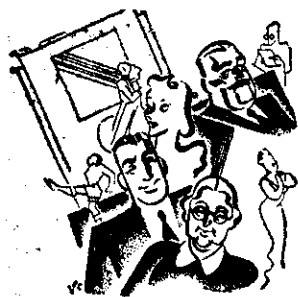


RADIO VIEWSREEL

What Our Commentators Say



Music Nobody Mentions

THE *New Zealand Herald* the other day published a well-documented article on the remarkable increase of local buying of classical records, and argued that certain trends were very clearly traceable to the effect of broadcasting. Another town replied with the news that an increased demand for "swing" was apparent in its population. But, as usual, no census was taken of that vast tide of music which is neither "classical" nor "swing," but which, according to the *Musical Times*, occupies over half the BBC hours of music (and one would put the figure at least as high for New Zealand). The people who like this type of music never seem so vociferous or so specific in their demands as the sponsors of "classical" or "swing," but they are obviously more numerous or more effective. Another curious fact is that the devotee of classical music is often amused at the assumption that "of course he hates all this horrid jazz," for as like as not he quite relishes a bit of "hot" music, but he will be across the room in a flash to switch off when the brass bands or cinema organs get busy with gems from musical comedy.

The Russians Are Thorough

WHEN the Russians do anything, they do it with all they've got. Take the publicising of young Shostakovich, whose music has poured out of the U.S.S.R. with the speed of a Red Army attack and knocked musicians into a state of semi-consciousness. He is going to be the world's leading composer, if it requires the whole of Soviet Russia behind, pushing him! The argument, no doubt, is that anyone who turns out symphonies and concertos at such a rate and actually gets them performed by famous musicians, just MUST be good. Listeners to 4YA recently might have some means of judging between Tzarist and Soviet music, when Eileen Joyce played Shostakovich's Concerto Op. 35, followed on the programme by a group of songs by Nevstruev, Dargomizjsky and Rachmaninoff. I read in some American magazine that "Shostakovich's music sounds to Russian ears the way Victor Herbert sounds to Americans"; but however that may be, he seems to me just a little too clever to be typically Russian. I prefer the Russian mood so nostalgically expressed in the works of "The Five."

Modern and Coherent

WE seem to have had quite a bit of Vaughan Williams from Dunedin stations lately; or it may be that I'm addicted to his music and constantly looking for examples of it. There are probably hundreds of "Water-Mills" in existence, but surely not many so subtle

as the song of that name by this composer. I don't know the author of the words (it would be an idea for announcers to give us the name of the author as well as that of the composer), but it's a curiously meandering poem telling of the uneventful life of the miller and his wife and his children and his cat, "a tabby, lean as a healthy cat can be." This unusual setting, by



Vaughan Williams, in its lengthy phrasing and monotonous rhythm, is nicely calculated to produce a picture of a busy life, its background the ceaselessly turning mill-wheel. I find Vaughan Williams modern without being incoherent, and feel sure that we could have much more of him in our radio programmes without a feeling of surfeit.

Swanee River and All That

I WONDER whether Swanee River, and the various elegies on Massa, and the works of Stephen Foster generally, have been a worth-while cultural influence on American development. Americans seem to find them an expression of some genuine national mood or experience, but it is not quite clear just what. Certainly not negro life in the slavery period, but rather the workings of white imagination in the search for an attitude towards the negro. These ditties, I suppose, are the musical counterpart to Uncle Tom's Cabin and that anti-slavery feeling which was probably more marked by generosity than by understanding. They did good work as the first cultural bridge between black and white; but they obscured for years the real artistic contributions of the negro—an American writer says that the spirituals were not widely appreciated till the 1920's—and made for that popular view, so infuriating to the intelligent negro, of his people as quaint and sub-medieval.

Poets and Kings

WHEN learning history at school, we rejoiced in our childish way at the defeat of the Armada without wondering greatly how the Spaniards felt about it. But poets are different. John Masefield's "Philip the King" (4YZ) was a gloomy play, unrelieved by any touch of humour or cheerfulness, but somehow gripping in its very despondency. Masefield's Philip, a prey to visions of despair and the sport of ghostly creations of his own wild imagining, waits for news of the great fleet. Rumour cruelly brings news of victory, but among the shouts and the bells the

King remains unmoved, as though anticipating the shattering horror that came. This was an NBS production, and although the players were not named, they performed something of a feat in compelling the listener to wait for the inevitable end of a play whose theme, though moving, was not exactly a cheerful subject for this year of war, 1945.

Blast Walt Disney!

ASSOCIATION of ideas can be a fearful some thing. Here am I switched on to listen to a Bach programme; the announcer tells me that we will now hear Stokowski's arrangement of the Toccata and Fugue in D Minor, and I sit back in rapt anticipation. Good heavens! What is this? The moment the music begins the room fades from my conscious sight, and on the dark maroon screen of mental vision I see yellow violin-bows dancing, accompanied soon by abstract cubisms in assorted shapes and colours. The wretched things simply won't go away. They are succeeded by colossal waves of undulant violet against a peacock sky. It's surrealist painting, a musician's nightmare, an artist's hang-over. It's appalling. In the end I switch off the beloved Bach and curse the day I ever went to see Walt Disney's *Fantasia*. How long will it be before my mind can listen again to the Toccata and Fugue and register nothing except music?

A Change from Serials

I HOPE that 12B and the sponsors of the weekly session called *One Way And Another* succeed in their attempt to interest listeners in the technique of radio plays. Two plays each week are written around the same set of clues—for instance, "a car moving, a revolver shot, an aeroplane warming up." The authors are chosen, it would seem, by invitation, and besides the interest of seeing what two different people will do with the



same clues, there is the excitement of wondering which of our local celebrities will next appear as playwright. Production is good, and comments—though only very polite ones—are made by the producer. My only general criticism is that too many of the plays are concerned with violence, either because of the nature of the clues, or because it is difficult within the space of a very few minutes to obtain an effect by other means; but I should like to see more scope given to human nature in its more gentle and humorous aspects.

Legendary Nonsense

HOW does any legend arise? Usually for lack of facts about the events it portrays. Cologne Cathedral remained unfinished for 600 years—plenty of time for any number of legends to arise! The play by the New York Radio Guild "The Legend of Cologne Cathedral," broadcast from 4YA, makes uncertain

capital out of a few facts, such as the killing of the architect when lightning struck the stone bearing his name, and his subsequent descent into oblivion. Surely the facts are enough without any legend. But here it is, demoniac atmosphere and all. The architect is visited by night by a Master Architect whom the listener will immediately recognise as Old Nick, who points out the unlikely fact that in several months the architect has produced no new plans for Cologne Cathedral, but merely copies of such famous cathedrals at Chartres, Strasbourg, Rheims, etc. The architect, who by some moronish mistake has completely overlooked this trifling error, agrees to sell his soul in return for the Master Plan. His lovely daughter consults the Abbe, who fools Mephisto by means of a sacred relic (this part was a bit complicated, and I confess I didn't follow it) and lo! the devil's cathedral is built to the glory of God! The subsequent true happenings are attributed to a judgment on the architect for the sin of pride. If this is good material for a radio play, the psychologists are correct who estimate the average listener's mental age as 12 years.

Guessing Competition

LIFE is still adventurous for the listener who relies on 2YC for his music, even now that Parliament is out of the way for a while. There was Vincent d'Indy's Symphony on a French Mountaineer's Song set down for Wednesday night at 8.0. It turned out to be Elgar's Violin Concerto. Two nights later Bloch's Piano Quintet was the scheduled work for 8.0—I stayed home specially to hear it. This turned out to be Ravel's Quartet in F. Both of these items were on records, so it was not a case of someone being unable to play. So on the Saturday evening when Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony was scheduled, I got out all my scores except that one. But as I say, life is adventurous for the 2YC listener; the advertised item was actually heard.

What's It All About?

"DOWN by the Rio Grande they dance no sarabande"—but one would have to be a greater admirer than I of Sachseverell Sitwell to remember more of this poem. When Constant Lambert's *Rio Grande* bursts forth, my immediate reaction is always, "Yes, very impressive, but what on earth are they singing about?" I remember, on first hearing this work at a Dunedin concert, the electric effect it produced on the audience; but on that occasion, and rightly too, the words were printed in the programme. Very seldom, even with strictly trained singers, is it possible to hear words sung in chorus, except where long familiarity makes for automatic perception, as in listening to Gilbert and Sullivan. Even in the record by the Halle Orchestra with St. Michael's Singers, the words are problematical. But the words matter only in that they set the mood for the music, and the wild Latin-American atmosphere is caught in alternating moods of raucous gaiety and unabashed sentimentality. As an unfortunate anticlimax, however, this particular presentation finished a few minutes before schedule, and was followed without pause or announcement by the sugary inanity of Toselli's Serenata.