



particular; and less than half-a-dozen songs were heard. Sea shanties are among the greatest folk songs; they belong to no particular country, but to the cosmopolitan life of the fo'c'sle, and they include every emotion from the ribaldry of "The Drummer and the Cook" to the cynicism of "Whisky Johnny" and "What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor?" There are also one or two shanties which rival, in breadth of mood and beauty of melodic line, the folk music of any country; such as the restrained sadness of "Tom's Gone to Hilo" and the sweeping grandeur of "Shenandoah" or "The Rio Grande." Richard Terry, who has made a collection of them, says the "shanty man" or leader sang the verse, while the reiterated refrain was sung by the crew as they marched at the capstan bars or hauled at the sheets. Shanties therefore vary in tempo with the work being done, and are designated accordingly, as windlass, capstan, fore-sheet, halliards, or pumping-ship shanties. A little such information to introduce a programme of shanties, together with a few details of the famous clippers of old, or a description of the seaman's life in a windjammer, would have made all the difference to the enjoyment of the average listener.

No Moa no More

DR. H. SKINNER, in his talk from 4YA, "The Maori in Otago," spoke not only of the pre-European Maoris, but of the pre-European birds and trees of Otago, painting a picture of Dunedin hills covered with subtropical rainforest alive with robins, fantails, rifleman, bell-birds—a picture which might well cause Dunedin citizens to look askance at the tussocky hills where once stood white pine, rimu, and matai, and to mourn sadly for the thick plant-carpet which once clothed the nakedness of burnt-out Central Otago, haunt of the vanished moa and takahe. There were few Maoris here in olden days, but there are fewer now. They came for the moa-hunting, and bartered moa flesh for the North Island articles such as huia feathers, flax, and so on. The only bad mark against them seems to have been the killing out of the moa, which we Dunedinites may accept as a mixed blessing; while I was delighted to find a pair of wood-pigeons frequenting a tree in my own back yard recently. I doubt if I could find it in my heart to welcome the same attentions from a couple of moas.

The Arts in Britain

I MAKE no apology for continuing to comment on the BBC talks (heard direct on alternate Sundays at 6.15 p.m., Pacific Service) on the present-day position of the artistic life of Britain, for few people will have heard them and they have such an extraordinary

interest that they should be more widely known. Perhaps the various speakers, persons of distinction in the critical world, are unduly optimistic, but the note of rebirth and reassurance is common to all; all sound excited in the literal sense — stirred by a new movement and a new life. The last talk I heard dealt chiefly with the work of CEMA, which body co-ordinates and distributes to the people at large the work of the various artistic bodies — stage, ballet, opera, etc. But two remarks especially stand out; one, that the artist seemed newly aware of his social responsibilities; the other, that the tendency of painters, novelists and film producers was all in the direction of emphasising the human subjects rather than their background and environment. When one reflects that "social responsibility" in the last has generally meant depicting the Man as completely dominated and crushed by the Street, the heart tends to leap up. Perhaps we are embarking on a new development, a sort of industrial humanism—but one fears to speak too soon.

1YX Runs Amok

I WAS very interested to see whose idols would be smashed in 1YX's "Iconoclasts' Corner" late on a Saturday evening. They were not mine, and as a matter of fact when 1YX wants to hurt my feelings it usually goes to it without any such warning. I have no oppressive reverence towards the "Poet and Peasant" Overture, nor tunes from Offenbach, and I could sit back to take a little passing pleasure out of their parody and distortion, and laugh at the overture to "Raymond" adapted to the drama of a cat fight. Time was when I didn't know that such records are not so funny the fifth time one hears them as they are the first, and if the salvage drives had ever made a call on old gramophone records I think most houses could unearth a little batch of these—relics of youthful pocket money happily but unwisely spent. Nowadays I am content to let the NBS handle my buying for me in this department; but judging by the increasing number of such records, there must be many people still determined to own the precious things.

Aesop a la Mode

I TUNED in recently to 1ZB to pay my respects to Aesop, and at the same time wishing to see how they would conduct the session, which I was hearing for the first time. Aesop has long been a happy hunting-ground for arrangers and adapters. Socrates spent his spare time in prison putting the fables into verse, and now 1ZB is providing short modern plays written around the morals of the fables. "Aesop," said the announcer, "wrote his fables in a form that could be understood even by the simple people of his age. I wonder how he would write them for our sophisticated times." But is a play that is written about human beings necessarily less naive than a fable that was written about domestic animals? And considering the highly sophisticated plays of Aristophanes, for instance, that were box office successes among the "simple" Greeks, the time to patronise these people is scarcely at the beginning of a little play which was perhaps no worse, but was certainly no better, than the average play heard from 1ZB.

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