

ALBERT COATES



Script of broadcast by Sir Paul Dukes, 11 December 1953.

With the passing of Albert Coates the world is bereft of one of the most outstanding figures of this century in the musical world. South Africans will mourn him particularly since he made this country his home for the last eight years of his life. The Cape Town City orchestra will certainly remember with deep emotion that Coates's last public appearance was as their guest conductor at a brilliant symphony concert at the City Hall just over a year ago. The Johannesburg S.A.B.C. orchestra will also remember his visit to Johannesburg three years ago.

Albert Coates's career was both romantic and eventful. He was born of English parents at St Petersburg, the capital of pre-revolutionary Russia, in 1882. He was sent to England for his schooling, where his leanings seemed at first to be in a scientific direction, but love of music soon predominated and he was sent to Germany to complete his musical education. He first studied to be a cellist and pianist, but his exceptional talent as a conductor became apparent almost at once. He was the favorite pupil of the director of the Leipzig Conservatoire, the famous Arthur Nikisch, who delegated his baton more than once to the youthful Albert before he was twenty years of age. Then, after a meteoric career at the most renowned opera houses of Germany, Coates was invited to St Petersburg in 1909 to conduct Wagner at the Imperial Marinsky Opera House. This visit was an outstanding success and Coates was soon invited to conduct Russian opera as well. After the outbreak of the first world war he remained Russia's premier operatic conductor for many years. He became the idol of the Russian musical public. What Chaliapin was on the stage Coates was at the conductor's desk. The two titans were bosom friends. Coates was popular with artistes, chorus, and orchestra alike not only by reason of his musical genius but also on account of his boyish good nature, his friendliness towards even the least in orchestra and chorus, and his informal manner of dealing with everybody.

In later years Coates became as well known in Europe and America as he was in Russia. But the land of his birth always remained his spiritual home. After the revolution he returned there many times; but his dislike of the Communist regime was intense, and in the end he refused all inducements to return.

I myself first became associated with Albert Coates when he invited me to become one of his assistants after I had completed my studies at the St Petersburg Conservatoire. When I first came to South Africa I stayed with him for some months, and we spent many happy hours recalling circumstances and events in