



Nicolas Slonimsky on his 85th Birthday

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SUI GENERIS AS HE IS, Nicolas Slonimsky means many things to many people. He is the pioneer who by his conducting, writing, and talking helped lead us to a knowledge of Charles Ives (my earliest knowledge of Slonimsky came in 1934 through classroom exposure to his 1930 *Modern Music* article on "Composers of New England"). There is the composer in his own right, especially good at setting texts from tombstones. The lexicographer, of course, for whom I have sometimes served as a cross between Dracula and a Missing Persons Bureau, and whose supreme erudition is flawed only by his Russophilic reluctance to admit that the principal city of Turkey has for some years now been Istanbul, not Constantinople. The author of books, including *The Road to Music*, which is the nicest children's book on music I know. The university teacher whose introduction of random procedures into course work was ahead of his time and over the heads of his more mundane students. The columnist and feuilletonist whose sober review, under his own name, of his own newly-published collection of articles drew ink even from the unlikely pen of the late gossip columnist, Leonard Lyons (Slonimsky at first wanted to hide behind the anagram L. O. Symkins, but later agreed that the editor's way was better). The pianist, whether playing his own "Yok, Effendi" in an Istanbul silent movie house nearly sixty years ago or more recently pounding out a request program for my two daughters in their own home, back to the piano and oranges in hand. The television quiz star who was never caught with a wrong answer though he proved to the network that *it* had been. On and on one could go; there is even the Slonimsky whose grandfather invented the (multiplex?) telegraph.

But the Nicolas Slonimsky who means the most to me, and whom I fondly salute as we pass what is alleged (with gross exaggeration) to be his 85th birthday, is the rotund pixie who will never grow old; who combines a photographic memory with a roguish smile and a heart even more so, yet who has certain feelings of delicacy. It was this Nicolas Slonimsky who accepted a suggestion that he be the afterdinner speaker for the national Music Library Association at Chapel Hill, N. C., on February 2, 1968, and that his topic be "Sex and the Music Librarian." He planned and wrote his speech with many a chuckle; but as February 2 drew near, Slonimsky did not draw near to Chapel Hill. At the last minute he mailed the speech to a Proxy, saying "Here, I can't face those people with this, I was born in the 19th century. You can do it, you were born in the 20th century." And so it was done, "to tumultuous cachinnations" as Slonimsky writes in his autobiographical sketch in *Baker's*. May you have many more happy and tumultuous cachinnations, Nicolas!