

NEWS OF MUSIC

(By Airmail — Special to
"The Listener")

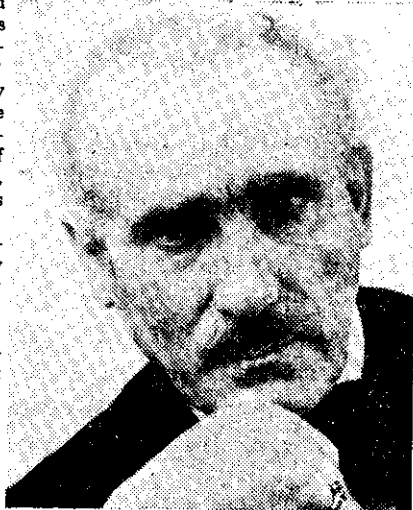
October 16

THE London Philharmonic Orchestra, which has been a self-governing body for several years, has just appointed one of its members to be permanent assistant conductor at a salary of £1,000 a year. He is Anthony Baines, who until last week was third bassoon in the L.P.O. He is 36, and lives in Kensington. The principal conductor for each season will continue to be chosen afresh each year. For 1949 it will be the Dutchman, Eduard van Beinum.

As part of the selection process, the orchestra spent one whole working day (from 10.0 a.m. to 5.0 p.m.) in concentrated rehearsal under the batons of seven young conductors, who represented the "short list" from a total of 30 applicants. This was done in the vast privacy of the Royal Albert Hall (behind locked doors) with the arena quite empty, except for a group of the orchestra's directors, who are themselves orchestral players. Thus the applicants must have worked in competition with their own echoes, though possibly the directors knew where to find the magic spots that ordinary ticket buyers at public concerts hunt for in vain through costly experiment. The seven candidates conducted the orchestra in a movement of their own choosing from a Beethoven symphony, and in John Ireland's *London Overture*, a work that is full of pitfalls.

Anthony Baines, who chose the first movement of the *Eroica*, was picked from these seven. The choice was backed by the entire orchestra, for a principle of the selection method was that each player was armed with a foolscap sheet of paper giving the names of the seven applicants, with space for a full comment on the achievement and promise displayed.

THOMAS RUSSELL, chairman of the L.P.O. (formerly a viola player in its pre-democratic days) says he believes this method of appointment is completely justified on artistic grounds. As an orchestral player, he had never had any difficulty in assessing the worth of a conductor after a brief spell of rehearsal, but since he has had opportunities of meeting conductors personally and studying their work intensively from behind their backs he has realised, he says, that nothing takes the place of experience in front of the conductor; and he is no longer surprised when an otherwise capable critic blunders badly in his



ARTURO TOSCANINI
He might have remained a 'cellist'

estimate of this or that "stick-wagger," because "he sees less than half the picture" in the concert hall.

If this is true, Russell says, the old method of an external committee "imposing" a conductor on the players ought to go. An external committee might select the wrong man, and often went out of its way to stress the subservience of orchestral members.

"However an orchestra is organised, the performances it gives demand active co-operation from all concerned, with no grudging response from those who feel ignored. That is why, in engaging Eduard van Beinum as principal conductor for 1949 the opinions of the players were first canvassed. Thus we can be sure of happy results when he takes charge."

The relationship between the orchestra and a man chosen under the method which selected Anthony Baines is a sound one, Russell says, and to prove it he speaks of the "perfect discipline" which reigned on the day of the tests.

"It is traditional to most orchestras that the appearance of a young conductor is the signal for high jinks. If, in addition, he comes from the ranks of the orchestra itself—as did three of these candidates—it is legitimate to give him a rough passage. This tradition arises from the fact that in the past conductors have always been imposed upon the men in the orchestra, who are often more capable as musicians if less privileged as citizens.

"Much as I trust the members of the L.P.O. with whom I have worked for more than 13 years, I was amazed at the perfect discipline which reigned on that day. The conductors themselves were no less gratefully surprised at the co-operation offered them."

THE result of the experiment will, no doubt, be watched with great interest, though perhaps with more reserve than Mr. Russell expresses; for it is well known that where genius depends for its full expression upon the compliance of organisation and a complexity of circumstances, as it does in the case of conductors, there is a powerful element of luck. There are many ways of selecting conductors. It seems improbable, but it is possible, that Toscanini might have remained a 'cellist' had not a conductor once fallen ill in South America, making it necessary for a member of the orchestra to take his place at the last moment.

Anthony Baines is a bachelor, and has told one of the papers here that he likes Bach and Beethoven, but finds that Elgar has a depressing effect on him. When he was at Westminster school he formed a band. It lasted eight days.

(continued on next page)

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