

PEER'S CRUSADE FOR ENGLISH MUSIC

Maros Gray Interviews Lord Lurgan

(Special to "The Listener" from Melbourne)

THERE was a day when Barons went crusading in tin pants astride the ancestors of Clydesdales. If you take the charitable view of history, they went crusading because they believed in something. Their enemy was the unbeliever.

But the days of tin pants are gone for ever. It's hard to take a charitable view of the present—and the result is you can seldom find anyone, let alone a baron, who believes in anything.

But I found someone this week—and a baron. He crusades for something he believes. He is a lone crusader, calling as liberally on a fund of moral courage as the barons of old called upon a fund of physical courage to parry the scimitar of Islam over Europe.

The baron is William George Edward Brownlow, fourth Baron Lurgan. His crusade is the music of England.

He Can Take It

Lord Lurgan is 38 years old. His eyes are the wide, blue, hooded eyes of the Irish artist. He is tall and spare, with fine, strong hands. He has a shock of shining, black hair and white Celtic skin.

You could say to him:

"Is it true that you are the first British peer to turn professional musician—or for that matter, to turn professional anything? Is it true your fellow peers in general disapprove of you? Is it true that newspapers whose women readers think you are a 'perfect thrill' ask you impertinent questions about why you are unmarried and what you think about love and coronets? And is it true that your title is the biggest handicap to your success as an artist?"

Lord Lurgan would look you flat in the eye and say, "Yes."

He can take it. He has learned to take it. He has declared war on his own private species of Unbeliever—the impresario who tells him to go away and learn to sing German Lieder so that he can sell himself to the highbrows as a highbrow musician; the acid-stomached critic who arches a moulting eyebrow when contemporary British composition is mentioned; the vapid concert-goer who thinks Mozart is "lurfly!"

A Friend in Need

Lurgan—yes, I prefer Lurgan to Lord Lurgan in exactly the same way I prefer Tauber to Mr. Tauber—has a good, sound, commonsense, intellectual conviction that English music needs and deserves a friend. He himself has a fine voice, and he has the backbone to fight. So, as a friend of English music, he is determined to fight—like the isolationists—from "hell to breakfast."

Some listeners were lucky enough to hear a brief recital from IYA a fortnight ago by William Brownlow (Lord Lurgan) when that well-known singer passed through Auckland. This interview with Lord Lurgan in Melbourne suggests that we were unlucky not to hear more.

It is good to hear him talk of his convictions. We sat together in the lounge of his Melbourne hotel and argued the thing out. In his quietly pitched, smooth voice, he put the case for his beloved English music forcefully and without frills. He said the English language was a beautiful language, that English music was fine music to sing. He spoke with natural bitterness of the strange English failing of decrying all English art as inferior.

Nothing But English

He said much that is controversial, and much that I believe to be wrong. He admitted that he was a propagandist before he was an artist, and that he would rather be called a "ham" singer than have English songs called "ham" songs. Because he was a propagandist, he was prepared to forego choice among all the best music and would sing only English songs.

Challengeable as all that is, Lurgan made one feel that his belief was a good, clean belief—a belief with

essential reason in it—and that it was worth while fighting for.

He has come to the Pacific Dominions, these relatively unprejudiced lands, with a deep sense of gratitude. He can sing more often here than he could ever hope to sing in England. Australia has a special appeal for him because it was the birthplace of his friend and guide, the famous Melba. But he was looking forward, also to his visit to New Zealand. New Zealanders, he had heard, have a straightforward, nonfalutin' appreciation of music which is sound at the core and capable of immense development.

Away From It All

But, convinced crusader as Lurgan is and anxious as he is to find new places for attack, it would be unfair to picture him solely as a fighting musician, with interests narrowed to his artistic creed.

With a bright grin, he admits he can get away from it all. Though, being Eton and Oxford, he didn't tell me this himself, it is true that he is a plus-one golfer and was once well into the top flight of the British Amateur. He is a devotee, too, of that esoteric game, royal tennis—one of the most difficult and expert sports in the world.

No man could get down to that golf handicap, spend so much time on another sport, and still have a one-track mind.

Lurgan is no crank.

But he's the sort of crusader you have to salute. If I may splinter a lance for his cause, I would like to say just one thing (and I wish I could believe people would take notice of me):

Forget the romantic Lord stuff and listen to his songs. He's got something in that voice—and something more under that thatch of black, shiny hair.

Maori Humour On The Australian Air

ANOTHER exiled New Zealander is doing her bit to publicise the Dominion abroad. She is Valda Renouf, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Renouf, popular among Napier repertory and Drama League circles. For several years a journalist in Wellington, Miss Renouf was married early this year and went with her husband to live in Melbourne. She has lately turned from journalism to radio, and has been doing work for the Melbourne National Stations. So far she has concentrated on an original and already very popular type of Maori session. It incorporates the usual legends and music, but is enlivened by anecdotes and descriptions of the Maori as he is to-day.

Australian listeners seem to enjoy the rich Maori humour quite as much as New Zealanders, and it looks as if this jovial type of publicity gets to the Australian heart quicker than anything. The first series of talks has just finished, but Miss Renouf has been asked by the ABC to prepare another series at once.



VALDA RENOUF