Interview with Arthur M. See,  
Financial Sec'y, Eastman School of Music,  
Executive Director, Rochester Civic Music Assn.

Mr. See graduated in 1916 from the Institute of Musical Art, which was located across from the University Campus on Prince Street. In 1918, after private study in Boston, he became a member of the Institute’s faculty for piano study. This school was a private dwelling, arranged into studios, and had 20 teachers and 600 students. The school grew out of the Fitzhugh Conservatory of Music. Mr. Alfred Klingenberg came from the University of Kansas to teach at the Fitzhugh Conservatory of Music, and when this was dissolved in 1912, he founded the Institute of Musical Art (with Herman Dossenbach and Oscar Careisen as partners.)

Mr. Eastman selected men from the faculty of this school for the Dossenbach String Quartet. They, with George Fisher, organist, played regularly at Mr. Eastman’s home from 1915 to 1920. Mr. See recalls James Paddon as first violinist in this Quartet, and a Bohemian named Vaska, as cellist. Mr. Klingenberg was an idealist and he wanted to obtain a bigger building and more equipment for his school. He told Mr. Eastman his hopes for the school and his ambition to make Rochester a musical center. Mr. Eastman went far ahead of Mr. Klingenberg’s dreams for he bought the little school in 1918 and made it part of the University of Rochester. He conceived the idea of making a great music school in conjunction with a theater which would further the development of music in Rochester and the nation. The School opened in the fall of 1921, and the Theater in 1922.
With regard to the background of symphonic music in Rochester, Mr. See says there was a Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra for forty or fifty years, and its director for a long period was Henry Appey. Herman Doszenbach had conducted the Rochester Symphony Orchestra, which gave six concerts a year (1910-20). This orchestra consisted of about seventy men and it played in Convention Hall. Rochesterians were dissatisfied with old Convention Hall as a concert auditorium and had asked Mr. Eastman for years to help build a better one.

Mr. Eastman obtained an orchestra of 66 men for the Eastman Theater, after scouring the entire country for musicians. About a score of men were obtained locally (many of them from Doszenbach’s Rochester Symphony Orchestra) and the rest from New York City. The conductor was Arthur Alexander and the assistant conductor was Victor Wagner. Alexander was a vocalist and taught voice at the Institute of Musical Art and Mr. Eastman wanted to give him a chance as a prospective American conductor. Mr. Wagner was a motion-picture orchestra conductor at the Criterion Theater in New York City, and was obtained through Alexander. The Eastman Theater Orchestra formed the basis of a Symphony Orchestra of 85 men (1922) and many of these additional men were obtained locally. This Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra gave ten symphonic concerts each season.

Mr. Eastman believed that if he combined motion pictures and symphonic music, many persons would form the habit of listening to good music and would learn to enjoy it. The combination of motion pictures and a symphony orchestra was a new idea in the United States. The theater program was elaborate and presented acts, solos, and dancing such as the Radio City Music Hall does now.
Mr. Eastman came to the school and theater almost daily for the first few years of their existence. He frequently came in Mr. See's office at 9 o'clock in the morning and his customary phrase was "What's new?" He scrutinized the woodwork for possible nail-holes and studied the position of the coat-racks in the hall. He spent fifteen minutes outside Mr. See's office getting a rack just the correct distance from the baseboard.

He had a great mind for details, and he studied the proper position for studio wastebaskets. He went through the School, looking at the baskets and if they were not placed correctly, he saw to it that they were. There was a small writing desk in each studio for the teacher's use and Mr. Eastman thought that, for efficiency, the wastebasket should be in a uniform location, where the person would not have to turn to toss paper into it. Also, it should not be at such a distance that he might miss, and litter the floor or have to get up and put the paper in the basket.

Mr. Eastman seemed to have a "photographic mind" and a visual power to observe small details. He sat at Mr. See's desk talking one morning and he looked past him with steely blue eyes fixed upon something. He said "What wood-butcher did that?" Mr. See turned to look at the door of a clothes closet behind him. Mr. Eastman explained "Look at that door. It's out of line" (the crack was a trifle wider at the top than at the bottom when the door was closed, although Mr. See had to look hard to observe it.) The Superintendent of the building was called and he was ordered to fix the door.
Mr. See began the issue of bulletins, soon after the Eastman School was organized, which gave news of the school to parents of students and to other people in Rochester. He sent Mr. Eastman's copy by mail, under a two-cent stamp so he would get it quickly. Mr. Eastman sent it back in another envelope which was marked in green pencil (commanding instant attention as his exclusive practice) "Hereafter, Mr. See, one cent." He made no comment on the contents of the bulletin. He was more interested in the business aspect of saving money on postage.

Mr. Eastman always tried to be fair and he did not want to hurt the feelings or reputations of others. A close friend of Mr. Eastman told Mr. See that Mr. Eastman, in deciding which of two musicians were to be retained in the theater orchestra, planned to put the matter to the vote of the other members of the orchestra. His friend said this was unjust, for the loser's feeling would be hurt when his associates voted against him. The decision must be made by Mr. Eastman alone, he believed. Mr. Eastman was glad he had not risked being unfair and hurt the man's feelings by putting his ability to a vote, as he had planned. He thought for several days and then went to the man he thought should go and told him in a friendly way. Mr. Eastman came to Mr. See's office afterwards and said "That was one of the hardest jobs I've ever done." He liked the man and gave him a dinner before he left.

Mr. See recalled one jolly occasion when Mr. Eastman performed under direction of the famous conductor, Eugene Goossens. This took
place at a party given, in 1925, at the home of one of the teachers of the Eastman School. Mr. Eastman saw to it that Mr. Goossens was invited to attend. A mock orchestra was formed which used kitchen utensils as "instruments." Mr. Goossens threw off his coat and merrily grabbed a broom-stick as a baton to conduct this unusual "orchestra." Someone passed Mr. Eastman a tin-pan cover and a big spoon for a percussion instrument. He laughed heartily as he beat the cover, while the other "musicians" played equally strange "instruments."

Mr. Eastman, after his Sunday evening musicales, often went out at eleven o'clock and was driven to the Eastman Theater where he stayed until one or two in the morning to watch the preview of pictures in order to give Rochesterians the best in motion-picture entertainment. (As a photographic manufacturer, he probably felt the Eastman Theater should present only films that were excellent from the technical viewpoint of photography.)

He stopped at the School on his way to work, and at the Theater on his way home. As part of his system of control, the financial report on the previous day's business at the Theater had to be placed at the lower right corner of the blotter pad on the manager's desk, so if the manager were not there, Mr. Eastman knew where to find it. If the report were not there, he showed his annoyance.

Mr. Eastman reserved four seats at the right end of the first row in the Mezzanine of the Eastman Theater. (A bronze plate has now been placed on the end seat at the request of Dr. Rush Rhees, and it reads "This chair was occupied by George Eastman when attending
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this theater." Mr. Eastman walked in to the motion pictures without a ticket, but he bought four season tickets for concerts. A group of people organized the Mezzanine Subscriber's Association. They bought mezzanine seats and contributed $100 a year each, and this money paid the symphony concert deficits. Mr. Eastman subscribed like the others. He brought various friends from Rochester, and out of town, to concerts at the theater.

The growth of Eastman School increased his interest in music. He gave it $2,000,000 endowment in his will in addition to $8,000,000 he had already given. He did not endow the theater or orchestra for he felt the public should bear that burden if they wanted them.

Music must have given a definite satisfaction to Mr. Eastman for he wouldn't have spent so much time on it otherwise. He could listen to more music than any musician Mr. See knew. He listened daily to his private organist, he had Wednesday and Sunday evening concerts at home, and he attended Eastman Theater concerts. He applauded performances at the theater moderately, for he didn't like to show emotions.

"Temperament," particularly that of Russian musicians who always seemed tired, sometimes amused Mr. Eastman. Someone complained of fatigue and Mr. Eastman said "He's a Russian, he's tired," and then he chuckled. Mr. Eastman hardly saw how teaching, plus two concerts a week could unduly fatigue a man.

Mr. Eastman wanted the facilities of the Eastman School used only by those who deserved them, not by dilettantes for he had no patience with them. Dr. Rush Rhees, suggested use of Seashore Psychological tests of musical aptitude and Mr. Eastman believed they were useful to select trained and talented pupils.
These tests prevented much wasted effort by the school, and prevented a waste of time and money by the pupil.

One great reason for Mr. Eastman's contributions to music, Mr. See believed, was that he foresaw an increase of leisure time in this country. He felt people should be prepared to use leisure hours enjoyably and that listening to music could be a fine diversion. The Eastman School educated performers of music, and the Eastman Theater indirectly "educated" listeners. He felt the development of music was a great civic asset, as indicated by the motto carved over the Theater front "For the enrichment of community life." The School is more than local in its scope, however, for its pupils come from all parts of the United States, and from other countries.

The use of sound motion pictures in the twenties made an orchestra (as well as dramatic, dance, and scene work) no longer necessary and it filled Mr. Eastman with sadness to see the Theater's usefulness diminished, although he never spoke of this disappointment. Mr. See, in 1929, developed a plan to carry on the Rochester Symphony Orchestra with public support to distribute the financial burden, as the Eastman Theater could no longer support the orchestra. Mr. See formed the Rochester Civic Music Association. (Mr. Eastman gave $600 a year to this until his death. The Mezzanine Subscribers' Association with 400 members, merged into the Rochester Civic Music Association.)

It has a large number of members (4200) and about the same number of "contributors" in addition. The members give $5 a year and up, and the contributors give less than $5. In 1939, $60,000 was contributed to the Rochester Civic Music Association, more than in any year since 1933. The purpose of the Rochester Civic Music Association is to

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increase public consciousness of, and responsibility for, good music in Rochester; and to make such music possible.

Mr. Eastman thought it better for citizens in general, rather than a small group, to support such a movement. Many small subscribers are better than a few large ones not only because it makes the organization more democratic, but because it cannot be affected by individual members passing away, or being unable or unwilling to contribute. Mr. Eastman's objective of establishing popular interest in good music in Rochester, was fulfilled, through the Rochester Civic Music Association. He agreed on a subscription, from the Eastman School Endowment Fund, of $75,000 a year to the Rochester Civic Music Association for development of its musical program. This was given until 1936 and was then reduced owing to reduction of income on investments of the endowment funds of the University of Rochester.