

THE ST. MATTHEW PASSION

Schola Cantorum Records Bach for Easter

Broadcasts

J. S. BACH'S *Passion According to the Gospel of St. Matthew* was recently performed complete in Wellington by the Schola Cantorum, a choir of 28 Wellington singers under the conductorship of Stanley Oliver. The National Broadcasting Service, instead of broadcasting the work direct at the time it was performed (it began at 6.0 p.m. and ended at about 10.30—with an interval for tea) made recordings of it. These recordings are to be heard from 2YA this week, on Thursday, April 18, and Good Friday, April 19. The *St.*

the matter of acoustics, because a curtain is not a sounding board, but it was the best that could be done in Wellington, and pointed to the city's need of a Cathedral.

The work is written for two small choirs, and two small orchestras, and these were placed on either side of the conductor, so that they all faced the audience; but the intended antiphonal effects were preserved.

The manner of presentation approached as nearly as possible what was done in Bach's own church in Leipzig. Bach's choir, including soloists, num-

originally written for oboe d'amore and oboe di caccia were played by the clarinets.

Special Effects

In the *St. Matthew Passion*, the two choirs (and some of their members, as soloists), perform different functions from time to time, according to a considered plan. C. S. Terry says that the Disciples, the inmost circle of the Christian community, are represented in certain of the numbers by Choir I, and the larger congregation (whom the librettist Picander called "The Faithful") by Choir II. At other times the two choirs lose their separate identity and speak in common utterance, with specific intention; for instance, to express the taunting of the mob. The strings also have a separate and particular function whenever they accompany the words of Jesus. They play a special accompaniment in sustained notes, generally at a high pitch, creating a musical "halo" which vanishes at the words "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

The first movement in the whole work incorporates a 16th Century version of the *Agnus Dei*, which was written on a separate stave, and in the Schola Cantorum's performance this chorale was sung by six sopranos, from the organ-loft behind the audience.



Spencer Digby photograph

STANLEY OLIVER

Cathedral acoustics would have helped



Spencer Digby photograph

KEN MACAULAY (left) and THOMAS E. WEST who were the principal soloists with the Schola Cantorum, the former taking the part of Jesus and the latter that of Evangelist or the Narrator



Matthew Passion is in two parts; Part I. will be heard this Thursday, beginning at 9.25 p.m., and Part II. at 7.0 p.m. on Good Friday.

This was the second time the *St. Matthew Passion* has been sung complete in Wellington, and it was an occasion that had been put off since 1942. Mr. Oliver directed a similar performance in the Dominion Museum in April, 1941, and it would have been repeated the following year but for the war and its inroads on the choir's membership.

Five years ago the seats were all sold out very quickly, without advertising, and this time the same thing happened, so that the 500 who did hear the work in the Town Hall were the lucky ones.

Makeshift Hall

The audience sat in the choir seats of the Town Hall, with the organ behind it, and the singers and orchestra were on an extended stage, with their backs to the main body of the hall, which was hidden by a high curtain. This arrangement left something to be desired in

bered 34. The Schola Cantorum has about 28 singers, and there were two additional soloists, Kenneth Macaulay (Jesus) and Thomas E. West (Evangelist, or Narrator). The orchestra included two oboes, but some of the obligati



ROY HILL (tenor)



Spencer Digby photographs

MOLLY ATKINSON (contralto) and, right, the soprano MERLE GAMBLE who are both heard in the reflective numbers