

# Pessimists and Pianos

*Do you play a musical instrument? If you do, read what Dr. J. E. Borland says about the influence of radio and the Gramophone on amateur music. If you don't, well read it, anyway. He covers a multitude of topics—all of them interesting.*

**M**Y opinion of broadcasting in New Zealand? Well, that is perhaps scarcely a fair question, because most of the six months I have been in this country I have been touring. I have had few hours leisure to listen-in. One impression I did gain, however—and one I think nobody will gainsay—was of the tremendous progress your broadcasting has made since my last visit in 1926. All I remember as outstanding then were church service relays. Now your programmes are, in arrangement at least, markedly similar to those at Home.

One of the greatest differences, from my viewpoint, is the lack of modern grand opera. This to a certain extent is counterbalanced by your frequent broadcasts of old favourites, such as excerpts from Gilbert and Sullivan's operas. I think these are a little neglected in English wireless programmes. Of course, you find it necessary to use many more gramophone records for broadcasting purposes than we do, but such a practice does not detract in the least from the attractiveness of a radio entertainment. On the contrary, recordings are probably preferable to first-hand renderings by less qualified artists.

I was rather surprised to find that at most of the country hotels where I stayed during my recent travels powerful modern radio receivers had been installed. I heard many enjoyable concerts.

**A**NOTHER point which impresses me greatly is the marked improvement made in England of recent years in recording music. In the early days of gramophones we thought that a certain recording of Dvorak's "New World Symphony" was marvellous. To-day, in comparison with a modern recording it is almost laughable.

The gramophone and the wireless set have an immense influence, over the younger generation especially, in the genuine appreciation of good music. In the old days, if a schoolmaster wished to talk about music to his pupils he was under a serious handicap. Perhaps he played the piano a little—but what use was that in trying to instil into children a love for the works of the great masters? Now, however, with the aid of the gramophone, he can present to his pupils any selection he desires, played by the world's finest musicians.



*Dr. J. E. Borland, F.R.C.O., A.R.C.M., an eminent English musician and the author of numerous books on music and musical instruments, has for the last six months been touring New Zealand as examiner for the Trinity College of Music, London. When in Wellington a few weeks ago, he spoke from 2YA, and this was so much appreciated that in response to many requests from listeners he kindly consented to broadcast once more before leaving for England on December 17. The accompanying interesting views on broadcasting, and music in general, were expressed by him while talking with the "Radio Record" the evening before he sailed.*

Broadcasting, too, is of great assistance in this direction. It is sometimes necessary to hear many of the classical works a number of times before a genuine liking for them is conceived. The fact that one may occasionally hear a schoolboy whistling a melody of a Beethoven sonata or an Italian opera may be quoted as an excellent indication of what radio has accomplished in this direction. Twenty or thirty years ago one was fortunate in hearing any particular composition once—

and then only during the excitement of a concert.

Will mechanical music ever displace home learning? you ask. No, I'm sure it won't. If a child, or an adult, for that matter, is really fond of good music, his or her enthusiasm for home playing will, if anything, be stimulated by mechanically reproduced music. One definite good radio and its ally, the gramophone, is accomplishing is the sorting out of those who have no real liking for music, but who as children were perhaps forced to learn some instrument.

**I**T is a curious idea, but a prevalent one, that the only instrument for children to learn is the piano. It is not uncommon to come across a family of four or five children all learning the piano, and worse, all playing the same pieces! I certainly admit that anyone who intends taking up any other instrument, whether for a profession or for pleasure, should study the piano, if only for a while. The student should progress until he, or she, is able to read two lines of music simultaneously. Then when the chosen instrument is taken up, things will be found much easier. In addition, the student will not be hopelessly lost when it comes to studying harmony or orchestral scores.

The standard of amateur musicianship in New Zealand? It is surprisingly high, and compares very favourably with other countries. Another point worth mention is that choir singing appears to be very popular among the people of this country. On a population basis, I should say that the number of persons interested in this form of music is as high here as anywhere in the world. I can think of only one real reason for this. At Home, people have tired of the old choral works, such as the "Messiah" and "Elijah," but in this country they are still popular. They possess one great advantage, namely, they are not difficult to present effectively.

**A**T Home, however more modern compositions are largely preferred. The majority of these are difficult, and to learn properly require an appreciable amount of time—probably more than the amateur in this country is prepared to give. In addition, at first hearing they sound almost (Concluded on page 2.)