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RADIO VIEWSREEL

What Our Commentators Say

Secession Averted

[T was only a couple of days after commenting for these columns on the lot of the U.S. Negro that an illuminating example flowed in through my loud-speaker. As far as I know there are four Negroes taking a part in the regular sponsored programmes on American radio networks. They are Rochester, in Jack Benny's show, and the King Cole Trio in an Edward Everett Horton show called *Music Hall*. (Mention of Amos 'n Andy will only produce hollow laughter. They are white men). Last week the King Cole Trio gave *Music Hall* customers two numbers, one of which was "Sweet Lorraine." Nat (King) Cole sang the lyric, but when he came to the deathless couplet:

a pair of eyes
that are bluer than the summer skies

he sang:

a pair of eyes
that are brighter than the summer skies

I was singing along with him (there was no one else in the house at the time) and was a little disconcerted, but it wasn't till we reached the last line:

just can't wait until that lucky day
when I marry sweet Lorraine

that light dawned on me. It wasn't hard to imagine the sponsor saying "We can't have this nigger singing a love song to a blue-eyed girl. We'd never sell our product in the South again. Change the lyric." So Sweet Lorraine acquired bright eyes, and if Nat Cole felt bad about the change, I suppose he was quite at liberty to take his Trio to some other sponsor—if he could find one.

Commonsense on the Air

THE 3ZB Sunday night *Round Table* seems to have filled a need in Christchurch. Radio has done a lot to atomise the community by bringing entertainment to the home, and thus keeping more people in small groups, rather than bringing them together in community activities. A discussion programme, like the *Round Table*, seems to draw the community together in the consideration of common problems. Comparison with the BBC Brains Trust is almost inevitable, but surely the two programmes have different objectives. Barbara Ward, the economist, who often takes part in Brains Trust programmes, has said, I think, that they are an exercise in conversation and should be judged as such rather than as a contribution to everybody's general knowledge. Elegant and fluent conversation is not a New Zealand characteristic, but the *Round Table* does show, week after week, on the most diverse subjects, that plain honest minds can discuss problems and come to moderate and sensible conclusions, which are certainly more logical and wiser than any single contribution of the members taking part.

Hearing Voices

LISTENING to a Nativity Play, *The Lovely Lady of Bethlehem*, from 3YA on Christmas Day, one recognised with a slight shock the fruity confiding voice which had given us a Message from the Leader of the Opposition an hour earlier. Anyone who listens to NZBS plays and features must be familiar with the voices of the select band of radio actors: the dignified one

who played Sir Kynaston Thrombosis, the famous surgeon, in "The Patient Only Coughs Once," and the stern but kind-hearted uncle in that drawing room drama, who was always shooting his cuffs and saying, "My boy, this is a grave decision, one of the turning points of your life" and the judge in "Well-Tempered Justice," and the whimsical Oxford don in "Quiet Flows the Cher":



the vulgar, ragged-trousered-but-heart-of-gold voice who plays Cockney servants, shop assistants, henpecked husbands, and, if I remember rightly, who played the New Zealander pulling a rickshaw for the Jap conqueror who had conquered because the New Zealander hadn't bought enough war bonds (1942 vintage): and the female voice with the Ruritanian accent, the one who usually betrays the villain by falling so hopelessly in love with the hero that she just can't shoot him when she gets the chance. One could wish that there were a greater variety of voices, but it must be admitted that the NZBS is in a difficult position. The BBC has a choice of hundreds of actors who can do radio work as well as appearing on the stage. In New Zealand there is no stage except repertory, and the solution is not there. So, until we have a population of eight millions, and a living professional stage, I suppose we shall welcome, again and again, our old friends the voices.

Pickled Piper

AFTER hearing the Marsden School Choir's singing of *The Pied Piper* from 2YA last Thursday I felt I had enjoyed half-an-hour of good choral music. The cantata is melodious, almost mellifluous, and falls sweetly upon the eardrums. It was sung melodiously, mellifluously, and at times dramatically. But this charming musical offering could equally well have been the ointment in which was embedded *The Highland Reaper*, *Casablanca* or *How Horatius Held the Bridge*. We might in fact ask, with apologies to Professor Sinclair, why drag in Browning? These smooth rhythms, this ordered melody, are completely at variance with Browning's harsh jingles and intentional cacophony. It would be difficult indeed to find a musical equivalent for those rats of Browning's which squeaked in fifty different sharps and flats, but any composer of the modern school could have told Mr. Rathbone how to do it. But the chief fault of the cantata seemed to me its complete lack of levity, a lack difficult to understand in view of the material on which it was based. How-

ever what might have been a jarring disparity between words and music was avoided by the fact that the words (as is generally the case in choral singing) were seldom audible, and, Browning being more or less incidental, the net result was a pleasing arrangement of choral and solo numbers.

Incongruous?

"HOW incongruous!" said a friend, looking at a 3YA afternoon programme. At 2.45 p.m. there was Benny Goodman, and at 3.0 p.m. Debussy's *Dances*, and *Petite Suite*, and Ravel's *Quartet in F Major*. I said cautiously that it would be possible to choose three to four Goodman records which would not jar against Debussy's airy tracery, but that I would not answer for the Ravel Quartet. When I listened to the selection it was clear that my friend was more right than she should have been. The 3YA programme organiser played run-of-the-mill commercial Goodman, and put the Ravel Quartet in straight afterwards instead of interposing the Debussy. Of course, on the face of it, there is no reason why Goodman and Debussy should have anything in common; Goodman, who came up the hard way in Chicago, chief breadwinner for a large, fatherless family, would not have found familiar notes in Debussy's way of life. But I think Debussy would have understood the language if he had ever been able to listen to the Goodman Trio working elegantly round a slow theme, and from what he has said, there is apparently no doubt in Goodman's mind what Debussy was up to.

Legal Eagle

AT 9.32 last Sunday evening 2YA took me a sudden journey from wool-bearer almost to woollack when I found that *This Sheep Made News* had been replaced by another H. R. Jeans comedy *The Great Barrister*, a very amusing



offering with opening and closing scenes almost in the same street as the Aldwych Theatre. The play aims at exhibiting scenes from the life of that eminent "Legal Eagle" Septimus Cowhorn, and though certain scenes

in the latter part of the play forget their primary object of searchlighting Septimus and become little plays in their own right the result is good entertainment, if not what Aristotle would call good art. Septimus's legal manner is very well done, and his "Is it or is it not a fact that . . ." proposal scene is a little gem. The irony is perhaps a little overdone, particularly in the scene where Sir George, young Septimus's father, is acquitted on the charge of shooting a poacher. But Mr. Jeans brings a new technique even to the flogging of dead horses, and has the gift of bringing to our notice the delicious possibilities of such often-heard phrases as "sober as a judge" and "You're now a man, my boy."

True Confession

AT the age of 14 I fell in love with Gertrude Lawrence. Competition was pretty tough; there were queues of elegant gentlemen outside her stage doors and Noel Coward swore eternal devotion,

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