

Sir,—Hard on the series of Promenade concerts in the four centres will come the official announcement of the programmes of the National Orchestra, and the usual appeal for subscribers.

It is a well-known and melancholy fact that the number of subscribers, even in a larger city like Auckland, is nowhere near as great as it is in Wellington where the orchestra spends most of its time. One at least of the reasons—and it is one that affects everybody—is that in centres other than Wellington the subscriber has on four different occasions during the season to attend two concerts in one week with only one night between them, whereas in Wellington, I understand, the subscription concerts are more evenly spaced over the season. It is quite useless, I know, to protest against this arrangement for economic reasons. It just isn't possible to keep the orchestra in Auckland or Dunedin to allow a longer interval between concerts. There are nevertheless two suggestions I should like to make, which may possibly increase the number of subscribers; firstly, a "half" subscription, which might tempt those for whom two major concerts in the space of three days may appear too formidable at first; and secondly, a reduced subscription (whole or half) for young people. Now that music is taken much more seriously in schools than it used to be, there are many potential concert-goers to whom the National Orchestra could offer a reduction with advantage. This should apply particularly to members of bodies like the Auckland Junior Symphony Orchestra, who have produced some sterling performances, but who should be encouraged to go and hear other players more experienced than themselves.

If the suggestion of "half" subscriptions were adopted, some thought would have to be given to the content of each series of concerts. That is a challenge that the NZBS should be able to take up. Now that Mr. Robertson is beginning his first full season, the time seems opportune. He is obviously not a man afraid of new ideas.

A. C. KEYS (Auckland).

(Professor Keys's first suggestion will be considered in relation to the 1956 subscription series. School children in the main centres have regular opportunities to attend free recitals; in provincial centres, visited by the National Orchestra at longer intervals, half-price tickets to all parts of the hall are available to children.—Ed.)

"ART IS NEVER EASY"

Sir,—May I suggest that we are in danger of making rather too much fuss about our expatriates, and, in the process, being slightly unjust to our own society? In his review of E. H. McCormick's study of Frances Hodgkins, Dr. Sutch quotes Frances as saying to a fellow New Zealand artist in London: "They're lovely people, the New Zealanders, so hospitable and so charming. But for God's sake, don't talk to them about art!" This recalls Samuel Butler's often and uncritically quoted saying about the shepherds of Canterbury, that "it does not do to speak about John Sebastian Bach's Fugues, or pre-Raphaelite pictures."

There are three replies that can be made to this. First, later in the same book, Butler modified or retracted this comment, where he mentioned that a volume of classics had been found in a mountain hut. Second, it could have been said to him: "How many people in England, outside your own selected circle, would you find ready to talk about Bach and the pre-Raphaelites?" I believe appreciation of Bach in Eng-

land was then in its infancy. Third, Butler found in the centre of this Canterbury settlement, a small pioneering town only a few years old, a newspaper prepared to publish his essays, including the germ of *Erewhon*. The amount of education and culture in Canterbury in those early days was remarkable.

I have no wish to diminish sympathy for our expatriates, but let us look squarely at facts and reasonable deductions. If Frances Hodgkins had gone into the mass of the people in the English middle and upper classes, how many would she have found interested in art? Critics will persist in confusing the select and the average. We are now coming to realise, I think, that the Wellington of Katherine Mansfield was not quite so culturally benighted as has been made out. It is quite possible that Wellington then, and Frances's Dunedin, enjoyed better plays and music by visiting professionals than did some towns of a similar size in Britain. The would-be artist in such a town today lights out for London or Paris, and there is no difference in kind but only in degree between such a pilgrimage and what a New Zealander undertakes when he goes abroad.

If our centres have been backward in appreciation of art, we may properly regret it, but should we be greatly surprised? The main responsibility surely lies with the distant society from which we have sprung. More than fifty years ago I bought my first picture—a coloured reproduction of "A Reading from Homer" by Alma-Tadema. I thought it was wonderful. It disappeared long ago, and among my pictures I now have a Van Gogh reproduction and originals by some recognised New Zealand artists, including an early Frances Hodgkins. That Alma-Tadema picture was in the taste of my time, not only in New Zealand but in England. I suppose I may be said to have advanced, though I am conscious I can't keep up with the advance guard. But I am just wondering what my grandchildren will think of my taste.

VICTORIAN (Wellington).

THE WEEK'S MUSIC

Sir,—In reply to Mr. L. D. Austin's letters, I doubt greatly whether the first requirement of a critic is, as he states, "clarity of expression." If a critic cannot form an intelligent balanced opinion, no command of the English language can help him. The few colloquialisms used by "Sebastian" are perfectly clear to most people, and constitute no great insult to the masters of music. This matter of disrespect to dead composers is I feel of exaggerated importance. I have heard many orchestral players swear vociferously over passages of Beethoven. That gentleman still sleeps soundly despite it all, and his music is no whit the worse for it.

Colloquialisms can be forgiven, but not misinformation, and here Mr. Austin himself is gravely at fault. Any concerto, he stated previously, that does not show off the skill of the performer fails to justify its title. His text book informs him that "A concerto is an instrumental composition designed to show off the skill of an executant." Nonsense! Any knowledgeable musician could quote a dozen concertos that will not stand by this definition. Apart from the "orchestral concerto," the basis of a concerto is con-

trast, between two or more (generally) unequal forces.

Your correspondent has apparently heard few 17th or 18th Century concertos. And what possible basis can he have for his incredibly sweeping statement about Saint-Saëns! "For versatility and general excellence of accomplishment, he had no peer." Mr. Austin, who apparently sets himself up as a critic, should remember that criticism, like charity, begins at home. One who sets himself the herculean task of judging others must first purge his own soul from preconceived likes and dislikes. Then, if he has the necessary knowledge and sense of values—and a sense of humour—he may eventually become a critic. Otherwise...

ALWYN OWEN (Rotorua).

CHRISTOPHER FRY'S PLAY

Sir,—I myself heard Mr. Eric Linklater (no mean judge) describe Christopher Fry as "God's gift to the theatre." And that in Wellington, too. What temerity he had to challenge in anticipation the judgment of the well-experienced, much-travelled critics on the insular New Zealand heath!

J.L. (Wellington).

Sir,—Mr. Mason's effort in your issue of March 4 made me chortle with gleeful appreciation. And I have been moved to reply in kind.

MARK ASSHETON'S ORATION

Friends, rum 'uns, countrymen! lend me your ears.

I come to bury Fry, sir, not to praise him. The noble Bruce

Hath told you, Fry, sir, is terrific. If this were so—I've made a grievous fault.

And grievously I'd have to answer for 't. Here under leave of Bruce, and of the rest,

(For Mason is an honourable man, So are the others—all honourable men)

Come I to speak in Christopher's funeral. I speak but to disprove what Bruce has spoke.

And here I am to speak what I do know. O judgment! Art thou fled to Bruchish breasts.

And have men lost their reason? I think not! I come not, friends, to steal away your Fry,

I am no orator as Mason is, But as you know me all, a plain blunt man

That loves the Theatre—as Mason knows full well.

I only speak right on I tell you that which you yourselves do know.

That Fry is but a wind-bag—full of strange oaths

That makes the going hard. He came—we saw—Fry stonkered.

Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen. The proof is written in the Office known as Box

Which is the gauge of any play's success. Not all the Masons in this pleasant land

Could build with Fry an edifice on sand Which could withstand the test of time.

Within the space of time a new-born lamb Would occupy to oscillate his tail

The population would with upturn'd thumb Pronounce the doom of Fry.

Oh, Mason, take some notice of the people, Forget your Ivory Tower or Lofty Steeple;

The Play's the thing to make us laugh or cry—

God save us the verbosity of Fry.

L. ASSHETON HARBORD

(Lower Hutt).

(This correspondence is now closed.—Ed.)

SUNDAY PROGRAMME

Sir,—If the new National Sunday Programme is, to use the words of your announcement, "a more effective combination of national and regional programmes of the NZBS," its extension to include Mondays, and eventually the rest of the week, would, presumably, be more effective still.

I would like to be informed what gain there is to taxpayer listeners to compensate for this drastic narrowing of listening choice. How much overtime is being

saved, how many programme organisers have been dispensed with, or is the radio licence fee to be abolished?

EDUCATED ARCHIE'S GRANDMOTHER, (Wellington).

(The official reply to this letter is as follows: "The quotation is incomplete and misleading. What was said was that this development, 'like previous experiments,' is aimed to bring about a more effective combination of national and regional programmes. 'Educated Archie's Grandmother's' presumption far outstrips any theory or intention of the Service. Information on the administrative points raised may be expected to be made generally available in due course. The Service is not financed out of taxation, and never has been; it is a large taxpayer."—Ed.)

CROSSWORDS

Sir,—I read F. K. Tucker's letter about the crossword puzzle, and did not agree with him. I am a person of average intelligence with a fair knowledge of literature and "R.W.H." invariably gives me much pleasure. When I open *The Listener* I look first at the headings of your editorial and the letters; then I work at the crossword puzzle. Perhaps occasionally the clues are rather easy, but usually they strike a happy medium and show an agreeable sense of humour. I do not want clues that keep me worrying for a long time and end in frustration. There is always the Differential Calculus.

It might be better to give the book in which a Milton line occurs, but I have not yet been stuck. Lately I read a clue from *The Scotsman* for the line "That so bedeck'd—and gay." It was Milton only. May "R.W.H." long continue, and will she in the meantime accept my thanks.

MIDDLEBROW (Dunedin).

LIGHT MUSIC

Sir,—It would be interesting to know who is responsible for selecting the records played on the Breakfast Session from 2YA. On occasional mornings there is some evidence of thought and taste in the selection, but more often this seems to be completely lacking. Of late, too, there has been an increasing number of Tin Pan Alley vocal numbers. These are of course very popular, but music of this standard is already provided at the same time by the Commercial stations.

At breakfast, therefore, we often have the choice of poor music with advertisements, or poor music without them. At such times, I suggest, a pleasant background is needed, rather than either symphony or swing. Fewer vocal numbers would at least be a help—the words are more obviously banal than the music. Otherwise, the best thing would be to choose someone to select the records who does not merely "listen with the feet."

C. ARTHUR HART (Christchurch).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. E. Easton (Auckland): Not withdrawn completed. David Welch recorded only four programmes while in New Zealand, and all four were broadcast.

Interested (Auckland): The programme entry has appeared in the panel for National Broadcasts.

Kay (Wainui-o-mata): (1) Since September 4, 1950. (2) No early ending is likely.

L.B. (Hamilton): (1) Pre-war recordings at all YA stations; post-war recordings issued in 1948 to all YA stations and some others. (2) Every station is responsible for a large part of its own programmes. The rest is filled by national programmes, scheduled and either circulated in recorded form or transmitted by line.