



SOME people unable to see beyond their noses talk of New Zealand as if it were a lazy backwater, a sort of pastoral idyll remote from the high-velocity tensions of the world of post-Freud, Harwell's Zeta and telly-pulverised mass man. But the jets have forced parish-pumpery's back to the wall. There is no escape from the technological monster or the latest nemesis. At the bottom of the earth you are just as likely to stumble on a Bolshoi ballerina as make way for a U.K. Lion or thread your way through a posse of musicians from central Europe. Even Royal aunts now stop over for tea.

Symbol of the new dawn is the visit of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. And who is to say that the globe-trotting Mr Bernstein and his New York Philharmonic will not be the next on the list? That some civilised magnate may not be seized with a vision of a Southern-style version of Bernard

RESPLENDENT SOUND

by GRAHAM PATON

Miles's Mermaid Theatre with a vista of Rangitoto rather more glorious than the water around Puddle Dock? It is a measure of our cultural ferment that such ideas need no longer be silly day-dreams and that we can look at the European scene with increasing self-respect.

The fateful 48 hours began with a trip to Auckland's Midlands-evocative Town Hall, with its faded atmosphere of dutiful "Messiahs" and Victorian discomforts. The candid morning light excited the patina on fiddle bellies jutting out from a forest of players. It looked a squeeze on the stage. A note of last-ditch nervous stand was implied in the eyes of local liaison down in the hall; the business of shepherding 120 weary English-sparse travellers from

meal to bed to rehearsal had, it seemed, its agonies. Only the inevitable men in overalls nonchalantly going about mysterious jobs seemed part of a saner, unglamorous world. A devout platoon of students rimmed the balcony beyond the conductor. Without its audience the hall was crazily resonant. The brooding chromatic figure from the opening movement of Brahms's First Symphony was more edgily insistent than usual. The conductor, Karel Ancerl, a sturdy absorbed figure, rarely interrupted the music. Perhaps a trombone missed the beat in an entry; or the orchestra hurried beyond the pulse in an urgent section. Usually it was enough to use an elbow to emphasise the curve of a phrase or shoot an eye-brow heavenwards to encourage the woodwind. For

the orchestra went through its paces with the air of concentration and general musical alertness that you find with a good quartet. When Brahms's demon had been thoroughly exorcised everyone trooped into a lobby for elevenses.

Slightly distraught (the language barrier) we caught up with Mr Ancerl over a cup of tea. Looking something like one's idea of Till Eulenspiegel (middle-aged) with an incredibly mobile face and impulsive gestures he radiated life-force and creature sympathy. And a willingness to test his English ("I understand all"). "No," he grinned in a way which vaguely suggested sweat if not tears in the Homeland, "I do not need to say very much to the orchestra. We did all the work in Prague." After a decade with him, they probably knew his intentions as well as he did anyway. The Brahms First? Here Mr Ancerl talked about the life-enlarging power of such music; its place in the musical scheme of things as carrying on the humane ideals of Beethoven; its capacity to bring men together in a common sharing of profound feeling. The problem of audiences? Different everywhere: London's are cultivated and warm; Paris's less so ("Is it right—snobbish?") And he was resigned to the needs of the East ("in Japan they want Tchaikovsky"). At this point he was whisked



LEFT: The first violins await the conductor's appearance. Third from right is the leader of the orchestra, Bretislav Ludvik