

George Ellwood Comes Back To Wellington For A Brief Stay



Spencer Digby photo.

BACK in New Zealand for a short time after a 15 months' tour abroad is Mr. George Ellwood, noted Wellington 'cellist and leader of the famous Ellwood trio. In a talk with the "Radio Record," Mr. Ellwood said the musical world of London was at the moment tremendously virile and active. Mr. Ellwood does not intend to settle in New Zealand again, but leaves for Australia this week and will probably go on eventually to Johannesburg.

This young musician was born in Yorkshire, England, and started to study on the 'cello at the early age of six. At the age of seven he started touring, and since then he has been for ever on the move. Four years later young George Ellwood played to Jean Gerardy, great 'cellist, and so enraptured was this famous player by the playing by the boy of the Saint-Saens Concerto that Gerardy promised to teach young George without fees. After seven months' intensive study the young student carried off the coveted "Premier Prix" of the Liege Conservatoire. After this he again started wandering over Europe. Alone on the Continent at the age of twelve, he had been in Britain at the outbreak of war. He left England, however, crossed over to Sweden and Denmark, and eventually came back to Scotland. After several visits to Australia and New Zealand and touring the Continent, he eventually settled for a few years in Wellington, where he gave many performances and did a lot of teaching. At the end of 1933 both Mr. and Mrs. Ellwood left for an extended tour of Europe, arriving in London in mid-winter. The concert season was in full swing. Concerts followed each other in rapid succession—five and six a week—artists of world fame and works both well known and modern. In that season most of the great artists of the world made at least one appearance in London.

"Last year was a most intensive musical season at Home," said Mr. Ellwood, "and one notices the come-back of good music and real appreciation all along the line. This seems to have had its effect in New Zealand and Australia in the revival of sales for pianos and other instruments. Of course people are naturally more interested in their own work, and even if it is not really as good as anybody else's they like to think it is. Since Verbruggen's time music in Sydney and in the whole of Australia seems to have slumped somewhat. People nowadays know immediately the difference between good and bad performances.

"Sir Thomas Beecham is a wonderful artist, and one of the finest conductors I have seen or heard, but he has a dictatorial mind and he is not content if his outlook and opinions are not taken notice of. He has only to appear at a concert in London and the place is absolutely full. He

more than holds his own with all the German and other European conductors. He is one who is helping tremendously the upward trend of music of the last century. I visited London, Paris, Brussels, Liege, Spain and other European centres where I had formerly studied, but the only place over there in which I would have considered settling for a couple of years was Paris. London is very gay now with all sorts of activities, and has enjoyed a theatrical boom for some time. But it is in a way a friendless place. Artists are giving performances in small halls perhaps because of the amount of competition there is in every musical line. A great many people who have left the Continent, many of them Jews from Germany, have brought more music to England."

Mr. Ellwood spoke highly of Sir Henry Wood's work in the musical world, and mentioned his effort to arrange a tour of wood-wind and string instruments under Sir Henry to Australia and New Zealand. When the arrangements were almost complete, Lady Wood was involved in a serious motor accident and this was a considerable setback to the conductor, who at that time was negotiating for substitute conductors from the Continent. The Australian tour has now been abandoned for this season, but Mr. Ellwood has high hopes that the project will be carried out next year. Sir Henry is very popular in England, and would undoubtedly do much to foster musical appreciation in this part of the world. The promenade concerts which Sir Henry conducts are still appealing to hundreds of thousands of music lovers. Business men after leaving their offices would get a bite of something to eat, then rush along to the Queen's Hall to the promenade concert, and listen to whole concerts devoted to Brahms, Delius, Wagner and so on. This did not seem to interfere with their digestion, if their hearty appearance and obvious enjoyment gave any indication.

After making several appearances with the B.B.C. and with the close of the concert season, Mr. and Mrs. Ellwood started their wanderings by motor-car. They covered most of England, Scotland and Wales, and Mr. Ellwood said that the delightful English countryside had never appeared more beautiful than in the summer of 1934. He said he had climbed Ben Lomond at midnight, and walked up the mist-covered side of the lovely mountain at the side of Loch Lomond in order to see the sun rise. In this same little car Mr. and Mrs. Ellwood afterwards travelled 30,000 miles on the Continent, and enjoyed every hour of it.

Speaking of 'cellists, Mr. Ellwood said that the finest player he heard was Piacorski, a most sensitive and subtle player, with an appealing tone and a background of the rarest intellectuality. Other good players of outstanding note were Cassavo, of Spain; Eisenberg, of Germany, and Gabousova, of Russia. Pablo Casals he did not hear. Referring to Gabousova, Mr. Ellwood said that he was playing a beautiful Strad loaned him by the Soviet Government, which was helping students by allowing them to use the valuable instruments they controlled. That was a splendid idea, thought Mr. Ellwood, far better than shutting them up in glass cases for people to look at. One of Mr. Ellwood's happiest memories was the playing of the Brahms Concerto by Jascha Heifetz under Sir Thomas Beecham at Queen's Hall. He also spoke enthusiastically of the magic of Yehudi Menuhin, the young violinist, whom he heard play the Elgar Concerto. Menuhin is due to make a tour of Australia and New Zealand in the very near future. At Sadlers Wells he saw Rimsky-Korsakoff's Fairy Opera, "The Snow Maiden," very beautifully performed under the direction of Clive Carey, an Englishman not unknown in Australia and New Zealand. Arnold Bax, too, was writing good music—one of his latest successes being "The Tale of the Pine Trees Knew."