

Leader Controls Musicians With His Deft Baton

Douglas Clarke Pleads For Support For Better Music

PICTURE of a musician: Wispy tobacco smoke drifting to the ornate ceiling of the Mount Royal Hotel ballroom; squealing of preparatory violins against the low-toned complaint of the basses and the horns; brassy rotundity of the tuba cutting a patch of gloom out of the far corner—and Mr. Douglas Clarke.

Meet Mr. Douglas Clarke, electromagnetic conductor of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. He is conducting a rehearsal of Sunday's programme at the moment, but that does not matter. He can do a lot of things at once. Conductors have to be like that.

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HE taps his music stand and the violins and the horns and the 'cellos give a last despairing fling of melancholy resignation and taper off into the silence he commands. The fiddles begin, quietly, wistfully, clear and sweet as the morning lark, are joined in a moment or two by the full-throated resonance of the brasses, there is an occasional, furtive cymbal, a boom from the drum, and suddenly, dynamically, the whole orchestra sweeps into being under that magic baton.

The baton strokes the rhythm, cajoles it; represses a too-jubilant bass fiddle, if there can be such a thing as a too-jubilant bass fiddle; pulls out of retirement a refined flute. And behind the baton is Mr. Douglas Clarke, like a potter at his wheel, taking a great deal of individual music and shaping it into a symphony.

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HE is warm and disordered. His jacket lies at his feet and his vest is unbuttoned. A wisp of black hair strays across his face but he does not appear to notice. He is more concerned with ensemble.

"La-de-da-de-da" he sings above the noise of the instruments. "That's it now — rather more suave. Good. Watch that third beat. Like this . . . La-de-da-da-da. Now again."

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"WHAT we want," he says, "is listeners. An orchestra cannot play to empty benches as a radio can. Attendances at our Sunday concerts are not so good as they might be, and the people of Montreal would help us by just listening to us.

"I really do think that it is better to listen to even a second-rate orchestra in the flesh than the greatest players in the world by radio. With radio, you do not get 'actual' reproduction. Some of the instruments get crowded out, and, of course, that makes a tremendous difference."

He tapped his stand again, and slowly, the whole group swung off into a glorious burst of melody.

It will be a tragedy if Montreal should lose this.

J. M.