

MUSICAL FAMILY

IT'S never surprising to find a Sterndale Bennett in the world of music. It would be more surprising to find one out of it. Even William Sterndale Bennett (who died in 1875 and was buried in Westminster Abbey), though the best known, was not the first—his father and grandfather before him were professional musicians. Robert Sterndale Bennett, who was in New Zealand a short time ago examining for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, is a grandson of William and a brother of T.C., also a composer. Robert, who is tall, with grey hair, and greying bushy eyebrows over horn-rimmed spectacles, joined the Associated Board as an examiner in 1925, but for many years he was Director of Music at Uppingham School.

About ten per cent of the Associated Board's candidates are examined in the Dominions, and of this percentage New Zealand contributes more than any other Dominion. So when *The Listener* saw Mr. Sterndale Bennett in Wellington it was especially interested in asking him about his work among students in this country. Was it true that he was "marking hard" because of the number of mediocre students going to England?

Mr. Sterndale Bennett said that the standard of performance was as high here as anywhere else—it compared very favourably with the standard in Great Britain and the other Dominions he had visited. This was especially true of younger students. There was a tendency, however, for advanced students in New Zealand to sit for their L.R.S.M.—which was equal to the A.R.C.M. of the Royal College and the L.R.A.M. of the Royal Academy—before they were ready.

There has been an ever-increasing interest in both making music and listening to it in the past ten years, Mr. Sterndale Bennett considers. "This is still increasing, and there is no doubt that radio is one of the media respons-

ible. When you talk about a symphony today a child knows what you are talking about. Before the war you had to explain what a symphony was."

The better distribution of money also meant that many more people were better able to spend it on education, and music has come to be a real thing in thousands more homes than before. In Britain today examiners met candidates whose parents were in every class of occupation. Speaking about musical education in Britain generally, Mr. Sterndale Bennett said that music was included in the syllabus for School Certificate more than 20 years ago, and later Instrumental Playing was also accepted as part of the examination.

While in Wellington Robert Sterndale Bennett recorded a talk on the work of his grandfather, which he illustrated at the piano. This programme was also planned to include vocal illustrations by Muriel Hitchings (soprano). It will be heard later in the year from National stations. For Children's Sessions he recorded eight talks illustrated with musical themes. These were first heard in BBC Children's Sessions, but have been adapted to New Zealand conditions. The titles of the programmes are: Birds, Insects, Fairies, Playthings, The Countryside, Gaiety, Bedtime, and The Sea. Under the general title of *Music with a Theme*, these programmes are currently being heard in the *Sunday Matinee* session from 3YZ.



Spencer Digby photograph

ROBERT STERNDALÉ BENNETT

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 29, 1952.

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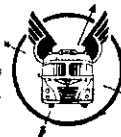
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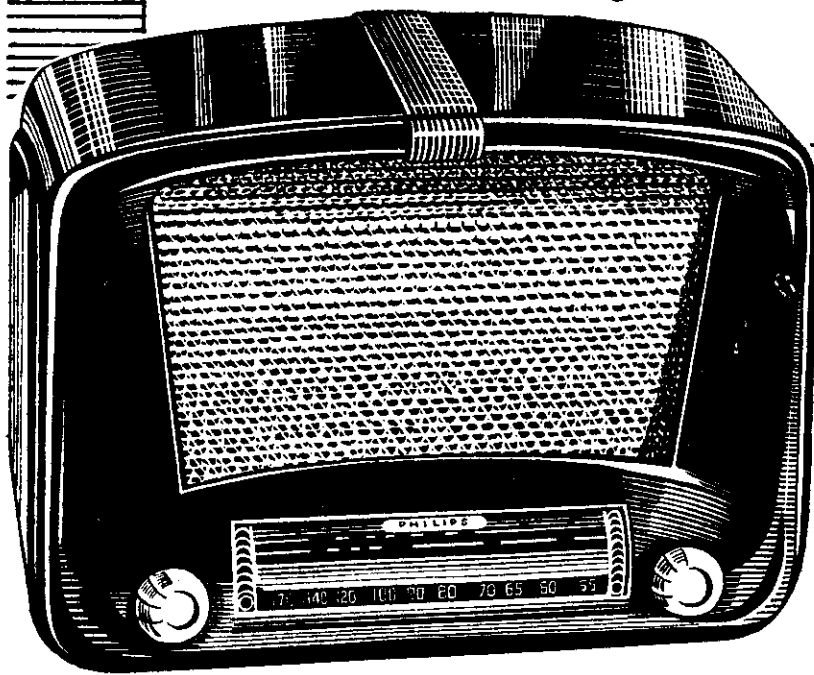
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