

MUSIC OF THE WEEK

*There is no art without life,
There is no life without growth,
There is no growth without change,
There is no change without controversy.*—Frank Rutter.

PAST performances by orchestras attached to the YA stations have convinced me that the inclusion of a national symphony orchestra in the policy trend of the NBS is essential. So far as I am aware, no move has yet been made to create a radio orchestra and by its refusal to subsidise symphony orchestras the Government has banished the hope that its interest in music is as considerable as its interest in back-country roads.

Yet, I believe the creation of a properly constituted orchestra must have its effects on the NBS plan for raising listening standards. My attention to an orchestral programme from 4YA last week has convinced me more than ever that continued dependence on recordings for the performance of major works is unfair to New Zealand musicians and musical listeners and that some attempt to overcome the obvious difficulties of the scheme must be made.

There is nothing really wrong with the 4YA orchestra or with any of the other orchestras. Individual faults and inaccuracies may be detected, but performances mostly are adequate.

The handicap is simple. The appreciably small amount of tone the orchestras can produce limits their performance mostly to the ballad type works of Coates et al. Pleasant enough for a time, perhaps, but never wholly satisfying.

Australian radio has created symphony orchestras skilful enough to warrant the special engagement of conductors as eminent as Dr. Malcolm Sargent. I cannot imagine Dr. Sargent engaged for the YA orchestras. Or if I could, I could also imagine his dismay at the limited forces available to him.

My plaint is for an orchestra of between 70 and 100 players, preferably permanently employed under the ablest conductor available and regularly appearing at each of the four main stations. The difficulties I realise. But latest returns show the number of licensed listeners to be more than 292,000, paying approximately £365,000 annually for the inestimable privilege

of listening to lengthy recorded programmes. Surely a portion of that fund could be devoted to the creation of an orchestra, well-trained, well-managed, well able to tackle major works, competent to give a lead to musical culture in the country by the exploration of musical paths so far untrodden for public benefit.

INCIDENTALLY, 4YA's orchestra, under James Dixon, was in useful form, particularly with Bantock's "English Scenes," programme music played well enough to give glimpses of the composer's mental photographs. I was not able, unfortunately, to listen to the whole of the Brandenburg No. 6. But the opening appeared to lack firmness and polish. Perhaps later results were better.

BRICKBATS, and heavy ones, for Mr. James Duffy's idea of the correct way to sing "A Bachelor Gay," from 3YA last Monday. A tenor of some skill, Mr. Duffy descended to the outrageous mannerisms and enunciation of the music hall era and his phrasing and breathing were not perfect. Such tricks as "eyes of tindah bleen" and "yeen" were almost as irritating as his "And when he thinks he's PAST luv, It is then he meets his LAST luv." And they were very irritating indeed. A capriciously misguided effort, I thought it. Why, I don't know because in his other songs, his Irish tenor was pleasant, though his breath control remained uncertain. Incidentally, he broke the unwritten laws of the Musicians' Union by appearing on successive nights from the station. Musicians of broadcasting status are little removed from the real stars and it is expected of both than one evening's performance should require at least three days for recovery.

MUSICALLY speaking, the famous question of whether or not a doctor should tell is irrelevant. Not so irrelevant is whether a brass band should tackle a symphonic movement, prompted by the Woolston Band's effort from 3YA to overcome the andante movement from Tchaikowsky's "Pathetique." If no one else will speak, I'm willing to say the attempt is mistaken. In a work demanding the skilled capabilities of a full orchestra Woolston's effort was—well, yes, "Pathetique." But not the right "Pathetique." Tone colour was lacking and the heavy brass produced almost a blur of sound, sharply divided from the piping corni—

a lonely dob of senna on a palette necessarily requiring the full rainbow! Ambition may be desirable, but it should take another direction, especially because the following item, Rimmer's "Orion March," was capably toned and smartly played. It showed what standards Woolston can reach. But the "Pathetique"....

THURSDAY'S programme from 2YA (changed to 2YC) triumphantly announced that in the recital by Miss Marjorie Bennie, two songs would be sung in Italian, the other two in French. Subsequently, I was also triumphant, because I recognised the word "serenata" at least three times in Miss Bennie's offering of the Tosti item. The French, however, defeated me. Miss Bennie gallantly demonstrated her nasals in the French, and as gallantly attacked the Italian. Presumably, she also pinned her ears back in the approved and traditional style of Italian soprano singing. The results? Not impressive. Miss Bennie knows many of the tricks. She uses them skilfully. In fact, if they were allied to a voice of considerably more power, wider range, and finer gradation of tone, the result would be expert. At the moment, Miss Bennie impresses as the type of singer decently applauded by whiskered gentlemen in the drawing rooms of other days as "pretty."

NOTED as the knob turned: Dawn Harding's precision and excellent control in a group of Brahms' lieder from 1YA. . . . Rex Harrison tackling "De Glory Road" at a charity concert broadcast by 3YA, and exciting no beliefs that he's another Tibbett; main trouble, lack of resonance. . . . Declina Hughson (2YC) lacking crispness in Debussy's "Cathédrale Engloutie," and accelerating the tempo in Moussorgsky's "Gopak" at the expense of tonal quality, but playing a Russian Lullaby well. . . . The cellist in the Max Scherek Trio (4YA) producing a fine legato in a Haydn trio, but unfortunately swamping the violinist in the process. . . . Madame de Mauny and W. Dearden Jackson (2YA) playing an Arensky suite for two pianos with notably smooth timing. . . . Hamilton Dickson (2YC) playing a cello group which included his own "Romance," a neat item with a somewhat precious melody. . . . Interesting discovery that there was, after all, a bass in the "Cameo Three" singing a group of French songs. Main trouble: Lack of balance, due to shyness (or something) of aforesaid bass. . . .

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