Leonard Bernstein Conducts Orchestra in Negev Capital

Special Cable from COLIN LEGUM, well-known South African journalist who is now on a visit to Israel

BEERSHEBA, Tuesday.—From all parts of the Negev Gedudim marched and drove into Beersheba, which lay basking in the desert sun of the Sabbath afternoon. The whole town was in gala mood. The nearest Egyptian troops were at Gaza and Falluja, 30 miles away on either side. As the gedudim marched down the streets they sang the songs of their units.

One unit came marching down the main street of Beersheba singing Zulu songs. Zulu songs in this desert outpost! The explanation of this mystery lay behind the identity of six large bearded figures leading the Gedud.—two former South African Potchefstroom, two from Johannesburgh, one from Cape Town and one from Krugersdorp.

Israel's southern army was marching to a Sabbath symphony concert to hear the first symphony orchestra ever to have played in the southern desert. The setting for the concert was a "fantastic" one—a perfect amphitheatre surrounded by the 20-foot walls of two enormous buildings and a mighty ruin.

Three thousand men and women crowded into the amphitheatre. Their uniforms were as diverse as the men and women who were there. There were sabras and settlers, Jews from Morocco and Libya, Britain, Canada, Scandinavia, the Orient and Central Europe. There were unkempt Palmach girls in blue shorts and elegant Chin girls in full uniform. Some of the men were scarves and sashes—war trophies from the Arabs.

Wooden Benches

The amphitheatre was lined with wooden benches—heaven alone knows where they were obtained. The benches were overcrowded, and hundreds of uniformed soldiers lay down from the parapets of the surrounding buildings. These were the men and women soldiers from Beersheba from the hands of the Egyptians.

As the sun beat down upon this festive scene, the musicians of the Israeli Symphony Orchestra entered the well of the amphitheatre and a great roar of welcome went up for Leonard Bernstein, conductor of the orchestra. The unrestrained chattering gradually died down.

The military commander introduced Leonard Bernstein, the conductor. His voice rang clearly through the sea of silence.

"Our ears are attuned to a different kind of music, but we shall never lose ear for this kind of music. We will always remember the concert halls for which we fight are best expressed by the symphony concert of this afternoon," he said.

The Wounded

As Bernstein raised his arm, the concert-goers rose, and the desert air carried the first notes of Hatikvah on its dry breath through the town and across the plains of the Negev. It was a moment of rich melodic poignancy. I kept my eyes riveted on two rows of wounded soldiers brought down from the hospital to attend the concert. Braided in bandages, legs and arms in plaster, these men had made the supreme effort for the sake of their country.

The last notes of Hatikvah died down, and the crowd subsided. Bernstein took his place at the grand piano—he is both conductor and pianist—and the orchestra began a Mozart concerto. The Jewish defenders of the Negev, men and women drawn from the five continents, were united into a common bond of cultural affiliation.

And thus it was that the music issued forth from the ruins of Beersheba on a Sabbath afternoon.

DOORFONTEIN, JUDITH'S PAARL AND BERTRAMS

Speaking in Yiddish, Mr. Leo Tager, national chairman of the Israeli United Appeal, addressed a meeting of Doorfontein, Judith's Paarl and Bertrams Jews at the Ginsberg Hall last Monday evening. He reviewed the present position in Palestine, Rabbi Dr. M. Kosowsky, who presided, introduced the speaker.

It was not by coincidence, said Mr. Tager, that Israel had become a State. It had been built up by the unquenchable ideals, the hard work and the ready sacrifices of the pioneers. The creation of the Jewish State was not an accident but a political inevitability. Bevis did not believe that the Jews would be strong enough to maintain their State and so gambled on relinquishing the Mandate. When he realised his great mistake, he made every effort to break the might of the Jews by supporting the Arabs in every possible way. But the Jews proved equal to the battle and today it is generally acknowledged that the Jews have won the battle of Palestine.

Mr. Tager explained the difficulties of the Jewish State in its early days, but stressed that the people were happy and optimistic. The spirit of Israel could not be broken.

REPEAT PERFORMANCE POPULAR REQUEST

The Highlnders entertain at the Belfry and other social functions. The orchestra is now being formed and will be able to give a second performance of the concert held recently in Johannesburgh, the "Free Trip to Israel," Mr. Saul Schumin, conductor. An appeal is made to all supporters of the I.U.A. to continue their efforts for the I.U.A. in order to hand over the vouchers and the "Free Trip to Israel" saw the light of day.