

MUSICAL JOURNEY

JAMES ROBERTSON, Conductor of the National Orchestra, gives impressions of his recent Australian tour.

OUR DC6 leaves Auckland behind—the adventure has begun. A perfect afternoon turns to a perfect evening, and soon, 25,000 feet above microscopic waves, we are chasing the sunset, which lasts for hours. Then the myriad lights of Sydney, the excitement of setting foot on unknown soil, and the ABC's welcome. We drive to our hotel, no contemporary colossus, but a converted mansion, set back among trees in gay King's Cross. In the entrance-hall stands a bronze knight, prodding with his lance what appears to be a goose. St. George about to despatch an unusually mild dragon? We inquire at the reception desk. It is Lohengrin. The old opera-conductor is at home, his goose is a swan.

In the next few days we gained some superficial knowledge of the city. And what a city—pulsating, informal, sun-loving. Most New Zealanders hope at some stage to visit London, Paris, Rome, even to see Naples and die. They might first do well to see Sydney and live.

My first assignment was to direct the three orchestral concerts of the Festival of Perth, and so, a day or two later, I found myself in a Viscount airliner, high above the well-named Nullarbor Plain, which helps to make the West Australian capital one of the most isolated cities in the world. Probably because of this very isolation, the inhabitants welcome the stranger with a warmth of heart remarkable even in a warm-hearted country. Within an hour

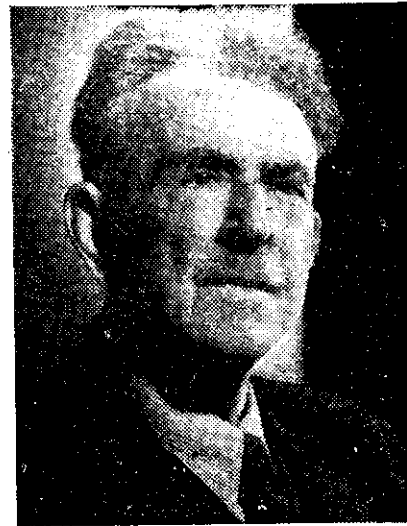
of arrival, I was whisked off to my first barbecue; and there was much hospitality during the fortnight.

The city has the most beautiful modern university that I can remember, built in a semi-Spanish style, with arcades, red-tiled roof, cypresses and an enormous goldfish pond. There is an open-air theatre in a sunken garden and an open-air concert hall, with Norfolk Island pines to reflect the sound and kookaburras to swell the applause. Our programmes ranged from Beethoven to *An American in Paris*, with three works calculated to make a special impression out-of-doors—"The Enchanted Lake," "The Lark Ascending" and "Nights in the Gardens of Spain." I was supplied with a surprisingly fine array of young local soloists. Perth is distinguished further for its high summer temperatures (often over 100 degrees) and for its strong beer. The two are doubtless connected.

Back over the Nullarbor Plain to Adelaide, a city so designed that a broad belt of parkland surrounds the central blocks. In a corner of this parkland one of the newspapers has built a sound shell. The auditorium is a long, gentle upward slope, one side of which is bounded by the river. Here we gave a Sunday evening concert to an audience that stretched away into the gloaming as far as the eye could see. The police estimate was 20,000. These free open-air concerts are a regular feature of the Australian scene, and indeed are part of Government and ABC policy. While in Adelaide, I attended another type of free concert, devoted entirely to works by Australian composers. This took place at lunch-



JOHN AMADIO
Toured with Melba



ALFRED HILL
Heard Brahms play

time in the Town Hall, which has, by all accounts, the best acoustics of any concert hall in the Commonwealth. The audience numbered over a thousand.

The next port of call was Hobart, Australia's second oldest city, which is not unlike Wellington in climate and situation. Here is another magnificent, almost land-locked harbour, another mountain setting, though Wellington must concede the virtue of mere size to Hobart's harbour and its 4000-foot mountain (named oddly enough Mount Wellington). The civic buildings, of light brown stone, have an almost continental charm, and the painted ceiling of the lovely little concert hall is actually Austrian work. Like the hall, the Tasmanian orchestra is not large, and both were well suited to Grieg and

Schubert, to whom the three festival concerts were devoted. The woodwind is led by John Amadio, a legendary figure who toured the world with Tetrazzini and Melba, and who is playing as well as ever.

On the Sunday between the last two concerts we drove in a hired Holden the 70-odd miles to Port Arthur, the notorious convict settlement of early days. It is not so long since the convict ships sailed into the cove to deliver a boy of 18 who had stolen a handkerchief, or a girl who had stolen a gridiron. But the hand of time already lies heavy on the place. Round the green sward near the cove stand crumbling edifices—the laundry, the solitary cells, the towers where the sentries kept watch for runaways, the church designed by one of the inmates, and for which he was granted (sign of unwonted humanity) a free pardon.

Hobart's great occasion is its Regatta, which is a declared public holiday—no one would work, anyway. The harbour scene is enlivened by four Australian warships, two of them aircraft-carriers, and the city scene by a great many light-hearted sailors. Alas, on the very morning of the Regatta I was transported away to Brisbane for a fortnight's Beethoven. In a sweltering combination of sub-tropical heat and humidity, we battled our perspiring way through four symphonies, four concerti, five overtures and the incidental music to Egmont. An audience of over 2000 a night perspired with us in the magnificent City Hall, which is square and colonnaded outside and circular inside.

The visitor to Brisbane is struck by the greenness of the vegetation (even Tasmania was brown this summer), by the butterflies, especially the pale-blue swallowtails in the Botanical Gardens, by the sea-food bars, with a choice of oysters, lobsters, king prawns, sand-crabs and mud-crabs, and by the broad river which serpentine through the city much as the Thames does through London. A highlight for anyone is the 15-mile launch trip up river to the "Lone Pine" Koala Bear Sanctuary; and for the musician a visit to Dr Dalley-Scarlett's unique collection of first editions of Handel, Purcell and Arne.

Next the relatively short trip to Sydney. I spent a pleasant few days working with the admirable Sydney Symphony Orchestra and paying some calls, one of them on the veteran composer Alfred Hill, who heard Brahms play



HOBART AND MT. WELLINGTON
"Not unlike Wellington in climate and situation"