

# LISTENER

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115 Lambton Quay, Wellington, C.I.

Post Office Box 1070.

Telephone, 46-520.

Telegraphic Address: "Listener," Wellington.

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## The War And Our Children

IF there is a tougher job than saying something sensible at a wedding, it is saying something useful to boys and girls leaving school. Few in fact attempt it, most of the oratory on such occasions being directed to the parents of the scholars and not to the scholars themselves. This year, however, the speakers can be forgiven. What are we to say to boys and girls who know as well as we do that civilisation has collapsed?

We certainly can't fob them off with platitudes about the use of time. We can't tell them that the future, with all its possibilities, lies ahead of them. They know that bombs have no more respect for them than for their fathers and mothers, that the future is for these who are not yet born, and that the living have yet to determine its shape. They know too, many of them, that they are leaving school, not because their education has been completed (if it ever could be), but because they are wanted at home or in industry. They hear us every day whistling to keep up our courage; listen to our appeals for men and money; watch us scanning the newspapers or sitting in silence before the radio—see and hear all this and know what most of it means. To tell them anything but the truth is to make fools of ourselves without making happier beings of them.

Well, not many of us try it. The break-up speeches this year have been laboured but they have usually been honest. We have said what we could say without being absurd, and having said it we already feel better. Certainly our boys and girls feel better. The war does not mean to them everything that it means to us, but it means enough to them to bring them near to us if we will have them. And they like being near in that partnership sense. Although our instinct is to shut them out from our troubles circumstances have let them in, and they feel for the first time that they are people.

## 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 Correspondents must send their names and addresses even when it is their wish that these should not be published.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.

### MODERN MUSIC.

Sir,—Although I respect the opinions of L. D. Austin and examine them thoroughly. I have no inclination to accept his assertions as basic truths; in fact I am almost led to conclude that such frantic declarations are based on the dictum "repeat a statement often enough and it will be believed."

I have no desire to belittle the talent of the old masters and the beauty of their works, but it is obvious from the dissension existing among members of the old school themselves that their music has its faults.

The name "Jazz" has become firmly fixed in the mind of L. D. Austin and others as a term describing a modern dance band, whereas in reality jazz was but a passing phase in the development of bands although the term may still apply to the "corny country cousins" type of dance band. The jazz era was a necessary stage in the evolution of the modern swing band and has the same relation to modern idiom as the first motor car has to the modern streamlined version.

Swing music has been described as being built of the theme and variation type, space being left for soloists, each improvising a new theme. L. D. Austin sneers at this allegedly haphazard principle, but an analogy will serve to illustrate its effectiveness. Examine the results obtained by two types of public speakers. One who is a gifted orator, steps forward and thrills his audience with every sentence, improvising as he proceeds with only occasional reference to the theme. The other is a man with a good delivery, but who has to read every word from notes or who has memorised his whole speech.

To the majority of people the old style of music represents this second type of speaker, and while all music lovers admit that the compositions are very beautiful, it is appreciated that they have not the same appeal as modern "integration" except to those who have been compelled from childhood to study and recognise the old masters. Such compulsion is comparable with the methods adopted in Germany by the Nazis, intent on enforcing their ideas on all and sundry. It will be remembered too that the Nazis have forbidden the playing of swing music in Germany, and L. D. Austin in his final furious "kick against the pricks" asserts that he would adopt similar measures if he had the power.

To me, much of the modern music is as beautiful as the old classics, and in most cases more so, and I feel a pang of sorrow for those who are too old or too bigoted to appreciate it.

Modern music, especially swing, is enjoyed by many people whose only real chance is on Friday nights at 10. A perusal of the weekly programme reveals the great inadequacy in choice and variety in that particular field.

What we need in this world is not a sharp division of opinion labelled highbrow and lowbrow, but a judicious blend—the broadbrow. So let us have our old and new in proper proportion and neither to the exclusion of the other.—HUGH A. R. PATTERSON (Gisborne).

Sir,—Modern music should neither be dismissed because it is unfamiliar in style and sound, nor championed for the sole reason that it is up-to-date and exorcising for the most part. Most of your correspondents take one or other of these extreme lines, charge each other with being out of date or lovers of the hideous, and so become futile.

There is a better test than this to try modern music by, that of Caliban—or rather, of Shakespeare himself:

*"Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises:  
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not."*

In Shakespeare and the older poets, music is invariably "sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not." What a beautiful and rational ideal of music, and how very different from that of many present-day composers! There is a further Shakespeare test—that of Lucentio on the purpose of music:

*"Preposterous ass! that never read so far,  
To know the cause why music was ordained!  
Was it not to refresh the mind of man  
After his studies or his usual pain?"*

Music then—to be music—must give delight, must hurt not, and must refresh us after study and tribulation. How much ultra-modern music will stand

More "Letters from Listeners" will be found on Pages 14 and 15

this test? A very large amount of contemporary music has apparently been written, not to sell, not to please, but in order to perpetrate sour, uncouth, rough and unwillingly ugly sounds—the uglier the better from the composer's point of view. It is great names that I have in mind—men like Sibelius, Mahler, Bax, Bliss, Ravel, Walton, and Stravinsky. The worse half of the music of these composers cannot well have been written to sell, it being so unenticing. It has no beauty at all to my ear, though I have tried hard to get acclimatised to it. It is rough, relentless, extraordinarily intricate and difficult to perform. Half an hour of a composer not out to shock his grandmother is worth many evenings of Bliss and Walton, so far as I am concerned.

I would not have you banish modern style music from the air, but since you arrange our programmes for us on the majority-taste system, it is but right that we should get less of the moderns than we now do. Whole unrelieved modern programmes now occur too frequently by far, whether we reckon by the standard of beauty or of majority likes and dislikes.

Modern music dates itself very badly, quite as badly as did Stainer, Sullivan, Barnby, Dykes, and the Victorians.

F. K. TUCKER (Christchurch).

Sir,—In your issue of November 29, L. D. Austin aired more of his poisonous opinions on modern music. Now, sir, I would like to put a few queries to you.

First: Who is L. D. Austin?

Second: What right has he to damn jazz from hell to breakfast when he obviously knows so little about it? By jazz I mean sincere music with a steady rhythmic background, and improvised solos; not the commercialised schmaltz that is so often called by the same name.

McSNORRT (Waipia).

Sir,—I would like to reply in a few words to your Bing-Eddy writer about old-fashioned grown-ups not appreciating these grand singers. My family of three over twenty-one drop everything to listen when Bing comes on the air. And Nelson Eddy is a special favourite of an old-fashioned—

MOTHER (Wellington).

Sir,—I think that most New Zealanders have become tired of listening to hackneyed American nasal crooners of the Bing Crosby standard. If Mr. Crosby is not a crooner, then perhaps you could tell me what he is. Nelson Eddy is not an artist up to the standard of Chaliapin, Stracciani, or Tibbett. If some of our listeners haven't heard of these three famous singers, then give us more of them and perhaps this country will wake up, "understand genius and ability" and "stop being stupid."—YOUNG NEW ZEALANDER (Tauranga).

### ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

"AWAHAU": The Rev. R. W. Simpson. The McCravy Brothers. (a) "Leave It There" (b) "Stand By Me."  
"PATRIOT": We are sorry that it is not possible.  
"COLONEL BOGEY": Making inquiries.