

## Musical Treasure Chest #39

When I decide on my focus each week for the Musical Treasure Chest, I find that ideas pop into my head from almost random prompts. At the beginning of the new year my husband and I traveled to Lenox, Massachusetts for a brief get away, and we stayed literally in the backyard of **Tanglewood**. Perhaps it is because my summers for most of my professional life have been spent playing in the orchestra at Glimmerglass Opera, or because in high school I was focused on the Saratoga Performing Arts Center and the Philadelphia Orchestra, but I had "forgotten" about the specialness of Tanglewood, and wandering around the perimeter and feeling the energy that seems to radiate from the grounds, I was struck anew by the legacy of the festival and its artists.

I attended Boston University, and therefore Tanglewood was in the air that I breathed at school. Almost all of the faculty in the School for the Arts were members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and my teacher Roger Shermont was the assistant concertmaster. I loved the BSO; attending their concerts was thrilling and inspiring. Mr. Shermont, part of the notable French contingent of the orchestra hired during Charles Munch's tenure, was an incredible violinist. I looked forward to my lessons each week and working with him was a gift. He was a devoted teacher, who always made himself accessible to his students even when school was on summer break. I would travel over to Tanglewood for lessons with him each summer during my college years. But once that time was over, life intervened and getting out to Tanglewood was taken over by playing concerts in the Capital Region and then getting the position in the opera orchestra. The last time I was at Tanglewood as a concert attendee was back in the early 1990s, when, on a day off from the opera, I went to hear **Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique***. A friend had given me a ticket for a nice seat in the Shed, and I was thrilled--the Berlioz is a piece I just love. Sitting nearly in front of me was a very tall young man, who had a violin tucked under his seat. I thought to myself that this must be a student at the Tanglewood Institute. At the end of the performance he stood up, and I caught a glimpse of his profile; this wasn't some anonymous student, it was Joshua Bell. I had a teen idol moment, losing my ability to speak

coherently. I mumbled some drivel about how much I loved his playing and respected his artistry. He was very kind, perhaps he is used to starstruck responses, and actually asked questions that implied he was interested in my answers. I have never forgotten that matinee.

Seeing Tanglewood more than twenty years after my last visit and now with a wealth of knowledge about the history of music in the Berkshires, and it is a distinctive history, reminded me just how unique a musical incubator it is. Tanglewood and the patrons who built the musical culture in the area were part of an extremely musically literate and artistically passionate group. Their love of the arts built institutions such as Tanglewood and Jacob's Pillow. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, who was a singular proponent for chamber music in America, funded and commissioned some of the greatest instrumental works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As I walked the backroads of the Tanglewood area and gawked at the mansions in the vicinity, I realized what a debt musicians owe to these early 20<sup>th</sup> century lovers of the arts. Their passion and support made huge contributions to music. If you think that you haven't been influenced by them, just remember that Coolidge commissioned Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, Barber's *Hermitage Songs* and Stravinsky's *Apollon Musagete* (which Balanchine choreographed), among many other pieces. Coolidge deserves a much longer accolade than this brief mention.

I encourage you to visit Tanglewood, to experience the palpable artistic energy and to revel in the stunning quality of its musical offerings. And in honor of the performance that I heard so many years ago in the company of Joshua Bell (we share a birthday!), here is the ***Symphonie Fantastique*** with Seiji Ozawa. You will need to forward through each of the five movements.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0C7IDnw5zs>