

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

(continued from page 5)

## CORRECT AGE FOR PIANO STUDY

Sir,—In your issue of August 23, Paul von Sturmer appeared as the author of a provocative article, "Don't Learn the Piano Until You're 21," which I thought would have evoked such a storm of protest that I did not bother to comment upon it. But seeing that only two letters about it have been printed so far, I can but assume the general silence of teachers is due to a natural professional diffidence or the belief that Mr. von Sturmer is having a little joke, on the principle that von Sturmer a day keeps the piano away.

However, Sir, the article of which he is guilty contains mis-statements and errors—the mildest terms I can find—that demand the most emphatic refutation. Let me cite a few and answer them.

- (1) "An adult learns the piano at least four times quicker than the average child."

A ridiculous statement, and impossible to prove.

- (2) "Many eminent pianists did not start learning the piano until they were the wrong side of (i.e., over) 40."

The reply to this is simply that there is not a single instance in musical history of a pianist or other instrumentalist having risen to "eminence" who did not begin learning at an early age. Mozart started when 3, Mendelssohn was 6; and, in later days, Myra Hess began at 3, Heifetz 3, Horowitz 6, Josef Hofmann 3, Casals 6, Kreisler 5, Rosenthal 7, Arthur Rubinstein 3, Paderewski 12, Hubermann 6, etc., etc. The list is endless. I challenge Mr. von Sturmer to cite one example to the contrary.

- (3) "Your fingers may be stiff, but a few well-chosen exercises will loosen them."

Every pianist and teacher knows the absurdity of this contention. It is not looseness, but absolute independence of the fingers that is required and which can be obtained only in youth. I have had long experience with pupils of all ages, and although those of 21 can certainly be taught to read music and to play passably, if talented, none will ever attain real fluency, let alone "eminence."

L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).

Sir,—I should like to endorse the remarks of "Practice Can Be Fun" (*Listener*, September 27). I, too, am a schoolgirl who is very fond of music. I am sitting for my last examination before A.T.C.L. this year, and hope to sit the latter next year. Just imagine what sort of a world it would be if no one learnt music till they were 21. How many Lili Krauses or Solomons would there be? It is only the firm grounding in music which these pianists have had as children that has enabled them to appear now as they are. Their technique has had time to improve, whereas if they had started at 21, everything would have had to be learnt at once.

Music is something which makes life worth while. Children who can play reasonably give much enjoyment to their parents and to themselves. A child's life without music must be very dull, especially for those who perhaps have an ear for it. If a child is eager to learn, should not the parents do all that is within their power to enable them to do so? Any country would be very backward if it had no child musicians.

How many people are there, who, at 21 are able to take up music, with their job as well? A lot of them are married (chiefly girls) by then, and therefore are too busy. Besides young children can digest and learn much quicker than adults. MUSIC HATH CHARMS (Otane).

## "CREATIVE WRITING"

Sir,—Your item of September 27, "Writing is difficult," should read a little oddly to M. H. Holcroft and his admirers. So! Sinclair Lewis says "writing is just work," and men like Thomas Mann and Ernest Hemingway operate to a schedule like any clerk or navy. They don't seem to be aware of what Mr. Holcroft tells us with such delightful certainty: "The fundamental fact in authorship is the necessity, operating with a biological rhythm, which makes men and women express themselves in words." (Emphasis mine). They fail to mention the "pervasive daemonism," "supra-sensual experience" and "periodic visitations" and other phenomena that make the author "an instrument rather than a creator" following an arbitrary rhythm imposed by supernatural powers. Yet all this, and more, is contained, not in the Sunday tract you found beneath your door, but in the amazing last chapter of *Encircling Seas* (which E. H. McCormick recently reviewed so favourably in *The Listener*).

There is sensible comment scattered through Mr. Holcroft's books, but those who rate him as the unassailable mentor of our literature should try the mental exercise of examining his ideas without, as it were, their garments of impressive prose. Why this romantic over-emphasis on our geography, almost to the exclusion of other influences? Is the human invader really the odd-man-out in these islands, cringing beneath "the primeval shadow" and awed by forests in which he is "not really at home?" Have we no customs, habits and ideas with vitality? Are the features of our life which deserve analysis confined to those in which we don't show up very well? His sins of omission and his other-worldliness set Mr. Holcroft apart in a haze of mysticism. And how humourless it all is! A few grains of salt and pepper—the sense of humour and the sense of proportion—are surely needed with a dish of M. H. Holcroft.

ELSIE LOCKE (Christchurch).

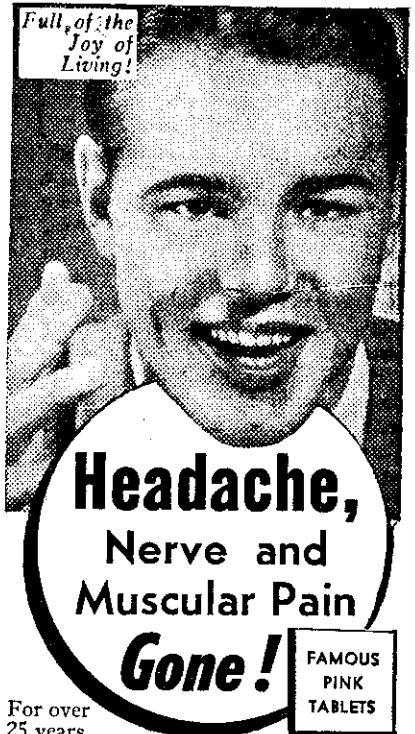
## TOO MUCH TAUBER?

Sir,—May I ask, in a spirit of sweet reasonableness, why we are treated in season and out of season to a steady diet of Richard Tauber? Is there any embargo on the recordings of, say, Joseph Hislop, not to mention a number of other equally pleasing tenors? Whether or not, please give Tauber decent interment, even if you must resurrect him after a long, a very long, period.

Incidentally, would it be possible to give us once again a series of that delightfully amusing "Mamma Bloom's Brood"? Besides its beautiful clean humour, it has the advantage of being a much safer fahulum for young and adolescent New Zealanders than the extremely dangerous gangster records which apparently are regarded as a safe diet for youth in its most impressionable stage.

A.F.C. (Dunedin).

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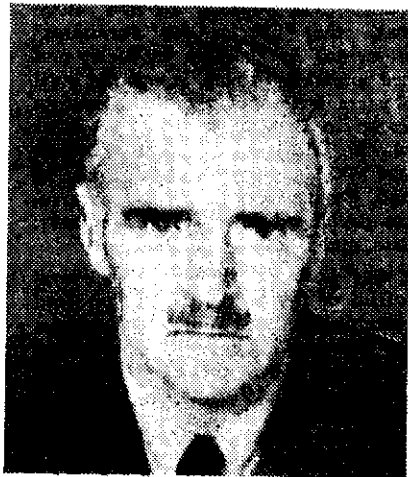
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**MCKENZIE JAMES RICHARD**  
McBRYDE, who died recently. His voice was familiar to many thousands of listeners for several years as one of the three readers of the 9.0 p.m. Overseas and New Zealand News over the main National stations. Mr. McBryde was Assistant Director at Base Records, Wellington. He was also compere and announcer at Station 2YD for some years.

# £50 IN PRIZES

## COMPETITION FOR HEALTH STAMP DESIGN OPEN TO EVERYONE

Designs are invited for future issues of Health Postage Stamps, and five Cash Prizes are offered for the best ideas submitted.

The Competition is open to everyone, and any number of suggestions may be submitted.

Although entries should take the form of a pictorial design, the idea is the principal factor, therefore rough sketches may be submitted. Amateurs will be on the same footing as professional artists and designers.

**FIRST PRIZE £25**

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**3 Prizes £5 each**

## CONDITIONS

1. All designs must be drawn in black on white paper or card, and measure approximately 7" by 4" (vertical or horizontal). Designs may be in pencil, ink, or wash.

2. Any number of entries may be submitted. No entry fee.

3. Name and address must be written clearly on the back of each design.

4. The basic idea of the design should relate to the purpose of Health Stamps—the improvement of children's health by means of Health Camps. Designs must include these words: NEW ZEALAND—1d. POSTAGE & REVENUE—1d. HEALTH.

5. All entries become the property of the Federation of Health Camps, and cannot be returned. No entry will necessarily be adopted.

6. Entries will be judged by a Committee of experts, whose decision will be final.

7. Contestants aged 16 or under should state age.

**CLOSING DATE—30th November, 1946.**

Results will be announced early in January, 1947. Entries should be addressed to:

Health Stamp Competition,  
P.O. Box 25, Te Aro, Wellington.