

# SALUTE TO SIBELIUS

—Helsinki Festival Recordings

LAST month a packed audience in the Festival Hall of Helsinki University, Finland, heard the Sibelius Violin Concerto played by the great but seldom-heard Russian virtuoso, David Oistrakh, whose fame has long travelled abroad from Russia until it has assumed almost legendary proportions. The occasion which had brought Oistrakh to Helsinki was the Sibelius Festival, which lasted from June 11 to June 18. Tape recordings made at the Festival were flown out to this country for use by the NZBS, and three of the most important concerts will be broadcast in a link of the YC stations on Monday, Wednesday and Friday of next week.

The first broadcast, at 9.0 p.m. on Monday, August 2, includes Oistrakh playing the Violin Concerto, and a rendering of Sibelius's Fourth Symphony by the Finnish Radio Orchestra conducted by Nils-Eric Fougstedt. At 8.55 p.m. on Wednesday, August 4, listeners will be able to hear Sibelius's string

is considered by some critics to be the world's greatest violinist. Even in America, where he has been heard only on tape recordings, he is rated the equal of Heifetz, Menuhin, Szegedy and other contemporary giants. He inherited his musical talent from his mother, a professional singer, and his father, a gifted amateur player who started him off on the violin at the age of five. At the Odessa Conservatorium he studied under Piotr Stolyarsky, a famous Ukrainian teacher, and in 1928 he moved to Moscow. After a successful concert tour he continued to build his reputation in Russia and made brief appearances in France, Holland, Sweden and Belgium. In 1937 he won first prize in the Concours Eugene Ysaÿe, Belgium's international violin competition, and later he was awarded a first-class Stalin Prize. Now, between concerts, he teaches at the Moscow Conservatory.

To those who have not heard Oistrakh on the few recordings of

him that are available, his playing of the Sibelius Concerto should come as something of a revelation. He was described after a concert in Florence three years ago as a tremendous violinist with a tone of exceptional power. "His left hand," the reviewer said, "has the agility of a rope-dancer." Others who have heard him acclaim his amazing and effortless technique and his perfect mastery of his material. He has done much to stimulate contemporary Russian composers to write for the violin, and the concertos of Khachaturian, Miaskowsky and Rakov are dedicated to him. Prokofiev dedicated his first violin sonata to him.

More can be expected to be heard also of Oistrakh's 22-year-old son Igor, who played Beethoven's Violin Concerto with the London Philharmonic Orchestra last Christmas, and whose fame is rapidly approaching that of his father. London's music critics were enthusiastic about Igor, and Cecil Smith, writing in the *Daily Express*, said: "Not since the piano playing of the 23-year-old Horowitz burst on Western ears 25 years ago has Russia given us so staggeringly gifted a young musician."

It has not always been praise, however, for these two famous violinists. A performance by David Oistrakh of César Franck's Sonata in A, which was broadcast recently in the BBC's Third Programme (from a recording) was greeted sceptically by the BBC's *Listener* critic Dyneley Hussey. Oistrakh played the sonata, he said, "as if it were a virtuoso piece by Paganini, often reducing the melodies to

mere passage-work by omitting the necessary inflections and accents which would give them proper shape." He added that "the violinist has been brought up in isolation from the central musical traditions of Europe, and has probably been taught to despise them. He was interpreting Franck by the light of his own unaided intelligence, and it is natural that a musical idiom, which must indeed be strange to a modern Russian, should not have yielded its meaning to him." He added, however, that Oistrakh's strength and richness of tone were certainly striking, and that he was obviously possessed of a technical mastery of his instrument. All in all, his performance of the Sibelius concerto on Monday night should be most interesting to hear.



JEAN SIBELIUS -From a bust by Aaltonen



SIR THOMAS BEECHAM



DAVID OISTRAKH

quartet, *Voces Intimae*, played by Erik Karma (viola) and Artto Granroth ('cello).

Another honoured guest at the Festival was Sir Thomas Beecham, who on one night conducted Sibelius's Sixth and Seventh Symphonies, as well as other works, and was later photographed with the craggy 88-year-old composer in his Helsinki home. The Beecham concert will be broadcast at 8.15 p.m. on Friday, August 6. It begins with the Sixth Symphony and ends with the Seventh. In between are sandwiched the symphonic poem *Tapiola*, and the incidental music for Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The latter work is in 14 parts: The Oak Tree, Humoresque, Caliban's Song, Canon, Scene, Intrada-Berceuse, Chorus of Winds, Intermezzo, Dance of the Nymphs, Prospero, Song (II), Miranda, The Naiads, and The Storm. The performances are by the Helsinki City Symphony Orchestra.

## Red Star

The star of this summer festival is undoubtedly David Oistrakh, for although he has only rarely been heard outside the Iron Curtain countries, he



THE DUPLICATS, (from left) Esme Stephens, Dale Alderton, Ena Allen and (seated) John Thomson. AT RIGHT (next page), Johnny Granger

## N.Z. Variety for BBC

LAST year around Coronation time the BBC planned a series of light programmes called *Commonwealth Variety*, which was to include performances by top variety artists from every part of the Commonwealth. The programmes didn't go on the air as planned, but now the idea has been revived and the NZBS recently airmailed to London tape recordings of some of New Zealand's popular radio entertainers for inclusion in the series. Those selected were chosen as typical of what this country has to offer in the field, and different from what listeners in Britain would normally get from their own cabaret and other performers.

*Commonwealth Variety* will be broadcast in the BBC's Light Programme, and repeated in the General Overseas Service. New Zealand's contributions will not be used to make up an individual programme, but will be studded throughout the series among those from

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