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Toscanini in his letters

by [Alexander Coleman](#)

The great conductor as revealed in his letters.

To the waning numbers of music lovers who have a clear memory of a live or even a recorded performance conducted by Arturo Toscanini (1867–1957), it must be galling to note how the grandeur of his achievement is gradually diminishing, principally among the two or three most recent generations of musicians and music lovers. The testimony from past audiences on particular live performances of Toscanini heard, let's say, at La Scala, Bayreuth, Vienna, or Salzburg before the war attests to the stunning impact of this conductor on musicians and audiences alike. Yet this history must come from written reports and interviews; whatever primitive recordings of such performances exist are still not available to the general public.

As for the recordings that are available, I note that many younger listeners just can't bear to listen to even a monophonic recording made by Toscanini ...

Alexander Coleman was a long-time contributor to The New Criterion and a close friend of the editors. He died on June 17th, 2002.

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