

SYMPHONY ON TV

Camera Must Move in Music Tempo

By HAL KEITH

NBC Television Production Staff

IN TACKLING the job of a symphony telecast, the admonition of Shakespeare must be re-worded to read, "The Music's the Thing." The music is the "script" to be followed.

This does not mean that every crashing of the cymbals must, or should, be caught on a close-up, but it does mean that when shots of the orchestra are employed, they should be on the sections playing at the moment. It means also that the lens chosen should reveal only the players involved. Camera movements should be in tempo with the music, i. e., if the score reads "Adagio," the camera panning at that juncture should be slow.

Likewise, switching should be in tempo with the music. For instance, if a different camera-angle is to be coordinated with the shifting of musical attention from one orchestra section to another, the choice between using a dissolve or a fast cut should be governed by the nature of the musical change—specifically, a liquid, song-like muta-



Through a double-exposure technique, symphony viewers were given this view of Toscanini, with orchestra providing the backdrop.

tion indicates the dissolve, whereas a sharp "attack" would seem to call for the cut technique.

Above all, the video contribution to a symphony pickup should enhance the audience's enjoyment, but it should never become so dominant as to distract.

What about front views of the conductor? In the case of the dynamic and photogenic Arturo Toscanini, the selection of facial expression and communicative hands is always desirable and frequently the best possible choice of shots. But obviously it is not every conductor who can provide the cameras with such absorbing material.

It would be presumptuous and incorrect to claim that the treatment given the two Toscanini televisuals pleased everybody, but any success achieved was acquired by

attacking the problem as follows:

(1) The director, who is not a musician, had to acquire a "good listener's" familiarity with the music, so that he could become, in effect, an extra member of the orchestra, ready to respond to a down-beat with some pre-established camera manipulation.

(2) To prime him for such a moment, a musical assistant (Margaret Snider) sat alongside with the job of "listening" to the music that would be coming along so that she could prompt: "In 30 seconds the brass choir lasting for 22 seconds, then full orchestra for a minute and 5 seconds." This advance information was essential to allow ample time for relaying information to the technical director and the cameraman. (All of which, in conjunction with NBC's musical-consultant, Samuel Chotzinoff, had been noted and written down on a cue-sheet during rehearsals, and re-checking by listening to Toscanini recordings of the same works).

(3) The selection of camera positions—one on the podium from up-stage, another facing the orchestra directly and the third showing the stage on the diagonal—had to be thought of in the light both of the performance and of the maestro's entrances and exits. Some consideration also had to be given to the physical disposition of those on stage. The presence of a chorus and soloists in the Beethoven Ninth Symphony pickup, for instance, demanded a re-location of the diagonal camera.

Work of Technical Crew

(4) The services of a technical crew, completely familiar with its gear as a result of long experience with all kinds of shows is absolutely essential—especially if the show is to be done without rehearsal, as was the case in the two pick-ups under discussion here. Lack of panic, quick responses, good picture composition—all the ramifications of teamwork—are possible only under such a situation.

(5) Finally, it was borne in mind that any pre-arranged plan of handling the show had to be treated as no more than a guide. It was expected that many things would be done on an impromptu basis—such effects as the superimposition of shots of the entire orchestra or chorus and the maestro—and they were. There were also some serious self-ministrations about keeping calm—but the less said about that the better.

GEN. FRANK E. STONER, chief communications engineer for UN, is scheduled as guest lecturer in series on "Mass Media and International Relations" at New School for Social Research, New York, April 14. He will speak on "Radio and International Relations."

100,000 Saw Inaugural, 'Tribune' Estimates

WGN-TV

A FAST-MOVING variety show, ushered in WGN-TV, the *Chicago Tribune's* television station, last Monday night. The *Tribune* estimated that 16,000 teletesets were tuned to WGN-TV and that an unseen audience of 100,000 viewed the show.

After 15 minutes of "first nighter" interviews in the lobby of WGN's main studio, the scene shifted to the stage where Illinois' Gov. Dwight H. Green, U. S. Sen. C. Wayland Brooks and Mayor Martin Kennelly of Chicago made brief dedicatory talks.

The show that followed included dancing girls, instrumentalists, singers, comedians, a ventriloquist, roller skaters, a mimic, an animal act, and a puppeteer. It was presented before a gay and responsive studio audience of 453 persons.

During the two-hour premiere, only 40 calls were received from televisers having reception difficulties, the *Tribune* reported. When WGN-TV made a test of the Golden Gloves fights March 6, some 300 complaints were received. The fact that fewer televisers complained Monday night convinced station officials that Chicagoans have been educated to the need for service checkups before expecting maximum results.

WGN-TV, which operates on Channel 9 (186-192 mc), has an investment of \$450,000 in video equipment, including three image orthicon cameras—all of which were used at the premiere—35 mm and 16 mm projectors, and two complete sets of microwave relay equipment. One of the latter was used to relay the inaugural pro-

gram to the station's transmitter, which has been placed temporarily on the Chicago Daily News Bldg.

The *Tribune's* new Centennial Bldg., adjacent to Tribune Tower, eventually will house WGN-TV but this building is not scheduled for completion until the fall of 1949.



TWO of the cameras used by the "Chicago Tribune" in launching its video outlet, WGN-TV, on April 5 are trained on the stage of WGN studio theatre as the two-hour inaugural telecast is presented. In addition to the two mounted cameras, equipped with telephoto turret lenses, a third camera can be seen on the stage. The telecast was carried to an estimated 16,000 video receivers in the Chicago area, according to WGN spokesmen. Program was relayed to the new television station's main studios in the Chicago Daily News Bldg. by the WGN-TV mobile unit.