

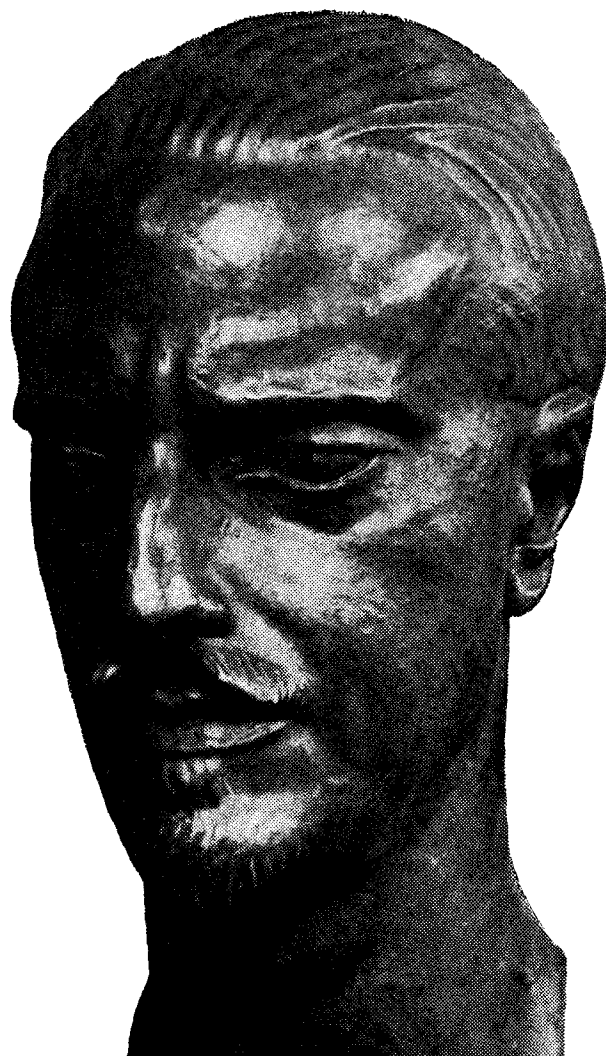
SRL

RECORDINGS

SECTION

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—Courtesy trustees for the Tate Gallery.

"Sir Thomas Beecham." by Ivan Mestrovic (1915).

FOR HUNDREDS and thousands of phonofans the current tour of Sir Thomas Beecham and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra is a dream of music making come true. Sir Thomas, to be sure, is not unknown amongst us as a conductor, and he has made unforgettable music with assets so variable as the New York Philharmonic on the East Coast and the Seattle Symphony on the West; not to mention the orchestras of Philadelphia and Houston, Washington and Dallas, San Francisco and Detroit. He has often been the most Beecham Beecham in the least likely surroundings—the New York WPA Orchestra or the Metropolitan Opera.

Despite all the magical skill with which he has transmuted these baser elements into musical gold—an ability he shares in all the wide world of conducting talent only with Leopold Stokowski—there has always been the lingering thought: what would he do with an orchestra made in his own image, one which was used to him and knew what he wanted, which would respond not out of shock or cajolery but as a consequence of deep-grained

sympathy, long-developed understanding, harmony of thought, and community of impulse? The possibility that such a demonstration could be arranged on our own terms, so to speak, seemed wholly remote; now that it is offered one cannot imagine anyone with the least interest in music passing it by.

Even without Beecham, the visit of the Royal Philharmonic would be historic. It is, after all, the most venerable of all comparable organizations in the English-speaking world, if one of the most youthful in its present composition. Its history antedates by thirty years the beginning of the Philharmonic Society of New York, which claims seniority among American orchestras; and it is close to seventy years older than the organization with the longest consecutive history of concert-giving in this country (the Boston Symphony). Beethoven profited by a commission from it, and it has been host on one occasion or another to such composers as Mendelssohn and Berlioz, Wagner and Dvorak, Saint-Saëns and even Sir Arthur Sullivan.

For most of this half-century, the Royal Philharmonic was an orchestra in name only, composed of "principals" and others brought together from various London ensembles, who played, on call, the twelve concerts scattered through the season's length. It is now verging on five years since Sir Thomas conceived the idea of making the Royal Philharmonic "his" orchestra, with a permanent organization, a year-round schedule of concerts, broadcasts, recording and film engagements. It exists, incidentally, wholly by its own resources, for the artistic-economic ideas of Beecham and the administration of the Arts Council—which provides financial succor to most other English organizations of similar function—are hardly harmonious.

We welcome in it a durable link with the soundest tradition of music known to us and hope its visit will be to some degree as pleasant for the visitors as it will be profitable for us. As for its director, he could not be more welcome if he were twins.

IRVING KOLONIN,
MUSIC EDITOR.

OCTOBER 28, 1950

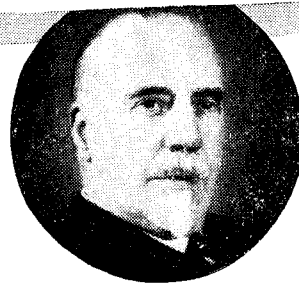
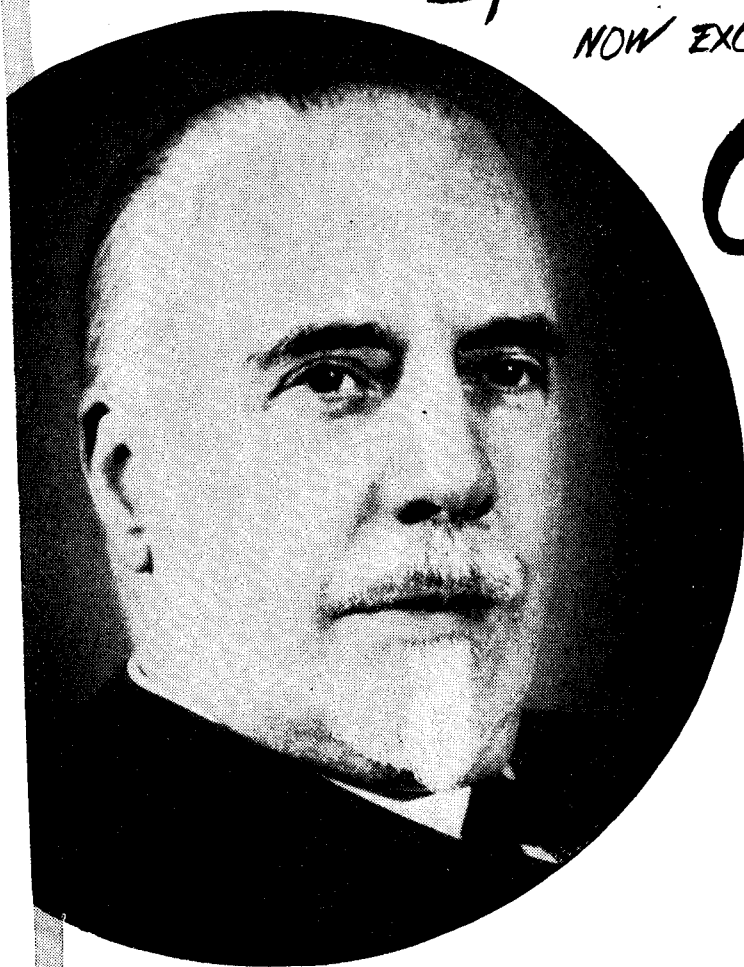
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GREAT MAN OF MUSIC

Sir Thomas Beecham

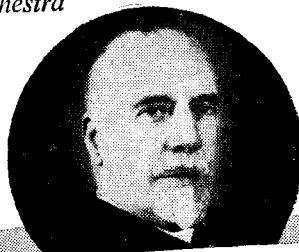
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The Saturday Review of Recordings

Sir Thomas and Mr. Beecham

Sketches for a Portrait

NEVILLE CARDUS



—Alec Murray.

Neville Cardus

change and assume the poise of the intent, civilized man, benevolence warming a vintage cynicism. In his urbane moods, when he is engaged upon what I think might be called conversational interior decoration, it is almost impossible to bear in mind that he was born in Lancashire, at St. Helens, a by-product of nineteenth-century industrial and commercial growth. As he talks to you, lying back in his chair, still clad in a Caesarian dressing gown at high noon, as he ranges from Mozart to Stendhal, from John Donne to Verlaine, from Donizetti to Delius, from Delacroix to Berlioz, discursiveness steered by wit all the time, he seems not to belong to any contemporary world or any world of only yesterday; we can see and hear him in the company of Sheridan, Walpole, Swift. (But I can't imagine what Doctor Johnson would have said to him.)

This connoisseur strain in Beecham, relating him to an eighteenth-century culture, gives us the clue, or way of approach, to one side of his nature. Swiftly he will modulate again. Tremendous humor and Lancashire urgency break forth in gusts; the elegant attitude is momentarily disturbed. His gestures become spacious, even excessive. Magniloquent phrases balloon from his lips; the eyes twinkle, the little adumbration of an Imperial beard is impishly pointed. He trails the Caesarian dressing gown like a

robe, as he strides the room in the gusty winds of conception. Great schemes—opera houses everywhere, in Manchester, Sydney. Cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, the great globe itself—"under entirely new management. . . ." Now he reveals that blood is thicker than culture; what's bred in the bone . . . The Lancashire man, true to the marrow; though Wadham claimed him, Wadham couldn't tame him.

BUT another, and perhaps dominant, trait of his genius puts him definitely into a sort of postdated eighteenth-century or Augustan calendar. He has something in him shared by none but the great English Eccentrics of the period. As it is necessary in these days to pick and choose the English language with care—for the best words in it are becoming obsolete; O.E.—I had better hasten to explain that in an eighteenth-century context the word "Eccentric" is complimentary, meaning an original twist of mind, a vision piercing to uncharted dimensions, a freedom from the inhibitions of those who live by proxy.

A man as marvelously mixed in his

elements as Beecham must inevitably perplex ordinary folk, who, in order "to make him out" at all, clutch at a simple and single aspect—the "wit" or the "wag"; the Diatribist of the Concert Platform; the stormy petrel; the strutting popinjay of the baton; the wizard of the rostrum; the perfect Mozartean; the perfect Berliozean; the High Priest in the ivory temple of Delius. Is he a chameleon? Which is the Sir Thomas and which the Beecham?

He once said to me: "All sorts of things are said about my 'flair,' my 'temperament,' my 'genius,' but I seldom get credit for my main virtue and attribute—*inexhaustible industry!*"

Heaven knows he is a worker. I have been with him in all hours of the day in various parts of the world, different hemispheres, different stratospheres. And always has he been working—actively conducting or reading a score or "arranging" a score or planning a program or a future enterprise or studying some art related to music or reading a book that is a book. He has no use for "small talk," or what the ordinary man calls "relaxation"; conversation must have for him some core of thoughtfulness or sensibility whatever the subject—music, politics, sport, or the weather. At the utterance by one of his company of a palpable platitude I have seen his eyes glaze dreadfully; the light dies out of them as though never to return. But give your heart to him without affectation and he gives his own generously to you. He can't abide pomposity. That is why, I fancy, he doesn't admire the music of Elgar, especially the symphonies. "The A flat Symphony?" he once challenged me. "You want me to conduct *that* work? The musical equivalent, my dear fellow, of St. Pancras Station." Neo-Gothic!

Yet there was a time when Sir Thomas *did* conduct the A flat Symphony of Elgar. It was performed in



—Keystone.

Beecham in 1910—"a vision piercing to uncharted dimensions."