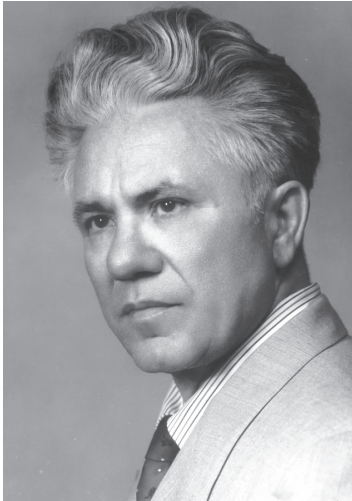


*“Waterbury has been left far behind in the countrywide movement of musical activity, and it is to be hoped that the new organization will bring it abreast of other Connecticut cities. The personnel of the orchestra is, in the main part, composed of ambitious young musicians eager for the opportunity to play good music.”*

**Mario DiCecco, after founding the Waterbury Civic Orchestra, 1937**



**Courtesy of Republican - American Archives**

Mario Guarino Domenico DiCecco devoted his entire life to music and is considered by many to have accomplished more in the teaching, performance and appreciation of classical music in Waterbury than any other individual. The son of Levino and Antoinette Gatti DiCecco, he was born November 23, 1896, in Cercemaggiore, Campobasso, Italy. At the age of 10 he immigrated to Waterbury, Connecticut where he attended Merriman, Walsh and Croft grammar schools and began studying the violin. Looking back at the origins of his love of music, he said, “I think it is

the beautiful Italian countryside, the blue sky, the sun, the fields, that breed things artistic.”

At the age of 17 he enrolled in the Von Ende School in New York City where he studied violin and also began teaching. He went on to Washington Square College of New York University where he studied under Maximillian Pilzer, concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic, and Franz Kneisel, director of the Kneisel Quartet. He was awarded the position of first violin with the newly formed Washington Square Symphony Orchestra.

Returning to Waterbury, he performed solo and with small string groups and orchestras throughout New England and New York. In the 1920s he established both the Waterbury Conservatory of Music and the People’s String Orchestra, which attracted professional musicians from New Haven and elsewhere and grew to about sixty members. Concerts were held in the magnificent Buckingham Building auditorium on the corner of Bank and Grand streets. Years later, DiCecco played a major role in opposing plans to raze the building to make room for a parking garage.

For ten successful seasons, he also directed the Newtown Orchestral Society, expanding it from ten to approximately fifty members.

Maestro DiCecco founded the Waterbury Civic Orchestra in 1937. It was incorporated in 1938, the year of the first concert. A local paper proclaimed that “The caliber of the performance, the smoothness and finish for a so recently assembled orchestra, with the fine and intelligent directing of Mr. DiCecco, was recognized as above the ordinary.” The orchestra became the Waterbury Symphony Orchestra in the 1940s.

DiCecco expanded the Waterbury Conservatory of Music into the Waterbury School of Music, adding several teaching studios and a large recital hall. He trained about fifty fine violinists, including Romeo Tata and Urico Rossi, who earned international recognition. Others went on to the Rochester Philharmonic, the NBC Symphony, the Symphony of the Air, the Berkshire Quartet, Radio City Music Hall and the symphony orchestras of Hartford,

New Haven, Springfield, Cincinnati and San Antonio. Still others have held positions of prominence at Yale University, Indiana University and City College of New York. A consummate teacher, he also taught at St. Mary’s School.

In 1945 DiCecco organized and conducted the Junior Symphony Orchestra, the first of its kind in Waterbury, consisting of about fifty children averaging 12 years of age. In 1950 he established the Symphony Chorale, a group of 125 voices that enabled the Waterbury Symphony to perform requiems by Mozart, Brahms and Verdi. He inaugurated and conducted free summer Chase Pops Concerts at the Municipal Stadium and the Hamilton Park Pavilion. A small ensemble also performed on radio station WBRY’s “Scovill on the Air”.

The Waterbury Symphony Orchestra continued to perform under DiCecco’s baton for twenty-five years. He selected the music, purchased the compositions, auditioned, rehearsed and paid the musicians, supervised publicity releases and conducted and narrated the programs. An accomplished cook, he prepared elaborate dinners annually for the orchestra at his home.

DiCecco brought world-renowned violinists, vocalists and pianists to perform with the orchestra. He also promoted Italian opera at the Loew’s Poli Theater, engaging various opera companies, and presented the Carabinieri Band of Italy to a sold-out audience of 3,200.

In 1962, during the orchestra’s financial crisis, old and new board members disagreed, causing a split that resulted in two orchestras. DiCecco became director of the new Waterbury Philharmonic Society, which he conducted for seven years until his death on February 25, 1970, at age 74.

Maestro DiCecco was a member of the Music Association of Greater Waterbury Local 186, the Mattatuck Musical Arts Society and the National Association for American Composers and Conductors.

Recognition of his contributions to music include “Mario DiCecco Night” at the 1966 Waterbury Arts Festival, a WSO testimonial dinner at the Chase Country Club, a Waterbury Teachers Association award for outstanding contributions to education, a citation in the U.S. Congressional Record for service to music in Waterbury, the dedication of the 1978-79 WSO season to Mario DiCecco and a scholarship in his name at the Hartt School of Music at the University of Hartford.

In an interview at the age of 70 DiCecco said, “I neglected everything for my music and the orchestra - everything, my family, my home, my business. But it is all right. I love it. I have no regrets. There have been many crises, but we have survived! And we have not compromised.” DiCecco and his wife Miriam Hayes DiCecco successfully raised six children. Sons Luca and Bruno, both accomplished cellists and Fulbright scholars, achieved prominence as university professors and performed internationally with prestigious string quartets.

Perhaps Charles Van Wynbergen, a Boston Symphony Orchestra violist, said it best after enjoying a WSO concert in 1954: “Mr. DiCecco is a magician. Waterbury can well be proud of such a citizen - a sincere, excellent musician, a credit to your city.”