

# CALLING THE TUNE

THERE is more in programme-planning than meets the eye, especially when the programmes are to be presented by the National Orchestra—and when an entire season of them has to be drafted in advance

**B**EETHOVEN bores me stiff—unless it's the Fifth. . . Can't stand the emotional stickiness of Tchaikovsky. . . Brahms! You can wrap him up and take him away as far as I am concerned. . . Mozart—no; give me a good fruity modern piece, something that makes a 20th Century noise. . . Nuts on this modern stuff; they're barmy to write it, barmy to play it, and those who pretend to like it must be a bit touched, too. . . Give me Beethoven. . . Give me Mozart. . . Why do they play all this romantic stuff? Give us something new. . . Why don't they play things people like. . . I know what I like. . . Give me . . .

After all, I'm a taxpayer. It's the likes of you and me that keeps the National Orchestra going. I wish I had a hand in arranging the programmes.

**W**HEN it came to the point, I wonder whether you would. There's more in this programme arranging than meets the eye, and a lot more to it, too, before the music reaches the ear. Programme arranging is an art, a very skilled one. When it comes to planning a whole season's playing for the National Orchestra, a good slice of craftsmanship must go along with the art and, as part of this, quite a bit of sheer, straight-out pen pushing.

As a matter of fact, in the whole short history of the National Orchestra, there have been remarkably few criticisms of the music played. This may be because, having only one symphony orchestra to entertain us, some may reason resignedly that we should be thankful for what we receive and anyway, we must be careful or we might lose the National Orchestra altogether. It may be that many listeners musically nurtured on a lavish diet of gramophone records are not really sure what additional sustenance they need. Perhaps New Zealanders are just constitutionally patient, apathetic or complacent—choose your own adjective. Or is it that in the very substantial part of the symphonic repertoire which the National Orchestra has presented in its eight seasons most of its audience have found enough to please them?

The National Orchestra has in its time performed, it seems, every major work of the 19th Century, and some, too, which might not figure among the tops. All Mozart symphonies from No. 34 onwards have been played; all the best known concertos; many smaller works and quite a bit of 20th Century music. Taken altogether, this is a staggering achievement. In fact, "staggering" may be just the appropriate word, for this would seem an overwhelming assignment for any orchestra, and an especially taxing one for an orchestra still, as it were, cutting its teeth.

There are, no doubt, both gaps and dull spots. Not enough Mozart and too little Haydn, perhaps; too little repetition over the eight seasons of the best works and a reluctance, maybe, to revive what in overseas programmes might be regarded as well-worn music; a rather

narrow range of contemporary music and some time wasted on second-rate examples from the 20th Century—and of other centuries, too; and certainly too little home-grown music. But before we discuss these matters, let's have a look at the difficulties that may be involved in planning a season's programmes for the National Orchestra.

First of all, there is that very fact, that the whole season has to be drafted out in advance, not bit by bit. Very soon, James Robertson and the NZBS Concert Section will be working on next year's playing; and, as far as overseas soloists are concerned, negotiations will be well in hand, and some of them, probably, completed. The whole season must be planned at the one time, not only because subscribers in the main centres will want to know what they are getting for their money, but for a variety of administrative reasons as well.

Availability of scores must be ensured. Some of these will already be held in the growing NZBS library; some may have to be bought; and an appreciable number may be among those available on hire which must be arranged for well in advance of requirement. Consideration must be given to spacing difficult or new works throughout the season so that the Orchestra is not living hand to mouth in the way of rehearsal. And an overall balance for the whole year must be worked out on one more count. The National Orchestra is not only a concert ensemble. It is, too, a broadcasting orchestra. Its programmes must be such as to fit neatly into the schedule of probable broadcasts.

With these considerations in mind, the actual programme may be put in hand. The first determining factor is the soloist and what he wants to play. If he is a big name that means, probably, what he will play. Whatever the present taste of New Zealand audiences, it is true that a large proportion pay the piper, not so much for his music, but for his name. This form of snobbishness—it may not even be musical snobbery—which accepts that a famous name is worth more than famous music is not by any means unknown in other musical scenes than ours, but in the limited range of our concert-going it may exert an unwarrantable pressure. With us it may



not be altogether snobbery so much as lack of confidence in our own judgment and a solution of this difficulty by sticking, as it were, to well-known or well-publicised brands. Whatever it is, the star artist still has a strong indirect influence on programme selection.

So here we are with Spatter Fingus-off, our hypothetical pianist, all lined up to play with the National Orchestra, flying here for a lightning tour of the country, or it may be the internationally known Fred Smith. Anyhow, he says he would like to play a Mozart concerto. This is O.K. by the Orchestra. They will be unworried much about rehearsals for this, nor will they have to advise the pianist's agent that our orchestra, being on the small side, would find the instrumentation beyond their scope. Mozart, indeed, would suit them down to the ground. But what to put round it?

Tchaikovsky before Mozart would be as unsatisfactory as beefsteak pudding before fillet of sole. There are many other things, however, that would go

well with Mozart and some, not so extreme as Tchaikovsky, that would kill any 18th Century music. But which of them will be just the right thing to open with?

The overture having been chosen, that means probably that the first half is suitably disposed of. Now, what to offer after the interval? Shall it be a symphony, a suite, short pieces or a balance of all three? Shall it be consistent with the musical mood of the first half, or shall we put in something for the people who don't cotton on to Mozart? Can we risk something new and modern, or shall we play safe and use something well known, at the expense of a few murmured grumbles from the Mozart fans who may, some of them, perversely regard popularity as synonymous with banality.

At last the programme is mapped out. It has been ascertained that the music will be available; the players will be able to manage it all in the rehearsal time that can be given to it; the programme on paper seems to have both unity and variety; the audience on the whole (you can't hope to please everyone all the time) will probably like it.

A cable arrives from the star soloist's agent: "Substitute Rachmaninoff No. 2 for Mozart!" I don't say that this has ever happened, but I would be willing to guess that something like it has thrown a spanner in the works at some time or other. So, where is your programme now? You see, what with one thing and another, planning a programme is not as easy as it might seem. And there is still the rest of the season to be done.

After all this, there is yet the box-office to consider. The National Orchestra is in a happier position than some organisations in that it is not entirely dependent on the support of what may be a fickle public, and does not have to rely on a tenuous grant; but it still has the enormous responsibility of exerting every effort to make ends meet. As a public body and the only organisation of its kind in the country, it has other responsibilities, too. Although like any other group of musicians, big or small, the primary aim of its existence is to provide the very best in musical entertainment, there is surely a duty as

(continued on next page)



"AVAILABILITY OF SCORES MUST BE ENSURED" N.P.S. photograph  
Officers of the NZBS concert section check scores with the NZBS music librarian for next season's National Orchestra programmes. From left, A. D. J. Heenan, G. L. Dean (librarian), M. J. Glubb (concert manager) and P. G. Parker (orchestra manager)