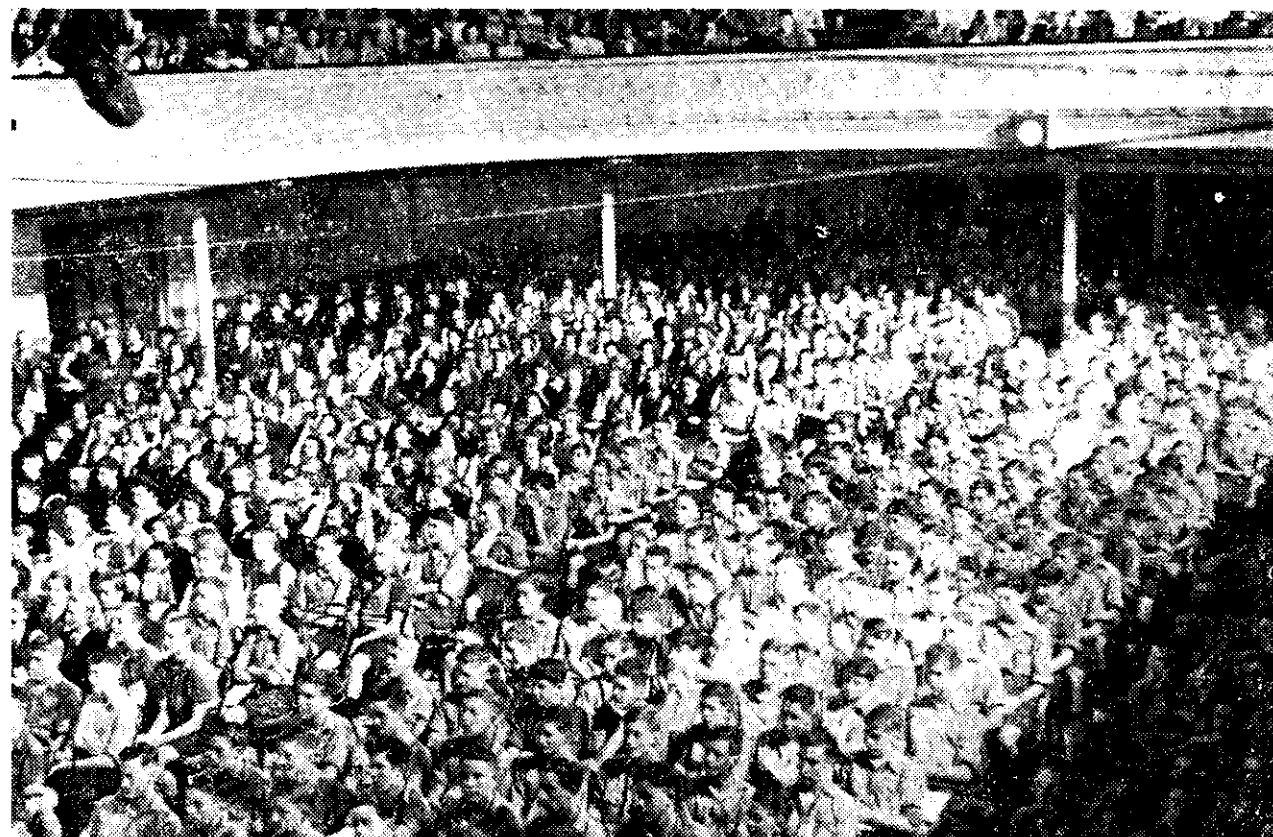


THAT Friday afternoon in Wellington was bright and sunny. When I reached the Town Hall for the first of the National Orchestra's two concerts for Wellington secondary school children, long crocodiles of assorted colour (grey and blue predominating) stretched from the main entrance. Each crocodile emitted a subdued but excited buzzing. It did not appear that the children had any regrets at the loss of an afternoon traditionally devoted to sport.

Not much time was spent (such is the power of organisation) on getting everybody inside. From the upper gallery the floor of the hall presented a neat arrangement of backs and heads, massed in columns of grey, green, blue, and again grey, heads bent studiously over programmes. The programme notes were full, and it was as well the children seized their opportunity, because once the concert started they seemed far too absorbed to refer to them again. Upstairs the effect was more motley, since the un-uniformed cohorts of the University and the school teaching staffs mingled with the navy and white of schoolgirl dress. The sun reached in at the high windows, chandeliers gleamed high above, and the arc light of the National Film Unit blazed upon the stage, upon the royal blue of the podium base and the bright red of the music covers, upon the yellow-gold of the big harp and the red-gold of the kettle drums. Even before the orchestra's arrival there was excitement in the air.

THE orchestra entered, clad for the most part in decent black. Tremendous applause. The conductor entered. An ovation. Then with a modicum of preliminary tuning and chair scraping the orchestra burst into the wild but ordered surging of the *Fingal's Cave Overture*.

The children loved it. It was perhaps their first experience of both listening to and seeing a symphony orchestra in action, apart from ephemeral and unsatisfactory impersonal acquaintance via the screen. And I think they were very conscious of the fact that the whole affair had been arranged exclusively for their benefit. Those busy and important people, the members of the National Orchestra, had assembled on the Town Hall platform with all their parapher-



MUSIC IN THE AFTERNOON

National Orchestra Plays for Schoolchildren

nal merely to give them pleasure. No expense had been spared. They had not been fobbed off with a string quartet and a woodwind or two. No, it was all there, from First Violin to Glockenspiel, from the modish gowns of the female members of the orchestra to the carnation in the conductor's buttonhole. And in spite of the size of the gathering the whole affair was gay and informal. The conductor roused an appreciative guffaw right at the beginning by telling his audience that, for the sake of the movie cameras, they were to look as if they were enjoying themselves, even if they weren't. All through the items camera

lights flashed upon the stage or picked out sections of the audience. Technicians in shirtsleeves bustled here and there in cheerful silence, broken by the faint whirr of wheels; and their presence, which might have been frowned upon by an audience which took its musical education more seriously, seemed to point the fact that musical appreciation is a natural faculty of the young, and that music for them need not be surrounded by an aura of sanctity.

AFTER the first item, bonds of sympathy had been established between orchestra and audience, and these were exploited in the next part of the programme, the "Walk Through the Orchestra" which is to be a feature of these NZBS concerts for children. The conductor introduces the audience to each instrument in turn, and the player gives some idea of the instrument's range and scope. Each soloist was given "a great hand" (possibly the first time I have heard a double bass solo earn vociferous applause), but playing honours went, I suppose, to the trombone player whose rendering of "You Are My Sunshine" set the house beside itself with glee.

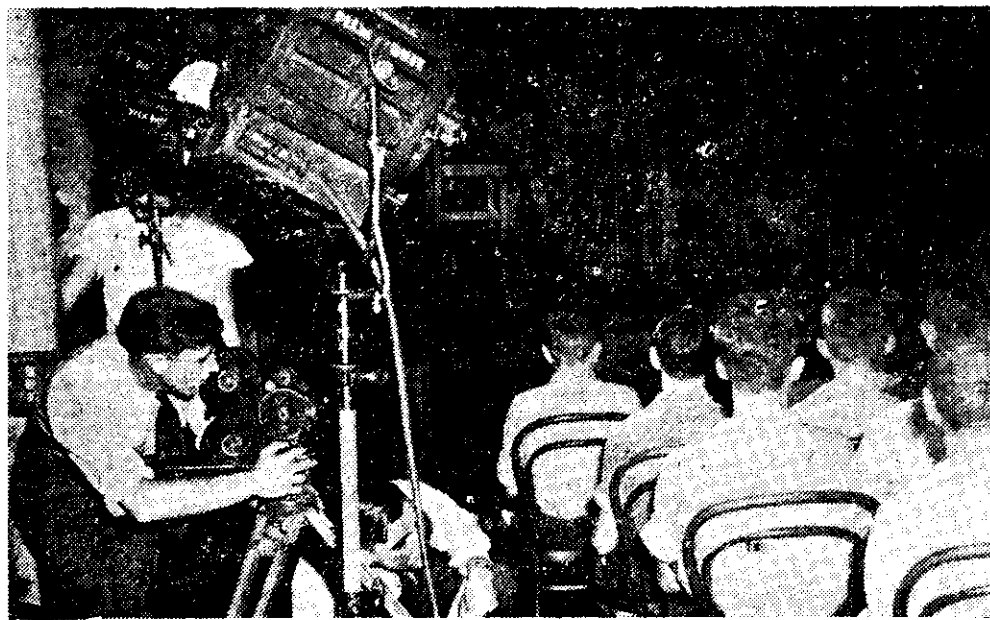
The children now have an opportunity to grasp the general pattern of the symphony orchestra and to appreciate the picture it makes, each

unit raised to command a clear view of the podium so that a movement of the conductor is as readily apparent to the player as the flicker of a buyer's eyelid to the experienced auctioneer. In front the forest of strings, behind the first violins the oboes and the shining convolutions of the horns, where the music goes round and round and comes out here. On the extreme left the harp rears its graceful bulk, and the eye finds its way upward via the double basses to where the drum-player sits ensconced behind his three shining cylinders, like a genial cook surrounded by simmering cauldrons, thus providing a suggestion of humdrum domesticity to counteract the flyaway romanticism of the harp. The colour and vitality of the visual impression add immeasurably to our enjoyment of the music.

THE concert is a short one. We are whisked through Grainger's *Handel in the Strand*, Harty's *The Fair Day*, Sibelius's *Valse Triste*, Johann Strauss's *Moto Perpetuo*, then a slightly longer item, the last two movements of Saint Saens's *Concerto No. 2 in G Minor*. Final number is Edward German's *Welsh Rhapsody*.

By this time the children are listening emotionally rather than intellectually, letting themselves be caught up and carried along on the abundant surge of sound. There is no fidgeting, but the languor of the summer afternoon creeps upon them. Then suddenly comes the Finale, "Men of Harlech"; the lotus-eaters realise that this is no music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies but rather music that stirs to action. Backs are straightened, and a

(continued on next page)



"Though six floodlights clicked off and on, the audience remained intent on the stage"