

BARON BÉLA



By Ken Fell, Staff Photo

BARON BÉLA . . . cimbalist with cimbalom

The Cimbalom Comes to Constitution Hall

Baron Bela Plays a Rare

By Thomas Putnam

BARON BÉLA, a cimbalist of gypsy descent, has come to the aid of the National Symphony Orchestra. Currently working with a quartet at the El Caesars restaurant, Bela will join the orchestra Tuesday and Wednesday in performances of Zoltan Kodaly's "Hary Janos" Suite.

Cimbalom players are rare in this country and hard to track down. When the orchestra originally scheduled the Suite, they hoped to use a cimbalist who was working at Michel's Restaurant. But they discovered that the restaurant

had closed down and the cimbalist had migrated to California.

What do you do without a cimbalist and with a performance of "Hary Janos" coming up? One idea, according to orchestra manager M. Robert Rogers, was to give a vibraphonist a "cram course" on how to play the cimbalom. The two instruments have one thing in common: they are both struck with sticks. Unfortunately, there the similarity ends, and when the prospective cimbalist saw his instrument he quickly retreated.

Rogers said that Antal Dorati, guest conductor for the concerts, "was considering al-

Instrument

country, and at last count there were "about 18." Most of these are gypsies who play by ear.

Rarely was a man more nonchalant about appearing with a symphony orchestra. He has performed the Suite before, once with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Eugene Ormandy, who impressed Bela with his enthusiastic dancing on the podium.

At the restaurant, he plays familiar melodies which often disappear in improvised cadenzas. "Summertime" has a soft sound, but for the "Third Man Theme" he uses his hard sticks. During lunch the other day, his obliging manner could not satisfy one woman's request for the Warsaw Concerto. "Now what can I do with that on the cimbalom?"

It was suggested that with its small repertory, Bela ought to commission a composer to write for the cimbalom. What about Stravinsky, who included cimbalom in "Renard and the Ragtime?" "I don't like what he wrote. You couldn't play what he wrote, you had to improvise."

The orchestra is hoping that Bela won't have to improvise for the concerts next week. At the moment, Bela is missing the last two pages of his part to "Hary Janos," but the orchestra library should be able to turn up a complete part.

tering the piano with paper, but that seemed to lack class."

Later, Rogers became confident about having the authentic "cimbalongarese" in the performances. He was part of a luncheon crowd the other day at the II Caesars, listening to Bela and the strange instrument.

THE CIMBALOM, dulcimer of the Hungarian gypsies, is a shallow, trapezoidal box with metal strings stretched across two bridges. It has damper pedals and is played with two light hammers.

Bela uses two sets of hammers: one with cotton wrapping and one with a coat of glue. "The wood wears down, so I put the glue on it for protection." Once he had to use drum sticks, but he wouldn't want to do it again because the sticks got caught in the strings.

Bela has an inventory on the cimbal players in this

