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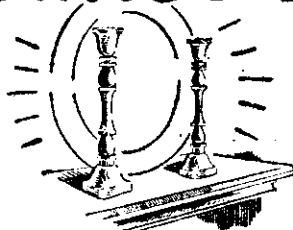


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MUSIC IN THE COUNTRY

PEOPLE living in the towns can scarcely begin to realise the difficulties facing pupils and teachers in country districts, according to Stanley Oliver, Chairman of the Music Teachers' Registration Board. Hundreds of country children cannot get lessons because there are no music teachers in their district. The Board has made an effort to encourage more teachers to settle in country districts, but even so the teacher's travelling expenses added to tuition fees make the cost of elementary lessons too high. In an effort to get a comprehensive view of this and other problems the Dominion Executive of the federated music societies recently sent a questionnaire to about 30 music teachers in country districts. The first question asked about the amount of co-operation existing between the music teacher and the local school. Most headmasters, it appears, allow the use of an empty room, and permit music lessons in school hours if the school bus has to leave straight after school, since in that case the alternative to school-time music lessons is no music lessons at all. But several (and they are quite within their rights) have refused to make these concessions.

The second question was: "What sort of co-operation do you get from the parents of your pupils?" The reasons for the question will be understood from this reply: "In the small community it is possible to keep in closer touch with the parents, and it is an advantage to know the pupil's background. Most of my pupils come from homes where there has been little musical training, and where they have not the advantage of hearing music except what I play for them during lessons. The wireless is a great boon, but most of the music heard is beyond the elementary pupil's comprehension."

Another teacher had the same thought in mind when she asked if "the NZBS could give a series of lectures suitable for children and adult beginners on short and easy classics, on the lines of those given by Dr. Galway in Dunedin." One teacher remarked that in the country more parents are home in the afternoons to see that the children practise, and fewer play bridge and golf. Several letters from teachers praised the hospitality of country parents—"always hot meals and cups of tea for the music teacher"—and gave heart-warming accounts of good progress made by pupils whose parents had to sacrifice a lot to keep up the lessons.

The third question asked if supplies of music for teaching were hard to get.

Most replies, however, spoke highly of the mail service provided by the larger city firms, particularly during the difficult war years.

Questions Four and Five were, "Have you many pupils who travel a considerable distance to you for lessons?" and "Do you travel far to give lessons?" One teacher had two pupils who came 33 miles. Another taught

Excerpts from a report by **STANLEY OLIVER**, Chairman of the Music Teachers' Registration Board

children "who leave home on Saturday morning at 7.30, have their lessons from 10.0 a.m., leave at about 4.0 p.m., finally reaching their homes about 6.30 or later." The travelling teacher had similarly long distances to cover, but usually had her own car, though many of the letters told of bicycling when the month's petrol ration ran out.

The last question "What can the Federation do to help you in your work?" brought requests ranging from piano-tuners to petrol licences. Out-of-tune pianos must be even more prevalent in the country than in the city. On the subject of petrol one teacher wrote, "Before the war I had a small car and travelled round a good deal, but owing to tyre and petrol restrictions was forced to give it up. This meant cycling 54 miles a week, and I could not keep it up." Another, however, described how her pupils' parents signed a petition to the Fuel Controller, who eventually allowed quite a reasonable supply.

Lessons in stringed-instrument playing in the country are apparently exceedingly rare. One part-time violin teacher wrote, "Musically we are very isolated. We never hear travelling artists or musical plays or orchestras. We hear nobody, see nobody, and everybody thinks musically only of the piano. . . . However, I have started a small orchestra. Where can I get suitable music for it? Are there such orchestras in some of the centres who would exchange or sell music?" A request of this kind, of course, does not present difficulties.

The sense of isolation mentioned in this letter is commented on by one or two others. One letter described a "feeling of one-ness—no recitals, no one to talk music with, very few who want to hear music other than swing." But on the other hand that is offset by such statements as this: "With all these difficulties I still prefer to teach as I get no end of pleasure from my work. I enjoy helping to start off those small children who would otherwise have to wait for lessons till they went away to school."

And apparently country teachers can see the humorous side of things too.

One wrote, "I shall never forget receiving a letter from a parent which ran something like this—'Dear Miss B.—Do you think Alice is sufficiently good at music to take it up as her profession? If you do not think so we really do not know what to do with her as she is not clever enough for anything else.' I might add that Alice did in time become a music teacher."

