

## RECENT MUSIC

No. 17: By Marsyas

MY plea for some more New Zealand music was answered almost before it appeared in print; on two consecutive nights music by New Zealanders was heard from 2YA and 1YA. At 2YA the NBS Orchestra, conducted by Andersen Tyrer, put on about forty minutes or more of pieces by four of our own musicians, and at 1YA the studio orchestra (Thomas Matthews conducting) played a new *Allegro for Strings* by Douglas Lilburn.

The Wellington programme opened with a tone poem by R. A. Horne, entitled "Aotearoa." The fastidious, noticing its name, might have found it both long and cloudy, but it's "popular music," and light. A short introduction leads to an oboe solo (the strings nearly drowned it); a lyrical but uneventful theme is worked up in the Gershwin manner—a little louder each time; a fresh start, and there is what was called in silent-film days "hurry music," with an ostinato in the violins; another slow part and then a new fresh start in jagged rhythms, brass chords staccato; another opening, slow again, with the ostinato transferred to the basses. It all sounded a bit loose, and even this sort of music must pay as much attention to form as more serious music. It has the sound of Eric Coates's scoring, but not the continuity. Still, it has plenty of lyrical feeling, of the Alfred Hill variety, and lyricism of any sort is an answer to some of the desiccated "moderns" of the 'twenties.

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ALAN HEATHCOTE WHITE'S *New Zealand Symphony*, of which we heard only the first movement, is a composition with different aims. After a bold introduction in symphonic style, the composer begins to consider various aspects of symphonic procedure. The first few pages could be New Zealand music right enough; the rest are Viennese. Mr. White has chosen excellent models for his youthful work. He is still hearing in his head the sounds that go on in the orchestra of Beethoven's *Eroica* days, and he couldn't do better in the meantime. His problem will be to discover how he may use them in his own New Zealand way. At present he can use classical procedure with aptitude but not aptness. His scoring sounded clear in the first movement of *New Zealand Symphony* though there was some gauche "gobbling" for the clarinet. It would be interesting to hear some essays in the smaller forms by this composer before he tackles the monumental dimensions of the symphony again.

If there are three more movements of *New Zealand Symphony* they should have been played. It is not an honour for a New Zealand composer to be performed by a publicly supported orchestra; he has the right to expect the help

it can give him. To play only one movement of a symphony looks like condescension, apart from the aesthetic aspect.

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H. TEMPLE WHITE'S songs are sympathetic settings of poems by Rosa E. Knight, of Wellington. It is good to see a musician turning to a compatriot for verse to set; it doesn't constitute provincialism. "Lullaby of Roses" is dainty; "The Butterfly and the Violet," is a contrast — the music brings a poignant "good-bye" to a sonorous climax: a sturdy ballad entitled "The Leafy Glades of England," sings (in the style of whoever wrote "The Fisherman of England") of the England we know from the illustrated calendars. I think that in New Zealand this particular nostalgia is capable of creating a sort of negative polarity between artist and audience. Songs about the New Zealand we know from the coloured Christmas annuals might find more hearts, even in wartime.

Myra Sawyer sang with feeling, and the composer accompanied her. The accompaniment in each case was as much in the spirit of the poem as the vocal line. The effectiveness of naive pianistic illustration (at words like "sailing through" and "cascades") has never been disproved since Elizabethan days.

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THERE is no discredit to the other three composers when I say that it sounded like arriving somewhere when Douglas Lilburn's *Festival* overture began. They would be the first to agree that Mr. Lilburn is a more developed and experienced composer. Mr. Tyrer acknowledged this by placing the overture last on the programme. It was last heard during the Centennial when it won second prize in the musical contests (the same composer's *Drysdale* overture came first) and I recall how the rugged strength of its opening impressed me then. On a second hearing, the overture sustained that strength, and throughout its duration.

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AN organ recital by Dr. J. C. Bradshaw (from 3YA) demonstrated that in skilled hands the instrument can make a great deal out of such music as the Largo from Dvorak's *New World Symphony*. Where the original possesses a more resplendent instrumentation, the result of the transcription might not be so happy, but in this instance the effect was to produce something that "sounded" better than the Bach prelude (*The Great*, so called) that preceded it. So much of Bach is too thick and full-sounding, on the organ, to be comfortably squeezed through the narrow spaces which microphone and loud-speaker provide. The prelude was preceded by an explanation which many listeners must have found distasteful; it was explained in the text-book terms of "A, B, A." If "A, B, A" is all there is in a piece, then it's not worth playing. If there is something more in it, then it should be possible to grasp it or else have it explained to you without this "A, B, A" stuff.



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