

THIS SCHOLARSHIP BUSINESS

How Many Musical Dreams Come True?

(Written for "The Listener" by L. D. AUSTIN)

EVERY year a number of young New Zealand musicians, more or less talented, pass certain examinations which qualify them for overseas scholarships. The war has unfortunately interfered with the plans of these young aspirants to musical fame. Nevertheless, peace will come again, sooner or later, and the holders of these scholarships will once more be faced with the problem of their future careers. It is a matter which provides food for serious thought. In the vast majority of cases the winners of scholarships journey to London, spend two or three years there as students of the Royal Academy, or Royal College, or Trinity College of Music. They work very hard, perhaps, while the glow of enthusiasm lasts—that is, until they realise their comparative insignificance as mere units among hundreds of other students possibly much more gifted. Those who keep their balance, and study conscientiously for the duration of their term, achieve certain minor triumphs which cause elation in the far-away parental bosom and are duly chronicled with pride in their home town newspapers. The scholarships conclude in due course, and in 999 cases out of 1000 the erstwhile holders return to their distant families. Well, what happens then?



What Ultimate Prospects?

This scholarship business is one which parents of talented children should consider with infinite care from every angle. Not too often the raising of sufficient money to take the winner to London entails a vast deal of worry and sacrifice, and not a little humiliation. Sometimes all this turns out to be wasted effort because the character upon which it is lavished has not the strength

to withstand the innumerable temptations of a great city. However, this consideration is beside the point. What I am concerned with is: what ultimate prospects face the holders of these scholarships? When they have finished their two or three years' jaunt to London and are confronted with the stark reality that the dream is o'er and that stern necessity compels an immediate return whence they came—can we not envisage a cruel revulsion of feeling, a sense of frustration and perhaps of bitter disappointment?

Nor does the parents' anxiety end here. To a young person, full of exuberance and "joie de vivre," existence in a small New Zealand town must inevitably seem dull, insipid, and uninspiring after three years passed in the hub of the Empire. London life normally is extremely gay and socially attractive, but it holds, too, a very great deal that represents the cream of human intellectual and artistic activity, such as cannot be experienced save in the world's largest centres. This is what the returned pilgrim of refined sensibility is going to miss and sigh for. The question then is: are the undoubted advantages, in other respects, of life in New Zealand a just compensation for the equally undoubted shortcomings?

All Geese Are Not Swans

The point for parents to ponder over is whether all this trouble and bother and expense is justified by the often negative consequences. Even though the youngsters are patently not heaven-sent geniuses, maybe it is right and fitting to give them the opportunity of seeing the great world, hoping that one's trust and affection will not be misplaced and that the returned travellers will be in every respect bettered by experience abroad. But if one has exaggerated ideas of a child's abilities or disposition nothing but severe disappointment can ensue. We hear a lot nowadays about New Zealand losing her best brains. This seems inevitable in a small country with few openings for outstanding talent. As far as music is concerned it is a foregone conclusion that any real genius we may produce will sooner or later drift abroad. Broadly speaking, we can lay it down as an axiom that young instrumentalists and vocalists who return to New Zealand after a period of intensive study overseas do so because of insufficient talent.

This is not written with the idea of discouraging youthful aspirants after scholarships. But something should be done to dissuade fond parents from the delusion that all their goslings are cygnets, their musical geese embryo swans; also the mistaken enthusiasm of ambitious teachers calls for damping down occasionally. Let it be borne in mind that of the many hopeful scholarship winners who have left these shores in past years only a mere handful have found their dreams come true.

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Cyril Arthur Pearson and he addressed themselves to the problem of finding an illustrator. Stanley L. Wood was the man suggested by Pearson, and an excellent choice he proved in the long run. Actually he was a specialist in drawing horses, and asked if Hyne's little sailor couldn't be turned into some kind of cavalry brigand who could do at least one all-out charge per story. When Hyne refused, Wood became very cross and abusive, saying that people bought magazines to look at the pretty pictures, and not to waste time over the stupid text. However, Wood saw reason at last after he had read one of the stories.

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