Interview with Mr. Gustave Tinlot,
Eastman School of Music

Mr. Tinlot was concertmaster of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra when he was contacted, in 1925, by Dr. Howard Hanson on behalf of Mr. Eastman. After discussing the matter, Mr. Tinlot agreed to become leader of the Kilbourn String Quartet. This organization was founded by George Eastman in 1920, and previous leaders had been Arthur Harnon and Vladimir Resnikoff. Mr. Tinlot came to Rochester in September, 1925, and directed the Quartet for seven years (until Mr. Eastman’s death). Our last Concert scheduled to be given on Sunday night, March 13th, the day before Mr. Eastman’s death.

Mr. Eastman preferred instrumental to vocal music and he had no singers regularly at these concerts. Mr. Tinlot considers it unusual for a businessman to have had this fondness for a string quartet because the music is “hard to understand.” Mr. Eastman never studied music but he liked it, as he liked all beautiful things, and while he may not have “understood” it, he appreciated it.

The Kilbourn Quartet consisted of the following men:
Gustave Tinlot, first violin and director; Gerald Kurz, second violin; Samuel Belov, viola; and Paul Kefer, ‘cello. The yearly contract which Mr. Eastman made with these men ran for forty weeks. They started their year’s engagement the last week of September when the Eastman School opened for the year, and they played twice a week regularly for Mr. Eastman until late in May. He did not greet the men individually on every occasion that they played. When they started for the year, however, he would greet them pleasantly.
and talk with them for a few minutes. On other occasions, Mr. Harold Gleason usually acted to pass messages between Mr. Eastman and the Quartet.

The Quartet performed on a landing of the stairway in Mr. Eastman's home at a point where the stairs branched in either direction, forming an elevated stage for the big room. He insisted upon his listeners being completely quiet, and Mr. Tinlot said it was so still, except for the music, that one "could have heard a fly." There was no smoking until the music was finished. Mr. Eastman felt that discriminating persons should enjoy one thing at a time and should give their full attention to listening.

At the Wednesday evening concerts there was chamber music only. On Sunday afternoon, in the grand salon, the program was offered by the String Quartet, or by the Quartet with Max Landow or Sándor Vás at the piano. On Sunday evenings the Quartet played two works, one modern and the other classical. The Sunday evening concert was held in the hall where the organ console stood. Each member of the quartet would take his turn playing solos on different occasions. On Sunday afternoons the Quartet wore business suits and did not change for evening but sat in the same room as the guests and dressed as they were. On Wednesday evenings they wore dinner jackets.

Upon advice of his doctors, who felt that he should conserve his strength, Mr. Eastman's group of guests during his last two years was cut down to not more than ten or fifteen persons. Among those who came as long as any guests were invited, were Dr. and Mrs. Rush Rhees. During the last two years of Mr. Eastman's life, the
Sunday afternoon concerts were discontinued and only the evening concerts were given. During the last two or three months, there were no guests present but the Quartet played on Wednesday and Sunday evenings for exactly one and a half hours as usual. Mr. Eastman listened in his bedroom, and occasionally they saw him pass in the hall above. When the Quartet had finished playing, they quietly got their wraps and went home.

Mr. Eastman was definite in his musical preferences. He liked the String Quartet and this was played often, and might be played on successive Wednesday and Friday evenings. He also liked Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn. They tried the Brahms String Quartets but it was a little beyond Mr. Eastman and he didn’t appreciate or like it. Mr. Tinlot once tried a Quartet by Kreisler, but Mr. Eastman said it was “too Viennese,” without suggesting what he meant by that, and he said he didn’t want to hear it again. Mr. Eastman had a marked admiration for Wagner and his music liked the classics but only Wagner among the moderns, ‘appealed to him greatly.’ For him Wagner was the greatest, and the Quartet always finished a program with an ensemble of Wagner played with organ accompaniment.

It is not plain why Mr. Eastman preferred Wagner. He may have admired the character of the man—original, self-willed, and versatile. Wagner’s music is not “flashy.” It is sometimes beautiful, and sometimes crashing. It is expressive not only of beauty, but of other emotions, and so is more true to life—for life itself has discords as well as harmony. Perhaps Mr. Eastman liked Wagner for his “realism.”
Mr. Tinlot tried to introduce works of some modern composers such as Claude Achille Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Darius Milhaud.

After a concert in which these compositions were played, he asked Mr. Eastman if he liked it. "No", Mr. Eastman snapped. Mr. Tinlot suggested "Maybe a second time you will like it better." Mr. Eastman answered with cool decision "No, I don't wish to hear it again."

Although Mr. Eastman would go to almost any length to please guests rather than himself in some respects, in the matter of music he was more arbitrary. One time Mr. Tinlot suggested that the many faculty members of the Eastman School among his guests might like to hear some modern music. Said Mr. Eastman "I don't care if my guests like the program or not. Let them stay home if they don't like it. I want to hear music for myself." This he spoke without gestures but in an emphatic, measured manner.

When the Quartet arrived at Mr. Eastman's home for a performance, they went up to his motion-picture room to leave their wraps and to tune their instruments (and in winter to warm themselves.) The house was always kept cool (about 68 or 70 degrees) for Mr. Eastman did not like it warm. There was a fireplace in this room, with wood and paper all ready for a fire to be lighted, but this was not used in all the years that Mr. Tinlot went to the house. Evidently there was a rigid rule about using this fireplace only for its intended purpose, if it were used at all. No one threw cigarette butts in this fireplace—not even the lively Eugene Goossens, the famous conductor, who sometimes acted as an additional violinist, viola player or pianist. Mr. Goossens usually did not have time to practice beforehand and might be nervous, pacing the room while he smoked.
cigarettes. Sometimes he was about to throw a cigarette butt into the fireplace, but he was always reminded by the Quartet not to do so.

Mr. Eastman's musicians operated on a time schedule which was as strict as if they were performing on a national radio network rather than in a private home. If they were not downstairs, ready to play, promptly at 8:30 Mr. Eastman would press a button which rang a buzzer in the motion picture room and they would scurry down. If they finished five minutes before the full hour and a half, Mr. Gleason would say the next day that Mr. Eastman had noticed this. Then they were more careful to fill the exact period the next time.

Mr. Tinlot remembers one evidence of Mr. Eastman's punctiliousness that is amusing. On Sunday afternoons when it was dusky the men would turn on the little lamps over their music stands and sometimes when they went out for a brief intermission one of the men might neglect to turn out his light. Without saying anything, Mr. Eastman would quietly step up and turn it out himself. It was not that he felt that a penny's worth of electricity would be needlessly used but he had such an orderly mind that he liked things attended to properly.

Mr. Eastman could be a "driver" when necessary, but he realized the need of persons who worked hard to "let down" occasionally. Mr. Tinlot in 1930 was tired from overwork and was not feeling well, so he took a month's vacation in Florida. After the first concert given on his return, Mr. Gleason said that Mr. Eastman wanted to see him. He said he was glad to see Mr. Tinlot felt better and added "Well,
you work hard. If you are tired, take another vacation. If you
don't feel well, rest again. I understand that." Mr. Eastman did
not like indolence, but he knew from his own experience how necessary
it was for a man who was accustomed to work hard to relax once in a
while. A good vacation, he felt, freshened the mind and body for
further activity.

(A). On Sunday afternoon, in the grand salon, the program consisted of
a String Quartet and a piano quintet or piano quintet with Miss Vanden
or Sauder Van at the piano.

We then took supper with Mr. Eastman's guest consisting of nearly
one hundred persons and gave another concert in the evening taking place
in the hall where the organ concert stood. The handel was placed on a
landing of the stairway at a point where the stairs proceeded in either direction
forming an elevated stage for the big room. The program for that concert
was made up mostly of selections for string quintet, organ and piano
with Mr. Harold Bloom and Mr. Ismael Beltran respectively at the organ
and the piano. Mr. Bloom would read three plays while organ solo's and
the members of the quartet would also in turn perform a group of concert pieces.

For the Wednesday evening concert, given also in the big hall, the
works performed on the previous Sunday afternoon was repeated and the
program completed with the usual ensembles and solo works.
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