

## Listening While I Work (5)

By "Matertamilias"

THE other evening I was at a friend's place. The wireless was left on, unintentionally I think, while we went into the kitchen. Suddenly at 9 p.m. a fierce cacophony of jive or boogie woogie jittered up one's Sunday evening peace. "I must turn that off quickly before my husband goes nuts," said Mrs. A. But by the time we had reached the radio the scene had changed. A fast patter of wise-cracking was pouring into the room. The Man of the House was sitting by the radio, his hands still poised to turn it off, a widening smile on his face. "Do you really want this noise?" his wife asked coldly. "Just wait a moment, ha ha! did you get that?" And so, amid chuckles, we listened through half an hour of the Fred Allen Show and even Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge. We even tolerated crooning sandwiched with back-chat. I thought of Mrs. A's remark to me in the kitchen, "My husband can't stand these American jazzy programmes." At the end of the programme Mr. A turned to Mrs. A. "The trouble is," he said, "that you aren't conditioned to enjoy American humour."

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IF we aren't yet, it won't be long before we will have to be in order to understand our husbands and wives and children and friends, not to mention our American visitors! We are getting a thorough grounding in Americanisation. Just look through the programmes, National and Commercial, and count the U.S. war programmes. From 2YA alone you will find five in a week, varying from more or less classical to the "Comedy Caravan" type. The ZB ones are not all listed as special War Department programmes and are therefore not so easy to pick, but there are plenty of them when you listen. The American is here as a visitor—a most welcome and necessary visitor—but already he is making a mark on what we may be pleased to call our culture. We go to American movies, we entertain American servicemen; our children idolise American marines; our streets ring with songs that come from the halls of Montezuma and go deep into the heart of Texas. And in our homes we hear American music, American actors, and American wisecracks every evening and frequently for a good part of the day too.

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BUT don't misunderstand me. All this may sound as though I considered Americanisation a Bad Thing. It would be ungrateful and narrowly nationalistic to think anything of the sort. But I think we should be prepared to ask ourselves some questions and formulate some answers. Are we getting Americanised—for we soon all shall be—in the right way? Some of the best movies have been produced in Hollywood—but also some of the worst.

Technically the American productions are far ahead of anything that we can do here, and ahead of most that is done

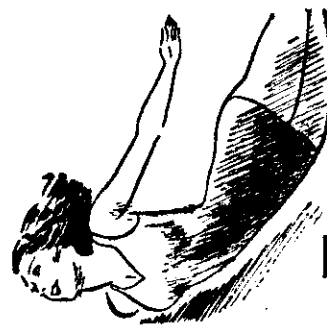
in England. But does the matter in the programmes—or much of it—really represent America, the part of America that we most want to know? Is it good for us to take so much humour and music from a culture that is not our own? Are we taking it critically enough—because we like it or because it is at present the thing to do to like it? When



I hear of audiences of thousands held spellbound by a single jive artist I am not only amazed but horrified. It may be all right to dance to, an individual performer may hold an audience, but is it worth hours of our listening time or just a ghastly background to illumine the empty spaces of our conversational deficiencies?

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BUT, you answer, you don't have to listen; and you are right. These programmes are intended to cheer American lads sick for home in an alien jungle. They are generously lent by the U.S. War Department, and they feature radio and film stars who have made reputations for themselves all over the English-speaking world. The NBS in New Zealand could not provide anything in the same category, the BBC (fortunately) doesn't. I know that. But it leaves New Zealand listeners without a wide enough choice. From the YA's those who enjoy classical music can get it, but classical music is not everybody's meat, and neither plays, serials, nor talks, generally, supply very much more than condiments. What is left? The ZB production "Dramatisation of the Classics"? In recent weeks we have had *The Rivals* (Sheridan), *The Corsican Brothers* (Dumas), *Don Quixote* (Cervantes), *The Haunted House* (Lord Lytton), *La Horla* (De Maupassant). Well, try to compress a long book like *Don Quixote* or a play like *The Rivals* into a half hour's listening and see how you feel. If you are not willing to make the experiment, sample a number of that astonishing American publication "Book," which compresses five full-size books into one magazine per month.



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basin on its  
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7. Dry thoroughly, away from sun or direct heat, before putting away.
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