

# THE MUSIC OF THE MAORI

## *Alfred Hill Bemoans Its Neglect*

*One of the busiest men in New Zealand just now may be found hard at work in Parnell any week-day between eight o'clock in the morning and ten at night—unless he has rushed off from Auckland for the day, to Ngāruawahia, Taupo, or Rotorua, for more material to work on. But his is a labour of love, and listeners to IYA on Wednesday evening, August 16, will have the privilege of enjoying some of its fruits, for the busy man is none other than Alfred Hill, engaged in his favourite task of weaving melodies around old Maori traditional airs and folk-songs.*

**E**VEN if there were not about Alfred Hill that subtle attraction peculiar to genius which makes those who speak with him feel that they have stepped within a charmed circle, his infinite capacity for taking pains would betray the quality, for he brings to all his composition an energy which seems ever-youthful in its force, and a boyish enthusiasm which delights in the stirring music that comes to life under his hand.

When "The Listener's" representative visited him one afternoon last week, he had been busy since early morning on the musical score for the film "Rewi's Last Stand," and his head was full of a myriad stirring war-chants that had come sounding down the years, as thrilling to him as the horns of elfland.

"It is very lovely and interesting work for the musician," he said, his eyes shining as he turned over the pages of half-finished orchestration. Most of the music for the film, with the exception of those sequences in which von Tempsky and his Forest Rangers figure, will be wholly or partly Maori in origin. These phrases, for example, were sung over to him by an old woman at Taupo, others he tracked down in the Waikato.

### **Much Material Gathered**

He has amassed a great quantity of primitive Maori melodies on visits to various native settlements and some of his compositions based on these will provide the material for the recital on August 16. Much of the work will be heard for the first time, and he is most enthusiastic about the capabilities of the quartet which will play the compositions.

### **Small Encouragement Is Not Cricket**

"The young singers and musicians here," he said, "are as good as can be found anywhere. The material is here, both the composers and the players, and that material has great possibilities, but there is not yet enough encouragement. You can't become a Don Bradman by reading a book, you must play cricket, and play it constantly. In the same way, if this country is to express itself artistically, it must get to work at once. Talent only requires handling by someone who loves music, but we must put talent on a pedestal first and then tell it to go to work."

By the establishment of a conservatorium of music, the field of music in New Zealand would be enriched in divers ways, he continued. And now was the time to give some encouragement to New Zealand music, with the Dominion's Centennial just around the corner. The celebrations would bring visitors from all over the world, and these visitors would want to hear New Zealand's own music.

### **Roosevelt Was Interested**

New Zealanders, Mr. Hill thinks, will be surprised to learn how interested people overseas are in Maori melodies. He found that out when visiting the United States, where even the daily papers were anxious to learn about the Maori melodies of New Zealand. More recently, he was approached by the representative of one of the major American oil companies which wished to feature "Hinemoa" in a sponsored radio educational session, dealing with the native music of the Pacific, and only the other week at a White House reception, after a young singer had given a Maori song, President Roosevelt enquired where he might get a copy, as he would like to learn it himself!

### **"Last-Post Horn"**

Anything touching on Maori music commands Alfred Hill's interest, and his working-day would have to be far in excess of the possible 24 hours for him to find time for all that he would like to do. If he could only find time, for example, to spend several days

just trying the old Maori instruments in the Auckland War Memorial Museum. And there was that wonderful old Maori putara, or war-trumpet, which he had come across just recently at Whaka. Almost like the post-horn in a recent issue of "The Listener," but a wood-wind, bound with creeper and with a tone rather like a French horn, penetrating, but round and luscious. He would have to embody it in the film-score somewhere.

Then there were the Maori flutes, fashioned in the bad old days from an enemy's arm-bone, but now, through the scarcity of the original material, made from wood. The harmonics of these instruments, he was sure, would make a most interesting scientific study.

### **Choosing The Better Part**

But if New Zealanders, and the Maori race in particular, owe much to Alfred Hill, they also owe much indirectly to his wife. For Mrs. Hill has found that her husband is liable to forget even his meals, so absorbed does he become in his work.

"He lives only for his music," she said, "and he can't live without it. Why, I remember one day he was writing a cheque. . . ." She laughed.

"He couldn't remember the date. 'What day is it?' he asked. Then, 'What month?' There was a brief pause, then, wearily, 'What year is it?'"

"You know," she added, smiling, "I often think he is lazy. He won't write a letter and he just works at what he likes best. But perhaps he is right."

And watching Alfred Hill, as he sat at the piano, his head of iron-grey hair flung back, triumphantly singing his rousing "He Haka Ngeri," an adaptation of an old Tuwharetoa battle chant, one might well have agreed that he had after all "chosen the better part."

ALFRED HILL, whose whole life is music, is here seen at work in his studio at home, overlooking Sydney Harbour

