

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

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## NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Sir,—J. C. Beaglehole, in *The Listener* of March 21, reflects (in more senses than one) on the first public performance of the National Symphony Orchestra. Disarmingly he starts off with a sweetly enough reasoned distinction between the privilege of the enthusiast and the believer on the one hand, and the duty of the critic on the other. Then in a flash the cloven hoof appears in these words—"The Orchestra really did very well indeed. Put coarsely and perhaps rudely, it wasn't nearly as bad as I thought it would be." The rest of the article is a damning with the faintest of praise, of a performance in which both performers and New Zealanders generally can take justifiable pride.

For my part, I would not stifle criticism of any kind of anything, whether it be well- or ill-informed. It is the essence of cultural as well as political democracy that free play be given to the expression of any opinion. But one is entitled to demand that this opinion, however biased or prejudiced, be given in good faith, particularly in a feature article as distinct from a letter to the Editor. I do not propose to contend that J. C. Beaglehole has no claim, in

general, to set himself up as a critic of music, much less that he has no real knowledge of music. The man who wrote what I consider the best poem yet written by a New Zealander, "Considerations on Certain Music of J. S. Bach," must have music in his soul. A lively sense of my own musical shortcomings in any case would preclude my leading with my chin in a counter-attack signed with my name.

What I do assert is that it is difficult to read Dr. Beaglehole's article as written in good faith. Not all his capacity to handle the language as an artist in words can conceal the venom of chagrin in what he says. It is his own fault if those who know the history of the Orchestra believe that he is still smarting under the defeat he and those associated with him suffered in their campaign against the appointment of Andersen Tyrer to organise the Orchestra and be its first conductor. Behind that opposition on the part of at least a section is a story going back to the days of the Centennial Orchestra.

I am not concerned to defend Andersen Tyrer either as organiser or conductor. He is well able to look after himself. Nor am I concerned even to put in a word for the Orchestra or its individual members. The receptions their initial efforts have received from

the people generally and most of the critics render that unnecessary. But it may not be out of place to say, in passing, that any unbiased person looking back over the past year, would feel much more generously inclined to, if not warmly appreciative of, our latest National infant and the work of Andersen Tyrer in bringing it into such lively being than Dr. Beaglehole.

What I am really concerned with here is to make your readers aware of considerations, other than "the duty of the critic to examine with coolness and what knowledge he has" (to quote Dr. Beaglehole himself), which seems to me to have actuated him in writing as and what he did.

It would be interesting to learn whether *The Listener*, before printing such an article, had any thought of itself being party to an unfair attack on fellow-workers in the New Zealand Broadcasting Service.

J. W. HEENAN (Eastbourne).

(*The Listener* does not agree that it printed an "unfair attack." It printed an honest, open, and constructive criticism by a highly intelligent listener who signed his own name.—Ed.)

Sir,—In fairness to the members of the National Orchestra of the New Zealand Broadcasting Service, the conductor, all connected with its organisation, and the listening public generally, will you please publish the full musical qualifications of J. C. Beaglehole, the writer of the article in the latest issue

of *The Listener*? In my knowledge of his academic qualifications—Lecturer in History, Victoria University College, M.A. (N.Z.), Ph.D. (Lond.)—I can find no reason for his acting (or, for that matter, your acceptance of him) as a music critic. I feel that all this space could have been occupied by a more constructive and educational article from an authority on orchestra work.

I quite realise that J. C. Beaglehole is a member of the Wellington Chamber Music Society. I also know the story of the president of the swimming club who couldn't swim. A. MACKAY (Karori).

(They appear to be no higher than the "qualifications" of the Liverpool businessman who started writing about music when he was 27 under the name of Ernest Newman, or of the journalist who started writing a regular column of musical criticism when he was 32, under the name of Corno di Bassetto, and later became known to the world as G. B. Shaw.—Ed.)

Sir,—As a broad statement of the scope and form of his critique the short introductory paragraph of J. C. Beaglehole's "Reflections on an Orchestral Performance" is commendable. Unfortunately, having possibly mislaid the first sheet of his MS. and forgotten his ambition to be a "Builder and not a Wrecker," he at once launches the attack. Later apparently the missing page is discovered, but evokes only the

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