

SOLO CELLO

WHEN she was asked to broadcast the six suites for unaccompanied violoncello, by J. S. Bach (the first of which is to be heard from the YC stations on November 6), Marie Vandewart's first reaction was that of pleasure, for her ambition to play the complete suites had been set aside, waiting for such an opportunity.

Later, remembering that Casals spent twelve years preparing the suites for performance, she became a little diffident. "They are a terrific undertaking," she said, "and I feel that I have only just scratched the surface. Their difficulty can be both technical and interpretative. In the first five suites, the trouble is in making sense of the notes, which are not difficult in themselves. There are so many different meanings possible that finding the right one is very hard, and putting a meaning is a very doubtful undertaking at all times. I have a facsimile edition of the suites, and I used that as a basis for my own phrasing. There are almost no phrasing marks in it, and I found it very useful for comparison with the edited and phrased versions. It is not in Bach's own writing—no copy in that exists—but in that of his second wife, Anna Magdalena, a very beautiful hand."

It has been said that Bach was an "abstract" musician, writing music without very much thought for the instrument that was to play it, but in studying these suites Marie Vandewart came to feel that this is a fallacy, and that Bach did write for specific instruments. "For instance," she said, "in his violin suites he uses a great number of chords, but very few in his cello works. The exception is the sixth suite, which was written for a viola pomposa, a five-stringed instrument which later fell into disuse. That suite is much more daring, with a greater use of chords. I tried to get an instrument that could have a fifth string added, but it was unobtainable in New Zealand, and even

overseas artists do not use it. The fifth suite was also written for a modified instrument, since the A string is to be let-down to a G. It is usually played with the string on the normal tuning, but I found that with a G tuning the chords, often considered unplayable, were all possible. The let-down string gives the cello a sound rather like a viola da gamba.

"The suites were written about 1720, when Bach was in Cöthen. They were not played much in the 19th century, since most people who knew them and edited them thought they were good as exercises, but too dull to be performed without the backing of other instruments. Some movements were even arranged with a piano accompaniment. It was Casals, I think, who first realised their beauty and brought them before the public. Since then most cellists have played them, though as far as I know, not in New Zealand. They are wonderful to play, showing just what can be done by a single string instrument."

Another work by J. S. Bach will be heard next week, on Saturday, November 9. This is the monumental *Mass in B Minor*, which in its original Lutheran version (Kyrie and Gloria only) he modestly introduced as a "trifling work (or proof) of the science which I have been able to attain in music." The Mass is being performed by the Christchurch Harmonic Society with the augmented Alex Lindsay Orchestra, and conducted



MARIE VANDEWART
Bach poses problems

by Victor C. Peters. The soloists are Edna Boyd-Wilson, soprano; Mary Pratt, contralto; Edmund Bohan, tenor; and Donald Jack, baritone.

When the young Gustav Holst heard the Mass in B Minor, it left an impression that his daughter later described as a "revelation that lasted for a lifetime." Later Bach's contrapuntal style was to deeply influence his Fugal Concerto for flute, oboe and string orchestra, one of the works heard in a concert of Holst's music presented at Canterbury University by members of the National Orchestra conducted by James Robertson. Music recorded at this concert will be broadcast by the YCs at 8.0 p.m. on Sunday, November 10. Among other works in this recital are the beautiful "Four Songs for Voice and Violin," with Edna Boyd-Wilson, and the *St. Paul's Suite* for string orchestra.

In the recent New Zealand Composers' Contest sponsored by APRA and the NZBS the judges found many works of a high standard. On Sunday, November 10, listeners to the YAs, 3YZ and 4YZ at 2.40 p.m., will hear the first of two programmes of some of these. In the first programme will be "The Avon," a song by Doris Sheppard, "Dance Mood," a work for the piano by John Taylor, "Slumber Song" and "Concert Study" for the piano by Pamela M. Quaife, and Georg Tintner's song, "And At the End." These works will be presented by Winston Sharp (baritone) and Matthew T. Dixon (piano).

Compositions to be heard in the second programme are "Night Song," by Leslie Jordan, "Country Sketches," a piano composition by Benny Gunn, "Danse Fantastique," by Wallace E. Woodley, "Beckoning Call from the Past," a work for the piano by Georg Tintner, and the song, "Wind of Fruitfulness," by Bryant Bell.

Sea-Drift

SEA-DRIFT, one of Delius's major choral works, will be performed by the Phoenix Choir and the National Orchestra conducted by James Robertson at Wellington on Thursday, November 7. The soloist in this work is Donald Munro, and the concert will be broadcast from all YCs.

Sea-Drift is a setting of a poem by Walt Whitman, which tells simply and poignantly the story of two birds who nest in a lonely place by the sea-shore. They are watched by a boy who came "every day, cautiously peering, absorbing, translating." One day the female bird vanishes. "And thenceforward all summer in the sound of the sea, and at night under the full of the moon . . . I saw, I heard at intervals the remaining one, the solitary guest from Alabama." The boy tells some of the story, and the chorus takes up the rest, personifying the lonely bird calling on the winds and stars for the return of his lost mate, his cries changing from elation to despair.

The work is both lyrical and dramatic, with the sea setting suggested at the



beginning by the orchestra. Peter Warlock has described his reactions to this work, "in which the passion of the words and music rises and falls with a perfection of poise and cadence that seems to echo the very sound of the sea itself, uniting the story and its setting in a single vision that grips the imagination with an almost uncanny tenacity."

Other works in the concert are the Overture "Benvenuto Cellini," by Berlioz, *Serenade to Music* by Vaughan Williams (with the Phoenix Choir), Symphony No. 4 in C Minor, by Schubert, and *Daphnis and Chloe*, by Ravel.

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