

# FELIX MARIA GATZ

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A Forgotten Bruckner Pioneer

John F. Berky



## FELIX MARIA GATZ (1892-1942) – A Forgotten Bruckner Pioneer

By John F. Berky

People interested in the music of Anton Bruckner very quickly begin to learn of key people who have helped to make his music better known. These champions of Bruckner's music date back to Bruckner's contemporaries and continue right up to the present day. Such names as Arthur Nikisch, Hans Richter, Bruno Walter, Wilhelm Furtwaengler, Otto Klemperer, Takashi Asahina, Bernard Haitink, and Eugen Jochum quickly come to mind as interpreters. In terms of musicology, such names as Ferdinand Loewe and the Schalk brothers, August Göllerich, Robert Haas, Leopold Nowak, William Carragan, Benjamin Korstvedt and Paul Hawkshaw are quickly associated with Bruckner's cause.

But over the years, the sands of time, along with individual circumstances have created situations where once well-known advocates have had their names all but eradicated from our collective memories. One case in point is the conductor and lecturer, Felix M. Gatz.

Felix Maria Gatz was born in Berlin on May 15 of 1892. He studied at the Universities of Berlin, Heideberg and Erlangen and received his doctorate of philosophy degree in 1917. He studied conducting under Artur Nikisch and conducted the Lübeck Civic Opera from 1922 to 1923.<sup>1</sup> Other activities included teaching positions in Vienna, Leipzig and Berlin.<sup>2</sup> His conducting activities took him to Vienna, Breslau, Dresden and Budapest.

Gatz's interest in Bruckner was already established in the early 1920s. When Bruckner's sarcophagus was opened in 1926, Gatz was invited to speak. This was the address that he gave:

### **THE MESSAGE OF BRUCKNER'S SYMPHONIES**

**(A tribute delivered by Felix M. Gatz at St. Florian, July 1926)**

*"When I am no more, tell the world of my suffering and persecution,"*

*Bruckner once said. Why was Bruckner persecuted? Because he was, more than we others, just a stranger, a visitor on earth. His whole being was rooted in the cosmic, the transcendental. He was, in the deepest sense, a mystic. Every mystic is inevitably a hermit amongst men. He beholds the earth. with the eyes of one who dwells in the Absolute. This great loneliness of the mystic was intensified in Bruckner's case, because he was born into a completely unmythical age. That age could not but feel that he was a protest against it--a living denunciation of it. Yet Bruckner's age was, in the light of some of its foremost representatives, one of romanticism. Bruckner was no romanticist, however. All romanticism, gripped by a yearning for the infinite, gazes into the boundless Distance; but Bruckner's entire being was actually rooted there. He was at home in the Absolute, just as we, every-day beings, are at home in earthly surroundings. Compared with Bruckner's world even the romanticism of his age was earthly. Furthermore, his age was intoxicated with its visions of beauty. Bruckner's tonal visions are not merely of great beauty. There is inherent in their beauty a religious, ethical force as well. His age was predominantly materialistic. It did not believe in the soul. It would not even countenance the possibility of existence in the Spirit. Nevertheless Bruckner the mystic proclaimed the reality of the soul. He believed in it implicitly.*

*Bruckner was a mystic--and there is a deep community between mysticism and music. For mysticism, as for music, the substantial world is non-existent. When Bruckner proclaimed the reality of the Spirit, he did not endeavor to shape this belief in the language of tone, in the manner of so many other composers, who pretend to the musical portrayal of extra-musical concepts. He proclaimed the world of the Spirit, by merely setting his tonal visions before us. These visions, lacking an extra-musical content whatsoever and baffling all attempts to discover such content, constitute Bruckner's direct testimony to the existence of a spiritual world.*

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<sup>1</sup> Slonimsky, Nicholas: Baker's Dictionary of Music and Musicians; p. 803

<sup>2</sup> Tonkünstler Lexikon, 1936

*Bruckner purged music of the mundane essence with which it had been adulterated by a materialistic age. Unlike Wagner, who proclaimed his mission to the world in daring manifestos, Bruckner was too unconscious an instrument of the Spirit to have been able to frame in words the revelation which was his to impart. Those who opposed him out of hostility to his art naturally did not dare arraign the pre-eminently spiritual quality of his music—hence their intense hatred of this being who was loftier than the age in which he was destined to play his transcendental role.*

*At last our own age, rebelling against the false sovereignty of materialism and positivism, is slowly beginning to glimpse Bruckner's mystic, superearthy world. Here in St. Florian the master spent his years of boyhood and youth. Here he labored through the years in which youth ripened to manhood. St. Florian was to him a Holy Grail. As its envoy he went forth into the world beyond the monastery. During many decades of bitter striving he would often return to St. Florian, seeking peace and consolation. And when his mission on earth had been fulfilled, he was brought back, at his own wish, to this place to find eternal rest, as befitted a devout member of the sacred band of St. Florian.*

*Few musicians have lived a life so completely identified with their artistry as Bruckner's. He lived in music alone; music was the expression of his great, universal, mystic-religious, transcendental world-experience. Only those, who understand that experience, may grasp the full significance of Bruckner's art. Therefore, let us strive ever more earnestly to fathom that realm of the Spirit, the world of Bruckner's revelation. That such a world really exists—that is the message of his great symphonies.*

In 1923, Gatz became the Founder of the Bruckner Society in Berlin and as the chief conductor for the Society proceeded to schedule numerous performances of Bruckner's music. From the list below, given both chronologically and numerically in terms of compositions, it can be seen that Felix Maria Gatz was clearly the greatest proponent of Bruckner's music at that time.<sup>3</sup>

#### **BRUCKNER PERFORMANCES BY FELIX MARIA GATZ**

##### **Chronological listing**

12.3.24 -	Symphony No. 7 , Te Deum
9.4.24 -	Overture in g minor, Symphony No. 2
24.10.24 –	Mass in f minor, Te Deum
12.12.24 –	Symphony No. 2 (Urauffuehrung), Psalm 150
19.2.25 -	Te Deum
10.3.26 –	Symphony No. 8
16.4.26 –	Symphony No. 9
20.10.26 –	Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2
8.12.26 –	Symphony No. 4, Te Deum
19.1.27 –	Symphony No. 6
16.2.27 –	Symphony No. 8
2.3.27 -	Symphony No. 7
23.3.27 -	Symphony No. 9
19.10.27 -	Te Deum
26.11.27 -	Symphony No. 6
18.1.28 -	Symphony No. 7
15.2.28 -	Symphony No. 9
19.10.28 -	Symphony No. 3
22.11.28 -	Symphony No. 4



Felix Maria Gatz during his days in Berlin

<sup>3</sup> Chord and Discord, Vol. 1, No. 8; December, 1936; pp. 19-20

- 20.1.29 - Adagio from Symphony No. 1, Mass in f minor
- 13.4.29 - Symphony No. 8
- 23.10.29 - Symphony No. 5
- 11.12.29 - Symphony No. 6
- 22.1.30 - Symphony No. 8
- 26.2.30 - Symphony No. 7
- 19.3.30 - Symphony No. 9
- 18.2.31 - Symphony No. 6
- 15.4.31 - Overture in g minor
- 31.10.31 - Symphony No. 1
- 17.2.32 - Mass in f minor
- 6.4.32 - Symphony No. 7
- 26.10.32 - Symphony No. 5
- 26.1.33 - Symphony No. 7
- 10.3.33 - Symphony No. 7
- 23.5.33 - Symphony No. 4

**Sorted by Composition**

- Symphony No. 1
- 20.10.26
- 20.01.29 (Adagio only)
- 31.10.31

- Symphony No. 2
- 09.04.24
- 12.12.24
- 20.10.26

- Symphony No. 3
- 19.10.28

- Symphony No. 4
- 08.12.26
- 22.11.28
- 23.05.33

- Symphony No. 5
- 23.10.29
- 26.10.32

- Symphony No. 6
- 19.01.27
- 26.11.27
- 11.12.29
- 18.02.31

- Symphony No. 7
- 12.03.24
- 02.03.27
- 18.01.28
- 26.02.30
- 06.04.32

**Festkonzert (VI. Konzert)**

VORTRAGSFOLGE:

1. Vorspiel zur geistlichen Oper „Ahasver“ . . . . . Aus dem 2. Akt: 2. Monolog des Ahasver } Die Vision des Andrea }	Uraufführung . . . . .	Paul Zschorlich
3. Schmerzen, Träume } Isoldes Liebestod }	. . . . .	Richard Wagner

Ansprache des stellvertretenden Vorsitzenden Herrn Hofprediger und Oberpfarrer Richter-Reichhelm

4. IV. Symphonie (Es-dur) . . . . . Ruhig bewegt (Allegro molto moderato) – Andante – Scherzo – Finale (mäÙig bewegt)	Bruckner
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AUSFÜHRENDE:

**Das Philharmonische Orchester**

DIRIGENT: **Prof. Dr. FELIX M. GATZ**

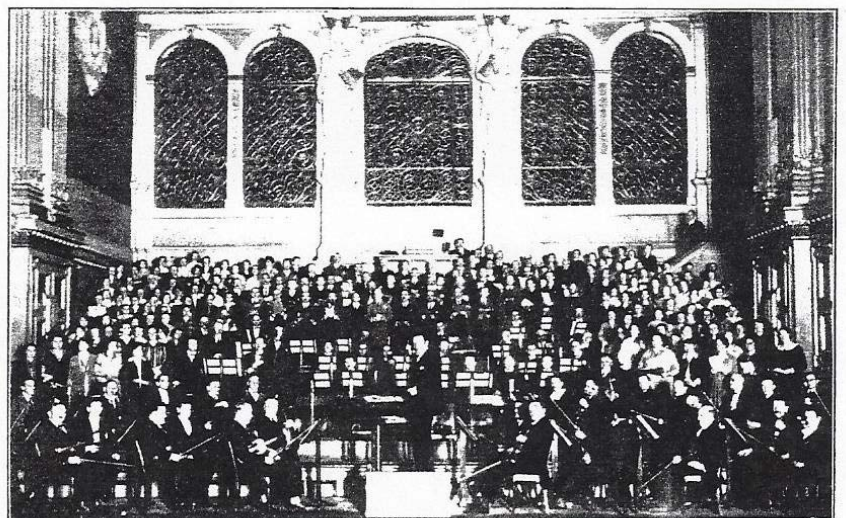
SOLISTEN: KammerSängerin **MAFALDA SALVATINI**  
 KammerSänger **FRITZ SOOT**  
**WALTER GROSSMANN** } Staatsoper

**Der Bruno Kittelsche Chor**

An der Orgel: **Walter Drwenski**  
 Organist an der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche

2

Concert program for the concert of May 23, 1933



Professor Gatz rehearsing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the Berlin Philharmonic and his own choir in the Berlin Philharmonie

-26.01.33  
-10.03.33

Symphony No. 8

-10.03.26  
-16.02.27  
-13.04.29  
-22.01.30

Symphony No. 9

-16.04.26  
-23.03.27  
-15.02.28  
-19.03.30

Overture in g minor

-09.04.24  
-15.04.31

Mass in f minor

-24.10.24  
-20.01.29  
-17.02.32

Psalms 150

-12.12.24

Te Deum

-12.03.24  
-24.10.24  
-08.12.26  
-19.10.27



Professor Gatz ca: 1940

These Bruckner Society concerts were performed by the Bruckner Society Orchestra, which was essentially the same players as the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Thus it can be said that the Berlin Philharmonic's long association with the music of Bruckner took seed under the guidance of Felix Maria Gatz. It should be noted however, that Gatz was not a "Johnny One Note." His repertoire was wide and far-reaching and included orchestral, choral and operatic presentations.

In April of 1924, Gatz was asked to write his thoughts about Bruckner for the music journal "Musica Divina" as they prepared a special edition for the Bruckner Centennial concerts in Klosterneuburg. He wrote, "*What I love most in Bruckner is those movements in which he is unsurpassed and not comparable to any other composer. Not the quick Allegros – here Beethoven is unrivalled; not the demonic Scherzos – here, again, Beethoven is the master; nor the marvelous Trios – they were preceded by Schubert – ; but the measured Allegros and his Adagios. These are so beautiful that I can find no epithet for it. And each of these Allegros and Adagios contains the innermost soul of Bruckner's art: exalted ecstasy, festively sparkling divine splendor, the mysterious intensity of this feeling of the earth, combined with beauty of the line. This is what I love in Bruckner. But why do I not just admire him? Why do I love him? Well, as always when asked for the reasons of your love, you realize that there is no real answer – the only answer I can come to think of is that I was granted the favor of feeling a spiritual congeniality with the nature of his art and its longing.*"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Musica Divina, Vol. XII, No. 3, June/September, 1924, p. 101 (translated by Ebbe Tørring)

Was ich an Bruckner am meisten liebe, ist das, worin er unvergleichlich, mit keinem Musiker zu vergleichen ist. Nicht das schnelle Allegro, darin ist Beethoven unübertroffen; nicht die dämonischen Scherzi, auch darin ist Beethoven der Meister; nicht die wundersamen Trios — die hat Schubert ihm vorgemacht —, sondern das gemäßigte Allegro und sein Adagio. Die sind so schön, daß mir kein Epitheton genügen will, es auszudrücken. Und in jedem von ihnen beiden lebt das letzte Wesen von Bruckners Kunst: Überschwengliche Ekstase, festlich strahlende Gottespracht, geheimnisvollste Innigkeit dieses Fühlens der Erde und Schönheit der Linie.

Dies ist es, was ich an Bruckner liebe. Warum ich aber Bruckner nicht nur bewundere, sondern liebe, dafür gibt es wohl wie immer, wenn man nach Gründen der Liebe fragt, keine rechte Antwort, es sei denn die, daß mir die Gnade zuteil ward, dem Wesen seiner Kunst in meiner Seele oder ihrer Sehnsucht irgendwie verwandt zu sein.

Berlin.

Dr. Felix M. Gatz,  
künstlerischer Leiter und Dirigent der Bruckner-Vereinigung  
und des Bruckner-Chores.

Statement in "Musica Divina"

But in the 1930s, the political scene in Germany was changing rapidly and as the National Socialists gained power, they aligned themselves with the International Bruckner Gesellschaft, a parallel organization but one that was a better fit for the ideologies of the Third Reich. During the next few years, the IBG became linked to the activities of the *Bruckner-Gesamtausgabe* and the cultural festivals organized by the Nazi Propaganda Ministry. With these shifts, the Bruckner Society quickly found itself without government financial support and Gatz, being Jewish, saw an immediate need to abandon his activities and to further his career elsewhere. During this time, Professor Gatz was assisted by the Emergency Committee in Aid to Displaced German Scholars which was founded in New York City in 1933 to assist scholars who were barred from teaching, persecuted and threatened with imprisonment by the National Socialists. In a report prepared by the Emergency Committee in May of 1937, Professor Gatz is listed as the recipient of a grant for the academic year of 1934-35.<sup>5</sup>

In May of 1934, it was announced that Gatz would become Professor of Aesthetics at the College of Liberal Arts at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He arrived in Pittsburgh on August 27, 1934 and immediately stated his goals. "My first aim, now that I am in this country, is to serve Duquesne University. My second is to introduce the works of Bruckner to the American people through my teachings here."<sup>6</sup> His teaching duties would commence in September of that year.<sup>7</sup>

As soon as Professor Gatz arrived in Pittsburgh, he began a new phase of Bruckner promotions. Using the new medium of radio, he immediately set out on a series of radio lectures on Bruckner. The lectures were broadcast over radio stations KQV (ABC Network) and WJAS (Columbia Network).<sup>8</sup> The Bruckner Society of America took note of this extraordinary activity and it may be best to let their article in "Chord and Discord" describe his activities.

### **BRUCKNER APPRECIATION--VIA RADIO!**

*During the past ten years there has been no one more prominent among Brucknerites in Germany than Felix Maria Gatz. It was he who founded the largest of all Bruckner groups, the Berliner Bruckner Bund, an organization so influential in the world of German music that it could command a generous annual subsidy from the government. Thus it was possible for this group even to launch a Bruckner Symphony Orchestra and a large Bruckner Choir of its own, dedicated chiefly to the performance of the Austrian master's works. In the course of almost a decade it succeeded in presenting before the music-lovers of Berlin many complete cycles of Bruckner's symphonies, masses, and most important minor orchestral and choral compositions. But the artistic ideals of Prof. Gatz, music director of*

<sup>5</sup> The Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced German Scholars, Report of May 1, 1937, page 14

<sup>6</sup> Pittsburgh Post Gazette, August 28, 1934

<sup>7</sup> Duquesne Duke, Vol. X, No. 29; May 24, 1934, page 1

<sup>8</sup> Duquesne Duke; Vol. X1, No. 1, October 4, 1934

*the Bund, were too progressive to be confined to the propagation of a single composer's works, so that the programs of his performances included a liberal number of major compositions by more modern masters such as Mahler and Schoenberg. Consequently, the advent of the new regime, universally styled the Third Reich, left the organization without the official financial support that had become necessary for its continuation, with the result that Prof. Gatz began to seek a new, more promising field in which to carry the Bruckner banner on to a complete and permanent triumph. Naturally he turned his attention to the New World where he knew that a Bruckner Renaissance was in process and happily accepted the post of Professor of Musical Aesthetics at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh. The enthusiasm and energy with which he set to work immediately upon his arrival in Pittsburgh this fall may be readily gathered from the following astonishing facts:*

*(1) He has been engaged for a series of twenty weekly radio talks on Bruckner, which he is illustrating not only by playing musical excerpts on the piano, but by performing whole sections of the Bruckner symphonies with the assistance of a chamber-symphony group.*

*(2) He has persuaded the Pittsburgh Board of Education to institute among the public schools a prize essay contest the subject matter for which is to be drawn from his radio talks on Bruckner.*

*Prof. Gatz is to be heartily congratulated upon having so quickly paved a way for the difficult and (in this country, at least) unprecedented appeal of the Bruckner cause directly to the hearts of the younger generation. Lovers of the art of Bruckner throughout the world should watch with great interest the progress of the Bruckner movement in Pittsburgh, for one might almost say that a paramount artistic ideal is on trial there, the successful introduction of which would silence forever the tongue of many a skeptical scoffer. The sincerest thanks and best wishes of all serious American music-lovers to you, Prof. Gatz. Chord and Discord will gladly communicate to the world of music the details of the glorious adventure in musical ideals into which you have so courageously and whole-heartedly hurled yourself.<sup>9</sup>*

As much as Professor Gatz hit the ground running when he arrived in Pittsburgh, it appears that 1936 may have been the end of his active advocacy for Bruckner. He appeared once again on Radio in January of 1936 (this time on Radio Station KDKA) on a program presented by the Congress of Women's Clubs. The subject again was the music of Anton Bruckner.<sup>10</sup> He submitted a few articles to the Bruckner Society of America and they were published in the December, 1936 issue of "Chord and Discord." In that same issue, it also announced that Gatz would present a series of lectures on Bruckner for the Guild of Musicians at Steinway Hall in New York City, but that is where the trail ends. It may well be that the strong links that the National Socialists in Germany had established to the music of Bruckner was making any advocacy for his music in the United States all but impossible.

It should be noted that Professor Gatz was also active in establishing a student orchestra and choir at Duquesne. During his tenure, he presented a series of "educational concerts" where he preceded each work with a short presentation. In October of 1934, he was busy preparing for a performance of Wagner's "Parsifal." He also introduced the concept of an Opera Ball, where a Christmas holiday dance would be preceded by a short opera. In December of 1934, he scheduled such an event with arias from Mozart's opera "Bastien and Bastiene." The soprano soloist at this event was Lura Stover (1914-2009).<sup>11</sup> Over the course of the next year, Gatz presented several concerts where Miss. Stover was featured. They were soon married. At this time, Professor Gatz had a new project to pursue as he became interested in furthering his wife's career.

In May of 1936, there was a major restructuring of the Duquesne School of Music and six positions, including the Dean of the school and Professor Gatz were released from their positions at the end of the academic year.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Chord and Discord; Vol. 1, No. 6; October, 1934; p. 20

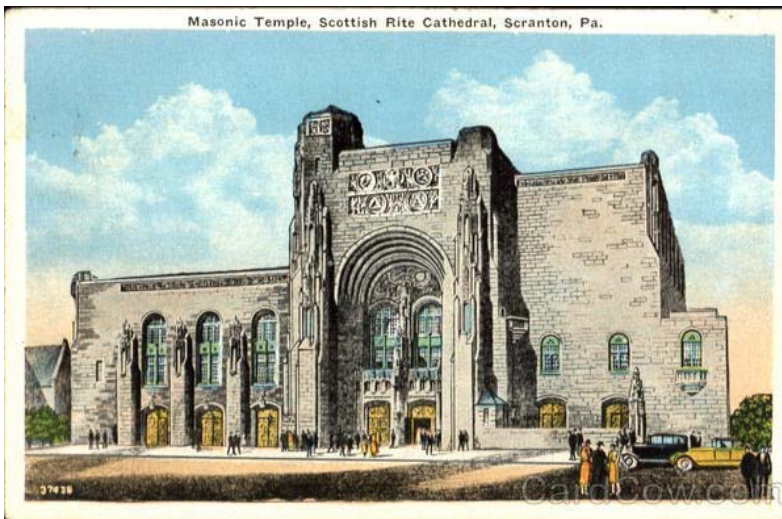
<sup>10</sup> Duquesne Duke; January 10, 1936; p. 3

<sup>11</sup> Pittsburgh Press, December 3, 1934

<sup>12</sup> Duquesne Duke, May 28, 1936; p. 4

During the 1937 academic year, Gatz lectured at New York University.<sup>13</sup> During his time at NYU, he attended the International Congress of Aesthetics and Science of Art in Paris where he was appointed a permanent member of that committee.<sup>14</sup> In September of 1937 it was announced that Professor Gatz would be joining the faculty at St Thomas College in Scranton, Pennsylvania.<sup>15</sup>

Upon arrival, Gatz was quick to get things started once again. He formed a choral group and a student orchestra, and he began producing opera productions including "Parsifal," "Il Trovatore," and "The Barber of Seville," all presented at the newly constructed Masonic Temple. His wife, Lura Stover was featured in several productions to great critical acclaim. While in Scranton, Professor Gatz helped establish the American Congress of Aesthetics and in 1939 brought the congress to Scranton with such artistic dignitaries as Martha Graham and Howard Hanson attending.<sup>16</sup>



Professor Gatz was the driving force behind the formation of the Scranton Philharmonic Orchestra. The Orchestra remained in operation until 1972 when it merged with the symphony orchestra in Wilkes-Barre and was renamed the Northeast Pennsylvania Philharmonic Orchestra (NEPA).

But while Professor Gatz was actively conducting the student and the professional orchestras and producing opera productions and attending congresses on aesthetics, his advocacy for the music of Bruckner is not evident. While his association with the music of

Bruckner is frequently mentioned in the Duquesne and Pittsburgh publications, it is never mentioned while he was at St. Thomas College (renamed during Gatz's tenure to the University of Scranton). There are no more literary contributions to the Bruckner Society of America after December of 1936.

During the war, there were cutbacks. Opera productions were cancelled and the professor's position was almost eliminated once again, but he was able to retain his position.

On June 20<sup>th</sup> of 1942, after presenting a lecture and returning to his home at 647 Monroe Avenue, Professor Gatz suffered a fatal heart attack. He died in his wife's arms.<sup>17</sup> He was buried at Cathedral Cemetery in Scranton on June 23rd.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Slonimsky, Nicholas: Baker's Dictionary of Music and Musicians; p. 803

<sup>14</sup> Letter addressed to Professor Gatz in Paris from the Secretary General of the Committee, August 16, 1937

<sup>15</sup> The Aquinas; St. Thomas College; Vol. VIII, No. 1; September 24, 1937; p.1

<sup>16</sup> The Aquinas; University of Scranton; Vol. VIII, No. 14; January 20, 1939, p.1

<sup>17</sup> Email from Lura Dolas, daughter of Lura Stover

<sup>18</sup> Death certificate of Felix Maria Gatz, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Bureau of Vital Statistics





Courtesy Scranton Tribune

Mrs. Felix M. Gatz, known professionally as Lura Stover, applies the proper make-up for her characterization of Leonora. Music critics loudly applauded her magnificent singing and superb acting.



The Gatz's home in Scranton (as it appeared in 2012)

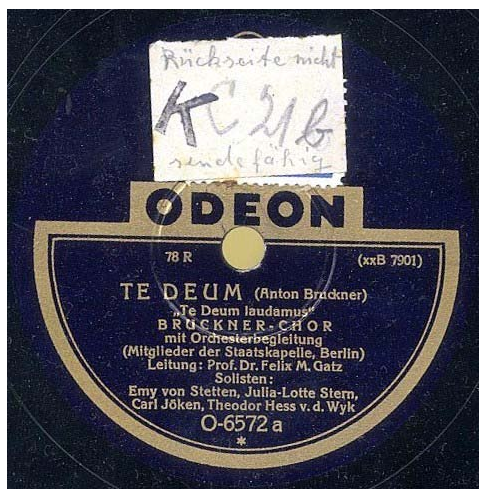
It is interesting to note that his wife, Lura Stover won the Naumberg Award in 1941 which helped to launch her singing career. She gave her Town Hall recital on January 26, 1942. The concert featured songs by John Dowland, Thomas Morley, Hugo Wolf, Siegmund von Hausegger, Felix Weingartner, and Claude Debussy. After Felix Gatz's death, she moved to New York City and continued her studies at the Juilliard School. Seven years later, she married the illustrator, Michael Dolas (1912-2010) and during their sixty year marriage (and at Mr. Dolas' direction) little was spoken of Professor Gatz. As they grew up, the Dolas' children knew nothing of their mother's first marriage. In 1955, the family moved to Santa Barbara, California where she continued her long career as a voice trainer and an advocate of arts for youth. She died there in 2009.<sup>19</sup>



<sup>19</sup> Obituary; Santa Barbara Noozehawk Newsletter, January 17, 2009

With his widow busy with a new career and a new husband and family, the work of Felix Maria Gatz, and his advocacy for the music of Anton Bruckner quickly faded from memory. Back in his native Germany, his extensive work was effectively eradicated by the highly effective National Socialist propaganda machine.

To date, few of his papers have been located. No papers were retained at Duquesne or at the University of Scranton. No radio transcripts have been found, but we do have one interesting recorded legacy. On December 19<sup>th</sup> of 1927, Odeon recorded excerpts of Bruckner's *Te Deum* (*Te Deum laudamus* + *Tu rex Gloria, Christie*) with Emy von Stetten, Julia-Lotte Stern, Carl Jöken, and Theodor Hess van der Wyk. The Bruckner-Chor and Mitglieder der Staatskapelle Berlin were conducted by Felix Maria Gatz.



The author would like to thank Michael Knies at the University of Scranton Library, Elizabeth Williams at the Duquesne University Library, Jörg Wyrchow of the Deutsches Rundfunk Archive, Lura Dolas in Berkeley, California and George Zepos of Athens, Greece for their assistance in the preparation of this paper.

For an additional essay on Bruckner by Felix Gatz, please see *Chord and Discord*; Vol. 1, No. 8; pp. 16-19. It is available at: <http://www.abruckner.com/articles/thebrucknersociety/>