

SINGING and SCENERY

FOR the first time since 1948 I missed the Edinburgh Festival this year. It normally forms the most exhausting part of my rounds as a music critic—with operas and concerts morning and evening, and sometimes in the afternoon, too—but it never fails to be musically exciting. This year I sampled the Dunedin Music Festival instead.

I am not meaning to belittle Dunedin with an absurd comparison. I have come to know that some of the most rewarding musical experiences occur in unexpected, out-of-the-way places.

But a threefold depression invaded me at that opening concert—first, to see the large, handsome Dunedin Town Hall virtually empty. In the programme was the Mayor's exhortation to everyone to attend the festival, but I did not notice any civic representation among the audience.

Second depression—to hear a quite inadequate performance by the Dunedin Festival Choir, a body compounded of several local groups. These singers lacked vigour, confidence, precision.

Third depression—to find the evening taken up almost entirely by Sir George Dyson's cantata, *The Canterbury Pilgrims*. This dull, respectable music all but smothers Chaucer's lively text.

Why was it performed? In Britain one extract, *The Wife of Bath* (on this occasion very well sung by Dora Drake) has been made popular by Isobel Baillie. But otherwise the work has little standing.

In the last six years I have not encountered one single performance in my duties as a music critic—except one performance, mercifully abbreviated, in Sheffield.

There are so many important works by important composers that are completely or almost unknown in New Zealand that it seems a pity to cultivate such works as this. In general, I suspect that New Zealand devotes too much time to Britain's second and third-line composers—to the Dysons and Rowleys and Thimans—and not enough time to the important ones.

If another choir is seeking a lengthy British work worth tackling, I recommend such examples as Michael Tippett's oratorio *A Child of Our Time*, Constant Lambert's *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, or Benjamin Britten's *Spring Symphony*. This last is very difficult, needing a boys' as well as an adult choir, but its stunning brilliance makes it worth the trouble.

Or why not try a non-British modern work? How about Stravinsky's magnificently barbaric *The Wedding*? Here is a work that does not need a professional symphony orchestra's accompaniment, as the only instruments required are four pianos and assorted percussion.

Or the choir might try a British masterpiece of the immediate past, like Delius's *Sea Drift*. Or they might be really daring and essay that unknown composer, Handel. (Oh, those dull minds who think that by performing *Messiah* they have "done" Handel!)

But, farewell to fancy, and back to that concert in Dunedin. *The Canterbury Pilgrims* was accompanied by the National Orchestra in a style not adequately finished, but at least sturdy enough to pull the choir through.

The strings of the orchestra also gave Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia* on a

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

Theme of Tallis. The opening of this with its soft, rich, widely-spaced chords, is like nothing else that had ever been written when this work appeared in 1910. If the devotional air appropriate to a huge Gothic cathedral can ever be expressed in music, this is that music.

But this performance under Warwick Braithwaite was at best matter-of-fact, and at worst marred by bad intonation and by lack of expression. I hope for something better from the National Orchestra in the Auckland performance which I shall review in next week's article.

Early one Sunday morning I left Dunedin by bus for Christchurch, via Timaru. Oh, the wonderful scenery on the first part of that journey!

The green hills roll delightfully as the bus takes the winding road. On the left, the towering Southern Alps, reminding me of Switzerland, and by no means belying their name. On the right, the blue Pacific. Other mountain scenery, equally inspiring, unfolded itself to the view during my flight from Christchurch to Wellington.

Such things are ranked as only minor attractions by those who know New Zealand better than I. But that is in itself an indication of what a tourist centre this country could be.

But for that, of course, a high explosive would have to be put under the present prevailing ideas of what constitutes satisfactory catering and accommodation. I was lucky enough to strike comfortable private hotels in Christchurch and Auckland. But the casual meals in restaurants are nightmares.

Do New Zealanders themselves want nothing better? In Wellington I found a restaurant owned by Greeks. But there was no *moussaka* on the menu, no *shish kebab*, none of the other tasty dishes



N.P.S. photograph

DORA DRAKE
The Wife of Bath was well sung

which make Greek restaurants famous in London. "Nobody here would take them," said the owner.

But if the food in Wellington disappointed me, I found a musical dish very much to my liking. Mind, it was not fully cooked: this was a rehearsal, not a concert. But no one hearing the Schola Cantorum, even on this occasion, could doubt that the ingredients were tested by the highest standards.

The Schola Cantorum is sometimes known, as its conductor Stanley Oliver smilingly told me, as "the choir with the funny name." As a matter of fact, its name could almost be interpreted literally. It might indeed be taken as a "school for singers," or, at any rate, as a group which could teach choral bodies all over New Zealand what is meant by a really high standard in programme-making.

Its current programme (which will already have been broadcast by the time this article appears) includes a Mass by Byrd, from the age of Queen Elizabeth I, and another Mass of very recent com-

position by Edmund Rubbra. Antony Hopkins, one of the new British composers who have emerged since the war, also has his place.

I found it even more gratifying to hear the choir rehearsing a work by the American composer Randall Thompson and another by Hindemith. Even in London we hear too few works from America; even in London, "modern music" is too often simplified to mean "modern British music."

High standards of performance, as well as programme-making, were also evident in the rehearsal. I see that Sir Malcolm Sargent called the Schola Cantorum "a Grade A choir anywhere." Much as I like sparring with conductors, I cannot see myself picking a quarrel on that point.

Also in Wellington I had the pleasure of lecturing to the Chamber Music Society about some recent developments in chamber music at home. But I almost felt the lecture should be the other way round. I could not help contrasting this society, which is so well supported that it has a waiting list for members, with similar bodies in England which are always begging equally for members and for funds.

And so to Auckland—where the local morning paper began its report of my university lecture by ascribing to me an epigram which I had carefully said was Bernard Shaw's, and by quoting the epigram wrongly, anyway.

Georg Tintner, the enterprising ex-Viennese who conducts a number of Auckland musical groups, tells me that his forthcoming performance of Bruckner's Mass in F Minor may well be the first anywhere in the British Commonwealth.

Yet I am surprised to see that the National Orchestra's performance of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, a work that is among the most commonly heard symphonies in Britain, advertised as "first performance in New Zealand."

Such contrasts, such surprises, beset the musical visitor everywhere here. But they are grist to the critic's mill. And this critic has found them so interesting that he has tacked a week extra on to his intended stay before answering the call elsewhere.

Pageant of British Music

COMPILED by Bessie Pollard, of the NZBS Programmes Department, a comprehensive series of 33 programmes dealing with various forms of British music from Elizabethan times to the present is to be broadcast shortly from YC and YZ stations. Entitled *A Survey of British Music*, the series is in five sections, dealing with English song, and with keyboard, church, instrumental and choral music, in that order. Contributions to the survey have been recorded in the four main centres, and in Hamilton and Napier, and with two exceptions the programmes are by New Zealand artists. The exceptions are an oratorio by the Handel Society of England, and a bracket of early English songs by Victoria Kingsley.

Each section of the series will be introduced briefly by a New Zealand musician specialising in the particular kind of music. Molly Atkinson will introduce the section on song, which is to be broadcast first. An unusual programme in this section is a selection of English folk songs based on the old and allegedly prophetic chant: Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor, Rich Man, Poor

Man, Beggar Man, Thief. There will be a song for each of these occupations, and a note on the historical background of each.

The section dealing with keyboard music—introduced by Stanley Jackson—will introduce listeners to several little-known works some of them taken from the famed Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. Three of the programmes in this section will consist of harpsichord music by Layton Ring.

The church music was recorded in churches of various denominations throughout the country. A notable programme in this section is a performance by the choir of the Church of St. Mary of the Angels, Wellington, of works by John Hilton, Thomas Tallis and William Byrd. This choir has specialised in early music.

The section on instrumental music will be introduced by Ruth Pearl, and will include Nine Fantasias for Strings, by Orlando Gibbons, performed by the Alex. Lindsay String Quartet. Among the modern works will be one by Bernard Stevens, the "modern, but not ag-

gressively modern" Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello. This music was obtained specially for the series.

In the choral section listeners will hear, among others works by the contemporary composers Benjamin Britten, Vaughan Williams and Gerald Finzi, performed by the Auckland Choral Group, and Walford Davies's *The Pied Piper*.

A Survey of British Music is to be the first of a number of series dealing with the music of various nations. It begins from 2YC and 4YC on Tuesday, October 13. From 2YC the introductory talk will be heard at 7.45 p.m., and the first programme of songs at 10.0 p.m. From 4YC the talk will begin at 7.30 p.m. and will be followed immediately by the song programme. Other YC stations and the YZs will begin broadcasting the series later.



N.P.S. photo

Bessie Pollard