



EAR ECOUTANT 1948

THE place of the Ear Ecoutant is by now well established in society. It has a dignity it could never attain or hold in the days when the noise came out of a radio through earphones (the days of the ear indented proper) or via a horn loud-speaker like a swan's neck with the beak obscenely enlarged.

The modern Ear Ecoutant is enshrined in the advertisement sections of the slick paper magazines; an Ear of Distinction, absorbing its pleasures from massive mahogany radio gramophones bigger than a chief executive's desk. Perhaps in this atmosphere of spacious dignity it has reached its highest level, for there are signs and portents of on-coming decadence. Radio manufacturers are planning their production on a basis of a radio in every room. If they achieve this object, and unless the A-bomb beats them they probably will, the Ear Ecoutant will degenerate. There will be a brief period of wild dissipation (Ear on a bend between six cross cross-lets), then auriculitis (listener's lug) will assume epidemic proportions, and on the day the manufacturers dispense with the last "off" switch, the Ear Ecoutant will become extinct, and will be replaced by the brutish Ear Caboshed, which flourishes in an environment of continuous noise.

Being a light-hearted Survey
of the Year's Broadcasting,
written for "The Listener" by
G. le F. Y.

If it is to 1948 that historians will point when they speak of the ultimate perfection of the Ear Ecoutant, then we should enshrine its present glories with formality and despatch; and what is there more formal than a coat of arms? Fall to, heralds! Remember your noble tradition, hymned by Anon.

Hark the Heralds' College sing
As they take their quartering.

Act on these suggestions, and if the job is not well done you will be seized, lodged, belled, parted, and engrailed on a shakefork.

WHAT a protean Ear it is. Ecoutant always, but by turn also poursuivant, expectant, issuant, rampant, couchant, passant, and many more. Truly an Ear with bendlets enhanced.

It entered 1948 naissant, and breathlessly expectant. This was annus mirabilis, a time of joy and wonder. Look! Otago's Centenary! Isobel Baillie, singing throughout a most exhausting tour with that calm, clear, liquid, inexhaustible voice; the National Orchestra, bowing, blowing and beating all over the country. All over the country? Well, all over the four main centres.

Miss Baillie and the Orchestra were good for each other. Who could wish for a steadier, more dependable artist to accompany? If she sang off key once during the whole tour, this Ear Ecoutant missed the occasion. How easy it is for a soprano to trill like a clarinet in the upper register, covering her mistakes with an affectation of brilliance, and how easy it is for a critic to play the same game, trilling out metaphysical moon dust, and telling nobody what he wants to know, which is: can the lady sing? If she makes off key noises she cannot sing. Miss Baillie never forgets that true tone is the basis of good singing. She therefore has a firm foundation on

which her many other talents may build, and she sings like an angel. The Orchestra accompanied her tunelessly and lightly, except perhaps during the Bach Mass in B Minor performances in the Christchurch Cathedral, when she had at times to strive against a rather overpowering volume of brass.

THE National Orchestra had a busy season. The Ear is inclined to be guardant when discussing the Orchestra. Hatchet men and the don't-foul-your-own-nesters are out in strength; the first do nothing but chop, and the second nothing but smarm, and it is hard to remain uninfluenced by one or the other. The Ear is glad that we have a National Orchestra, glad that a good start at least has been made, not altogether happy about the time spent touring with Carmen in 1948, and not at all happy about the Annual Disintegration. When is an Orchestra not an Orchestra? When it is trying to be in four different places at once. Recommendations for 1949; more lunch time concerts (need they all include the *Beau Danube*?), more schools' concerts and more visits to small towns.

And *Carmen*, which cannot be put down on our escutcheon as anything else but barrulets dancette. *Carmen* was a magnificent success of the theatre. Janet Howe set fire to the rest of the cast, and everyone burned brightly. A lot of this liberated energy came over the air, where light cannot come, as most pleasing sound, but the solitary, unaided Ear, Ecoutant only, was baffled, frustrated, and longing for television.

And Richard Farrell; a serious artist, not fully realised perhaps, but potent-counter-potent. Look out future, here he comes! The young man who dared to play Copland and Prokofieff to New Zealand audiences. A brave young man, well worthy of a place on the 1948 coat of arms. And a lady, Moura Lympny; smiling, enigmatic, leaving the Ear with the feeling it was not keen enough to catch all there was in her music.

AND—who else was there? No one? Not in annus mirabilis? No, and for a very good reason. So many worthwhile artists were in the country in 1947 that the Ear forgot to be Ecoutant,

and people like Ninon Vallin sang to half-empty houses. The word went round, and this year it was the stages which were empty.

There were many talks, plays, and spoken features, by some of which the Ear was elevated and addorsed, and some of which left it decidedly palybendy. Does Gresham's Law apply also to radio? Does the bad drive out the good? The Ear remembers the start of Controversial Discussions. The atmosphere was imbued proper expectant. How would the country take it? Would mobs storm the stations, demanding that nothing be discussed which might eat at the roots of our unity, or debauch our children, or take in vain the fair name of one of our racehorses? Would the Minister in Charge of Broadcasting be burnt at the stake? No. Gresham's Law had worked, quietly, over the years. Constant repetition of the mediocre had driven out one of our goods; our capacity to react. The most Controversial of Discussions raised no more than a murmur and a tired sigh. Poor Ear; so indented, so puzzled, so full of patent medicines, so flory counterflory.

There was some reaction to a talk by Clough Williams-Ellis, who hinted



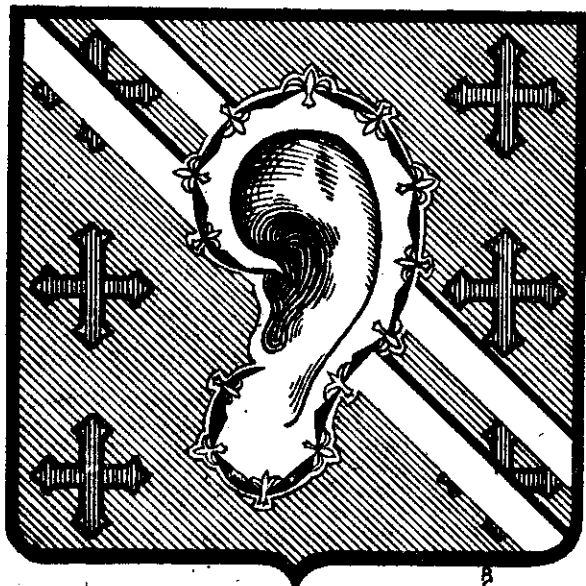
CONTROVERSIAL DISCUSSIONS
"Reaction was low in voltage"

that our building and town planning were, in a few places, not quite perfect, and to D. D. Raphael, who turned over some flat stones, looking for intellectuals and writers, but how low in voltage it was compared with the correspondence in the local paper about the route taken by a suburban bus.

Steal on Ear, over the field of verte. Emblazon the name of Ngao Marsh, because she talked with style, and of MacLeod of Iona, because he nearly made us think; of the Wanganella, who stilled the Wellington wind, a thing the Oliviers could not do, although they did to us anything else they pleased; of Davin and Sargeson, who were more nearly honest than is customary on radio discussions, and of the unsung technicians who gave us Parliament, swinging with agility from microphone to microphone.

DIE 1948. Some dustman will put you on your shield and carry you away to the tip.

Live on, Ear, amid your gules and bendlets enhanced; be ever ecoutant, vigilant, and because sadness is negative and destroys art, never, never forget to be riant.



THE EAR ECOUTANT 1948
(Charged with a Cross Gules)