I WILL NOT BE DEFLECTED FROM MY COURSE:

THE LIFE OF DR. ANTONIA BRICO

by

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Thesis directed by Professor Mark S. Foster

ABSTRACT

Dr. Antonia Brico (1902 - 1989) rose from the humble environs as the foster daughter of Dutch emigrants to become the first world-renowned female conductor of the 20th Century. Ignoring the sexual bias of both her mentors and the world around her, she became the first woman to conduct many major orchestras in the 1930s, including the Berlin Philharmonic, the New York Philharmonic, the Hollywood Bowl Symphony and many others.

Failing to obtain permanent conducting positions, Brico often created her own employment. The New York Women’s Symphony, founded by Brico, became the first major all-female orchestra, assembling over 80 musicians to both financial and critical acclaim. Upon its dissolution, she traveled to Denver where she conducted the Denver Businessman’s (later Brico) Orchestra, an ensemble of both professional and non-professional men and women. Her professional associates included a close friendship with Finnish composer Jean Sibelius and a long relationship with Dr. Albert Schweitzer.

Brico spent the last forty-seven years of her life in Denver, teaching conducting, vocals and piano. Her most famous student, Judy Collins, returned to Denver in 1973 to produce the Academy Award-nominated documentary, Antonia: Portrait of the Woman. Her career was revitalized by the film, resulting in many worldwide guest-conducting performances, recording opportunities and an appearance
on Johnny Carson’s *Tonight Show*. She continued conducting until a stroke left her bedridden in 1988. Upon her death, a collection of more than 60 boxes of tapes, manuscripts, photographs, recordings and newspaper clippings were donated to the Colorado Historical Society, comprising the bulk of the research for this thesis.

This abstract accurately represents the content of the candidate’s thesis. I recommend its publication.

Signed: Mark S. Foster
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife Kirsten for her devotion, understanding and unfailing faith and support that allowed me to undertake and complete this work.
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My thanks to the Colorado Historical Society for their support and understanding in allowing me access to the Antonia Brico Collection. My thanks to Mark Foster, who worked tirelessly to teach me to write properly and whose criticisms were always constructive and Donna Bogard, who helped me remember that the joy of the music itself should always be most important. I want to give my thanks to my good friend Bill Convery who held nothing back in critiquing my writing and compositional technique; to Milly Roeder who translated my German manuscripts so expertly; to my parents Robert and Brenda Christensen who always believed I could achieve anything I chose to pursue and did nothing to impede my ambition; to my mother-in-law Pat Hill who provided the stable environment and spiritual support to advance my education; and to all my teachers at the University of Colorado at Denver who made my search for knowledge a joy to undertake.
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CHAPTER 1
A LITTLE STICK

Why is it that outside of a few sepia females the woman musician never was born capable of sending anyone further than the nearest exit? . . .
You can forgive them for lacking guts in their playing, but even women should be able to play with feeling and expression and they never do it.
- An anonymous critic in Down Beat, 1938.¹

Prior to the twentieth century, society often viewed the occupations of the musician and orchestra conductor as belonging exclusively to men. Despite the presence of female troubadours in 14th century England and female religious musical gatherings in 16th century Italy, women were denied instrumental musical employment in much of the Western world. Many women composed, played and performed music, but such instances of feminine creativity were often negatively judged from the predominant male perspective. As a rule, women were traditionally limited to performances as solo vocalists or as members of larger operatic companies. Women were usually not allowed to play in orchestras alongside men or to conduct. Those women who were allowed to perform as musicians were typically limited to what were considered traditional feminine instruments: the harp and the piano.

Several gifted women dared to challenge the all-male musical world in the nineteenth century, but with limited success. Clara Schumann advanced her musical
writing career through her famous spouse Robert early in the century, though apparently thought her own work was of little consequence in comparison. Despite the reservations of others including her husband, she became well known as a solo pianist by premiering difficult works by Chopin, Brahms and her husband. She became famous for being the first pianist of either sex to standardize the practice of performing from memory. This concept of playing without music and without supporting musicians completely changed solo piano recitals.²

Clara Schumann's example encouraged other women to both compose and perform later in the century. French composers Cécile Chaminade and Augusta Holmes conducted their own orchestras in Paris and made guest appearances throughout France. Like Schumann, they too encountered anti-female prejudices. Although they published their works under their own names, their conducting efforts were strictly limited to nonprofessional organizations.³

Unfortunately, prejudice often worked to dissuade many of these gifted young women entirely. Fanny Mendelssohn was dissuaded by her brother Felix from publishing her own musical works on account of her sex. Instead, she published several compositions under her brother's name in *Songs Without Words*. Other early female composers opted to use masculine pen names to disguise what they saw as the condemnation of their sex.⁴

In the United States, female composers and conductors found limited outlets
toward the end of the nineteenth century despite efforts to keep them from orchestral ranks. Composer Emma Steiner conducted light and grand opera as a guest with several orchestras in the 1890s. The Women’s String Orchestra of New York, founded in 1896 as one of the first all-female musical ensembles, performed for three seasons before it went bankrupt.5

Real progress in the advancement of female musicians did not take place in the United States until the labor movements of the early twentieth century. The Musical Protective Union became affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1903. The two became what is now known as the American Federation of Musicians, the first major entertainment union in American history. The policy that excluded women from the Musical Protective Union was abandoned at the insistence of the AFL, who did not officially allow that sort of policy within their own organizations. Professional ensembles reacted immediately. That year, the Metropolitan Opera (in New York) became the first classical ensemble to allow female union musicians into its ranks. As expected, all the first applicants were harpists.6

It was into this environment that Antonia Louisa Brico was born in Rotterdam, Holland. Her mother Agnes, the eldest of eight children, was raised in a strict catholic family in Amsterdam. Typical of other women of the period, Antonia’s mother found work as a housekeeper and scrubber woman in order to make a living. By later accounts, she was a very emotional woman who was gifted with a wonderful singing
talent.

The young Agnes fell in love with an Italian pianist, a sailor who was visiting in Amsterdam and attending the Brico family's church. Her father, distrusting the young man and his intentions, forbade the growing relationship. The sailor moved to Antwerp and Agnes, being hopelessly in love, soon followed.

She was a very religious girl and apparently had never had the facts of reproduction explained to her. The result was a single-night tryst that left her pregnant without a home or income. Her father immediately came to Antwerp to get her. The elder Brico moved her to Rotterdam where employment was more easily obtained by working women.

Antonia's mother didn't learn she was pregnant until several months later. The father never knew of her pregnancy and never saw either of them again. In a letter written several nights before Antonia's birth, her mother stated that she, “didn't have money and [she] didn't have anything... and [she] had to keep working all the time and she couldn't properly take care” of the new infant. In tear-stained letters written to a sister, the unhappy mother stated that she hoped that the infant would die before she became very old because, “there's nothing in life for [her baby] but sorrow.”

A few nights after Antonia's birth on June 26, 1902, distraught that she had no money, no clothes for the baby and no time to raise her, the young mother placed the baby in a local convent. Here the infant Antonia stayed for two years, a period of time
marked by malnutrition, rickets and black spasms.

Desperate to find adequate help for the starving child, Antonia’s mother placed an advertisement in the local paper seeking a foster family. She eventually interviewed a couple from Amsterdam and placed her baby with them. The baker and his wife were unable to have children of their own and the Wolthus couple seemed an ideal solution to a less than ideal situation; Antonia became their charge, with the agreement that the natural mother would pay a weekly stipend for food and board.

For the next four years, baby Antonia was visited by her mother and other relatives in what was apparently a fairly open relationship with the Wolthus family. The young Antonia’s earliest memories included feeding swans with her foster grandfather and being awakened by her new foster father at three a.m. to eat fresh-baked bread when he returned from his employment at a local bakery.

The foster relationship fell apart in 1906 when one of Antonia’s aunts, a nun at a local convent, went to reclaim the girl on behalf of her mother’s family. Antonia’s foster mother refused, stating that since no one had paid for upkeep, the natural mother had lost her claim to the little girl. The Catholic Church intervened and a court date was set to adjudicate the matter.

On the appointed date, Antonia’s natural family appeared in court, unaware that her foster mother had secretly sailed for the United States the previous night, taking Antonia with her. The girl was renamed “Wilhelmina Wolthus,” given a new
birthday of June 12th (the date she was to have appeared in court) and spirited away to the United States and a new life with her ‘adoptive’ parents. 9

And there they were, sitting in the court room, waiting for [me] and [I] was on a ship, and [Mrs. Wolthus’] relatives shrugged their shoulders as to where she was - - with [me] under a different name and a different birthday.”10

It was not until later in her life that she would learned who her birth mother was and how she had come to be with her foster parents. She never even knew her real birth name until she was a teenager.

The woman and child traveled to New York in steerage class, then to Chicago and finally to San Francisco. They immediately found a home in Oakland, California, where her adoptive father had already found work as a baker. He had been in the area since just after the Great Earthquake and had not realized that his wife was coming with the child until they actually arrived that winter.11

The family moved to St. Helena, Napa County, in 1907. The climate proved healthful to the young girl, who had been sickly since earliest childhood. Wilhelmina’s mental state, however, was not so healthy. Her foster mother was abusive, her foster father withdrawn and non-communicative, content to allow his wife to raise the child as she saw fit. Brico recalled this relationship in a 1971 interview.

My [foster mother] was a very stern, typical Dutch woman who was not given to affection... and I suffered heavily under that. I was a very emotional, sensitive child and I had spankings and beatings and pinchings and all of those sorts of things from a very early time. It was probably this terrific fear that made me do everything wrong. If you’re
afraid of doing something wrong, you’ll probably land in it. If anyone had an accident, it was I... I think it was more terror for things that might happen that created the happenings.\textsuperscript{12}

Wilhelmina’s foster father, though not abusive, did not challenge his wife in her treatment of the girl. He showed little affection and often avoided confrontations by leaving the house:

He never raised his hand against me. But he would never put his arms around me. Nobody did that, except people for whom I played. Nobody. But he couldn’t stand it. And when [my foster mother] got real rough with me – the strong woman against this child who was very undersize... then he would take his hat and go out.\textsuperscript{13}

![Figure 1.1. Wilhelmina Wolthus. c.1912.\textsuperscript{14}](image)

The family moved back to Oakland in 1909 where they would stay (in various houses in the same neighborhood) until Wilhelmina was a teenager. The young girl was a nervous child, constantly fearful and often prone to biting her fingernails until
they bled. This became intolerable to her adoptive mother as the girl grew older. In exasperation, the 10-year-old Wilhelmina was taken to a doctor, who after many tests suggested that she receive piano lessons, stating that giving young hands something to do, “usually does the trick.” 15 The doctor’s prescription proved correct, and the young girl’s chronic nail-biting was cured.

The young Wilhelmina quickly fell in love with the piano. A teacher was secured, a local twelve-year-old girl who lived across the street. The new student quickly learned to play, performing outrageous fills and adding extra notes to befuddle her 12-year-old teacher.

Its tragic that I lived in the type of neighborhood, rather a low brow neighborhood, where people didn’t think things out. Otherwise, they would have said, “This was a gifted child and sent to the best teacher in the area [instead of a 12-year-old girl]...” There were plenty of marvelous teachers in San Francisco, I’m sure, who would have given me a scholarship.16

The piano quickly became an obsession with Wilhelmina. She became frantic in her search for new music, practicing at all hours of the day and enduring beatings for disturbing her foster mother, whether in the daytime or evening. Often she would be punished by having a favorite piece of music destroyed. Later, the young girl would sit and cry by herself, stroking the piano, saying “At least this doesn’t hurt you.”17

Wilhelmina’s foster mother began to take the girl everywhere with her, both due to her inability to leave the child alone and her own desire to secure some sort of
monetary return on the cost of lessons. Throughout Wilhelmina’s young life, the elder woman tried to make money by having the girl play. At local talent competitions, Wilhelmina, who only knew classical works, was heckled and booed from the stage because she could not play popular standards. The piano lessons were discontinued as a result of the girl’s failures.

The elder woman was a dilettante, dabbling at religious fads: first following mysticism, then astrology, then far-eastern theology. For all these events, she had Wilhelmina play piano. The other women in these groups held seances, then claimed to see the shadow of Beethoven standing behind the girl. Others saw the guiding hand of greats such as Brahms and Liszt. These statements were to have a great effect on the girl, convincing her that music was not only her love but ordained to be her destiny.

Her foster mother flitted from one group to another, a habit that frustrated the young girl. One of the elder woman’s last fads was a dalliance with the Theosophical Society, a group based on Hindu beliefs. The women in this group heaped love and understanding on the young pianist, giving her the attention and affection she could not get at home. Wilhelmina returned to this group during her studies in college due to this nurturing affection in her earlier years, the only nurturing she obtained in her youth.
Until sometime after her twelfth birthday, Wilhelmina had been told that the Wolthus' were her natural parents. It was not until an unfortunate fight with her foster mother that she found out the truth.

...I'd say, “Oh Mom, don’t get so mad.” And then finally it broke. And finally she said, “Don’t you call me your mother! I’m not your mother, and thank God I’m not!” ... And this is how I heard it. The shock was terrible at first. And at least when I reeled from the shock, afterwards I thought, “That’s right. She couldn’t be my mother. She couldn’t be my mother.”

A short time later, Wilhelmina’s foster father showed her the original newspaper advertisement that her natural mother had placed in the papers in Rotterdam seeking foster parents, along with a copy of a birth certificate. Wilhelmina learned that she had once had another family, her natural family. She learned that she
had also had a birth mother and had been born with another name: Antonia Louisa Brico.

Family life for young Wilhelmina became worse from that day forward until she graduated from high school. Although her studies went well, she had few friends and spent most of her waking hours away from home. Her foster mother forbade her to spend time with friends and often beat her for disobeying her instructions. When she avoided physical punishment, Wilhelmina was demeaned and abused verbally.

Her high school choral teacher became one of her strongest influences at this time of her life. After hearing her student play Bach’s *Toccata and Fugue in D minor*, Mrs. Minnie Wadsworth Davis became Wilhelmina’s strongest advocate. The young pianist began to be noticed by both students and teachers as a young prodigy. By the time she was in her early teens, her teacher was suggesting that she attend college. “No, no, my mother won’t let me go to college,” replied Wilhelmina. Undaunted, Mrs. Davis accompanied her home to speak with the elder Wolthus. Although the meeting went well, Wilhelmina’s foster mother reacted furiously after the teacher left, declaring the such a girl as her stepdaughter would never go to college.21

Still, the choral teacher persisted in assisting the young girl. Wilhelmina was taken to her first concerts by Mrs. Davis. She heard for the first time a large ensemble conducted by an individual. German-born Paul Steindorf conducted these outdoor concerts every Sunday afternoon in Oakland, providing Wilhelmina with her first
exposure to the art of conducting.

Despite her love of the piano and her tumultuous life at home, she quickly became enamored both by the act of conducting as well as the conductor himself. The young girl was fascinated with the power wielded by the conductor of the band, later stating that she was “amazed that a little stick could have such an influence on a group of people.” She decided that she wished to become a conductor herself, a goal she would carry with her for all her life.

Wilhelmina also found fulfillment in employment outside of school. She worked at the local Woolworth's store, selling everything from sodas to perfumes, discount sundries to sheet music. She flourished as a saleswoman, often spending entire days demonstrating music at a piano in the store's front window and earning the grand wage of six dollars a week. She would often work after hours for no pay to avoid coming home, having learned that she could avoid the worst of her foster mother's temper by simply not being in the elder woman's presence.

Conducting remained her passion. Wilhelmina followed Paul Steindorf on streetcars and on foot, often waylaying him as he returned home from his teaching job at the University of California at Berkeley. The conductor finally asked the teenager to play piano for him and shocked her by stating, “What a pity that you don’t know anything about the piano.” Surprised and dismayed, Wilhelmina burst into tears. “Well,” continued Steindorf, “[since you do not,] then I will teach you.” It was an
association that was to last until she was in her twenties.\textsuperscript{23}

By the time Wilhelmina graduated from the Technical High School in Oakland on June 20, 1919, her home situation had become completely unbearable.

It was open warfare between [my foster mother and I] all the time. I was just as demon as she was, because I was defending myself just like a trapped fox. And finally I graduated from high school and she did not go to my graduation.\textsuperscript{24}

Determined to find her own path, the young woman registered for the fall semester at the University of California at Berkeley. Her foster mother had often belittled the girl's desire to attend college, stating that "her type" should try to find a job as a stenographer or secretary, that a college education would be wasted on her.

Wilhelmina strongly disagreed. It was one of the few times in her young life that she directly went against her foster mother's wishes. Predictably, the return home the next day was far from happy.

I came home the next afternoon – it was September the 7\textsuperscript{th}... I came into the house around five or six o'clock. My foster mother greeted me like this: "Your father and I have decided we don't want you anymore."

...So there I was, on the street. Nothing in my hands, nothing – no clothes, no books, nothing.\textsuperscript{25}
CHAPTER 2
THOSE BEAUTIFUL EYES

Wilhelmina Wolthus attended the University of California at Berkeley beginning with the fall semester, 1919. Despite her foster mother’s predictions, she flourished in the college environment. Much of her first year was spent recovering from her abusive childhood, learning not to flinch when someone raised a hand around her, and learning not to expect to be constantly belittled and reprimanded. She stayed with a friend’s family, receiving both financial and emotional support. She also began teaching her first piano students, receiving 25 to 50 cents per lesson.

Wilhelmina also found spiritual guidance through the Theosophical Society, a group founded on yoga-basted teachings. She had first been exposed to their teachings as a girl accompanying her foster mother many years previous. Amelia K. Weitman, the group’s local president, provided Wilhelmina the only real affection the girl had experienced when she was young. In college, the young woman found both peace and spiritual fulfillment with the Theosophical Society. Their beliefs and teachings would shape much of her spiritual growth in the early 1920s.

The Theosophical Society embraced the Eastern Indian philosophies of meditation and yoga. The group believed that a person’s future was self-determined, a choice of paths that led one either to destruction or fulfillment depending of their own
realization of personal truth. In their teachings the young girl found an escape, a path that could lead from her life of frustration toward one where she could find happiness.

Wilhelmina's first summer away from home was spent as a daytime waitress. In the evening, she performed at the Harbin Springs Resort in Lake County, California. She filled the happiest summer of her life with performances at dances and on the radio, making large tips from waiting tables, and on and warm summer days learning to swim and be happy in her newly found freedom. She left the resort wealthier by 300 dollars, the most money she had ever had in her entire life.

By the next summer break, Wilhelmina had come into her own as a student at Berkeley. She performed in many quartets, trios and duos, learning violin and cello as well as continuing her education on the piano with Paul Steindorf. She had very little social life with other students, preferring to spend her time with members of the music faculty or alone practicing her music. She spent her spare time ushering in San Francisco to earn free tickets to performances of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra.

By her own accounts she made high grades in her music classes. She attended as many concerts as possible, hearing many of the great musical works played by local bands and orchestras. She performed both as a soloist and as an accompanist, expanding her craft beyond the relatively untutored beginnings of her childhood.

That summer, the young student learned that the great pianist and composer
Ignacy Paderewski was going to perform a concert with the San Francisco Symphony. Elated, Wilhelmina vowed to see the great Polish performer. She persuaded a friend to purchase a front row seat for the exorbitant price of five dollars, but was dismayed when her front row ticket turned out to be the last seat on the end, far away from the center of the auditorium. In such a location, she would not even have been able to have a clear view of the pianist from so far on the side.

So I went somewhere and bought a camp stool. And I went to San Francisco with the camp stool and I looked at the seat and sneered at it, and took the camp stool and set right in the aisle, right where the piano was, next to the front row. And of course since I knew all the ushers, they let me sit there. ... And one lady said, “Oh, is this how they do it in New York?” And I said, “Yes, Madam, this is how they do it in New York.” And I sat there with a whole stack of music— all the music that Paderewski was [going to play.] And when Paderewski came and bowed he looked at me because here I was outside the aisle— one little campstool, misfit clothes... And so I heard this concert in the front row.”

Continuing her studies with Steindorf, Wilhelmina finally told her instructor that she wished to be a conductor herself. “No, no, that’s too difficult,” he replied, “[You’ll] never [be] able to do that.” He firmly believed that the young woman only wanted to be a conductor because she was simply infatuated with him. Though somewhat true, she disagreed, persisting in her desire to conduct despite Steindorf’s assertion that, as a woman, she could never have a future as an orchestral conductor.

The professor I loved the most in the whole world said to me, “It won’t work... it won’t work. Even if you get accepted into schools it won’t work. Nobody wants a woman conductor.” How’s that for your ego?
Pretty bad, right? Well, it just went in one ear and out the other. I replied, “I want to conduct.”

Steindorf found positions for her in choral productions in the Bay Area, leading to more involved participation in actual musical theater productions. Wilhelmina was thrilled the first time she saw her name in a program as musical coach. Ultimately, these productions provided her with her first hands-on education in major operatic and musical works—knowledge that would serve her well in her future musical aspirations.

The next summer, Wilhelmina learned that conductor Sigismond Stojowski, a contemporary and friend of Paderewski, was going to be giving master classes at the university. She wanted desperately to attend but did not have the several hundred dollar tuition payment for the class. Desiring a scholarship, she managed to get herself invited to a reception that was being given prior to the master class. As she was introduced, Stojowski winked at her and said, “Oh, this is the girl with the camp stool,” referring to her machinations to hear Paderewski the previous year. The young woman blushed, deeply embarrassed. “Well, if anybody would do that to get to hear Paderewski,” he continued with a smile, “she deserves a scholarship.”

Wilhelmina Wolthus attended her master classes, continued her studies and finally graduated from the University of California with Honors in Music on May 16, 1923. Her degree was a Bachelor of Arts, with a major in music and with minors in oriental philosophy and foreign languages. Enrolling in graduate school, she
continued her piano studies with fellow student Felida Everingham. She paid five dollars a week for lessons which she described as "...the first very fine lessons I had after Paul Steindorf...taught me piano."³

Stojowski had told Wilhelmina that he would give her a scholarship should she ever come to New York to study with him. To this end, the graduate student began taking extra jobs, giving extra lessons and performing on the radio. She rented a cottage and taught piano students of all ages. She also began taking voice lessons, learning from a professional vocalist in exchange for teaching piano to the woman's niece.

Though she worked hard at her studies, it was obvious that her goal was to travel to New York, not finish her graduate degree. She also yearned to conduct. Although Steindorf had found her enough occasional work to keep her in professional music, she still wished to hold a baton and create utilizing an orchestra as her instrument. Studying with one of the finest conductors in the country, she reasoned, would bring her closer to that goal.

An accidental fall in the winter of 1924 left Wilhelmina bedridden for many weeks. Both students and faculty attended her in her home, some students even doing housework for her while she recovered. "I finished [the semester] after a fashion, but don't really remember what my record was," she later related. She managed to complete her first year, but ultimately decided to put her education at Berkeley on
hold. Wilhelmina applied for and received a leave of absence from the university beginning the following September, 1924.4

Traveling to New York was a big step for the student. Another big step would change her life forever. Wilhelmina had decided that upon arrival in New York, she would take back her original birth name. Quite informally, Wilhelmina Wolthus became a memory. “From then on I was [Antonia Brico] and didn’t use my own... my foster name anymore,” she later recalled.5

The cost of traveling to New York was fairly high for a student, so Antonia agreed to chaperone a young girl whose parents were traveling separately by train. Both the eight-year-old girl and the college graduate had their own pianos to transport, as well as large amounts of luggage, so they were forced to make their way by sea. They traveled by steamship, passing through the Panama Canal and journeying quite pleasantly for nearly a month.

Unfortunately, Antonia arrived in New York City only to find that Stojowski and his wife had departed on a vacation trip to Paris. They had been expecting the young student, however, and had made arrangements for her to stay in their house until they came back. When they returned a short time later, the student found that she was to be one of three other pianists living in the household.

The Stojowski home was an elegant four-story brownstone house on 76th Street with an entire floor set aside for the various piano students who came to study.
The Stojowski’s slept on the second floor, the children (ages two, four and six) were on the third floor, while the students occupied the top floor. Life that winter was very much akin to life in a conservative European household, Antonia later recalled. Stojowski was very concerned about his young female students, making sure that they were home on time and stayed out of trouble.

Antonia worked to pay for her scholarship by babysitting the Stojowski children. She played with them, took them for walks in the park and kept watch over them when their parents were away. She later admitted to being a rather poor babysitter, often prone to sleeping when the youngest would cry. Often it was “Madam” herself who came to the child’s rescue while her babysitter lay sleeping soundly nearby.

While her main studies were with the Master (as Stojowski insisted on being titled), she also attended technique and repertoire lessons with a woman named Madam Conrad Elise Corzinyaska.

...Madam Corzinyaska was a little bit on the strange side. I think she was a little bit, well, let us say peculiar. Anyway, she had such a thing about technique that she declared that no one [among the students] had any technique – absolutely no one, that it was an absolute disgrace for them to play any repertoire for the Master because they had no technique. So we did the wildest exercises, and she inspired us so much to practice technically that I [began to practice] twelve hours a day.7

Madam Corzinyaska’s persistent training even extended to meals. The
students commonly dined at a boarding house located next door to the Stojowski residence, often sharing their meals with their instructors. Corzinyaska often insisted that the students hold utensils with only their fourth and fifth fingers, helping strengthen them for technical exercises. "Oh those Stojowski students," she would exclaim. "I don't know what I'm going to do with them - the way they eat and the way the handle the cutlery!".

"She was hilarious," Antonia later stated.

Antonia quickly discovered that there were not enough practice hours in the day for her to learn both her technical exercises and her required material for her lessons with Stojowski. She generally practiced on her own piano in the Stojowski basement from 9 A.M. to 1 P.M., then again from 2 P.M. to 6 P.M. Practicing was not allowed in the household at night.

Ever resourceful, Antonia made arrangements to practice at Steinway & Sons, a huge piano showroom located on 57th Street next door to Carnegie Hall. They had studios that they normally rented to students during the day, but were persuaded to allow the pianist to practice on her own after the store closed for the night. She would typically practice there between 8 P.M. and midnight then return late to the household, tip-toeing barefoot to avoid waking her teacher (a difficult task on old wood floors).

Finally, concerned for his student's welfare, Stojowski spoke with Antonia. When he was at his most stern, he called her Cheretska, which meant 'daughter' in
Polish. He demanded to know what was keeping her out until one o’clock at
night.

She hung her head, embarrassed. Her instructor, fearing she was involved in
inappropriate behavior, became more insistent that she confess her late night activities
to him. Antonia finally relented.

“I practice,” [I said]. ...And I told him [that I practiced late at night] at
Steinway & Sons. And he said, “But you practice here eight hours a
day.” I said, “I know, Master, but it isn’t enough.” And he just raised
the roof. He said no – I couldn’t do it anymore and he would stop me
from practicing and I couldn’t do it and I was terribly upset.10

She later admitted that she continued to practice at Steinway & Sons late at
night despite Stojowski’s wishes. Her mentor apparently never knew (or admitted
knowledge) of her duplicity.

Mrs. John Jay White, a friend from Antonia’s journey to New York, engaged
the pianist to provide lessons for her own children and others one day a week at her
home in Greenwich, Connecticut. White took a special interest in the young woman’s
past, insisting that Antonia needed to search for her original family in Holland. When
Antonia protested that she had no interest, her foster mother had explained how her
birth mother, a woman of low moral character, had abandoned her. Mrs. White
persisted, insisting that Antonia’s foster mother was likely not a good source for
reliable information and that it would be possible to find out more by consulting other
sources. She offered to contact friends in the Hague to see if further information
might be obtained.
“I knew nothing – nothing,” Antonia later related. “And so I thought nothing more about it and she did the investigating.” Mrs. White continued making her inquiries, a lengthy process due to the distance and limited information available to begin such a search.

Meanwhile, Antonia’s studies continued. Stojowski occasionally had other pianists hold master classes for his students, inviting the famous and gifted to his home and studio. One well-remembered guest was pianist Ignacy Paderewski.

We had an evening where the Stojowski students all played something by Stojowski for Paderewski. That was great concert evening. And I played something called By the Brookside. And then we all went to Carnegie Hall and heard Paderewski play and I shook his hand. And it was great.11

Antonia approached Stojowski later in the spring and spoke with him about her ongoing desire to conduct. Though happy in her piano studies, she had not forgotten her original desire to someday become a conductor. Stojowski responded by telling her that such an ambition was ridiculous, that she should instead concentrate on more serious pursuits instead of pursuing such an unlikely dream. Undaunted, Antonia secretly took courses at the Music and Arts Institute (now Julliard) in New York City. Upon learning of his student’s activities, Stojowski became furious, insisting that she was wasting her time, that “women would never get anywhere conducting anyway.”12

The year of studies in New York came to an end all too soon for the pianist in May, 1925. Antonia had a return ticket to California and had even lined up students
for piano lessons upon her return back to Berkeley. Still, she had no genuine idea of where the future was to take her. "I didn't know what I was thinking, what I was believing, and I was unhappy."13

Her footsteps took her by serendipity to a church located around the street corner from the Stojowski residence. Swami Yogananda was giving his final lecture of a stop in New York on a nationwide crusade, the last of a series of along with related classes. An Indian Guru, Yogananda had founded the Self-Realization Fellowship in 1917, with the first United States branch becoming active in 1920.14 Antonia decided to attend the lecture, based on no other reason than the similarity to the teachings of the Theosophical Society and her own simple curiosity.

The lecture that she attended made a profound impression on her, both spiritually and emotionally. Antonia fought her way through the crowds to see Yogananda in the back rooms, remembering the support the Society had given her and the lessons of support that had been given her. Antonia was immediately overcome with a desire to hear and learn all she could from this Hindu Swami.

And I tell you I just fought past this crowd of people to get to him. And he had the most beautiful eyes you ever saw in your life...15 And I got to him and I looked him straight in the eye, and I said, "I need you." And he looked me straight in the eye and he said, "If you need me, you may come." I said, "I have no money." He said, "You may come to my classes."

She attended a full week of classes, learning both yoga and the Swami’s teachings on ‘path self-realization.’ These lessons in spirituality were the first
foundations in self-worth that the young woman had ever experienced. For the first time, she had found something to focus on in addition to her only love, music.

Yogananda’s teachings were simple, based on a love for nature and self; a desire to achieve self-realization through love and understanding. The Swami’s message to Antonia gave her hope beyond her life’s own unhappy beginnings. He spoke of destiny in terms of both fate and personal motivation:

![Swami Yogananda](image)

Figure 2.1. Swami Yogananda. c. 1926.

The starry inscription at one’s birth, I came to understand, is not that man is a puppet of his past. Its message is rather a prod to pride, the very heavens seek to arouse man’s determination to be free from every limitation. God created each man as a soul, dowered with individuality, hence essential to the universal structure, whether in the temporary role of pillar or parasite. His freedom is final and immediate, if he so wills; it depends not on outer but inner victories.
Antonia used her return train ticket to California by stopping off first in Detroit, the site of Swami Yogananda’s next series of lectures. The trip took several days, marked by uncomfortable railcars, sooty clothing and frequent stops for dining. The woman had no idea where she would stay in Detroit, having no money to speak of, nor any specific plans. Her only immediate goal was to further her spiritual growth and learn more from the Swami. She felt the best way to do both was to spend as much time near him as possible.

Antonia attended five days of his classes, staying in a hotel room provided by a hotel-owning friend of the Swami. The classes only served to strengthen her resolve further to learn more of his philosophy and teachings. Although she had taken courses in oriental philosophy and eastern religions in college, she had never taken her lessons further than the course work required by the instructors. In Swami Yogananda, she found lessons that allowed her to firmly order her life and ambitions, to find inner peace.\textsuperscript{18}

...Swami Yogananda taught [me] things to help me get hold of myself. I was a very passionate, emotional child with no direction really. And I think if it weren’t for him, [who knows where] I would have, goodness knows, ended up.\textsuperscript{19}

By the time the summer semester started at Berkeley in Spring, 1925, Antonia had finished her lessons with Yogananda and was back on the Berkeley campus with her new name and new responsibilities. She taught classes under the direction of Dr.
Modeste Alloo, a former trombonist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Alloo had replaced the retiring Steindorf as the conducting professor at Berkeley.

Aarloo’s teaching style, based on very strict European traditions, was very much like Stojowski’s. Most of his students were teachers accumulating further credits for graduate degrees or increased wages. Although many students despaired at Aarloo’s very difficult grading, Antonia flourished under the discipline, enjoying her duties immensely.

Antonia’s duties mostly involved sight-singing classes and other assistant duties, yet she still persisted in her desire to become a conductor. Her association with the Swami had only strengthened her desire to find her own path in life, to seek out her own dreams despite the discouragement of others. Dr. Alloo reacted predictably to Antonia’s desire to be a conductor.

And then I told him I wanted to be a conductor. And he said that [it] was absolutely crazy and insane – that no woman would ever be a conductor and that he could get me a nice job at the University of California. And I should stay and do the things that I would be able to do professionally. Not a pipe dream like this conducting. Well, of course it went in one ear and out the other.

Despite this discouragement, exciting news encouraged young Antonia. A letter from Mrs. White in Connecticut arrived toward the end of the summer. Antonia’s maternal Grandfather had been located in Amsterdam and wished very much for his granddaughter to visit him. To Antonia’s amazement, she learned she had an entire extended family in Holland, including many aunts, uncles and cousins. Casting
aside plans to travel to New York for further studies, she immediately made plans to travel to Europe as soon as the summer semester came to an end.

Antonia had been performing regularly, both as a concert accompanist and as a soloist and accompanist on local radio broadcasts. With plans for Europe in her future, she redoubled her efforts to raise money, performing as much as possible and taking additional students.

I was so imbued with the thought, 'I’m going to meet my relatives,' and with great imagination I thought this was most romantic – you find your own relatives after twenty years. And so I gave a couple of concerts – piano solo concerts to get the fare to Holland that summer. And everybody wished me well and everybody was very excited about the whole thing.
CHAPTER 3
MY HOMELAND

Antonia Bricó departed for Holland on September 1, 1926, anxious to meet her natural family. Having grown up with only her abusive foster parents she hardly knew what to expect when she arrived. She had no real memory of any of her relatives and her only childhood memories in Holland involved her foster parents and foster grandfather.

She arrived to find that her mother had been deceased for many years. Never in very good health, her mother had died in 1909, requesting on her death bed that her family find Antonia. Antonia’s grandfather had conducted the search for many years. His investigations did not yield results until Mrs. White’s friends made contact in the summer of 1926.

Of course that was to me such a shock to meet my [maternal] grandfather and not my mother... and then they all cried and cried and said how much I looked like Agnes – my mother. And all this went on and on and on and they had a piano and I practiced all the time.¹

For the first time in her life, she found herself surrounded by family and relatives. The family members were happy to see her, proud of her accomplishments. Most kind of all was an uncle named Theo, the youngest of her relatives and only nine years her senior.
Uncle Theo had met her when her ship docked in Rotterdam. “He was such a handsome fellow,” Antonia recalled. “He was so much like me in personality – very dramatic and very musical and affectionate.” Where she felt little for her other relatives, she found herself liking her uncle very much.

Theo had recently divorced but was still caring for his ex-wife in his home in the upscale area of Amsterdam. The family insisted that Antonia stay with him, as he was closest in age to her and seemed to have the most in common with her. While staying there, Theo’s ex-wife would often go to bed early, leaving the other two to carry on conversations long into the night.

The growing relationship was encouraged by the family, who saw nothing unusual in a love affair between an uncle and his niece. Antonia herself had few misgivings herself, once she had resigned herself to her feelings. In fact, the thought it quite normal for an uncle and niece to have a close relationship. The only one with reservations was Theo himself, who was a staunch Catholic (like much of the family) and felt remorse over what he felt was becoming a potentially incestuous relationship.

And in the meanwhile, this tragedy developed: that I fell absolutely, madly and insanely in love with him and he with me... First I said to myself, “oh this is how you feel when you have relatives... that’s how blood [relationships] feel... He was looking at me... and uh... at the beginning I was going to leave because I saw what was coming up then... after the initial glow of thinking what a great thing this was to love your relatives like that, then I realized that is not what it is. 3
Still, Theo and Antonia spent more and more time together. They attended a presentation of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in Amsterdam conducted by Richard Strauss himself. Antonia managed to meet the famous composer and then spent time with the Amsterdam Philharmonic's concertmaster, a violinist named Zimmermann.

For the first time, no one attempted to dissuade the young woman from her dream of conducting. Zimmermann suggested that Antonia go to Berlin and study with Dr. Karl Muck, former conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and current head of the prestigious Berlin Master School of Conducting at the University of Berlin. "You ought to study in Germany," advised Zimmermann, "and you certainly ought to go to Bayreuth [where the Wagner Festival is held] and meet Dr. Karl Muck since he's the orchestra director of all the Wagner festivals." Zimmermann even provided a letter of introduction to the young woman, much to her surprise. He had been concertmaster under Muck for several years in Amsterdam and felt that the woman's ambition would be welcomed by the famous conductor.

Unfortunately, Antonia's growing relationship with her uncle seemed to become more serious as she made plans to return to the United States in January for a touring engagement with Native American singer Tsianina Redfeather Blackstone. She had accompanied Blackstone, a protege of Charles Wakefield Cadman, for a concert in Carmel the previous summer and had been hired to accompany her on her tour.
Theo fully supported Antonia’s future plans, paying her way to the United States and promising to support her if she were to attend school in Berlin. However, he was distraught at Antonia’s imminent departure. He protested that he was in love, and did not want her to go, despite his growing misgivings. Antonia did want to leave either.

And I said, “Theo, do you realize what we’re doing?” He said, “You can’t go, you just can’t. I can’t stand it.” And of course its very difficult when you’re so madly in love to act rationally. So I stayed on and it got worse and worse and worse... of course."

A train trip to Paris prior to departing for New York was the last time the couple spent together. The two shared a sleeping car with each other, with Antonia fully expecting that they would “consummate” their relationship. Theo’s growing uneasiness with being intimate with his sister’s daughter finally brought the love affair to a halt, despite Antonia’s complete willingness to both consummate the relationship and ultimately marry her uncle. It was likely the closest that she ever came to marriage.

So that was the way we were supposed to consummate, you see? ...It wasn’t as wonderful as you might think for the simple reason that he was so filled with guilt toward me as his sister’s child. And he just didn’t see how we could marry ever – uncle and niece. I said, “What do I care?” So anyway the whole thing was a quite a tragedy. And then when he left, of course, I went all to pieces. And I was just beside myself."

Antonia Brico put her reunion with her family and its growing difficulties from her for the trip back to the United States. She was much more outgoing on the trip
home than the timid girl who had begun college seven years earlier. The knowledge that she might be able to study in Germany and her recent intimate relationship had freed her from her last vestiges of temerity toward others.

Antonia spent her time aboard ship playing the piano, temporarily abandoning her usual repertoire of classical music for jazz and other popular music. "I was harum-scarum yet," she later recalled, "and I had fooled around, played jazz for the people and really made a fool of myself." The weather was stormy and icy for much of the journey and the young woman's entertainment was a welcome diversion for many of the other passengers in tourist class.

When not performing, she perused scores and continued her classical studies, well aware that she had a great deal of work ahead of her if she were to be accepted to the University of Berlin. After all, no American and certainly no American woman had ever been accepted to the conducting program.

While on the return journey, Antonia made another association which rededicated her musical study.

Then on [a] deck chair I sat next to Dr. [Benjamin] Steigmann, who was a very highly educated gentleman – a writer of distinction and a Wagnerite... And he was one of those who wrote [books] on Wagner and just adored him. And of course I was so crazy about Wagner. I had learned to love him the winter before.9

Dr. Steigmann noticed Antonia studying the piano score to Wagner's Tristan und Isolde. Angrily, he accosted the student, berating her for daring to study Wagner,
much less a score to one of Wagner’s greatest operas.

And he got mad at me because he thought I was nothing but a silly kid, you know. And he said, “What are you doing with a score of Tristan?” And I said happily, “Because I expect to conduct it someday.” And then he got really mad. To him it was... the most sacrilegious thing I could possibly say... He could not reconcile the fact that I was playing all this [popular] junk [for the other passengers] and then the next minute I was talking about Tristan.¹⁰

When Antonia conducted The San Francisco Symphony Orchestra in Berkeley in 1930, the program included excerpts from *Tristan und Isolde*. After the performance, she received a telegram from Dr. Steigmann offering his congratulations and apologizing for his anger at her during the voyage to America. “Subsequently he became a very good and close friend of mine,” Antonia later recalled.¹¹

Back in America, Antonia returned to Berkeley only to find a package of mail waiting for her from Theo. Most were simple correspondence, but the last had a great affect on her. Apparently, Theo had allowed a letter from Antonia to fall into the hands of his ex-wife. The jilted spouse promptly threatened to kill herself. Theo responded by remarrying his ex-wife and renouncing his relationship with Antonia. He concluded by stating “they would always be like brother and sister.” Antonia was devastated.

His guilt complexes got so strong, probably, that he just did this and went off, and then wrote to me and said it’s too bad but I’ll just have to forget about his supporting me in Europe and that I had better forget about the conducting, forget about going to Europe and all that.¹²
Furious, the young woman only redoubled her ambition to travel to Europe and study conducting. She vowed that she would never stop doing anything in her life because of him, even if it killed her. The breakup marked a turning point for Antonia Brico. Never again did she pursue a serious romantic relationship and never did she let a man dictate to her what she should do with her life.13

Antonia left on her tour in January, 1927, with Tsianina Redfeather and Prince Oskenonton, another native American singer. Although the engagements did little more than pay her keep, it did keep her busy and allowed her to focus her thoughts. The tour lasted until March, taking her by train to performances in California, New Mexico and Arizona.

When the tour ended, Antonia found herself without any real money or a place to go. By sheer serendipity, she landed in Fort Worth, Texas, broke and without further plans. Gaylord Houser, the nutritionist that she had met in Detroit the previous year, was busy giving lectures in the Amarillo area and had been staying in touch with Antonia throughout her tour. Upon arrival, she made a phone call, explaining to him that she had no money and no place to stay. Houser told her to board a bus to Amarillo. A short time later she had lodging and some time with an old friend.

Antonia played piano for many of Houser’s lectures, then received money to travel from Amarillo to Buffalo, New York, to meet again with Swami Yogananda. Yogananda had advanced from the title of Swami to Paramansaji. Swami meaning
'priest,' *Param* meaning 'best,' *Paramansaji* meaning 'above the rest.' She spent several months with Yogananda, learning his techniques of *Kriya Yoga*, his beliefs in the need for the unification of world religions and other lessons derived from the Paramansaji's home in India. Antonia seemed determined to bury herself in his teachings of self-fulfilment by pledging herself to serving him.

To the young woman's surprise, the Paramansaji refused to allow her to confine herself to the pursuit of religious studies. The teacher saw other possibilities in Antonia's future. "Now you watch," Yogananda stated in June, 1927. "No, Antonia, you are going to be a conductor. The renunciation is complete."

And I believed him. And he introduced me to someone, believe it or not – this is how my life went – who then subsequently payed my fare to New York and to Germany, out of his congregation there. And then I was to sail on the 25th of June, I think it was on a German liner, to Bremen and from Bremen I was going to go to Bayreuth, and then I was going to try to get into the Berlin Master School of Conducting at the University of Berlin.  

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It is important to note the many misconceptions and stereotypes concerning the roles and limitations of women in classical music that had been cultivated for many years. Chief among those was the generally accepted belief that women were not capable of the physical prowess needed to play many instruments. Gustave Kerker, musical director of the Casino in 1904 New York recalled using men in his women's musical groups in an interview in 1935:

The necessity of introducing men players into female organizations was demonstrated to me when I had a band at one of the London theaters. Though the women played their best, they could not hold their own, so I had to find four or five beardless youths, who could play, dress them up as girls and mix them with the others. The experiment proved a great success musically and the audience never knew but that the entire band was composed of pretty young women.¹

It was believed that women could perform well on violins and the smaller wind instruments, but would never be physically capable of performing on large brass, percussion or string instruments such as tubas, basses and tympani. “Women cannot possibly play brass instruments and look pretty,” further asserted an anonymous New York conductor, “and why should they spoil their looks?”² Indeed, the actual difficulty was often their perceived traditional appearance as well as their perceived physical abilities! For many men, the domestic view of women in the home did not
match the concept of the woman as a performing musician.

Antonia had ignored most of these views, continuing her studies and focusing on her conducting aspirations. It was her strong belief that musical creation was not gender dependent, that the production of music was inherent in personal desires and the emotions of the soul. She also believed that it was dependent on study, on a strong commitment to learning and growth. She instead strove to overcome the prejudices that surrounded her and continued her scholastic work, regardless of the gender-biased perceptions around her.

Most insidious too was the concept that women should be judged on criteria based on their gender rather than on their abilities. Dr. Lucy Green, in her book *Music, Gender, Education*, noted that it was common practice to label performances by women that were aesthetically or technically poor as "feminine" or "effeminate," while also ascribing "feminine" qualities to those that were moderately pleasing. Still, the greatest compliment then would be to call the performance masculine or to have masculine qualities. These achievements were often described in such terms as "manly," "bold" or "resolute."

A woman's own femininity was therefore seen as a detriment to her as a performer. "A conductor, in the stress of rehearsal, cannot stop and delete his favorite remarks when things are not going so well, just because there are ladies present," noted Chicago conductor Richard Czerwonky in a 1923 interview in the *Musical*
"Observer. ‘Time is too valuable... That is the main reason that women are not popular as members of symphony orchestras.’"

Despite these views, Antonia persevered. In June 1927 she traveled to Bayreuth, home of the Wagner Music Festival to audition for Dr. Karl Muck of the Master School of Conducting at the Berlin State Academy of Music, University of Berlin. The Academy was one of the most demanding and prestigious schools in Europe. Prior to Antonia’s application, it had never before accepted an American student.

In route, she stopped in New York City to visit with her former teacher, Sigismond Stojowski. Though he expressed the same misgivings to her plans as before, he consented to provide Antonia with a letter of recommendation. Armed also with a letter from Dr. Modeste Alloo and a letter from the Dutch concertmaster Zimmermann, she prepared to impress Dr. Muck.

Muck was the Director General of the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth and was acknowledged internationally as both an interpreter of German music as well as an authority on German composers. He had been director of the Boston Symphony orchestra prior to World War I but had been forced to leave the United States during the anti-German sentiment of the war years. He still felt bitterness over his expulsion: a bitterness that surfaced when the young girl from America arrived in Bayreuth to study.
"From California?" he asked incredulously. "A girl? You want to be a conductor?"

"Yes, yes and yes," were Antonia's answers. She presented the three letters of introduction, all three of which described her as conscientious, determined and talented. Muck examined the three letters of introduction, particularly the letter from his former concertmaster in Amsterdam. Swayed, he gave Antonia passes to all the music dramas for the season, a huge boon as the tickets were quite expensive.

Ever persistent, Antonia then convinced Dr. Muck to allow her to attend the rehearsals for Wagner's *Parsifal* so that she could observe his conducting technique from a closer vantage. The performances in Bayreuth took place in the Festival Theatre (*Festspielhaus*), a concert hall established by Richard Wagner in 1872. The orchestra pit in the *Festspielhaus* was unusual in that the orchestra area actually extended underneath the stage, with the horns and other brass well underneath and behind the scenery. This made for very intense acoustics. Antonia later recalled the impact that the rehearsals had on her.

Now I was very impressionable and [Dr. Muck] was doing [Wagner's] *Parsifal*. ... I swore [later that] I would never [listen to] *Parsifal* again in my life because I had heard it twenty five times with the greatest conductor in the world and I didn’t want to disturb that memory... The effect was something tremendous. Imagine being there and hearing the end of the transformation scene... oh me, oh my it was so tremendous... I was shaken, absolutely shaken to the core of my being.9

Driven more than ever by her desire to conduct, Antonia made the daily trip to
Dr. Muck’s house to request conducting lessons personally. She intended to show up every day at the conductor’s house until he either kicked her out or gave in to her request. Impressed with the young woman’s tenacity, Muck finally relented and provided lessons, along with full access to all the remaining rehearsals.

By summer’s end, he had become so impressed in her progress that he insisted she apply to the Master School of Conducting. Earlier, she had auditioned for Muck and Siegfried Wagner, son of the famous composer and coordinator of the Bayreuth Wagner Festival, for the position of musical coach. Her successful audition also served as the foundation for her application to the school.

Antonia was one of two students selected for the Master School out of over 20 applicants. A very traditional program at the Berlin State Academy of Music, the school had never accepted an American student before and had never invited a woman into the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik. Antonia saw her acceptance as both an omen and turning point in her life.

Two [applicants] got in and by some miracle I was one of them. There was one boy and one girl. The whole conducting school was only seven students, five in one class and we two in the other. So I said to myself, “uh huh, if you weren’t meant to be a conductor you wouldn’t have gotten into this school.”

The school’s instructors tested Antonia’s musical talents from her first day of classes. All of the students in the school were competent pianists or more than competent in many cases. Only excellent pianists were admitted to the program, as it
was believed that piano playing was essential to competent score reading. After all, the piano was the only instrument in the orchestra capable of performing all the notes of a chord simultaneously. Along with piano classes, students were expected to learn many different instruments. A knowledge of all instruments (or as many as possible) allowed a competent conductor to give specific directions to the musicians regarding their own instruments. This was particularly important with strings, as a conductor needed to be able to provide bowing or fingering suggestions as an important part of musical interpretation.

The students studied harmony, counterpoint, theory and composition. They engaged in constant score reading and playing, particularly string quartet repertoire. "[The] study of string quartets [was] valuable," she later wrote, "because it [was] the enlarged quartet of strings that [was] most employed in the orchestra."11

Antonia attended classes, taught students and made extra money as best she could, much as she had during studies in California. She reveled in the techniques employed by her instructors. Her musical training grew by leaps and bounds. The strict techniques of Dr. Muck challenged her daily, giving her insight into the German musical tradition, a tradition bounded on strong discipline and an adherence to the musical score. She also studied with Professor Julius Pruewer, director of the Berlin State Academy and Conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.
"Antonia Brico is strongly gifted and of extraordinary diligence. An excellently serious human being with flawless character. It would be a gross mistake to not allow her to complete her studies.

(Signed) Julius Pruewer
Professor of the State College
Berlin - Wilmersdorf
Briennerstrasse 10
January, 1929"
"My personal impressions about Miss Antonia Brico are:

ad 1. that she is a thoroughly decent human being, modest, simple, thrifty; and that she is filled with a consuming ambition – namely during her career to achieve the highest artistic goals.

ad 2. that she is musically highly gifted, that she pursues her studies with nearly iron diligence; and that she has made extraordinary progress.

(Signed) Dr. phil. Karl Muck
Hamburg
Gellertstrasse 25.
Hamburg 19, J./29. 1929."
It was through Muck that Antonia began to develop her insight into the German symphonic repertory, instilling a lifelong love of the music of Brahms, Wagner and Bruckner. She discovered the strength of will necessary to do justice to the great masters, the skill needed to bring the best of the music forward. She discovered the meaning behind Muck’s strongest admonition to the aspiring artist: “Serve the work,” implying that the conductor’s most sacred duty was to allow the composer’s original intent to come before the conductor’s own ego.

Dr. Muck was a “rigid and stern classicist,” according to Antonia. He approached score reading analytically, examining and assembling elements for best effect. He adhered to scores religiously, planning his conducting carefully before any rehearsal. “[Arthur] Nikisch was a poet,” she later wrote, comparing her teacher to the pioneering German conductor, “Muck is the scientist. His dissecting mind guides all his interpretations.”

Muck gave me lessons on Wagner... Not [just] conducting lessons. He just talked about music and everything. Invaluable. Unbelievable.

Days full of study and discovery passed quickly for Antonia. She spent two years of study in Berlin, working at the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth during the summer. Her education was further supplemented by choral training under the guidance of composer/conductor Siegfried Ochs: experience that she put to good use as a musical coach in Bayreuth.

Antonia Brico graduated from the Berlin State Academy of Music in the fall of
1929: the first American to graduate from the school. Traditionally, graduates from the prestigious conducting program premiered with a major symphony soon after graduation. In Antonia's case, it was expected that her world debut would gain notice. School officials, however, were reluctant to sponsor an event featuring a female conductor.

Critical acclaim finally came to the young woman when, on January 10, 1930, Antonia finally made her official European conducting debut with the Berlin Philharmonic. Unable to find serious support, she sponsored herself. Music afficionados from around Europe took notice as Antonia became the first woman to conduct the famous ensemble. Critics hailed the young woman, citing "her clear and precise beat and sure control of the changing speeds of the music."20

Antonia's debut resulted in notoriety in the United States as well. The New York Times made much of the young woman's triumph: "Miss Antonia Brico of San Francisco, the first American woman to conduct a concert in Berlin, made a successful debut tonight in Berlin with the Philharmonic Orchestra, which followed her baton most enthusiastically in Dvorak's Symphony in D minor, eliciting thunderous applause." The article further noted that, "Miss Brico received many floral tributes," and "hopes to direct concerts in California during the coming summer."21

The University of California contacted Antonia, offering to pay her way back to the United States to conduct summer concerts at the Berkeley campus and in San
Francisco. The promoters of the Hollywood Bowl intervened, insisting that her American premiere should be held at a major facility rather than on a college campus. After much negotiation, it was decided that she would premiere in Los Angeles in exchange for a series of concerts in San Francisco the following week.

Antonia Brico returned to the United States and made her American debut as a guest conductor with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl in July, 1930. Audiences purportedly came to see the novelty of a woman conductor, but ultimately were treated to the spectacle of a competent and talented musical artist. The *Los Angeles Times* stated, “Antonia Brico, famous woman conductor made her American debut as symphony director before one of the largest crowds in the history of the Hollywood Bowl. She proved that she will register her niche in the symphony Hall of Fame.” The *San Francisco Examiner* noted, “She was a phenomenon and a symbol. A phenomenon in her mastery of the orchestra—a symbol because she illustrated the emancipation of women from the man-imposed fetters of the ages.”

This “emancipation” was unfortunately at the mercy of growing unemployment during the Great Depression. With many male musicians out of work, there was a great reluctance to sacrifice men’s jobs to give employment to women. Female conductors (and musicians too) were often viewed as novelties, not mainstream artists. Antonia recalled this attitude years later, stating in a publicity biography that, “the world of serious music was not yet ready to afford a woman equal prominence and
entry to the conductor’s podium and when the novelty had been fully exploited, return engagements were not forthcoming even though critics were high in their praise of her musicianship. 23

Fortunately, other enlightened reformers were seeking to help women’s causes in the music industry. “I am all for women in orchestras,” said Hans Kindler, conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington, D.C. “The only condition I make is that they be good enough.” 24 Other noted conductors voiced opinions in favor of women as well. Conductor Leopold Stokowski had written as early as 1916 that, “... not hiring women constituted a terrible waste of splendid power.” Interestingly enough, Stokowski himself did not actually engage any women for his orchestra until 1930 and then only hired female harpists until 1936. 25

Frédérique Petrides, another female conductor just coming to prominence in the New York area, wrote an article for American Music Lover which addressed the certainty that conductors such as herself would soon be commonplace. “When one pauses to consider the increasing numbers of young American women who are now studying or who aspire to study in the near future, the art of directing an orchestra, one’s conviction grows stronger and stronger that the day is not far distant when the sight of women conductors will no longer evoke feelings of curiosity and surprise.” 26

Disappointed from a lack of immediate offers for employment in the United States, Antonia returned to Germany, convinced that her best chances for a future lay
in the more liberal musical environment of European symphonic organizations. Her association with Dr. Karl Muck led to a few temporary assignments. Antonia traveled to Poland, conducting the Warsaw Philharmonic before huge audiences. She continued outside studies and guest-conducted the Hamburg Symphony Orchestra, Muck’s own organization, in early 1931. She also conducted a triumphant concert for Queen Elizabeth of Belgium that winter in Brussels.27

Unfortunately, the Depression, so heavily felt in the United States, had settled in Germany several years earlier. Paid conducting positions were even more scarce, regardless of the conductor’s gender. Antonia stayed with friends in Vienna for six months, returning to her pre-Berlin existence, teaching a few students and generally living hand-to-mouth.

A series of engagements arranged by Mrs. Ernest Feigenberg, a Jewish soprano in Riva, Latvia, whom Antonia had taught several summers before provided relief for the conductor. Antonia spent the summer of 1931 conducting the Latvian State Orchestra in Riva between further guest conducting appearances in Poland. Despite critical acclaim, the acquisition of further employment became increasingly complicated by world affairs.

The whole conducting field was based on the premise that once you completed your training you would embark on the ‘route’ through the different opera houses... A conductor would progress, say, from being the third conductor in a small house to the second conductor in a larger house, and then perhaps back to the small house as first conductor and
so forth up the ladder. I am quite sure I could have followed that route if... World War II had not intervened. 28

January, 1932, found Antonia back in Germany performing as an piano accompanist for six opera singers in various seaside resorts. The rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the subsequent increase of Nazi political influence forced her into hiding.

Many foreigners were either imprisoned or simply deported. Fearing retribution due to her association with Jewish sponsors, she borrowed money and traveled to Dusseldorf, then secretly by train to the Netherlands. From there, she borrowed further and found her way aboard a ship destined for New York and safety. 29

Far from her childhood home in California, far from her European home of the last several years, Antonia remained optimistic. She still had contacts in New York and she had her newly-honed skills to perhaps bring her success in the United States:

And as I said, despite the hard breaks, despite everything, and there [was] difficulty because it turned out that it wasn’t just whether or not you knew what you were doing [professionally] that you would get everything. No, prejudice [too] has done many tragic things in the world. You may say, “Oh that’s just a musician talking, a crazy musician.” But I say that if Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Churchill had played string quartets there never would have been a Second World War! 30
Figure 4.3. Antonia Brico early in her conducting career. Courtesy, Colorado Historical Society. # F-50,450. Photo by Herbert Mitchell. 31
CHAPTER FIVE

IF NINE GIRLS THEN WHY NOT NINETY?

I returned to the United States in September 1932 for the simple reason that all foreigners were booted out of Germany by the Hitler business, which was getting very serious... And so I arrived in New York at the height of the Depression with thousands of musicians out of work! I had spent years and years training: I had conducted in Berlin, Hamburg, the Hollywood Bowl, San Francisco, Warsaw, Lodz, Poznan, [Poland], and [Riva], and yet I had no opportunities forthcoming to me at that time. I even owed money for the trip back!

Refusing to be daunted by the ever-growing Depression, Antonia set out to put together a group of musicians to keep themselves employed and herself in the public eye. Along with Mrs. Sidney Price and Mrs. Olin Downes, the spouse of the famous New York Times music critic, she raised $1000 to sponsor the event. She performed two engagements at the Metropolitan Opera House with the Musicians Symphony Orchestra, a group comprised of out-of-work professionals from the New York area. The production not only provided opportunities for the musicians but led to conducting opportunities for Antonia in Detroit and New York.

Still seeking further employment, Antonia remained strong in her desire to make a successful career working with small chamber groups and providing private instruction. She was allowed to assemble groups for the Works Progress Administration, conducting civic concerts for the unemployed masses. As fulfilling as
these concerts were, she still worked to find her own orchestra.

She shared her troubles with other rising female conductors in the United States. Many cities strove to assemble orchestras that either contained women or were solely composed of female musicians. Still, prejudice separated female musicians from males. "Unless a girl attains the rank of a successful virtuosa," wrote Sophie Drinker in *Women in Music*, "she has far less chance for a profitable and interesting career as an instrumentalist than if she were a man of equal native talent and proficiency."3 This prejudice was aided by the double-digit unemployment rampant in the United States.

In 1934, a group of young women approached Antonia with the idea of forming a full size professional orchestra comprised entirely of women.

One day, I happened to make a remark, because some musicians wanted to play some ensemble with me. I mean about nine girls, they wanted me to conduct them assembled in some kind of ensemble. And I made this remark, the remark of all remarks that, "If nine girls can play together then why not ninety?" And so I got a couple of key women together and I said, "How many women musicians are there in New York?" And [they said], "Well there's stacks of them but they never get any chances to play in orchestras." And so I said, "Well, we're just going to see about that."4

Antonia immediately set out to gather sponsors and collect funds to start the organization. She met with Eleanor Roosevelt at the White House and arranged meetings in New York to obtain support from Mayor Fiorello La Guardia and his wife.5 She ultimately signed on such important sponsors as Mrs. James Roosevelt,
Bruno Walter, Harold Bauer, Albert Spalding, Mr. and Mrs. Sigismond Stojowski, Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Mrs. Godfrey S. Rockefeller, Mrs. Edmund B. Wilson, Mrs. John Henry Hammond and others in the attempt to present a major professional woman’s orchestra to New York audiences.6

“A woman’s orchestra, formed with the aid of prominent sponsors and rehearsing quietly, will make its debut as the Women’s Orchestra of New York at the Town Hall on Monday evening, Feb. 18,” stated the New York Times in 1935. “The new ensemble of eighty players has been recruited under the direction of Miss [Antonia] Brico, who conducted the Musician’s Symphony Orchestra and the New York Civic Orchestra in this city.”7 The Women’s Orchestra of New York (later renamed the “New York Women’s Symphony Orchestra”) was a critical success, performing several concerts in 1935 and receiving an invitation to perform several more at Carnegie Hall the next season.

Equity was yet to be had in many areas of music for women, despite the success of Brico’s orchestra. Radio stations continued to practice a policy of hiring men rather than women, and many major symphony orchestras still resisted the concept of gender integrated organizations. The Musical Leader noted:

With few exceptions, the gentlemen who conduct the great orchestras of the country have never yet been able to employ women musicians. They do not openly discriminate. They simply take care there shall be no vacancies. The radio stations actively and openly discriminate against women orchestral players. Women are absolutely boycotted by the powers that be. Although many women are superior to some of the
men playing in some of the orchestras, it is useless for a woman to make application for a place in their sustaining programs. That radio stations should so drastically discriminate against woman orchestral players is incomprehensible."8

**NEW YORK WOMEN'S SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

ANTONIA BRICO
Conductor

THIRD SEASON
1936-1937

**CARNEGIE HALL**
5TH STREET AND SEVEN AVENUE
THREE TUESDAY EVENING CONCERTS
at 8:00

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Subscriptions are being received at the office of the Manager.
Manager: RICHARD CORKAY

Figure 5.1. New York Women's Symphony Program 1936-1937. Courtesy, Colorado Historical Society. A. Brico Collection. CHS, Box 7, Folder 237.9
The New York Women’s Symphony Orchestra grew both in sponsorship and musicality to become a premier orchestra in New York, both a critical success and financially solvent. The organization featured over one hundred women, one of the largest orchestras in the city. “One of the noteworthy features of the orchestra’s playing was its unwavering concentration upon its difficult task and its apparent unawareness of any other consideration than the work of music-making,” wrote Lawrence Gilman in the November 13, 1935 New York Herald-Tribune, “Miss Brico herself is a conductor of unchallengeable sincerity, artistic integrity and continuity of purpose; and she knows how to get what she wants from the human instruments on which she plays – so far as they are at present able to comply.”

All around the United States, women’s orchestras flourished and grew. “Sooner or later, there will be an undersupply of adequately trained male musicians in the symphonic field,” predicted a researcher for the state museum in Jefferson City, Missouri. “Due to technological unemployment, music is no desirable career for the man who must choose it as a profession and here lies the opportunity denied women since history began.”

Antonia managed to stay both busy and employed. The New York Women’s Symphony continued its success, performing at Carnegie Hall to full audiences. She also conducted WPA concerts and taught students. She even stayed in touch with her old teacher, Sigismund Stojowski, featuring him on at least one of her programs.
New York Women's Symphony Orchestra

TOWN HALL
113 WEST
43rd STREET
NEW YORK CITY

Saturday Evening, March 16, at 8:45

ANTONIA BRICO, Conductor
SIGISMOND STOJOWSKI, Pianist

PROGRAM

1. BEETHOVEN
   Epitome Overture

2. BEETHOVEN
   Symphony No. 2 in D major
   i. Adagio
   ii. Scherzo
   iii. Allegro

INTERMISSION

3. CHOPIN
   Concerto for piano in F minor
   i. Allegro
   ii. Scherzo
   iii. Allegro

4. WAGNER
   Overture to the Flying Dutchman

Tickets for the Series of Three Subscription Concerts
March 16th, March 31st and April 13th:

Children, each season for the three concerts: $5
Senior citizens ABCD: $4.50
Subscribers: $10
Ticket fees: $2
Tickets for individual concerts: $2 – $3.50 – $6

AT TOWN HALL BOX OFFICE

Figure 5.2. New York Women's Symphony Program, March 16, 1937. Courtesy, Colorado Historical Society. A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 7, Folder 237.
As the Depression continued, the number of musical opportunities for women declined, often driven by male hiring practices. This inequity in hiring was addressed at a Musician's Union rally in New York in 1938 where over 125 women protested what they called "an unjust discrimination" for which "there was absolutely no reason except habit." Antonia, of course, was the first principal speaker.

The law, medicine, economics, politics and many other professions are open to women. Why then should not music be equally open to them? There is no lack of opportunity to study, what with tuitionless schools, music colleges, private teachers. And the union admits us to its ranks. But what after that? Where shall we all work, when so many organizations will not only not accept us but not even give us auditions?13

The Musician's Union rally resulted in the formation of the Committee for the Recognition of Women in the Musical Profession. Director Jean Schneider stressed that the group needed to focus on striving for equal rights within the Union and bringing women's issues to the attention of the public. The women attending were encouraged to organize and become more active in union functions.

Two other significant events occurred during Miss Brico's residence in New York City. First, she became enamored with the music of Finnish composer Jean Sibelius. She had not experienced much of his work outside of a few of his compositions until she was introduced to the music by critic Olin Downes. She immediately became impressed with the originality and nationalistic tones of Sibelius' compositions.
Once I said to him, “Olin, I don’t know what to conduct. What shall I conduct on the next concert?” And he said, “Why don’t you conduct a Sibelius symphony?” I said, “Sibelius? I don’t know anything about Sibelius except *Valse Triste* and *Finlandia.*” ...So I conducted the First Symphony of Sibelius and I was so gone over it and so smitten by it that I said, “Where has this man been all my life?” I was just beside myself over it.  

Sibelius was unusual among period composers in that his music was not based on another’s. Antonia saw the Finnish composer to be an individualist, much like Wagner. In fact, Sibelius was one of the few early-20th century composers to not utilize the expressionist themes of Wagner’s work in his own compositions.

Antonia secured letters of introduction from both Mr. Downes and George Sjöblom, who wrote articles on Finnish music for the *New York Times.* In much the same fashion as her journey to meet Dr. Karl Muck, Antonia set out in late 1937 to meet Jean Sibelius in person.

Taking leave of her orchestra, Antonia traveled to Finland and arrived in Helsinki in September, 1937. She continued to Järvenpää and sought out the Sibelius home. She did not know if Sibelius expected her arrival, but she persevered in her usual fashion.

So I rang the doorbell and one of their two maids... opened the door. And of course I gave [the maid] the two letters. And I said I was an American for Mr. Sibelius and showed the letters. So she went into the main room and my heart was just stopping and trembling... And I was shaking and so much and I thought this is how one must feel when one meets Beethoven – if one were to meet Beethoven... And finally in came this huge man – so tall and big – and he held both his arms out to me and I walked right into them. Right off the bat it was love at first
sight— I mean adoration... You can live an eternity in an hour. Well, I was there for three hours... And [later] Mamma Sibelius took both my hands in hers and said to me in German, "It must be a wonderful thing to meet [Jean] for the first time." She adored him so.\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{center}
\textit{The New York Times}
\textit{Jean Downes}
\textit{June 29, 1937}
\end{center}

Dear Mr. Sibelius:

I want herewith to introduce Miss Antonia Breeze, conductor of the Women's Symphony Orchestra of New York, a very serious, gifted and interpreting musician who has scheduled your first performance in New York for the upcoming season and who wishes to ask you particularly some questions concerning the interpretation of your own works.

She would greatly appreciate an audience with you. I am glad to have Miss Breeze, this letter because I know how industrious and ambitious she is and how much genuinely good work she has done for music in New York.

With best wishes, I am

\begin{center}
Sincerely yours,
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\textit{Olin Downes}
\end{center}

\begin{center}
Mr. Jan Sibelius
Jyväskylä
Finland
\end{center}

Figure 5.3. Letter of Introduction from Olin Downes to Jean Sibelius, 1937. \textsuperscript{10}

The two became fast friends, although Antonia was in awe of the composer. Sibelius instructed her on correct interpretation of his music and helped her annotate her scores of his musical compositions. It was an association that would persist until Sibelius' death in 1957.
The second event occurred when Mills College in California decided to award Antonia Brico an honorary Doctorate of Music degree. In a ceremony on the Mills College campus, the conductor was presented with the first of seven honorary degrees. The degree presented in a ceremony on June 13, 1938, recognized Antonia for her work:

as an artist, pianist and conductor and for her valiant and effective crusade on behalf of an orchestra of women helping to open this field of artistic endeavor to her sister musicians.

Figure 5.4. Mayor Fiorello La Guardia of New York, Antonia Brico (guest conducting the Bay Region Symphony Orchestra, a WPA ensemble) and Mayor Angelo Rossi of San Francisco in Mayor Rossi’s Office. 1938.
Following these successes, the persistent conductor continued her fight for musical equality. Antonia disbanded the very successful New York Women's Symphony Orchestra in 1939 and announced the formation of a fully integrated orchestra: the first large ensemble of its type in the country. The new organization, called the "Brico Symphony Orchestra," consisted of eighty three musicians, twenty five of whom were men.

Antonia stated that, "the time has now come to stimulate interest in the mixed symphony orchestra," nationwide. It was her belief that men and women could cooperate effectively in an orchestral environment. Unfortunately, her board of directors disagreed. They felt that the novelty of an all-female orchestra was a sufficient draw and that integrating the orchestra would lose money.

Antonia, always prepared to overcome obstructions, continued with her plan for a male/female orchestra. The Brico Symphony performed Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 with noted soloist Simon Barère at Carnegie hall. This new organization eventually performed three similar concerts and ultimately was featured at the 1939 New York World's Fair. One concert even featured over one hundred musicians and a chorus of over eighty five vocalists performing Giuseppe Verdi's Requiem.

Although the orchestra was well received by critics, the board of directors reacted to Antonia's obstinacy by withdrawing financial support. They strongly felt
that an integrated orchestra was no novelty. "[The board felt that] the female aspect of the orchestra was its interesting feature," Antonia later stated, "Since the orchestra had no capital, that was that."²²

She maintained her beliefs, even in the face of this opposition:

I'm opposed to segregation. I formed the women's symphony but when I proved my point that women were capable of playing every instrument, I then changed the group to a mixed orchestra. I don't believe in groups that are just women conductors, composers or musicians. In life both sexes mix, and in music they should do the same.²³

Unfortunately, the continuing Depression in the United States and the loss of financial backing ultimately proved to be the undoing of many women's orchestras, including the new Brico Symphony. Despite an outstanding first season, the Brico Symphony disbanded in 1940.

Antonia embarked on a fairly ambitious conducting tour that summer. She continued her WPA programs, conducting programs both in the Midwest and in California. She also appeared as a guest conductor with other symphonies. One major performance took place in Denver in June, 1940, where she had stopped to visit a friend, Mrs. George E. Crammer and learn about Denver's symphony orchestras. Coverage in the local papers allowed Antonia to vent some of her frustrations with the male bias in the music industry. Her opinions made local headlines in the Denver Post:

Women bring babies into the world and for years, regardless of whether they are boys or girls, the children receive equal treatment and devotion. Time comes when baby puts on skirts or trousers and for the
skirts the tussle for constitutional rights begins. Years ago I decided to combat this discrimination in music.24

Antonia appeared as a guest conductor with the Denver Symphony Orchestra six months later on December 10, 1940. The concert was a varied program, featuring Sibelius’ Symphony No. 1, Beethoven’s Leonore Symphony No. 3, Enesco’s Rumanian Rhapsody No. 1 and Wagner’s Prelude to Lohengrin. One composition on the program was fellow New Yorker Joyce Barthelson’s Overture, a piece based on a folk song theme and a premiere work for the local audience. Antonia dedicated the performance to her good friend, a concert that was carried nationwide on NBC via local radio affiliate KOA.25 Denver Post critic John C. Kendel was firm in his admiration for both the conductor and her pro-feminist cause:

All Denver joins me in saluting a first-class conductor. Dr. Antonia Brico, guest conductor with the Denver Symphony orchestra, not only justified fully her advance notices but went far beyond them. It is a sad commentary on music lovers of America that there is any sex prejudice in the recognition of superb talent in the field of conducting. Antonia Brico is a distinct personality dependent only upon her ability and vast musical knowledge for her success on the podium. She has a dynamic beat that conveys to her instrument, the orchestra, exactly what she wants... At the conclusion of the program, believe it or not, the audience gave the conductor not only a demonstration of appreciation but rose and cheered her to the echo. When a Denver audience gives vent to “bravos” and huzzas” at a symphony concert, that is news indeed.26
CHAPTER SIX

NO WOMEN ALLOWED

In 1940, Dr. Antonia Brico traveled to Mills College in Oakland, returning the favor of their honorary doctorate by teaching a summer course in conducting. She had given lectures there before, along with special presentations on both herself and the world of conducting in general. The course was based on notes she gathered together from her varied experiences. Later, Antonia assembled the notes into an unpublished manuscript entitled, “The History and Development of the Art of Conducting.”

Building on an earlier teaching session at Golden Gate College in 1938, the notes Antonia made at Mills College in 1940 paint a picture of a mature, knowledgeable, experienced and opinionated conductor. Antonia shared with her students the insights gleaned from her professors in Germany, meshed with her own strong opinions. A few excerpts indicate that Antonia had advanced from apt student to a virtuoso in her profession:

On the act of conducting:

It is so tremendously important to be technically correct. So many conductors spurn technique, and conduct solely with the heart instead of with the heart controlled by a well disciplined mind.
On qualifications for a conductor:

A conductor should definitely have absolute pitch for many reasons, for sight reading, for correcting a false note in any instrument, for keeping the instruments in tune, for easy finding of the place in the score in sequences.

On age and the conductor:

A conductor of 40 or 45 years of age is still a young conductor, for conducting is so much a matter of experience and maturity. Child prodigies in conducting, though hailed, are impossible for it takes years of preparation [to become a conductor].

On the teaching of conducting:

Conducting can be taught as well as any other subject... Ear training is most essential for the conductor must be able to pick out where the wrong note is being played, which violinist is using the wrong fingerling. A conductor should have absolute pitch or a very good relative [pitch], a knowledge of composition, counterpoint, piano, score reading on the piano in reducing a score...

On the conductor and use of the orchestral score:

Except for Toscanini who has an almost photographic memory and is nearly blind, and who has conducted for years and years, it is almost always exhibitionism when a conductor uses no score. The men in the orchestra hate it. They want to feel the security of seeing the score before the conductor. Even if each musician knows his entrance he wants the cue from the conductor – he wants to feel that rapport. He has no confidence if he sees the conductor struggling to remember his cues.

If only for reference, the score should be in front of the conductor. From repetition a conductor practically knows his score, remembers just where on a page a certain section enters, and often does not refer to it for pages and pages, turning them rapidly, automatically.
An audience doesn't really know whether or not one is a competent conductor. Sometimes the orchestra is so fine that it plays right anyway. But the men know... I have had orchestra members occasionally play a wrong note, deliberately, and I have [had] to catch it- and instantly, to show them that I know.

Unless an orchestra has the deepest respect for, and confidence in its conductor's musicianship, beautiful performance is hopeless.

On the differences between conducting symphonic works and opera:

Operatic conducting is very different from Symphonic conducting, for [in opera] the human element enters strongly, and there are likely to be accidents. The conductor is at the mercy of nervous singers, who may have faulty technique, or because of weariness are not giving their best performance. It is difficult to produce an operatic performance which is as brilliant and perfect as a symphony, conducting opera is like trying to drive a nine horse chariot and make each horse keep in step with the other nine.

On the study of music, Antonia was even more opinionated. Here, she revealed not only her grounding in Germanic strictness, but her disappointment with the more lax aspects of American musical college studies and the results of their programs:

We are too anxious to perform before being properly equipped, but there are no short-cuts to success in any line, but least of all in the music world. Good hard boning is necessary. Opposition is healthy, for if a person persists in following a definite line in spite of it, then he is likely to succeed.

Too often people become teachers because they cannot become concert performers. If you love the subject and want to impart it to someone else - then you fulfill a mission. But if you do it because there is nothing else to do, then it is pathetic.
August, 1940 found Antonia back in New York, desperately trying to find employment in the depressed musical economy of pre-war America. The National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C. invited Antonia to a guest conductor. She
conducted the orchestra at the Watergate, the first time a woman had ever conducted there and the very first time a woman had conducted the National Symphony itself in its long history. Reviews of the concert were marked by a seeming fascination with Antonia’s choice of dress on stage.

George Gaul (personnel manager for the orchestra) asked me if I brought a change of costume for intermission. Imagine, a change in the middle of a concert! I’ve only got one dress; it’s a year old. I always wear black with touches of white. Wear a sleeveless dress? Over my dead body! Can you imagine how it would look for a woman to wave her arms about with no sleeves on? Like playing tennis in an evening gown.¹³

The Washington Times-Herald was more direct in its opinion of Antonia. Though focusing on the ‘sleeveless’ dress, the writer also focused on the woman herself that was in the spotlight.

Miss Brico neither drinks cocktails, coffee or tea, nor does she smoke cigarettes. “Music is my stimulant,” she said. She gave up coffee 15 years ago, “Because,” she said, “I liked it too much.”¹⁴

Antonia filled the time between profitable assignments by staging a benefit concert for war-torn Finland at Town Hall in New York. Intending to bring the plight of Finland to the attention of still-neutral America, she featured the works of Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, a friend to whom she still sent care packages. A combined chorus, accompanied by composer/pianist Joyce Barthelson performed on May 18, 1941. The concert succeeded in drawing attention to the cause and was a financial success. In gratitude, Sibelius wired, “Finland deeply touched by your sympathy.”
Figure 6.2. Detail from the program for the Benefit Concert for Finland. 1941. Courtesy, Colorado Historical Society. A. Brico Collection. CHS. Box 7, Folder 219. 

Figure 6.3. Cable from Jean Sibelius after Brico's concert for Finland, 1941. Courtesy, Colorado Historical Society. A. Brico Collection. CHS. Box 1, Folder 40.
With conducting opportunities declining and desiring more time to teach, Antonia spent more and more time with friends in Denver, Colorado. She arrived in the Mile High City in January, 1942, offering private conducting, piano and voice lessons to local students. Although many published sources place Antonia’s move to Denver as late as 1945, personal correspondence from the period demonstrates that she permanently remained after her arrival in 1942. A letter from her New York accountant at Callahan & Fries on May 13, 1942, stated that she would need to secure a new accounting firm in the event that she remained in Colorado for the tax filing year in 1943.  

Many were happy to welcome the famous conductor back to the Queen City of the Plains. Robert B. Hudson of the Rocky Mountain Radio Council immediately consulted Antonia on improving musical programs on Denver radio. He felt that her expertise in arranging WPA concerts could help bring classical programming not only to KOA, the NBC affiliate which often broadcast the Denver Symphony, but also to the CBS affiliate, KLZ. Although it is unclear what influence Antonia had on radio programming, it was obvious that Denver’s cultural community welcomed the conductor who had become so famous in New York and Europe. 

Antonia purchased a house at 959 South Pennsylvania Street and settled into the challenges of making a career in yet another new city. Submitting numerous applications to secure permanent positions, she signed an agreement to be the
conductor of the Trinity Choir at Denver's Trinity Methodist Church in 1943. The agreement also called for her to be their choir organist from October 10, 1943, through June 19, 1944. The position with the church ultimately lasted for five years.

Other guest conducting opportunities presented themselves as well. Antonia was again featured as a guest conductor with the Denver Symphony. She also taught a course on the music of Wagner at Colorado College. Though a far cry from Carnegie Hall, the conducting work and her students kept her busy.

Antonia continued to seek permanent symphonic conducting opportunities despite these successes. An announcement was made that the Denver Civic Symphony Orchestra was planning to become a fully professional organization and was in search of a permanent director. Although Antonia applied for the position, the symphony board rejected her application to become the organization’s permanent conductor without offering an audition. Antonia later claimed that the symphony board actually extended a formal invitation, but the organizers and board members withdrew their offer when they realized that Dr. Brico was not a male conductor but was actually a woman. Many years later, she explained this duplicity:

In Denver... there is a club called the Cactus Club, a very exclusive male club. The orchestra president said to me... “Why, we couldn’t have a woman conductor. She couldn’t be a member of the Cactus Club!”
The end of World War II brought renewed contacts with Europe and renewed opportunities for Antonia to conduct. Though busy with her students, Antonia contacted Jean Sibelius and asked to be allowed to travel to Finland to conduct. The composer used his influence and invited her to conduct the Helsinki State Symphony Orchestra in the fall of 1946.

Excited, Antonia arrived in Finland in September, 1946. She visited Aïnola, the beautiful Sibelius home located 25 miles from Helsinki. The house was named for Jean’s wife Aino, and literally meant, “a place where Aino dwells.”

One of the daughters of Sibelius took me to Järvenpää, where the master was, and I walked right into his arms first thing. And he and his wife, well, they were just absolutely magnificent to me. I dined there and I slept there so many times that season.

Antonia conducted a special program of the music of Jean Sibelius in Helsinki in September, 1946. Sibelius himself was present for the concert, an event that was a treat both for the composer and the conductor. The great composer described the American as “a conductor and an artist who understands how to exalt the music and the listeners.” Antonia was just as inspired as Sibelius by the association.
Several times a week I went there for dinner and stayed overnight... and slept in what is known as the "Seventh Symphony Room," where he composed the *Seventh Symphony*. And I used to lie in bed in the mornings (I woke up very early) and I would be studying my score at five o'clock in the morning, and suddenly I woke up and I thought, "Heavenly days, Jean Sibelius is sleeping downstairs; and here I am studying the works of the great and famous composer and here he is downstairs – very alive. And that was a tremendous thing. ...And I don't know what it was that made such a mutual attachment. It was quite obvious that I would be attached to him. But that he would be so kind to me and his wife and all of his five daughters – they took me everywhere with them."

Antonia conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra in the Royal Albert Hall in November, 1946. She returned to Finland on December 8, 1946, conducting a concert in honor of Sibelius' birthday, then vacationed for a short period before returning to the United States in 1947. She carried with her scores to two of Sibelius' works, carefully marked with indications for changes in tempo, emphasis and interpretations at certain points. She carefully utilized these scores, delineating Sibelius' indications with the initials 'J.S.' for clarity.

Antonia returned to her duties at the Denver's Trinity Methodist Church with a renewed vigor. She founded the Denver Bach Society in 1946 and continued to set down roots in the community, even as she remarked that she would like to return to California someday. She accumulated students and taught lessons in her studio in her home at 959 South Pennsylvania Street.

The Denver Businessmen's Orchestra, an amateur ensemble, approached Dr. Brico in 1947 with an offer for her to be their conductor. The orchestra was...
composed of both amateur and professional musicians of all ages and had been searching for a leader. The ensemble became a home to the woman, even as it weathered several name changes in the following few years. The Denver Businessman’s Orchestra became the Denver Community Symphony, then the Denver Philharmonic, then returned to its original name by 1955. Antonia’s student base grew as well, with nearly 70 students either taking lessons or participating in master classes at the Brico Studio.

She traveled to Finland again in 1947, 1948 and 1949, spending more time with Sibelius, gaining insight into his music and carefully notating her own scores with

Figure 7.1. Antonia’s house at 959 South Pennsylvania Street as it appeared in March. 2000. Photo by Kris Christensen.
both her own references as well as the composer’s own suggestions. She conducted several concerts in Finland, Holland and Germany, often performing works with the composer in residence. Sibelius later said of Antonia, “She has in a masterful manner, with artistry and understanding, played my composition Pohjola’s Daughter as well as my First Symphony so that to me it was an inspiring experience.”7 The citizens of Finland appreciated Antonia as well, both for her artistic ability and her support of the Finnish people during the Second World War. She was awarded the Pro-Finlandia gold medal by President Judo K. Paasikivi in 1947 for her support and contributions to the people and culture of Finland. The medal was also awarded for her outstanding accomplishments in interpreting Sibelius’ music. From that day on, Antonia made a point of wearing the medal anytime she conducted a program of Sibelius music.8

Antonia also stayed busy during this period, performing on a piano and conducting tour of Austria, and conducted the Mozarteum Orchestra in Salzburg.9 Even as she traveled, she wrote letters to Sibelius, the man whom she called, “dearest Pappa.”

I’m fortunate to conduct in Germany, some cities in the American Zone, Stuttgart and others. I will conduct Pohjola’s Daughter and En Saga as many times as possible, as I have all the orchestra parts.10

Sibelius followed the progress of his protege, listening to radio broadcasts and writing letters of his own in return. Although many of Antonia’s letters to him survive, only one letter from Sibelius himself has surfaced in recent years. On
November 12, 1949, the composer described his pride in the woman’s conducting skills:

What I heard [on the radio] from Holland was very good – yes, outstanding. You have such a deep understanding for my art. We are happy about your artistic triumphs and we send our best regards.11

The two remained in close contact, exchanging letters, comparing notes on musical interpretation and filling an emotional void that had remained in the woman since the death of Karl Muck in 1940. “I spent many hours with Sibelius at his home near Helsinki,” she told the New York Times. “He is in fine health and appears fifteen years younger than he is.”12 To Sibelius himself she was more direct about her feelings.

And just now I am thinking especially of you as my orchestra [the Denver Businessman’s Orchestra] plays your Second Symphony... The musicians are now so trained in your works that they have developed great understanding of your music. And how they love you!! I rehearse the strings alone, – high brass alone, horns by themselves, etc. Those great string passages (and high brass) entrances... 20 measures before the last movement, I conduct very slowly and in 12 instead of 4 so that these passages later can be played very clearly in tempo. Oh Pappa if you only knew how I long for you – when I conduct I can’t put into words my admiration and love for your music.13
I haven’t even talked about the greatest influence on my life – Albert Schweitzer, the great humanitarian who was four times a doctor, an enormously gifted organist... I met him first in Aspen where some enterprising person [Friedl Pfeifer] wanted to make a big ski resort... Well this person had... a two hundred year anniversary [celebration] of Goethe’s birth and they celebrated by asking the greatest scholars in the world to come to Aspen including Schweitzer who came from the middle of Africa. They asked him to come and to give two lectures. Of course, this was right on my doorstep and I was beside myself with joy... Well, to see him once was to want to see him all the time.¹

The City of Aspen had been fairly quiet until the combination of two individuals: Austrian skier Friedl Pfeifer and Chicago industrialist Walter Pappaeke. Along with Pappaeke’s art patron wife Elizabeth, they set out to make Aspen a world class ski resort and cultural center. Aspen Mountain opened with the world’s largest ski lift in 1947. In 1949, Walter Pappaeke worked with Dr. Robert Hutchins, Chancellor of the University of Chicago to create the Goethe Bicentennial Convocation.²

Dr. Albert Schweitzer was invited by Pappaeke and Hutchins to be a prominent speaker at the Goethe event in Aspen. Scholars from the world over were invited to celebrate the bicentennial of the birth of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a twenty-day event highlighting Goethe’s writings, as well as the music of fellow German Johann
Sebastian Bach. Schweitzer was invited not only because he was a noted authority on both Goethe and Bach, but because of the publicity his appearance would bring to the event.

Schweitzer originally refused the invitation but reconsidered when the sum of $2,000,000 francs (approximately $6,100) was offered as an honorarium. Schweitzer knew that such a sum of money was not only unavailable in war-torn Europe, but would be useful in establishing a new health facility in his African clinic in Lambarene. Relenting, he traveled on what was to be his only visit to America, arriving in Aspen on July 4, 1949. 3 He gave his first lecture on July 6, speaking in French and translated by Dr. Emery Ross, treasurer of the Albert Schweitzer Fellowship.

Looking with the eyes of the spirit upon nature, as it is within ourselves, we find that in us also there is matter and spirit. Searching into the phenomena of the spirit in us, we realize that we belong to world of the spirit, and that we must let ourselves be guided by it. The whole philosophy of Goethe consists in the observation of material and spiritual phenomena outside and within ourselves, and in the conclusions that can be drawn from this. The spirit is light, which struggles with matter, which represents darkness. What happens in the world and within ourselves is the result of this encounter. 4

Antonia attended Schweitzer's lecture under overcast skies along with a record crowd of 2,000. She had been drawn to Schweitzer not only because of his recordings and interpretations of Bach in the 1930s, but also because of his humanitarian work in Africa, his theological writings and his scholarly publications. It is likely that she was ultimately attracted to him because of his individuality. His own personal drive was
much like her other idols, Paramansaji Yogananda and composer Jean Sibelius.

"So we have these two," Antonia later said of both Sibelius and Schweitzer, "both men of the forest, men of music, with great humility and great simplicity." 5

Antonia and Dr. Schweitzer found a common interest in the music of Johann Sebastian Bach; Antonia as a pianist and conductor, Schweitzer as an organist and scholar. Schweitzer's approach to the study of Bach was, much like his studies of Goethe, based on both artistic and spiritual themes. An example of his teachings can be found in a 1905 article, *What Bach is to Me*:

Bach's music is at once of this world and infinitely sublime. It goes beyond technique and becomes a world view – the essence of Being. Each voice has its own will, its own personality. All are free to meet in freedom, to go their own way, to hate or to love, and in the end work together in order to create something that is alive because it is. 6

Antonia had admired Yogananda for his gift of spiritual teaching, his melding of the spirit and love. She had found a love for Sibelius through his immense gift of music, a joy given life through the musical score. In Dr. Albert Schweitzer, Antonia found a melding of both of these, music analyzed spiritually.

Albert Schweitzer was the greatest individual to have ever been – his reverence for life was not just humans, but also animals, town, country, and the universe. He did what he wanted to, administering to the sick and the poor, and for that he gave up organ playing which was the most wonderful thing in the world to him. 7

Antonia's conducting and teaching duties continued even as she made plans to visit the S in Africa. The Denver Businessman's Orchestra began its third season with
Antonia as its conductor: a season marked by increasing accolades from the public. Antonia insisted on challenging her musicians, both musically and culturally. A critic’s review of a January 1950 concert is typical of the opinions concerning the amateur organization.

Audacity and artistic responsibility in equal parts figured in the decision of the Denver Businessman's orchestra to make a Bruckner symphony the main item on its second program of the season. Playing under Dr. Antonio [sic] Brico's persevering direction, the orchestra drew a good crowd to Phipps Auditorium Thursday evening... It was typical of the workman-like earnestness of the group that Bruckner's fourth symphony, known as the "Romantic," was selected. Dr. Brico imposed on the players her understanding of Bruckner and there was evidence in the performance of the careful manner in which she had prepared the work... It was no slight achievement for an off-hours' group that the symphony came over as readily as it did.

Antonia traveled again to Europe in August, 1950, stopping in Paris, Munich and Oberammergau, then to Salzburg for a conducting debut. After visits to London and Edinburgh, she traveled to Finland for three weeks of study with Sibelius prior to another guest-conducting performance in Helsinki. Finally, she conducted in Vienna and Frankfurt before making her long-anticipated visit to Dr. Albert Schweitzer in French Equatorial Africa.

The fall of 1950 found Antonia at Schweitzer's clinic in Lambarene, located in the depths of French Equatorial Africa. Established in a chicken coop prior to World War I, the hospital had grown to become one of the few modern health facilities in all of central Africa.
In a letter home on November 13, 1950, Antonia remarked on how the facilities had “immense cleanliness,” despite the desperate need for funds to upgrade them. She remarked on Schweitzer’s love for animals and his obvious humor, apparent in the naming of three pet pelicans Tristan, Lohengrin and Parsifal, all characters from Wagner’s operas. She was amazed at what the doctor accomplished, the obvious love the workers in his clinic had for him and the work that continued despite the deprivations of both location and lack of ongoing funding.

This is another Leonardo Da Vinci, as I realize that Dr. S. is not only four times a doctor, but is also an architect, carpenter, road builder. There is no end to what he has done here. ¹⁰

Antonia spent several months with Schweitzer, assisting in the clinic and speaking long into the night on Bach and spiritual matters. She accompanied the doctor to a leper colony, taking 8mm home movies of Schweitzer at work.¹¹ She made further plans to return. Their association that would last until Schweitzer’s death in 1965.

What Gandhi said is applicable to Albert Schweitzer. “If a single man achieves the highest kind of love it will be sufficient to neutralize the hate of millions.”¹²

I shall always be grateful to the Aspen Institute because it was there I began my association with Dr. Albert Schweitzer. He invited me to go to live in France in his home and for six summers I did, studying with him.¹³

Antonia returned home again to the Brico Studio on South Pennsylvania Street, a grand house built with stone quarried in Marble, Colorado. The main room
of the house had two matched nine-foot Steinway pianos with a large Persian carpet beneath, photographs of a growing collection of musical celebrities, composers and friends. Several large busts of Bach, Beethoven and others adorned the room.

Among Antonia's students was a young local girl named Judy Collins. Pigtailed, eager to please, the girl had begun studies in 1949 and slowly became one of Antonia's favorites. Judy had been playing piano since the age of four and had considerable talent by the time she became Antonia's student at the age of nine. By the beginning of 1951, the girl had moved from simple works to the more complicated compositions of Chopin and Debussy on her own grand piano, purchased on the strong recommendation of her teacher. Judy was musically gifted; her father, a radio host, had encouraged the younger Collins in vocal and instrumental music.

Antonia found in Collins a child much like her in talent. Remembering all too well her own childhood without instruction, the conductor drove little Judy mercilessly, demanding more and more practice from the young pianist. The elder woman was determined to give Judy the childhood that Antonia never had. She imposed strict guidelines, discouraging her student from studying popular music or seeking outside interests.

Judy thrived under the instruction, even as she searched for her own musical identity in the face of her teacher's growing demands. She worked hard to live up to her teacher's expectations, desperate to please the elder woman. Judy played music
she had never believed attainable, spending long hours of practice perfecting more technically complicated musical compositions. Judy later recalled,

   It was not that Brico was cruel, exactly; yet she made me suffer, thrusting upon me her longing that I be better, and do better, knowing I could, and telling me I should. She used a kind of emotional blackmail on me... When I didn’t live up to her expectations, there were many tears... I determined, of course, to do better, to do better for her. For me, but especially for her.14

   By the spring of 1951, Judy Collins was thirteen years old and working on Mozart’s Concerto for Two Pianos in Bb Major with another Brico student, Danno Guerrero. It was a demanding composition but the girl persevered. She and Guerrero premiered with the Denver Community Symphony (Denver Businessman’s Orchestra) on a snowy night at Phipps Auditorium on February 19, 1953.15 Although the audience was small, Antonia was ecstatic. She promised that the girl would be the first of her students to perform Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto #2 with the orchestra in the near future.

   Still, young Judy was at a rebellious age. She yearned to express her music vocally, to tell stories with words. She chafed at Antonia’s restrictions, wanting to explore popular music instead of addressing the masters. The elder Antonia kept Judy from popular music, perhaps fearing that the young girl would be forced to work on radio and in stores, much as Antonia had in her own youth. Judy later remembered:

   Brico, with her scowl or her grand, smiling, European approval, spoke of technique, devotion, timing, determination. In my lessons she
constantly told me I didn’t practice enough, I wasn’t devoted enough, but she believed in me anyway. 16

Judy struggled with difficulties at home, problems that only added to the teenager’s stress. Her father was blind and alcoholic, her mother constantly struggled to raise a growing family that included three sons and Judy and was pregnant with a fifth child in 1954. The girl was driven both by Antonia to play with the Denver Community Symphony and by her father to perform publically on her father’s occasional public appearances. Rebellion was inevitable.

Judy began drinking at 15 and attempted to commit suicide shortly thereafter. Depressed, agonized as she memorized the Rachmaninoff concerto, she struggled to find her own identity in the her growing discontent with her life. She borrowed her father’s guitar and began learning folk music – first Irish folk songs such as *When Irish Eyes are Smiling*, then more contemporary works. She rebelled against Antonia, singing with local dance bands at Lowry Air Force Base. The classics called to the girl, but the call of folk music was stronger.

It was not long after a master class in December, 1954, that Judy announced that she would leave Antonia and pursue a career as a folk singer. Predictably, the elder woman was devastated. It was to be the first in a series of disappointments for a woman who was described by Judy Collins as a “Cinderella” story.

We were both upset. The scene at Brico’s studio was tearful and extremely hard. I left Brico behind, with regrets that still haunt my dreams, but with great joy as well. I knew I had found the music I
loved. It wasn’t Daddy’s music, those lush and rich songs from Broadway theater, and it wasn’t Brico’s with those cold marble statues staring down at my drooping shoulders. It was something of my own.17
CHAPTER NINE

BURIED ALIVE IN DENVER

Her favorite student gone and foreign conducting opportunities diminishing, Antonia turned to her friends in Denver for comfort. Her work with the (renamed) Denver Businessman’s Orchestra continued, its numbers augmented by members of the military band at Lowry Air Force Base and other local musicians. She still continued to teach, selectively accepting students and utilizing close friends to teach students who were not yet ready to enter the sanctum of the Brico Studio. One friend was fellow teacher Joanna Palacas, who later recalled Antonia’s teaching methods.

Antonia was the most systematic and consistent teacher I ever observed. Although I had studied piano pedagogy in college, I really learned to teach from her methodical system. I became her assistant, taking borderline students until they were ready for Brico.¹

Antonia had learned from her experience with Judy Collins. She avoided putting quite so much pressure on subsequent students. Still, Antonia insisted on intense study from her students; constant practice and absolute diligence. They needed to be disciplined and fully prepared to follow all of Antonia’s instructions. The most promising students often were encouraged to play two instruments so that they could also perform with the Denver Businessman’s Orchestra. This combination of intense drive and European discipline were the foundations for Antonia’s teaching.
I run a pretty European studio in my house. By that I mean the strictness of it. I was brought up in the Prussian school in Berlin, for a few years, and there they were ever so much strict... But I can't compare much [with] other studios because I know in my studio, either the students conform and do what I say or they're out. I've no time and no patience and the people shouldn't spend the money.²

Antonia continued pursuing her desire to conduct but found much to bring her contentment as a teacher. Though she had lost Judy Collins as a student, there were many more aspiring pianists and conductors who began careers with Antonia. The changing group of parents, students and professionals who gathered at the Brico Studio for master classes, lessons and comradery became her family.

I play rehearsals all the time [on piano] and I teach because I love to teach, I have to, I love to. And one of my big things is to [teach] students, and I love to involve myself with students and I want to be there with students.³

This secure group of students and friends proved helpful as many pivotal spiritual figures in Antonia's life began to pass away. Paramahansa Yogananda died on March 7, 1952, an event which his followers called the Mahasamadhi, the God-illuminated conscious exit from the body at the time of physical death. Antonia remained in contact with the Self-Realization Fellowship for the rest of her life, visiting their headquarters several times including a visit in 1954 with students and friends. A photograph of Yogananda remained prominent in her home and was at her bedside until her death.

Another important father figure in Antonia's life died less than ten years later.
"Pappa," composer Jean Sibelius, died in Ainola on September 20, 1957. Antonia was heartbroken. "He called me his sixth daughter," she recalled later. Antonia conducted Sibelius' music in a special concert with the Denver Businessman's Orchestra on November 11, 1957, dedicating the performance to the memory of the great Finnish composer. She gave voice to her grief in an annual letter written to her friends:

Many of you have written me and I know felt with me, when the world heard of the passing of the distinguished Finnish composer, Professor Jean Sibelius. Although he was 91 years of age, I could not ever bring myself to think that I would ever journey to Finland without seeing him. Alas, this time has come and I know that many, many people in America, Europe and elsewhere will mourn his passing, but I in particular will miss him as a friend, counselor and teacher.

Antonia continued to exchange letters with Dr. Albert Schweitzer, corresponding in German and remaining a part of his life. She gave lectures on Schweitzer and his work, his studies on Bach and his humanitarian views. It was a relationship that lasted for over fifteen years and only ended with Schweitzer's death in 1965. Twenty years later, Antonia struggled with her sorrow and intense emotion as she described Schweitzer in the film, Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman:

[Being with Albert Schweitzer] was too divine for words. Its hard to explain to people if they haven't seen his eyes... He was such a sensational person. He was so humble looking and wore old floppy hats. But when he looked in your eyes, that about all you needed to turn yourself inside out.

We all had our duties [at the hospital in Lambarene]. And the while he would be talking about tropical medicine [so someone] and [talking to]
sombre else about building the leper hospital. He'd turn to me and say, "Now in this certain [musical] phrase you do such and so." And then he'd talk to me for hours at a time at night next to his little piano with organ petals and he would sit there and explain everything like that to me and I would play for him.

But it isn't just music I learned from him. It was philosophy and life and so many things. [I]t's impossible to relate in a few minutes what it means to be with a man like that for fifteen years, a man who is so knowledgeable in so many fields.7

For the first time in many years, Antonia found herself without the mentors that had guided so much of her life. All had been father figures, providing comfort, support and instruction. From her earliest days with Steindorf and Stojowski, to Yogananda and Muck, Sibelius and Schweitzer; they had been the guides for the path that determined Antonia's life and career. With Schweitzer's death, the last of her mentors was gone, leaving her alone with her students and duties in Denver.

Despite her sorrow at the loss of these personal friends, Antonia continued to garner further conducting and teaching opportunities, often to no avail. She applied to conduct the Colorado Springs Symphony in 1954, only to be passed over by the symphony board in favor of Walter Eisenburg of Pueblo. She applied to Contra Costa Junior College in Martinez, California in 1956 to teach choral music as well, listing among her qualifications her studies in Berlin and studies with other great scholars. Unfortunately, her lack of a higher degree (she only possessed a B.A. and an honorary doctorate) probably contributed to her failure to secure permanent teaching positions at Contra Costa or any other college or university.
Antonia also applied again to become conductor of the Denver Symphony Orchestra in 1963. *Rocky Mountain News* columnist Marjorie Barrett had written an article urging the Denver Symphony to offer the opening conductor position to Antonia, a very public plea to finally do "the right thing." Despite some public support, the Symphony ultimately hired Vladimir Golschmann, a European who spent much of his time abroad, a choice typical of Denver Symphony board choices until the Symphony's demise in the 1980s.

Antonia continued her work with the Denver Businessman's Orchestra, working hard to meld the semi-professional group into an world class organization. Indeed, many of the orchestra's followers believed the group to be superior musically to the fully-paid male-led Denver Symphony. A *Rocky Mountain News* article written by Marjorie Barrett in 1957 noticed the differences between the amateur organization and other local groups.

One of the most musically ambitious organizations in the Denver area is the Denver Businessman’s Orchestra. Made up of musicians who rehearse after work and on Sundays, who receive no financial remuneration for their efforts, the orchestra offers some of the most rewarding concerts in the season.

In the newspaper article, Antonia explained her philosophy in conducting: why she managed great results with the amateur musicians and why the orchestra was important to her.

* I work the members hard. I know no other way. I have always been taught fidelity to the score. The orchestra members come from all over
the area because they are interested in playing. Their love and devotion to the music they make moves me.\textsuperscript{10}

In 1967, the Denver Businessman’s Orchestra changed their name to become the Brico Symphony in honor of the conductor who had led them for twenty years. Antonia also conducted various community groups, both orchestral and choral, including the Westminster Symphony Orchestra and the Rocky Mountain Concert Band. She continued to teach voice, piano and conducting and give lectures on subjects ranging from Schweitzer to the demanding qualities necessary for modern conductors. Antonia also featured soloists from all walks of life with her orchestra, including a young pianist named Philippe Entremont to a Colorado State University faculty violinist Wilfred Schwartz. She also found time to lead the Greater Denver Opera Association and served as director for the Boulder Philharmonic and the Women’s String Orchestra.

The University of California at Berkeley chose to remember their famous graduate in a unique fashion in 1968. On the occasion of college’s one hundredth anniversary, Dr. Antonia Brico was honored with a fellowship as one of U.C. Berkeley’s one hundred most distinguished graduates. She was also selected as one of 39 graduates to contribute to a book, \textit{There Was Light}, edited by Irving Stone.

The Denver Business and Professional Woman’s Club of Denver, Inc. honored the conductor by choosing Antonia Brico as its “1970 Woman of the Year.” Given at the Brown Palace West Ballroom, it was the first major award given the woman by a
Denver Organization. The organization honored her as “Denver’s world-famous conductor, pianist, teacher and lecturer.”

ABOUT DR. BRICO and the BRICO SYMPHONY

Dr. Antonia Brico, for whom the orchestra is named, has had a distinguished career as conductor, pianist, teacher, and lecturer. After graduation from the University of California, she studied piano with Sigismund Stojowski and studied conducting in Germany with Dr. Karl Muck, formerly conductor of the Boston Symphony. She was graduated from the Master School of Conducting at the Berlin State Academy of Music, and in 1930 made her debut with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. She was awarded the honorary Doctor of Music degree from Mills College in 1938 and has had the unique privilege of studying with Jean Sibelius and Dr. Albert Schweitzer. Most recently she has been elected a member of the Berkeley Fellows, one of 100 distinguished graduates of that college honored in commoration of its 100th anniversary.

Dr. Brico has conducted an impressive list of orchestras all over the world. This has included performances in London, Vienna, Yugoslavia, Holland, Poland, Japan, Mexico, Norway and a command performance by Queen Elizabeth of Belgium. In the United States, Dr. Brico has conducted the New York Philharmonic and in Hollywood Bowl, Detroit, San Francisco, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. She organized the New York Women’s Symphony in 1934 and conducted it until moving to Denver.

The unique development of the Brico Symphony since its inception 21 years ago has been due to the outstanding ability, experience and background of the conductor, to her drive and devotion to the orchestra and to the dedication and loyalty of its members. The outstanding quality of the musical works performed has made an impact upon the cultural life of this area through two decades. The orchestra provides outstanding young soloists a chance to perform and has given many fine instrumental and vocal soloists, ensembles, choirs and dancers in this community the opportunity of adding their talents to help create programs of distinguished caliber.

The Brico Symphony personnel list includes more than 80 professional and near professional musicians. During the day these people are busy executives from large corporations, lawyers, engineers, teachers, accountants, housewives, and students; many other professions are represented. All find that playing great music under the inspired leadership of Dr. Antonia Brico is a very important part of their lives.

Examples of the reception received by the Brico Symphony are indicated by the following reviews taken from Denver newspapers: The Denver Post, Saturday, March 23, 1968: “Brico Symphony program a treat . . . The orchestra played extremely well. At times it was easy to forget the semi-professional status of the musicians.” From the Rocky Mountain News, Sat., Nov. 19, 1966: “Brico Orchestra Quality Sound.” . . . Dr. Antonia Brico . . . takes pride in rehearsing the minutest details until they are performed to her standards.” Rocky Mountain News, May 21, 1966: “Symphony Performance Dazzling . . . Dr. Antonia Brico conducted in an exciting performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony.”

Figure 9.1. Brico Symphony publicity flyer. 1968. Courtesy, Colorado Historical Society. A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, Folder 1.
Still, Antonia wished for a change in her career: a surge of publicity that would bring her more professional conducting opportunities. She had often noted that it took competent management for a musician or conductor to succeed. Competent management avoided her as a female and thereby limited her potential opportunities. In the cultural outback of Colorado, she began to feel trapped, isolated, forgotten. “I called it being buried alive in Denver,” she later recalled.\(^{13}\)

Though Antonia’s days were filled with students, though she had received public accolades, though she conducted her very own orchestra, there was still something missing. Other musicians had an instrument they could take home and play. Antonia’s favorite instrument, the one that had driven her desires as a young woman, was the orchestra. Her instrument (the orchestra) was an instrument she could only play in rehearsal once a week and in performance four or five times a year. It was a point of frustration, one that became apparent when Antonia lashed out in anger during an interview for the 1974 film, *Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman.*

How would it feel to you if you had in the whole year four performances? I have four, five performances in a year. I’m strong enough to have five performances a month! I am essentially a creative artist, and I teach most of the time, and I would like to conduct more- I am frustrated!

I want to conduct professional orchestras! And I want to conduct in New York, I want to conduct in California, in San Francisco, I want to conduct in Russia. I don’t talk about it everyday. I don’t let everybody know my heartbreak. But people close to me don’t understand – it’s a perpetual heartbreak!\(^{14}\)
"It will be easier for a woman to become President of the United States then conductor of a major symphony orchestra," said Dr. Antonia Brico, who has spent a lifetime trying to break the masculine music monopoly... "Why? I don’t know. It isn’t the musicians. Their only concern is your ability. It isn’t the audience. I once conducted the New York Philharmonic in a summer concert because a petition with 4000 signatures demanded it."

Antonia’s life changed, due to the love of a former student. In a strange twist of fate, the student was Antonia’s favorite, the one who caused her so much heartbreak many years before. That student was Judy Collins.

Judy had left Antonia, playing guitar and singing folks songs along the Colorado front range at the age of 16 in a variety of venues. She moved east, singing in Chicago and New York before signing her first record contract in 1961. "In those days, [Elektra Records'] symbol was the moth, but I called it the butterfly," Judy later related. "I already had the wings. Elektra would give me the sky and let me fly."

After both platinum and gold albums, Grammy nominations and several top ten hit records, the little girl that had played Mozart for Antonia was a star, performing in major concert halls nationwide. Antonia had gone to see several of Judy’s concerts, appreciating the younger woman’s skill but still remembering the talented piano student of many years before. Antonia met Judy backstage once, taking her hands and
commenting, “Little Judy, you really could have gone places.”

Still, Judy spoke fondly of her teacher. In a later interview she honored her former teacher, stating, “She was my major musical influence from the beginning... She showed me tenacity, never giving up. She showed me music and performance are a demanding part of life.”

Judy Collins approached Antonia in 1973 with the idea of filming a biography of the conductor’s life. The film intended to combine unstaged interview footage with concert footage, film clips and biographical material. The film would be produced by Judy and directed by both Judy and her friend, filmmaker Jill Godmilow. Flattered, Antonia agreed.

Filmed over a six-month period, the film actually comprised three filming sessions. Interview material was shot at Antonia’s studio, while rehearsal footage was accomplished at the Brico Symphony’s rehearsal hall. Concert footage with piano student Helen Palacas was filmed live during a concert at Denver’s Phipps Auditorium.

_Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman_ premiered at the Telluride Film Festival in the fall of 1973. The film, which “powerfully portrays the life and times of the artist and her unremitting battle to be accepted as an artist rather than a novelty ‘woman conductor,’” was ultimately nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary of 1974.
The film became a landmark feminist work. Viewers saw the triumph of Antonia's career in New York and witnessed her struggle against the gender bias of the music industry. The film demonstrated the conductor's anger at not being allowed to conduct, her joy at her young students triumph with the orchestra, her sadness at the passing of her dear friend Albert Schweitzer. Robert Sklar, noted film historian, recognized the film's significance in his 1975 book, *Movie Made America*:

The breakthrough work [in feminist film] was *Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman* (1974), the first feminist documentary nominated for an Academy Award... *Antonia* gained a theatrical release in twenty cities and helped develop a new commercial niche for non-Hollywood independent films.

*Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman* revitalized the conductor's career. No less than three managers contacted her, and guest conducting offers poured in. Antonia obtained engagements at the Lincoln Center in New York and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. She was asked to conduct members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and received her first foreign conducting offers in almost two decades. Other concerts included performances in Tokyo, Manilla, Nova Scotia and Alaska.

One performance in New York's Lincoln Center for the "Mostly Mozart Festival" was recorded by Columbia Records, Antonia's first commercial recording. The program was given after a showing of *Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman*, and included Mozart's *Haffner Symphony* and Beethoven's *Symphony #2*. The performance proved to be so popular that a return engagement was scheduled for a
Antonia continued conducting and teaching, much as she had done all of her life. The major difference was that instead of conducting 5 - 6 concerts a year, she was often conducting 5 - 6 concerts a month. Guest lectures were requested as well, many of which were sponsored by the growing National Organization for Women (NOW). Enough work came from the movie that Antonia announced her career to be resurrected, literally raised from the dead, all due to a film which brought her more publicity than she could have ever purchased. Extremely grateful, Antonia stated her feelings in a 1975 interview with noted historian Studs Terkel. “Everyday,” she declared, “I say ‘thank God for Judy Collins.’”

Along with conducting, Antonia spent more time in lectures, particularly lectures aimed at feminist audiences. One such lecture was, “One Undeflected Step at a Time,” a talk based on Antonia’s experiences and beliefs gathered over more than sixty years of experience. One such lecture, given in California on April 14, 1975, demonstrates Antonia as a speaker:

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am not a lecturer. We’ll start that way. I just ramble. I ramble and I talk about whatever I feel like, and I have enough information inside myself that I can ramble. Right now I’m mad, not at you, but I’ve just come from a newspaper interview, never mind for what newspaper, but the interview has made me angry and perhaps my anger can generate some thinking in you...

You know that when you have sad feelings that you have repressed, about an unhappiness or sadness or death, or something that went quite wrong, you repress those feelings. Don’t you? Nod yes. Yes, uh huh.
All right, now what this interviewer did... was to succeed in bringing out all the negative and sad aspects of what has happened to me, all the hurts, all the disappointments, all the frustrations, and now I am letting these feelings out on you.

Instead of talking positively and that’s what I want you to do, ladies and gentlemen, students – think positive! What he did was not to say aren’t you thrilled to death that because of the love, devotion, ingenuity, know-how and money of one Judy Collins... Instead of saying positively that isn’t it wonderful that thanks to this film and to Judy Collins I now have concerts I never thought I would have?

Orchestras don’t care who is at the helm. They don’t care whether it’s a he or a she or an it or a that or what color or what religion or what background; they just don’t care. All musicians care about is whether the he or she on the podium, the person who moves this little magic wand about, knows or doesn’t know what they’re talking about. That’s all musicians care. That is why I remain an incredible optimist and have been since the word go. If I had not been I would never have started this bloody business of trying to be a conductor. And don’t anybody ever say Brico is a “woman conductor.” That’s enough to make me jump down your throat. I am a conductor, period...

I want to say right now that I am not a “woman for the sake of women,” not a feminist to the extent of “rah, rah, women.” No, nein, nicht! But I think it’s terrible if anyone is black, yellow or what – if they say, “Give me a chance, I need this chance.” Only if you deserve it, then you should have it... Music is not relegated to one sex or another. You’re either gifted or not gifted and I think if you’re gifted then you shouldn’t be having things put in the way.

I just wanted to conduct. I said that from the beginning. I wanted to conduct and I believed that I could if I had the training. I didn’t have father, mother, sister, brother, husband, children. But I did have the greatest training in the world and the greatest teachers in the world...

If you want to do something, you can’t just say, “I want to do it.” You have to be prepared. You have to study. As a woman you even have to know five times as much as a man. You have to believe in what you’re doing. You don’t say, “Do I have talent?” You say, “I want to
do it. I’m going to leave no stone unturned to better myself. I want to do it and I will do it.” Let that be my final word to you.” Prepare, and then do it.”

Antonia Brico

"...without any doubt a born conductor. She has not only the technical skill, but what matters more, the most important quality of a conductor, the ‘power of communication,’ both with regard to her orchestra and the listeners.”

Bruno Walter

Internationally acclaimed in 1930 as a “girl genius.” Star of the Academy Award-nominated film “Antonia: A Portrait of the Woman.” Now a very energetic 72, Miss Brico returns to Hollywood Bowl 45 years after her American debut there as the Bowl’s first woman conductor.

See and hear this remarkable musician lead the LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC in a program of music by Beethoven, Strauss, Wagner, Sibelius, and Ravel, plus Mozart’s Piano Concerto in C (“Elvira Medigian”) with Rubinstein protégée JANINA FIALKOVSKA.

Saturday, July 12, 8:30

Figure 10.1. Advertising flyer for a concert by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Antonia Brico at the Hollywood Bowl, California - July 12, 1975. Courtesy, Colorado Historical Society. A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 7, Folder 211.
Antonia also outlined many of her thoughts on music and conducting in that radio interview with Studs Terkel before her performance with members of the Chicago Symphony in 1976. Terkel, who had written many historical books and was well-known for his oral history accounts, conducted the thirty minute interview with the “Maestra” live in a radio broadcast. Antonia was very vocal in her thoughts on the state of modern music.

This country doesn’t seem to think that music should be government sponsored. I disagree with that. I think it’s much better to be government sponsored than to be sponsored by often a board of directors of a symphony who don’t really know much about music and they dictate policies to the conductors. I can’t see that [the board of directors] can dictate less than [the] government.

You can’t expect schools or fire departments or police departments to be self supporting, and one should not expect necessarily that music is self supporting. It just isn’t in the nature of the business. ... I would love for the government to put it’s fingers on [musical organizations] if I got more of a chance to conduct!

Antonia thought that it was ultimately the nature of women themselves that hindered their careers as conductors. She noted that women sometimes have difficulties being aggressive, and that a conductor must be very aggressive to “put their stamp on the orchestra,” adding that an orchestra and its members always knows when a novice is on the podium. She stated that she believed in the old German conducting adage, “Conducting starts in where everything else leaves off,” and restated Muck’s statement that the most important attribute a conductor could have was to “Serve the Work.” Antonia also made the observation in this interview that there were not as
many obstacles to women conductors in Europe as there were in the United States. It was her hope that someday a woman would become the conductor of a major symphony.16

After appearing on a television segment of 60 Minutes, Antonia made her only appearance on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson on July 7, 1975. The performance featured her in her best humor. She told of her desire to someday conduct the New York Philharmonic in the Metropolitan Opera House and recalled her glory days conducting the New York Women's Symphony. At Carson's request, Antonia conducted the Tonight Show Band, leading the normally jazzy ensemble in a rendition of John Philip Sousa's Stars and Stripes Forever. Carson offered her his best in her upcoming Hollywood Bowl concert and extended an offer for her to return again in the future, an offer which she was never able to accept.

Denver's Mayor William H. McNichols, Jr. and Colorado Governor Richard Lamn declared December 14, 1979 to be Dr. Antonia Brico Day in honor of the great conductor for greatly enhancing, "the cultural life of this state and its people."17 A concert to benefit the Cambodian Fund accompanied the proclamation, along with a string quartet performance in the State Capital and a concert by the Brico Symphony at the Paramount Theater.
EXECUTIVE ORDER
PROCLAMATION
DR. ANTONIA BRICO DAY
December 14, 1979

WHEREAS, Dr. Antonia Brico, internationally recognized conductor, has been a resident of Colorado for almost 40 years; and

WHEREAS, as Founder and Conductor of the Brico Symphony, Maestra Brico has greatly enhanced the cultural life of this State and its people; and

WHEREAS, under her baton, the Brico Symphony has provided outstanding opportunities for both professional and semi-professional musicians to grow and to develop their art; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Brico has conducted such major symphonies as the Berlin Philharmonic, the New York Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and organized and conducted the New York Woman’s Symphony Orchestra; and

WHEREAS, throughout her career, the Maestra has frequently been "the first woman to..." thus, demonstrating her own considerable talents and opening doors for other women musicians; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Brico will conduct a special benefit concert for the Cambodian Relief Fund, on December 14, at the Paramount Theatre;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Richard D. Lamm, Governor of the State of Colorado, do hereby proclaim December 14, 1979, as

DR. ANTONIA BRICO DAY

in the State of Colorado, in honor of her musical contributions to Colorado and the World, and in recognition of her efforts on behalf of the Cambodian refugees.

GIVEN under my hand and the Executive Seal of the State of Colorado, this seventh day of December, A.D., 1979.

Richard D. Lamm, Governor

Figure 10.2. Executive Order Proclaiming “Dr. Antonia Brico Day,” December 14, 1979. Public record courtesy Colorado State Archives. 

Antonia received a total of six honorary degrees by 1984 from colleges and universities across the United States. They included the Doctorate from Mills College, honorary Doctorates of Fine Arts from Drake University (1975), Regis College in Denver (1976) and Emmanuel College in Boston (1984), an honorary Doctorate of humane Letters from the University of Colorado (1978), and an honorary Doctor of
Antonia’s last major media appearance was on a Pittsburgh television program aired May 29, 1981. *Antonia: A Celebration of the Woman* screened the film and followed that screening with a question and answer session involving Antonia, Judy Collins, host Susan Stamberg (of National Public Radio) and an all-female audience.

Judy Collins described why she made the film about her teacher. “Obsession—exactly the right word!” she stated firmly. “I thought this story should be told... The story is a personal story to me.”

Antonia, at age 79, was still her opinionated self. She turned her attentions to the feminist audience, speaking in loud tones. “I will not be deflected from my course.” she said, encouraging the women to join her. “Say that with me. I will not be deflected from my course!” Answering questions, she became more serious and descriptive.

Once, a number of years ago, I was invited to talk in Los Angeles at a meeting of [the elderly]. When I came there and it was my turn to speak, I said, “You know, I think I’m in the wrong room.” Why? I said, “Because I do not recognize age. It makes no difference... Where there’s a will, there’s a way. And you mustn’t sit down in your rocking chair and say, “Well, I’ve reached a certain age: thirty, forty, fifty.” Whatever it is, all those stopping stones of this or that. You can do whatever you want if you want to badly enough – don’t be deflected! I mean it – if you want to do it, there is no age limit.

I hate to disappoint you, but it never occurred to me to give up. There is so much more beautiful music that I would like to interpret, I have never felt the urge to compose myself. I personally have the desire only to recreate the beautiful music that already great ones have written.
Dr. Antonia Brico filled her final days as full as the ones preceding. She continued teaching, stating that her idea of happiness would be to be allowed to both teach and conduct as much as she would desire. Accompanied by her small dog and live-in assistant Elisabeth Jans, she continued teaching her smaller group of students and conducting, even as opportunities began once again to decline.

Antonia conducted the Brico Symphony Orchestra until her association with the group ended in 1985, after disagreements with their management. Antonia claimed her exit was due problems from a back injury, but the symphony board claimed that there had been growing dissatisfaction over the quality of the performances and Brico's reluctance to enforce discipline. Disappointed but refusing to simply be quiet, she kept busy, turning to former and current students to keep her days filled and happy. She stated, "I love to conduct, and that's all in the world I care about!"
Antonia suffered a fall leaving a Judy Collins concert in 1988, an injury that left her mostly bedridden and unable to perform the music she loved so much. Judy Collins last visited at the Bella Vita Towers rest home. Judy remembered the sad visit with her mentor and friend, Denver’s most famous female conductor:

“Have you clipped your nails, little Judy?” [Antonia] asked, studying my fingers with her hands. Across the room from her bed was a large framed photograph of Yogananda, her guru and friend, whose dark eyes glowed in the soft light of the room... Her last words to me were, “You must practice, little Judy, you must always practice!”

Dr. Antonia Brico succumbed to old age on August 3, 1989, at last laying to rest the tireless drives of a lifetime. Antonia left no survivors (having never married), no family except for a nephew in Amsterdam. She was eighty-seven years old.
Figure 10.4. Dr. Antonia Brico's final publicity photograph. Courtesy, Colorado Historical Society.

# F-33,921. 25
CHAPTER ELEVEN

"I THOUGHT THAT THIS STORY SHOULD BE TOLD"

Pianist Arthur Rubinstein once declared that Antonia Brico had, “a thorough knowledge and complete mastery of the orchestra,” and Bruno Walter called her, “a born orchestra conductor.” Ironic praise for a woman whose teachers had once said, “it won’t work,” an artist who once said of herself, “I do not call myself a woman conductor, I call myself a conductor who happens to be a woman.”

Antonia had often spoken about those who would deter her with a defeatist attitude. “You see,” said Antonia, “that’s the whole trouble, that’s the reason in a sense that we have wars, because people look at the bad, not the good.”

A memorial service was conducted by Chris Mohr, announcer for Denver’s classical radio station, KVOD. Elizabeth Jans, Antonia’s assistant and live-in housekeeper was named executor of her estate and an estate sale was held some time later. Many of Antonia’s personal effects were given to friends, others were auctioned off at the sale. The disposition of many items, including the two grand pianos, several recordings and some personal effects remain unknown.

Upon completion of the sale, Jans donated more than 60 boxes of material to the Colorado Historical Society. The collection included scrapbooks, photographs, pieces of statuary and over 50 boxes of recorded material, comprising the largest
collection of audio in the Society’s holdings.

Several articles on Antonia have appeared in recent books, most notably Jeanne Varnell’s *Women of Consequence* in 1999. An unpublished thesis from the University of Northern Colorado in 1991 examined Antonia’s relationship with Sibelius and a recent Sony collection of classical recordings included excerpts from Antonia’s “Mostly Mozart Orchestra” recordings from 1975. The Colorado Symphony Orchestra, successor to the Denver Symphony, finally has a woman as its conductor, Marin Alsop, an event that would have thrilled Antonia.

Norman Cousins, editor of the *Saturday Review* and a longtime friend, possibly had the best perspective on the world’s loss at the death Dr. Antonia Brico. “I loved the lady,” said Cousins to the *Denver Post* at the time of her death. “The cosmos being a large place, her death doesn’t cause much of a tremor, but among her friends, quite an upheaval.”

Still, it is important to note that the “cosmos” and the world have failed to take much notice of the passage of Dr. Antonia Brico, with few references available in mainstream books or historical writings. Her memory still survives in the minds of many her many compatriots and fellow musicians still living in the Denver area, along with her many students and faithful followers worldwide. It is unfortunate that such a pivotal figure in the world of women’s history should be allowed to fade away so quickly.
If this is worth anything to you that I have come all the way from Denver to talk with you, if it is worth anything to you at all then just tell yourself and tell your students – have blinders like horses, have blinders – don’t look to the right or to the left, set your goal and follow it. Whether there was heartbreak in my life (and there was plenty of it) or not it did not matter to me.5

Now I am not a Pollyanna, not by any means. I’ve suffered but I do think that when you get something great happening to you what do you care whether its in the Hollywood Bowl or a Los Angeles auditorium,? I have said... in a thousand interviews, literally a thousand interviews, “I love to conduct and that’s all in the world I care about. How it comes, with what orchestra I could care less.”6
Chapter One


2. Ibid., 60.


7. Quoted in Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Charles Thomas, transcript 6, December 13, 1971, Antonia Brico Collection, No. 1457, Box 1, folder 14, Colorado Historical Society, Denver (hereafter cited as A. Brico Collection, CHS).

8. Ibid.

9. Antonia always referred in interviews to her adoptive parents as her “foster parents” or as her “step parents” and apparently never mentioned them by name later in life. It is for this reason that their first names are not given in this work.

10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.

12. Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Charles Thomas, transcript 1, November 1, 1971, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 14. All further indented quotations are by Antonia, unless otherwise noted.

13. Ibid., 16.


15. Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Studs Terkel, open reel tape from radio broadcast, Chicago, November 5, 1975, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 43.

16. Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Charles Thomas, November 1, 1971, 6 - 7.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 13.


20. Ibid., 15 - 16.


22. Ibid.

23. Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Charles Thomas, transcript 2, November 8, 1971, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 20.

24. Ibid., 3.

25. Ibid., 3 - 4.
Chapter Two

1. Dr. Antonia Brico, “One Undelected Step at a Time” (lecture given April 14, 1975, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 4 - 5.

2. Ibid.

3. Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Charles Thomas, transcript 4, November 30, 1971, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 14.


6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 4.

8. Ibid., 7.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 6.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid. The Music and Arts Institute offered seminars in beginning orchestra and conducting techniques and apparently did not discriminate against having women as students.

13. Ibid.


15. “And he had the most beautiful eyes you ever saw in your whole life, unless its Schweitzer.” Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Charles Thomas, November 30, 1971, 13.
16. Photograph of Swami Yogananda from Swami Yogananda and F.G. Richdale, *Om Song*, (Los Angeles, Self-Realization Fellowship, 1926), A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, Folder 15.


18. Antonia kept a photograph of Yogananda with her in her travels and in her home all her life. A photograph of the Swami was in her nursing home room at the time of her death in 1989.

19. Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Charles Thomas, November 30, 1971, 16.

20. Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Charles Thomas, transcript 5, December 6, 1971, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 5.

21. Ibid.

Chapter Three

1. Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Charles Thomas, transcript 6, December 13, 1971, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 9.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Quoted by Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Charles Thomas, transcript 7, January 10, 1972, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14.

5. The transcript of the interviews by Charles Thomas with Dr. Antonia Brico contain many aural-based misspellings. One refers to a “Princess Chanina,” for whom Cadman wrote operatic works. Tsianina Redfeather Blackstone toured the United States performing Native American songs in the teens and early twenties, then sang opera beginning in 1924. Blackstone was known as a Princess of the Creek Indian tribe. Later references in the transcripts refer to “Princess Tsianina.”

6. Ibid.
7. The transcripts of the interviews with Antonia are vague as to whether she actually had sex with Theo on the trip to Paris only indicating that she wished to do so and was fully prepared to marry her Uncle Theo.

8. Ibid., 12.

9. Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Charles Thomas, transcript 7, January 10, 1972, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 2.

10. Ibid., 3.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 5.

13. "...anytime I'm going to stop what I'm going to do in life because of him -- no, I'll do it if it kills me doing it." Ibid., 6.

14. Ibid. page unknown.

Chapter Four


3. Antonia refers often to the "Depth of emotion that comes from the miracle of hearing... great music." Dr. Antonia Brico, "One Undefined Step at a Time" (lecture given April 14, 1975, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 13.


6. Dr. Antonia Brico, personal biography (1975). A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 1, 1.

7. Ibid.

8. Dr. Antonia Brico, "One Undeflected Step at a Time" (lecture given April 14, 1975, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 11.

9. Ibid., 12.

10. Ibid., 13.

11. Dr. Antonia Brico, "History and Development of the Art of Conducting" (unpublished manuscript) (c.1940), A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 2c.

12. Julius Pruewer, "Report on Candidate to University of California at Berkeley" (January, 1929), A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 7, Folder 194. It is not entirely clear if Antonia ever actually submitted these reports to the university.


14. Dr. Karl Muck, "Report on Candidate to University of California at Berkeley" (January 29, 1929), A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 7, Folder 194.


16. Brico was apparently very close to Muck, as evidenced by the very large collection of articles in her scrapbooks that she collected at the time of his death in 1940.

17. Dr. Antonia Brico, "History and Development of the Art of Conducting" (unpublished manuscript) (c.1940), A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, V.

18. Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Charles Thomas, transcript 7, January 10, 1972, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 14.

19. Siegfried Ochs, renowned composer and interpreter of choral music, died in February 1929, before Antonia’s graduation.

20. Quoted in Dr. Antonia Brico, personal biography (1975), A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 1, 1.

22. Quoted in Brico, personal biography (1975), 1.

23. Typical of such publicity materials, the biography went on to refer to Brico's "...determination and singleness of purpose that characterized her career" that allowed her to overcome this obstacle to her career. Ibid., 2.


26. Quoted in Ibid., 11.

27. Brico, personal biography.


30. Dr. Antonia Brico, "One Undeflected Step at a Time" (lecture given April 14, 1975, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 14.

31. Herbert Mitchell, photograph of Antonia Brico, 1930s, CHS # F-50,450. Used by permission.

Chapter Five


7. Ibid.


9. New York Women’s Symphony program (1936-1937), A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 7, Folder 237.

10. Quoted in New York Women’s Symphony program (March 16, 1937), A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 7, Folder 237, 2.


12. New York Women’s Symphony program (March 16, 1937), A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 7, Folder 237.


16. Reproduced in Ibid., Appendix B.
17. Quoted in Brico, personal biography. Antonia utilizes the title “Doctor” in all her official capacities from 1938 forward.


21. This concert was recorded by Carnegie Hall Recording January 25, 1939. Sadly, the original transcription disc no longer exists in the Antonia Brico collection, although an open reel tape duplicate has been preserved and restored by the author.


25. Transcription discs of the performance of Barthelson’s Overture has been preserved in the Antonia Brico Collection.


Chapter Six

1. Brico, “History and Development of the Art of Conducting” (c.1940).

2. Reprinted, by permission, from CHS #F-50,499.


5. Program, “Benefit concert For Finland, May 18, 1941.” A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 7, Folder 219.

6. Jean Sibelius, RCA Radiogram Cable to Antonia Brico, May 18, 1941. A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, Folder 40.

7. Letter from Callahan & Fries, May 13, 1942. A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 2, Folder 43.

8. Robert B. Hudson, letter to Antonia Brico, May 2, 1942. A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 2, Folder 43.

9. Agreement from Trinity Methodist Church, 1943. A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 52, Folder 384, Scrapbook 4 (1932 - 1943).


Chapter Seven


3. Quoted in Ibid., 1.


7. Quoted in Brico, personal biography, 2.

8. Thomas, “Antonia Brico and Jean Sibelius,” 2.


11. Jean Sibelius, letter to Antonia Brico, November 12, 1949. A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, Folder 53.


Chapter Eight

1. Dr. Antonia Brico, “One Undeflected Step at a Time” (lecture given April 14, 1975, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14, 14.


4. Ibid. An audio recording of Schweitzer’s speeches are included in the Antonia Brico Collection, *Goethe: His Personality and His Work, July 1949, International Goethe Convocation, Aspen Colorado*, LP Record. A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 49.
5. Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Diane Nordstrom, transcript, 1975. A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, Folder 22, 4.


11. These movies, a total of two 400 foot standard 8mm reels of film reside in the photography department of the Colorado Historical Society.


17. Ibid., 71.
Chapter Nine


2. Dr. Antonia Brico, interview by Studs Terkel, open reel tape from radio broadcast, Chicago, November 5, 1975, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 43.

3. Ibid.


6. Schweitzer’s letters to Antonia reside in the A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 6, still untranslated as of this writing. Her letters to him reside in the Schweitzer collections in Europe.


8. Ibid., 148.


10. Ibid.


12. Brico Symphony Flyer, 1975. A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, Folder 1.

13. Brico, Terkel interview, 1975. She noted that she had wanted a manager after her debut in Berlin and after conducting at Royal Albert Hall in England and had not received offers. She blamed this for her subsequent lack of opportunities.

Chapter Ten


3. Ibid., 72.


5. A copy of this film is preserved in a 16mm film print in the Antonia Brico Collection at the Colorado Historical Society. A Beta format video copy of Antonia- A Celebration of the Woman, a 1981 television documentary containing most of the original film and a 30 minute question and answer interview with both Antonia and Judy Collins is contained in the collection as well and has been used for this thesis.


10. Dr. Antonia Brico, “One Undeflected Step at a Time” (lecture given April 14, 1975, A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 1, folder 14.

11. Ibid., 1-2.

12. Ibid., 15.

13. Ibid., 16.


15. Ibid.
16. Ibid..


18. Ibid.

19. A. Brico Collection, CHS, Box 7, Folders 195, 199, 201, 204-5, 208.


23. Brico, interview by Terkel.


25. CHS # F-33,921. Used by permission.

Chapter Eleven

1. Quoted in Brico, personal biography, 3.


6. Ibid., 3.
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_____. “History and Development of the Art of Conducting.” Manuscript. c.1940. Antonia Brico Collection, Box 1, Folder 14, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Co.

_____. “One Undeflected Step at a Time.” Lecture, 14 April 1975, Antonia Brico Collection, No. 1457, Box 1, Folder 14, 4 - 5, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Co.


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_______. Interview by Charles Thomas, 1 November 1971. Transcript 1. Antonia Brico Collection, No. 1457, Box 1, Folder 14, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Co.

_______. Interview by Charles Thomas, 8 November 1971. Transcript 2. Antonia Brico Collection, No. 1457, Box 1, Folder 14, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Co.

_______. Interview by Charles Thomas, 15 November 1971. Transcript 3. Antonia Brico Collection, No. 1457, Box 1, Folder 14, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Co.

_______. Interview by Charles Thomas, 30 November 1971. Transcript 4. Antonia Brico Collection, No. 1457, Box 1, Folder 14, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Co.

_______. Interview by Charles Thomas, 6 December 1971. Transcript 5. Antonia Brico Collection, No. 1457, Box 1, Folder 14, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Co.

Interview by Charles Thomas, 10 January 1972. Transcript 7. Antonia Brico Collection, No. 1457, Box 1, Folder 14, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Co.

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