

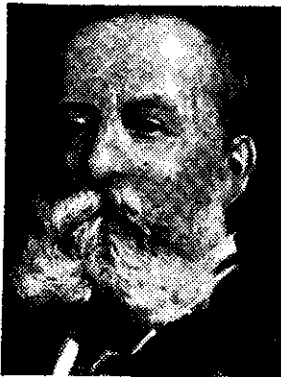
PIANIST'S CONCERTO

CAMILLE ST. SAENS was racked with pains, when people addressed him as 'Saint Sains,' quipped Ogden Nash. M. St. Saens might be a little more racked if he knew what people sometimes say about his music these days. His status is rather like that of a guest at a party whose prestige has been outshone by late arrivals in the same line of business.

This week the Orchestra is sequestered in its Wellington rehearsal room, running its fingers over new works for next week's Auckland Prom season. One of the pieces the players may be looking into with James Robertson is Saint-Saens's Concerto No. 2 in G Minor for Piano and Orchestra, in which the soloist will be Jocelyn Walker (1YC, February 25).

Saint-Saens was a successful musician; successful, that is, if you count scholarship, technical mastery and wit as the ingredients, and popular acclaim as the criterion. When he died at the age of 81—it is astonishing to realise that so 19th Century a character should have lived on until 1921—he was among the most admired and respected of French composers. Yet for all his learning, skill and elegance, there was something missing in his musical make-up.

There is a story told that when a musician was asked to identify an anonymously introduced composition, he immediately pronounced it as one of Saint-Saens. He recognised it, he said, because "the first movement sounded like Schumann, the second like Mendelssohn and the third like Franck—but none of these three wrote for the music-hall." This is a little unkind to Saint-Saens who, always writing music that



Saint-Saens

contemporary audiences liked, nevertheless hit off the taste of his time with considerable technical accomplishment and sophisticated polish. The beauties of Saint-Saens's music as Alfred Cortot praised them, are characterised by "neat and even brilliant rhythms, more intelligence than sensibility, more verve than feeling," and if all this doesn't send you to the skies or rock the foundations of your listening, it is at least very cheering.

The Concerto in G Minor is a pianist's concerto. It shows off the piano, providing opportunity for the instrument to sing, to coo meltingly and to fire off fanfares of exuberant passage work.

The stage is set right at the beginning when the piano, disdaining traditions of form, asserts itself with the opening cadenza-like fantasia. The Orchestra is allowed a subsequent eight bars to announce its presence before the soloist brings in the main theme. This is all very unusual; or at least it was when Saint-Saens tossed it off—he wrote the whole concerto in seventeen days. More unusual it becomes when you discover that after all this is the slow movement, despite the piano's occasional gay fling. Things settle down to the accustomed in the next movement, when the timpani establishes the rhythm. At no stage is the piano encouraged to be modest. If you're not looking for philosophy in this music and can enjoy a little pianistic exhibitionism, Saint-Saens's second piano concerto is as good clean fun as you'll find in any symphonic programme.

—Owen Jensen

A QUESTION OF COLOUR

"I DON'T like black people. It's the colour. It makes me nervous. They might be savage."

"I think all Negroes are . . . just like us except the colour. I like them. They're nice people."

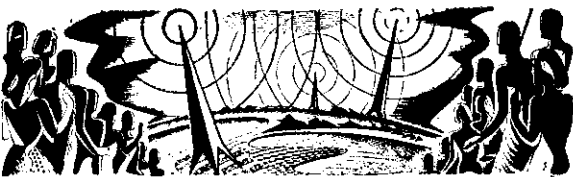
Funny, isn't it, the difference a bit of first-hand experience makes, for these are the actual impressions of a child—the same child—in a school in England before and after he had had a chance to meet some Negroes. The Negroes he met were two women from the Gold Coast, well qualified as teachers and experienced with children. They went to the school, stayed for a few weeks and, in a way, conquered. Either way the child's judgment was superficial—based on too little evidence—yet very much like the sort of judgments made about other races and nations by children and grown ups, too, the world over.

This is one of the points made in *The*

Teacher Was Black, one of a series of Unesco Radio programmes which are to start the rounds of YA and YZ stations next week. This one not only discusses popular ideas and prejudices on the subject of race, but throws a good deal of light on the contributions that have been made by people of many nationalities to the material benefits of civilisation. It shows that in the long run no particular nation or colour can pride itself on having a monopoly either of intelligence or inventiveness.

Also to be heard in this series is *What Price Atomic Energy?* a feature about the peaceful uses of atomic energy, and *Back Page News*, which looks at the world's postal services and shows how they have overcome international barriers. The series will

start first from 2YA, which will broadcast *What Price Atomic Energy?* on Tuesday, February 15, at 9.15 p.m.



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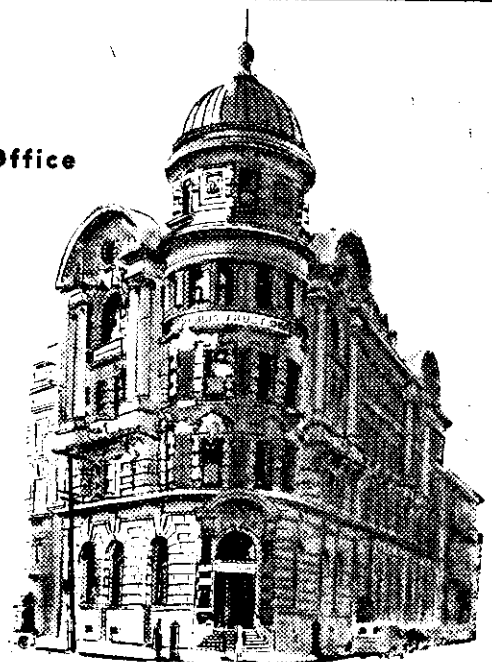
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