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RADIO VIEWSREEL

What Our Commentators Say

The Great Man

I FOUND *Beethoven the Man*, an hour-long illustrated talk, produced by the NZBS and read by William Austin, outstanding in both content and presentation. The biography seemed to me just the right kind of biography. There were enough but not too many details of nepotism, ingratitude and squalid surroundings not merely to call forth our compassion but to heighten our sense of awe and wonder at the greatness of his accomplishment. The real tragedy of Beethoven's life, his deafness, was dealt with at greater length, and the scriptwriter, realising that poetry is better fitted than prose to convey the depths of human suffering, let Milton, in his blindness, speak for the deaf Beethoven ("O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon, Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse, Without one hope of day!") But, the programme went on to point out, how much worse for the composer to be deaf than for the poet to be blind. Milton could at any rate hear his own verbal music! And the tragedy was pointed by the introduction here of the biographical detail, the piano wrecked by Beethoven's efforts to hear his own playing, the story of the composer, still conducting from his score, having to be turned round to see the audience's thunderous applause and know that the performance was over.



Three Strings

THE string trio is a combination strangely difficult to handle. Players used to string quartets find the absence of the second violin disturbs their sense of balance and produces an unsettling effect. None of this uncertainty was felt in the Beethoven Trio, Op. 9, No. 3, played from 3YA on Sunday, July 4, by the Northern String Trio. Rather was the broadcast an example of first-class string playing, rhythmical and precise. Eric Lawson, a newcomer to the National Orchestra, is an acquisition to the ranks of New Zealand violinists, and his playing was a pleasure to listen to. Frieda Meier's viola has never been heard better. Greta Ostova had less to do, and was placed too far from the microphone for her fine playing to tell sufficiently. In balance the trio was badly served in the control room; the viola was much too prominent and the 'cello too weak. Though they call themselves the Northern Trio there was no northern restraint in their handling of Beethoven: his *sforzandos* were finely marked, though not enough was made of the pianissimo drops. The general effect of the trio, though, was exhilarating.

Film Into Radio Play

I SETTLED down with relish the other Thursday night to listen to James Mason and Pamela Kellino in 2ZB's Radio Theatre version of *The Upturned Glass*, and found to my distress that instead of concertina-ing the

original action into the smaller compass of half-an-hour and sacrificing a few relevant details the pair had elected to perform an occipitotomy right in the middle of the plot. This was, of course, very disconcerting to the filmgoer, who had had no time to divorce his preconceived idea; and I was left obstinately refusing to believe that the eminent brain specialist had performed his *telo de se* in so unworkmanlike and unmasonlike a fashion, and long before anyone had been able to explain to him the significance of the title. Had I not seen the film I think I should still have been distressed at the complete absence of any suggestion of retribution. The shorter version, on the other hand, is much more forthright in its early diagnosis of James Mason's madness, so that the whole thing, in spite of identical dialogue, seems much more obvious. And the fact that there are two versions, both presumably by the same pen, makes one wonder whether Pamela Kellino believed in her own creation. It is rather as if Shakespeare, having written Hamlet, decided to prepare a shorter version (with Hamlet applying the bare bodkin to himself after stabbing Polonius) for players who didn't feel equal to three acts.

Not Truly Rural

I SHOULD have suspected, when I tuned in to Donald McCullough's talk on *The English Countryside* (2YA, Thursday morning, July 1), that all those years of brainstraining might have made Mr. McCullough more adept at talking about a subject than on it. Certainly there was very little of the English Countryside Proper in Mr. McCullough's talk, but there was, on the other hand, a lot of good stuff I would have been loth to miss, like his account of



the objects of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, and the work of the National Trust. He also whets my appetite for a glimpse of the *Countryman* series of County Maps, which have been in preparation during and since the war but which, like our own Centennial Atlas, has been a long time in the making. The same evening I heard Mr. McCullough again, giving a talk on *Fougasse, an Artist at War*, and here although he was more closely confined by his subject (friendship apparently imposes more obligations than does mere affection), he showed that even the comparatively serious biographical sketch can be gracefully and informally conveyed to the radio audience. Mr. McCullough has quintessentially the chairside manner of the practised radio speaker—no matter how well prepared, he always appears to be a man without a script.