

INSTRUMENTS IN THE ORCHESTRA:

(8) The Bassoon

THE eighth 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.



IT has been remarked that if an orchestra without a bassoon sounds all wrong, a bassoon without an orchestra sounds terrible. The instrument has a strong reedy tone, sometimes (and fittingly) described as "fruity." Its ability to produce notes of a humorous quality has earned it the nickname of "Comedian of the Orchestra." Beethoven, in his Sixth Symphony, uses a bassoon to portray a meandering drunk, and in "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," by Dukas, the enchanted broomstick is represented

first by one bassoon, and later, after it has been chopped into halves by the apprentice, by two. The bassoon is by no means employed for humorous effect alone, however, and it is used in a wide variety of ways in the orchestras of most of the master composers.

The bassoon is a double reed instrument of the woodwind family, in which it has the bass voice. It is to the oboe and the clarinet what the violoncello is to the violin. Its history is much the same as that of the oboe, its direct ancestor having been the *bass pommier* which was six feet in length and

quite straight. The mechanics of the bassoon, however, require the tube to be just under eight feet long, so it is "doubled back" on itself, giving it in effect a length of about five feet and making it easier to handle. The reed has been brought within easy reach of the player's mouth by a curved metal tube. The instrument is made of wood, in five pieces, and has a tapering, conical bore.

A high degree of skill is required to manipulate the keys, of which there are from 16 to 22, and as the acoustics of the instrument are imperfect the player must rely partly upon his ear to guide him.

The double bassoon, which is sometimes seen in orchestras, is more ponderous and produces an even mightier bass than does the bassoon. Its fore-runner bore the magnificent name of *great double quint-pommier*.

The National Orchestra has two bassoons.



Spencer Digby photograph

R. GIRVAN
First bassoon in the National Orchestra

Time Gallups on at 3ZB

PUBLIC Opinion, 3ZB's new programme to be broadcast each Sunday at 8.0 p.m. starting on August 31, is an extension of an idea which began nearly two years ago with the *Round Table* series. The *Round Table* discussion group was a panel of fewer than a dozen speakers, from which four were chosen each week to deal with subjects submitted by listeners. After a run of 18 months this session gave way to *Radio Town Meeting*, in which anybody who wished was given the opportunity to have his say as a member of the studio audience after the selected speakers had spoken. In *Public Opinion*

the man in the street will not visit the studio, but a microphone will be taken out to him so that he can express his views on matters of topical interest. A symposium of views will be broadcast every week and the programme will finish with an authoritative expression of opinion by some selected speaker. The compere will be Allan Sleeman, who was chairman of the *Radio Round Table*, and of the *Radio Town Meeting* sessions. The main speaker for the first broadcast will be H. Winston Rhodes, lecturer in English Literature, Canterbury University College, and his subject will be "A Formula for Peace."

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