DISCOVERING NEW CONDUCTORS

An English experiment — and a young New Zealander's success, by ARTHUR JACOBS

BOURNEMOUTH, on England's south coast, is an all-the-year-round seaside resort—but the twelve young musicians who recently converged on it came without thought of holidaying. They had been selected from 39 applicants for a chance to prove themselves as orchestral conductors. Among the twelve were two representatives of the Commonwealth, both from New Zealand: Robert Philpot (33), originally from Auckland, but trained mainly in Dunedin, and Peter Zwartz (25), born in Nelson and trained in Christchurch.

For four days the twelve were let loose on the 65-strong Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, which is England's only full professional orchestra outside London, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. They worked under the guidance of the orchestra's regular conductor, Charles Groves. They rehearsed Beethoven, Schubert, Tchaikovski, Malcolm Arnold and Elgar.

Additionally they had conferences with members of the orchestra. They were also lectured by Sir Adrian Boult ("Only a white enamelled baton will do"), and by the Master of the Queen's Musick, Sir Arthur Bliss. Sir Arthur's voice sometimes rose in quiet excitement to a squeak as he talked: "We are an inhibited nation. We suffer from the feeling that 'it's not done.' But for a conductor, everything is 'done.' He's swimming in Beethoven!"

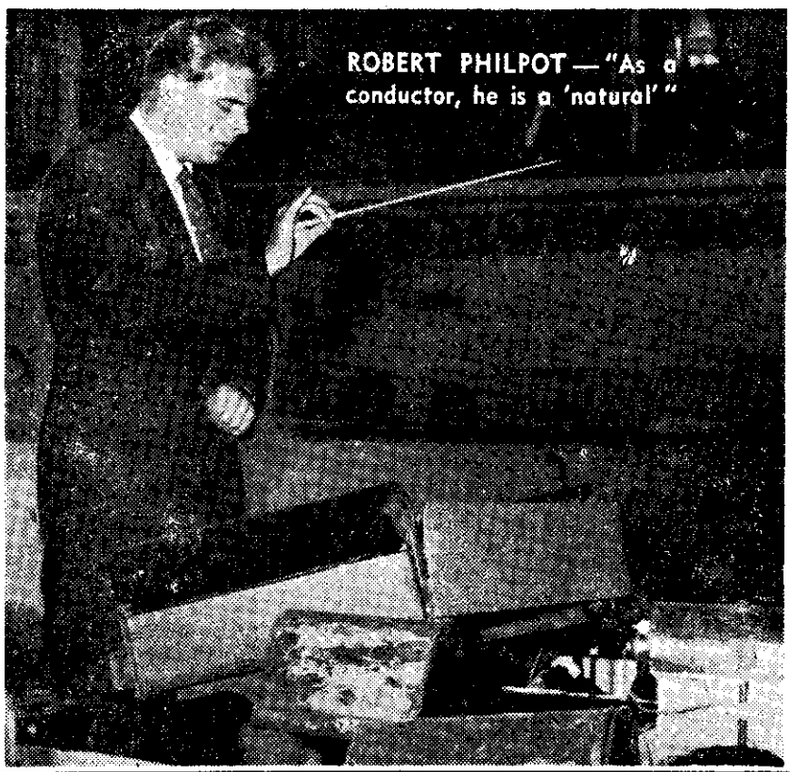
Of the twelve, the three whom Charles Groves adjudged the best shared the conducting of the orchestra's public symphony concert that week. But how should you appraise a budding conductor? Not merely by academic correctness of the beat. That would be to fly in the face of experience. Superficially, nothing could be more baffling or arbitrary than the gestures of a Furtwangler or a Beecham. Yet what magic those gestures have wrought!

So Robert Philpot found himself chosen among the victorious three, despite a defiantly unconventional air on the rostrum. He would sometimes flex his legs, sometimes wag a left forefinger like an extra baton. But he established a swift and lively communication with the players. As a conductor he is, in a word, a "natural."

At the concert he was allotted the evening's most difficult works, Elgar's "Cockaigne" overture and Beethoven's Second Symphony. Given more experience—which would have prescribed a slower tempo for Beethoven's first allegro—Philpot is likely to astonish.

I agreed with Mr Groves also in his choice of Rhoslyn Davies for the concert. Davies — a Welshman with Italian training—has a smoother and more elegant technique than Philpot, and plenty of ideas behind the baton.

On Mr Groves's third choice I disagreed. Instead of Peter Godfrey (a music teacher at one of England's "public schools," Marlborough College), I should have selected Myer Fredman, who coaches at London's privately-run Opera School.



ROBERT PHILPOT — "As a conductor, he is a 'natural'"

Peter Zwartz, who has shown London his ability recently in conducting a student string orchestra, was one of the youngest members of the course at Bournemouth—and not the least distinguished. He, like the others, will have gained enormously from this training. Indeed, the facilities offered at Bournemouth showed up the apparent inadequacies in the training of conductors at our London schools of music—to which musically ambitious New Zealanders still flock. Robert Philpot left the Royal College of Music because "I was wasting my time. I was only allowed to conduct the orchestra about once a term."

Peter Zwartz is still a student at the rival institution, the Royal Academy of Music. There, he tells me, he has a chance to conduct an orchestra only for about a quarter of an hour every fortnight. Yet conducting is his main study!

Whether conductors can get adequate training in Britain is no mere academic question here. It may shed light on a matter which continues to agitate British music-lovers—the increasing appointment of foreign-born conductors to leading British posts.

Not merely, as readers of *The New Zealand Listener* know, has Rudolf Schwarz won the position of chief conductor to the BBC. His successor with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra is to be Andrzej Panufnik, a recent refugee from Poland. The Scottish National Orchestra, from which the Austrian-born Karl Rankl has resigned, has invited Hans Swarowsky, of Austria, to take his place.

It would be not merely intolerant but wilfully short-sighted to prevent foreign-born musicians from enriching the British musical scene. (To take only two examples, the Halle Orchestra, of Manchester, and the Bach Choir, of London, were both founded by "foreigners".) Yet, as British conductors see one plum after another fall from their grasp, they are understandably demanding, "What have *they* got that we haven't?"

The answer is, in one rather surprising word, opera houses. In Germany, Austria, and Italy (and to some extent elsewhere), a multiplicity of opera houses provides a training ground for young conductors. There the youngsters act as coaches, assistants, chorus-masters and general musical handy-men, eventually graduating to the conducting of performances. In Germany no self-respecting town is without its resident opera company. In England we have no such resident companies outside London.

The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, not content with its conductors' course, would like to take a further step. It would like to engage a young conductor for a few months each year as general assistant—thus providing a kind of substitute for training in the opera-houses that Britain lacks. But the orchestra's management will not be able to do this unless its State subsidy (paid through the Arts Council of Great Britain) is increased. I wish I could say that was likely.

Meanwhile, at any rate, Robert Philpot, of New Zealand, and Rhoslyn Davies, of the Rhondda Valley, have faced the audience at Bournemouth's Winter Gardens and have proved their capability for more. Will British impresarios and British committees, so ready to be impressed with foreign names and foreign languages, give them the chances they deserve?

Commonwealth and Empire

IN the last 10 years many former British colonies have become self-governing States, and more are on the verge of independence, or moving towards it. The evolution of sovereign States brings problems which are the common ground of several forthcoming talks.

At 4YA the NZBS recently recorded several talks by research students and authorities on British colonial policy and constitutional history, who came to Dunedin for the Science Congress earlier this year. Emily Sadka, for example, who is a Malayan research scholar in South-East Asian History at the Australian National University, Canberra, will be heard from 4YC this Sunday, March 31. In her talk she discusses the Malayan situation and the particular problems of this multi-racial country, and tells of the progress being made towards solutions which will help Malaya, when self-governing, to surmount her difficulties and become a stable and developing member of the Commonwealth.

A backward glance will be taken the following Tuesday when the first Government formed by a Labour Party—in Australia in 1899—will be recalled by Dr. Robin Gollan, of the Australian National University. Dr. Gollan discusses the idealistic spirit of the 1890's and the contributions of the first working-men Parliamentarians. These working members were men like Charles Jardine Don, a stone mason who sat in the House at night after a day's work and described himself as "punching stone by day and squatters by night" (4YC, April 2).

Three talks on Creative Colonialism will be heard later in April. Professor J. W. Davidson, also of the Australian National University, will discuss the special qualities needed by a British Colonial Governor if he is to be successful; Professor W. P. Morrell, of Otago University, will speak on the humanitarian background of British Colonial policy in the Pacific Islands in the 19th century, and Mary Boyd, of Victoria University College, is to bring the record up-to-date with a talk on Samoan development in the last 30 years.

Meanwhile, three BBC talks by Sir Ivor Jennings, entitled *Approach to Self-Government in the Commonwealth*, will start from the YAs and 4YZ on Thursday, April 4, at 9.15 p.m. Sir Ivor, Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, is Constitutional Advisor to the Government of Pakistan, and while he was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ceylon he acted as an adviser on the Ceylonese Constitution. He talks on the constitutional problems involved in the conversion of dependent territories into independent states. Sir Ivor emphasises the importance of the local background of politics and interests, where nationalism is often confined to a small, wealthy and comparatively educated section of the people, and there is no strong body of public opinion watching the politicians. In these countries loyalties of class, religion or language tend to dominate politics, and genuine national patriotism may need to be replaced by constitutional devices, if the interests of the whole community are to be served. In his third talk Sir Ivor outlines the processes necessary to establish a strong and efficient Public Service.