

MR. TOWERS OF LONDON

BEFORE long, New Zealand listeners will be hearing the broadcast productions of a rising new British transcription service whose letter-head bears the eye-catching title "Towers of London."

Founder and head of this service is a quick-talking, enthusiastic young man who called on *The Listener* during a recent hurried visit to New Zealand. He is Harry Alan Towers, already well known to BBC audiences for the many programmes he has devised and produced. Mr. Towers, who comes of a theatrical family, is 26 years old and has been in radio since he was 14. He started in commercial broadcasting, wrote scripts during the war for Tommy Handley, George Formby, and many other popular favourites and ran a Forces radio network.

His present project is to produce programmes of "international interest" which will be equally entertaining to audiences in all parts of the world, instead of only in the country in which they are made. To this end he has established overseas offices in Paris, New York, Toronto, Johannesburg and Sydney, and his productions are already being allotted time on the radio systems of several countries. Towers hopes there will be five shows a week running in Canada, for instance, by next winter. He is arranging for some shows to be recorded in French for the benefit of French-Canadian listeners.

Noel Coward Programmes

"Towers of London" has been happy so far in its choice of artists. Noel Coward, to mention one whose plays, songs and voice are known the world over, has recorded 13 half-hour programmes for the concern, featuring mainly his songs, which he introduces himself, reminiscences over and (in the case of the principal ones) sings, supported by members of the companies of Noel Coward stage shows. A series of Gracie Fields shows has also been transcribed, and the first series to be made by Australian artists features Chips Rafferty and Peter Finch in *The Sundowner*, episodes of Australian life. *Secrets of Scotland Yard*, with Clive Brook in the main role, occupies 52 half-hour programmes, and is, according to Mr. Towers, a good deal different from the ordinary crime serial on the air. In addition to these selections the concern has secured world radio rights of productions staged by the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and has done a series of Irish plays, acted by the Abbey Theatre players.

One of Mr. Towers's most ambitious schemes is the reproduction for radio of the leading films turned out by the British cinema industry, under the heading *London Playhouse*. Extracts from the principal scenes are enacted by the complete original cast of the film and the story is held together by linking

dialogue spoken sometimes by one of the main characters, through whose eyes the action is presented to the listener. This use of a narrator usually makes it possible for the producer to condense even a long and eventful film story into a half-hour compass; in any case, the purpose of the series is rather to recall peak scenes than to re-enact the whole plot. Among the films already dealt with have been *Brief Encounter*, *This Happy Breed*, *Blithe Spirit*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *I Live in Grosvenor Square*, *I See a Dark Stranger*, *Good-bye, Mr. Chips*, and *Stairway to Heaven*.

In the case of some of the older films where the original cast is for some reason not available, some use has been made of the actual sound-track; but this practice is now avoided—while the film is in production it is easy enough to make a radio version.

Right: HARRY ALAN TOWERS—
There are big names behind the letter-head



ORCHESTRAL SEASON NEARS END

New Lilburn Work for Final Wellington Concert

THE National Orchestra of the NZBS made its first public appearance on March 6 of this year in Wellington. Since then it has given 29 concerts, presenting 15 different symphonies and 80 other different works. And its concerts have been attended by more than 50,000 people.

The final concert for this season is to be given in Wellington on Wednesday, August 20, under the guest-conductorship of Warwick Braithwaite; the programme will include Douglas Lilburn's new composition for full orchestra, *Song of the Antipodes*. Then the orchestra will go into recess till the opening of the 1948 season in Wellington in March. The players' contracts, which were for 12 months, will be reviewed in October this year, and then will come their annual leave of a fortnight.

Recess Means Work

Recess does not mean a holiday; it means the preparation of the coming season's increased repertoire. Tentative plans for 1948 provide for 18 public concerts within the first two months of the season alone, whereas the 29 performances this year were spread over the whole period from March to August.

The Listener was told by Andersen Tyrer that it was proposed, during the recess, to build up the repertoire of standard works, with the addition of new compositions now on order as they come to hand from overseas. By making the players familiar with those works, rehearsing from scratch while on tour would be minimised or avoided, and revision only would be needed. The orchestra would, therefore, be able to give more concerts than in the first season.

A good deal of music is being bought from England and the United States. At the moment it is arriving in small quantities and at irregular intervals. Works by Benjamin Britten, Weinberger and Moeran have been ordered, and their arrival is now awaited. Completion of the instrumental complement is expected at any time by way of a bass clarinet and a cor anglais to come from France. So far the cor anglais parts have been played by the first oboe, with amendments to the parts to bring them within the oboe's scope.

Home Town Broadcasts

Since its formation the membership of the orchestra has changed very little, and its size is the same as when it was launched. After the last concert of this season the groups belonging to centres other than Wellington will go home, to put in at least two hours a day preparing the new season's repertoire. And as well as this, they will give regular broadcasts from their home stations as individual groups, and with the studio orchestras in Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin. The Wellington Orchestra will give concerts from 2YA. Thus the music lovers of their home towns will benefit by the players' experience with the full orchestra.

In addition to giving more concerts next season in the centres, it is probable that the orchestra will extend its travelling programme to take in some of the smaller towns. Otago will, of course, see a good deal of the orchestra in 1948 when (as reported recently in *The Listener*) it will assist in the celebration of the province's centennial.

Lilburn's New Work

"A well-written composition by a New Zealander whose work has been known

to me for some years," is how Warwick Braithwaite describes Douglas Lilburn's *Song of the Antipodes*, which is to be given its first public performance next Wednesday by the NZBS National Orchestra. "The orchestration," Mr. Braithwaite told *The Listener*, "is both interesting and extraordinarily clear, and the themes are original but not harsh."

Song of the Antipodes was completed last year. Its central idea is a chorale-like theme, briefly announced at the opening, later set out in full by the strings, with woodwind episodes, and used again as conclusion. It is from this theme that the title of *Song* is derived. The word *Song* should be thought of in its older sense of psalm, or again, as the poet Whitman used it. It implies praise or thanksgiving, as well as description.

"Composers in a new country, having no established tradition to guide them, must seek out their own paths as best they may," Douglas Lilburn told *The Listener*. "History and environment may help to establish a background. The word *Antipodes* was chosen here for its richness of association in these things. To the early voyager it meant strangeness and remoteness, uncharted seas and the unknown South land, and even today a New Zealander may share something of these feelings towards parts of his country. When he moves out of the cities he is apt to be confronted by distance and solitude, or the mountains leap suddenly on his horizons, and he is never far from the sound of great oceans that beat upon his coasts."

"These, and similar things, form part of his heritage, and it is thought that this heritage will have its influence on the art that is produced in these islands."