

The Blue Room achievement

(By a Special Correspondent)

While beatings, bashings-up and acts of vandalism by young people claim the headlines, it is salutary to discover an opposite side to this story. Equally newsworthy is the tremendous effort that is being made in New Plymouth to establish "The Blue Room," which will provide headquarters for a Folk and Blues Club.

Other activities such as talent quests and art exhibitions are envisaged but, basically, a very live centre for the youth of this city is on its way to completion.

Ask any of the young people concerned why they have given up so much of their spare time during the past few weeks to work so hard for their dream of "The Blue Room" and the reply is unanimous. "We NEED it," they declare.

"And," they will add, "we wanted to prove that young people can do something for themselves."

The story of "The Blue Room" began, in effect, with two 16-year-olds, pupils at the Girls' and Boys' High Schools. Determined to do something about the idea, the girl student tramped the city trying to find suitable quarters, a discouraging task that had many setbacks. Finally, the only possibility appeared to be space in the old Farmers' Co-op building in Courtenay St, but what needed to be done was a daunting prospect.

A bare shell had to be completely converted to com-

ply with what was envisaged, and health and fire regulations demanded facilities and safeguards that could not be evaded.

Money was scarce but the will was there, and by pooling their skills and resources they believed it could be done.

A spectacular change has taken place since that time. The largest and most striking mural ever to be seen in New Plymouth has made the walls something to see and remember, and this has been the work almost entirely of 16-year-old Paul Hartigan, one of the two initial movers of the scheme.

Inspired

To say this mural is inspired is no over-statement.

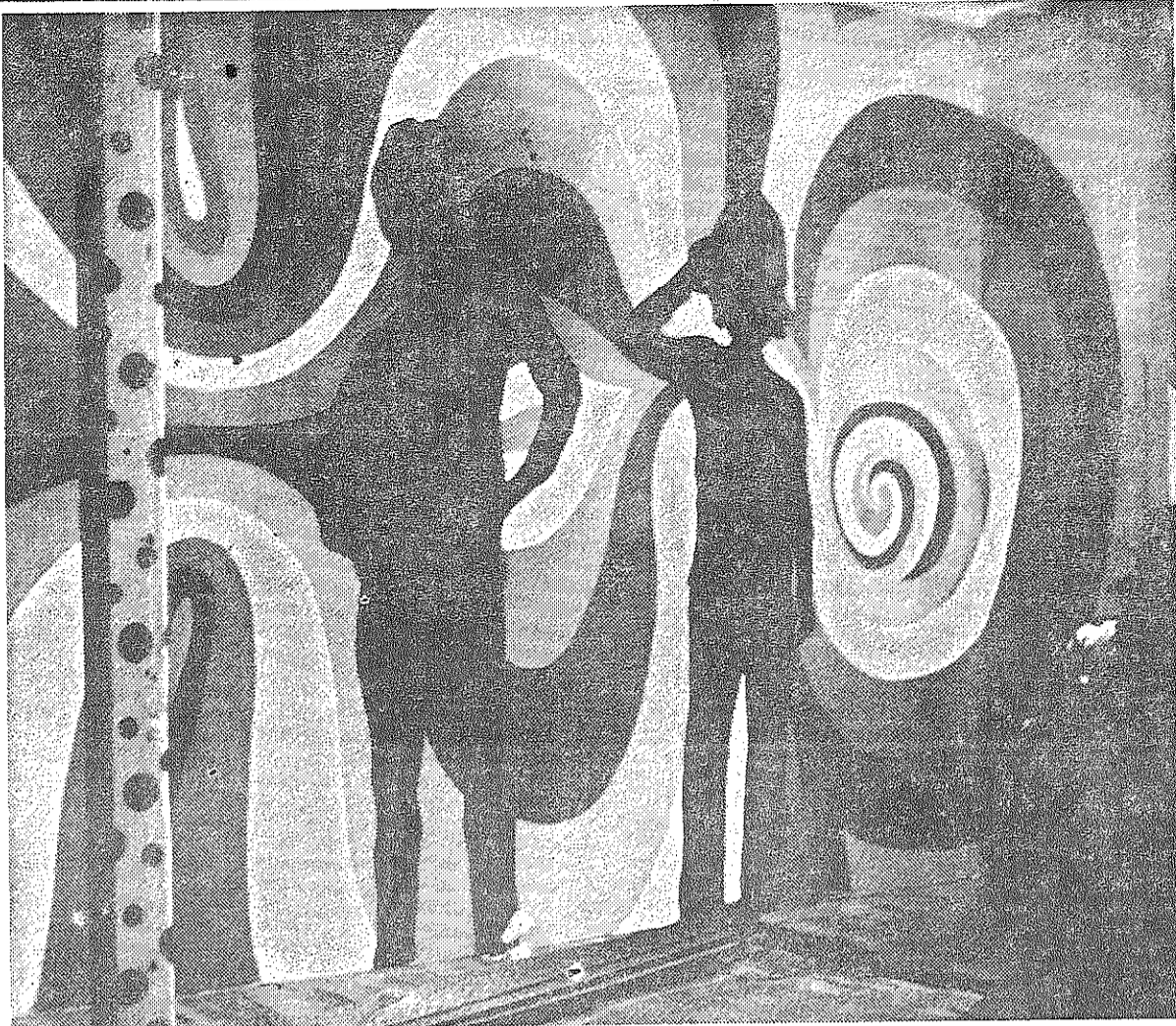
Paul noticed the fall of the shadows of the young people against the walls and suddenly the whole idea was born. By placing a light on the floor he

posed them and created giant black silhouettes as the central theme.

These are set in a brilliantly-coloured rhythmic design which flows and swirls around the walls in complete harmony. A bold silhouette with six arms dramatises the stage. The sustained and stupendous effort necessary to paint this mural has occupied endless hours and lifts the whole atmosphere of "The Blue Room" into something live and telling.

The stage was one of the items bought from a New Plymouth auction mart and extended to suit. The mart, where a genial auctioneer was both helpful and encouraging, proved a happy hunting ground for these young people and tables and chairs were bought at throw-out prices.

Transforming them with paint was a willing chore and psychedelic material donated by a local fabric firm was used to cover the



SWIRLING COLOURS and the shadows of models fill the walls of the New Plymouth Folk and Blues Club premises in Powderham St, New Plymouth. The models posed in front of a light bulb and their shadows drawn in, then filled in with black paint. The effect is striking.

seats. Somehow other equipment was found: a sink, a counter, washbasins, whatever was needed; and, where donations were not forthcoming, it had to be bought.

Business

The few local business firms who were approached were, in the main, both interested and sympathetic. "It's good to see the kids try to do something like this," they said. "They really need a place—get them off the streets."

The requests to the firms were varied: Paint, blue, black, or white, perhaps; plumbing or building material. Money, of course, has been a pressing problem, for young employees and school pupils are not always blessed with excess funds. But hands dived into pockets, adults and firms helped, and donations began to creep in. Various schemes were discussed for soliciting help, both in the present and future, until that happy time when "The

Blue Room" can support itself.

The size of the task they had set themselves and the responsibility soon began to dawn on the group and there were many times when "the blues" really began to descend on "The Blue Room." Despondency began to battle with the exhilaration of earlier hopes. Personality conflicts — difficult even in older, more experienced groups — began to create differences. Problems seemed too big to solve. After so much willing effort either they had to disband or turn the corner.

'The Fuzz'

But turn the corner they did. By a happy twist it was the law who held out a helping hand. "The Fuzz" proved that hearts beat beneath the uniforms.

When policemen one night wandered into the rooms they must have been considerably refreshed by what they found. Here were no nefarious activities requiring

investigation, but instead evidence of a constructive attempt by young people to accomplish something themselves.

They heard the story of hopes, fears and problems, and listened with sympathy. As a result, the Jaycees were alerted and members of this organisation, as individuals, came forward and offered their help. A hard discussion of facts, faults, figures and future took place, and the task of final organising began.

Opening

The Blue Room is now on the road to its opening night. It is dominated by a magnificent mural, has a stage for performers, a kitchen area for refreshments, an office and changing room, and toilet facilities for him and her. All the work has been done by the young people themselves, spurred on in the final stages by Jaycee helpers.

Their experience, since the venture began, has been con-

siderably widened by their activities and has added to their education for living.

The pioneer group of this new venture remains convinced that what it is doing will provide something that is vitally needed by the young people in the community. They have problems ahead—but they have many problems already solved. The "somewhere" they can meet is almost a reality. When the doors open in the near future there will be many who will offer a salute to "The Blue Room" and wish it well.



SIXTEEN-YEAR-OLD Paul Hartigan, New Plymouth, with one of his models for the giant murals he has painted on the walls of the New Plymouth Folk and Blues Club. The model is Sylvia Penny.