

George Voutsas Autobiography

George Voutsas married Margery Mayer on 11 Oct. 1974 following George's divorce and the death of Margery's husband Sigvart Steen. In his retirement years, George wrote the following about his own life and career:

I was born January 16, 1911 in the town of Cyzikus-Artake, Asia Minor, of Greek parents. Originally Asia Minor was part of ancient Greece and did not go under Turkish rule until early 19th century. Old maps show only Cyzikus, or Kyzikos, and sometimes only Artake, yet other ancient maps show two towns very close together. My mother and father always called the area Cyzikus-Artake. It was founded about 300 B.C. and remained thoroughly Greek until about 1922 or so when the Turks tried to eliminate all Greeks in Asia Minor. Relations, friends and other family members were lost in the butchery that followed. Some managed to escape to Greece where the government founded a new community called new Artake and helped the escapees start a new life.

In 1912 Turkey and Greece had another of their periodic confrontations. This time Turkey insisted that the Greeks in Asia Minor were to fight with the Turkish Army against the Greeks. My father was conscripted but eventually escaped and got to Greece where he secured passage on a ship to America. I was about a year and a half old when my Father escaped. Six months later a brother, Peter was born. I remember nothing about aunts, cousins, uncles, relations, friends or other events.

As soon as my father settled down in N.Y. he began to make every effort to bring us to America. My mother was very reluctant as she did not want to leave her relations and friends. Father finally issued an ultimatum and we were on our way. From the Sea of Marmara we sailed through the Dardanelles into the Aegean sea on our way to Piraeus—the sea port of Athens—where we would board a ship for the U.S. The day after we passed through the Dardanelles the British bottled up this narrow passage as a result of W.W. I. Had my mother deliberated for another day, it might have been the end for us.

We settled in New York City in early 1914 just a few blocks from where the U.N. buildings now stand. About a year later Peter and I had a new brother—Diamond by name—"Athamandios" in Greek. Soon our home became a clearing house for other Greeks from Artake who wanted to get away from the Turkish rule. It was their first haven in the new country and they sought advice and help. Since most of them were bachelors, my folks began to function as a long distance marriage bureau pairing those bachelors with young ladies they knew in the old country. Soon there was a parade of eligible young ladies and wedding bells began to ring quite frequently.

My great fascinations in those early days were the elevated trains, fire engines pulled by horses, and streetcars which were enclosed during cold winter months and open during the warmer months.

Education and Early Career

I was educated entirely in New York City. A high school graduate, I was a student of the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox school, the Manhattan Conservatory of Music, and private music teachers. I was a winner of the Manhattan Conservatory Medal for Excellence in violin playing, and a student of theory, composition, harmony, music appreciation, music history, and piano.

In 1928 I joined the staff of the National Broadcasting Company as music librarian. I received additional training in program building, music research and radio while working for N.B.C., even

while I continued my own private studies in violin, piano, theory, composition, harmony, music history and appreciation. At this time I was also concertmaster of the Rudolf Luks string orchestra and a member of the exclusive Liederkranz Symphony Orchestra.

In 1930 I began research work and program building for the General Motors and Atwater Kent programs. I also scored music for the Great Northern Railway series, worked with various artists in selection and execution of repertoire. In 1931 I was selected by Mr. Erno Rapee, the first General Music Director at the National Broadcasting Company, to supervise the building of his programs, arrangers, and his music library. The next year I continued in this capacity under his successor, Dr. Frank J. Black.

In 1933 I was relieved of all other duties to serve as Dr. Black's general assistant. In this capacity, I supervised Dr. Black's vast music library, copyrights, and arrangers; did research work, built programs, hired talent, and assisted producers in proper execution of all his programs, including:

- General Motors Symphonic Series
- Chevrolet Series (with Jack Benny)
- Pontiac Series (Jane Froman and Modern Choir)
- Coca-Cola Series (Orchestra, choir and famous guests --a cast of 100)
- Ipena Troubadors Orchestra (with famous guests)
- N.B.C. String Symphony Orchestra (Victor Red Seal Artists)
- N.B.C. Symphony Programs (introducing new American composers and works
in addition to presenting recognized classics)
- Five Hours Back (first regularly scheduled international program to Europe)
- Great Pianists Series (Egon Petri, Josef Lhévinne, etc.)
- Gladys Swarthout (First radio appearances)
- R.C.A. Saturday Night Series
- R.C.A. Magic Kay

In addition, I built and produced a recorded commercial series for the American Bankers Association and wrote and adapted choreography for a radio presentation of the Red Poppy and Nutcracker Ballets.

In 1937 I accepted N.B.C.'s offer to come to Chicago as producer where I produced such programs as: Breakfast Club, Club Matinee, Farm and Home, Rhyme and Rhythm Club, Allis Chalmer's Family Party, This Amazing America (Greyhound Bus), Roy Shield and Company, Fitch Bandwagon, Spin and Win with Jimmy Flynn (originating at army camps), and the education series Music and American Youth. In addition, I wrote and produced Singin' and Swingin' as well as the Chicago Civic Opera.

I have also produced other educational and institutional programs. In addition, I have been active in developing and promoting talent for N.B.C. in my capacity as a production director.

War Years and After

From 1942 to 1945 I served in the armed forces where I was selected to become the radio director of a special unit being formed around Glenn Miller. This unit was to include an orchestra of 45 musicians as well as announcers, actors, writers and singers, and was to become the official radio voice of the Air Force. Our duties were to promote the Air Force through music and drama,

participate in bond drives and recruitment. This we did through programs over the NBC and CBS networks. Later we were ordered overseas where we devoted all our capabilities as a morale building factor thru thirteen weekly broadcasts to our troops and in-person concerts at hospitals, air bases and wherever else needed.

Upon my discharge in December 1945 and at the request of NBC, I returned to my duties in New York and continued my career. It would be difficult to name all the programs and all the stars and wonderful talent it was my privilege to direct. At this point my staff assignments besides musical programs included some dramatic, documentary and biographical series as well. There were also special commercial productions to mark important anniversaries of large firms such as International Harvester, Ford, Cities Service, Thomas Alva Edison Foundation, etc. A series called "Biographies in Sound" was to win many awards.

Other series featured these stars--Robert Merrill, Helen Hayes, Lawrence Tibbett, Helen Traubel. Joan Fontaine, Basil Rathbone, Vivian della Chiesa, Meredith Willson, and Joan Crawford. This is a meager list of stars. Also it is impossible to list near-stars and a lot of young capable talent, musical and otherwise. However, I will take the liberty of mentioning one—Margery Mayer Berthold Steen Voutsas.

Suddenly television! And television secured my services on a free-lance basis in the fifties. I was to coin a new phrase in the business—"audio director" which was part of my talents in radio. NBC-TV asked me to serve as audio director for their opera presentations. The improvement was noted by the audience and critics and soon other TV sponsors and producers requested my services as well. The famous Ford Fiftieth Anniversary Program which teamed Mary Martin and Ethel Merman was one of them. All this was in addition to my radio schedule at the same time.

After five years I thought I had done all I could do to help TV with its "sound problems," so when the producer of the Metropolitan Opera Broadcasts asked me to take over the direction of the intermission features of these broadcasts, NBC surprised me by giving me permission, since the opera was on another network. What was supposed to be a brief association lasted twelve years.

One of my favorite assignments was the NBC symphony orchestra conducted by Arturo Toscanini. I relieved the regular director who was my substitute during the time I was in the service. As a matter of fact, NBC tried to do all in its power to have me released from the army so that I could take over the symphony, but to no avail. (I knew nothing about this till I was released from the service.)

The last big network series on NBC radio was called "Monitor" and it covered the entire week-end in five three hour segments. Every famous star, writer, personality, politician, musician, singer or what have you, appeared on this show in the fourteen years it was on the air. It was the last "live" network program and had won numerous awards including the famous Peabody award from Ohio State University which in those days was the same as an Emmy or an Oscar.

I reached retirement age in 1975 after 47 years with NBC. On August 16, 1986 the U.S. Air Force awarded all members of the Major Glenn Miller radio unit the Air Force commendation medal at special ceremonies lasting two days. This, after forty one years following the end of W.W. II.