

Letter by Natalie Curtis to Ferruccio Busoni (New York, 17 March 1921)

106 West 57. New York U.S.A.

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My dear long-lost friends!

The war certainly placed a wall between this far continent and those who dwelt on the other side. Some word of you I had from Richard Buhlig:[*] but he had not seen you at all lately. And now comes the program of your concert with Henry Wood at Queen's Hall and the inferential news that you and the Indian Fantasy are in London. I send this letter in care of Mr Robert Newman with a prayer that it will reach you safely.

And to think that this will be the first opportunity I have to tell you that I married in 1917, the painter, Paul Burlin whom I met in 1916 in New Mexico while he was on a sketching trip. It was his first visit to the Far West and to the land of the American Indian and I naturally became much interested in his impressions. I was very much struck with his approach to the new material. He did not paint at all for many weeks, saying that he must first absorb, before he could express, as he felt himself for the first time in contact with a primeval world and an ancient and archaic people. I liked his depth and earnestness and his artistic sincerity. His pictures were very remarkable (his painting The Indian Mother was shown at the Luxembourg and at the International Exhibition in Venice last spring) – I never before saw any paintings of the American aborigines that reflected, as his did, the soul of primitive man. – Needless to relate, our artistic sympathy was fatal! And we found it impossible to keep our spirits apart. We are completely happy, as each builds into the growth and development of the other. We have a studio apartment on 57th Street near Carnegie Hall, and we own a little Spanish house in the ancient city of Santa Fe, New Mexico. This sounds more affluent than is the silent fact, I am sorry to say, as painters have had a hard financial struggle in America, during, and since the war.

Will you be coming over with Coates next season? – The Mengelberg concerts have been very fine. How I should love to hear the Maestro and Mengelberg together –

We are pining to go abroad this summer. My husband longs to go to Spain. Can we afford it? This, alas, is the question! If you know of any modest place to stay, you who have traveled the world over – do give us advice! – How I wish we might all meet some where. My husband would love the Maestro's compositions! He is ultra modern in his own works, and being intensely and most sensitively devoted to music, he adores ultra-modern music and has been most interested in all that I have told him of Busoni's writings. He went to the concert of the Friends of Music to hear the Maestro's work – I was ill, so he had to listen for me! He was enthusiastic about the whole concert. I suppose you saw the program?

What is your address and where will you be? I want to send you my two last books. Let me know where they would reach you. Thank you so much for your kind thoughtfulness in sending me the program of the London Symphony Concerts.

My husband's recent pictures (two of them, and about a dozen drawings) left about three weeks ago for an exhibition in London and Paris. If you get a chance to see them (some exhibitions of American art), I hope you will do so. He is walking the same path in paint that the musical pioneers are treading in sound. Let me have some personal news of you! What happened to your son, the sculptor? And where is Rafael? I have been much in the Far West since you left, and have lost track of people. Warmest greetings to you with – Monsieur et Madame! Your affectionate friend

Natalie Curtis.