

# The Orchestra on the Coast

WHEN the National Orchestra first crossed the Alps into Westland this month it was a pioneering expedition. One could be certain about West Coast hospitality, but could one be sure that the Orchestra and its music would meet with the approval of West Coasters? To find out, "The Listener" sent a representative along too, and his report is printed on these pages. The Coasters, willing as ever to try anything once, tried the Orchestra and found it well worth while.

THE rain started about four miles from Arthur's Pass, and the National Orchestra, making its first tour of the Coast, crossed into Westland without benefit of sunshine. The rain didn't surprise the party's South Islanders when they remembered the balmy Nor' West air in Christchurch that morning. The sun had shone on them all alike as they walked into the railway station: violin, bassoon and contra bass, trumpet, timpani and harp. Those who were carrying their instruments put them very carefully in the luggage racks of the two reserved carriages.

The train pulled out and they settled down quickly into their particular defences against travel boredom: talk, papers, magazines, knitting, cameras, sleep and food. But they were not sluggish. They leapt out of boredom into volatility at the sight of a new lamb, the Waimakariri Gorge, a white horse or a distant peak. They were artists: they had a well-developed sense of wonder.

Music was never far away. Often it was associated with things beyond an outsider's understanding. Crossing the Bealey Bridge, we looked down at the white and green water. A face lit up: "Remember?" and he sang "Ta-ta-tum-te-ta."

"No," somebody else said, "Tum tum ta tum tum."

"Ah yes!" said a third, beaming, and joined in. They sang for half a minute in the manner of instrument musicians, accurately from the throat and head, without chest tones, then stopped sud-

denly, all together, and talked about something else.

At Otira it was raining steadily as the keener travellers stampeded for their dinner. Orchestra members late in the queue muttered to each other about feeding methods in other countries. In their time they had covered ground. Nobody mentioned Lhasa or Samarkand, but the rest of the world was well spoken of.

## RAIN CAME DOWN SOFTLY

GREYMOUTH at 4.30 p.m. from the railway station was not a rousing sight. Rain came down softly with occasional heavy showers. It was the end of a wet fortnight, but the Coasters in the street were in the main overcoatless, or, if they wore them, did so carelessly, swinging open, adornments rather than protection from the weather.

After dinner it was still raining. Who was for an evening out? A few went to a movie they had seen before, most settled in their hotels. Greymouth would be there tomorrow, and who knew, it might be fine. The group I happened to be with were diverse. So was the talk: freedom of speech, publicity methods, watersiders, the licence allowed the student community, edible snails fattened on dock leaves, jambes de fraigees boiled in white wine and served with a tablespoon of cream, the habits of bulls in Akaroa and the way rumours spread through a body of people.

Outside it rained softly and steadily with occasional heavy showers. The



SOUTH-BOUND CONVOY: Special buses carrying the National Orchestra from Greymouth to Hokitika stop for a moment at the Taramakau road-rail bridge

Coasters continued to paddle about their business overcoatless. We didn't know how we stood with them yet.

Sunday brought a Southerly change, which meant that it was colder and still raining, but likely to clear in a day or so. Sunday is a free day for the orchestra. Most of them practise for a few hours in the morning, if they can find a place to play.

In the afternoon I went to Reefton with a violin and a flute on the invitation of a man who had business there. At times it rained very hard indeed, but the trip was worthwhile. Our host made about £80, and on the way back we shared a vision of a bright and perfect rainbow, standing north of us against bush and the dark sky. The flute and the violin exclaimed in a mixture of languages, flinging themselves round the car to get a better view. We stopped, and watched the western end of the bow lift and dissolve as the sun set. Monday was sure to be fine now.

## YOUNG COASTERS

TWO of the busier members of the party were the Concert Manager, G. C. F. Parker, who does everything, all the time, pleasantly and competently, and Bill Barsby, whom I met at the

theatre on Monday morning. When he finishes a concert, Bill puts away his bass fiddle in its case, heaves it on to a truck, stacks all the other large instruments with it, and the music stands and the platforms and the conductor's podium and many other pieces of gear, making a very large truck load and a couple of hours' work if things go well. When he is not playing or rehearsing or practising or loading or unloading or travelling, his time, as he puts it, is all his own.

He gave me a quick grin and went on unloading cases shaped like gigantic metronome boxes, which, I learnt later, held double basses.

"Don't drop 'em," he said, round and rosy, moving rapidly in several directions at once. "Put those down there. Any of those marked 'A' over here. Use the trolley for that, son. Better move that flat. Leave her to me, she's tricky."

The orchestra members arrived in small groups, exchanged gossip about their hotels, and started to clean and tune their instruments for rehearsal. I went down into the body of the theatre and met the Coast peering through a door, in the persons of Errol, Dian and

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"THE NATIONAL ORCHESTRA can coax music out of all of us, West Coasters or North Aucklanders, but best of all they coax it out of children."

