

propaganda. Of 17 compositions broadcast in seven programmes only one was composed outside America, and this proportion is representative I think of the whole series. Admirable as are these programmes, they give a somewhat unbalanced picture of music to-day. Either some commercial recordings of new music from other countries should be interpolated, or the label should be altered to "Music from America."

Noel, Noel

THE singing of Noel Coward, on the fairly rare occasions when we hear recordings, is one of the minor curiosities of the air. No one could really claim that his voice possesses range, or any marked tunefulness, or even any immediately recognisable character; yet there is something which makes one continue listening, and the composition of the songs he presents, if his own, or their choice, if not, has always something to justify one's interest. This was exemplified by a recording heard from 3YA in a morning session—no, not the renowned (and over-rated) "Don't put Your Daughter on the Stage, Mrs. Worthington," but a series of songs from *Cavalcade*. Most of these were the ultra-familiar yet never despised Cockney music-hall immortals—their names too well-known to be repeated—possessing in their associations the hackneyed charm which is their peculiar secret. Coward has always made a cult of the music-hall tradition—is there something over-ripe in his presentation, an over-prized sweetness? Probably not; these songs are so familiar that nothing can make them clichés (unlike 90 per cent of modern sentimental songs, born redundant). But some of his own songs are interspersed and mingle rather oddly with the company. How tame, now, sounds "Twentieth Century Blues," once the acme of weary nihilism; and how much more it "dates" than the music-hall hearties. What makes endurance in a popular song?



The Freudian Approach

I HAVE always admired those I have heard of Miss Cecil Hull's radio talks; the other night when she was commenting on some quotations under the heading "More Leaves from My Diary" I began to admire also her character and endurance. Here is a woman who has spent most of her life teaching in a girls' school, who came out of her well-earned retirement during the war to teach schoolboys, and who can still speak with tolerance of the pun. "The seeds of punning," wrote Addison, "are in the minds of all men." It is unfortunate that these seeds germinate suddenly when the child first goes to school and simultaneously begins to sit up at table with his parents for the evening meal. "Dad, a boy said to me to-day that I'm going to be rich because my name's Richard. D'y'a get me?" The child collapses into giggles and the parents groan. They fear, with Addison, that "Posterity will in a few years degenerate into a race of punsters," or hope with him that the seeds will ultimately be "subdued by reason, reflexion, and good sense." They think of some of their own contemporaries who still delight in making a whole room groan with more mature examples of this "false wit." Why do we groan and

jeer? Miss Hull quoted no Addison but threw out provocatively the interpretation of an American critic who would have us believe that we jeer through jealousy and that our groans are pure envy.

Talking About Music

"MUSIC is not a criticism of violins but a playing upon them," wrote Santayana. There is much truth in this; and, for the most part, music had best be left alone to explain itself. Some music however, needs a spoken introduction; and some listeners, too, may need a little assistance before they are on more than nodding terms with the music. A good deal of contemporary music comes within this category. I listened recently to Virgil Thomson's Suite: "The Plough that Broke the Plain" which was followed by the Schoenberg Piano Concerto. Nothing was said about either of these compositions, and to those unfamiliar with their backgrounds the music may have sounded uninteresting and, in the case of the concerto, obscure. The Virgil Thomson Suite was taken from the music which accompanied the famous documentary film *The Plough that Broke the Plain* and out of its context much of its entertainment value was lost. The Concerto is based on a novel harmonic system and while explanation might not have removed any apparent obscurity, it would have at least counselled patience in the listener. When this particular series of records was broadcast from the American 12M a recorded commentary accompanied them, but this has been deleted. It would be an assistance to many a listener if it were replaced.

Fabulous

A CERTAIN episode in the series "Mr. Meredith Walks Out" had such an aura of unreality that the people in it seemed mere puppets, set in motion by an author completely out of touch with real life. Mr. Meredith is evidently a multi-millionaire; there can be no lesser explanation of his attempting, for a bet, to get rid of £170,000 in two months, without recourse to giving or throwing away. He gives thirty thousand to an insane inventor, a hundred thousand to a dud theatrical producer, and forty thousand to a woman for some fake jewels. Of course the invention is a success, so is the play, and the jewels turn out to be real, but these are not the improbabilities which stagger the mind. It is merely incredible that millionaires, even eccentric ones, should go about with the intention of getting rid of their money without getting something back, even if it is only the altruistic thrill of having backed a worthwhile charity. Mr. Meredith, on the contrary, gets nothing but the satisfaction of being thought a prize sucker. I refuse to believe in the man.



Sinfonia New Zealand

DOUGLAS LILBURN'S "Sinfonia for Strings" broadcast from 1YA recently, is a moving work. It is not cheerful music. In parts almost stern, always contemplative, it has about it a calm confidence. Its vitality has its roots in New Zealand, and, for that reason if for no other, it finds an immediate response

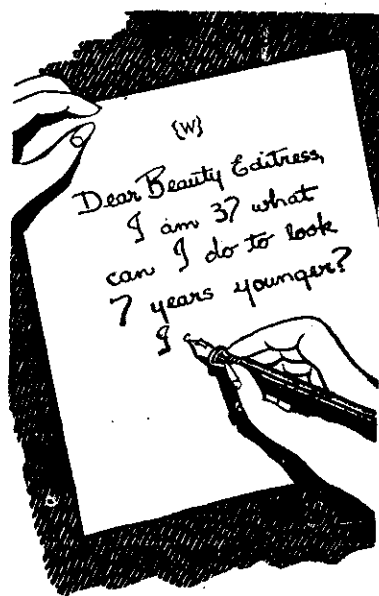
in the heart of the unprejudiced listener. Indeed, the Sinfonia has a beauty all its own. New Zealand's music will gain vigour as more composers here forsake mere imitation of other worlds and other things to find an idiom indigenous to their environment. The 1YA Strings, conducted by the composer, gave a convincing performance.

Newton Predicted It

"ENTROPY continually increases . . . This law (the second law of thermodynamics) holds, I think, the supreme position among the laws of nature." In these words Eddington sums up the effect of Newton's famous proposition that all things tend continually to become more and more disarranged, and prophecies that this will go on until the universe becomes a uniform mixture of indistinguishable particles at a uniform temperature. Thinking the other evening that this law, apparently of universal application, might be influencing radio programmes, I investigated those of 1YA. Newton was right. The "unclassified" programme is on the increase. "The Boys Overseas" feature, which used to be heard from 1YA at 9 a.m. on Sundays, was followed at 10.0 by "Players and Singers"; the latter mixture has now spread itself over the whole two hours from 9.0 till 11.0. A former serial feature on Thursdays at 7.30 p.m. is now superseded by a miscellaneous collection of new gramophone records known as "In Mint Condition." "Music which Appeals," "Say it with Music," "Musical Highlights," "From our Sample Box"—all the lovely titles that are strewn through 1YA's columns in *The Listener*—cannot indefinitely mask the fact that they are but synonyms for "The Mixture as Before." Will the day come when the programme organisers will bow finally to the forces Newton warned them, were beyond their control, and describe their week's programme in one all-embracing word, "Miscellaneous"?

Musical Black Mass

"THE CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY," I read in the programme, "and Dinah Shore." On the face of it this looked about as odd a combination as could well be imagined, though I once heard a bracket consisting of the 1812 Overture and "Love in a Bunch of Roses." As it was no doubt intended to, the oddity of the announcement led me to seek an explanation by listening at the appointed time. It then proved—as was perhaps expected—that the Chamber Music Society bears the further appellation "of Lower Basin Street" and consists of a coterie of enthusiasts who have conceived a method of swinging on the woodwinds alone; while on the other side of the record Miss Shore warbled songs appropriate to the company. Though I missed the Ducal rattle and clang it was good swing and made amusing listening; but the most noticeable feature was the compère, who spoke with the conscious diabolism of the swing addict present in unusual measure. Surely it is time, however, that swing music was recognised (especially by itself) as a pleasant and normal entertainment, and its fans dropped this attitude of gentle nihilism which almost seems to take it for granted that everyone who enjoys swing is a marijuana addict. These pretences are totally unnecessary: we are more and more coming to regard swing as a regular and everyday phenomenon, with the enthusiasts letting off their fireworks in broad daylight.



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