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THE ENGLISH PRESS AND THE "ORCHESTRE DE LA SUISSE ROMANDE."

As reported in our issue No. 1119, of August 26th, 1949, the "Orchestre de la Suisse Romande" under the direction of M. Ernest Ansermet, took part in the Music Festival in Edinburgh, which was held recently.

We have much pleasure in reproducing below a few comments made about the performance of this well-known Swiss Orchestra.

"Yorkshire Post" (1.9.49).

... "One of the chief delights of the Edinburgh Festival is the opportunity it affords of hearing a number of distinguished orchestras within a short space of time. In the Usher Hall last night the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande gave the first of their two concerts under their famous conductor, Ernest Ansermet. It is a fine orchestra, and international in structure; for in M. Ansermet's modest words, "Switzerland is not big enough to provide an orchestra of the first rank by itself." The players are from Italy, Germany, France (the woodwind section) and Belgium, and there is a trombone player from England. But there is a unity about the orchestra that puts their playing alongside the best that we have heard, and for this visit M. Ansermet has deliberately chosen to present music in which his orchestra specialises, which makes a welcome and refreshing change." ...

"The Tribune" (9.9.49).

... "There were some outstanding performances among the orchestral shows. I was not able to wait for the Paris Conservatoire concerts, but knowing that admirable orchestra as I have done in the past, I still doubt whether anything in the whole three weeks will be remembered as gratefully as the two concerts given by the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. This was something quite out of the ordinary; a most exquisite touch in the classics (Haydn's B. flat Symphony, No. 102, and Mozart's Prague, both splendidly played) and in music of this century impeccable grace and ease. Ansermet conducted, he who founded the orchestra and has trained it. A quarter of a century ago we knew him for his extreme adulation of Stravinsky and all his works; now he has mellowed, is quieter on the rostrum and has produced for our delight this magnificent instrument. Only two concerts; it was a sparing allowance which next year, one hopes, will be increased." ...

"Manchester Guardian" (1.9.49).

... "Among the seven orchestral teams engaged for this year's meetings is L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, conducted by Ernest Ansermet, and I arrived in Edinburgh in time to hear these clever musicians give in the Usher Hall a concert that opened with Haydn's "Clock" Symphony. It was soon made clear that this company from Geneva can deal elegantly with Haydn without foisting on him the over-fastidious manner which is becoming far too popular nowadays — a manner that gives his rapid movements a dandified air instead of real distinction and vivacity. Owing to Ansermet's masterful directing the allegro playing kept a fine flexibility, and the rendering of the slow movement was dignified without losing its occasional touches of sly persiflage." ...

"Manchester Guardian" (2.9.49).

... "In the Usher Hall last evening the Swiss Orchestra, conducted by Ernest Ansermet, gained tremendous applause for its playing of the "Petrouchka" Suite. It was truly an exciting performance in which the woodwind and brass were particularly brilliant; their massive chording in ensemble and the sporadic flare and glitter of their solo passages cast a strong light on the grotesque sections of the work. The conductor was at his liveliest in this music, and Stravinsky's multiplex, bacchanalian, and seemingly tangled scoring, crowded and criss-crossed, was handled with entirely admirable power and sureness of judgment." ...

"The Times" (2.9.49).

... "The second of the three European orchestras to come to this Festival has now given its two concerts, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, which is 10 years old and has not been heard in this country before. It is based on Geneva and is the creation of M. Ernest Ansermet; it reflects his musical personality in that though it plays the classics, Haydn and Mozart here in Edinburgh, it has a bias towards the French school which affects the style of its playing: its tone and responsiveness are quick-silvery.

These two programmes avoided the profundities and gave us extraverted music in which category Ravel must be placed, whose piano concerto for the left hand was revived with Mme. Jacqueline Blancard as the defiant and triumphant soloist. The same composer's Spanish Rhapsody was an enchantment of the senses in M. Ansermet's hands.

Indeed, there is something of the astrologer about M. Ansermet. He usually comes to us under special engagement to act as advocate for some particular brand of modernism or other, but here he is now at the head of his own orchestra presenting music of his own choice. Being a mathematician, his interpretations have all the lucidity of mathematical demonstration, but they also have that other quality of mathematics — and this is where the likeness to astrology comes in — the element of the uncanny: what begins as rational logic ends as spell-binding and, since music has never forsaken its magical powers of incantation, the conjunction of the mathematical and the musical minds in one person is every bit as potent as the more common combination of rhetoric and emotion." ...

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"News Chronicle" (31.8.49).

... "The second Continental orchestra to appear in Edinburgh this year has come from Geneva, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande.

They played at the Usher Hall this evening under their founder and permanent conductor, Ernest Ansermet, that is to say the man who has trained and formed them into the responsive instrument they now are.

And as is right and desirable in a visiting orchestra, they have brought with them some of the music of their own country. The first of these works came after a performance of Haydn's "Clock" Symphony which placed the orchestra high in technique and interpretation of the classics.

The Swiss work which followed was a symphonic concertante for harpsichord, pianoforte, harp, and two string orchestras by Frank Martin, one of the most important contemporary Swiss composers.

It is excellently written, very intelligent, and full of interest. The way in which the three solo instruments are combined and contrasted shows great craftsmanship.

The other novelty was by Honegger, who has for years been in such close contact with Paris that one is liable to forget that he is in fact Swiss.

These three movements, a Prelude, Fugue, and Post-lude from the ballet "Amphion," which he wrote with Paul Valery for Ida Rubenstein, is rich scoring for a large orchestra. Here, too, there is complete mastery such as Martin shows, but in this case it is exercised in a totally different style, with much dramatic emphasis and grandeur of sound.

The playing of both the modern works could not have been more exact and impressive." . . .

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