



LEFT: Prommers at the Albert Hall cram the floor to see Sir Malcolm Sargent conduct.



round nine holes? Sir Malcolm's explanation is that the brain is so concentrated upon the music that it has no chance of receiving the message that the muscles are tired. To conduct the score without any musicians responding would, he says, be physically impossible.

After it all, however, he can look as limp as his shirt. His "gentleman's gentleman" says that Sir Malcolm generally changes shirt, collar, and sometimes underwear in the interval and again after a concert. In the recent hot weather he has also done so after the morning's rehearsal and before the concert. That means five shirts a day, three days a week. Changes on rehearsal days during the rest of the week bring the total to 24 shirts.

But this is all part of his well-organised life. "I'm lucky," he says. "I've two secretaries, a chauffeur and my man to look after me. One secretary looks after my social life. Knowing my love of the theatre, she'll often book seats when I have a free night. She may even arrange a companion, someone I'd like to take."

What about the charge that he is similarly acquiescent about the popular demand for well-worn works? "Why should I conduct new works just because they are new?" he asks. "If I included one in every programme, people would probably say they didn't like my judgment."

In fact, in the past decade, he has conducted more new music than any other English conductor, most of it on the Third Programme. At the Proms this season he will conduct many of the 17 works having their first performance in London or before any audience. One of the old favourites will be Beethoven's Violin Concerto in D, played by Alan Loveday with the London Symphony Orchestra. Artists making their Prom debuts include the 13-year-old pianist Allan Schiller; Jean Harvey, a young Scottish woman who will make history by appearing as both pianist and violinist at the same concert; and John Kennedy, cellist son of the Australian cellist Kennedy.

Making another "positively last appearance" is Kirsten Flagstad, in a programme commemorating the 50th anniversary of the death of Grieg.

As one of the series of concerts in the centenary year of Elgar's birth, *The Dream of Gerontius* will be heard with the Royal Choral Society and the Croydon Philharmonic Society. This is a work that Sargent has made peculiarly his own by sensitive interpretation. Tears have been known to roll down his face as he conducts, and this may well be one of those occasions. In any case, it will be musically memorable.

SONG OF THE TWENTY-FOUR SHIRTS

J. W. GOODWIN writes from London on Sir Malcolm Sargent and the Proms



GOOD wine needs no bush and good Proms should need no party, but it is a happy idea of the BBC to announce the plans for each season of Promenade Concerts at a convivial gathering of United Kingdom and overseas correspondents. Dutifully we asked a few questions just to prove that we were not like Felix in the old song who went to the funeral just for the ride. Ten minutes' business was followed by a cocktail party, at which a Welshman from a London newspaper was overheard discussing the Edinburgh Festival with a German, a South African chatted uninhibitedly with a West Indian on modern jazz, and two New Zealanders who had last met at Hong Kong exchanged news of newspaper friends round the world.

The pleasures of that party in the panelled boardroom of the BBC Governors were as nothing to the enthusiasm with which the Proms are greeted, even more now than when they began 63 years ago. Undeterred by the acoustic vagaries of some parts of the hall, by heat and crush and tired feet, some 2000 promenaders cram the floor round the illuminated fountain at half-a-crown a time.

Their slightly more affluent fellow music-lovers line the steeply raked galleries which sweep up from above the two tiers of boxes to the vast glass-domed roof. These boxes, incidentally, are valuable private property, which were worth £1000 for a grand tier box and £500 for the second tier when the hall was opened. The latter were changing hands at £1500 soon after the war, but one was recently sold for about £800.

First and last nights are traditionally exuberant with a far-from-musical fantasia of crackers, streamers, and stamping feet, though this year there was moderation without any less enthusiasm. Young faces, rapt, half-hypnotised, confronted the BBC Symphony Orchestra;

between them stood the magician and his wand.

"There's been talk of hysteria and indiscriminate applause," said Sir Malcolm Sargent, chief of the Prom's five conductors, recently, "but as soon as I raise my arms for the first beat, the fun stops. Prommers have a deep natural love of music. If they find music worth standing through for three hours, why shouldn't they be excited when it's over? Isn't music something to get excited about?"

This enjoyment of the most serious music is considered not quite decent by some snobs who also criticise Sir Malcolm for his showmanship and elegant appearance. It's true that he can make a superb entrance, no less impressive if he's interviewed in his own home than in the concert hall.

He has been known to come out of his music room with a budgerigar perched on his head and to announce quite casually: "He's been there all morning. He even sat there while I had my bath and I had to pull my vest on with him still there."

But why is he called "Flash Harry"? The Harry comes from one of his Christian names—Harold Malcolm Watts Sargent—and Sir Malcolm has his own version of the "Flash." After a wartime Brains Trust—the familiar combination of Huxley, Joad, Campbell and Sargent—the announcer said the programme had come from London and immediately went on to announce a concert with the conductor at Manchester.

"He didn't say it had been recorded, so there I was—Flash! Like the man in the comic strip."

Some of those who charge him with showmanship probably suspect that conductors are actors and ballet dancers who provide the audience with some-

thing to watch while the orchestra does the work. It's true that some orchestras can play some music sometimes without some conductors, but the real answer comes from watching one of the great practitioners wielding his baton with the vigour and precision of d'Artagnan's sword in a duel with the Cardinal's Guards.

At a rough calculation a conductor swings, waves, or thrusts his baton some 7000 times in an hour. Many of these movements are the physical equivalent of a golfer's drive—though there are some mashie shots and even some short putts. And what golfer could endure the physical strain of striking the ball 7000 times in the time it takes him to go



BBC photograph
SIR MALCOLM SARGENT
"Like the man in the comic strip"