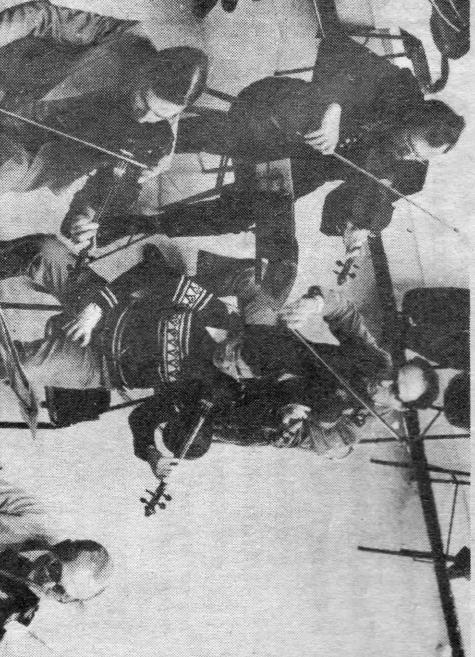


# United in the cause of making fine music



Members of Banbury Symphony Orchestra pictured preparing for their forthcoming concert.

Schubert's Unfinished Symphony.

Now in its 17th year, the orchestra continues to attract an extraordinary cross section of Banbury area people, writes JOHN ROCHE. They are united in the cause of enjoying good music while, at the same time, giving the town yet another cultural asset that would be the envy of so many other communities.

It is not exactly a "butcher, baker, candle-stick maker" gathering but certainly ages range from 15 to fifty-plus and the orchestra draws the best from students, shopkeepers, company directors and housewives alike. Yet, even more extraordinarily, it does not get the support it deserves and in spite of its contribution to the development of young people it gets no concessions from the education authority.

That, perhaps, is the

Stand anywhere near the circular drama building on the Banbury School campus these Tuesday evenings and you could be excused for thinking that the needle had stuck.

Music, classical mainly and in varying quality and volume, fills the air. The same passage is repeated over and over again and the stops are unpredictable. There are odd pauses between pieces, and it is all because Banbury Symphony Orchestra are hard at work preparing for their next concert.

I ventured inside that drama room the other evening and sat through the two-hour rehearsal while new conductor Robert Secret took his amazingly enthusiastic gathering of players through the intricacies of Schubert's Unfinished

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Oct '77



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New conductor of the orchestra, Mr Robert Secret.

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That, perhaps, is the biggest problem facing the orchestra's energetic new committee, intent on raising standards and projecting an exciting new image. It would take £17 a

The orchestra chairman Max Ford, leader Lawrence Farbrother, schoolboy Stephen Bingham and immediate past conductor Donald Simpson are all there striving to get the right sound, the right blend to do justice to composers like Strauss, whose work will dominate the forthcoming concert at Wykham Hall on October 18.

The brass are sent out to "get things right" in one room, the attractive woodwind section — all young and feminine — are despatched elsewhere for a spell of isolation. Meanwhile the strings are driven remorselessly but pleasurable through their paces and when the three sections come together again with half an hour remaining the improvement is easily noticeable.

## TEACHER

Bob Secret, who is married to professional violinist Gillian Hoare, teaches music at Stowe School and lives at Abingdon. He is a professor at the Royal Academy of Music and he does a good deal of conducting in the Swindon area.

"I am thoroughly enjoying my evenings with the Banbury orchestra," he says. "They are a very nice bunch of people and they work terribly hard to get the music right. In some ways it is more satisfying than conducting professionals because then you sometimes get a lack of concentration from players and that can be infuriating."

He is looking forward to his first concert but, like the committee, he is puzzled by their difficulties in finding a more suitable home for the orchestra. "With so many young people here, you would have thought the education authority would have encouraged them more."

Thus, the orchestra seek the help of anyone in Banbury who can offer them the use of premises more sympathetic to the needs of a conductor and his ear!

That brings us to Eric Snowden who manages the orchestra and is spearheading a public relations exercise on behalf of the committee. Nine years in sound engineering with the BBC and a marriage to a professional musician have stood Eric in good stead for his new role.

members' subscriptions and from patrons in local industry and commerce. Now the orchestra are intent on attracting more patrons from among Banbury's music-lovers and Chairman Mr Max Ford of 8 The Daedings, Deddington, would be delighted to hear from anyone willing to make a contribution by becoming a patron, or indeed, by joining him in making music for Banbury.

#### DETERMINED

He also plays in the first violins and there is no doubting his determination to help the orchestra to bigger and better things.

"What we need are people with the willingness, time and determination to make the orchestra better than it has been. There is more talent in Banbury than we have got here but for one reason or another it has not been attracted to the orchestra in the past. If we could only get these excellent musicians to join us then everyone would get a lot more from the orchestra and we could make an even bigger contribution to Banbury entertainment."

Mr Snowden is convinced that Banbury must support its orchestra more firmly. "But only if it is worth supporting," he adds. "We would welcome a good hall to play in and to rehearse in. Perhaps any organisation who is interested in helping could contact me."

Eric Snowden is a director of Demag, the crane firm in Beaumont Road, Banbury. "They have given me every encouragement," he says, "and I can be contacted at work at any time if anyone is willing to offer some help."

Around 34 musicians attended the rehearsal I visited but conductor Robert Secret pointed out that there were some absentees. There is a need for more players in all sections but he would particularly welcome percussionists.

His rehearsal technique is stimulating, to say the least. A vigorous, good looking young man of 28, who would not look out of place in a farming context or even on a rugby field, Bob deals scathingly with those who err but there is always humour in his approach.

"Let's see the smoke rising," he calls, as the strings deal too timidly with one tricky passage. "Just play like mad until you run out of music," he suggested when he found time to try a run through of the stirring Thunder and Lightning Polka.