

# SECULAR CANTATA

INCLUDED in the second half of the concert which 3YA will broadcast from the Civic Theatre, Christchurch, at 8.0 p.m. on Tuesday, April 27, will be a performance by Isobel Baillie and the strings of the National Orchestra of Gerald Finzi's *Dies Natalis*, a secular cantata for soprano and strings. This work has not previously been performed with full string accompaniment in New Zealand.

Finzi, who was born in 1901 and studied under Sir Edward Bairstow, is a composer whose small published output has won respect from musicians for its sincerity and sensitive workmanship. His reputation rests mainly upon his songs and a few choral works, nearly all of them composed around the writings of famous English poets. His songs in particular are genuinely lyrical in feeling and show an unusual regard for the stresses of the words. A severely self-critical writer, he has discarded much of his earlier work which failed to satisfy him.

Although Finzi's compositions show the influence of the school of Vaughan Williams, especially in their use of English folk-music idioms, his work is not entirely derivative, and Oscar Thompson describes him as "an independent, creative personality deserving of a wider recognition than he has so far enjoyed." His *Dies Natalis*, which was first performed at the Wigmore Hall in 1940, is perhaps his most independent work to date.

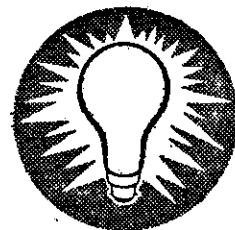
The text of the cantata is taken from the *Centuries of Meditation* and the poetical works of Thomas Traherne, the 17th Century mystic who had remained practically unknown until the beginning of this century. "In these poems," says a writer in the *Radio Times*, "Traherne gives a description of his childhood, revealing a sense of mysticism combined with a simple fervour that is often profoundly moving." The cantata opens with an introduction for strings only, followed by a rhapsody in the form of an instrumental recitative.

The opening vocal passage from the *Centuries of Meditation* is the one beginning, "Will you see the infancy of this sublime and celestial greatness? I was a stranger, which at my entrance into the world was saluted and surrounded with innumerable joys; my knowledge was divine." The three poems are "The Rapture" (Sweet Infancy! O Heavenly Fire! O Sacred Light!), "Wonder" (How Like an Angel Came I Down!), and "The Salutation." Traherne's words provide an inspiration that Finzi translates into music of a peculiar beauty and haunting power.

## NATIONAL FILM UNIT

"RHYTHM AND MOVEMENT," a full reel film showing the value of eurhythmics in relation to everyday life, is the National Film Unit's release for the week beginning April 23. The idea behind these rhythmical exercises is to improve general health, posture and physical well-being. People who have jobs that cramp their muscles, round their shoulders, or dull their mental outlook get (it is said) quite a new outlook on life by this special form of physical culture. "Rhythm and Movement" shows a Wellington Y.W.C.A. class trained by Gisa Taglicht. Background music for the picture was written by the New Zealand composer Douglas Lilburn.

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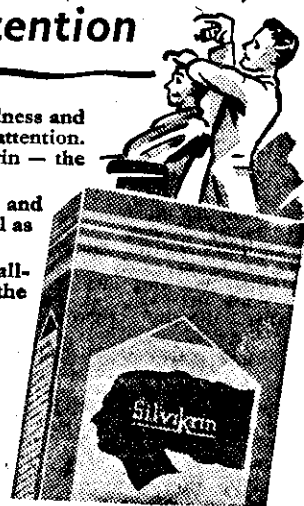
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