

and everywhere to find works which will do honour to their own individual technique.

## Bach in Lighter Mood

THE Trio from Bach's "Musical Offering" was recently an offering in the "Masters in Lighter Mood" session from 1YA. I wonder how Bach would have regarded this classification of one of his last and greatest works. "The Musical Offering," you will remember, was a flattering tribute to Frederick, King of Prussia. "As the notes, so may the King's welfare increase" wrote Bach over one of the canons; and again, "May the King's glory soar with the ascending modulation." The thought and labour that produced this quintessence of contrapuntal writing are incalculable qualities of genius; hardly, one would think, the concomitants of a lighter mood. To suggest, however, that the seriousness of conception implies an absence of lightness in the music is to confuse the means with end. This is Bach enjoying himself, revelling in the unfolding of beautiful patterns. The "Musical Offering" is a tremendous trifle.

## Debatable Land

A BARITONE in a 3YA Studio presentation was billed to sing something described simply as "Border Ballad." I tuned in to see which of the enormous number of possibilities had been selected, and was informed with some gusto that all the Blue Bonnets were over the Border. There is no complaint against this; the "Blue Bonnets" is a genuine Border song, though perhaps hardly a ballad. The curious thing is that a barbaric upland inhabited by professional cattle-raiders should have produced so unique a concentration of folk song and that of so individual a character.



ter. A life in which the amateur and informal warfare was endemic presumably bred an ethic composed of the simpler and more adventurous virtues, which might be reflected in a poetry which for all its beauty and delicacy is essentially primitive; but that does little to explain the unique quality of the art. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch could find no explanation of this but to suppose that in those parts lived a ballad-maker of genius, who left his imprint on all subsequent compositions. I have never been able to understand why Quiller-Couch did not go a step further and identify his mysterious master with Thomas the Rhymer, hero or narrator of several ballads, who possesses some sort of historical reality. But the whole theory is not especially convincing—the distribution of the ballads is too wide and the known dates are rather against it—and these

poems, seldom broadcast with any success, as the original music is mostly lost and that subsequently written an anachronism, remain something unique in English.

## Get a Haircut

AS I sat alone in the privacy of my home the other evening, a Voice speaking on behalf of the Electricity Controller interrupted the musical programme to which I was listening, and told me that my electric clock was ten minutes slow. A quick check with the old seven-and-sixpenny alarm showed that the Voice was right. Something at Arapuni, or wherever these things begin, had struck at its life centres, and for the first time in years its heart had failed to beat its 60 to the minute. This was my first shock—the clock that had been infallible for years was no longer so. But somehow that was not the worst of it. A disembodied Voice had floated into my home and told me something I myself did not know about its inner workings. I thought of Robinson Crusoe startled out of his long solitude by the voice calling, "Poor Robinson Crusoe"; I thought of other people who have sat alone and had strange, significant things said to them by voices in the air. It is profoundly disturbing at first, but no doubt one becomes quite used to it. And now I look forward to the time when there will be more of these useful hints—when I may leave it to the omniscience of various Controllers to watch over me in my solitude, to tell me that I have left the iron switched on, that I need a haircut, or that a mosquito is about to settle on my left ear.

## Did I Hear That?

"SICILIAN VESPERS, sung by Miliza Korjus," the announcer's voice, as it percolated through the structure of my ear, seemed to be saying; and a train of thought blew its whistle and moved off. In the year 1282, the population of Sicily, disliking a French Army of occupation then in possession of the island, rose in a body and massacred them to the tune of 30,000 or so. This is generally represented as a spontaneous explosion of popular wrath, and colourful stories are told of how it all began when some French soldiery attacked a wedding party; but historians have disinterested, vague suspicions that the whole thing was at least encouraged, perhaps organised, and certainly applauded by the King of Aragon on the one hand and the Emperor of Byzantium on the other. Be that as it may, the affair was one of history's more vigorous and sweeping gestures—and what of all this, my consciousness suddenly demanded, was apparent in the singing of Miss Korjus? There was clearly nothing of the bloody and revolutionary passions of a proud and warlike populace; could it be that the composer had ignored the usual meaning of the phrase and merely concentrated on something vaguely Sicilian and vaguely vesperian? Or was it all a misunderstanding and had the announcer said "Whispers" after all? At this juncture a cultivated acquaintance breaks in and informs me that the song is from a little-known opera by Verdi and has no connection with the main political theme. This probably proves something.

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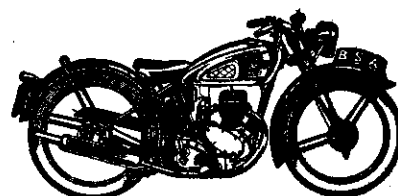
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