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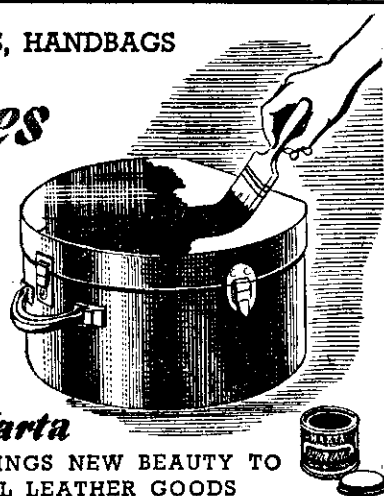
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## Sometimes

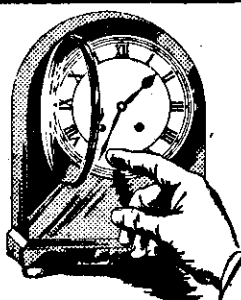
(oh, not very often) the clock gets slow, and Father has to 'regulate' it



## Sometimes

(just occasionally) Jack gets 'slow' with important duties and then mother makes him regular again with

Calfig the gentle laxative



11.7a

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# Acoustics and the National Orchestra

(continued from previous page)

unfortunately accompanied by other distortions. Reflection of the sound from hard surfaces produces waves travelling in the opposite way, and these can either reinforce the original sound for some listeners, or almost cancel it out for others. What are called damping effects in improperly built halls can also so weaken certain frequencies that tone colours can be substantially altered. In the Wellington Town Hall, certain notes throughout the musical scale become too prominent due to acoustical reinforcement, and produce what are called resonances; these can utterly mar a total effect and eventually become most distressing. They result, in many positions in the Wellington Town Hall, in considerable loss of the cohesive or welded effect, and the orchestra sounds like a number of quite separate instruments, with the brass and percussion tending, when loud, to obliterate the rest by stridency and booming. I would call particular attention to this, as it is of course the reason why some critics there have complained of the brass section, the over-emphasis yet deadness of the tympani, and the peakiness of some of the woodwind. What they are hearing is not just the natural tones as the players are producing them but also, in certain positions, uncomfortable additions made by the Wellington Town Hall itself. These are strong statements to make, but they become obvious to anyone who listens at Dunedin after coming straight from Wellington.

### Tchaikovski in the South

During the rehearsal of the Tchaikovski *Theme and Variations* on the morning of the Dunedin concert, all this made such an immediate impression that I went round the auditorium looking for bad listening places. I found none. Even in the draught of the side exit door, as far under the overhanging gallery as possible, there was no noticeable treble cut-off or reverberation resonance. At night, with every seat occupied, there was still no perceptible difference in total effect. In Wellington, I heard one concert from a seat at the junction of two of the main aisles; the orchestra there sounded thin, and the double-basses, though frequently observed to be bowing for their lives, had no weight at all. I heard another from halfway down the centre aisle; the brass appeared out of proportion in loud passages, trumpet and oboe notes were edgy, tympani sounded dead, and fortissimo cymbal clashes completely drowned the orchestra.

I heard a third from just under the gallery inside the entrance door; anyone who has listened to the National Symphony Orchestra only from that position has my sympathy.

It is so easy to quote particular passages where the difference in Dunedin is marked, that one is tempted to say "Just listen for five minutes to any bit at all." Yet it is necessary to point out some specific cases for those who have not had the chance of comparison, or who have listened only casually.

In the item selected for discussion, *Theme and Variations*, a difference is apparent immediately. In the first state-

ment of the *Theme*, the close lying notes of the second violins and violas in their lowest register sound like an obscure accompaniment to the first violin melody—in Wellington, but not in Dunedin, where the E, G, and A are clearly separated. The flute duet (with clarinet doubling) of Variation 1 can easily override the pizzicato theme on the strings, because of its much higher pitch and greater dynamic power; it entirely does so in Wellington, but the plucked strings sing out clearly in Dunedin. In Variation 2, every note of the 1st Violin spiccato is distinct, though played at great speed. The bassoon and clarinet counterpoint of Variation 3, and the triplets of the second flute against the first flute melody, do not merge into a general woodwind mass of tone as in Wellington, but stand out in cameo relief, with the later solo second clarinet theme easily heard through six other woodwinds.

The minor mood 'cello theme of Variation 4 is about equally prominent in both halls, by reason partly of the orchestration employed, partly of the bass resonance in Wellington, but there is a most noticeable difference when the cymbals and tympani enter, and in Dunedin, form (as they should) an integral tone-colour part of the orchestral canvas, instead of introducing merely martial noises. The subsequent run-down on the strings from top G to bass G sharp is beautifully clear down to the last notes of the double-basses. The fugal treatment in Variation 5 really sounds fugal, not just a medley of strings. In the fine woodwind Variation 7, all the inner parts can easily be followed, and the oboes and flutes actually do die away imperceptibly into the upper string tremolos. The violin solo of Variation 10 appears to come from within the heart of the orchestra, and not as violin solos in Wellington sound, from someone sitting away in front of the other players.

### Welter of Sound

It is in the final polacca which tends to become a welter of sound in Wellington, that probably the greatest differences are heard, due to the timbres and dynamics employed. The dramatic effect of the opening F sharp on tympani and bassoon gains enormously by the enhanced clarity; in Wellington it is not much better than a loud thud. And as the orchestral power builds up, how marvellous is the entry of the brass! The Valkyrie-like calling to each other of the trumpets and trombones against the tonic and dominant cries of the four horns, and the 36-bar pedal of the double-basses—what a magnificent finale! It has to be heard in Dunedin to be believed. Perhaps the most outstanding features are the clarity of the percussion, and the absolute lack of harshness in the brass section. The loudest cymbal crashes never dominate the orchestra, but three fortissimo trombones finally do dominate (as they should), though they never overwhelm. And through it all the actual notes of the double-basses can be easily heard as well as felt, and the trumpets have that beautiful pure tone an orchestral trumpet should have.

(continued on next page)