

"IT'S PROVINCIAL"

"WHY are you going to New Zealand?" they said in Sydney. "You'll find it's provincial." Of course it is! "Any ass can see that" (as Brahms said when someone remarked on the similarity of a theme in his first symphony to the main choral theme of Beethoven's Ninth).

Indeed, you would hardly find better evidence of provinciality than a sign which New Zealand puts on her front doorstep—that is, at the flying-boat base where one arrives in Wellington from Sydney.

It has been decided there to translate into several languages the inscriptions "Ladies" and "Gentlemen" on the appropriate doors. Someone has evidently found the words *donna* and *uomo* in an Italian dictionary, and has assumed that the Italians, like any right-minded Englishman, make their purals by adding *s*. Hence the stupendous words, for all to see:

DONNAS UOMOS

Is the explanation of why they still remain that no Italian has ever passed this way? More likely each Italian traveller passes the joke on secretly to the next.

In music, too, I have come across an example of such pure provinciality that I hardly expect friends at home to believe it. Resignations are threatened from one of New Zealand's best-known choirs because certain members, staunch Methodists, refuse to sing Bach's *Magnificat* in Latin.

But the problem of provinciality is a serious one. I am not referring to mere small-mindedness, like this, but to the problem of appropriate musical organisation in a country which has no cities the size of Sydney—never mind of London.

Obviously, Australian example cannot be copied here. And, as a critic I am



BBC photograph

This is the first of five weekly articles written about his stay in New Zealand by the visiting English music critic ARTHUR JACOBS

keen to see what distinctive forms of musical organisation have been evolved instead.

So far, I have heard the National Orchestra only performing in a small broadcasting studio in Wellington, where the acoustics no doubt flattered it. But despite this I was agreeably surprised and considerably impressed. I liked the liveliness and unanimity, as well as the quality of tone, which Warwick Braithwaite evoked from his players. I was pleased at the apparent absence of mere "passengers" in the string

section such as some orchestras are forced to carry to make up numbers.

In two other fields of musical activity, choral work and chamber music New Zealand has achievements which would seem to make Australia backward by comparison.

Indeed, a recent number of the Sydney musical journal, *The Canon*, held up New Zealand's chamber music organisation as a example to Australia.

In Perth a senior radio official said sadly to me that in his city (population more than 250,000), "we can do *Messiah*, but it seems we've not a hope of putting on *The Dream of Gerontius* or the Ninth Symphony." Does he know I wonder, that Christchurch, with a considerably smaller population, has in recent years heard both these very works?

I came to sunny, friendly beautiful Christchurch after a few days in dull sullen, cheerless Wellington. If you detect a personal bias here you are quite right. Even music critics are mortal and therefore susceptible of flattery, and the welcome I have had in musical circles in Christchurch would have won over the stoniest heart to that city.

Thanks principally to Dr. Vernon Griffiths, professor of music at Canterbury University College and to Mr. C. Foster Browne, organist of Christchurch Cathedral, I have been kept busy. I have heard some notable singing in the Cathedral (to congregations sometimes of half a dozen).

I have heard some New Zealand music. All of it, to anyone coming from Britain has an oddly old-fashioned ring about it. Vernon Griffiths's cantata *Peace and War* occasionally advances beyond the idiom of Stanford and Parry to that of Elgar. Some songs by a younger composer, John Ritchie venture more boldly still into the pleasant melting chromaticism which E. J. Moeran offered twenty years ago.

I longed, I confess, for something to break through the musical conventionalities. But I admit that this music is solid. Not merely is it practical—*Peace*

and *War* is for choir and brass band, an admirable idea—but it is also thoughtful, honestly-wrought handiwork.

How fortunate for me that I heard these works and did not first encounter New Zealand music in the form of Eric Curtis's oratorio *The Christ*, which I heard rehearsed by the Christchurch Harmonic Society. How choraleists who have recently given Bach's Mass in B Minor can devote time to this unspeakable drivel is beyond me.

The presence of the Biblical text must have numbed their critical faculty. Remove the words, play this music in a restaurant, and it would be recognised as an inadequate accompaniment for drinking what in New Zealand passes for coffee.

I really feel that if I can persuade this society to drop this oratorio before it is too late I shall not have come to New Zealand in vain. The thought of healthy men and women spending time on this type of combination of bad Mendelssohn, bad Gounod, bad Saint-Saens, and bad Stainer, when they could be engaged in some relatively uplifting occupation like dominoes, stirs me to a quite personal indignation.

What a relief it was to pass to a rehearsal of the Royal Christchurch Musical Society, conducted by E. R. Field-Dodgson, which was tackling Vaughan Williams's *Dona Nobis Pacem* with sensitivity and intelligence.

But I note from the paper that Christchurch has another vocal attraction. *Il Trovatore* is being given, announced as

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ENTRANCING MELODIES
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DRAMATIC CLIMAXES
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I can only say, I can only say, that I hope to be writing, that I hope to be writing, about this about this, next week.

LIVING MUSIC

MUSIC that was great in one century is great for ever, and will always be appreciated whenever it is played. But the important thing is to bring it to life, and to play it on the right instruments. That is the belief of the Dolmetsch Trio, and they have been convincingly demonstrating its soundness on their current tour of New Zealand. Listeners will be able to hear them next from all YC stations on October 12 at 8.0 p.m., when part of a recital in the Wellington Town Hall Concert Chamber will be broadcast, and again on October 22 at the same time in a recital at Auckland. They are seen at right rehearsing in the Auckland studios of the NZBS. From left: Joseph Saxby (harpichord), Carl Dolmetsch (recorder), and Laylor Ring (viola da gamba).



Mermaid Playhouse

A LARGE ramshackle house that had once been a boarding school and still had an assembly hall attached is the sort of home that might give any man of the theatre ideas, and when Bernard Miles, the actor and film director, went to live in such a place in North London in 1945 he began to think of that assembly hall as a small theatre. About three years later Kirsten Flagstad was staying with Miles and his family when he told her about their plans. She said that if they carried them out she hoped she would be invited to come and sing there. That was how the Mermaid, London's only Elizabethan playhouse, was born. It was financed by neighbours, friends and well-wishers who included a great number of the best-known names in the world of the arts in England, and there, on September 9, 1951, with a cast that followed her example by giving their services free, Kirsten Flagstad made her debut on English opera—Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. With several of the original soloists, including Miss Flagstad as Dido and Thomas Hemsley as Aeneas, the Mermaid Theatre Company and the Mermaid Singers and orchestra under Geraint Jones have now recorded Purcell's opera on long-playing discs which will be heard from 2YC at 8.28 p.m. on Friday, October 2.