

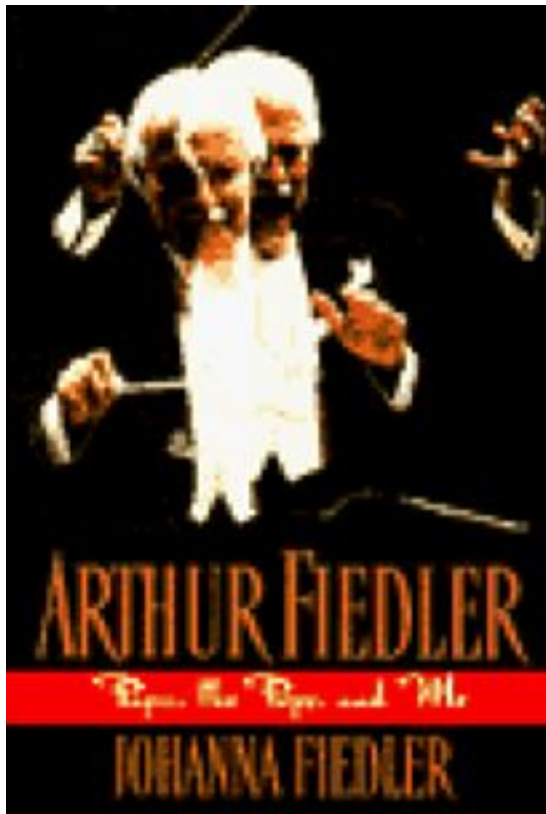
# The Columbus Dispatch

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## BOOK FARE

### FIEDLER'S LIFE STRUCK DISCORDANT NOTES

*Nancy McAllister, For The Dispatch*

Arthur Fiedler was one of America's most popular and well-loved musicians. From his early career playing the viola in the Boston Symphony Orchestra to his familiar role bringing classical music to viewers on PBS' Evening at the Pops, Fiedler had a fascinating career.

Johanna Fiedler, Fiedler's oldest child, has written a frank and unrestrained book about her famous father. Part of it chronicles his eccentric personality and unusual career as a

conductor of popular music; part of it documents her bittersweet relationship with the man.

Born to a Jewish family that had emigrated from what is now the Ukraine to Boston, Arthur Fiedler (1894-1979) was raised in the traditional "European manner." Music was introduced to him as a discipline, not a possible career. He began his study of the piano at age 5.

Fiedler hated the rigorous practice. He would often escape to a nearby firehouse where the firefighters would let him slide down the pole and pet the dogs and horses.

Thus, Johanna Fiedler explains her father's lifelong fascination with fires, a quirk for which he was well-known. But music was Fiedler's real passion. Fiedler did not marry until late in life. His wife, Ellen Bottomley, wanted children, but he did not. After a serious heart attack in his early 50s, Fiedler told his wife that he would grant her wish for children if he survived. He did. Their first child, Johanna, was followed by two siblings, Debbie and Peter.

Despite Fiedler's charming public persona, his home life was often unhappy and marred by alcohol.

Johanna Fiedler explains that she grew up with a strong desire to please her complex and often difficult father. Eventually, she took an interest in his music - the only family member to do so. She chose a career in music mostly to please her father, she says, and she usually dated conductors or

musicians. Unfortunately, none of these men could compare to her omnipotent father. But it was her love of music that allowed her to discover a different man from the unhappy father she had come to fear at home. Something mysterious and wonderful would happen to him once he crossed the threshold of Symphony Hall.

At times, Johanna Fiedler's memoir of her father is appalling; at times it is moving. There is a genuine quality about the book that cannot be easily dismissed, though readers might find themselves wishing that she had used restraint in revealing the ugly side of her family.

Nevertheless, the author has focused much of the book on her father's career. She remembers the thrill of being backstage, the fun of the rehearsals. She remembers Arthur Fiedler's dreams, disappointments and flaws.

**Nancy McAllister** is a Columbus writer.

At A Glance

Arthur Fiedler: Papa, the Pops, and Me is a memoir by Johanna Fiedler (Doubleday, \$24.95). To coincide with the publication of this book, RCA Victor has released a companion three-CD set titled Arthur Fiedler: The Collection.