

1933 he realised that music, rather than medicine, was his life, and he founded his orchestra, a body of 18 young professionals from the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Music. He chose boldly—young players whose enthusiasm and vitality might sustain his venture. They rehearsed every Sunday morning for six months, and then gave their first concert in the Aeolian Hall. BBC representatives recommended engagements for them at once, and recording contracts were offered immediately.

Over 100 Recordings

Neel then gave up his medical career, and has never regretted it. Small orchestras then were few, and he knew there was a vast amount of first-rate music for strings that was barely known to the public. He believed he could increase the demand for such music, and has succeeded in doing so. Recordings began in the first year, and over a 100 works have now been done—including a good deal of modern music for strings, and all of Handel's Concerti Grossi for strings. The orchestra also gave the first performance—a private one—ever given in the Glyndebourne Festival Theatre.

In 1937 he was invited to take his orchestra to give a concert of English music at the Salzburg Festival, and thus it became the first foreign orchestra to play at the Festival. It was also the youngest band of players that had ever been heard there. The conductor himself was only 32 at the time.

Wartime Activity

When the war came, he looked at first as if six years' hard work might dissolve in nothing. The players were all in age groups that were wanted for the forces, and they quickly went—including the leader, Frederick Grinke. Boyd Neel returned for a while to medicine. But as everyone knows now Britain discovered after the first panic that music was as necessary in war as in peace—if not more so—and Neel started to re-assemble the orchestra with some substitutes for those who had been called up. Before long he was overwhelmed with other work as well—he became Music Adviser for the London Region to ENSA, and worked with the London Regional Committee that was responsible for education in the Services. This meant administrative work, lectures, and conducting at CEMA concerts.

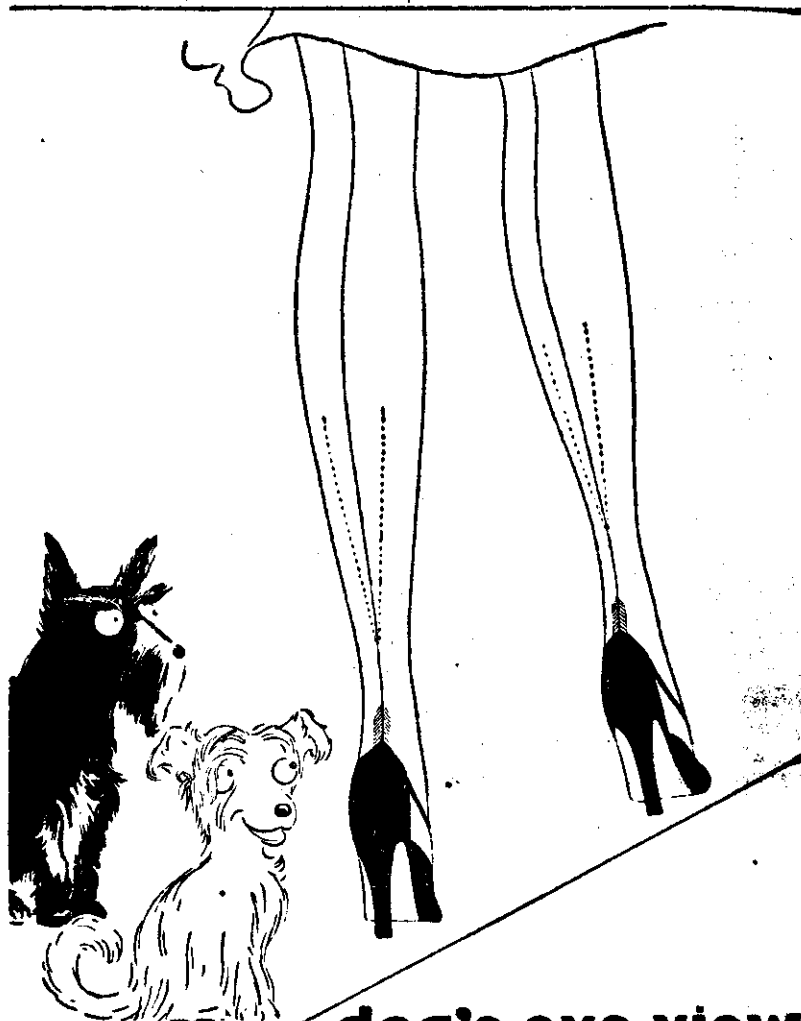
With the orchestra, he went all over England and Scotland, and to the Orkney Islands and Scapa Flow. Alone, he visited the Navy, wherever it happened to be, to give lectures. In the Adriatic he was passed from one minesweeper to another.

The orchestra still plays at some factory music clubs that have survived, and Boyd Neel says that the music which invariably brought the greatest applause was Bela Bartok's *Divertimento*. It brought factory audiences to their feet, cheering. Benjamin Britten's music also was popular with such audiences.

Last year Boyd Neel recorded the six *Brandenburg Concertos* of Bach, and they were all to be played at 15 different centres during the winter. But that plan is probably one of the many things that have had to be suspended in Britain this winter. In London, the orchestra's home is the Chelsea Town Hall, and it plays there each Monday night in the season.

Several recordings of the Boyd Neel Orchestra will be heard in next week's programmes—for instance, 1YA, Wednesday, 2.30 p.m.; 2YA, Tuesday, 9.45 p.m.; 3YA, Thursday, 7.57 p.m.; and 4YO, Wednesday, 10.17 p.m.

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, MARCH 7



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