

SCHNEEVOIGT THE FORMIDABLE FINN

He Doesn't Like Women—In Orchestras

Written for "The Listener" by
MOLLIE ALLEN, Melbourne

GREY-HAIRED, talkative Georg Schneevoigt, famous Finnish conductor and patriot, who is making his second tour for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, is as formidable and untiring in his own way as his soldier countrymen who held back the Russian steam roller for four terrible months of Arctic fighting.

The energetic musician, who looks hardly 60 years old but is nearer 70, flies all over the world in a hectic race to keep up with his engagements. "It is not I like flying," he told me, "but no time is to sit on a steamer. Unless I fly it would be months in the travelling. Where is my year then?"

But for that unforgiving year, Professor Schneevoigt would probably have added New Zealand to his list of countries visited. "That so beautiful country I would like to see, yes," he admitted. "Perhaps when I go there in one day by the air, yes, I see it."

His Strong Right Arm

The manner in which Schneevoigt dashes through Australia is typical. Landed at Darwin after bumping 11,000 miles from Europe, he wired the general manager of the Australian Broadcasting Commission: "Very happy to come you. Please rehearsal Friday." Friday was the day after he was due in Sydney.

In Adelaide he slightly injured his right arm and had a stitch put in it. One newspaper suggested the injury would prevent him conducting. So Schneevoigt bearded the editor, "and I poke him with the arm with which I cannot conduct and he fall down—so I think I prove I can still conduct."

In Melbourne, Schneevoigt was not afraid to tell women of the ABC Symphony Orchestra that he did not like them under his baton. He arrived at the rehearsal room, removing his coat and a wilted collar and waving a damp hand at his players. On his rostrum he found a paper protesting, on behalf of those not in shirt sleeves, against previous remarks he had made about women.

Woman's Place

"Ah, so" he shouted, amid laughter. "I do say that women should use their charm in their homes. Here, perhaps it is not place for them. Yes, in their homes should they be."

A woman's voice from among the violas: "But what if we cannot get husbands, Professor?"

"Ach, that should not be so! I tell you! It is because you do not use your charms. Then—you will all get husbands. Come, I tell you one cause why I prefer men in my orchestras. Sometimes I use the strong words and if I find women here, they—how you say—cramp my style!"

"Women, they have not the physique," he harangued them, gamely struggling with imperfect English. "They can play beautifully on the strings, oh, charming, they have knowledge and technique. But when I ask more of them, no use! They have not the power for the music which bursts out of a man. It is no lack of feeling, which in them is finer than in men, but lack of strength. You will never have a woman conductor—no, in thousand years!"

He swung round on a slim woman sitting near the rostrum. "Stand up, this charming lady! Stand! You see?—can you imagine this charming lady play the trombone, or the tuba? No, no!"

"The composers are mostly men. They have masculine outlook. How can woman know it? The men could not know the woman composer. It is this



PROFESSOR GEORG SCHNEEVOIGT comes from Finland, and so does soft wood. That's why Harry Longson carved in wood the striking features of this classic conductor.

—I like the women for the music, but I like them outside the orchestra."

Not a Woman-Hater

Women members of the orchestra listened and simmered. Schneevoigt's English prevented him making his point gracefully. Many got the impression he is a woman-hater.

But the Professor denies that as emphatically and genially as he criticises women's orchestral capacity. He himself is married to a musician—the Finnish

pianist, Sigrid Sundgren, who will arrive in Australia in May for a concert tour with the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

"Finland Will Rise Again"

Madame Schneevoigt was living in their flat in Helsinki when Russian 'planes bombed the city. The houses on either side fell in ruins, but her own building escaped. Her husband does not know whether later bombs destroyed it. He owns a little loved farm of 14 acres, which was close to the fighting zone and was blown flat in the first few days.

"Ach, I am profoundly sad in heart to leave my country when she is aflame now," he said. "I wanted to go back. I said I would be a policeman in the streets, but they say I do best to talk about Finland in other countries. Ach, one hundred and eighty millions Russians—it is too much! But Russia was just stupid to attack Finland."

He said the peace between Russia and Finland was a peace of exhaustion. Russian 'planes came in wave after wave, and help for Finland was too late. Finland made peace to give her time to recover. Sooner or later two things were sure to happen—England would fight Russia or there would be a split between Russia and Germany. When that time came Finland would rise again and fight with the Allies.

You may doubt Schneevoigt's argument. But you cannot doubt, once you have heard him conduct his Finnish music for relief concerts, the spirit of his indomitable people. It beats through a glorious tumult, rises high with the music until a hundred and eighty million Russians lie slaughtered in magnificent sound.

Unfortunately, the music of Sibelius in particular, with its dynamic treatment of the brass and drums, does not broadcast well. New Zealanders listening in could not recognise the sweeping climaxes for what they really are. Schneevoigt might complain, as another conductor once did, that his beautiful crescendos "ave zee tops knock off 'm!"

IDEA FOR A SHORT STORY

By Dorian Saker

SOMEBODY could write something really funny about aerials, particularly our aerial. They could construct a story out of it, full of human pathos, and salted with human tears. Dad, in his old clothes, covered in leaf mould and paint, slightly resembling a superannuated scarecrow, could be the hero. People would laugh like anything if they could see Dad pottering round, hunting for bits of wire to add on to his aerial.

Every week-end you can bet your boots that Dad will have altered our aerial. It may be only a hairpin, it may be the neighbour's fence, but that aerial won't be the same on Monday. Wasn't it Heraclitus who said that everything was in a state of change? Well, I guess the old chap didn't know much about aerials, but what he said would certainly apply to ours.

A clever person could make tragedy, as well as comedy, out of our aerial. With the sort of

detail that wrings tears from stony-hearted spinsters, he could describe how one day the cleaner flex disappeared, how Father swore by every saint that he hadn't touched it, how it was discovered, and where; how Mother vowed she would leave the house, never to return; how little sister June howled to think her mummy was abandoning her for ever; how Dad, broken-hearted and repentant at last, said he would put his head in the gas oven—if that would do any good. I know I've got something here, but I suppose the idea, like lots of others, will have to be wasted.

Meanwhile our aerial continues to grow, becoming more ragged every day. All the spare wire in the house has gone up to its maw, and now the clothes line is in jeopardy. But in spite of this the set remains absolutely the same.

I'm sure that somebody—somebody clever—could make something really funny out of

our aerial. There's the idea, anyway, and it is not copyrighted.

