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# RADIO VIEWSREEL

## What Our Commentators Say

### "Queen of Song"

LISTENING to a preview of the ZB feature *Melba, Queen of Song*, I wasn't at all sure that I was going to like it; it resembled one of those concert tours given by prima donnas in the films, when in five minutes of montage we are given brief visions of express trains de luxe, famous opera houses, applauding audiences, and embossed programmes, with a sound track containing as many brief excerpts as possible from all the famous operas (I remember one film singer who, apparently, managed soprano and contralto roles with equal ease—whether they were transposed for her or not, the film didn't specify). However, I suppose in a preview of a radio serial some such superabundance of incident is necessary, in order to give listeners a fair idea of what to expect. The actual serial is a more leisurely affair. After a couple of episodes we are still dealing with the girlhood of Nellie Mitchell, and this is being treated in a suitable and restrained style, without recourse to the histrionics which could easily have ruined it. Even the incident where the school singing-master chooses another singer than Nellie for the church service is related without an attempt to make dramatic capital out of it (one can imagine a Hollywood version of a similar incident!). Special credit must go to the actual performer who sings as the "voice of Melba"; her task is a thankless and well-nigh impossible one, but she manages, as the young Miss Mitchell at any rate, to infuse her singing with clarity and beauty of tone, making it possible for the listener to accept her as a substitute for a voice which, save on a few old recordings, we shall not hear again.

### Lynch-Lore

IN *Backstage of Life*, a current 22B session, I made acquaintance recently with an author—William Lynch—described as Australia's best short story writer and the world's seventh. Mr. Lynch had produced a little opus, called *The Gentleman of Nobility*, concerning an engineer who builds a bridge which collapses when a passenger train is crossing over it, thus causing the deaths of hundreds of people. The gentleman decides that the only noble course is suicide, but he is cunningly circumvented by his wife. In the subsequent enquiry the engineer is completely exonerated, since the disaster is shown to be due not to any fault in the bridge itself, but to the fact that an earth tremor had loosened its foundations. The engineer leaves the court with personal and professional character unblemished, presumably to build bigger and better bridges all equally innocent of the principles of earthquake resistance.

### Signifying Nothing

"PAGANINI — ROMANTIC VIRTUOSO," an NZBS production heard from 2YA the other Sunday night, lasted an hour and a-quarter, and got nowhere. It was a curious blend of fact and fiction, realism and romanticism. It was at times powerful, but rarely comprehensible. At 10.46 when the programme concluded, the gratitude I had felt during the early part for the rich store of violin recordings (by artist or artists unknown) had

been overlaid by my failure to grasp the central theme of the production, and annoyance at the circumlocution and pawkiness of the dialogue. The script is full of clichés such as "wiser counsels prevailed," "suffering from a dread disease," and, when the young Paganini turns to take a second look at a pretty girl, "something in him was awakening



—he knew not what." No attempt seems to have been made to evaluate Paganini's artistic contribution; there is merely the attempt to illustrate his artistic temperament. And I am at a loss to explain why the production ended at "So passed the great Paganini out of England," when it would have been so much more logical to have escorted him out of this world.

### Homegrown

A RECENT studio programme from 3YA was announced only as "Music for Voice and Piano, by Douglas Lilburn, presented by Gwyneth Brown and Gerald Christeller." This did not give anything like the full picture of the union of New Zealand artistic talents involved or associated in this admirable broadcast. The quarter-hour programme began with two songs by Mr. Christeller; they were Mr. Lilburn's settings of two poems by the Auckland, R. A. K. Mason, namely, his irresistible translation of Horace's "O fons Bandusiae" and the lament "Song Thinking of Her Dead." In these both Mr. Lilburn and Mr. Christeller showed that a poem can, contrary to normal usage, become a song without being distorted, sentimentalised, or rendered inaudible, and can even gain in charm and significance. This "O fons Bandusiae" perfectly caught the humour and sensuous joy of Mason's translation; and I doubt if any who heard the second will re-read the line "where her small powerful face lies strong and dead" with quite the same feelings. There followed two of Mr. Lilburn's pieces for piano, of which the first was the Fourth Bagatelle; an interruption caused me to miss the second. Last, Mr. Christeller returned and sang the composer's setting of the Willow Song from Shakespeare's *Othello*. This was first publicly heard two years ago as part of the Canterbury College Drama Society's production of the tragedy; and those who heard it in its dramatic place will, I think, have found their attention on this occasion diverted a little from its isolated merits, which are considerable, to recall the intensity of that stage scene in which Desdemona sings it in random snatches before retiring to that bed where *Othello* presently visits her for the last time. Music, voice, poetry and theatre,