

Feb. 4/4/40

DOSSENBACH

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Interview with Herman Dossenbach,
32 Laurelton Road

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for many many

Mr. Dossenbach, who ^{was} ~~is~~ leader of the Rochester Park Band, has been active in music in Rochester since the beginning of the century. One of the pioneers in symphonic music in this city was Henry Appey, who conducted the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra from about 1875 to 1890. That orchestra gave its concerts in the old Corinthian Academy which formerly stood across from the rear of the Reynolds Arcade. Ludwig Schenk, a violinist, conducted the Rochester Symphony Orchestra, which was made up mostly of amateurs, during the 'nineties. Schenk's orchestra played in the Lyceum Theater and, later, in Convention Hall.

The first concert of the Dossenbach Orchestra, with Herman Dossenbach as conductor, was given on February 5, 1900. Several years later the name was changed to Rochester Symphony Orchestra. Concerts were given by that orchestra in Mirror Hall, a spacious room decorated with numerous panel-mirrors on the walls, located on the fourth floor (at that time) of the Powers Hotel and Building. The Rochester Symphony Orchestra continued to give concerts until 1918.

The name of Mrs. George W. Eastman appeared as a "patroness" on the early printed concert programs of the Dossenbach Orchestra. Mr. Eastman gave \$1000 on behalf of his mother for the orchestra, and others contributed smaller amounts. Mr. Dossenbach was introduced to Mrs. Eastman by Mrs. Walter S. Hubbell, and through her he became acquainted with Mr. Eastman who engaged Mr. Dossenbach in 1903 to conduct a string quartet in concerts in his home.

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*Living in
Rochester now*

Mr. Dossenbach's String Quartet played every Thursday and Sunday evening for Mr. Eastman for many years. The members were: Herman Dossenbach, conductor and first violinist; J.B. Paddon⁺, second violinist; George Henrickus, violist; and Biedrich Vaska, 'cellist. Theodore Dossenbach, brother of the conductor, made an occasional fifth member, and he played the violin. The group played two string-quartet compositions at each concert and George Fisher⁺ gave organ solos. Programs for the concerts were mimeographed and Mr. Dossenbach kept a complete file of them which went to the Eastman School of Music when Mr. Dossenbach sold his musical library to the School.

Mr. Eastman liked to do things in a large way. When he "went in" for the collection of pictures he eventually gathered the third largest private art collection in the United States. Before Mr. Eastman had his house enlarged, in 1915, (to make the conservatory larger) Mr. Dossenbach asked him "If you knew what you do now, would you have built this home as large as you did?" Mr. Eastman replied "I would have built it twice as large."

Kodak Office building--which ^{was then} ~~is~~ 16-stories--was, for several years, the highest structure in Rochester. Several years after its completion the Lincoln-Alliance Building was erected on Main Street and was higher than ^{the} ~~Kodak Tower~~ ^{Building}. Mr. Eastman then had three stories added to Kodak Office Building so that it would again be the highest in Rochester.

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An evidence of Mr. Eastman's "grit" was his refusal to "give in" to illness. He suffered from a cold in the winter of 1925 and no guests were invited to a concert which was planned. Mr. Dossenbach

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said "You are pretty sick. Why don't you send us home and we will come and play tomorrow evening?" Mr. Eastman replied "Mr. Dossenbach, I have never given up to being sick in bed for one day in my life." He remained up and listened to the full-length concert alone.

Mr. Eastman's enjoyment of a musical composition apparently varied with his mood. Mr. Dossenbach recalled that Mr. Eastman on one occasion thought the Beethoven Quartet, Opus 18, Number 4 was "the most beautiful thing I have ever heard." When the same piece was played a year later, with variations, Mr. Eastman again expressed himself definitely. His opinion was "It's the rottenest thing I have ever heard." Incidentally, Mr. Eastman's sense of pitch was not critical, for when he played phonograph records, particularly for Mr. Fisher to accompany on the organ, the speed of the record turntable was increased but Mr. Eastman was not sensitive to the distortion of pitch which this caused.

Mr. Eastman not only enjoyed the music himself but he liked to have his friends enjoy the concerts to which he invited them. Mr. Dossenbach said that Mr. Eastman ^{often} ~~who~~ occasionally closed his eyes while he listened, ^{but never & then} ~~often~~ opened them and quietly peeked at various guests to see if they, too, were enjoying the concerts.

One was never too old to learn, Mr. Eastman believed, and when he was past sixty he learned to dance. For a period of three months after he had taken lessons he went to one dance a week at the Genesee Valley Club. During the holiday season of 1918-19 Mr. Dossenbach's Orchestra played every night of the week at the

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Genesee Valley Club for the special benefit of Mr. Eastman and a handful of his friends to dance. Mr. Eastman's butler (then Shirley Thompkins) told Mr. Dossenbach that when he went in to call his master after Mr. Eastman's fifth successive "night out" he found him up and reading a newspaper after a little more than two hour's sleep. Mr. Eastman in his sixties was still a man of tireless energy.

Mr. Eastman's energy also found expression in quick decisions. Mr. William S. Gifford, manager of Kodak Limited, told Mr. Dossenbach, when the latter was in London, that when Mr. Eastman wanted to move the English Kodak headquarters from Clerkingwell Road Mr. Gifford found a site on Kidgthsway which he thought suitable. Mr. Gifford ~~had~~ asked Mr. Eastman to step into a taxi and when it started on its way Mr. Eastman asked "Where are you taking me?" Mr. Gifford answered "Wait a while. I'll show you." When Mr. Eastman was shown the plot for a building ^{the} site Mr. Eastman said "This is where the building should be put up." He said no more, but went back to the office and drew sketches of building plans for more than an hour. Then he said to Mr. Gifford "This is a rough draft of the buildings I want. Go and make arrangements for the lease of the land."

When Mr. Eastman wanted something or somebody he went in hard pursuit. Mr. Dossenbach visited Berlin in 1911 to "brush up" on the technique of orchestral conducting. Mr. Eastman came there with Mr. Hubbell and Dr. Mulligan on business, and as he knew Mr. Dossenbach was in the city he wanted to say "hello", but did not know his address. He went to the Police Department and located him through it.

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Mr. Dossenbach and his musicians were invited to Oak Lodge for three seasons (1914, 1915, 1916). They gave a concert every evening during the two week's visits to the Lodge. A separate cabin was built for the musicians which contained a practice room, a kitchen separate from the cabin (to keep out odors), and a bunk-room in which each man had his bed. A chef ^{had been} supplied by the Pullman Company for service in the private car, but Mr. Eastman did not use his services and ^{as} loaned him to the musicians.

Mr. Eastman was the first person up in the morning at Oak Lodge. He and the guests strolled in the woods, or hunted, or went on a picnic. One of Mr. Eastman's manual activities was to make wooden seats around tree trunks. In the evening the party sang songs or conversed. After the others had gone to bed Mr. Eastman often sat up to develop pictures, and usually he slept only three or four hours.

Sometimes the party, including the musicians, went hunting 'coons at night. As there were poisonous snakes in the region the hunters wrapped burlap bags around their legs for protection. Mr. Dossenbach's brother carried a cornet and sounded it when someone strayed away from the party so the straggler could find his way back. When the coon was found, the tree in which he took refuge was cut down and the dogs caught the animal. The 'coon was given to George Myrick, Mr. Eastman's caretaker of the Lodge.

On Sunday some of the party--but not Mr. Eastman--went to a small nearby town to hear an itinerant colored preacher. One Sunday the minister did not arrive on time and the guests were obliged to leave before he came. George Myrick mused regretfully "Too bad,

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you're late, parson! There's a lot of good money going by." However, the parson called at the Lodge before the party left and received a donation, so the money didn't "go by."

The musicians gave one concert a week at the village church where the whites sat in one section and the darkies in the other. Mr. Dossenbach recalled with amusement the dark faces and glistening eyes of the darkies who came from many miles around, and ^{the overflow} peered through the windows--^{when} ~~for the inside~~ of the church had been filled.

An incident occurred at the period of Mr. Eastman's dancing enthusiasm which showed his fairness and his consideration. He was to give a party to repay a number of parties which had been given for him. He had a temporary pavilion built over a sunken garden back of his library to accommodate a 50-piece string orchestra and a 50-piece band. There were two hundred guests, and dinner was served to the musicians as well as the guests. A day or two after the party Mr. Eastman came to Mr. Dossenbach with a hundred dollars in his hand. He said "Herman, I want you to give each man who played here the other evening a dollar." Mr. Dossenbach inquired "What's that for?" Mr. Eastman replied "We had something that your men didn't have." The supply of Red Duck had run out and the musicians had been served chicken. Mr. Eastman didn't want the men to feel slighted, so he had them each given a dollar.

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