

SIR THOMAS'S SECOND ACT

Famous Conductor Takes Baton At Auckland Music Festival

AUCKLAND was unusually fortunate in the opening of its Centennial festival in that the first performance of "Faust" was attended by the noted British conductor, Sir Thomas Beecham. Sir Thomas was passing through Auckland on his way to Australia, where he has a series of engagements to fulfil with the ABC, and at the invitation of Andersen Tyrer, the musical director, he consented to take the baton for the second act of the opera.

Sir Thomas was introduced to a crowded house by J. S. Stewart, chairman of the Auckland Centennial Fine Arts Committee. In a brief speech, he said that he had been asked to conduct the whole performance and but for a lack of acquaintance with the excellent chorus and orchestra, he would gladly have done so. However, he described himself as rather a bird of passage and a little out of practice and he had therefore elected to conduct the garden scene, in which only the principals appeared.

At the conclusion of the second act, prolonged applause marked the audience's appreciation of his skill and he received a second tumultuous ovation when he took a curtain-call with the principals.

Sir Thomas's reputation as something of a martinet even in the august precincts of Covent Garden resulted in a little general restraint and nervousness when he first went backstage, but before the performance was over the mellow influence of the music appeared to have broken the ice completely and when the show ended about 11.30, Sir Thomas appeared to be signing autographs for anyone and everyone.

Opera in England

But he is still dissatisfied with the position of opera in England. There is still no State or municipal patronage of opera there and little enough private support. In its present commercialised form, opera was too expensive a form of entertainment for the ordinary citizen. The position had been made worse by the war. Now it was impossible to get singers from abroad and there were not enough English singers to fill the roles.

"Stands Alone"

"In his versatility he stands alone, and he has done more for British music, particularly that of Delius, than any other man," said Andersen Tyrer,



BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY: A striking action picture of Sir Thomas Beecham, the celebrated English conductor who attended the first presentation of "Faust" in the Auckland Music Festival, and, at the invitation of Andersen Tyrer, conducted the Garden Scene. Sir Thomas was passing through Auckland on his way to Australia

musical director of the Centennial Festival, when discussing Sir Thomas Beecham's place in music with a representative of *The Listener*. Mr. Tyrer added that no other conductor could compare with Beecham in his interpretation of Mozart.

For the past 36 years, Sir Thomas Beecham had been striving to put opera in England on a proper footing and he had devoted his own personal fortune to that end. To-day the London Philharmonic Orchestra, which he created, was second to none in the world. He was one of the few conductors with a sense of humour and that helped to keep his orchestra, and singers as well, in good spirits. One had, of course, to get used to his mannerisms, but his personality was electric.

Andersen Tyrer himself was associated with Sir Thomas Beecham in 1920, and Maurice Clare, the Centennial Orchestra leader was at one time one of the 22 first violins in the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Orchestra's Hard Work

Sir Thomas, Mr. Tyrer continued, had expressed amazement at the standard of performance which

had been reached by the Centennial Orchestra in such a short time. To demonstrate the magnitude of the task which the orchestra was doing, he added, it was sufficient to point out that Sir Thomas Beecham would be conducting 14 concerts between now and October in his Australian tour, whereas the New Zealand Centennial orchestra was doing 40 concerts in two months, necessitating an almost colossal repertoire.

"But," he added, "though the members of the orchestra are working night and day there has never been any grumble. Everything has been done in a spirit of co-operation." The manner in which the festival project itself had been carried into effect, too, was a credit to the New Zealand Government. He recalled that the only time State assistance had been forthcoming for Covent Garden was during the term of the first British Labour Government. Only from Labour administrations, indeed, he said, had music received any substantial encouragement. Yet, in his opinion, music was much more important from a community point of view than pictorial art; opera was of more immediate value than art-galleries.

His Perfect Exit

Haydn's last public appearance was at a performance of "The Creation" by the Society of Amateurs in Vienna. Then nearly 76 years old, the aged musician was carried into the hall of the University in his armchair. Trumpets, drums and loud applause greeted his entrance, and immediately he found about him the most distinguished members of the Austrian aristocracy.

The performance was a wonderful one, and at the climax, on the words, "And there was light," the assembled throng broke into a sudden frenzy of cheers and applause. Haydn was greatly moved. Pointing upward, he cried: "It came from there."

So intense became his excitement that it was deemed wise to carry him out after the first part. Demonstrations of affection were showered on him, and Beethoven stepped forward to kiss his hand and forehead. At the door, Haydn turned suddenly.

He lifted both hands slowly in a gesture of blessing.

It was the perfect exit for the most beloved composer of his day.

"The Creation," Haydn's oratorio, will be featured in the Wellington Centennial Music Festival on Tuesday evening, June 25, and broadcast by 2YA.

"IT CAME FROM THERE" How Haydn Wrote "The Creation"

The First Performance

There followed the first performance, held at Prince Schwarzenberg's palace. The composer wrote later: "One moment I was as cold as ice, the next I seemed on fire. More than once I was afraid I should have a stroke."

"The Creation" rapidly became such a success that Salomon threatened to sue Haydn for the theft of his idea. However, on reconsideration, he wisely decided to make money for himself by presenting it in London, although a rival impresario named Ashley beat him by nearly a month.

Some time after he had finished "The Creation," Haydn wrote another oratorio, "The Seasons." This seems to have exhausted him, for it was the last work of any magnitude that he wrote.

When the Emperor Francis asked Haydn which he preferred of the two oratorios, the composer immediately named "The Creation." Asked for his reasons, he said: "Because, in 'The Creation,' angels speak and their talk is of God. In 'The Seasons,' no one higher speaks than Farmer Simon."

BORN in a wheelwright's cottage in a Lower Austrian village, Joseph Haydn stands in much the same relationship to the folk music of Croatia as Burns stands to the peasant songs of Scotland. All his life Haydn cheered people with his happy, simple peasant outlook on life; yet he was a man to whom great melodies and thunderously magnificent harmonies also came.

While on a visit to London, Haydn heard some very fine performances of Handel's music. When Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" resounded in Westminster Abbey, Haydn burst into tears and cried, "He is the master of us all!" He decided then and there to try his own hand at oratorio; and later accepted the idea of "The Creation" from Salomon, taking with him to Vienna a poem by Lidley, based on Milton's "Paradise Lost," which had been intended in the first place for Handel.

It has been recorded that during the period of composing "The Creation," Haydn felt himself swept by a great creative energy. Each day he knelt in prayer, and from his bended knees thanked God for giving him strength to write this music.