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CRITICS AND HOBBY-HORSES



Tom Harrison Confesses And Says Good-bye

TOM HARRISSON, whose name to most people means *Mass Observation*, has for the last two years been the radio critic of the London "Observer." Throughout that period he has also been in the Army, and the Army has now called him away from the "Observer." Here is his farewell note to his readers:

TWO years ago no other national daily or Sunday paper had a regular radio critic. Now nearly all have one, except (oddly enough) two journals which devote much space to arts and influences infinitely less "important." I am glad to see the wide awakening of critical interest.

Inevitably one finds oneself continuously commenting on material from one source, and bearing one signature—Broadcasting House. After a few months one feels the lack of variety. One begins to be afraid of repetitive criticism. Under these circumstances, it is easy to develop hobby-horses and ride them too hard and too far. For myself,

I have had to hammer away at my special "goat-getters"—snippetism, personal advertising, poor reporting, "character" Cockney, "plummy" voices, the neglect of Nature's sounds, the feebleness of some discussions so much needed by democracy, poor players, hurried adaptations, third-rate "cabarets." And I have found myself praising over and again the same things, such as the imaginative handling of time, Stephen Potter, BBC music policy, sports commentaries, Itma, Robb Wilton, Gert and Daisy, some of the health and cookery talks, and the Gramophone Library team.

Moving Into a New World

A critic owes patience and sympathy to artists and organisers in their difficult present. Also, whenever possible he must see beyond the immediate. Radio has a future which very few, even at the heart of it, can yet visualise. As well as television and frequency modulation, there is the great new field of electronics. Radio is so much larger than what we understand by the term.

What we have to hand from recent research is so immense, it will be years before we have realised it all. We are moving into a world of seventh sight and supersonics, where we may presently hear a pin drop on Mars, and see the splash, too. Man's other senses are increasingly left behind—at peril to his balance and safety. How shall we employ our new power? Is our first concern to be the good of many, or the advantage of some? Shall we judge by short-term pleasure or long-term plans? If our air is to be "free," how free? Can we combine responsibility with vitality, communal with commercial interests, national with international views? These are partly questions of world politics, common to many peoples and things. But on the whole I think one may answer them fairly hopefully for radio, provided only that technicians think and act carefully about the developments which they enable and encourage. The public must take a far more active, intelligent interest in directing these developments.

"Good Luck And Good Temper"

Radio critics have a very special responsibility in ensuring that all concerned foresee the better and forswear the worse. Indeed, the responsibility is everyone's. If we are careless and anarchic, the world's ears will soon be drowned in a volume of uncontrolled sound, the like of which we have not yet imagined, and the consequences of which could be unimaginably lowering to the wisdom and decency of man. Radio will be one of the great problems of Peace, when so much can so easily go wrong for so many.

Meanwhile, I would like to thank my readers and to wish my successor good luck and good temper. He will need both!

