



Between the Concerts

LOOKING out over the rooftops of Christchurch homes, I notice that they have not yet been adorned with twisted television antennas, and New Zealand inhabitants have not yet become addicts to 100,000-dollar quiz programmes.

A pity it is, for during our month's visit to this country, a jackpot question had invaded my mind, the answer of which could have netted furs, jewels and cars for a hard-working New Zealand contestant: "Can you compare a New Zealand fruit with a musical instrument?" And the answer is ever so simple: "The Chinese gooseberry," Cinderella would burst out, "which is neither Chinese nor a gooseberry, and the English horn." she would continue matter-of-fact, "which is neither English nor a horn." And the audience would go into a frenzy of applause while the Master of Ceremonies proceeded to enumerate all the prizes and their respective sponsors.

For the time being, my brilliant question remains without a sponsor in New Zealand, but it may perhaps bring a message to the authorities to make this delicious fruit available to other parts of the world, particularly to us in Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A.

Cincinnati. That's the place where we live when we live there. This past month we have lived in New Zealand for twenty concerts. There are about seventy more to go, in a dozen other countries.

It was our first visit here. As all humans, one has preconceived notions about a country never visited before. We had visions of a scenic paradise as pictured in travelogues, which is precisely where we had formed our ideas.

It wasn't true. Reality turned out to be more attractive than the movie lure.

But what the technicolor films failed to show was an even greater surprise for us: New Zealand, a relatively young country, has developed a predilection for one of music's most esoteric branches — chamber music.

The original term "chamber music" implies that it is music played in a "chambre," or living-room, restricted to the initiated few whose presence is invited. Nowhere could we find a better example to refute this old-fashioned stigma than in New Zealand. Here, chamber music is as enthusiastically supported by thousands of people in Auckland, Wellington or Christchurch as it is in Tauranga, Hastings or Invercargill, or even in a little town like Otorohanga, population 1500. This is truly a phenomenon.

The people who attended our quartet recitals here reacted much the same as their fellow music lovers in Boston, Amsterdam or Tel-Aviv. In some cities, there was greater evidence of reserve, in others of spontaneity.

Most audiences favoured the classical repertoire, and most places, large or small, requested a new work along with the familiar. There was particular interest in the Quartet No. 3 by Schoenberg, never before played in New Zealand, and in the work of an American composer, Walter Piston. With characteristic pioneer spirit, the audience was anxious to listen attentively to a new composition and give it a forum on which to be heard and judged.

Strangely enough, among these listeners we often spotted a great number

★ **WHEN** the La Salle Quartet was in New Zealand recently, "The Listener" asked EVI LEVIN (right) to record her impressions of the tour. Mrs. Levin is the wife of the leader of the Quartet, Walter Levin, and is a contributor to American music magazines.



★ of young people. A lady in Wanganui explained that it was simpler to take the youngsters along to a concert than rounding up a baby-sitter—a marvelous solution. In Otorohanga, most of the boys and girls in the audience were members of Mr. Gorrings's fifty-piece high school orchestra. Sometimes, a whole section of the hall was occupied by students, uniforms and all.

But June 8 was the day when we met over a hundred New Zealand children. They were brought into the 2YA studio of the New Zealand Broadcasting Service in Wellington for the recording of three children's programmes by the Quartet. As the first group of eight and nine-year-old boys and girls filed into the studio in neat rows of two by two and very quietly, we were overawed by their discipline, and grew a little apprehensive. Would their reaction differ very much from the uninhibited attitude of American children? The youngsters were asked to sit on the floor in a semi-circle around the four musicians.

LEFT: "The children knew the musicians were on their side"

"Are you playing hockey from school this morning?" one of the Quartet members asked. There was complete silence.

"I bet New Zealand children never play hockey," the violinist challenged.

"We play hockey in our school," affirmed a little boy with pride, whereupon the Quartet explained that playing hockey in America meant not being in school when one is supposed to be there. The children laughed and knew that the musicians were on their side. Then the ice was broken, and the youngsters listened to the music, asked questions, and participated fully. "I guess children the world over react the same way to music," was the unanimous conclusion of every one of us.

Tomatoes grow on trees in this country. But where and how do New Zealanders cultivate their rich crop of kind volunteers who seem to grow in abundance here? The operations of the Federation of Chamber Music Societies are the basis of my question. Wherever we performed, a delegation of volunteers from the local musical society greeted us upon arrival. Executives, clerks, accountants, businessmen—from every walk of life. They drove us to the hotel and to the concert, invited us to supper parties in their homes after the recital, offered to take us sightseeing and saw that we were in complete comfort at all times.

They did even more than that. "Greetings from the Tauranga Chamber Music Society" read the card among the flowers awaiting us in the hotel room. A basket of Hastings-grown apples were gratefully offered to the Quartet after a three-hour rehearsal. In Dunedin, a parcel of chocolates was sent up before our concert; and at Auckland airport we found a souvenir booklet of New Zealand in our coat pockets.

And still more. Ophthalmologists, dentists, dermatologists and general practitioners kept us in tip-top shape, free of charge. The mail carrier brought us a tin of home-made cookies from a Quartet fan. And a lady in the Hamilton audience presented the Quartet wives with ear-rings she had made for us from fish-scales. Even people who had never heard of us, when we entered a grocery store or bookshop, offered to wrap a package for mailing containing merchandise bought elsewhere.

Yet our New Zealand stay also had its trials and tribulations. After systematically getting used to a hotel menu of lamb chops or mutton roast, mutton loins and lamb roasts, we spotted last Friday a complete newcomer. It was goose. This was going to be a feast. We adjusted our ties, powdered our noses, and buttoned our napkins tight. This was going to be the farewell dinner supreme. The goose arrived. It was lamb-roast, colonial style.

Or when we were invited at Mr. Irwin's, and Jack, our cellist, did not arrive in time. We called and found out that he was being taken out to Mr. Irwin's by car. When after an hour, he still had not arrived, I concluded that he must have had a flat on the way. "A flat in New Zealand?" asked Mrs. Irwin. But what New Zealanders call a flat, we call an apartment. And what we call a flat, you call a "puncture."

And when a gentleman in Whangarei said that his 15-year-old daughter couldn't visit us this afternoon because she was engaged, I marvelled at the premature conjugal mores of this country. For in America, one is engaged with a diamond ring, while here one is simply busy or occupied, possibly even just cooking colonial goose?

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