

# BOMBED OUT THREE TIMES

*But Eileen Ralph, Visiting English Musician, Was Chiefly Concerned About Her Piano*

"I WAS sixteen when I left Perth to study in London at the Royal College of Music," said Mrs. Matthews.

Mrs. Matthews, the story of whose recent adventures in Hawaii appears elsewhere in this issue, was telling me something of her life in London, where, as Eileen Ralph, she became known as a pianist of outstanding talent.

"For the first three months my mother stayed with me, and before she left saw me settled with a respectable family in the suburbs. It happened to be too suburban for my liking, because I had to play in many night concerts, and I often found that by the time the concert was over my last train had gone. After that I got 'digs' in the West End (not nearly as expensive as it sounds, as I had only one room) and I managed to scrape along somehow.

"At this time I was studying with Eric Grant, who is now Director of Music at the Capetown Conservatorium. He and his wife were very good to me, and after I had been living in digs for six months they invited me to live with them. I stayed with them for five years."

## The Work of Myra Hess

Mrs. Matthews went on to speak of the part women are playing in the musical life of London. Chief among

them in her opinion, is Dame Myra Hess, who has been organising the series of mid-day concerts held in the National Gallery.

"She is easily the most inspiring woman in the musical world in London," said Mrs. Matthews. "She has a terrific platform personality. She is perhaps fifty, very short, but she has a beautiful head



EILEEN JOYCE  
"It's rather sad for her"

with a mass of black hair, and lovely brown eyes that are affectionate and humorous and understanding all at the same time. There are many young artists in England to whom she has played fairy godmother. Just before the war she had planned an American tour, but when war broke out she decided that her duty lay in England, and since then she has been doing all in her power to help music to survive the blitz and the blackout."

"Has there been an increase in the proportion of women in orchestras since the war?" I asked.

"There has been no change at all," said Mrs. Matthews. "The big orchestras, such as the London Philharmonic, have always been and will always be exclusively male. But there are some very fine women's orchestras. The Society of Women Musicians does a lot to promote women's interests in music, and Eda Kersey, who is in my opinion the best female violinist in London, has done a great deal to encourage the formation of women's orchestras."

## Eileen Joyce Carries On

"Did you see anything of Eileen Joyce when you were in London?"

"Yes. Of course I knew her before, when we were both children together in Perth. She's married now and has a baby. It's rather sad for her because her husband is in the navy, the baby is in the country with its nurse, and she herself is carrying on with her concert work in London. But in spite of her anxiety she retains the same marvellous vitality."

"I suppose you and your husband are now rather at a loss about your future plans?" I asked.

"Fortunately we have a tour of New Zealand arranged. It's a godsend to us, because it's saved us weeks of waiting. And we're fortunate to be able to practice at the NBS studios—I'm sure I'd never dare to lay hands upon a hotel piano."

## In The London Blitz

"Did the London blitz affect you very closely?"

"We were bombed out three times. When we were first married we had a flat just behind Madame Tussaud's. On this particular week-end my husband happened to be in Scotland. On the Saturday night I was having dinner in the flat with Nina Milkina (a young Russian pianist whom you will probably hear of in the future) when my husband rang from Scotland to suggest that I join him immediately. I had a concert on the following afternoon so I couldn't leave that night. I caught the midnight train for Scotland on Sunday night. At 3.30 a.m. on Monday a bomb struck Madame Tussaud's and demolished the flat. When I rang up the police on Monday to see if there was anything left, they told me I couldn't possibly investigate because a time bomb had landed immediately in front of the flat and I'd have to wait till it was disposed of. I was chiefly concerned about my piano, but Steinway's very altruistically replaced it for me. Unfortunately, I was never able to get the new one out of storage.

## Bombs Near The BBC

"Our next residence was a large house in Kensington which some friends lent us. We felt rather lonely in it, and it had no piano. We decided to stay with some friends for a week or so. The day we left it was completely cut in half. It looked most peculiar.

"After that we decided to go back to my husband's old rooms behind the BBC. The Germans were always making unsuccessful attempts to bomb the BBC. One evening at half-past ten there was a terrific explosion and we were thrown from one side of the room to the other. A piece of plaster hit my head, but that was the only damage we sustained. The furniture suffered rather more."

"Isn't being bombed out three times something of a record?"

"I don't really know. You see in London you don't tell your bombing stories because the next person has always a much more gruesome one. So I've really no standards of comparison."

## Ambulance Work Was Strenuous

"Were you doing any war work apart from your concerts?"

"I did ambulance driving for about a year. It was rather strenuous as we worked an eight-hour shift without a break. The day was divided into three shifts and we worked a week about on each shift. It meant that I was hardly able to sleep at all, and at the same time I was carrying on my concert work and looking after my flat and my



Spencer Digby photograph  
EILEEN RALPH  
(Mrs. Thomas Matthews)

husband. After a year I had to give up my ambulance work."

"Did you find food rationing make housekeeping much more difficult?"

"No, we got used to it. And there was always enough to eat, even if there wasn't so much meat, sugar, or butter. Actually the London people are looking marvellously fit and well in spite of war-time, and I think it's because they're eating less."

## Clothes in London

"Was clothes rationing more of an inconvenience?"

"It never worried me very much. I've never had time to be a fashion-plate—I've always spent my money on music and pianos, and never been really interested in clothes."

(For the reader's benefit I might add that when I saw her, Mrs. Matthews was wearing an extremely smart and carefully casual navy short-sleeved linen suit, a white silk shirt open at the neck, sheer nylon stockings, and toe-peeper court shoes. She is red-haired and very attractive.)

"But the women of London are managing very well on their sixty-six coupons a year. All the same it was lovely when we got to New York to see all the girls in exciting and colourful clothes. The tendency in England now is to buy clothes with lasting qualities, and it is quite a thrill in America to see the girls wearing gay things that you knew they'd have to wear only one season."

"When you were in the United States were the people expecting that they themselves might be involved?"

"Most of the Americans I met thought that America would enter the war sooner or later, but their recognition of this hadn't affected their daily lives. Apart from things like the 'Bundles for Britain' movement there were no preparations on the domestic front. And unless there has been feverish activity since we left, American cities requiring to be blacked-out will have to do what was done at Honolulu—switch off the power at the mains."

—M.I.

## Don't Lie To Your Children

MOTHERS are forever risking the loss of their youngsters' love and confidence with a host of dangerous prevarications. Are you guilty of any of these?

Promises you may not be able to keep: Do you remember those satin-lined leather manicure rolls filled with dozens of ornate instruments? The one I coveted at nine was pink and green. It was promised to me if I won a certain speaking contest. I worked hard and won the contest. But not the manicure set. After that experience I had no ears for "Yes, my darling daughter."

What are the odds against your keeping your promise? Better say, "Let me think it over." Then, if the final answer is no, explain why. If yes, add that some unforeseen event may keep you from fulfilling the child's request.

Threats you have no intention of carrying out: "If you're not a good boy we'll send the train back to Santa Claus." We won't do that, because there isn't any Santa Claus, and if there were, we would scarcely part with an expensive toy just to enforce obedience.

—Marjorie Mighell