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On the first of the second half of the concert, the distinguished
of the programme the first performance of Dmitri Shostakovich's Tenth
Symphony, under the baton of Sir Malcolm Sargent. The evening opened with the
orchestra, and the instruments, and a good use of woodwinds, and then, I think
you will be able to see the great work. There was a 10-minute break of silence and
then a piece which lasted about five minutes or longer of 194, and the
instrument should have played, the strings, it's really, very beautiful, and a
couple of the wonderful effects you could see.

For the first time of the concert was a superb performance of Dmitri
Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony, given by the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and the
Ladies of the Birmingham School of Music Choir, conducted by Louis Fremantle. The concert
in Birmingham was a great success, and the highest standard was set
by the orchestra and soloists.

18th February : Town Hall, Birmingham.

Concert of Works by Messiaen and Shostakovich
given by the City of Birmingham Symphony
Orchestra and the Ladies of the Birmingham School
of Music Choir, conducted by Louis Fremantle.

Possibly the most enterprising of all the C.B.S.O.'s concerts this
season took place on February 18th, when the orchestra coupled a performance
of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony and Messiaen's "Trois Petites Liturgies
de la Presence Divine".

The Messiaen work, like the later "Trangalila" Symphony, calls for
the prominent use of ondes martenot. John Morton executed the sometimes
ticky passage work with assurance, playing, to quote the programme note,
"the only ondes martenot in existence in this country". John McCabe (piano)
and Harry Jones (celesta) also proved themselves well able to combat the
considerable demands of the solo parts. However, Town Hall acoustics apart,
the piano could often scarcely be heard in the tutti passages, despite the
full chords and triple forte indicated by the composer. The ladies of the
Birmingham School of Music Choir were completely convincing in their taxing
role, and whether their material was sung or spoken, articulation and
ensemble were steadfastly maintained. Again in the tuttis, they too were
swamped by the string band and ondes.

While admitting that all that glitters is not gold, the first movement
of the Shostakovich symphony seemed like cold stone against the preceding
shimmering gold and emeralds. Unfortunately, ten minutes would have been
more than enough to do justice to the material used in this movement; one
only regrets there having been more than that. The second movement seems

almost an anachronism after its predecessor - a full-blooded scherzo in a style well exploited by Hollywood, before and after 1953 (the date of the symphony's composition). With the third movement (at least the second half of it) Shostakovich lets drop his first surprise, as the tam-tam heralds a series of mimicking sections based on the brazen outbursts of the second. This movement is arguably the most original in construction and inherent material, and certainly the least predictable. The final movement, in contrast, is predictable enough for Shostakovich - a slow introduction leading to an allegro which gets interrupted a few furlongs from home by a breathing space, before the final homeward dash, with side-drum stirring every worker to his feet.

It is easy to see why this symphony is such a favourite with both orchestras and audiences, but, for my taste, its duller moments were dull from the first hearing, and its brighter ones dull after several. This does not reflect the performance under Fremann, which could hardly have been more rigidly controlled or vivacious and wholly involved.

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