

London is Again World Music Capital

I DON'T care if you say I'm talking nonsense, but any day now I am hoping to hear that Antonio Piccolini has come to London for his musical education and that he intends, when he finally returns to sing at La Scala in his native Milan, to assume the name of Bill Smith as more appropriate to a musical career.

After all, enough Bill Smiths and Mary Browns have found it advantageous to add an Italian name to an Italian musical education. At least one New Zealand provincial town clerk can still cluck disapprovingly years after such an event.

That was before London became the musical capital of the world.

Any day now the music-starved Italians, French, and Germans, and the Americans as well, may realise that, whatever they have believed in the past, the stolid British are the greatest music-lovers in the world, and that more of the best music is to be found here than anywhere else.

I began to sense something of that at the recent Edinburgh Festival, not so much from the number of German visitors in their own glossy cars, but from the fact that notices at my student hostel were posted in three languages. Some of the young people there had hitch-hiked half way across Europe, two of them from Algiers.

With the end of the festival, London is again the musical capital of the world.

300,000 Reasons

If you still say, "Nonsense," you're saying it not to me, but to Sir Malcolm Sargent.

"Nowhere in the world is there a greater interest in music than in London," he says. "Nowhere is there a better centre for music."

He has 300,000 good reasons for his opinion—which may still surprise you—for that is the number of people who have attended the 60th anniversary series of Promenade concerts. There must have been millions more in the radio audiences, sound and television, in Britain and on the Continent.

"The Prom season lasts eight weeks; at New York's Carnegie Hall it would have taken six months to equal our attendance," said the conductor.

More Orchestras

He might have added that the 6000-seat Albert Hall has not been a white elephant since the opening of the Royal Festival Hall, whereas in New York the 3000-seat Carnegie Hall is big enough. Six symphony orchestras play regularly in London, four in Paris, three in New York. Two opera companies perform simultaneously in London, but the New York City Opera closes when the Metropolitan opens its season.

"The war started it, a time of emergency when we were made to face the real values," said Sir Malcolm Sargent after the last concert.

He has decided ideas about what these values are. Composers, he says,



SIR MALCOLM SARGENT

"Music must make an appeal from the heart to the affections"

should listen to Bach and Beethoven, read Shakespeare, and get to know the Bible. "Music must make an appeal from the heart to the affections. If a new work does not do that, it will be short-lived.

"If I were the director of a school of music for composers, I would have two quotations placed above the door: 'If music be the food of love, play on'—Shakespeare; and 'if not, shut up'—Me."

When he says "love," he means "the Bible word for love—charity. Music does and must stress this attribute."

Even those who are elated, and perhaps a little dazed, at being in the musical capital of the world, are reluctant to live up to the honour—and to dress specially for a concert.

Now two conductors have appealed for more people to wear evening dress or dark suits with white shirts. They say it gives "a tone of elegance" and adds to the enjoyment because "a concert should be an occasion."

Busker's Bach

If that confirms your suspicion that "all this Prom stuff's a bit highbrow," here's a story I've been saving for such an occasion, ever since I found 20-year-old Keith Ramsell fiddling in Leicester Square.

He plays most evenings in the doorway of a shoe-shop, but it's not airs on a shoe-string that bring as much as £2 an hour into his violin case.

He plays Beethoven "mostly the violin concerto, all three movements, it lasts three-quarters of an hour."

Sometimes people in the theatre crowds ask for jazz, but he just smiles and shakes his head. "If they start to jeer, I give them a bit of Bach. That drives them away."

Not only does Beethoven pay, but the violinist has just been awarded a three-year scholarship from the London College of Music. How's that for a busker?

And how's all this for Sir Thomas Beecham's old jibe that the English had an insatiable appetite for music, but no taste. Even he has now relented sufficiently to conduct a Prom concert; his only complaint was that he had expected the audience to be noisier.

—J. W. GOODWIN (London)

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