

the temperature and the skill of the performer. It is told of one of our best-known conductors that once, when the oboe gave the orchestra a tuning A more than usually full of vibrato, he said, "There you are, gentlemen; take your choice." But even discounting such human variation, there is no doubt that on a cold morning such wind instruments cannot start by giving an A that satisfies even the player himself. The brass instruments are even more susceptible to pitch varying with temperature change. The BBC's intention to use an oscillator to give orchestras their A as well as a programme tuning-note should therefore be very welcome.

The new international standard of 440 c.p.s. was agreed on by France, Germany, Britain, Holland and Italy at a meeting of a specially-appointed committee of the International Standards Association, which is a federation of national standardising bodies in the countries concerned. In Great Britain, for example, the Standards Institution has been responsible for publishing 800 standards, applicable to such widely different things as screw threads, automobile wheels, colours, mathematical symbols, and electric fences.

It's Hotter in the Hall

The principal European countries had agreed in 1885 to adopt the French standard called "Diapason Normal" (A equals 435 c.p.s.), but the disadvantage of this was that the Government tuning-forks were standardised at room temperature (59 degrees F.) and musicians came to believe that all instruments should be in tune with these (and with each other) at that temperature. Unfortunately, however, the average temperature of the concert hall is well above this; and since some instruments rise in pitch with a rise in temperature, while others (such as the piano and the tuning fork itself) do not, considerable confusion resulted. By the end of the century, then, Continental orchestras were using pitches more like 439 or 440 c.p.s. At that time the English concert pitch was as high as 452.4 c.p.s. — so high, in fact, that Patti refused at Covent Garden to conform with it and persuaded the management to use Continental pitch.

In 1896 Britain adopted the so-called "New Philharmonic Pitch" of A equals 439 c.p.s., which approximately represents a correction of Diapason Normal to a more practical temperature. Even within my own memory, however, there were still three well-recognised pitches to which one could have one's piano tuned.

The makers of wind instruments, of course, welcome the adoption of the now international standard A because for almost 40 years in Britain alone they have had to make and stock all instruments in two standard pitches—the so-called "Old Military Pitch" and the newer Fleet Pitch used by full military bands and orchestras.

In musical education, too, the value of standardising the pitch is likely to be considerable, because in the course of a few years a young generation of musicians should be produced with a sense of accurate pitch developed by sheer habit. This will give them a great advantage over those brought up in a world of different pitches when they come to deal with problems connected with pitch changing at varying temperatures, as is inevitable in concert work. The responsibility of all broadcasting organisations in maintaining standard in performance is therefore very real.

N.Z. Singer in London

ADVICE has been received that Tony Rex, the Auckland tenor who is now in London doing two years advanced study under a rehabilitation bursary, was asked by the BBC to represent New Zealand in their Empire Day programme on May 24. On the same programme was Tommy Trinder, and the musical arranger was Max Saunders, another New Zealander. Mr. Rex sang a group of Maori songs with orchestra and chorus. He landed in London with his wife on April 24, and is being trained, on the advice of Heddle Nash, by Julian Kembell, Wigmore Street Studios.

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