

NEW CONDUCTOR FOR NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

JOHN HOPKINS, whose appointment as Conductor of the National Orchestra has been announced by the Minister in Charge of Broadcasting, the Hon. R. M. Algie, has had wide experience in orchestral conducting in Britain, and in recent years has appeared as a guest conductor on the Continent. At present conductor of the BBC Northern Orchestra, in Manchester, his appointment to this position in 1952 made him the youngest conductor of any major orchestra in Britain. He is still not 30 years old.

"The Northern Orchestra broadcasts from the studio, in television as well as sound programmes, and frequently performs on the public platform as well," said Mr Algie, announcing that Cabinet had approved the appointment. "Under Mr Hopkins, in well over a thousand concerts, it has ranged the standard repertoire of orchestral and choral music and performed much modern music, including many first performances." It is, of course, an established part of the National Orchestra's function to give free concerts to school children, and Mr Algie mentioned that Mr Hopkins has had experience in conducting and introducing music at such concerts.

Mr Algie said he announced the appointment of Mr Hopkins with great satisfaction, since he had been well aware that the place in which James Robertson had achieved so notable a success since 1954 could not be easy to fill worthily. He added: "Just when Mr Hopkins will take over from Mr Robertson I am not yet able to say; but it will be towards the end of the year. It will be time, then, to pay a full and due tribute to Mr Robertson; but I should like to say now that the Committee of Advice [which advised the Minister on the new appointment] took steps to convey to him its thanks 'for an outstanding contribution to music.'" Mr Algie thanked the committee for its work.

As indicated by Mr Algie, the BBC Northern Orchestra, where Mr Hopkins has gained his most recent experience, is more than a broadcasting and television orchestra. One of several orchestras which the BBC established soon after the war, its concert platform work has included Proms and appearances at festivals. Of the work of John Hopkins with this Orchestra, the *London Daily*

Telegraph said: "Under John Hopkins the BBC Northern Orchestra steadily does sterling service for British music by its performance of works which have yet to establish themselves in the concert hall repertoire."

Behind the conductor's appearance on the rostrum lies a long and rigorous training, and John Hopkins began his studies in Manchester at the Royal College of Music where his main instrument was the cello. At this college he won several important prizes for string playing and orchestral playing. In 1947 he gained his A.R.M.C.M. Performer's Diploma for the cello. Conducting, however, was his aim, and in 1947 he went to the Guildhall School of Music in London to study conducting under Joseph Lewis. Later he was to attend the Mozarteum Salzburg International Summer Academy to study conducting under Carlo Zecchi. Experience of a different kind came during his period of National Service, when he combined cello with horn playing in the R.A.F. Central Band and Orchestra.

His first appointment was as first apprentice conductor to the Yorkshire Symphony at Leeds. This orchestra, which was supported by many of the civic authorities in Yorkshire, was said to resemble the National Orchestra in many ways. In 1949 John Hopkins moved to the BBC Scottish Orchestra, where he was assistant conductor, and in 1952, when only 25, he took complete charge of the BBC Northern.

His greatest successes have been his recent European appearances as guest conductor. In 1955 he was in Yugoslavia, introducing English music into the programmes. One paper wrote: "Quite a few people realised, perhaps for the first time, that we do wrong when we treat English music as something apart." And another said: "The Vaughan Williams Fantasia, which is unfamiliar to us, at last received a satisfactory interpretation, which opens our ears to its beauty and restores its good name."

In Sweden last year, appearing before highly critical audiences such as those at Malmo, he again included English works in his programmes, and was described as "a most sympathetic visitor who even succeeded in captivating the responsible Malmo audience to such an extent that they rose to their feet as one man to applaud at the end of the concert." One of the works played was



THE NEW CONDUCTOR, JOHN HOPKINS BBC photograph
From the BBC Northern to the NZBS National Orchestra

the Vaughan Williams Fifth Symphony, which was "shaped with great veneration and controlled enthusiasm."

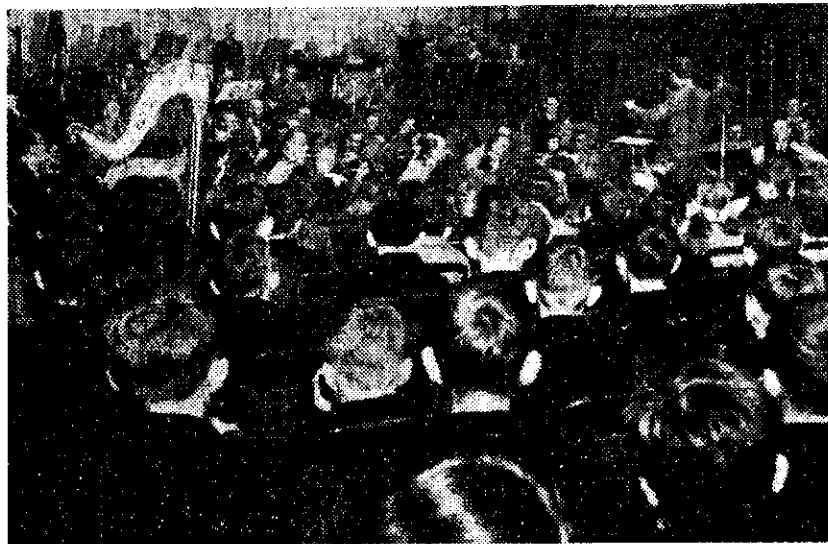
In an interview a few years ago John Hopkins mentioned Tudor church music and the music of the Elizabethan madrigal school among his interests; and he is fond of quartet playing. Among his relaxations, he said, were tennis, swimming and walking.

In 1955 Mr Hopkins married Rosemary Blamey, secretary in the BBC Music Department in Manchester. On his last appearance before his marriage, in Manchester, he found a rolling pin instead of a baton on the rostrum.

The committee which advised on the present appointment comprised Dr V. E. Galway, Stanley Oliver, C. Foster Browne, Julius Hogben, F. Turnovsky, the Director of Broadcasting (W. Yates) and the Assistant Director (J. H. E. Schroder). Commenting upon the appointment, Mr Turnovsky said: "What appeals to me in Mr Hopkins's appointment is that he is a young man who has had the advantage of gaining tremendous experience in conducting, and who has a large repertoire at his command. His youth should be a great asset in conducting a young orchestra in a young country. He has had a brilliant career in holding important posts in England. His success in Sweden and Yugoslavia is impressive, because these are countries with an established musical tradition and a highly critical public which is not likely to accept without close scrutiny a young conductor

appearing for the first time unless he shows great promise. Our orchestra is growing to a state of maturity very rapidly, and only a fine conductor will bring out the best it is capable of. I believe we have found such a man in Mr Hopkins." Mr Turnovsky added that personally he liked to see in addition to an excellent resident conductor an increasing flow of guest conductors of varying background who would bring to the Orchestra, and to the public, a variety of musical experiences.

Another Wellington member of the committee, Stanley Oliver, said of Mr Hopkins: "In spite of his youth there is certainly nothing of the novice about him. This is a young person's country and youth isn't an irrevocable thing to have. What does impress me about this appointment is John Hopkins's wide interest in all the activities which surround music. He has spent some time in giving talks, meeting musical societies, and in taking part in activities other than his own. These outside interests are so necessary in this country, especially in view of the remarkable things Mr Robertson has done in this way. This young man seems well equipped to continue these interests. To have held his position with the BBC Northern Orchestra for five years with experienced orchestral players is an achievement, and the notices from his European tours could not have been other than deserved. He appears to me to be eminently suited to our particular conditions."



THE BBC NORTHERN ORCHESTRA under John Hopkins broadcasting BBC photograph
before an audience of children in the Northern Children's Hour