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RADIO REVIEW

A Pickwick Frolic

PICKWICK PAPERS, over the air, has turned into the wildest and most delightful extravaganza. We started, at the Club itself, with reasonable sobriety, but now we are being whirled across England, and given heady stirrup-cups of life with the Wardles or the Jingles or Fat Boy Jo or some other improbable character who could have played great-uncle to the Marx Brothers. Publishers Chapman and Hall are doing the 1837 equivalent of compering the show, and every so often we are returned to the studio to eavesdrop on some gentleman's disagreement. (To Mr. Chapman's plea for the inclusion of the Cricket Match Mr. Hall counters, "Mr. Chapman, it just can't be done. Only eight episodes, remember. We've got to select.") But I'm finding that even the briefest encounter with a familiar character can, in this vivid and vigorous radio version, light up a sizeable stretch of memory.

The Game's the Thing

IT would be hard to say whether the Philistines or the long-hairs won in the final match of the series *Aspects of an Englishman*, played this time on the art-appreciation ground. It was doubtful for which teams some were playing—Sir John Suckling, while giving voice to the Englishman's right to know what he likes (a Philistine's privilege) wrote in verse, which would seem to put him among the long-hairs. The Philistines were vigorous in attack—their pronouncements were clear-cut and succinct, like George I's "I hate Boets and Bainters," or the comment of Keats's critic "drivelling idiocy." The Artists

were batting on a stickier wicket, since it's harder to explain why you like something (of Walter Pater on the Mona Lisa) than to announce that you don't. But we spectators weren't so concerned with the score—the game's the thing. I'm pleased to be able to say that everybody, especially the compiler of the programme, kept a nice straight bat.

—M.B.

Professional Touch

ST. JOHN ERVINE'S *Friends and Relations* (1YA) didn't strike me as being up to old Abbey Theatre standards. The best scene, the reading of a caustic will to a group of grasping relatives, came in the first act, and after that, the play resolved itself into a series of predictable relationships between the chief legatee, the deceased's illegitimate daughter and miscellaneous spongers. But the suave playing of the New Zealand Players under the direction of Richard Campion made this ordinary piece very agreeable listening. Although individual Players have been heard before in NZBS plays, this was the first time I had heard them work as a body, and they proved as satisfying and co-ordinated a team on the air as they are on the stage. It was also a pleasure to hear some new voices in a locally-produced play. From uniformly good playing, it is not easy to select anyone for special praise, but I thought Michael Cotterill's Adam was a nicely-shaded character and that John Gordon's reading of the will was a gem. One curious feature—was Charles Sinclair deliberately imitating Charles Laughton, or—although I've never noticed it on the stage—does he *always* speak like that?

On the Ball

ONE of the things I think we're least good at is wireless whimsy. Sometimes a speaker, airing a discomfort, for instance, strikes the right note, but I've heard so many would-be bright, witty talks which turned out to be lumbering, arch or damply funny that I'm inclined

(continued on next page)

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

THE National Orchestra, like the rest of us, must be feeling the approach of the end of the year. Yet there seems no slackening in the exuberance of its playing. The programme of Russian music conducted by Iwan Federoff was quite one out of the box with some specially exciting playing in the Kabalevsky Symphony and some notable trumpeting in the last movement. For once we may describe this performance as "good as a recording," not just because of the playing but for the work of the broadcast technicians, which was first-rate.

The Orchestra, however, if it still finds it possible to lift a lissome bow and blow with vigour may be, and understandingly so, a little jaded in the matter of thinking and feeling. The Sibelius Symphony No. 5 in E Flat conducted by James Robertson (YC link) was more notable for strength than subtlety, and was hardly the polished performance they gave us of this work earlier in the season. But then Sibelius's moodiness comes a bit too near mid-summer, to which it is by no means attuned.

Something more summery was given us by Anita Ritchie, Vera Martin and Winston Sharp with pianist M. Dixon in *Old Songs in New Guise* (3YC). Such

familiar morsels as "Sing We Enchanted" and "Scots Wae Hae" (is that the way you spell it?) came off in their trio arrangements by Vernon Griffiths and John Ritchie with delightful frankness.

Listening to Mary Pratt and Maurice Till (YC link) in the final broadcast of their series together, when Miss Pratt sang contemporary British songs to make the very best of their pastel romanticism, one remembers again how easy it is to forget the pianist when the singing is so good. Maurice Till's accompanying was admirable, always clear and fluent and sensitive to the demands of the singing. His Chopin "Berceuse" was beautifully played, too.

The best contemporary music of the week was Walter Piston's *Sonata for Flute and Piano* played by James Hopkinson and David Galbraith (YC link). This music had something to it. It seemed well wedded to the flute, and the piano, too; or at least the expert playing made it sound so.

The highlight of cheerful vulgarity, vulgarity of the kind that goes with a holiday binge, was "Blackpool by the Sea," sound-picture of the famous holiday resort (2YA). Blackpool sounds as though it might be a bit of all right—if there weren't so many people about the place.

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