

ABE PEPINSKY (1888-1973)¹

Abe Pepinsky died in Norristown, Pennsylvania, on January 31, 1973, in the 85th year of his life. He was an immensely gifted man, who, throughout a long and rich career, gave warmly and generously of himself to others. His versatility enabled him to do well almost anything that he attempted, whether with his head or with his hands. Former students and colleagues at Haverford College will remember him as an experimental psychologist, a dedicated scholar, an exacting and inspirational teacher and a fine administrator. To many who sought and obtained personal counseling from him, he was also a valued adviser and therapist. To all these and numerous other persons in many countries of the world, he was also a good friend and respected colleague. What may be less well known among his former students at Haverford is that in addition to his scientific and professional accomplishments as a psychologist, he was also a gifted professional musician and musicologist. Indeed, these pursuits were interwoven as leitmotifs of his professional career.

Abe Pepinsky was born of Russian immigrant parents in Cincinnati, Ohio on December 3, 1888. A precociously gifted violinist and violist, he was already at age 13 on concert tour in southwestern Ohio and neighboring communities in Indiana. He was also a fine athlete: for example, while studying at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, he also swam for the state of Ohio in national competition. In 1907 he met and became engaged to Rachel Roxanne Brenner, in that year the first woman graduate of Miami Medical College--subsequently

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incorporated into the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. After a brief period of work and study in Boston, they met again in Berlin, Germany, where she had gone to serve as Assistant to Dr. Paul Strassmann, Director of the Women's Hospital, and he to study viola under Henri Marteau. He also became solo violist of the traveling Blüthner orchestra and later a first violinist with the Berlin Philharmonic. Abe Pepinsky and Rae Brenner resided in Berlin from 1907 to 1911 and were married there in 1909. It was during this period that he began his studies of tone psychology at the University of Berlin under Professor Karl Stumpf. Returning to the U.S.A. late in 1911 with his wife and a daughter born to them in Berlin, Abe Pepinsky spent the year 1912 as solo violist for the St. Paul Symphony. From 1913 to 1942 at the University of Minnesota he had a long and productive career in music, moving up the ranks from instructor to professor. There, he taught musicology and music education and directed both the University Symphony Orchestra and the Collegium Musicum. A sabbatical leave during the calendar year in 1929-1930 took the entire Pepinsky family --by now there were four children--to Berlin, Germany. There, while Rae Pepinsky was Assistant to Dr. Marianus Czerny, Director of the Children's Hospital, Abe attended the University of Berlin, now studying the physical basis of music under Professor Erich von Humboldt. Upon his return to Minnesota, Abe Pepinsky received his BA degree in physics with a minor in mathematics in 1931, and his MA in the same fields in 1932. It was in the course of a second sabbatical during 1938-1939 that he attended the University of Iowa, managing to complete within a period of nine months all of the requirements for

the PhD. degree with a combined major in psychology and physics under Professors Lewis and Stewart. The title of his dissertation was "Pitch as a Function of the Extent and Rate of Frequency Modulation." The degree in psychophysiological acoustics was awarded in June 1939. During Abe Pepinsky's last years at Minnesota, the second career pattern was establishing itself: two of his courses were jointly listed in physics and music; he regularly taught a class in architectural acoustics in the School of Architecture, and contributed annually to the teaching of a graduate proseminar in the Department of Psychology. When World War II broke out, he was invited to the Bartol Foundation in Swarthmore, where he spent the year 1942-1943 as Research Fellow. From there he was attracted to Haverford College to become its first Department Head and Professor of Psychology, which position he occupied until his retirement in 1954.

As Professor Emeritus, however, Abe Pepinsky was by no means ready to retire from active professional life. For the next year and a half, he served as Chief Psychologist at the Norristown State Hospital. Following a brief second retirement, he then became Dean and Director of Admissions in the Philadelphia Musical Academy, remaining in that post from 1956 to 1967. For the most part his last years were spent quietly at the house in Norristown to which his wife and he had moved from Haverford.

This brief summary cannot do justice to Abe Pepinsky's many and varied activities. During his Haverford years, he was Visiting Professor at Hamilton College in the summer of 1946, Consulting Psychologist with the U.S. Naval Electronics Laboratory in the summers

of 1947, 1948 and 1949 and a sabbatical year 1950, and in 1948 Consulting Psychologist with the Solar Aircraft Company. His professional memberships then included Sigma Xi, the American Psychological Association, and the American Musicological Society, and he was a Fellow of the American Acoustical Society. His active participation in the Society of Ancient Instruments was a source of keen enjoyment to him. For many years, he had also been a Life-time Honorary Member of the American Federation of Musicians. Among offices held at the time were those of Chairman of the Psychology of Music Section of the Music Teachers National Association, Vice President of the Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, Mental Hygiene Society, and Member of the Board of Directors of the Philadelphia Musical Academy. His scholarly publications appeared in such places as the Journal of the Acoustical Society of America, The American Journal of Musicology and the Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association.

At the age of 77, he was signally honored by an invitation from the Greater East Asia Music Society and the Music Education Society of Japan to serve as distinguished lecturer on the psychology of music and music education, at joint meetings held in Tokyo, Japan, during January of 1965. In the mid-fifties he had listed among his hobbies precisions shop work, experimentation with musical instruments, weaving and art work, and marksmanship. Anyone privileged to view his handiwork can vouch for his skill as an artisan and his accuracy on the pistol range.

Abe Pepinsky is survived by his widow, Rae Brenner Pepinsky; a brother Bernard Pepinsky, a Cincinnati architect; a son, Ray,

Professor of Physics at the University of Florida; another son, Eugene, Special Agent for the Prudential Life Insurance Company in Philadelphia; and a third son, Harold, Professor of Psychology and Computer and Information Science at Ohio State University. A daughter, Minerva, was at the time of her death in 1965 Associate Professor of Music at Northern Illinois University.

Up to the end, it was a source of pride for Abe Pepinsky to participate in the Haverford Commencement exercises. To those who knew him well and over a long period, it appeared that his years at Haverford were among the happiest ones of his life. To the last, he treasured his associations there, and he felt himself for many reasons to be greatly indebted to the College. This short biography only partially indicates the extent to which, in turn, he served the College well.

At the family's request, former associates or friends who wish to honor him may send contributions in memory of Abe Pepinsky to Haverford College.

Harold B. Pepinsky
Worthington, Ohio
February 1973