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## RADIO REVIEW

### The Vogue for Tchaikovsky

WHY is the music of Tchaikovsky so popular in broadcasting programmes? A glance through a recent *Listener* showed that during the week from Main National stations alone, there were 41 broadcast works by Russian composers, both early and modern. Tchaikovsky easily headed the list with 12 performances. The previous week had offered 36 Russian works (nine by Tchaikovsky) and the following week promised 34 (once again 10 by Tchaikovsky). This generosity, of course, is simply an automatic assessment of the worth and interest of the works as music. It is an undeniable fact that the Slav race appears to have an inexhaustible supply of ability, often amounting to genius. In music, a steady stream of composers ever since the first "nationalist," Glinka, has compelled the attention and respect of the Western world because of the sincerity, patriotism, technique, originality, and sheer beauty of what they have written.

Tchaikovsky's supreme popularity is not, of course, proof of musical worth, but in spite of lapses into triviality there remains in his best works an instinctive kinship with the troubled minds, and the intense emotions of ordinary people, and an unsurpassed ability to render these feelings into music. One cannot simply dismiss the "Pathetic" by saying it is an abandonment to sickly self-pity; so many of his hearers have got much more out of it than that. Though we rightly regard Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner, and such giants as superlative in their fields, perhaps the canvases they used are a little outsize for many people, and the portraits those of gods rather than men. It is the fashion in some circles to regard as of secondary or even little importance such men as Liszt, Berlioz, Tchaikovsky, Strauss, Delius and Elgar. But music, however intellectually written, is primarily an emotional art; is a composer really of such little importance if he can affect deeply feelings that cannot yet quite respond to more sublimated works?

Tchaikovsky always worried that he had written himself out, and for one who had to be at composition all the time that was purgatory, but what would have been his status as a composer had he not written the last three symphonies? And why are some works of composers performed to satiety while others are practically never heard? In some of the latter cases an unfamiliar, perhaps racial, idiom is the reason, as in the Borodin No. 2 and the Chausson (both heard recently over the air here); sometimes difficulty of performance, as in the Beethoven Ninth and the Mahler "Symphony of a Thousand," and sometimes simply complete overshadowing by the composer's greater works, as with the Bizet No. 1 (also broadcast here lately). This seems to be the case in Tchaikovsky's first three symphonies. Musically they are interesting, but often reminiscent in themes and treatment of

what was to be accomplished much more movingly in Nos. 4, 5, and 6, and in the tone-poems.

His second symphony was broadcast recently from 2YA, 3YA, and 4YA, and his third from 2YA. Those who know only the more familiar Tchaikovsky should take any future opportunity of hearing these two works, and then reasoning out just why they have been so completely overshadowed. In the same programme with No. 3 was Borodin's *Steppes of Central Asia*, an illuminating contrast. Is it that we instinctively realise in the latter an honesty of feeling, an absence of effect for theatricality's sake, and a compactness of expression that is missing in much of the No. 3?

One might well listen, at all events, to this symphony, and muse on why Borodin's No. 2, composed about the same time (1875-6), is so much more satisfying, expressive, and rightly esteemed a greater work of art. Great achievements must be sincere, though not all sincere ones are great.

—H.J.F.

### Geopolitics

THE solid contribution which the geographer has to make to modern problems of world strategy was illustrated by J. W. M. Fox in the final talk in his series *New Zealand in the Pacific* from 1YA. Despite Mr. Fox's over-formal manner and lecture-room phraseology, this was a thought provoking talk. He used Mackinder's concept of the "Heartland," the centre of Europe, as the pivot of history, to point up the necessity for such powers beyond the "Rim-land" as Australia and New Zealand consolidating and developing their resources for defence. We are so used to hearing of our smugness, complacency, and indifference to world problems that even the dullest among us must be coming to believe that there is something in it. Mr. Fox did not spare New Zealanders in his detailed and reasonable proposals for carrying strategic thought into action. His suggestions for the relief of population problems in the East by migration south took account of the fact that this would lower living standards there, but asserted that this would be a lesser evil than those which would follow if New Zealanders refused to think "globally." The realism of such statements impressed me no less than the comprehensiveness of his exposition.

—J.C.R.

### First and Second Estates

DO we or don't we, with all its faults, love our House of Peers? This is the question which, with truly democratic detachment, the BBC avoided answering in "Focus on the House of Lords"—a topic perhaps somewhat less than immediate to a New Zealand audience, though listeners probably had little difficulty in applying some of the arguments for abolition or reform to the

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