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Radio Review

SMUDGED PORTRAIT

I LOOKED forward to the first talk in the *Imaginary Persons* series (1YC). The straight-out creation of "odd bods" seemed a pretty good idea; what a fine opportunity for tart commentaries on human nature, and for satirising New Zealand mores. But the talk on Hugh Cornerham Montmorency by Pauline Quinlan Stafford (I wasn't sure, at first, from the names, which was the speaker and which the subject) fell far short of expectations. This pompous, self-satisfied, reactionary London stockbroker presented to us was compounded of chief character-clichés of second-rate fiction—a highly improbable person, rather like one of those bogies the *New Statesman* scares timid young radicals with. He was neither wildly fantastic enough to be funny, nor close enough to ordinary experience to provide a meaningful commentary on a type. Even if Mr. Montmorency were based on an original, he should have been made to seem real, and not just a collection of scraps torn from rather ingenuous books. One touch of originality might have brought him to life, but I waited in vain to hear it. Perhaps it is too much to expect subtlety in such a programme; all the same, the heavy-handed jocosity and the synthetic comments of this first sample set the series off to a limping start.

—J.C.R.

The Mask and the Face

WHY are impersonations so delightful, so intrinsically enjoyable? I asked myself this after listening to two of Florence Desmond's brilliant performances. Not only has she an ear like a

cat's whisker, which enables her to reproduce with astounding accuracy the familiar timbre of persons as diverse as Charles Boyer and Katharine Hepburn, but she adds to this a wild imagination which gave listeners recently the hilarious experience of hearing a retired Indian Army Colonel singing, "I hate to see dat even' sun go down." Why do we so enjoy these entertainments? Is it because the casual assumption of a famous and distinguished personality gives us an agreeable sense of superiority, the feeling that the quirks and mannerisms for which these people are so highly regarded are only skin deep? Perhaps. But I wonder if it does not hint at something more subtle and profound. In the plays of Terence, the *persona* was the mask assumed by a character to differentiate him from his fellows. It is personality which separates us; by laughing when it seems to be exposed, do we tacitly admit the existence of a deeper identity which binds us?

Occasional Music

IT must be ten years since I listened to a ZB request session with any care: I did so on Sunday and was intrigued to find that they haven't changed at all. After some time, I felt ridiculous giving to a thumping thirty-two bar chorus on the fickleness of some unruly jade the attention proper to a symphony, and found my thoughts free to wander at their will. Resounding phrases for use in this column began to rumble, viz.: "The ear debauched by a surfeit of coarse sound and ignoble conceptions," but this is pointless, and quite ignores the purpose of the session. It is occasional music, and what is the occasional? That while reading the paper, while convalescing after a dull week or the Saturday night bacchanal, one should have a background pleasingly distracting and quite undemanding of the intellect. To each his taste: mine is silence on such occasions. All music was once

(continued on next page)

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

I SUPPOSE it was natural enough, after the "selling" of pet national composers by the BBC and VOA, that other countries should start to put their wares on view. The Radio Nederland programmes have already been mentioned in this column, and now the French Broadcasting Service are doing their own bit of pumping with programmes covering the period from the 16th Century to the present. So far I've liked the older music most, especially some interesting Rameau, but that is not to say that the rest is beneath notice. It may be my receiver, but I had the impression that the recording was not up to the standard we expect nowadays from transcription services.

Occasionally we hear programmes of older choral music, but those of local origin are rare enough for comment. The Wellington Baroque Chorus conducted by the indefatigable Stanley Oliver (NZBS) gave us such a programme, comprising madrigal-type and secular pieces by early German composers. This was pleasant music, some of the best of the period, though a far cry from the contemporaneous Elizabethan works. The performance was competent, with some patches of really sensitive singing; two pieces by Lassus and Hans Leo Hassler stole the show—but then, they are hardly "pure" German.

There have been several recent recitals from the baritone Gerald Christeller (2YC), who rarely has an off night. Latest of these was a Schubert programme, which induced some of his loveliest tone and phrasing work. Some of his upper notes had almost a tenor quality, but this only bore out the adage that a baritone is a tenor who takes pride in his voice. On the other hand, for singers who, like Anna Russell and Jimmy Durante, take little or no pride in their voice, let me recommend Florence Desmond (YA link), whose biting commentaries on other people's voices must be heard to be credited. Whether the victim is male or female seems to make no difference, and the subject matter (as with a bee) carries its honey close to the sting.

Descending to Piano Corner, most of us will remember Doris Veale as a talented member of a talented family who, after coming home from some highly successful overseas study last year, gave us some equally fine—not to say successful—concerto playing. Now it appears that she can play to the dispassionate ear of the microphone as well as to an audience, and recitals of Bach, Ravel and Schumann showed the scope of her interest as well as her great capabilities. As a pianist, I am quite cowed by Miss Veale.

N.Z. LISTENER, MARCH 4, 1955.