

## Listening While I Work (8)

By "Materfamilias"



AS I was glancing through the week's programmes the other day it occurred to me that our listening fare is not unlike magazine fare. A magazine aims primarily at entertaining its readers—readers of all tastes. Few magazines have literary pretensions. They offer distraction to the invalid, the traveller, the patient in the dentist's waiting-room. If you don't like one article you turn to the next. You may find useful recipes, hints on sewing, funny stories, or serious political discussion. This is much what our radio programmes provide—with the important addition of classical music. Magazine ZB caters for the somewhat different reader from Magazine YA, but both aim largely at entertainment. Is this harmful? Not if we can prevent it from atrophying our ability to read well or listen well. But can we? Does magazine reading become a habit that undermines the ability to read, criticise, and enjoy a bigger and better book? I was told the other day by a local librarian that magazines, especially women's periodicals, ranked among the most popular reading on the library shelves.

IS this cause or effect? Have we as a community become so restless that we can stomach nothing but bits and pieces. And again does it matter? Can we honestly assert that magazine reading and listening increase our enjoyment and appreciation of living? I think not. I do not wish to exaggerate, but I feel that it is, in far too many cases, the adult equivalent of the child's comic—amusing, absorbing perhaps, full of sound and fury but signifying nothing. Just another distraction for those whom it hurts to think.

THIS train of thought is partly due to an irritation that I personally feel at frequent changes from one sort of programme to another. There are few programmes that last more than a half-hour. The classical hour is an exception. Even here I would welcome an hour, or even a half-hour of a single composer. Some of the evening programmes from local NBS stations give an evening of good listening (3YL provided a whole and remarkable two hours of Beethoven on a recent Saturday), but for those who do not want to listen to classical music there are not enough alternatives to variety. Talks, plays, and readings are very sparingly dealt out in 20 minute doses of thin quality. Who reads books a chapter at a time?

ALL the same I realise that altering programmes to one's tastes is no easy matter. You want a good modern play—Shaw, perhaps, or Steinbeck or Eugene O'Neill? Good, but you will find the royalties for a single broadcast performance may be £100 or more. Fortunately the fact that a composer has been dead for a long time and no longer entitled to royalties does not make his music out of date. But words are different. I would be far from venturing to say that Shakespeare is out of date, but I would be prepared to admit that the number of people who would listen to a Shakespeare play once a week would be small. In fact I can imagine that a proposal for Shakespeare once a week on

(continued on next page)

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