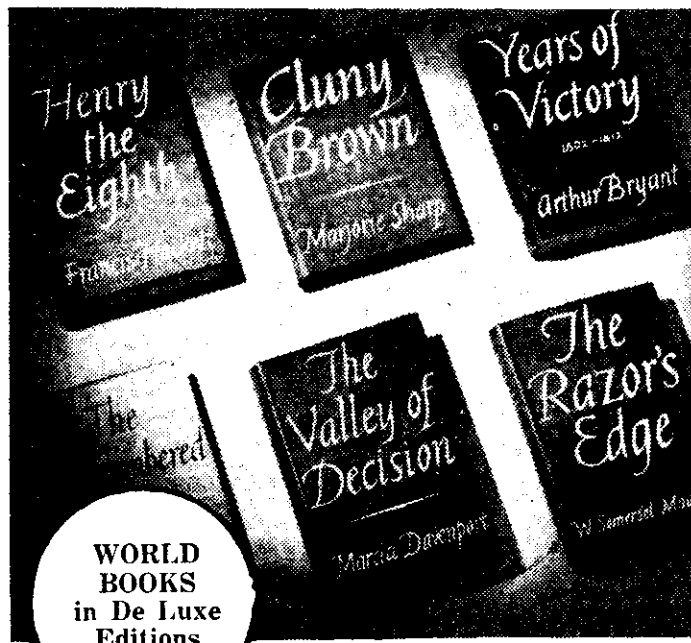


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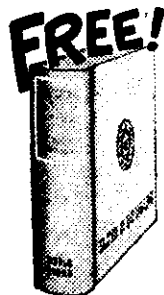
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## Listening to Some Purpose

INTERESTING opinions on the condition of music were expressed recently by Dr. V. E. Galway at a St. Cecilia Day address in Wellington. He was more than satisfied with what is being done by people who play instead of listening. "The best of our performers have attained a grace of technique which is simply breathtaking." But he was not so sure about the listeners. "Many people live their whole lives with a background of broadcast music. They are no more conscious of it than they are of the carpet or the wall-paper." Is it possible, however, that we see too much significance in the indiscriminate use of radio? If the standards of listening are as low as Dr. Galway thinks they might be, it is a little difficult to explain why the standards of performance should be so high. After all, musicians are not a race apart: they do not grow up in an environment which is somehow kept in a state of clinical detachment from the influence of radio. And if it is found that "the best of our amateurs reach standards hitherto regarded as being attainable only by professionals," the suspicion grows upon us that the improvement has been brought about at least partly by the pervasiveness of music in the age of broadcasting. People who formerly would have had few opportunities for hearing music are now able to hear it at almost any time of the day or night. Some of them are apparently giving it more attention than they usually give to the carpets or the wall-paper. They are listening to the best performers in the world. If there is no music in them, they are inattentive; but others feel the stir of emulation, and they are driven by what they have heard through the radio to aim at standards which would have seemed impossibly high when virtuosi could not be heard in the home. It may be assumed, then, that there is a logical

connection between good performance and good listening. Imitation is an element in the creative process, and it may be indulged freely in most homes today. Moreover, as Dr. Galway pointed out, there are also opportunities in education: the lesson begun at home may now be completed at school. Yet what of the person who only wants to listen? It may be true that the "highest form of appreciation always comes from doing a thing for oneself"; but some of us feel that appreciation is not quite the same thing as performance. Admittedly, Dr. Galway was not denying the possibility of pleasure for the untrained listener: he was merely suggesting that the pleasure is increased by understanding. Music converts thoughts and feelings into sounds which have to be interpreted, and the response may be stronger and richer if we understand the technical framework of the composition. Even then, however, the full story has not been told. Some people play instruments correctly, but without revealing any real appreciation of the music; whereas people who cannot play a note or read a score are lifted by a symphony into a bright and wonderful region. Possibly they hear the wrong things, or hear the right ones in the wrong way. They become lost in private dreams when they should be "concentrating on the intricacies" of the music. Instead of following the composer's intention, they find themselves gazing upon strange and wild landscapes, or taking part in impossible adventures. Their response is emotional, and the music is turned into images which flash and waver in the excited mind. Yet who shall say that they are unsatisfactory listeners? Music has different values and rewards, and in our various ways we turn to it for compensations of the spirit. It may not matter much if we hear more or less than is in the theme: the important fact is that we have learnt to listen.

N.Z. LISTENER, DECEMBER 9, 1949.