

Fewer Women in British Orchestras

"IF a lady is not well-favoured the male instrumentalists do not wish to play near her; if she is well-favoured they can't," Sir Thomas Beecham is reported to have said when excusing himself for banning women from his sixth orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic, which he formed in 1946. "Not that I don't think women are good musicians," he added in qualification.

A former member of the old NZBS String Quartet, May Hyam (now Mrs. Ronald L. Meek), who is visiting her people in Wellington after three-and-a-half years studying and playing in England, has noticed that "lots of orchestras in England today are discharging their women players and replacing them with men." But she has not been one of the unfortunates, for she will return to London next month to continue orchestral work.

One reason for using male instrumentalists in preference to women was, she thought, a desire to rehabilitate men players on their settling down after the war.

"Take the Covent Garden Orchestra for example. At the end of 1948 there were only five women players left in it of about 25, and some of them are very fine players indeed," she told *The Listener* in an interview.

"What happens to the women who are discharged?"

"They can teach, or they could form orchestras themselves."

Miss Hyam has definite views about female musicians. "A good woman player is every bit as good as a man." Perhaps, she added, some of the women might be regarded as unstable creatures, but she thought they were able to settle down to a job equally well with the men. She herself had been playing at Covent Garden under the conductorship of Karl Rankl, with the Scottish Orchestra of the BBC under Ian Whyte, and in orchestras conducted by Sir Adrian Boult and Sir Malcolm Sargent. The standard of British contemporary music was rising rapidly and the BBC Symphony Orchestra was making great progress; but, in her opinion, Manchester's Halle Orchestra was still the finest in England. Plenty of British music was performed at concerts and in the BBC programmes. At the same time there seemed to be too many orchestras in London. Many fine players were keen on free-lancing which meant that they were sprinkled about and so

did not congregate to form one really first-class combination.

Maurice Clare, formerly of Wellington, is now leading the Boyd Neel Orchestra, and doing it very well, said Miss Hyam. Frederick Grinke, the former leader, left the orchestra at the end of its Australian and New Zealand tour in 1947 to take up solo work. Clare, she considers, is one of the best chamber music players in England today. Miss Hyam (whose husband, another former resident of Wellington, is now lecturing in Economics at Glasgow



Spencer Digby photograph

MAY HYAM

Manchester still has the best orchestra

University) will be heard from 2YA during this month and January in four violin sonatas by Tartini, Beethoven, Cesar Franck and Brahms. Her first recital will be on Tuesday, December 13, at 8.4 p.m., with Dorothy Davies (pianist) as associate artist.

Working for the Future

"I still have to remind myself occasionally that the results of what I try to do will be felt by those as yet unborn. They will never know I existed, but that does not matter; if I do my job faithfully I shall be able to say with the great Roman poet Horace, 'That I built a monument more enduring than brass, a heritage of people with rather more foundation in their lives and loves than those of us who labour here today.'"

John Newsom, Director of Education for Hertfordshire, in a BBC programme.



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