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Radio Review

UNFULFILLED PROMISE

THE promise of liveliness in the *Question Mark* title, *Empty Churches—Can They Be Filled?* was, for me, at least, unfulfilled. A limping session, it never at any stage went below the surface, possibly because of a reluctance by panel members to admit that there was any such problem as the title proposed. Early in the piece, they agreed that churches weren't empty—at least not too empty—and then went on to discuss the things that kept people away. These were not anything as fundamental as doctrinal or cultural or moral matters, but such considerations as parsonical mannerisms, church heating and lighting, and archaic translations of the Bible. So far as I could make out, three Nonconformists and an Anglican made up the panel; the trouble seemed to be the lack of a really "challenging" element. What was needed, surely, was a Catholic or a Freethinker to question some basic assumptions, and make it all just a little less cosy. Still, I shall remember this session for one remark I can only describe as piquant—"The Church has to re-think its theology in terms of the community!"

The Edwardian Stage

SIR COMPTON MACKENZIE'S flair for nostalgic re-creation of the Edwardian period has given us some excellent radio talks in the past. (Personally, I prefer his honest relish to the rather faded preciosity of "the incomparable Max"). However, in the first delightful *Beaux and Belles* programme (1YA) we heard him on the same theme, but in a new role—that of commentator on some of the songs and personalities of the Edwardian stage, and as interviewer of the fabulous Ada Reeve, one of the darlings of the day. One can only guess, in a cadish way, Miss Reeve's age from her casual references to musical comedies she played in in the nineties, and those

which Compton Mackenzie, now in his seventies, saw as an undergraduate, but she stole the show by her chirpy reminiscences, her "old trouper" manner and her singing of a bright song with amazing zest and polish. *Cultural footnote:* I was interested to observe that musical plays of which both spoke in reverent tones as long dead and forgotten are still going concerns in the repertoire of some of New Zealand's amateur operatic societies. —J.C.R.

Grandstands and Towers

PETRONIUS, that *arbiter elegantiae* (Leo Genn to you) probably arbitrated about a number of things of which he had no direct experience. Talk of the circus games at his table was, for example, entirely theoretical, which is possibly one reason for the Decline and Fall. In comparison our New Zealand Petroniuses are whole men. The chairman of last week's *Book Shop* (and his audience with him) moved with consummate ease and no decline in interest from a literary competition (whose entries would not have disgraced the *New Statesman*) to a review of Terry McLean's account of the last All Black Tour, followed by comments from the All Black captain. There is much to be said for a cultural landscape that can show grandstands as well as ivory towers.

Strength in Quietness

IN the NZBS programme "The Amazing Harold Williams," Tolstoy is made to say something like "I distrust movements that make a lot of noise. God did not speak to Elijah in the whirlwind, nor in the tempest, but in the still small voice." I was reminded of this afterwards in thinking back over the programme, which was considerably less flamboyant in technique than that earlier series of New Zealand biographies, *We Reap Their Harvest*. The low key, the simple passing from hand to hand of the narrative torch without any suggestion that there was a race on, seemed entirely in keeping with the quiet, unassuming nature of the hero. Harold Williams was virtually unknown to me before this programme. I felt

(continued on next page)

★ The Week's Music . . . by OWEN JENSEN ★

WE can't have our cake and eat it, I suppose. Listening to Vivien Dixon in the final broadcast of a series of Mozart violin sonatas (2YC) was a reminder of how much music is locked up in the National Orchestra. Miss Dixon's playing is usually lost in the thicket of first violins. It emerged on this occasion to present Mozart of some considerable elegance, set off, too, by Frederick Page's meticulous pianism. National Orchestra commitments permitting, more broadcasts like this and some solo or chamber music concerts, too, would add much to our musical well-being.

Broadcasting, you may have discovered, makes it easy to become an armchair musical traveller. One evening we are sitting in on Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* (2YC), and the next night it's the Canadian Dominion Day broadcast represented by Dr. Healy Willan's eminently Elgarian *Coronation Suite for Choir and Orchestra* (YC network). The surprising thing, of course, even in this most surprising of centuries, is that both these musical styles can live happily side by side—Willan's

suave and comfortable dignity and Schoenberg's dynamic dissonance. In music, at least, despite this art's generally accepted universality, we are today, it seems, a long way from achieving one world. Schoenberg's *Second Chamber Symphony* broadcast in the same 2YC programme is, incidentally, a work of real beauty and easier on the ears, too, than might be expected.

Two interesting programmes this week, interesting not only in the presentation but in the idea behind the programme, were "Songs of the Sea" (2YA), and Bach's celebrated *Chaconne* (3YC). Sung by Gerald Christeller and students of the Wellington Teachers' Training College, with Bob Schmitt on the piano accordion, the sea songs made good listening. Bach's *Chaconne* was presented on records in its original form for solo violin by Giocondo de Vito, in Busoni's piano adaptation by Arturo Michelangelo, and "blown up" for orchestra by Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra. To be complete, the programme only needed John Sebastian Bach himself to comment on the matter in the style, say, of George Bernard Shaw, Arthur Jacobs, or, perhaps, L. D. Austin.

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 16, 1954.