

SOME RECENT MUSIC

No. 8: By MARSYAS

HOW often does the New Zealand listener get the chance to make up his own mind about a new piece of music? Not very often. Yet that's one of the most important things about hearing music—to be able to put your own value on it, going only by what you've heard in it. It's hard in New Zealand, because the more striking a new composition is, the more there is written about it when it is first heard in London or New York; and by the time recordings (or score-and-parts), reach this country, something like a cross-section of reliable opinion is already available, and people like myself who are greedy for news of music find it impossible to approach a new work in a purely personal and unintellectual way. It is already weighed and measured and ticketed, and has been allotted its pigeon-hole. Thus the first reception of a new work of art here is in direct contradiction to the conditions that attended the births of the greatest works we know.

EVEN if you don't seek out advance news, you can't put your critical faculties to the test, because when you are to hear a big new "Symphony for Chorus, Orchestra and Wind-Machine" by that great contrapuntist H. Inglesius Borogrove, first you will be told that in the year of its composition the composer was on a fishing trip to the Sea of Marmora in order to escape from his mother-in-law, to whom he owed 1,600 guilders; that his father had recently died and bequeathed to the composer one-third of his stock of linen shirts; that the composer was wildly in love with a Balinese dancer at the time, but in spite of all these worries, he had managed to write a piece of music that was full of gay frivolity. If he had an unsavoury disease, it will go by some other name, as for instance "deafness," or "terrible sufferings." And finally, you might be told what that great critic Dr. Hugo Speisenkammer wrote about the *Symphony* in the June issue of the "Neue Zeitschrift für Musik" in 1931. Well, after that, you've obviously got no show of making up your own mind, because all that you have just been told clearly defines the substance of the music for you.

SO it was good to hear some new music by Douglas Lilburn, relayed from the Christchurch Cathedral by 3YA, with nothing more fearsome than prayers before it and a sermon afterwards. The Canticles (Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis, plus Gloria), are impassioned, but nobly dignified, stylised but sincere. Brevity is their most salient feature; they are mere fragments, in terms of staves and barlines. Mr. Lilburn realises that to speak briefly is not to reveal that you have nothing to say, and that to work humbly is not to be humiliated.

NOTICE that for a certain seven minutes last Tuesday, Dunedin listeners had the choice of only one composer from their National stations—Arthur Bliss. Obviously someone's right hand was ignorant of what his left hand was doing. Ignorance's Bliss?

THE Christchurch Ladies' Choir (which must have got bashful about its old German name), who to sing over 3YA this week, I notice, a programme of Edward German, Frank Bridge, Walford Davies, Bainton, Boyce and Mackenzie. I've nothing against any of these composers except that they're not even stimulating enough to arouse my dislike (though I know little of Boyce).

What a pity the ladies' choirs can't get on to something a bit more virile. And I'm not complaining of ladylike singing when I use the word "virile"; women's voices can sound robust; it's the choice of music that puts them wrong. There are lots of invigorating Elizabethan "canzonets, or little short airs of three voyces" which would sound well, sung as written, for S.S.A., or S.A.A. While all the tenors and basses are away at the war, some of these things should be raked out. That would eliminate the business of transposing music that was intended for mixed voices. But I know what the choral libraries are like in New Zealand, and I don't want to blame the present members of choirs and societies for the poverty of their inheritance. I am really grateful that they sing to us at all.

I HEARD a soprano called Anna Case the other day. She rolled all her r's till they sounded like a stick being pulled along a tin fence; "Angels everrrr brrrright and fairrrr, take me to yourrrr cairrr." So I looked her up, and found that she was born in New Jersey in 1889. After giving a couple of details, the biography adds naively: "She married Clarence H. Mackay and retired." That's what I call tact, and you'll find it in encyclopædias, but music critics don't cultivate it!

THE other week I was talking about the very knotty problem of "arranging" in respect of J. S. Bach. Since then 1YX scheduled the Lener Quartet playing Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*, and a new aspect of the question occurs to me. Beethoven's friends persuaded him not to leave this movement attached to his late B Flat quartet as a finale, but to publish it as a separate work, because it was "difficult."

They did not, to my knowledge, go so far as to advise him to re-write it, or not to publish it; but since that time musicians whose judgment we can trust have gone almost as far. They question whether the *Grosse Fuge* should be played as written. Obviously Beethoven did intend it so; there can be no argu-

ment, as there has been over Bach's *Art of Fugue*, as to whether it was a theoretical treatise intended for perusal rather than for performance.

Yet he has a strange ear who will contend that the *Grosse Fuge* makes beautiful sound. Sir Donald Tovey suggested that it should be played by a string orchestra rather than by a quartet, and I have a feeling that he actually did this at his Edinburgh concerts. At any rate it is certain that it should be listened to with reservations if it is played as written; so anyone who was puzzled when it came over 1YX might be comforted to know this.

IS it an act of treason to listen to music from Berlin? Somehow I think it must be, because I was well punished for doing so. Late at night I heard a Mozart symphony, then a Schubert song with orchestra. Then we started on the third Leonora overture of Beethoven. I was furtively enjoying this grand concert when suddenly there came a voice—patronising and disgusting: "Deutscher Kurzwellessender, Berlin." I got annoyed on two recent occasions when my music was burst open by the crashing of the nine o'clock chimes on a local station. But New Zealand has nothing to compare with the wantonness of this Nazi.

What do I do . . .

... to help our
Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen?

Whenever I can, I offer the hospitality of my home to a man in uniform who is on leave in my town or city.

I collect interesting periodicals and books (not unwanted rubbish) and parcel them up for camps and air stations.

I do not ask questions about military and shipping movements.

When entertaining a man in uniform, I remember that sobriety is a military virtue. I remember that our fighting forces and the men of the merchant marine deserve the best of enjoyment and relaxation; but I realise that the liberty to enjoy imposes the necessity for reasonable restraint.

I "hold fast to liberty" by holding fast to moderation in all things.

An announcement issued in the Nation's interests by the National Council of the Licensed Trade of New Zealand.