

WOMAN LEADS MAJOR ORCHESTRA

Special to the "The Listener"
by BETTY GILL—Through
the Australian High Commis-
sioner's Office

BERTHA JORGENSEN, who by the unanimous request of her fellow members has just been appointed permanent leader of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Concert Orchestra and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, has the distinction of being the only woman leader of a major orchestra in Australia, and one of the few in the world.

Miss Jorgensen has had a wealth of experience playing under those of the world's great conductors who have visited Australia. As an ordinary member of the orchestra, she has played under Sir Hamilton Harty, Georg Szell, George Schneevoght, Sir Thomas Beecham, and Eugene Ormandy. As leader she has played under Sir Malcolm Sargent, Susskind, Sir Ernest MacMillan, Kubelik, Warwick Braithwaite, and Eugene Goossens.

Professor Bernard Heinze, permanent conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, in commending Miss Jorgensen's work, said she had fully earned her position as leader.

"Her achievements," he said, "are the result of sincerity of study, conscientious and sustained preparation as an artist, and loyal, constant and unselfish search for a faithful artistic expression. That a symphony orchestra should be led by a woman is not without precedent, but Miss Jorgensen's long experience of orchestras, and the splendid natural qualities which she brings to bear upon her work stamp her leadership with an individuality which has won respect and admiration."

From the Age of Four

Bertha Jorgensen and her violin have been almost inseparable companions since she was four years old, when she had her first lesson. She gave her first public performance at the age of five at a musical evening in Castlemaine, Victoria, where she was born. Her parents knew even then that music was her career, and accordingly planned her future training. From the age of six till she was 15, she travelled every week by train from Castlemaine to Melbourne for study at the Conservatorium—a distance of 160 miles.

She got her orchestral training early, for at 13 she sometimes filled in

for a violinist at the local cinema. At 15 she came to live in Melbourne with her family and, still wearing pigtails, joined the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, then mainly an amateur body. At 20, she was leading it. She remained with the orchestra under Fritz Hart, and was still a member when the Australian Broadcasting Commission took it over. She became its deputy leader about four years ago.

Her violin is a valuable instrument—a 1780 Fent, which she bought from the brilliant French violinist Jeanne Gautier, when the latter was in Australia. Miss Jorgensen used to do a great deal of solo work—recently, she

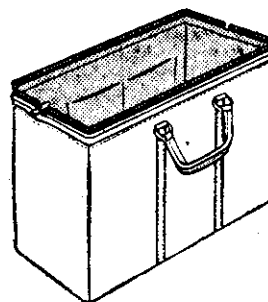


BERTHA JORGENSEN
"Her chief relaxation is playing the violin"

played the Max Bruch and Beethoven concertos. But she believes that to be both a good soloist and a good orchestral leader is impossible, and she now prefers orchestral work. She spends some time teaching (though of late lessons have had to be cut down considerably) and she also auditions artists at the Australian Broadcasting Commission several days a week.

Her chief relaxation is playing the violin. She has not spent one Christmas night at home since she was 15—always she has been playing in the performance of *Messiah* in the Melbourne Town Hall. Until recently, Good Friday nights, too, were taken up with *Elijah*. She looks forward to the day when a permanent symphony orchestra is established in Melbourne. To-day, there is a nucleus of 45 members playing all the time as the ABC Concert Orchestra. For symphony concerts, this orchestra is augmented with casual players. "But for the finest orchestral work, an ensemble which is in daily association is an absolute necessity," Miss Jorgensen says.

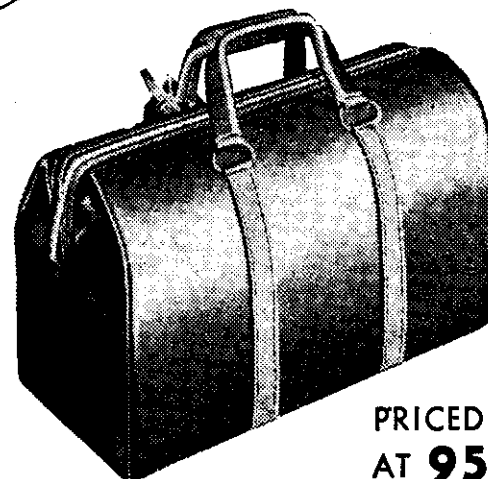
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