



LEFT: Karel Ancerl relaxes back stage after his first New Zealand concert. RIGHT: Discussing the concert and the ones to follow are (left to right) L. R. Sceats, Auckland District Manager for the NZBS; M. J. Glubb, NZBS Concert Manager; Jiri Pauer, composer and the orchestra's Artistic Director; Ladislav Slovak, associate conductor; Karel Ancerl, principal conductor

off to an anxious discussion by the stage. It was time to get on with Shostakovitch . . .

Make no mistake—when evening came it was an occasion, gala-style: there were ladies splendid in *haut couture*; others come simply for the music. Bespoke on the men or just the functional uniform of gaberdine over-coats. Everyone spun in an orbit of potential appreciation. Two national anthems made the unprimed bob up and down. And at last the chance to judge the visitors on this, their first concert beyond Europe.

The opening work—a scherzo for large orchestra by Jiri Pauer—sounded like the musical equivalent of Soviet realism in art—uncomfortably literal in its interpretation of Nature (in this case the throb of industry); obvious and stereotyped in its "lyricism"—music for Komsomols and devoid of subtlety of mind or freshness of invention. Nonetheless

it got a brilliant and ebullient performance. It was during the playing of the Shostakovitch First Symphony that the character of the Czech Orchestra became apparent: its resources of refined never-coarse colour, its capacity for attack both delicate and trenchant, its unity of ensemble and constant purity of intonation. As the work of a precocious richly gifted 19-year-old the symphony is remarkable—its technical aplomb is ceaseless; its light irony sometimes invokes Prokofiev; in its grace of statement in the *lento* it sometimes recalls Tchaikovsky. In all a symphony abounding in a promise which some think yet unfulfilled in Shostakovitch's subsequent career. Karel Ancerl showed his calibre in a highly sophisticated, unforced reading of the work, rhythms free as the air, colours distinct yet sensitively graded to the dynamic needs of the score.

If the Brahms's First Symphony made its impact largely in terms of sheer

splendour of sound, impeccable clarity of texture, the beauty of solo woodwind playing—responsible musicians making music without meretricious glamour or glibness—it was also a view of the symphony that left inner emotional tensions, to some extent, unaccounted for. Mr Ancerl, it seemed, took a somewhat complacent view of Brahms's post-Beethovenian grapplings of soul.

Surprisingly enough, at the second concert Mr Ancerl again showed a reluctance to come to grips with the inner emotional current of the music in a work where you would least expect to fault him—the New World Symphony of Dvorak. The quicker movements tended to squareness of phrasing, a short-breathed rhythmic policy which inhibited the surge of the movements. On the other hand the *largo* was as smooth and poignant as you could reasonably expect to hear. The cor anglais played by divine charter.

And if our visitors had done nothing else for us but re-instate the Schumann piano concerto, a work which has taken some hard knocks from deadening routine, we should be in their debt. Their soloist Jan Panenka is a pianist of intense poetic perceptions, whose technique is both elegant and *bravura*, whose temperament can swing easily from virile authority to a heart-easing intimacy as in the slow movement.

Mr Ancerl himself was at his most masterful in the Ravel transcription of Mussorgsky's *Pictures from an Exhibition*. Outwardly he did very little excepting, of course, those times when the music seethed to the boil. Yet one was aware of a vast effort of musical will. He set the music in motion, thereafter its course seemed predestined and the Czech Philharmonic produced what was probably the most resplendent orchestral sound yet heard in the South Pacific.



"Responsible musicians making music without meretricious glamour or glibness . . ." Violas, cellos and basses (left) and (right) the woodwind section and some of the brass