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FARRELL LOSES HIS TEACHER

Sudden Death of Madame Stokowski



RICHARD FARRELL on arrival at Whenuapai airport photographed with his parents and a brother

ALL the photographs in *The Listener* files of the young New Zealand pianist Richard Farrell show him to be handsome but deadly serious and therefore when I went to see him on his arrival last week from the United States I was prepared to meet someone from whom early achievement had exorcised all sense of humour. However, this was not so. The good looks were there, but with them went a ready smile and quiet chuckle. However if he should lapse into undue solemnity at the present time he has good reason. It will be recalled that when he left Australia in 1945 he went to America to study at the Julliard School of Music run by Madame Samaroff-Stokowski, former wife of the conductor, as one of the 10 students to whom she personally gave tuition. About a week before he left for New Zealand he received his final lesson from her, one of the last she gave, for just as Farrell was leaving the States Madame Stokowski died suddenly. In her he lost not only a teacher but also a friend who had played an important part in launching his career as a concert pianist in the United States. She presented him in his first New York public appearance in two recitals at the Town Hall a few months after his arrival in America and her name is frequently mentioned by Farrell in talking of other concerts he has given.

Two of the highlights in his concert work were playing the Copland *Sonata* and being complimented by the composer on his performance, and his feat in memorising the difficult piece, and an occasion when he took part in a recital of Walter Piston's *Concertino for Piano and Orchestra* in Philadelphia. Because of the difficulties the composi-

tion presented and the fact that he had only two days to look at the music before the concert, Farrell rearranged the music and "hoped for the best." He was not very happy about doing this and after the concert devoted his energies to avoiding Piston, but in the course of the evening Madame Stokowski came to Farrell and told him Piston wanted to congratulate him on what he had done. The composer told Farrell he had given him an idea for rewriting the music.

Farrell said he was very interested in the modern composers and would include their music in his New Zealand concerts. "I hope I shan't be hissed off the stage," he smiled. "I understand I shall be giving Copland's *Sonata* its first performance in New Zealand." Accompanied by other pupils from the Julliard School he had given the first radio performance of Bartok's *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion* and the first performance of a *Concerto for Piano and Eight Instruments* by Von Webern. Other broadcasts included Shostakovich's piano concerto.

Farrell was glad to be back in New Zealand to see his family—by a lucky coincidence a brother now working in India happened to land in Auckland for a short stay the day Farrell arrived—but he would not stay here. He had hoped to be able to go to England after the Dominion tour, but there was not time for him to do so and be back in the States for concert engagements there, including one in October at Carnegie Hall. Asked about long-term plans, Farrell said he anticipated staying in the United States indefinitely and even though he might travel abroad, America would always be his headquarters. "There is so much to do there." America—for musicians at least—was still a land of opportunities New Zealand could not offer.—P.M.

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