

Serge Krish, Norwood News - Friday 10 May 1957.

'The man who brought music to the masses' by Reg Exton

Living quietly in Rydal Road, Streatham, is a man who has done as much as anyone and considerably more than most to bring good music to the masses. Conductor, pianist, violinist, composer, teacher and broadcaster. The Serge Krish Septet broadcast regularly for years before the war, playing Viennese and Hungarian music, and before that the Modern Trio which Mr. Krish founded in 1920 with himself at the piano, Melzak, violin, and Mannucci, 'cello.

They toured America in 1923 and when they returned earned such fame as was celebrated in *Punch*—

*Though prophets are groaning  
Though trade is not all we could wish  
The BBC's programmes are booming  
With Melzak, Mannucci and Krish.*

Serge was born at Lodz in Poland, his father a Russian, his mother the daughter of English parents. He soon showed a talent for music, in which he was encouraged by his mother, but frowned upon by his father, who wanted him to become a doctor.

When he was eight, he practised on a rented violin in a loft, and was smuggled to the house of a friend for further practice. Four years later he ran away from home to carve his own career in music.

At Kalisz, near the German frontier, he obtained his first job as a violinist in a variety orchestra. Later he set out for Berlin with the intention of continuing his studies, but he had no passport. So, not allowed to stay in either Berlin or Hamburg, he sailed steerage for America. With only a few cents in his pocket, he was detained at Ellis Island. and was permitted to land only through the good offices of a kindly official who found him a job as violinist in a cafe orchestra.

His mother, when she heard of this, begged him to return home. His father relented—and Serge was able to go to Berlin, complete with passport. Still only a boy—he was not yet fifteen—he entered the Berlin Conservatorium and won one of its most coveted awards, the Mendelssohn Scholarship, for the composition of a string quartet. He studied the piano under Busoni, composition under Max Bruch, and conducting under Nikisch, who advised him to take up conducting.

#### CHORUS MASTER

It was while he was still studying in Berlin that he got a job as chorus master and coach in a touring company, and before long he found himself the orchestra's conductor, but the orchestra resented his youth. He consulted the leader, who told him it was the custom for a new conductor to provide a barrel of beer. The result? —that night a sleepiness fell over the strings and the woodwind couldn't blow a note!

After two years of conducting opera and he went back to his first love—the piano. He came to Britain in 1905, toured Ireland and Scotland, and then settled in England, becoming a British subject.

In the summer of 1914, he married and went to Germany for the honeymoon. But he soon saw the signs of war, and on the August Bank Holiday weekend made a hurried return to England, only narrowly missing internment as war broke out. His first thought then was to enlist and he joined the Artists Rifles and for the next few years he was engaged in the grim business of war. With the end of hostilities, he toured for several seasons with Lionel Powell's International Celebrity Concerts, which featured such famous artistes as Melba and Pachmann. Then in 1920 came the Modern Trio, and in

1928 the Serge Krish Septet. He conducted all the Tom Walls-Ralph Lynn farces at the Aldwych, synchronised music for the films, made records, gave regular concerts in the provinces, taught the piano, and coached in operatic singing and conducting.

#### STILL TEACHING

The most important phase of his life came in 1934. With the advent of the talkie's, cinemas were dispensing with their orchestras all over the country. Musicians were finding themselves out of work with little hope of a job. It was then that Serge Krish hit upon the idea of forming the New Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra—he saw in it the means of giving employment to those out of work musicians, to establish a centre for music away from the West End, to give good concerts at prices everyone could afford, to encourage young soloists by asking them to play, and English composers by asking them to come and conduct their own works.

Good music, played by an 80-strong symphony orchestra, at cinema prices. It was a revolutionary idea, and it was not easy to bring about. But Serge Krish was not to be denied. He persuaded the management of the Trocadero, Elephant and Castle, to let him stage a Sunday afternoon concert at prices ranging from sixpence to half-a-crown. He himself took no fee—whatever money to be paid to be shared out among the orchestra.

#### SELL OUT

The idea proved a great success. For the second concert the Trocadero was sold out, people travelling from all over and outside London, often paying more in fares than admission prices for their seats. In no time the orchestra was established, the concerts a big feature of London's musical life. They moved to the People's Palace in the Mile End Road. Nine concerts were given in the first season, 22 in the next. Here was enthusiasm and atmosphere. Here was something that the people wanted and loved. Mr. Krish had brought the best music to them at the prices they could afford. Visiting conductors were delighted to find an orchestra which was there for music and not for shillings and pence, and the people came from the West End because they found in the audience a fervour and enthusiasm which was unique.

Came war again, and the People's Palace was closed to music. But Serge Krish wasn't beaten. He had a good friend in Dr Sangster, and through his intervention the orchestra was enabled to play again—at the Central Hall, Westminster. Many well-known people, conductors and composers, helped, among them Sir Henry Wood. Serge Krish asked Sir Henry if he would conduct the first concert, but Sir Henry agreed only to share the conducting—he felt that Serge Krish should himself share the honour in appreciation of all his great work for the orchestra and for music. Serge Krish treasured the letter from Sir Henry, written in his own handwriting—he showed it to me—in which Sir Henry described the sort of rostrum he wanted—and sketched it to make sure!

But, with the Blitz, doodlebugs and the rest, the concerts could not continue—the authorities became worried about the possibilities of tragedy should the Central Hall be hit during a concert. So came the time when Serge Krish had reluctantly to call it a day, and with it ended for a while at least, the idea of bringing good music to the masses. It became a victim of the war.

Serge Krish still conducts the New Metropolitan Orchestra at concerts, but he spends more time these days teaching and coaching younger musicians in the intricacies of the piano and conducting. However, South London is to have the opportunity of seeing this man who has done so much for music—he is to conduct the London Philharmonic Orchestra, with the world-famous violinist Campoli, at an afternoon concert at Streatham Hill Theatre next week Sunday week, May 19.

Once again, he will bring music to the masses with a programme which he has himself arranged.

Obituary from The Stage:

Broadcaster and the main force behind the New Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, which provided regular employment for musicians after the depression in the early 30s, as well as taking classical music to the general public, died in May. aged 91.

The first concert to be played by the Orchestra was in the form of a trial one-off at the Trocadero, Elephant and Castle, which proved tremendously successful.

Subsequent performances were equally well attended, and eventually the NMSO established a home base at the People's Palace in Mile End.

Krish was successful in getting English composers to appear with the orchestra as guest conductors or soloists, and likewise obtained many leading instrumental soloists who agreed to perform for expenses only.

The NMSO performed up until the War and had a brief period of revival thereafter Actor and director.

Grateful thanks to Chris Goddard