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**KIPNIS DISCUSSES ROLES HE SANG, TOSCANINI, RECITALS AND OTHER TOPICS**

In 1973, Alexader Kipnis sat down with an interviewer to discuss his life, the roles he sang, Toscanini’s approach to *Die Zauberflöte,* and other topics. This interview was recorded on two sides of an audiocassette, which is now in the possession of the Alexander Kipnis Society. Sadly, we do not know who this interviewer was.

This is an extremely valuable document for individuals who are interested in knowing more about the keen intellectual abilities that Alexander Kipnis brought to performing his roles. Kipnis focuses mostly on two extremely different roles: Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte* and Hagen in *Götterdȁmmerung*. He also offers some observations on the art of giving recitals. And in an extremely valuable section of this interview, he discusses Toscanini’s approach to *Die Zauberflöte.*

The audio recording of this interview is stored on our Google Drive and we will be pleased to share it with you. For more information, email barrylenson@gmail.com

**Cassette Side One:**

**Interviewer:** Should we talk a bit about *Meistersinger*, about Pogner, or about Sarastro?

**Alexander Kipnis:** Well, we could talk about Sarastro. As a beginner in Wiesbaden I sang the Sprecher. And the Sprecher is a comparatively short part. He has about two or three pages to sing. And it was lying very well in my range.

And I was very happy. And after all, I was a beginner. And one day, I received a message from the general manager, “In about a week, we expect you to sing Sarastro.”

I almost died, because I realized Sarastro has to be a low bass. And I was very young at that time. And I really didn't know how will I make it. I tried Sarastro to sing at home. It didn't work out. It was not satisfactory. There is, in the entrance, in the first act, the first entrance of Sarastro, when he sings to Pamina, “I cannot force you to love us. But I don’t let you go.”

And there is the jump. “I cannot force you to love us.” Then the next note, on “But,” comes down to a low F without any warning. This was, it is, a very dangerous jump from a very quite high tone to a very low tone.

And there is no . . . it cannot be faked. There is no accompaniment. This is *a capella.* So I tried out to sing those high tones quite soft. And then I jumped to the low tone. So to even out the scale. Not to sing too loud the high tones. And so the low tones would be very weak. So I sang the high tones quite soft. And then the low tone came out the way I wanted it.

And then I realized there is what I call mathematic in singing. Don't spend too much money one week and then the next week comes up and you don't have anything to spend. So I realized I have to be very careful in the high tones in order to justify the low tones. And it worked out very, very satisfactory.

Later on when I grew up really and my low scale became very sonorous and good, I could have thought to sing the high tones loud and also the low tones loud. I didn't have to be very careful. But at that time this was the only thing to do.

And I realized this is something which I had to pay attention to. And this lasted for a long, long time. It served me in many other parts, in, for instance, in *Lohengrin*, where I have to sing very high tones, and then suddenly, in the King’s prayer, he has to go down to a very low tone.

It is a very grateful part, Sarastro. It's a beautiful line. One has to have a very long and steady breath for the aria, “O Isis und Osiris.” One has to have a great deal of color for the second aria, “In Diesen Heil’gen Hallen.”

This aria, I thought, is the credo of Sarastro. This is the religion. This is the aria where he expresses the real love to humanity. This is the aria in which he says, “We don't have vengeance in this surrounding.”

At the end of this aria, a tradition came up through the years. The bass is going down to a low E. It has not been composed by Mozart, but it is very effective to go down to the low tone.

Toscanini asked me to sing *The Magic Flute* with him in Salzburg. I knew that Toscanini is a fanatic with a composition. It has to be played and sung the way it has been written. He always said, “Canto com’è scritto, so then I thought, what is he going to do to say when I am going down to the low E in “In Diesen Heil’gen Hallen”?

And I, during a rehearsal, I said to him, “I sang all the time, *The Magic Flute,* and I sang down after the second verse in “In Diesen Heil’gen Hallen” and I went down to the E. Would you allow me to do that?”

He looked at me very quietly, and he said, “I have several scores of *The Magic Flute.* Some of them are first and second editions of this opera. I will bring them tomorrow. We will go over them together and see what can be done.”

To sing the low E consists of the following. He goes down with the other instruments, they call it parallel octaves. And parallel octaves are prohibited from the point of view of harmony. Harmony by Mozart, of Mozart's music, not of Schönberg's.

And the following day, Toscanini came with five scores, and he said, “Kipnis, let's try, here's edition number two.” And there is that Sarastro is allowed to go down to the low E, but not in parallel octaves, but changing the rhythm.

He said, “If you sing, this would be allowed.” And I said, “Fine, I'm going to sing it.”

[Kipnis demonstrates on the cassette.]

So not parallel octave, but a plain line and so I was able to sing the low E in Salzburg with the permission of the maestro.

He understood German quite well, but he couldn't speak it. My Italian was not as good in order to negotiate with him, and his English was also not too good, but also not too bad. And we got along very well.

A very strange thing happened. We have a great deal of dialogue in *The Magic Flute.* And strangely, Toscanini knew the dialogue by heart, but he asked us to modulate the dialogue into the key of the following aria.

For instance, the aria, “O Isis and Osiris,” is in F major, and I have to introduce to go down in a dialogue toward this aria, and he said “Try to talk the dialogue and modulate it into F major. So when I start with orchestra, we are in the key we needed.”

It was not so easy to modulate into a key which I didn't hear it before.

**Interviewer:** So he wanted the lines sort of like Sprechstimme . . .

**Alexander Kipnis:** Spoken approximately toward F major. So I did it, and it worked out satisfactorily. Later on, to the aria “In Diesen Heil’gen Hallen,” which is in E major, I had also to finish, “Alein, du sollst sehen, wie ich mich an deiner Mutter rȁche.”

Rȁche should be in E, so this worked out very satisfactorily.

There's a third item before the trio. The trio, if I am not mistaken, is in C major. So I had to modulate also on that time to C major. So it worked out satisfactorily.

I sang this opera in Chicago, in Berlin, in Wiesbaden, in Buenos Aires, in London, in Paris, and I sang it in New York in English. With Bruno Walter. It was very satisfactory because the people understood not only the music, but also the dialogue, they knew what it was all about, although it is not a complicated story. But it is pleasant to know that the people were laughing after a joke and the right place.

**Interviewer:** What are your feelings, generally, about opera in English?

**Alexander Kipnis:** If we would have, if we could have a perfect translation that would be the ideal way to produce opera in this country, it would serve the public and especially the music and the musicians to a greater extent than they are.

We would not have only people to come in and to hear *Aïda* or *Madame Butterfly* *or La Bohème* in Italian or *Carmen* in French or *Thaïs* in French. And people who don't understand what we are talking and singing about. They pretend they do enjoy it, but how much joy would they really have if they could really understand everything, every word? No, I think a good translation would be a great blessing to the opera and to the public in English.

**Interviewer:** Who sticks out in your mind as an impressive Queen of the Night?

**Alexander Kipnis**: Oh, the best I have heard was Meliza Korjus. This was in Berlin a long time ago. Yes. I have her recording.

**Interviewer:** I visited her out in Hollywood. I'll tell you about that one, what I'm going to tell you about her. Yes, she's still living out there. She's still living in Hollywood, yes. She would be very happy to hear that you've said this about her. She's still in California. She lives in Hollywood, yes. She still sings. She sang for me. She sang Brünnhilde’s Immolation Scene. And it's an enormous voice. My ears were ringing for an hour. I couldn't hear anything in one ear. Amazing.

**Alexander Kipnis**: She was really the most impressive. Most impressive Queen of the Night I have heard and I sang with many, many Queens of the Night, they all have to transpose the second, yes, especially, because it goes up to the high F.

**Interviewer:** Did she transpose it, she sang it originally?

**Alexander Kipnis:** No, she sang it originally. She's Finnish and she speaks very fluent Russian.

**Interviewer:** Oh really that's interesting

**Alexander Kipnis:** She's recorded some things in Russian recently.

**Interviewer:** What else do you remember about her? Did you see anything else with her or see her in anything else?

**Alexander Kipnis:** No, I sang with her only in this opera. This was in the State Opera in Berlin. I sang with many, many Queens of the Knights. Most of them have to transpose it. Or they have such thin voices, you see, that they don't express the drama.

**Interviewer:** How would you rate this opera among Mozart's other operas? Is it his greatest opera in European history?

**Alexander Kipnis:** No. All the operas by Mozart are great. Some are greater. The greatest opera by Mozart is *Don Giovanni.* The second, after *Don Giovanni,* is *Marriage of Figaro*, then *Così fan Tutte,* and then is *Abduction from the Seraglio.*

These are the greatest operas of Mozart. Then are several others which have been written, like *Bastien und Bastienne,* which is lovely. Then some other others which are unfortunately not produced . . .

*The Magic Flute* is unique, it's an angelic opera, it's unbelievable, beautiful. I don't know, I cannot verify this, but the story is when Goethe heard *The Magic Flute,* he was so impressed that he decided to write a continuation of *The Magic Flute,* and to find a composer, to compose it, and he had a friend, and his friend was Zelter.

At that time he was considered, he was a friend of Goethe, he was considered as a great conductor, a great composer. But there was no Mozart anymore, and he started to realize, it is not the story, it is not Pamina, is not only Sarastro, or the high priest, or the Freemasonry, it is Mozart.

And Mozart was not alive. Schikaneder, who wrote the libretto, complained, “Mozart has spoiled my good libretto.” He said he was also a Freemason, but who is Schikaneder? Nobody would know his name if it was not for *The Magic Flute* by Mozart.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember any productions of *The Magic Flute* that were especially impressive or beautiful in terms of costumes and stage design?

**Alexander Kipnis:** No, I don't, I don't recall. I have not seen *The Magic Flute* here, so I don't know how Chagall. We hear something very exceptional, the expression about Chagall’s scenery. And we also hear that it's not what Mozart had in mind, It does not reflect the music. A very, very good, exceptionally good performance, and with good scenery, although it was, although it was very simple, was in Glyndebourne. Very intimate, small, beautiful. You did not see these enormous big columns, the Egyptian columns of the Sarastro’s temple. But you saw a door, and if you had a great deal of imagination, you could think and see what is behind that door. . .

**Interviewer:** Do we dare risk the story of Siegfried Wagner funeral again? Should we give it another try? We've lost it four times. On an earlier tape.

**Alexander Kipnis:** Well, I have not very many memories about Siegfried Wagner's life, but except he was a very kind person, a very good stage director, and not quite a good organizer, although he was very kind and very harmonious, he never raised his voice.

In 1930, when shortly after Toscanini had his rehearsal of *Tristan*, it became known to us in the Festspielhaus that Siegfried Wagner passed away. And everything was broken up. No rehearsals for the time being.

They have in Bayreuth an old cemetery. Among other people, famous people, Franz Liszt is buried there. And we have been told that Siegfried Wagner is going to be buried close to the grave of Franz Liszt. From all over Germany, as well as England and France, and other countries, European countries, laurels, bouquets, telegrams, messages, came to this funeral.

We, the artists, sent a floral along with a long ribbon, written to what we think of him and so on. Same thing was sent by Toscanini, who sent a painting. And also a wreath came from [Karl] Muck.

Muck was still there. He was conducting *Parsifal*. He was the only conductor of *Parsifal* through the years. And the fire department from Bayreuth have also sent a wreath with golden letters to our most famous citizen the greatest master.

And there were hundreds of wreaths, and you could not find them all lying for a mountain of them. And the time came, and we were all standing around the grave, and the head of the fire department was looking for his wreath, and he couldn't find it.

So he took the first one, grabbed that, and had it in front of his feet, and standing there, and starting to talk about what a greatly important citizen, what a great personality, and what it meant for the world to have him, and so and so.

On the other side, close to me was sending Muck, and Muck looked at this man, and recognized that this man of the fire department is holding his wreath. because you saw the golden letters, Dr. Carl Muck.

And in this situation, Muck started to laugh like Mephisto, pointing with his finger to this fire department. He said, “look, say, look, my wreath, the fire department.” You know, like this. And it was strange, in this situation, to see Muck with his thin lips, you know, you know, like, so he talked, you know, pointing with his finger at the Hauptmann of the fire department, the head of the fire department. So this was the burial, the tragic moment of Siegfried Wagner.

Shortly after that, there was a concert in the *Festspielhaus*, a memorial for Siegfried Wagner. The first on the program was Toscanini conducting the *Siegfried Idyll.* This was the most touching moment, and the most unbelievable rendition I have ever heard.

**Interviewer:** Was the orchestra on the stage, or underneath?

**Alexander Kipnis:** The orchestra was underneath, underneath. You couldn’t see the orchestra. And after that, number two was Siegfried's funeral march, conducted by Muck. And it was the most sad, sad like funeral march, if you can say something else about the funeral march.

Muck came out, his face was like dry parchment, and his lips still thinner and pale. There was no difference in color between the skin and the lips. And he conducted the funeral march. It sounded like music out of a grave. This was my last memory of Siegfried.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any contact with Winifred?

**Alexander Kipnis:** I had a contact with Winifred Wagner, two years later A colleague of mine, Andresen [Ivar Andresen – Ed.], became ill and he had to have an operation on his vocal cords. And he cancelled all the performances. And I was the only bass. I took on, I was engaged for *Parsifal* and for *Tristan*. You know, I am making a mistake. This was not 1932, it was 1930. So they asked me, would I take over Andresen’s part. Andresen sang also *Parsifal*.

When he sang Parsifal, when he sang Gurnemanz, I sang two Titurel, and then when I sang Gurnemanz, he sang Tuturel. So I agreed to take over *Tristan, Parsifal, Tannhȁuser* too. He had a *Tannhȁuser* too.

We received at that time, a thousand Marks for a performance. This was the highest fee. So I sang my *Parsifals* and Titurels, and there were three more *Parsifals* . . .

And the festival was over, and then they sent me a check for three thousand Marks more because I had sung one *Tannhȁuser* and two *Parsifals*, which I was not obliged to sing. So I took this check and I sent it over to Winifred Wagner.

I said, “This is my gift to Bayreuth.” I didn't want to take the money. So I gave it back to her. And she was speechless. She didn't know what to say. Then she said, ”But we cannot accept this.”

But I said, “Take it as a gift from me. This is my gift.”

**Cassette Side Two**

**Interviewer:** What interests me a great deal in dealing with Hagen and your characterization, of course, is that most of the roles you did were very sympathetic, Arkel or Wotan. I mean, most of the things you did, The Flying Dutchmen, Fidelio, were rather sympathetic individuals, you know, compassionate, intellectual.

Hagen, of course, is just an out-and-out villain. What special qualities, in a sense, it must have been a pleasure and a way to do it. Of course, there are similarities, I suppose, between the aspects of Boris Godunov and Hagen.

But in terms of the sheer power drive of the two men, but what, in terms of playing Hagen, what, did you make any attempt, in other words, to make him more than just a villain? I guess this is the question that I'm after.

**Alexander Kipnis:** Well, young singers often have very little opportunity to, to... to go in deeply to the characters they have to sing. They have to hang on into two possibilities which this character brings out. To be good, honest, evil or humorous or to be a drunkard or to be a very funny, humorous character like Kecal in *The Bartered Bride,* Baron Ochs in *Der Rosenkavalier,* or a very good character the like Cardinal in *La Juive* or an evil character, like Méphistophélès or like Hagen. This is a sort of characterization to which a young singer who has not very much experience uses to hang onto the character as such, give a young singer a clue how to sing this character and especially how to act this character.

Later on, when he has more experience and more ability to penetrate into a character, then he has so many other things to hang on and to be able to get out the juice of this typical character. Hagen, as such, has so many parts and so many words and so many musical things to hang on in order to create this unbelievable character.

Wagner has created for a bass voice two different or rather three different characters. One is a character of kindness, of wisdom, of everything a human being can bring out in showing how kindness and goodness can be. This is Gurnemanz. Another character is King Marke, where the king has to be a human being full of love, full of unhappiness, full of feeling of being betrayed. He has to forget that he is a king. He has been betrayed by his best friend. Hagen, on the contrary, is the character of evil. He has been born evil and he has been working on this earth thinking how more evil can be created.

The key for Hagen's character is in the beginning of the Second Act [of Götterdämmerung – Ed.] when Alberich appears in his dream. As you probably know, Hagen has been assigned to watch the entrance of the hall where they lived. And Hagen is sitting there with his spear and Alberich, his father, appears in his dream. And Alberich is asking Hagen if he is still sleeping. But Hagen is not sleeping, he is sitting there with open eyes.

He is listening to Alberich's questions. “Do you sleep, Hagen, my son?”

And Hagen, answers him on two questions, “My mother, Grimhilde, gave me courage and I am not grateful to her. That she has been, has given herself, has been raped in order to create me. I am pale. I am grey. I am much younger and much older than I should be. I hate laughter. I cannot enjoy people who do, enjoy gaiety. And therefore I am what I am.”

This is the key of Hagen.

**Interviewer:** But do you make any attempt at all to make him sympathetic? How do you make a person, how do you make just an absolute black villain into a human being? Because is there anybody in life who really is that villainous?

**Alexander Kipnis:** No, he has only one thing to say, in his voice, he has only an expression of self-pity, that he has been created like that. He is always on the outlook of something which would justify the evil of Hagen.

In every sentence he speaks, in every phrase he sings, the hatred of heaven against the other people surrounding him is full of hatred. He is almost like a wild animal who is just sitting and waiting until he can attack his enemy.

In the very beginning, when Gunther asks him, “Shall we not be proud of you that you are such a wise person?”

And he answers, “I am not proud of that.”

And Gunther says, “I am also not proud that I am the first born child of Grimhilde. I am striving to much important things in this life and ours. I know a woman whom you should marry and I know a man who should marry Gutrune.”

And he tells Gutrune that Siegfried is coming here and he is the most biggest and the strongest human being, man, the world has created. And then they hear the horn of Siegfried and Hagen steps to the shore of the Rhine and he calls in Siegfried to come in and to stop here.

“We are waiting to greet you, the greatest hero of the world.”

He has already the plan. He has made it up in his mind. Hagen is walking with his head. He has enormous big head. He is pale and a lot of grey hair.

And he has already made his plan. He offers a drink and Gutrune shall give him that drink. In the beginning Siegfried doesn't see anything of Gutrune but after he has tasted and drank that drink suddenly Siegfried falls in love with Gutrune.

This was already the planning, the beginning of the planning of Hagen's intrigue. When Siegfried asks, “Good, good Gunther, “We heisst dein schwester, what is the name of her?” he hasn't seen her before, but after Siegfried has tasted that drink, he forgot everything in the past.

He forgets Brünnhilde, he forgets everything about what happened before. An experienced actor performs all these things without being a cheap actor, without being an actor which we see very often in the moving picture.

He turns to be a real, a real character. When Brünnhilde appears on the stage in the second act, Gunther is a puppet. He just is there. Siegfried, who put on the helmet, transfers Siegfried into Gunther.

And when she finally appears on the stage, Hagen is telling the man, “Now listen what this woman has to complain.” He knows what she has to complain. She suddenly sees Siegfried the way he is, not as Gunther.

And then comes up the part, which she is swearing on the point of the spear. Hagen is aware that this is going to be a false swearing, and he calls attention of the man, “Now listen what he has to complain.”

Siegfried is also swearing on the spear, because he is not aware that he was married before to Brünnhilde. This is Hagen from the beginning until his end. Every phrase, as I mentioned before, musically, as well as verbally, is full of hate.

This is the character of Hagen. Now I would like to tell you something about my first Hagen, really. Being a young singer, I saw many performers of Hagen, and they have been like moving picture actors. They acted evil, they pretended to be evil, but they had not been convincing as Hagen was. They had not been convincing vocally as well as dramatically. I was in Wiesbaden at that time and the tenor buffo in Mainz, which is about eight miles away from Wiesbaden. And the tenor buffo of Wiesbaden, both had been very intelligent and they tried to arrange performances in Wurms. Wurms is the town where the Ring of the Niebelungen is taking place, right on the shore of the Rhein. And they arranged to have a performance of *Götterdȁmmerung*. And they wanted to make some money on these performances and they asked me, “Could you and would you be willing to sing Hagen.”

I never sang Hagen in my life, but Hagen was a dream of mine. I wanted to sing Hagen all the time but you cannot sing Hagen without real experience. So I attended all the performances of *Götterdȁmmerung* and watched watching all sorts of singers singing Hagen and I was not very happy and was not very satisfied with their performances.

So when they asked me if I would like to sing Hagen of course I said yes. I never sang Hagen before/ The fee at that time was they offered me was 30 Marks, in American dollars it was about seven dollars. We had at that time very little food and I studied my part very conscientiously and when we arrived Wurms, this was the city where Mr. Hagen was born, he was created, and he died. I was hungry, just hungry for food. I went down there to the shore of the Rhine. There was an enormous big monument of Hagen, standing there. It's still there.

And I was standing there looking up to this giant of a figure, Hagen. On his shoulders, he had his, just once I let me think for a moment, he had a big shield. On the top of the shield was quite a bit of gold, a crown, a sword, and Hagen was standing there like an unbelievable, majestic figure, gazing toward the Rhein. And I was standing there hungry, thin, you could count my ribs, you know. It was during World War I. But I knew my part. I studied very well, and in the evening I sang my first Hagen for seven dollars. After the performance, there was not very much to eat.

We stayed overnight in a small hotel. Hagen, Gunter, Gutrune, Brünnhilde, Siegfried, and all of us in the same place. The only thing we had was plenty of wine. Wurms is very close to the Rhine, and we had plenty of wine, and it was very cheap, but no food.

So we went to bed, and hungry, and we fell asleep. And while I was sleeping, I was still listening to Alberich, singing to me, “Schlȁfest du, Hagen mein Sohn?” Do you sleep, Hagen my son?”

And I woke up in the following day, I took a train, and I went to Wiesbaden, and then finally I had something to eat. Well, this is the short story of my first Hagen. I sang many Hagen's since that time. I sang it here in the Met, and people asked me, “Are you so evil as you showed on the stage as Hagen? It was unbelievable that a human being could be so evil as you have acted that character.”

In some newspapers, they said, I am the most evilest character, the most evilest Hagen they have ever seen on this stage. But believe me, I was not so evil as that. I was also able to sing Gurnemanz and King Marke. And also the Cardinal in *La Juive* and also Arkel in *Pelleas and Melisande.*

But there are two things. What you are acting, and what you are, and the music in *Götterdämmerung* gives you all the indications, what you are, what you have to play, and the kindness and the evil.

**Interviewer:** Did you ever, preparing Hagen, draw from any personal, you know, did you, have you ever known anybody who was even slightly, I mean a lot of Hagen’s motivation is simply jealousy of Siegfried, treachery, and there are treacherous people certainly in this world, in preparing the role, other than the music and the words which guided you. Did you ever use any, did you think of anybody that you knew. That’s a very personal question, you can just, you know, you can forget it, you know.

**Alexander Kipnis**: No, I was never envious.

**Interviewer**: No, not, but did you ever know anybody who you said, “Ah yes, I see a character trait in that person that I might use in preparing Hagen.”

No, I'm not saying did you have any of these experiences, but did you know anybody, or did you, you know, this is an extraordinary picture of Hitler there, you know, looking so much like your, your Hagen, that strange sort of power drive, which, which your Hagen shows me is the same thing one sees in Hitler.

**Alexander Kipnis**: I saw Hitler, I never thought that Hitler has the intelligence of Hagen. I was thinking that Hitler's effect or influence on people was just plain simple stupidity. The people in Germany at that time needed a Hitler. They didn't need a Hagen. They had plenty of Hagens there. No, I never thought that Hitler would be capable to have the intelligence of Hagen.

The music of Hagen, from the very beginning until the end when he says for instance . . . they ask him after he has killed, Siegfried says, “Hagen, what did you do?” And he said, “I took vengeance unto you.”

What Hitler did, it was not unto us, and he did not have to take vengeance upon anybody.

I had several Brünnhildes. One of them was Flagstad. A very great Brunhilde was Frida Leider. Another good Brünnhilde at that time was Traubel.

**Interviewer:** Did you sing with Marjorie Lawrence?

**Aleander Kipnis:** I did sing with Marjorie Lawrence, but she was not and couldn't be compared to the other two women.

**Interviewer:** Pease tell me your memories of Lehmann as Sieglinde.

**Aleander Kipnis**: Lehmann was vocally ideal as Sieglinde. Her voice was sweet. A voice of suffering. A voice of youth, suppressed youth. Expressing exactly what's beginning is she was married to a man whom she didn't love.

She was forced to marry that man. And this man bought her. And she acted the part. She was a very, very fine actress. She acted the part and she sang the part as it really is. Full of unhappiness . . .

**Break in Recording, then Kipnis Discusses Recital Programming**

I would advise singers, high voices or low voices, to include a group of old songs. For instance you have, you start a program with a classical group like Bach, Handel, Mozart. Then you go to a romantic group like Schubert, Schumann or Brahms. Then you go to a French group like Debussy, like Faure, like DuParc. Then you put in three or four songs by Hugo Wolf. It would bring an enormous change in the character of the entire program.

They can choose from the Italienischses Liederbuch, from the Spanishes Liederbuch, from songs of Mörike songs or Goethe songs.

There's a great deal of variety according to their own character or voice. The program would be, could bring in a great deal of variety.

And then of course an English group, modern English or English at the end of the 19th century.

This would be my suggestion for a good program. People would be able to judge the ability of a singer, how their voices are, how the ability to interpret, to perform, to show humor and to show drama, tragedy.

And of course they always have to have a very good accompanist.

**Interviewer:** your feelings about operatic excerpts. If the singer is an opera singer, how about yourself? Could you include an operatic excerpt?

**Alexander Kipnis:** It depends where it was, when it was, When I sang for instance my first recital in London I didn't have any any help I had to . . . if somebody is an operatic singer and he has a big voice and he wants to show that he is a big voice and he wants to show his ability to perform drama, then he should definitely put on an aria.

There is of course a difference between singing recitals in Europe and singing recitals in the United States. Singers, European singers, when they come to the United States they will soon find out that the audience in the United States do not understand German or French or even Russian or anything else. But the result, they begin to act, which is absolutely against concert singing. Concert singing is chamber music, this is not opera, you don't make any gestures and they begin to exaggerate in their diction as well as in their vocal production.

This is something which every concert singer shall take into consideration, it does not help to print the words in a program, usually they keep the hall so dark that the people cannot read the words and they don't have the time to read a program. If the singer has the talent and the ability to express himself then he can explain in a few short words the meaning of a song English,

**Interviewer:** Did you often to do that?

**Alexander Kipnis:** I did. I started it one day, I was singing in Lexington for instance, in Kentucky and after the program the people were applauding and I decided to give them an encore. and I had with me the Song to the Evening Star and it came to me in my mind what shall I sing, it's a lovely melody, it's very lovely. Do the audience know about the evening star, the situation, what it is and what it means and suddenly I started to talk to the audience and I described who Wolfram is why is he singing to the evening star, what is the mood of the evening star that Elizabeth who was waiting for Tannhȁuser to return from Rome, didn't find him among the pilgrims and she walked up to the wood prepared to die of devotion and of love to Tannhȁuser. In this mood Wolfram is sitting there with his harp and he sings the song to the evening star . . . And I realized the reaction was so strong that I thought all my songs which I'm going to sing now in a foreign language I'm going to explain to the audience.

I remember I sang a recital in Philadelphia Forum, or something like that, and I started to explain each song as short as possible. The meaning of the song, the humor or the drama, or the tragedy, I was only engaged three times to this Forum in this concert on the way the poems began.

And I did it ever since. Everywhere I sang. I remember once in Seattle, I was singing and having them explain my songs. And after the concert, the proprietor of the hotel, or the director of the hotel, invited me for dinner and there was Joan Charles Thomas was there.

And the proprietor said, “Listen, John, you should have heard this recital tonight. You would have seen how the audience are reacting to a song which they don't understand.”

Many, many singers later on . . . it was a good idea. Some singers attempted to go into the long stories. This is, of course, not the purpose of it.