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ART FOR WHOSE SAKE?

Dobell In The News Again

(Written for "The Listener" by KAY)



IN spite of himself, William Dobell, Australian painter and winner of the 1944 Archibald Prize Competition, is in the news again. The excitement of the first controversy had hardly died down when he was appointed one of the 12 trustees of the National Art Gallery Board of Trustees, Sydney. And now the Sydney Equity Court has been asked to decide whether Dobell's much publicised painting of Joshua Smith was rightly awarded a prize of £500.

Never has there been such a rumpus in the history of Australian art and the court (as I write) has not yet given its decision. But there have been lesser sensations of the same kind in Australia—and bigger ones in London and Paris.

To begin with, there was the famous lawsuit between Ruskin and Whistler. Ruskin scored the first hit by saying that Whistler flung a pot of paint in the face of the public. In his defence Whistler flayed Ruskin with his maliciously brilliant jabs of wit.

Then there was the affair of the Peacock Room which Mr. Leyland had commissioned Whistler to decorate. Following a fierce dispute over the payment, Whistler altered one of the peacocks in such a way that Mr. Leyland might have before his eyes an obvious caricature of himself.

The Balzac Affair

Another great artistic battle was over the Rodin statue of Balzac. All Paris buzzed with it. The controversy went on for many months, and almost equalled in importance the Dreyfus case. The Balzac affair was for a time a daily feature throughout the entire Paris Press, and even the Philistines knew all about it.

It began simply enough. Rodin was commissioned to have a Balzac statue ready for the Balzac Centenary in 1899. Rodin accepted the commission, but asked for sufficient time, his own time, to prepare the figure. When the date agreed upon arrived, he was anything but ready. He had spent an inordinately

(continued on next page)

VERY LIGHT BUT VERY BRIGHT

2YA Camp Entertainers

PERHAPS I am low-brow, and perhaps I have no brow at all, but it is a long time since I enjoyed anything so much as I did the 2YA Camp Entertainers in the Wellington Town Hall last week. Fresh from showing to the Armed Forces, they gave a packed audience in the Wellington Town Hall an opportunity to recapture the thrill of the variety stage in a non-stop show. It was a fine voluntary job in aid of the Leper Christmas Appeal.

Everybody in the show had reached specialist status, and the term "non-stop" was fully justified—especially the pace kept up by compere Will Yates, whose original type of humour found patrons leaning forward in their seats to catch every sparkling word.

Every musical artist realises the value of a polished build-up in accompaniments. And this is where Henry Rudolph and his Variety Orchestra scored—a compact and excellently-modulated musical body. Mr. Rudolph, as well as being conductor, is a top-line performer with a variety of instruments.

The nicely balanced full chorus produced from its capacious musical pocket everything from musical comedy to opera, with a dash of "swing" now and then as an interesting sideline. Soloists were Audrey McNamara and Joyce Izett. Elizabeth and John Tait, xylophone duettists, gave unusual arrangements of well-known melodies. Doreen Calvert and Yvonne Andrews were decidedly attractive as vocal duettists.

Then there was Leela Bloy's violin in Sarasate's "Gipsy Airs," and her clever performance of the fast-moving "Ragamuffin." Jeane Horne's School of Dancing pupils (soloists, Kathleen McDonald and Alex Grant) glided gracefully through their ballet contributions. As for the show's baritone, Ken Macaulay, it must be a long time since anyone made "Boots" more dramatic.

Will Yates' researches into osculation must have carried him through some dangers, while his "Snore," and exposition of nocturnal camp noises, displayed extraordinary powers of remembrance. The Auckland performer, Sybil Philipps, carried the whole house with her in Gounod's "Ave Maria."

Short-statured, and using the confidential style of comedy, Walter Marshall did the famous bass song, "Drinking," and followed this with a laugh-getter, "Bungin' 'Em In" (words and music by the late W. Graeme Holder). The Harmony Serenaders (Doreen Calvert, Yvonne Andrews, Sylvia Devenie and Dorothy Kemp) whose numbers were "Isa Lei" and "Swiss Bellringer," and The Four Musketeers (Ken Macaulay, Walter Marshall, Ken Strong and Len Hopkins) provided the kind of harmony that every crowd enjoys. So did Jean McPherson with her attractive and original arrangements of popular songs of the day—"Boy in Khaki," "I Love a Lassie," and "Out of the Bluegums."

It seems only the other day that I saw Heather Wright embarking on her acrobatic career in Christchurch. To-day she is the complete artist in spine and leg-cracking contortions.

Responsible for the show were: General director, Will Yates; programme organiser, Malcolm Rickard; stage manager, Bernard Beeby; musical director, Henry Rudolph.

—E.R.B.