


TO BE A PUPIL

 was in my fortieth year when I climbed the 78 steps to the two-storeyed, wide-verandahed house at the top of Abel Smith Street. I made the mistake, never repeated, of knocking at the front door. A piano was being played inside the house and a raised voice, with an accent that almost turned a 'th' sound into a 'dh', said 'Not that way - Like this.' There followed a rush of sound that lifted the spirit. Then quick steps and the rasp of bolts being drawn and there she was, Diny Schramm, described to me by one and all as the best teacher of the piano in Wellington.

This was my first encounter with a degree of disapproval that was to change only in pitch over the years that I knew her. I had come to the wrong door. I had interrupted a lesson. I had not made an appointment. But my delight in the great fold of flowering clematis that hung over the verandah rail and the spread of the Brooklyn hills and the city sprawl below, not yet obscured by new building, won me a space to explain my presence. I wanted to learn to play the piano, from the very beginning. 'Oh, but you are too old, I teach beginners only when they are very young, and then only if they show aptitude.' We discussed the problem of the forty-year-old brain at some length, its inability to absorb



all the requirements of a good technique, particularly to make the quick response necessary to translate sighted notes into action of hand and foot governed by musical interpretation. She was quite right of course, the obstacles were very great, but I persisted and after severe probing into many aspects of my life style, constant attendance at orchestra and chamber music concerts winning a

nod of approval, I got partial acceptance. If I would go as a pupil for a year to one of her senior pupils she, Diny Schramm, would see what she could do.

So it was that I went for a year, each week for an hour, to John Cegledy at his parents' home in Brooklyn. So it was that when I next presented myself at Abel Smith Street, this time through the gate in the six-foot garden wall behind the Te Aro school, under the crab-apple tree and across the lawn, I could play some scales, move each finger independently, apply, in slow motion, two pressures to a piano key, give a recognisable version of a Chopin prelude.

The ten years that followed, so far as my involvement with the piano was concerned, were full of incident. Diny Schramm was musical to the very marrow of her Dutch bones. As a teacher she had one aim: flawless performance. To achieve that it was necessary to master a technique