

# ENTER THE MAN WHO WON THE LAURELS

## Douglas Lilburn Returns Unexpectedly From England



DOUGLAS LILBURN  
" . . . He should go far "

IT is now common knowledge that, in the recently-concluded Centennial Music Festival Composition competition, overwhelming success went to Douglas Gordon Lilburn, of Hunterville, for his "Drysdale" and "Festival" Overtures and for his choral work, "Prodigal Country"; but what came as a complete surprise to everyone at the National Broadcasting Service was the sudden arrival the other day of the composer in person. When a ship came unheralded into Wellington Harbour, this young composer was on board, seeing his country for the first time since he left it in 1937 to continue his studies in London. He intends now to go farming, but hopes to find time for some more composing.

When Douglas Lilburn left New Zealand he had already made something of a name for himself by winning the prize offered by Percy Grainger for a work for orchestra. Of this work, "Forest," the judge remarked: "A lovable work . . . the composer . . . has the power of sustaining a 'vast,' sombre mood over many minutes, by his dark colours and the rare restraint of his quiet atmosphere."

### Andersen Tyrer's Comment

Commenting on Mr. Lilburn's two prize-winning works in the orchestral class of the recently-held competition,

Andersen Tyrer, speaking as one of the judges, said that the composer shows very definite promise of bigger things to come. "He must hear more music and see more life yet," said Mr. Tyrer, "but if the quality of these works continues, Lilburn should go far."

Of the "Drysdale" Overture, Mr. Tyrer said it displayed a good sense of form and a sound knowledge of the orchestra. Some "pruning" might have been an advantage, but the overture showed plainly that Mr. Lilburn possesses musical ability of a refined order.

Although immature, the "Festival" Overture, said Mr. Tyrer, also shows a sincerity and earnestness of purpose which are commendable, and although some of the passages are clouded, the orchestration taken as a whole is very good. The same musicianship was manifest in "Prodigal Country," Mr. Lilburn's successful entry in the choral class. This work, the judge said, had an excellent vocal line, was never stodgy, and as a whole showed fine writing and judgment.

### Long Journey Home

This, then, was the crown of laurels which awaited Douglas Lilburn when he stepped off the boat in Wellington, after a 20,000-mile journey, round the Cape, into the Red Sea, down to Australia, across the Tasman and home. Yet none knew better than he that it was the result of hard work and labour in London.

When he arrived in England in 1937 Mr. Lilburn went to the Royal College of Music. There he studied composition under Dr. Ralph Vaughan Williams and Dr. Morris, and orchestration with Dr. Jacob. It is from Vaughan Williams especially that Mr. Lilburn feels he has learned much. This doyen of English composers is, he thinks, "very human." "Vaughan Williams does not bother much with technical explanations," he told a *Listener* representative. "In fact he does not seem to be teaching much at all. But he has a few shrewd, sage comments to make, a few illustrations to give, and when you have finished the lesson and are thinking about it all afterwards, you find that he has really taught you a lot."

### Centennial Matinee in London

Mr. Lilburn flung himself into musical life at the College and outside—in the first year in London especially he went to dozens of concerts by the leading orchestras and conductors. Last year he gained the much-coveted Cobbett Prize for string quartets, one of the main composition prizes granted at the College.

One of Mr. Lilburn's overtures which has not been presented in this country yet is the one he wrote for the New Zealand Centennial matinee in London, at which world-famous New Zealanders entertained. Lilburn's work was conducted by the New Zealand musician,

Warwick Braithwaite, and played by the Sadlers Wells orchestra. The matinee was held in His Majesty's Theatre, was attended by the Duchess of Kent, and the proceeds went toward comforts for the New Zealand troops. Among those who participated were David Low, who did lightning sketches which were later sold at auction for considerable sums; Hugh Walpole, who gave an entertaining talk; the singers Hinemoa Rosieur and Dennis Dowling; and Ian Coster, a New Zealand colleague of Low's in Fleet Street. As Mr. Lilburn remarked, it was amazing what a wealth of New Zealand talent was to be found in London nowadays.

### Culture Coming Back

Speaking of the changing face of musical life in Great Britain since war began, Mr. Lilburn said that in the first two months of the fight, all cultural activities suffered an almost total eclipse; but since then they had been revived, and now music in particular was occupying a more prominent place in the national life than it had ever done before—and that notwithstanding the fact that the increasing threat of battle had caused many artists to go to the U.S.A. It is not only in London that this gradual renaissance of music had been taking place, but all over the countryside; and the revival was marked by many original features. For example, there were several good luncheon-hour concerts to be heard in London now, all of which had sprung up since Myra Hess inaugurated the now extremely popular mid-day concerts in the National Gallery, which were so packed that often there was standing room only.

The international opera at Covent Garden had folded up, of course, but that had not been an unmixed evil—for Sadlers Wells opera went from strength to strength and some excellent work was being done there. The Old Vic., temporarily eclipsed by war, had been reopened, and when Mr. Lilburn left London, John Gielgud was presenting a season of "King Lear."

### Music in the Provinces

Because of the war, music had also gone into the provinces, and there were several funds in operation to send the big orchestras into the countryside. The Philharmonic Orchestra had done much travelling and many parts of England had had the thrill of hearing this orchestra for the first time. Sir Henry Wood, said Mr. Lilburn, intends to start another of the by now almost legendary Prom seasons, "and nothing short of a direct hit on the Queen's Hall will stop him." There were also luncheon-hour concerts in factories, and even concerts for midnight shifts in factories.

### Birds For Company

There is a curious boom in London at present—a growing demand for talking parrots. A pathetic psychology underlies this latest craze. So many homes have been broken up—with their children evacuated—and their men away fighting. Even the voice of a parrot can bring life and sound back into a silent home.

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