



STRAND BAG CO. LTD. - - CHRISTCHURCH - - APRIL, 1949

CONTRAST IN STYLES

Visiting Operatic Conductors

IT is not often that one has the opportunity of seeing on successive nights two conductors whose methods on the podium seem so completely dissimilar as those of Franco Ghione and Manno Wolff-Ferrari, the two principal conductors of the Italian Opera Company. I could hardly tear my eyes away from the conductors to watch the stage, so fascinating did I find their musical methods. Signor Ghione is of the vehement school: he does everything but play the instruments. With wide-sweeping and extravagant gestures he seems to live the music in him-

self, and through the force of his personality to mould the players as he wants them. Even from the back he was forceful enough. Had I been playing in the orchestra before that eye and that baton I should, I know, have given my best not only lest, like Jove, he loose a thunderbolt and smite me, but because one felt that here was a man to whom the music, and nothing but the music, mattered.

Signor Wolff-Ferrari, on the other hand, is a conductor who does not waste a movement. His best is economical; his entries are given to the lead instruments with a glance and a slight movement of the left hand, where Ghione with stabbing forefinger and sweeping arm would fairly tear the music from the player. But his control of the orchestra is as acute as Ghione's; not a note escapes either of them. It is evident that



FRANCO GHIONE
"He does everything but play the instruments"

both know their scores so thoroughly that hardly a glance at the music is needed for whole scenes whose complexities would baffle completely one without their experience.

I thought that the response of the orchestra to the two men was slightly different. Signor Ghione extracted from it a pianissimo which had to be heard to be believed. The end of the Second Act of *Madame Butterfly*, where poor Butterfly stands in the moonlight at the windows of her house waiting for a husband who does not come, while a distant chorus hums a beautiful melody to the softly plucked strings, was a triumph of artistic restraint. On the other hand, Ghione draws a more powerful fortissimo from his orchestra, chiefly by allowing his trumpets and trombones to produce a bigger tone at climaxes, sometimes, I fear, swamping the singers. This was more noticeable in the heavily scored *Aida* than in some of the other operas. Wolff-Ferrari does not allow such a tone from his brass in loud passages, but on the other hand he does not produce quite so ethereal a pianissimo. Again, the very vehemence of Signor Ghione's beat sometimes had the local players in two minds. In one horn solo he gestured with trembling hand to the player, who naturally responded with more tone, only to be quietened again by a quickly upraised palm.

It was amusing to contrast the ways of the two men when anything went wrong in the orchestra. Ghione glared and pointed an accusing finger as though he would blast the offending player from the earth. On the other hand, when in the performance of *Bohème* that I heard the pianist playing the harp part made a disastrous wrong entry in the tenor air "Thy tiny hand is frozen," Wolff-Ferrari simply cut him out with a flick of the finger and a minute shrug. I noticed, however, that a new pianist appeared for the second act, so perhaps Wolff-Ferrari is not so restrained as he looks.

—D.McK.



MANNO WOLFF-FERRARI
"A flick of the finger and a minute shrug"

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