

Heartbreak Hall

HEARTBREAK HALL they call it, but every year more than a hundred singers, pianists, and other instrumentalists just out of music colleges in all parts of Britain eagerly make their debut at London's Wigmore Hall. They even come from the United States to the world's musical capital. Many of them are never heard of again.

If they scrape and cheese-pare on publicity, a recital may not cost more than £75. If they want to get their faces on the right hoardings and their advertisements in the right newspapers, the bill is £100—a lot of money for a student or for parents who have been supporting a young hopeful during training.

Arrangements are inevitably in the hands of an agent—bland-faced, soothing-voiced, perhaps fond of music and even of musicians, but with heart hardened by experience. Once a recital date has been squeezed into the crowded Wigmore Hall calendar, a contract is signed. There is a payment then, and the rest of the £75 or £100 is due before the concert.

Rows of Emptiness

It may be only then that the young hopeful realises that even if he can persuade hundreds of friends and acquaintances to buy tickets, he cannot hope for anything like a full house. If a miracle filled every seat, the takings would be less than £125.

The average recitalist does well if his ticket sales bring in £20, but a loss of £80 is faced for the sake of justifying years of study and in the hope of "rave" Press notices. What is really dreadful is to sing or play to rows of empty seats.

"Do you want us to get you an audience?" asks the agent.

"Oh, yes, please," says the grateful beginner.

So on the big night the Wigmore Hall is half full, perhaps three parts



★ THE New Zealand Music Society helped them over a hurdle—From left, Ronald Tremaine, Edna Graham, Peter Cooper

full, of attentive strangers who have not paid a penny for their seats; they are cultivated amateurs with a professional or student stiffening.

When it's all over, when relatives have soothed the agitated nerves and friends have put their friendship before their conscience and made their kindest comments, what of the cruel critics? One who, I am sure, was not trying to be wounding, said the other day of a singer that she had "a strong voice with which she hardly knows what to do. . . . The accompaniment was the most rewarding part of many of the songs." That is by no means the worst to follow a first recital.

Nothing can be done to cushion the young musicians against the critics, but to help them over the first financial hurdle the New Zealand Music Society—which has been providing a musical and social centre for Dominion visitors in London for several years—decided to finance two concerts with a small Government grant from art union funds.

The committee offered this chance to several young New Zealanders who had already performed at the monthly con-

certs of the society in the gracious 18th century salon of the Arts Council overlooking St. James's Square. Some of them have also been heard by radio listeners in the Dominion on the programmes recorded by the society at the BBC.

They were Peter Cooper (piano), Edna Graham (soprano), Wilfred Simenauer (cello) and Emily Jean Mair and Ronald Tremaine, accompanists.

Success in Britain

Some of these had already been noted in the musical world of London. Edna Graham, Christchurch soprano, has toured with the Carl Rosa Opera Company, sung under Sir Thomas Beecham's baton, and at Glyndebourne, as well as being heard on the BBC.

Dr. Ronald Tremaine, formerly of Feilding, now teaches harmony, counterpoint and orchestration at the Trinity College of Music after studying at the Royal College of Music and in Rome. Last year he wrote a string trio and recently has been writing educational music. Four of the songs sung by Edna Graham were composed by him for Arthur Waley's translations of Chinese lyrics.

BY J. W. GOODWIN



A recorded presentation of the MRA musical play "The Vanishing Island" is to be heard in a link broadcast from the four YA stations on Sunday, September 9, at 9.15 p.m. The play, in three acts, is by Peter Howard and Cecil Broadhurst, with music by Will Reed and George Frazer. Ivan Menzies and Reginald Owen head the cast.

At the age of 27, the cellist Wilfred Simenauer has established himself with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, of which he became sub-principal cellist six years ago. Later he was principal cellist at Sadler's Wells. He has toured the Continent and the United States with the Philharmonic.

Now with his wife, the Scottish pianist Emily Jean Mair, he has hopes of establishing a national string quartet in the Dominion. Although conscious of the difficulties involved and so far unable to gain the necessary support, he still hopes to be able to contribute towards the musical life of his homeland. He was educated at Waitaki Boys' High School and Wellington College.

"Charming . . . Erratic"

All of these musicians received favourable comment from the critics after the Wigmore Hall concert, when the programme was: Beethoven's Sonata for Cello and Piano in C Major, Op. 102, No. 1; Beethoven's Sonata in F Minor, Op. 57; Dohnanyi's Sonata for Cello and Piano in B Flat Major, Op. 8; Chopin's Fantasia Impromptu and Scherzo in B Minor, Op. 20; songs by Mozart, Verdi and Ronald Tremaine.

"The most lively performance of the evening was from the young soprano Miss Edna Graham, who, though by no means yet in full control of her voice, left no doubt that she has some very fine raw material to work on," said *The Times* critic. She has "a vivid musical imagination to make all the arduous training worth while."

Ronald Tremaine's songs, he continued, "had a sensitive, elusive, fragile charm wholly in keeping with the text." The sonatas for cello and piano were "intelligently musical and fluent performances."

The *Daily Telegraph* was less appreciative. The songs from the Chinese were "charmingly conceived," but Edna Graham's "very attractive natural voice" was "insecurely controlled and disconcertingly variable in timbre." The cellist, it said, was expertly accompanied, though his intelligent and forceful performances "would have been more eloquent had his tone possessed a wider range."

Peter Cooper's playing of Beethoven was dismissed as "erratic and incoherent." For him alone, there might have been a touch of Heartbreak Hall that night.

A second concert to assist Dominion musicians is being organised by the New Zealand Music Society for October.

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