

## CONTEMPORARY ART

Sir,—I am glad to see two letters in your issue of November 4 sailing into the opponents of "modern art." Both have recalled vital truths, one that mankind commonly enjoys the "abstract" beauty of a mass of flowers, the other that logic breaks down in the final assessment of a work of art. That is why it also breaks down when we try to convey the impression a great work makes upon us to those who are completely out of sympathy with it.

Unfortunately the remarks will fall on deaf or sieve-like ears. It is not modern visual art against which so many people revolt, but all visual art which does not come within very close range of the photographic ideal. Thus in my own home I have met aggressive haters of art who have as they think airily dismissed my own taste with a wave of the hand. It wasn't me these persons really dismissed but modern New Zealand art, impressionist art, Renaissance art, Byzantine art and that of Pompeii wall frescoes. From the tone of the letters of the earlier correspondents I suspect they belong to this happy breed.

If this is so, how can Messrs. Snadden and Ward effectively communicate with such persons? Why do the art haters even listen to radio discussions on art? And lastly, why are they frequently so much more aggressive in their dislikes than, say, those who must confess to an attraction for the work of a Klee, a Chagall or a Gauguin?

If we who like 20 old pictures to every one modern painting are, as one of your correspondents implies, a little crazy, then I contend we are crazy in a pretty solid and harmless tradition and should be left, hoaxed as we have been by the master charlatans of pictorial art from Cimabue downwards.

From the safety of my own happy asylum and home, I will say only this, that while I do distrust those who talk on modern art and who display little interest in what went before, I cannot take those men seriously whose concern for the state of painting is prodded furiously alive only when they hear any modern art praised.

JOHN SUMMERS (Christchurch).

Sir,—Permit me to reply to your correspondents John Pine Snadden and R. Ward, who have attempted to dissect my annoying letter on modern art (in spite of the last-named correspondent's claim that he "cannot feel about a thing and dissect it simultaneously"). It would seem that Mr. Ward has revealed a weakness which he deprecates in others, namely that "the most reserved and taciturn of men will react with amazing energy if caught in a discussion of its (modern art's) merits or otherwise."

To me, Mr. Ward's predilection for the term "contemporary" instead of "modern" art is just another example of the pointless profundity at which local "intellectuals" excel. I note that overseas artists, critics, and directors of galleries of modern art are content with the accepted definition.

In reply to Mr. Snadden, I stand by my contention that Picasso might at times have deluded the public. In spite of appearances, artists are human and have to eat. If they can concoct a more or less meaningless juxtaposition of paint and hoodwink some "arty" individual into buying it, then I feel that the artist violates no important ethics. On the contrary, the buyer's ego is satisfactorily inflated, and the seller is temporarily relieved from financial worry.

# LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

Thus liberated, the artist is free to pursue his art, instead of the pockets of some wealthy, misinformed patron.

My well-meaning critic assumes too much with his conjectured percentages relating to whether readers have been subjected to monochromes, or four-colour reproductions, or the technicolour originals; and whether or not they have been awed by canvases twenty feet by ten. I deduce that Mr. Snadden lumps me, in the category of those whose judgment is based solely on experience limited to monochromes and local art. His assumption compels me once more to admit publicly that I have been unable to benefit from every change of art exhibition at the Wellington Public Library over the years. But this may be offset by more than a decade of world travel, mixing with writers and artists in the five continents, and being conducted through many of the world's finest art galleries by informed critics and connoisseurs.

I forgot to take a tape measure to the New York Museum of Modern Art, so I cannot say whether or not I have seen a canvas twenty feet by ten. Is this important? Or should we not be impressed by quality rather than quantity?

JACK THORNTON (Upper Hutt).

Sir,—I should like to thank John Pine Snadden for his letter. I am very happy to find that there is one person who knows his Picasso intimately, not just a scoffer who has glanced at reproductions, mostly of the artist's latter period. Most people I discuss Picasso with have never seen his portraits executed during his classical period from about 1918 to 1925. With such economy of line he conveys the most ethereal portraits, and when suddenly confronted with them in an art gallery one stops dead in one's tracks, entranced by the feeling, the colour and passion of this giant of the brush. Even if we do not like the lady with a geranium pot sticking out of her chin, let us look further afield at his numerous other pieces and not just condemn the man for one or two pictures that we do not happen to find beautiful or inspiring.

SUSIE R. COLLINS (Auckland).

## "EYES OF THE PIG"

Sir,—If Mr. Cape wants to divorce literature and life (as he seems to), if he would postulate a separate aesthetic faculty with which to enjoy imaginative literature as a world independent and complete in itself (as he would have to), then I prefer a "half-way house." It is a compromise between an ivory tower sealed and windowless, and a telephone box on a busy street corner, when the bustle outside has no meaning yet distracts one from listening to the prophetic voice over the wire. But most likely we are arguing at cross purposes.

K. I. MASLEN (Timaru).

## "THE QUIZ KIDS"

Sir,—If what your correspondent says is correct it would seem that these "quiz kids" are almost paid Commercial Broadcasting performers. Quite apart from the fact that it would be fairer to share the money round, the idea is undesirable. There is a lot of prompting by the compère, many guesses are allowed, and it seems that the guest quiz kids are carefully picked, because they are never in the money. It should not become a matter of "easy money" for

a few, apart from commercialising our youngsters. If advertisers have so much money to give away, there are plenty of deserving people in the country who could do with it. The quiz kid business is being overdone, and the sooner certain features of it are abolished the better. No one cavils at harmless amusement for perhaps some reward, but it should not be allowed to become a commercialised business with its obvious undesirable features.

OBSERVER (Dunedin).

## SOMETHING NEW! SOMETHING NEW!

Sir,—In a recent issue of *The Listener* your radio critic, "D.M.," has taken to task the programme organiser of Station 1YZ for allowing a programme to be put on the air, which included "In 'Questa Tomba," an English traditional song, a Negro spiritual and Rimsky-Korsakov's "Hindu Song." He says: "There is not so much as there used to be of the sin of grouping together the songs of four or five divergent schools."

Who is this "D.M."? Is he an authority of such standing that he states it is a sin to have a programme such as this? Has "D.M." himself ever broadcast? Is his outlook so narrow or his judgment so warped that he is unable to see any virtue in such a choice of songs? Does "D.M." condemn the vocalist who, in endeavouring to win the Championship at any musical competition, must enter in practically every class, including Grand Opera, Lieder, British Art Song, Traditional Song, etc. if he or she wishes to be anywhere in the running?

Does "D.M." realise that in broadcasting such a programme the vocalist who offers such a variety of songs is showing versatility and an intelligent vocal technique in being able adequately to handle such works? Far too many of even our best singers confine themselves to one type of singing.

What about "D.M." setting out some of his ideal programmes for us to ponder over? I'm sure many a programme organiser would receive inspiration from his contributions—or would he not? No, Sir, if you want something new, don't turn to those vocal works that have stood the test of time—just tune in to the latest boogie-woogie session.

MUSICUS (Rotorua).

(Abridged.—Ed.)

## "MAN BORN TO BE KING"

Sir,—May I suggest that the Dorothy Sayers' series of Radio plays, *The Man Born to be King*, should again be broadcast over the New Zealand YA stations. As a New Zealand visitor to South Africa, I was interested to find that the plays were heard this year from Capetown and Durban on Friday nights and from Johannesburg on Sunday afternoons. The SABC so arranged the times that the eleventh play dealing with the Crucifixion came over the air on Good Friday, and the last of the series, based on the Resurrection, was given on Easter Day.

The BBC Director of Religious Broadcasting, in his introduction to the text of this remarkable play cycle, expressed a hope that the recordings would be used at intervals of about five years. The reason is obvious. There is at present a generation of New Zealand children who were too young to appreciate the plays when they were last on the air,

but who are now old enough to find them a source of interest and inspiration. In any case I am sure many adults, particularly those who have read the text of the plays, would enjoy hearing them again.

J. S. HATHERLY  
(Western Transvaal).

## ORGAN MUSIC

Sir,—I write to ask whether we could not have something more informing in place of the bare title, "Organ Music" for our Sunday afternoon programmes. Can we not have the names and composers given of the pieces to be played? Especially necessary is this when, as has often lately been happening, "organ music" has been on the air simultaneously from 1YA and 3YA. I try one programme and find it over-familiar; I try the other station, find some unfamiliar item in progress, whose title I have missed through late switching, for the announcers seldom give us this information at the end. Why don't they?

This prompts me to ask whether there is not a wealth of seldom or never-played recordings of organ music on the shelves. We hear the same few war-horses again and again. On a recent Sunday, Cesar Franck's A Minor Chorale was played three times, once in each of the three organ programmes. A published programme and some research would put all to rights.

F. K. TUCKER (Gisborne).

## BRASS BANDS

Sir,—Judging by the large numbers of Brass Band defenders in these columns earlier this year, I am justified in making some complaints about the local *For the Bandsman* sessions: (1) The bandsmen of New Zealand are almost wholly from brass bands and do not appreciate military band items, although in fairness a small proportion should be broadcast; (2) massed band items are generally enjoyed "in the flesh" only, and fail as recordings; (3) during the past few months I have noticed on numerous occasions only one side of a double-sided recording being broadcast. October 10 was such an occasion from 2YC. I am sure others as well as myself would like to hear a complete recording, or if time is a factor, none of the recording rather than half of it.

Finally, the voice of the announcer over a subdued recording is in very bad taste and completely ruins the enjoyment of the particular recording. One request before I finish. The NZBS has now excellent recordings from four national contests. As a change from the well-worn overseas recordings could we not hear some of these?

J. GEE (Petone).

## ACCOMPANISTS

Sir,—I was interested to read D.M.'s remarks on the "unsatisfactory recognition" given to accompanists. I have always felt that it is a most unmusical way of doing things to announce songs sung by Madame Whosit and then to hear some anonymous pianist commence the proceedings. This denies him or her any recognition for what is often the more difficult part of the performance and surely can't be conducive to pride in the accompanist's work.

M.S. (Auckland).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS  
A. Moncur (Auckland): It seems to be rather a fine point.  
Music Lover (Stoke): Your suggestion is being passed on.