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# MAKING MUSIC WHILE MAKING WAR

## Effects On New Zealand Amateur Societies

**T**HREE and a-half years of making war would not be likely to pass without in some way disturbing the making of music in New Zealand, but from answers obtained from musicians, conductors, and secretaries in four cities. *The Listener* has found that the total effect of the war on amateur musical societies is in no two places exactly the same, and that it is often just the reverse of what one would expect.

The plans and expectations of a music-performing group can be upset by the slightest disturbance to the list of members. Successive manpower ballots may remove the mainstays in the tenor section and leave the basses untouched; the call to essential work may remove the only contralto capable of taking the solo part in the new work that was projected for the next concert; orchestral societies, such as they were, have suffered more noticeably than choral groups, because women have a preference for string instruments and wind instrument players were few enough, anyway, before the war drew them into the armed forces, or into essential work which gave them less spare time, or into E.P.S. units which happened to meet on the same night as the rehearsals were held.

So the Auckland Symphony Orchestra, the Wellington Symphony Orchestra and the Christchurch Laurian Club (a string orchestra), have gone into recess; male choirs here and there have submerged their identity meanwhile in the tenor and bass sections of larger (and therefore more stable), choral groups, and generally speaking, the year's range of concerts in any one centre is not what it was.

### Some Exceptions

Yet there are exceptions to the general trend of recession. When *The Messiah* was performed in Christchurch before Christmas and broadcast, it was proudly announced that 40 men were taking part. The Auckland String Players are still functioning, the Wellington Choral Society has (according to the secretary), more tenors, and fuller audiences, than it had in the last war, and the Christchurch Savage Club has the biggest orchestra it has had for years.

Starting in the north, we sought a few general observations on the effects of the war on amateur music-making of all kinds. The Auckland Symphony Orchestra has gone into recess. "Of necessity," said the conductor, Colin Muston, who added that the string players have been kept in training against the day when the war is over.

The chief trouble has been lack of brass players and comparative lack of woodwind players, brass playing not being a woman's occupation. "No, not so much too spitty as too heavy," said Mr. Muston. "The physical strain is too great on a woman."

### Good for Teachers

In various parts of the North Island the British Music Society works to propagate the love of good music, and its organiser, Valerie Corliss, told us that the society itself has suffered no

numerical losses in membership, and it was possible to say that among the many teachers who are in touch with the society, there is a definite increase in the amount of teaching done. Adult pupils in particular seem to have grown in numbers, and teachers everywhere (Miss Corliss said), declare that war conditions have driven many people to take up the piano, or singing, who might never have done so otherwise.

"Perhaps they find that music gives them relief from their strenuous occupations without requiring the physical energy of their peacetime recreations," she suggested. "In the country, petrol restrictions have had the effect of making people co-operate in their rural centres towards their recreation more than in peacetime."

In Wellington itself the B.M.S. operates a song group, a pianoforte group, and a string group, which were all meeting regularly (until the string group was forced into recess), giving varied programmes, including talks and occasionally compositions by the society's members.

The Wellington Choral Society finds that the effects of the war have not been as they were expected to be. Older members have returned to the ranks to fill gaps, and the secretary (Mr. W. E. Caldwell), told *The Listener* that audiences seemed better than they were in the last war, when the heavier casualties kept people away from entertainments.

A Christchurch singing teacher and conductor, Len Barnes, was able to confirm what Miss Corliss told us about teachers—"Queer thing," he said, "but the only ones who've got no grouse are the teachers. Not so much that there are fewer of them to do the same work, but there are actually more people wanting to be taught."

Two male choirs still function in Christchurch (or did until the end of last season), and the Royal Christchurch Musical Society and the Christchurch Harmonic Society showed no signs of going under.

From Dunedin the only information we obtained was that the Dunedin Choral Society had gone into recess for the duration.

### Stocks of Printed Music

The supplies and sales of music were points on which we questioned a man in the music trade. It was quite true, he said, that war conditions turned the adult population towards good music. This had been known in England for some months, and one interesting development there was the enormous demand for miniature scores, with which men and women of all kinds (according to a big London publishing and retail house), were increasing the usefulness of their gramophone records—perhaps, during blackouts. But he deplored the quality of much of the imported music which, he said, if expressed in another medium—in words or films—would never pass the censor.