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"PROPAGANDA OF THE SPIRIT"

Purpose of Boyd Neel Tour

THE talk from which the following excerpts are taken was given from the ABC recently by Boyd Neel while he and his orchestra were still in Australia. But what he says here applies as much to New Zealand (where the orchestra is, of course, now on tour) as to Australia.

THE Boyd Neel Orchestra has come to this part of the world for various reasons. The main one is that so many of you had asked us to when you heard us in London. Another reason is that the people in England wanted you to hear the orchestra, because they are rather proud of it as being unique in its own particular line. But the problem was how to send it—you see, it cannot serve for a commercial proposition for any impresario. The fares alone come to an astronomical figure!

We got here all because of that grand institution, the British Council.

"Brawn is not Everything"

If a nation wants to impress other nations with its naval might, it sends its fleet on a cruise in foreign waters. This is known as showing the flag and has been a favourite practice of governments for hundreds of years. But of later years, it has been realised that brawn is not everything, and that a nation to be really great and strong must have brain as well—indeed it is, in these days, more important.

So different countries have been making a point of showing each other what they can do in affairs of the mind as well as in feats of arms. It is a rather more subtle approach to the whole of that rather well-worn subject, propaganda. Nations are beginning to realise that they can gain a greater respect and prestige by displaying a variety of things which they have created for the enjoyment and happiness of mankind, rather than for his destruction. But the difficulty is in the displaying of these things.

If Lord Nuffield wants to sell a motor car, all he has to do is to show the car, and say, "Here it is, I can turn out thousands more like it." He has something concrete to display. But it is different if you want to show off, say, a symphony which has been written by one of your leading composers. The symphony exists on paper, but must first be performed as sound before it can be appreciated. So somebody must study it and then an orchestra must play it. Of course it can be recorded and sent out, and this is done to a great extent, but it can never be the same thing as a live programme.

Instrument of Goodwill

The task of all this propaganda of the spirit is undertaken in England by the British Council, and it is through the Council's wish that we are here to make music, and to help to realise that, in spite of anything you may read or hear, England is in a vigorous state of mind, and in excellent health, so far as the fundamentals of living go, although, like everyone else, she is going through a period of convalescence after the war.

We are here to enable people to listen to the orchestra in the flesh, so that they can see what sort of work our young English players are doing, and also to play compositions written by Englishmen, some of them quite recently, to give an idea of how our creative musicians are working.

The Council is doing this sort of thing all over the world and not only with music. It also sends out art exhibitions and libraries to all parts of the globe. It is a great instrument in creating international friendship and goodwill and we cannot have too much of that just now.

If you go and give a warm-hearted performance of a musical work in another fellow's home, he will immediately think you are a good sort and worth chatting to and making friends with. So in this way, the Council makes friends with other nations all over the world. Apart from the performances, the personal contacts made are valuable. Supposing it had not been possible for us to come here and play, just think what we would have missed in the good friendships and interesting new views on life we have already experienced.

"This Dreadful Cult"

Anyone can appreciate good music if it is presented to him in the right way, free from all pretentious rubbish and the ghastly legacy, which we have inherited, of the idea of music being something rather apart from life and difficult to understand.

We have suffered too long under this dreadful cult of making music something mysterious that only a few privileged souls can understand. I have heard otherwise sane people get up and talk about music to the man in the street in terms which have made me go hot under the collar. Why cannot musicians talk about their art in ordinary language that anyone can understand? Every profession has its own professional jargon, naturally; it has got to have it for its own work to progress. But when it comes to communicating something to an uninitiated person it is not the slightest use to use it.

I happen to be a doctor of medicine and in the days when I practised, I never would have thought of telling a nervous mother than her boy had a staphylococcal abscess surrounded by a zone of inflammatory reaction. The poor woman would have been terrified and think that he had only a few hours to live! I would merely have told her that he had a boil on his neck, which is the same thing.

Therefore, why in heaven's name must a musician talk about an *Allegro Vivace in B Flat Major*, when all he need call it is a lively tune? Musicians are the only professionals who do this kind of thing, and it has got to stop, otherwise the wretched person who is newly come to music will be frightened away before he has learnt all the joys it can bring him in life.

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