

## PINS AND NEEDLES AT THE PROMS

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IT is six o'clock, and the Woman of the Stools superintends another little ceremony which is virtually the reverse of the previous one. We then stand for approximately 20 minutes (while two youths at our side compose infantile quatrains about the Albert Hall) until the doors open, and there is a wild rush to buy the tickets and get a good place in the hall. The impressive clique of Season Ticket Holders, who know all the short cuts into the Arena, have already bagged the seats round the fountain and the row by the altar-bar immediately in front of the orchestra, and there is nothing for it but to get as near to the front as possible and reconcile ourselves to standing throughout the concert. It is permitted, as a matter of fact, to sit down on the floor until about a quarter to seven, "Because we are NOT COMFORTABLE" but the red matting is very hard, and it is probably more comfortable (at this stage) to stand.

So we watch the seven-and-sixpennies and five-bobbers swoop gracefully to their seats; and all around us, as if we were in a great amphitheatre, the people spread outwards and upwards to the very roof of the enormous hall. Standing where the front stalls would be in a New Zealand theatre not more than 20 feet from the conductor's rostrum, you have an uncomfortable feeling that the seated audience is coming there to look at you, and not at the London Symphony Orchestra. You feel as if you were meant to perform, or to fight one another, or something; the temptation to stretch your arm upwards and salute Caesar would be quite irresistible were it not for your doubt as to whether they think you are a Christian or a lion.

It is all somehow unreal and absurd. What is the meaning of the boxes of pretty flowers which grow between the altar-rail and the orchestra? Why those extraordinary convex pale-blue screens (apparently designed to improve the acoustics of the place) which stand behind the orchestra like great pillars? Why the fountain and the hibernating goldfish? It is all intensely curious, and full of wonder.

The man who tells you to stand up comes round and does so, and you stand up if you've been sitting down. The members of the orchestra begin to seat themselves, and start making those odd little preliminary noises which to many of the audience are the most attractive part of the show. And then Sir Adrian Boult comes in, and bows, and the hall echoes with the applause, and he starts off on Leonora No. 1.

At this juncture, you begin to feel a slight pain at the base of your spine, and a touch of fatigue in your legs.

I SHOULD not like it to be thought that we are philistines. In my view, philistines are only one whit better than bohemians. I am personally very fond indeed of the two main items on this evening's programme—even though the Eighth Symphony is a trifle too bucolic

for my taste, and the first movement of the Concerto has been somewhat spoiled for me ever since a friend drew my attention to the resemblance between the Famous Five Notes and the reiterated blast of a motor-horn. So when I say that our enjoyment of the programme diminishes in direct proportion to the effluxion of time, I hope that you will be willing to blame this on the frailty of our forms, and not on any lack of spiritual grace.

Because we are not comfortable. The pain that was only a pin point during the overture swells up to the size of a balloon during the Concerto. You try to exercise it by changing from one leg to the other, by leaning slightly forward or backward, by bending at the knees, by smoking a pipe, and by making every conceivable bodily adjustment—but you only succeed in aggravating it. (Dah-dah-dah-dah-dah . . . those damned motor-horns again! Curse my false

friend!) You feel that if you have another pipe it will take your mind off the agony; you fill it quickly and quietly, and make a dive for your matches during the next pause between movements, but your pipe goes out, and you're left with the horrid taste of stale tobacco in your mouth, and the pains grow in intensity and spread to hitherto inviolate portions of your body. (Dah—de dah—dah dee . . . the second movement does sound like "Annie Laurie" in places, doesn't it?) You try to listen intelligently to the music, because you really like the Concerto very much, and Mr. Rostal is playing it superbly. You try to be as unconcerned at the discomfort as the numerous people around you who are rapidly following the music with the aid of their miniature scores.

A little distance away from us, a girl faints and is promptly removed.

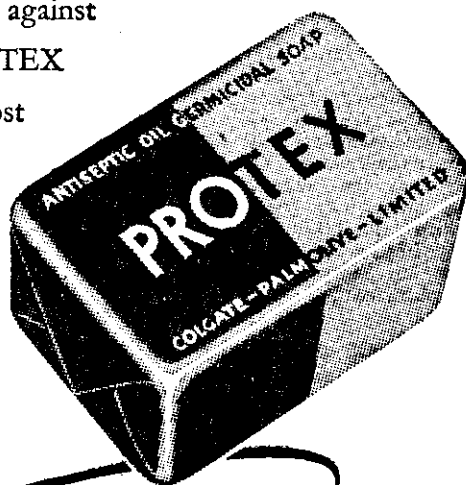
Anyway, going to concerts is a silly pastime. Like taking a clock to bits to see how it works—a child's game. Concerts like this are always a bit of a flop, because the mystery of the music is unveiled, and you see before your eyes the exact manner in which the effects which have hitherto delighted you are produced. Why pay good money (even if it's only two bob, and sixpence for a stool) to remind yourself that music is distressingly human? If you see a beautiful torso on the beach, no one other than a madman or a specialist wants to take an X-ray photograph of it, to examine the tubes and vessels below that silky epidermis. And so far as music is concerned, we are not technicians. . . . We wake up from this reflection to find that the third movement of the symphony is drawing to a close, and the pains have been working quietly but efficiently during our period of somnolence.

YOU are in a dilemma when the interval comes. If you go out and buy a glass of lemonade and a slab of fruit cake, you will probably lose your place in the Arena. And if you stay in your

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