

is quite understandable, for the present orchestra has, after all, a membership of only 65, and lacks many of the instruments and players necessary for a full Wagner or Strauss orchestra of about 110. The massive outpouring of sound and brass choir effects simply cannot be got with the means at hand, and it is unfair to criticise too heavily a performance that fails from the outset in this respect, *but which is still vastly better than any we have heard here before*. That is the point to bear in mind. Should the orchestra then not play Wagner? Well, either it does so with these relatively slight imperfections, or we get none at all. I know which alternative I prefer. Curiously enough, the Strauss, though even more demanding technically than the Wagner, was relatively much better done, *Don Juan* at least comparing favourably with several recordings that have been issued. A fine chance for effect was lost in *Espana*, where the orchestra could have toned down to the merest whisper just before the shattering trombone passage; nevertheless the actual performance had more verve and fire than any recording I have heard.

### Choice of Items

Consider now Dr. Beaglehole's criticisms of choice of items for the programme. Of the first concert he says, "What can you make of that as an exercise in programme-building?" Who said it was to be such an exercise, and why should Dr. Beaglehole's evident personal preferences be consulted to the exclusion of others? After all, there are those who occasionally like to hear something besides Bach, Mozart, Haydn, and early Beethoven. Let some of us be fearless and iconoclastic enough to say that, with the wealth of neo-classical and modern music available and too little heard, we find a long programme of Bach considerably boring. Let us be honest enough to say that a Tchaikovsky, Mahler, or Sibelius symphony in the middle of a Haydn or early Beethoven concert, however artistically shocking, might be a welcome breath of life. I wonder just how many lovers of orchestral music today, on hearing the two played in succession, would really say they preferred the second Beethoven to the second Brahms—or, worse still, the first Beethoven to the first Brahms! The third is a different matter: it is the weakest Brahms, and the strongest early Beethoven, but even then there could be doubts.

It seems to me that Dr. Beaglehole overlooks the fact that devotees of orchestral music fall roughly into two classes—those whose chief delight is in form and method, and those who enjoy colour and texture. The same divisions exist, of course, in pictorial art. It seems to be clear, from his expressed preferences, that Dr. Beaglehole likes structural music of relatively simple type, with not too much volume or colour (or as he calls it, "romanticism"). But the orchestra for which most of that sort of music was written, the early classical orchestra, consisted, besides the strings, of only two horns, two bassoons, two oboes, two flutes, two trumpets, and sometimes two clarinets—a relatively small body of players. In addition, the horns and trumpets were so handicapped by methods of manufacture that they could not be written for freely and their parts in the score are largely uninteresting. Since the National Symphony Orchestra has three of most of the above instruments, also trombones, tuba, harp and much more in the

percussion department, it would be unreasonable to expect it to devote excessive time to the performance of works that would leave many of its personnel unoccupied, and could not display its resources. Occasional performances of the three last Mozart symphonies (incidentally, how do we know that they are not up to Mozart until we hear them play it?) such Haydn as the Salomon set, and all the Beethoven works would be a reasonable demand; to censure most other music as too romantic is a matter of individual opinion. In selecting programmes, Mr. Tyrer doubtless largely considers what he believes to be the trend of modern orchestral taste. That he is not too far out in his judgment is evident if one considers the average run of orchestral music broadcast by the best American symphony orchestras. It may again, of course, be purely personal taste, but I for one approved wholeheartedly of both the programmes so far played and could wish for many like them, though a different arrangement might please purists more.

Nor have I much objection to the type of encore played. These items were lighter in character of course, but after all, not every listener is ivory-tower and high-brow, and not everyone's blood runs cold at the prospect of the particular pieces Mr. Tyrer is playing at the school-children's concerts. It is nice to have one's head high in the artistic clouds, but it may be sounder in the long run to have one's feet on the earth of commonsense. Mr. Tyrer, I judge, is playing as encores the kind of music that many people not so far advanced as Dr. Beaglehole will welcome as relaxation, and for school-children the kind of music he thinks they will appreciate at that age and will lay the foundation for greater understanding later. Consider even *Peter and the Wolf*: what better way could an orchestra instil into the mind of a child the idea of the Leit-motif, so fundamental to Wagnerian and other music later? Actually, *Peter* was superbly played, not only with vim, but considerable artistry and was obviously intently listened to and enjoyed. What also is the harm in the Rumanian Rhapsody? Like Dr. Beaglehole, I think it is rather dull music, but its rhythmic character has strong attraction for that large section of musical people whose rhythmic sense is much better developed than the harmonic or melodic; *Bolero* has a similar effect, with the addition of crescendo of sound as in the Rhine-gold Prelude. *Moto Perpetuo* and *Handel in the Strand* are light, sparkling pieces, and despite Dr. Beaglehole's statement, I don't think many people really look for a joke in the Grainger—they take it as music, not as a comic.

### Why Encores?

"Why encores anyhow?" Dr. Beaglehole asks. Well, if you are giving people a very enjoyable time, and they demonstrate how sincerely they are enjoying it, and how much they would like a little more, it borders on rudeness at least to adopt the attitude, "There's the programme; take it or leave it."

There is also one very important aspect of the matter that has not been touched on at all either by Dr. Beaglehole or by any Press notice I have seen. That is the fact that this orchestra is intended primarily as a broadcasting one, and that its "over the air" audience was many times greater than, and at least as critical as, that actually in the Town Hall. One pronounced feature of this, which alters the significance of

several of Dr. Beaglehole's remarks, is that the effect of the broadcast (from a good set) was very different from that got in many parts of the Town Hall. Critics have remarked that the harp was inaudible, the brass blaring, the balance wrong, etc. None of these defects was apparent during most of the broadcast, due to the strategic placing of the microphones, and the elimination of resonances and echoes which affect many seats in the hall. The first number in both concerts was not perfectly broadcast, and I have been informed that adjustments during this time were continuous. After that, nobody could reasonably quarrel with the balance or distinctness of all the instruments or the light and shade. I attended the rehearsal in the Town Hall on the afternoon of the second concert, and was able to make a direct comparison with a rehearsing over the air at night. Although the echoes in the empty hall were exaggerated, allowance could be made, and it was most noticeable that what sounded like "tinny" high harp notes were clear and distinct over the air, while a variety of percussion and woodwind timbre effects which had been simply inaudible in the afternoon came over the air beautifully clear. The brass choir work blended with the orchestra without stridency, and the whole of the complex *London Symphony* was particularly successfully broadcast. Dr. Beaglehole should therefore bear in mind that the defects he fancied were not audible to the majority.

That the broadcasting was so carefully and adequately done here makes it the more regrettable that Dominion coverage could not be better. Neither concert was relayed to the main centres, and the first one was merely half broadcast outside of Wellington. Only a small percentage of the musical public of the Dominion could have listened satisfactorily under such conditions; no orchestral broadcast can be tolerated, let alone appreciated, unless the set can give it ample volume, without treble or bass cut-off, and without extraneous noises of any kind. The authorities are sufficiently convinced of this orchestra's major importance in our musical life, but apparently it is not possible to link up the four main stations for every concert, in the absence of land-lines suitable for transmitting music.

One must, however, recognise the excellence of the work put into these broadcasts at Wellington. It was plain from the results that special care had been taken to ensure the maximum effect, and that the land-lines and controls were minutely watched the whole time. Of the many people we have to thank for the pleasure received from these two concerts, let us not forget the technicians at the hall and in the control room, who could so easily have dulled the whole broadcast, and who kept it living and vital and free from transmission defects. Let us not forget Professor Shelley and the other broadcasting authorities, who have had this project in mind for so long, and have seen it triumphantly begun. And let us not overlook that no orchestra could have given such performances without most adequate selection, discipline, and conducting. Whether Mr. Tyrer was or was not the best possible conductor to choose for the orchestra's initial efforts is now of no interest; the fact is obvious that he has got results for which the Town Hall audience, and that much larger unseen body, whose general opinion I hope I am voicing, were deeply grateful.

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