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Radio Review

DROUGHT IN DRAMA?

LAST year we suffered from a chronic shortage of new NZBS plays. It looks as if the situation is going to continue in 1955. During the last three weeks there has not been one new NZBS production broadcast from Auckland National stations. The three repeats ranged from the good to the indifferent—*The Amazing Doctor Clitterhouse*, now rather shop-worn; *The Shadow of the Tree*, a gloomy piece about neurotics; and the three-years-old *Browning Version*, with Frederick Farley sadly miscast as Crocker-Harris. I have no objection to repeats when they supplement fresh material. But this period's new plays were both *World Theatre* jobs. The NZBS Drama division has been going long enough and has a high enough standard to be able, surely, to keep up a reasonable flow of new productions. It is, too, a long time since we have heard a radio play written by a New Zealander, from 1YA and 1YC. Are radio dramatists, I wonder, actively sought for, encouraged, and, perhaps more to the point, adequately paid?

Ingredients of the Pudding

STATION 1ZB's Sunday evening programme, which seems to me to be admirably planned, shows what the backroom boys can do when released from week-day bread-and-butter considerations. The middle-brow tone the station takes on at this time must attract many listeners who don't normally

listen to it, and who, although mainly drawn by the evening's plums of *TIFH*, find the surrounding pudding also agreeable. *Paris Star Time* is a lively programme of French popular music; *The Broad Highway*, well produced and played by the NZBS, blows some of the dust off Jeffrey Farnol's romantic tushery, and even the anaemic *ZB Radio Theatre* seems to have had a shot in the arm from the *Lady of Song* competition. The high quality of *Sunday Showcase* makes it one of the week's high-spots, and the music which ends the evening comprises fairly obvious but still listenable "classics." I feel that the new *Books* session comes too early for comfortable listening, and hope that it will creep up on the clock. Apart from that, the evening is as pleasant a one as we can hope for in this imperfect world, offering real competition to 1YC's out-of-the-way operas.

—J.C.R.

Remembrance of Things Past

WHEN I was fifteen, one of the chores at my school was the swallowing whole of one classic per term. The names of dignified authors were put into a hat, and we drew one each. Once I drew Joseph Conrad, and I found myself faced with *Almayer's Folly*. I can see that book now: its brown paper cover to thwart greasy fingers, and the horrid close print before which my eyes swam. I found the book unbearably "dry," as we used to say, and I have never since read a single word by the great Polish writer. And then last week, I heard Bertrand Russell's beautifully moving recollection of Conrad in the series *Portraits from Memory*. Russell's voice has the dry elegance of an old scholar, and is the perfect instrument for his exquisitely turned and polished prose. Conrad lived in this talk so profoundly, with his firm, though never

(continued on next page)

★ The Week's Music . . . by SEBASTIAN ★

NATURALLY enough, I've been straining on all valves to catch every cadence of the Prom Concerts from the southern centres. It seems that at last we have a conductor who has caught the fickle fancy of a capricious public, and who has found the imaginary line running round the middle of their brow. Every concert seemed to be packed to the doors, and the applause, if not discriminating, was at least whole-hearted, at times even full-throated. Apart from matters of mere taste, Mr. Robertson has improved the orchestral quality—there is a far better response from the strings, the brass are making music as well as noise, and the woodwind are working as a team rather than as a collection of individuals. Some of their recent work I have rarely heard equalled—even on the hiest-fi LPs.

The various solo artists set a high standard; the only guest to the country, of course, was Lance Dossor, who gave us a spirited reading of the Rachmaninoff Concerto in C Minor. He was much at home with it, and the orchestra blended well to make most pleasant listening, which in the second movement became really beautiful. (By the by, his Bach Partita in B Flat, on YC link recently, was well-nigh perfect; the versatility of the man is no publicity stunt.) Maurice Till, on the other hand, seemed less than happy in the Rachmaninoff *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, though he and the Orchestra

let their hair well down to produce a memorable version of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.

The Orchestra on their own played the two Fateful Fifts, Beethoven's and Tchaikovsky's. The latter was a bit soupy—duck soup, at that—after its nature; the former was fine, a "different" interpretation from that usually given it, with a more measured tread to the first movement and a smooth swinging gait to the second. I was glad to notice that a local guest conductor (Hans Colombi, of the 3YA Studio Orchestra) was given his chance, and that he took it, too; I hope this is only the beginning of such talent displays.

I picked up an odd little programme the other day, an illustrated talk, *The Birth of Music* (Unesco programme), an unpretentious piece replete with various wailing sounds from different parts of the world—primitive types of folk music for the most part. Unearthly, but interesting. More civilised but no less interesting are the current programmes from Radio Nederland, featuring their national composers and orchestras. Latest gems on the list are, a Concerto Grosso by Hellendaal, savouring strongly of Corelli, and the Symphony No. 3 by Badings, a modern with the norm of dissonance of a Dutch Vaughan Williams. I think I will soon have to make a plea for an international scale of dissonance; I suggest that it be calibrated in microbergs.

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 25, 1955.