

Festival Music from Aldeburgh

ALDEBURGH is a small fishing village on the East Coast of England, about three hours from London. Each year a festival of music and the arts is held there. Started in 1948, they are run by Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears—Aldeburgh is their home town. The distinguished author E. M. Forster has been to many of the Festivals, sometimes as a lecturer, sometimes as a visitor, and from his study in King's College, Cambridge, he has recorded a talk to serve as a general introduction to a series of Festival programmes recorded last year. These will start this week from 1YC.

"Aldeburgh is a very small place," he says, "that will be your first surprise—it is a small sea-coast town in Suffolk, with about 2000 inhabitants. There are no big buildings, no industries, one cinema and no through traffic. The roads are stopped by the marshes

and the sea. The town is a small place and it can't grow." In the past the town has been almost swallowed by waves, and today the Elizabethan Moot-hall stands almost on the beach. On every side lie desolate, wind-swept marshes.

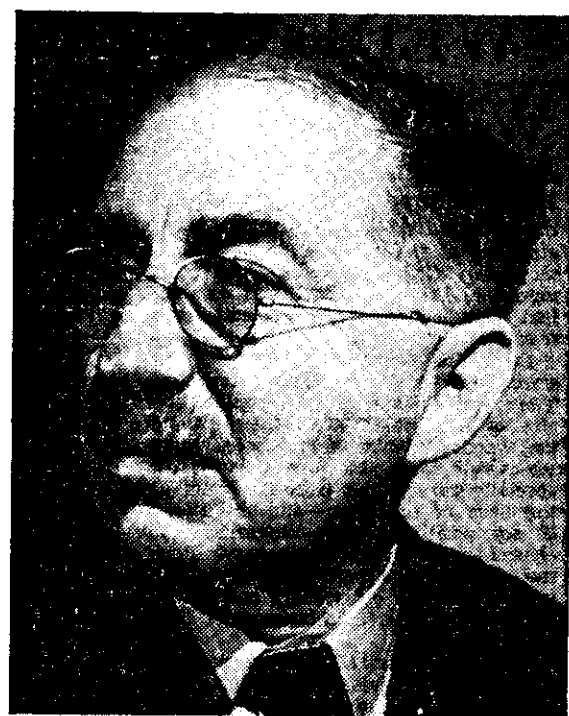
"I want to emphasise the smallness of the place," says Forster. "Anything more unlike the Edinburgh Festival can't be imagined." For the Festival itself, everything is on hand. Lectures can be heard in the Elizabethan Moot-hall, or in the Baptist Chapel; choral and orchestral performances are given in the Parish Church, open-air performances in the gardens, and madrigals "a couple of miles away on the Meare." During the Festival the normal life of the town goes on. The fishermen go out as usual for lobsters, sit and mend their nets and make remarks about modern music, "which are sometimes

extremely cynical and devastating." Over the town flies the Festival flag, light blue and dark blue in colour, with a musical quotation from Britten's opera *Peter Grimes* emblazoned on it. Britten was born in Suffolk and both he and Peter Pears give their services to the Festival for nothing.

"People come to Aldeburgh for music and the general atmosphere of sincerity," and the music they hear ranges from early English music, through Purcell and Mozart to contemporary composers. Britten sometimes plays a Mozart piano concerto, reviving the practice of conducting the work himself from the piano.

"There is sure to be Bach," Forster goes on, "not much Beethoven, not as much as I would like. There is certain to be Schubert, as well as Verdi, in an operatic concert." The operas are held in the Assembly Hall, which makes a splendid setting, but as it holds only about 200 people it tends to act as a kind of bottle-neck restricting the number of people who attend the Festival. Large-scale operas are out of the question but many small operas are performed, including Britten's own miniature works. In 1955 *The Turn of the Screw* was chosen.

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E. M. FORSTER



BBC Illustration

Visiting String Players

ONE of the leading chamber music ensembles of today, the Robert Masters Quartet, arrives in New Zealand at the end of July to begin a month's tour for the N.Z. Federation of Chamber Music Societies. Many of their concerts will be broadcast, and three members of the quartet will act as soloists in a performance of Beethoven's Triple Concerto with the National Orchestra in Wellington. The quartet specialises in piano quartets, piano trios, string trios, and duos, and its members are Robert Masters (violin), Muriel Taylor (cello), Kinloch Anderson (piano) and Nannie Jamieson (viola). Modern works included in their repertoire are piano quartets by Benjamin Frankel (1953) and by William Walton. The Quartet visited New Zealand in 1950, and its present visit is part of a world tour to include Australia and the Far East. Programmes by the Robert Masters Quartet this week are from all YCs at 10.0 on Monday, July 30, and 1XH at 8.0 on Thursday, August 2, and from 2XP at 9.5 on Saturday, August 4.

Another string player who has achieved distinction overseas since he left New Zealand in 1937 is the cellist Harold Beck, who is beginning a concert tour for the NZBS. For many years Harold Beck conducted the 3YA Studio Orches-

tra, and was founder of the famed Laurian Club in Christchurch. This club, founded in 1931, gave chamber music concerts of an unusually high standard, often including works by modern composers, such as Hindemith. Beck had many good cello pupils, and as a teacher was noted for his musical integrity and for his genial personality. When he went to Australia in 1937 he formed his own chamber music group, and at the same time did orchestral playing. He went on to London, and it was while playing in a quartet there that he had a piece of good fortune. John Barbirolli, conductor of the Halle Orchestra, had lost his first cellist and was in London to select another. He attended a performance at which Beck was playing, and immediately engaged him as his first cellist. Beck stayed with the Halle for six years, and during this time reintroduced the Delius cello concerto to the repertoire. His performance in 1954 earned him

wide acclaim. He is now with the London Symphony Orchestra and after his New Zealand tour will be rejoining this orchestra in Johannesburg, where it is taking part in the city's centennial celebrations. Harold Beck originally came from Wanganui, where his family were active musicians. His brother, Haydn Beck, has become a celebrated violinist, and now plays with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London. Broadcasts by Harold Beck this week are from all YCs at 7.30, July 30, and all YCs at 8.45 on Sunday, August 5.



"This sinister opera," according to E. M. Forster, "had a most shattering effect—the ghosts were more alarming than at a performance I saw when in London. They were more likely to get at one. I feel that this is Britten's most successful opera, though not his greatest one, which seems to me to be *Peter Grimes*."

The poet Crabbe, who provided the inspiration and starting point for Britten's opera was born in Aldeburgh, and has described its landscape in some of his most haunting and vivid verse. The church tower, which he mentions in one of his poems, still acts as a landmark for the fishermen. Its bells ring out at the start of the Festival, and from the same tower, the Festival is ended with the singing of hymns.

E. M. Forster, who now lives at King's College, Cambridge, wrote the libretto for one of Britten's large operas *Billy Budd*, from the book by Herman Melville. He still writes occasional articles for English magazines, and somewhat infrequently gives a broadcast talk. He is a Companion of Honour, and for many years people have been hoping for one more book from his pen to add to the few novels on which his reputation is founded.

This talk can be heard from 1YC on Saturday, August 4, at 7.0 p.m., and it will be followed at 7.10 by the first programme. The artists will be Nancy Evans (mezzo-soprano), John Francis (flute), Benjamin Britten (viola), and the Zorian String Quartet. They play works by Purcell, Vaughan Williams, Bennett and Bridge. Highlights of the succeeding programmes are Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten in Schubert's Song Cycle, *Die Schöne Müllerin* (which will show Britten to be one of the finest accompanists of the age), a programme by the Dennis Brain Wind Quintet, and a recital of church music from the Parish Church.