



# ALL KINDS OF CONDUCTORS

## An Art That Calls For Extremism

THE "art of talking with one's hands" requires of its exponents that they should be charged with enormous vitality, profound sensibility, and unlimited versatility. The sessions on "Famous Conductors," of which another will be heard from 3YA at 3.45 p.m. on Sunday, January 25, should therefore portray some interesting personalities.

In its present form, conducting is a relatively modern art, but there were conductors of a sort in early Greek times. The Greek chorus had its "choragus" who stood on a stool, with a device attached to his foot to make a clinking sound. About 24 centuries later the "traps" player in the swing band found it necessary to "invent" an exact parallel. The Greek chorus kept time to the regular clinking; the swing band keeps time to a foot-operated "big drum."

In early times the problem was no more difficult than that—merely to keep a group of performers "together." Sooner or later, though, the element of interpretation had to make itself felt, and the conductor became responsible for the manner of performance as well as the speed. He became a creative artist.

### Lully—And Stokowski

Jean Baptiste Lully, Louis XIV's corrupt and greedy master-musician, was one of the first to abandon the old-

fashioned audible beat, and he did this in no uncertain manner. The story is well known. Lully was conducting as usual with a heavy cane, thumping it up and down; it stabbed his foot, caused an abscess, and Lully died.

Lully paid for his extravagance at the age of 55; there is a certain living American conductor, equally well known for his extravagances, who will no doubt be more careful—his creed is said to be "Life begins at forte." That he is



"Beethoven would spring into the air, as if wishing to float on the clouds"

already keeping a watch on his age is apparent from the fact that in the 1924-5 *Who's Who in America*, he gave an age that would make him 59 now. In the current issue he appears as 54.

As a matter of fact this same Stokowski epitomises the exhibitionist-virtuoso-conductor, a type that has been known to music since perhaps 1500; he has carried the practice to its furthest possible extreme by permitting himself to be filmed, in silhouette, so that the whole world, not a mere hall-full of people, may watch his hypnotic motions — and perhaps be distracted thereby from the pure sound of music.

### Beethoven Was Spectacular

Beethoven was a man who behaved in a spectacular manner with an orchestra, but with this difference, that he was quite lost in the music and oblivious to the audience. We read that:

"At a *pp* Beethoven would crouch down so as to be hidden by his desk, and then as the crescendo grew, would gradually rise, beating all the time, until at *ff* he would spring into the air as if wishing to float on the clouds."

The language of conductors often rises to great heights. Arnold Bennett (in *Things That Have Interested Me*) recalled a most eloquent conductor:

"He said: Now I want a sudden exquisite hush. He said: Everybody must be shadowy together. He said: Let the Pizzicato act as a sort of spring-board to the passage. He demanded: Can't we court that better? And he said: Gentlemen of the first fiddles, this isn't a bees' wedding; it's something elemental."

If this conductor was evocative, Sir Thomas Beecham was provocative on another occasion. Unfortunately in New Zealand, so far from the scene of such happenings, one has to rely on the printed word, which sometimes leaves a little doubt. At any rate we have it on record to this extent, that when an

audience would not stop talking to let the music begin, Beecham turned round and fiercely hissed: "Shut up you —!"

### Communist Methods

Obviously the art calls for extremism of one kind or another. Russia chose another:

In 1922 the Moscow orchestra "Per-simfans" was formed, on Communist principles, entirely dispensing with the conductor. The idea was to set the individual free from the imposed decisions

of one person in control. Players had to study the whole score, knowing the other parts as well as their own, as in chamber music (the "music of friends.").

The value of the experiment would be more educational than economic. It was said to have been a success, but political opponents of the idea allege that all the performers had played through the whole classical repertoire many times under different conductors, and that therefore their unanimity was not the result of Communist methods.

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(Continued from previous page)

### Clues Down

2. Effusive.
3. Appropriate dish for Lady Astor?
4. Her cry for fruit.
5. Lady's maid.
6. Forty-five inches.
7. Dan dug earth (anag.).
8. Deigns.
12. Disgusted with Ted and Mrs. Bagwash's daughter.
14. Is a lion serving as contact between allied forces?
16. Fred Astaire or Ray Bolger, for instance.
18. Aside from notions.
20. In addition.

(Answer to No. 83)

M	A	G	Y	A	R	S		B	J	R	M	A
	R		B	H				I	A		C	
A	D	O		S	A	R	C	A	S	T	I	C
L	A	O		O	S	T		U				
L	I	N	O	L	E	U	M		A	L	U	M
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G	Y	R	A	T	E		T	I	N	S	E	L
O	E		E	B		M					A	
R	A	S	P		P	E	T		U	L	A	N
I		U		T		D		L		L		E
C	A	M	A	R	I	L	L	A			E	N
A	E		U		A		T				R	
L	I	S	L	E			M	A	E	S	T	R