



Spencer Digby photograph



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N.Z. Composers

VARIATIONS ON A FELT HAT

SYMBOL of the real dinkum New Zealander is not the silver fern or the kiwi, but the felt hat. Condition, shape and angle all tell their story. And so when you come to music by a New Zealander—the genuine article—it is not the beard of Brahms that sticks out, or the bleeding heart of Tchaikovsky or Fate Knocking at the Door, but a felt hat. You will probably know what I mean if you listen in to the music of five New Zealand composers to be broadcast by the National Orchestra from the YCs on December 13 and 20 respectively—Dorothea Franchi and Douglas Lilburn in the first programme, and Thomas Gray, Ashley Heenan and Warwick Braithwaite in the second.

All of these are very handy at writing for the orchestra. This must be mentioned first, for after all, whatever you have to say, it is necessary to say it well; and in New Zealand, moreover, the craftsmanship of the "local" composer is still depreciated by a lot of people. Let it be said again, then, that Dorothea Franchi, Lilburn, Gray, Heenan, and Braithwaite have all learnt their trade, and learnt it well. Whether you like all or any of their music is another matter. Back to the felt hat, then.

In Thomas Gray's *Festival Overture*, the old felt hat is on the side of the

head, brim well down, a little jaunty, holiday style. Mr. Gray's music, fit for a festival, is bright and brassy, jubilating with glorious clashes of chord and colour. With cheerful rhythmical themes, the impetus of the overture hardly slackens from beginning to end. *Festival Overture* is boisterous hearty holiday fun. Ashley Heenan's *Cindy—A Square Dance for Strings*, hat on the back of the head, is prepared to foot it with the best of them. This is clever and effective string writing brought off with almost virtuoso omniscience. In putting the theme through its paces with varied instrumental and subtle harmonic and rhythmical touches, the composer makes this American folksong his own.

Warwick Braithwaite's *Variations on a Personal Theme* is the third composition in this National Orchestra programme of December 20. Mr. Braithwaite's musical felt hat is a respectable domestic one with homely dents and a comfortably worn brim. The "Personal Theme" is from his opera *Pendragon*, "the child's song from the beginning of the third act, which is quite a simple piece of music designed so that any person could sing it without any trouble." The texture of the music grows out of the theme, being simple and straightforward and for the most part diatonic, by no means "modern." Each of the thirteen variations displays a

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different facet of orchestral colour from the pattern of clarinet and strings in the first variation to the whole orchestra brilliantly set out in the last.

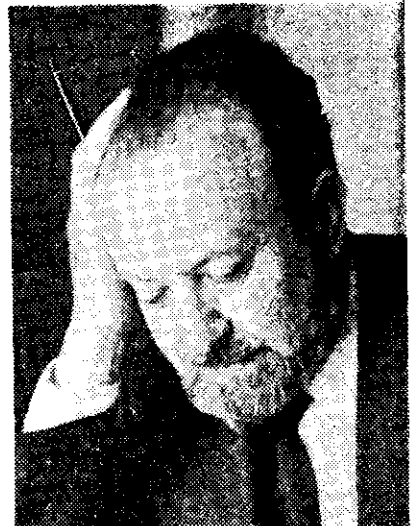
Two Major Works

The first of these two National Orchestra programmes of New Zealand music will be broadcast on December 13 and will include Dorothea Franchi's *Rhapsody for Viola and Orchestra* (soloist, Winifred Stiles) and *Symphony No. 2 in C Major*, by Douglas Lilburn.

Mr. Lilburn's felt hat is one that has peeped through his music for some time now, the hat of the countryman who lives in the open spaces or upon the heights, and in this symphony, for a while, a little rakish as if the countryman had come to town and was enjoying the experience. This is just a fanciful way of saying that we have come to regard Douglas Lilburn's music as part of New Zealand, in some tangible way steeped in the aroma of the landscape; that this time, in the second movement, at least, there is a more sophisticated urban tang; and that now the composer seems to know exactly where he is going. The Second Symphony speaks with assurance and unhesitatingly moves towards the summits of its expression.

There are four movements. The first, marked *Prelude: Moderato*, is broad and spacious in conception. Themes appear from them and around them the music evolves, builds up to climaxes and subsides again. Out of this variety of interest there grows an impression of inevitable unity. Landmarks of listening in this movement are the opening string passage, a theme by oboe, followed by clarinet and then oboe again and flute, a passage for two horns and a bold trumpet solo. The second movement, *Scherzo*, has a cheeky, sophisticated air portrayed by the crisp opening theme from the strings and perky, syncopated street-urchin tunes from oboe and clarinet. In the middle section "chippy" strings make a setting for a cantabile cello theme.

The third movement, solemn and introspective, is an introduction to the finale. This is marked *Allegro* and the



THE five New Zealanders whose works are to be performed by the National Orchestra: Top left to bottom right, Ashley Heenan, Dorothy Franchi, Douglas Lilburn, Thomas Gray, Warwick Braithwaite

suggestion to the strings to play with "springy rhythm" sets the mood of the movement. This is not jovial music, nor is it athletic. It is rather like a brisk walk on a summer night, felt hat and all.

If Dorothea Franchi ever wore a felt hat, either figuratively or actually, I am sure she must have sent it flying into the air as she wrote her *Rhapsody for Viola and Orchestra*, for this is music as fresh as a morning breeze. The *Rhapsody* won the Royal College of Music's 1951 Tertis Prize awarded to encourage composition for solo viola. (Incidentally, another New Zealander, Ronald Tremain, won the second prize in the same year.) Dorothea Franchi's work is in one movement which seems to fall naturally into two contrasted sections. The style of the music is contemporary enough, without, however, any straining after effect, and to say that it reminds one of nothing else but itself is to commend its originality. The general spirit is lyrical as befits a rhapsody, and the orchestration, bright and cheerful, never overpowers the more modest but soaring tone of the solo viola. This is exciting music as, indeed, is all the music in these two programmes. Listen to them and, if you have a felt hat, you will probably take it off to all five composers.

NEARER GROUND LEVEL

READERS who have managed to sneak back within range of the Earth's gravitational pull after reading the story on page 6 may think the atmosphere of a mere College of Aeronautics a little too earth-bound for a while, but once acclimatised they should find *Shaping Wings to Come* interesting and profitable listening. For this programme a team of BBC commentators visited the College of Aeronautics at Cranfield, in Berkshire, where much of the training and research that lies behind the success of Britain's aircraft industry is centred. Cranfield was built just before the war and provides a first-class aerodrome with excellent permanent accommodation for staff and students. To guide listeners through the complexities of the college, it was decided to trace the course of a second-year project—the design and development of a twin-

engined fighter. The programme is linked by Richard Dumbleby and the Principal of the College, Sir Victor Goddard. The other commentators are Raymond Baxter in the Department of Aircraft Design and Aircraft Economics and Production; Charles Gardner in the Department of Aerodynamics; and James Petridge in the Department of Aircraft Propulsion. Before the programme ends Charles Gardner, in an aircraft, describes some aspects of test flying. *Shaping Wings to Come* will be heard from 4YA at 3.0 p.m. on Sunday, December 13, and later from other National stations.



BBC 1950
Richard Dumbleby