

# Menuhin and the Orchestra

**Y**EHUDI MENUHIN will play two concertos with the National Orchestra under Michael Bowles, at a concert in the Wellington Town Hall on Tuesday, July 24. Menuhin's appearance with the orchestra, the only one during his strenuous New Zealand tour (nine concerts in fourteen days) is by arrangement with the NZBS, and the whole concert will be broadcast by 2YA. The concertos, which will make up the entire programme, will be the Brahms and the Beethoven.

Listeners who are to have this unusual treat will probably feel that two major concertos make a heavy evening's work for any musician, but it will be no new thing for Menuhin. On a European tour while still in his early teens he once played not only the Brahms and Beethoven, but a Bach concerto as well in a single evening, with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under Bruno Walter. And last year in the Albert Hall he played two concertos without rehearsal after arriving in his street clothes an hour and a half late—he had just motored 75 miles because his plane, delayed by fog in Ireland after a trans-Atlantic crossing, had found London also shrouded.

Now aged 35, Menuhin has travelled much since his last visit to New Zealand, during his first world tour, in 1935. After that tour he withdrew from public life entirely for nearly two years. Living for most of that time on a ranch in the Santa Cruz Mountains, California, he studied and extended his repertoire. When he again faced the public and began his second world tour, the child prodigy had become one of the greatest living masters of the violin.

What is the secret of Menuhin's genius? Neither the great violinist's father, Moshe Menuhin, nor his mother can explain it. Neither was a practical musician, although his mother played the piano a little and his father had scholarly cultured tastes. Yehudi was born in New York, but his musical education began in San Francisco when he was a year old. Wrapped in a shawl, and with a bottle of milk to keep him from crying, he went with his parents on their weekly visits to the concert halls. It was only a year or two later that he was presented with a toy-violin because of his interest in music. He flung it on the floor and jumped on it because it wouldn't "sing." On his fourth birthday he was given a real violin, and he was only seven when he played the Mendelssohn concerto with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra to an audience of 9000.

But the most memorable of his childhood performances was his playing of the Beethoven concerto at Carnegie Hall with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under Fritz Busch. His hands were too small to tune the three-quarter size Grancino, which he had to pass for this purpose to the leader of the orchestra.

"His entry came nearer and nearer," Donald Brook described the occasion in *Violinists of Today*, "and at the last moment—only a few bars before he was



to start—he nonchalantly raised his fiddle and started his gigantic task with all the self-assurance in the world. It was a memorable occasion. He played like a virtuoso with thirty years' experience behind him. At the finish the audience found that mere clapping would not adequately express their

feelings; cheer after cheer broke out, and several hundreds of the 3000 present rose to their feet. Tears streamed from the eyes of old ladies, and after the first acknowledgment of the applause, Fritz Busch came down from his rostrum, took Yehudi in his arms, and kissed him."

And it was not just a case of being carried away by the occasion. The critic Olin Downes wrote in the *New York Times* afterwards: "It seems ridiculous to say that he showed a mature conception of Beethoven's concerto, but that is the fact." His playing was similarly praised in Britain and on the Continent.

During the war Menuhin played to troops in the war areas. One trip took him to the Aleutian Islands, where he gave 64 concerts in one month. He made many tours in aid of war charities—he was in Australia during this period—and is said to have raised over five million dollars. After the liberation of Paris he was the first artist to play in the Paris Opera House, and he has since visited other parts of Europe.

His second visit to New Zealand follows an Australian tour. Hephzibah Menuhin, his pianist sister, is making the tour with him as accompanist.

Donald Brook said of Menuhin that he can produce "a tone unparalleled in the history of the violin: for cleanliness, smoothness and quality generally it is comparable with that of Heifetz, but is considerably warmer. His style is capable of seemingly innumerable variations, and technically difficult works simply do not worry him at all. The Bartok concerto, which is considered to be one of the most difficult we possess, he plays with incredible ease."

The inclusion of Menuhin's concert with the National Orchestra in the programme for 2YA will make necessary some rearrangement of regular 2YA features. Listeners will find details on the programme pages.

## Prize-winning Programmes

**U**NDER the title *Who Wants the English Composer?* a two-hour concert of recorded music compiled and presented by W. T. Bagnall, will be broadcast from 1YC at 9.1 p.m. this Saturday, July 21. This concert is the winning entry in a competition held by the Auckland Recorded Music Society and judged by Dr. A. Heppner and J. C. Reid, the Society's president and vice-president respectively. The second-place winner, *The Pure in Heart*, compiled by Robin Wood, president of the Whangarei Turntable Club, will be heard at the same time on July 28.

"My entry was inspired by an article written by Vaughan Williams many years ago," Mr. Bagnall told *The Listener*. "You could call it a minor crusade." The article was an appeal for the return of English music to its rightful place of affection and esteem within the daily lives of the people, but Mr. Bagnall would like to go beyond that to the point where English music will penetrate national barriers and be accepted wherever good music is appreciated. New Zealanders, he says, are now only on the threshold of appreciating the great surge of vitality that English composition began to feel over fifty years ago. His programme is designed to illustrate the rise of English music since 1900 and to deepen the general understanding of the works and composers represented. These are: *Tintagel*, by Sir Arnold Bax; *Falstaff*, by Elgar; Benjamin Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*, the Delius *Sea Drift*; and the Vaughan Williams *Serenade to Music*.

In *The Pure in Heart* Mr. Wood has taken up the ancient argument of the arranger versus the composer in a programme-essay on purism in music. His programme will open with Bach's Prelude in E, played first in its "pure" version by an unaccompanied violin, and followed by the Pick-Mangiagalli arrangement presented by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Works by Mozart, Liszt, Ravel, Pergolesi, Wolf and César Franck have been chosen to illustrate other forms of purism and arrangement.

"I have endeavoured to be objective," Mr. Wood says, "though to the purist I

would no doubt be a vulgarian, and the result will probably serve to strengthen the convictions both of those who are purists and those who are not."

Entrants were given a free hand in expressing their own ideas of what is best in programme building, the principal condition being that each entry should be in the form the Society has found most effective for achieving its objects—consisting of approximately two-thirds music and one-third explanation. Most of the narrative will be heard between works or at other suitable intervals, but in presenting *Falstaff* Mr. Bagnall will also speak during the music. This half-hour item, he says, is full of allusions and private jokes which  
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W. T. BAGNALL  
"A Minor Crusade"



Amalgamated Studios photographs  
ROBIN WOOD  
"To the purist, a vulgarian"

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