

Appendix B. Benjamin Podemski

PERSONAL INFORMATION

From time to time the Orchestra office receives requests for special personal data pertaining to the members of the Orchestra for PUBLICITY purposes. So that we may be able to furnish such data without delay, we will appreciate it if you will fill-in this form completely and turn it over to Henry Schmidt. Thank you.

(PLEASE PRINT)

LAST NAME PODEMSKI FIRST NAME BENJAMIN MIDDLE INITIAL _____
 INSTRUMENT PERCUSSION
 HOME ADDRESS PRESIDENTIAL APTS. CITY PHILA. ZONE 31 STATE PA.
 PLACE OF BIRTH: City RIGA State CHORLAND Country LATVIA Date 1890
 NAME OF HIGH SCHOOL (or equivalent): _____ City _____
 NAME OF COLLEGE (or equivalent): _____ City _____
 NAME OF MUSIC SCHOOL: RIGA CONSERVATORY City RIGA
 NAMES OF OTHER MUSIC TEACHERS: TAUBE City LODZ
CHWAT City ''

GIVE SPECIFIC INFORMATION REGARDING YOUR PRESENT INSTRUMENT OR INSTRUMENTS:

DRUMS - CYMBALS - XyLOPHONE - BELLS
CHIMES - TRAPS & ACCESSORIES

OTHER SYMPHONIC, OR SMALLER MUSICAL ORGANIZATIONS IN WHICH YOU HAVE PLAYED PRIOR TO JOINING THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA:

HAZOMIR SYMPH. CITY LODZ Approximate Date 1908
RUSSIAN OPERA Co. CITY '' Approximate Date 1910
THALIA THEATRE OPERA '' Approximate Date 1910

INFORMATION REGARDING ANY COMPOSING, CONDUCTING OR ARRANGING YOU MAY HAVE DONE:

DO YOU TAKE PRIVATE STUDENTS AT PRESENT? YES NO _____

NAME OF SCHOOL (if any) AT WHICH YOU NOW TEACH _____ City _____

YOUR HOBBIES - OR - WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR LEISURE TIME: _____

WORKS OF ART

OTHER INFORMATION: _____

Check one: MARRIED _____ SINGLE

GIVE INFORMATION REGARDING YOUR CHILDREN AS FOLLOWS:

NAME	AGE	STUDYING OR STUDIED MUSIC (Yes or No)	INSTRUMENT	PROFESSIONAL (Yes or No)
<u>IRVING</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>YES</u>	<u>FRENCH HORN</u>	<u>NO</u>

Podemski's Music Is Mostly Cymbal-ic

But Bacchantes Offer Exciting Moments

Cymbals are among the most ancient of musical instruments. Oldest extant are a pair in the British Museum — crusted old pieces, dug out of the mummy case of one Ankhape, a sacred Egyptian musician of more than 2000 years ago.

Philadelphia's leading exponent of the brass discs, however, is neither Egyptian nor sacred. His name is Benjamin Podemski. He is Latvian by birth, first cymbalist of the Philadelphia Orchestra and a sound musician with nothing of the mummy about him.

"Zimbals," said Mr. Podemski the other day, "are ver-r-y romantic instruments. Either they are

associated in music with mad girls who dance like crazy in their night gowns—what you call bacchantes like in Wagner's *Venusberg*. Or they are belonging to military bands like sometimes in Tchaikovsky. Either way is exciting."

Idol of Youth.

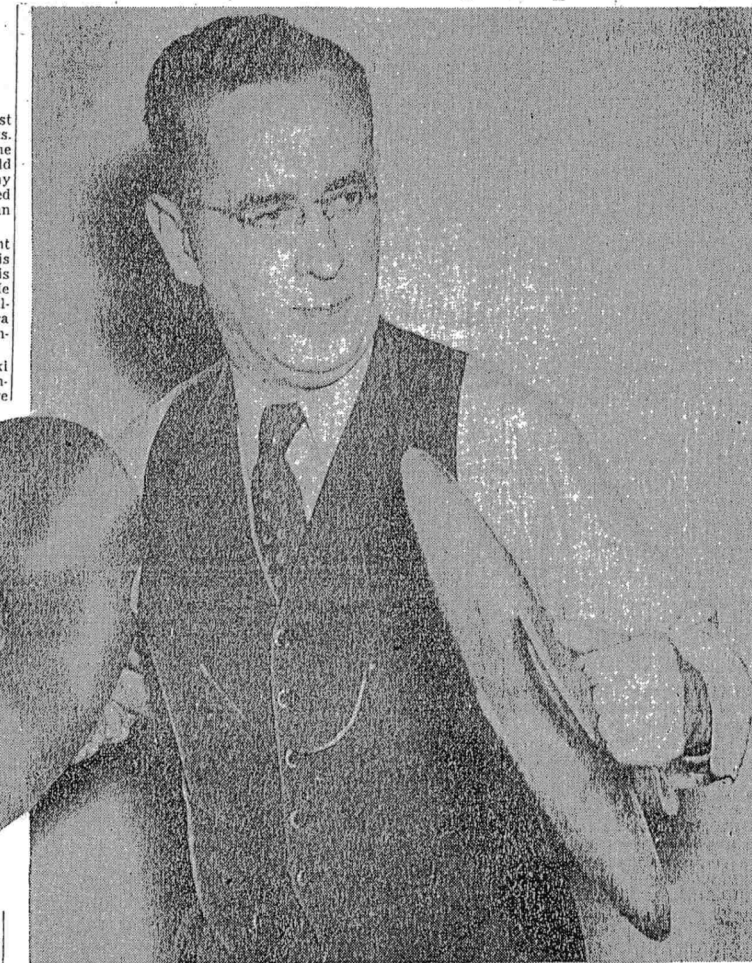
Podemski explained that he was first excited by drums and cymbals when but a mere lad in his native Riga. There were no bacchantes around—at least none accessible to a youngster of 7. But there was a military band. It played almost every day on a drill ground near the Podemski home, and the snare drummer became young Benjamin's ideal, worshipped from afar.

"That man," says Podemski, "was a hero. Far more important as the general. The general he yelled good at the soldiers, but not very often. Every day the drummer drummed. When he drummed fast, the soldiers ran. If slow, so the soldiers go slow. The drummer wore a blue hat and he was the works. I wanted to be a drummer more even than to be the Czar."

So, Podemski's father was sympathetic and soon the great man with his drum began coming to the house three times a week to give little Benjamin lessons—fee, 15 kopecks and a plate of cabbage soup, or on the days when there was borsch, a plate of soup and 10 kopecks.

"I studied with him in private," says Podemski, "anyhow so private as you can study drumming anywhere."

That was the beginning of Mr.



BENJAMIN PODEMSKI . . . "Zimbals are ver-r-y romantic instruments."

Podemski's musical education, but by no means the end. Later he studied violin, a little piano, theory and the whole range of percussion from tympani to castanets.

There are about 15 instruments in that standard gamut, not including wind machines, rattles and wah-wahs, which Podemski rather contemptuously dismissed as "not musical—just stage effects."

Westward, Ho!

At 19, Podemski came to this country with an uncle, bringing both fiddle and drum sticks, but finding the demand for drummers greater than violinists. He rolled, tapped and zinged about for his living until he joined the Philadelphia Orchestra 17 years ago.

Podemski says that there is no truth in the popular belief that cymbalists are paid piece work—a fable sprung from the fact that during an orchestral concert percussion players are often idle for long stretches at a time. Neither is it true, he says, that during their long rests they are surreptitiously reading the *Police Gazette* in the shadow of the big drum while the orchestra is sighing forth the "Liebestod" all about them. More likely they are counting, or, if they are familiar with the score, just dreaming—wondering whether Momma is going to give them Rinderbrust mit

kartoffelsalad again for dinner tonight.

When the program is classical, the percussion player (except for the tympanist) is likely to find himself at leisure.

The juicier scorings for percussion began in the symphonic tradition after Beethoven. Cymbals began to crash into their own in the orchestrations of the noisier and more plangent Romanticists—Liszt and Berlioz.

Liszt, for example, was the first composer to introduce the triangle into a piano concerto (his famous one in E flat), an innovation which led Hans von Bulow to remark that "Liszt was so mixed up with married women he even had to introduce a triangle into his concerto."

Cracks a Whip.

Podemski says that by and large he is kept busiest when the orchestra is playing Wagner or Tchaikovsky, both of whom lean heavily on the exclamatory punctuation that the percussion section yields.

Most unusual stage effect called for in the standard repertoire, he says, is the noise of cracking whips demanded from the orchestra in Richard Strauss' "Elektra."

This is produced by a sort of slapstick which Podemski describes as a "couple of slobbs which hit into each other wid a spring."

Next Friday, by the way, will

be a field day for the Philadelphia Orchestra's percussion when the batteries attack Respighi's "Feste Romane," a score calling for from seven to nine men in that department, known in orchestra slang as "the kitchen."

New Effects.

Occasionally, Podemski says he is called for some special, original effects for which he has to improvise means.

One such occasion came up a few seasons ago when Stokowski demanded a "crackling" sound for the Fire Music from "Die Walkuere." Podemski crackled like a four-alarm blaze, he says, but refuses to tell how he did it. Such matters, it seems, are closely guarded professional secrets.

Podemski says that although one cymbal may look pretty much like another to you, there's a great difference in the quality of their tone. The best discs come from the Near East and the best of those bear the mark of K Zildjian, of Constantinople.

It seems that Zildjian, who died about 20 years ago, was the Stradivarius of the cymbal world. His instruments are rather rare now and bring as much as \$150 a pair. But you can buy a serviceable pair that will make a nice zing for \$25 or so.

Though, as Podemski says, unless you have a real feeling for the instrument, why should you?

E. H. S.

From *Record*, 6 October 1940.

Courtesy of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives.

207 S. Le Doux Road
Beverly Hills
California

June 15, 1951.

Dear Mr. McDonald:

Am enclosing a separate sheet listing some of the various instruments used for effects in the Percussion section, most of which I own.

Your regular form would not be adequate to list all of these and I feel sure that your publicity man will have plenty to choose from and eliminate what he does not want to use.

The insurance may be listed as follows.

Chinese gongs, 1 29 inch.....	\$400.
1 24 "	125.
Cymbals (pair) 12 "	80.
(2 pr) 15 "	300.
17 "	250.
16 "	75.
GLOCKENSPIEL	150.
Traps (various)	500.
	<hr/>
	\$1880.

With best personal regards, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Benjamin Podemski
(B. Podemski)

Benjamin Podemski's letter dated 1951 regarding the percussion instruments used by the Philadelphia Orchestra. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives.

CHINESE GONGS (Tam tams)

These are not obtainable today. To date, no one else has been able to duplicate the quality of tone, the secret being in the mixture of the metals and firing.

JAVANESE GONG, made in Bali.

CYMBALS.

Genuine Turkish made in Constantinople by the finest cymbal makers in the world, K. ZILDJIAN, and sons. Known for their fine and brilliant quality. The last of these were made during the first World war.

GLOCKENSFIEL.

These were made personally by J. C. Deagan in about 1910. He was the finest bell maker in the world, to my way of thinking, as the quality of tone proves.

ANTIQUÉ ENGLISH SLEIGH BELLS.

When hearing Mozart's German dances, or the Mahler 4th Symphony, you will note the fine quality of tone.

TRIANGLES

These were made from spindles taken from demolished New England textile mills. These spindles are of steel which is unsurpassed for its quality of tone and brilliance.

Also various effects which come from all parts of the world, as follows: To name a few

- Temple blocks from Korea
- Wood blocks from China
- Claves from Cuba
- Maraccas from Mexico
- Gourds from Central America
- Switch (Rute) from Japan
- Papageno, the flute of the fawn, made by the natives of New Hebrides
- Midget sleigh bells; worn by the Hindu dancing girls on wrists and ankles.

Benjamin Podemski's letter dated 1951
regarding the percussion instruments used by the Philadelphia Orchestra.
Courtesy of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives.

Percussionist to Retire From Phila. Orchestra

Benjamin Podemski, head of the percussion section of the Philadelphia Orchestra, will play his last concert with that group tonight in Convention Hall.

Retiring after 28 years of service with the orchestra, Podemski will move with his wife to southern California. He plans to continue his professional work.

The vacancy will be filled by Charles E. Owen, Eugene Ormandy, director, announced. Owen is now head of the percussion section of the U. S. Marine Corps Band and Symphony Orchestra in Washington.

Notice of Benjamin Podemski's retirement from the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1954 and the appointment of Charles Owen as principal percussionist.

Evening Bulletin, 8 May 1954.

Courtesy of the Philadelphia Orchestra Association Archives.