

CHILDREN WHO DRAW TO MUSIC

A DEVICE which a teacher in a Wellington city school used originally to induce her 45 six, seven, and eight-year-old boys and girls to listen to good music has produced an interesting two-fold effect. About two months ago she started to play to them short classical works on the school piano, telling the children to draw their impressions of the music on blackboards with coloured chalks. The idea was expression of impressions. They liked it and clamoured for more. Later she gave them blank sheets of paper so that they could take the finished pictures home.

Then she used the radio, taking Station 2YA's classical hour for objective researches into what the youngsters thought about music. Now she finds that, as well as listening to and enjoying the classics, the children are producing evidence of an artistic sense, some of their drawings suggesting appreciation of the combination of music, colour, and shape.

Boxes of chalk and large sheets of white paper were being handed to Standard 1 when *The Listener* called at the school the other afternoon. From the radio came Chopin's *Waltz in A flat*. One or two children started to draw immediately; others took time to select their colours; others again fiddled with the crayons, gazing out of the window or at the ceiling, or concentrating on the

radio receiver for inspiration. By the time several bars had been played every head was down and there was complete silence as they translated their ideas to paper.

An interesting phase then opened. "Please, may I have some more chalk?"

"What colour, Sue?"

"Green, please."

"Why green?"

so was her minuet. Some, only a few, just let their imaginations run riot, with little, if any, relation to the music, drawing simply a conventional horse or house.

But, with a sigh of satisfaction, a boy of seven put down his chalks. He had drawn a hare running through a forest. The jumpy notes in the piece, he said, reminded him of a hare "running away from a lion to get a bit of peace for a

drawings are finished. And the teacher told us she was quite convinced that most of the pictures were the actual, sincere and personal expressions of what they heard. Curiously enough, she added, the boys seemed to be a little better than the girls at this sort of thing. Theirs was completely individual work, whereas some of the girls were apt to copy each other occasionally.



IN AT BOTH EARS and out on to paper: Children listening to a Chopin waltz and drawing as the music moves them

There is nothing new in the tendency to associate colour and sound. The art critic speaks of tones in paintings, quiet and loud, low and high. Whistler borrowed from music as titles for some of his paintings such words as *nocturne* and *symphony*. Children often regard figures, or names of persons, or the days of the week as each possessing a distinctive colour. People have been found who looked on Mozart's music as blue, Chopin's as green, and Wagner's as "luminous, with changing colours." Sir Dan Godfrey set out a tabular description of each of the instruments of the orchestra, in one column of which he attaches to each a colour; to him the flute is blue and the clarinet "rose-pink to blush red."

Mercery in E Major

Hoffman, the composer-novelist, speaks of his hero, Johannes Kreisler, as "the little man in a coat the colour of C sharp minor with an E major coloured collar." From the latter part of the 19th Century onwards there were many attempts to combine colour and music. Alexander Rimington demonstrated a colour-organ in London in 1895. The instrument did not produce music but accompanied with a play of colour on a screen performances on piano or orchestra. Wagnerian trumpet blasts were imagined as light of intense orange.

From then on several attempts were made to produce colour music. Another composer went further. His idea was to include a play of perfume, as well as a play of colours to enhance the effect of his music. But he died before completing his plans.

For inclusion in the Sunday night 2B Gazette, Station 2ZB has taken a three-minute recording of the work of this musical-drawing class, with explanations by the children themselves. This will be heard at 9.1 p.m. on Sunday, October 30.

It would be interesting to find out if any of the children derived some of their ideas from coloured talkie cartoons, and if there are any little budding Disneys in this class of music-colour-form interpreters.

—E.R.B.

"That's what the music sounds like."

Drawings finished, the teacher asked a dozen or so just what their drawings meant. In many cases the musical stimulus had had a similar effect, for dancing themes were uppermost, while one had presented the idea with a series of diamonds and other objects grouped in series of three, and representing waltz time.

Minuet Meant Rain

On the piano the teacher then played the Beethoven Minuet in G. Again the chalk-boxes rattled and the papers filled up with a variety of colours and designs. With the teacher's permission we asked several children to tell us what gave them their ideas. Bruce said that the music helped him to think up a story which he could draw. Mary said that runs going up and down in the music made her think of tall and short trees, so she had drawn an avenue, fading into distance. To two others the minuet meant rain and notes were represented by raindrops.

A boy presented his teacher with a poser. "How do you draw air?"

"What do you want air for?"

"To do that bit where the notes are quick and soft."

A girl wanted some brown chalk—no bright colours. The music, she explained, was good-mannered. To the girl next to her, blue was a dominating colour. Her jumper, dress, shoes and socks were blue;

change." And the minuet, to somebody else, meant a minstrel strolling through a wood playing a banjo.

Similarities in Interpretation

Here are some more interpretations of the minuet: fairies going shopping; children dancing at a recital with others watching them; two children playing follow-the-leader (this more suitable, perhaps, to a Bach fugue); a girl crying, and her father in his grave (complete with tombstone); people sailing in a canoe over rippling water, and fairies dancing round a Christmas tree.

Young Harry was asked to stand up and speak his mind on the subject. He cleared his throat, struck an attitude, and declaimed to the whole class: "There was a big storm and all the animals ran round about looking for shelter. It rained like anything, but the animals were all right."

Encouraged by Harry's reception, Mary secured attention above the clamour of the other speech-making candidates. "There was an old horse," she told us. "And he lived on a hill and he swished his tail to brush off the raindrops and when it was very wet he lived in a shed with a tin roof and the rain fell on the roof and the waves broke on the shore near by." Water-music, obviously, that minuet was to some of them; dancing to others, but to practically all it suggested rippling movement.

So that there can be no effect of a title on the children, they are not given the name of the work played till their

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among broadcasters. Broadcasting is still in its infancy as a world power, and it were surely wise to seek the guiding hand of the United Nations in these comparatively early days so that our steps may be led into the way of peace.

Broadcasting is the most powerful potential instrument of peace the world possesses—and alternatively, it is the greatest potential instrument of psychological aggression available to the nations. Let us not have war on the air. It is easy for us to drift into aggressive practices under cover of news and commentary, but there is no such thing as drifting into peace. Unless the United Nations can secure the goodwill and active help of broadcasting, the Security Council will have plenty of thankless work to do with little chance of ultimate success. So why not the "United Broadcasting Institutions?" Why not turn the stupendous instrument that has been so effectively used for war into an instrument which can as effectively be used for nation to speak peace unto nation?