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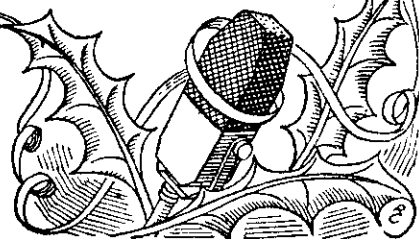
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# CHRISTMAS PROGRAMMES



AS usual, a number of Christmas broadcasts will be heard before December 24, and of these one of the most notable will be the presentation from the 2YA studios of Benjamin Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*, sung by the Studio Singers under the direction of Harry Brusey. This will be the first "live" performance of the work in New Zealand. When it was first heard in England in 1942, the *Ceremony of Carols* was acclaimed as an original and daring choral work that demonstrated the composer's unusual ability to combine the elements of an old and a new art. The traditional verses describing the Nativity should be familiar to many listeners, especially the well-known *Hodie Christus Natus Est*, which, sung as plainsong, is used for a processional approach at the beginning and again for the departure at the end. W. McNaught, writing in the *Musical Times* about this work, said, "Epithets that come to mind are 'ingenious,' 'spirited,' 'picturesque,' 'original'; they leave out essentials, for the suite has a grain, atmosphere, or quiddity of its own that is partly mode of expression, partly composer's personal craft, and will not go into words. It is difficult now and then to reconcile the headlong pace with the sense of the words . . . but more often one is asking how Britten came to think of some notion that is freakishly but unassailably the right thing; and the whole suite is full of invention and suggestion that over-ride passing doubts."

The *Ceremony of Carols* was written for boys' voices and harp, but Harry Brusey's performance of it will be by women's voices, and the accompaniment will be played on the piano by Ormi Reid. The broadcast is timed for 8.33 p.m. on Tuesday, December 23.

## Christmas in America

BEATRICE ASHTON, who will be familiar to many readers of *The Listener* through her series of articles discussing the American way of life, has recorded a talk describing the way the people of the United States celebrate Christmas. It will be broadcast from 2YA at 10.25 a.m. on Monday, December 22, under the title *Christmas in America*. In her own penetrating and impartial way Mrs. Ashton analyses what she calls the "festival abandon" with which Americans approach the Christmas period, and shows just how it differs from our own, and possibly more sober, attitude. She tells how the gaiety and excitement with which everyone is filled sometimes overflows into "nauseous sentimentality," although it is based on genuine feeling and pleasure in giving. The essentials of a typically American Christmas—turkey, cranberry sauce, and so on—are all described, and the joys and tribulations of the American housewife at this time are compared with those of her New Zealand counterpart.

## Allegorical Play

URSULA BLOOM is best-known for her 30 or 40 romantic novels (with titles like *The Passionate Heart* and *The Judge of Jerusalem*) nearly all of which champion the woman's point of view. Her play *Displaced Persons*, which has been produced by the NZBS, will be heard from 2YC at 8.0 p.m. this Sunday, December 21. *Displaced Persons* is described as a Christmas allegory, and the chief characters are a young man and his wife, refugees from some Central European country, who are trying to get back to their native land. They find they can't get lodgings anywhere, so they appeal to a householder who says they can stay in his outhouse if they don't mind sleeping amongst his gardening tools. Since their position is desperate (the young wife is going to have a baby) they accept his offer. From this point on the parallel of the allegory becomes obvious. But when the child is born, it turns out to be a girl, and the play then develops the theme that women are needed as much as men to redeem the world. "All children are redeemers," the husband says, "and if these children don't save the world it will pass away by our own mischief."

## "I Sing of a Maiden"

SOME of the loveliest and most interesting of the Christmas songs are the least known. In a programme called *I Sing of a Maiden* the BBC have gathered together some of these little-known melodies with the English baritone Frederick Fuller to sing and describe them. For one of his earliest examples Fuller goes back to a song mentioned in Chaucer, "Angelus ad Virginem," which tells of the story of the Annunciation. Others are taken from English folk-lore, and from Ireland, Wales and America. Several of these songs have been given very beautiful settings by contemporary composers, for instance, Frederick Austin's setting of "The Twelve Days of Christmas," Martin Shaw's "Boar's Head Carol," and "The Frost-Bound Wood," by Peter Warlock. Strangely enough Fuller does not include any example of Scottish origin, but the reason for this, he explains, is that the Presbyterian Scots in past days disapproved of the keeping of religious feasts and the making of carols. (Details of broadcasts are given in the table on page 9.)

## Outdoor Ceremony

A DRAMATIZED version of the Christmas story, enacted in Myers Park, will be broadcast by 1YA at 9.30 p.m. on Christmas Eve. The relay from the park will be handled by a commentator from 1YA, and the production, which has been arranged by the Y.W.C.A., will tell the story of the Three Wise Men, of the shepherds who watched by night, and the scene at the Manger—with individual players and a narrator. This portion of the ceremony will conclude with a solo rendering of the carol

"Silent Night." Then follows the reading of the poem, "A Candle is a lovely thing to light for Him to-night." During the recitation candles held by those participating will be lit. After the candle-lighting, there will be 15 minutes of carol singing. As a result of the epidemic restrictions younger children will not be able to attend the ceremony, but the suggestion has been made that they participate by listening in and lighting their candles at the appropriate time, and by joining in the carol singing.

## Fantasy

A CHRISTMAS fantasy on a Rip Van Winkle theme will be heard from 1YX at 7.20 p.m. on Christmas Day. Entitled *Mr. McKenzie Goes On*, it concerns a man of 1847 who is projected in time to 1947, and finds himself in a city on Christmas Eve. He meets the Spirit of 1947, to whom he expresses his criticism of the people. The Spirit of 1947 explains to Mr. McKenzie why the people are what they are and after satisfying him sends him back to where he came from. The play was written and produced in the NZBS studios.

## Folk Opera

WHEN, during the early years of the first world war, Rutland Boughton, the English composer, was living in Glastonbury, he wrote a folk-opera which he called *Bethlehem*, the story of the Nativity. It was first performed by (and was, in fact, written for) a body of amateur singers in the neighbouring village of Street. After the production of *Bethlehem*, the amateurs found they had won fame as the Glastonbury Players. One or two of the main parts demanded more of the performer than local resources could give, so they were played by professionals, but the great majority were villagers who brought much earnestness to the production. The girl chosen to play the Virgin Mother, for example, declined the honour because she was not "good enough," but she was ready to sing in the choruses. The man cast for the Unbeliever refused to sing so unchristian a passage, and Boughton himself took over the offending words. A recording of *Bethlehem*, made by the BBC Transcription Service with leading singers and the BBC Theatre Chorus and Orchestra conducted by Stanford Robinson, will be heard on Christmas Day from 2YH at 9.30 p.m., 2YA at 7.15 p.m., and 4YA at 8.0 p.m.

## Carol Symphony

IT was a few years ago that Hely-Hutchinson, struck by the dearth of symphonic music specially suitable for