

QUEENSLAND STRING QUARTET

Tour of New Zealand Will Start in May

NEXT May chamber music enthusiasts in New Zealand will have the opportunity of hearing recitals by Australia's most celebrated string ensemble, the Queensland State String Quartet, a group which was formed in 1944 to play classical music for school-children, and which has been delighting both adult and child audiences with high-class performances throughout the Commonwealth ever since.

The Quartet's tour, which will last for approximately two months, has been arranged with the Queensland State authorities by the Wellington Chamber Music Society. In addition to giving public concerts in the four main centres and provincial towns, the Quartet will make eight 30-minute broadcasts for the NZBS. Their schedule is: 1YA on May 2 and June 14, 2YA on May 9 and June 6, 3YA on May 16 and 24, and 4YA on May 21 and 23.

The members of the Quartet—Ernest Llewellyn and Harold Taberner (violins), David Powell (viola), and Don Howley (violinello)—were first assembled at Brisbane in August, 1944, when Llewellyn, whom many consider to be Australia's finest violinist, was commissioned by the Queensland Education Department to form a quartet to perform in schools. The primary object was to assist in the advancement of musical appreciation amongst the children of the State, but such a good team was chosen that the scheme soon passed far beyond its original conception.

As the essence of quartet playing is combination, Llewellyn tried to find artists who were matched both in their style of playing and their general ap-

proach to music. He gave careful consideration also to personality and temperament, since each member of a quartet must retain his own musical individuality and yet be prepared to submerge it in the needs of the organisation and of the music being performed.

New Zealand Violinist

Llewellyn drew his team from the whole field of Australian music. He himself had come from a New South Wales coalfield, and for the second violin he chose Harold Taberner, a New Zealander who went to Australia in 1935 seeking work, and found it with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. For the viola Llewellyn picked David Powell, a West Australian who had played with the Perth and Melbourne Symphony Orchestras, and for the 'cello, Don Howley, Irish-born but Australian-bred, who had played with the Melbourne and Brisbane Symphony Orchestras.

For a month the members of the Quartet—already considerable artists in their own fields—rehearsed in a disused Brisbane hotel. Under Llewellyn's idealistic guidance they endeavoured to mould their styles to suit each other's, trying to perfect their combination in what is perhaps the most difficult of all the executive forms of music. When they began playing the old masters in the schools they met with instantaneous success, which was surprising to them considering the length and technical nature of the works performed. They found that the children became thoroughly absorbed in the music, and invariably asked when they were coming back.

The Quartet's reputation quickly spread throughout Australia, and in 1945 they made their first visit to other States when they played at the Melbourne University's Mozart Festival. In 1946 they toured the Australian capitals with the pianist Hephzibah Menuhin, and their Sydney performances received the praise of Neville Cardus. "The splendid point in all the interpretations," he said, "was that characteristic tone was sought rather than the polished tone that only touches the surface—and Sydney has had too much lately of merely fastidious chamber playing."

In 1947 they took part in the University of Melbourne's Brahms Festival, and their playing in the fifth programme of the series was described by the *Herald* critic John Sinclair as the high-water mark of the chamber music part of the festival. "Such string quartet playing as the Queensland Quartet did last night has not been heard in Melbourne for a long time," he said. "Their performance was always keen and searching of the essential spirit of the music." In January, 1948, a recital was given in Brisbane's Albert Hall.

Extensive Repertoire

Examples of their repertoire from pieces played at these concerts show the wide range of performance the ensemble has achieved. Of Mozart's quartets they played the C Major K.465, the B Flat Major K.458, the G Major K.387, the B Flat Major K.589, and the E Flat Major K.428. Others include Brahms's *Quartet in B Flat Major, Op. 67*, Arnold Bax's *charming Quartet in G*, and Haydn's *Quartet, Op. 74*.



ERNEST LLEWELLYN

In an article which appeared in the Queensland *Courier Mail* late in 1946, E. J. Reid said, "When Queenslanders count their musical blessings, pride of place in most of their lists is given to the group of four famous troubadours known as the Queensland State String Quartet. Nor is the delight of the Quartet's music confined to Brisbane. Like the troubadours of the Middle Ages, the Quartet carries its instruments from town to town to give the music-starved people of the country the chance of enjoying the most popular of the arts. . . . In the two years of its existence the Quartet has travelled in Queensland a distance of more than 16,000 miles—an average of almost 200 miles a week. With every performance the Quartet's reputation has grown."

COLIN McCABON'S PICTURES

ABOUT three months ago I was in Australia, and visiting Sydney and Melbourne. I naturally enough visited their art galleries, to see what had happened in the last decade or so. In Melbourne the Felton Bequest had bought the usual hundred thousand pounds' worth of European paintings; but the exciting thing in both places was the collection of contemporary Australian art. It was really contemporary and exciting art—no more the acres of dull vulgarity by Norman Lindsay, no more the rather mechanical shine of Elioth Gruner, no more the competent academicism of Edwardian England, but a real burst of distinct and individual talents, seeing things and painting things with fresh and enormous vitality. It is evident that not merely has Australia the painters, but the galleries have highly intelligent directors. And then, turning my thoughts to New Zealand, I felt a little depressed.

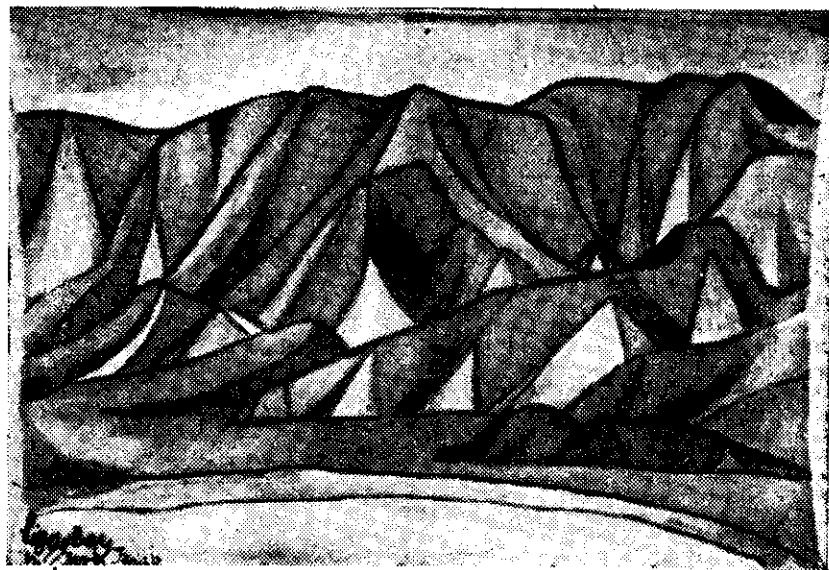
But why be too depressed? I am convinced that, given the director, a thoroughly interesting and exciting collection of contemporary New Zealand paintings could be assembled. Oh for the director!

Oh for the council or the trustees that would back him up! Really we should not need to hang our heads in shame. None I need not list, but, as often before, I had this conviction and these yearnings when looking at Colin McCabon's exhibition at the Wellington Public Library the other day. McCabon is not a brilliant technician, in the academic sense; there are men in New Zealand who can run rings around him in ease and speed of output and slickness of finish; he is deliberately all too primitive all too often, he is gauche, self-willed, violent. Yet for us he is one of the important people. He is a serious artist. His pictures are open to criticism, but they can take criticism—the best of them stand up to real critical study as very few of the too numerous exhibits in our too numerous annual shows do. He is a serious artist because he takes painting seriously, as something to be thought about and worked at; he knows the importance of construction, of the architecture of a picture, and while he works in colour, he also works in form; and he is experimental. In other words, there is an individual mind coming out in his pictures. There is no easy mastery of a perpetual pattern; the influ-

ences have been permeated with McCabon, and McCabon is a process of development. The old sombre landscapes have given place to a frequent blaze of colour, and to figure studies both strong and moving. It is important that this development should go on. I wish there

were a Church in New Zealand alive enough to buy the Annunciation or Deposition paintings. A Religious Drama Society we have. A Religious Art Society seems indicated.

—J.C.B.



LIGAR BAY—one of McCabon's larger paintings