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"I am a Vi====olerplayer" — Pound and Serly in the early 1930s [1]

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Tibor Serly, the Hungarian born American musician is relatively well-known in the literature on Ezra Pound. That knowledge, on closer examination, however, is not only rather narrow, and can be traced back to a limited number of sources, but is often erroneous as well.

Thus, for example, Serly's obituary in *Paideuma* (7/3, Winter 1978, 620.) relies exclusively on Schafer's otherwise excellent *Ezra Pound and Music*, repeating the fallacy that Serly and Pound first met in 1929. Serly's year of birth is also erroneously given as 1900. Information from his widow, Miriam Serly, however, confirms that he was born in 1901, but because of an error made on his original passport, "he felt he must stick with 1900," and that is shown on his Academy entrance papers, too. According to Mrs. Serly, her husband not only stated many times that the correct year was 1901, but she has the original citizenship paper of his father, Lajos Serly, which confirms it.[2]

Stock mentions Serly three times only in his *Life* (1972), first in connection with Zukofsky's visit to Rapallo (and Budapest) in 1933 (p. 388), then with the Concerti Tigulliani, where Serly was a participant (p. 404), and, finally, when discussing Pound's visit to the United States in 1939 (p. 463). Nor does the Hungarian musician get a fairer treatment in three more recent biographies of Pound. Tytell (1987) does not refer to him at all, Carpenter (1988) mentions him in connection with the 1939 visit in New York only (p. 561.), and even Wilhelm (1994), who had taken considerable pains to write the detailed history of Pound's early life,[3] is comfortable with three references to Serly,[4] the information in them based on second hand material.

It would seem that the only authors who went to the trouble of talking to Tibor Serly or corresponding with him, are R. Murray Schafer and Charles Norman. Schafer's definitive *Ezra Pound and Music* (1977) contains the greatest number of references (24) to Serly in the literature on Pound. Most of these references (10), however, are in Pound's writings themselves printed in Schafer; Pound's letters in Paige are quoted 4 times, and Serly is mentioned in three entries of Hungarian musicians (Bartok, Frid and the Hungarian String Quartet) in the "Glossary of important musical personalities". The rest includes 5 one-word references, and, finally two, more substantial but nearly identical passages, one of them the entry on Serly in Appendix II, and containing the errors mentioned above. Schafer mentions two letters written to him by Serly (July 22, 1968 and October 25, 1970, p. 335n.)

Charles Norman apparently talked to Tibor Serly, took notes, and quotes him verbatim in his *Ezra Pound* (1960). He seems to be the chief source of the anecdotal episodes in New York in 1939, but he also quotes Serly on his own and Pound's views on music and their joint ventures in that field of art (pp. 282, 306). He also mentions the interview Zukofsky gave in Budapest to Árpád Pásztor of *Pesti Napló* and, probably on Serly's authority, the circumstances of the article's coming to Pound's attention.

It would seem that during the first five years of their acquaintance they met annually, that is, Serly went to see Pound and his Italian friends on his yearly visits to Europe and Hungary. After

1935, however, their next meeting took place in 1939 during Pound's visit to New York. Norman has the following to say about this visit:

> "He saw Tibor Serly in his West Fifty-eighth studio, where he consumed quantities of Hungarian pastries with his tea. He appeared to like sweets so much that Mrs. Serly baked a 'real old-fashioned home-made strawberry shortcake' for him, which he enjoyed immensely. As Serly's studio was only five blocks from the Museum, Pound got into the habit of calling on the composer after visits there. Serly told me that Pound tried to adapt New York to Rapallo 'conditions.' He was 'a great dropper-in,' and brought a 'crowd' with him, 'mostly from the Museum of Modern Art.' After years of mulling this over, Serly concluded that Pound did this 'to be of help to me.' But: 'I was — I am — angry at Pound. He should have known better.'" (Norman 1960, p. 362.)

A careful reading of the passage might suggest why relations between the two men were interrupted — indeed, terminated. It would seem that the two men had lost touch, Pound not only had no idea what New York was like, but he must have been similarly unaware of Serly's position as an independent composer, conductor, and music teacher, with even a little orchestra of his own. Norman interviewed Serly some twenty years after the incident, and the latter was still 'angry at' the poet. On the other hand, a letter from Pound to his wife on May 25, 1939 might suggest that the musician also irritated the poet: "...[I] dealt with Tibor by phone/ only way to TERMINATE conversations." (Lilly Library [henceforth: LL] Pound mss III)

The incident of the missing black shoes was a more complete little anecdote, and Norman quotes it in both his books on Pound.[5] Serly, an accomplished anecdotist, added a little touch later when he referred to the incident to me in 1976, hinting that they might have *painted* a pair of brown shoes black. In the same interview he mentioned a heated argument or quarrel between Pound and himself about fascism and Mussolini, "on politics. And then we said good-bye and that was the end, we know the rest."[6] That could be a reference to the poet's political career, which had him end up in St Elisabeths Hospital after the war, as well as to the end of the relationship between Serly and Pound, as if hinting at a politically coloured motivation behind it.

The Serlys would never meet Pound again. Serly and Miriam, his second wife, whom he married in 1964, met Pound's family in the United States in the late 1960s, when Mary de Rachewiltz visited her son, who was studying at Rutgers. There are also a few extant items of correspondence in public and private collections that Serly exchanged with Dorothy Pound and Olga Rudge in 1968 and 1969. It might seem, though may not be, significant that when Pound and Olga Rudge visited the United States in June 1969, they did not meet the Serlys during the two weeks they spent in and around New York. (See, e.g. Wilhelm, pp. 346-347.)

In the following I shall try to survey the beginning of Pound and Serly's relationship in the early 1930s based on their mostly unpublished correspondence, and on the published and unpublished writings of Pound on, or concerning, Serly.

*

Their first meeting took place in 1931. It was preceded by Zukofsky calling Pound's attention to the musician, and as the passage below indicates, not for the first time.

> "...My friend [Tibor] Serly is sailing the seaz on May 7 and hopes he will find you in Paris. After a while, I suppose he'll go to Budapest till September. How long do you expect to stay—in Paris? The lunatic Stokowski who was going to play his viola concerto and his orchestration of Mozart's Simfoni for a Musical Clock—at any rate, goin' to give Serly a trial hearing of these things—didn't after all. Serly talks the Eng. langwidge in the most peculiar way—but you will find it a crime to stop him if you meet him: the gentleman I recommended to you last year...." (Zukofsky to Pound, Apr 25, 1931. *Pound/Zukofsky*, p. 95.)

The following is the first letter Serly wrote to Pound from Paris before taking the train to Rapallo:

> "Aug. 3, 1931
> Dear Mr. Pound,
> Whether my friend Louis Zukovsky[7] has brought to your attention a musician by the name of Tibor Serly I am not certain. At any rate here I am in Europe and very anxious to meet you for a number of reasons.

> First: I bear an old grudge against your writings on Anthiel, and note that most of the nails that were hit on the head by you were unfortunately bent by Anthiels wisecracks.
> Second: I have reached the point where through a gradual elimination, there are about two composers left: Bach & Mozart. I say about because recently I have even discarded Bach as being the greatest mis-contrunpuntist that ever lived. That leaves Mozart as the only riddle. Which means, so far as I am concerned that music ended either before Bach or, did it ever begin? Until now?
> Third: I agree on one point with G.A. that music is no 'God-Damned Circus'. Nor does it rest on one little effect such as time-spacing.
> But most important, I feel that I have something definite to say to you concerning matters musical.
> Expect to be in Paris (Europe) until about Sept. 10th. If you are not here in Paris before before that time, would like to take the trip to meet you if the expense will not be beyond my present means. All this of course, if you are not 'off' musicians by now.
> Sincerely Tibor Serly
> P.S. You may be interested to know a few words concerning myself. Have lived in U.S. since age 2, lived from 1920-25 in B'pest where I graduated the academy as a pupil of Kodály. Am at present a member of the Phila. Orchestra. (heaven help me.) Have never had any performances worth mentioning and have not made any great effort to do so.
> Address until Sept 1st.
> 14 Rue Des Verjus (Seine) Suresnes France"
> (Beinecke Rare Book Library, Ezra Pound Archives [henceforth: BRBL-EPA] file 1610)

Their first personal encounter took place in Rapallo — in August 1931, and not in 1930, as Serly himself would later remember.[8] Apart from the date, Serly would remember much of what went on at the meeting — Pound must have made a lasting first impression on him, as he indeed did on most young people who went to see him in Rapallo and later in St Elisabeths. There was also some misunderstanding concerning the scope of the canon attributed to Pound by Serly, to which Pound responded in the following way to Zukofsky:

> "...what the HELL do you mean to convey by the sentence 'Serly tells me you have limited that [invention] for our age to Joyce, Rexroth and the Cantos'(??)
> ????
> whatever HAS S[erly]. half/swallowed. And why Rexroth? what of Rexroth.
> I can't remember [having made] any such summary, or ANY summary
> I can't see why I shd. have omitted Bill [Williams]/ Marianne [Moore]/ the professor [to be] etc// in fact
> I dont rekognize the remark AT ALL. too tired to go into it now."
> (December 22, 1931. *Pound/Zukofsky*, p. 122.)

Unfortunately, Serly apparently did not keep Pound's letters to him from this period, nor did Pound make or keep carbon copies of the letters he wrote to the musician. The first letter from Pound to Serly that I know has survived (in a carbon copy in the Beinecke Library) is one written in March, 1935. This makes our picture of the relationship somewhat lopsided, although Pound's reactions can sometimes be traced in his letters to others, such as Dorothy Pound, Agnes Bedford,[9] James Laughlin,[10] or Louis Zukofsky.

Serly's next letter from late December says nothing of this little *malentendu*, in fact that is the letter that contains the vehement and vituperous attack on Antheil.[11] It is worth quoting in full because it was Pound's favourable attitude toward Antheil that had prompted Serly to seek the poet's acquaintance in the first place, although not precisely in the same chronological order as he would remember later.

> "Dec 29, 31
> Dear Mr. E.P.
> Just heard the naughty boy G. Antheil play excerps from (to be sure) Erskines "Helen Retires." If I could swear like hell before you for about 5 minutes it would better convey my opinion of him than anything else I could say.
> He started out some 12 yrs. ago by writing littke Burleque times on Stravinsky, Casella, Debussy. He has never gotton beyond that stage. It is the not very clever rambling of a petty improvisator.
> In plain words A. never even having been a genuine false-alarm, has finally become his natural self and has taken material advantage of the little childish, pianistic, witisisms that he has always had a knack for.
> Technically, (is such a term may be used) his method is the taking of good-old sure-fire standbys such as, Rimsky, Chopin (my God) even Grieg, advancing to Petroushka and Bartok, (Eearly) not forgetting of course Debussy, which he uses as a base. These he coats with mildly-

> scented dis-cords.
> He has no method, no line, and has never even mastered elementary academic harmonic structures. And writing a hundred fugues? on a subject never seemed to have given him a remotest hint as to what two indipendent melodic lines actually consist of. Rythmically he has even less to say, and does not even monkey Stravinsky, Bartok, or Jazz-rythyms with any understanding.
> And did you say he hates the piano? Thats a lie! Without it he would never write another note in his life. Take that away from him and you take his life. The only little spark of individualism he posseses.
> You ask me to make the acquaintance of the gutless jellyfish who writes music to Erskines belly-belching Helen? Well, let me tell you I can only take imbeciles of A's ilk as mortal enemies, in fact he and his type are the only ones to fight against. His performance fitted in well with the Ethical Culture Society of Phila. 15 minutes of it was all I could heroically tolerate of that atmosphere. Another five minutes and I'd have vomited all over the place.
> I am afraid now, we did not quite understand each others point of veiw when we discussed music this summer. I had so much to learn from you and did not want to miss any of it that I really never presented myself as I had planned to do.
> As far as I can see no one has contributed much in this century to re-astablishing music on a solid foundation exept (perhaps) myself. The reason for this is because no one else has taken the trouble to rationally understand & anylize the era of cock-eyed art from Bach on to the 20th century.
> Until they do so, there is not much hope for a general understanding.
> Furthermore, I neither look forward to any recognition nor would I be much pleased after a lifetime of struggle if it were finally said there are Sravinsky, Ravel, Hindemith, Honegger, Satia, Respighi & Serly, etc. Because my work is a biginning and theirs an end.
> Not until the time when individual existance is guarenteed will there be any general ettempt at clear examination. Meanwhile the less written, composed, painted, and printed, the better.
> Yours for the next step. T.S."
> (BRBL-EPA f1610)

By his next letter of May 7, 1932, Serly had cooled off, and even agreed to the possibility of eventually coming into contact with Antheil. Pound, however, did not really want to discuss Antheil with him, but had other plans, to which Serly did not respond with the enthusiasm that the poet might have expected. Serly's scepticism concerning Pound's work in the operatic field was due to his general belief that the fusion of drama and music was not feasible. In the same letter he reveals his plans for a summer visit in Rapallo in between Budapest, a modern music festival in Vienna and spending most of the summer in Paris. (May 7, 1932; BRBL-EPA f1610)

The planned time of the visit to Rapallo is given in a post card (dated erroneously 'July 27') as from 12th to 17th of July. (July [=June] 27, 1932; BRBL-EPA f1610) Pound subsequent letters to others confirm that the meeting did indeed take place. He wrote to Agnes Bedford on August 6, 1932:

> "...You might correct All grace notes. instead of please put or one composer and one singer and one viola player (Phila. orchestra) have assured me that it will prevent ambiguity."
> (LL Pound mss II.)

Géza Frid, Amsterdam based pianist and composer, graduate of the Budapest Academy also went to Rapallo in 1932, and not in 1933 as Schafer claims (p. 492.), probably together with his friend, Serly. The topics touched upon during the visit concerned, among others, Pound's work as a composer, and Pound, though insisting on his own ideas, definitely respected the professionalism of the two Hungarians, as seen in another of his letters to Agnes Bedford:

> "...Serly thought melody in DMP [Donna Mi Prega] came UP to same point too often. I wd. for an instrument. However Eakin sang thru' it and it didn't seem hopelessly monotonous. [...] If the whole thing needs more BUILT orchestra/ either Serly or Frid cd. do the job."
> (August 20, 1932. LL Pound mss II.)

The result of this visit included one of a number of articles that Pound would write concerning Serly and/or Hungarian musicians. It would seem that on this second visit, in addition to introducing his friend, Géza Frid, and playing for Pound in private some of his works, Serly had time and the presence of mind to discuss his musical ideas with the poet. In his "Compositori Ungheresi a Rapallo" Pound described in some detail Serly's (and his own) thoughts on modern

music.

> "Serly is a brilliant composer of genuinely modern music, based on profound studies — modern for its polytonality but classical in its sobriety and shaping. In fact, he opposes the current opinion about polytonality, maintaining that, at least in practice, polytonality is rather a combination of major and minor together with a common fundamental in the bass.
> [...] Sense of rhythm, fine, but there is also this sense of time, the equivalent in "duration" of the great designers' mastery of line in "space."
> This is the essence of music, where harmony is but a *corpus vitae*, the *animated* sonority of divisions shaped by duration."[12]

From Serly's letters that followed this meeting it appears that Pound sent him some of his musical compositions, probably his *Ghuidonis Sonata*, (Schafer, p. 335.) for orchestration. Serly also promised to consider the idea of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a basis for operatic librettos. (October 1, 1932; BRBL-EPA f1610) In a later letter he acknowledged the receipt of an "extravagant edition" of the book, and insisted on paying for it. (November 20, 1932; BRBL-EPA f1610. See also Schafer, p. 335.) He would have preferred a joint venture in doing something musical with Ovid: "...there seems to be plenty of good operatic material just as you said. C'd possibly hope to interest you to do Ovid some time? We c'd then combine some of our musical idea into the work." (February 10, 1933; BRBL-EPA f1610.) At the time, however, Serly was more interested in the idea of writing an "Injun-American opera", and although he never wrote that either, his orchestral compositions took all his time and energy in those months.[13]

Pound's explanation was somewhat different a few years later: "Both Antheil and Tibor Serly, convinced of the value of my scheme [of setting excellent poetry to music], have asked me to find them texts. And I have not been able to do so because even Shakespeare's *Pericles* presents the same difficulties as the work mentioned by Luciani..."[14]

The other important topic of the correspondence, which at that time was not very frequent, was Zukofsky's visit to Europe and Rapallo. "...If you are in a pos. to repeat the offer of his fare again this summer, a couple of friends & myself will see to it that he won't have to worry about his expenses there for a few months," Serly wrote on February 10, 1933. (BRBL-EPA f1610.) Zukofsky was finally convinced by Pound's and Serly's insistence and sailed for Europe on June 30.[15]

Very few communications between Serly and Pound have survived from 1933 before the former's visit to Rapallo in that year. Indeed, apart from a letter in February, we only have a postcard, mailed in Budapest on June 16, 1933, with no message but a signature: "T. Serly" (LL Pound mss II.) The visit took place in late August (and possibly early September). Serly took with him to Rapallo the article on Zukofsky, which had appeared in the August 13 (Sunday) number of *Pesti Napló*. After the visit Pound wrote an article on Serly. The essay, however, has remained in typescript to this day.

> "TIBOR SERLY Composer
> Two years ago there appeared in this seaside village a solid highly concentrated Hungarian.
> "I am" he said, "a Vi====olerplayer"
> He continued to state that as a small boy on the sideworks of Noo Yawk he had been ashamed of his parents' refusal to learn and speak english that he was accustomed to walk on several paces ahead of them in the street, pretending he had nothing to do with them.
> He stated that most modern musical composition is plop, but that "now that no one plays him any more, during the last few years Bela Bartok had committed several very fine compositions.
> He advanced a further hypothesis (which I think we may safely take as established) to the effect that musical composers both living and dead are and have been of an imbecility surpassing all computations possible to the layman.
> Or perhaps I advanced that hypothesis.
> I don't know how much bluffing is done by scholl-broke musicians as to their capacity to understand music from seeing it written or printed. A great many conductors obviously do NOT make head or tail of a score until the orchestra has played it for them.
> There is the locus classicus of the very very indeed very celebrated conductor hearing the composer play it and saying with disconcerting freshness and frankness: "Oh! I didn't know that's how it went."
> I do not pretend to know all about a new piece of music just from seeing it written. The written page often bores me, some written pages do not. I looked at Mr Serly's compositions and decided his best work was for wood wind (that was two years ago.) He had written a viola concerto, and played it with piano accompanying. It is a good concerto and very useful

> addition to the limited literature of the viola. Several violists with great reputation have or are supposed to be etc. played or about to be playing it.
> Last year he had a fine piece of scoring for that highly interesting and little know[n] almost-last work that Mozart wrote for a mechanical clock. I have heard it sketched in by a couple of executants, and want to hear it with orchestra.
> I have any number of beliefs about the Zauberflote and about how much Mozart invented during the last few months of his life.
> This year however we saw a new Serly, a calmer and solider Serly, he had again been to see Bartok and Kodali. He again asserted that the later Bartok was really, among living composers etc... and that after waddling and paddling around hunting for something Bartok had now at last done it, "no[w] that no one plays his new stuff."
> During all his three visits Mr Serly has talked about polytonality, or rather about the simple (that is relatively simple) but solid basis on which so called polytonal work is or of a right ought to be built, and how a clear comprehension can or should work in that realm.
> Serly has now backed up his hypothesis, in place of counterpoint he has emitted a solid composition in what I am inclined to call "counter-mass", that is to say he has written a work for orchestra in which you can hear two distinct bodies of sound moving, performing their evolutions, like two clearly defined masses of troops on a parade ground; no messing about in confusion, or in that utterly damned 19th century messiness; of which at least a few decent auditors and writers of music are wholly utterly and thoroughly tierd.
> I don't expect a great number of people to believe this statement merely on my say so, but I assert the existence of a new composer, and I wish him and the wider public a prompt opportunity of hearing and (in the case of the capable) of judging for themselves.
> William Atheling (Ezra Pound)"[16]

Although Pound discusses Serly's musical theories in vague outlines only, some progress can be percieved in his having moved from polytonality, i.e. the "combination of major and minor with a common fundament in bass" to a solid basis on which so-called polytonal works are to be built, counterpoint being substituted by "counter-mass". Interestingly, he never discussed Zukofsky's views on music either in his letters to, or in his essays on, Serly.

The year 1933 also saw the beginning of the series of the concerts Pound would organize during the rest of the decade. The first events, three evenings of Mozart's sonatas, took place in the Rapallo cinema house, the "Teatro Reale". After the success of the Mozart Week, Mayor Solari offered to Pound and his friends, including Olga Rudge, and Gerhard Münch, the use of the new great Rapallo Town Hall. The first full season started in the new venue in October.[17]

Serly thus became Pound's "first link with Hungary,"[18] who not only played the viola at the concerts and brought his own works to be played there, but would also recommend and introduce Vilmos Palotai and Endre Gertler with their respective string quartets to Pound, as in his letters of March 11 and May 28, 1934.

Serly, by that time, was anxious to have his own work performed properly, by an orchestra and in a concert of his own. He felt he had been more than once frustrated by Leopold Stokowski, the director of the Philadelphia Philharmonical Orchestra, who had been putting off performing his work. Serly felt that he was employing "new techniques for orchestra instruments" and had "short pieces for strings with sounds never heard before," which would certainly "put a few musical friends on ears," and that his manipulations with different types of mutes for brass would "change status of Brass to blend even with single string instr[uments]," and would revolutionarize orchestra in some respects — as he wrote to Pound. (February 22, 1934; BRBL-EPA f1610)

Serly visited Rapallo in 1934 as well, probably in late August and/or September. There is what is probably a reference to this visit (apologising for forgetting Gertler's address in rush) in a letter dated October 5, 1934. (BRBL-EPA f1610) Pound's next published piece which mentioned the Hungarian composer contains the the first public written utterance by Pound with respect to what Serly regarded as the recent change in Bartók's music:

> "The composer SERLY, who plays in Stokowski's orchestra and passes through Rapallo every year on his way from Philadelphia to Budapest to visit his old teachers, assures me that Bartók's more recent music has a force and richness unknown to the very lively and better known first works of this composer."[19]

Although Pound had mentioned Bartók in his "George Antheil (Retrospect)" in 1924, he did not

know him — in fact he was only quoting Antheil on Bartók.[20] Pound would remain sceptical for a while, preferring Stravinsky, but learning slowly, thanks to Serly's organising abilities, to the Gertler and the New Hungarian Quartets, and, not the least, to Bartók's Fifth Quartet, to appreciate the mature art of the Hungarian composer.[21]

In the autumn of 1934, Serly was promoted to the position of one of Stokowski's three assistant conductors. "No extra pay, but gives me opportunity for conducting at rehearsals." (October 5, 1934; BRBL-EPA f1610) "...Serly has been made one of Stokowski's three asst/ directors..." Pound relayed the good news to his young friend, James Laughlin. (October 18, 1934, *Pound/Laughlin*, p. 34.)

Serly started making preparations for his next visit very soon — in fact, he had his leave of absence for January 1935 confirmed as early as October. By that time he was seriously preparing for a debut as a conductor and composer in Budapest. The preparations were delayed by a series of accidents. In October, a piece of the scenery from the Academy fell on him and broke his bow, costing him $250; in December, some acid was poured accidentally on his head from a building in the street, ruining his coat, burning his head. (Serly to Pound, December 21, 1934; BRBL-EPA f1610)

Despite the obstacles, Serly finally sailed from New York on February 8, 1935. Pound announced his arrival in London to Agnes Bedford:

> "...My lunatic friend Serly, now asst/ condktr Phila. is passin thru Lunnon. I think he will amuse you if you can keep head to the wind. Its a TREmenjus delivery.
> That there Gertler 4trt quart/et that he sent here, WUZ some 4 TET. knoched the Lehners DEAD. and I hear it is better than the Rotschild/ aza nole scot, had just heard the Rot/ do the same Bartok in eddnBug..."[22]

Professionally, the one in 1935 was probably the most satisfying for Serly of all his visits to Rapallo. On March 3 he played his *Concerto for Viola* in a viola/piano reduction at a Tigullian concert. The program included Mozart's Duo in G major for violin and viola, and the same composer's *Sinfonia Concertante* (violin/viola), both pieces performed by Olga Rudge and Serly. Pound reported the event to Zukofsky on March 6. "...Tibor [Serly] is goin' good. Local press excellent/ half full. He wuz nuts to say 75 people/ 160 at least. I wasn't countin..." (*Pound/Zukofsky*, p. 163.) That he was impressed is seen from his letter to Agnes Bedford on the same day: "...Having heard pyanny part Serly's concert PROperly done/ am convinced Ser/ is more important than I had thought. I thought he was good., but allus a matters of degree..." (LL Pound mss II.)

Serly must have left Rapallo very soon after the concert. Pound had to write him a letter, probably to Budapest, to tell him about his favourable press:

> "Deer Tiborr/
> Glad you got as far as Trieste without tears/
> Here is the Lavoro artcl/
> I dont know where I put the announcement cut f(om Genova paper before concert/ but it was same as first part of Mare artcl/
> There are several misprints/ but it means
> Very great success;
> T/S/ showed himself to be a composer of front line (first rank) endowed with magyr fervour, full of juice, (life sap) without falling into epilepsy of the recent decadence, but to carve sounds.
> (misprint, or omission of a word, prob/ meant he KNOWS how to chisel or carve the sound)
> Then there is misprint re/ Lubek/ Says yrs/ stood test/ the Duo of Mozart conceived with such genius that the two instruments have a sonority that seems almost orchestral.
> Serly's Concerto for viola ought outen precede the Sinf/ Conc/ to display the competence of the livin' orther and Moz' eternal modernity.
> Hearin Munch, didn't miss orch/ but cd/ still make out that the violer line is co mell designed that it wouldnt gi lost or smothered against the full blaze of orchestry
> And (sez the critic, the purrzoombly Eyetalyan critic) this reveals (reCalfs) and confirms (or proves) the profound knowledge of his means that the Serly has in his jeens.
> sorry the translation sounds so like ole EZ/ but so IZ it,
> will send you another copy/ but dont wanna putt em all in one envelope.
> The snotty Giornale merely sez yeh hadda succes..

> Sez yer a valoobl composer, that yer muzik wuzza preciated, and the publikk applauded.
> wall, mebbe they did. an what of it. The Lavoro also sez they applauded. mebbe it awl hellups.
> I have written to Agnes. also."[23]

Serly needed the publicity because he was at an important turning point in his career. Indeed, the Rapallo concert was of minor importance to what was to follow in the rest of the year.

On May 13, 1935 he gave his first author's night at the Academy of Music in Budapest, conducting the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra. The program was 1) Mozart-Serly: Fantasy and Fugue; 2) Serly: Concerto for viola and orchestra (violist János Temesváry); 3) Serly: Symphony in three movements; 4) Serly: Six Dance Designs. According to the critics, the concert was a great success. Bartók himself was present, and had himself photographed with the young composer during the break. On July 19, Serly conducted the Opera Orchestra on the Hungarian radio, the program including his Concerto for viola and orchestra and the Mozart-Serly Fantasia. Finally, on August 13, he was conducting another performance of his own compositions at the Open Air Festival in Szeged in Southern Hungary.

Pound followed all these events with close attention. He published an essay entitled "Tibor Serly, Composer" in *New English Weekly* after the Budapest concert. Although the article adds little to what he had already said about Serly's music in public and in his private correspondence, it was a nice gesture and a useful promotional piece.

> "...Haics Geza, in the "Magyarsag" (Budapesth), 1st Aug., 1934, summarises Serly's doctrine — or shall we say Serly's estimate of what has happened musically during the past few decades, and where his own work comes in. Roughly the phases are: decay of melody and consequent flop of music. Harmony dominates half-formed fragments of melodiousness, as distinct from being generated by a nucleus, that is from a melody strong enough and fixed enough to give tension to larger musical form.
> Accidentals and chromatic notes break loose from all orderly control, producing atonalism, then polytonality, but no new, real technique.
> Tibor Serly sees the birth of the new music in the use not merely of polytonality, but in correlation (with due opposition) of two sclaes, major and minor, of the same key. This movement or phase includes at different tensities and densities, Bartok, Stravinsky and Casella, Bartok being Serly's spiritual father as Kodaly was his actual teacher in the conservatory at Budapesth..."[24]

Pound made a point of listening to the radio broadcast, urging his wife, then in London, and friends to do the same.[25] And in late July and August he was even ready to travel as far as Szeged to see and hear Serly perform at the head of an orchestra. The date, however, was changed in the last minute, and August 13 was too late for him to come to Szeged. (Novák 1995, p. 76, n. 4, 5.)

Serly's life significantly changed after 1935. He became a successful and recognized composer-conductor. In June 1936, he resigned from the Philadelphia Philharmonics to become a free-lance composer, and, most importantly, a few months later he got married ("which is all right because Alice got a good job'n I aint, see!").[26]

*

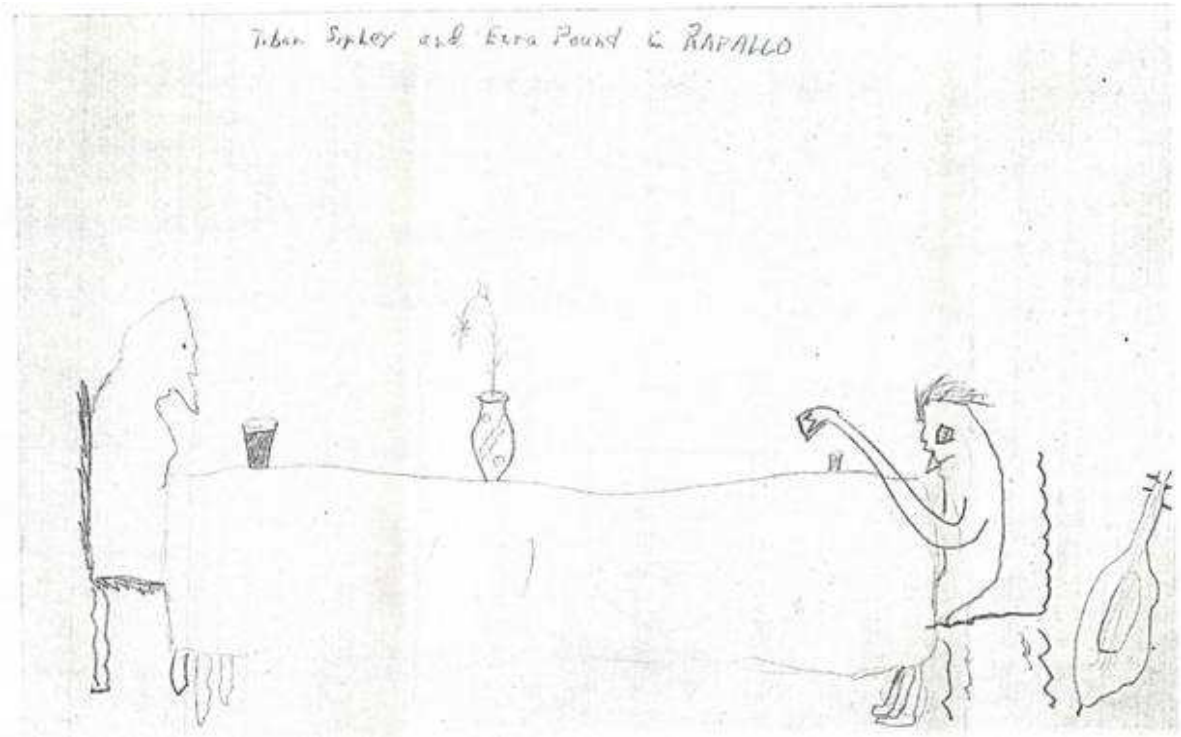
The two artists went on exchanging letters and ideas, but they would never meet again in Europe, although Serly continued his annual visits to Hungary. In 1936, he wanted to meet Pound in Rapallo, but in another letter he said they would not be able to make Venice on the way back to the States (he was travelling with his would be wife, Alice).[27] Nevertheless, this was the year that he brought Pound and the New Hungarian Quartet together. (See *Letters*, p. 282.) In the following year, he was again planning to go and see Pound, but had too much work to do in Budapest, and had to rush back to the boat, and could not make Venice.[28] From the year 1938, we have only one letter, in which Serly complains about the failure, due to a bad cold, of a surprise visit to Rapallo.[29]

The year 1939 saw Pound coming to the States after 28 years of absence in the spring. His visits to Serly then have been mentioned above. Later in the same year the Serlys were in Europe again. They wanted to see Pound in Rapallo in the first days of September, but the war, which Pound

had travelled to the United States to prevent, broke out. The Serlys, who were staying in France, went to Bordeaux instead of Italy, and took the first boat home.[30]

Pound would still translate the "Long nose" poem for Serly,[31] and a few more letters would cross the Atlantic. Indeed, all the three letters published by Paige based on his transcripts of Pound's carbon copies were written after their last meeting in Europe (*Letters*, pp. 282, 326-327, 343-344.). There is, however, no trace of any epistolary communication between Pound and Serly after April 1940 — until October, 1972, a few days before the poet's death.

(Prague—Szeged, 1998)



"Tibor Sirley and Ezra Pound in RAPALLO"

(Drawing by "J.R.", BRBL-EPA f1502)

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Notes

[1]. Previously unpublished material by Ezra Pound Copyright © 1998 by Mary de Rachewiltz and Omar S. Pound. Used by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation, agents. Previously unpublished material by Tibor Serly Copyright © 1998 by Mrs Tibor Serly and used by kind permission of Mrs. Miriam Serly. Manuscripts held in the Yale Ezra Pound Archives, in Lilly Library used by courtesy of The Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University and Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, respectively.

[2]. Letter from Mrs. Serly, September 18, 1986.

[3]. See *The American Roots of Ezra Pound*. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985, and *Ezra Pound in London and Paris: 1908-1925*. Pittsburgh: Pennsylvania University Press, 1990.

[4]. The references are in connection with Zukofsky's visit to Rapallo (p. 64), Pound's 1939 visit to New York (p. 151), and Canto 35, which mentions Serly as 'Mr. Fidacz' (p. 99.).

[5]. "'One Saturday night,' Serly told me, 'Pound came in a great rush of confusion to my place — he was to go to Hamilton College the next day to receive a honorary degree and had no black shoes, just the big brown shoes he always wore. My feet were too small, but I think I finally found a pair to fit him.'" (Norman 1960, pp. 366-367; Norman 1968, pp. 41-42.)

[6]. The interview was made on November 4, 1976 in Budapest on Serly's last visit there. A copy of the recording and the transcript are now deposited in the Vasvary Collection (Somogyi Library, Szeged). See also Novák 1982, 218.

[7]. The manuscript and typescript letters and articles are printed here as they are in the original, without

any changes or corrections.

[8]. See Novák 1982, 202

[9]. Agnes Bedford (1892-1969), English pianist and vocal coach. Pound turned to her for musical advice and assistance throughout his life. She helped him with his *Le Testament*; Pound sent her *Cavalcanti*, his second opera for comment; he dictated his own music to her. Their correspondence on musical affairs extended up to 1959. See, e.g. Schafer 1977, p. 484.

[10]. James Laughlin (1914-1997), poet, Pound's pupil at the "Ezuversity" in 1934, owner of the publishing house New Directions.

[11]. That was the letter, rather than his first, that really "roasted" Antheil. Cf. *Pound/Laughlin*, p. 25n.

[12]. (Gallup C871) *Il Mare*, XXV. 1223 (20 Aug, 1932), 4. English translation: Schafer, p. 335-336. — Schafer erroneously dates the article to 1933 (p. 335. n.29.).

[13]. Pound's suggestions as librettos for operas included even such exotic texts as that of Beowulf (see Zukofsky's letter to Pound, September 8, 1930, *Pound/Zukofsky*, p. 42.) — which will not sound so out of the ordinary if one thinks of his translation of "Seafarer".

[14]. "Vocale o verbale" (Gallup C1526), *Meridiano di Roma*, IV. 47 (26 November 1939) 3. English translation: Schafer, p. 454.

[15]. *Pound/Zukofsky*, p. 150. For Zukofsky's visit, see Norman 1960, pp. 316-319; Stock, p. 388; Novák 1982, 211-217; Tytell, p. 230 (misdating the visit to early spring); Carpenter, p. 483 (claiming that Zukofsky made the trip at his own expense); Wilhelm, p. 64.

[16]. BRBL-EPA f4975. The file in the Pound Archives is dated "30 Nov 33-24 Apr 34".

[17]. For a full account of the concerts, see Schafer, pp. 331ff.

[18]. See "Stagione musicale del Tigullio. I concerti di Febbraio: Il successo di ieri sera" (Gallup C1440), *Il Mare*, XXXI. 1506 (January 22, 1938), 2. English translation: Schafer, p. 433.

[19]. "Musica Tigulliana progettata. Inverno Musicale" (Gallup C1101), *Il Mare*, XXVII. 1334 (October 6, 1934), 1. English translation: Schafer, p. 366. — The planned concerts included Bartók's 3rd and 4th String Quartets, Serly's String Quartet and Sonata for viola and piano.

[20]. "'Bartok, while sense of time-space in the violin sonata is essentially masterful and probably his own, has done much bird-stuffing with folksongs of Hungary.'" — "All of which appears to me to be very good sense," commented Pound. "George Antheil" (Gallup C660), *Criterion*, II. 7 (April 1924), 331; *Antheil*, pp. 60, 61; Schafer, p. 264.

[21]. "He [Serly] and I are at a deadlock re the relative status of Stravinsky and Bartok, or rather, my ignorance of most of Bartok's later work (apart from the fourth quartet, done here by the Gertler team) disqualifies me from having anything but a tentative estimate of Bartok and a willingness to lean upon opportunity. [...] Serly swears that Bartok has attained a comparable sanity. I don't believe it, but shall be delighted to find it true. Among composers whose work I have heard, Stravinsky is the only living musician from whom I can learn my own job." "Tibor Serly, Composer" (Gallup C1173), *The New English Weekly*, March 28, 1935, p. 495. For the other, lengthier and more favourable references by Pound to Bartók, see, especially, "Mostly Quartets" (Gallup C1371), *Listener*, XVI. 405 (October 14, 1936), 743-744; "Ligurian View of a Venetian Festival" (Gallup C1389), *Music & Letters*, XVIII. 1 (January, 1937), 36-41; "'Amici del Tigullio': Il nuovo Quartetto Ungherese nel gran salone municipale di Rapallo, Giovedě 18" (Gallup C1393), *Il Mare*, XXX 1457 (February 13, 1937); *Guide to Kulchur*, pp. 134-136.

[22]. January 22, 1935; LL Pound mss II. — Agnes Bedford indeed liked Serly, see Dorothy Pound to Ezra Pound, July 12 and July 17, 1935; LL Pound mss II. The Gertlers played modern Hungarian music: Bartók's first and fourth String Quartets and Tibor Serly's String Quartet (Schafer, p. 367).

[23]. Pound to Serly [March?35]; BRBL-EPA f1611. [the transcription follows the characters on the typed carbon copy] — The article is not listed in Gallup. The Beinecke Library, however, keeps what appears to be a typed draft of the article in Italian, written probably by Pound himself.

CONCERTO MEMORABILE

Per discrivere la Sinfonie Concertante bisognerebbe un articolo di fondo, cioé discutere la composizione in se, poi l'essecuzione. Notiamo che in un certo punto, considerando le tre nazionalita dei essecutori, si stava speculando se il suono relativamente ignoto, strano, sucoso della viola, non era veramente l'anima tzigana, ma guardando, si vedeva ch in quel' instante il viola taceva e la Rudge rispondeva col violino a quel suono esotico? (BRBL-EPA f4974)

[24]. (Gallup C1173), *New English Weekly*, VI. 24 (28 Mar. 1935) 495.

[25]. Pound to Dorothy Pound, July 5, 1935; Dorothy Pound to Ezra Pound, July 12, 1935; Pound to Dorothy Pound, July 14, 1935; Pound to Dorothy Pound, July 20, 1935 — LL Pound mss II.

[26]. See his letters to Pound on June 17, and September 25, 1936; BRBL-EPA f1611.

[27]. See Serly to Pound July 23, August 29, and September 9, 1936; BRBL-EPA f1611.

[28]. See Serly to Pound, June 26, August 19, 1937; BRBL-EPA f1612.

[29]. Serly to Pound, September 20, 1938; BRBL-EPA f1612.

[30]. Serly to Pound, August 24, September 14, October 23, 1939; BRBL-EPA f1612; Pound to Serly, August 26, September 5, 1939; private collection.

[31]. See Novák 1982; *Letters*, pp. 326-327.

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