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A Concert for the Queen

ON January 26 the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, then in the last week of their New Zealand tour, attended a Royal Concert in Dunedin. At the end of the broadcast the announcer described the concert as "memorable," and he could not have used a better word. For those present, of course, it was more than a musical event; and they, the fortunate ones, will remember what was seen as well as heard. Yet people who listened to the broadcast gained more than might have been expected. Music, it is true, transmits its own emotion; but it can be subtly affected by the conditions under which it is played. The programme had been planned in such a way that music and occasion were brought close together, and became a single and moving experience. Some items were chosen because, in dedication or performance, they had been linked to the Royal Family. Others evoked the freshness of youth and the ceremonial mood. And the Liszt Concerto in E Flat, played brilliantly by Richard Farrell, had an appropriate and sparkling joyfulness.

The concert was the first of its kind offered to a reigning sovereign, and this alone would have made it memorable. But it was also a demonstration of maturity in art. The National Orchestra could have handled a much more difficult programme, and Richard Farrell's talent would not be at full stretch in a Liszt concerto; but there was no need for virtuosity. What was important was the fact that New Zealand had the orchestra and the soloists for a great occasion. The orchestra was not alone in showing what advances have been made in the musical life of this country. The singing of the girls' choir will be remembered with delight by all who heard it. And it was fitting that this beautiful performance should have been

given in Dunedin, a city where pioneer work of much value has been done in school music.

New Zealand has only a modest place in music, and must not look for anything else until the effects of isolation are no longer felt in the arts. These difficulties are already less formidable than they used to be. Some of our musicians are heard on concert platforms in London, and one or two composers are being noticed overseas. But music has values which have nothing to do with outside recognition. It is played and heard for its own sake; and nowadays, under the influence of the National Orchestra, it is being played and heard with new standards of performance and appreciation. And the interesting fact, not sufficiently understood by visiting critics, is that music in New Zealand is growing from a colonial tradition which has left no wide cleavage between performers and audience.

In earlier days, when broadcasting and air travel were unknown, music was above all else a family enterprise. There were orchestras and choirs, and sometimes concerts by famous artists; but the stronghold of music was in the home. The influence persists. Mr. Arthur Jacobs, who was sparing in praise when he passed through the country last year, was impressed by the strength of the chamber music movement and the Schola Cantorum. It would be strange indeed if music intended for intimate performance had lost its appeal, or if choral work were not among the best features of our musical life. These activities are rooted in a society which for many years had to make its own music, and they are being strengthened today by training in the schools. Music in New Zealand, like all the arts, is young; but it lives among the people, its true custodians. Those who heard the Royal Concert will have little doubt that its future is secure.

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 12, 1954.