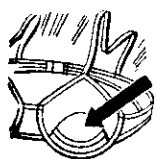




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RADIO VIEWSREEL

What Our Commentators Say

"Peter Grimes"

TO attempt to judge an opera by five orchestral excerpts is not as difficult as to assess the worth of a film after seeing the trailer. But it is perhaps only as difficult as it would be to judge Hamlet on the blank verse scenes alone, or Henry V on the chorus speeches. We cannot get much idea of the impact the whole work would make upon us, but we can assess the artist's calibre and his skill in handling his medium. Benjamin Britten emerges Siegfried-like from the test imposed upon his opera *Peter Grimes*, by 2YA recently. One notices firstly the power of his work, the controlled atmospherics of, for example, his storm scene. And I think secondly it was noticeable even in these orchestral excerpts that Britten was capable of shifting his point of view, that musical composition was for him more than a means of self-expression. If he has this ability to get outside himself it means (to take the long up-gazing view) that he is more likely to produce the musical equivalent of *Macbeth* rather than the musical equivalent of *The Cenci*.

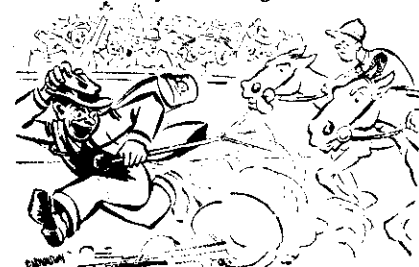
Music in Dunedin

THE reconstruction of the 4YA Orchestra has meant an immediate improvement in local programmes, since the String Group began to give excellent recitals soon after it was founded. Some well-chosen and little-known music has been included, and has been made especially interesting by the precision and sureness of the playing. It was a pity, however, that several performances were given before the programmes were printed in *The Listener*; many listeners may have missed them through not hearing the announcements. The new formation has resulted in extra work, apparently, for announcers who, instead of announcing the 4YA Orchestra, now have to get their tongues round "the String Group of the National Orchestra, with the 4YA Concert Orchestra," a clumsy circumlocution which I hope it will soon be possible to avoid.

Sporting Talk

WE have had about nine straight Saturdays of racing in Christchurch, and the trammies say that now the cars trundle out of the sheds on Saturday mornings and make for the course without a hand being laid on them. Station 3YA's racing commentator rattles out his descriptions with verve and precision, putting us briskly out of pocket. While considering the depth of my overdraft last week I wondered briefly how I should get on if suddenly faced with a microphone and told to describe a race. There was very little doubt in my mind what would happen—chaos and a dull muttering. I wondered if there was anything I could describe fluently, and finding nothing, went on to assess the merits of sports commentators of different countries. New Zealand was definitely ahead in racing and football; I remembered the English football fan who felt quite faint after listening to Winston Macarthy's description of a match the Kiwis played in England. It was

hard to pass over the BBC cricket descriptions in favour of Australian commentaries, but observation, accuracy, and deep knowledge finally overcame beautiful voices and urbanity. Boxing went to the Americans without question, and, naturally, baseball and American football. There my knowledge ran out. I've



never heard a Springbok describe a football match, or a Thailam a game of Jai Alai, or Moscow radio a grudge match at chess between the Masters Botvinnik and Keres.

Over-Eager?

VARIOUS records made by the Vienna Boys' Choir have at times caused my hackles to rise (no need to mention any items by name, since discriminating listeners will know well enough which ones I refer to) but should they be allowed to get away with it in the case of Bach and Brahms? What is the matter with this choir? Their blend is all right; their quality can be positively beautiful at times; they never sing off pitch. The whole thing can be summed up as the sin of exaggeration. Attacks and releases are super-abrupt; accents are over-pointed; subtle nuances of tone become often shrill crescendo or tailing off to infinity—but all done with an automaton-touch which immediately makes one visualise the unseen conductor who has trained his young singers to such a pitch that they sound both over-eager and strained. And am I wrong in thinking that in its record of Brahms's "The Little Sandman" the choir actually sings a phrase which is not supposed to be in the song at all?

Virginals and Recorder

AND so to bed, my mind mightily satisfied with this evening's work," is the quotation which closes the programme *The Musical Diversions of Samuel Pepys*, heard from 2YA recently. And the same mighty satisfaction is likely to be felt by listeners to this programme by Zillah and Ronald Castle. For while we can enter freely into most of Pepys's other occupations and delights—scientific, amatory, and potatory techniques have altered little, in essence, in 300 years—it is seldom possible for us to hear the same sweet sounds of music which made "so much demand over the soul of a man" that Pepys confessed himself ravished by them. In this programme we hear virginals, violin, recorder: instruments Pepys was familiar with, playing music he might have listened to or perhaps played himself. The programme was compounded with skill. Dance music at a New Year's Eve Ball at Court followed the simple folk air of the milkmaid's song, and in only one case did the music fail to measure up to the expectations suggested by the diary excerpt. (I feel that Pepys must have