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the characters at Hamlet's own valuation as a couple of deep-dyed traitors, and would probably dismiss them anyhow as two minor characters of a play containing so many more interesting people. In this BBC production, however, they emerged without a stain on their joint character—thanks to a detailed investigation by the arranger, who found them guilty of nothing more than a pronounced lack of intelligence, and scarcely deserving the horrid end plotted for them by the Prince himself. "Let us hope," the production concluded, "that they died like gentlemen (like first and second gentlemen), and that they drew their last breath, as they would no doubt have wished, simultaneously." This programme, and similar ones, may well serve as a reminder to the desultory dipper into Shakespeare that here is one poet who can't be read without concentration. Shakespeare in this respect resembles the great composers; you can appreciate their work without really understanding it, but the real greatness is only revealed to the student who is willing to approach the subject with intelligence as well as emotion.

Radio Voices

ONE of the most interesting sections in the Dunedin Competitions was the quest for a Radio Voice. After all, it is little use for a singer to participate with success in competitions and examinations unless his or her voice is heard by an appreciative audience, and radio here plays a big part in providing such an audience ready-made. The more we hear of our best local artists the better, but it requires a competent judge to select which of them are good enough to be heard on the air. As the judge of this section pointed out, there is more to a radio performance than the ability to stand before the microphone and sing without nervousness; and in awarding the prize to Rema Smith, he stated that it was this singer's personality as well as her vocal ability which qualified her to win the section. Listening in the non-competitive atmosphere of my own home, without the distraction of a tense audience and the imminence of the judge's box, I couldn't help regretting the necessity of choosing between the three singers whom I heard—all three possessed good broadcasting voices, and used them well, and in addition all three sang so clearly that all their words were audible. I hope that these three, having tried themselves out in this competition before the 4YA microphone, will be given the opportunity to present regular radio recitals, together with the best competitors of the other sections of the competitions. If competitions are not held to bring to light the best of the younger talent, for what purpose are they held?

Story of Dunkirk

A STORY which verges at times on the sentimental becomes, I think, rather more so, in the dramatized radio version of the *Snow Goose*. I have heard this play twice recently; my first impression was that the original story had been changed considerably, but on looking it up I decided it was rather a change of emphasis than anything else—and this chiefly due to the difference of medium.

The story, when it first came out, was of course enormously popular in its timeliness, and in its very real charm. This latter has been retained in the radio version, particularly in the early scenes on the marshes, where it is laid on delicately, with a restraint that is very necessary. It is in the latter part that both story and play, it seems to me, get carried away—not unnaturally, considering the nature of the subject, but unfortunately for the artistry of the work. In the play it is particularly noticeable because there is a delicacy of touch in the original and a simplicity which apparently could not be transferred in an otherwise ably dramatized version.

Shakespeare's Characters

MERCUTIO is probably one of the most satisfactory of Shakespeare's characters to dissect. He is less complex and less open to ingenious theories than Hamlet, and he appears in the youthful *Romeo and Juliet* as the one outstanding character. Consequently he can be allowed to speak for himself—which he does with great force and wit—and still stand out in relief against his background. This BBC production in the series of *Shakespeare's Characters*, arranged by Herbert Farjeon and produced by Mary Hope Allen, was a worthwhile one for any listener. Even those who like their Shakespeare served up whole would have found this particular dissection less barbarous than many. But I am not sure that in a programme of this type it was necessary to trace the rather obscure origins of plot and character. While this is interesting and valuable to the Shakespearean scholar, it is the sort of thing that discourages the average listener from programmes of this sort. An analysis of Mercutio's character may well add to one's understanding and appreciation of the play; but to have its source revealed is going to help nobody—except the scholar who passes his examinations on just such information. And for him the text-books are written.

The Conductor Justified

BOYD NEEL answered the question posed in the second of his Friday night talks from 2YA, *Is the Conductor Really Necessary?* with an emphatic affirmative, nor could any grinding of axes be heard. By the end of the talk I was convinced that an orchestra without a conductor is as an army without a general, a football team without a captain, a Gala Ball (Gents 2/6, Ladies a basket) without a Master of Ceremonies. Now (although it had not occurred to me before) it is obvious that the conductor's position does need some justification, since Boyd Neel in his historical survey of the office revealed the fact that its origin is recent enough to be positively post-classical. (One of the first men to use a baton or its equivalent at an orchestral performance was Spohr in 1820; as late as 1847 Mendelssohn had to share his conductorship with the first violin, who, harking back to a former era, "was constantly beating time with his fiddlestick in such a manner as to obstruct the view of the conductor and to confuse the attention of the instrumentalists.") It was significant that Boyd Neel concentrated on the conductor's function of purveying aural rather than visual enjoyment, modestly refraining from suggesting to his hearers that one of the reasons radio audiences leave home is to experience visually the satisfying rhythm of the well-trained conductor's arm and shoulder muscles.



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