

# AUSTERITY ON THE AIR

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Most of the press said "Hear! Hear!" and so did many band leaders. The *Yorkshire Post* declared: "Drivel and snivel, in days of challenge and strain, may almost be classed as a minor form of Fifth Column activity." Said the *Times*, with a reminiscent rumble of thunder: "The nation is in the Dorian mood; it has a mind to hear something strong, full-throated, and vital."

Others questioned the right of BBC, itself often assailed as schoolmarmy, to judge what is debilitated and what is not. One plausible jest was that the German radio would build up its British audience (as pre-war Radio Luxembourg had) by establishing a black market in crooners.

Loudest squallers were music publishers. They thought BBC's edict was directed primarily against songs (mostly U.S.) that, by moaning about unfaithful sweethearts, were likely to make members of expeditionary forces homesick and jealous. A prize example is the current hit "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree," in which the singer melodiously complains that he has just had information from a friend (not a relation) that an unconscripited neighbour next door

was making pleasant woo with a charming creature who might be the girl he left to go to war.

Others mentioned were "Miss You," "Someone's Rocking My Dreamboat," and "Somebody Else is Taking My Place"—all from the U.S.

Nobody objected when BBC also banned "Deep in the Heart of Texas" from *Music While You Work* programmes, which go into British war factories. Reason: workers robustly beat out the clapping sequences with their hammers, sometimes damaged their machines!

## TWO OBITUARIES

(English "Listener," August 6)

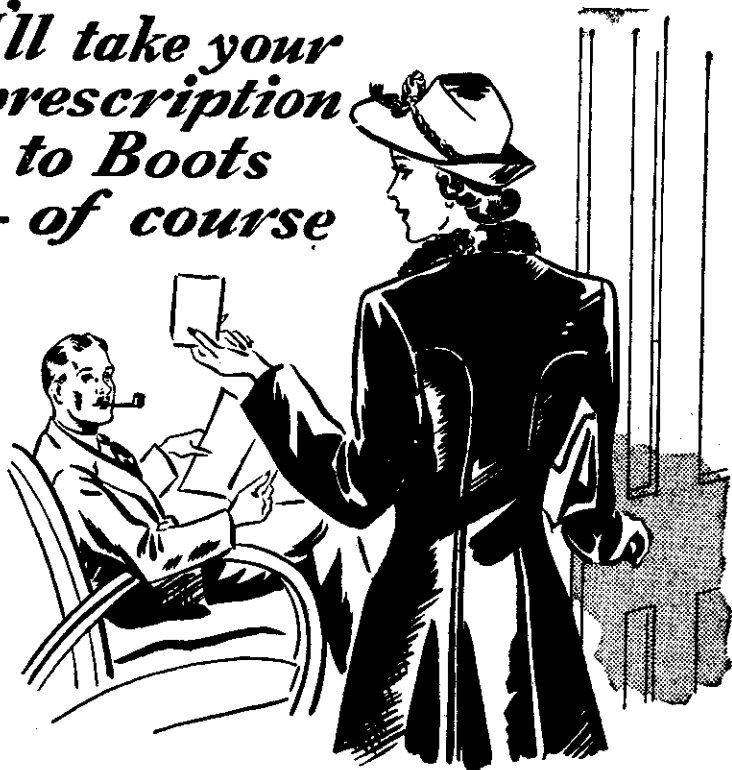
UNDER the caption, *Requiescant*, W. McNaught makes the following comment in the English *Listener*:

This being the season for light topics, let us begin with a couple of obituaries. The radio crooner has been put out of his pain; and I feel that it is up to somebody on this page to assist in the obsequies. Crooning scarcely comes under the head of Drama; nor does it qualify as, though it may frequently invoke, the Spoken Word. There is no getting away from it: crooning is Music. In fact, the impossibility of getting away from it has been the chief trouble; and here the BBC has covered itself with blame. By filling the air with these sub-human bleatings for many thousands of hours our dear, perplexing Corporation has made itself the biggest force in existence for the debasement of public taste. Apologists have pleaded that the public must be given what it wants; it is also true, and more to the point, that the public will want what it gets. As a well-known foreign expert has laid it down in another connection, the public will fall for anything if you shout it long enough and often enough. And here am I laying reproaches on the BBC when I ought to be patting it on the back for getting rid of the nuisance at last. Still, I could wish that the motive had been simpler. The radio crooner has been laid to rest because the spirit of the times calls for a more virile and robust type of song. I would rather have read that he had been put away merely because he was an offence.

Doom has also been passed upon the Scrounged Melody. And quite time too, for this form of misdemeanour has long been a cause of pain and exasperation among musical folk. A crooner's sounds may be inescapable, but you can ignore his songs, for they are musically null. But a well-known tune, in whatever form, is bound to catch your attention, and to set up irritation if it has been maltreated. Beyond this, however, I have to admit that I am unsound on the ethics of theft. The pillaged classic suffers no permanent damage (where now is "The Damask Rose"?); the thing can be decently done, and it can happen that a purloined tune is the only one worth listening to between the hors d'oeuvres and the coffee. But since most of these robberies are done with violence the best course has been taken by forbidding them altogether. So thumbs down on the filched tune.



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