

Off-stage With Badura-Skoda

IN the neon-lit interior of a hotel foyer we sat and waited for the visiting concert pianist Paul Badura-Skoda, who was flying down from Auckland that day. People streamed past on their way to the bars or the rooms upstairs, glancing at the photographer with his camera on his knee. A hotel steward stood on duty in the background, a cigarette concealed in his hand. We had been waiting for some time before a young man, familiar from his photographs, suddenly appeared at the reception desk. Paul Badura-Skoda's plane had been late—his trip had proved extremely tiring—so it was not until later that we saw him again, along with representatives of the NZBS and the Wellington Chamber Music Society.

In appearance Paul Badura-Skoda is not very tall, with brown, wavy hair, and a pale sensitive face, with lively brown eyes. His first concern, apparently, was to find a barber's shop—"I played with long hair in Auckland, but it will not do for the capital city," he said. In the plane on the way down he had been busy making corrections in the score of the wind quintet, which he was to play with New Zealand artists in Wellington. He has an intimate knowledge of Mozart's music, and is anxious that the version to be played will be as near as possible to the original. We were surprised to learn that a Mozart score could over the years have become so corrupt. In this particular quintet, harmonies had been altered—"all sorts of things," Mr. Badura-Skoda said.

A discussion started about the piano to be used in the Sunday concert, and when Badura-Skoda learned that the city's new Steinway could not be shifted from the main hall to the concert chamber he was curious to know why, and even offered to lend a hand in the shifting. "In New York they are always shifting pianos," he said, and described the shuffle that takes place between the city's celebrated concert rooms. "However, the other piano may be a good one, too, and then there will be no

worry." Mr. Badura-Skoda was in New Zealand for ten days only, and it seemed that he would have practically no free time—he had six concerts, he keeps up a regular practice schedule when on tour, and he had the special chamber music concert rehearsals as well.

The complaint has been made of many concert pianists touring lately that their programmes have often been made up of familiar "war-horses." Mr. Badura-Skoda's were far more interesting than most, so we asked him how he chose them.

"Usually I plan my tour a year beforehand," he said. "I write out all the works I want to play on pieces of paper, then I try to fit them all together to make up balanced programmes. Each country I go to has its own kind of programme; for instance, in Australia they are not as long as the ones you have here. When I submitted mine to your Broadcasting Service they wrote and said, 'These programmes are much too short!' so I was pleased I would be able to play longer."

In his Wellington programme Mr. Badura-Skoda included a sonata by Hindemith. "Did he always include a modern work in a programme?" we asked him.

"I think you have to introduce modern works gradually," he said, "perhaps put one in each programme. Then the audience can get used to the modern harmonies and the modern use of counterpoint, until they find they are starting to enjoy it. The younger generation seem to go ahead and understand it on their own. I think the most receptive age is about 20, for then they

have an elasticity of mind that allows them to give themselves completely to something that is new and unknown."

"Do you hear much modern music in Vienna?" we asked him.

"Yes, a great deal. Twenty to thirty concerts a year offer the most interesting novelties. In Europe there are many festivals of modern music, and the number of performances is really fantastic. The trouble is that now there is quite a craze for something new—people want a new opera each year, like a new hat or a new car."

"Is there a younger group of composers following Bartok, Hindemith and Schoenberg?" we asked.

"There are many younger composers," he replied, "though young is a strange word to use of composers who are often around forty before they begin to be known. There are Hartmann, Messiaen (who wrote a gigantic symphony), Heiler, Von Einem (who wrote two operas), and Carl Schiske. It is certainly a good time for composers, though the financial aspect of modern music bothers them."



★ PAUL BADURA-SKODA at rehearsal with the violinist Francis Rosner ★

This was an interesting point which, unfortunately, there was not time to discuss fully. We had to content ourselves with a final brief question on the place of the piano in music today.

"The piano seems to be thought of as a romantic instrument, and as such is not very popular with present-day composers," he said. "Some seem to like it, such as Hindemith; and there is Stravinsky's Serenade in A, one of his best works. But on the whole it is not liked."

In conversation Mr. Badura-Skoda is charming, considerate and forthright. On the concert platform when he is playing a work that particularly appeals to him his face lights up and he enjoys himself. He is a fine and rare artist, and it is to be hoped that he will return to this country on a longer tour that will enable more people to see as well as hear him.

SIR BERNARD HEINZE'S PROGRAMMES

LAST week we printed the highlights from the programmes to be presented under Sir Bernard Heinze during his month here as guest conductor of the National Orchestra. Several new works are to be introduced, the first New Zealand performances of some seldom-heard classics will be given. Most interest will probably be aroused by the first performance of the Ninth Symphony of Shostakovich—a composer who would feel very much at home in New Zealand at present. He is a keen follower of football, and has said that he is never so happy as when he is one of a tightly-packed, cheering crowd. In Russia he travels hundreds of miles to see his favourite team, plots its progress on wall charts. As a composer he is one of the best of the post-revolutionaries—though his ability has not altogether saved him from the unpredictable attacks of the Soviet regime. His opera *Lady Macbeth of Mzensk* had to be withdrawn, and after one rehearsal of his Fourth Symphony he withdrew it himself, substituting a fifth symphony, which he called "a Soviet artist's reply to just criticism." The Ninth Symphony

was written in 1945, and given its first performance shortly after the end of the Second World War. Before this, Shostakovich had played a piano version of it to some friends, describing the work as "a merry little piece—musicians will love to play it, and critics will delight in blasting it." He was right in predicting trouble, for before long a Soviet journal had described it as "a sorry hodge-podge with an abundance of high whistling and screaming timbres." The composer's own description seems to be the more reliable, for it is often played in concert halls. Listeners can look forward to a short but cheerful symphonic scherzo.

One of the musical phenomena of our time is the way in which manuscripts, neglected for hundreds of years on library shelves, are gradually being published, recorded and performed. In the library at Turin lies a great stack of music by Vivaldi—300 concerti, 22 operas, many of them still awaiting publication. One such work, a concerto for organ and string orchestra, arranged by the Russian pianist and conductor Siloti, will be performed in Auckland.



SIR BERNARD HEINZE

Two early symphonies by classical composers in the programmes are the Mozart No. 28, K.200, written when he was 18, and the Schubert Third Symphony.

Of the other modern works, there is Stravinsky's satirical little Suite No. 2, with an andante, napolitana, espanola and balalaika; and also an "Adagio for two violins and orchestra," by the Australian composer Margaret Sutherland. Margaret Sutherland, born in 1898, and married to an Australian doctor, has composed many works which have been published in England and Australia. Unlike Ethel Smyth, she does not do battle for her sex in the grand manner. She is not exactly a miniaturist, but she believes that instead of writing heroic symphonies women will develop a more intimate music of their own. Besides her works for orchestras she has written songs, a quartet for wind, and sonatas for various instruments. Even today there are not many women composers. Particular strength of some kind seems vital to their success, whether it is the feminine charm of Chaminade, or the indomitable frontal onslaughts of Ethel Smyth.

Finally, children in Wellington and Auckland will see Sir Bernard Heinze in action at schools concerts—Auckland on August 3, and Wellington on August 14. And he has a high reputation for those in Australia.