

"EXTREMISTS WILL SHRIEK"

"**W**HATEVER one does about programme planning, the extremists will shriek; it must be realised that there are always people who want to listen *only* to Hindemith, Schoenberg and Stravinsky, but we must be sensible about these things. The orchestra that caters only for the extremes in musical tastes will soon find itself playing in empty or near empty halls." James Robertson, the new conductor of the National Orchestra, expressed this view to *The Listener* in Auckland soon after his arrival from Britain.

"The bulk of each programme has to be music that one knows is good and great—established music. Nevertheless, in nearly every programme there should

be something unfamiliar, of the sort that can be enjoyed. I am not in favour of mere note-spinning." Mr. Robertson said. "Within that scheme I hope to provide as much variety as possible, to please audiences as much as possible, and perhaps to educate a little, too."

Within an hour or so of landing in this country Mr. Robertson was able to hear the orchestra giving a public concert—its final one in Auckland under the baton of Warwick Braithwaite—and, he said, he was most favourably impressed. Encouraging reports he had heard in England after accepting the post had been fully confirmed. Before that Mr. Robertson did not know very much about either this country or the orchestra. "But I am something of an adventurer, and it seemed a marvellous opportunity to come to a new and

lovely part of the world. It was a great attraction to have an orchestra which serves a whole Dominion. In London there are a lot of orchestras, all trying to do the same things—too many of them, perhaps. Then, too, I felt I had been in my previous post long enough. After eight years at Sadler's Wells, where my main concern was opera, I needed a change, and felt it time to devote myself fully to a symphony orchestra."

Mr. Robertson is accompanied by his wife, June, and their son, Duncan John. They plan to establish a home in Wellington. The family have been living in a Georgian house of about 150 years old, in Islington, London. "There were five floors and 70 steps, but only two rooms to a floor, and a long narrow garden running out like a skittle alley from the back," Mrs. Robertson says. "We used the stairs to teach the little boy to count, but it will be a joy to be without them."

In addition to his work as Director of Opera at Sadler's Wells, where he has been conducting about 100 performances a year, Mr. Robertson has been doing a good deal of other conducting, both orchestral and choral, as well as broadcasting and lecturing. Mr. Robertson did not expect to undertake many activities here apart from his work with the orchestra. "Generally speaking," he said, "conducting an orchestra such as yours is quite an onerous task, however enjoyable, and the number of other things one can do is strictly limited. Every hour one spends on such things as lecturing, or writing, even if one is



JAMES ROBERTSON

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talking or writing about music, is an hour lost to actually making music."

Mr. Robertson has studied conducting in Leipzig under Herman Abendreth, and at the Royal College of Music with Constant Lambert. At the College he took composition with C. H. Kitson and Gordon Jacob, and piano with Herbert Fryer. He has served on the musical staff of the Glyndebourne Opera, and has been accompanist, conductor and chorus master with the Carl Rosa (Touring) Opera Company. Before the war he was conducting an orchestra for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

"**N**EW ZEALAND'S sons and daughters overseas are her excellent ambassadors," said the Minister in Charge of Broadcasting, the Hon. R. M. Algie, on the eve of last week's National Orchestra concert in Wellington. "Of this group, Warwick Braithwaite, who has been guest conductor of the National Orchestra of the New Zealand Broadcasting Service during the past two seasons, is a distinguished member. In opera, ballet, and symphonic music he has for years been among the foremost British conductors."

"Warwick Braithwaite's acceptance of the position of Guest Conductor of the National Orchestra for 1953 and his agreement to carry on during the Royal Tour and this further season have put us all deeply in his debt. Now his musicianship and experience are to reinforce the pioneering efforts of the National Opera Company of Australia, with whom he takes up the appointment of Artistic Director in September. During his two seasons in New Zealand, the National Orchestra has reached high levels in musicianship, and has won an increasing number of friends, and this is attributable to Warwick Braithwaite's wise and efficient guidance. On behalf of the Government, I wish to thank Mr. Braithwaite for his services to the Orchestra and the New Zealand concert-going public, and to wish him well in his association with the National Opera Company of Australia."

THREE MEN OF MUSIC

IF it's love that makes the world go round, you can still get round the world very successfully on music—as the Alma Trio, now touring New Zealand, has proved. The Trio comes from San Francisco, but only Maurice Wilk, their violinist, is an American. "I was actually born in New York," he says, "and that makes me rather a rare bird." Adolf Baller, the Trio's pianist, is

Polish, but received his musical education in Vienna, where he made his debut at eight as soloist with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1938, after establishing an excellent reputation on the Continent, he arrived in the United States to become Yehudi Menuhin's accompanist in sonata recitals. Since 1944, when the Alma Trio was formed, he has divided his activities between re-

citals with both the Trio and Yehudi Menuhin, and teaching at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

New Zealanders can regard Gabor Rejto, the brilliant 'cellist, as an old friend. Last year he toured this country with Yaltah Menuhin, giving sonata recitals which were widely appreciated. In an interview recorded in San Francisco before the Trio left Mr. Rejto said he greatly admired New Zealand's chamber music movement, manifested as it was not only in the main centres but in towns "like Timaru," with a relatively small population.

Mr. Rejto is Hungarian by birth and graduated with honours from the Royal Academy at Budapest. Unlike Maurice Wilk, who took up his instrument at four, Gabor Rejto began to play the 'cello at nine, "because, you know, the 'cello is a pretty big instrument for a small boy to handle." After study with the renowned Casals and extensive concert-giving in Europe, Rejto and his Domenica Monagnana 'cello migrated to the United States in 1939.

In the summer of 1944 Rejto, Baller and Roman Totenberg, the violinist, were staying at Yehudi Menuhin's Californian estate of Alma when they thought of forming a permanent group. What

could be more natural than that the Trio should adopt the name of the place where it had come into being? Since those first concerts on the West Coast they have toured all over the United States.

Last year Maurice Wilk succeeded Roman Totenberg as violinist. His first professional appearance had been at fourteen, as soloist in a Bach Concerto with the Mutual Broadcasting System Orchestra. Later he was associated with Toscanini in the NBC Symphony and with the Stuyvesant Quartet. He then became concert-master of the Brooklyn Symphony under Sir Thomas Beecham and, during the war, of the Army Air Force Radio Orchestra. After the war he toured Europe and the important cities of the United States.

The Alma Trio are giving concerts here for the New Zealand Federation of Chamber Music Societies in association with the NZBS. Highlights of the tour should be performances of the Beethoven Triple Concerto in Christchurch on September 11, and the Brahms Double Concerto in Dunedin on September 14, both with the National Orchestra. The Trio will also visit Gisborne, Hastings, New Plymouth, Hamilton, Auckland, Wellington, Nelson, Timaru and Invercargill. Radio listeners will be able to hear, in the first part of the tour, broadcasts from 2XG on Monday, August 30, 2YC on Tuesday, August 31, 2XP on September 2, 1XH on Friday, September 3, and all YC stations on Saturday, September 4.

The Alma Trio's programmes will include, besides music by Mozart, Schubert, Bach, Brahms and Beethoven, comparative novelties in a 'cello sonata by the modern Rumanian Martinu, the Ravel Trio in A Minor and Bartok's First Sonata for Violin and Piano.



THE ALMA TRIO, left to right: Maurice Wilk (violin), Adolf Baller (piano), and Gabor Rejto (cello)