

Downhill and Uplift

IN Dunedin there is a public library, and in the library there are chairs, and on the chairs there are—yes, there are—cushions! I salute this gay defiance of the spirit of John Knox, who surely would have stipulated bare boards.

Those friendly red cushions warm my heart to Dunedin. I can even treat with a tolerant smile the quaint notion that the city is in some way reminiscent of Edinburgh.

Of course some of the street names are the same. But Dunedin's city fathers had evidently so far forgotten Edinburgh as to make George Street a continuation of Princes Street instead of parallel to it.

Perhaps, indeed, they are a bit absent-minded in Dunedin. The litter-bins in the streets carry the inscription "Keep cycles clear"—all except one, on which is written "Keep cycles cycles."

But after last week's article, I must pick up my recollections from just before

This is the second of five articles written for "The Listener" by the visiting English music critic
ARTHUR JACOBS

I left Christchurch. There I saw the local amateur production of *Il Trovatore*.

This opera had apparently been performed there a few years ago by a travelling Italian company. I should have thought this a good reason for not doing it again, with several hundred other operas to choose from, but apparently Verdi is habit-forming in Christchurch.

Intense in its dramatic style, exorbitant in its musical demands on the singers, this opera presents a tough undertaking to amateurs. The Christchurch Grand Opera Company emerged reasonably well.

But an ironic challenge came from one of the city's cinemas, where it was possible to see a German film of Mozart's Italian opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*.

That opera would have been a better choice for amateur production.

For one thing, it requires a much smaller orchestra. The company could then perhaps have dispensed with that wheezy harmonium making do for this and that.

Whatever the opera, may I caution amateurs first against overloading the same men with the functions of both conductor and producer, and secondly against using obsolete translations in stiff and absurd English?

A good rule is to be suspicious of all translations published before 1914. Even if a copyright fee has to be paid for the use of newer ones, the artistic value in approaching an audience with sense instead of nonsense makes it worthwhile.

The next day I was welcomed to an all-Maori charity concert, in aid of funds for the London-Christchurch Air Race. O charity, what crimes are committed in thy name!

If there is anything more hideous than a boy of about twelve, singing "Because" in a monstrously distorted voice through a microphone to the accompaniment of a pianist who was no nearer the right notes than London is to Christchurch, I have yet to hear it.

When a troupe in traditional Maori dress came on, I hoped for something better. I should have been warned by my musician friends, who told me that first the missionaries and then "civilisation" in general had sent Maori music downhill.

Downhill? It could hardly go further down than this. Except for the grunts, this was on the same insipid level as the so-called Hawaiian music which has filtered through New York's Tin Pan Alley.

And so to Dunedin, with a music festival in prospect. About the first concert of this music festival I hope to be writing next week.

I was anxious to see Dunedin Technical College. Professor Vernon Griffiths' book, describing his work there in organising musical activity for everybody in a large school, had whetted my appetite.

At daily assembly, this school sings all manner of settings from unison to six-part. The school has string orchestras, military bands and combined symphony orchestras. At its annual festival it musters 1000 singers and 250 instrumentalists.

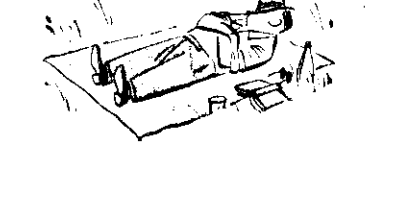
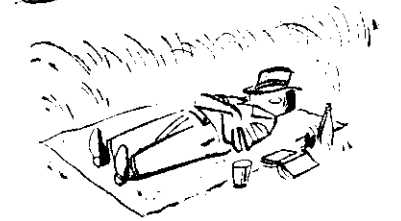
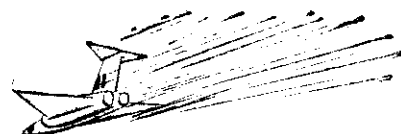
Naturally I was pleased to be invited to sample the school music-making, now under a recent arrival from England, Mr. W. H. Walden-Mills. At school assembly I heard lively and really musical singing in up to four parts, and some equally impressive playing by a string orchestra.

This orchestra boasted three double-basses. What is more, you could hear them; and they played well. Any teacher of school music in England will tell you what a wonder that is.

But now, in the same friendly spirit in which I was received, I want to criticise. I do so knowing that other schools in New Zealand have followed Dunedin's lead, and believing that school music is a subject every music-lover should be interested in.

The music of which I heard a sample is not worthy of the performers. Far too much of it is by New Zealand composers of only local importance, and by other composers who do not matter a scrap.

The local composers are doubtless gratified. But instead the children could be singing those songs by Purcell which should be the musical glory of English-speaking people. The orchestra, instead of playing a march by a modern English composer of merely "educational" standing, could have played a movement from Handel.



(C) Punch

For school music should be real music. Children should be brought into contact as much as possible with the great composers. Great works, even in special arrangements, are better than original versions of inferior music.

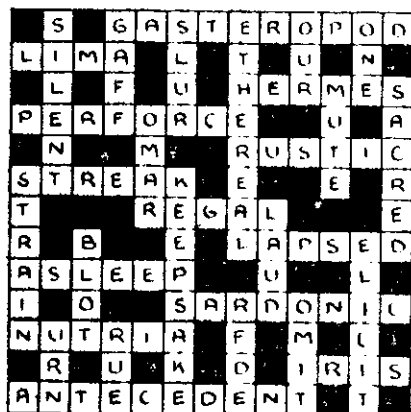
There are no songs by Purcell in the Technical College song book. But out of 100 songs there are 45 hymns, plus three other songs of an "uplifting" nature. In the supplement there are 12 hymns and only three other songs. This is far too much uplift altogether.

Let the school doors be opened to the wide musical world. These children should be on intimate terms with the masters of music—including the modern masters. Let them try, for instance, the audience-songs from Benjamin Britten's *Let's Make An Opera*!

The method of training this school is admirable. The present music staff and their predecessors have fashioned a fine, precision-edged tool. What a pity to waste it on butter!

"THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

(Solution to No. 663)



Clues Across

1. Sober, but you might find it sad.
4. A proverbially close fish and a proverbially busy insect combine to be noisy.
8. Oil test for understatement.
9. A good thing to have if you're suspected of the crime.
10. They have no fingers but often wear rings.
11. This line limits the load.
13. The half sister makes a proposition.
15. "I have seen old ships sail like swans ——" ("The Old Ships," James Elroy Flecker).
18. Pelt aunt? Surely this is rather bad-tempered.
19. "The play's the thing Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the ——" ("Hamlet," Act 2, Sc. 2).
22. Retinue.
23. "Heard melodies are sweet, But those — are sweeter" (Keats, "Ode to a Grecian Urn").

24. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all Ye know —, and all ye need to know" (2 words) (from the same poem as 23 across).
25. Part of a conclusion I cannot escape.

Clues Down

1. Tin seal develops a bulge?
2. Sir John Gielgud, for instance.
3. Fruitful time of the year?
4. Throw a French article and produce a chessman.
5. Panic-monger.
6. Would soda-pie give rise to this tissue?
7. With this test, Sam could become a 5 down.
12. Her creations go to one's head.
14. Rearrange a red seat to provide a low platform.
16. Sacred towers.
17. One hug is quite sufficient.
18. Enclosed courtyard.
20. Unsuitable mixture of paint.
21. It's a bit meagre, but followed by 19 across, it becomes reflective.

No. 664 (Constructed by R.W.H.)

