

CHRISTOPHER FRY'S PLAY

Sir,—While licking my wounds after your issue of February 18, the following lines came to me:

Blow Gently, Sweet Assheton

Alack! O well-a-day!
All quenched is my fire!
Naught I do, no word I say,
But rouses Harbord's ire!
Blow gently, Sweet Assheton, ere I end my song.

I rail when Drama is abused,
My Harbord gives a roar,
I praise when she is fitly used:
My Harbord roars the more!
Blow gently, Sweet Assheton, ere I end my song.

O toxin to the gladsome heart,
O poison to the soul!
Shall I tearfully depart,
Or stay, be swallowed whole?
Blow gently, Sweet Assheton, ere I end my song.

Blow gently, Sweet Assheton, for I weep not loud and long.

Nay!
I will these pigeon muscles flex,
I will this puny frame inspire.
I'll twist the mane of Harbord Rex
Till lion or tamer tire.

We will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall our swords sleep in our hand
Until our struggle sheds some light
Upon this green, unpromising land.
Blow gently, Sweet Assheton, for now I end my song.

BRUCE MASON (Wellington).

A LITERARY PROGRAMME

Sir,—I did not hear the feature which Mr. Curnow describes in his letter in your issue of January 14. From his account of it, however, it is easy to recognise one of those stock items, some better and some worse, whether they consist of words or music, with which broadcasting services keep the pot boiling for about sixteen hours of the day.

If that is so, a single item or a single compiler alone should not be picked out for blame. We should rather blame the type of product, literary or musical, which the NZBS demands, accepts, and distributes: responsibility lies very largely with the Service. It may be argued that it cannot hope to get enough good items to fill every hour of its time every day. But does it try? Does it encourage work that is better than the average? Does it offer better payment for better work? Its difficulties in any case do not alter the responsibility which it owes to listeners, to works of art and their creators, to the canons of taste and judgment.

This responsibility is the greater in that writers and composers are not always in a position to decide what use is or is not to be made of their work; fees must be paid if it is copyright, but there, effectively, their control ends. The living may have some say, the dead have none.

CHARLES BRASCH (Dunedin).

WEATHER FORECASTS

Sir,—C. T. Cooke objects to our weather forecasts and apparently finds no joy in them. For me, one announcer in particular can never fail to charm my ear. Be the outlook sinister or gay, his dead-pan tones remind me irresistibly of Stan Freberg. Hearing him, I shall not be in the least surprised if one day the forecast contains those well-known and appropriate words, "I just played a hunch."

M. H. FORESTER (Marton).

SAINT-SAENS

Sir,—Owen Jensen's article about the above composer, in your issue of February 11, calls for immediate comment, on several grounds. There is, first, the vexed question of pronunciation. Since only French people and first-rate lin-

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guists can give the correct inflection to "Saint-Saens," why should the name not be Anglicised into "Sant-Sains"? Surely this is no worse than the grotesque attempts at correct pronunciation heard over the air and elsewhere.

Second, Mr. Jensen shows poor taste in echoing the feeble efforts of musical pygmies to disparage and belittle a composer of indubitable genius. Saint-Saens was, and remains, a great composer, by any standards. To assert, as your contributor does, that "there was something missing in his musical make-up," is a generalisation as foolish as it groundless.

Third, Mr. Jensen refers to the G Minor Concerto of Saint-Saens as "a pianist's concerto, it shows off the piano." Of course it does, because any concerto that did otherwise would not justify its title. The text-books inform us that "a concerto is an instrumental composition designed to show the skill of an executant," and nobody knew better than Saint-Saens how to exploit this maxim to the full. It was my rare privilege to have heard the composer as soloist in his Fifth Piano Concerto, when that work was given its première in Paris to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Saint-Saens's concert debut. Many times since have I listened to other eminent pianists in the same work, but none has eclipsed that brilliant performance. With the sole exception of Mendelssohn, Saint-Saens stands unrivalled in history as virtuoso performer on both piano and organ—in fact, for versatility and general excellence of accomplishment he had no peer. His name and fame will endure when all trace of petty detraction has vanished.

L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).

LIGHT MUSIC

Sir,—Permit me to endorse the remarks of F. M. Price (*Listener*, January 28). My wife and I—and many of our friends and relations—are also middlebrows, and like all the varieties of music that Mr. Price has enumerated. Grand Opera is about the upper limit of our music appreciation. We can stand a little of the "great masters"; most of them have written at least one or two brief and tuneful pieces, but the bulk of it—well, it has no appeal to us, and soon becomes tiresome. As for all the jazz, swing, boogie-woogie, "hot music," crooners, groaners, howlers and screamers, it is just horrible noise, and to describe it as "light music" is unfair to the many listeners who detest such trash. I have been a subscriber to *The Listener* for a good many years. I enjoy it for itself; there is something refreshingly original about its literary pages, but as a guide to listening—well, it just isn't. Surely it is possible to put on a half-hour or so of "middlebrow" stuff occasionally (in the evening, when one has time to listen) and to indicate it clearly in the programme.

By the way, why cannot we have some Gilbert and Sullivan sometimes? Yes, I know, there is occasionally a "Sullivan selection"—bits and pieces from several of the operas, strung together and played too fast, in a perfunctory manner, apparently by an orchestra in a hurry to get to the pub before 6.0 p.m. or something. But Sullivan's music, good as it is, is incomplete without Gilbert's clever libretto. You may have records of words and music, but if not it would not be impossible to organise a company of our best amateurs and produce the operas in the

studio from time to time. It should not even be very expensive, as there would be no costumes, scenery, theatre-hire or travelling expenses. There is a whole generation (nearly two generations) who have seldom or never seen or heard G. and S. properly presented. Anyhow, there is a suggestion, for what is it worth.

V. C. CURTIS (Christchurch).

Sir,—May I add one or two considerations to the timely letters already published on the above subject? Fritz Kreisler thinks that the golden age of music is past, and that modern music is "noisy and incoherent." This may be true, but surely the Broadcasting Service has a duty to licence-holders who love good music that is neither too highbrow nor too intolerably lowbrow.

When broadcasting records, due consideration should be given to the time of day, for who can enjoy extremely good or extremely bad music before breakfast? We always have with us many elderly and sick subscribers who enjoy their little bedside radios. Most of these unfortunate folk are awake long before 5.0 a.m., and would enjoy music they can understand and appreciate. But the only listeners who could tolerate most of the records played at this time are firmly locked in the arms of Morpheus, and well beyond the sound of any music.

It has been said that an index of the demand for this "Light Music" may be taken from the Request Sessions, but this estimate is all wrong, for what lover of tuneful music could sit and listen to, say, a dozen popular records while waiting for his favourite to be played? So he just keeps out of it. And what shall we say of "The Last Six" sessions (1YD)? Some of these sessions are good and very enjoyable. Others are not so good. And I often wonder what some of these enthusiasts would think when they were 40 years older if their musical fare had been limited to the records they had chosen.

G.A.H. (Auckland).

"TOURIST IN TAKAKA"

Sir,—The article "Tourist in Takaka," by Lawrence Constable, was most interesting. However, he made one mistake. The springs he speaks of are the Bubu Springs, and very wonderful they are. He also forgot to mention the fact that one of the first railway lines in New Zealand once ran between Takaka and Waitapu, the sea port, a distance of about three miles. I remember driving from Takaka up the road on the western side of the river. I was surprised to see the river flowing up the valley. That was over 40 years ago. It was only in recent years that I found the secret—the river at one place, so I was told, goes out of sight through a subterranean passage. It emerges, flows up the valley, and then through another passage, and then flows down the valley. It is rather a large river.

NELSONIAN (Wellington).

CROSSWORDS

Sir,—"Edwd." (Nelson) has written to point out an error in the location of the "damned spot" of R.W.H.'s clue. My quatrains with her are that: (1) While she will always give both scene and act for even the most hackneyed line of Shakespeare, she gives only *Paradise Lost* for a clue from that epic of twelve books and many thousands of lines. Fortunately, I know my Milton reasonably well, and have easily located

all her Miltonic lines so far, but what am I to do should she ever refer us with like brevity to *The Ring and the Book* or *The Faerie Queene*? (2) Her definitions are far too easy; they blow too much of the gaff. Tenser ones that tell you everything and yet for a long while don't—that's the kind of definition the true crossworder loves to try his wits on. Thanks, however, to the lady for her weekly effort.

F. K. TUCKER (Gisborne).

TRAVEL AMENITIES

Sir,—When an American writer, Del Schraeder, of the *Los Angeles Times*, visits New Zealand, the New Zealand Tourist and Publicity Department supplies a conductor (Mr. J. P. Campbell) and (presumably) a car; yet when a New Zealander, intending to gather 12 radio talks on Southland, writes to Head Office of this same Department seeking but a working-map of Southland with a boundary marked, he is referred to "Lands and Survey Department, Top Floor, Government Building, Wellington, C.1."

J.H. (Eastbourne).

(This letter was shown to the Director of Information Services, Mr. R. S. Odell, who replied as follows: "The correspondent was referred to the Lands and Survey Department, because that is the correct department for map inquiries."—Ed.)

THE RED-NOSED REINDEER

Sir,—We have heard a lot lately about the dangerous effects of comics on the youth of today, but nobody seems the slightest bit perturbed about the pernicious influence of the anti-social propaganda that is encouraged every Christmas and over Junior Request sessions throughout the year. I refer to Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer, who, by reason of a slight physical defect, was scorned and rejected by his fellows, who used to laugh and call him names and refused to let him play with them. This is bad enough as a behaviour pattern, but a worse example is to follow, for when he achieves success, the reindeer who have previously scorned him now come running with the most disgusting display of flattery. Whatever the reindeer equivalent of a milk-bar cowboy is, I have no doubt that is what these reindeer became, and yet we allow and even encourage the spread of their propaganda.

DISGUSTED OF DOLLY VARDEN.

SPARS FROM HOKIANGA

Sir,—It would be interesting to know upon what grounds your correspondent D.A.S. bases his belief that there were Europeans at the Bay of Islands when Captain Cook arrived there in 1769! And would he give us his authority for the statement that the *Splendid* called there in the 1790's?

A. H. REED (Dunedin).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

A Bopper (Wanganui): Not practicable at present, but will remember suggestion.

Vuff (Woodville): Thanks. Both suggestions would be adopted with pleasure; but very few commercial recordings of the first artist are available (and those that are are often used), and the BBC did not transcribe the programmes of the other two.

Bored Stiff (Rakaia): Thanks. The advantage of an occasional change will be pursued.

His Daughter (Eketahuna): Fully considered, after rehearsing; neither suggestion is warranted.

Interested (Wellington): Possibly lack of disc space caused the abridgment you mention (and others) in what is, anyhow, not the complete version of the ballet music, though it is understood to be the version used at Sadler's Wells.