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ERNEST ANSERMET 75 YEARS OLD.

The eminent Swiss conductor, Ernest Ansermet, is celebrating his 75th birthday this year. He was born in Vevey in 1883, and was a student at Lausanne University and then taught mathematics for six years at Vevey and at the Lausanne *Gymnasium*. During these years he devoted his leisure hours to the study of music with several eminent teachers including Ernest Bloch. His ambition was to become a conductor and in 1910 he gave up his teaching and accepted the conductorship of the Montreux Kursaal Orchestra. In 1915 he became conductor of the Geneva Orchestra and from that year until 1923 he was also intermittently engaged by the Diaghilev Ballet, directing the first performance of many of its important productions. It was then that his name first became closely associated with Stravinsky's music and that he began to be known internationally as a rising conductor of catholic tastes with a pronounced inclination towards contemporary music, in the interpretation of which he exhibited unusual ability. Since those earlier days of his career he has conducted as a guest most of the world's leading orchestras. In 1920 he set the musical cognoscenti of London talking with a concert of Stravinsky's music which included the chamber orchestra suite " L'Histoire du Soldat " and which he prefaced by a lecture on the aesthetics of the composer. In November 1923 he was engaged by the Royal Philharmonic Society to conduct a programme which ranged from Mozart to the first English performance of Honegger's " Chant de Joie " and since then he has appeared in this country on many occasions.

When the " Orchestre de la Suisse Romande " was first formed, it consisted of forty-eight players (augmented when necessary to sixty). Its work was limited to a six-month winter season during which it gave series of concerts in Geneva and visited all the important towns in French Switzerland. To assemble his orchestra Ansermet had been forced to rely largely upon foreign musicians; the woodwind was French and the brass German and Austrian, while the string section was made up of Belgians, Italians and Swiss. Only half of the orchestra's budget was covered by its concert receipts and for the remaining half it relied upon a public subscription. Ansermet set himself the three-fold task of reducing the amount of financial assistance needed from the public, extending the season, and increasing the proportion of Swiss players. Progress was slow but in all three aims he was largely successful; by 1946 eighty per cent of the players were Swiss, the orchestra had achieved all-the-year-round performance, and dependence upon the generosity of the musical community in the maintenance of its public concerts had been substantially reduced, mainly as the result of the award of a Government subsidy given in return for popular concerts and special concerts for children.

The formation of the orchestra had encouraged the municipality of Geneva to reopen its theatre and the orchestra was engaged for the limited seasons of opera that were then presented. This provided it with welcome additional employment but even so its position was somewhat precarious and would probably have remained so had it not been for the Radio. From the late nineteen-twenties onwards broadcasting developed rapidly in Switzerland. In the French region a transmitter was established at Sottens which was served by studios in Geneva and Lausanne, and the " Orchestre de la Suisse Romande " strove continuously to prevent, so far as it could, the establishment of separate studio orchestras which might have proved sources of unwelcome competition. It was successful so far as Geneva itself was concerned but a studio orchestra was established in Lausanne. However, in 1938 success was complete, for in that year the " Orchestre de la Suisse Romande " was amalgamated with the Lausanne radio orchestra and became the only symphony orchestra regularly employed for broadcasting in the French region, contracting in return to place itself at the disposal of the broadcasting studios for the whole of its time not absorbed by public concerts and its duties in the municipal theatre. It was at last assured of employment all the year round. Since the last war it has had an establishment of thirty players under contract for twelve months in the year, of sixty for nine months, and of eighty-four for the six months of the winter season during which it gives its main series of public symphony concerts in Geneva and Lausanne and regular concerts in all the other principal towns of the Suisse-Romande.

Ansermet has remained the orchestra's permanent conductor and main inspiration. He has raised it to the undisputed position of leading Swiss orchestra with a reputation appreciably greater than that of any of its rivals.

In a few months' time Ansermet will celebrate his 75th birthday and the time cannot be far away when he must hand over to others the control of the orchestra that he created, but if, as it surely must, the orchestra " de la Suisse romande " continues to play for many years to come, its very existence will stand as a permanent memorial to the achievement of one of Switzerland's greatest musicians.

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