

Written for "The Listener"
by BRIAN SNOWDON

I notice that the air force lads who occupy the (indispensable-for-cultural-reasons) art gallery and what-not are using the carillon to hold up t'other end of their aerial. I wasn't aware it had any other purpose he added innocently.

You lie they said bitterly. You know it is there primarily to play tunes on bells.

One very seldom hears it, he said musingly. Mind you he added hastily, not that I want to hear it particularly. But it is left unplayed for such protracted periods that I consider it likely that the services of a tuner will be required. Possibly several tons of metal will have to be filed off the bells to bring them up to pitch he said sarcastically. Mind you, he said, not that it would sound any different in tune or out of it. It all sounds dreadful to me.

Therein you reveal yourself a yahoo and a goon, they said. The sound of bells is beautiful. Why the cities of culture in the middle ages all had carillons. Giotto (the immortal) designed one of them.

Of course mind you he said quickly Giotto didn't think a hell of a lot of the bells himself. But they hadn't got anything better those days. But now, bless your soul, we've got wurlitzers and Hammond organs. Or is it the fact that carillons are out of date and tuneless that gives them their cultural value?

NO but, he said, seeing that they were temporarily unable to answer, why not stop kidding yourselves? You don't want culture. Why spend thousands of pounds on things that delectate only a minute fraction of your number when you personally don't care for them and would far rather just go to the pictures?

It's true, isn't it, he said more gently, that you don't care very greatly for the music of bells.

It's true they said regretfully.

And it's true that your pleasure in life wouldn't be greatly impaired if you didn't have art galleries and what-nots he said.

Surely they serve some purpose they said, trying to convince themselves.

Certainly they serve a purpose he said. At present they are housing—even if not very comfortably—various offices of the Armed Services. Herein appears your hypocrisy he said. As it is being used as a military installation it might conceivably have been regarded by a hypothetical enemy as a military objective. Suppose it had been bombed, he said, what would have been your reaction?

What would be our reaction they began indignantly.

You would have said a curse on these vandals who designedly seek out to destroy our temples of culture he suggested cunningly.

We certainly would they said warmly.

And by that remark you make yourselves hypocrites he said triumphantly,

since you don't use the place, and in a time of national stress when morale is vital, the morale-building value of an art gallery and what-not is so slight that you can afford to close it to the "culture-loving" public and use it as an office.

But . . . they said.

I haven't heard of any picture theatres being closed down to be turned into offices he said.

They hung their heads.

Summed up he said you have no desire for culture. Your love of culture so called is merely a liking for ostentation. You have no faculty that requires to be expensively titillated by the building of art galleries and what-nots. You have no . . .

We deny that they said.

Ah he said, so I'm not as I imagined flogging a dead horse. The animal breathes. And what is this faculty you claim to possess that can only be satisfied by art galleries and what-nots?

It sounds ridiculous they began diffidently.

It is bound to be he said kindly.

We are Wellingtonians they said. When we walk to work in the morning the city and harbour are spread out before us for our consideration.

And you don't even notice it he said.

Ninety-nine times out of a hundred we don't they admitted freely. But the hundredth time we may look and then we stop—even if only for a moment—and something moves . . .

Your hat blowing off he said desperately, not liking the turn the argument was taking.

Something moves here they said serenely tapping their breast. You can't deny it; you've felt the same. You have, haven't you?

To be honest . . . he said.

Thank you they said. And that means despite what you say there is an awareness of beauty.

And on that foundation you build art galleries and what-nots he said.

We don't need any foundation other than an admitted awareness of beauty they said.

It's a mighty thin foundation he said.

It's all you've left us they said, but it's sufficient. It's the ultimate, it's the fundamental. You've chased us a long way, but you can't harry us any further. On that we stand.

I won't take it from you he said.

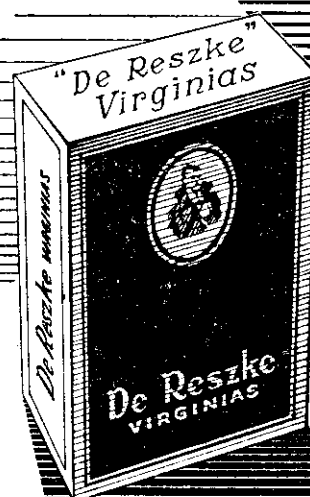
That's very kind of you they said ironically.

South of the Border

SOME day some sober-minded scholar may try to explain the passion for rhumbas and tangos. Possibly Freud has a word for it. At any rate, there is hardly a listener whose foot does not start to tap when the south-of-the-border instruments start. Devotees who like wagging head, hips, and toes should tune in to 3ZB this Sunday, June 2, at 6.15 p.m., to hear Morton Gould and his orchestra in Gould's own arrangements of such alluring tempos as "La Cumparsita," "Brazil," "Adios Muchachos" and others. These eight recordings by one of America's well-known musicians will also be heard from 2ZB on the following Sunday evening.

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