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RADIO REVIEW

THE BREATH OF LIFE

"AND so, good fellow, you are a jester?"—thus Margaret Bull, aged 79, from her wheel chair in a home for retired actors, when visited by Wilfred Pickles in his *Have a Go* series. Margaret had played with Julia Neilson and Fred Terry in *Sweet Nell*, was almost twenty years with the D'Oyly Carte Company and gave us Jack Point with a verve and flair which was equalled by her colleagues when it came their turn to be interviewed. Pickles has a way with him, and is at his best in a session like this when his own showmanship is matched—and sometimes bettered—by other showmen.

After Miss Bull came Harry Pollock. Asked what he liked best, he said "Old Burgundy—I can drink it till it runs out of my ears." Then Frank Dix, aged 78, who wrote over one hundred and twenty pantomimes with Arthur Collins, appeared in most of them, and whose greatest dislike is soft drinks. Frank's display and his beautifully-modulated voice made one conscious of the ghost of an old time theatrical, hat slightly on one side of his head, poking someone in the rib with his cane and calling him "laddie." Add to this group May Nelson Ramsay, 83, who was "born in the Highlands unexpectedly," and who told us with a spirit undiminished by age, her experiences in heavy Victorian melodrama at Sadler's Wells, and we had a session which I, for one, enjoyed unreservedly. We were back in an era of hansom cabs and gaslight, stage door johnnies and Gaiety girls, with Henry Irving and Ellen Terry hovering somewhere in the background. They were all delightful, but how I'd hate to be the matron of that particular institution, the clash of personalities at times must be terrific.

Itma has no successor. It may never have one. But there is a spirit and attack in the best of the *Have a Go* series which is at least reminiscent of the Tommy Handley setup. There is the same drive and feeling for humanity which bubbles up like a yeast through the more turgid and pretentious offerings, and it is in sessions like these that radio scores over any other form of presentation.

I mentioned previously how well the old timers in Arrowtown came over the air. Another similarly successful broadcast was the recent 2YA Women's Session which gave us Mr. Reid, Wellington's last remaining "cabby." Early Wellington came to life as he remembered, and if there is such a person as a typical New Zealander, it could be Mr. Reid. Colloquial, hearty, completely at home in front of the microphone, he was wisely given his head, and didn't he love it! So did I—and we could do with a lot more of this kind of broadcast where the minimum of editing, allied with the right questions asked at the right time, gives us a fully rounded and natural personality with a story to tell.

—Sycorax

Unimpaired Vitality

I REMEMBER a Culture-conscious young man telling me once that he considered Gilbert and Sullivan operas

extremely vulgar, in deplorable bourgeois taste and as having no more vitality than an antimacassar. How fashionable such a view is I do not know, but the fact is that the Savoy Operas continue to please all levels of "brows" with the perpetual freshness of their fantastic worlds. As a listener to *The Yeomen of the Guard* for the first time for some years when it was broadcast from 1YA recently, even the tired condition of the recordings did not hinder me from enjoying again the delights of encountering old friends and of anticipating well-remembered pieces. This time, however, I felt I got a good deal more out of the opera as a result of having heard the BBC serial biography of the partners, which deepened my understanding of the personalities behind the operas and the milieu in which they had worked. How clean and sane are the children of this strange marriage! How alive sound even the most familiar of Sullivan's pieces! Where else in the arid seventies and eighties can we find a dramatist surpassing Gilbert in dramatic craftsmanship, in perfection of plot, in verbal skill and in comic genius? Vulgar, indeed!

A Lead from Listeners

IS it a reflection on programme organisers in general or merely an illustration of the idea that several heads are better than one that the Friday night classical request session from 1YD is consistently more interesting than most of the planned music programmes? A recent session contained Elgar's "Cockaigne" Overture, Beethoven's Romance No. 2 in F Major and his Piano Sonata in A Flat Major, Bach's Piano Concerto in D Minor, Haydn's "Clock" Symphony, and Saint-Saens' "Omphale's Spinning-Wheel," most of which are by no means heard too often on the radio. Perhaps the answer is that those who like serious music, unlike the popular request fans, actually do ask for pieces they have not heard recently rather than those they have. Although the Paganini Violin Concerto and the "Pathétique" Symphony have appeared more than once in this session, it seems to me that a study of these varied programmes would give organisers a few much-needed clues. It might also lead to the decent retirement of "Italian Caprice," Chabrier's "Espana" and the ubiquitous "Polovtsian Dances" which the backroom boys are determined the public shall accept as popular pieces—and like it.

—J.C.R.

Well-Polished Souvenirs

HENRY RUDOLPH has a way with him. Whenever his name appears as conductor (and frequently arranger) one may be sure of really expert entertainment, for whatever the quality of the music he is presenting, it is given with polish. His programme *Among My Souvenirs* given with strings and piano dusts off some old songs with the aid of "great singers" (hateful expression!) I heard the programme given with Merle and