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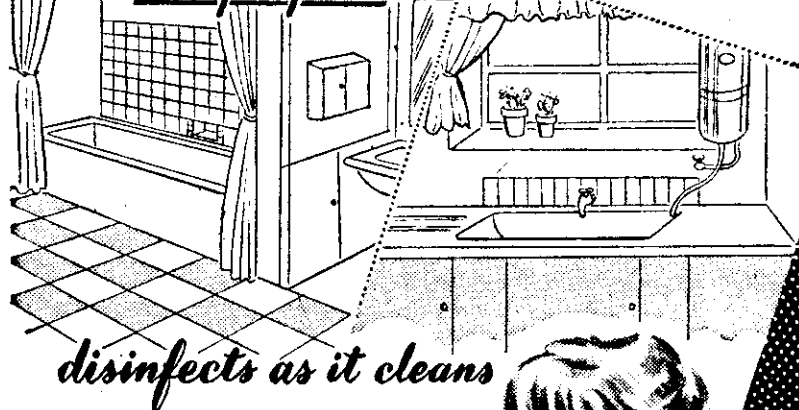
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TALKING OF MUSIC...

ONE of the sharpest music critics to visit New Zealand was Arthur Jacobs, who writes for the *Musical Times* and other London papers when he is at home. Some of Mr. Jacobs's remarks about New Zealand music were caustic enough to arouse shouts of anger in several cities, yet few would deny that he was an expert who knew his subject thoroughly and how to express himself just as well. These qualities of musical knowledge and a gift for talking provocatively about music are in evidence in a series of 13 illustrated talks which he recorded for the NZBS before his departure, and which will be broadcast in a link of the YC stations starting at 9.30 p.m. on Wednesday, June 2.



RBC photograph

ARTHUR JACOBS

Caustic remarks roused shouts of anger

He ranges over a variety of subjects, to each of which he devotes two or three talks. The first three, for instance, are about three famous composers who spent a good deal of their active life in London—Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn. Mr. Jacobs tells us not only about the composers individually, but also about the musical life of England during the time under discussion. Two talks are about the "musical revolutionaries" Stravinsky and Schoenberg. Two more are entitled "The Changing Opera."

But Mr. Jacobs likes to get off the beaten track, and perhaps the most interesting of his series, certainly those containing the most caustic phrases, are the last four: "Are Conductors Necessary?" "Child Prodigies," "Composers and Performers," and "Bernard Shaw as Music Critic." This is how he begins his talk on "Child Prodigies": "Well, let me be frank. I loathe them. I mean that, as a practising music critic, I hate the dressing-up, the glamourising, the exploiting of young people for the profit of others. I hate the audiences which this kind of thing attracts—audiences who don't know a euphonium from a semi-quaver, and don't care, and normally never go to concerts, but who will go to hear a twelve-year-old play a Beethoven concerto as they would go if a bearded lady from the circus said that she was going to try it."

But having got off this volley, Mr. Jacobs proceeds to examine the child prodigy business in a more dispassionate manner. He discusses a number of more or less famous prodigies, beginning with Mozart, who composed his first symphony in London at eight. He mentions Sergio Varela Cid, a Portuguese six-year-old who recently appeared as solo pianist with a well-known London orchestra; Gerard Poulet, an outstanding young violinist; and several child conductors. His final word on the subject is that "interpretation may touch the highest levels in childhood; composition never." Although there have been child prodigies as performers, in the field of composition there are only "adolescent prodigies." The works composed by Mozart as a child were of little real value, and his symphony composed at eight was probably revised by another musician.

In his discussion of "Composers as Performers," Mr. Jacobs talks in detail about the feats of improvisation by composers like Beethoven (who first made his name as a pianist), Bach and Rachmaninoff. He mentions how Rachmaninoff became so bored at the number of times he was asked to play his famous Prelude in C Sharp Minor at concerts that he used to put in a few

variations as he went along. This led to some London critics complaining that he did not know his own composition. Modern composer-performers of note are Stravinsky, who is an accomplished pianist and a good conductor; Hindemith, who is a famous viola player; and Vaughan Williams and William Walton, who are both good conductors. Mr. Jacobs mentions that composers who are also violinists are rare, and he considers that, as was the case with Paganini, Vieuxtemps and Wieniawski, these men are inevitably violinists first and composers second.

In his talks on "The Changing Opera," such controversial points as that of "opera in English" are discussed, and Mr. Jacobs points out that in Germany, Italy and other continental countries the accepted practice is to sing the opera in the language of the audience. The reasons this is not done in England is, he thinks, first snobbishness, secondly the lack until recently of good English translations, thirdly the scarcity of good English singers. This has led to some recent performances at Covent Garden being sung in English by the chorus, but in German or Italian by the famous continental singers who had been engaged for the leading roles.

On the subject of conductors Mr. Jacobs has many perceptive and amusing things to say: "Conductors are horribly tempted to play to the audience; and many of them fall for the temptation. . . . Indeed, they sometimes go a stage worse; they perform a kind of one-man ballet on the rostrum . . . they even distort the composer's intentions. . . ." and so on. His conclusion is that musical life might well be healthier without the man who specialises in conducting.

Australian Elections

BECAUSE of the preferential voting system in operation in Australia, little early indication of election trends is likely to be heard in New Zealand on the night of Saturday, May 29. The NZBS will broadcast results as they come to hand from a link of YA and YZ stations, beginning on Saturday night after the 11 o'clock "News," and continuing early on Sunday morning, with progress reports following the "News" at 7.15 and 8.10 a.m., and the "Weather Forecast" at 12.30 p.m.

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 28, 1954.