

SOME RECENT MUSIC

No. 15: By MARSYAS

THE NBS Orchestra has completed another tour of the Dominion. I say "another" because it was virtually the same combination that toured New Zealand during the Centennial celebrations, and it is the first time in two years that radio licence holders in all four centres have had the chance to see and hear the orchestra they support. But during this tour, although a deal of jolly music was played, I should have liked to hear more work by New Zealand composers. Readers of *The Listener* will remember that Andersen Tyrer, the conductor of the NBS Orchestra, recently defended his programme notes for Vaughan Williams's *London Symphony* by saying that they were acceptable to a Queen's Hall audience in London. Well, Douglas Lilburn's Concert Overture (which has now, I am glad to say, been played twice at 1YA) was employed to open a matinee at which famous New Zealanders like David Low, Hugh Walpole, Ian Coster, and the conductor Warwick Braithwaite celebrated the Centennial. It was also broadcast recently by the BBC. Without questioning whether these facts indicate that such things would be "acceptable" here, I would ask, are they not even of interest?

LISTENING to Australia can be well rewarded. The other night, for example, I heard a session by Neville Cardus, formerly music critic (I nearly wrote cricket) to the *Manchester Guardian*. Mr. Cardus discussed Delius, whose music he called "an acquired taste," and he suggested that Delius's reputation had been not well served by the photographs, which show him as a blind old man. "He was once handsome, tall, vital," said Mr. Cardus, who applied Nietzsche's term: "One of the great despisers."

I MUST confess that I rarely listen to the 3YA orchestra, but only because I never get any further than looking at the programmes. Looking back over my pile of *Listeners*, a list taken from the last few months' programmes of the 3YA orchestra resembles a roster of the Innocents of the Nineteenth Century. What could be more innocuous than Lortzing, Rubinstein, Luigini, Poldini, Drigo, Chaminade, and the rest? But I wish I had noticed at the time that they also did a Haydn symphony, and the Handel-Beecham *Gods go a-begging*; especially since I heard them play the Holst *St. Paul's* suite the other night and it was magnificent. In the middle I forgot it was the 3YA orchestra, and found myself thinking only of the music before I pinched myself to remind me to listen for the playing. The strings were together and the intonation was

satisfying. It sounded as if the 3YA strings had been playing *St. Paul's* regularly for weeks.

A PROGRAMME I wish I'd heard was that given over 2YA by Lionel Harris and Dawn Hunt. "Music from the Bach Cantatas"; a good idea, and I hope there will be more raids on this inexhaustible store of great music.

TWO works by the contemporary Frenchman, Jacques Ibert, were on in the one week: *Concertino da Camera* for Saxophone (2YC) and *Divertissement* (4YA). I've seldom heard such rubbish called serious music, and I took care not to listen long to either of them. In the one, wanton dissonance with no content to justify it; in the other, plain proof of the dangers of pastiche when laid on by any but the most expert hands.

IF you are fond of the music of Vaughan Williams, but can't imagine him writing film-music, then go to 49th Parallel and hear a most effective score. The man who wrote the music for this film was no "cow staring over a gate" as some smart young man tried to describe Vaughan Williams. There is a "marching" piece that recurs each time the Nazis are shown setting out on another leg of their journey, and it contains sublime comment on the spectacle and all it means. The overture is not the usual bustling stuff but mostly surge, and rich sound. Listen for something rather exciting during the first shot of the film proper, just after the titles finish. The surface of the sea breaks, and U37 appears: what does the composer do? He brings in *Ein Feste Burg*, Martin Luther's great hymn, and it is a splendid, awesome moment in the music — though there's not much about the conning tower of an emerging submarine that suggests "A stronghold sure," when you know of its impending fate.

JUDAS MACCABAEUS (Handel), as done by the Christchurch Harmonic Society, was well worth hearing. It's a marvellous work, rich in what are known as "popular numbers." Apart from *See, the Conquering Hero Comes*, it contains the duet *Oh Lovely Peace* and the airs *Sound an Alarm* and *Arm, Arm, Ye Brave*. All of it is Handel's most fiercely passionate music. The choruses are burning, the duets melting. And this performance was excellent; no hanging about with the recitatives, not even an interval, so that what could have seemed like a concert sounded like a composition, and that's what it should do. The tenor's bold blatancy served him well in some of his airs; and the bass had a remarkable proficiency in rapid runs — you heard every semiquaver. The soprano and the duettists, too, seemed to have been well chosen. But must all lutes be sung as *lyewts*? And pardon my ignorance, does an organ have to die away like the bagpipes? I seem to have heard some organs stop instantly at the end of a quick piece.

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