

Paying the piper

THE perks of working in the *Nature* office are not extensive. No doubt if the journal were dedicated to the evaluation of stereo equipment or gourmet meals or travel to the tropics we would not lack material benefits, but reporting on advances in science and on science policy hardly leads to obvious free handouts. Can you imagine the Science Research Council's report being distributed with a modest fusion reactor or an 'autonomous house' to keep the press happy? Of course we get the occasional lunch, the odd trip abroad and even an executive jet flight now and then to help us see things in an objective light. We also get an agreeable pile of diaries and calendars (and if Ciba-Geigy read this I'd like them to know how I've enjoyed their calendar of fully dressed high class girls and how I hope I'll get another one this Christmas). And the other day a tiny crate containing a bottle of champagne to help me join in celebrating the launching of a brand new film on embryology the makers of which I can't plug in these columns. But the most interesting perk I've yet had came a few evenings ago.

Bayer AG Leverkusen makes drugs and like every other large company these days a million and one other things also. It also has a symphony orchestra conducted by Rainer Koch and comprised entirely of its own employees. That is unusual, you may say, but not unique; companies keep all sorts of things besides football teams these days. Aren't there famous bands such as Black Dyke Mills Band and Foden Motor Works Band? (I can remember advertisements in the local paper, "Stanton Iron Works requires a tenor euphonium player; office job will be found"). What's new about the Bayer Philharmonic?

I cannot claim to be a music critic, although I do reckon to know a fair bit about orchestras, and not through regurgitating comments from record magazines. Nevertheless it was clear that the Bayer Philharmonic would have stood comparison with the best of amateur orchestras anywhere in the world. For its concert in the Fairfield Hall, Croydon, the company had invited along staff, customers, business associates and, no doubt, rivals ("got anything like that in your company, eh?"). The orchestra started with Vaughan Williams's "The Explorer", film music of the 1950s and a rarity indeed in English concert programmes. Nice as it was as a gesture it didn't really come off. Vaughan Williams is so English and has to be appreciated in the context of green fields, sheep and country pubs; there is something intangibly incongruous in eighty German drug company employees in dinner jackets trying to make the folk songs sing. But enough chauvinism; there was little to fault elsewhere in the programme.

Dinorah Varsi joined the orchestra to perform Chopin's somewhat over-inflated piano concerto in E minor. The orchestra was more in its element here and

it was only the occasional ability all amateur orchestras have to make the piano sound slightly out of tune which detracted from a fine performance. The orchestra concluded the evening with an excellent rendering of Brahms's First Symphony, in which the only weakness of substance was the inability of the woodwind, particularly clarinet and oboe, to make much impression over the top of a fine body of strings.

Now what is the moral of all this, for moral there has to be, even in a Christmas issue? Not that it must take a great deal of 'spare time' to drill so precise a band. Not even that you should go out and buy Bayer products to keep the orchestra in business. Rather that it is a much more intelligent form of patronage of the arts than most companies indulge in at present.

Sponsorship and patronage is under much discussion, because in a period of financial gloom the first thing a business does is economise on its peripherals. There is an obvious tendency to regard sponsorship as advertising and thus to seek to attach the company's name to the best known events both in art and sport. In the short run this probably does little harm and a fair bit of good in keeping admission prices down. But in the long run anything that tends to centralise and to emphasise the cult of the excellent at the expense of personal participation is bad. It is good to know that various London symphony orchestras, theatres and operas are being supported by big business but it would be better to know that big business was equally among the grassroots, raising the levels of competence and enthusiasm of amateurs and young professionals in Scunthorpe, Swansea and Kilmarnock. With modest help, perhaps most intelligently supplemented by the provision of professionals to coach or even write for them, such groups can clearly flourish, and what's more young professionals can be encouraged. It may even have a longer lasting effect on the company image than a once-a-year mention in the programme of a London performance.



AFTER the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, it is well known that in many districts in France a new vegetation sprang up, evidently the result of the invasion. It was believed that this vegetation would become acclimatised. It is not so, however, *L'Institut* informs us; at least very few of the species introduced in this way appear likely to continue to flourish on French soil. In the departments of Loiret and Loir-et-Cher, of 163 German species, the half at least have already disappeared, and the surviving species diminish in vigour each year. Scarcely five or six species would appear to manifest any tendency to become acclimatised; these are, according to M. Nouel, *Alyssum incanum*, *Trifolium resupinatum*, *Rapistrum rugosum*, *Melilotus sulcata*, and *Vulpia ligustica*. On the plateau of Bellevue, where in 1871 many strange species were seen, M. Bureau has been able to find only one—*Trifolium resupinatum*. M. Gaudesroy also, who in 1871 and 1872 found many adventitious plants, has been able to collect only two this year—*Ranunculus macrophyllus* and *Linum angustifolium*.

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