

NEW ZEALAND  
**LISTENER**

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD

Every Friday Price Threepence

SEPTEMBER 6, 1940

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES:

93-107 Featherston Street, Wellington, C.1.  
Post Office Box 1070.  
Telephone, 46-520.  
Telegraphic Address: "Listener," Wellington.  
For Subscription Rates, see Page 47.

## Decision By Battle

**B**Y common consent one of the decisive battles of history is now in progress over England. If Britain had not fought on after the French surrender the Battle of France would have been decisive. But Britain did fight on, does fight on, will fight on. The decision that Hitler aimed at not only eluded him in France, it is beginning to turn against him out of France. Whatever happens during the next week or two—and they are not brave British boys but blind British buffoons who say that Germany is already beaten—England will still lie across Hitler's path. The Battle of Britain will go on till liberty is destroyed or triumphs, and a new era will date from the last shot.

For we must not deceive ourselves. Hitler wins or we win. Liberty disappears or we save it with our last blow. Those who think that life under Hitler would not differ much from life under our own free institutions are victims of a twilight sleep. Those who think that the sword never settles anything shut their minds to its story. The sword turned the Persians back out of Greece. It saved Rome from the Carthaginians. It halted Islam at the gates of Vienna. It turned the Saracens out of France. It conquered England in 1066, saved England in 1588. It made the United States, saved the French Revolution, destroyed Napoleon—and almost made civilisation safe for ever twenty-five years ago. It made Europe Christian, North Africa Mohammedan, Britain a democracy, Russia a socialist republic. To argue that in spite of all this it settles nothing is to use language that to the normal mind means nothing.

It has settled so much in the Western World that it is time to look back again at the facts, and to help our readers to do this we shall recall during the next five or six weeks some of the supreme battle crises of history. To many these stories will be familiar; some will find them new; we hope that all will find them significant in the light of the terrible fires now raging in Europe.

## LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

Letters sent to "The Listener" for publication should be as brief as possible and should deal with topics covered in "The Listener" itself. Correspondents must send their names and addresses even when it is their wish that these should not be published. We cannot undertake to give reasons why all or any portion of a letter is rejected.

### COMPOSERS' NAMES WANTED

Sir,—Allow me to tell you how we enjoy reading *The Listener*. The correspondence section often proves most amusing. I cannot see where listeners find reason to complain about the YA Stations. My opinion is that the entertainment provided is of the highest standard possible. There is one suggestion that I have to make, though. Is it possible for the announcers to give the name of the composer after each piece of music? Take, for instance, the Strauss compositions. There are so many Strausses that one becomes muddled at times trying to figure out which is which—Johann, Richard, or Oscar.

—NINA CONRY (Palmerston North).

### MODERN MUSIC

Sir,—My recent letter in disparagement of certain forms of modern music has provoked exactly the type of retaliation one would expect. The controversy is not new, and the policy of steady denunciation I have pursued for years past has injured me to every sort of attack from those who nourish resentment. That is the natural lot of the professional critic, and I don't mind it at all—in fact, I thrive on invective, and the more furious the opposition, the more I enjoy it. My only real difficulties are two—viz., (1), the danger of being dubbed a musical prig or snob by those who cannot see my point of view and whose opinions I really respect; (2), the task of adequately explaining that point of view within reasonable limits. However, the risks must be met, so here goes.

First let me refer as briefly as possible to the correspondents who have entered the arena.

Brian Hornblow made a spirited but quite futile attempt to suggest that "sincere jazz"—whatever that may be—does not come under the definition given by Leonard Hibbs. But he admits that it is a monotonous, haphazard sort of music, if nothing worse, for what other inference can be drawn from the quotation cited by the correspondent?—

"... On a steady, rhythmic background (i.e., a background of deadly monotony) is built music of the theme and variation type, ample space being left in the score for soloists, each improvising a new theme... and thus, in complete opposition to all other forms of music, the composer is of far less importance than the performer."

The italics are mine. Mr. Hornblow evidently hugs the fond delusion that this quotation supports his case. On the contrary, it gives the death blow to any intelligent consideration of jazz. Nuff sed.

"Schoolboy" was somewhat more reasonable in his letter, but his arguments in favour of modern serious composers will not bear examination. It may be true that Beethoven in his day was believed to have "reached the utmost limit in musical expression"; that "Berlioz was intensely disliked because of his bizarre orchestration"; and that "critics declared Wagner's 'Tannhauser' Overture to be nothing but horribly discordant noise"—though in regard to Berlioz and Wagner we know that much of the adverse criticism they evoked sprang from the jealousy of inferior rivals. But these composers, in common with all great masters of classical tradition, never departed from the basic rules of harmony and form which, though largely unwritten, are inherent in true music, and are understood by every genuine musician. As Mrs. Malaprop might have said, Mr. Editor, these rules of musical composition are as static, as inviolable, and as unalterable as the laws of the Swedes and Nasturtiums. Yet they are being constantly assailed and deliberately broken by the iconoclasts of to-day—among whom, I regret to say, are several British composers who should know better, such as William Walton, Vaughan Williams, Cyril Scott, and others. In my opinion, nobody has yet written a bar of music in the so-called modern

idiom that is worth a tin of fish. Perhaps when "Schoolboy" matriculates, he may develop a keener sense of logic.

Now, Sir, we come to "Honi," my latest opponent. I propose to dismiss him in very few words. For his information, I, too, am among "the thousands who like good light music"—again my italics. But jazz is not good, nor, from my viewpoint, is it music. "Honi" should really be more careful in his statements. He says "all the great composers died in abject poverty, unlettered and unsung"! I would say to "Honi," "Honi soit qui mal y pense."

What disputants usually lose sight of, in this eternal argument about music, is that the whole matter hinges upon the formation of good taste in the individual in childhood. I am frankly an idealist, and firmly believe that the plastic infant mind can be guided to an appreciation of fine music which will confer immunity from jazzitis or similar infections. The average adult jazz or "modern" addict is beyond human aid.

Seriously, Mr. Editor, I have often heard admirers of the "modern idiom" admit that it is an acquired taste—you have to get used to it before you like it. But does not the same argument apply to a taste for tobacco—not to mention more dubious

More "Letters from Listeners" will be found on Page 11.

forms of indulgence? Why submit to the yoke of such habits at all? The initial boyish venture with tobacco, as many of us may recall, is invariably unpleasant enough to discourage further experiment. Without wishing to preach, I am merely pointing out that antecedent nausea constitutes Nature's warning. My feelings when I hear an allegedly musical phrase in the modern idiom are analogous to those of the tobacco novice in his first reaction to nicotine. Perhaps if I persevered I might overcome this repulsion; but what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole—tone whirled and lose his own solo?

Boiled down, the question resolves itself into one's conception of music's actual meaning, and the ability to appraise its spiritual value—if any. Be it noted that no admirer of modern music ever calls it "beautiful"—cleavah, don't cher know, an' all that, but the word "beauty" is instinctively avoided, because felt to be incongruous. I think it was Stravinsky who said that beauty has no place in music, and stoutly he lives up to his pronouncement.

To sum up, Sir, it may be urged that both contemporary extremes of musical expression—i.e., modern dance music and the would-be serious modern idiom, are manifestations of paganism as opposed to the spiritual in music. The free-thinkers are entitled to their opinions, provided that they don't try to subvert the cherished faith of the orthodox. This may seem old-fashioned. If it is, I am happy to be classed among the back numbers. But I am equally glad to know that many of our young people share my views, and it is to the rising generation that we must look for musical salvation.

L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).

Sir,—I found "Honi's" letter most interesting, and would like to enlarge on one of his points. A doesn't like "modern" music and B cares nothing for Bach, Beethoven, etc. What I think to be an explanation of this state of affairs may be of interest. Many people who profess to appreciate "high-brow" music fail really to understand it, just as a child finds very little in the works of Shakespeare. But as the child has further experience in the appreciation of literature he can often get pleasure from works once dark to him. So Bach and Beethoven have meaning only to those who can understand them because their interest in music has developed their power of appreciation. If a person enjoys cheap thrillers, there should be no attempt made to force works of art upon him, for thrillers are the works he is capable of making use of. Surely the music should be made to suit the man, not man the music. With "Honi," then, I ask for "greater tolerance by musical men."

—PETER GRAHAM (Mount Eden).