

# TO-NIGHT THE SYMPHONY!

## *Behind the Scenes at a Concert Broadcast*



*A Striking Study of  
a Conductor in Action:  
Sir Thomas Beecham*

**I**T has been a tiring day at the office, and when you sit down by the fire and glance through the radio programmes, you want to hear something which will banish all thoughts of dull work from your mind. You want to listen to something good, something interesting and entertaining. So you come upon the item: "A Symphony Concert will be broadcast this evening." You read through the details, and decide to listen. The time of the broadcast has nearly arrived, so you settle back in your armchair, turn the dials, and soon you hear the voice of the announcer introducing the concert. The fire burns up brightly, and the first chords come over the air. It will be a pleasant evening's listening.

There it is—the mere twisting of a dial, and you may hear from your fireside a fine concert of great music. But to bring that concert to you, many people have been busy perhaps for days before; musicians, technicians, announcers, attendants — all have played a part in preparing your entertainment.

The actual preparation starts with the first rehearsal of the orchestra. This is probably several weeks before the concert. The items have been carefully selected—an overture, a symphony, a suite and a concerto, perhaps—and the work goes on from the first rehearsal in recreating the music of the great composers. The music must be played as it was written; but, as in dancing, there is a tradition which has been handed down from composer to conductors. These are certain shades of expression which must be caught to give a fine interpretation of the music. All this the conductor studies, and gradually

the various themes and motifs played by the orchestra are welded together until a really beautiful unity is achieved.

Then the day of the concert arrives. Early in the day men are at work at the Town Hall making ready. Perhaps the previous night there has been a wrestling match. The ring must be cleared away, seats arranged, and the hundred and one odd things which must be attended to before the hall is prepared. In the morning the instruments are brought on lorries—double basses and timpani and harp. They are delicate, these instruments, and must be handled with care. On the platform, stands are put up, benches arranged. (The places where musicians sit are called "benches" or "desks".)

Next to arrive on the scene are the technicians. With them come microphones and control panels, and all the complex apparatus needed for the broadcast. The microphones must be hung from the ceiling, so two of the technicians go far up into the roof by winding, narrow stairways, to clamber over dusty rafters until they are over the platform. Ropes are let down through the grilles, and below someone attaches the microphones which are drawn up above the platform. Three microphones are suspended in this way, and they must be carefully placed, so that the balance of the music is not destroyed. This task accomplished, the "mikes" are connected up to the control panel which is set up in the gallery overlooking the orchestra. A telephone to the station is also connected up; during the evening, communication will be kept up, so that the operators know how the broadcast is "going over." And at last the technical side is settled and everything is in readiness.

## **A Day in the Life . . .**

At school most children are asked to write an essay about a day in the life of a dog, or sailor or tram-conductor. A day in the life of an orchestral musician would be a rather harder affair. It might go something like this:

Mr. Jones (or Mr. Robinson or Mr. Smith) goes to the office in the morning. It is hard to concentrate on work to-day, and at five or half past, he dashes out to get home as quickly as possible. There he has a hurried meal and changes into evening dress. Then perhaps a hasty last look over a difficult part, and he leaves for the concert.

He arrives half an hour before the concert is due to begin. Back-stage there is a buzz of chatter and a sort of electric excitement is in the air as instruments are tuned. Up in the gallery, technicians make a final check over of the control panel and microphones.

People are arriving, and at last the doors are closed, the orchestra comes on to the platform. When they are on, the conductor enters and mounts the rostrum. The hall is hushed. The conductor stands, baton poised. It is the moment for which everyone has been working. The baton falls and the concert has begun.

That is the way a big concert is presented by the National Broadcasting Service to listeners. As may be seen, it is no easy matter, but something for which much preliminary work has been needed, before, by the magic twist of a dial, the concert comes to your fireside.