

THE PLAYERS' "ESCAPADE"

IT'S always an agreeable surprise to see a new play that succeeds at two important levels—that entertains all the way with a lively, suspenseful, amusing story and at the same time discusses wittily, and sometimes even wisely, ideas about such topics as the bomb and pacifism, man-woman relations, education and modern journalism. Roger Mac-Dougall's *Escapade*, which Richard Campion's New Zealand Players have chosen for their new season, is such a play, and I shall be surprised if it doesn't please large audiences throughout the country.

The mainspring of the action—and the forerunner of even bigger and better things—is an outbreak of violence at a boarding school, in which the sons of a pacifist author are involved. The boys are never seen: their escapade is felt through their father, John Hampden, and his wife, their headmaster, a couple of schoolboys, a reporter and one or two others. To thicken the plot, Mrs. Hampden is trying to make up her mind to leave her husband because he is too busy with good causes to give her or the family any attention.

It's no reflection on the rest of the cast to say that the play's best scene is one in which a young schoolboy ostensibly "comes clean" to his headmaster about his part in the escapade. This well-written part is played in an

engagingly natural way by Lyn Brooke-White, and along with the next development, when Geoffrey Wren as an older boy creates for the Hampdens a picture of the almost legendary figure their eldest son has become, it makes this second act as a whole the most consistently sincere in the play. Mr. Wren, by the way, does a finely sensitive job in the last act also.

These questions of consistency and sincerity are at the heart of my one small criticism of the play and the production. My feeling is that Mr. Mac-Dougall's attitude towards ideas entertains rather more than it persuades, and every now and then I was troubled by what a programme note called the play's "rare combination of near-farce and drama"—so troubled, in fact, that I went to see it a second time. I have a faint suspicion that there were doubts on the other side of the footlights, too—for one thing, Gay Dean's playing of the mother (the most difficult and emotionally subtle part in the play) has some passages that are self-conscious and (in the wrong sense) almost theatrical. We know she can do better. I personally enjoyed the play much more the second time by looking for a straightforward interpretation—one, that is, which ignores any inclination towards farce. It's on that level that we can say that Roy Patrick plays Hampden with impressive strength and ease, and Briton Chadwick the headmaster with suitably solemn conviction. Of the rest I liked best Helen Stirling, as the voice of wise old age, though Bernard Shine, Charles Sinclair and Pamela James earn honourable mention.

The décor by Raymond Boyce, one must add, is of the usual high standard.

—F.A.J.

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well-spring of secular music, the troubadours, trouvères and minnesingers.

You will enjoy Adam de la Halle's tunes from the play of Robin and Marion, surely the original musical comedy, first performed about 1283, and his 13 Rondeaux. The 17 Anonymous Dances of the 13th Century which go along with them are a real joy (Archive APM 14018).

There is a special interest in hearing these primal designs of music which has become part of our familiar listening. The third research period introduces the beginning of the madrigal, and five magnificent sacred songs by the great Netherlands composer Guillaume Dufay (died 1474), sung by Jeanne Deroubaix, Franz Mertens and Louis Devos, with instrumental accompaniment of the period (APM 14019).

The Elizabethans are represented by ten songs of Thomas Campion (AP 13006)—tracks here would have been most useful for two ten-inch sides of Mr. Campion may be a bit too much at one sitting. From Monteverdi we have *Arianna's Lament*, often sung in a truncated version by sopranos, but here given complete and most beautifully by Elisabeth Høngen (APM 14020) with a glorious oratorio by Carissimi, *Jepthe*, on the reverse side.

On the Threshold

The introduction to what might be called our modern times and the end of the beginning is in the *Musicalische Exequien* of Heinrich Schutz (APM 14023). The books will tell you that Schutz (1585-1672) is one of the greatest geniuses in musical history. After hearing the disc you should have no

doubt on the matter, particularly as the music is so superbly sung.

Purcell marks the 4th Research Period with Fifteen Fantasies for Viola da Gamba (APM 14027). Alessandro Scarlatti is remembered with a cantata, with the original version of Corelli's "La Follia" sonata on the reverse side (APM 14024), and a charming "Lesson" for viola d'amore by Attilio Ariosti.

Johann Sebastian Bach has a period all to himself. In this first series he is represented by two solo cantatas sung by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (APM 14004). If one feels a little disappointed in these, it is only because we have come to expect so much of Fischer-Dieskau. The gayest of the music is a performance of Handel's *Water Music* complete, which means 45 minutes of it and not a dull moment. It is brilliantly played by 55 members of the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Fritz Lehmann (APM 14006). Then there is a Trio, and a Quartet for three wind instruments, by Georg Telemann (AP 13020). The first series of these Archive recordings ends with Mozart's Piano-forte Concerto No. 12 in A Major, K.414 (AP 13021). This is not one of Mozart's most exciting piano concertos and the performance is not made more so by being given on a Mozart forte-piano, about which even the soloist, Heinz Scholtz, sounded as if he may have had doubts now and again. But as the Archives have set out to be authentic, one could hardly have it otherwise. The Camerata Academica of the Salzburger Mozarteum conducted by Bernhard Paumgartner are fine in this accompaniment.

Altogether, without any qualifications whatsoever, this Archive series is one of the most significant contributions to the long-playing repertoire.

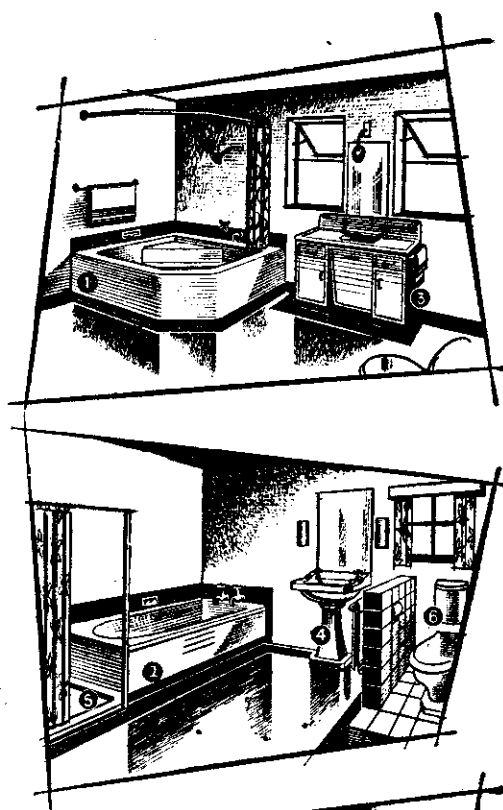


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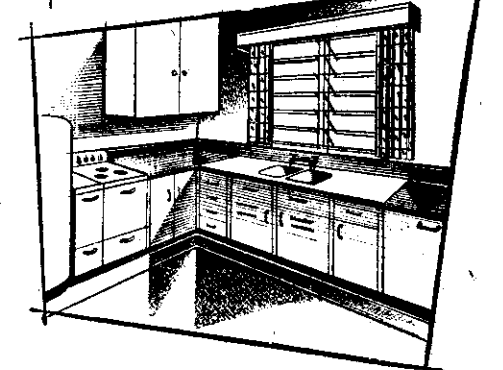


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