

450 RIVERSIDE DRIVE  
NEW YORK CITY

May 25th, 1933

My dear Mr. Shaw, —

It is so very nice of you to take such warm interest in my particular difficulties! Mrs. Wagenaar and I appreciate your sympathetic attitude enormously, and we wish to thank you again for enabling us to speak so frankly and thus to allow us to burden your friendship.

As you requested me to fully state the situation in which I find myself at present I let it follow here:

There is a period in an artist's career in which he finds himself established artistically in the public eye, while at the same time his monetary difficulties are still very much in the stage of struggle; particularly in the case of a composer. I am still at that turning point. Under ordinary circumstances this would not alarm me, in the consciousness of its temporary nature; and, as a matter of fact, when I entered this stage I considered this trying time a great step forward, and was full of faith. But that was a few years ago. Since then the curious incompatibility of these two conditions has been aggravated a great deal through my constantly increasing success and

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recognition as a composer, while my income steadily decreased due to these perplexing times.

I had many hopes, and ventured some things; and maybe my judgement and management were incorrect. When, for instance, I had the singular honor of being chosen as the only composer to represent the United States at the Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music with the performance of my Sinfonietta at Liege in 1930, I felt that I must attend that very important yearly occasion in order to conduct my work. It was a very successful undertaking but, rather than beg for financial help towards this professional trip, I financed it by taking a thousand dollar mortgage on our little cottage in Massachussetts. This has become, in view of the depression, a great burden; particularly where it falls due next July. I have another debt which is very difficult: the purchasing money for my piano was loaned to me by a former pupil, and I payed this back in lessons. The kind lady has however moved to Switzerland for a few years, with the result that this debt does not diminish further, while I continue to pay interest.

I can still flatter myself with being chosen to teach composition by quite a few private pupils, but they cannot afford my price any longer and, indeed, some are obliged to let me wait for payment, and my salary at the schools is of course an insufficient income to live from. Last year I was obliged to accept

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a contract for a six weeks summerschool session, and managed thereby to save a few hundred dollars to assist the cost of living during that summer, but at the expense of nearly seven weeks of valuable time to compose! For, since I am so rushed with teaching during the eight months winter season I build all my hopes on the summer for my own work. The coming summer session I was however forced to refuse, since I was offered such a reduction over last year that I would not be able to save anything at all. And I cannot afford to teach six weeks for virtually nothing, particularly not this time, and that for two reasons: First, because I may have to continue paying rent on our city apartment ( although we are trying hard to sublet it even at a sacrifice ) and, second, because I shall need all summer for composition since I have to finish two major works. Dr. Koussevitzky namely has requested me to write a Symphony for him ( remuneration was not even mentioned, under the present system of exploiting the composer in this country ), and Messrs. Salzedo, Britt and Barrere have honored me by requesting from my hand a Concerto for their very unusual combination with accompaniment of orchestra, and written specially for them. (They wish to keep this from public knowledge for a while). In this latter case there is no honorarium either, and that because they have their own difficulties as an organization. I should like to

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make it very clear, Mr. Shaw, that in both these cases I do sincerely consider it an honor and, of course, an untold delight to write those works; but there is so much more!

I must have time; therefor summerschool is impossible. I must have quiet; and that I have ideally in my studio in the country. But I have no quiet of mind! If I could only write in peace! Only in the summer, enabled to do so through saving enough from my work in the winter, and start with a "clean slate!" I could do so much better then!

Under such conditions management is excessively difficult, and I cannot economize any more than I do, for I am expected to keep up a standard. For instance, if I should live elsewhere I would waste too much time in going to and coming from school, and would then moreover have to have a studio in the city for my private pupils, which would drive my rent much above what it is now, etc..

And in connection with these two proposed orchestral works I must not forget to mention the enormous cost of having them prepared for performance, such as the writing out of the score and parts by a professional copyist. This runs into the several hundreds! The bill for my second Symphony which Maestro Toscanini performed so marvelously, for example, was well over five hundred dollars. I gratefully admit that this was generously paid for me in that case, but the fact nevertheless remains

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that I received not one cent for any of the three performances. And such is the ordinary course of affairs. Indeed, while working I am often attacked by the thought that I cannot afford to be a composer!

Is there not someone to be found who is interested in me as a composer, and who is willing to subsidize me for the summer? I think I may say that I have proven that I am willing to work to earn my livelihood, especially during the winter, the music season. I wish nothing else.

Most gratefully yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Bernard Wagman". The signature is written in dark ink and features a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the signature.