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# RADIO VIEWSREEL

## What Our Commentators Say

### Let's Go Places

TILL television comes I feel there is no particular point in broadcasting radio plays that are merely stage plays missing on the visual cylinder. *Petticoat Fever*, for example, which I had the misfortune to hear from 2YA last Friday night (I am no more capable of turning off a programme in mid-career than I am of returning a book half-finished) had as its single setting the interior of a wireless operator's hut off the coast of Labrador. This seems like wicked neglect of the listener's ability (given suitable stimulation) to feast his inward eye upon the rich pastures of the imagination. Why cabin and confine him for the necessary hour in a 10 x 10 living room with table (i.e.), two chairs (lower right), and the wearisome company of a quartet, when you can give him all the advantages of a 12-scene drama and a cast of dozens without the expense and inconvenience of a revolving stage or a succession of creaking backdrops? Earlier in the week some lucky chance led me to listen to *Celestial Omnibus*, an adaptation of E. M. Forster's short story in 2YC's *Mystery and Imagination* series. *Celestial Omnibus* did not despise the mobile resources of the listener's imagination, his ability, suitably guided, to range from earth to heaven. It took us to the Isles of the Blessed, and enabled us to see visions of poetic truth through the eyes of a Wordsworthian child. When listeners know they can be taken journeys like this why expect them to be happy in a hut with two bickering women and a brace of matrimonially-minded men?

### Life Begins at 45

MRS. NAN PARSONS'S talk "Women in the Community," the second in 2YA's series *Let's Look at Ourselves* was more a blueprint of what we might be than a monochrome picture of what we are. Which made for lovely listening. In fact I would rank Mrs. Parsons's talk as one of the most inspiring I have heard on the morning air, and the warm intimacy of her approach, her courageous use of the personal pronoun and the autobiographical confession, must have succeeded in evoking impulses to growth in minds even less susceptible than my own. Mrs. Parsons began by declaiming the obituaries of various women who had deserved well of the state, whose record of public service made them fitting examples for us to follow. She deftly demolished our time-honoured line of defence against charges of apathy by admitting that the housewife with young children has every excuse for non-participation in the community life, but by 45, pointed out Mrs. Parsons, the domestic round has probably ceased to be a vicious circle. By that time the energies previously directed to the bringing up of children could well be directed into a wider channel. Mrs. Parsons concluded her talk with a wisely reasoned scheme for the bringing up of daughters, directed at enabling them to get through

the slough of domesticity with a minimum of discomfort and emerge with undamaged cervical cortex on the other side.

### Popski's Army

SUFFERING as I was from a bad case of Listeners' Lassitude last Sunday night (from having my radio tuned in from power-cut onwards), the BBC programme *Popski's Private Army* roused me like a reveille. For this was an inspiring subject for the BBC's inspired talent for documentation. Vladimir Peniakov himself is as romantic a figure as was ever granted to radio scriptwriter—as mysterious as Lawrence and as single-minded as Dinos Vawr. Seemingly anachronistic in the middle of a highly mechanised modern war, Popski and his Private Army might have sprung fully armed from the brain of a Hollywood ideaman, and subsequently seen the light of a million screens under the direction of Franz Lang or another of his calibre (Mr. Gary Cooper as Popski, of course). But Popski's Private Army is fact, not fiction. The BBC production has neither touched up nor played down its material, but by careful selection, cunning narration, and flashes of directoral brilliance (the Italian sentry's singing of *Santa Lucia* in the silence preceding the attack) the producer has contrived a programme as dashing as its subject. My only regret was that the action ended so abruptly, in the middle of Popski's drive through Venice after the liberation of Italy. What has since been the lot of Major Vladimir Peniakov? Artistically it was fitting for the programme to end where it did, but I for one would have welcomed an historic footnote bringing our information up to 1948.

### Interrupted Opera

I CANNOT see the point of beginning a new series of programmes based on Opera, unless they are either better than the operas we now hear on the air, or else present some new aspect of the theme. Certainly opera, as now given us, is by no means perfect. Operas are not given complete, most of them being severely cut to fit the time-tables. From 4YA, at least, the Sunday night operas are interrupted for over half-an-hour, during which we hear talks and news, which, however interesting, completely break the continuity of the opera. And, of course, the arrangement whereby the narrator's voice telling us the plot is superimposed on the actual music is, to musical ears, completely impossible. Nevertheless, these presentations do give us a great deal more than the new *Highlights from Opera* from 4YA, of which *Rigoletto* was the first to be heard. This programme is described as "a series introducing favourite arias and choruses from well-known operas," a description which admits a limitation; and since it does not attempt to perform a whole opera one can scarcely criticise it for being too curtailed a presentation. But, after all, the music is the most important thing in an opera, and when a bare half-hour includes both plot and music in a presentation which on the stage would occupy a couple of hours, the opera-lover may well complain of

