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Can Such Things Be?

EVERYBODY knows that television is coming, but nobody knows when it will be here. It is still far enough away from the average home to appear unreal, and the forecast on another page of its likely course in America still leaves us unmoved in New Zealand. We can't think in millions where entertainment is concerned, and even if we could we should not be able to get excited about a miracle beyond our range of experience.

We in fact hardly believe yet that what we read is true; and we are not sure that we wish it to be true. If there were nothing worse involved than the scrapping or remaking of our receiving sets we could take refuge in the thought that loss is never absolute. But if we may believe the prophets, television will remake our minds as well as our sets. As marine creatures become terrestrial after a few million jaunts ashore, we shall develop look-and-say brains by face-to-face acquaintance with the world's wonders. It will in fact be simpler than that. The fish has to flounder out of the mud. We shall not have to move out of our chairs.

It is all very disturbing till we remember that television in twenty years has moved less than fifty miles. It is coming, but if its next fifty miles are as long and as costly as its first fifty, some of us will die without it. For we must suppose that a million dollars is a million dollars even in the United States, and if it would cost a hundred million dollars merely to link up sight stations from the Atlantic to the Pacific, co-axial contact between Auckland and Bluff will be a worry for our grandchildren.

There will be no need for a year or two to burn our books, but politicians with a forward look should begin cultivating photogenic personalities.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

Letters are still reaching us from all parts of the Dominion praising or criticising the "Listener." For all these we are grateful, but it is not possible to print or answer them all. We shall, however, when we have space, print letters sent to us for publication if they are interesting and brief, and deal with topics covered by the "Listener" itself. We cannot, however, undertake to give reasons why all or any portion of a letter is rejected. Correspondents must send their names and addresses even when it is their wish that these should not be published.

FORGET THE FRONTIERS

The Editor, *New Zealand Listener*.

Sir,—To me your publication fills a long-felt want in that it sets out in concise form what is on the air. . . . One thing I would like to impress upon you—keep the publication free from cheap journalism. Keep it free from the vicious criticism, buffoonery, cartoonery, and sneers against good peoples of the world who happen to be of a different opinion from ourselves.

There is no nationality in music and art so far as New Zealand is concerned, so let us be generous to our opponents by showing in at least one journal an appreciation of all peoples as potential friends. . . . Don't pander to the mob psychologist who delights in guffawing with the rest of the herd. In other words keep the journal an unbiased entertainment guide, and nothing else. We get enough propaganda in the daily press.

Yours, etc.,
F.A.W.

Palmerston North.

BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE

The Editor, *New Zealand Listener*.

Sir,—I was disappointed with Vol. 1, No. 1. I was hoping for a *Listener* like the B.B.C. publication with a leading article on some topical subject, something with plenty of meat in it, reprints of the leading talks of the week, with an occasional sermon perhaps, a musical critique, and another on art. Because if Spengler is right, and our European civilisation is hurriedly hastening to its end, it will be in places like New Zealand only that it will survive. Therefore we ought to be up and doing to inculcate a love of art and beauty and good music so that

there may be some ground for a civilisation to grow.

I don't think people as a whole want to know what the dinner music programme is. I go into as many kinds of homes as most people, and I usually get shown into a room where there is a wireless in full blast. Even when I know I ask what is being played. Nobody ever knows—the usual answer is "I was not listening. I just have it on for company."

It is merely a background of noise to which they have become accustomed. So why not give us more classics and less crooners? It would be a better background for the subconscious to work on.

I feel that the Broadcasting Service is paying far too much attention to the people who do not really listen, and that it is therefore losing an opportunity to instruct the others and improve the culture of the country. It will be too late if the remnants have to go and live in the Waitomo Caves with only Eb and Zeb and some jazz band records.

Yours, etc.,
E.E.M.

Cust.

BACK TO BURBLETON

The Editor, *New Zealand Listener*.

Sir,—Listening in to 3YA on Saturday, July 8, I was deeply interested to hear a recording, "A Northern Evening from Burbleton."

When the performers mentioned Radcliffe and Bury in their rambles it brought back old times, as I used to be a motorman on the Bury Corporation Tramways. Then I heard the Concertina Band. What joy when the announcer said it was the Tattington Concertina Band. The route I was on was from Bury to Tattington and I know that band well.

Yours, etc.,
J.P.

Okoia.

Programme-Building

You Asked For It

OUT of possible conclusions to be drawn from the 3,000 letters received by 2YD, Wellington, for the "Listeners' Own," or, as it is now called, the "You Asked for It" session, one fact plainly emerges: the largest section of this listening public likes plain middle-brow music.

This may or may not be an indication of listening taste. The programmes given over the air are reproduced almost exactly as listeners send them in, so they are at least a true indication of the radio tastes of those people who will go to the trouble of making programmes for themselves and submitting them.

The work is representative of different tastes, but sufficiently within limits to be grouped under the general heading of Music without Smiles. Humour is strangely lacking.

If the words above and below may be used without prejudice, these listeners are not below asking for classical music and not above asking for a sentimental song or two.

The session had its anniversary last month. This week you will hear it for the 56th time under the new title of "You Asked for It."

It was an experiment 12 months ago. For a year it has been a success. As many as 20 letters come in for it every day. These are carefully sifted and the four or five best are selected for the weekly broadcast. Very little is done to them. It is necessary to be sure that they are correctly timed, and occasionally a suggested record is not available; but there

is absolutely no "faking." If listeners themselves did not supply the programmes there would be no session.

Surprising talent is displayed in the creation of themes and in the selection of records to build the music round them. Some are scrappy, but most are obviously the result of careful thought and planning. The standard has risen consistently as the session has grown. Listeners are now annotating their programmes much more thoroughly and linking selected pieces with commentary which is usually apt and neatly phrased.

With the improvement in method has come an improvement in taste.

"Hot" music attracts as little attention as humorous sketches. Gladys Moncrieff and Jean Macfarlane out-vote the Boswell Sisters by 100 to 1. Formby turns up about once a month, but Tauber, Tibbett and Nelson Eddy come in every day. A good concert orchestra or a military band has 10 chances to one against Duke Ellington.

Symphony music does not get much chance, but there is some demand for chamber music. Popular operatic extracts and classical melodies are almost favourites. The word "melody" is important. Listeners will ask for anything if it has melody in it. Few of them like music which has to be "interpreted," or any sort of impressionism. They prefer music which tickles them, or soothes them, or gives them little shivers up and down their backbones; but they definitely do not like music which puzzles them.