

ALLA CORRENTE

Alfredo Antonini

Alfredo Antonini (May 31, 1901–November 3, 1983) was a leading Italian-American symphony conductor and composer who was active on the international concert stage as well as on the CBS radio and television networks from the 1930s through the 1960s. In 1971 he received an Emmy Award for best musical performance on television for his conducting of the premiere of Ezra Laderman's opera *And David Wept* for CBS television.



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Maestro Antonini was born in Nicosia, Sicily on May 3, 1901. His father, Ignazio Antonini, was a horn player; his mother, Anna Boccia, was Argentinian. He grew up in Alessandria, near Milan, and pursued his musical studies at the Royal Conservatory in Milan. He graduated from the Royal Conservatory in 1920 in organ and composition. From 1921 to 1924 he was the organist for La Scala Opera. He was a student of the legendary Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini. He immigrated to the United States in 1929, and became a U.S. citizen in 1938.

During the 1940s, he distinguished himself as a conductor of several leading orchestras while performing on the CBS radio network. These included: the CBS Pan American Orchestra (1940–1949), the Columbia Concert Orchestra (1940–1949) and the CBS Symphony Orchestra. He joined ASCAP in 1948, and his compositions include: *The Great City*, *Sarabande*, *Sicilian Rhapsody*, *Suite for Cello and Orchestra*, *Preludes for Organ*, *Suite for Strings*, *The United States of America*, *Circa 1790*, and *Mambo Tropical*.

Maestro Antonini also conducted live radio broadcasts of the popular program *Viva America* on the CBS radio network and *La Cadena de las Americas* (*Network of the Americas*) in collaboration with such noted artists as Nestor Chayres (Mexican tenor, who was also known as “El Gitano de Mexico”), Terig Tucci (Argentine composer/arranger) and John Serry, Sr. (Italian-American concert accordionist). He also appeared with Nestor Chayres (tenor) at the *Night of the Americas* concert series at Carnegie Hall. His performances with the Carnegie Hall Pops Orchestra at Carnegie Hall were eagerly anticipated by the general public. Additional performances in collaboration with Juan Arvizu (“El Troubador de las Americas”) and the CBS Tipica Orchestra for the Inter-America Music Fiesta at Carnegie Hall attracted widespread acclaim.

As a musical director at CBS Television during the 1950s, Maestro Antonini was instrumental in presenting an extensive program of classical and operatic music to the general public. His collaboration with Julie Andrews, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II in a production of *Cinderella* for CBS television (Sunday, March 31, 1957) was critically acclaimed. It was telecast live to an audience of 107 million people. (I remember watching this performance on TV when I was a 12-year old. It was really terrific and whetted my appetite for future Rogers and Hammerstein performances). In 1955 he conducted the Oslo Philharmonic in the first of a series of American Exchange Programs. During this decade he also appeared in concert with such operatic divas as Eileen Farrell (soprano) and Beverly Sills (soprano). In 1957, Maestro Antonini became the musical director and conductor of the Tampa Philharmonic in Florida.

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ALLA CORRENTE, *Continued*

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Maestro Antonini also served as a conductor of the popular open air summer concerts held at the landmark Lewisohn Stadium in New York City during the 1950s. His appearances with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and the Lewisohn Stadium Orchestra during the series of Italian Night concerts frequently attracted audiences which exceeded 13,000 guests. These performances featured arias from the standard Italian operatic repertoire and showcased such operatic luminaries as Jan Peerce, Eileen Farrell, Richard Tucker, Beverly Sills and Robert Merrill.

In addition to performing as a conductor on WOR radio in New York during the 1940s, he also appeared as a guest conductor for leading symphonic orchestras in Chicago, IL, Milwaukee, WI, Oslo, Norway, and Chile during the 1950s. In the 1960s Maestro Antonini also appeared as a guest conductor with the New York Philharmonic at Philharmonic Hall during a grand opera benefit concert which featured the artistry of Jan Peerce (tenor) and Robert Merrill (baritone). Throughout the 1960s he continued to collaborate with such operatic luminaries as Peerce, Merrill and tenor Franco Corelli in a variety of gala concerts. He also performed with Roberta Peters at the Lewisohn Stadium of City College in front of an audience of thousands.

Maestro Antonini's musical legacy has been preserved on a variety of LP recordings which reflect his interest in symphonic compositions, popular music from Latin America as well as grand opera. He recorded for Coral Records, Columbia Masterworks and SESAC Records.

For a number of years he also served as Chairman of the Music Department at St. John's University of New York.

He died at the end of his illustrious career on November 3, 1983 in Clearwater, Florida.

Adapted from Wikipedia, from IMDB (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0031350/bio>) and from Composers Classical Music (<http://composers-classical-music.com/a/AntoniniAlfredo.htm>) by Dr. James Boitano.