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RADIO REVIEW

Browning and Music

I SUGGEST a medal for the NZBS officer who filled the interval at Solomon's piano recital on April 10 with three poems by Browning. The second, "A Toccata of Galuppi's," a "must" for any anthology of the treatment of music in poetry, was linked in subject to the occasion, and, admirably read, how delightful it was to hear! It has been a favourite of mine all my long Browning life, and I have always carried snatches of it in my head, but this was the first time I had heard it read, and the art of a great player had put me in a particularly receptive mood. I was struck afresh by the poem's extraordinary qualities—the mixture of gaiety and doom in the capture of a past society, the mastery of metre and rhyme, the skill with which technical musical terms were woven into the tapestry of the picture, and the lucidity. I refreshed my memory of what Chesterton says of Browning and music, that he may not have known enough about the organ to be more than a sixth-rate organist, but there are some things that a sixth-rate organist knows which a first-rate judge of music does not know, and these were the things that Browning knew. Some of them appear in "A Toccata of Galuppi's."

Then, over the air, on the evening of an April autumn, we listened to that so oft-quoted and sometimes laughed-over song of April spring in England—"Home Thoughts from Abroad." Neither the long friction of the poem nor the opposition of the seasons affected its beauty. It has the power to move those who have never seen an English spring. I thought again of the reaction that has come upon Browning as upon other Victorians, and comforted myself with the joy this recital had brought me. I remember the recent reference of an English critic to what he called Browning's "bounce." If this was bounce, on with the game of ball! At any rate, it is better to bounce than to crawl.

—A.M.

Projection of Personality

DESPITE the fact that over 80 people have appeared on the 1YC Critics panel, it has not yet produced its Joad, possibly because only through repeated appearances do such personalities impose themselves. However, the nearest thing I have heard to a Joad-ish performance on *The Critics* was A. J. C. Fisher's contribution to the recent discussion of the National Orchestra and the N.Z. Players' *Private Lives*. Subdued during the Orchestra portion, Mr. Fisher leaped to life at the mention of Noel Coward, and the resulting tangle with A. R. D. Fairburn, who was inclined to defend *Private Lives*, was vastly entertaining. His characterisation of Coward's exquisites was maliciously perfect, and was pointed by idiosyncratic emphases—incred-ible, fan-tas-tic, and significant pauses. "Good gracious! Mr. Coward would have died!" (a character's suit) and "A corsage that completely malformed the poor gal," were among the least acid of his comments. Out of the

clash of opinions came a fair estimate of the performance; but the main impression I carried away was of a fruity character having his say with unusual pungency of phrase—a projection of personality as much as a critical contribution, but a very agreeable one.

A Musical Victor Hugo

NOW and again, by presenting to us a great work we have not heard before and are unlikely ever to hear "in the flesh," the radio more than compensates for the insistent well-worn pops, and desiccated classics. Berlioz's *Requiem (Messe des Morts)*—held me entranced during the whole of 1YC's playing of the Passini Choir recording. The fantastic Berlioz, with his strange malformed genius, can be vulgar, cheap and theatrical; he lacks religious sense; he naively tinkers with the sacred texts he sets; he loves the big battalions and the bludgeoning row of grotesquely large orchestras. Yet in this extraordinary *Requiem*, a dolorous celebration of melancholy mortality, without faith or belief, there is a power, a vastness and gloomy solemnity which made a great impact on me, almost despite myself. I felt that here was the very centre of French Romanticism, but at the same time unmistakably Berlioz himself, uneven, almost megalomaniacally grandiose, quite unliturgical, yet marked with inexplicable genius—the musical Victor Hugo. For such an experience, I am almost prepared to tolerate the thrice-weekly performance of the Overture to *The Bartered Bride*.

—J.C.R.

An Easter Story

THERE is a sweetness and simplicity about the stories for children broadcast in the Kindergarten and Schools session that parents find most encouraging. But quite the most outstanding I've heard recently was Allona Priestley's Easter story, "The Little Donkey," an account in the little donkey's own words of how he carries Jesus into Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. It was full of homely detail—Martha chats to the donkey's owner about the marketing for the big supper she's preparing for the Master and His friends; the donkey, frightened by the children waving branches in front of his eyes, is steadied by the Master's reassuring hand and voice. The young child's delight in being someone else and seeing things from an entirely different viewpoint was sagely used to bring the happenings at Easter within his own experience, and the programme created a matter-of-fact piety that was never at odds with its informality.

—M.B.

Clear and Simple

FEW people could be more convincing than Professor C. Day Lewis in his four talks on Modern Poetry broadcast from 3YC. Models of clarity and simplicity, the talks threw a light even on familiar paths. Apart from the work of Owen, Spender and Dylan Thomas, I was delighted to have picked out MacNeice's rollicking satire on today's materialistic world. But a man convinced against his will is a man unconvinced still. A subsequent reading in Eliot of Prufrock's love song left me as cold as ever. A few passages in that melancholy, listless testament rise above the general level, the rest is tied down to

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 30, 1954.