

# SOUTH AFRICANS TO HELP PALESTINE ORCHESTRA

## Inaugural Meeting in Johannesburg

ABOUT two and a half years ago there took place in Tel-Aviv a never to be forgotten event, the inaugural concert of the newly-established Palestine Symphony Orchestra. The occasion was a brilliant and a festive one. It set a new standard for artistic achievement in the Yishuv and was symbolic of the success which is crowning the efforts of the Jewish people to rebuild their cultural life in their old-new homeland. The story of the Palestine Orchestra, its founding by Bronislaw Huberman, the progress it has made since its inaugural concert, the part it plays in the life of the Yishuv, and the recognition it has received in the musical world generally, were some of the facts dealt with by Col. Kisch when he spoke at an informal meeting held at the house of Mr. and Mrs. H. L. Karnovsky on Friday afternoon, June 2.

The large gathering present listened with the utmost interest to Col. Kisch's talk on the Palestine Orchestra, and at the end of the meeting it was resolved that a South African Society to promote the interests of the Palestine Symphony Orchestra should be formed. Mrs. Sarah Gertrude Millin has accepted the position of Hon. President of the Society. Col. Kisch also read a letter from Arthur Rubinstein, dealing with the Palestine Orchestra, which is printed on this page.

COL. KISCH briefly recalled the history of the Orchestra. He described how Huberman, a man of vision and knowledge, had through his untiring efforts been responsible for its establishment. After Hitler had come into power, Huberman had seen what was happening to Jewish musicians all over the world; he had visited Palestine, recognised the creative atmosphere that pervades Palestine, and conceived the idea of a Jewish Orchestra, Jewish in composition, which would one day become the finest in the world, and which would be Hitler's gift to the world.

Huberman had gone back to Europe and played in Amsterdam and in Paris in order to create a nucleus and for the starting of the Orchestra. He had visited America and played there also to increase his fund and he actually built up an initial fund of about £9,000 before starting the Orchestra.

On returning to Palestine, Huberman had approached Col. Kisch and asked him to act as Trustee and Treasurer for the Orchestra, to which Col. Kisch had agreed.

In December, 1936, the Orchestra had come into being. In the meantime Huberman had travelled again all over Europe, spending many months selecting the members of the future orchestra. He had given infinite time and patience to his search, and personally given auditions to between two and three hundred musicians.

### "Not Merely Cultural."

ACTUALLY the orchestra was a sort of cross section of Jewry from countries where Jewry was persecuted. As far as possible it consisted of musicians drawn only from those countries where Jews were no longer permitted to play. The orchestra, therefore, was far from being merely a cultural enterprise. One of the tasks in which this Orchestra Management had to concern itself was the saving of the families of the Orchestra members. The fact that Jewish musicians had posts in Palestine meant that their nearest kin, too, had been admitted into the country.

Today the orchestra had seventy musicians under contract, and about a hundred and ten souls dependent on it. The members of the orchestra

were paid very small salaries, about quarter of the salary a good musician could command elsewhere, but they were content with a modest remuneration, and happy to be playing in the orchestra. Actually the highest salary paid was £25 per month, but the average for a married musician was £15, and for a single player just under £13 per month.

### The Orchestra's Achievements.

FROM the musical standpoint, said Col. Kisch, the standard of the orchestra was unchallengeable, and there was no better in Europe to-day. Huberman considered it as good as the Vienna Orchestra at its best. Today it included among its numbers some of the best musicians from half the orchestras in Europe, musicians who had been leaders of instruments in these great orchestras.

Famous conductors had visited Palestine to conduct the orchestra. Among them had been Toscanini (twice), Malcolm Sargent (twice), H. W. Steinberg, E. Szenkar, I. Dobrowen, M. Taube.

Col. Kisch referred to the achievements of the orchestra since its inaugural concert, which had been conducted by Toscanini. Toscanini had come at Huberman's invitation on that occasion, but he had come the second time because he wanted to. He had fallen in love with the Jewish public, and would take no fee on either occasion.

From December, 1936, to March 1, 1939, the orchestra had given two hundred and six concerts, including thirteen abroad—eleven in Egypt and two in Syria. In Tel-Aviv each concert was given twice on two consecutive nights—one to members and one to workers at very low rates. The Tel-Aviv hall holds about three thousand people and so, roughly, about five thousand eight hundred attended for the two nights.

### Maintaining Morale.

THE speaker also dealt with the part the orchestra had played in helping to maintain the morale of the Jews during the three years of riot. The orchestra had provided them with an emotional outlet which had helped to divert their minds from the disorders.

The Royal Commission had commented on the Palestine Orchestra, and paid tribute to the Yishuv's love of music, which it regarded as a most striking aspect of the culture of the Jewish National Home.

The orchestra, moreover, constituted one of the few useful links between the Yishuv and the British Authorities in Palestine. The last High Commissioner, Sir Arthur Wauchope, had never missed a concert. Both the Military Commanders at present in Palestine attended every concert.

Among the workers, for whom the concerts were given at very low rates, the orchestra had an amazing public. In illustration of the workers' interest in music, Col. Kisch told the following story:

"We were once rehearsing at Tel-Aviv, and as there was some work going on near the building which was disturbing the rehearsal, we sent out to ask the workmen whether they could not stop for a while. They explained that they could not, as they were being paid by piece-work, and even though we offered to pay them, they said that they would not take the money for nothing. Whilst we were discussing the matter, they suggested that if we gave them tickets for a concert, they would be quite ready to lose their day's earnings."

### The Budget.

CONSIDERING the budget for the orchestra, Col. Kisch said that his estimate for a year's expenditure

was about £24,750, of which the estimated income from Palestine in concerts, etc., was £16,000, leaving a deficit of £8,750 a year. This deficit, he believed, would be covered by subscriptions, etc., received from England and the United States, as well as Australia, due to the efforts of Huberman who had visited that country. No orchestra in the world, he reminded his hearers, was self-supporting, and he expressed the hope that South Africa would make a contribution of £1,500 to £2,000 a year to help to maintain this orchestra, which really belonged to the whole of the Jewish people.

In America a committee, "The Palestine Orchestra Fund Inc.," had been established with Professor Albert Einstein as Honorary President. In Palestine they had a small society of friends who paid subscriptions over and above the purchase price of the tickets.

### South African Society Formed.

COL. KISCH'S address evoked an enthusiastic response from those present, and it was resolved to establish a South African Society for the Palestine Symphony Orchestra, and to form a committee consisting of the Hon. President, Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary, and seven members, with power to co-opt. The following agreed to serve:

Mrs. Sarah Gertrude Millin, Hon. President; Dr. W. Sachs, Chairman; Mrs. F. Karnovsky, Treasurer; Miss M. Carnovski, Secretary; Mrs. N. E. Rosenberg, Mrs. Z. Braun, Mrs. J. Schwartz, Dr. Suzman, Dr. Loven, Mr. Louis Sachs, Mr. E. Schaiowitz, Committee.

Dr. W. Sachs, who presided over the meeting, conveyed a message from Mr. N. Kirschner expressing regret at his inability to be present that afternoon, but promising support in every possible direction.

Col. Kisch closed the proceedings with a hearty vote of thanks to the host and hostess, Mr. and Mrs. Karnovsky, which was seconded by all present.



Photo Jane Plotz.

"It is a Wonderful Thing to have Created such an Orchestra—"

ARTHUR RUBINSTEIN TO COL. KISCH

(Letter Read at Meeting Reported on this Page)

I AM extremely sorry that my recital at Pretoria to-morrow night will make it impossible for me to be present at the reception which has been arranged in support of the Palestine Symphony Orchestra. My friend Bronislaw Huberman has often told me about the Orchestra.

It is a wonderful thing to have created such an Orchestra in so small a country, and in this way to have salvaged many fine musicians who lost their livelihood and have been threatened with starvation only because they belonged to the Jewish race—but at the same time it must be a joy and a great pride for every Jew in the world to know that this Orchestra is going to be able to show to our enemies the genius for music which the Jewish race own in such a high degree.

And I agree with all that has been said by Toscanini, Huberman, Sargent and others about the very great importance of maintaining the Orchestra in the new Palestine. Palestine itself is supporting the Orchestra to a wonderful extent, but cannot maintain it unaided, and as the Orchestra brings such great credit to the Jewish people, I certainly think that Jewish music-lovers and, in general, all those who are proud to be Jews, ought to be happy and more than willing to provide the little extra support that is necessary.