

THE CHILD and the ORCHESTRA

By ARTHUR JACOBS

HUNDREDS of children swarmed out from the Underground station and headed for the variety theatre. But this was just before 10.30 in the morning, and what awaited them was not a variety show. The London Philharmonic Orchestra, 65-strong, was due to give one of its special free concerts for children attending London County Council schools.

Dr Leslie Russell, music adviser to the Council's education department, conducted the concert. First he gave the children—aged from 11 to 15—an opportunity to sing "God Save the Queen" with the orchestra. Then he introduced them to the various instruments. And then, with some prefatory remarks, he plunged them into Humperdinck (the *Hansel and Gretel* overture), Haydn, Dvorak and Sibelius.

As an observer, I had not chosen to come to a "model" concert. On the contrary: these children were regarded as "tough," and came from some of the shabbier districts of London. Once—only once—Dr Russell had to reprove a boy who was talking. Even that was a rare occurrence at these concerts, and one of the orchestral players almost apologised to me for it afterwards. For the orchestra itself takes an obvious pride in these concerts, as its performance showed.

The previous evening, the same orchestra had been performing Schoenberg, Milhaud and Hindemith to an audience of connoisseurs at the Royal Festival Hall.

Part of Pattern

Britain's educational system allows a large measure of independence and initiative to each local education authority (the town or county council); and, in providing that each child shall have the opportunity to hear a symphony orchestra as part of the ordinary curriculum, London has taken advantage of the special cultural facilities of the capital. Certain other big cities have done similarly. Dr Russell also takes

a smaller orchestra into some of the schools themselves.

But this is only part of the drive to bring children into contact with orchestral music. London concerts for children (at a small charge) have been held on Saturdays for many years—one series organised by the conductor and teacher, Ernest Read, the other by the German-born philanthropist, Sir Robert Mayer. Apart from this, musically-gifted children are encouraged to play orchestral instruments themselves. The London County Council owns hundreds of such instruments—from violins to tubas—which are lent to schools for the use of children who do not possess their own.

Tours Abroad

Most orchestras of schoolchildren have their being, of course, within the school alone. But others have won wider fame. The combined London Schools Symphony Orchestra, 160-strong, meets thrice a year for a seven days' course in the school holidays, and annually ventures into the Royal Festival Hall for the concert which it gives afterwards. It has also been abroad twice, touring Holland and Denmark, where it gave first performances of Vaughan Williams's *Job* in those countries.

Even more distinction has been won by the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, drawing from a much wider field, which has played at the

Edinburgh Festival (five times), at the Promenade Concerts in London, and in France, Belgium and Holland.

The National Youth Orchestra is ten years old—an event which will be celebrated by a London concert conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent in April. What makes this orchestra remarkable is that it takes youngsters from all over the country (something unparalleled overseas), and that none of them are music students. When any of them enrolls in a musical academy, he or she must leave

and make room for some of the hundreds of others who are ever clamouring to join. The "turnover," therefore, is high. But these players, aged from 13 to 19, have achieved a musical standard which led Bruno Walter, the celebrated conductor, to call the orchestra "one of the most inspiring things I have ever heard in my life."

A Thing of Promise

It is not suggested that such ventures as these will work quick miracles and set the factories of England buzzing with Bartok and Britten. None the less, what is astir is something new. Archie Camden, the distinguished bassoonist, who is one of the London musicians who coach the players of the National Youth Orchestra, assured me that no organisation of this kind would have been possible in his own young days—before the British Broadcasting Corporation arrived to foster the appreciation of music among young people.

Not all the members of the National Youth Orchestra eventually become professional musicians. Similarly—to revert to the other side of the two-way traffic between the child and the orchestra—not all the children who attend the London County Council's symphony concerts will go on to be devoted music-lovers. Yet the seed, at least, is implanted. And it can be seen ripening in such a frank report as this, received by Dr Russell from a 13-year-old girl who attended a similar concert to the one I heard:

The concert was finished by a Slavonic Dance. The tune jumped from major to minor and back again in a most vigorous manner. I noticed one girl, who was having a quiet little nap, when suddenly the tune changed to major and she nearly shot out of her seat! ... We went from the Town Hall back to the bustling world outside, humming snatches of tunes. We had all, I think, enjoyed the concert very much.



LOUIS LEVY with members of the London Schools Symphony Orchestra during a recording session for the film, "It's Great to be Young"



PARRENIN QUARTET

THE Parrenin Quartet, now one of the leading European Quartets, will be giving its first New Zealand concert next week. The concert will be broadcast from YCs in two parts, on Wednesday, April 24, at 9.0 p.m., and Thursday, April 25, at 8.45 p.m. The programmes will contain the 12-tone variations by the contemporary French composer Jean-Louis Martinet, the Quartet in G Minor, by Debussy, the Schubert, Op. 168, and Prokofiev's Quartet No. 2. Members of the Quartet are, from left: Pierre Jenasson (cello), Serge Collot (viola), Jacques Parrenin (first violin) and Marcel Charpentier (second violin). They are touring New Zealand for the Federation of Chamber Music Societies.