

# THE ECONOMICS OF MUSIC

## *Must the Boom Become a Slump?*

**T**O-DAY music is news. Since the war there has been a steady stream—in fact, a deepening stream—of visiting vocalists and instrumentalists to New Zealand, and most have been well supported by the public. On each occasion it has played, the National Orchestra of the NZBS has faced large audiences; many musical societies, too, are enjoying a boom.

The Listener set out the other day to find the causes of the growing interest in music. It was suggested that quite a large part of it could be traced to returned servicemen who, having heard fine music in other countries, and from concert combinations appearing in camps, had become enthusiasts. Much greater student facilities, by the way of lectures, broadcasts on music appreciation, and recorded presentations of famous artists have all played their part.

An attempt was made to discover the economic background of the "industry" of making and presenting music, but this was difficult, for musicians have not a passion for statistics. At least one music society in Wellington, however, has a long waiting-list of intending subscribers and is therefore able to pay generous fees to its artists, and many other choral and instrumental bodies are enjoying unusual success.

One man told us that he thought there had been a renaissance in music in New Zealand covering the last 10 to 15 years, with a considerable speeding up in the last three or four years. And this, he considered, was due to the educational facilities offered to adolescents, and the fact that on any night in the week, through an intelligent study of the radio programmes, some really good music could be heard. It pleased members of the committees of musical bodies that so many young people were taking an interest in chamber, or academic, music, he said, adding that whereas a few years ago they would have preferred Chopin's piano works, to-day they would listen to a complete programme of Beethoven or Mozart.

### Cult of the Familiar

The boom in music has been noted in Britain where people have been flocking to the opera, the ballet, and the symphony concert, and enjoying the Third Programme of the BBC. But, according to a writer in *The Economist*, there are signs that the peak of the boom has passed. He says that there is no big money in serious music, and the more enterprising the promoters and the newer their programmes, the lower the profits they obtain. Musical curiosity is still the mewling infant in the seven ages of concert audiences in Britain, and a great deal of careful education will be needed before unfamiliar music can be introduced into programmes without unfortunate repercussions on box-office receipts.

At the present time it is possible to fill almost any large concert-hall with a programme of Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, or the one really familiar Brahms symphony, however second-rate the conductor or the orchestra. But try something unfamiliar, even with well-known performers, and the hall will be half

empty. Yet to play a few favourites over and over again is to face not only musical petrification but also, ultimately, commercial ruin, for even the most docile audience will sicken of repetition, and of an orchestra grown stale from boredom.

The difficulties that face concert promoters with unfamiliar programmes are well illustrated by analyses of attendances. A recent series of Sunday concerts by a well-known British symphony orchestra had attendances of 1,400 to 1,800 for concerts of established classical music. The attendances dropped to 850 to 950 when Walton, Prokofiev and Shostakovich were played, even when the new music was coupled in the same programme with tried favourites.

### More Orchestras

During the war there was a considerable increase in the number of full-time orchestras. Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham put their orchestras on a full-time contract basis and one new full-time symphony orchestra sprang up in London. In addition to this, four smaller chamber and string orchestras were formed, and since the war Sir Thomas Beecham's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra came into being.

The *Economist's* writer goes on to deal with the musical balance-sheet—the revenue and expenditure involved in running concerts of serious music. He says that there is a perilous period ahead for many orchestras, because in spite of the dramatic increase in the demand during the war, and its continued (if more sober) rise since, there are signs that the supply of music is outstripping it.

To take the expenditure side of the account first, the biggest single item is the wages bill. Fees of players have risen (in England) during the last few years as follows: 1939, principals £2/8/-, sub-principals £1/17/6, rank and file £1/9/-; 1946, £2/10/-, £2/5/-, and £2. On this basis an orchestra of 80 players costs something more than £200 for a London concert, ignoring the fees to conductor and soloist. A Toscanini or Menuhin may command a fee counted in several hundreds of pounds, but the more normal range is between 25 and 200 guineas for conductors and 15 and 100 guineas for soloists. On the average, a single concert without any outstanding stars would cost about £300.

If the orchestra is a full-time contract orchestra playing regularly together as a company, the impresario, or whoever sponsored the concert would pay this lump sum for a single performance; but the concert manager responsible for the life of the orchestra throughout the year would have a different kind of arithmetical calculation. For the players would be on a salaried contract on the basis of, say, £13 to £17 for a 30-hour week, about half of which would, as a maximum, be occupied in playing at concerts and the rest at rehearsals.

### Five Concerts a Week

In England a self-supporting orchestra, without a subsidy, cannot hope to make ends meet with less than an average of five concerts a week. But to expect an orchestra to give five concerts a week is to put a very severe strain on the players, and to demand more than can be produced if high quality is to be maintained. It is widely held that three full-dress concerts a week is all that is compatible with really good playing and this is, in fact, all that is expected of orchestras in large towns in America, where generous public support allows for good rates of pay and an assured audience.

The next most heavy cost is hiring the hall. The Royal Albert Hall costs £150 a night, with seating for 5,000, but including the 1,300 seats which are privately owned and therefore a dead loss to the concert promoter—an absurd legacy from the days when the Albert Hall was first built and financed. But the chances of making a handsome profit in the Albert Hall are so good, owing to its size, that players can demand an extra 20 per cent. in fees for playing there. In America, where concerts are a more normal recreation of the general public and halls are more generously provided, a far larger proportion of towns can receive a first-class visiting orchestra on a profitable basis.

Then comes publicity—press, poster and handbill. There is the cost of hiring any scores and orchestral parts the orchestra does not already possess. There are fees for the Performing Rights Society, if these are not covered by the licence of the hall. And there are travelling and subsistence expenses of the whole orchestra, if it travels away from home, which for 70 to 80 players may be a large sum, and would rarely be less

than £100. One final cost is entertainment duty. The imposition of this tax is erratic, but generally speaking, when a concert is promoted by some person or body not recognised officially as "non-profit-making," duty is payable on all tickets, and averages roughly one-third of their price.

Before the war at least one large orchestra was financed on the basis of public subscription, with private persons acting as guarantors. This system is widely used in America, where civic pride has produced very handsome sums. But it has not flourished in Great Britain and shows little sign, as yet, of reviving. Before the war there were a few orchestras assisted by municipal funds, for instance Bournemouth and Torquay on a modest scale and Manchester and Liverpool more ambitiously.

During the war, when the large orchestras were put on a full-time contract basis the grants from the rates were increased, and ranged from £1,500 to £7,000 a year. In addition several thousand pounds might be paid for concerts for schools. Since the war the London County Council has agreed to pay £10,000 to the London Philharmonic Orchestra for one year. These contributions are of some assistance, but compared with the costs of an orchestra, which may be as much as £100,000 a year, they cannot be said to be large.

### An Economic Crisis

An even gloomier view is taken by a staff reporter of *The Observer*. What has all the appearance of a first-class economic crisis has developed in the field of orchestral concert-giving, he says. Audiences have sharply dwindled in recent months, promoters in the happiest of cases are finding it anything but easy to make ends meet, and in certain instances guarantors and artistic "backers" are being called upon to meet substantial losses.

The financial situation of the Royal Philharmonic Society is such that it was unable to comply when Nikolai Malko, the eminent Soviet conductor, sought an extra rehearsal for Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony which was to be given in the Albert Hall recently. Consequently the Shostakovich had to be withdrawn from the programme, together with a second symphonic novelty by the United States composer, Harl McDonald. Tchaikovsky's familiar Fifth Symphony was substituted. The Society has weathered several economic storms in its 134 years' history. The present position is described as very disquieting none the less.

### Boyd Neel Restricted

It was announced that a series of concerts at Chelsea by the Boyd Neel Orchestra, which specialises in rare classics and modern works, was cut from nine, as originally planned, to five. A year ago up to 200 were being turned away from the doors at every concert. Latterly the hall on occasion has been only a quarter full. The loss of the September to Christmas series alone came to about £1,000. The decision to curtail activities was therefore unavoidable.

It is reported that the Philharmonia Orchestra lost £700 on its November concert, notwithstanding the inclusion in

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## Concert Party in Japan

(By Cable from Chofu)

ENTHUSIASTIC receptions have been given everywhere to the first New Zealand Concert Party to tour Japan. In their first week on the road, the four young women and two men of the party have delighted their audiences with their presentation of singing, instrumental, and lighter comedy items.

In its 14 weeks in Japan, the party is to play to all B.C.O.F. component forces and its variety programme will undoubtedly be as popular elsewhere as it has been in the New Zealand area. After about two more weeks of playing to New Zealand units and detachments, the party will entertain men at R.A.A.F. and R.A.F. stations, afterwards moving to the Australian area. The NZBS co-operated with New Zealand Army H.Q. and the Australian Army Amenities Service in arranging for the formation of the party and its tour. Names of the party are as follow: Will Yates, of NZBS (producer and compère), Henry Rudolph (musical director and instrumentalist), Margaret Richmond (soprano), Zita Outtrim (violinist and vocalist), Joyce Izett (soprano), and Sylvia Devenie (contralto and comedienne).