



N.P.S. photograph

NIGHT OUT FOR THE YOUNG PEOPLE

SHOOTS of laughter at a symphony concert? Those listeners to 2YC on Saturday, April 16, who tuned in their radios after 8.0 p.m. may have been somewhat mystified until they realised that they were listening to a broadcast of the NZBS Youth Concert from the Town Hall, Wellington. This concert was a pioneering venture for the National Orchestra and for the audience, too. Even *The Listener*, which tries to keep both ears to the ground, had to wait until just before the concert to find out what were the two mysteries, tantalisingly described as "Special Items" on the programme. In the conductor's room James Robertson spoke with cautious optimism about the evening's prospects. He also told us about the double-bassoon which George Booth, of the Orchestra, had specially imported for the performance—for the first time in New Zealand that night—of Malcolm Arnold's Second Symphony.

As for the crowd which filled the Town Hall foyer, it numbered hundreds of young people from about ten years old upward, in bright coats and shirts—girls bob-haired, flat-heeled—chattering like magpies on a Spring morning. Also, perhaps not surprisingly, there were many older people present, some obviously Mums and Dads, others drawn simply by the prospect of a pleasant and piquant evening's music.

The audience settled expectantly into its places. The Orchestra filed in, the women, Prom-style, in light-coloured evening dress, James Robertson in a white tuxedo. . . "God Save the Queen" sounded and the experiment had begun. First there was Arthur Benjamin's *North American Square Dance*, not quite the gay, inconsequential romp you might expect. Rather, instead an impression of a square-dance scene including some

thoughtful contemplation of the kind of remote, forbidding country where these dances were performed by frontier folk. Obviously, however, the lilting rhythms caught the fancy of the young audience.

The second item, one of the "mysteries," turned out to be a quiz. James Robertson explained to the boys and girls of all ages that he wanted six victims from the audience. Far from being put off by his choice of words, nine stalwarts rushed the platform. No prizes? Since when did Hillary conquer Everest for money or a bag? They squared up to the microphone—"Not too loud. You might break it!" they were cautioned. When the victim didn't answer correctly, the question was thrown open to the audience. One small boy, feet apart, hands behind his back, in a long raincoat, had a valiant stab at naming the Largo from the "New World" Symphony, played by a cor anglais. He didn't get it, but then, could you? By the way, the contestants couldn't see the instruments playing. Flute, oboe and clarinet then, in succession, played the same theme—the slow movement from the Tchaikovsky Fourth Symphony. The contestant, not surprisingly, couldn't pick the theme, but one bright spark in the audience did.

All the time James Robertson kept the

musical pot boiling. One lanky lad identified the saxophone wail of *Rhapsody in Blue*—"He's from the University. Thought he might despise that one." The trombones braved the *Ride of the Valkyries*—"Anna Russell and I learnt our Wagner from the same teacher, but I've never heard anybody make him as devastatingly clear as she does." Trumpets and a couple of gadgets which any-



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THE CONTRA-BASSOON: "Like a hearty length of doubled-up liverwurst"

body could be forgiven for not recognising as sandpaper blocks played the theme from the *Square Dance*, but what really set the joint jumping was a slap-bass and sax. version of "Skokiaan," the popular *Hit Parade* number. The crowd really dug that. The avuncular double-bassoon and the piccolo played "Lucy Long," and when they had finished their incongruous duet George Booth gave a quick snatch and jerk to hold up his instrument over his head for all to see and wonder at. It had the colour and configuration of a hearty length of doubled-up liverwurst, resting on a spike. Its tones were similarly Central European and rotund. Finally eight percussion instruments gave an impression of an express train, with guard's whistle, bell, xylophone, drums and ceteras. There was a shriek of delight when the lights went out as the "train" roared into a tunnel. If Honegger's *Pacific 231* is ever put in the programmes it's practically guaranteed a sold-out audience from that Saturday night's railway-music enthusiasts.

Following the nine quizzes, Janetta McStay, in a romantic rose-starred gown, gave a warm, flowing performance of Grieg's Piano Concerto.

In the interval we struck up acquaintance with Mr. Raymond Thompson, aged 13, and a boarder at Scots College. This was his first orchestral concert, and we asked him what he liked best so far. He considered seriously. "The train going through the tunnel," he said at last. And why? "Oh, it was good and loud!" he grinned. He quite liked the Concerto, but thought it was "a bit long."

We spied and eavesdropped shamelessly around. As far as conversation went it was exactly like an ordinary concert—almost everyone talking about anything but the music. However, from one group of teen-agers came "Did you hear them play 'Skokiaan'? Wasn't it super! Wish they'd played it all, though." Farther on two intense youths were discussing the performance. "Didn't think the Orchestra played too well in the Grieg," said one, and went on to talk about football.

After the break, the Orchestra, with some preliminary theme-illustrations, then launched into the Arnold Symphony—the chanciest part of the whole experiment. And the audience loved it. The vitality of the orchestration, the wildly complicated rhythms took them by storm. Raymond said that he liked it very much, but what he was really waiting for was to see his sister, a Solway College pupil, play the violin in the next item. (This was the second surprise of the evening.) "There she is, the one in the green," he proudly pointed out as most of the string players in the Orchestra made way for a group of young instrumentalists. They played the Bach Concerto for Two Violins, with John Buxton and Alex Bonnett as soloists, and made an excellent job of it.

Finally (or so everyone thought) the Orchestra played Enesco's *Roumanian Rhapsody*, No. 1. This was whirlwind stuff which set the audience wildly applauding, and after it James Robertson gave them that good old "rock and roll" number, *Jamaican Rhumba*. As he thanked his audience James Robertson said that he considered the experiment had been a great success, which he hoped to be able to repeat in the future. In Sydney they have a season of six Youth Concerts. That could be a target to aim at.