



MUSIC FOR THE VERY YOUNG

AT what age are young children likely to respond to the music of a symphony orchestra? The National Orchestra of the NZBS has given free concerts for school children each season since its formation, but only to children of ten and over. When *The Listener* received from the United States Information Service a story about a "Tiny Tots" concert given by the Washington National Symphony Orchestra—to children between the ages of two and six—we asked the conductor of the National Orchestra, Warwick Braithwaite, and other local musicians for their opinions of the value such a concert might have for New Zealand children. Their replies, and the USIS story, are printed here.

I THINK such a concert would be a very good thing, although the schedule of National Orchestra concerts is so exacting that to put on another would be a major operation.

The players would get a great kick out of it, I'm sure.

Still, I sometimes doubt if things of this kind done especially for children are of any value at all. Out of a thousand

children at a concert like this only ten would be so impressed by it that they would bother their parents to take up their interest in some practical form. I got my interest in music by going to a real live opera with my family when I was four. It was all very, very serious, I wonder if the result would have been the same if I'd gone to a children's concert? It connects their ideas not necessarily with music, but with the curious sounds made by the piccolo in "Pop Goes the Weasel," and so on. But I would love the joy of doing a concert like this.

—Warwick Braithwaite

I THINK it's a very good idea to give concerts of this kind, provided you play descriptive music which has been orchestrated in a way to appeal to children, and which tells a story. My own experience of playing music for very young children is that they wriggle about, don't sit still, push each other's hats off and so on, but when you ask a question, they've heard everything. And their listening is quite untrammelled.

I think that what you hear before you are five is very important; after five your life is already set. New Zealand children today are growing up in a musical desert. In my childhood every house had a piano, but how many houses have one now? Children used

to be sung to sleep, but that practice is dying out nowadays, too. There is a complete change from conditions of 40 years ago, and I think that is one reason New Zealanders don't have the deeper perception into Beethoven and Bach that people in other countries have.

Concerts of this sort for very young children would be invaluable for their musical life in later years.

—Dorothy Davies

IF you want to guide children to better things in music you can't start too young. Concerts for children as young as these would have to be frequent enough for the kiddies to accustom themselves to hearing and seeing an orchestra playing. Their parents would have to be with them, too. But if we did have more concerts for young children we might have decent audiences for symphony orchestras one day. Symphonies all over the world are having trouble with audiences.

There would be no educational value in a concert like this, but from the point of view of inculcating habit into the children it would be valuable. When parents ask me at what age their children should start learning the violin, I say about six. If a child grows up in a household which plays and listens to good music, then nine times out of ten he will grow up to have the same tastes as his parents. So it is a good idea to accustom children to hearing good music right from the cradle. A few concerts of this nature wouldn't mould them, but would influence their tastes to the extent that they would know in future what good music is.

I think the kind of musical training given in schools, even music-making, has mostly condemned itself because we haven't yet got a discerning musical

CONCERT FOR TINY TOTS

EVERY performance of the Washington National Symphony Orchestra is not played for serious adult audiences, properly dressed for an evening at the concert. Occasionally, members of the Symphony, under the direction of Howard Mitchell, go on the stage before younger groups. Only once, though, has the orchestra given a concert entirely for tots under six years of age.

Before the "Tiny Tots" concert began, everyone was wondering just what would happen when a group of exuberant youngsters found themselves seated before a symphony orchestra. The question was answered shortly after the music started, as the children clapped, sang and applauded in the right places and generally had a wonderful time.

The noises they did make were merely normal children's reactions to an enjoyable experience. They listened soberly to the serious pieces and danced along the aisles to light numbers like the *Mosquito Dance*.

When the concert was over, the children swarmed around the orchestra, singling out their favourite instruments. The bassoon player was coaxed to play the part of the Grandfather in Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. The piccolo player had to play the Weasel from the American folk tune *Pop Goes the Weasel*.

Providing free concerts for school children has been a policy of the National Symphony Orchestra for the past three years. The "Tiny Tots" concert this year was an experiment to bring good music to pre-school children.

public out of it. A few concerts like this would be of more value, in my opinion, in building up such a public.

—Alex Lindsay

THIS concert seems to fulfil Aldous Huxley's predictions in *Brave New World*, where he talks about indoctrinating infants by putting a microphone under their pillows. In America they don't seem to worry about going to all that trouble—they just haul them along to a concert.

I should think that one child in ten thousand or more would have sufficient response to music at that age to get anything truly musical out of such a programme unless the music were reduced to the nursery level. Nevertheless, the basic rhythms and what might pass for melody would certainly have some sort of effect—but then this could be obtained just as well and much more easily by singing a few nursery rhymes and folk songs around the piano, and the psychological effect would be much better. In fact, I would rather think the "Tiny Tots" concert might be a form of cruelty if the children were not allowed freedom to fidget and even to move about and talk when they felt like it—and certainly to go home when they'd had enough.

But, after all, the Menuhins used to take their little boy, Yehudi, to concerts when he was no more than a babe in arms, and he doesn't seem to have suffered from it. I wonder how much he gained?

—Owen Jensen

