

# MUSIC BY A NEW ZEALANDER:

"If He Can Do This Already, What May He Not Do In Time?"

A RECITAL of music by Douglas Lilburn was given in Christchurch two weeks ago and broadcast by Station 3YA, so that the radio audience and a large and enthusiastic local audience had a good opportunity to hear what this young New Zealander is doing with the stuff of music. For one of those present, it was a change from straining an ear at the loudspeaker on Empire Day to hear the BBC Scottish Orchestra play the *Concert Overture* in the Pacific Service, or from trying to filter through all the atmospheric of the broadcast-band the sound of the ABC Symphony playing the *Allegro for Strings* from Sydney. One simply walked into the College Hall at Canterbury University College without paying a penny, and sat down under the gaze of Captain Cook, Samuel Marsden, Lord Rutherford and many other stained-glass heroes, and shortly a string orchestra assembled itself on the stage, and Mr. Lilburn came out to conduct it through his first one-man show.

FIRST there was the *Allegro for Strings*, a single movement in something like the symphonic manner; with its exhilarating rush of ideas it comes to the ears of a New Zealander as the fresh air of the Southern Alps might come to his lungs. To hear the opening bars of the *Allegro* cleanly played is like opening your eyes for the first time on some challenging valley in the ranges; as the work goes on, you may, if you wish, remember that the mysterious hollows of the New Zealand bush or the glimpses of wild beauty that appear unexpectedly through clearings in the beech forest have made you feel like this before. All through, there are things to make you wonder: if he can do this already, what may he not do in time?

FROM a work that rose to the surface of a composer's well of ideas by its own buoyancy and in its own time, we came to something that was drawn up by order, its pattern roughly defined in advance—"Landfall in Unknown Seas" being a poem by Allen Curnow, written for the Tasman Tercentennial Celebrations last December, for which Mr. Lilburn provided four incidental pieces for strings. As a work for an occasion it is truly remarkable, when we think of the great ugly graveyard of such things. There must be nearly as many dead husks of music in this category as there are ugly tombstones in Karori, but what spontaneous inspiration could produce anything more fresh and adventurous than the bold tune that opens the first Tasman piece?—Mr. Lilburn's way of saying "On a fine morning, the best time of year." And the tentative mood of the second, with its moments of tremulous excitement, suggests that the composer got the poetry of Tasman's adventure right into his blood and then put down its music as if he himself had been among those first ones who saw "Peak and pillar of cloud—O splendour of Desolation." I have the same feeling about the awestruck hush of the third, which dwells on the horror of the "clash of boats in the bay." But the last piece still seems (as it did at the first hearing

last December), to leave something undone. Mr. Lilburn never relies on mere *entrain* to make a finale go, but I suspect it is more than merely the rhythmic aspect that keeps checking the course of this finale. Has he, in his care to avoid (on the poet's advice), "the self-important celebration," taken too literally the entreaty to substitute "the half-light of a diffident glory?" The last word is the hardest one to have, and I have yet to hear a finale by Douglas Lilburn that sings of what has gone before as his overtures and allegros sing of what is to come.

THE *Five Bagatelles for Piano*, though excellently played by Noel Newson, had to withstand direct comparison with the best work of one who is primarily an orchestral composer. Mr. Lilburn seems to think naturally and continually in terms of the orchestra—that is why his music, whether for strings only or the full band, never sounds "orchestrated," however clever its use of the instruments may be at chosen moments. And for me the most pleasing moments in the *Bagatelles* are those when he seems to have forgotten his piano, and one hears vestiges of his now familiar orchestral style.

TO describe the new *Sinfonia in D* with which the programme ended is very hard. After one hearing, I confess that the impressions that remain are almost crowded out by interfering memories of the more familiar *Allegro* and the Tasman music, and some of the overtures. The first movement seemed packed with ideas, and tuneful ones; its slow movement, in six-eight time, put away any notions of promising to be a gentle barcarolle by rising through a mood of tension to a gripping climax. The last movement came nearer than its counterparts in the Tasman music and the violin sonata to being what I, with my convention-spoiled expectations, have come to demand of a finale. But I shall not be surprised if, in time, I find that this was the best music of the whole programme.

WE know now that Mr. Lilburn's music continues to be the clean, new-growth, in that healthy condition that will keep anyone up to the mark who sets out to write New Zealand music—particularly Mr. Lilburn himself, who has something to live up to now. In the Tasman poem, Mr. Curnow asks:

But now there are no more islands to be found. . . .

Who navigates us towards what unknown

But not improbable provinces?

There seems to me no doubt that Mr. Lilburn is one of the new discoverers.

Those who made possible such a concert are to be congratulated—the Association of Registered Music Teachers arranged it, and the NBS provided the 3YA strings, with adequate rehearsals. One hopes there will be more such ventures.

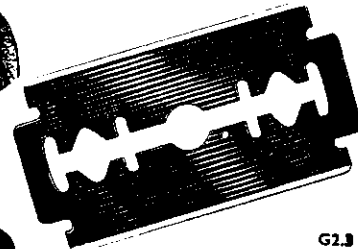
—MARSYAS



Paratrooper

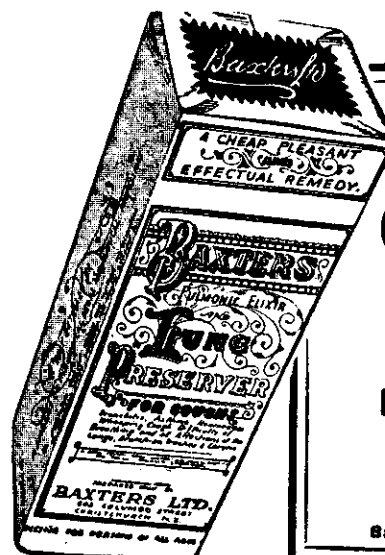
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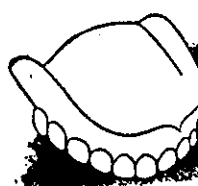
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