

# FRENCH CHORAL MUSIC

DURING the last two months several broadcasts of little-known French choral music have been heard in the series *Music from Overseas*. It is unfortunate that these seem to have aroused little attention so far, particularly in view of the fact that the French choral tradition is a vital and growing force in the European cultural scene. From the time of Leonin and Perotin to the present day, French sensitivity to choral texture and colour has been far in advance of other European nations. Stylistic innovations have almost invariably arisen from the Western end of Europe. Enterprising programme planning has presented us with a number of works whose "Frenchness," with its typically Gallic transparency and lightness of texture, is a tonic to New Zealand ears.

An important work that will be heard in this series is Dufay's "L'Homme Armé" Mass, from YCs this Saturday, (April 20). "L'Homme Armé" was a late mediaeval folk song which served as a cornerstone for at least 150 mass settings during the Renaissance, including one by Palestrina written as late as 1570. It is easily recognisable in this role, played on the trombone with the voices weaving a freely-flowing contrapuntal web about it. This method of performance, by the way, was a usual Renaissance practice. The unforced and leisurely writing, evocative as it is of the Gothic Cathedrals of Dufay's Northern France, is remarkable even amongst the riches of Renaissance art for serenity and beauty of expression.

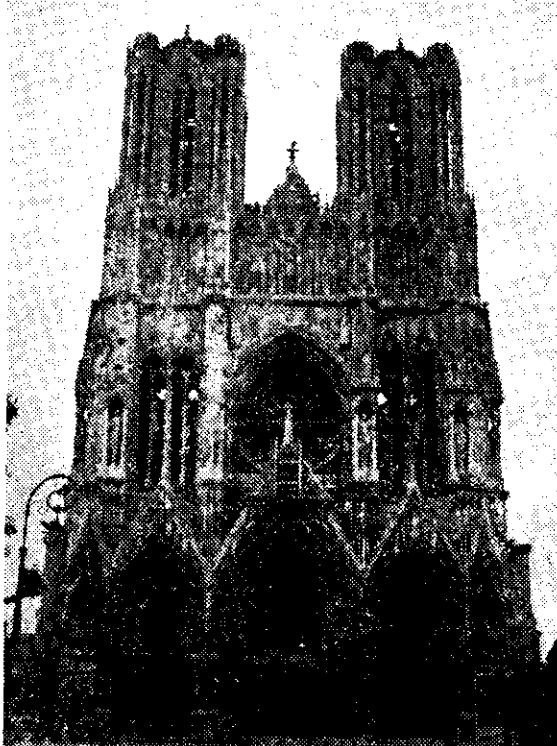
Another work in this tradition that deserves to be more widely known is "Sacræ Solennis," by Lalande (1675-1726), a setting of the hymn from Matins for the feast of Corpus Christi. The words are by St. Thomas Aquinas. Recorded in the French Chapel Royal, for whose singers it was originally written, it will be remembered by those who heard it as a massive hieratic work that bridges the musical centuries between Monteverdi and Bach, exhibiting in many ways the characteristics of both. It is a work in the great contrapuntal and ecclesiastical tradition, with all the beauty and discipline of its balanced asceticism—a notable contrast to the music written and performed outside the church doors in the gay and irresponsible Paris of Louis Quatorze. It is pre-eminently singer's music—with its long flowing lines and closely-knit texture it is stylistically very akin to the Bach cantata. A competent quartet of soloists and a well-trained choir combined to give a workmanlike performance in which, charmingly, the echo indispensable to Continental churches finds a place amongst the notes.

The French choral tradition has some capable exponents amongst contemporary French

Canadians, some of whose music can also be heard in this series (YCs, Saturday, April 27). The term "French" may presumably also cover those Frenchmen-by-extraction who have never set foot in a Left Bank cafe or drunk Beaujolais in the Provencal vineyards. A style, like a good wine, does not travel well—it will always lose something in transit. But the balance is made up in Canada by a hardy, tough-at-root colonialism that adapts itself, with all its French superstructure, very well to the New World. The delicacy and tenuousness of a Ravel would not be possible in a new land, but one finds in works like Somer's Chorale and Fugue for Voices, and Violet Archer's cantata "The Bell," the architectural sense and attention to detail that are so evident in Dufay and Lalande. The choral writing is meticulous and astringent. It is perhaps significant that in these works the orchestral accompaniments (where these occur) are noticeably inferior in quality. "Diffuse" is the best adjective to describe them—a vague impressionism obscures the musical content. The French seem to have a greater feeling for voices than for orchestra and a more natural sympathy with the demands of a choir. Tradition, it is true, dies hard. Violet Archer has something to say in her cantata and says it well. She has not yet mastered the art of the Successful Conclusion, but this is something that Frenchmen, and often French Canadians particularly Harry Somers in the work previously mentioned, can teach her. But she is a composer worth watching for.

These programmes of *Music from Overseas* have brought us many works off the beaten track which New Zealand choirs with reasonable technical competence could well perform with profit to themselves and pleasure to the listener.

—S. M. Rhind



RHEIMS CATHEDRAL

"Unforced, leisurely, evocative of the Gothic Cathedrals"

## Not just for the lazy ones

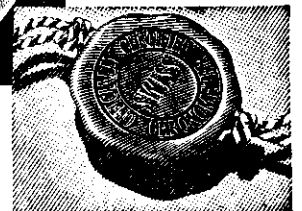
THE ROLEX OYSTER PERPETUAL, although it winds itself, was primarily developed because a self-wound watch is more accurate than a hand-wound watch. The tension on the mainspring is much more constant, much more even. And the remarkable accuracy of its precision movement is perfectly and permanently protected, even against dust and humidity and all other harmful elements, by the 100% waterproof Oyster case.



Prices from

£48/2/6

THE ROLEX RED SEAL indicates that the chronometer to which it the tests of the Swiss is attached has passed Government Testing Stations and has been awarded its own Official Timing Certificate.



# ROLEX

GENEVA · SWITZERLAND

Obtainable only from the Official Jewellers—

AUCKLAND: Godart Jewellers, 29 Vulcan Lane; M. Timmerman, 312 Dominion Road. DARGAVILLE: Wright Jewellers, Hokianga Road. HAMILTON: Challiner Jewellers, Garden Place. KAIKOHE: Kaikohe Jewellers, 33 Broadway. KAITIA: George Hofstede Ltd., Commerce Street. MORRINSVILLE: W. L. Watson, Thames Street. OPOTIKI: Hickey's, Church Street. PUTARURU: Ron Brownson, Princess Street. TAUPŌ: McClurgs Ltd. TAURANGA: Lay's Jewellers Ltd., 33 Devonport Road. TE AROHA: E. Haynes, Whitaker Street. TE KAUWHATA: W. I. Harper. TE PUKE: Kirk Jewellers, Jellicoe Street. THAMES: C. & M. Hutton Ltd., Pollen Street. TOKOROA: Thomas Jewellers Ltd., Roseberry Road. WAIHI: Goldfield Jewellers, Seddon Street. WHAKATANE: Armstrong Jewellers, The Strand. WHANGAREI: Palmer's Ring House Ltd., Cameron Street. R7-3



ZSC50.6

## The Essential Household Milk

Highlander gives all your cooking that added creamy flavour the family loves. Always ask for economical and convenient Highlander Milk. Backed by the famous Nestle's name!

indispensable in the kitchen