

Listening While I Work (3)

By "Materfamilias"

LAST week, lunching with a friend, I realised how much education for housewives was given by the Hint Method. Hints over the air had saved our boiled eggs from cracking, had added flavour to our tea, had removed the mildew from our table cloth. The furniture was polished à la Country Education, and the evening meal prepared according to Aunt Daisy. I wondered whether my hostess went round perpetually with pencil and paper ready to catch the next tip as it dropped from the radio. But no . . . "I can't remember a whole talk if its about a special subject," she said. "It just bores me then; but I'm always on the look-out for Hints, and I learn ever such a lot, and all by chance!"

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THIS is, I feel, the guiding policy of those who talk to housewives; to deal out tips and hints by the score but to shy off anything in the nature of serious instruction. The Educational session is actually called an Educational session, but although the A.C.E. talks and the *Health in the Home* talks could be classed as educational they are disguised as though the broadcasting powers-that-be were afraid that anything that sounded too instructive would send people quickly to the knobs. The result is a compromise. We get our useful talks and helpful hints, but we seldom know quite what to expect. Is *New Days*, *New Ways* going to be about cooking or house furnishing or women in factories or fashions in hats? We may assume that *Fighting the Rat* deals with rodents and not with child psychology. We can guess what to expect if the talk is on Pie Making, but how does that fit onto last week's talk on *Fitness Counts*? My own rather matter-of-fact mind resents this sporadic infiltration of useful ideas. I like my instruction cut and dried—so many talks on laundering or cooking or dressmaking; and then if I knew plenty about them I wouldn't need to listen but could turn to other programmes. Picking up hints may be a pleasant and unobtrusive way of being instructed, but it is far from being the most efficient. If the Hint Method is to be adopted I would recommend the quizz way of doing it. You don't listen to learn, you listen to see how many half-crowns you might have won if you had been there answering questions. If you know the answer you are pleased with yourself; if you don't you feel that you have picked up another hint. Quizz listening may be an ignoble waste of time but it does at least not do more than it sets out to do—drop a few hints in a form that may also be entertaining.

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THE other Sunday I listened to my first programme in the new American series *Front Line Theatre*. This particular playlet was called *V. Day*—the day when the victorious troops of the United Nations march down *Unter Den Linden*. A small boy of uncertain age is being taken to see these troops by his Mommer, and he is looking for his father among the men who march by. ("You see my father left Germany before the

war and he said he would come back when free men marched through the streets of Berlin again.") First come the Czechs, and then Poles and Norwegians, and then Dutch and then French and British, and lastly Americans. The boy, who must have been at least nine years old if he remembered his father, asks each lot if they have



"Hints over the air . . . added flavour to our tea"

seen his father, and he swallows sobs and gets offered rides on the shoulders of the marching lads just as though he were the little boy of four or five that he behaves like. Finally he stops an American. No, the American doesn't find the lad's father, but he gives him a nice uplifting talk on the American way of life and things like democracy. I don't remember it too well, because somebody else found it too much and reached for the knob, and by the time we got back to the station little Fritz and his Yank had gone for good. That is to say, I wish they had gone for good. I prefer to keep my tears of joy for the time when in reality the feet of free men can walk in safety again down the lanes and alleys of a liberated Europe.

BY way of contrast in war propaganda, I found *Pipe Dream*, the NBS-produced fantasy by J. Wilson Hogg (broadcast the other Sunday by 2YC), refreshing. The idea of the Pied Piper returning to modern Germany to pipe away the Nazi rats has its possibilities—on the whole well enough exploited to make a half-hour's entertainment, and the allegorical implication that power leads to self-destruction was not overdone.

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FOR those who like music and have not had full opportunities of knowing much about it I would recommend the new 2YA Sunday afternoon series of programmes (4.30 p.m.). *Composers Through the Ages*. I was a little afraid that this would be another of those tiresome talks that give long collections of facts in an unsatisfactory attempt to be comprehensive. Instead, there was very little talk and the records were illustrative and well chosen—not enough of course, but perhaps I am greedy in wanting a lot of the things I like. The series should at least give those who wish it a chance to hear fragments by composers from Palestrina to the present day, and if listeners are interested enough they can supplement this series of musical illustrations by getting something about the composers themselves on their next visit to the local library.

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Listening Curiosity: "You will now hear Richard Tauber singing 'The English Rose' from *Merrie England* by Edward German."

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