

A CHALLENGE TEMPTED HIM

Eugene Goossens goes to Sydney

EUGENE GOOSSENS, the conductor, son of Eugene Goossens, the conductor, and grandson of Eugene Goossens, the conductor (also brother of Leon, the oboe player, and Marie and Sidonie, the harpists), landed in Auckland on a fine morning last week with two days to go before the concert he gave in the Auckland Town Hall (and over 1YA) with the National Orchestra of the NZBS. With his wife, who is an American, he had been on board the motor vessel Suva for a month, with ten other passengers and a huge cargo of timber from Canada. We climbed on board the Suva out in the stream, and managed to shake hands with Sydney's new conductor on a narrow strip of deck before slithering winch-cables and scurrying Chinese seamen persuaded us we'd better get out of the way. Later, when he was settling down in his hotel room, we gathered he had been very glad to be on that listing timber-boat.

"It was a marvellous rest; if I'd flown, I'd have had no rest and no sea air," he said. "I'd had a very tough season with the Cincinatti."

Goossens has been conductor of the Cincinatti Symphony Orchestra for 16 years—and has been in America for 25 years. Now, at 54, he is going to Sydney to be Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Director of the New South Wales Conservatorium, which he regards as a challenging opportunity. His initial term is three years. If it is as fruitful as he hopes it will be, he expects to spend the rest of his life there, with trips abroad for conducting in Europe and America from time to time. He and his wife decided when they were in Sydney a year ago that they were "simply crazy about the place as a city."

Relearning the Tongue

"I'm a Cockney," is Goossens's answer if you ask him where he was born. His voice is still an Englishman's voice after 25 years in America, but before we had been talking to him very long he remembered one word he will have to learn again for Australia. Speaking of his strenuous final season with the Cincinatti Orchestra, he said, "They have these very heavy schedules of one-night stands—or *shedules* and as I suppose I shall have to say now. . . ."

His grandfather Eugene was born at Bruges and died in Liverpool in 1906, having conducted the Carl Rosa Opera Company in England in its palmiest days. His father (Eugene again) was born in France, and also conducted the Carl Rosa Company. (He is 80 now, and still living in England). And his mother was the daughter of T. Aynsley Cook, one of the leading operatic basses of his day.

The third Eugene is tall, with dark hair turning grey, is what Americans call "tweedy," very easy to meet and talk to, and travels with a colour-camera, which he turns on to ships, flying boats, and other colourful objects, while you talk. He doesn't smoke.

He was born in London, and studied music at Bruges, Liverpool, and the Royal College in London. He made his name first as a violinist, and was well under way as a conductor by 1916. He had some connection with the Carl Rosa

Company, so there were some musicians in it who had played under three generations of Goossens, Eugene. Then in 1923 he became conductor of the Symphony Orchestra at Rochester, N.Y., and later went to Cincinatti. He has composed two operas (*Judith*, 1929, and *Don Juan*, 1937, both to libre tos by Arnold Bennett) and gave the premiere of his Second Symphony in London last year.

Before that, he had been conducting in Australia under contract to the ABC, and the proposal to offer him the dual appointment originated then. He went from Australia to London, taking with him, as our readers may remember, the score of a ballet-suite *Corroboree*, by John Antill, an Australian composer. The work was a great success in London and, Goossens says, still more so in America.

After London, he went to Belgium; then he returned to America and conducted the Cincinatti Orchestra in an arduous tour of the southern and western States of America, took a few weeks in New York, and then boarded the Suva.

In England Now

"English rehearsals are pitiable," he told us, when we were on the subject of *Corroboree*. "They're up against it for money, and only the BBC Orchestra can afford really adequate rehearsal-time. But that's not a criticism of them—they achieve miracles. The British string player has always been renowned for his slick work in an orchestra. His reading is superb. The London Symphony Orchestra, for instance, did *Corroboree* in one rehearsal, and it's a tricky work."

"But it's a lamentable condition. A conductor is harassed when he has to rush a work through and can't feel he's doing the composer justice. It's all to their credit that they do achieve miracles; but that doesn't condone the conditions. If orchestras could be treated

as civic assets, and subsidised, then it would be all right. And I honestly believe a community can't even begin to call itself—I hate the word—cultured, if it hasn't an orchestra to bless itself with."

In Sydney, Goossens wants to make his programmes "a nice mixture of classical, romantic and contemporary music, without any stress on one class in particular."

"The Sydney orchestra could be one of the first half-dozen in the world, and I hope to make it so—given time. It will take time. I will need to introduce new material and drop some, but one doesn't do these things precipitately. That doesn't mean I don't intend to take a direct stand, though. However, after what they did last year, I'm convinced that a great deal can be done with them. I asked them if they had done Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. They hadn't. But do you know, they did it in three three-hour rehearsals—a most exacting work, as you probably know."

New Horizons

We asked Goossens if he could say what it was that had tempted him away from America after 16 years. His answer is that after 16 years conducting one orchestra in America you are spending your time perpetuating an old tradition, not creating a new one.

"Naturally after 16 years one leaves a position like that with a certain amount of regret, but when an orchestra is established (for fifty years, in this case) there is no challenge in the creative line. Your personnel remain the same, your programmes are substantially the same, and the city's horizon and tradition stays the same. In Australia, there's no doubt about it, the place is ripe for development. There's a tremendous amount to do. And it was that very quality about the position that I found so challenging."

As we go to press, Auckland is entering a period during which it will hear four different conductors and two different orchestras within nine days. Auckland has just lately heard the National Orchestra of the NZBS for the first time, under Andersen Tyrer, and on Friday, June 20, the orchestra will play under Eugene Goossens in the evening, after a schools concert conducted by Mr. Tyrer in the afternoon. A week later (Friday, June 27), the orchestra will be conducted by Warwick Braithwaite. And on the following evening (Saturday, June 28), Aucklanders will go to their Town Hall again for the first concert in New Zealand by the Boyd Neel String Orchestra. A portion of this concert, and the whole of the other concerts, will be broadcast by 1YA.

Of course it will take a tremendous amount of energy. But it's my idea that the Conservatorium can be a kind of feeder for the orchestra. I would like to make Sydney's pre-eminent school of music. That will need a very direct policy. I want to get hold of young players—of which Australia is full—and build up a fine string school (I'm a violinist myself) and I want to see if I can persuade the fathers of these young players that there is a career in music just as there is in the bank, or anywhere else. Music's not an apologetic thing, but a vital thing—and honourable, and distinguished. I've no time at all for the down-at-heel musician who doesn't acknowledge the dignity of his profession. And then the other thing that appealed to me enormously was the climate, and the physical attraction of Australia. Both my wife and I felt that very strongly last year, and that made us decide."

"What about opera in Australia?"

"Oh yes—most certainly. They've had one or two opera ventures, but I visualise the thing going in full swing. I think it's not too optimistic to hope for a combined opera-house and concert-hall in one. If I do achieve anything in Australia, I hope it will be along these lines. The place is automatically an opera country, because they produce all these

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EUGENE GOOSSENS rehearsing the National Orchestra in 1YA's studio on the day of his arrival

Sparrow Industrial photograph