PIKI HAERE

PIKI HAERE is a school motto. It is also a school song with a difference. *Piki Haere* started in Waipiro Bay, and it is an ideal that seems to be flourishing today in Wainui-o-Mata.

A week or two ago there was a brief note in the Wellington papers about a new orchestra at Wainui-o-Mata, nothing splendid you understand, no symphonic glamour, but an orchestra giving its first concert. An orchestra which had started in the school, the primary school; and now the parents were playing, too. The Home and School Association had its music. Everyone was turning out for the first concert. Nothing splendid, you understand or highbrow, or "cultural." Just an orchestra, or two orchestras rather—the children, some parents, and anyone willing to tackle an instrument: music at Wainui-o-Mata.

Wainui-o-Mata lies over the hills from the Hutt Valley, seventeen miles or so from Wellington. It sounds a comfortable sort of place, a rash of new houses and trim streets in a snug valley. The road to Wainui-o-Mata is a gash on the side of a hill, a not quite straight line between two points—the Hutt Valley and what happens on the other side. Motorists from Wellington look at the road and shudder, but the people of Wainui-o-Mata take this hazard lightly. After all, forty or more buses make the trip every day.

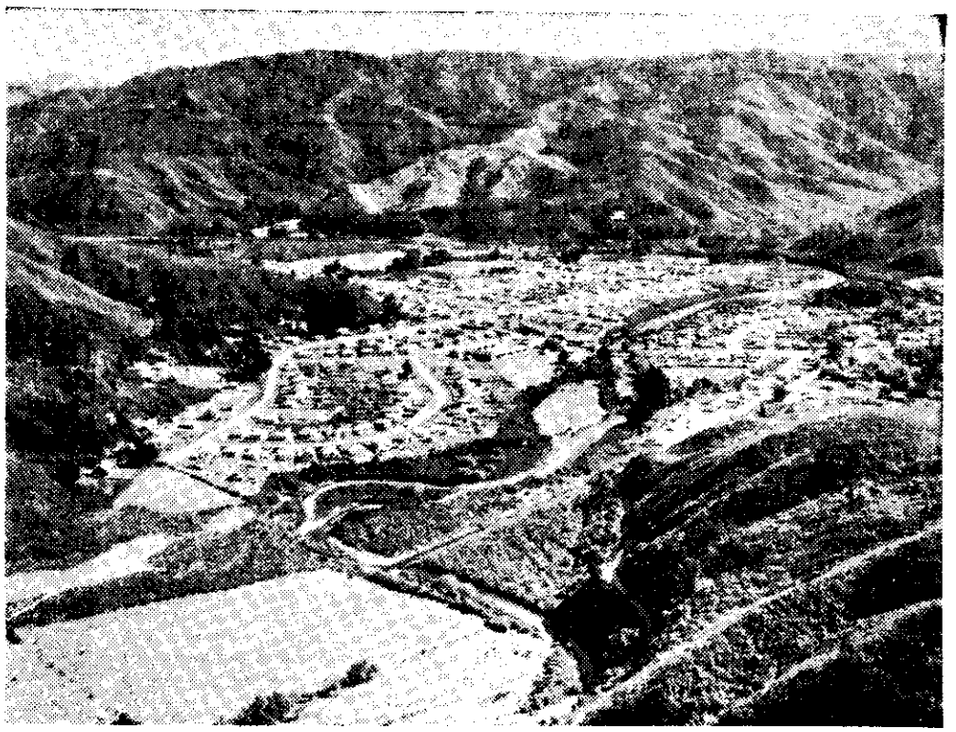
Every morning between six and eight of the clock, these buses climb over hill, down to the Hutt Valley and into Wellington. Wainui-o-Mata becomes a woman's world except for a handful of shopkeepers and the School. From about five in the evening onwards, the buses creep back Wainui-o-Mata is itself again—men, women and children, who have learned to make something of leisure. Part of the leisure is the orchestra.

There was no splash about the orchestra, and it might just have gone along quietly, or fizzled out, according to which way the wind blew, like so many other modest beginnings. But the headmaster of Wainui-o-Mata School is Mr. E. G. Anderson. It seems he started all this orchestral enthusiasm; and if it were Gordon Anderson whom I met some years ago, then this was no flash in the pan. It was Gordon Anderson and this is his story.

Mind you, this is only my version. I wish Gordon Anderson could tell you the story himself for enthusiasm at second-hand is a bit like home-brew with the cork blown out. But then, says Gordon Anderson (s-o-n not -en; from Aberdeen, you see), there's really nothing to tell. "I'm just a bit of a crank about music," he says, "I believe the best way to learn about music is to write it; and the best way to enjoy it is to play it on an instrument. When I was a student, I eked out my pocket money by playing at the pictures—the violin; and I've just gone on playing. There's nothing like an orchestra in a school."

So orchestra at Wainui-o-Mata it had to be. Gordon Anderson had a spare violin or two himself. He fossicked round and raised a few more. No, not recorders. Recorders are all right if you've got nothing better to hand, but children can learn other instruments just as easily. "You see," he added, "I want to give the children something they can always use, something to play anytime, anywhere, in a trio, a quartet, an orchestra, an instrument that will fit in with any group, with any music." So, as there were more versatile instruments available, recorders were out.

This was towards the end of last year. The Andersons had not been long at Wainui-o-Mata. Now there are 21 fiddlers in the school, 16 of whom can take a hand at either first or second violin parts, with five just working their way up. Standard 2 is the time to start, says Mr. Anderson. The children are big enough to hold a fiddle, young enough to learn it without too many worries; and by Standard 6 you have a pretty good band of players. All the 21 fiddlers now own their instruments. The school has bought a double-bass, too. They learn and practise after school. This includes, as well, two of the teachers, who have been enthusiastically co-opted for the good of the cause.



Whites Aviation photo

WAINUI-O-MATA—trim streets in a snug valley, and music in the evenings

Having got this far, Gordon Anderson thought it was time some of the parents took a hand in the music. Were there any who would like to have a go at it? Yes, two or three; but the trouble was, they couldn't play or even read a note. Let's get going, said Gordon Anderson, and again brought his two spare fiddles out of cold storage. "I wrote the music of 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star' upon the board." At this stage he was looking round the room for a piece of chalk. "Telling you all this," he said wryly, "I get to thinking I'm back at school—you're not putting this all down are you? It's nothing really."

Actually, it is something, something very exciting. At the end of the evening the small but happy band of adults were making a pretty fair shot at twinkling, if not like stars, at least—what is probably better—like fiddlers who were going to enjoy themselves. That was at the beginning of this year. It was discovered that there were others at Wainui-o-Mata who could already find their way about a violin or a 'cello. One practice night a chap turned up with a small case. He proceeded to assemble a clarinet. "Thought I might be able to help," he said modestly as he took his place. A flute was found lying idle. It was introduced to a player and put to use. Two expert violinists, whom no one had liked to ask to come along while enthusiasm still outstripped achievement, insisted on adding their music.

The other week, Wainui-o-Mata had its first orchestral concert. The senior orchestra of flute, clarinet, 'cello, double-bass, violins, percussion, and a trumpet who came all the way from Wellington because he liked playing with them; the junior orchestra, Standard 2 upward, 21 violins; and both of them together. A whole programme, with two singers as guests. The programme was what, in some circles might be called, with a slight inflexion, a "popular" one; but "You mustn't be too highbrow about it," explained the enthusiast. "Soon we must get to work on something really good."

Gordon Anderson seems to have left a string of orchestras round the North Island countryside. He has never yet been in one school more than three years. Waitotara Valley, Alton—at one place the school roll mysteriously grew faster than expected. It seems that children were being sent in from the surrounding districts to stay in town with aunts, cousins or grandmothers "so they could play in the school orchestra." Unfortunately the roll went up beyond Mr. Anderson's grading, and he had to move on, which was a bit of luck for the next school. And then there was Waipiro Bay.

Waipiro Bay is a native school, up the East Coast. Music here was not the straightforward business it could be in a pakeha school. But Gordon Anderson's Aberdonian persistence was not to be put off by small things like this. He soon had the school writing, printing and publishing its own paper, *Piki Haere*, the title taken from the school motto. English put to practical uses. The next thing was to turn some of the local stories into poetry and finally into music. Teachers and children first discussed such matters as rhyme and metre, for, said Mr. Anderson, the children must learn you can't do these things any old how There's a way of poetry. The poem finished, it was written on the blackboard and signed by the poet. "Most important that it be signed." The children must be allowed to feel proud of their work. The next step was to read the poem aloud and then to beat time to it, to clap it, or, if you liked, to stamp. Now it must be sung and finally the music written down. A song has been born and a music lesson has taken place.

One day at Waipiro Bay, Gordon Anderson put it to the boys and girls that it was time they had a school song. What shall it be? "Piki Haere" was the answer, Piki Haere, the school motto, proudly written over the school emblem, the shining cuckoo, with the flagpole, all looking down over beautiful Waipiro Bay. It was near the end of the war, and the thoughts of the children and their parents were turned often to the Maori soldiers overseas. They were proud of these, too.

The school song was hammered out, word by word and line by line. "Piki Haere—what does it mean?" "Keep on going." "Well, that's not a very good phrase to have in a poem." "Piki Haere—keep climbing," said someone in the class. So "keep climbing" it was. And the flag, the hills and the sea, and the soldiers, too, all had to come into the song. The Waipiro Bay school song. It's not good poetry, nor is the music good music by "cultural" standards. But, as Gordon Anderson pointed out, neither words nor music were written for aesthetic delight. They were functional. But all the same, they came from the hearts and minds of the children of Waipiro Bay.

As Gordon Anderson told me all about it, I remembered other teachers too, out in the country, making music as best they knew how and with whatever materials lay to hand. Schools with pianos, schools who could never afford a piano, but all of them with ideas, which, after all, cost nothing.

"The best results I have seen," Gordon Anderson was saying, "turn up when you least expect them, and in places where you mightn't believe there was any talent. The two things you need to start with are an urge to take part and enough people to dig their toes in and do things."

Well, that's the story. "It's nothing really," says Gordon Anderson. "You just make use of what you have. And don't be too highbrow about it." But when you add it all up, it amounts to quite a bit—not "culture" but, more important, music among people. And the answer is—Piki Haere: Keep on going.

—O.J.