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RADIO REVIEW

Themes from a Play

BY following through two of the three strands of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* plot the NZBS and the New Zealand Players gave us in forty minutes something much more satisfying than a mere programme of excerpts—managed, in fact, to put a girdle round the play. The fairy theme certainly deserved the close-up provided by the microphone, for it was in the fairy passages that David Farquhar's music revealed its complete felicity, and the producer his recognition of its felicity—there was exquisite harmony in intervals and assonance between Titania's words, the notes of the glockenspiel, the twitterings of the fairies and Bottom's occasional bray. And one felt that the characters in the *Dream* who, on stage, have less chance of winning audience affection, here in the radio version came into their own. For, while Bottom and Puck emerged at radio level somewhat colourlessly, Oberon was revealed in full tonal splendour, and even Hippolyta, usually regarded as a clothes-horse part, stirred the heart oddly with the microphone-revealed pause ("Like to a—silver bow, new-bent in heaven") while she reached, triumphantly, for her simile.

Romantic Attachment

SUMMER RAIN, a play from the *BBC Thirty-Minute Theatre*, turned out as refreshing as its title. A tyrannical old lady is forced to share her favourite park bench with a crusty old gentleman. The ice-breaking process is

long, since both are armoured in Spanish punctilio, but spiced for the listener by the realisation that the two once cherished a romantic attachment. They finally confess their identities but not their subsequent marriages, preferring to preserve the aura of romantic integrity. This version of the love theme is counterpointed by the equally romantic but uncomplicated attachment ripening between the gentleman's valet and the lady's maid. The production was light and deft. Donna Isabella's asides, for example, were as natural to her as they were convenient to us. —M.B.

Pleasant Departures

TO the best of my knowledge Dick Morris, who has been doing *Wild Life* for 3YA, was "found" for the radio about five years ago. He is a man who spends a great deal of his time in the bush observing the habits of wild creatures. In fact, he is a "natural" in a way that few other people anywhere would be, with a tremendous enthusiasm and knowledge for his subject and a coherence to his thoughts which enable him to pour out an apparently unscripted and lively torrent of information. Because of his rich bush lore, so obviously learnt at nature's feet, what might be intolerable in another speaker becomes as unique and as wonderful as the cactus flower in him. But surely in choosing the unusual, the pleasant departure from standard English, discrimination is necessary; and whatever other qualifications Leslie Masters may have for writing for *Book Shop*, his script, as is the custom with the work of many people not considered suitable, should be delegated to someone else to read.

Moving Experience

ALTHOUGH Eugene O'Neill has been criticised on the score that his plays do not conform to the verse tradition (continued on next page)

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

MADAME FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS, John Gray's surprise packet in this month's *New Records* (YC link), must be the world's most unappreciated singer, though not necessarily the least enjoyed. In order that her art should be remembered by posterity, Madame Jenkins arranged to have some of it preserved on records, the production of which, I gather, was financed by herself. If you did not hear Florence Foster Jenkins, no description of her efforts can possibly convey the impression she leaves on the imagination. Suffice to say that she manages to achieve a musical surrealism surpassing even the best of Anna Russell's masterpieces of caricature. Her representation of Mozart's "Queen of the Night" aria was the failure of a dream, the realisation of a nightmare or a fantasy of farce, depending on your sympathies towards singers in general or how much you are prepared to let Mozart suffer in the interests of brightening up the world a bit. "People may say I couldn't sing," Madame Florence Foster Jenkins is reported to have said, "but no one can say I didn't sing." With this epitaph Madame Jenkins may very well become the patron saint of all frustrated vocalists.

Bela Siki's first New Zealand performance of Bartok's Third Piano Concerto with the National Orchestra (YC link) was an exciting addition to our listening repertoire. Played cleanly and imaginatively, with sympathetic partnership from the Orchestra, it sounded

fine in the Wellington Town Hall. If the broadcast was as impressive it must have considerably enlivened the Saturday night listening. What those who braved the wild weather to go to the concert did miss was an interval talk on the concerto by David Farquhar which, by all accounts, filled to perfection those difficult minutes in an extended relay.

The first of Frederick Page's broadcasts of the six Bach French Suites on the clavichord may not have produced many difficulties for Mr. Page, who knows his Bach very well, but may have set the technicians a problem or two. It was probably a toss-up between putting the microphone near enough to the instrument to catch the genuine quality of the clavichord's delicate tone and keeping it out of earshot of the noise of the tangents falling on the strings. The result was a fair enough compromise, a little adjustment of the radio's tone control and some imagination, too, compensating for a liveliness which tended to make the sounds rather more than life-size. Further adjustment on the other side of the microphone will give us music of incomparable charm.

Notes in passing: Good tone and bright rhythms contributing to some delightful singing from the Otago Girls' High School Special Choir in madrigals and contemporary part-songs (4YA); some attractive playing of Schumann by Lola Johnstone (pianist) in *Paths of Music* (2YA).

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 6, 1954,