however, was lost on the *Star* editors. They responded to Lowens’s words by inserting them among the newspaper’s classified advertising, thus giving readers opportunity to reflect on Lowens’s opinion of the concert and, at the same time, shop for used cars. Conversely, anyone purposefully seeking out the review would most assuredly have been at pains to find it.

The *Star*’s erstwhile noncommittal approach to news of music rapidly evolved into wholehearted advocacy as Lowens’s standing in the community grew. The occasion of the opening concert of the National Symphony Orchestra’s 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary season in 1966 demonstrated that the *Star*’s interest in matters musical had, in just five years, taken an unprecedented turn. The editors placed Lowens’s review of the performance,<sup>399</sup> not in an obscure and hard-to-find section of the newspaper, but on the bottom half of the A section’s front page, effectively pre-empting any national or international news of import that might otherwise have warranted front-page attention.

Emblazoned across the review’s five-column width, the headline proclaimed, “Constitution Hall Spectacular: National Symphony’s Opening Proves Gala of Galas.” It made clear the editor’s intent to persuade, not just Washington-area music lovers (who would seek out Lowens’s music reviews wherever they might be located), but the entire *Star* readership that Washington’s cultural life was thriving, thanks in no small measure both to its

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Irving Lowens, “Constitution Hall Spectacular: National Symphony’s Opening Proves Gala of Galas,” *Evening Star*, October 12, 1966: A1.

resident orchestra and to the orchestra's home, Constitution Hall. The main points of Lowens's review elaborated on this theme:

That National Symphony opener last night in Constitution Hall turned out to be the most spectacular one in the orchestra's history . . . [It] attracted more of the country's first citizens to a purely musical event yesterday, than I can recollect in some 20 years of concert going . . . [D]ecided acoustical improvements in the hall [have] been accomplished . . . In view of the comparatively minor alterations, the change in sound is remarkable . . . I would now consider it one of the best halls for music, of its size, in the country.<sup>400</sup>

Lowens emphasized in particular the attendance of then sitting President Lyndon Johnson, who was "on hand throughout the entire concert," and, "[a]t the conclusion of the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto . . . personally led two standing ovations for his fellow Texan, Van Cliburn, the soloist of the evening."<sup>401</sup> Lowens's remarks were powerfully reinforced with a photograph of President and Mrs. Johnson congratulating conductor Howard Mitchell and Cliburn at the concert's conclusion.<sup>402</sup>

Lowens further emphasized the extraordinary popularity of the event, noting that all of Constitution Hall's 3,810 seats were filled and that the repeat performance would in all likelihood be sold out as well: "The same concert is repeated tonight, and while the same hoopla can't be promised, the musical show alone is well worth hearing. That is, if you can buy a ticket for it."<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Lowens, "Constitution Hall Spectacular," loc. cit. Lowens's review of the orchestra's second concert in its 1966 season again emphasized the sizable audience in attendance as well as the improved acoustics and exceptional playing, as the lead paragraph indicates: "The National Symphony, off to the best start in its 36-year history, continued the fast clip of opening week last night in Constitution Hall. Once again the 3,810-seat auditorium was sold out; once again the renovated hall demonstrated its superior acoustics and its handsome new blue-and-gold decor; once again the music-making and the program-making were decidedly superior." See Irving Lowens, "Stern and Symphony In Top Form at Sellout," *Evening Star*, October 19, 1966: C18.

The editors inserted into the body of Lowens's text a rubric directing readers to a second story on Johnson's presence at the concert. Garnering preferential placement as well, on the front page of the newspaper's Society-Home Section,<sup>404</sup> this article highlighted a solemn pledge that President Johnson had made to hear Cliburn's performance. Reporting, in conductor Howard Mitchell's words, that the concert "open[ed] the best-attended subscription season in National Symphony history,"<sup>405</sup> it implied that if the President of the United States supported National Symphony Orchestra concerts, so should the rest of Washington.

The *Star* completed its coverage of the gala event with a third feature article that had been published the previous Sunday. A typical Lowens think-piece serving as an advance for the concert, it touted the orchestra's robust season-ticket sales, which were "some thirty percent better than . . . the 1965-66 season and almost [certain to] establish a new record," before launching into an ardent homily on the obligation of American orchestras to the music of living American composers.<sup>406</sup>

These three articles found the *Star* engaged in an unabashed promotion of the National Symphony Orchestra, but the newspaper was promoting Lowens's byline as well. By situating his review in high relief, the *Star* proffered tacit, but unequivocal, acknowledgement that Lowens's name could indeed sell newspapers. At this juncture in his career at the *Star* and for the rest of the decade, Lowens would enjoy unparalleled respect from the newspaper's

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<sup>404</sup> Ruth Dean, "Johnson Keeps Pledge to Hear Van Cliburn," *Evening Star*, October 12, 1966: C1.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>406</sup> Irving Lowens, "The Role of Novelties in the New Orchestral Season," *Sunday Star*, October 9, 1966: F1. On the issue of programming more modern music, Lowens argued: "[P]laying the standards so that they sound fresh and inspired is not [an orchestra's] sole function. An orchestra must educate as well as delight. An orchestra owes a debt to living music. An orchestra must give that which is being composed right now a chance, or else the repertory grows stagnant and concerts become a sort of museum of the glories of the past . . . If the musical community disagrees with Mitchell's tastes in programs, it has the option of demanding a conductor with different

editorial management and, by current standards, virtually limitless column space for coverage of classical music.

### **Championing the Kennedy Center Memorial**

The decade of the 1960s witnessed the *Star* joining vigorously in the effort to turn the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts into reality. In a letter to the editor, written fifteen years after the fact, one reader still remembered the pivotal contributions of the *Star* to the development of the District of Columbia's, as well as the nation's, landmark performing arts institution. He lavishly claimed that the Kennedy Center owed its very existence to the *Star*'s support, and that this sentiment was common knowledge: "Everyone familiar with the history of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts knows that there probably would be no such center if it had not been for timely editorials and support by the *Star* in 1963 when President Kennedy was assassinated."<sup>407</sup>

The writer doubtless referred to the *Star*'s role in advancing the idea to make the Kennedy Center, known in 1963 as the National Cultural Center, a living memorial to the slain president. The *Star* richly deserved credit for this claim, having been the first to broach the suggestion publicly in an editorial on the subject. Published on the newspaper's front page November 26, just four days after the assassination, the unsigned editorial read, in part:

There can be no more fitting memorial than the dedication now, to him [President Kennedy], of the National Cultural Center. The President and Mrs. Kennedy brought to the center of things the service performed by the arts for men and women. In thought and speech John F. Kennedy moved with familiar friendship among the poets and the prophets . . . . The White House became a place of welcome for musicians and painters, dancers and writers. The idea of the Cultural Center preceded the Kennedy administration. But President Kennedy gave the idea force and form, and a

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tastes and I would expect a loud clamor . . . . The pressure by an articulate minority [among which Lowens must surely have counted himself] I consider both healthy and inevitable."

<sup>407</sup> George Frain, Letter to the Editor, "Bailing Out the Kennedy Center," *Evening Star*, January 11, 1978: A18.

singularly personal leadership, without which it could hardly have achieved its present development . . . . Other memorial proposals have been made, chiefly of re-naming athletic stadia already in existence. The Cultural Center as a memorial to Mr. Kennedy is not only uniquely expressive of a purpose shared by the President and his wife. Since it is now in early process, since funds are still being raised, it also would give all Americans the chance to remember the President by bringing to completion an intent and wish of his. The change of name and the dedication should be made at once. The building should be brought to reality as soon as possible. John F. Kennedy will live in the hearts of men. Let him live also in the arts he loved.<sup>408</sup>

So persuasive was this editorial that a bill “to build the National Cultural Center on the banks of the Potomac as a living memorial to the late President Kennedy”<sup>409</sup> was on the same day introduced in the United States Senate.<sup>410</sup> To emphasize their point, the bill’s co-sponsors<sup>411</sup> inserted into the *Congressional Record* the *Star* editorial, thus confirming its role as the bill’s primary motivating force.<sup>412</sup> A second editorial, in print November 27, challenged Congress further, by urging “legislation which will change the name of the center, formally dedicate it to its new purpose, and authorize a Federal appropriation to underwrite any portion of the eventual cost which may not be covered by private subscription.”<sup>413</sup> To

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<sup>408</sup> [Unnamed author], “A Kennedy Memorial: An Editorial,” *Evening Star*, November 26, 1963: A1. The editorial has been attributed to *Star* editor Newbold Noyes. See Ralph E. Becker, *Miracle on the Potomac: The Kennedy Center from the Beginning* (Silver Spring, Maryland: Bartleby Press, 1990): 63.

<sup>409</sup> Orr Kelly, “Support Given Center As Kennedy Memorial,” *Evening Star*, November 27, 1963: A1.

<sup>410</sup> Senate Bill, S. 2341. See *Congressional Record—Senate*, November 26, 1963: 22769-22776, *passim*.

<sup>411</sup> Senators James William Fulbright [Dem-Arkansas], Leverett Saltonstall [Rep-Massachusetts], Joseph Sill Clark [Dem-Pennsylvania] and Hubert Humphrey [Dem-Minnesota.]

<sup>412</sup> *Congressional Record—Senate*, November 26, 1963, loc. cit. The editorial was in fact inserted into the *Record* not once, but twice, on p. 22770 at the request of Senator Fulbright, and on p. 22775-6 at the request of Senator Saltonstall. In the remarks that accompanied his request, Senator Saltonstall credited the *Star* with initiating the idea: “Mr. President, on behalf of the Senator from Arkansas [Mr. Fulbright], the Senator from Pennsylvania [Mr. Clark], and myself, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an editorial published in this afternoon’s *Washington Evening Star*, which makes a suggestion that the National Cultural Center be renamed the Kennedy Memorial Cultural Center . . . . Mr. President, this suggestion has great appeal to us and we are sure it will have to others . . . .”

<sup>413</sup> [Unnamed author], “Living Memorial,” *Evening Star*, November 27, 1963: A10.

buttress the merits of his position, the editorial writer argued that the Cultural Center's unique characteristics perfectly mirrored those of the youthful president:

Among our Presidents, John F. Kennedy will be remembered first, perhaps, for his youth and the vibrancy of his personality. These are not qualities best preserved in cold stone. They are more fittingly preserved, apart from memory, in a living, functional, useful monument. It is the rarest of good fortune that in this period of his untimely death there happens to be at hand a project whose purposes are so closely related to the character and the interests of the man. This is the point which has impressed those at the highest levels of Government, and leaders in every walk of life. It seems to everyone so completely the natural thing to do. So also it seemed to us in advancing the proposal.<sup>414</sup>

During the first week of the promotional blitz on behalf of its proposal, the *Star* published as many as three articles per day about the Cultural Center's suitability as a memorial for President Kennedy. These articles included, variously, *Star*-solicited testimonials from major players on the Washington and national political and cultural scene,<sup>415</sup> numerous letters to the editor applauding the idea,<sup>416</sup> blow-by-blow accounts of the

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> [Unnamed author], "Cultural Center: Trustees Back Dedication to Kennedy," *Evening Star*, November 27, 1963: B1. The major players included, among others, former President Dwight Eisenhower and Mrs. Eisenhower; then Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield; Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen; Ralph Bunche, Under-Secretary of the United Nations Secretariat; Georgy Meany, President of the AFL-CIO; and Charles A. Horsky, special adviser to the President for National Capital Affairs.

<sup>416</sup> "LETTERS TO THE STAR, 'A Fitting Memorial,'" *Sunday Star*, December 1, 1963: C4. This editorial-page column included letters from thirteen readers, all rallying behind the *Star*'s effort.

progress of Congressional legislation toward the idea's eventual fulfillment,<sup>417</sup> and supportive commentary by editorial columnists.<sup>418</sup>

Perhaps the most influential piece was one published on December 1, 1963, four days after the *Star's* initial suggestion had appeared. The article reprinted in its entirety the text of an address given by President Kennedy at Amherst College the previous October dedicating the college's new library to the memory of the poet Robert Frost. Kennedy had taken full advantage of this auspicious occasion to press his case for the importance of support for the arts in America. As the *Star's* editors must surely have known, no words could have persuaded more eloquently the merits of their plan than those recently voiced by the fallen president:

When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.

For art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstones of our judgment. The artist, however faithful to his personal vision of reality, becomes the last champion of the individual mind and sensibility against an intrusive society and an officious state.

The great artist is thus a solitary figure. He has, as Frost said, "a lover's quarrel with the world." In pursuing his perceptions of reality he must often sail against the currents of his time. This is not a popular role . . . .

Yet in retrospect we see how the artist's fidelity has strengthened the fiber of our national life. If sometimes our great artists have been the most critical of our society it is because their sensitivity and their concern for justice, which must motivate any true artist, makes him aware that our nation falls short of its highest potential.

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<sup>417</sup> Orr Kelly, "Kennedy Center Plan Supported Across U.S.," *Evening Star*, November 28, 1963: A1; Sam Eastman, "White House Drafts Bill For Memorial," *Evening Star*, November 30, 1963: A22; Orr Kelly, "Cultural Center Action For Memorial Grows," *Sunday Star*, December 1, 1963: B1; Orr Kelly, "Johnson Backs Arts Memorial For Kennedy," *Evening Star*, December 3, 1963: A1; [unnamed author], "Bills Offered For Kennedy Memorial," *Evening Star*, December 4, 1963: C1; Orr Kelly, "2 ½ Years Seen Ample To Open Culture Center," *Evening Star*, December 5, 1963: A1; Orr Kelly, "Senate, House Units Join To Push Arts Memorial," *Evening Star*, December 6, 1963: A1.

<sup>418</sup> Charles Bartlett, "A Fitting Memorial to Kennedy," *Evening Star*, November 28, 1963: A25; [unnamed editorial author], "Memorial Center," *Sunday Star*, December 1, 1963: C4.

I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist. If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him.

We must never forget that art is not a form of propaganda, it is a form of truth . . . .

In [a] free society art is not a weapon and it does not belong to the sphere of polemics and ideology. Artists are not engineers of the soul.

It may be different elsewhere. But democratic society—in it—the highest duty of the writer, the composer, the artist is to remain true to himself and to let the chips fall where they may.

In serving his vision of the truth the artist best serves his nation. And the nation which disdains the mission of art invites the fate of Robert Frost's hired man<sup>419</sup>—"the fate of having nothing to look backward to with pride and nothing to look forward to with hope."

I look forward to a great future for America—a future in which our country will match its military strength with our moral restraint, its wealth with our wisdom, its power with our purpose.

I look forward to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty, which will protect the beauty of our natural environment, which will preserve the great old American houses and squares and parks of our national past and which will build handsome and balanced cities for our future.

I look forward to an America which will reward achievement in the arts as we reward achievement in business or statecraft.

I look forward to an America which will steadily raise the standards of artistic accomplishment and which will steadily enlarge cultural opportunities for all of our citizens.

And I look forward to an America which commands respect throughout the world not only for its strength but for its civilization as well.<sup>420</sup>

When full debate of the Kennedy Center memorial legislation was joined by Congress in earnest, the *Star* found itself confronted with the unanticipated possibility that the project might be derailed by some resistant Congressmen. In order to safeguard its proposal, the

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<sup>419</sup> President Kennedy references Frost's poem, "The Death of the Hired Man," published in the poet's collection *North of Boston*, 1915 (New York: Henry Holt).

<sup>420</sup> [John F. Kennedy], "Behind Good Judgments: The Basic Truths of Art," *Sunday Star*, December 1, 1963: C3. The rubric introducing the text reads: "President Kennedy gave a summary of his philosophy of the arts in a speech at the dedication in October of a library at Amherst College to the memory of Robert Frost. This is the address."

newspaper leapt headlong into the political fray, unleashing a barrage of editorials<sup>421</sup> to block any objections gathering steam. An editorial published on the first day of the Public Works Committee hearings<sup>422</sup> set the tone for what would become the *Star's* strategy toward gaining Congressional endorsement of the bill. Although refraining for the moment from *ad hominem* attacks against individual Congressmen, its author nevertheless made clear that, because the Cultural Center was a peerless symbol of President Kennedy's life and purpose, and because the proposal had massive nationwide support (the writer perhaps exaggerating at this point), opposing it bordered on the immoral:

[S]ome members of Congress are expressing reservations about the . . . dedication of the National Cultural Center . . . to Mr. Kennedy's memory. The proposal seems to have been first made in this newspaper, but it occurred simultaneously to thousands of Americans. The change is enthusiastically favored by the Center's trustees, has been formally proposed by the Johnson administration and is approved with enthusiasm by the Kennedy family. The unique suitability of this memorial is as strong today as when first proposed . . . Nothing could be more appropriate. It would be shameful if Congress did not bring promptly to reality a memorial so felicitous to the spirit of the man, so desired by those who mourn him.<sup>423</sup>

As support for the bill continued to waver, although certainly not terminally, the *Star* seized on the power of its headlines to turn back the presumed tide. Two news stories reporting on the progress of the hearings led with headlines that betrayed the *Star's* perhaps exaggerated fears that the proposal might be undermined. The first article, published the day

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<sup>421</sup> Nine editorials were published in the *Star* during the Congressional consideration of the bill: "The Kennedy Center," *Evening Star*, December 12, 1963: A22; "Financing the Memorial," *Evening Star*, December 14, 1963: A4; "Momentum," *Evening Star*, December 18, 1963: A22; "Against Culture?" *Evening Star*, December 26, 1963: A12; "Top Priority," *Evening Star*, January 5, 1964: F4; "Center Memorial," *Evening Star*, January 7, 1964: A6; "Good Day's Work," *Evening Star*, January 9, 1964: A14; "Kennedy Center," *Evening Star*, January 11, 1964: A4; "Kennedy Library," *Evening Star*, January 19, 1964: C4. The author of these editorials may have been John Cline, who was the *Star's* chief editorial writer at the time.

<sup>422</sup> An historic, first-ever joint meeting of the House and Senate Public Works Committees to consider both House and Senate versions of the bill took place on December 12 and 16.

<sup>423</sup> "The Kennedy Center," loc. cit.

after hearings began and appearing on the Metro (B) Section's front page, detailed the testimony of Center officials<sup>424</sup> and questions regarding procedures for establishing a presidential memorial. It was topped with a headline and subhead that sounded an alarm: "Kennedy Center Plans Encounter 'Slowdown': Fast Action, Funds to Build and Run It Are Stumbling Blocks at Hearing."<sup>425</sup> The article revealed, however, that Center Chairman of the Board Roger Stevens and those Committee members voicing criticism of the *Star*'s proposal were actually in "mild agreement" regarding the amount of money necessary to build the Center. One committee member and critic, Representative William Cato Cramer, Republican from Florida, was disparaged in the article's narrative as "the one most active in dashing cold water on . . . hopes."<sup>426</sup> His venal sins had been to suggest that the bill give Congress a say in "the memorial aspects of the Center" and to raise concern that the proposal might be "just a 'gimmick' to raise money for the Center," the *Star* paraphrasing, perhaps unflatteringly, the Congressman's remarks.<sup>427</sup>

The *Star* made coverage of the second and final day of the committee's hearings the A-Section lead story for its December 16 edition. Crowning this front-page article was a two-line banner head that, with an over-large point size and a three-column width, could well be

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<sup>424</sup> Testifying were Roger Stevens and Ralph Becker, respectively, the Center's Chairman of the Board of Trustees and General Counsel.

<sup>425</sup> Orr Kelly, "Kennedy Center Plans Encounter 'Slowdown,'" *Evening Star*, December 13, 1963: B1.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.* Representative Cramer's questions about motives behind the push for federal funding may well have had merit. The federal government's contribution in 1958 of land for the Center came with the stipulation that funds for construction be raised within five years. Because the Center trustees had failed in this regard, Congress nearly cancelled the entire project in July 1963. Owing in large part to President Kennedy's support, a bill awarding the trustees a three-year extension was signed into law on August 18. See [unnamed author], "Kennedy Cultural Center," *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 88th Congress, 1st Session, 1963, Vol. 19 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1963): 387.

described as a screamer: “Center Name Issue Faces New Hurdles.”<sup>428</sup> The accompanying subhead, drawing attention to the nature of the obstructions, was subdued in comparison: “Reservations Are Held in Plan’s Details.”<sup>429</sup> Further contradicting the urgency of the headline’s message, the article’s lead sentence declared unequivocally that the proposal had “moved ahead today” in the committee hearings, if “over bumpy ground.”<sup>430</sup> Acknowledging as “obvious” that “most of the committee members favored the bill,” the author conceded with some reluctance that the number of Congressmen expressing “reservations about details” was not, in fact, large.<sup>431</sup>

The *Star* followed up on these sky-is-falling news stories with editorials designed to push both the House and Senate to act on the measure before the Christmas recess. A December 14 piece ostensibly addressed the necessity of federal funding for the project, pressing the government to finance Center construction by as much as \$25 million (nearly \$10 million more than the \$15.5 million suggested by the legislation). After recommending as well that Congress authorize a substantial “long-term loan to cover the costs of underground parking,” the editorial concluded with an exhortation for “expeditious passage of the necessary legislation.”<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Orr Kelly, “Center Name Issue Faces New Hurdles,” *Evening Star*, December 16, 1963: A1.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.* The full text of this passage reads: “At today’s public hearing, which preceded the executive session, it was obvious that most of the committee members favored the bill as now amended. But it was also obvious that some of them had reservations about details.”

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*

A second piece, published December 18, was inspired by the revelation that neither the House nor Senate planned to take any immediate action on the proposal.<sup>433</sup> Following a Senate Public Works Committee spokesman's declaration, for the record, that "the Senate would wait to act upon whatever bill is passed by the House,"<sup>434</sup> two House Committee members called for delays. Representative William Beck Widnall, Republican of New Jersey, cautioning against "a hasty approach," recommended that the committee "take a good hard look at this so that we'll have the finest possible cultural center here."<sup>435</sup> Opposition by Representative Frederick Delbert Schwengel, Republican of Iowa, went further. He called into question the very suitability of the Center as a memorial, recommending "careful study" toward establishing "a memorial that would pay tribute to all of Mr. Kennedy's interests and not just his interest in the performing arts."<sup>436</sup>

With its pet proposal now sustaining body blows, the *Star* went on the offensive with a strongly worded editorial calling for passage of the bill with no further delay:

[The proposal] has . . . developed a legislative momentum which should not now be broken. For a delay at this point would be costly in two respects. First, it would needlessly postpone the Nation-wide drive for public contributions which is no less essential than the Federal contribution to the success of the project. The enthusiasm throughout the country which greeted the proposal to develop the Cultural Center as a living memorial has developed a momentum of its own. But there are practical limits to the time for which such a high degree of interest can be sustained. Every day that passes from this point on will make the job of fund-raising more difficult.

In a more subtle way, a loss of momentum within the Legislature could not be fully regained, either. There is every indication that Congress overwhelmingly favors the present bill, and no real concern that it will not ultimately be adopted. But the fact is that the members of Congress will return to Washington in January with a great many other things on their minds.

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<sup>433</sup> "Center Name Issue Faces New Hurdles," loc. cit.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

We hope, therefore, that the leadership of the House and Senate will change its mind and find a way to bring this important bill to the floors of both houses during the brief time remaining before the Christmas holidays.<sup>437</sup>

The day following publication of this editorial there appeared in the *Star* a short, but prominently placed, news item, with the headline: “Senate Speeds Culture Center: \$15 Million Voted Kennedy Memorial.”<sup>438</sup> As the article’s opening paragraph noted, the Senate, in a surprising reversal of course, decided to vote on the proposal:

In a completely unexpected action, the Senate voted approval last night of a bill to name the National Cultural Center for President Kennedy and put up \$15.5 million in Federal matching funds for its construction . . . . Supporters of the bill had expected that the Senate would wait until the House had acted—and it was revealed early yesterday that the House did not intend to vote on the bill until January . . . . House leaders decided this morning to wait until after the holiday recess, as they had decided yesterday.<sup>439</sup>

So stunning an about-face on the part of the Senate must have gratified the *Star* editors, whose commentary may well have exerted a decisive influence on the bill’s sudden passage. With its business, however, as yet unconcluded, the *Star* went gunning for the House in an editorial appearing immediately before the Congressional recess. Entitled “Against Culture?” the essay blatantly, and for the first time in its editorial blitz, named names in an apparent effort to embarrass recalcitrant representatives into passing the legislation as quickly as had their more righteous colleagues in the Senate:

The Senate has swiftly passed the measure dedicating the National Cultural Center to the memory of the slain President and authorizing Federal matching funds for its construction . . . . Only one sour note remains: The disgruntled murmurings of a handful of House members who seem unaccountably dedicated to the proposition that there is something wrong with the cultural project itself. Strangely enough, the foot-dragging seems to be

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<sup>437</sup> “Momentum,” loc. cit.

<sup>438</sup> Orr Kelly, *Evening Star*, December 19, 1963: A1.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

focused among three Iowans—Representatives [Frederick Delbert] Schwengel, [John Henry] Kyl and [Harold Royce] Gross. What has Iowa got against culture? . . . Perhaps the spirit of the holiday season will act to soothe these disturbed tempers. We hope so. It would be a shame if a worthy bill, which has won such a high degree of support at every level of the administration and Congress, were to be tarnished by a dogfight at the eleventh hour.<sup>440</sup>

Almost on cue the following day, a short news item appeared announcing the House's decision to place the Kennedy Center bill first on its post-recess agenda. For all intents and purposes, the United States Congress was now dancing in earnest to the *Star's* tune:

The first business of the House in its 1964 session will be a bill to establish the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as a national memorial to the late President . . . [T]he office of the House Democratic Whip, Representative Hale Boggs, Democrat of Louisiana, routinely notified members today of business planned for the first week of the new session . . . On January 7, the schedule calls for two hours of debate and presumably a vote on the bill to rename the National Cultural Center.<sup>441</sup>

The *Star* penned two more censorious editorials in advance of the House's final deliberations over the bill. The first, printed January 5, reminded Congress of its "unfortunate" failure "to complete action on the . . . bill before adjournment." Noting the proposal's position of primacy on the legislative agenda, the editorial also presumptuously petitioned for same-day passage:

[T]he cultural-memorial bill will be the first order of business when Congress returns on Tuesday. With time already set aside for debate, we hope this deserving bill will be cleared and sent along for the President's signature on that day.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> [Unnamed author], "Against Culture?" loc. cit.

<sup>441</sup> [Unnamed author, Associated Press], "Kennedy Memorial Bill First on Agenda of '64," *Evening Star*, December 27, 1963: B1.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*

The second piece was written in reaction to a sizable wrench thrown into the works by the *New York Times*, which, in an editorial appearing on the first day of full House debate, had come out entirely against the proposal.<sup>443</sup> Categorically contradicting the *Star*'s arguments in support of the legislation, the *Times* essay described the proposal as an "indiscriminant tribute" that "has been rushed through the Senate and now the House . . . irrespective of its meaning or its appropriateness." Doubting that it was "the best way to honor [President Kennedy's] memory," it declared that the objections raised by the bill's critics in the House "strongly suggest that the Congress, which has yet to provide a memorial to Franklin D. Roosevelt, is being too hasty in deciding on the national memorial for John F. Kennedy. There is no need for haste or waste."<sup>444</sup>

The *Star*'s reply to the *Times*'s subversive machinations was in print by late afternoon, its writer responding almost with disdain to the latest criticisms, as he enumerated for the still unconverted the unique merits of this *nonpareil* legislation:

As the House prepares to vote on the bill designating the Cultural Center as a Kennedy memorial, it is being treated to a spate of advice to 'go slow'. Now comes the *New York Times*, throwing its august weight behind the idea that a cultural center is somehow inappropriate to the memory of the late President. We have felt from the start that it is hard to imagine any project more appropriate to this purpose . . . . The terms of the proposed legislation are entirely reasonable. The provision of Federal matching funds and loans in no way conflicts with public participation in the venture. The bill does not bar a later second-look at the question of alternate sites for the structure. It would be a shame to Mr. Kennedy's memory if this wholly proper measure were to bog down in last-minute bickering doubts.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> [Unnamed author], "The Kennedy Memorial," *New York Times*, January 7, 1964: A32.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>445</sup> "Center Memorial," *loc. cit.*

The bill was passed by the House, after two days of debate, on January 8. Sent January 10 to President Johnson for his signature, this historic legislation became the law of the land on January 23.<sup>446</sup> Thanks in large part to speedy passage of the bill through Congress and immediate infusion of the stipulated \$15.5 million in federally mandated matching funds, ground-breaking for the Kennedy Center was accomplished in ten months time, on December 2, 1964.

### **Ginning Up the National Symphony Orchestra Strike**

In mid July 1969, on Lowens's watch, appeared three articles that either directly or indirectly addressed the sadly deteriorating financial state of America's symphony orchestras. The first, a Lowens-penned Sunday think-piece, disputed a proposed initiative by the federal government to reduce tax incentives to charitable organizations. According to Lowens, Congress's tax-restructuring proposals included "a reduction in the allowable tax deductions on charitable gifts of property" and "a five percent tax on the investment incomes of private foundations."<sup>447</sup> Buttressed by data supplied by the American Symphony Orchestra League and the National Music Council, he outlined the deleterious effect such legislation would have on the fiscal health of orchestras:

[M]ost of the money orchestras get comes from a relatively small number of people who are encouraged to give because of the tax incentives provided in the tax treatment of their contributions . . . . Since the performing arts traditionally receive only the last few pennies of foundation dollars, the House [Ways and Means] Committee proposal imperils still another big source of support for orchestras . . . . It is gifts from individuals, businesses,

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<sup>446</sup> [Unnamed author], "Arts Center Bill Is Signed: Kennedy Praised," *Evening Star*, January 23, 1964: A1.

<sup>447</sup> Irving Lowens, "MUSIC: Proposed Tax Changes Threaten Orchestras," *Sunday Star*, July 6, 1969: E4. Lowens's bid to influence this legislation was largely unsuccessful. The Tax Reform Act, signed into law December 30, 1969, mandated, among other restrictions on charitable enterprises, a four percent tax on the investment income of foundations and taxation of the appreciated value of charitable gifts of property. It also restricted deductible charitable gifts, according to specified conditions. *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1969, Vol. 25 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1969): 589-591 *passim*.

and foundations that keeps [sic] this country's symphonic pot cooking. Should we not keep the fire burning?<sup>448</sup>

More riveting, however, was the article's opening statement. By virtue of its fatalistic and even intemperate tone, it sounded a stark and prescient warning that could not have escaped the attention of the *Star*'s readers: "It may not seem that way since there are now more symphony concerts and bigger audiences to hear them, but our orchestras are headed for disaster."<sup>449</sup>

The question of symphony orchestra impoverishment, this time in terms of audience support, emerged again when Lowens covered a summer concert performed by the National Symphony Orchestra at the Merriweather Post Pavilion. In an already unduly brief review, published the day after his think-piece on the tax-restructuring threat, Lowens devoted almost half of his precious column space, not to the details of the performance, but to the paltry size of the audience and its likely consequences:

The setting was as lovely as anyone could want, and the Merriweather Post Pavilion with its excellent acoustics, made listening to music a distinct pleasure . . . . Even the weather cooperated—it was warm but pleasant, and the showers stayed away.

Everything was set for a nice musical evening—but there were hardly any people there to experience it.

Where is the audience for this kind of affair? Certainly, it wasn't at Columbia. A few hundred people rattled around like misfits in the 3000-seat shed; perhaps twice or three times that number enjoyed the show on the grass at reduced prices. The view from the management side must have looked pretty discouraging I'm afraid. Can you really keep a summer symphony season this way, I wonder?<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Irving Lowens, "NEWS OF MUSIC: Symphony Shines In Pavilion Pops," *Evening Star*, July 7, 1969: B8. The entire review was a scant 200 words in length.

The following Sunday, Lowens yielded his editorial platform to Walter F. Anderson, the newly appointed director of music programs for the National Endowment for the Arts. As guest contributor, Anderson devoted most of his sizable essay to an explanation of the manner in which the National Endowment for the Arts distributed funds to music-related activities.<sup>451</sup> The piece's concluding statements, however, gave pointed emphasis to the critical necessity of financial support for symphony orchestras, thereby serving as a proximal gloss on Lowens's doomsday theme:

Since the needs are so great and the funds so limited, I hope that alternative formulas of assistance, in which private, corporate and governmental patronage would be combined in cooperative patterns of support, might be developed particularly to assist major performing programs to flourish. We need our symphony orchestras. We need them badly.

Although for various reasons audiences may increase or decrease at a given time, the more significant fact to remember in our troubled times is that concerts uniquely provide the setting in which people are able to transcend their dissensions and become united in heart and mind. Consequently, irrespective of all the pressing needs of the present, I hope, and pray, that support of the arts will become a high priority in our time and that, in turn, a resounding impact of aesthetic values will evolve at the heart of our society.<sup>452</sup>

Whether by design (at Lowens's behest) or happenstance, these three articles serendipitously appeared in print just as contract talks between the players and management of the National Symphony Orchestra were getting underway for the coming fall season. They provided an instructive backdrop to the unfolding drama of the negotiations and, ultimately, a protracted strike. In the ensuing four months, that strike and its crippling effects on the resident orchestra of the nation's capital would be played out in the *Star's* editorial pages.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Walter F. Anderson, "Federal Aid to Music: Dispensing 'Seed' Money," *Sunday Star*, July 13, 1969: G7. Anderson's piece, which received front-page placement in the *Star's* Arts section, ran to approximately 1500 words.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> This strike was the second in the orchestra's history. Its first strike, an eighteen-day affair, occurred in October 1963. The ensemble went on strike a third time in September 1978, shortly after Lowens resigned from the *Star*.

The orchestra's management fired the opening salvo in July when, citing a \$200,000 deficit, it announced that it now faced "a serious financial crisis and could not afford higher salaries" for the players.<sup>454</sup> Player spokesman J. Martin Emerson returned fire by going public with the musicians' complaints. On August 18 he called a press conference, ostensibly, to "head off anything that resembles a strike."<sup>455</sup> Far from conciliatory, these words carried the unmistakable double meaning that, if player demands went unmet, a strike was inevitable, leaving open the "very real danger that there will be no National Symphony Orchestra this fall."<sup>456</sup>

The *Star* took the bait, covering this press conference with not one, but two, news stories. It headlined its first report, ominously, "Fall Strike Threatened at National Symphony," and printed the piece in the center of the Metro Section's front page. The second article, filed the following day, iterated *verbatim* Emerson's accusation that the National Symphony Association was offering only a "status quo contract":

[The Association] has made it crystal clear that no increases in wages or benefits of any kind will be offered to the musicians of the National Symphony for the coming year. The offer has been put to us as an ultimatum: accept these terms or no terms at all. We characterize this posture of the National Symphony as a refusal to bargain.<sup>457</sup>

This second story also reported on a press conference that the National Symphony Association had been impelled to call to rebut Emerson's by then well publicized stance and to provide a more flattering version of its own position, to wit: "We haven't refused to discuss

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<sup>454</sup> Donald Mintz, "Players, Board Hit Inharmonious Note," *Evening Star*, August 19, 1969: B3.

<sup>455</sup> Donald Mintz, "Fall Strike Threatened at National Symphony," *Evening Star*, August 18, 1969: B1. Emerson was at this time secretary of the D.C. Federation of Musicians.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>457</sup> Mintz, "Players, Board Hit Inharmonious Note," *loc. cit.*

anything. They use the word ‘discuss’ in terms of our yielding.”<sup>458</sup> Through its spokesman Lloyd Symington, the Association also took advantage of its press appearance to contravene Emerson’s more pessimistic posturing:

Association President Lloyd Symington said yesterday the board is being polled about a cost of living increase of about \$12.80 per week. He remarked that he cannot speak for the board but was hopeful that it would approve the adjustment . . . Symington said that “[t]he situation is of course grave . . . but there is no feeling of hopelessness on the management side.”<sup>459</sup>

The players’ union managed to obtain press coverage a third day in a row by leaking to a willing *Star* a telegram, originally sent to Symington, rejecting the Association’s offer of a cost-of-living increase. The *Star* printed, again *verbatim*, that portion of the telegram cast most in the mold of a reproach:

[T]he union secretary, J. Martin Emerson, said that he wished “to remind you [Symington] of the futility of this effort [the cost-of-living offer]. When (the) same idea was proposed at our July 15 meeting, we advised you against consulting the board of directors because the offer was totally unacceptable to the union and musicians. We will not accept an offer involving no increase in real wages.”<sup>460</sup>

This incendiary maneuver on the part of the players, in *de facto* collusion with the *Star*, prompted attorney Milton C. Denbo, negotiating for the Association, to voice his firm opposition “to bargaining in the press.”<sup>461</sup> By virtue of his remark, he tacitly acknowledged the power of the press, in this case, the *Star*, to influence, unduly and detrimentally in his view, the outcome of the negotiations.

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.

<sup>460</sup> [Unnamed author], “Musicians Veto Symphony ‘Offer,’” *Evening Star*, August 20, 1969: B6.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

Denbo's call to remove the press from its fictive seat at the bargaining table went unheeded. The *Star* followed the negotiations with vigilance, placing into print no fewer than thirty-eight articles on the dispute. These included numerous straight news items, of varying lengths, giving *Star* readers day-by-day progress reports on the negotiations;<sup>462</sup> Sunday think-pieces by Lowens and assistant critic Donald Mintz, offering opinions on issues arising from the conflict;<sup>463</sup> music reviews concerning concerts influenced by the strike or in which comment was made on the strike or its aftermath;<sup>464</sup> letters to the editor inspired by the

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<sup>462</sup> Mintz, "Fall Strike Threatened At National Symphony," loc. cit.; Mintz, "Players, Board Hit Inharmonious Note," loc. cit.; "Musicians Veto Symphony 'Offer,'" loc. cit.; [unnamed author], "Musicians, Symphony Hit Flat Note," *Evening Star*, August 26, 1969: B4; Herman Schaden, "Musicians Get New Offer for Symphony Pact," *Evening Star*, October 8, 1969: B1; Herman Schaden, "Symphony's Pay Offer Weighed by Musicians," *Evening Star*, October 9, 1969: B4; [unnamed author], "Symphony's Players Spurn Pact Offer," *Evening Star*, October 12, 1969: B1; [unnamed author], "The Metro Scene: Symphony Opening in Doubt," *Evening Star*, October 13, 1969: B4; Herman Schaden, "Musicians Strike: Opening Concert Called Off," *Evening Star*, October 14, 1969: B4; [unnamed author], "Symphony Talks Set Tomorrow," *Evening Star*, October 15, 1969: B6; [unnamed author], "Union Makes Offer In Symphony Strike," *Evening Star*, October 17, 1969: B1; [unnamed author], "Strike Deadlock Dashes Tuesday Concert Hope," *Evening Star*, October 18, 1969: A24; [unnamed author], "Chances for Tuesday Opening of Concert Season Dimmer," *Evening Star*, October 19, 1969: B1; [unnamed author], "Musicians See Board Thursday," *Evening Star*, October 21, 1969: B4; David Braaten, "Striking D.C. Musicians State Case at Concert," *Sunday Star*, October 26, 1969: A5; [unnamed author], "The Metro Scene: Symphony Joins Call For Arbitration Panel," *Evening Star*, November 3, 1969: B6; [unnamed author], "Striking Musicians Schedule Concert For Next Week," *Evening Star*, November 6, 1969: B4; Irving Lowens, "Area Music Notes, Library of Congress Displaying Rare Items," *Evening Star*, November 6, 1969: B8 [the news items including an announcement of the Wallenstein/Fleisher-headlining benefit concert, including its date, time, locale and ticket prices]; David Holmberg, "Joint Panel Will Seek End to Symphony Strike," *Evening Star*, November 12, 1969: B4; [unnamed author], "Panel Seeking To End Strike Of Symphony," *Evening Star*, November 17, 1969: B4; [unnamed author], "New Symphony Talks Fail to End Deadlock," *Evening Star*, November 19, 1969: B2; David Holmberg, "Musicians Reject Pact Despite Majority Vote," *Sunday Star*, November 23, 1969: A6; Walter Taylor, "Symphony Musicians End Strike, Concert Set: Feared Season's Cancellation," *Evening Star*, November 24, 1969: A1; [unnamed author] "Nixon Attends Concert," *Evening Star*, November 27, 1969: A4.

<sup>463</sup> Donald Mintz, "MUSIC: The Cincinnati Symphony Finds a New Role," *Sunday Star*, August 24, 1969: D8; Irving Lowens, "The National Symphony Season That Lies Ahead," *Sunday Star*, September 14, 1969: D7; Donald Mintz, "MUSIC: The Symphony and the Musicians Negotiate," *Sunday Star*, October 5, 1969: G8; Irving Lowens, "Symphony Orchestra Becomes Economic Dinosaur," *Sunday Star*, November 9, 1969: C1; Irving Lowens, "MUSIC: Running Orchestra Like Operating Business?" *Sunday Star*, November 9, 1969: C4; Irving Lowens, "MUSIC AND MUSICIANS: Pittsburgh Solves Symphony Deficit Problem in Patronage," *Sunday Star*, November 24, 1969: D11.

<sup>464</sup> Irving Lowens, "NEWS OF MUSIC: Concert Relieves Music Hunger," *Evening Star*, October 27, 1969: D9; Irving Lowens, "NEWS OF MUSIC: Symphony Musicians Put Heart in Concert," *Evening Star*, November 14, 1969: D8; Irving Lowens, "NEWS OF MUSIC: Capacity Throng Hails Symphony's Return," *Evening Star*, November 26, 1969: A5; Robert Evett, "NEWS OF MUSIC: Symphony Has Luster In Beethoven Concert," *Evening Star*, December 5, 1969: D10.

newspaper's coverage of the imbroglio;<sup>465</sup> and even one editorial.<sup>466</sup> If such voluminous and detailed coverage is any indication, the status of Washington's resident orchestra clearly mattered to the *Star* editors, and they must urgently have desired that it matter to their readers.

In his first Sunday column on the subject, Lowens elaborated on the theme that the National Symphony Orchestra's survival should be a matter of concern to Washingtonians. He made his case within the context of a pre-season rundown of coming orchestral attractions, including featured performers headlining many of the concerts, guest conductors scheduled to take the podium and programs with particular appeal.<sup>467</sup> Lowens approached his task by first pitching to readers the idea that a season subscription to National Symphony Orchestra concerts was too exceptional a value to resist:

The management has held the line on ticket prices, which makes a subscription an even bigger and better bargain than it was last year. Prices are really very reasonable in view of costs—perhaps even more reasonable than can be reasonably expected. A subscription is definitely a “best buy.”<sup>468</sup>

Playing to their sense of shared obligation, he then declared Washington's concert-goers to be largely responsible for the financial well-being of the orchestra and predicted that, without their patronage, the orchestra would not likely survive. He also made clear the orchestra's right to expect support from the people of the city it served:

Your presence in Constitution Hall is important to the future of the National Symphony, if it is to have any future. You pay for your tickets and

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<sup>465</sup> Milton Denbo, letter to the editor, “The Symphony and Money,” *Evening Star*, November 18, 1969: A12; Peter Karegeannes, letter to the editor, November 18, 1969: A12; Lawrence M. Bocaner, chairman; Donald P. Havas, Wayne Angel, Robert Genovese and William Horountounian, Members, the Orchestra Committee and Sixty-two Symphony Musicians, letter to the editor, “Symphony Musicians Viewpoint,” *Evening Star*, December 2, 1969: A12.

<sup>466</sup> [Unnamed author], “Start the Music,” *Evening Star*, November 25, 1969: A10.

<sup>467</sup> Lowens, “National Symphony Season,” loc. cit.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

thus indirectly pay the salaries of the musicians who are making the music for you. The National Symphony . . . relies on your patronage for its existence, and nobody yet has said that [orchestras] don't deserve to exist. They do deserve to exist—indeed, they must exist because they preserve, in meaningful fashion, the heritage of the past . . . . In a phrase, support your symphony.<sup>469</sup>

Lowens must have been gratified at the large audience greeting the orchestra's first performance after the strike had been settled, but, in his review of the concert, he commented only briefly on audience size: "Another excellent augury for the future was the fact that Constitution Hall was filled to capacity—if I am not mistaken last night's was the first full house for a serious music event in the DAR auditorium of the entire 1969-70 season."<sup>470</sup> The *Star* editors, on the other hand, chose to extract this idea from the body of the review and, inflating it to grandiose proportions, created a potent headline betraying the newspaper's strong sympathies: "Capacity Throng Hails NSO's Return."<sup>471</sup>

No doubt with Lowens's blessing, if not direct instruction, assistant critic Donald Mintz added his voice to the dispute's editorial mix. In a Sunday think-piece published August 24, he reported on an innovative project undertaken by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, in part to attract financial backers and in part to enlarge its audience base. The enterprise, which included participation by public-school music, art, and drama students, took the orchestra's players into target locales around the city for performances of music "designed to appeal to the musical tastes within neighborhoods."<sup>472</sup> Winning substantial support from Cincinnati's business community, it secured a total of \$200,000 to fund 168 performances and

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<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

<sup>470</sup> Irving Lowens, "Capacity Throng," loc.cit.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Mintz, "Cincinnati Symphony Finds a New Role," loc. cit.

reach 150,000 concert-goers in non-traditional settings.<sup>473</sup> Offering the project as a model (surely to benefit no cohort beyond the National Symphony Orchestra), Mintz determined that symphony orchestras will remain viable in modern America only if the paradigm of the orchestra as “a museum of past glories” shifts to meet the expectations of an audience no longer attuned to classical repertoire or traditional concert-hall performance:

The sources of trouble . . . lie . . . in social and artistic changes so deep as to be difficult to grasp. The line between “popular” and “serious” has become blurred. Audiences are seeking new sorts of music . . . . And so the symphony orchestra may well turn out to be a temporal phenomenon: An invention of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that cannot long survive the stylistic context in which it was created . . . . Those who suggest radical changes do not maintain that their ideas will help orchestras to succeed without subsidy. They do suggest that these ideas will make orchestras more worthy of it . . . .

When it took on the project, the orchestra . . . did not in effect say: “Behold, we have come to uplift you.” It said rather: “We like and can play your music, and maybe you’d like to hear some of the stuff that’s been our thing.”

That is a long way from the traditional orchestra. But American society has changed immensely since that function was defined . . . .

As it moved into new areas, [the Cincinnati Symphony] in effect declared that it is part of modern life. By so doing it has probably refreshed itself. It has certainly strengthened its case for additional financial support, from both public and private sources.<sup>474</sup>

In a Sunday think-piece published October 5, Mintz furnished *Star* readers with an update on the negotiations. His lead paragraph proposed to allay public concerns that the orchestra’s 1969-70 show might not go on:

The question of the moment is: “Will Washington have a symphony orchestra this season?” Presumably the answer is, “Yes,” despite the poor state of the current negotiations between the National Symphony Orchestra Association and the D.C. Federation of Musicians which represents the players.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid.

<sup>475</sup> Mintz, “MUSIC: The Symphony and the Musicians Negotiate,” loc. cit.

Mintz gave no hint that he believed negotiations might break down. Instead, he pointed out that, because the arguments evinced by the two parrying factions were strategic, they should not be taken too seriously as harbingers of future calamity:

Why then does it seem likely that the orchestra will continue? First[,] of course, is the fact that predictions of impending disaster are customary in labor negotiations. No one on the outside can tell what is propaganda and what is prophesy. And frequently the actors themselves are not entirely certain. At the moment, the Union is raising the alarms, while the Association seems to be calm and reassuring.<sup>476</sup>

Mintz also implied that the dispute would necessarily be resolved, because the players held an ace in the hole, *vis.*, that they were capable of performing with or without the ministrations of the Association:

Second, however, is a fact which cannot have escaped the attention of either the Union or the Association. In an orchestra, it is labor and not management that owns the equivalent of the means of production. Striking steel workers cannot go out and start their own steel mill; striking orchestral musicians can go out and start their own orchestra.

It is not an easy thing to do, of course. The same financial problems that plague a conventional orchestral management would face a musicians' cooperative, and the cooperative would probably discover a few additional difficulties besides.

Nevertheless, it remains true that a total breakdown of negotiations between the Association and the musicians would not necessarily mean that Washington would be without a symphony orchestra for a time. The reported present mood of the players seems to suggest that should it come to the worst, the men might consider trying to continue on their own.<sup>477</sup>

Mintz's last words proved to be uncannily prophetic. Just one week after his article appeared in print, negotiations did in fact irrevocably break down. On October 13 the

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

National Symphony Orchestra players walked out.<sup>478</sup> The *Star*'s news story on the event led, dramatically, with the compelling statement that, for the first time in its history, the orchestra's opening concert would be cancelled: "The National Symphony Orchestra will fail to play its season-opening concert for the first time tonight because of a musicians' strike."<sup>479</sup>

Accompanying the piece and virtually doubling its column space was a sizable picture. It captured the image of a picketing player holding, in the foreground, a placard reading, "Washington Deserves the Best." Behind him were shown, in white-tie-and-tails and with instruments in hand, orchestral musicians performing on the picket line for the enjoyment of passersby.<sup>480</sup>

One month to the day after the strike began, the players succeeded in organizing a concert for their own benefit, just as Mintz, in his think-piece, had suggested could happen. Presented November 13, the concert featured guest conductor Alfred Wallenstein and piano soloist Leon Fleisher—both of whom donated their services to the orchestra's cause.<sup>481</sup>

Lowens weighed in on the conflict in a Sunday think-piece that served, marginally, as an advance for the orchestra's *ad hoc* benefit concert.<sup>482</sup> Armed with information supplied by the American Symphony Orchestra League, he showed the National Symphony Orchestra's financial travails to be reflective of a perilous, nationwide trend destined to place many of the

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<sup>478</sup> Schaden, "Musicians Strike," loc. cit.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid. Billed as a concert by Musicians of the Washington National Symphony, the performance took place at Washington's Lisner Auditorium and included works by Beethoven, Brahms and Benjamin Britten.

<sup>482</sup> Lowens, "Symphony Orchestra Becomes Economic Dinosaur," loc. cit. In this 1300-word essay, only the penultimate and antepenultimate paragraphs were actually devoted to promotion of the concert.

country's finest orchestras in serious jeopardy.<sup>483</sup> Employing a strikingly pessimistic tone, he presented as virtually inevitable the worst-case scenario that orchestras, with fast-diminishing resources and indifferent audiences, would, like the prehistoric dinosaur, soon become extinct:

[A]s in Greek tragedy, the characters are being driven to destruction by powers over which they have no control. Ironically, the drama is playing to virtually empty houses. The blunt truth of the matter is that considerably less than one percent of the population is watching breathlessly as the plot unfolds.

The symphony orchestra is an economic dinosaur—it has absolutely no right to exist in this day and age . . . .

[T]he gap between cost and income continues to widen at a rate which makes the continuing existence of the symphony orchestra as we know it most unlikely . . . . The figures are incontrovertible—they do not lie. The gap gets bigger, and the symphony orchestras hang on by the skin of their teeth, hoping for a miracle, but the miracle does not come.<sup>484</sup>

Maintaining a strict neutrality, Lowens lay blame for the conflict on neither the Association nor the players. Instead, he summarized in the simplest of terms the essence of the stalemate, *vis.*, that the Association did not have the financial resources to meet the demands of the players, however justified those demands might be. He then bluntly concluded that the negotiation efforts, because they were driven by implausible expectations, and because they had failed to galvanize public opinion, were, in effect, doomed:

[M]usicians are not members of the oppressed proletariat and symphony boards are not money-grubbing capitalists trying to grind another penny of profit out of the poor. It is one thing if workers try to get a bigger slice of the pie from General Motors, which is in business to make money; it is another thing if musicians try to get more from a symphony orchestra which has already lost its shirt and is trying desperately not to lose its pants as well.

It is too frequently forgotten that symphony boards and symphony orchestra musicians have a common cause—both groups are trying to make music. Symphony boards are cognizant of the economic problems of their musicians—it would require a low-grade moron not to be. Most

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<sup>483</sup> Ibid. Lowens reported that the nation's top five orchestras (New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Chicago) were expected to accumulate combined deficits of \$8 million in the 1970-71 season.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

of them would be delighted to give the musicians all they ask for. The trouble is that they can't. They don't have the money to give away, they can't earn it or beg it; it is against the law to steal it.

So you have a strike. Both sides are right. The men deserve what they are asking for; they really need it. The board wants to give them what they need, but they cannot. Tempers rise. Non-economic issues intrude. Arguments start. Bitterness increases.

There is no music.

In the light of the alarming shrinkage in the size of audiences for serious music (at least in this city), one is forced to ask whether it makes much difference to people whether the symphony orchestra does or doesn't perform . . . The lack of public outcry about strikes by orchestra musicians, whether in this city or that, is deafening.<sup>485</sup>

Lowens concluded his essay with an appeal to Washington's music lovers to support their beleaguered orchestra by attending the benefit concert. Alongside the appeal came a veiled admonition to the protagonists in this symphonic drama that the damage done by the strike might irreversibly alter the orchestra's future course, and not for the better:

According to Lawrence Bocaner, clarinetist and orchestra committee chairman, the concert was decided upon by the symphony musicians "as their expression of dedicated resolve to provide a great orchestra in the nation's capital." The words are guarded, but the implications are clear . . .

It should be an excellent concert and, as Bocaner says, it "will at least show area music lovers that we are alive and well and still love to play, in spite of adversity. Also, this concert will provide a small measure of financial relief for the symphony musicians, who have been unemployed since Aug. 22." If you are seriously interested in music you should go. Even if the hall is sold out and you can't buy a ticket, which is quite possible, you should contribute as much as you can to the musicians.

Maybe the wheel has gone full circle. Our orchestra began as a players' cooperative almost four decades again [sic]. Will it now revert to that status, trying to bypass the management with which it cannot seemingly agree? . . . [I]t could happen here.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

Lowens's review of the concert saw the critic again lamenting public indifference toward the orchestra, which on this occasion was made manifest by thoroughly disappointing attendance figures. His words betrayed both deep-seated pessimism and barely contained indignation, as he upbraided the National Symphony Orchestra's regular patrons for failing to support their home orchestra:

Sitting in the hall and listening to the familiar strains of the Leonore No. 3 Overture, one question kept recurring: Who really cares whether the Washington National Symphony lives?

Certainly, the 1,200 or so people in the audience care. They care enough to have paid good money to hear the orchestra and to help ease the financial burdens of the musicians, who have not played as a unit since August.

Certainly, guest conductor Alfred Wallenstein and soloist Leon Fleisher, surrogates for the professional musicians of the country, care. They care enough to donate their time, their talent and their money to the cause of music-making and Washington's symphony musicians.

Certainly, the men and women of the orchestra care. They care not only because their livelihood is at stake, but because music is important to them, because music is their life.

However, I could not help wondering: Where are the 6,000 or so regular subscribers to the National Symphony Orchestra's regular Constitution Hall concerts? Had they really cared, there would have been at least a mini-mobilization for music at the doors of Lisner Auditorium. Had they really cared, it would have been impossible to buy a ticket for the concert.

The only realistic answer to the question in view of the empty seats in the hall, is a sad one: not enough people.<sup>487</sup>

Lowens was not beneath resorting to biting hyperbole to convince the two warring parties to resolve the dispute felicitously. In a companion piece to his advance on the benefit concert, he wantonly lampooned perceptions coming from any quarter that the players might not merit the raise they were requesting or that the orchestra might be inefficiently allocating its funds. With tongue planted firmly in cheek, he reported, for the benefit of his readers, on a study purportedly undertaken by a (nameless) "respected firm of management consultants

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<sup>487</sup> Lowens, "Symphony Musicians Put Heart in Concert," loc. cit.

who are used to dealing with such matters in a business-like fashion,” at the behest of an (also nameless) “orchestra in a neighboring state, concerned about the problem [of financial crises among orchestras].”<sup>488</sup> Claiming to find the study to be “so perceptive and important in its implications” that he could not “refrain from passing it on to the *Star*’s readers,” Lowens published a number of the study’s alleged recommendations. Included among them were the following cost-cutting and labor-saving measures that would surely bring salvation to any failing orchestra:

For considerable periods . . . the four oboe players had nothing to do. The number should be reduced and the work spread more evenly over the whole concert, thus eliminating peaks and valleys of activity.

All the 12 violins were playing identical notes; this seems unnecessary duplication. The staff of this section should be drastically cut. If a larger volume of sound is required, it could be obtained by means of electronic apparatus.

Much effort was absorbed in the playing of demi-semi-quavers; this seems to be an unnecessary refinement. It is recommended that all notes be rounded out to the nearest semi-quaver. If this were done, it would be possible to use trainees and lower-grade operatives more extensively.

There seems to be too much repetition of some musical passages. Scores should be drastically pruned. No useful purpose is served by repeating on the horns something which has already been handled by the strings. It is estimated that if all redundant passages were eliminated, the whole concert time of two hours could be reduced to 20 minutes and there would be no need for an intermission . . . .

Finally, obsolescence of equipment is another matter into which it is suggested further investigation could be made, as it was reported in the program that the concertmaster’s instrument was already several hundred years old. If normal depreciation schedules had been applied, the value of this instrument would have been reduced to zero and purchase of more modern equipment could then have been considered.<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>488</sup> Irving Lowens, “MUSIC: Running Orchestra Like Operating Business?” loc. cit.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

In the concluding paragraph of this openly sarcastic diatribe, Lowens aimed his parting shot directly at the orchestra's administration. In so doing, he betrayed his hidden sympathies for the players' position:

Plainly, there really isn't much difference between running a business and running a symphony orchestra. All that our orchestras need is a little more efficiency. Washington National Symphony officials please note.<sup>490</sup>

Lowens's two Sunday think-pieces roiled the waters sufficiently to raise the hackles of Association attorney Milton Denbo, who in a scathing letter to the editor, denounced the critic's alleged efforts to derail the negotiations. Denbo's comments give further credence to the supposition that the *Star* in general and Lowens in particular wielded considerable influence in swaying public opinion and influencing the outcome of the conflict:

During my long experience as a negotiator in labor relations, I have learned that the exchange of viewpoints in the press rather than in private negotiations invariably drives the parties farther apart and delays an equitable settlement. The article in the *Star* of Nov. 9 by Irving Lowens was an example of the sort of discussion that makes settlement more difficult for both parties. The article was especially unfair and inaccurate . . . . If the facts had been otherwise and as cited by Mr. Lowens, then it is my opinion that settlement could have been reached long ago.<sup>491</sup>

The *Star* inadvertently gave the last word on the subject of the strike to the symphony musicians themselves. On November 25, the very day of the National Symphony Orchestra's first concert after the strike, the newspaper put into print an editorial so provocative as to beg counterassault by the orchestra. In an attempt perhaps to constrain the musicians from entertaining thoughts of any future insurrection, the author warned that "the settlement may be a very short-term affair," owing to the "extravagant" and "unwarranted" demands of "a

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<sup>490</sup> Ibid.

<sup>491</sup> Milton Denbo, Letter to the Editor, loc. cit.

minority of union members.”<sup>492</sup> The author further placed responsibility for maintaining this shaky truce squarely on the shoulders of the players, whose resolve would be necessary, in the best interests of all concerned, to hold in check the unsavory influence of the more radical minority:

With luck, however, this minority sentiment will remain in the minority. The good sense of the majority and of the management will prevail, and the purpose of making music will be pursued . . . . Happily . . . the straining for a supreme expression of self-fulfillment has been modified by the majority that wants to make the best music it can.<sup>493</sup>

The orchestra rallied monolithically to its own defense via a prolix letter to the editor signed by most of the ensemble’s eighty-eight contract players.<sup>494</sup> In a paroxysm of righteous indignation, the musicians took “sharp issue with the *Star* regarding the . . . points raised by the editorial” and reiterated their intention to “honor our promise as long as the Symphony Association honors its.”<sup>495</sup> The letter concluded with the perhaps immoderate complaint that the *Star*’s editorial, with its antipathetic stance, might well inhibit their ability even to make music. Such, or so they insinuated, is the power of the pen:

Certainly your unfortunate editorial subjects us to a kind of provocation and divisiveness that are [sic] antithetical to the state of mind required for the creation of great art . . . . The *Star*’s mischievous attempt to rub salt into our wounds and to discredit our aspirations is not worthy of a fine newspaper.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> [Unnamed author], “Start the Music,” loc. cit.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> Lawrence M. Bocaner, *et al*, “Symphony Musicians Viewpoint,” loc. cit. At 350 words, the letter was more than twice as long as the editorial it rebutted. It was signed: “Lawrence M. Bocaner, chairman; Donald P. Havas, Wayne Angel, Robert Genovese and William Horountounian, members, the Orchestra Committee, and 62 symphony musicians.”

<sup>495</sup> Ibid. Their contract was to hold for a three-year term.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

Although the immediate crisis had been finally and favorably resolved, the orchestra's woes were hardly at an end. With the Association already more than \$200,000 in the hole at the end of the 1968-69 season,<sup>497</sup> the newly enhanced players' salaries guaranteed that expenses over the next three years would balloon by an additional \$750,000, straining its budget to the breaking point.<sup>498</sup> In April 1970, without sufficient funds to meet its payroll and with no guardian angel at hand to make up the difference, the Association abruptly announced the cancellation of its ten-week summer series,<sup>499</sup> thereby renegeing on a crucial portion of its hard-won contract with the players.<sup>500</sup> Given these bleak circumstances, the orchestra's upcoming fall season was now hanging by a thread.

Enter Lowens, crusader's cape aloft, to attempt an eleventh hour rescue.

Coincidentally, the orchestra was at this moment undergoing a critical shift in leadership, with

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<sup>497</sup> Irving Lowens, "The Problems Facing Our New Symphony Manager," *Sunday Star*, June 7, 1970: G1. According to Lowens, the Association posted a deficit of \$238,673 in 1968-69.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.* The new contract stipulated a minimum salary of \$220 per week for the first year, \$230 in the second year and \$255 in the third. The expired contract's base salary had been \$200 per week. The Association was also required to enlarge its contributions to the pension fund, health and life insurance premiums and *per diem* (travel) expenses. [See "Symphony Musicians End Strike," *loc. cit.*]

<sup>499</sup> "The Problems Facing Our New Symphony Manager," *loc. cit.* The Symphony Association actually began leaking news that the orchestra was in jeopardy in early March, when it claimed that if \$400,000 were not raised within twenty-five days, Washingtonians would "face the prospect of a darkened [orchestra] hall," and Dorati might withdraw as music director designate. (See Nancy L. Ross, "Concerts Imperiled," *Washington Post*, March 6, 1970: B1.) Even President Nixon, in a gesture that was as magnanimous as it was unprecedented, issued, on the orchestra's behalf, a national appeal: "Today, when I have to speak to the whole country, and for the whole country, I have to lend my support to this symphony, because it seems to me that in this city, which is the capital of the world, which means so much to so many Americans, it is vitally important that we have a great symphony orchestra. I ask you to join with me and others who reside in the city of Washington to support the symphony." Mr. Nixon's remarks were made in March at an assembly of executives of large national corporations. (See "The Problems Facing Our New Manager," *loc. cit.*) His zeal to secure funding for the orchestra is inconceivable, unless beheld through the scrim of pervasive—and persuasive—*Star* press coverage to which the orchestra had been heir in the preceding several months. His appeal, securing only \$75,000 in pledges for the orchestra, fell short of expectations.

<sup>500</sup> The new agreement called for a 46-week season and a minimum of four weeks paid vacation for the musicians. (See "Symphony Musicians End Strike" and "The Problems Facing Our New Symphony Manager," *loc. cit.*)

both the posts of music director and managing director about to change hands.<sup>501</sup> Exploiting to the fullest the adventitious timing of these developments, Lowens penned a sizable Sunday think-piece, entitled “The Problems Facing Our New Symphony Manager,” advocating public support for the orchestra. Prominently placed, compliments of the *Star* editors, at the bottom of the Arts section’s front page and along its full six-column width, the piece opened with a summary of the orchestra’s prior financial history. It showed that its decade-long fall from fiscal grace was inversely proportional to its eye-poppingly high attendance and earnings figures:

When [outgoing managing director M. Robert] Rogers accepted the symphony board’s invitation to become manager in 1962, he inherited an orchestra with a 32-week season, a \$967,000 budget and an accumulated deficit of \$151,540. He reversed the trend in his first season . . . operating on a budget of \$870,000 and ending with a surplus . . . . There was another small surplus in 1963-64.

By the end of the 1964-65 season, the orchestra’s budget exceeded \$1 million for the first time and the books showed no deficit at all—a not inconsiderable achievement.

The budget for 1966-67 went over \$2 million and by 1968-69 had reached almost \$2.3 million.

The orchestra’s earning power also grew from \$593,000 in 1961-62 to better than \$1.8 million in 1967-68, a sum which placed the National Symphony among the country’s top five orchestras in that regard. Attendance figures also were spectacular – from 364,000 in 1962-63 to 645,000 in 1967-68. For the past two seasons, the orchestra has ranked first in the U.S. in average attendance at its subscription pairs.

But despite these spectacular statistics . . . [i]ncome was not keeping pace with expenses . . . and annual deficits were an inevitable result.

An annual deficit reappeared in 1965-66 . . . and by the end of the 1968-69 season, the accumulated deficit had reached \$238,673. No end was in sight.<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> Managing director M. Robert Rogers had just resigned, relinquishing his position to William L. Denton, and Howard Mitchell’s retirement at this time occasioned the appointment of Dorati as the orchestra’s new music director.

<sup>502</sup> “The Problems Facing Our New Symphony Manager,” loc. cit.

The remainder of the article developed into a vehicle for making available to a wider public excerpts from Rogers's final report to the orchestra's board of directors. Leaving himself out of the mix and, therefore, giving the piece an aura of objectivity, Lowens pleaded his case for government subsidy of the orchestra, using Rogers's words, *verbatim*, as testimony:

Many are of the opinion that the Washington National Symphony cannot survive unless it becomes a kind of ward of the federal government . . . .

It is the public policy of the association that the federal government should subsidize the orchestra with at least \$500,000 a year, which is realistically needed from new sources if the Washington National Symphony is to continue as presently organized . . . .

Logical and desirable as such support may be, I, for one, have grave doubts that it is politically possible to achieve this level of financing from the federal government in time to preserve the continuity of the National Symphony. I would be happy to be wrong, but if I am right then it is clear that substantial new means of private funding must be found rapidly . . . .

It is virtually certain that the Washington National Symphony should become a major component of a national cultural center and now is the time to start planning for the additional funding that will almost surely be needed unless the Kennedy Center itself can provide new forms of subsidy.<sup>503</sup>

Lowens concluded his think-piece tersely, with a facetious, but on-target, comment that had the effect of reducing the orchestra's entire, troubling situation to absurdity: "[Managing director designate William L.] Denton takes up full-time responsibility for managing the orchestra's affairs as of July 1. He shouldn't find the job boring."<sup>504</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid. The orchestra's official appellation at this time was Washington National Symphony. The name change to National Symphony Orchestra occurred when the ensemble took up residence in the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 1971.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

Less than two weeks after Lowens's well-positioned think-piece was published, eleventh-hour funding did in fact miraculously appear to salvage the orchestra's summer series,<sup>505</sup> and, before the summer was out, the National Endowment for the Arts had delivered to the Association its "extraordinary emergency grant."<sup>506</sup> Thus the National Symphony Orchestra narrowly averted the embarrassment of welcoming its new music director to the podium at the very moment it saw itself fading permanently to black.

### **The End Begins**

The long-sustained attention that, over the course of the preceding year, the *Star* gave to the National Symphony Orchestra constitutes a high watermark in its support of the performing arts in Washington. Throughout the decade of the 1960s, the newspaper's efforts had been pivotal in affecting for the better the cultural landscape of the nation's capital. Ironically and sadly, its capacity to offer broad-based performing arts coverage had already begun to erode, even as its influence seemed to be at its most enduring.

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<sup>505</sup> The series began as scheduled on June 21 with a concert at the Merriweather Post Pavilion. The announcement that funding had been found was made just two days prior to the concert, on June 19. Monies were reported to have been acquired, with the help of the White House, from "a jigsaw puzzle of grants from a variety of sources, including the National Council on the Arts . . . a trust fund of the musicians' union and . . . from trustees of the orchestra." (See Meryle Secrest, "Symphony Summer Concert," *Washington Post*, June 19, 1970: C9.) In a review of one of the orchestra's summer concerts, "Symphony Concert Pleasant But Routine" (*Evening Star*, August 17, 1970: B11), Lowens credited the Schlitz Brewing Company with sponsoring that portion of the orchestra's summer series taking place in Constitution Hall. Other sponsors included the National Park Service, the National Endowment for the Arts, the D.C. Department of Recreation, the Musicians Performance Trust Fund, the Merriweather Post Pavilion, and two members of the orchestra's board of directors who remained anonymous. (See Alan Kriegsman, "Symphony Saviors," *Washington Post*, June 27, 1970: C1; and Irving Lowens, "Symphony Summer Opener Has Stormy Accompaniment," *Evening Star*, June 22, 1970: B11.)

<sup>506</sup> Irving Lowens, "MUSIC: A Good Start," *Sunday Star*, October 18, 1970: H4. Although laudatory of the National Endowment's generous gift, Lowens's comments regarding the orchestra's fortunes remained pessimistically framed: "Everything points to an exciting growth in artistic stature for the Natonal [sic] Symphony Orchestra. But we cannot forget that the orchestra plays under an economic cloud, that it was enabled to open its season thanks to an extraordinary emergency grant of \$500,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts, and that its already alarming deficit will continue to grow."

During the period of the National Symphony Orchestra's financial tribulations, the *Star* failed to turn a profit for the first time in its 117-year history.<sup>507</sup> So stunning a development might have remained manageable, at least for the short term, if, at the same time, Haynes Johnson, unarguably the newspaper's most valued reporter, had not abruptly resigned from the *Star* to take a position at the *Washington Post*, and if the manner of his departure were not so incongruous. In November 1969, the *Star* had invested in appreciable advertising, showing Johnson, "America's foremost national reporter," to be a leader on the *Star*'s editorial team.<sup>508</sup> This marketing maneuver may have been conceived to attract new subscribers in the wake of the newspaper's anticipated economic shortfall, but it backfired badly when Johnson's byline appeared, not two weeks later, on the front page of the *Post*.<sup>509</sup> Thus did the *Star* give the lie to its entire advertising thrust, laying the paper open to scrutiny by the press. The *Star* inadvertently compounded its felony by buying space for its boastful advertisement in the story-craving *Washingtonian*, where media watchdog Joseph C. Goulden, putting two and two together, quickly picked up the scent.

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<sup>507</sup> In announcing to his employees purchase of the *Washington Daily News*, in July 1972, John H. Kauffmann, President of The Evening Star Company, acknowledged that the *Star* had "not been profitable for two years." (See Memo from John H. Kauffmann, to "All Employees" of the *Star*, July 12, 1972, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collections in the Performing Arts, Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library, University of Maryland, College Park.) In its piece on the *Star*'s acquisition of the *News*, the *Post* reported: "For the first time, Kauffmann admitted that the *Star* newspaper had lost money in 1970 and 1971. Moreover, he said, losses this year looked even greater than last year." See William H. Jones and Paul W. Valentine, "The *News* Is Closed; Loss Cited: *Evening Star* Buys Assets of Competitor," *Washington Post*, July 13, 1972: A1.

<sup>508</sup> *Washingtonian*, V/2 (November 1969): 14. The full text of the advertisement, which featured a dramatic, oversized picture of Johnson intently questioning a supposed newsmaker, reads: "Haynes Johnson—America's foremost national reporter. The *Washington Star* . . . for people who decide for themselves."

<sup>509</sup> Haynes Johnson, "Young Protesters: 'Great Vibrations,'" *Washington Post*, November 14, 1969: A1. Johnson's first assignment for the *Post* was actually a four-part analysis of the Vietnam war protest movement. The series appeared on the occasion of the largest political demonstration in Washington's history, which took place November 13-15 and attracted more than 250,000 protesters. The remaining three articles, also situated on the *Post*'s front page, included, "A Stranger Cries for Homer Ruple," November 15, 1969: A1; "Middle-Class Youth Has Its Day," November 16, 1969: A1; and "Antiwar Movement Gropes for New Course to Follow," November 17, 1969: A1.

Perhaps sensing in Johnson's defection the newspaper's latent vulnerability, Goulden went on the attack, penning for *The Washingtonian*, in January 1970, a muckraking exposé of the *Star*, vituperatively entitled, "Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*? The Good Grey Lady Is No. 2, And Not Really Trying Harder."<sup>510</sup> Although as yet unaware that the *Star* may have been operating in the red,<sup>511</sup> Goulden drew upon the newspaper's at the time less than spectacular circulation and advertising lineage figures<sup>512</sup> to create a convincing portrait of a newspaper in free fall. Rejecting out of hand the fast-waning popularity of afternoon dailies nationwide and the *Post*'s morning monopoly as elemental to the *Star*'s apparently failing fortunes,<sup>513</sup> he pointed an incriminating finger instead at the *Star*'s longstanding history of nepotism that, in his view, gave rise to "an executive suite . . . populated with a mélange of cousins, brothers-in-law, uncles and sons" and ultimately "[bogged] down in tradition and family during the very period it faced its most strenuous competitive situation."<sup>514</sup>

The competitive predicament to which Goulden referred was the *Post*'s 1955 buy-out of the *Washington Times-Herald*. By giving the *Post* its morning monopoly, as well as an

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<sup>510</sup> Goulden, "Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*?" *Washingtonian*, loc. cit.

<sup>511</sup> Because it was privately owned, the newspaper was not required to release revenue figures. *Star* President Kauffmann may have misled Goulden when he claimed for the article's benefit that the newspaper company was "very profitable" with a "tremendous cash flow." Since filings made to the Federal Communications Commission by the *Star*, in advance of the newspaper's sale in 1974 to Joe L. Allbritton, disclosed losses in 1970 totalling \$866,000, these so-called profits would likely have been derived at the time more from the company's broadcasting holdings than from the newspaper. See Goulden, "Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*?" op. cit.: 30, and John Morton, "Saving the *Star*," *Washingtonian*, (November 1975): 166.

<sup>512</sup> Goulden, "Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*?" op. cit.: 28. Goulden reported the *Washington Post* to hold "commanding circulation leads in both daily (487,829 to 312,145) and Sunday (641,790 to 358,754) editions" and to have bested the *Star* as well in advertising lineage, with seventy million lines sold, compared to the *Star*'s forty-one million.

<sup>513</sup> Goulden, "Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*?" op. cit.: 33. Goulden disparaged such explanations as "[t]he easy answer—the one *Star* executives prefer."

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*

immediate infusion of new subscribers, this to be sure risky purchase<sup>515</sup> significantly altered the *Star*'s playing field, and not for the better.<sup>516</sup>

Goulden's account of the *Star* in the decade after the merger took place impeached the newspaper's performance more than was warranted by the particulars. Although reluctantly acknowledging that the *Star* for several years continued to surpass the *Post* in circulation growth, despite the latter's new morning advantage, he dismissed this inconvenient statistic as "an anomaly."<sup>517</sup> For the *Post*'s emerging strength in ad lineage, however, he waxed rich in hyperbolic metaphor, describing it, glowingly, as "the upward flight of one of Frank Howard's homeric pop flies."<sup>518</sup> Continuing his hyperbolic rant while measuring, by oblique means, the editorial capacity of the two newspapers, Goulden further remarked, to the *Star*'s detriment, that "the *Post*'s news hole—the space available for editorial matter—often looks like [the] Grand Canyon," whereas the *Star*'s constituted, in his view, "a minor cascade in Rock Creek Park."<sup>519</sup>

Goulden further diminished his already thin veneer of objectivity, by peppering his narrative with often rancorous opinions gleaned almost exclusively from anonymous sources.

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<sup>515</sup> See *supra* Chapter I: 97-98.

<sup>516</sup> Had the *Star* bought the *Times-Herald* instead—and in 1955 it had greater financial resources to do so than did the deficit-spending *Post*—the competitive positions of the *Post* and the *Star* in 1970 would likely have been reversed and Washington newspaper history radically rewritten.

<sup>517</sup> Goulden, "Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*?" *op. cit.*: 32-33.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.* Contradicting Goulden's premise that the *Post* was in swift ascendancy during these years are the words of *Post* political pundit Charles Krauthammer, who, in an encomium to the late Katherine Graham, described his own newspaper, in hindsight, as "undistinguished" and its parent company "small" when Graham took over as publisher in 1963. See Charles Krauthammer, "Quite Simply, the Best Publisher," *Washington Post*, July 20, 2001: A31.

<sup>519</sup> Goulden, "Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*?" *op. cit.*: 28. Goulden used advertising lineage to determine the relative sizes of the *Post* and *Star* news holes. Had he simply measured and compared column inches of editorial copy, his readers might have had more meaningful data with which to judge whether his metaphor was accurate—or overwrought.

Identified only vaguely,<sup>520</sup> these purported authorities on the newspaper and its operations supported Goulden's vision of the *Star* as "a stuffy, humorless, conservative institution."<sup>521</sup> Regarding Johnson's sudden resignation, one nameless informant claimed that "Haynes got fed up with all those pro-war editorials and the conservative tone of the *Star* in general."<sup>522</sup> Another declared, truculently, "This shows the *Star* has really had it, when they can't hold their top man. The lineage is down, they don't give a damn about good news coverage, and Johnson was close enough to the top to see how hopeless it is."<sup>523</sup> With Goulden's apparent blessing, a third witness engaged in blatant hearsay to make his gossipy point:

Haynes kept writing memos to Noyes [editor Newbold Noyes] telling him how to perk up the *Star*, and Noyes and some of the other brass got fed up with him. Noyes said—and this is true, because a secretary I know heard him say it—"The next time Johnson writes one of those things and tells me he has a job offer, I'm going to let him take it."<sup>524</sup>

One source, authoritatively identified as "an elder statesman of journalism" and, therefore, allegedly having no particular ax to grind, pleaded the *Star*'s case no more effectively than did its detractors. In summarizing the reasons for its historic success in Washington, this seditious pundit damned the newspaper with faint praise, leaving the reader with the impression that the *Star* was no longer in step with the modern world:

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<sup>520</sup> Goulden, "Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*," op. cit.: 28-69 *passim*. Goulden cited no fewer than thirteen anonymous sources, identifying them, variously, as "Star-gazers," "a man who was in a position to know," "executives," "a man who has been in Washington journalism," "an elder statesman of [Washington] journalism," "a *Star* executive," "an outsider," "one insider," "a former *Star* colleague," "another who claimed privity to [Haynes] Johnson's thinking," "a staffer," "one socialite" and a "key editorial officer."

<sup>521</sup> Goulden, "Has the Sun Set On the *Evening Star*," op. cit.: 33. Goulden's remark continued to reverberate as late as 1975 when *Time*, similarly referring to the newspaper as "the stuffy, money-losing *Washington Star*," parroted Goulden so closely as to verge on plagiarism. See "To Catch A Falling Star," *Time*, loc. cit.

<sup>522</sup> Goulden, "Has the Sun Set On the *Evening Star*," op. cit.: 28.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*

The *Star* became great because it was the first Washington paper that didn't wag its finger in the President's face and tell him what was wrong with him and his goddamned policies. The *Star* caught the tempo of the city—you didn't violate civil service rules, you met a nice sweet little girl in the office, you married her and bought a row house, and you quit after thirty years to gaze into the sunset. The *Star* was patterned to fit those regularized lives. It didn't excite people, and this suited advertisers and the Board of Trade fine. The *Star* was the medium through which the good solid commercial burghers who run this town held the whole thing together.<sup>525</sup>

For his barometer of that “immeasurable quality”<sup>526</sup> journalistic influence, Goulden chose to count the number of *Star* and *Post* articles selected for inclusion in the *Congressional Record*. These numbers, he alleged, would “suggest, if not prove, which newspaper [was] read, if not heeded.”<sup>527</sup> By his count, the months of September and October 1969 did in fact show 223 insertions into the *Record* of miscellaneous copy from the *Post* and only 120 from the *Star*.<sup>528</sup> Goulden failed to stipulate, however, that these figures may have resulted less from a disparity in overall influence between the two newspapers than from the *Post*'s alignment with opponents of the war in Vietnam, who at this moment happened to be pressing intensely their case in Congress.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>525</sup> Goulden, “Has the Sun Set On the *Evening Star*,” op. cit.: 30, 32.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>529</sup> That discussions in Congress over the war in Vietnam were especially heated during these two months in particular could not have escaped Goulden's ken. A stalemate at the Paris peace talks and frustration with continued delays in the withdrawal of American troops from the conflict escalated the debate in the fall of 1969, culminating on October 15 with an unprecedented demonstration that came to be known as the “Vietnam Moratorium.” This nationally organized protest was endorsed by eighty Congressmen and included the participation of one million Americans in numerous venues throughout the country. Several Congressmen in sympathy with the moratorium even attempted to hold their colleagues hostage by forcing Congress to remain in session throughout the night of the demonstration. A motion to adjourn, which was passed at 11:15 p.m. by the slim margin of 112 to 110, finally overrode their effort. See [unnamed author], “Special Reports: Antiwar Protests Confront Nixon Administration,” *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 1969, Vol. 25 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1969): 1017-1020.

Had Goulden given consideration to the *Star*'s influence in musical, rather than political, Washington, a more favorable picture of the capital city's now-second newspaper might have surfaced. Assuming breadth of coverage to be an equally legitimate measure of journalistic effectiveness, the *Star*'s signal attention to news of music shows that, contrary to Goulden's assertions, it exerted upon Washington's cultural life an estimable force. Under Lowens's leadership, to be sure, but with the endorsement of the editors self evident, *Star* music critics routinely blanketed Washington's musical scene, covering the broadest possible spectrum of events in the performing arts. A Monday *Star* music page typically carried five sizable news articles, including reviews of several classical music performances and at least one rock concert.<sup>530</sup> Reviews of organ recitals were regular features,<sup>531</sup> and a captioned picture of an upcoming or recent musical event was invariably added to the page to enhance its visual appeal.<sup>532</sup> If Mondays saw the heaviest music-page traffic, nearly every day

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<sup>530</sup> June 1, 1970, included reviews of a timpani concert at the Philips Collection, a performance by a violinist at the National Gallery, Iron Butterfly appearing at the Merriweather Post Pavilion, an outdoor concert on the Mall by the National Symphony Orchestra, and an organ recital at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. See Irving Lowens, "Timpani Concert Surprisingly Good," Donald Smith, "Iron Butterfly's New Sound A Hit With Young Listeners," George Gelles, "National Gallery Concert: Farago Strong But Sloppy," Wendell Margrave, "MacDonald Impressive at Shrine," and Lawrence Sears, "Symphony Tries Its Best Amid Roar of Jets," *Evening Star*, June 1, 1970: B11.

<sup>531</sup> Three of the five *Star* music-page articles of Monday, June 29, 1970 were organ recital reviews: James Backas, "Kenton Stellwagen Triumphs With Shrine's Grand Organ," Wendell Margrave, "Organ Recital At Cathedral A Good One," and Lawrence Sears, "Pancoast Enjoyable At Organ." They were flanked by Robert Evett's review, "Ragogini Piano Concert Has a Leisurely Pace," and William Holland's "Splendid Concert By Procol Harum," *Evening Star*: A17.

<sup>532</sup> On June 1, the captioned picture, entitled "Singing the Gospel," was of vocalist Pearl Williams Jones. The June 29 music-page picture, "A Guest Conducts Orchestra," shows an eight-year-old chimpanzee named Pierre leading the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in a performance of "Happy Birthday" to honor the daughter of the orchestra's then-music director Leonard Slatkin on her birthday. See *Evening Star*: B11.

contained at least one article on music, often two or three. Seldom was music news missing completely from any edition of a *Star* newspaper.<sup>533</sup>

Throughout the summer of 1970, although it was now sinking into its initial stages of fiscal torpor,<sup>534</sup> the *Star* continued its tradition of pressing full throttle for news of music. The month of July saw fifty-seven musical items posted, and, in August, sixty-two. In July 1971, when Wolf Trap opened its doors to the public for the first time, the newspaper, despite further financial weakening,<sup>535</sup> posted 111 items within its pages and, in the month of August, forty-nine. In September 1971, the month of the Kennedy Center's grand opening, the number of items related to music published in the *Star* for the benefit of its readers leapt again, as it had in July, this time to 112.<sup>536</sup>

Credence to the thesis that the *Star* at this time outstripped the *Post* in coverage of music comes directly from Lowens's pen. In February 1975, his new editor<sup>537</sup> invited him to testify to the music department's escalating vicissitudes. In response, Lowens prepared a lengthy affidavit that included a capsule history of the *Star* music pages dating back to 1953,

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<sup>533</sup> In July 1970, for example, only eight days out of the thirty-one included no news of music (July 1, July 4, July 8, July 11, July 18, July 24, July 25 and July 29). The remaining days carried anywhere from one to six articles.

<sup>534</sup> [Unnamed author], "Daily News Closes, Star Takes Over," *Evening Star*, July 12, 1972: A1. The *Star's* acknowledgement in this article of losses of more than two years' duration places the first intimation of its newly unprofitable status at or before mid-year 1970.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.* According to the article, the purchase agreement pursuant to the *Star's* acquisition of the *Daily News* stipulated that the "buyer [had] been operating at a (substantially increasing) loss for more than two years." *Time* reported in 1975 that between 1971 and 1974, the *Star* had lost \$15 million. See "To Catch a Falling Star," *Time*, loc.cit.

<sup>536</sup> This count includes classical music articles and think-pieces of varying size, concert reviews and miscellaneous news items, articles on popular music, folk music and rock, captioned pictures, editorials, letters to the editor and dance reviews.

<sup>537</sup> James G. Bellows, hired by Joe Allbritton in January 1975 to replace the *Star's* longtime editor and owning family member Newbold Noyes. The opening sentence of Lowens's memorandum reads: "I much appreciate your invitation to write you a 'long memo' about music in the *Star*, and I hope you'll pardon me for taking advantage of it." See Irving Lowens, letter to James Bellows, February 21, 1975, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

when Day Thorpe became the *Star*'s music critic and when, shortly thereafter, Lowens joined the staff.<sup>538</sup> In these recollections, Lowens pointed unequivocally to 1970 as the *belle époque* for music at the *Star*. Notwithstanding the positive bias that he would naturally bring to an account of his and his department's virtues, Lowens's comparison of the relative merits of the *Post* and the *Star vis-à-vis* music reportage during these years nevertheless rings immanently true:

[T]he *Star*'s superiority in music was complete by 1970. We outcovered the *Post* two to one; our music calendar was much more complete; we had regular record coverage; we ran local music news and national music news. And we did this in approximately the same space the *Post* used. The *Star* was nationally acknowledged in the musical field as the Washington paper to read.<sup>539</sup>

Goulden's questionable journalistic tactics notwithstanding, his assessment of the *Star*'s future fortunes would prove to be tragically near the mark. In July 1972, when the *Star* completed its purchase of the tabloid *Washington Daily News*, Goulden revisited the scene of his 1970 journalistic crimes to report, in an analysis published in *The Washingtonian*'s October issue, that, after "the *Post* bought, and junked, the *Times-Herald* [in 1954] and began beating the *Star*'s brains out in every conceivable way," the *Star* was "now losing money in boxcar lots."<sup>540</sup>

Given so apparently precarious a financial position, the *Star*'s buy-out of its afternoon competition, which required \$5 million in borrowed assets, may at the time have taken on the appearance of a multi-million dollar boondoggle; but, as Goulden acknowledged, it helped to

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<sup>538</sup> See *subter*, Chapter IV: 240-247.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>540</sup> Joseph Goulden, "Will the *Star-News* Survive?" *Washingtonian* VIII/1 (October 1972): 76. Chalmers Roberts put *Star* losses in 1971 at \$4.5 million. See Roberts, *The Washington Post: The First 100 Years*, op. cit.: 453.

keep the now-renamed *Star-News* afloat.<sup>541</sup> According to *Star* Company President Jack Kauffmann's tally, which Goulden did not dispute, the newspaper's circulation after the buy-out was boosted by nearly forty-two percent,<sup>542</sup> indicating that a large portion of former *News* readers now reached for Washington's only afternoon newspaper, rather than defect to the morning-edition *Post*. Goulden also reported, indifferently, that the post-merger *Star-News* had actually bested its morning rival in advertising lineage increases,<sup>543</sup> and that, in terms of the Washington metropolitan area, the *Post*'s overall circulation lead, again, according to undisputed figures Kauffmann provided, was at this time "slim."<sup>544</sup>

Goulden was less sanguine in his assessment of the *Star-News* management team. Despite the rosy picture presented by the newspaper's newly released lineage and circulation statistics, he held fast to his theory that the *Star-News*'s long-term prospects would inevitably be subverted, and not by such factors beyond the newspaper's control as the changing lifestyle patterns of its readers or the evolution of television as a primary venue (and competitor) for the dissemination of evening news.<sup>545</sup> On the contrary, he found the newspaper's leadership wholly guilty, by reason of incompetence.

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<sup>541</sup> The *Star* retained this appellation for two and one half years. The newspaper was renamed *The Washington Star and Daily News* on February 21, 1975, but this choice, only two weeks later, was revoked as well. Dropping "Daily News" from its masthead on March 6, 1975, it became *The Washington Star* until its demise in 1981.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>543</sup> Goulden's words were: "In advertising, the *Star-News* jumped a quarter of a million lines through the first month after the July merger, the *Post* a shade less. A long-range projection based on this gain is iffy. But the *Star-News* is giving advertisers considerably more reach for the same money." Goulden, "Will the *Star-News* Survive," *op. cit.*: 77.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>545</sup> In a more evenhanded assessment of the *Star*'s woes, newspaper analyst John Morton isolated three extrinsic impediments to the newspaper's success that contributed to a rapid decline in the nation's overall "habit of afternoon newspaper reading": Television, the "shift away from an industrial to a predominantly service economy" and the "suburban explosion." See John Morton, "Saving the *Star*," *op. cit.*: 110.

Goulden's opening salvo was an *ad hominem* attack on Jack Kauffmann that, serving as the lead for his article, immediately conveyed to readers an image of a man beyond his prime physically and, as a leader, impotent:

Jack Kauffmann is nervous. Suddenly, his *Star-News* is all alone in Washington with the *Post*, and what he does in the next two years—his own time limit, and a realistic one—could determine whether we are to have competitive daily newspapers. Washington is watching Jack Kauffmann, and Jack Kauffmann is fidgeting under the attention. He begins talking with finger-jabbing aggressiveness that is intended to convey tough-guy determined confidence, but leaves you thinking *Jesus, this guy is wound tight*. "I'll be goddamned," he is saying, "if I'll be the Kauffmann who came along and put the *Star* out of business." Jab. "You're damned right we're going to turn this newspaper around." Jab. "You're damned right we are."

Jack Kauffmann pauses and gets down into the stuffed chair in the corner of his office in the *Star* building. He is a little puffier in the face since our last talk two and a half years ago, and the striking golden hair has lost some of its gleam. And the hands. Kauffmann slides them along his trousers and brings them together in a big double-fisted grip, as tight as he can make it, and then lets them dangle briefly across the chair. Now they are at the sides of his head, stroking, stroking, stroking.<sup>546</sup>

Goulden followed this colloquy with testimony gleaned from the usual suspects—by his own admission, "past, present and future competitors,"<sup>547</sup> and other malcontents—who, under cover of anonymity, put Kauffmann to the sword. Goulden's primary witness for the prosecution was a former (and nameless) *Daily News* executive, who, in addition to reinforcing Goulden's contention that Kauffmann was ineffectual, flayed the entire *Star* family of owners with derisive and ill-mannered pejoratives:

Kauffmann comes out of the same crowd that let the *Star* go to pot. They should have gone outside the families (the Noyes-Kauffmann-Adams troika, which has owned the *Star* since 1858<sup>548</sup>) and found a real newspaper professional, a man who could kick people around without

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<sup>546</sup> Goulden, "Will the *Star-News* Survive?" op.cit.: 74.

<sup>547</sup> Goulden, "Will the *Star-News* Survive?" op.cit.: 76.

<sup>548</sup> Goulden's date here is incorrect. The "Noyes-Adams-Kauffmann troika" purchased the *Star* in 1867.

worrying about offending somebody's dumb cousin or fat-assed, worthless grandson.<sup>549</sup>

Turning the screws still further, Goulden published opinions from two additional sources, also drawn, presumably, from the ranks of the aforementioned competitors, and to whom he gave no legitimizing ascription at all:

Another man chimes in: "What good does it do to change the *Star* at the bottom when the top is what got it in trouble?" And yet another: "Well, at least Jack has a better grip on things than his daddy"—meaning Samuel Kauffmann, President of the *Star* Company through 1968, the years when the *Star* completed its long drop to number two.<sup>550</sup>

Goulden concluded this particular rant with the pallid disclaimer: "These biting criticisms are not entirely fair, for they fault Jack Kauffmann for many other people's errors. Kauffmann did not assume command until 1968 (although, as he pointed out to me, he has been an executive with clout for two decades)."<sup>551</sup>

In a sidebar to the article, seven purported authorities were given leave to comment on the question, "If I Were Running That Newspaper . . ." <sup>552</sup> Giving the appearance of evenhanded reporting, the article mingled comments by both named and unnamed sources. The four identified sources, including *Post* staffer Ben Bagdikian, former D.C. City Council president and Washington businessman John Hechinger, freelance journalist and former *Daily News* staff writer Tom Kelly, and *New York Times* staff writer and former *Star* reporter Bernard Gwertzman, offered thoughtful and

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<sup>549</sup> Goulden, "Will the *Star-News* Survive?" op.cit.: 76.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

<sup>552</sup> Goulden, "Will the *Star-News* Survive?" op.cit.: 78.

restrained suggestions.<sup>553</sup> The three nameless sources were strikingly, but not surprisingly, less constrained. A “*Star-News* editor” recommended sarcastically:

The first thing Jack Kauffmann should do is fire Newbold Noyes and Smith Hempstone<sup>554</sup> . . . . Neither would have their jobs if they weren’t members of the families which own the *Star*. Then Kauffmann should fire himself.<sup>555</sup>

A “*Post* editor” maligned:

The *Star* is not an intelligent paper and it’s just no fun to read. Its editorial page is dull and its women’s section is incredibly old fashioned . . . . Who has the *Star* got who [sic] you really look forward to reading?<sup>556</sup>

An *au courant* “Washington magazine editor,”<sup>557</sup> providing the following pseudo-authoritative comments, drove the final nail into the *Star*’s coffin:

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid. Ben Bagdikian recommended that the *Star*, “play the long game of thorough, talented coverage . . . . It already has a very solid base in which to use its enlarged staff to do basic local and national journalism. It should not expect definitive results for a matter of years, and it should steer clear of the quick fixes used when papers are hard pressed.” John Hechinger’s suggestions included recognizing, “that there is a 70 percent black community in the District of Columbia and offer total responsive reporting of that segment . . . . I think the *Star* should focus on the local area . . . . If the *Star* can maintain itself and push ahead with a greater share of the market, it will be for the good.” Tom Kelly generously opined that the *Star* was “maybe the most fair-minded paper in the country . . . but it has not been perceptive . . . . It does not try to answer the question of what kind of city and country this should be.” Bernard Gwertzman’s remarks focused on the lack of coverage for “some marginal news stories [that] . . . have not been [covered] because of the lack of manpower or lack of money for trips . . . . Hopefully these conditions will change. The *Star* is an excellent newspaper . . . . It has some good people[,] and it should hire more. Many reporters would be glad to work for such a paper.”

<sup>554</sup> Had he questioned the claim that Hempstone owed his position at the *Star* to his bloodline, Goulden would have discovered that Hempstone earned his stripes as a journalist the old-fashioned way: He became the Chicago *Daily News*’s Africa correspondent after spending four years as an observer in Africa under the auspices of the Institute of Current World Affairs. A recipient of Harvard University’s Nieman Fellowship and author of two histories on the dark continent, he covered Europe and the Middle East for the *Star*, before rising to the rank of editorial page editor. Although having dissolved his association with the *Star* in 1975, Hempstone remained in demand as a syndicated columnist. His extensive knowledge of Africa brought him the United States Ambassadorship to Kenya. Serving in such capacity from 1989 to 1993, he distinguished himself for courageously confronting the country’s then ruler Daniel arap Moi. See Adam Bernstein, “Obituaries: Smith Hempstone; U.S. Ambassador to Kenya,” *Washington Post*, November 20, 2006: B4.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid. One would be hard pressed not to assume that the unnamed magazine in question was *The Washingtonian*.

The *Star*'s fundamental problem is that it has not recognized and accepted change. The people running the paper still think the late nineteenth century was the best of all possible worlds. The *Star* doesn't like change. It doesn't want to face the world as it is.<sup>558</sup>

Goulden's destructive barbs notwithstanding, the *Star*, although wounded, remained operational until 1974 when, finally, it changed corporate hands. After a hundred years of continuous family ownership, the newspaper was sold to the Texas millionaire investor Joe L. Allbritton, making Goulden's tacit, but unmistakable, wish come true. The managers whom he had portrayed as woefully inept ceased to control the fortunes of the *Star*. Under its new ownership, the *Washington Star* entered into its final and precipitous slide to oblivion.

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<sup>558</sup> Ibid.

### Chapter III *Götterdämmerung*

Whether the historically sturdy *Star* was compromised, as Goulden would have his readers believe, by perennial blundering at the top of its leadership pyramid, or by circumstances beyond human control, the *Star*'s jump-the-shark buyout of the *Daily News* in 1972 was, if not a blunder, certainly ill-fated. The *Star*'s owners, perhaps in anguish, discovered too late that the debt incurred to finance the *Daily News*'s purchase eroded irreparably the *Star*'s already depleting treasury, not merely doing harm to its editorial mission, but threatening its survival.

Unquestionably driven by their own, century-long devotion to the newspaper, the newspaper's owning families attempted to right their *Star* ship, by bargaining in good faith with prospective purchaser Joe Allbritton, then a stranger to Washington and an unknown quantity. Throughout negotiations and after the purchase was complete, Allbritton vowed, to the *Star*'s stakeholders and to the public at large, to rescue the newspaper from impending ruin, retain intact its heretofore illustrious name and reputation, and, not the least, preserve the livelihoods of the newspaper's longtime loyal staff. In the doing, however, Allbritton's glowing vision for the newspaper stopped at the bottom line.

Already having gathered steam during the *Star*'s abrupt takeover of the *Daily News*, a hyper-vigilant press chronicled in dramatic, and occasionally mean-spirited, detail the battle over the *Star*'s transfers of ownership,<sup>559</sup> and then the civil war, fought between Allbritton's *parvenu* management team and the *Star*'s rank-and-file employees. When the smoke cleared, the familial bond between staff and management, so tenderly nurtured by the

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<sup>559</sup> First to Allbritton, then to Time, Inc.

Kauffman/Adams/Noyes *troika* had evaporated, and a badly listing *Star* careered forward toward its eventual demise.

Whereas Allbritton departed for new adventures in the banking and broadcasting industries,<sup>560</sup> the *Star* staff, ultimately, paid with their jobs. Lowens, his music department tucked protectively under his wing, constituted just one unsung casualty among many, but his martyrdom yielded some collateral damage. Corollary victims included a steadfast *Star* readership transformed *via* Lowens's persuasive finesse into avid devotees of music news and views, and Washington's numerous musical power brokers who had aligned with him and the *Star* to forge in the nation's capital a sophisticated concert life. When Allbritton released the *Star* in 1978 to Time, Inc., its subsequent, and final, buyer, the newspaper's signal participation in Washington's ever-expanding musical landscape was permanently shuttered.

### **The *Star* Wars**

In a flagrant distortion of facts, *MORE Magazine*, the New York-based monthly review of American journalism,<sup>561</sup> blatantly misled its readers when it opined, in its September 1976 issue, on the subject of the *Star*'s sale to Allbritton. In the course of an exposé on the alleged antagonism between the then-editors of Washington's two competing daily newspapers—the *Post*'s Ben Bradlee and Jim Bellows of the *Star*—author Aaron Latham erroneously, but adroitly, attributed the *Star*'s sudden appearance on the auction block in 1974 to the investigative prowess of its arch-rival. Using minimalist prose, Latham insolently set forth his own myopic version of the sequence of events:

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<sup>560</sup> Upon sale of the newspaper, the Star Company's television and radio holdings were retained under Allbritton's control. Allbritton led a successful, hostile takeover of Washington's historic Riggs Bank in 1981. See [unnamed author], "Man in the News: Controversial Self-Made Man," *New York Times*, April 2, 1982: n.p.

<sup>561</sup> The short-lived magazine, in publication for only seven years, was subsumed in 1978 by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism as *The Columbia Journalism Review*.

At the end of 1974, *The Washington Post*, the fat man of the nation's capital, reported that *The Washington Star*, the thin man, had lost \$15.5 million over the past four years. The paper was put on the market. Joe L. Allbritton, a Houston Multimillionaire who had more money than social or political cachet, bought the dimming *Star*.<sup>562</sup>

In fact, the *Post* played no such pivotal role in the *Star*'s takeover bid by Allbritton. Disclosure of the newspaper's financial condition was not a contributing factor, but a consequence of the sale proposal, with negotiations occurring long before any *Star* losses were made public.

As early as 1973,<sup>563</sup> having determined that their limited financial resources were inadequate to keep the *Star* solvent, its owning families placed themselves in the market for an investor. Stepping into the breach, Joe Allbritton proffered a two-tiered, but still partial, investment plan that was approved by Star Company corporate stockholders in September 1974.<sup>564</sup> Initially, Allbritton purchased outright, for just over \$4.5 million,<sup>565</sup> sufficient shares in the newspaper to make him its majority stockholder. This purchase agreement included an additional \$4.5 million loan to the company. In return, he demanded, and received, managerial control of the newspaper, the chairmanship of the corporate board, and *carte-blanche* to secure additional loans of up to \$18 million to operate and revitalize the newspaper.

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<sup>562</sup> Aaron Latham, "D.C. Shootout: Bradlee vs. Bellows in Big Macho Duel," *MORE: The Media Magazine*, Vol. 6, No. 9 (September 1976): 15. The *Post* article to which Latham referred was, in all likelihood, "Few Layoffs, 4-Day Week Eyed at *Star*," by Stephen Green, published December 10, 1974: C1. Inasmuch as the article, in addition to reporting the \$15.5 million loss, made clear reference to Allbritton already in place as the "new publisher," Latham's chronological inaccuracy could not be attributed to ignorance.

<sup>563</sup> The *Washington Post* reported negotiations between Allbritton and Star Communications to have been underway for "a year and a half" prior to the purchase agreement's ratification. See Stephen Klaidman, "A Financial Wizard at the *Star*'s Helm," *Washington Post*, February 28, 1975: C1.

<sup>564</sup> *Time* reported that Allbritton signed the sale agreement with Star Communications, Inc., in mid-July. See unnamed author, "A Texan Takes the *Star*," *Time*, Vol. 104, No. 5 (July 29, 1974): 68.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.* This figure amounted to only a ten-percent share of the overall corporate holdings. Allbritton expended an additional \$2 million on exploratory investigations concerning the sale.

Allbritton also advanced a more thoroughgoing, follow-up offer, in the amount of \$25 million, that would increase to thirty-seven percent his holdings in Star Communications, Inc.,<sup>566</sup> including its lucrative broadcast holdings.<sup>567</sup> This second, more complex transaction required approval of the Federal Communications Commission, in part because it violated the FCC's one-to-a-market rule prohibiting the sale to one owner of television and radio stations operating in the same city. The transaction was also in violation, *ex post facto*,<sup>568</sup> of another, similar cross-ownership regulation prohibiting the sale to one owner of newspaper and broadcast operations in a single market. At the time, the Star corporation owned, in addition to the newspaper, three broadcast facilities in Washington, D.C., and three in other states.<sup>569</sup> For FCC approval of the sale, Allbritton and Star Communications submitted, on November 18, 1974, an application that included a financial statement citing the losses to which Latham had mischievously referred. Application for a waiver to the newspaper-broadcast media rule was made on February 11, 1975, only ten days after the new regulation had taken effect.<sup>570</sup>

Allbritton's application for FCC approval of the sale and (especially) the accompanying request for a waiver of its cross-ownership rules ignited a firestorm<sup>571</sup> of

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<sup>566</sup> The newspaper's parent company.

<sup>567</sup> Details of Allbritton's purchase proposals are recorded, variously, in [unnamed author], "A Texan Takes the Star," *loc.cit.*; Martin Arnold, "Corporate Rift Is Reported in Ownership of Star Co.," *Washington Star*, June 28, 1975: A1; and John Morton, "Saving the Star," *op. cit.*: 166.

<sup>568</sup> Although this regulation became operative on January 31, 1975, more than two months after Allbritton and Star Communications, Inc., had made their initial application to the FCC, they were still required to apply for a waiver.

<sup>569</sup> Company holdings included WMAL-AM, WMAL-FM and WMAL-TV in Washington, WLVA-AM/TV in Lynchburg, Virginia, WCIV-TV in Charleston, South Carolina, and a syndicated news service. The broadcast holdings reportedly generated profits of \$3 to \$4 million per year. See John Morton, "Saving the Star," *op. cit.*: 108.

<sup>570</sup> Stephen M. Aug, "Unusual FCC Statement on Star Handling," *Washington Star*, August 3, 1975: A1.

<sup>571</sup> A waiver request of the FCC's new rules, filed so soon after their implementation and, implicitly, attempting to circumvent their purpose, would have been at pains in any event to secure swift or unquestioned approval.

appreciable proportions in Washington's journalistic and political circles. Among the first to line up in support of Allbritton's *cause célèbre* was, remarkably, the *Washington Post*,<sup>572</sup> which took pains to promote the would-be media mogul in a lengthy, human-interest story appearing in print only two and one half weeks after Allbritton's waiver request had been filed. Written in two parts, the series constituted little more than an extended puff piece,<sup>573</sup> recounting in narrative form Allbritton's credentials—none of which related to journalism—and puffing in particular his spectacular prowess in brokering lucrative financial deals:

[Allbritton's] holdings include a medium-sized insurance company and a chain of mortuaries in California, a bank in Houston, the largest single block of shares in the biggest bank holding company in the Southwest (assets in excess of \$6 billion), a bank in Luxembourg, a two-thirds interest in the institutional brokerage firm of Dominick and Dominick, a variety of real estate holdings, an investment portfolio that includes substantial stock in the Savoy, Claridge's and the Connaught, London's top hotels, and the Lancashire Hotel in Paris, and, of course, The Washington Star and its parent, Star Communications;<sup>574</sup>

his power connections in the political arena:

Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine), whom Allbritton supported for President in 1972, says he is "what I would call a good friend. He's thoughtful, considerate, and good company. Lot's of things besides business." Says Allbritton of Muskie: "He listens when you talk. Have you ever tried to get Hubert Humphrey to listen?" Leon Jaworski,<sup>575</sup> Allbritton's friend and lawyer for many years, says[,] "He's just a dynamo—a tremendously friendly

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<sup>572</sup> The *Post's* support for Allbritton's cause may have been more self-serving than altruistic, given the company's own penchant for media acquisition. To date, the Washington Post Company owns six television stations, a cable network, several newspaper outlets, the national weekly magazine *Newsweek* and an assortment of related industries. See "Company History," [www.washpostco.com](http://www.washpostco.com), accessed December 26, 2003.

<sup>573</sup> The two articles in the *Post* series, written by Stephen Klaidman, were "Financial Wizard at The *Star's* Helm," February 28, 1975, loc. cit.; and "Meteoric Rise of *Star's* Chief," March 1, 1975: B1. Together, they numbered approximately 4,500 words.

<sup>574</sup> Klaidman, "Meteoric Rise of *Star's* Chief," loc. cit.

<sup>575</sup> Leon Jaworski served in 1963-64 as Special Counsel to the Warren Commission investigating the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and in 1973 rose to national prominence again when he was named Watergate Special Prosecutor after Archibald Cox was dismissed.

individual who has the knack of selling himself to people. He moved along very fast, because his business judgment was very good”;<sup>576</sup>

and his dedication to home and hearth:

He and his wife, the former Barbara Balfanz, whom everybody calls “Barbie,” have a 6-year-old son named Robert, who Allbritton says “is the apple of my eye.” Primarily because of Robert, Allbritton bought . . . [a] well-proportioned, red brick Georgian-style house . . . surrounded by gardens, including a tea garden with a small summer house, a rose garden landscaped in the shape of a rose blossom and a simple oval garden, which is all white when the flowers are in bloom and is Allbritton’s favorite.<sup>577</sup>

The article’s author even managed to warrant within the confines of a single, anecdotal paragraph Allbritton’s familial devotion, his decisive editorial leadership and his ability to peddle influence at the highest levels of national and international diplomacy:

The conversation over breakfast was relaxed, ranging from Robert’s car pool . . . to the fact that the *Star* White House correspondent had just been barred from a briefing, because the *Star* broke the embargo time on the federal budget. Allbritton quipped: “I’m glad it happened after I was invited to the White House for dinner.” He attended the dinner for British Prime Minister Harold Wilson.<sup>578</sup>

The series’s first installment found the *Post* engaging in an unbridled attempt to sway the FCC in Allbritton’s favor. Citing an off-the-cuff remark by Allbritton that the *Star* “would never be a significant property economically,” along with warnings from unnamed Cassandras that “it was one of the worst deals . . . from a business standpoint,” for which Allbritton may have “bitten off more than he could chew,” the *Post* implied Washington’s second newspaper

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<sup>576</sup> Klaidman, “Financial Wizard at the Star’s Helm,” loc. cit.

<sup>577</sup> Klaidman, “Meteoric Rise of Star’s Chief,” loc. cit.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

to be an all-but-lost cause requiring extreme measures (namely, profits from the *Star*'s broadcast operations) to reverse.<sup>579</sup>

Headlined with magical metaphor—"Financial Wizard at the *Star*'s Helm"—the piece, in its opening paragraphs, continued to borrow language from both necromantic and sacral lexicons to conjure Allbritton as the unworthy *Star*'s best hope:

Joe L. Allbritton, self-made millionaire, professed idealist and widely acclaimed financial wizard, has arrived in Washington in the role of savior. He gives himself roughly three years, with a combination of cash and entrepreneurial [sic] alchemy, to make The Washington *Star* pay its own way . . . . By the age of 33 Allbritton . . . had made his first \$1 million. Now, at 50, many tens of millions of dollars later, he can insure you and bury you . . . . [H]is brand of enterprise has turned base companies into gold.<sup>580</sup>

Finally, the *Post* story put forward the contention that, if the FCC failed to support the waiver request, Allbritton might scuttle the deal entirely, leaving the *Star*'s blood on the Commission's hands:

More than anything else, success depends on a decision from the Federal Communications Commission that will permit the parent company of the *Star* to continue operating its three broadcasting outlets in the metropolitan area, which in turn will provide sufficient corporate cash flow to support the newspaper . . . . Allbritton has a substantial investment in the *Star* at this point, but it would not preclude his pulling out immediately should the FCC rule against him.<sup>581</sup>

Leading the opposition was Michigan publishing magnate John P. McGoff,<sup>582</sup> who, having no interest in the *Star* Company's broadcast operations, had attempted to acquire the

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<sup>579</sup> Klaidman, "Financial Wizard at the *Star*'s Helm," loc. cit. The unnamed sources were identified only as "a longtime Allbritton friend and adviser" and some of Allbritton's "acquaintances and associates."

<sup>580</sup> Ibid.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid.

<sup>582</sup> Opposing the sale in addition to McGoff were several citizen advocacy groups, including Concerned Citizens for Balance in News Media, the Adams-Morgan Organization, the National Organization for Women National Capital Area Chapters and the D.C. Media Task Force. These groups voiced concerned about the failure of the

newspaper alone and at a bargain-basement price.<sup>583</sup> Unsuccessful in his machinations and largely ignored by the press (or so he complained),<sup>584</sup> he responded by buying advertising space for himself in the *Post* amounting to fully half a page of newsprint. Having thus constructed an alternative platform on which to plead his case, he undertook to persuade the FCC by means of a public grandstanding maneuver bordering on the absurd.

Headlining his communiqué, “The Last Extra: An Open Letter to Washingtonians,” McGoff devoted the top third of his sizable column space to a picture of himself, in professorial pose.<sup>585</sup> Below this overweening image, he wrote his frustrations large in a 700-word, self-serving polemic, still hoping, perhaps, that, should he convince the FCC to rule against Allbritton, he might win control of the *Star* by default.

He levelled his guns first at Allbritton, challenging the *Star* would-be owner’s inexperience as a journalist, a point upon which the *Post*’s puff piece had remained mute:

There is the matter of qualifications. The current publisher is a banker and insurance man. I am president of two newspaper publishing companies, which operate forty-seven daily and non-daily newspapers. That is your assurance that I have the know-how to run a newspaper. If I am successful in my attempts to buy the *Star*, you will benefit. The *Star* can be a lively,

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purchase proposal to meet the FCC’s standards of marketplace diversity. See Stephen M. Aug, “Hearings Ordered by FCC On Sale of WMAL-Star,” *Washington Star*, July 29, 1975: A1.

<sup>583</sup> John Morton, at the time a newspaper analyst with the New York-based investment concern John Muir & Company, called McGoff’s purchase proposal “an empty one,” because, although seemingly viable at \$25 million, certain of its financial terms, including an assumption within the purchase price of *Star* debt, would have left McGoff in effect “pay[ing] no cash for the *Star*.” McGoff’s offer was rejected by all but one of the *Star*’s owners. See John Morton, “Saving the Star,” op. cit.: 166.

<sup>584</sup> In his public appeal, McGoff gave explicit voice to this complaint: “My interest in the *Star* is not widely known in Washington nor have the media given it the attention it deserves. But I think the people of Washington **should** know of my interest and intentions.” Klaidman’s two-part hagiographic spread on Allbritton’s greater virtues would likely have played prominently into McGoff’s mortification on this point. See John P. McGoff, “The Last Extra: An Open Letter to Washingtonians,” *Washington Post*, April 29, 1975: A10.

<sup>585</sup> The inspiration for this photograph may have come directly from the pictures accompanying the *Post*’s article on Allbritton, the first installment of which featured Allbritton in a head shot, seated and with countenance animated, as though imparting wisdom. The second of the two articles pictured Allbritton, standing heads above a (small) crowd and in front of a microphone, responding to an off-camera questioner. In a picture that appears to conflate these two images, McGoff is posed seated, likewise imparting wisdom, and with the microphone prop.

interesting, COMPETITIVE newspaper—with a fresh point of view. It cannot succeed—nor will it serve any worthwhile purpose—if it becomes but a pale carbon of its major competitor.<sup>586</sup>

McGoff also alerted Washington’s newspaper-buying public to the alleged dangers inherent in Allbritton’s waiver request and pointedly demanded that the FCC uphold its civic responsibility and reject it:

You should know the Federal Communications Commission recently adopted rules that daily newspapers and broadcasting outlets *in the same market* must be separated when their ownership is transferred. The wise intent of the FCC rules is to encourage diversity in media ownership . . . . The regulatory commissions have been criticized as promoters of monopoly. But in the case of this FCC rule, it is a regulation to free-up [sic] the economy. This diversity of ownership rule should not be abandoned in its first big test. The FCC should not negate its rules simply because it is expedient to the ownership of the *Star!*<sup>587</sup>

Finally, McGoff took the Star Company to task for trying to circumvent FCC regulations. In so doing, he laid out a scenario for the future that proved to be uncannily on the mark:

The management of the *Star* wants the FCC to waive these ownership rules. It contends control over both newspaper and broadcast stations . . . is necessary so that broadcasting profits can, in effect, subsidize the *Star*. This is nonsense. While additional capital must be found to revitalize the *Star*, the newspaper’s future should not be mortgaged to television and radio properties. The *Star* is an ailing enterprise. It could go under. Ask yourself this question: When a fellow buys profitable broadcasting stations and a losing newspaper, which is more likely to be killed off in a financial crush? . . .

In a time when this capital city already has seen other newspapers fold, the question of saving the *Star* as an independent, unfettered editorial voice is a critically important one. This city needs two sound, prospering newspapers.

More importantly, Washington needs diverse news philosophies, a commitment to print journalism that transcends the balance sheet approach . . . .

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<sup>586</sup> McGoff, “The Last Extra,” loc. cit.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid.

It would be a national tragedy if Washington, D. C., becomes another one newspaper town.<sup>588</sup>

After having accumulated and reviewed the mountain of materials pursuant to the case, amounting to no fewer than “12 to 15 pounds of assorted pleadings,”<sup>589</sup> the FCC announced in July its decision—not to decide. Taking what must have appeared to be the safer, middle road, the commissioners voted, neither to approve nor deny Allbritton’s waiver request, but instead to hold public hearings before making a ruling.<sup>590</sup> Failing to gauge correctly the intensity of the prevailing political winds blowing in favor of Allbritton, they left themselves vulnerable to a scathing attack, not only on their judgment in this case, but on their legitimacy as a regulatory agency.

Allbritton was the first to come out swinging. Couching his blistering response in the argot of the outraged, but resolute, victim, he played his trump card: Because the *Star* was vital to the journalistic integrity of the nation’s capital, its survival, without the forceful—and posthaste—intervention of the Commission, was all but lost:

I was distressed when informed of the Federal Communications Commission’s decision to hold hearings on our eight-month application for relief. The relief requested was most necessary to give the *Washington Star* newspaper an opportunity to survive. Our lawyers have informed us that these hearings could delay a final decision for more than a year.

That is too long a time for indecision about the *Star*. I would like to say, however, that I came to Washington to produce a quality newspaper and maintain that competitive voice in the nation’s capital.

WE SHALL NOT let the shocking news of today stop us from working out plans to save the Washington Star.<sup>591</sup>

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<sup>588</sup> Ibid.

<sup>589</sup> Stephen M. Aug, “Unusual FCC Statement on *Star* Handling,” loc. cit.

<sup>590</sup> Stephen M. Aug, “Hearings Ordered by FCC On Sale of WMAL-Star,” loc.cit.

<sup>591</sup> Ibid.

On cue, the *Washington Post*, following Allbritton's lead, took up its cudgel against the FCC. Putting a sizable<sup>592</sup> editorial into print the following day, it delivered, with ever more combustible language, a truculent gloss on Allbritton's selfless themes:

THE DECISION by the Federal Communications Commission to put off for at least a year, and probably longer, any definitive action on the application of the Washington Star for a waiver of the new multiple ownership rule is a demonstration of regulatory lethargy at its worst. If this city is deprived of one of its two remaining major daily newspapers in the near future . . . much of the responsibility for that outcome will rest not on an affirmative action by the FCC but on its decision to treat this as a routine case . . . . [T]here is a larger public issue involved here—one which . . . has to do with the quality and quantity of news and information available to the residents of the Washington area. We believe in a freely competitive press and that is precisely why we also believe that the nation's capital needs at least two competing newspapers . . . .

We believe a waiver is appropriate in this case. But we can also understand the reluctance of the FCC to grant a waiver of a rule it has created quite recently. What is utterly uncomprehensible is the languor with which the FCC is acting . . . . Such protracted time frames . . . are not acceptable in situations where the life of a major source of information in the nation's capital is concerned . . . .

[T]he danger has steadily grown that the newspaper's controlling stockholders will simply close it rather than face the continuing losses. It is not too much to expect an agency of government in this situation to move rapidly to resolve . . . the question presented to it . . . . The inability of the FCC to grasp the urgency of the situation and respond to it demonstrates anew the encrustations that have turned much of the government's regulatory efforts into nightmares.<sup>593</sup>

The *Post*'s caustic editorial succeeded in raising the decibel level on the issue sufficiently to attract the scrutiny of then-Treasury Secretary William E. Simon.<sup>594</sup> Hard on

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<sup>592</sup> [Unnamed author], "The *Washington Star* and the FCC," *Washington Post*, July 30, 1975: A14. The editorial numbered approximately 500 words.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>594</sup> Simon was Secretary of the Treasury from May 1974 to January 1977, for the end of Richard Nixon's administration and the duration of Gerald Ford's.

the heels of the *Post*'s rant,<sup>595</sup> Simon, an outspoken conservative,<sup>596</sup> seized on the *Star*'s sad plight to advance the notion that regulation and regulatory agencies—including especially the FCC—were a hindrance to the promise of entrepreneurship and should be curbed. Taking wily advantage of a propitiously timed Treasury Department press luncheon, he publicly proselytized on the subject,<sup>597</sup> prodding the press to attack:

I was interested in the recent *Washington Star* decision by the Federal Communications Commission; and while I don't know anything about the substance of the issue, I think that here is a perfect example of inefficiency in action. Here is a bunch of regulatory Pontius Pilates walking away from making a decision on an issue and putting it in limbo.

In this case, a guy comes to town to try to save the only other newspaper we have in Washington, D.C.—and for nine months they fool around with it and then say we need another year to make a decision. I think it's damn unfair. I really think if any "power of the press" exists, which it most certainly does, you ought to land on the government on that one . . . .

I think it is unconscionable what the FCC did, and I'd be interested in your reaction. I mentioned this to a couple of senators on the Hill and they said, you should see what happens in our states. One senator from a rural state told me that one of the large newspapers, started a radio station, first radio station in the state. The only way they could support a radio station like that was from revenues from the paper, and they complimented [sic] each other's operations. But no dice, said FCC. This is one of the most visible examples of government inefficiency in action. Like the postal service. We ought to put the postal service into competition with private firms on first-class mail, and I'll bet the same thing would happen that happened on delivering packages.

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<sup>595</sup> Simon made his remarks on July 30, the day of the *Post* editorial's publication, only hours after the morning-edition newspaper would have hit the stands. See [unnamed author], "Simon Assails FCC on *Star* Case," *Washington Star*, July 31, 1975: A1.

<sup>596</sup> Secretary Simon earned a reputation for blunt, hard-line remarks during his years in government service. About the Arab Oil Embargo, for example, which occurred in 1973-74 during his tenure as Deputy Treasury Secretary in the Nixon administration, Simon is reported to have remarked, glibly, "I'm the guy who caused the lines at the gas stations . . . . We have become a nation of great energy wastrels." In 1975, as Ford's Treasury Secretary, he provided advice and consent when the President opposed legislation to bail out New York City, which was at the time on the verge of financial collapse. While a banner headline in the *New York Daily News* shrieked, "Ford to City: Drop Dead," Simon followed up with a glib comment that was spiked with contempt: "We're going to sell New York to the Shah of Iran. It's a hell of an investment." Fortunately for New York, the political tides eventually turned against Simon's (and Ford's) reactionary and polarizing stance. See Philip Shabecoff, "The Simon Years at the Treasury," *New York Times*, November 1976: F1; and Brian Trumbore, "William Simon," *Buy and Hold, A Division of Freedom Investments: Educate Yourself: Wall Street History*: [http://www.buyandhold.com/bh/en/education/history/2000/william\\_simon.html](http://www.buyandhold.com/bh/en/education/history/2000/william_simon.html).

<sup>597</sup> "Simon Assails FCC," loc cit.

But I mention things like this publicly and who lands on me, the postal unions and the postal workers and all the rest. But aren't we trying to do something for the American people[?]

Do we need two newspapers in Washington, D.C.? Is that a good idea? Sure it's a good idea. And the *Star* needs its radio-tv affiliate to survive.

As I say, never mind the point about whether it's right or wrong or the FCC's final ruling is favorable or unfavorable. We're not talking about the substance; I just consider the decision's delay absolutely unconscionable—for them to wash their hands of the matter. If it's true that this great newspaper is in financial difficulty, which I have to believe is true, does it have to go out of business in a year as a result of inaction on the part of government? Wouldn't it have been a hell of a lot better if FCC was going to make an unfavorable ruling for them to say, "Sorry, we won't grant the waiver." But no, they called for the pan of water . . . .

I'm not an expert on the efficiency of the *Star* or any other operation and whether they're willing to work to survive. All I'm saying is that we got a new man in there. He came in a year ago to energize this operation and he made this request of the FCC. He spent a lot of money and he's willing to spend more time and more money. All he wanted to know was whether he'd be granted a waiver or not to own and operate radio-tv. Then he could make a business decision based on marketplace realities. A year's delay by the FCC is a coward's way out.<sup>598</sup>

Additional influential—and vocal—friends of Joe, beyond the *Post* and Secretary Simon, were to be found in the United States Senate. On the day following Simon's outburst, a bi-partisan coalition of Senators<sup>599</sup> served up the *coup de grâce*. Via a (nonbinding) resolution on the Senate floor, it directed the FCC to "expedite its decision" on Allbritton's waiver request.<sup>600</sup> In a speech urging passage of the resolution, bill co-sponsor Glenn Beall, Jr., [R-Md] was only slightly less antagonistic than his predecessors in censuring the FCC's

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<sup>598</sup> [Unnamed author], "FCC May Move Faster on *Washington Star* Hearings: Excerpts of Simon's Remarks to Reporters," *Editor and Publisher*, August 9, 1975:12.

<sup>599</sup> Co-sponsors of the bill, led by Glenn Beall, Jr. [R-Md], were William Brock [R-Tenn], Jennings Randolph [D-W.Va], and Wendell Ford [D-Ky]. Because Congress was scheduled to adjourn for summer recess that day and because one Senator spoke in opposition of the bill, a discussion and vote were postponed until after the recess—showing the Senate to be guilty of the same lethargy in its deliberations for which it was reproaching the FCC. See William Taaffe and Stephen M. Aug, "Senate Resolution Urges Fast FCC Action in *Star* Case," *Washington Star*, August 1, 1975: A1.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*

lassitude: “[I]t would be totally unconscionable if the newspaper were forced to stop its presses because an agency of the federal government couldn’t make a decision on the matter in a timely fashion.”<sup>601</sup>

Backed thus from all sides into a corner, the FCC, in an unprecedented maneuver,<sup>602</sup> rose up to defend its action publicly against the “unfair assessment” of its critics.<sup>603</sup> Claiming that the FCC had decided earlier, on its own recognizance, to expedite the hearing process, and conceding that Simon’s bellicose remarks had surfaced for discussion during Commission deliberations,<sup>604</sup> FCC spokesman Glenn O. Robinson argued that the Commissioners understood the grave implications of the *Star* case and were endeavoring only to act in good faith toward all parties:

[T]his, after all, is a contested proceeding . . . . [T]he regular and proper way to elicit facts is to rely on the pleadings of the parties in the first instance, and thereafter to make further inquiries ourselves. That is precisely what we have done . . . . The commissioners of this agency are accustomed to hearing prophecies of impending ruin from businessmen in all the industries we regulate . . . . Of course we listen to such pleas – sometimes they even turn out to be true – but we can hardly be faulted for wanting to satisfy ourselves in a particular case that there is a solid underpinning for them . . . . Whatever rumors are abroad to the contrary, we share the public’s concern for the health of the news media in the city of Washington . . . but we will not sacrifice the minimum elements of fairness just so we could proclaim to the public that – whatever we had not been – at least we had been swift.<sup>605</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Aug, “Unusual FCC Statement on Star Handling,” loc. cit. This *Star* piece reported that “not in recent memory” had the FCC engaged in any public rebuttal of criticism over a case that was still pending.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid. *The Guild Reporter*, the print organ of the Baltimore/Washington area newspaper employees’ union, made a similar assertion regarding Simon’s influence. One of its news stories reported an “FCC official” to acknowledge Mr. Simon’s criticism as having “made the commission realize that this is an unusually important case.” See [unnamed author], “Allbritton Says FCC Won’t Do In the *Star*,” *Guild Reporter*, August 8, 1975: 3.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

Perhaps because the FCC had at this point still not capitulated, Allbritton revised his course of action, launching two initiatives, one against the major stakeholders in Washington Star Communications—by and large, the triumvirate of original owning families—and another against the FCC. Allbritton first announced a new, revised purchase proposal to the media before word of it reached either the *Star*'s board or its stockholders.<sup>606</sup> Included in his offer was a rationale implying that his good faith efforts—which included having “placed four options before the *Star* board”<sup>607</sup>—had failed to produce an agreement on how best to save the *Star*, leaving him with one recourse for the good of the newspaper—to buy the corporation in its entirety.<sup>608</sup>

Prior to making this Offer, Perpetual<sup>609</sup> has explored with representatives of [Washington Star] Communications alternative means by which Perpetual might achieve control of Communications or arrange for or otherwise provide additional capital to the Newspaper Subsidiary. In the opinion of Perpetual, such discussions have not been fruitful. Perpetual believes that further discussions are not likely to be fruitful, and that the uncertainty and delay which would necessarily accompany such discussions

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<sup>606</sup> Stephen Klaidman, “Allbritton Offers \$28.5 Million for Star Holdings,” *Washington Post*, August 19, 1975: A7. Klaidman reported that, “the tender offer . . . came as a complete surprise to Star Communications directors and stockholders [and] appears to be a take-it-or-leave-it offer from Allbritton.” Having been queried about the new offer for the same article, Star board director John H. Kauffman declared he first heard of the proposal, “on the six o’clock news on WMAL as I was driving home . . . I didn’t care much for that . . . I don’t think that was the decent way to do it.” In a communiqué to shareholders urging that Allbritton’s offer be rejected, Star Director Godfrey Kauffman also bore witness to this affront: “The Tender Offer was made by letter dated August 18, 1975, without advance notice to your Board of Directors. In my letter to you of August 19, 1975, I recommended that you refrain from tendering your shares until members of your Board of Directors had an opportunity to analyze the Tender Offer.” See Godfrey Kauffman, [memorandum] “To the Shareholders of Washington Star Communications, Inc.,” August 21, 1975: 1, in Federal Communications Commission Docket 20559, National Archives, Record Group Entry 22 (UDWW), Account #86-0038, Box 46.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.* Klaidman reported this information to have been provided to the press by a nameless “source close to Allbritton.”

<sup>608</sup> The original purchase plan, to which both Allbritton and the *Star*'s owning families had agreed, gave Allbritton leave to acquire only a minority share in the corporation, amounting to 37 percent of the stock.

<sup>609</sup> Perpetual Corporation, Inc., a financial holding company wholly owned by the Allbritton family.

would be harmful to Perpetual's efforts to preserve and further revitalize the *Washington Star*.<sup>610</sup>

Allbritton's surprise tender offer—\$28.5 million for Washington Star Communications and all of its corporate assets—amounted to only \$1600 per share,<sup>611</sup> which placed the corporation's value at thirty percent below the level of his original (1974) bid.<sup>612</sup> The offer also required that a minimum of 80 percent of the corporation's stock be handed over to Allbritton, or his obligation to purchase the *Star* would be null and void.<sup>613</sup> Thus, for the thirty pieces of silver they would receive, the *Star*'s owning families had to agree to boot themselves completely out the door of their century-long family enterprise, and at a fire-sale price.

Initially, the corporate board rejected this offer. A coalition of nine of the board's twelve directors, who together controlled 52 percent of the stock, stonewalled the negotiation, claiming that some of Allbritton's conditions were impossible to meet.<sup>614</sup> In the end, however, Allbritton prevailed. The nine directors capitulated, and Star Communications

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<sup>610</sup> Joe L. Allbritton, "Offer to Purchase 17,846 Shares of Stock of Washington Star Communications, Inc.," August 18, 1975: 6. See Federal Communications Commission Docket 20559, National Archives, Record Group Entry 22 (UDWW), Account #86-0038, Box 46.

<sup>611</sup> Joe L. Allbritton, "Offer to Purchase," op. cit.: 1.

<sup>612</sup> In 1974 Allbritton had promised to pay \$2300 per share to acquire 37 percent of the company. See John Morton, "Saving the *Star*," op. cit.: 166.

<sup>613</sup> Joe L. Allbritton, "Offer to Purchase," loc. cit.

<sup>614</sup> Godfrey Kauffman, memorandum, "To Shareholders," op. cit.: 2. Allbritton's primary condition, permission by the FCC to delay execution of its media ownership rule by at least five years, was beyond the authority of the *Star*'s Board of Directors. See also [unnamed author], "Allbritton's Stock Offer Rejected by *Star* Directors," *Editor and Publisher*, August 30, 1975: 12. According to the *Editor and Publisher* report, the directors made a counter offer, attempting instead to sell Allbritton only the *Star* and two of the corporation's three out-of-region broadcast facilities. Allbritton declined.

stockholders accepted his offer “almost unanimously.”<sup>615</sup> In September, the deal was closed.<sup>616</sup>

Having brought the board to heel, Allbritton then made an offer to the FCC that, given its newly uncertain status in the public eye, it could not—or dared not—refuse. His revised application for transfer of the corporation, provided to the Commission on September 23,<sup>617</sup> included an appeal for a temporary stay of execution of the media cross-ownership rules, rather than the previously requested permanent waiver. He submitted two provisional waiver options, for durations of either two or three years. As he affirmed in the waiver petition, these options would allow him sufficient time to bring financial stability to the *Star* and, when their profits were no longer necessary to the *Star*’s operations, to liquidate the broadcast properties:

If the Amendment is accepted and the Commission grants its consent to the transfer of control of WSCI [Washington Star Communications, Inc.], Perpetual will obtain *de jure* control of WSCI and hence control of its broadcast station licensees which are wholly-owned subsidiaries of WSCI. Thereafter Perpetual will cause WSCI to comply fully with the Commission’s multiple ownership rules by promptly disposing of broadcast stations in Lynchburg, Virginia and Washington, D.C . . . [A]cceptance of the Amendment and grant of Commission to consent to the transfer . . . will permit Perpetual . . . to initiate a program of divestiture (thereby eliminating common ownership of media in Lynchburg and Washington, D.C.), secure interim financing utilizing the credit of WSCI, and otherwise undertake the financial rehabilitation of the *Star*.<sup>618</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> Stephen Klaidman, “Allbritton Wins Plea to FCC on Star Ownership,” *Washington Post*, January 22, 1976: C2. Klaidman reported that additional, undisclosed negotiations took place between Allbritton and the owners before reaching accord, and the amended purchase proposal shows that the directors did win a concession from Allbritton to accept a three-year delay, rather than five, on discharge of the cross-ownership rule. The essentials of the final agreement, however, including the price per share, remained firm. Both the original and amended purchase proposals, can be found in their entirety in Federal Communications Commission Docket 20559, National Archives, Record Group Entry 22 (UDWW), Account #86-0038, Box 46.

<sup>616</sup> The Federal Communications Commission was in receipt of the purchase proposal on September 3, 1975.

<sup>617</sup> Stephen M. Aug, “FCC Approves Allbritton’s Purchase of Star Properties,” *Washington Star*, December 18, 1975: A1.

<sup>618</sup> Howard Roycroft and Theodore Pierson, “Before the Federal Communications Commission: Petition for Waiver of Certain Procedural Rules,” September 23, 1975: 3-4 *passim*, in Federal Communications Commission

He also asked that appeals by opponents to the sale be nullified, and, if the FCC were to opt for a divestiture delay of two years rather than three, that federal income tax on the sale of the broadcast properties be deferred.<sup>619</sup> Formalizing its decision in January 1976,<sup>620</sup> the FCC, choosing the three-year option and disallowing tax relief, acceded to Allbritton's terms.<sup>621</sup>

With the purchase negotiations concluded, Allbritton now enjoyed complete and unimpeded control of Washington Star Communications. Having acquired 100 percent of the corporate shares, he was free to pursue his own purpose *vis-à-vis* the newspaper, without having to answer either to a board comprised of *Star* loyalists or to a single investor.

The mystery of Allbritton's purpose remained: Why would this multi-millionaire investor go to such great lengths to buy a newspaper that, in his own words, would "never be a significant property economically"?<sup>622</sup> Newspaper analyst John Morton raised this very issue in his assessment, for *The Washingtonian*, of the Allbritton takeover:

Why would Joe Allbritton, financial genius, who apparently had a talent for making big money in everything from real estate to funeral homes, want to invest in a money-losing operation like the *Star*? Assuming he can turn it around, he probably never will make more from his investment at the *Star* than he could receive simply by investing in certificates of deposit and never lifting a finger or risking a penny.<sup>623</sup>

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Docket 20559, File Nos. BTC-7600, 7601, 7602, National Archives, Record Group Entry 22 (UDWW), Account #86-0038, Box 46.

<sup>619</sup> John Morton, "Saving the Star," op. cit.: 166.

<sup>620</sup> Stephen Klaidman, "Allbritton Wins Plea to FCC on Star Ownership," *Washington Post*, January 22, 1976: C2. Klaidman reports that preliminary approval was given on December 17, with the final ruling made public January 21.

<sup>621</sup> The vote was 6 to 1, with Commissioner Glenn O. Robinson the sole dissenter. See Stephen M. Aug, "FCC Approves Allbritton's Purchase," loc. cit.

<sup>622</sup> Stephen Klaidman, "A Financial Wizard," loc. cit.

<sup>623</sup> John Morton, "Saving the *Star*," loc. cit.

Straining to answer his own question, Morton, although at first paying it lip service, to a large extent discredited the supposition that Allbritton might have bought the *Star* solely for material gain. Implausibly, he favored instead the notion that the acquisition of the *Star* appealed not only to Allbritton's greater virtues, but also to an unmet psychological need to linger at the seat of universal power, symbolized by the city of Washington:

Allbritton has said that at base he invested in the *Star* because he expects to make money with it. He said he accepts that the return on his investment will be eventual rather than immediate and that his risk is high, but that he "never works for money per se . . . I have always worked to achieve a goal. If I make the *Star* profitable, I will have achieved a goal."

This explains part of his motivation, no doubt, but it is easy to guess that there is more at work here, something that touches on Joe Allbritton's pride and stature and station in life and social philosophy and age and countless other facets of his makeup. He was a millionaire at 33 (he's now 50) and has numerous financial and civic achievements to be satisfied with [sic] in his home state of Texas. In a sense, the *Star* is a new challenge, but in a different and much more exciting arena than he has been used to— Washington, with its famous politicians and statesmen, its giddy social life, its power over economic interests from Houston to Peking, the eye of national and international events, with Joe Allbritton in the center of it all, immediately famous and powerful and a hero in his role as saviour of the *Star*. Whatever one may think of Allbritton's chances for success with the *Star*, it's impossible not to be thankful that he's here and willing to risk a lot of his money."<sup>624</sup>

Having failed, perhaps, to comprehend the lengths to which Allbritton might go to fulfill his pecuniary ambitions, Morton's assertion that the financier's interest in the newspaper was more altruistic than financial would prove to be decidedly off the mark. To be sure, Morton's conclusion may have been bolstered by Allbritton's public avowals to have purchased the *Star* as a public service, because, as an entrepreneur, Allbritton had said he saw "a compelling need for two newspapers in the nation's capital."<sup>625</sup> Allbritton was also

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<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> Stephen Klaidman, "A Financial Wizard," loc. cit. Klaidman reported Allbritton, the investment banker, to have used the following entrepreneurial analogy when queried about his interest in maintaining competitive

reported to have been “adamant about his commitment to the newspaper, which he insist[ed] [was] more than financial.”<sup>626</sup>

On the public record, Allbritton declared his intent to preserve ownership of the *Star* solely for the public good. In order to convince a dubious FCC, having presciently questioned his longterm commitment to the newspaper,<sup>627</sup> he devoted an entire chapter of his FCC pleading to “Public Interest Goals,”<sup>628</sup> wherein he laid out his extensive and ostensibly altruistic aims:

It is doubtful that anyone in Washington wants to witness the collapse of the 123-year-old *Star*, leaving the Nation’s capital with only one daily newspaper as the single dominant voice of local print media . . . . The present proposal will solve the financial crisis immediately confronting the *Star*, while achieving total compliance with the multiple ownership rules in a very short period of time. We respectfully submit that it is the best and only practical way now remaining to adequately realize these vital public interest objectives . . . . It is believed that the recent widely publicized uncertainties about the newspaper’s future—which under the circumstances were unavoidable—combined with doubts about whether Mr. Allbritton will ultimately be permitted to secure control, have contributed to a growing recent decline in advertisers’ confidence in the survival of the paper . . . .

By taking prompt and definitive action on the pending applications in the manner herein proposed, the Commission can fully resolve the uncertainties presently affecting the *Star*. But if it is not possible for Perpetual to secure control of WSCI, and provide additional financial support to the newspaper through application of proceeds from sales of broadcast properties, interim financing, or longer term financing secured by assets of WSCI, there exists a grave probability that no other satisfactory way of resolving the *Star*’s

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journalism in Washington: “Sure I’d like to be the only bank in Houston, but it wouldn’t be good for Houston and it probably wouldn’t be good for me.”

<sup>626</sup> Ibid.

<sup>627</sup> Howard Roycroft and Theodore Pierson, “Before the Federal Communications Commission: Petition for Leave to Amend and for Emergency Relief,” September 23, 1975: 11. See Federal Communications Commission Docket 20559, File Nos. BTC-7600, 7601 and 7602, National Archives, Record Group Entry 22 (UDWW), Account #86-0038, Box 46. The petition makes reference to a Commission comment that Perpetual had not “explicitly committed itself . . . to the continued publication of the *Star-News* [the *Star*] following approval of the requested [unconditional] waiver.”

<sup>628</sup> Howard Roycroft and Theodore Pierson, “Before the Federal Communications Commission: Petition for Leave to Amend and for Emergency Relief,” op. cit.: Chapter III, 9-12.

current severe financial difficulties will be found. In that event, and if publication is discontinued, the largest newspaper in Washington, D.C., commonly-owned with a dominant television station and an AM radio station, will become the *only* local daily newspaper voice in the Nation's capital. That outcome would brutally frustrate the Commission's concept of deconcentration of local media of mass communications . . . .

We believe that the instant proposal should fully satisfy the Commission's concern about the firmness and good faith of Perpetual's commitment to devote its best efforts to saving the *Star*. In addition to its existing \$5,212,2387 investment in WSCI, Perpetual will invest an additional \$29,000,000 to complete the purchase of the WSCI stock. It would be arbitrary to construe this substantial commitment as anything other than what it is – a genuine effort by Perpetual to save the *Star*.<sup>629</sup>

In an interview he gave for the *Star* shortly after the sale negotiations were complete, Allbritton affirmed his ambition to “put the *Star* in the black within a year,”<sup>630</sup> the point at which profits from the broadcast holdings would no longer be required to sustain the *Star*. Allbritton made good on his promise and, in one year's time, the *Star*'s prospects indeed began to improve.<sup>631</sup> The upward climb in the newspaper's fiscal condition provided Allbritton with sufficient ammunition to go knocking immediately at the door of Time, Inc., to propose a sale. Belying his own words, he offered to sell to Time, not the broadcast companies—as he had one year earlier led the world to believe—but the capital's beloved

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<sup>629</sup> Howard Roycroft and Theodore Pierson, “Before the Federal Communications Commission: Petition for Leave to Amend and for Emergency Relief,” op. cit.: 9-12 *passim*. In addition, a footnote to the Petition's narrative on the required divestiture of other media properties reiterates not only Allbritton's explicit affirmation of commitment to the *Star*, but also the FCC's stipulation under which he might keep WMAL-TV: “There is every intention to retain the newspaper. Under the rules, one broadcast outlet in Washington (TV or AM-FM) could be retained if for any reason the newspaper were not owned by WSCI.” (See Chapter V, “The Divestiture Period”: 14.) In the fullness of time, he undertook the latter action, to wit, retaining the television station, which, to date, his holding company still owns, and divesting himself of the *Star*.

<sup>630</sup> See [Edwin Yoder], “Q and A: Allbritton's View of *Star* and Future,” *Washington Star*, September 7, 1975: 1; and John Morton, “Saving the *Star*,” op. cit.: 108.

<sup>631</sup> The Audit Bureau of Circulations, at the end of March 1976, posted circulation gains for the *Star* of 20,000 readers, and Media Records, for the same period, posted an advertising lineage increase of 22 percent. In January 1977, the *Star* ran an advertisement in *Washingtonian* boasting that it led “the nation in circulation gains,” and “had the second highest advertising lineage gains in the country.” See I. William Hill, “*Washington Star* Reports Gains in Circulation, Ads,” *Editor and Publisher*, May 8, 1976: 37; and *Washingtonian*, XIII/4 (January 1977): 161.

*Washington Star*.<sup>632</sup> In the next, waning phase of the *Star* saga, the newspaper's energies would be consumed by Allbritton's full-court press to make it sufficiently profitable to sell. The consequences of his machinations in pursuit of a marketable bottom line would, for the *Star*'s brave and devoted staff, be grave. For its already sagging music department and embattled chief music critic, they would be lethal.

### **Full-Court Press**

Allbritton agreed to be interviewed by the *Star* for the record on only one occasion<sup>633</sup> during his three-year tenure there, in September 1975, immediately after he and the *Star*'s owning families had at long last come to terms on the newspaper's destiny. Although entitled "Allbritton's View of *Star* And Future,"<sup>634</sup> the piece, a Sunday "Question and Answer" profile written by *Star* editorial page editor Edwin R. Yoder, Jr., was actually a carefully crafted

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<sup>632</sup> [Unnamed author], "Capital Buy: Time Inc. Acquires the *Star*," *Time*, III/7, February 13, 1978: 59. *Time* reported that "[t]he sale . . . was first proposed a year ago by Allbritton to Time Inc.," placing Allbritton's initial contact with Time early in 1977. Allbritton claimed that the sale negotiations were initiated by Time, Inc., and, improbably, "in progress for only about a week" before coming to an agreement, reached in February 1978. See [unnamed author], "Allbritton: Time Inc. to Give *Star* the Strength It Needs," *Washington Star*, February 4, 1978: A2.

<sup>633</sup> Although his business intrigues kept him ubiquitously in the public eye, Allbritton aspired to a low public profile and developed over the decades a reputation for "relish[ing] his privacy and giv[ing] few interviews." (See Kathleen Day, "Allbritton Resigns as Riggs CEO," *Washington Post*, February 15, 2001: A1.) His standard response for news items concerning his business dealings was either a written communiqué or no comment. Information about him was of necessity more frequently gleaned from unnamed sources or ostensibly informed associates. (See, for example, Stephen Aug, "Hearings Ordered," loc. cit.; Stephen Klaidman, "Allbritton Offers \$28.5 Million," loc. cit.; Martin Arnold, "Corporate Rift Is Reported In Ownership of Star Co.," loc. cit.; and [unnamed author], "Allbritton's [sic] Name Is Back On The *Washington Star* But as Chairman Now," *New York Times*, February 20, 1977: n.p.) In 1974, when his limited investment proposal was still in negotiation, he had agreed to sit for a *Star* interview with reporter Fred Barnes. After the piece was completed, however, Allbritton killed it, maintaining that he "had said some things that were sharply critical of . . . the featherbedding practices of the Kauffmann-Noyes management," and because he was "essentially a private person who was unused to publicity." (See Stephen Klaidman, "Financial Wizard," loc. cit.) Ironically, and perhaps because it was to his advantage *vis-à-vis* the FCC's deliberations, Allbritton allowed the *Post* to scoop the *Star* for his first public introduction to Washingtonians. See Stephen Klaidman, "Financial Wizard," and "Meteoric Rise," loc. cit.

<sup>634</sup> The piece was printed in the *Star* September 7, 1975, on the A Section's front page.

stump speech that, with Yoder pitching soft-ball questions,<sup>635</sup> permitted the new owner-publisher to tell the *Star*'s assorted constituencies what they wished—or needed—to hear from him.

Perhaps for the FCC and assorted (potential) creditors,<sup>636</sup> Allbritton reiterated his bold intent to put the *Star*'s finances in the black within one year<sup>637</sup> with a plan that was prolix, redundant—and vague:

To turn this publication into a profitable venture, we must analyze all of our expenses and make sure that each expense is appropriate and essential. In any business that's gone on for a hundred years . . . you find there is a buildup of barnacles of unnecessary and unwarranted expenditure that slow the vessel down to the point where it eventually goes backwards. We've got the ship out of the water, and we're going to clean off the barnacles and put it back a seagoing vessel. Each department and each expenditure is being reviewed. We must pay what the marketplace requires for the services rendered to this publication, and the goods we purchase. We must not pay more than the marketplace requires us to pay. The other part of making the *Star* profitable is to look at expenses. Remember, when you are losing money, you can never cut costs too deeply. You'd be absolutely amazed, when you analyze a business of this size, how many things you could truly do without in putting out a better product or distributing it more efficiently. So cutting costs intelligently will be our first step."<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>635</sup> Ibid. Yoder's interview included such less-than-hard-hitting interrogatives as: "You said in one of your press conferences that you'd like to have the paper in the black within a year. Could you give a brief outline of your strategy for putting the *Star* in the black?"; "It's obvious that you very strongly believe that Washington needs competitive journalism and that this is a primary motivation for you. How would you sum up the need for competitive journalism?"; "You came to the *Star* with the reputation of a man who has had a special skill at managing and turning around various enterprises in financial difficulty . . . [I]s there any job that stands out in your mind as a particular success?"; "What kind of curtailment in your other business activities . . . has been required by the attention you have been giving to the *Star* and its problems?"; and "You've said . . . that the economics of the situation have not necessarily been the primary appeal, and you could have found investments elsewhere. What was it that kept your patience intact?"

<sup>636</sup> For further information on Allbritton's (and the *Star*'s) creditors, see *subter*: 192-193.

<sup>637</sup> See *supra*: 180.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid. Allbritton implied here that the newspaper's expenditures were variable. In his *Washingtonian* article, "Saving the *Star*," on the subject of the *Star*'s financial constraints, John Morton, who was at-the-time a Wall Street newspaper analyst (with John Muir & Sons), contradicted Allbritton directly: "But the problem with saving money at a newspaper is that so many of the major costs are relatively inflexible. Newsprint represented 20 percent of the *Star*'s costs last year, and the *Star* and other papers probably will face a price rise from the current \$260 a ton to \$285 a ton early in 1976, with perhaps a second increase coming along later in the year. Most of the early 1976 increase will add about \$1 million to the *Star*'s operating expenses next year. Labor costs accounted

For the benefit of those members of the community who might still be dubious of his motives, he waxed altruistic and, in a response that fleetingly echoed one he had given to the *Post* in its February profile piece on him,<sup>639</sup> laid claim to a history of devotion to noble purpose:

I've never in my life worked just for money. I've always worked to meet the challenge of the job, and the money has always been there. A lot of the jobs I've worked very hard at never had any money in them to start with, like chairing the Baylor University College of Medicine. I was at one time giving that 12 and 14 hours a day. I never stopped to think how I was going to make any money out of it because it was not a money matter. The challenge is important. If I meet the challenge, and can entice my colleagues here at the *Star* to meet the challenge and to do the things we ought to be doing as a responsible publication in Washington, the money will be there.<sup>640</sup>

For the ordinary city dwellers of Washington, who constituted his local readership, he still pledged that the *Star* would be tailored to meet their unique and important needs:

There is the city of the government, the elected government. It comes and goes and it is important. It's of the city but it's not the city. There is a second city which is that city because we are the most important nation in the world which sends its emissaries to make sure that they are recognized by the most powerful nation of the world. Then there is the city of Washington and its environs. These are the people who work here every day, who go to grocery stores, who operate the shops, who run the department stores, who operate the businesses here – the people who have been here for generations like the distinguished families that have owned this newspaper for years. That's another city too. It's basically that third city that our newspaper should and must appeal to.<sup>641</sup>

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for 53 percent of the *Star's* total expenses last year." Allbritton could not have been ignorant of this financial reality. As his actions later demonstrated, the barnacles to which he referred in this response would prove to be the *Star's* staff. See John Morton, "Saving the *Star*," loc. cit.

<sup>639</sup> Stephen Klaidman, "Financial Wizard," loc. cit. Allbritton's remarks on the same subject for the *Post* article were: "[T]hree years from now my ambition to save the *Star* will have to be weighed against the economic interests involved. I know that if I turn the *Star* around it will be worth the money . . . and the money will be there . . . . But . . . it will never be a really significant property economically."

<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid.

Allbritton's final soliloquy was a rose-colored and largely fantasmagorical vision of a *Star* yet to come whose reach would extend to an ill-defined readership existing far beyond the D.C. city environs to the distant suburbs and even nationwide. He failed to explain, however, how a newspaper mandated to serve Washington's "third city" of local residents would attract so geographically far-flung a subscribership—and Yoder failed to ask:<sup>642</sup>

I foresee that there will be people who will be interested in a copy of the *Star* to read on the way home when they don't have the responsibility of driving. It's a very constructive way to add to their life and enjoyment. We can expand our readership by going to where many people are, in the suburbs. I can see that expanding our readership within reason to these areas is essential and important and a good service. I can see an unlimited field to have our publication appeal to people. I could envision that eventually there will be people across the nation, not in large numbers, but responsible people who would be interested in subscribing to the *Star* because of our originality in investigating and reporting happenings that aren't available in their own local, hometown newspapers or from the wire services. As our slogan says, "Get it straight from the *Star*." I can see a growing subscription list of people who are interested in these happenings and subscribing to the *Star*.<sup>643</sup>

Allbritton may have believed that his declared objective regarding the *Star*'s fortunes would resonate with Washington's newspaper-buying public, at least temporarily, but he could have had no such illusions about the *Star*'s employees. They were unionized and, therefore, hardly aligned with his pecuniary ambitions, professed or otherwise. Allbritton's aversion to organized labor would, in the ensuing months, become ever more apparent, and during his "Q and A" interview with Yoder, he let slip a clue to his intentions that should have placed the *Star*'s unions immediately on the alert:

Q[uestion]: Most of our readers are well aware of the *Star*'s problems. You said in one of your press conferences that you'd like to have the paper in

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<sup>642</sup> Ibid. Yoder's one question on this subject, which included in the last sentence a deft prompt for Allbritton, was: "Looking down the road a bit to the future of Washington as a community, what changes do you foresee in the lifestyles or the patterns of the city of Washington which themselves might have an impact on the fortunes of the *Star*? For example, the development of a commuter subway which conceivably could develop new afternoon reading habits in the Washington public?"

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

the black within the year. Could you give a brief outline of your strategy for putting the *Star* in the black?

A[nswer]: To turn any business around and take it from a losing posture to a profitable posture, you have to analyze some basics first. Can you make a profit in the newspaper business? Usually, if you are in a competitive market with union labor and no other consolidatable [sic] sources of income you cannot make a profit. But the newspaper business in these circumstances can be profitable.<sup>644</sup>

That Allbritton and the *Star*'s unionized staff would mix in the manner of oil with water had become apparent much earlier, in September 1974, when he and the owning families were still negotiating his initial, limited-investment purchase proposal. As the *Post* reported, Allbritton, after learning that he had been left out of the loop during a labor negotiation, made an abrupt and inexplicable exit from talks, only to return, equally mysteriously, to the table. Neither Allbritton nor the *Post* offered a plausible explanation for his odd behavior, but it would prove to be a portent of events to come:

Another incident that took place during the negotiations came close to killing the deal altogether. Allbritton had been promised that he would be kept abreast of all labor negotiations during his own talks with The [then] *Star-News*, but nonetheless the old *Star* management signed a far-reaching and costly [according to Klaidman] contract with the printers' union without telling Allbritton.

When he learned about it he withdrew from negotiations, but let it [be] known that he would be in town for a couple of weeks. At that point *Star* columnist Mary McGrory, who was a firm believer that The *Star* needed both Allbritton and his money, sent him a note saying, "Say it ain't so, Joe." Allbritton, having decided to resume contract talks, sent Miss McGrory three dozen yellow roses with a note that said, "It ain't so. Joe." Shortly thereafter the deal was completed."<sup>645</sup>

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<sup>644</sup> Ibid.

<sup>645</sup> Stephen Klaidman, "A Financial Wizard," loc. cit.

Allbritton may have had good cause for concern. Labor unions constituted a powerful force in the operation of capital-area newspapers,<sup>646</sup> and at the *Star* they had held the upper hand for decades. The *Star*, in fact, was the first newspaper in the nation's capital to be laid low by a union walkout.<sup>647</sup> Occurring in December 1958, this first strike was a watershed in labor/management relations at the *Star*, because it established the balance of power between the two factions, with labor successfully maneuvering itself, by both hook and crook, into primacy.

Posterity has recorded two versions of the event. The first one publicized as breaking news what the strikers had hoped to dupe the *Star*'s management and its readers into believing: Because the differences between labor and management had become hopelessly contentious, the employees on the picket line in desperation lost control and turned violent, threatening the newspaper's very existence.<sup>648</sup>

The rowdy melée, described by the *Post*, may not have been all it seemed. Reminiscing forty years after the fact, longstanding Washington-area newspaper journalist Jeremiah O'Leary offered another side to the story, *vis.*, that the outsized and comical donnybrook occurring on that fateful day had been staged for dramatic effect by a few mischievous co-conspirators. As O'Leary tells the tale, four union sympathizers, including a *Post* reporter, fell on one another in a mock brawl to suggest to the court

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<sup>646</sup> John Morton declared Washington's newspaper unions to be "notorious as the second toughest in the newspaper industry, behind only New York's." See Morton, "Saving the *Star*," *op. cit.*: 169.

<sup>647</sup> [Unnamed author], Editorial, "Violence at the *Star*," *Washington Post*, December 6, 1958: n.p.

<sup>648</sup> The *Washington Post* dutifully reported, as front-page news, all of the shocking details. See [unnamed author], "Court Bars 'Violence' In Guild Strike at *Star*," *Washington Post and Times Herald*," December 6, 1958: A1.

overseeing the strike that the lives of employees, who were obliged by law to cross the picket line, were in peril.<sup>649</sup>

The unions, including those early agitators in the *Star*'s first strike, remained a potent force within the company, in large part, since the owners were as invested in the newspaper and its survival as were the employees. Because the *Star* was a family legacy, the owners' wish for it to continue into perpetuity had been a reason for them to negotiate an investment agreement with Allbritton in the first place, to save the family business. Whatever their failings, the *Star*'s owners wanted the newspaper to survive and thrive, and they had believed that Allbritton would help them to do that.

Harboring no such protective sentiments about the *Star*, Allbritton played on this familial vulnerability in June 1975 when he found himself at odds with the Star Company's Board of Directors over the need for a sizable loan to stanch the drain of capital from the newspaper's hemorrhaging coffers. When discussions between the two factions stalemated, a rumor was leaked, anonymously, to the *New York Times* accusing the owning families of attempting to shut down the *Star* permanently. The piece was based solely on information gleaned from sources, likewise anonymous, entirely sympathetic to Allbritton's position, and Allbritton's hand-picked editor James Bellows decided to publish a same-day reprint of the *Times* piece in the *Star* without notifying the *Star*'s Board.<sup>650</sup> Whether Allbritton personally authorized the leak remains unknown, but the incident worked entirely to his advantage, painting him as the hero and the owners as villains:

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<sup>649</sup> Jeremiah O'Leary, "O'Leary's Washington: Newsmen Made Good Actors on the Picket Line," *Washington Times*, December 18, 1989: B1.

<sup>650</sup> Stephen J. Lynton, "Former *Star* Editor Denies Closedown Effort Under Way," *Washington Post*, June 29, 1975: B1. According to Lynton, Bellows freely admitted making no attempt, prior to the story's publication, to confirm independently the veracity of the accusations.

A struggle is under way within the *Washington Star* between the paper's new publisher, who is fighting to save it, and its controlling company directors, who apparently want to close it. On one side is Joe L. Allbritton, a Texas millionaire who is the publisher, and on the other are the families who operated the *Star* for more than a century. One person involved said the fight had reached the "crucial and critical" stage.

It is a corporate struggle over money. What is involved, it was learned in interviews here, is the newspaper's ability to borrow the large sums it needs to survive and become viable.

Sources close to the situation say that without such loans the paper will be forced to close, throwing hundreds of persons out of work and leaving the nation's capital with only one journalistic voice and viewpoint—those of the *Washington Post*.<sup>651</sup>

The *Star*'s board reacted with outrage to these perceived libelous allegations.

Newbold Noyes, formerly the *Star*'s executive editor,<sup>652</sup> responded with a civil, but sharply worded letter to the editor, which Bellows obligingly printed in the *Star* the following day. In it, Noyes exculpated the owning families, making clear that their sole purpose had always been to save the *Star*, not destroy it. Throughout his disquisition, however, Noyes was careful not to cast aspersions directly at Allbritton, perhaps because no smoking gun was to be found indisputably in the new publisher's hands, or because Allbritton was still keeper of the *Star*'s golden egg. In so doing, Noyes, generously and for the good of the *Star*, left open the door for reconciliation:

The *New York Times* story which ran on the front page of yesterday's *Star*, suggesting that members of the Noyes, Kauffmann and Adams families . . . are trying to close the newspaper, is grossly false and unfair.

On the contrary, the effort of all members of the boards, old and new, is and always has been to save the paper. It was in such a spirit, when it became clear that this effort was beyond the financial capacity of the original owning families alone, that Joe Allbritton was brought into the picture. Since his arrival on the scene, the rejuvenation and strengthening of the newspaper has proceeded, with strong prospects of eventual success. The families . . . are

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<sup>651</sup> Martin Arnold, "Corporate Rift Is Reported In Ownership of Star Co.," loc. cit., reprinted from *New York Times*, "Corporate Struggle Over Its Ability to Borrow Money May Force The *Washington Star* to Close," June 28, 1975: A24.

<sup>652</sup> Noyes had served as executive editor of the *Star* for 11 years, from 1963 to December 1974.

betting what for them is a great deal of money that, under Mr. Allbritton's direction, the *Star* will survive and prosper as a great newspaper, and as an important part of the Washington community.

[I]t would be a sad misreading of the situation to suppose that I and my associates on the board could contemplate with equanimity the death of an institution to which we, like previous generations of these families, have devoted our lives.<sup>653</sup>

This episode is ironic, because threatening to skuttle the *Star* would become Allbritton's trademark tactic in his offensive against the newspaper's personnel and the unions that served them. Despite Allbritton's public pledges of allegiance to the *Star* and its rejuvenation, when Yoder, in his "Q and A"—and to his credit—asked the new owner point-blank how long he was willing to honor his commitment to the newspaper, Allbritton dodged the question, in response offering cash, not time. In the doing, he refrained from identifying explicitly how much or from whose coffers said capital would come. Apparently satisfied with Allbritton's antipodal answer, Yoder interrogated him on the subject no further:

Q[uestion](Yoder): I may as well get to the question which you insist is purely hypothetical: How long are you prepared to stick with the attempt to save the *Star* as an institution? What are the milestones you are going to be looking for in the coming months?

A[nswer] (Allbritton): I am prepared to invest heavily in the continuation of the *Star*. I don't think it would be proper however, to spell out the exact amount but let me assure you that I am prepared to see that substantial, additional sums are available to this paper, giving it every opportunity to return to profitability. I deeply believe that it will and can do so.<sup>654</sup>

That Allbritton would brook no dissent from the *Star*'s labor unions became apparent shortly after he acquired operational control of the newspaper as its publisher. In December 1974, Allbritton and his newly hired management team issued to the *Star*'s Newspaper Guild

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<sup>653</sup> Newbold Noyes, Letter to the Editor, "Families' Reply to *Star* Story," *Washington Star*, June 29, 1975: B2.

<sup>654</sup> Edwin Yoder, Jr., "Allbritton's View of *Star* and Future," loc. cit.

workers<sup>655</sup> an ultimatum—the first of several—demanding layoffs of twenty percent of its staff.<sup>656</sup> By disclosing to the union leadership, preemptively, that he had the wherewithal to nullify his purchase agreement with the *Star*'s owning families if these expectations went unmet, he effectively blocked any possibility for negotiation.<sup>657</sup> In short, if the unions did not acquiesce to terms, Allbritton could walk away from the *Star* without a backward glance, leaving the paper, without the support of his financing, to fold.<sup>658</sup>

With its back against the wall, the union, creatively, made a counter-proposal—the lesser of evils—that conceded to Allbritton the financial savings he required, but by an alternative means, *vis.*, a twenty-percent, across-the-board pay reduction, balanced by an equivalent cutback in the work week, from five days to four. Allbritton accepted this offer.<sup>659</sup>

Allbritton's ultimatum, a radical departure from the *Star*'s old way of doing business, came to the staff as a shock.<sup>660</sup> During its 100-years-long journey through Washington, D.C., history, the *Star*'s management had earned, deservedly, a reputation for good will and fair play

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<sup>655</sup> The Guild membership included editors, reporters and advertising staff.

<sup>656</sup> Twenty percent of the union membership at the *Star* amounted to 100 employees. See Stephen Green, "Few Layoffs, 4-Day Week Eyed at *Star*," *loc. cit.*

<sup>657</sup> *Ibid.* According to a source identified by Green only as a "senior reporter," the union leadership had been told that Allbritton's initial purchase agreement included "escape" clauses allowing the publisher to withdraw "if financial losses reached certain levels," and that those loss levels had been reached.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.* During negotiations, Allbritton was reported to have declared that he was "not about to lose his shirt on the *Star*."

<sup>659</sup> [Unnamed author], "Guild Votes 347 to 44 to Assist the *Star-News*," *Washington Star*, December 10, 1974: n.p., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.* An unidentified staff member was reported to have said, "it came as a bombshell." For Morton's *Washingtonian* article, "Saving the *Star*," James Polk, one of the *Star*'s Pulitzer Prize-winning reporters, remarked: "The four-day week came as a surprise to the staff. The Guild just suddenly presented us with an up or

toward its employees:<sup>661</sup> Secure positions,<sup>662</sup> competitive salaries and benefits.<sup>663</sup> For this heretofore well-tended group, the sudden and unprecedented pay cut, taking effect three days before Christmas, was calamitous. Livelihoods hung in the balance. For Allbritton, as the *New York Times* detailed in an article published several years after the fact, the escapade was no more serious than a lively game of poker:

A few years ago, when Joe L. Allbritton had just taken over the failing *Washington Star* and was trying to reach compromises with the unions to keep the paper alive, he let the newsprint dwindle to two days' supply. The implication was not lost on anyone. "People keep asking me if I really would have closed down when the newsprint ran out, or if I was just bluffing. Well, we were playing cards and nobody paid to see my hand. Only I knew what

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down vote, and a down vote was 100 lay-offs. We were given no other option." See John Morton, "Saving the *Star*," op. cit.: 169.

<sup>661</sup> Haynes Johnson, after 12 years at the *Star* remembered particularly its "family atmosphere where you liked the people and respected the editors." (See Joseph Goulden, "Has the Sun Set on the *Evening Star*," op. cit: 30.) Polk, who worked at the *Star* for three years, recalled it being "a hell of a newspaper [where] . . . I'd always had a lot of elbow room"; and *Star* science reporter Judith Randal who, along with Polk, left the newspaper shortly after the paycut was instituted, said: "In a way I'd been spoiled by the *Star* . . . I'd been able to cover just about anything I wanted to . . ." (See John Morton, "Saving the *Star*," op. cit.:170.) In his memoir, Jack Germond, former *Star* political columnist and editor, eulogized the newspaper for this virtue as well: "The *Star* was . . . a great place to work. There were many excellent editors and reporters on the staff. And, most important . . . there was an ethic I could appreciate. This was what newspaper people call a reporter's paper, meaning one that did more than give lip service to the proposition that the reporters' product was the heart and soul of the paper, to be treated with respect by editors . . . I had no idea of the politics of Newbold Noyes, the editor at the time I arrived . . . I knew him only as a man with the manner of a friendly patrician who wrote elegantly and performed wickedly funny skits of his own creation at the annual Gridiron Club dinner." (See Jack Germond, *Fat Man in a Middle Seat: Forty Years of Covering Politics*, [New York: Random House:1999]: 112.) The anecdote related by Jeremiah O'Leary as a final couplet to his essay on the *Star*'s first strike provides further illustration of the rapport between management and staff at the *Star* before Allbritton's arrival on the scene. The story, however, a *Star* legend, may not have occurred as O'Leary remembers it. As "The Most-Repeated Story," it led the list of reminiscences published by the *Washington Post* in tribute to its former and now defunct competitor, upon the *Star*'s demise in 1981: "And then there was the cold winter morning when Mike Mok, a talented young *Washington Star* reporter, went into the office of editor Newbold Noyes to demand a raise, pointing out that he didn't even have enough money to buy a topcoat. Noyes, a member of one of the families that owned the *Star*, noticed Mok was still wearing a summer cord suit and replied effusively, 'Well, Mike, I'll give you one of mine!' And Mok wore Noyes' old great-coat through the winter – without the raise." See George Wilson, "The Most-Repeated Story," in "Washington *Star* Memories," *Washington Post*, August 7, 1981: C1.

<sup>662</sup> See *supra* Chapter II: 83.

<sup>663</sup> John Morton, "Saving the *Star*," op. cit: 169. According to Morton, only six newspapers in the country offered higher salaries than the *Star*. Alas, one of those newspapers was the *Star*'s morning competitor, the *Washington Post*.

hand I held, and nobody knows what I really would have done. I've written it down in my diary," he added with a sly smile, "and they'll find out after I die."<sup>664</sup>

As the *Star*'s employees were soon to discover, any capital that Allbritton might (or might not<sup>665</sup>) advance from his own funds toward the newspaper's operation would come at a high price, in form of a *de facto* mortgage that, tacitly, the staff was expected to pay off—and with the unions' December 1974 concession serving merely as down payment. Allbritton moved to extract from *Star* employees a second installment a mere nine months later, in September 1975. Freed from any interference by the owning families, who on September 3 had formally relinquished all control of the Star Corporation, Allbritton moved preemptively to short-circuit pay increases looming on the horizon.<sup>666</sup> His initial proposal<sup>667</sup> was for a year-long moratorium on any and all raises, tempered with a concomitant release, for editorial employees, from the four-day work-week restriction.<sup>668</sup> Additionally, Allbritton made the

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<sup>664</sup> Deirdre Carmody, "Income Up for *Washington Star*, But Layoff Plans Lower Morale," *New York Times*, November 20, 1977: A34.

<sup>665</sup> Having once boasted that he "bought on terms and sold for cash," Allbritton had financed his acquisition of the *Star*, not from his own capital, but by means of a \$29 million loan from Chemical Bank of New York. His insistence in March 1976 that the *Star* staff concede time, money and jobs was reportedly rooted in his desire to bolster the newspaper's financial viability in advance of a loan, in the amount of \$7 million, that he was negotiating with Riggs Bank of Washington, D.C., and American Security and Trust Company. (See Stephen Klaidman, "Financial Wizard," *loc.cit.*; and Stephen Klaidman, "Layoffs at *Star*, Pay Freeze Set," *Washington Post*, April 9, 1976: C1.) The catalyst for Allbritton's June 1975 altercation with the then *Star* Corporation Board stemmed from his desire to secure loans of between \$12.5 and \$18 million, which he expected the Board to guarantee. They balked. (See *supra*: 187-188.) Shortly thereafter, he initiated proceedings to acquire, from the original owning families, the entire *Star* Corporation—lock, stock and barrel.

<sup>666</sup> Stephen Klaidman, "*Star* Workers Asked to Forego Pay Rise [sic]," *Washington Post*, September 20, 1975: D3. The typographers' contract, expiring not until 1979, stipulated a pay increase of \$28 per week, to take effect October 1. The remaining unions were scheduled to renegotiate their salaries before year's end.

<sup>667</sup> Because all but one of the unions—the typographers—were working under contracts in force through December, Allbritton's proposal was presented in the form of an unofficial letter to union leaders requesting the concessions. See [unnamed author], "Unions Told *Star* Wants 175 Laid Off," *Washington Post*, March 31, 1976: A20.

<sup>668</sup> *Ibid.*

astonishing request that the staff purchase shares in the company. To safeguard against employees asserting unwanted influence over *Star* policy decisions, he included in this quasi-involuntary<sup>669</sup> investment plan a special clause denying voting privileges to the stockholders.<sup>670</sup> If this deal with the devil were ratified, *Star* workers would serve up to Allbritton, in addition to the required salary cutbacks, both an added windfall of ready cash and a permanent and binding proxy.

Discussion of this proposal was tabled almost before it began,<sup>671</sup> eclipsed by a strike, in October, against the *Washington Post*,<sup>672</sup> wherein workers from nine unions walked off their jobs, all but closing the *Star*'s morning competitor for four months. The *Post*'s misfortune served to benefit the *Star*, sending its circulation and ad lineage figures skyward,<sup>673</sup> ironically giving Allbritton less leverage to pursue his questionable ends.

The outcome of the *Post* strike, having concluded in February 1976 with a decisive victory for management,<sup>674</sup> made possible an opening for Allbritton to lay his proposal back at

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<sup>669</sup> Ibid. Klaidman reported that "if a union accepted the stock proposal by a majority vote, all members of that union would be obliged to participate."

<sup>670</sup> Ibid.

<sup>671</sup> The *Star*'s typographers initially rejected Allbritton's proposal and received their contractually stipulated wage increase on schedule, in October. See [unnamed author], "Unions Told *Star* Wants 175 Laid Off," loc. cit.

<sup>672</sup> Ben A. Franklin, "*Washington Post* Is Shut By Pressroom Vandalism," *New York Times*, October 2, 1975: A24.

<sup>673</sup> [Unnamed author], "Lucky *Star*," *Time*, vol. 106, no. 22 (December 1, 1975): 52. According to *Time*, the *Star*, in October, reported a profit for the first time in five years.

<sup>674</sup> Ben A. Franklin, "Chastened Unions Lick Their Wounds as Last Holdouts in 20-Week *Washington Post* Strike Return to Work," *New York Times*, February 29, 1976: A39; and Ben A. Franklin, "STAR," *New York Times* News Service, April 9, 1976, typescript: np., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection. Franklin reports that the *Post* summarily "ousted its striking pressmen and replaced them with non-union workers." The strike had been launched by the *Post*'s pressmen who, on October 1, had torched their presses, in a largely unsuccessful effort to stop publication of the newspaper. The *Post* may have fired the pressmen in retaliation for this offense and for rejecting management's final contract proposal. According to *Newsweek*, the Baltimore-Washington Newspaper Guild was "in disarray" after the *Post* strike. This circumstance may, therefore, have left the union more vulnerable to Allbritton's machinations vis-à-vis the *Star*. See Edwin M. Yoder, Jr., *Telling*

the feet of the *Star*'s labor negotiators. At this point, after having been afforded months to rethink and refine his terms, and, perhaps, smelling fresh blood from the unions' defeat at the hands of the *Post*, Allbritton upped the ante.

Returning to the negotiation table in mid-March, Allbritton now demanded a much more sizable pound of flesh, including not only the wage freeze and stock purchase plan, but in excess of 200 layoffs as well.<sup>675</sup> Two weeks of grueling discussion, requiring the assistance of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service,<sup>676</sup> brought forth no agreement. His patience perhaps wearing thin, and surely mindful that in May the *Star*'s circulation and advertising reports<sup>677</sup> would be released, the contents of which might have compromised his bargaining position, Allbritton played his ace in the hole. Opening the newspaper's financial records to union leaders, he gave purported evidence<sup>678</sup> that the *Star* was in dismal economic

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*Others What to Think*, Louisiana State University Press (Baton Rouge, 2004): 127; and [unnamed author], "The *Post* Settlement," *Newsweek*, March 1, 1976: 54.

<sup>675</sup> Stephen Klaidman, "Layoffs at *Star*," loc. cit. Phillip Kadis, the *Star*'s Newspaper Guild unit chairman, estimated the body count to be 215 or 217 employees. With approximately 1700 workers on the *Star* payroll, this number amounted to nearly thirteen percent of the work force. Allbritton was determined, quite literally, to decimate the *Star*'s staff.

<sup>676</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>677</sup> In his position as publisher, Allbritton submitted circulation statistics to the Audit Bureau of Circulation semi-annually, and to Media Records, advertising lineage figures every quarter. Figures released in May were for the reporting period ending on March 31.

<sup>678</sup> Allbritton had played this card once before, having opened financial records to union negotiators in December 1974 as well, when he was also pressing for layoffs. In both cases, whether the books were cooked, or data giving a more positive picture withheld, is unknown, but it lies within the realm of possibility. As the largest stockholder and, until 2001, Chief Executive Officer for Riggs Bank of Washington, D.C., Allbritton and other Riggs bank officials were investigated for dubious accounting practices involving money-laundering. In May 2004, Federal banking regulators levelled the at-the-time largest fine in banking history—\$25 million—against Riggs for "failing to comply with money-laundering laws and for failing to report tens of millions of dollars of suspicious transactions" involving accounts being "scrutinized as possible conduits for terrorist funds." (See Timothy L. O'Brien, "Regulators Fine Riggs \$25 Million: Suspicious Activities Not Reported," *New York Times*, May 14, 2004: C1; Terence O'Hara, "Legal Woes Cut Into Bottom Line at Riggs: Embassy Banking Proves Costly," *Washington Post*, November 10, 2004: E01; and Terence O'Hara, "Riggs Uncovers Deep Ties to Pinochet: Internal Inquiry Finds Indications of Money Laundering," *Washington Post*, November 20, 2004: A01.) That the unions may have doubted the veracity of the *Star*'s records is borne out by their decision, during contract negotiations in 1977, to hire an independent accounting firm to audit the *Star*'s financial condition. They used the

straits. He then threatened to close the plant permanently were his conditions not met.<sup>679</sup> The unions capitulated.

A joint labor/management statement euphemistically described the resulting agreement as: “A collective effort unique in the Washington newspaper industry [to] . . . assure survival of the newspaper, a [sic] vigorous competitive daily journalism in the nation’s capital and of strong and healthy unionism in Washington newspaper publishing.”<sup>680</sup> As it was drawn, however, the agreement was hardly bilateral in nature, nor was it healthy for the unions. Allbritton won every bargaining point. The unions yielded to management over 200 jobs and accepted the freeze on wages. Allbritton conceded only his pledge, for the moment, to keep the plant open.<sup>681</sup>

The agreement, ratified in turn by all ten unions engaged in negotiation, was formalized on April 22.<sup>682</sup> During the first week of May,<sup>683</sup> the Audit Bureau of Circulation and Media Records,<sup>684</sup> released to the public the *Star*’s then current circulation and advertising figures, which Allbritton himself had submitted. Belying the unpromising financial picture that Allbritton had voluntarily presented to the unions to cement his ultimate victory, these

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analysis, which projected a profit within the year, to press, successfully, for concessions from Allbritton, namely, bonuses, to be paid to workers when the *Star* reached profitability. (See Lawrence Meyer, “Pressment at *Star* Approve Contract Without ’77 Raise,” *Washington Post*, March 8, 1977: C4.)

<sup>679</sup> Stephen Klaidman, “Layoffs at *Star*,” loc. cit., and Stephen Klaidman, “News Guild Votes 318 to 12 to Accept *Washington Star* Wage Freeze Plan,” *Washington Post*, April 10, 1976: B4.

<sup>680</sup> I. William Hill, “*Washington Star* Reports Gains in Circulation, Ads,” loc. cit.

<sup>681</sup> [Unnamed author], “Pressmen Accept Job Terms at *Star*,” *Washington Post*, April 23, 1976: B13. Whether the stock purchase requirement was included in the agreement remains unknown.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid. The printer’s union was the last to accept the terms, perhaps because, with 100 of their number scheduled for layoffs, they had the most to lose. They voted, in favor of the agreement, on April 22.

<sup>683</sup> I. William Hill, “*Washington Star* Reports Gains,” loc. cit.

<sup>684</sup> Media Records is an independent statistical measuring agency for media advertising.

data showed the *Star* to have had a banner year: In the six months ending March 31, circulation increased by 20,000 newspapers for the daily edition and 31,000 for the *Sunday Star*. The *Star*'s advertising revenue figures for the first quarter of 1976 proved equally impressive: A forty-six percent increase in classified linage and a fifteen percent increase in retail advertising linage.<sup>685</sup> This upward trend in the *Star*'s fortunes reportedly continued for the remainder of the year that the wage freeze and layoffs were imposed.<sup>686</sup> Allbritton had his cake and ate it.

### **Starve the Beast**

In January and February 1977, Allbritton and the *Star*'s unions were again back at the bargaining table, where Allbritton, throwing yet another curve ball, proposed, not to lift the moratorium on wage increases as might have been expected, but to extend it for another year. Perhaps wiser now to Allbritton's methods, the unions struck back, hiring an independent audit service to assess the *Star*'s financial condition. Concluding that the *Star* was fast approaching profitability,<sup>687</sup> the analysis gave negotiators the ammunition they needed to file a counter-proposal stipulating wages to increase incrementally within a three-year period: By \$10 per week immediately, \$15 per week in 1978, and \$25 per week in 1979.<sup>688</sup>

Labor's clever and aggressive stratagem—which perhaps too closely matched Allbritton's own—may have prompted the publisher's next move on the contract-negotiation

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<sup>685</sup> Ibid. Hill reported these statistics to have been calculated exclusive of any artificial or short-term uptick caused by the *Post*'s temporary, strike-related discomfitures.

<sup>686</sup> Print advertisement, "The *Washington Star* Leads the Nation in Circulation Gains," and "The *Star* Had the Second Highest Advertising Linage Gains in the Country," *Washingtonian*, XI/4 (January 1977): 161.

<sup>687</sup> Lawrence Meyer, "Pressmen at *Star* Approve Contract," loc. cit. Meyer reports the analysis to have projected the *Star* to roll into the black in January 1978.

<sup>688</sup> [Unnamed Author,] "Albritton's [sic] Name Is Back On The *Washington Star*," February 20, 1977, loc. cit.

chess board. On February 7, with discussions still unresolved, he removed his name, without warning, from the newspaper's masthead.<sup>689</sup> The *Star* was now, in title at least, inexplicably without benefit of publisher. Edwin R. Yoder, Jr., the *Star*'s then associate editor and, by his own account, one of Allbritton's loyal confidants at the newspaper,<sup>690</sup> recalls the incident in detail, but offers no plausible explanation for his superior's seemingly inscrutable behavior and even casts doubt on hypotheses that may well have had merit:

The most harrowing crisis, however, broke with little warning in February 1977. At 5:30 one Monday morning, Joe called the night desk from Los Angeles. He directed that his name be removed, immediately, from the *Star*'s masthead . . . .

In a *Washington Post* story . . . the usual shopworn rumors were rehearsed: Joe was preparing to sell the *Star* to the right-wing Michigan publisher John McGoff, who had tried to buy it earlier. Or he was trying to "frighten" the labor unions, with whom contracts were now being renegotiated . . . . Mary McGrory, who seemed to have inside information, was quoted saying that Joe wanted to make himself chairman of the board, not publisher, because he viewed his role as "financial."

When Joe returned from the West Coast, I gingerly suggested . . . that he finesse the rumors by making a joke of the masthead matter . . . . Joe did not act, but he sent word that if his name went back on the masthead it would be as "CEO," chief operating officer, a familiar title in banking and business but entirely strange to journalism. I suggested a memorandum . . . . A publisher, I suggested, works a bit like a constitutional monarch, with the right to be notified and to warn . . . . I sent it to Joe, but there was no answer, written or otherwise. Months later, I asked him one day whether it had been helpful. "Not very," he said.<sup>691</sup>

This episode, the latest in Allbritton's long-running game of brinkmanship with the *Star*, brought consternation to the staff. According to *The Washingtonian*'s disdainful characterization of the affair, the *Star* newsroom, in the absence of hard facts, was awash

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<sup>689</sup> Ibid.

<sup>690</sup> Edwin R. Yoder, Jr., *Telling Others What to Think*, op. cit.: 124-135 *passim*. describing his relationship to Allbritton as that of "priest and counselor, hand-holder and adviser, and even amateur confessor," Yoder claimed that he and Allbritton "liked and understood one another instantly, as Southerners in exile sometimes will."

<sup>691</sup> Edwin R. Yoder, Jr., *Telling Others What to Think*, op. cit.: 132-33.

in nail-biting speculation over the accumulating clues that Allbritton might have neither the *Star*'s nor the employees' best interests at heart:

Rumors of trouble in the Allbritton-Bellows Show began in earnest last February, when Allbritton, exercising the imperial prerogative of a publisher, phoned the newsroom in the middle of the night and lifted his name from the masthead.

Allbritton's name stayed off the masthead for several days as reporters and editors scampered madly about the building in search of some clue to what was happening. Was Allbritton still smarting—six months after the fact—from Bellows' refusal to run his pro-Gerald Ford editorial on page one of the paper? Was the Texan sore about a *Star* editorial on natural gas? Was he getting ready to unload the paper after all? . . . Ultimately, Mary McGrory, the widely respected political columnist, sought a say-it-ain't-so-Joe audience with the publisher.

Her wish was granted, and a luncheon was arranged. After dining with Allbritton, McGrory hurried back to the newsroom, there to stroke ruffled feathers. Yes, said McGrory, Joe was mad, but no, he isn't mad anymore. Yes, he took his name off the masthead, but no, he's not selling the paper or closing it down. Heaving a collective sigh, reporters and editors headed back to their desks. But they still didn't have an inkling as to why he got mad in the first place.

The masthead incident had come close on the heels of a series of acrimonious contract negotiations between Allbritton and the newsroom's bargaining agent, the Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild . . . *Star* management's hard line effectively ended Allbritton's status as a patron. The sobriquet "Little Wrangler" was taking on a rich new meaning.<sup>692</sup>

Allbritton himself remained forever mute about the meaning behind his capricious conduct, but his message, as the *New York Times* reported, was abundantly clear to the *Star*'s union negotiators. If they failed to comply with his demands, Allbritton would not hesitate to exit the *Star*, or so they believed, leaving the newspaper's loyal staff bereft of their newspaper and their jobs:

The action was variously attributed, on the one hand, to his [Allbritton's] anger at some news or editorial decision that displeased him or, on the other, to "bargaining tactics" in the company's current negotiations with eight of its ten labr [sic] unions.

The latter theory, which has been adopted by union leaders, is that Mr. Allbritton was showing them that if they pressed the money-losing newspaper

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<sup>692</sup> Steve Daly, "Shootout at the *Star*," *Washingtonian*, XIII/4 (January 1978): 62-63.

company too far in wage demands, “Joe could take his money and go back to Texas,” in the words of one union official. The speculation produced a rash of published rumors that the *Star* might be for sale, something that officials other than Mr. Allbritton have denied.<sup>693</sup>

In the end, Allbritton got what he needed from the unions. Although the contract included cash bonuses for employees when the *Star* reached profitability, and raises were scheduled to be instituted in 1978 and 1979,<sup>694</sup> the wage freeze was to remain in place for the coming year.<sup>695</sup>

After the dust settled, Allbritton denounced the caviling rumors questioning his motives toward the newspaper or its staff. His declaration stopped short of any avowal that he was not attempting to sell the *Star*:

The front-page article in yesterday’s editions of the *Star* reported that board chairman Joe L. Allbritton praised the agreement between The Star and the union. The article quoted Allbritton as being critical of the “unfair and certainly unfounded speculative news stories recently about troubles at the *Star*.”

The article quoted Allbritton as saying: “My commitment to this newspaper and all its employees is substantial and real, and it has been consistent since I arrived in this city more than three years ago.”<sup>696</sup>

Allbritton’s condemnation of the rumor-mongers and his public declarations of loyalty to the *Star* may have been a smoke screen for a hidden agenda, in order to unload the *Star*, and sooner rather than later. In February 1978, after the deed was done, and the purchase a *fait*

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<sup>693</sup> [Unnamed Author], “Allbritton’s Name Is Back on The *Washington Star*,” loc. cit.

<sup>694</sup> Whether by design or happenstance, Allbritton’s responsibility for the *Star* and its employees would, in any event, end in early 1978.

<sup>695</sup> Lawrence Meyer, “Pressmen at *Star* Approve Contract,” loc. cit. Meyer reported that wages were to increase by \$20 per week beginning January 1, 1978, and by an additional \$20 per week on January 1, 1979. The cash bonus plan directed that employees receive not more than ten percent of “before-tax profits” and “at the point of company profitability.” A marginally improved benefits package was also incorporated into the contract agreement.

<sup>696</sup> Lawrence Meyer, “Pressmen at *Star* Approve Contract,” loc. cit.

*accompli*, both *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines reported Allbritton to have approached Time, Incorporated, officials with a sale proposal in early 1977, the same period during which he had insisted on the wage freeze extension and, indefensibly, lifted his name from the masthead.<sup>697</sup> How close Time and Allbritton came to a purchase agreement at that point remains unknown. They did acknowledge that discussions were ongoing throughout the year.<sup>698</sup> If the *Star*'s financial status had markedly improved, but was not yet sufficiently appealing to Time's negotiators to close the deal,<sup>699</sup> speedily shoring up the newspaper's bottom line by extending the wage freeze may have been a ploy too tempting for Allbritton to resist.

As time would tell, the ploy worked. The *Star* lived up to Allbritton's original expectation—which he had predicted upon taking over as its publisher—that it would develop into “an attractive financial package.”<sup>700</sup> Owing in no small measure to the increasingly bruising sacrifices that Allbritton's staff had incurred on his behalf in 1976 and 1977, the *Star*,

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<sup>697</sup> David M. Alpern *et al.*, “Time's New *Star*,” *Newsweek*, February 13, 1978: 56; and [unnamed author], “Capital Buy: Time Inc. Acquires the *Star*,” *Time*, III/7 (February 13, 1978): 59. *Newsweek*'s version of the events: “As Time executives told it, Allbritton came to them a year ago and met periodically with Time Inc. president James R. Shepley and others in Washington and New York. Sources at the *Star* said the initiative was Time's, and that ten or fifteen other possible buyers had also expressed interest.” *Time*'s version of the events: “The sale, effective Feb. 19 and subject to approval by directors of both companies, was first proposed a year ago by Allbritton to Time Inc. President James R. Shepley.”

<sup>698</sup> David M. Alpern *et al.*, “Time's New *Star*,” *loc. cit.*

<sup>699</sup> The January 1977 advertisement appearing in *Washingtonian* that boasted of the *Star*'s improved circulation and advertising lineage figures may have been placed in part for the regard of a potential buyer, namely, Time, Inc. (See print advertisement, “The *Washington Star* Leads the Nation,” *Washingtonian*, *loc. cit.*)

<sup>700</sup> Stephen Klaidman, “A Financial Wizard,” *loc. cit.* Klaidman reported Allbritton's comments of February 1975, in their entirety, to be: “I thought, and still think, that if you can get the economics of this paper on an even keel, and if you can get the broadcast facilities on a consolidated basis, the whole thing could be an attractive financial package.”

now the marketable commodity that he had desired, was successfully sold to Time the following year.<sup>701</sup>

Allbritton's name reappeared on the *Star's* masthead February 20, 1977. He was listed, not as publisher, but as board chairman.<sup>702</sup> The masthead listing for publisher remained, for the time, unoccupied.

### **Clash of the Titans**

One of Allbritton's first acts as publisher was to hire James Bellows, late of the *Los Angeles Times*, to take over the reins as *Star* editor. Arriving in January 1975 to much fanfare,<sup>703</sup> Bellows was charged with transforming the purportedly dull image of Washington's Grey Lady into a newspaper that would appeal to both new readers and new advertisers.<sup>704</sup> To that end, he instituted sweeping changes in both the *Star's* appearance and content, adding such trend-setting items as a dirt-dishing gossip column with the appellation, "The Ear,"<sup>705</sup> a print soap opera, in cartoon format, known as "The Federal Triangle," a

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<sup>701</sup> Word of the purchase was released to the public February 3, 1978. See [unnamed author], "The *Star* Is Sold to *Time Magazine* [sic]," *Washington Star*, February 3, 1978: A1. The headline should have identified the purchaser as Time, Incorporated, not *Time Magazine*.

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>703</sup> Holding title to the "longest résumé in journalism history," or so declared *Washington Journalism Review* in 1992, Bellows earned his journalistic wings serving as the *New York Herald Tribune's* last editor, between 1961 and 1967, when the newspaper folded. The nationally syndicated political columnist and the *Star's* then-assistant managing editor, Jack Germond, opined in his memoir that, in such capacity, Bellows had "made the [*Herald Tribune*] a great read, far more entertaining and interesting, although less complete, than the *New York Times* of the same period." See Bellows's memoir, *The Last Editor: How I Saved The New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Los Angeles Times from Dullness and Complacency*, Andrews McMeel Publishing (Kansas City: 2002): "Résumé," n.p.; and Jack Germond, *Fat Man in a Middle Seat*, op. cit.: 139.

<sup>704</sup> Bellows maintained that Allbritton "knew of the changes [Bellows] had wrought at the *New York Herald Tribune*" and hired him to "bring similar incandescence to the *Star*, perhaps with a better outcome." See James Bellows, *The Last Editor*, op. cit.:15.

<sup>705</sup> In his memoir, Bellows commented that "The Ear's" success was "a testament to the fact that Washington was at heart a small, provincial southern town . . . [I]t loved its gossip . . . It was . . . a combination of dish and dirt." Among the more frequent victims of "The Ear's" gossipy innuendos were the *Washington Post*, otherwise known as the "O.P." (Other Paper), and Bellows's rival Ben Bradlee, the *Post's* then editor. See Chapter 2, "Ben Bradlee

Sunday life-styles magazine entitled *Home Life*, a daily column, “Focus,” that covered a broad spectrum of topics,<sup>706</sup> and the front-page “Q and A,” a daily feature as well, that presented personality and lifestyle profiles of notable newsmakers.<sup>707</sup> Exploiting connections forged from his years at the *New York Herald Tribune*, Bellows also fruitfully tapped a pool of such at the time rising stars in the journalistic world as radical-chic author Tom Wolfe, sports writer Dick Schaap, and New York-area cultural critic Jimmy Breslin, to serve short-term guest residencies in a *Star* writers’ program.<sup>708</sup>

Bellows’s transformative efforts with the *Star*, in large part designed to reach Washington’s young-adult population,<sup>709</sup> showed credible results, and in only one year. The financial gains that the newspaper had heralded in the spring of 1976 continued robustly into the fall. Circulation had improved even further, now by thirty percent, and advertising revenue was nineteen percent higher,<sup>710</sup> making the *Star*, according to its own measure, the “fastest growing newspaper in the country.”<sup>711</sup>

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and The Ear,” from Bellows’s memoir, *The Last Editor*, op. cit.: 15-33 *passim*; and Aaron Latham, “D.C. Shootout,” op. cit.: 15-20 *passim*.

<sup>706</sup> *MORE Magazine* described “Focus” as a column “that is as likely to concentrate on cancer as on politics.” See Aaron Latham, “D.C. Shootout,” op. cit.: 20.

<sup>707</sup> For further information on Bellows’s improvements to the *Star*’s style and substance, see Aaron Latham, “D.C. Shootout,” op. cit.: 18-19 *passim*; [unnamed author], “*Washington Star* Seeks New Image,” loc. cit.; and John Morton, “Saving the *Star*,” op. cit.: 108, 170-171.

<sup>708</sup> Formerly a journalist and now a best-selling author, Wolfe is winner of the American Book Award, the National Institute of Arts and Letters Harold Vursell Award, and the Columbia Journalism Award. Schaap became a sports journalist and Emmy-Award-winning television broadcaster. Breslin is a nationally syndicated columnist, winner of a Pulitzer Prize and author of both fiction and non-fiction books.

<sup>709</sup> [Unnamed author], “*Washington Star* Seeks New Image In Community,” *Editor and Publisher*, April 26, 1975: 20.

<sup>710</sup> Aaron Latham, “D.C. Shootout,” op. cit.: 20.

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid.*

In spring 1977, the *Star* at long last turned a profit,<sup>712</sup> and by the following fall, the newspaper's deficit had shrunk to less than one-tenth of its size in the previous year.<sup>713</sup> In November 1977, the *New York Times* verified the *Star*'s successful makeover: "The gamble that [Allbritton] . . . took in 1974 when he acquired the *Washington Star*, which was then losing more than one million dollars a month, seems to be paying off."<sup>714</sup>

Despite the *Star*'s (and Bellows's) emergent success story, Allbritton was apparently still dissatisfied with the odds. In November—the very month during which the glad tidings of the *Star*'s resuscitation had been announced—he undertook courses of action that, at first glance, can be characterized only as incomprehensible. First, through his financial lieutenant James H. Smith,<sup>715</sup> he instructed employees to join in a massive newspaper recycling program, ostensibly to minimize the cost of newsprint. As *The Washingtonian* tells it, this new demand, not only adding insult to injury, intimated to an already suspicious staff that Allbritton's agenda might be less heroic than saving the *Star* for Washington:

It took a gesture of stunning small-mindedness to jolt the newsroom into an awareness of what was transpiring. On November 4, the following memo appeared on the *Star* bulletin boards:

"Effective Monday, Nov. 7, 1977, across the hallway from all elevators on all floors, front and rear of the building, there will be receptacles for the deposit of newspapers.

We are asking each employee to deposit in these receptacles any newspapers, supplements, Roto Gravure Magazines, T.V. Magazines, etc., that are left in their particular work area at the end of the day.

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<sup>712</sup> Deirdre Carmody, "Income Up For *Washington Star*," loc. cit. Carmody reported that the *Star* had not previously been profitable since 1970.

<sup>713</sup> Ibid. According to Carmody, the *Star*'s operating deficit in 1976 was \$12 million, and in fiscal year ending September 30, 1977, \$1.3 million.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid.

<sup>715</sup> James H. Smith's position at the *Star* was described, variously, as business manager, general manager, president and publisher.

It is also requested that all employees return to these receptacles from their homes any newspapers, etc., they would have so we can sell them for recycled newsprint . . . .

Your cooperation in this effort has a potential of generating dramatic savings for the *Washington Star*.”

It was signed by James H. Smith.<sup>716</sup>

Second, rather than hold to the newspaper’s fortunate status quo, thereby allowing Bellows’s editorial improvements opportunity to take permanent root and give the once-shaky *Star* ship and its by now queasy crew some much needed stability, Allbritton, again by way of Smith’s office,<sup>717</sup> decided on yet another round of layoffs. These last planned cuts amounted to an additional ten percent of the *Star*’s workforce.<sup>718</sup>

News of impending layoffs was disclosed prematurely—and in direct contradiction to Allbritton’s expectations<sup>719</sup>—by Bellows, in a brief memorandum<sup>720</sup> to the *Star*’s editorial staff. Although ostensibly announcing the cost-cutting elimination of freelance work, the memorandum also included an oblique, but unmistakable, first reference to “the coming staff reductions.”<sup>721</sup> Bellows may have engaged in this blatantly passive-aggressive ruse against

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<sup>716</sup> Steve Daley, “Shootout at the *Star*,” op. cit.: 63-64.

<sup>717</sup> Steve Daley, “Shootout at the *Star*,” op. cit: 66. Daley implied that the layoff order came from Smith when he reports Allbritton to have “drygulch[ed] James Smith” when he superseded the layoff order on December 2.

<sup>718</sup> Ben A. Franklin, “Editor Quits *Washington Star* Amid Reports of Planned Cuts in Staff,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1977: A36. An undated Newspaper Guild bulletin to *Star* staff reported that management “intends to proceed with the layoff of ten percent of the work force in commercial and editorial departments, effective December 30, 1977.” According to the report, an alleged ten-percent reduction in circulation between 1976 and 1977 was cited to justify the measure. The layoff order was expected to effect forty-six employees. (See Newspaper Guild Bulletin, *Washington Star* morgue, Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King, Jr., Building, District of Columbia Public Library, Washington, D.C.) In Franklin’s report for the *New York Times*, Allbritton, on the public record, attributed any purported loss in circulation to management’s decision to “cut out” some circulation, “because the circulation areas were too far away, and it cost too much to deliver the paper at those distances.”

<sup>719</sup> According to *Washingtonian*, Bellows “had blown the cover on management’s decision to implement another round of layoffs. The Little Wrangler was not amused.” See Steve Daley, “Shootout at the *Star*,” op. cit.: 64.

<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.* Daley reported the memo to have been three lines long.

<sup>721</sup> *Ibid.*

Allbritton to protest management policies that in his view impaired his ability to make necessary changes in the *Star*'s editorial product;<sup>722</sup> but his action, calculated or not, fanned the flames of a fire between himself and Allbritton that, as he tells it, had long been smoldering:

Another thing that annoyed the hell out of Joe was the accolades I had been getting for transforming the *Star* . . . . [I]t was developing a brisk style and a bold look that made the *Post* look institutional. But Joe wasn't sharing in the bouquets, and I guess it galled him to see me getting all the credit for the *Star*'s success . . . . Joe was getting irascible . . . . Of my changes at the *Star*, Joe said, "Yeah, Bellows has a lot of good ideas, but they all cost an awful lot of money." The pecuniary theme would not go away . . . . When Joe hired a new general manager [business manager James H. Smith] . . . I didn't win any more arguments about money. I reflected on the situation. I was being lionized in the media for my transformation of the *Star*. Joe . . . was planning cuts in our already lean newsroom. I was fighting to keep editorial control. Joe and I were on a collision course . . . . Battle stations, everybody!<sup>723</sup>

Bellows's stunt backfired perhaps more spectacularly than even he could have divined. Within twenty-four hours of the offense, Allbritton had summarily sacked his former ally,<sup>724</sup> the one man who had done the most to help him bring the *Star* back from the brink of

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<sup>722</sup> The ongoing conflict between Bellows and the *Star* management was an open secret. The November 1977 issue of *Washingtonian* even goes so far as to predict, presciently, that Bellows's days at the *Star* were numbered: "Struggles to the death continue within the Washington papers. At the *Star*, insiders say new publisher Jim Smith and veteran editor Jim Bellows are at each other's throats, and only one will survive. With Joe ("Bottom Line") Allbritton making the final decision, the smart money is on Smith." See [unnamed author], "Capital Comment: Press Talk," *Washingtonian*, XIII/2 (November 1977): 11.

<sup>723</sup> James Bellows, *The Last Editor*, op. cit.: 182-184 *passim*.

<sup>724</sup> That Allbritton fired Bellows so swiftly and with so little reflection or concern should hardly have surprised Bellows. The erstwhile publisher had developed a reputation for dismissing employees routinely and with sometimes little provocation. *Washingtonian* reports that when Allbritton hired James H. Smith, the newsroom took little notice, "given Allbritton's penchant for hiring and firing presidents, advertising directors, and circulation managers." (See Steve Daley, "Shootout at the *Star*," loc. cit.) In July 1977, according to then-editorial-page editor Edwin Yoder, Allbritton, without consulting either Bellows or Yoder, instructed a clerk at the night desk to leave space for an editorial of his own creation (endorsing Gerald Ford for president) on the *Star*'s front page. When the night clerk dutifully notified Bellows, who countermanded Allbritton's order, Allbritton fired the clerk. (See Edwin Yoder, *Telling Others What to Think*, op.cit.: 128-129.) Yoder relates another story that further testifies to Allbritton's capricious disregard for personnel: "Joe was in a worried and stormy mood; and with each of these reversals, as in the Ford-editorial episode, he was, as I think about it now, probably storing up what he saw as well-warranted frustration. He must have viewed himself as a savior balked at every turn by obtuse, ungrateful, nit-picking editors; a prophet without honor at this own newspaper. His mood was further exacerbated by what he

ruin. Having released his memorandum on November 14, on November 15 Bellows was no longer a member of the *Star* staff.<sup>725</sup>

With Bellows, their editor, on the run, and having become more fully cognizant of the extent of Allbritton's mischief, the *Star*'s employees, now in a state of utter turmoil,<sup>726</sup> fought back, using words as their weapon of choice. The *Star*'s Newspaper Guild representative Nancy Ferris was unappeased by Allbritton's pseudo-placatory and too little, too late declaration that any layoffs were to be "carried out intelligently, tactfully and, first and foremost, with a concern for the welfare of the individuals concerned."<sup>727</sup> Taking up the verbal cudgel, she daringly goaded Allbritton into showing his hand. In her corner sat the *New York Times*, obligingly divulging her every combative word to the world at large:

A statement posted on the newsroom bulletin board by Nancy Ferris, the unit chairman of the Newspaper Guild, called the rumored personnel cuts "devastating" to already declining morale. It said: "Guild employees have already given enough: the four-day work week, two years without pay raises and an ever dwindling work force with which to produce a quality newspaper.

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thought of as a slight at the annual Gridiron Club dinner. One day during this unsettling period, Bert Lance, Jimmy Carter's (briefly) all-powerful director of the Office of Management and Budget, came to lunch. He was talking about some issue that had nothing to do with the *Star*. 'If any subordinates gave me that kind of trouble, I'd fire them.' Joe nodded vigorously at this endorsement of the managerial guillotine. Bellows, Mary McGrory and I exchanged nervous glances." (See Edwin Yoder, *Telling Others What to Think*, op. cit.: 133.)

<sup>725</sup> Steve Daley, "Shootout at the *Star*," op. cit.: 65. Daley reported that "the following morning [November 15], the editor [Bellows] and some of his closest friends carted his belongings out of the *Star* building and into a waiting car." In his recollection of the episode, Jack Germond confirms that Bellows's departure from the *Star* was not a resignation, but a dismissal: "The relationship between Allbritton and Bellows deteriorated for several months until things reached a point at which Bellows left or was driven out, ending those three golden years. I remember getting off the third-floor elevator that morning and seeing Bellows at his desk, buttering a doughnut and wearing an amused expression. 'I have been relieved of my command,' he said. The paper survived another couple of years but was never the same." (See Jack Germond, *Fat Man in a Middle Seat*, op. cit.: 146.) Bellows said his separation at the *Star* "wasn't a firing, or a resignation, just a mutual agreement." (See James G. Bellows, *The Last Editor*, op. cit.: 185.)

<sup>726</sup> Steve Daley, "Shootout at the *Star*," op. cit.: 65. Daley reported that newsroom morale during this period "plunged . . . to a level unknown since the last round of employee layoffs." The *New York Times* reported that "word of Mr. Bellows's resignation and what Mr. Allbritton's statement described as 'a review' of personnel cutbacks had come as a demoralizing surprise" to the staff. (See Ben A. Franklin, "Editor Quits *Washington Star*," loc. cit.; see also Deirdre Carmody, "Income Up for *Washington Star*, But Layoff Plans Lower Morale," loc. cit.)

<sup>727</sup> Ben A. Franklin, "Editor Quits *Washington Star*," loc. cit.

The guild is not willing to accept any further erosion of jobs in its jurisdiction without a complete economic presentation from management, justifying in every case the need for layoffs . . . . There is a growing feeling among *Star* employees that they are being taken, not for the survival of the *Star*, which they probably could accept, but as pawns in a much bigger game of financial wizardry.”<sup>728</sup>

In response, management began to hum a slightly more mollifying tune. A communiqué from Smith to assistant managing editor Sidney Epstein, placed on the newsroom’s bulletin board by person or persons unknown,<sup>729</sup> officially confirmed the layoffs; but perhaps in an attempt to allay worst fears, the memorandum also recommended that Epstein authorize the number of editorial cuts and that voluntary retirements or resignations with severance be accepted alternatively to outright firings.<sup>730</sup>

Ferris, having none of management’s pallid attempts at placation, posted a rejoinder on the bulletin board. With the *New York Times* faithfully recording the essence of this message for posterity, she urged the *Star*’s employees “not to respond to the company’s call for volunteer sacrificial lambs” and not to succumb to Smith’s suggestion to “trade off bodies in this way.”<sup>731</sup>

Perhaps because the *Star*’s internecine strife was being scandalously played out in the public arena and giving management a black eye, Allbritton, without offering explanation, capitulated to the furious and hostile energy of the *Star*’s staff. On December 2, he

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<sup>728</sup> Ibid.

<sup>729</sup> Deirdre Carmody, “Income Up For *Washington Star*,” loc. cit.

<sup>730</sup> Ibid.

<sup>731</sup> Ibid.

countermanded Smith's layoff orders.<sup>732</sup> Thus the *Star's* heretofore unyielding publisher yielded, giving a victory, if fleeting, to the newspaper's employees. Their jobs, for the moment, were spared. Just days later, Bellows, ironically, departed Washington permanently.<sup>733</sup>

Shortly after the martyred Bellows vanished from view, Allbritton attempted to throw the *Star* ship one more curve ball, proposing to name himself editor, as well as publisher, of the newspaper. Dissuading Allbritton from traveling down this wrongheaded path required some judicious nudging, which the *Star's* associate editor Edwin Yoder claims to have provided:

For reasons that had perhaps been inevitable all along, Joe and Jim Bellows soon came to a parting of ways.<sup>734</sup> Jim went off to Los Angeles to try his hand with another failing newspaper, the *Herald-Examiner*, and Joe was now the undisputed driver of the *Star's* creaky machine. He clearly relished the sensation; his mood brightened immeasurably. A few days after Jim's departure, Joe summoned Jim Smith, the business manager, Sid Epstein, the managing editor, and me to his office. The three of us sat down in his make-believe-English drawing-room office. After brief pleasantries, Joe tossed out a bombshell. "Gentlemen," he announced, "unless you object I propose to name myself editor and publisher—at least for the interim."

There was an awkward silence. I finally suggested, swallowing hard, that maybe Joe ought to think that one over. I asked if I could send him yet another of my many memoranda. I once again found myself offering advice which probably seemed to Joe impertinent. But he never refused it.

I laid it on the line: "Anyone who advises you that the editor's title is something to be put on like a hat is giving you unsound advice . . . . In my view you need a professional editor at the *Star* . . . . Owners of newspapers who assume the editor's title were and are regarded within the trade as whimsical eccentrics and amateurs. Indeed, their papers were often regarded . . . as the toys of rich men (or women) and their weight and influence discounted accordingly . . . . A second major problem lies in the combination

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<sup>732</sup> Steve Daley, "Shootout at the *Star*," loc. cit.

<sup>733</sup> Donnie Radcliffe and Joseph P. Mastrangelo, "'Old Boys' Network: A So-Long Party for Jim Bellows," *Washington Post*, December 10, 1977: B1.

<sup>734</sup> Although Edwin Yoder, in his memoir, covered the *Star's* Allbritton-era history in considerable detail, this one statement is, oddly, the only reference to the entire scandalous episode that had sent Bellows packing. See Edwin Yoder, "Star Wars," from *Telling Others What to Think*, op. cit.: 123-144.

of the two titles . . . [which] may imply an unsavory merger, as well, of business and advertising affairs with news and editorial comment. If you wish to run a serious and reputable newspaper, as I am confident you do, this is a confusion to be avoided absolutely.”<sup>735</sup>

Allbritton, apparently taking Yoder’s advice, acquiesced again to forces challenging his choices at the *Star*. His name as editor never appeared on the masthead.

Remaining is the troubling verity that, at a time when the *Star* was making significant progress toward sustained profitability, if not prosperity,<sup>736</sup> Allbritton attempted courses of action about which he had been warned might sink the ship. Bellows had vigorously pressed the case that continued cost-cutting would undermine the *Star*’s editorial goals.<sup>737</sup> When his pleas went unheard, he chose, valiantly, to fall on his sword and face dismissal rather than cede to Allbritton’s editorially counterproductive choices.

The *Star*’s then assistant managing editor Jack Germond threatened resignation as well, when Allbritton’s payroll cutback plans jeopardized the careers of two reporters Germond had just hired. As Germond tells it, the staff reduction:

[W]ould have prevented two reporters I had hired, with [Allbritton’s] explicit approval, from actually starting work. Both of them had left their previous jobs, and one of them had moved from Chicago and bought a house in Washington. For me the situation was untenable. If the two reporters, Ed Pound from the Chicago *Sun-Times* and Phil Gailey from Knight-Ridder, were cut adrift, I was going to have to leave as well. The result was that, while reassuring them every night that it would work out, I was spending several hours a day with Allbritton trying to find other ways to cut the news department budget. In the end the publisher rescinded the decision and went into the newsroom to stand on a desk and announce it and then, of course,

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<sup>735</sup> Ibid.

<sup>736</sup> The *New York Times* reported that, because Bellows had “turned the *Star* into an imaginative, audacious afternoon paper,” it was “giving the morning *Washington Post* brisk competition in a number of areas.” See Deirdre Carmody, “Income Up for *Washington Star*,” loc. cit.

<sup>737</sup> Ben A. Franklin, “Editor Quits *Washington Star*,” loc. cit; and Deirdre Carmody, “Income Up For *Washington Star*,” loc. cit. Franklin reported that Bellows “fought a losing battle with the management to avoid further cuts in the reportorial and editorial operation.” Carmody said that Bellows “clashed with James H. Smith . . . over business decisions that Mr. Bellows saw as compromising journalistic quality.”

enjoy the plaudits of the crowd for rescuing us from himself. When I called Gailey with the news that he could report for work the following Monday, he was relieved. “You mean,” he asked, “I don’t have to get knee-walking drunk tonight?”<sup>738</sup>

Echoing both Bellows’s and Germond’s grave concerns was Nancy Ferris’s memorandum giving voice to staff fears that Allbritton had misled them—and greater Washington—about his designs on the *Star*. Her suspicion that his interest was less in saving the newspaper than in enlarging his already abundant coffers may have been much closer to the truth than she appreciated at the time.

If, as Ferris alleged, the *Star* and its staff were being held hostage in a high stakes profiteering game, Allbritton’s decision to lay off yet another ten percent of the workforce, despite the deleterious effect it might have on the *Star*’s longterm viability, becomes more comprehensible. In his interview for the *Washington Post* in February 1975, Allbritton had disclosed his goal to make of the *Star* “an attractive financial package,”<sup>739</sup> and within three years. When, through Smith, he announced his plans for a second round of layoffs, in November 1977, he was just three months shy of that self-imposed deadline. A ten-percent payroll cut at this time, making for a ten-percent smaller drag on the *Star*’s bottom line, would likely have improved the odds of finding a willing buyer and fetching a higher purchase price.

That Allbritton so easily forfeited Bellows and then came perilously close to leaping into the editor’s seat himself also becomes less perplexing in light of his continuing discussions with Time, throughout 1977, over the disposition of the newspaper. If Allbritton

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<sup>738</sup> Jack W. Germond, *Fat Man in a Middle Seat*, op. cit: 146. See also Ben A. Franklin, “Editor Quits *Washington Star*,” loc. cit.

<sup>739</sup> Stephen Klaidman, “A Financial Wizard,” loc. cit. According to Klaidman, Allbritton’s words, *verbatim*, were: “[T]hree years from now my ambition to save the *Star* will have to be weighed against the economic interests involved. I know that if I turn the *Star* around it will be worth the money . . . and the money will be there . . . I thought, and still think, that if you can get the economics of this paper on an even keel, and if you can get the broadcast facilities on a consolidated basis, the whole thing could be an attractive financial package.”

had insider knowledge that ownership of the *Star* might shortly be transferred and its editorial department fall into the hands of another entity, Bellows's disappearance from the editor's desk would be a moot point, the necessity of replacing him unnecessary, and Allbritton's own near walk on the editorial wild side only temporary. In any event, Bellows's position was not filled until after the sale of the *Star* to Time, Inc., was complete.<sup>740</sup>

Negative publicity, particularly in New York City's press, may also have convinced Allbritton to back away from the perilous path down which he had nearly veered; and the *New York Times* had provided ample coverage of the recent flare-up in hostilities between the *Star*'s labor force and its management.<sup>741</sup> Taking the gamble of steering the *Star* onto the shoals might have been acceptable to him, were the newspaper to break apart on the rocks after he had jumped ship; but he stood to profit only if the newspaper appeared to a prospective buyer to be not only in good fiscal health, but also internally stable.

As time would tell, Allbritton observed his self-imposed, three-year deadline, almost to the day. The sale of the *Star* to Time, Inc., was announced to the public as a *fait accompli* in early February 1978.<sup>742</sup> Time's corporate headquarters were, and still are, located in New York City.

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<sup>740</sup> Marjorie Hunter, "Time Inc. Buys *Washington Star*; It Will Pay Allbritton \$20 Million," *New York Times*, February 4, 1978: A1.

<sup>741</sup> The two major *New York Times* articles on the *Star*'s November travails appeared four days apart and each headlined at the top of the page. The first report was 650 words long and the second, a feature appearing, complete with photograph of Allbritton, in the Sunday edition, 850 words long. See Deirdre Carmody, "Income Up for *Washington Star*, But Layoff Plans Lower Morale," loc. cit., and Ben A. Franklin, "Editor Quits *Washington Star* Amid Reports of Planned Cuts in Staff," loc. cit.

<sup>742</sup> [Unnamed author], "The *Star* Is Sold To *Time Magazine* [sic]": Price Is Set at \$20 Million; Allbritton Remains as Publisher," *Washington Star*, February 3, 1978: A1.

## Allbritton's End Game

The countdown on Allbritton's swift exit from the newspaper to which he had pledged long term fealty began at least as early as the fall of 1977.<sup>743</sup> At this time, he was deep into negotiations with Combined Communications, Inc.,<sup>744</sup> entertaining divestiture of WJLA-TV, the property that, three years earlier, he had publicly vowed he would sell, and for which his ownership would, after December 31, 1978, constitute violation of the Federal Communication Commission's cross-ownership stricture.<sup>745</sup>

In part owing to its affiliation with the ABC broadcasting network, WJLA's ratings, at the time of these negotiations, were skyrocketing,<sup>746</sup> making it a property so desirable that, for the privilege of acquiring it, Combined was willing to release to Allbritton its own ABC-network affiliate KOCO-TV in Oklahoma City, as well as \$55 million in non-voting Combined shares.<sup>747</sup> According to reports, the transaction, had it been consummated, would

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<sup>743</sup> When purchase discussions between Combined and Allbritton were initiated, and by whom, is unknown. According to Allbritton's statements, they were underway in September 1977. See Jerry Knight, "Allbritton Cancels Pact to Exchange Television Station," *Washington Post*, March 25, 1978: A1.

<sup>744</sup> Combined Communications was a communications conglomerate wholly owned by Arizona entrepreneur Karl Eller. Its operations were suspended in 1979 when Eller sold all of its holdings to The Gannett Company, Inc., in what was described at the time as "the largest merger in the communications industry." See Gannett's corporate website: [www.gannett.com/map/history.htm](http://www.gannett.com/map/history.htm), accessed February 17, 2006.

<sup>745</sup> Stephen M. Aug, "FCC Approves Allbritton's Purchase," loc. cit.

<sup>746</sup> John Holusha, "Allbritton Resigns As Publisher of the *Washington Star*," *Washington Star*, May 31, 1978: A1. Holusha reported Allbritton to acknowledge that the Star Company's broadcasting holdings had been marketed profitably, because, as network affiliates of ABC, they had "surged to the top of the television ratings."

<sup>747</sup> William H. Jones, "Star Sale Said Caused By TV Deal," *Washington Post*, February 21, 1978: D8.

have brought to Allbritton a record price,<sup>748</sup> in the amount of \$100 million in stock and property<sup>749</sup> and an anticipated future income of \$3.5 million annually in dividend payments.<sup>750</sup>

Combined Communication's purchase proposal should have proven irresistible to Allbritton. KOCO's profit potential as another ABC affiliate, albeit in a smaller market than WJLA, would allow him to retain capital resources to subsidize any future *Star* shortfalls, as was his professed desire.<sup>751</sup> His stock portfolio, moreover, would reap rewards still generated in part by his prized station WJLA,<sup>752</sup> if under a new corporate umbrella, and his divestiture obligation to the FCC would be discharged, thus leaving him free to complete his purported longstanding mission to save the *Star*.

Allbritton's next step was not to close a by all accounts lucrative deal with Combined. Instead, claiming the hard to swallow concern, given the generous terms of Combined's offer, "about whether [he] could rely on the revenues from the WJLA-KOCO transaction to subsidize the *Star*,"<sup>753</sup> he approached officials at Time, Inc., and invited them to invest in his newspaper.<sup>754</sup>

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<sup>748</sup> John Holusha, "Allbritton Resigns," loc.cit. Holusha described the WJLA-KOCO tradeout proposal to be a "record sale," but without ascribing independent corroborative documentation.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid.

<sup>750</sup> Jerry Knight, "Allbritton Cancels Pact," loc. cit.

<sup>751</sup> Ibid.

<sup>752</sup> Allbritton was sufficiently attached to WJLA so that, after selling off its sister radio stations WMAL-AM and WMAL-FM in 1977, he branded it with call letters mirroring his own initials. Thus the television station that had for decades been known to Washingtonians as WMAL-TV became, proprietarily, WJLA-TV, standing for Joe Louis Allbritton. See Marjorie Hunter, "Time Inc. Buys *Washington Star*," loc. cit.; and John Holusha, "Allbritton Resigns," loc. cit.

<sup>753</sup> William H. Jones, "*Star* Sale Said Caused By TV Deal," loc. cit.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid. According to Jones, after Allbritton had contacted Time to "express his concern" about the problematic nature of his WJLA-KOCO tradeout arrangement, the two parties met to discuss "a possible Time investment in the newspaper."

Whether Allbritton floated a bride price to Time at this juncture is unknown, but immediately after the meetings<sup>755</sup>—held, according to the by now notorious publisher’s only vague recollection, in “September or October”<sup>756</sup>—came the November surprise, his sudden, bottom-line decision to remove forty-six editorial employees from the *Star*’s payroll ledgers. Had Allbritton followed through on this staff squeeze play, the *Star*’s sales value would likely have rapidly increased, and by a significant margin. Despite having initiated the discussions, Allbritton later insisted that he had then been “unprepared to sell the *Star*,” citing his “personal commitment” to the newspaper and the “challenge” that it posed.<sup>757</sup> In January, he apparently changed his mind.

Having courted Time, Inc., for one year and kept Combined Communications on the hook for nearly six months, Allbritton continued to flirt, separately, with both corporate would-be purchasers of his two important Star Company holdings throughout the month of January.<sup>758</sup> January also witnessed the Federal Communications Commission deliberations of Allbritton’s contract with Combined for the WJLA-KOCO exchange. Notwithstanding the *Star*’s for-the-record improved financial profile, for which he would only three weeks later publicly verify, as well as give himself credit,<sup>759</sup> Allbritton applied to the FCC for the trade,

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<sup>755</sup> Ibid. Without specifying a number, Jones reported that, during this period, “several meetings were held.”

<sup>756</sup> Ibid.

<sup>757</sup> Ibid.

<sup>758</sup> Ibid.

<sup>759</sup> Joe L. Allbritton, “Statement by the Publisher: *Star* is “Off and Running,” *Washington Star*, February 3, 1978: A1. Allbritton’s statement reads, in part: “Four years ago, when I bought control of this paper, I said: ‘I am confident that the *Star* has a bright future.’ The stakes were high: The survival of a second daily newspaper, a second voice, in the Nation’s Capital. Financially, the *Star* was on the ropes. Its morale was low. Despite their regard for an institution that had well served this community and the nation for more than a century, readers and businessmen viewed the *Star* with the sad concern one feels for a dying friend. All that has changed. The *Washington Star* has been saved, not just for its employees, but for the citizens of Washington. Its vast debts have been paid. Many of its advertisers have returned. It has been modernized—its labor force brought more closely

rather than an outright sale, under the contention that the swap was “necessary to keep the *Star* alive and that dividends and cash income from KOCO-TV was [sic] needed to assure continued publication of the *Star*.”<sup>760</sup>

The FCC, apparently still sympathetic to the *Star*'s continued vitality and the public interest that it served, decided, cooperatively, to rule on the WJLA-KOCO exchange in Allbritton's favor. Perhaps in part to avoid any repetition of the criticism that they had endured after placing themselves between Allbritton and the *Star* in 1975, the commissioners issued their ruling promptly and over the objections of several citizens' groups,<sup>761</sup> who protested that WJLA “should be sold to minority buyers” and that “the arrangement between Allbritton and Combined did not actually separate ownership of the newspaper and television station.”<sup>762</sup> On January 12, by a vote of five to two, the sale of WJLA to Combined Communications, in return for KOCO-TV and \$55 million in stock, as stipulated, was approved.<sup>763</sup> Shortly thereafter, Allbritton flew directly in the face of the FCC's generous intentions and moved to kill the sale.

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into conformity with today's needs, its management techniques shaped to today's realities. Its losses have been reduced from \$1 million a month to something near the break-even point. Most important, it has become a lively, fair, energetic and attractive newspaper—worthy of such a city. To help achieve these things, I invested millions of my own money beyond the original purchase price. I also invested every fiber of my imagination, every ounce of dedication I possess. So did the writers and editors and craftsmen of the *Washington Star*. Together, we turned the *Star* around.”

<sup>760</sup> Jerry Knight, “Allbritton Cancels Pact to Exchange Television Station,” loc. cit.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid. Knight reports that three groups aligned against Allbritton's purchase of the *Star* in 1975—the D.C. Media Task Force, the Adams Morgan Organization and the D.C. Chapter of the National Organization for Women—turned out to oppose the WJLA-KOCO proposal. They were joined in their opposition to this sale by the National Black Media Coalition.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid.

As he later acknowledged to the FCC,<sup>764</sup> Allbritton, in meetings with Combined's President Karl Eller on January 24 and January 31, asked that the WJLA-KOCO tradeout contract be voided. Demurring on both occasions, but, perhaps suspecting by now that Allbritton's profitable television station would not be in his corporation's future, Eller posited on both occasions a counteroffer, namely, purchase of the *Star*, for an undisclosed amount.<sup>765</sup>

Now finding himself simultaneously in the company of two suitors for the *Star*, Allbritton was fortunately positioned to play one against the other. Whether he took advantage of this lucky circumstance, by leaking news of the Combined proposal to Time and promoting a bidding war, is unknown, but Allbritton did acknowledge undertaking separate discussions throughout this period with both Combined Communications and Time.<sup>766</sup> According to his own testimony for the FCC's record, on January 31, the day of Allbritton's last meeting with Eller—during which details of Combined's purchase of the *Star* were discussed—Time made an apparently more appealing offer than that of Combined. Allbritton required little time to decide. The following day, he accepted Time's offer,<sup>767</sup> and on February 2, only two days after the offer was made and fewer than three weeks after the FCC had blessed the WJLA-KOCO exchange on behalf of the *Star*'s well-being, Allbritton announced to the public the sale of his cherished *Washington Star* to Time, Inc.<sup>768</sup>

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<sup>764</sup> William H., Jones, "*Star* Sale Said Caused By TV Deal," loc. cit.

<sup>765</sup> Ibid.

<sup>766</sup> Ibid. See also Marjorie Hunter, "Time Inc. Buys *Washington Star*," loc. cit. Hunter reported Time to have confirmed engaging in "active discussion" with Allbritton about a *Star* purchase for "a week or ten days" prior to the final agreement.

<sup>767</sup> Ibid.

<sup>768</sup> [Unnamed author], "*The Star* Is Sold to *Time Magazine*," loc. cit.

*J'Accuse . . .*

Described, variously, as “one of the best kept secrets in journalism”<sup>769</sup> and “well-kept news . . . in view of the capital’s penchant for gossip,”<sup>770</sup> Time’s sudden purchase of the *Star* startled the capital’s chattering classes. Although the transaction was saluted by the region’s civic leaders and captains of industry,<sup>771</sup> even a *Star* news story acknowledged that it “caught many in the Washington . . . community by surprise.”<sup>772</sup>

The sale also came as a surprise, if not a shock, to the *Star* staff. Although the possibility of a sale—or, worse, closure—of the newspaper had for them been a continuing and overt cause for concern for years,<sup>773</sup> the *Star*’s loyal workers were reported to have received from Allbritton no forewarning about Time’s acquisition of the newspaper, learning about it only when Washington’s readers did—February 3 on the *Star*’s front page.<sup>774</sup>

Assuming this unanticipated turn of events to have represented for the staff the lesser of two evils, the *Star*’s purchase, as the *New York Times* reported it, “was greeted happily by employees.”<sup>775</sup>

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<sup>769</sup> David M. Alpern, Lucy Howard, Betsy Carter and Nancy Stadtman, “Time’s New *Star*,” *Newsweek*, February 13, 1978: 56, 61. The *Newsweek* story on the purchase led with this portrayal.

<sup>770</sup> [Unnamed author], “Capital Buy: Time, Inc., Acquires the *Star*,” *Time*, February 13, 1978: 59. About the unforeseen sale, *Time* reported Jack Nelson, then Washington Bureau Chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, to have remarked, sardonically: “We didn’t even read about it in ‘Ear’ [the *Star*’s daily gossip column].”

<sup>771</sup> [Unnamed author], “Area Leaders Hail *Time*’s Purchase of the *Star*,” *Washington Star*, February 5, 1978: A1. In this undeniably self-serving article, the *Star* printed encomiums by so diverse a group of local leaders as, among others, Washington’s then-Mayor Walter E. Washington, then-City Council Chairman Sterling Tucker, R. Robert Linowes, President at the time of the Metropolitan Washington Board of Trade, and Herb Harris, then-United States Congressman from Virginia.

<sup>772</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>773</sup> Marjorie Hunter, “Time Inc. Buys *Washington Star*,” *loc. cit.*

<sup>774</sup> David M. Alpern *et al.*, “Time’s New *Star*,” *loc. cit.*

<sup>775</sup> Marjorie Hunter, “Time Inc. Buys *Washington Star*,” *loc. cit.*

No group could have been more astonished by the sale than the Federal Communications Commission, which had just approved the WJLA-KOCO exchange explicitly to save the *Star* on Allbritton's behalf. With the newspaper no longer part of the Combined equation, the transaction was now suspect. Backpedalling with all speed, the Commission voted on February 16 to revisit, as well as more closely scrutinize, what now appeared to be its naïve decision to approve the Combined-Star contract.<sup>776</sup> Whether they believed Allbritton to have deliberately misled them is unclear,<sup>777</sup> but the commissioners did demand, in advance of these second deliberations—and before they would consider reapproval—an explanation of Allbritton's seemingly baffling action.<sup>778</sup>

Rising immediately to his own defense, Allbritton turned the tables on his inquisitors, blaming the Commission for the sale of the *Star*. In his sworn statement, submitted to the FCC on February 20,<sup>779</sup> the publisher claimed that restrictions buried in the fine print of the commissioners' approval of the WJLA-KOCO sale made retaining the *Star* altogether too risky an undertaking for this otherwise famously high-stakes financial gambler.

Pointing first to a footnote in the FCC's ruling suggesting that future cross-ownership decisions might apply to his Combined shares, Allbritton complained: "I could no longer be assured that I could retain the stock for the twenty-year redemption term, and hence, obtain the

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<sup>776</sup> William H. Jones, "*Star* Sale Said Caused By TV Deal," loc. cit.

<sup>777</sup> David M. Alpern et al., "*Times New Star*," loc. cit. Alpern reported that Allbritton was from the beginning of the negotiations over WJLA a reluctant participant, arranging for the tradeout "under pressure from the FCC."

<sup>778</sup> William H. Jones, "*Star* Sale Said Caused By TV Deal," loc. cit. Jones reported that statements filed with the FCC by Allbritton had been "required by the agency last Friday [February 16], when it voted to reconsider this week its earlier 5-2 approval for Allbritton to sell WJLA (Channel 7) to Combined Communications."

<sup>779</sup> Ibid.

full value of the transaction for the *Star*.”<sup>780</sup> Additionally, because the Commission had endorsed the acquisition of KOCO for the public-interest purpose of “subsidization of the *Star*,” he also grieved that “due consideration” had not been given “to the financial realities facing the newspaper,” thus irrevocably tying his hands.<sup>781</sup>

Neither of Allbritton’s objections bears up well under scrutiny. He was not precluded from selling his Combined stock, should his cross-ownership investment in Combined and the *Star* be again called into question. If the *Star* were at the time, as Allbritton declared upon its sale to Time, “somewhere near the break-even point,”<sup>782</sup> there was little reason to suspect that the newspaper would require support from his Combined investment for the foreseeable future, and certainly not for twenty years. The subsidization grounds for the FCC’s ruling, moreover, could not have come as an unwelcome surprise to Allbritton, inasmuch as it mirrored the argument he included in his original filing, *vis.*, that revenues from the trade-out transaction subsidize the newspaper.<sup>783</sup>

Why, after having liberated himself from ownership of the *Star*, Allbritton fought to keep the notion of the WJLA-KOCO transaction alive in the eyes of both the FCC, and the public is inexplicable given that he had already attempted twice to sour the WJLA-KOCO deal.<sup>784</sup> His interest may have been less in reviving the tradeout than in covering his tracks about what the public might have perceived as an indecorous and premature sale of his

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<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>781</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>782</sup> Joe L. Allbritton, “Statement By the Publisher: *Star* is ‘Off and Running,’” *loc. cit.*

<sup>783</sup> See *supra*: 215.

<sup>784</sup> See *supra*: 216-217.

newspaper. Inasmuch as he continued to the end to pledge publicly his loyalty to the *Star*,<sup>785</sup> his credibility in Washington, at this point, would likely have been on the verge of dangerous freefall. Playing thus the victim, Allbritton may have hoped to deflect preemptively any criticism he might otherwise have endured in renegeing on his fiduciary obligation to Washington's Grey Lady. His tactic was to contend that he released the *Star* under duress, because the Commission made him do it:

[The FCC] had so restricted my future actions with respect to the *Star*, which I had kept alive in the face of million-dollar-a-month losses, that I would not be able to continue freely to exercise my business judgment regarding a sale or closing of the newspaper. I decided then to sell the *Star*.<sup>786</sup>

The sale of the *Star* was a lucrative one for the financier. According to the terms of the purchase agreement, Allbritton reportedly pocketed \$20 million in cash<sup>787</sup> and handed to Time an additional \$8 million in *Star* indebtedness, chiefly for the Star Building's mortgage.<sup>788</sup> Although maintaining that the purchase price was "less than [he] had proposed [to Time] earlier,"<sup>789</sup> Allbritton later acknowledged that, after three years of full ownership, he had more than doubled his investment in the Star Corporation.<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>785</sup> See, e.g., Allbritton's "Statement by the Publisher," loc. cit., and "Statement by Allbritton," loc. cit., which appeared in the *Star*, respectively, immediately after the sale and immediately upon his resignation as publisher.

<sup>786</sup> William H. Jones, "*Star* Sale Said Caused By TV Deal," loc. cit.

<sup>787</sup> Allbritton's initial investment for control of the newspaper in 1974 had been \$4.5 million in cash and a \$4.5 million loan to the Star Company. See *supra*: 162.

<sup>788</sup> [Unnamed Author], "Time Inc. Closes Deal to Buy The *Star*," *Washington Post*, March 16, 1978: C5.

<sup>789</sup> William H. Jones, "*Star* Sale Said Caused By TV Deal," loc. cit. Beyond "earlier," Allbritton did not disclose to what time—week, month or year—he referred in this statement.

<sup>790</sup> David M. Alpern et al, "Time's New *Star*," loc. cit. Halpern reported experts' estimates of the yield from Allbritton's disposition of Star Company holdings to be, "as much as \$70 million." See also John Holusha, "Allbritton Resigns As Publisher of the *Washington Star*," loc. cit. Holusha reported the profit margin to be approximately \$65 million. Allbritton's minimalist comment on his windfall was, according to Holusha: "I'm not at all unhappy with the financial arrangements."

Even after relinquishing possession, Allbritton continued to claim his enduring loyalty to the *Star*. With Time's president James R. Shepley at his side, he announced, at a press conference divulging the sale, that he would carry on his publishing labors at the newspaper for a term of "not less than five years."<sup>791</sup> He also affirmed his altruistic objectives for the *Star*, reiterating that he was "pleased to continue to work at [the] task [of publishing the *Star*] with the backing of a company such as Time Inc., which is dedicated to editorial excellence."<sup>792</sup>

Enlarging upon this theme in a statement that he placed into print alongside the breaking news of the sale, Allbritton made further public declaration of his honorable intent, as its once and future publisher, to shepherd the *Star* to greater glory for the benefit of Washington:

The *Washington Star* will remain an independent voice in the Nation's Capital. Its editorial policies will be set here. Its writers will speak the truth as they observe and understand it. And it will have the means to reach new thousands of readers with a wider sweep of news and comment.

As publisher of the *Star* I look forward eagerly and gladly to the coming years. The *Star* is on its feet. With the help of Time, Inc., and with your continued interest and support, it will be off and running.<sup>793</sup>

This good-faith testament of Allbritton's longterm devotion to the *Star* appeared in the newspaper February 3. On May 31, he resigned.<sup>794</sup>

Effecting his great escape from the *Star*, inasmuch as he had seemingly locked himself into a five-year job commitment to the newspaper, required singular finesse on Allbritton's part, as well as serendipity. The groundwork was laid in March, when, still determined to

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<sup>791</sup> [Unnamed author], "The *Star* Is Sold to Time," loc. cit.

<sup>792</sup> Ibid.

<sup>793</sup> Ibid.

<sup>794</sup> John Holusha, "Allbritton Resigns as Publisher," loc. cit.

remove himself from the tangle of the WJLA-KOCO transaction,<sup>795</sup> the media magnate took wily advantage of the discomfiture of the civic groups opposing the sale. Fortune provided an opening for Allbritton when these groups, upon learning that the FCC had on March 10 approved the WJLA-KOCO contract a second time—over their objections and calls for delay—appealed the Commission’s decision in federal court.<sup>796</sup> Likely unknown to them at the time, their appeal was sufficient to activate a termination clause in Allbritton’s purchase agreement with Combined. Referencing, as the *Washington Post* reported, “specific provisions of the contract providing for cancellation,”<sup>797</sup> having to do with the insinuation of the federal courts into the mix,<sup>798</sup> Allbritton, in a letter sent to Eller on March 24, dispatched KOCO and Combined with one swift stroke of the pen:

You have said you do not want to consummate the transaction unless the court has ruled on the matter. Rather than prolong the present state of uncertainty concerning our proposed transaction, the most practical course of action under the circumstances is to terminate the agreement. I regret that so many complications and delays have prevented our companies from carrying out the intended transaction.<sup>799</sup>

Thus spurning a sale reported to have been valued at no less than \$80 million,<sup>800</sup> Allbritton abandoned the KOCO ship.<sup>801</sup> Still owner of WJLA, however, and, as its publisher,

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<sup>795</sup> Jerry Knight, “Allbritton Cancels Pact to Exchange Television Station,” loc. cit.

<sup>796</sup> Ibid.

<sup>797</sup> Ibid.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid.

<sup>800</sup> In offering to purchase WJLA, Karl Eller had valued WJLA at \$80 to \$85 million—\$25 to \$30 million for KOCO and \$55 million worth of Combined stock. (See [unnamed author], “Time, Inc., Closes Deal to Buy the *Star*,” loc. cit.) Another report placed the value of the sale at nearly \$100 million. (See John Holusha, “Allbritton Resigns as Publisher,” loc. cit.)

<sup>801</sup> Jerry Knight, “Allbritton Cancels Pact to Exchange Television Station,” loc. cit.

in operational control of the *Star*, Allbritton was not yet released from the FCC's cross-ownership rules.<sup>802</sup> After selling the *Star*, although another ten months to dispose of the television station and retain his position as the *Star*'s publisher were available to him, Allbritton, defying logic, announced his resignation. Whether Allbritton sought another buyer for WJLA between March 16, when the *Star* sale was finalized, and May 31, when he resigned, remains unknown. No evidence suggesting that he (publicly) signalled entertaining a sale between 1975, when the FCC issued its December 1978 deadline for his cross-ownership-rule compliance, and the autumn of 1977, when the KOCO transaction materialized has surfaced.<sup>803</sup> When asked why he chose not to sell the broadcast facility with its anticipated \$80 million price tag and remain at the *Star*, which, for purportedly altruistic reasons, he had only three months earlier pledged so to do, he responded: "The economics of that just didn't make good sense."<sup>804</sup>

Allbritton employed the same strategy for defending his resignation from the *Star* as he had when he had sold it, namely to assign culpability to the FCC. Despite three years' forewarning that retaining WJLA while in control of the newspaper would keep him in the cross-hairs of noncompliance with FCC regulations, he implied in his final public utterance as the *Star*'s publisher that, because the Commission had again forced his hand, he was resigning against his will:

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<sup>802</sup> Ibid. As was stipulated in the report, the cross-ownership regulation applied to individuals who owned, operated or controlled two media outlets in the same market, and, for purposes of the regulation, publishing the *Star* constituted operational control.

<sup>803</sup> According to *Newsweek*, unnamed "sources at the *Star*" claimed, improbably, that "ten or fifteen other possible buyers had also expressed interest" in the *Star*. No information was given as to the names of these alleged buyers or the period, if any, during which they might have come forward. See David M. Alpern et al, "Time's New *Star*," loc. cit.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid.

The Federal Communications Commission, which granted us the license to operate Channel 7, has adopted rules that would require a decision on my part as to whether or not I will continue as a licensee of Channel 7 or as publisher of the *Star*. I have always been in total compliance with the FCC rules and do not intend to be in noncompliance. I, therefore, have decided, effective at the end of this business day and with the consent of Time Incorporated, to resign as publisher and chief executive officer and director of the *Washington Star*.<sup>805</sup>

As he indicated in his statement, Albritton departed on the spot. On the day he made his announcement and having given no advance notice,<sup>806</sup> the now-former publisher, trampling on the four-years-long loyalty of his employees and the equally longstanding trust of his readers, walked away from the *Star*.

At the end of Allbritton's turbulent reign, the *Star*, on the surface—and surely to its purchaser Time, Incorporated—might have appeared to be solvent; but it teetered on the verge of collapse, owing to internal weaknesses brought about in part by Allbritton's Machiavellian machinations. In tribute to the god of the bottom line, one third of the newspaper's workforce had been eliminated,<sup>807</sup> and its much-diminished staff had functioned for the previous six months without benefit of an editorial leader.<sup>808</sup> In addition, daily circulation stood, in September 1977—with Bellows still perched at the editorial helm—at 349,475.<sup>809</sup> At the end

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<sup>805</sup> “Statement by Joe L. Allbritton,” *Washington Star*, May 31, 1978: A1.

<sup>806</sup> John Holusha, “Allbritton Resigns as Publisher,” loc. cit. Allbritton acknowledged deciding to resign, “on the advice of his lawyers,” one day prior to his announcement. Holusha reported a spokesman for Time, at pains to spin the bad effect of the void abruptly left by Allbritton at the top of the *Star*'s food chain, to remark: “I'm sure there will be a publisher, but I'm not sure who it will be at this time.”

<sup>807</sup> [Unnamed author], “Capital Buy: Time Inc. Acquires the *Star*,” loc. cit.

<sup>808</sup> *Star* managing editor Sidney Epstein held place as interim editor after Bellows left. A permanent replacement for Bellows, having departed in November 1977, was named not until June 1978, in the person of Murray Gart, previously *Time Magazine*'s assistant managing editor and chief of correspondents. Gart had only minimal experience at a daily newspaper. For a survey of Gart's credentials in journalism, see Richard T. Stout and Joseph Tinkelman, “Is Time Running Out on the *Washington Star*,” op. cit: 206, 208.

<sup>809</sup> Marjorie Hunter, “Time Inc. Buys *Washington Star*,” loc. cit.

of March 1978, four months after Bellows's dismissal, it measured only 329,147.<sup>810</sup> Sunday circulation during the same period fell equivalently, from 336,680<sup>811</sup> to 315,763,<sup>812</sup> an erosion in both cases of approximately six percent. Undoubtedly for the benefit of a wary public, as well as the *Star*'s new owners, Allbritton, on the day that he resigned, publicly attributed the disparity in circulation figures to nothing more than his own "inattention," reassuring one and all that circulation figures were already rising, would reach 350,000 by September 1978 and 375,000 within a year. His predictions never materialized.<sup>813</sup>

The *Star*'s employees were demoralized, perhaps irreparably so. As *The Washingtonian* recalled it, the rapid rise and fall of the *Star*'s fortunes in this roller-coaster period, during which Bellows was hired to revive the newspaper, engaged in his death struggle with management for editorial space, budget and personnel, and then was unceremoniously shown the door, left the staff in the remaining few months of Allbritton's tenure twisting in the wind.<sup>814</sup> Although only Allbritton can say with certainty why he had bought, managed, trod on his personnel, and then sold the *Star* as recklessly as he did, shortly after taking over as publisher in 1974 a clue surfaced. At a meeting with area advertisers, designed most probably

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<sup>810</sup> Richard T. Stout and Joseph Tinkelman, "Is Time Running Out on the *Washington Star*," op. cit.: 134. When it purchased the *Star* in February, Time, Inc., may not have been privy to the the newspaper's then-recent circulation figures, inasmuch as they were made public not until April, a month after the *Star*'s sale was completed.

<sup>811</sup> Marjorie Hunter, "Time Inc. Buys *Washington Star*," loc. cit.

<sup>812</sup> Richard T. Stout and Joseph Tinkelman, "Is Time Running Out on the *Washington Star*," loc. cit.

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid.*, and John Holusha, "Allbritton Resigns," loc. cit.

<sup>814</sup> Steve Daley, "Shootout at the *Star*," op. cit.: 61-66 *passim*.

to attract their business to the *Star*, he revealed, off the cuff, the pecuniary nature of his ambitions, reportedly remarking: “You and I are driven by the same purpose—greed.”<sup>815</sup>

### **Zero Sum Game**

On June 1, 1978, Time, Inc., took over complete control of the *Star*, installing Murray J. Gart as executive editor and pledging to spend five years—as Allbritton had—as well as \$60 million, to continue speeding the newspaper’s recovery.<sup>816</sup> To give credit where due, Time, in the three-and-one-half years that it held ownership, acquiesced to liberal expenditures on behalf of the *Star*, improving the physical plant and equipment, and recovering some of its editorial staff positions, as *The Washingtonian* detailed in what would become its last feature on the dying *Star*:

Using Time’s money, [George] Hoyt [the *Star*’s Time-designated business manager] has done an admirable job of refurbishing the down-at-the-heels *Star*. He spent \$303,000 remodeling the *Star* building and another \$300,000 on an elaborate security system that has sharply reduced muggings of *Star* employees in the Southeast slum neighborhood where the newspaper is inconveniently headquartered.

A computerized system for keeping track of advertising accounts cost some \$400,000, and another \$807,000 was spent to rebuild the advertising composition system. Hoyt found that the *Star*’s 300 delivery trucks averaged nine years in age and 200,000 miles in service; he has committed \$891,000 to replace 100 trucks and rebuild the others. Another \$400,000 was spent on a computer system to improve newspaper delivery and billing. New machines costing \$774,000 stuff advertising supplements into the paper, a job that used to be done by hand.

Hoyt has spent \$400,000 on press modifications, one of which saves \$500,000 a year in newsprint costs by reducing the paper’s width by half an inch. One expense “rose out of the weeds,” says Hoyt: New District workers’ compensation regulations that cost an unexpected \$1.1 million last year and will run more than \$2 million this year. That’s for some 1,300 *Star* employees, and it compares with a 1980 workers’ compensation bill of only \$984,000 for all Time Inc. employees outside Washington and Texas, where much of Time Inc.’s timber, packaging, and building-material operations are located.

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<sup>815</sup> Stephen Klaidman, “A Financial Wizard,” loc. cit.

<sup>816</sup> Richard T. Stout and Joseph Tinkelman, “Is Time Running Out,” op. cit.: 129.

Hoyt says that the biggest investment has been in the editorial department, where the computerized newsroom operation was brought up-to-date for \$2.681 million, the staff was increased from 225 to 270, and offices outside the *Star* building were rented for \$100,000 a year to house staffs for the local sections.<sup>817</sup>

Having been given carte blanche by Time,<sup>818</sup> Gart retooled the *Star* in his own editorial image, favoring hard news over features and analysis, creating spin-off, local sections for each of the District's surrounding suburban counties, and inaugurating a morning edition released for news-stand distribution in the District of Columbia.<sup>819</sup> As he reiterated in an interview with *The Washingtonian* shortly before the newspaper folded, his goal, in part, was to make of the *Star* a serious newspaper. By inference—and in the same breath—he eschewed, acerbically, the glittery and gossipy *Star*-lite approach of his predecessor Jim Bellows:

We chose deliberately not to do a number of things we could have done to get us quick fixes in circulation that would have done, in my judgment, very little for the quality of the newspaper, and maybe in the end put us out of business . . . .

I didn't want to settle for a little glamour and a little froth . . . . I wanted to cover this city as it should be covered. You cannot be a major Washington newspaper without playing major-league journalism . . . . I'm trying to deliver to the town what I think of as a fair and balanced report. It may not provide all the drama . . . of the other paper [the *Washington Post*], but I think over the long haul it's more durable . . . .

Let me tell you about Bellows. He left here in the fall of '77. I got here in June of '78. There was little resemblance between the paper that Bellows put out and the one that I inherited. A lot of the institutions that he started had gone straight to hell. He wasn't here and they weren't being kept up . . . "In Focus" and "Q&A" and some of the other things. They'd gotten so

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<sup>817</sup> Richard T. Stout and Joseph Tinkelman, "Is Time Running Out," op. cit.: 208

<sup>818</sup> Richard T. Stout and Joseph Tinkelman, "Is Time Running Out," op. cit.: 131. Stout and Tinkelman reported that Time "honored what it calls 'separation of church and state,' meaning that the publisher can't tell the editor what to do, and vice versa. So Gart puts out a product tailored to his own standards and turns it over to Hoyt, who sells it."

<sup>819</sup> Richard T. Stout and Joseph Tinkelman, "Is Time Running Out," op. cit.: 131-133, *passim*.

damn tiresome and boring that it was embarrassing to print them. Those who still bleat for the good old days, so be it.<sup>820</sup>

Gart's vision for the *Star* failed either to galvanize the newspaper's staff<sup>821</sup> or to win Washington's readers. On his watch, the *Star*'s vital signs plummeted beyond repair, and *The Washingtonian*, ever vigilant, reported the bad tidings:

Daily circulation has dropped to 323,000, the lowest since the *Star* merged with the tabloid *Washington Daily News* in 1972. Sunday circulation has fallen below 300,000 for the first time since 1960. Advertising linage was down last year from 1979 and has declined still further this year . . . .

As the *Star* has shriveled the *Post* has prospered. The *Post* now sells five newspapers for every two sold by the *Star*, and prints three times as much advertising . . . .

Important editors and writers continue to peel off. Last month, the man Gart had recruited as his second-in-command, former *Newsday* editor William F. McIlwain, resigned from the *Star* to accept the editorship of the *Arkansas Gazette* in Little Rock. A day earlier, Jonathan Fuerbringer, son of a retired Time Inc. vice president, quit the *Star* to join the Washington bureau of the *New York Times* . . . . McIlwain and Fuerbringer said that they simply accepted offers of better jobs, but their resignations closely followed the departures of sports editor David Lee Smith to the *Dallas Morning News*, political correspondent James R. Dickenson to the *Post*, and assistant managing editor Denis Horgan, who resigned angrily this summer after two years of friction with Gart.<sup>822</sup>

Despite this dismal reading of the *Star*'s badly faltering performance, Time continued to behold the *Star*'s prospects, publicly at least, through rose-tinted glasses. Interviewed for *The Washingtonian*'s last *Star* story, the three Time-appointed managers overseeing the *Star* during this period—editor Gart, along with business manager Hoyt, and Time's corporate

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<sup>820</sup> Richard T. Stout and Joseph Tinkelman, "Is Time Running Out," op. cit.: 207-209, passim.

<sup>821</sup> Gart's leadership style may have been responsible in part for the further deterioration of relations between staff and management. *Washingtonian* detailed the problem thus: "[Gart] makes his staff feel like lackeys, including top editors," says one top editor. "Even when he's agreeing with you and telling you you're doing well, he makes you feel bad about it." Ben Bradlee [executive editor at the *Post*], a man often criticized for his own abrasive personality, has reportedly said: "Murray Gart is the best thing that ever happened to me." See Richard T. Stout and Joseph Tinkelman, "Is Time Running Out," op. cit.: 206.

<sup>822</sup> Richard T. Stout and Joseph Tinkelman, "Is Time Running Out," op. cit.: 130.

secretary and vice president in charge of *Star* affairs Charles B. Bear—reassured in unison that the communications conglomerate’s financial and temporal devotion to the *Star* was unshakeable. *The Washingtonian* punctuated their unctuous claims with an external vote of confidence from an unlikely source—arch-rival Donald Graham, publisher of the *Post*:

Gart: “This is just the beginning of the beginning.”

Hoyt: “Nobody came down and said you’ve got five years or eight years or two years. The commitment is the question, not the figure. The commitment is to do the job; to make the *Star* a financially sound newspaper, a viable newspaper.”

Bear: “At our February board meeting it was stated that management feels we should stick with the *Star* for the long pull, and the board agreed with that. We’ll stick with it whether it’s \$40 million or \$60 million or \$80 million, or whatever.”

That open-ended promise should be a surprise to worried *Star* staffers who’ve never been informed of it and are aware only of the five-year commitment. *Post* publisher Donald Graham views the promise with respect.

Graham: “Time, Inc., has said they are in the business for the long run, for the duration. They are the biggest communication company in the United States. We know them very well, having competed against them in the news-magazine field since 1962. They are extremely good and extremely strong competition for us. I absolutely believe them when they say they are here for the long run. Their willingness to pour money into the *Star* speaks for itself.”<sup>823</sup>

This unambiguously roseate vision of a secure future for the *Star* also appeared in *The Washingtonian*’s final feature on the newspaper, which, released in the magazine’s August 1981 issue, posed in its title the question, “Is Time Running Out on the *Washington Star*?” *The Washingtonian*’s query was answered almost immediately. On August 7, belying Gart’s, Hoyt’s and Bear’s sanguine remarks to the contrary, Time, without warning, pulled the plug on its beleaguered newspaper, and the doors to the *Star*, after 169 years in continuous publication, closed forever.

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<sup>823</sup> Richard T. Stout and Joseph Tinkelman, “Is Time Running Out,” op. cit.: 129-130.

Syndicated political columnist Jack Germond, who, as a political reporter and assistant managing editor for national news served the *Star* for eight years, remained fervently loyal to his newspaper to the end. Although not necessarily an impartial observer, he, nevertheless, gives a convincing critique of Time's failed leadership in his eye-witness account of the *Star's* final act:

The experience with Time, Inc., was a disaster almost from the first day. The company installed Murray Gart, who had been chief of correspondents for the magazine, as the editor and gave him substantial money to try to save the paper. Gart and the *Time* editors seemed to think it was necessary to undo everything Bellows had done and to do everything he had not done, whether or not it made any sense. For example, they set up an elaborate and enormously expensive system of regional editions, complete with satellite offices and staffs, on the theory that the way to compete with the *Post* was with comprehensive coverage of every school board and sewer commission in the suburbs. What they learned, as Bellows had known, was that in Washington the national story is also the main local story.

The principal flaw in the *Time* approach, however, was that Gart and his cohorts were too stuffy. They wanted to put out a staid newspaper of record that was not really any different from the *Post* except perhaps less interesting and less thorough. We were very big on publishing the texts of presidential statements that had already appeared in the *Post* and the *New York Times* and heaven knows where else. We were short on series about homosexuals in professional sports. Gart treated Jules Witcover and me well enough. We had started our column, with help from Bellows, in 1977, but Jules had not been a full member of the staff. Gart made us joint political editors of the paper with prime responsibility for covering the 1980 presidential campaign while also writing our column, an arrangement that continued until the paper folded in August 1981.<sup>824</sup>

Thus did Washington's one-time, noble newspaper of record come to its ignoble end. The talent and industry of its stout-hearted staff had been squandered and dismissed, its financial underpinnings, both neglected and exploited. Mismanaged and mishandled by

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<sup>824</sup> Jack W. Germond, *Fat Man in a Middle Seat*, op. cit: 147-148.

outsiders, the formerly vibrant *Washington Star* passed, mourned but undefended, from its symbolic locus beneath the dome of the nation's capitol, into history.

## Chapter IV

### Lowens Undone: The End of an Era

The years of financial and editorial turbulence that hammered the *Star* before its eventual demise in 1981 wrought understandable havoc in its newsroom; but perhaps no arm of the editorial division was more calamitously hit than Irving Lowens's music department. Classical music reportage and criticism was during this period rapidly marginalized. The signal villain to inflict the most egregious damage to classical music coverage at the *Star* was, ironically, also the editor who came closest to returning the newspaper to its feet, James Bellows. As Bellows endeavored to lift the *Star* from its premature grave, his vision erred stunningly regarding the relative importance of classical music in Washington's culture. His mistaken perceptions worked to mute Lowens's voice, and, by extension, to constrain the vibrant and growing musical community that Lowens and his music staff served. As time would tell, neither Lowens nor his admirers would accept this shift in the *Star*'s path with equanimity.

#### **The Canary in the Coal Mine**

In early 1973, not long after the *Star*'s desperate acquisition of its afternoon competitor the *Daily News*,<sup>825</sup> Irving Lowens's memorandum<sup>826</sup> announcing unprecedented cutbacks in the *Star*'s music-department activities went out to his dream team of assistant music critics, the nine writers on music, both full and part time, who were then employed at the *Star*.<sup>827</sup>

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<sup>825</sup> The *Daily News* was folded into the *Star* on July 12, 1972. According to Joseph Goulden, "The sudden but not surprising death of the *Washington Daily News* on July 12—Black Wednesday, the newspaper people around town call that day—gave the newly-hyphenated *Star-News* an afternoon monopoly. And also a reprieve from death: Both papers, by public testament of their executives, were sick and dying. Either one died now, or both in time." See Joseph Golden, "Can the *Star-News* Survive?" *Washingtonian*, op. cit.: 76.

<sup>826</sup> Irving Lowens, Memorandum to [*Star* Music Staff], loc. cit.

<sup>827</sup> See *supra*: 68.

Times were bleak for the newspaper, and belt-tightening was the order of the day. The music department's contribution to what Lowens described in his memorandum as the "first economy wave since the purchase of the *News*," was undertaken by a variety of creative means.<sup>828</sup> The number of published reviews was curtailed "by an average of four each week"—causing substantial hardship for his part-time staff who stood to lose work and money—and, "in addition to trimming here and there besides," the length of each review was shortened by five lines.<sup>829</sup> Despite the dismal reduction in newsprint now allotted to music, Lowens remained upbeat, anticipating at this point, at least for public consumption, only a temporary setback. Thus, at the memorandum's conclusion, he remarked optimistically: "I do not know whether these changes will be permanent or not, but I would doubt it."<sup>830</sup>

Belying such optimism for the record were Lowens's private apprehensions about the well-being of his department and his job, no less than the survival of the *Star*. As he later recalled to the conductor Antal Dorati, serious music, as long as one year before the purchase of the *News*, was fast losing its preeminent position in the *Star*'s arts pages:

Beginning in 1972, the *Star* started losing money at a horrifying rate. Among the first departments to feel the pinch was the arts department. Space for serious music was cut drastically; pop and rock music space increased. The mass arts (movies, TV) were emphasized; the real arts were downplayed. All this was accompanied by weekly pitched editorial battles and weekly defeats.<sup>831</sup>

These newly restrictive editorial policies toward serious music must have caused Lowens grave concern. Not only did they signal a worrying deficit in the *Star*'s financial

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<sup>828</sup> Irving Lowens, Memorandum to [*Star* Music Staff], loc. cit.

<sup>829</sup> Ibid.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid.

<sup>831</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Antal Dorati, May 12, 1975, loc. cit.

capacities, but, although Lowens failed to mention so in his statement, they were also executed on arts editor Harry Bacas's watch. After his predecessor Edwin Tribble had been hurried into early retirement in late 1971, Bacas was given editorial supervision of the *Star's* arts departments.<sup>832</sup> He carried oversight for music during the 1972 fiscal crisis, and in 1973 he was in position to design and implement the cutbacks that Lowens enumerated in his memorandum. The *Star's ancien régime* had begun to shift, and, *vis-à-vis* music, danger loomed. As time would tell, the parlous restrictions now inhibiting the music department's journalistic reach augured only that more difficult troubles lay ahead.

According to Lowens, Bacas was no friend to serious music. The *Star's* financial challenges surely took their inevitable toll on all areas of the newspaper; but Bacas's ascension to a position of higher power "marked a new and even sadder chapter in the deterioration of the newspaper's coverage of Washington music," or so Lowens, looking back on that period in the *Star's* history, declared in his letter to Dorati.<sup>833</sup>

Lowens's messages to Bacas, protesting editorial indignities suffered by the music department at Bacas's hands, paint an unflattering portrait of the arts editor's overbearing management style and his purported bias against classical music. In one such missive, put forward in April 1974, Lowens complained that, by assigning stories on classical music without consulting him, Bacas circumvented the critic's authority, jeopardizing his ability to control the quality of the *Star's* music product. Lowens's anomalous syntactical errors in this short, three-sentence note betray his otherwise muted fury at Bacas's actions, which constituted a personal, as well as professional, affront:

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<sup>832</sup> See *supra*: 65.

<sup>833</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Antal Dorati, May 12, 1975, loc. cit.

Re [Day] Thorpe's Mozart piece. I have no way of knowing whether or not it will interfere with my proposed 5 May piece since I don't know what he is saying. But it is a bit difficult for me to plan my columns if somebody else is writing stuff on music which I haven't seen and which I don't know [sic] when it will run.<sup>834</sup>

Two more of Lowens's communiqués to Bacas together comprise a serial injunction against edits to a piece on the conductor Leopold Stokowski written by Richard Freed, then a stellar contributing critic for the *Star*.<sup>835</sup> Lowens's remarks imply that Bacas, or his subordinates, had galloped roughshod over Freed's copy, tampering with it almost beyond recognition and without regard for the writer's editorial integrity. His blistering language shows both his outrage at the offense and his willingness to confront forthrightly a superior on behalf of one of his own:

Dear Harry: I was appalled at the slaughter on Dick Freed's Stokowski piece—almost everything unusual, including all the forecasts of stuff he is planning to record, got chopped out. Surely, there is no point in plastering it all over page 1 and then cutting the living daylights out of it? Couldn't only one picture have been used, with the rest of the saved space devoted to the lead and the rest jumped? If the piece was to be cut that much, wouldn't it have been a reasonable thing to call Freed, tell him about it, and give him a chance to do the cutting? I'm most embarrassed about it, and since he went to a great deal of trouble over the piece, I think he'll be embarrassed about it, too.<sup>836</sup>

Dear Harry: Continuing the little conversation. Re the Stokowski piece. It may have read well, but whoever cut it threw out the story in it, which was a national beat. I enclose a copy of the letter I got from Freed

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<sup>834</sup> Irving Lowens, [memorandum] to Harry Bacas, [April 14, 1974], loc. cit.

<sup>835</sup> The communiqués in question were dispatched on consecutive days and concurrent with the April 14 complaint. At the time of this incident, Freed was the executive director of the Music Critics Association (1974-1990) and a contributing editor for *Stereo Review*. Prior to his tenure at the *Star*, he had served as a critic for the *New York Times* and an administrator at the prestigious Eastman School of Music. Having begun writing record reviews for the *Washington Post* in 1976, he received the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for music criticism twice, in 1984 and 1986. In 1996, he won a Grammy Award as an annotator for the *Heifetz Collection*, that year's Best Historical Album. See Paula Morgan, "Freed, Richard," *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy, <http://www.grovemusic.com>, accessed 14 January 2007; and [unknown author], "Grammy Award for Best Historical Album," *Wikipedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammy\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Historical\\_Album](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammy_Award_for_Best_Historical_Album), accessed 14 January 2007.

<sup>836</sup> *Ibid.*

(special delivery yet) at home this morning, and I must say that I agree with him about 95%. Why all the attention to the format when nobody bothers to read what goes into the paper? Since I definitely feel that I can't argue this one on the *Star's* side, I wonder if you wouldn't call Freed and try to smooth things over? I would hate to lose him. I don't see any reason why he can't be phoned if this kind of slaughter is going to take place. He doesn't have to be here personally to cut—he can do it by consulting over the phone. I know about production headaches, but after all, he should own his own by-line.<sup>837</sup>

In September 1974, in accordance with the stipulations of the *Star's* purchase agreement, Joe Allbritton took up his hands-on-the-rudder job as publisher, and Newbold Noyes stepped down as executive editor. When Bellows took Noyes's position in January 1975, the transfer to the *Star's* new leadership was complete. With neither Noyes nor Tribble on hand to intercede, Lowens and his music department were now subjected unfettered to the not-so-tender mercies of the *nouveau régime*. This included Bacas, Bacas's assistant Calendar editor Mary Vaughan, editor in charge of Portfolio Robert Menaker, and Mary Anne Dolan,<sup>838</sup> Bellows's new editor for the *Star's* entire Style department, which included, within Portfolio and the Sunday Calendar section, all news relating to arts and entertainment. As Lowens complained in his epistle to Dorati, both Bellows and Allbritton turned a blind eye to the *Star's* musical affairs, leaving Bacas and his anti-musical biases in full control:

Along came Mr. Allbritton, along came a new editor, Mr. Bellows,  
along came a new look to the newspaper, but Harry Bacas and his bias against  
the fine arts and his prejudice in favor of the mass arts remains and still  
basically determines the policy.<sup>839</sup>

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<sup>837</sup> Irving Lowens, [memorandum] to Harry Bacas, [April 15, 1974], loc. cit.

<sup>838</sup> As Bellows tells it, he promoted Dolan to head of Style after a small dinner party she hosted to welcome the new editor to Washington, D.C. By Bellows's own admission, Dolan's qualities as cook and hostess earned her the promotion: "One evening a couple of weeks later [after joining the *Star*], Keven [Bellows's wife] and I were at a dinner party for 12 at Mary Anne's home in Old Town Alexandria. Mary Anne managed it beautifully with no serving or cooking help. As we emerged, I asked Keven, 'Don't you think that someone who could pull that off without a ripple, with no serving or cooking help, could run a section at the *Star*?' I promptly put Mary Anne in charge of the paper's Style department." See Bellows's, *The Last Editor*, op. cit.: 174.

<sup>839</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Dorati, May 12, 1975, loc. cit.

Any illusions that Lowens might have harbored to contradict this dismal conclusion were summarily dashed in February 1975, only one month into Bellows's tenure, when another piece by Richard Freed was subjected to mediocre editing.<sup>840</sup> Freed had reviewed<sup>841</sup> a recording of music by Robert Parris<sup>842</sup> and the recently deceased Robert Evett,<sup>843</sup> a frequent contributor to the *Star* music pages and, as such, a close associate of both Freed and Lowens. As Freed told it, the review, which served in part as an obituary for Evett, was published in a grievously altered state, prompting Freed to send a letter of protest, in high dudgeon, to Vaughan. Freed's well-documented complaint shows the copy editor, from Freed's perspective, to be insufficiently schooled in language, to have ignored the writer's editorial rubrics, and to have deleted, carelessly, an important part of the review, *vis.*, Freed's commentary on Parris's music. The letter also objects to the *Star*'s lamentable lassitude in publishing the review long after the recording's new release would qualify as a current event:

Dear Miss Vaughan:

Had I know [sic] how the record cover or what I wrote about the Evett/Parris record would be used in the *Star-News*, I would not have made either available. It is not the changing of my words that rankles me (though "diffidences" does not fit<sup>844</sup>), or even the tasteless superimposition of that

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<sup>840</sup> This editorial altercation between Freed and Portfolio assistant editor Mary Vaughan occurred just weeks after Bellows had joined the *Star* staff as executive editor in January 1975.

<sup>841</sup> Richard Freed, "A Recording Worthy of Evett," *Washington Star*, February 9, 1975: D2.

<sup>842</sup> Robert Parris, 1924-1999, was a composer, pianist, harpsichordist and professor of music at George Washington University, as well as occasional contributor to the *Star* music pages.

<sup>843</sup> Evett, 1922-1975, was sufficiently accomplished as a writer and composer to have received Pulitzer Prize nominations in both arenas before his untimely death.

<sup>844</sup> Richard Freed, "A Recording Worthy of Evett," *loc. cit.* The offending paragraph read: "At the same time, a grant from George Washington University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences made the recording of the Parris sextet possible, and the pairing of these works by two composers so much admired in this area seemed a 'natural.' The irony is that, because of the possibly exaggerated diffidences, hardly anyone knows the record has been available for about five months."

ghastly cartoon<sup>845</sup> on the record cover, but why, when I specifically struck it out, was that slobbering and embarrassing first paragraph restored? (I even changed “Bob’s” in paragraph 2 to “Robert Evett’s” so it could become paragraph 1; no one bothered to change that back, so the references go from “Robert Evett” to “Bob” and back to “Robert Evett” within a few lines, but the ill-considered opening, which I clearly deleted, was printed.<sup>846</sup>) I sent the ms. in that condition instead of re-typing the page without the paragraph, only because I was writing in great haste; if I had re-typed it, of course, I’d be spared both the embarrassment and the additional time required for writing this protest. I even took care to point out in the letter with which I sent you the piece that that first paragraph was “ruled out.”

Even more irritating than the restoration of the paragraph clearly expunged, though, is the deletion of all the material on the Parris work on the same disc, the short paragraphs at the end of my piece. What is most incredible is that someone felt it appropriate to erase the very listing of the Parris work from the reproduction of the record jacket!!!!<sup>847</sup> (I wonder if anyone shopping for the recording, by the way, would accept what he finds, if he expects to find something resembling what is pictured in today’s paper.) The record has waited all these months for a review; surely the more substantial work of Parris is entitled to coverage, too.

As a professional reviewer whose name is affixed to this, I am mortified, and Bob Evett, barely cold by now, must be spinning in his grave over this gratuitous slight to his closest friend.

Sincerely,

[Richard Freed]<sup>848</sup>

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<sup>845</sup> Freed notes an unflattering caricature of Evett placed on the right half of the reproduction of the LP’s jacket appearing in the *Star*.

<sup>846</sup> Ibid. Freed refers here to the following paragraph, which opened the review’s printed version: “By postponing a telephone call I had intended to make last Monday evening, I missed my last opportunity to talk to Robert Evett, whose friendship—unique as all real friendships are—can be appreciated only by others who knew him. Many knew Bob longer or better than I did, but anyone whose life was touched by his feels a sense of loss; his humor, compassion, thoughtfulness, and even the way he would commiserate over the world’s going to hell in a bucket, were invaluable factors in my own survival efforts.”

<sup>847</sup> The LP’s title composition was Robert Parris’s “The Book of Imaginary Beings,” for flute, violin, cello, celesta, piano and percussion. No mention of this title piece appeared in the edited review’s narrative or on the record jacket’s reproduction in the *Star*. The recording, on the Vox Turnabout label, was released in 1974. The Parris title did appear in the review’s agate: “EVETT: Quintet for Piano and Strings, Robert Parris, piano, with the University of Maryland String Quartet; PARRIS: The Book of Imaginary Beings, University of Maryland Trio, with Dorothy Skidmore, flute, and Ronald Barnett and Thomas Jones, percussion. Turnabout TV-S34568, \$3.09.” Richard Freed, “A Recording Worthy of Evett,” loc. cit.

<sup>848</sup> Richard Freed, letter to Mary Vaughan, February 9, 1975, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

*Vox clamantis in deserto*

Coincident with this second editorial assault on Freed's work, Lowens saw his assistant Lawrence Sears abruptly replaced by George Gelles<sup>849</sup> and his cardiac symptoms recur.<sup>850</sup> In addition, the critic was at this time left badly troubled by the death and then posthumous disrespect for his friend Robert Evett<sup>851</sup>—occasioned by the editorial disassembly of Freed's review. Two months earlier, Allbritton had instituted his twenty-percent across-the-board pay cut.<sup>852</sup> Whether one or all of these incidents may have provoked Lowens to more aggressive action, within two weeks of Freed's complaint, the *Star's* chief music critic, on behalf of his staff and their journalistic efforts, protested directly to Bellows.

During an initial interchange between the two men,<sup>853</sup> Bellows made the suggestion—in all likelihood solicited by Lowens—that his chief music critic enlighten him in writing about the status of the *Star's* music department, as the opening sentence of Lowens's follow-up memorandum implies:

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<sup>849</sup> See Chapter I *supra*: 69-70.

<sup>850</sup> Lowens wrote to Dorati, in confidence, "It was at that point [after Gelles had replaced Sears in the music department] . . . with increasing signs of some cardiac instability, due to the incessant war over the way in which all music copy (not only the notorious one about which you already know [to which article copy Lowens refers here is unknown]) is being butchered by incompetent and unsympathetic editors at the newspaper, that I decided I must leave the newspaper at least temporarily. See Irving Lowens, letter to Dorati, May 12, 1975, loc. cit.

<sup>851</sup> In his letter of condolence to Janet Morris, Robert Evett's aunt, Lowens confessed: "You might be interested in knowing that Bob's [Evett] death has had a profound effect on my own life. Just this week I decided to apply for a year's leave of absence from my position as music critic of the *Star* . . . Life simply is too short to spend it working eighteen hours per day seven days per week." Irving Lowens, letter to Janet Morris, February 27, 1975, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>852</sup> *Ibid.* Lowens complained to Morris about the necessity of his working seven days per week despite the "four-day week for four days pay" restriction then in place.

<sup>853</sup> Although no record exists of a meeting at this time, the first sentence of Lowens's memorandum to Bellows alludes to this prior conversation. That Lowens, after an interchange with Bellows, penned his memorandum without delay is more, rather than less, likely.

Dear Mr. Bellows:

I much appreciate your invitation to write you a “long memo” about music in the *Star*, and I hope you’ll pardon me for taking advantage of it.<sup>854</sup>

The seemingly genuine concern for music implied by this invitation must have provided significant encouragement to Lowens. Hopeful perhaps that his editor would, if not return the *Star*’s music coverage to its past splendor, at least reduce some of the impedances to its survival, Lowens took full advantage of the opportunity that Bellows’s offer presented, penning, in response, a rambling, 2500-word monograph on the music department’s past and present.<sup>855</sup>

Beginning his deposition for the defense by setting the scene, Lowens described the condition in which he found music coverage at the *Star* upon his arrival in 1954 as a player on Washington’s music-journalism stage:

Let me begin with the beginning of the world, since a little bit of history may help to clarify the present disastrous situation. Back in 1953, when from Alice Eversman, music was one area in which the *Post* had clear superiority, even though the *Star* was the dominant Washington newspaper. Paul Hume was young and eager, had gotten that letter from Truman, while Miss Eversman was the old-fashioned “lady” type of critic, who reviewed the dresses and who attended to that rather than the music. Day changed that. His writing was literate and sophisticated, he covered more ground than did the opposition (which then included the *Times-Herald* and the *News* in addition to the *Post*) and he made the *Star* essential reading for everybody who was interested in serious music in Washington. I served as his assistant, no. 1 in a line of stringers.<sup>856</sup>

Foremost among Lowens’s goals in writing this communiqué was to convince Bellows of the music department’s importance to the *Star* and to Washington, Bellows’s new

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<sup>854</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to [James] Bellows, February 21, 1975, loc. cit.

<sup>855</sup> Ibid.

<sup>856</sup> Ibid.

home town. Not shy of pointing to his own record of achievement, Lowens engaged in some minor puffery to plead his case, which, because it was precisely documented, allowed him to tout, correctly, his own virtues as a music critic of national influence and authority. As such, his pivotal role in the evolution of music at the *Star* into a grand and growing concern served as the subtext for the second segment of his homily, on the newspaper's more recent musical history:

By 1960, Day had tired of the music game, and when it was decided that he would become the *Star*'s book critic, taking over from the retiring book critic, I was asked if I would become the *Star*'s chief music critic. I accepted, although I had a full-time job in the Music Division of the Library of Congress, because I felt I could do the job on a contract basis—a weekly Sunday column, two to three reviews per week, building up a bigger and better stable of stringers, providing the town with full and interesting coverage of the musical scene. But Washington was growing musically, and by 1966, it became evident to me that I had to make a choice—I couldn't hold down jobs at both LC and the newspaper and do justice to either. After many discussions with your predecessor and myself, I opted for the *Star* and came on full-time, with Newby Noyes conceding the need for an assistant to take care of the burgeoning paper work and to enable me to expand into the pop music field with stringers, something which had been previously neglected.

Despite a six-month absence of mine in 1969 (on the request of the National Endowment of the Arts, I was given leave without pay to help launch the *American Musical Digest*, a national news magazine devoted to music, which regrettably survived for only seven monthly issues—this was just after the income tax revision law, and foundations were very queasy about underwriting continuing projects), the *Star*'s superiority in music was complete by 1970. We outcovered the *Post* two to one; our music calendar was much more complete; we had regular record coverage; we ran local music news and national music news. And we did this in approximately the same space the *Post* used. The *Star* was nationally acknowledged in the musical field as the Washington paper to read, despite Paul Hume's individual big reputation, occasioned for the most part by wide exposure in local radio programs (and later national radio programs such as the Met opera broadcasts). I was asked to be a member of the Pulitzer Music Jury in 1969, again in 1972, and once again in 1975. I was elected president of the Music Critics Association in 1971 and re-elected in 1973. I received the Deems Taylor Award for distinguished music criticism in 1973, the highest award in the field.<sup>857</sup>

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<sup>857</sup> Ibid.

Herewith Lowens apprised Bellows that, under his leadership, the *Star* had risen to certain supremacy over the *Post* as purveyor of current national and world musical events and as Washington's go-to news outlet for local music coverage and criticism. With only partly concealed fury, Lowens then lambasted his superior with the irony that this remarkable music department, with its far-reaching, if not global, influence and prestige, was being undermined by the very newspaper that created it. Unlike his earlier, irate memos to Bacas, at least this portion of Lowens's appeal to Bellows retained a modicum of decorum and civility:

[B]eginning in 1972, with the retirement of Ed Tribble as editor of the arts section, and as the *Star* began to go downhill economically, the music section has come under constantly increasing pressure to contract. Of course, that's when the space squeeze began getting acute, too, and one must adjust to realities. I did, although I went down fighting. The *Star*'s reviews began to grow shorter, then fewer. News about music in the paper became less frequent, and was finally reduced to a once a week "Area Music Notes," column. The catchword was, "if it's outside the Beltway, we're not interested." I had built up a network of good writers all over Europe, and during the summer, important musical events were covered at minimal costs to the *Star*. That disappeared. Record coverage grew sporadic.

OK. Times were hard. Meanwhile, the *Post*, using as example the *Star*'s excellent music coverage, increased its own and was clearly beginning to push us. They began to use more stringers, cover more concerts.

At the *Star*, the pressure on music was unrelenting. I had lost my assistant in favor of a part-time helper, and the concerts continued to proliferate, while available space declined. In effect, even if we stood still, we were losing ground, because there was more to cover.

But things did not begin to get really desperate until the 1973-74 season, when a policy cutback was decided upon, and a maximum was placed on the amount of space available for music on Mondays and this led to a decrease in coverage, and the abandonment of any idea of complete musical coverage. We were plainly overhauled by the *Post* at that time despite every effort I made to try to keep up with them.<sup>858</sup>

The meat of Lowens's memorandum was a sizable laundry list of individual grievances, collectively demonstrating that, through the *Star*'s financial retrenchment, music had forfeited its former exalted position in Washington's music scene and its competitive edge

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<sup>858</sup> Ibid.

over its formidable rival, the *Post*. Additionally, its valued status inside the *Star*'s own editorial family had been seriously compromised. As Lowens told it, his department's music critics were increasingly subjected to malicious harassment, and their work routinely denigrated. Such untoward circumstance proved in Lowens's mind beyond any reasonable doubt that the mid-level editors then in place at the *Star* held in contempt classical music as a worthwhile enterprise, held in contempt the dedicated staff who reported on it, and, by inference, held in contempt those of the *Star*'s readers who saw fit to follow its pursuits.

Exhibits A and B for the prosecution were Robert Menaker and Harry Bacas, about whom

Lowens minced no words:

Which brings me to the present season, when things are just about catastrophic. I am not complaining about the amount of space that has been allotted to serious music in the paper, but to a vicious war which has developed in the arts section between editors and writers, which is resulting in a debilitating morale problem and totally inferior music copy. It is not a space problem. I can adjust to any amount of space. It is a question of contempt on the part of at least some of the editors for the writers whose copy they are handling, and quite specifically, a young man inherited by the Portfolio Section from the Sports Department, Bob Menaker. There have been far too many instances of poor editing based on ineptness, but Mr. Menaker's are to be distinguished from those because of their particular brutality, almost to the point of sadism. If this newspaper is going to pull out of its present fix, it will do so only if everybody respects each other and pulls together—this Mr. Menaker seems utterly incapable of doing. During the whole course of my career in government and with the *Star*, I have never come across an individual quite so arrogant, so cruel, and so destructive of the morale of others around him. The late Robert Evett, who suffered particularly at his hands, once called him "a little Hitler," and despite what ability as a layout man he might have, I think that is an accurate characterization, and (if you can speak to them in private so that they will not be afraid of retaliation because of their frankness) I am certain that others in Portfolio will bear this out.

This brings me to a few words about Mr. Bacas, which I trust you will hold in confidence (as I assume you will hold my words about Mr. Menaker in confidence.) Obviously, either or both are in a position to make my life at the *Star* absolute hell with the greatest of ease. I do not doubt his good intentions—but I do doubt his ability and his imagination when it comes to supervising a ticklish operation such as Portfolio. I have often, in the past, suggested (for example) the desirability of using the *L.A. Times* Sunday arts

supplement as a model, but I have been ridiculed for making the suggestion. Of course, I might be considered prejudiced, since I have watched the music section decline under his stewardship to the point where I am quite literally ashamed of it. My colleagues in the Music Critics Association ask me “what’s happened to the *Star*?” I can’t answer except to say that times are bad. And much worse, the musical public, which formerly respected, read, and bought the paper, has been steadily going to the opposition. Frankly, I don’t blame them much. My own copy has been consistently butchered to the point where it only minimally resembles what I have written; with increasing frequency, it just isn’t run. The explanation, from which there is no appeal, is that it is “boring” or “dull” or “pedantic.” That of the *Star*’s stringers is handled with even less respect. I am hardly surprised—I have been on hand nights often enough to be forced to hear the contempt with which it is handled. If all your writers on the arts are as bad as Mr. Menaker makes them out to be . . . you’d be well advised to either fire them all, including myself, or give up any attempt to bring the *Star* back to real life.<sup>859</sup>

Lowens presented the particulars of his indictment complete with a documentary paper trail that incontrovertibly established probable cause for an internal investigation. No legitimate business enterprise should have allowed such professional improprieties to continue, and ascertaining their truth would have been incumbent upon any official in Bellows’s senior position. That Lowens, on short notice, labored to develop so comprehensive an analysis, and in such vivid detail, implies his belief that Bellows would indeed take his complaint seriously and act accordingly:

Allow me to cite a few instances of bad editing, stemming from only the past few weeks.

1. You will find, in Wednesday’s (19 Feb) paper an AP story about a commissioning program initiated by the Washington Performing Arts Society. I wrote a bylined story based on a very poorly written press release, which was thrown in the wastepaper basket by Menaker despite the incomprehensibility of at least part of the AP dispatch. No effort was made to explain why—he “intuited” that the AP story was clearer and refused, upon confrontation, to explain to me what was wrong with my story. I enclose my black sheet for your comparison.

2. For two Sundays running, unauthorized material from the *Sunday Times* was used as filler material in music. I understand that the hole

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<sup>859</sup> Irving Lowens, Letter to James Bellows, loc. cit.

developed “at the last moment.” However, no attempt was made to contact me, or to ask my opinion about what musical items were available, or were good or bad, either at that time or at any other time. Neither Mr. Bacas, nor any other editor feels it necessary to ask for my advice in regard to musical materials appearing in the *Star*.

3. After Bob Evett’s death, I was too broken up to do a story myself. He had been a close personal friend since the 1940’s, and I was responsible, in large measure, for his presence at the *Star*. I therefore asked Mr. Bacas’s permission to have Richard Freed, a nationally known record critic who was responsible for arranging to have Evett’s Quintet recorded, to do a review of the record. The enclosed letter from Mr. Freed, written in anger immediately after he saw how the *Star* had handled his story, is indicative, I think, of the way in which the Portfolio editors feel about the copy they are handling.

4. For weeks, the items I had chosen to go under the music rubric in Top Billing in the Saturday morning edition were duplicated in the Furthermore section following on page 2, an utterly stupid waste of good space, and foolish duplication. It probably would have gone on forever had I not called it to Mr. Bacas’s attention. It continued even after I had called it to his attention until I personally stood over the Hendrix [computer system] and pointed this out to the editor who was handling the copy.

5. Some weeks back, the National Endowment for the Arts suddenly convened a three-day open national conference on music here in Washington, open to the public. I called it to the attention of Mr. Bacas, who said no coverage was possible, but that I should write an advance. I wrote the advance, which was thrown in the wastepaper basket. Nothing about the three days appeared in the *Star*. The *New York Times* felt it important enough to send Grace Glueck down here for the three days, to devote extensive daily coverage to the event, and to base two front page arts section pieces to problems raised by the conference in the Sunday arts section several weeks later. The *Post* covered the first day extensively, and had a reporter there throughout the conference. Obviously, for Mr. Bacas, music simply isn’t important. This is reflected by the editorial personnel around him. Example: When the Kennedy Center last year put on a month-long Mozart festival which attracted music critics here from all over the country, the *Post* devoted much of its front page to the matter. The *Star* used a cut version of a short column I wrote on an inside page with the headline, “Why Pick On Mozart?” All through the festival, the event was looked at with contempt and moans and groans by the *Star*’s editorial personnel—and music is consistently played down by them.

I could cite dozens of additional instances, some big and some small, by going back into the past a bit, but these can serve as fairly typical. Let me make myself crystal clear. I am not asking for additional space for music. What I am asking for (and I strongly feel that this is a legitimate request) is that the present spirit of fear, contempt, and arrogance demonstrated by a character such as Bob Menaker be eliminated, that editors and writers work together with a feeling of mutual respect and confidence for the betterment of

the newspaper. It is a shocking waste of good people to allow such attitudes to wreck morale (and it is by no means the morale of the music people alone that has been affected) when the only road to survival is through cooperation. If my copy is not up to the standards an editor expects, I would think that he would tell me why and give me a chance to do better. I have never been given that chance—rather, my words have been “improved” for me and I have been faced with a *fait accompli* about which I can do nothing. And if I can’t write well enough to satisfy a competent editor, I have no business on the staff—I ought to be fired for incompetence.<sup>860</sup>

Leaping above the chain of command and reporting directly to Bellows the many abuses and affronts allegedly perpetrated against his music staff by such malefactors as Bacas and Menaker, constituted a bold, but hazardous tactic on Lowens’s part. The palpable outrage emanating from his remarks and the indecorous rhetoric to which his essay occasionally yields placed Lowens in flagrant opposition to his immediate superiors and, therefore, in their line of fire, were they to be made aware of his accusations. His points, entirely credible, are likewise damning. As he declared to Bellows at the end of his narrative, any leak of the memorandum’s contents to his persecutors would have imperiled his work life at the *Star*:

One final request. As you know, the editor-writer relationship is a delicate one. Vengefulness on the part of an editor is simple to execute and almost undetectable. Life has been rough enough for me thus far at the *Star*—it can easily be turned into living hell if Mr. Menaker (who is to be in charge of the new “Calendar” section, I understand) and/or Mr. Bacas (who remains in a powerful position) were to know that I have written to you so bluntly. Please, therefore, treat this as a confidential communication. I don’t know how many others in Portfolio would be bold enough to try to solve this problem, but you won’t get any such reaction in an open meeting with both writers and editors present, I can assure you.

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<sup>860</sup> Ibid.

I don't want to take up more of your valuable time than I already have, but if you wish to speak to me, I'll be happy to elaborate or elucidate further. And God knows there are dozens of other problems. Even just in Portfolio.

Most cordially,

Irving Lowens  
Music Critic<sup>861</sup>

Bellows should have neither ignored nor condoned the bad behavior of Lowens's antagonists, but he was apparently culpable on both counts. A fellow traveler, if not one of the ring leaders, of the new breed of journalist<sup>862</sup> then emerging on the American scene, Bellows's editorial predilections leaned heavily toward youth<sup>863</sup> and popular culture.<sup>864</sup> While his predecessor, the gentleman journalist Newbold Noyes, respected the entire range of available news beats, to which the editorial *carte blanche* that he famously allowed his reporters gives

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<sup>861</sup> Ibid.

<sup>862</sup> The American author Tom Wolfe, who was a cohort of Bellows when both worked at the *New York Herald Tribune*, coined the term, "New Journalism," to denote reportage that blended fiction and nonfiction and put the writer at the center of attention. Wolfe, who claimed that New Journalism was founded at the *Herald-Tribune* during the Bellows era, served as a pillar for Bellows's Writers-in-Residence program at the *Star*, along with fellow New Journalists Jimmy Breslin and Dick Schaap. For critical commentary on New Journalism, see Michael J. Arlen, "Notes on the New Journalism," *Atlantic*, May 1972: 43-47; and John Hersey, "The Legend on the License," *Yale Review* LXXV/2 (February 1986): 289-314.

<sup>863</sup> In his memoir, Bellows points with pride to his youth-oriented innovations at the *Star*, and the anti-establishment patois of his descriptions reflects those predilections: "In the newsroom of the *Star* we continued to produce a feisty, solid alternative to the *Washington Post*'s in-with-the-power-set approach . . . I added some young blood to the staff and many new features . . . local news fresh with telling details . . . consumer coverage . . . pushing, insistent stories on government . . . the Q & A on page one every day [and] . . . focus stories explaining some aspect of the news . . . [Star reporter] Dave [Burgin] was young and hot-blooded; his ideas were irreverent, and he had a million of them. See Jim Bellows, *The Last Editor*, op. cit.: 173-174 *passim*.

<sup>864</sup> The *Star*'s then-associate editor Jack Germond praised Bellows's "feel for the popular culture that is essential in editing newspapers these days." (See Jack W. Germond, *Fat Man in a Middle Seat*, op. cit.: 143.) Prior to his arrival at the *Star*, Bellows edited the *Los Angeles Times*'s West, a Sunday supplement of soft news and pop-culture features designed for men. Bellows's penchant for the popular arts reached its epitome between 1981-82, when he served as one of the creators and the managing editor of *Entertainment Tonight*, the still ubiquitous daily television show dedicated to "news" about popular culture in America.

evidence,<sup>865</sup> Bellows, the self-styled nonconformist,<sup>866</sup> respected edginess, novelty and irreverence over old and established newspaper tradition.<sup>867</sup> As he frankly admitted, his editorial *credo* was to sell newspapers in part by stirring the rumor pot and capitalizing on the resulting buzz.<sup>868</sup> Because classical music was by definition unequal to the demands of Bellows's more ostentatious editorial agenda, Lowens's long and carefully drafted appeal to restore classical music's status at the *Star* would have—and must have—fallen irretrievably on deaf ears.

### *Interregnum*

That Bellows responded unenthusiastically to Lowens's fervent petition is confirmed by Lowens's subsequent, and fateful, action. On February 24, 1975, only three days after his memorandum to Bellows was penned, Lowens submitted a formal request for one year's unpaid leave of absence from his beloved *Star*, a *de facto* resignation, although at this point still impermanent.

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<sup>865</sup> See *supra*: 87.

<sup>866</sup> In his memoir, Bellows described himself as “a maverick, a firebrand, a bomb thrower. I rub some people the wrong way. I can be a little brash. And I don't fall back gracefully . . .” See James Bellows, *The Last Editor*, op. cit.: 139.

<sup>867</sup> Another virtue for which Jack Germond lauded Bellows was his willingness to break with newspaper orthodoxy: “He [Bellows] understood that the standard fare—the coverage of politics, business, and sports—was essential but far from enough . . . The rules were there to be broken. Bellows's willingness to ignore many of the conventions of journalism was particularly satisfying . . .” Jack W. Germond, *Fat Man in a Middle Seat*, op. cit.: 143.

<sup>868</sup> Bellows's self-described wish to “roll the bowling balls, heat things up, get people talking” translated at the *Star* into The Ear, a gossip and rumor column that Jack Germond claimed “became famous—or infamous—and the best-read feature in the paper.” The column's accuracy was not necessarily guaranteed, according to Germond: “[Diana] McLellan [one of the column's two authors] did not make a fetish of checking out fully every little nugget that came her way, which meant corrections—or what she called “grovels”—were sometimes required. On occasion, however, the grovels were as snide as the original items.” (See Jim Bellows, *The Last Editor*, op. cit.: 141, and Jack W. Germond, *Fat Man in a Middle Seat*, op. cit.: 140-141.) Bellows also puffed with pleasure over his invention of the lampooning cartoon, ‘Federal Triangle,’ which he described as “a daily piece of political satire . . . a soap opera in print about Washington, which ran for several months.” See Jim Bellows, *The Last Editor*, op. cit.: 174.

Lowens warranted outstanding book commitments to be his petition's primary motive. Its tone, unlike his earlier, more collegial appeal to Noyes on a similar subject,<sup>869</sup> was little more than civil. Its timing, immediately upon the heels of his failed pleading of February 21, signaled his self-acknowledgement that no *deus ex machina* would appear to reverse the music department's downward-spiraling trajectory and that his interests would be better served if he allowed himself to be sidelined, at least for the while:

Dear Mr. Bellows:

In accordance with Part I, Article VI, Paragraph 5 of the *Star*-Newspaper Guild agreement, I am herewith requesting a one-year leave of absence without pay, to begin with the 10 March 1975 pay period. I need the time to complete three books on American music, two of them contracted for many years ago when I was still a staff member of the music division in the Library of Congress. These books are tied to the Bicentennial, now crashing down on us, and my publishers are pressing me for final copy.

I have thought about this matter long and hard, and I see no other solution to the problem. As chief music critic of the paper for 15 years (and a stringer for 7 before that), I've loved my job and most of the people with whom I've worked. It is hard for me to think about leaving what has been my working home, even temporarily. But as things now stand in Portfolio, I cannot find the peace of mind I need to discharge these outside responsibilities honorably, even were the necessary unbroken stretches of time available, which they are not. My peace of mind has long since eroded due to what I consider the deterioration of serious music coverage in the *Star* despite my best efforts to prevent it. And I've discovered that, so far as I'm concerned, there is no such thing as a four-day-a-week music critic. It's true that my pay is 20% less, but there's no way I can work only four days a week and do the kind of job in which I can take real pride. Consequently, my time logs since 22 December tell me that I've averaged considerably more than 40 hours per week due in part to the fact that this particular job involves much more than reviewing a few concerts and writing a weekly Sunday piece. To spend all

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<sup>869</sup> Lowens's 1969 letter to Newbold Noyes on a similar topic, a request for leave—in this earlier case to found the *American Musical Digest*—contrasts strikingly with his 1975 leave request to Bellows. The convivial language of Lowens's letter to Noyes reveals an affectionate camaraderie existing between the two men, as well as mutual respect. On a first-name basis with his superior, Lowens is cordial, energized and enthusiastic. Unwilling to divorce himself completely from the *Star* during the six-months leave, he offers to send dispatches on occasion from afar, and at reduced rates. No such offer appears in the Bellows memo, nor does Lowens show in it any enthusiasm for either his work at the *Star* or his book projects. Thus the supposition that Lowens's departure owed in large measure to his pessimism over the turmoil then running unabated in the music department, including both the harassment of music staff members and the return once again of the infamous George Gelles to dog his tracks, gains credence. For the full text of Lowens's letter to Noyes, see *supra*: 62-63.

this time and effort on my job and still see an inferior product appear in the newspaper, owing to circumstances beyond my control, is most demoralizing and it has seriously affected my ability to work on my book commitments during non-*Star*-committed hours. Furthermore, a recent talk with Harry Bacas leads me to believe that I can expect no improvement in the music situation—in fact, he gave me several reasons to expect that things for me will get worse rather than better. (I'll gladly discuss the music problem with you in private and at length if you wish.)

Since Day Thorpe, my predecessor as the *Star*'s music critic, is available for assignment, and since George Gelles, my one-time assistant, is returning to duty, I don't think my temporary absence will materially inconvenience the paper. Should I complete my books more quickly than I anticipate, I plan to return to the *Star* before the leave period has expired. I'll be living entirely on my personal savings during my leave, a most distasteful situation to me but one I cannot avoid if I am to make good on my long-standing book commitments.

Very sincerely yours,

Irving Lowens  
Music Critic

cc: Harry Bacas, Portfolio  
Phillip M. Kadis, Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild<sup>870</sup>

Bellows's action—or inaction—must have implied to Lowens the flamboyant editor's tacit alignment with the unnamed, implacable staff who had told the music critic, in so many words and ways, that serious music and its coverage no longer fit the new, youthful vision of the *Star*. Because a positive response to his complaints, despite his best efforts, had proven illusory, Lowens's relationship with his editor, as the aloof formality of this petition suggests, was irretrievably soured. Operating under this demoralizing assumption, Lowens embarked on a trial separation from the *Star*, effective within two weeks of the request.

### **The Bad News Spreads**

The impact of the *Star*'s malfeasance regarding the position of serious music within its realm traveled beyond the bricks and mortar of the Star Company plant, leaking into

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<sup>870</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to James Bellows, February 24, 1976, Irving and Margery Lowens Special Collection.

Washington's music community. Because it had long years earlier won pride of place as Washington's newspaper of record *vis-à-vis* music news, the *Star's* sudden turn away from this signal privilege—and obligation—must have doubly dismayed its constituents. Although Lowens's cordial relations with the leading lights of musical Washington would remain unshakeable,<sup>871</sup> Bellows's indifference to classical music coverage threatened to damage not only his own music department, but also the good will earned by the *Star* in the classical music community, at Lowens longstanding and painstaking behest.

In particular, such august institutions as the Kennedy Center and the National Symphony Orchestra stood, potentially, to lose customer and donor support in direct proportion to the shrinking size of news coverage in the *Star*, historically the region's most important print conduit for music. Thus did both organizations justifiably register their concerns about the noxious, but prevailing winds at the *Star*.

In a letter alerting Roger Stevens, President of the Kennedy Center, to his imminent, year-long departure from the *Star*, Lowens verified by implication the apprehension with which the Kennedy Center's leadership must have greeted the new direction in the *Star's* reporting of the arts. Cognizant perhaps that disquiet might be caused by news both of his sabbatical and of George Gelles's promotion to interim chief music critic, Lowens attempted preemptively to mollify Stevens with the prospect, if faint, of some relief. Whether Lowens believed his own ameliorative words is unknown:

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<sup>871</sup> About the events then engulfing him at the *Star*, Lowens remained completely candid with those of his constituents—and sources—with whom he had developed personal relationships. Owing perhaps to this candor, as well as to his historic support of musical endeavors in Washington—including such noteworthy achievements as the Haydn conference—that the Washington music community might in the fullness of time close ranks with him against the *Star's* malignant musical choices was likely.

Dear Roger:

Since the rumors are flying all over the place already, I thought I'd best give you the story from the horse's mouth, so to speak.

The enclosed letter [Lowens's leave request] to the new editor of the *Star* is self-explanatory. My request for a year's leave of absence without pay was approved in routine fashion, and this will be my last week with the newspaper . . . .

Although I've made no secret of the fact that things for music at the *Star* have been deteriorating steadily, the second paragraph (which is, of course, confidential and for your eyes only) by no means tells the complete story. I did have a long, frank discussion with Jim Bellows . . . and I hope that will result in a better shake for music (and for the Center) at the *Star* in the future.<sup>872</sup>

Early in Lowens's sabbatical, the National Symphony Orchestra's music director Antal Dorati, sufficiently incensed by what he believed to be Gelles's continued verbal assaults against the NSO in general and his conducting leadership in particular, took aggressive action against the controversial music critic. Dorati may have had special incentive for attempting to silence Gelles's polarizing pen at this time. His relationship with the NSO had in recent months badly deteriorated,<sup>873</sup> and, in March, when Lowens was released to his sabbatical, Dorati was likewise pressing the orchestra management for favorable terms governing his own, permanent release from the NSO's directorship.<sup>874</sup> His departure was hastened by the stunning arrival in Washington, also in March, of the Russian cellist and then

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<sup>872</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Roger L. Stevens, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, March 3, 1975, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>873</sup> According to Dorati, the NSO Board and Dorati had come to loggerheads regarding the suitability of three projects that Dorati wished to undertake with the orchestra, including recordings, tour concert venues and a European trip. At an impasse, Dorati's separation from the orchestra became inevitable. For further details about Dorati's version of the conflict, see Antal Dorati, letter to Irving Lowens, May 17, 1975. Irving and Margery Lowens Special Collection, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collections Reading Room, Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>874</sup> *Ibid.*

novice<sup>875</sup> conductor Mstislav Rostropovich. Among the several concerts that Rostropovich performed during his first week in America was one with the NSO, in his American conducting debut. His performance was greeted with such wild enthusiasm<sup>876</sup> that the orchestra's management promptly invited him to succeed Dorati.<sup>877</sup> That Rostropovich's nearly credentials-free conducting artistry<sup>878</sup> was extolled in the press when Gelles had in the same period scathingly criticized Dorati's abilities could not have sat well with the veteran conductor. The resulting quick leap by Rostropovich into the welcoming arms of the NSO would likely have been tantamount to rubbing salt into Dorati's wounds. To be sure, Dorati

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<sup>875</sup> Rostropovich's conducting experience prior to his performance with the National Symphony Orchestra included appearances in 1968 and 1969, for the Bolshoi Opera Orchestra's production of *Eugene Onegin*, and in 1974, when he made his orchestral conducting debut with England's New Philharmonia Orchestra. Based on these meager credentials, the NSO hired him outright as their music director. About the Rostropovich hire, Dorati commented: "I get on with Slava very well, he is indeed a very fine talent, and—who knows?—maybe he will develop to be a conductor?—and I shall be glad to help to hold the orchestra together while he 'learns.'" See Noël Goodwin, "Rostropovich, Mstislav," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols., Stanley Sadie, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1980), XVI: 254-255; and Antal Dorati, letter to Irving Lowens, May 17, 1975, loc. cit.

<sup>876</sup> Lowens's comprehensive press coverage in the *Star* of Rostropovich's triumphal week in Washington included the following reports: "He's the World's Greatest Cellist," (A solo recital with Samuel Sanders, pianist) March 1, 1975: Calendar, 18; "Rostropovich's Conducting Debut: The NSO Played Like Angels," March 6, 1975: C1; "Rostropovich: 'Superhuman,'" March 7, 1975: np. Underscoring the cellist/conductor's signal success were the frankly adulatory remarks with which Lowens opened "He's the World's Greatest Cellist": "Rostropovich is back in Washington. Last night the great cellist began his 1975 occupation of the American capital – which ultimately will bring him to the Kennedy Center no less than 14 times before July is over – with a solo recital in the Concert Hall. If this were a war, I'd say it was already over. Rostropovich has conquered – Washington lies at his feet."

<sup>877</sup> According to commentary Dorati provided to Lowens about this surprising turn of events, the NSO hired Rostropovich as Dorati's successor almost immediately following the cellist's conducting appearance with the NSO. Ironically, the enthusiasm of Lowens's critical response to Rostropovich's debut may have contributed to the NSO Board's speedy decision to replace Dorati with the renowned Russian cellist. According to chronology implied by Dorati, Rostropovich was hired either in March or April 1975. As author and critic Ted Libbey tells the story, the NSO management sent to Dorati unceremonious word that he was to be replaced just moments before he walked onto the podium of the Kennedy Center Concert Hall to conduct the orchestra in a performance of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. Rostropovich began his tenure as NSO music director in 1977. See Antal Dorati, letter to Irving Lowens, May 17, 1975, loc. cit.; Ted Libbey, *The National Symphony Orchestra* (Washington, D.C.: NSO Book Project): 1995, 77-78; and Noël Goodwin, "Rostropovich, Mstislav," loc. cit.

<sup>878</sup> In response to a question posed by interviewer Claude Samuel, Rostropovich pointed with some pride to his lack of training as a conductor. Question: "Did you take any classes in conducting?" Answer: "No! Never in my life!" See E. Thomas Glasgow, trans., *Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya: Russia, Music and Liberty: Conversations with Claude Samuel* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1983): 128.

was at the time withdrawing from his NSO position, but he did not expect to be replaced quite so quickly.<sup>879</sup>

The confusion of this turbulent period in his professional life helped perhaps to spur Dorati to complain about Gelles to the *Star*. Apparently circumventing Bellows, he approached directly the *Star*'s publisher Joe Allbritton for redress of his grievances.<sup>880</sup> Although the precise nature of the dialogue between the two is unknown, the publisher, at least initially, was persuaded to intervene on Dorati's behalf, dispatching Bellows to the NSO, ostensibly to smooth the waters that Gelles had (again) roiled.<sup>881</sup>

Any complaint about the *Star*'s music department, even if put forward by a musician of Dorati's stature, would not likely have placed high on Allbritton's agenda. The fiery publisher's plate was already full, since he was at the time battling the Federal Communications Commission for control of the newspaper and all of its local broadcast holdings.

Bellows's meeting with the NSO to resolve *Dorati v. Gelles* ultimately availed little. Shortly after this high-level *tête-à-tête*,<sup>882</sup> one of Gelles's more caustic reviews, of the NSO's premier performance of Mahler's Third Symphony, inopportunistically appeared in the *Star*. The

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<sup>879</sup> Dorati related to Lowens that Rostropovich's appearance "fell into [a] 'vacuum' period, when it was already known to the Board of the NSO that I will not stay for long—and this gave added 'kindling wood' to the fire that R's [Rostropovich's] concert created. So they asked him to succeed me and he was willing . . . [O]ur Board . . . went after R. in a hysteria." See Antal Dorati, letter to Irving Lowens, May 17, 1975, loc. cit.

<sup>880</sup> Dorati revealed his action to Lowens in his letter of 17 May.

<sup>881</sup> Antal Dorati, letter to Joe L. Allbritton, May 8, 1975, Irving and Margery Lowens Special Collection, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collections Reading Room, Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library, University of Maryland, College Park.

<sup>882</sup> Dorati's follow-up letter to Allbritton suggests that the NSO's general manager William Denton met with Bellows shortly before May 1. See Antal Dorati, letter to Joe L. Allbritton, May 8, 1975, loc. cit.

sizable article<sup>883</sup> initially praised the players for work that “redounded . . . strongly to the orchestra’s credit” and “was always commendable and often exceptional.”<sup>884</sup> Quickly shifting gears, Gelles then turned his attention to Dorati, excoriating the seasoned Hungarian conductor for commanding from the orchestra only “a low level of attention,” for “the awkwardness he finds in weaving an elegant orchestral texture,” for a rhythmic sense that was “lax and fuzzy,” for his “profound problem . . . maintaining a rhythmic life,” and for music that, “too often [going] dead on its feet,” was “uncanny and painful, but unmistakably bare.”<sup>885</sup>

This appallingly denigrating assessment of Dorati’s efforts could not go unattended. On the day following the review’s publication, the beleaguered conductor made one last attempt, on his own behalf, to persuade Allbritton that Gelles must go. Penning what he declared to be his final appeal, Dorati mounted a visceral, *ad hominem* attack on the *Star*’s firebrand music writer, but his language, hectoring and overwrought, reduced the impact of his verbal pugilism to little more than bluff and bluster:

Dear Mr. Allbritton:

Thank you for your kind letter of May 1. Mr. Bellows has indeed met with Mr. William Denton, with what result I do not know.

However, Mr. Gelles’s latest exploit of May 7 forces me to bring up the matter once more for the last time. Personally, I have decided to distantiate [sic] myself from Mr. Gelles, because I do not wish to contribute to making him an “interesting” figure.

From Mr. Gelles’s vicious, abominable performance, as well as from his past history,<sup>886</sup> which is public knowledge, it is clear that he is a pathological case. It seems to me that he belongs either in a hospital, maybe in jail, I do not know which. Certainly, it is easy to know where he does not

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<sup>883</sup> The piece numbers 600 words.

<sup>884</sup> George Gelles, “Mahler, Maturity,” *Washington Star*, May 7, 1975: D1.

<sup>885</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>886</sup> Dorati likely refers to Gelles’s exploits as a music critic in Boston in 1969 and in Washington in 1971.

belong. This – if they do not know it yet – his employers, whose public responsibility will come under increasingly strong spotlight if this rampage is allowed to go on, will learn before long.

It is our cordial relationship which makes me write this personal note, after which I shall remain silent.

Yours sincerely,

Antal Dorati<sup>887</sup>

This last of Dorati's petitions to remove Gelles from power went for naught.

Although, just one week later,<sup>888</sup> Dorati expressed to Lowens the happy, if unrealistic, expectation, from unknown source, that "the Gelles matter . . . might be taken care of during the summer months,"<sup>889</sup> no evidence has surfaced to suggest that either Allbritton or Bellows followed through on any proffered assurances that the offending music critic might be neutralized. On the contrary, during those same summer months about which Dorati had expressed optimism, Gelles's criticism generated another vociferous complaint, but from an independent source who held no vested interest in the critic's mordant opinions.

Arriving in August from the pen of Lt. Cmdr. H. G. Pendergast,<sup>890</sup> an erstwhile music critic and regular reader of the *Star's* music pages,<sup>891</sup> this complaint tossed Lowens into hot water with the *Star* management. Before reaching Lowens, the letter passed through the hands of his two nemeses, Bob Menaker and Harry Bacas, with a note by Bacas asking

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<sup>887</sup> Antal Dorati, letter to Joe L. Allbritton, May 8, 1975, loc. cit.

<sup>888</sup> Dorati apprised Lowens of his interchanges with Allbritton in his letter to Lowens of May 17, 1975.

<sup>889</sup> Ibid.

<sup>890</sup> H.C. Pendergast, Letter to [Editor], *Washington Star*, August 10, 1975, Irving and Margery Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>891</sup> Irving Lowens, [memorandum] to James Bellows, August 16, 1975, loc. cit.

Menaker to “read the underlined.”<sup>892</sup> This cryptic instruction referred to a paragraph near the end of the narrative relating a conversation that had taken place between Pendergast and Lowens. Lowens’s remarks, as interpreted by Pendergast, apparently smacked to Bacas of disloyalty. That only this suspect paragraph was highlighted for further examination and/or action suggests Bacas and Menaker to have been less concerned with the substance of the complaint against Gelles, than with gathering evidence about a would-be treasonable offense allegedly perpetrated against the *Star* by Lowens:

Dear Sirs:

The enclosed music reviews of George Gelles, which mention Rostropovich’s performance of the “Scheherazade,” are magical examples of this writer’s critical consistency. As I recall, his actual review of the concert reflected yet a third opinion.

Gelles’s random attacks on eminences in the music world such as Ormandy, Rostropovich, Dorati and his praise of such well-known institutions as the Central City Opera of Colorado led me to inquire about him. He is, I was told, a “disappointed horn player” who could not make the grade as a music critic in Boston. According to my sources, his technique as music critic of the *Washington Star* is “to fire buckshot at prominent targets in music in hopes that some of the pellets will land on target.”

Such a technique, of course, can be successful in the long run only if your readers continue to read Gelles. Having learned what he is up to and why he is up to it, I will ignore his writing in the future. My decision to ignore him imitates the attitude of an increasing number of informed music lovers in the area, including a distinguished music critic now on leave of absence. “I never read him,” this critic told me. He added that he relied on others to keep him informed of Gelles’s more outrageous reviews.<sup>893</sup>

If you want to retain the respect of informed music lovers who read your newspaper, I recommend that you replace Gelles as your music critic.

Sincerely,

Lt. Comdr. H. C. Pendergast<sup>894</sup>

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<sup>892</sup> H.C. Pendergast, Letter to [Editor], loc. cit.

<sup>893</sup> The underscoring added herein by the author duplicates the hand-written underscoring appearing in the original letter. The offending sentence was also marked with a broad X that horizontally bisected the paragraph.

<sup>894</sup> Ibid.

## Hell Hath No Fury

After having invested over twenty years of his professional life in the *Star*, Lowens must have been severely stung by an accusation of disloyalty. To defend his integrity, he drafted a response<sup>895</sup> to Bacas's tacit allegation, which he sent directly to Bellows only a few days after Pendergast had posted his complaint.<sup>896</sup> Initially, Lowens's purpose may have been nothing more than to provide his side of the story and, at least, to pull himself off the petard on which Pendergast had unintentionally impaled him. As the trajectory of his narrative suggests, this single concern, as he put it to paper, expanded in his mind, bringing forward other, more troubling questions. Slowly, but inexorably, the lid to Pandora's Box was loosed.

Lowens began his letter to Bellows with a brief, but hagiographic account of Pendergast's credentials, perhaps better to persuade his editor that the writer's criticisms of Gelles should not be dismissed out of hand. In Pendergast, after all, Lowens had found an accidental ally in his war to save the music pages, not only from Gelles's critical machinations, but also perhaps from the greater danger posed by the *Star*'s increasingly malignant treatment of classical music coverage. Making the complaint count for the defense would require the complainant to be a convincing witness:

Dear Mr. Bellows:

Lt. Comdr. H.C. Pendergast of Arlington was kind enough to send me a copy of his letter of 10 August, addressed to the editors of the *Star*. I think it calls for some personal comment and amplification from me.

First of all, I should point out that (despite the rather hot language), Comdr. Pendergast is a freelance music critic of international eminence whose

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<sup>895</sup> Although at this time plagued by illness and heavily involved, not only in his book commitments, but in the lavish and labor-intensive Haydn Festival under preparation, Lowens took time to research and pen this lengthy and pointed memorandum to Bellows. Hardly the disloyal traitor that Bacas had alleged, Lowens shows himself to have been still haunted by concern for the *Star* and for his cherished music pages.

<sup>896</sup> Pendergast's letter is dated August 10, Lowens's response to Bellows on August 16.

interviews with world-famous musicians have been frequently published in this country and abroad.<sup>897</sup>

Lowens then recounted in some detail that portion of the interchange with Pendergast causing the dust-up, in order to exculpate himself honorably from complicity in Pendergast's attack on Gelles:

I had a single conversation with him [Pendergast], just prior to the press conference called by the National Symphony on 9 July 1975 for Mstislav Rostropovich who (as you know) takes over the orchestra in the 1976-77 season. Since I expect to be reviewing for the *Star* when he returns, Joyce Idema, of the NSO press office, kindly invited me to attend, which I did with pleasure since it was the first opportunity for anyone to ask him direct questions in Washington since his appointment.<sup>898</sup>

At that time, I told Comdr. Pendergast that I no longer read any newspapers, because I was too busy trying to write the three books for which I have contracts, but that my wife scanned both *Star* and *Post* for me and read me all music reviews.<sup>899</sup>

His primary task accomplished, Lowens then turned to Pendergast's uncomplimentary assessment of Gelles's music criticism, taking advantage of the moment to present his own view on the subject. With carefully measured words, but as Pendergast's letter had corroborated, Lowens pronounced Gelles's work to be wanting. He then suggested to Bellows that the acerbic pen of the *Star*'s interim chief music critic would prove injurious to the *Star*'s standing with the public:

It is true that I expressed no enthusiasm for Mr. Gelles's music reviews—but then there are rarely two music critics who agree about anything . . . I might say in all candor that I do find Mr. Gelles's dance reviews stimulating and penetrating, although I am not enamored of his rhetoric. In the same spirit of candor, I must say that I do feel that his music reviews are not

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<sup>897</sup> Irving Lowens, [memorandum] to James Bellows, August 16, 1975, loc. cit.

<sup>898</sup> As this comment indicates, the sabbatical time away from his post at the *Star* had done nothing to diminish Lowens's strong, vested interest in Washington's musical life and in his work as a critic.

<sup>899</sup> Irving Lowens, [memorandum] to James Bellows, August 16, 1975, loc. cit.

adequate and are harming the newspaper at a time when the *Star* surely needs all the support from the Washington community it can get.<sup>900</sup>

Concern about the *Star*'s reputation in Washington would have been a useful card for Lowens to play at this time. The months preceding Pendergast's letter saw, simultaneously, two of the newspaper's nastier—and more public—tussles: First, Allbritton's request to the Federal Communications Commission for waiver of media cross-ownership rules; and, second, the fight between Allbritton and the *Star*'s original owning families over the details and ramifications of his purchase of the corporation. Serving to taint, sensationally, the *Star*'s public record even further was the twenty-percent wage reduction under which employees were at the time laboring, and news would soon spread of Allbritton's demand that *Star* employees both accept a wage freeze and agree to purchase shares of non-voting stock in the company.<sup>901</sup> Against this ignominious back story did Lowens thus remind Bellows, if obliquely, that the newspaper could ill afford bad press of any ilk at so fractious a point in its history.

At this juncture in his discourse, having equably dispatched the charge of his treachery against the newspaper, Lowens careered dramatically to a topic about which he was less sanguine: The apparent collapse, during his leave, of the *Star*'s classical-music coverage. Over the previous five months of his sabbatical—as he stipulated in his memorandum's first paragraph—and with the informed assistance of his wife and comrade-in-arms Margery Morgan Lowens, Lowens had faithfully monitored the *Star*'s music reportage. His observations revealed an extensive inventory of editing blunders and ill-considered policy judgments that, willful or not, continued, in Lowens's view, to do damage, not only to the

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<sup>900</sup> Ibid.

<sup>901</sup> The wage-freeze and stock purchase demand was announced in September.

*Star*'s music department, but to the newspaper as a whole. Until this time, Lowens's lengthy absence from his music critic's post had left him with no avenue to expose these fast-escalating problems. Fortuitously, the circumstances surrounding Pendergast's provocative letter opened a portal of communication to Bellows, and Lowens, fortified with the fruits of his analysis, impetuously stepped through.

Lowens began this last of his appeals to Bellows by challenging the *de facto*<sup>902</sup> policy of replacing serious-music coverage with news of pop and rock. As Lowens saw it, shifting the newspaper's balance of musical power away from the world of classical music, would not likely attract new subscribers among the young, as might have been intended, but would most certainly alienate a significant body of classical music lovers.<sup>903</sup> Music reporting at the *Star*, as Lowens had conceived and established it, was not broken in his view; but the new management had seen fit, even so, to fix it, by stripping classical music of its precious column space and by turning music current events, oxymoronicly, into old news. Lowens's to-be-sure anecdotal assessment showed that longstanding and loyal readers whom he had painstakingly cultivated in the preceding two decades of his musical stewardship were in consequence now inexorably drifting away.

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<sup>902</sup> No evidence of any formal directive from Bellows regarding the status of classical music at the *Star* has surfaced. The proof of the policy lies in the result, revealed on Bellows's watch, and in Lowens's analysis and accusation of same, based on his testimony as house authority on the subject.

<sup>903</sup> Lowens's fears were prescient. Washington's penchant for taking its serious music seriously took a latter-day turn for the worse in February 2005, when the city's public radio station WETA discontinued its classical music programming in favor of an all-talk format. Figures from its fall 2005 fund drive and its concurrent listenership report revealed musical Washington's displeasure, in form of reduced contributions and listenership for the station. WETA later restored its classical music programming. See Marc Fisher, "Beethoven's Revenge: Ratings Drop at Classical Music-less WETA," *Washington Post*, Sunday, December 11, 2005: N1; and Paul Farhi, "Radio Stations Harmonize on Classical Music," *Washington Post*, January 23, 2007: C1.

Perhaps believing he had little now to lose,<sup>904</sup> Lowens pulled no punches during this portion of his pleading. The mask of civility with which he had begun his memorandum evaporated, and the critic, turning the sword on his editor, let fly a stream-of-consciousness protest, lucid and persuasive, but also peppered with indecorous language. Respectful deference, with which he might have been expected to accord his professional, and powerful, superior, was nowhere in evidence. Lowens's anger with Bellows flooded from his pen:

I cannot refrain from registering a strong protest . . . in regard to the paper's daily and Sunday editorial policy in reference to the coverage of serious music in Washington, which has reached a point of near scandal. In the past half-dozen years, Washington has become one of the 10 most important American cities so far as serious music is concerned, and yet the daily music coverage of important events has dropped drastically. I understand the space-pinch, but I do not understand the doubling and tripling of space devoted to rock and pop music contrasted with the halving (and worse) of the space devoted to serious music. It seems to me self-evident that the *Star's* readers are not the teen-agers and the teeny-boppers who jam Capital Arena from time to time—they get their money from their parents. Furthermore, they are not a reading public—they don't give a damn what Charlie McCollum or Boris Weintraub or God himself has to say about their idols. Their parents, on the other hand, are much more likely to have been *Star* readers, and I can tell you from my bitter experience that you are losing subscribers, because the *Post* is beating the pants off the *Star* in its daily coverage of classical events. If Mr. Gelles cannot cover the scene himself, a highly respected team of skilled stringers was available to him when I went on leave of absence as of 10 March 1975. I would urge a re-examination of this area, even though I realize that the paper perhaps faces more crucial problems at the moment.

One of the worst situations occurs with Friday night concerts, which (to the best of my knowledge) are never reviewed in the Saturday *Star*. I realize that Portfolio [the *Star* section devoted to arts coverage] is short-staffed on Friday nights, but it still seems to me ridiculous that the *Post* can print its Friday night concert reviews on Saturdays, whereas the *Star's* reader must

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<sup>904</sup> In a letter written in September to the composer Karel Husa, Lowens confessed to the fears about the *Star's* gloomy future that he had harbored in August, the month during which he penned his memorandum to Bellows: "As you know, I'm on leave from the newspaper until next March, and as of this writing, it seems that there will be a newspaper to return to. A month ago, it looked very black, and things may blacken again." Irving Lowens, letter to Karel Husa, September 21, 1975, loc. cit.

wait until Monday to find out what the *Star*'s critic thinks—if the event has been covered at all.<sup>905</sup>

Having thus indicted both Gelles and Bellows on matters of general policy and procedure, Lowens turned to specifics, enumerating a second<sup>906</sup> litany of musically damaging blunders that he had uncovered in the prior several weeks as an informed reader of the *Star*. First and perhaps foremost among them was the *Star*'s failure to cover a press conference given by the National Symphony Orchestra's music-director designate Mstislav Rostropovich.

Rostropovich's appearance and imminent residency in Washington constituted major political, as well as musical news, owing to the cellist's prominent political position on the world stage as a Soviet dissident. In 1970, Rostropovich and his wife, the soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, had openly provided personal and political support to the Nobel-prize-winning novelist<sup>907</sup> and fellow Soviet dissenter Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Such support—aiding and abetting a subversive enemy of the state—had made Rostropovich *persona non grata* in his homeland.<sup>908</sup> His concert calendar was cancelled, his recording contracts nullified, and he

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<sup>905</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to James Bellows, August 16, 1975, loc. cit. Lowens's special pique on this score concerned the *Post*'s ability, as well as inclination, to publish concert reviews, despite late-night deadlines, in its morning edition. By contrast, the *Star*, as an afternoon newspaper with more hours of lead time, could easily prepare such copy for print, but elected otherwise. So remiss a practice could signal only indifference.

<sup>906</sup> This set of accusations constituted a follow-up to his initial allegations of February 21, 1975.

<sup>907</sup> Solzhenitsyn won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970.

<sup>908</sup> Using Rostropovich's words, *New York Times* writer Jeremy Eichler reports on the dramatic consequences of the cellist's support for Solzhenitsyn: "Mr. Rostropovich wrote a letter defending Mr. Solzhenitsyn and attacking state criticism of the arts. He made copies for four Russian newspapers and dropped them in a mailbox at the airport when leaving the country for a concert tour in 1970. Around two weeks later, he said, camera crews showed up at this concert, and the telltale car, a black Volga, was waiting at his hotel. The letter had been leaked. The K.G.B, he said, questioned him, not believing it to be genuine: 'Who made this provocation against you?' I told them, 'My friends, excuse me, it's my letter.'" See Jeremy Eichler, "Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Britten and Me," *New York Times*, April 16, 2006, Section 2, "Arts and Leisure": 1.

was thrust from his homeland into exile.<sup>909</sup> At the time of his July visit to Washington, although having been in the West for less than a year, Rostropovich had already created a sensation in England and America, with his performances and with his first-hand testimony, freely given, concerning the plight of artists and intellectuals hobbled by the shadow of Soviet repression.<sup>910</sup>

Rostropovich's press conference, taking place July 9, could qualify as nothing other than major international, as well as musical news, but *Star* readers, inexplicably, were left wholly in the dark. The newspaper devoted not a single column inch of space to the appearance in the nation's capital of this globally regarded musician. Still dedicated to both his readers and his music department, Lowens did not allow this egregious oversight to go uncontested:

I must also protest against the newspaper's lack of attention to important local music news, and I cite the Rostropovich interview of 9 July as a characteristic instance. That press conference was big news. It was covered by national television. The *Post* was there with photographers, the *New York Times* was there with photographers, the wire services were there, out of town newspapers were present. There were some 30-40 people on hand for the hour-long interview, and big stories appeared in the press the following day. The *Star* was represented by neither critic, reporter, nor photographer, and not a single line appeared in the *Star* of 10 July about the story. Even a rewrite of

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<sup>909</sup> The Soviet government was not easily persuaded to allow Rostropovich release into the West and freedom. The cellist credits Leonard Bernstein and United States Senator from Massachusetts Edward Kennedy for effecting his escape: "... [A]bove all it was Leonard Bernstein who helped us and accelerated the process of our departure. We had ... applied to the government for permission to leave Russia for two years and were waiting for the response. I would speak about it on the telephone to all my friends and scream into the receiver that if we hadn't obtained the permission within two weeks, I'd start breaking things. I screamed, because I knew we were being bugged. That was when Senator Edward Kennedy, to whom Bernstein had previously spoken, came to Moscow to see Brezhnev ... And, suddenly, Kennedy's secretary phoned us with good news, saying that, after the senator's conversation with Brezhnev, the situation should be quickly resolved. Two weeks later we received the permission." Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya were initially given an exit visa for a two-year leave, which became a lasting exile. Stripped of their Soviet citizenship in 1978, the couple did not return to Russia until 1990. See E. Thomas Glasow, trans., *Mstislav Rostropovich*, op. cit.: 120-121; and Jeremy Eichler, "Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Britten and Me," loc. cit.

<sup>910</sup> See George Feifer, "Rostropovich in Midpassage," *Saturday Review*, March 5, 1977: 35-39.

the big *Post* page 1 story (front-page, lavish pictures &c.) would have been preferable to that kind of utter blank.<sup>911</sup>

In telling this story of journalistic negligence, Lowens did not name Gelles as co-respondent, but the burden of guilt lay as much with the *Star*'s interim chief music critic, on whose watch this lapse had occurred, as it did with Bellows. Lowens did include Gelles in his other complaints about similarly grave errors of omission in the music department's coverage of Washington's concert life, as well as the arcane events, of little or no significance to Washington readers, on which Gelles had instead chosen to focus his energies:

Allow me to turn my attention to Calendar for a moment. It is, from many points of view, a vast improvement over the previous Sunday Portfolio, but I am distressed here too by the overbalance in favor of pop-rock as contrasted to classical music and by some perfectly avoidable editorial nincompoopery.

Look at the last four issues. On 27 July, Gelles wrote a Sunday column focused on the Central City [Colorado] Opera company, comparing it to the Bolshoi company . . . . On 3 August, there was a pice [sic] by Gelles on the Joffrey Ballet on page 1, but not one word about classical music, and no classical record review. On 10 August, the lead musical piece was a record review by Richard D. Freed of some discs by the Juilliard String Quartet. That review had been written and submitted for publication to the *Star* more than a year ago and was completely stale. It should never have been run. The *Post* made the *Star* look even more ridiculous by featuring, on page 1 of Sunday Style, a feature record review of the Budapest String Quartet which had just been released that week . . . . On 17 August (today), we have a full-page treatment of the Santa Fe Opera Company by Gelles—this in a week which saw the death of Dmitri Shostakovich, a week in which the New York Philharmonic is paying two visits to Wolf Trap, and quite a few other things are happening locally in music. There was no classical record review of any sort.<sup>912</sup>

Lowens turned his attention last to the musical events calendar. An important community service for music presenters and concert-goers alike, these listings had badly deteriorated, according to Lowens, and the information that they had traditionally supplied to

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<sup>911</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to James Bellows, August 16, 1975, loc. cit.

<sup>912</sup> Ibid.

readers was now obscure, incoherent, or entirely absent. In addition to detailing the extent of the damage inflicted, he offered up his two adversaries Bacas and Menaker as the crime lords responsible for this particular felony:

Allow me to point to the music listings, which are very close to useless and are a distinct embarrassment since the *Star* was the Washington paper local residents looked at on Sunday to find out what was going on here. The listings have four basic flaws: they are arranged higgledy-piggledy in no chronological order; there are no listings of programs; there is no uniformity of listing; only a small fraction of what is taking place is included. An example from today's Calendar: The New York Philharmonic is listed as playing at Wolf Trap on Friday, conducted by Pierre Boulez. Period. No programs; no composers. That's like saying that the Bolshoi Ballet is performing without telling anybody what they are likely to see. It is an utter waste of space. It so happens that the New York Philharmonic is also playing at Wolf Trap on Saturday—an entirely different program. But there is no mention of that fact in the music listing . . . .

This kind of thing (all too characteristic of Calendar's classical music ratings) must be attributed to either sheer ignorance on the part of the person who puts them into the Hendrix, or sheer negligence on the part of the editor who is supposed to see that what gets into the newspaper is accurate and complete. Perfectly honestly, I have been waging this war with Harry Bacas since he took Ed Tribble's place years and years ago, with little or no success despite my every effort to cooperate to improve the paper. And my brief experience with Bob Menaker . . . was even more unproductive. There are many more things about which I could run on, but this letter is long enough as it is, and please believe me when I say I am writing it with the *Star's* best interests very close to my heart. I am looking forward to my return next March (or sooner, if I can get my publishers satisfied) to a great newspaper in which serious music will once again have a respected place and a fair shake.<sup>913</sup>

Alas, a fair shake was not to be had at the *Star*, not for the newspaper's music department, not for serious music in the nation's capital, and certainly not for Lowens. By virtue of his February and August communiqués to Bellows about the editorial mischief against music that was festering at the organization's core, Lowens joined the heralded ranks of whistle blowers, whose heroic efforts all too frequently end in futility, character assassination, or professional martyrdom.

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<sup>913</sup> Ibid.

Lowens may have added fuel to aggravate Bellows's fire in early December, when, upon learning that he had been awarded a prestigious grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, he engaged in some sly self-promotion. Although eager to spread the word of this lustrous honor, as the spirit of his subsequent missive so indicates, Lowens elected not to advise Bellows directly of the news. Instead, the critic made an end run around the editor, sending word to Bellows's superior and professional rival,<sup>914</sup> Joe Allbritton, and providing Bellows only with a carbon copy of the correspondence. By thus informing his editor at second hand, Lowens may have wished that Bellows be brought up to speed on more than the news of the award. Surmising perhaps that Bellows might dismiss Lowens's complaints less easily were the critic known to be an Allbritton familiar, Lowens insinuated, by virtue of the letter and its convivial content, that he and the publisher enjoyed a relationship of mutual respect and good will. The letter also gave Lowens opportunity to expand on the significance of the NEH award, *vis.*, that his achievements as a music critic had earned him the admiration of the capital's official cultural community, making him a leader with whom Bellows would be ill advised to trifle:

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<sup>914</sup> Whether Lowens was aware of the competitive relationship between Bellows and Allbritton is unknown, but it was hardly a secret in the newsroom. Bellows claimed that the "accolades" he had received from his transformation of the editorial side of the newspaper, paradoxically, "annoyed the hell out of Joe . . . For years, the paper was dignified and stately. Now it was developing a brisk style and a bold look that made the *Post* look institutional. But Joe wasn't sharing in the bouquets, and I guess it galled him to see me getting all the credit for the *Star*'s success." Jack Germond confirmed this assessment of the competitive relationship existing between Bellows and Allbritton: "[Joe] may . . . have been growing a little weary of all the encomiums being heaped on Bellows's head as the *Star* gained critical attention from other journalists. He was the one who put up the money, after all, but he was neither having any fun nor getting any credit. It was no surprise if he was growing a little testy." In an analysis of the *Star*'s roller-coaster years during Allbritton's tenure, Dom Bonafede, at the time senior editor of the *National Journal*, echoed Germond's perspective on the apparent Allbritton/Bellows rivalry: "It was inevitable that Bellows, the roving old pro with gypsy in his blood, whose paramount concern was the quality of the product, would clash with a carpetbagger owner unacquainted with newspapering except in terms of the accounting ledger . . . Involved were personality differences, a lack of communication, personal pride, private ambitions, and clash of egos." See James Bellows, *The Last Editor*, op. cit.: 182; Jack G. Germond, *Fat Man in a Middle Seat*, op. cit.: 145; and Dom Bonafede, "Dropping the Pilot at the *Washington Star*," *Washington Journalism Review*, 1/2 (January/February 1978): 47-48 *passim*.

Dear Mr. Allbritton:

Sorry I didn't succeed in making connections, but I did want to let you know about a coming event before you read about it in the newspapers. It seems that, to my great astonishment, I have been awarded a grant by the National Endowment for the Humanities to write a book on the theory and practice of music criticism, and a press release to that effect is supposed to be released next week.<sup>915</sup> Furthermore, the Endowment tells me that since this is one of the few grants they have made to a non-academic type, and the very first time a grant in the field of music criticism has been given, they intend to feature my name in their release.

When I applied for this grant shortly after I went on leave from the newspaper last March to finish several books, it was really more a matter of job insurance than any real desire on my part to write yet another book. You will, of course, remember that the future of the *Star* was then what might be called somewhat cloudy, and getting the grant was very much of a long shot. The competition from the academic community is formidable, and the odds against a non-academic beating out a college professor would be something like 500 to 1.<sup>916</sup>

The letter confirmed Lowens's express intent to return to the *Star* at the conclusion of his sabbatical, the grant notwithstanding. The force of his language suggests that he may have begun to feel the heavy hand of Bellows pushing him into retirement:

Now that I do have the grant, however, I want to assure you that I still intend to return to the *Star* this coming March as music critic when my leave expires, and I hope the newspaper continues and prospers, and that I can continue and prosper along with it.

At the same time, I have informed the Endowment that I do intend to accept the grant. This is now definitely a question of job insurance . . . .

I am doing this because the matter of the *Star*'s ultimate survival still has not been resolved, and it would be foolish of me to throw away one of the most prestigious of all research grants (and one with a large stipend) until the newspaper is once again firmly on its feet . . . . I hope you understand my

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<sup>915</sup> Lowens may have been jumping the gun on this point. He acknowledges being sent confirmation of the grant not until spring 1976, as he implies in a letter to his colleague Donald Krummel: "Dear Don: I'm delighted to have confirmation of the rumor about the N.E.H. grant, and the more I learn about N.E.H. vs. N.E.A., the happier I am with the former and the more miserable I am with the latter." Assuming his announcement to Allbritton to be premature, as the Krummel letter suggests, that Lowens was using his award at this critical juncture to charm the publisher is plausible. See Irving Lowens, letter to Donald Krummel, School of Library Science, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, April 14, 1976, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>916</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Joe L. Allbritton, December 5, 1975, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

dilemma, as well as my strong desire to continue with the *Star*, for which I have served as chief music critic since 1960.

Cordially yours,

Irving Lowens

cc: James G. Bellows<sup>917</sup>

Whether Allbritton responded to Lowens's letter is unknown, but Bellows's reaction was swift. Within the month, he addressed Lowens's sweeping allegations of February and August by sucker-punching his music critic. Mimicking Harry Bacas's finger-pointing, Bellows, in like manner, accused Lowens of denigrating the newspaper to outsiders.

Lowens's discovery that he had been accused a second time of slandering the *Star* came to him *via* the newspaper's Guild representative Philip Kadis.<sup>918</sup> A letter requesting Kadis's assistance with the details of Bellows's retirement proposal voiced his consternation about the charge, along with some wishful thinking. In the conclusion to his letter, which contained a clumsily worded attempt to refute the accusation, he again dropped Allbritton's name, in the hope perhaps that his relationship with the publisher, however obscure, might provide a corrective:

I must say that I am still somewhat stunned by your report that Mr. Bellows claims I have been going around "bad-mouthing" the *Star*. This is not only completely untrue, but seems to me quite malicious—on the contrary, I have been defending the *Star* and praising its "new look" consistently while I have been on leave. It is true that I have expressed some disappointment at the decreased coverage of classical music from time to time, especially when people ask me about it at concerts I attend, but this hardly constitutes what I would call "bad-mouthing." In any event, there isn't anything I can do about this except to feel profoundly disappointed about the fact that Mr. Bellows

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<sup>917</sup> Ibid.

<sup>918</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Philip Kadis, loc. cit.

apparently feels this way—I feel certain that Mr. Allbritton feels differently about the matter.<sup>919</sup>

Bellows's recommendation that Lowens retire, were it to proceed, would have spelled trouble for classical music in Washington. In the year preceding this suspect offer, Allbritton and company had led a frontal assault on the newspaper's work force, including the failed attempt in December 1974 to implement a twenty-percent staff reduction and in September 1975 the proposed moratorium on pay raises. In March 1976 would come the demand to guillotine another 200 existing jobs. Given management's penchant for such wholesale job eliminations, hiring a new music critic to replace Lowens at this volatile time was doubtful. Thus, with his retirement proposal for Lowens, Bellows seems to have been disposed to allow a personnel vacuum of enormous proportions in the *Star's* music department. He was content to leave classical music coverage in the hands of Lowens's heir presumptive George Gelles, whose longstanding relationship with the Washington music community, as Bellows could hardly deny, was one of enmity, rather than amity.

Bellows's interest in seeing Lowens retire faded at the gate to the *Star's* coffers. The editor duly provided Lowens with a financial accounting of his anticipated pension, but the proffered figures were too abysmal to support even a modest standard of living. Bellows distanced himself from the likely consequences to Lowens of this meager offering, insisting, as Lowens testified to Kadis, that the financial details of the proposal were outside the editor's purview or control. Pilate had washed his hands:

Dear Phil:

I enclose a Xerox copy of the computation which was handed to me by Jim Bellows earlier today showing that were I to accept early retirement as of 1 September 1976 . . . my pension would amount to 14% of my earnings as at [sic] 7 December 1974, or \$3,399.76 per annum, which came as something

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<sup>919</sup> Ibid.

of an unpleasant shock to me. Mr. Bellows disclaimed any knowledge of any figures, stating that I would have to see Ed Duplinsky for an explanation thereof . . . .

Also enclosed are copies of my pay slips for the weeks ending 7 December 1974 (which shows my weekly earnings, as stated in the computation, to be \$467) and 14 December 1974 (which shows my weekly earnings to be \$596.90). Even were the 14% offer acceptable, I do not understand why the 7 December figure rather than the 14 December figure was used in order to compute the pension—but perhaps that is something that was agreed to by the Guild. I don't know.

I would much appreciate your taking this matter up with Mr. Bellows or whomsoever and checking into the legitimacy of this offer. And, of course, I'd appreciate a phone call (437-4843) or a note from you as to the results of your investigation.<sup>920</sup>

As a condition of Lowens's discharge, Bellows, oddly, demanded that the music critic's unpaid sabbatical be extended by three months (March, April, and May 1976). In exchange, Bellows promised Lowens full pay for the months of June, July, and August,<sup>921</sup> thereby coinciding with Lowens's release on September 1, the earliest date of his retirement eligibility.<sup>922</sup>

The purpose of this *quid pro quo* remains obscure. For the bottom line, it would mean a savings of about \$7200. Hardly significant in terms of the company's multi-million-dollar deficits, the sum would certainly not go far toward righting the newspaper's balance sheet; but it might help support, should he wish it, such pet projects of Bellows as the writers-in-

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<sup>920</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Philip Kadis, Star Guild Representative, 30 December 1975, loc. cit.

<sup>921</sup> Ibid. In his letter, Lowens shared Bellows's odd stipulation with Kadis: "Also, the offer of early retirement was predicated upon my writing a letter to Mr. Bellows requesting an extension of leave without pay to June 1976, whereupon, he said he was authorized to pay me three months salary in full (covering June, July, and August) with retirement following."

<sup>922</sup> Ibid. As he clarified to Kadis, Lowens would meet the age requirement for retirement on August 19 of that year, his sixtieth birthday.

residence program.<sup>923</sup> For the music department, it could mean only that Gelles would continue in the driver's seat during three more months of Washington's busy concert season.

Delaying his decision by two months, Lowens must have given Bellows's offer serious consideration, but for its financial paucity. In an attempt perhaps to improve the terms, he solicited support from one of his many powerful allies, the Kennedy Center's Director Martin Feinstein, whose name, Lowens may have hoped, would carry sufficient influence to move Bellows off his dimes and dollars. The request for assistance that Lowens sent to Feinstein during this painful period is, if ambiguously worded, revelatory on two seemingly contradictory counts: First, his suggested retirement was wholly involuntary;<sup>924</sup> and, second, he apparently preferred not to reject the offer, despite its malice, should Feinstein successfully persuade Bellows to enhance the financial incentives that would allow Lowens to depart on more solid economic ground:

Dear Martin:

The pressure from the newspaper remains very strong and uncomfortable, and I would much appreciate it if you would let me know when you plan to pay them a visit. I am holding off on declining their effort to force me into early retirement until you have spoken to Mr. Bellows about the situation.<sup>925</sup>

Sadly, a workable separation agreement could not be found. Contacting Bellows at the end of February, Lowens chose in the end the economically safer course and declined early

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<sup>923</sup> Jack Germond verified Bellows's need for dollars to fund his editorial innovations, writing in his memoir: "Bellows was never given the kind of budget that would allow him to go outside for many 'name' hires." See Jack G. Germond, *Fat Man in a Middle Seat*, op. cit.: 140.

<sup>924</sup> Lowens was ambivalent on this point. During his leave, he had confided to Donald Krummel that he "hoped to wangle some kind of early retirement as quickly as possible and then get on about the business of doing something I want to do." See Irving Lowens, letter to Donald W. Krummel, June 5, 1975, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>925</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Martin Feinstein, Executive Director, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, January 15, 1976, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

retirement, not because he wished to remain tethered to an organization with no apparent use for his considerable talents, but solely for the economic toll it would exact. Perhaps as one last and futile effort to nudge his editor into sweetening the deal, Lowens shaped his reply's salient first paragraph, curiously, with a tacit proviso, *vis.*, that changing the financial terms of the proposal might change his mind. Judging by result, Bellows failed to take the bait, thereby consigning the beleaguered music critic to the *Star* for another bleak two years:

Dear Mr. Bellows:

I have considered your offer of early retirement carefully and discussed it fully with my family. For economic reasons, I find it impossible to accept under the terms you have postulated.

Therefore, I shall be returning to my post as the *Star*'s music critic as of Monday, 8 March 1976 (in accordance with my letter of 1975 requesting a year's leave without pay), and I will drop in to discuss the specifics of the matter some time that morning with Mary Anne Dolan. I am assuming that my first reviewing assignment for the newspaper will be the National Symphony concert of Tuesday, 9 March, at the Kennedy Center, and I will also plan to write a Sunday piece for *Calendar* after talking things over with Miss Dolan (and, hopefully, with you) on 8 March.

Sincerely yours,

Irving Lowens<sup>926</sup>

Shortly after his sabbatical began, Lowens had sent a memorandum to Bellows, on April 1, 1975<sup>927</sup> that, although on unknown subject, likely related to his later complaints of February and August. This memo was circulated sufficiently widely to reach Antal Dorati's hands *via* a third party (certainly not Bellows), whom Dorati preferred not to name.

Contacting Lowens about the letter, Dorati extended to his friend full support:

First that I think it a truly splendid document, in the best interests of not only the *Star*, but of Washington's cultural development. This "bulls-eye"

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<sup>926</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to James Bellows, February 28, 1976, loc. cit.

<sup>927</sup> For reference to this letter, see Antal Dorati, letter to Irving Lowens, August 31, 1975, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

will, of course, not decide the battle in itself, more “sloothing” [sic] will be necessary. May I register as your ally!” *Second*, that I was very happy to notice from your letter that you will resume your post by next March—excellent news!—and, inherently, that you expect the “Star” to survive. Another excellent news—because only as long as something exists can it be improved.<sup>928</sup>

After having tasted freedom during his year-long leave, and now finding himself back, unhappily, at the *Star*, such words of encouragement may have provided impetus for Lowens to consider the risky business of going public with classical music’s struggle at the *Star*. Surely constituent pressure external to the newspaper would sway Bellows and his minions to reverse course. More such motivating messages as Dorati’s would soon surface. Thus was Lowens, for better or worse, propelled inevitably to take his next, fateful step.

### **Do Not Go Gentle . . .**

Upon returning to regular duty in March 1976, Lowens found the situation for classical music at the newspaper to be even bleaker than he had anticipated. He acknowledged privately to his friend and fellow librarian Dr. Donald Krummel, perhaps longingly, that jumping ship was likely his best course—if indeed there were any prow in his future from which to leap:

I’m hung over a genuine quandary, which I intend to resolve once and for all when we [Lowens and his wife and partner in scholarship Margery] go to Holland for a couple of weeks in June, and I get a chance to think things out in comparative peace . . . . Chances are 10 to 1 that I’ll be leaving music journalism (as a full-time occupation) as of 1 September.<sup>929</sup>

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<sup>928</sup> Ibid.

<sup>929</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Dr. Donald W. Krummel, April 14, 1976, loc. cit.

The odds proved not to be as Lowens wishfully professed them to Krummel. Having had little luck attracting viable offers during his year-long hiatus,<sup>930</sup> September saw him still, and unhappily, on the job at the *Star*.

In the months after his return, Lowens watched his beloved music department continue to lose precious ground, in part a sacrificial lamb on the altar of rock and pop music, and in part a casualty of the internecine struggle that would eventually overtake, and overwhelm, the *Star*. Preoccupied perhaps by more urgent business matters at the time enveloping them, and, by virtue of their professional and cultural biases, the *Star*'s editors, measured by results, found little value in affording classical music the space it required for an even chance at survival. They chose instead to veer sharply onto the pop-culture track, and Lowens, despite his best efforts, had been unable to halt the train.

The setbacks that the music department had suffered were as much a personal affront to Lowens as professional. He had lost his stringers, friends and colleagues all, to the inexorable budget cuts. His capacity to bring the universe of classical music home to Washington for the edification of his loyal and, until recently, satisfied readers, was sharply curtailed. His professional status and authority at the *Star* had been irrevocably undermined, and he faced a likely future as a reporter without a viable beat.

Having thus far lost his battles with Bellows and Bacas *via* the orthodox means available to him within the newspaper's normal communication channels, Lowens reacted as would any public intellectual and put mutinous pen to paper. Charging around his *Star* superiors, he protested in writing directly to his readers, to whom, by definition, he owed first allegiance. Thrusting his campaign into the public arena could be hazardous, if not lethal, to

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<sup>930</sup> Ibid. His letter to Krummel suggests that, during his hiatus, he had set about finding alternative employment and come up short, because "at my age (approaching 60) nobody is willing to do much more than offer me one- or

his career; but, as his turning-point testimony shows, Lowens had decided, recklessly, to go down fighting. In the end, the gambit failed; but in the doing, Lowens produced one of his most inspired, and inspiring, journalistic creations: A thoroughgoing treatise on the past, present and future of music coverage and criticism, systematic in its presentation and trenchant in its effect.

Incredibly, Lowens's editors consented to publish the piece. It appeared in the *Star* November 14, 1976, with the fitting title: "A Music Critic's Muse."

### **Apocalypse Now**

"A Music Critic's Muse"<sup>931</sup> is master music critic Irving Lowens's *cri du coeur* warning that, in American newspapers, classical music—its events, issues of import and trends from around the nation and the world—was in danger of extinction. Its currency as a serious topic of public interest and concern was fast waning, and, without powerful and timely intervention, it would likely be afforded news coverage no longer.

The essay is as relevant now to the whole of American culture as it was when it was written in 1976, but the tale that Lowens told was not one of national scope. Rather, he told the *Star's* unique story, including, most particularly, the parochial policies of its then editors toward coverage of music in Washington, their antagonism toward the *Star's* formerly flourishing music department, and the destructive consequences of their choices, whether intended or not.

Arguably, and certainly according to Lowens's vantage point, the *Star* had for many years reigned supreme among American newspapers in the coverage of serious music. By

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two-year distinguished professorships or contracts, and that's hard on the nerves."

<sup>931</sup> Irving Lowens, "A Music Critic's Muse," *Washington Star*, November 14, 1976: Calendar, 1.

virtue of its excellence in delivering current musical events to the nation's capital, it had helped to transform Washington into one of the most prominent venues for concert life in the country. If the still incipient, but potentially devastating trend toward degrading classical-music news and criticism could happen in so robust a music capital as Washington and with hitherto so musically vibrant a newspaper as the *Star*, Lowens posited to his readers, then it could—and would—happen anywhere.

Although his editors might have so believed, agitprop was likely not the sole driving force behind Lowens's decision to write "A Music Critic's Muse." He may have been spurred to action, at least in part, by perceived customer dissatisfaction. As he confessed in the essay's introduction, when they sensed the music department's ordinarily high standards of classical-music coverage and criticism to be declining, Lowens's readers did not hesitate to call the critic to account:

Now, as 1977 approaches, my mail has taken on a predictable cast. Each week brings me a portion of letters asking why there was no review of pianist X or violist Y or singer Z. Each week brings me another portion of letters from young and gifted artists about to perform here, there and elsewhere, begging for a review.<sup>932</sup>

This apparent uptick in complaints, although likely demoralizing to Lowens at the time, confirmed the usual and customary high regard in which his music pages were held by the wider public. As he suggested, reclaiming the *Star*'s heretofore peerless coverage of classical music was, for many readers, of sufficient import to justify written protest.

Less than three weeks before "A Music Critic's Muse" was published, one such unsolicited complaint reached Lowens's desk *via* Bellows, to whom the disgruntled reader vented her frustration. The letter shows that either the writer was a particularly canny

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<sup>932</sup> Ibid.

observer of the newspaper's editorial affairs or the changes *vis-à-vis* music that Bellows had thus far wrought in his fewer than two years tenure at the *Star* were too conspicuous for the average reader to overlook. In any event, the writer, believing the *Star* to be steering into troubled musical waters, registered her displeasure directly with the steerer. Her brief note concisely made the point:

Dear Mr. Bellows:

As a reader of the *Star* for more than forty years, I am writing to tell you that something must be greatly wrong, because you had no one at hand to review the last two concerts I heard. They were by the Philadelphia Orchestra (heard it first in 1918) and Simon Estes.

The popular musicians seem to be well covered—I never read about them—just judge by the space covered.

Music is my main interest, and I hear a great many concerts, saving programs and reviews.

Too bad Mr. Lowens isn't a twin.

Sincerely,

Julia H. Jarvis  
October 27, 1976<sup>933</sup>

A similarly pointed letter, this time addressed to Lowens, arrived in early November. The writer expressed surprise and dismay that the *Star*—and, therefore, Lowens—had failed to report news of pianist Lorin Hollander's appearance in Washington. Her insight that the *Star*'s negligence constituted, according to her understanding, a striking departure from normal practice could have been delivered only by a devoted *Star* reader of long standing. As such, it must have further convinced Lowens that he was falling abysmally short of his public's expectations. "A Music Critic's Muse" went to press less than two weeks after Lowens received this letter:

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<sup>933</sup> Julia H. Jarvis, letter to James Bellows, October 27, 1976, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

My dear Mr. Lowens,

When I was in Phoenix, Ariz[ona], my musical friends told me of their pleasure in hearing Lorin Hollander[,] a pianist with the Phoenix Symphony.

When I read he was to appear on Oct. 29<sup>th</sup> with the Fairfax Symphony playing the Khachaturian Concerto[,] I have looked in the *Star* daily for some mention of his appearance.

I could not go to the concert. What ails the *Star*? There seems [sic] to be many critics in your department.

Sincerely,

Mildred Yount  
November 1, 1976<sup>934</sup>

An equally discerning, but more loquacious armchair critic weighed in on the *Star*'s apparently obvious cutback of classical-music news, in response to three short, back-to-back reviews of Kennedy Center concerts<sup>935</sup> that Lowens had placed into print on the day following publication of "A Music Critic's Muse." Lowens earned the writer's pique when, in an otherwise positive review, he lamented poor attendance at one of the concerts:

My sole disappointment was the size of the audience. Why a concert of this distinction should fill less than half the Concert Hall is, I am afraid, one of those puzzles which a music critic cannot solve.<sup>936</sup>

Although likely unaware of the November 14 manifesto—since he made no mention of its content or any bearing it might have had on his grievance—the reader complained about Lowens's comment about audience size, salting the wounds that Lowens only days before had laid open for public viewing in "A Music Critic's Muse." In a sprawling outburst penned in

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<sup>934</sup> Mildred Yount, letter to Irving Lowens, November 1, 1976. Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>935</sup> The three reviews appeared together beneath the headline for the Choral Arts Society's Concert, "MUSIC: Vaughan Williams on Display at KenCen," which was reviewed first. Subheadings were attached to the two, shorter reviews that followed: "Hearing Solti—an 'Influence for Years,'" and "Perlman plays with Power, Penetration," *Washington Star*, November 15, 1976: n.p., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>936</sup> Irving Lowens, "MUSIC: Vaughan Williams on Display at KenCen," loc. cit.

longhand to a length of over 600 words, the reader uncharitably charged Lowens with dereliction of duty for failure to provide readers with appropriate advance notice of the concert. In so doing, he touched on an important obligation of music journalists to the communities they serve, *vis.*, that they are no less responsible for building audiences for music than are concert promoters:

Dear Mr. Lowens:

A puzzle you can't solve? I beg to differ . . . My wife and I are limited in our 'entertainment' budget. I don't know how many times we have read a glowing review of a musical event, only to lament that "it might have been" us in the audience had we only known, been alerted, or teased to attend. When we do go to the KenCen we are invariably part of a "vast audience" attending to hear a sure thing. Sir Georg Solti and the Chicago Symphony are sure things by virtue, not only of genius/talent, but also because their virtues are widely recognized and long publicized. Similarly, the Kennedy Center opera series for which we have had series tickets for the past two years; (Incidentally, whom may we expect next year?) it's another sure thing.

BUT—How much of a preview did you give the Ralph Vaughan Williams choral work concert? I can't remember reading anything . . .

[I]t's clear from your review you had at least addressed an inkling of what to expect from Norman Scribner, the Choral Arts Society, et al. in the RVW [Ralph Vaughan Williams] concert. Why didn't you tell us in time for us to buy tickets? Granted, we're unsophisticated and need tutoring, but there are surely enough of us "at least one persons" who would have helped turn the "less than half" audience into something closer to capacity, had we known what to expect. Frankly, Mr. Lowens, it's your responsibility (and Paul Hume's), not that of the P.R. people at the KenCen. How about an experiment? Next time something exceptional is coming up give it a column as an advance man and a paragraph of review later saying it was damn good!<sup>937</sup>

Because the writer's argument was built on the premise that Lowens's opinion had power to boost the popularity of the music on which he reported, this rebuke was as much admiration, albeit backhanded, as it was criticism for Lowens and the respect that he commanded in Washington. Foreknowledge of the concert, along with an endorsement by

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<sup>937</sup> Richard F. Downs, letter to Irving Lowens, n.d., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

Lowens, would have been sufficient impetus to place the reader in the audience, or so the reader claimed. He thus made the point that a newspaper's readership is indeed swayed by the critic, and that critics who have the capacity to influence positively audience support should do so. Such is the important social and cultural role that the critic plays in ensuring the success of classical-music endeavors and safeguarding the long-term survival of the art form.

To make his case, the writer engaged in some *ad hoc* research, both qualitative and quantitative, on the *Star*'s seemingly dubious space-allocation practices. Astutely, he noticed the glaring disparity between the ungenerous space given classical music in the *Star* and the more ample coverage allotted sports:

[W]e need only flip through the sports pages to know who, when, and where the Redskins, Bullets, Caps, Diplomats, Terrapins, etc., etc. are playing. And in most cases, these teams do little advertising in the *Star* compared to the Kennedy Center and other music/legitimate stage organizations. How come?

Has the sports stuff some magic formula for capitalizing on their own vested interests to which you are not privy? I doubt that readers of the sports section have an 8-1 majority over those readers who are interested in musical events (8 pages of sports in today's *Star*—hardly 1 of music coverage). Even so, like many others, I'm disillusioned with professional sports, but how could one become disillusioned with professional music—unless it suddenly turned 100% rock? You've got a great thing going, but you're not capitalizing on it.<sup>938</sup>

Because, as a reader he was not constrained to pull his punches, the plaintiff lobbied for expanded classical-music coverage almost as convincingly as did Lowens. Only at the end of his missive does he concede, obliquely, that the fault may lie less with Lowens's failings than with the puppet masters occupying loftier rungs on the newspaper's hierarchical ladder:

Oh well! I could write a lot more, but that's enough for now lest I sound paranoiac. (I've even suspected pre-publicity was limited so the "establishment" audience wouldn't have to compete with *hoi polloi* for seats!) I'm sending this to you, rather than "Letters to the Editor," but if you think it would do you (us) any good with Joe Albritton [sic] (or Katherine Graham), please pass it on.

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<sup>938</sup> Ibid.

Thanks for listening!

Sincerely,  
Richard F. Downs

p.s. If you used contractions as freely as I do, you'd get more mileage from the measly space they give you.

p.s. Watch your language! "Hackneyed masterpiece"? Granted, the "Pathétique" is "habituated," the second meaning of the word, but ignoramuses such as me are likely to think you're calling it "trite" or "commonplace," the primary meanings of "hackneyed," and even when it's in juxtaposition with "masterpiece," it raises an eyebrow—or did you mean to?<sup>939</sup>

If these complaints are any indication, Lowens's own music department was now an object of public inquiry and, therefore, news. As reader Mildred Yount had insisted in the last sentence of her letter, Lowens's readers wanted to know: "What ails the *Star*?"<sup>940</sup> Just as the newspaper's internal turmoil had in the Allbritton years become the focus of reader attention, so now were the trials and tribulations of its music department.

At bottom, Lowens was a beat reporter, and his news beat was music. To him, these letters would have constituted news to be reported, and warning his readers of a looming music-news disaster, to which they were already becoming increasingly alert, was incumbent upon him. Such was his function and his obligation as a member of the press, or so, by definition, he would have believed.

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<sup>939</sup> Ibid. This last of Downs's statement references a comment Lowens made, in his Chicago Symphony Orchestra review, about Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, to wit: "The only thing a critic can do in this situation is to keep in mind that, hard as it is to believe, there must be at least one person in that vast audience who was hearing the "Pathétique" for the first time, and for him (or her), Sir Georg's reading must have been a revelation. I envy anyone who makes his first acquaintance with a hackneyed masterpiece in a performance such as this—it will influence the way in which he (or she) reacts, not only to the "Pathétique" but to all Tchaikovsky's music for many years to come." See Irving Lowens, "Hearing Solti-An 'Influence for Years,'" *Washington Star*, November 15, 1976: n.p., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>940</sup> Mildred Yount, letter to Lowens, loc. cit.

## Walking the Line

Lowens likely intended “A Music Critic’s Muse” first and foremost as an *apologia* directed toward these loyal, but discontented readers, as well as to Washington’s larger music-loving community. Also lying within his line of sight were Bellows and company, who urgently required an attitude adjustment regarding the place of the *Star*’s classical-music department, given its legitimately won, towering status in Washington and its import to the newspaper and its customers. To achieve this goal, Lowens could neither whitewash the actions of his superiors nor alienate them, lest the column wind up on the cutting-room floor.

Lowens reveals this cognitive dissonance early on, in the piece’s lead. His opening comment that, as a noteworthy cultural activity, classical music’s ascendancy in America was common knowledge betrays a hint of sarcasm, aimed at any who might be ignorant of this verity, to wit: the *Star*’s editors. By contrast, he follows this assertion with acknowledgement that the escalating predicament of drastically reduced classical-music coverage was not local, but national in scope—so better to shield these same editors from their failings. Thus from the outset, the resonance of the piece is, by necessity, both conciliatory and slyly reproving:

There’s a funny thing going on these days with concert music and music criticism in newspapers, and very few people seem to be aware of it. Of course, everybody knows that there are more concerts taking place now in this country than ever before—indeed, in some places, the number has reached epidemic proportions. But very few people across the country are aware that, compared to the way things used to be not long ago, less and less space is being devoted to concert music in daily newspapers.

I hasten to emphasize that I am not speaking only of what has taken place in the *Washington Star*. The decline in coverage of concert music and the paralleled increase in pop coverage is a nationwide phenomenon. I write about the *Star* because I know it best, having served as its chief music critic since 1960 and as a contributing music critic for seven years before that.<sup>941</sup>

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<sup>941</sup> Irving Lowens, “A Music Critic’s Muse,” loc. cit.

Lowens continued to split his authorial personality, between commendation and condemnation of his *Star* superiors, throughout the course of his narrative. Bringing to light the early, ante-Bellows editorial and management policies that had given the music department its initial nourishment won pride of place on his agenda.<sup>942</sup> His historical description set in relief the positive and supportive role that the *Star* had played in advancing music coverage toward its incarnation as a force for paradigmatic change in Washington's musical culture. By naming none of the editorial decision-makers responsible for this happy circumstance, he backpedaled on his salute; and, not accidentally, he placed his encomium in passive voice. That, in comparison, Bellows failed to measure up remains implied, rather than articulated:

In 1953, when Day Thorpe took the place of the late Alice Eversman as the *Star's* music critic, newspaper coverage of concerts in Washington consisted largely of a combination of superficial chatter about music. The art was used as an excuse to discuss the affairs of high society. Eversman, who at one time sang at The Met, was a competent professional musician, but she did not write like one. The times dictated that she should review concerts not as a musician, but as a lady musician. She was highly respected.

In her work, she was assisted by Elena de Sayn, a personal friend of hers who was also, at one time, a professional performing musician, a violist. De Sayn also wrote music reviews like a lady musician.

At that time, a decision to change this policy was made. [Day] Thorpe was to discuss music in much the same way as books were discussed, as an art with dignity and a worth of its own. Just like a book.

It was also decided that an attempt would be made to report on the musical life of the entire city, and to that end, Thorpe was given permission to bring in musicians expert in particular fields who could write literate English in order to deepen and enlarge the newspaper's concert music coverage.<sup>943</sup>

Lowens concluded his tutorial on the *Star's* distant musical past with a veiled denunciation of Bellows's breezy, celebrity journalism, which had displaced the hard-hitting

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<sup>942</sup> Ibid.

<sup>943</sup> Ibid.

music news of the old *Star*. Because the Bellows brand of reporting favored gossip and personality profiles, Lowens backhandedly and cautiously implied that, in reducing classical-music coverage, the *Star* insulted the intelligence of its readers, whom the newspaper could ill afford to spurn:

The *Star* did not, at that time, emphasize “personality” pieces and interviews with visiting musical stars. It emphasized Washington’s musical life and the country’s musical news as it pertained to Washington. This news aspect of the Sunday page was felt to be of interest to the intelligent, informed concertgoer and *Star* reader.<sup>944</sup>

Lowens’s lessons of history carry the implication that shattering the *Star*’s longstanding precedent and annulling what had been for decades an important and progressive *modus operandi* for music coverage in Washington should not be tolerated, by neither the *Star* nor the public it served. As he implied, without the *Star*’s consistent and pro-active participation over time, Lowens would have been unable to explore, for the good of Washington’s music community, the many notable frontiers in music criticism that engaged him during his two score years at the music department’s helm.

As Lowens recorded it, the evolution of the *Star*’s liberal sensibility toward classical music parallels the evolution of his own pioneering journalistic and critical philosophy—along with its signal success. Lowens laid out his storied tale through actions in support of music undertaken by the *Star*; but they were less the *Star*’s actions than those of Lowens, since, as chief music critic, he by definition guided music policy and practice. His capsule history sketches out the philosophical choices he made when given a free hand so to do and some space with which to do it. If his testimony is to be trusted, by his own acknowledgement

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<sup>944</sup> Ibid.

Lowens put the *Star* and Washington's musical scene on the national map and provided a gold standard to which other critics and newspapers would aspire:

It was in 1953 that I wrote my first review as a contributing critic for the *Star*, in effect taking the place of de Sayn and serving as the *Star*'s second string concert music critic . . . .

In 1960, the *Star* appointed Thorpe its chief book critic, and I was offered the opportunity to take his place as chief music critic. I accepted with great pleasure, inheriting from him a number of prominent Washington musicians, all more or less skilled at writing, to serve as contributing critics. At one point, some 13 critics were writing occasional reviews for the *Star*, probably the best concert music staff in the country.

It was around that time that I tried with some success to persuade the arts editors that popular music, with its large audiences, also deserved some coverage in the newspaper and I was given permission to engage, on an occasional basis, musician-writers who were competent in such hitherto undignified fields as jazz, pop, country and western and even rock, borrowing talents both from within and without the newspaper.

By the time of the late 1960's, a Monday afternoon *Star* might carry as many as seven or eight concert reviews and one or two pop reviews, and we had acquired a national reputation in the world of music as the "newspaper of record" in regard to musical events in Washington . . . .

From the mid-1960's until the Kennedy Center opened in 1971, just about every concert presented in the National Gallery of Art, the Corcoran Gallery, the Phillips Collection, Barker Hall and dozens of other places where young professionals, trying their wings before attempting to conquer first New York and the world, was covered by a *Star* music critic. It was the heyday for concert music reviewing in the nation's capital . . . .

Organ music—and Washington is blessed with some of the finest instruments and organists in the country—were regularly reviewed. It was the *Star*'s policy to try to visit a musical happening in each of the churches with regular music programs at least once each season—no church musician could look out at his audience and be sure that a *Star* critic wasn't listening. This, I am convinced, had much to do with the high degree of excellence in church music for which Washington came to be known.

Considerable space on the Sunday music page was devoted to new recordings and books about music. At least two general round-ups (summer and Christmas) were regular annual features along with much national and international musical news, used to fill at the end of the regular Sunday music article.<sup>945</sup>

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<sup>945</sup> Irving Lowens, ["A Music Critic's Muse,"] ts., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

In keeping with his sustained effort to avoid overtly offending the *Star*'s then-current management, Lowens continued to camouflage the individuals—cohorts of the *Star*'s Noyes/Kauffman leadership team—who had collaborated to realize Lowens's groundbreaking initiatives. Lowens made one exception to this rule. For winning the 1972 ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award for music journalism and criticism, Lowens credited, if obliquely, his former editor Newbold Noyes in particular and the *Star*'s support in general:

In 1973,<sup>946</sup> Newbold Noyes, Jr., former editor of the *Star*, and I went to New York to accept the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award in music journalism, the major award in the field given, annually by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). This I won “for the best music articles written in the previous year.” I accepted the prize and the cash award with great pride, secure in the knowledge that it was really an acknowledgment of the *Star*'s general excellence in music and not a personal award to me.<sup>947</sup>

Lowens's good deed, softly saluting his former editor as well as the *Star* of old, did not go unpunished. If he had believed that such seditious approbation, even cautiously shrouded, would escape the scrutiny of Style editor Mary Anne Dolan, he was mistaken. Dolan, a Bellows protégée,<sup>948</sup> owed her position of power at the newspaper, and thus her fealty, to the *Star*'s flamboyant editor in chief. As Lowens was soon to discover, Dolan, sensing perhaps that the *Star*'s upstart music critic was bent on damning her benefactor with faint praise, perpetrated a pre-publication hatchet job on Lowens's carefully crafted discourse. In so doing, she placed herself in violation of Lowens's First Amendment freedoms.

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<sup>946</sup> Lowens was recipient of the award for 1972 and again for 1977.

<sup>947</sup> Ibid.

<sup>948</sup> Upon Bellows's dismissal, Dolan arranged for a going-away party, inviting many of Bellows's colleagues from the *New York Herald-Tribune* before its demise. Four days after Bellows departed permanently for Los Angeles, she resigned from the *Star*, effective immediately, and followed him to California, taking a post at the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* that he was responsible for giving her. See Donnie Radcliffe and Joseph P. Mastrangelo, “Old Boys' Network: A So-Long Party For Jim Bellows,” loc. cit.

To her credit, Dolan allowed the piece to go into print, but not before she had scrubbed it clean of its perceived radioactive content. In its unexpurgated version, Lowens's article ran to a sizable 2000 words. When her work was done, Dolan had cut away a 300-word swath of narrative.<sup>949</sup>

Ranking high on Dolan's list of priorities for expunging was Lowens's honorable mention of Noyes in his explication of the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award. Bluntly abridging the two-paragraph tribute, she conflated Lowens's words into just one sentence:

In 1973, the *Star* was the recipient of the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award in music journalism, the major award in the field given annually by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP).<sup>950</sup>

After the cutting, salvaged only was the fact of the award, its impact annulled by the scant space Dolan granted it within the narrative. By omission thus she falsely assigned credit for the award to "the *Star*."<sup>951</sup> Both Noyes, whose crucial—and personal—support was indicated by his presence at the awards ceremony, and Lowens, the award's true recipient, were now missing in action.

Among the more perplexing items to be removed from the essay's original draft was Lowens's minimalist citation of his critical credentials:

I can testify to this [the sad state of classical music newspaper coverage in Washington and nationwide] with some degree of expertise since I have served as a national officer of the Music Critics Association of the United States and Canada for 15 of its 19 years, and four of the past five (1971-75) as its president.<sup>952</sup>

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<sup>949</sup> See original typescript, [Untitled], with handwritten rubric reading: "WS Nov 14/76, Orig. with M.A.D's [Lowens's sardonic pun on Dolan's initials] corrections," Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>950</sup> Ibid.

<sup>951</sup> The ASCAP-Deems Taylor Awards are bestowed exclusively on individuals, not to the literary or journalistic organs with which the winners might be affiliated. See *The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers: ASCAP-Deems Taylor Awards*, [http://ascap.org/eventsawards/awards/deems\\_taylor/index.html](http://ascap.org/eventsawards/awards/deems_taylor/index.html).

<sup>952</sup> Irving Lowens, "A Music Critic's Muse," loc. cit.

As the passage discloses, Lowens enjoyed international stature in the music-criticism universe at a level that would—and did—attract readers. Exploiting his standing and writing him large as one of the *Star*'s own stars would ostensibly have been at one with Bellows's new-journalism proclivity to marquee celebrity writers. Even had Dolan in good faith believed Lowens's credentials to be beyond the scope of the narrative, a preamble stipulating how he might hold authority to impart expert opinion would surely have added to the essay's—and the newspaper's—credibility. Credibility apparently not having counted among her main concerns, Dolan struck Lowens's capsule *résumé* from the public record, sparing readers the dangerous knowledge of Lowens's radiant reputation.

Also deleted was Lowens's fleeting assertion—self-evident to regular and longstanding readers of the music pages—that in its prime the *Star*, not the *Post*, had raised the bar on music reporting and analysis:

It was my great pleasure, at that time, to build up the list of the *Star*'s contributing critics to the point where, at one point, the newspaper probably had the best concert music staff in the country (including the *New York Times*) . . . .

[T]he opposition [the *Post*], because of the *Star*'s extensive music coverage, was forced to expand its concert coverage.<sup>953</sup>

Why Dolan removed this short and seemingly innocuous message from sight might mystify, if not for its subtext. Lowens's presence and purpose at the *Star* had constituted value added, and “extensive music coverage,” having been undermined by the more recent, Bellows-instituted editorial practices, inhabited the *Star* no longer.

At the heart of “A Music Critic's Muse” was a public reckoning of then current crimes against the music department. Having with this essay contrived the opportunity to answer the

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<sup>953</sup> Irving Lowens, “A Music Critic's Muse,” ts., loc. cit. In the published copy, Dolan retained the message that, “the newspaper probably had the best concert music staff in the country.” Only the fact of Lowens's causal role was deleted.

allegations directed at him by aggrieved readers, Lowens took full advantage, showing his flock in no uncertain terms wherein they might have been misled. Although graciously continuing to leave the perpetrators anonymous, he left no question that the *Star*'s new obstructionist editorial policies toward music were not of his doing and wholly beyond his control. Miraculously, the substance<sup>954</sup> of Lowens's entire woeful tale went into print uncensored:

Debut concerts were not considered very important. They attracted small audiences and were frequently not of top quality.

But they were legitimate events and they would have been reviewed in the 1960's as a matter of course. Now they were no longer covered, and many members of the musical community were very unhappy about it.

Reviews of organists, even the finest in the world, many of whom had made a special point of visiting Washington in their tours, because of our fine instruments here and the extensive newspaper coverage they had come to expect here, rarely appeared.

The idea of visiting musically active churches at least once each season was abandoned.

The maximum number of concert reviews the *Star* felt it could find space for on Mondays (the week's big review day, since reviews did not normally appear in the Saturday and Sunday newspapers for technical reasons) was reduced to four.

At the same time, pop music events proliferated, complicating the musical scene still further. The Smithsonian got very active musically and so did dozens of other institutions and groups. If concert music had been overcovered in the 1960's, pop music was undercovered in the 1970's. The *Star* began reaching out towards the youth culture, utilizing the talents of star staff writers such as Boris Weintraub.

By 1975, when I took leave for a year, it was clear that the old order had changed and that concert music no longer maintained its old exalted status on the newspaper. It was to be deemphasized and pop music was to take its place.

When I returned to the *Star* in March 1976, I found that from the point of view of a critic dealing with concert music, the situation had deteriorated further. Coverage of pop music was to be further expanded. No contributing critics were to be used to review concert music.

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<sup>954</sup> Dolan altered only one sentence, revising, “. . . the coverage of music in the paper was limited to that which I personally could accomplish,” to read, more impersonally, “. . . the coverage of music in the paper was limited to the work of one critic.” See Irving Lowens, “A Music Critic's Muse,” typescript, loc. cit.

Indeed, the coverage of music in the paper was limited to the work of one critic. In 1976, when the amount of Washington's concert music was virtually quadrupled within a decade, that was pitifully little.<sup>955</sup>

Perhaps to mollify his critics, as well as exculpate himself, Lowens mounted a no-fault defense to account for the *Star's* increasingly meager efforts to cover musical Washington. Laying blame on no single player, he argued that the city's now super-sized concert life had simply outgrown the capacity of a newspaper to report on it:

What any single critic could review in culturally booming Washington was infinitesimal. Theoretically, more should be done; practically, no more could be done. Even if you could cover each event and write about it, there was no available space in the newspaper to print what you had written.<sup>956</sup>

Placing himself, as he did, in second-person singular permitted Lowens to masquerade as detached observer of a trend, rather than center of a case in point. Diplomatically thus leaving both newspaper and critic indeterminate, he claimed absolution for both himself and his *Star* superiors. Less diplomatically, Dolan struck his absolution from the record.<sup>957</sup>

Owing in no small measure to Lowens's scholarly engagement in the field was the breadth of column-space historically accorded sacred-music concerts in the *Star*, which, as Lowens had implied, was perhaps unprecedented in music journalism. Observing that such heretofore matchless coverage had largely withered, Washington's church musicians arose as a body in protest. They convened a summit meeting between themselves and Lowens to register their displeasure in a *mano-a-mano*, semi-public forum. Whether a conciliatory gesture to his organist colleagues or simply an item of pertinent news, Lowens carried in his landmark think-piece a brief report on the fact, and issue, of that meeting. Its

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<sup>955</sup> Irving Lowens, "A Music Critic's Muse," loc. cit.

<sup>956</sup> Ibid.

<sup>957</sup> Irving Lowens, "A Music Critic's Muse," ts., loc. cit.

currency evidently having been lost on Dolan, the typescript mention of this close encounter never saw the light of day in publication:

The organists and the church musicians no longer write [letters of complaint to the editor]. I had an opportunity to discuss the problem at a meeting of the American Guild of Organists and tell them the facts of life. They understand that the days of the organ review in a large metropolitan center such as Washington are numbered.<sup>958</sup>

While Lowens's chief complaint with the *Star* was its *de facto* policy of advantaging pop music over classical, push coming to shove, he chose to soft-pedal these objections as well. Acknowledging the difficulties inherent in attempting to balance competing journalistic interests as the budget noose tightened, he played his own devil's advocate. Reemphasizing that Washington's musical life had far outgrown the *Star*'s capacity to cover it comprehensively, he deferred conspicuously to management's greater wisdom and faulted, at least in part, shifting consumer life-style patterns no longer in accord with routine and thoughtful newspaper reading:

Activities at the Kennedy Center alone have reached such a pitch of intensity that it is impossible for one music critic dealing with concert music to cover its bookings fully. Not infrequently, concerts are scheduled for Friday night, Saturday afternoon and night and Sunday afternoon and night—total of five.

The newspaper simply does not have the space to handle this kind of glut of concert activity even assuming that a [single] professional listener can attend five concerts over a weekend and write about them intelligently with some degree of perception week after week.

Meanwhile, the perspicacious reader of the *Star* will have noticed that the majority of space devoted to music in the newspaper is now devoted to pop. This is plainly a decision which has been arrived at after the most serious editorial consideration. I may disagree, but as a reviewer of concert music, I must admit my bias in the matter. The rapid rise in the *Star*'s circulation shows that the editors must be doing something right, and one of those things may be the change of emphasis from concert music to pop music. Time will tell.

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<sup>958</sup> Ibid.

Today's newspaper reader isn't yesterday's. We no longer have the time for long, analytical articles—we want it short, to the point, pretty and really as much like TV as possible.<sup>959</sup>

Left unwritten in this passage was the obvious conclusion that dividing space a little more equitably between pop and classical music would both make for more balanced coverage of Washington's concert life and serve an important segment of the newspaper's subscribers. Thus Lowens gave his editors a largely unmerited pass at the same time that he cried fowl. So generous a gesture of conciliation was pointless. Dolan redacted the whole of this revisionist theory out of the narrative.<sup>960</sup>

### **A Call to Arms**

At bottom, "A Music Critic's Muse" was Lowens's last-ditch effort to recruit strength-in-numbers allies among his loyal readers in his struggle to save the *Star's* music pages from oblivion. As one lone critic, his remonstrations had had little or no effect on his adversaries; but an entire community of loyal believers might just persuade the *Star's* editorial leaders of their error, or so Lowens must have believed at the time. He thus concluded his essay with a fervent plea to readers, asking them to weigh in on the question of classical music's importance as a topic for routine and regular news coverage in their community. As he stipulated, editorial policy should not be made without taking the paying customer into account. Because the newspaper's first responsibility is to its public, the public has a right, if not a responsibility, to make its wishes known; and its wishes, once established, should determine the newspaper's direction. Lowens reminded his editors, along with the public, of this crucial journalistic axiom:

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<sup>959</sup> Ibid.

<sup>960</sup> Ibid.

The ultimate arbiter in matters such as this is the public, and I am sure that, in regard to music, the *Star* would be delighted to try to fill the public's needs. But it is customary for newspapers to talk to people and not vice versa. If you agree or disagree, I would urge you to write to the *Star*'s editors and let them know how you feel in this matter. After all, there is the theoretical possibility that the fuddy-duddy concert critic may be right and the with-it pop boys wrong, but the newspapers can't know this unless somebody tells them so.

Somehow, I feel that it is not the rock fan who runs out and buys a paper to see what the critic has to say about the latest top pop group—he (or she) is much more likely to borrow Pop's newspaper than to get one of his (or her) own.

On the other hand, I know a considerable number of concert-goers in the area who no longer read the *Star*, because of its heavy current emphasis on youth and gossip.<sup>961</sup> They get their news about musical events now from the morning paper, and if they feel they need for an update on political happenings or sports, there's always the TV set to flip on for a pleasant half-hour or hour of pre-digested news.<sup>962</sup>

Lowens's philosophy of public inclusion in the *Star*'s editorial decision-making never reached the public. Dolan eliminated from the essay this entire, 200-word section, an action indicating that neither she nor, by extension, her superior Jim Bellows would countenance counsel from their own subscribers. Whereas Lowens, at the apex of his narrative, encouraged readers to help set the path of music coverage in the *Star* and influence positively the future of music in Washington, Dolan denied them knowledge of the opportunity.

Lowens concluded his musings with the fearsome, but sage prediction that classical music coverage might well disappear completely from newspapers:

Is this the way in which the reviewing of concert music will make its exit from American newspapers—not with a bang but a whimper? Maybe, in this day of technological miracles, concert criticism no longer belongs in the pages on newspapers. All critics of concert music are hung on the horns of the same dilemma. They know that people like to read about music; they also

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<sup>961</sup> Lowens's indictment here was no undocumented assertion, given that emphasizing gossip and youth culture was a strategy for improving the *Star* about which Bellows had publicly boasted.

<sup>962</sup> Irving Lowens, "A Music Critic's Muse," ts., loc. cit.

know that the newspaper looks less and less like the place where critics can write about the art.<sup>963</sup>

This statement, perhaps better serving her purpose, passed through Dolan's hands untouched. She purged instead Lowens's last remaining thought—a straightforward cry for help, directed at any who might pay heed: “Any suggestions that would help to resolve the dilemma would be gratefully received.”<sup>964</sup> Having thus preferred not to include Lowens's readers in the debate, Dolan stripped “A Music Critic's Muse” of its power and purpose. In the end it read, less as a rallying cry, more like an obituary.

### **Damage Control**

Perhaps to limit further the impact of Lowens's message, Dolan, rather than allot the essay the full-page column space customarily reserved for Sunday think-pieces, situated its first 400 words as a teaser at the bottom of Portfolio's front page. The remaining 1300 words were consigned to a jump on page 14. She paired the teaser with one for “Don't Wait for Disco to Die,” an essay, by the *Star*'s pop-music critic Charlie McCollum, on a like catastrophe facing rock music, or so McCollum at the time mistakenly speculated. After some introductory comment about the disco style, the main body of McCollum's piece opens with the warning that rock music may soon depart the pop-culture world:

There were conversations with promoters, record executives and personal managers. There were some concerts that did not sell as they should have. And there were the charts, the ultimate indicator of what is happening and where the public is spending money on music. Last of all there was a memo shown to me by a publicist for a major label. The memo . . . was startling and had caused much comment within the firm. Basically, the report's conclusions boiled down to one: Rock, as it has been now since 1955, is undergoing a massive change, which it will continue to undergo for the next

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<sup>963</sup> Ibid.

<sup>964</sup> Ibid.

decade. “What it really says is that rock is dying,” is how the publicist put it.<sup>965</sup>

The articles’ two teasers sat side-by-side in a layout suggesting a thematic correlation: Rock music and classical music suffered from similar, life-threatening conditions. This juxtaposition blurred the distinction between McCollum’s premise, that rock music was no longer popular with audiences, and Lowens’s assessment of classical music as a still-thriving art form suffering from apathy on the part of newspaper editors, not the public at large. Whether, or how much, Dolan may have influenced McCollum’s copy—or, for that matter, the entire thesis of his think-piece—remains unknown, but the early paragraphs of the two stories carry an eerily similar cast.

Dolan’s intent may have been to underscore the notion that pop music, not rock or classical, as her two columnists alleged, was here to stay, and that the *Star*’s responsibility lay in reporting that trend. Thus equating the two genres, rock and serious music, she confirmed that both were fashions now at or beyond their zenith.

Placing the two articles in spatial conjunction and squaring them off in competition with one another might have easily befuddled readers. It filtered Lowens’s grim message through the dulling prism of McCollum’s sky-is-falling-on-rock-music scenario and diluted its effect. In hindsight, of course, McCollum was less than prescient in comprehending the lasting power of rock as it has since evolved in its many incarnations. Lowens’s prediction, by contrast, was on the mark.

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<sup>965</sup> Charlie McCollum, “Don’t Wait for Disco to Die,” *Washington Star*, November 14, 1976: Calendar, 1. After changing its wording syntactically, Dolan transferred one of Lowens’s sentences, “The trend towards de-emphasization of concert music and concentration on pop is a nation-wide phenomenon,” from the third to the second paragraph. With this seemingly minor revision, Lowens’s introduction echoed McCollum’s, but with classical music now the topic of concern.



## Chapter V: Coda

### The Big Bang

Lowens's story might well have ended as he had predicted, not with a bang, but a whimper, but Dolan's effort to render her music critic's potent commentary toothless was less successful than she might have hoped—or than Lowens might have anticipated. To Dolan, and certainly to Bellows, coverage of classical music, in the greater scheme of press matters, signified little. As they were both soon to learn, a voluble faction of their newspaper-buying public was of another mind.

Dolan had abrogated Lowens's prerogative to summon reader reaction to his side. In the event, his readers required no invitation to respond. From the affecting testimony of "A Music Critic's Muse," notwithstanding Dolan's chary elimination of Lowens's concluding call for help, letters to the editor—all<sup>966</sup> in favor of reinvigorating the music department—rained down<sup>967</sup> on the *Star* and caught the Bellows cohort napping.

Lowens must have been astonished—and delighted—by the breadth and intensity of the ripostes submitted on his behalf by this select assemblage of admiring—and admirable—followers. Reader upon reader fervently—and speedily<sup>968</sup>—joined in the debate, their collective unity of purpose and viewpoint taking on the appearance of an organized rebellion. So was the revolt all the more stunning, having arisen thus spontaneously—and with Lowens as sole beneficiary. His power base inflated almost overnight.

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<sup>966</sup> In the interest of parity, if nothing else, Dolan surely would have published letters opposed to, as well as those in favor of, Lowens's position. No such letters appeared in the *Star*.

<sup>967</sup> In the month following the publication of "A Music Critic's Muse," at least twenty-six letters were sent either to Lowens or Bellows, in addition to the radio broadcast of Washington Performing Arts Society Director Patrick Hayes that aired December 9.

<sup>968</sup> Three of the responses were written on November 14, the day of the article's publication. Another eleven were sent in the first week after the think-piece appeared.

Such surfeit of support demonstrated, not only the high regard in which these armchair critics held Lowens, but also their shoot-straight perspicacity. Rallying to his cause, they issued their discerning critical judgments in bold face and with striking unanimity. Concurring overwhelmingly with Lowens, they held that the over-abundance of rock-and-pop music coverage was unwished for and unwelcome;<sup>969</sup> they expressed dismay at the music department's now degraded standing at the *Star*; and, even when disputing certain of Lowens's critical findings, they averred full faith in his wisdom, as well as his absolute—and hard-won—dominion, in matters musical.<sup>970</sup>

The calculus of these forthright responses—their whole totaling much greater than the sum of their individual parts—duly sanctified Lowens's music department as an historic, larger-than-life presence in the capital city's community of performing musicians and concert-goers. Throughout the two decades of his tenure, Lowens and his robust team of assistant critics had gladly toiled as fellow travelers in service to the rich and variegated musical culture that, with their expert help, had flowered in Washington. As his fiercely outspoken readers were quick to acknowledge, this longstanding labor of love for their benefit had been, and was still, treasured, notwithstanding Bellows's—and Dolan's—seeming assumptions to the contrary.

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<sup>969</sup> None of the writers judged the larger comparative proportion of rock- and pop-music coverage to be necessary or appropriate. See Mae Rapport, letter to Irving Lowens, November 14, 1976; Mrs. Sidney Shear, letter to James Bellows, November 16; A. Pfeiffer, letter to The Editor [Mary Anne Dolan], *Washington Star*, November 18, 1976; Mrs. Thomas J. Slowie, letter to James Bellows, November 18, 1976, Margaret Woolley, letter to Editor, November 18, 1976, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>970</sup> Mrs. Charles L. Stohr, Jr., letter to Irving Lowens, November 14, 1976; Joseph Michaud, letter to Editor, *Washington Star*, November 15, 1976; Carroll B. Larrabee, letter to Irving Lowens, November 16, 1976; Mrs. H. Gardner Ainsworth, letter to James Bellows, November 18, 1976, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

Also reflected within these letters was growing public awareness of the devastating toll that the looming loss of the music department's nurturing influence would likely exact on musical Washington. As Raissa Chadwell, then-President of the American Bach Foundation, sagely—and dramatically—predicted in her testimonial, removing classical music from public discourse would forfeit cultural plenitude, not only in the capital city, but nationwide for future generations of music lovers:

Dear Irving:

I read your article "A Music Critic's Muse" with great interest. Honestly it made me sick and sad. We are actually destroying great music in this country. What kind of life [do] we plan to leave to the next generation if what they are going to inherit from us will be rock music. I hope that those who make the decisions will see the light before it is too late. We owe you a great debt of gratitude for informing us. Please accept my sincere heartfelt thanks.

As ever yours,

Raissa Tselentis Chadwell  
Founder-President  
The American Bach Foundation<sup>971</sup>

### **Speaking Truth to Power**

Into the dialogue set in motion by "A Music Critic's Muse" leaped readers of all stripes, including both average concert-goers and such musical cognoscenti, in addition to Chadwell,<sup>972</sup> as Joseph Michaud, then Music Director of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Mrs. Theodore Woolsey of the widely regarded Friday Morning

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<sup>971</sup> Raissa Tselentis Chadwell, letter to Irving Lowens, November 17, 1976, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>972</sup> For her work in spearheading the American Bach Foundation's establishment and sponsorship of the J.S. Bach International Competition, she was awarded in 1973 the Bundesverdienstkreuz (Cross of Merit), First Class, of the Federal Republic of Germany. See "Appointments, Awards," *Musical Times*, Vol. 114, No. 1560 (February 1973): 131.

Music Club,<sup>973</sup> organist Dale Krider, then of the Catholic University of America's School of Music, music critic John Guinn<sup>974</sup> of the *Detroit Free Press*, and Nancy Hallsted,<sup>975</sup> then President of the Maryland State Music Teachers Association's thriving Montgomery County Chapter.<sup>976</sup> Perhaps none was more prominent than Patrick Hayes, founder and at the time director of the Washington Performing Arts Society. An impresario and one-time manager of the National Symphony Orchestra, Hayes operated a for-profit concert bureau in Washington from 1947 to 1966, whereupon he converted his business into the WPAS, a non-profit arts-presenting group. Owing to his leadership, the Society developed into one of the capital city's most prestigious institutions, bringing to Washington such world-class artists, among many, as singers Leontyne Price and Marian Anderson, pianists Arthur Rubinstein and Vladimir Horowitz, the Metropolitan Opera, and the Bolshoi Ballet. For his peerless work in furthering the arts, Hayes was awarded in 1970 *L'Ordre National des Arts et des Lettres* from the French Ministry of Culture, conferred through the French Embassy in Washington, D.C.<sup>977</sup>

Having over the years kept the Society in the public eye with advances and reviews of the many concerts that it sponsored, Lowens had championed Hayes and the WPAS from its

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<sup>973</sup> The affectionate relationship between Lowens and the Friday Morning Music Club dates back as far as 1954 when as a *Star* stringer he wrote his first review of a Music Club concert, March 27, 1954.

<sup>974</sup> A pianist and musicologist as well as critic, Guinn is a three-time recipient of the Detroit Press Club Foundation's award for distinguished contributions to fine arts reporting. *University of Michigan Record*, [http://www.umich.edu/~urecord/9293/Jan25\\_93/30.htm](http://www.umich.edu/~urecord/9293/Jan25_93/30.htm), accessed October 15, 2006.

<sup>975</sup> Nancy Hallsted, letter to General Editor, Fine Arts Section, November 23, 1976, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>976</sup> Established in 1965, the Montgomery County Music Teachers Association is the largest of the MSMTA's local affiliates. It includes among its membership college music faculty, "proprietors and directors of private multi-teacher schools, active performers and lecturers, and published composers and authors of educational materials." See the MCMTA website, <http://www.msmta.org/locals/mcmta.htm>, accessed October 16, 2006.

<sup>977</sup> Irvin Molotsky, "Obituary: Patrick Hayes, 89, Impresario Who Enriched Washington," *New York Times*, May 5, 1998: A25. Since Hayes's death in 1998, the WPAS has continued to flourish—his enduring musical legacy to the city of Washington.

inception. In the organization's formative—and precarious<sup>978</sup>—first year of life, he devoted to it one of his prominently placed,<sup>979</sup> and therefore widely read, Sunday think-pieces. His casually affectionate<sup>980</sup> critique extolled the Society's preternatural growth and the genius of Hayes's guiding hand:

In a remarkably brief space of time, WPAS has set a national pace. Concert managers from all over the country are looking at the Hayes operation as the wave of the future. His activities are being scrutinized and studied closely as a model of how to get things done in the field of the performing arts . . . .

Hayes is a marvelous organizer and a much more than ordinarily gifted businessman of the arts. Washington is lucky to have him . . . .

Largely through his efforts over the years, Washington has become a center of musical culture. He did this by dint of hard work and imagination.<sup>981</sup>

Having thus conferred on Hayes early and exceptional praise, Lowens and his influence could only have served to jump start the organization's subscribership efforts, enlarge its general audiences and amplify its reach in the community. Thus did Hayes, in some measure, owe the vitality of his organization, as well as his professional career as an arts presenter, to Lowens.

For Hayes and the WPAS, grateful payback was now at hand. Afforded the opportunity to settle his debt to Lowens in grand style, he took to the airwaves. For the December 9, 1976, edition of his weekly radio broadcast, which he produced for

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<sup>978</sup> Ibid. According to Molotsky, Hayes developed a reputation for taking substantial risks to help his Society grow. When those ventures failed financially, expenses were drawn from his own pocket.

<sup>979</sup> Irving Lowens, "MUSIC: Our Remarkable Impresario—Patrick Hayes," *Sunday Star*, October 16, 1966: D4. By virtue of its status as a feature in the more highly subscribed and wider circulated Sunday edition, the piece reached the *Star's* broadest audience. It was positioned as a headlined article at the top of the Sunday music page.

<sup>980</sup> Ibid. The piece's lead hints broadly at the camaraderie existing between Lowens and Hayes: "This is the beginning of the second season that Patrick Hayes's bouncing new baby, the Washington Performing Arts Society, has been around, and it would be difficult to find a healthier infant."

<sup>981</sup> Ibid.

Washington's (at the time) commercial classical-music station WGMS,<sup>982</sup> the famed impresario, in a turnabout ten years in the waiting, made "A Music Critic's Muse" his sole topic, delivering Lowens's plight in bulk to a sizable chunk of sympathetic listeners.<sup>983</sup>

That he had made his living and his reputation as a market builder for the arts empowered Hayes to speak on the subject at hand with the authority—and visibility—of his position: He had been a successful entrepreneur in Washington for over 30 years. He understood, and could speak to, the practical exigencies of entrepreneurship—exigencies that would also have been understood by Bellows and Allbritton, themselves both master entrepreneurial manipulators.

Hayes's speech was a soliloquy on the practical—and economic—value of the arts to newspapers, and especially to the *Star*, since, in large measure thanks to the cultural leadership of both Hayes and Lowens, it served a city of unbounded artistic and cultural magnitude. Hayes pointed to the conundrum that, even as "hundreds or perhaps thousands" of musical stakeholders, either professional musicians or concert-goers, relied on the *Star* for news of classical music, *Star* coverage of same had paradoxically diminished. He reiterated the self-evident claim, in his view, that Washington's cultural market would continue to burgeon ever larger, notwithstanding the editorial choices of the *Star*'s management to the apparent contrary. He painted as misguided those<sup>984</sup> who, ignoring the economic value of this growth

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<sup>982</sup> The station's call letters stood for Washington's Good Music Station. The station was shuttered permanently on January 22, 2007. Its role was appropriated and its call letters taken by Washington-area public radio station WETA, for service on its Hagerstown, Maryland, satellite transmitter. See Paul Farhi, "Radio Stations Harmonize on Classical Music," loc. cit.

<sup>983</sup> Patrick Hayes, "Washington Performing Arts Society," ts., for radio broadcast, WGMS, Washington, D.C., December 9, 1976, 5:30 p.m., Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>984</sup> Hayes referred here by definition to Allbritton and Bellows, although their names as active antagonists in this drama were excluded from the speech.

market, would tear away at the *Star*'s own circulation and advertising potential. By implication, he branded such destructive practice fiduciary folly.

As he concluded his speech, Hayes slyly winked at his audience, advising them of competing outlets to which they could turn for their news and views of music, should the *Star* not step back up to the plate. He named in particular *Musical America*,<sup>985</sup> the nationally circulated trade magazine that, during his entire work life, had been Hayes's bread and butter, in that it served as an important advertising vehicle for artists' managers and their clients.

Last, but hardly least, Hayes put forward the hard-to-dispute notion that newspapers are not merely deliverers, but also creators, of news. In the decades of Lowens's tenure, the *Star* had made classical music an ongoing theme of public concern, by virtue of the consistent attention paid to it. Because, in the person of Lowens and his assistant critics, it had molded popular opinion in favor of classical music, the *Star* had imbued such music with value. As Hayes persuasively opined, in one last, tacit compliment to Lowens for his success in placing classical-music current events at the center of public discourse, classical music was cherished in the larger community, because "the *Star* said so."<sup>986</sup> Underlying this verity was the equal, but opposite, truth that classical music's value would be lost to greater Washington when the *Star* ceased to say so:

Good evening. The remarks I am about to make are entirely my own. They do not reflect the opinion of Radio Station WGMS and are not connected in any way with the Washington Performing Arts Society. These remarks, and all of my comments in these weekly vignettes, are the personal expression alone of Patrick Hayes.

A Sunday or two ago, Irving Lowens, music critic on the *Washington Star* newspaper, wrote a major Sunday piece documenting and lamenting the decline of review coverage by the *Star* of classical musical events.

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<sup>985</sup> Ibid.

<sup>986</sup> Ibid.

I read the article with an understanding based on history—I have been a close reader of the *Star* newspapers since I arrived in town in 1941, 33 consecutive years. It is a good paper, it has always been a good paper, and during the last two years it has become very good, even bright and snappy. But what Lowens wrote about is true, that less and less space, hence attention, is given to music as we know it.

A newspaper is a public institution, but it is based on private enterprise, which means dollars, profits, or losses, and every inch of space counts. There is no government subsidy for our newspapers. It follows that a newspaper publisher must be a market man—he must aim his product at the buying market—you and me as subscribers, and once he gets us, he has a basis of bargaining with advertisers who also want us as customers—and the combination works. He publishes; we buy and read; we see advertisements and we buy the advertised products. Everybody is happy.

But who is everybody? There are many different everybodies. There are the sports fans, and they are well served with the pages and pages devoted to sports coverage day after day. There are financial fans who read the financial pages first. There are the social pages, now known as the women's pages, or *Style* or *Portfolio*, talking about people, which is basic journalism—names make news, and the more names the more news. There are other segments of the population which make up the total market the newspaper publisher seeks to win favor from—including a growing cultural market—a performing arts readership market in particular in Greater Washington. And here indeed is an irony, that while this performing arts market grows annually, the *Star* coverage of the music segment of that growth gets less and less.

I think the *Washington Star* is making a mistake. The *Star* should keep pace with its own splendid record of musical event coverage of past years, as well as giving all the space it wants to sports, popular music, rock music, recording reviews—anything else it wants to cover as news. It seems to me that for the moment the publishers and editors of this fine paper have not made a good assessment of the number of readers who are members of the cultural community, nor of their influence as opinion makers—the people who talk about newspapers, radio stations and TV stations, politics, social movements and the like—and whose opinions count with others. Downgrading cultural events, musical events by lack of coverage of them in the press is cause for talk, as well as concern, and it is negative talk.

All that is at issue is that music, good music and its public presentation as we know it today, is entitled to its share of public-press attention, and if it is not getting it, the issue should be aired.

The discussion narrows down to a simple question about the press, meaning newspapers, versus other forms of media—radio, television, and direct mail. The cultural public wants information, before and after an event. The music review the next morning is a service to the people who were not in the concert hall the night before, as well as to those who were, because the event is news—something happened, hundreds or perhaps thousands of people were concerned with what happened. It is news, because one rule of thumb in

journalism is that the action of something happening is news. In the performing arts field there is a joke that tells the performer to go out and break a leg—with two meanings, first a legendary and comic way of saying “good luck,” but also that breaking a leg as the conductor jumps for the podium would for certain be a news story the next morning.

If this decline in musical coverage continues, as we pray it will not, the reader who wants to keep in touch with music news will turn elsewhere for that news, and he has at least three printed, and a dozen verbal sources to turn to—other newspapers, *Musical America* and other magazines, and the various radio and TV stations that now have professional reviewers in music, dance and theatre.

The performing arts are lively in Washington, livelier than ever. A major newspaper has or does not have a public obligation to pay attention and publish accordingly. The readers, fortunately, have the ultimate power of decision of where to look for what they want to find and read. We will hope for a shift in the wind at the *Star* so that once more I can write to the editor thanking him for seven reviews that appeared of big and small events over a weekend several years ago, saying that it made music important in Washington because the *Star* said so.<sup>987</sup>

### *Les Jeux sont faits*

In his dangerously direct and all too confrontational bid on behalf of musical Washington to alert a concerned public to the misfortunes of the *Star*'s flagging music department, Lowens unquestionably prevailed. Having won this decisive battle for his readers' hearts and minds, he nevertheless lost the war. Although Lowens's landmark think-piece had garnered for the *Star*'s cherished music pages a full measure of support from the community, fatefully, he had mistimed his gambit.

Thanks to its potency, “A Music Critic's Muse” splashed upon a sea of welcoming public opinion, but it was fast upstaged by decidedly more compelling news. The *Star*'s circulation figures and advertising revenues had then recently mushroomed, sending the newspaper's bottom line, stunningly, into the black.<sup>988</sup>

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<sup>987</sup> Ibid.

<sup>988</sup> See *supra*: 202-203.

Owing in large part to this historic financial turnaround, Bellows's populist, new-journalism philosophy and editorial retooling methods were incontrovertibly validated, flinging the flamboyantly heterodox editor high on a tidal wave of approbation. With the *Star* arising thus on his watch as a phoenix from the ashes, Bellows was in no way obliged to submit to any Lowens-led recommendations for a course correction *vis-à-vis* classical-music coverage. Neither did courting the good will of the classical-music niche market hold any appeal for him at this time. Lowens's *cause célèbre* was instead left to founder in the wake of Bellows's soaring celebrity.

Fate allowed Bellows the luxury of indulging his journalistic triumphs on behalf of the *Star* only fleetingly. One year to the day after "A Music Critic's Music" was published,<sup>989</sup> irreconcilable differences between Bellows and his former champion Joe Allbritton forced the *Star* editor to decamp abruptly to California. Fewer than six months later, with Allbritton likewise having permanently departed,<sup>990</sup> the *Star* found itself in the uncomfortable embrace of Time, Inc.

The editorial team delivered by Time to the *Star* would have been inclined by definition to cultivate alliances within the community and was in fact little enamored of the former editor's pop-culture agenda. Had the ground-swell of reader support for Lowens surfaced when Time was still new to the neighborhood and thus looking at the newspaper's potential with fresh eyes, it might well have heeded a call to strengthen classical-music coverage and rewritten history, at least provisionally.

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<sup>989</sup> Bellows was fired either on November 14 or 15, 1977. He left the *Star* building, belongings in tow, on the morning of November 15.

<sup>990</sup> The sale to Time having been announced in February 1978, Allbritton's resignation as publisher took effect on May 31.

In the event, Time's editor designate for the *Star*, Murray J. Gart, arrived in June 1978, temporally removed from the prior year's classical-music dust-up. Innocent as well of the music department's illustrious history and Lowens's abiding influence in Washington, he followed in the footsteps of his predecessor, electing neither to rejuvenate the music department nor uphold the *Star*'s responsibilities to Washington's classical-music community.<sup>991</sup> The failed fight for the music department was done, and Washington's classical-music movers and shakers were forced to sail on without the *Star*'s stabilizing rudder.

Having quickly reached the inescapable conclusion that his music department would prosper under Time's aegis no better than it had at the hands of Bellows and Allbritton, Lowens chose not to sink, stoically, with the ship. Within weeks of Gart's entrance upon the scene, he accepted the Peabody Conservatory's deanship.<sup>992</sup> After nearly twenty-five years of devotion to the *Star* and to Washington's now-thriving music community, Lowens walked away with scarcely a backward glance.<sup>993</sup>

The whole of Irving Lowens's tenure at the *Star* coincided with the rise and reign of a gilded age for musical Washington that was seeded by two collaborating, and occasionally colliding, factions. A venerable city newspaper, the *Star*, made an enduring, *nonpareil* investment in expert personnel and column space to examine, report on, and promote serious

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<sup>991</sup> In addition to reducing the number of Sunday music think-pieces to "only one every other week," Lowens complained in July 1978 that the new editors, suffering from "a sudden attack of inside-the-beltwayitis" and deciding that "readers were simply not interested in what went on in Austria," rejected pieces he might have posted in the *Star* during his June 1978 European trip. See Irving Lowens, letter to Constance Shuman, July 28, 1978, Irving and Margery Morgan Lowens Special Collection.

<sup>992</sup> Irving Lowens, letter to Herman and Sina [Berlinski], July 21, 1978, loc. cit. His letter to the Berlinskis suggests that negotiations for his position at the Peabody Conservatory were concluded by mid-July.

<sup>993</sup> See *supra* Chapter I: 76-77.

music. At the same time, professional and amateur musicians of all stripes labored to build within the region a vibrant musical confederacy—and constituency. At the nexus of these two entities stood music critic Irving Lowens, who had made the betterment of classical music in Washington his sacred and labor-intensive mission.

In collaboration with his hand-picked lineup of gifted assistant critics and stringers, Lowens shaped the lens through which his readers perceived Washington’s fast-rising musical establishment during its vigorous, formative years. His aggressive journalism, including both wide-ranging coverage and astute commentary, played a pivotal role in raising the bar on the capital city’s performing arts. The numberless reviews, advances and think-pieces that he published throughout the two-and-one-half decades of his dominance in Washington brought classical music prominently and perennially to the center of public attention.

Thus Lowens fulfilled the notion that newspapers have the power both to report the news and create it. As Patrick Hayes tacitly implied in his unprecedented speech, and as the rush of responses to “A Music Critic’s Muse” corroborated, classical music became important in the nation’s capital—and has ever since remained—not only because the *Washington Star* said so, but because its long-ascendant chief music critic, Irving Lowens, had made it so.

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