

TIRED OF LONDON BUT NOT OF LIFE

WHEN a viola player leaves a secure post in the BBC and settles down beside one in an outer suburb of Auckland, she cannot hope to avoid questions, particularly when her attempts to reach New Zealand have been prolonged and unorthodox. Winifred Stiles, who has been principal viola in the BBC Theatre Orchestra, was known by chamber music enthusiasts in New Zealand to be preparing for the journey early in 1946. She hoped to come in the yacht *Nebula* (37 tons). Then there was brief word that she was ill. The *Nebula* sailed without her and was wrecked in a gale on the coast of England. Miss Stiles arrived by air a few days ago. The story seemed to need filling out. First I asked Miss Stiles, "Why New Zealand?"

"Well, I had to leave England—yes, I'll explain that later. I didn't want to go to the Continent. I don't think I like the American way of life. I knew I would not like the distinctions of race and class in South Africa. I've never been drawn to Australia. So that left only New Zealand. It had to be a place where there was sunshine."

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for the same cycle. Various musical organisations exchanged news and artists with unprecedented energy.

Travel was possible again, which is not to say it was any fun for those who arranged or underwent it. One notable mass migration was the week-end visit of the Schola Cantorum at the invitation of the Auckland Chamber Music Society. They spent Friday and Sunday nights on the Main Trunk and gave two concerts in between, both of which were broadcast. Nearly 2,000 people sat silently listening to a programme of Bach's non-secular music in the Town Hall on a Sunday afternoon, and went quietly away wondering why this kind of music was not there more often.

Everybody Was Pleased

In the spring Isaac Stern made a swift tour for the NZBS and seems to have pleased everyone. We now have such people during their best working years. It used not to be so. Simon Barere came and played the piano in that grand manner I thought I had been born too late to hear. He found the bust of Liszt lying in long grass, wiped the moss from its brow and put it back on the pedestal.

Even with the visiting musicians removed, the broadcast programmes of 1947 look better than before. Series have been arranged which are satisfying to the steady listener, though exacting to performers. Dorothy Davies played many of the Haydn sonatas, and Haagen Holenbergh a series of Beethoven. George Hopkins and Owen Jensen covered a wide range of music for clarinet and piano; and lately 2YA has had a series of choral music by the Studio Singers, and of early English music by various performers.

Although 1947 has found people pretty tired about other things in life, there has been energy in every corner of music. Hallkeepers combed odd rooms in municipal buildings and brought out

"Didn't anyone warn you about Auckland?"

"Yes. I know what you mean. Friday and Saturday were dreadful, weren't they? But when the sun came out after that it was sunshine, wasn't it?"

She knew no New Zealanders until she had set her heart on this country for other reasons. After that she made it her business to meet some, and her decision was strengthened. "Of course I should have known they would have to be people like that." She wrote to names here that they gave her, and although one or two replies were discouraging, others hinted that she might find what she wanted, which was something quite different from what she was used to. Everyone was helpful, but the shipping companies could do nothing. Somebody told her about the *Nebula*, and she paid £500 for the hope of reaching New Zealand in it. The journey might take six months, 12 months, 12 years. The owner would do his best to get there. Nothing was guaranteed. She became ill before the ship sailed and was told she might try to sell her passage to someone else.

everything but the mayor's throne to seat the crowds that came to hear John Charles Thomas. Douglas Lilburn wrote a major work, *Song of the Antipodes*, which had its first performance in Wellington, played by the National Symphony Orchestra under Warwick Braithwaite. A man who opened a booking-office queue with bed and blankets at 1.30 a.m. found it difficult to convince two policemen that he was only waiting for the *Messiah*. The Philip Neill Memorial Prize for composers was won for the first time by a woman—by two women, in fact. And this month the numbers of skilled and devoted musicians needed for Bach's Mass in B Minor have been assembled at last and 2YA has broadcast what is probably the first performance of the Mass in New Zealand.

This survey is parochial and limited, because in 1947 there has been more and enough music close at hand. When we hanker for foreign capitals we imagine we are longing only for their standards and forget that we are starved also of choice. This year we have had both. I left Auckland only three times during the year for music. Most of the time there was more here than I could digest. I missed Dorothy Helmrich because I was at a music school where about 50 people sang around me day and night. None of them sang as well as she does, but most of them tried as hard and there's something in that. Later, when I saw how things were going, I decided to concentrate on orchestras, chamber music and pianists—if that can be called concentration—and I missed an outstanding year of vocal music. Next year I hope to concentrate on singers. If a fair and impartial survey is to be made, it must be done by someone who has sat detached, like the man in the creepy play *The Wrecker*. He had a coloured electric chart on his wall which showed him where each train was at any given moment, but he travelled in none of them.

"About a hundred people rang me up about it, but it was getting on into winter then, very cold and foggy, and nobody seemed as keen as all that to leave England in a yacht just then. I said good-bye to the £500. And then it all ended tragically. The yacht grounded on Christmas Day, and the people in it had to swim about half a mile. They lost everything, including their passage money. When I thought of that swim I stopped regretting the £500."

One of the shipwrecked passengers came to see Miss Stiles. They had met only two or three times before, but they determined to make another attempt on Auckland, working in together. The sudden partnership was rash enough, they both knew, but not more so than the plot that had just failed. Miss Stiles's friend in May of this year, came to Auckland, where she bought a section and built the house they are now living in. I didn't need to gasp. Miss Stiles takes none of the good things for granted.

"Of course, I know that we've been terribly lucky and my friend must have worked very hard. People were unbelievably helpful to her, though."

Ten Years with BBC

Miss Stiles began her career under Barbirolli. Just as she was leaving college he chose her as principal viola for the Covent Garden Opera Company he was forming then in 1922, and she was with him for some years. She has just had a few months with the New London Opera Company in the Cambridge Theatre, and for 10 years she has been with the BBC's permanent Theatre Orchestra.

"Did you hear the BBC recording last night of *Chu Chin Chow*? That was one of many I helped to make. We did a good deal of light stuff, but I didn't mind that because it was so perfectly done. I don't mind so much what the job is, as long as it is done in the best way possible. I cannot bear doing a good thing badly, apathetically. And that Theatre Orchestra is the brightest spot in the BBC because of the personality of Stanford Robinson, the director."

London Became Intolerable

I asked Miss Stiles what had made London intolerable for a born Londoner and a professional musician.

"I simply knew that if I went on working in the same place in the same way any longer I would be finished with music. It was going dead. Without music London has nothing I want. Therefore, it was best to get out, come to life, and save the music. It's not easy. The BBC pays you so well that even if you stop enjoying the work, you've enough money for bought pleasures—that's if you like the pleasures money can buy. I don't. I know I shan't want to go back. Already I've found at least one corner in Auckland where music flourishes in the way I like—in a free, adventurous way, plenty of fun and hard work, and no greed. That's the thing that can spoil musical life quicker than anything else—greed. There's a great feeling of freedom about this place. I know already I was right to come."

"But why did you stop enjoying the work?"



Sparrow Pictures

WINIFRED STILES

"It was pretty tough living in London, you know. Every day I'd have to queue for the bus for half-an-hour at least—every single day—and the women all round me would be talking, *Points, Points, Points*. When I'd get to rehearsal everyone was the same way—long faces, grey faces, moans and miseries. We were all tired—and cold. When you can't feel the end of your viola unless you hold it in the gas oven, it isn't funny." I hoped Miss Stiles's viola wouldn't have to rely on the services of our gas ovens; but I wanted to hear more about the way musicians were moving round, and orchestras changing. She told me that many of her colleagues would come if they knew they could find a living here.

Changing Orchestras

"There's movement going on all the time. Any orchestra can become set in its ways, start to die, and then you find that new life's going into another one and making it better worth listening to. At the moment the Halle is becoming the liveliest. And during the war it was the London Philharmonic—and the Liverpool one. You wouldn't expect that, would you?"

I said I didn't know what I would expect, but we'd heard the Boyd Neel, which was quite beyond our expectations. Miss Stiles wished I had heard them earlier, in England. Some of their regular players had not come on this tour. I wished she had heard them in New Zealand—if they were as much stimulated by the place as she was, they had probably surpassed themselves here. It sounded like it at times. We agreed that we couldn't settle this matter. We spoke of the number that had left the Boyd Neel Orchestra at the end of the New Zealand tour, almost as if it were beginning to disintegrate.

"But it never does. The Boyd Neel Orchestra has been through many phases and it always renews itself. It always will—with that conductor."

Miss Stiles has settled down at once to regular practice on her instrument and she hopes she is not too late to be fitted in somewhere at the Summer School of Music at Cambridge in January. After that she will know more about our musical life and what she wants to do. In the meantime there is a garden to be made from the bare field.

—D.F.T.