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INSTRUMENTS IN THE ORCHESTRA:

(6) The Clarinet

THE sixth of a series of short articles on the instruments of the National Orchestra, written to help interested listeners towards a more informed appreciation of orchestral music and a better understanding of the resources at the command of the conductor.



THE clarinet is descended from the *chalumeau*, a medieval instrument based on the same principle of a single reed, but it is probable that a simpler form was known to the ancient Greeks and Egyptians. The conversion of the *chalumeau* to the clarinet took place towards the end of the 17th Century, since when numerous modifications have been made, similar to those made to the flute. The Boehm system of fingering (the general principle of which

was described in last week's article in this series) was applied to the clarinet in 1842, although some players to-day still favour other systems.

The clarinet has a cylindrical body, with a mouthpiece at one end to which is attached a single reed, held in place by a metal clamp. The stream of air from the player's mouth sets the reed vibrating against an air slot, causing movement in the column of air in the body of the instrument. The orchestral clarinetist uses two instruments, the pitch of one being B flat and of the other A. They are both the same size and shape and the technique of playing and fingering is the same in each. The compass of the clarinet is just over three octaves. The lower notes are rich and mellow, and the highest are penetrating; and clear-cut. In agility the clarinet is the equal of the violin, and a number of effects can be produced upon it.



Spencer Digby photograph

J. A. McCaw

Principal clarinetist in the National Orchestra

The clarinet appears to have found a place in the orchestra during the early 18th Century. J. C. Bach and Rameau wrote music for it, but Mozart, who favoured the instrument highly, was the first really to appreciate its capabilities, and he gave it important work to do in orchestral and chamber compositions, and also wrote a concerto for it.

The National Orchestra has three clarinetists, each of whom has a B Flat and an A clarinet.

NZBS Tours by Local Singers

LISTENERS will have noticed from the programmes of the last few months that New Zealand singers of promise from the different centres have been touring the main NZBS stations. Performers from Dunedin have been heard at 1YA, 2YA and 3YA, Aucklanders from 2YA, 3YA, and 4YA, and so on. This is part of the NZBS policy to encourage New Zealand talent.

A year or two ago, tours of this nature were spasmodic. If, for instance, a Christchurch singer up to broadcasting standard happened to be in another centre on holiday, he or she was given an opportunity to broadcast away from home. But since February of this year, the local tours have been regular, and

about 10 singers—men and women—have visited different stations on an organised plan. This means that one city can appraise another's talent; it also offers singers a greater incentive to acquire a high musical standard.

Before undertaking a tour a performer's work must be of high quality and he or she must possess an extensive repertoire of songs, well-balanced in type and range. Sometimes the programmes announce two or three such tours a month, but their regularity depends on the availability of the performers.

So far the plan has allowed only for tours by singers, but it will probably be extended later to include instrumentalists.

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