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Mystery of Ellery Queen

"HE'S a man in his early thirties—a man with brains, not a roughneck. He's cultured and widely-read, big and can handle himself in a brawl. He almost never uses a gun and doesn't carry one. He is no Micky Spillane, but if the occasion calls for it—and it sometimes does—he'll break bones with the best of them." Thus Ellery Queen on Ellery Queen, his fabulous character and latter-day knight-errant, whose adventures have sent chills up and down the relaxed spines of millions of arm-chair detectives all over the world.

Since the appearance of *The Roman Hat Mystery* in 1929 the number of Queen publications has mounted to 80. There have been 28 novels; four books of short stories; twenty anthologies and many critical works and juvenile books. That seems a lot of crime for one man to perpetrate, but hold on! Here the mystery deepens, because there is not one Ellery Queen—our hero; not two—our hero and his author; but three—Ellery Queen, detective, and his two co-authors. Total world sales of Queen titles since 1929 have already reached 45 millions, which is best-selling in anybody's language. Long ago, of course, Mr. Queen moved off the confines of the printed page. His kind of smooth manner went over well in films and radio, and the Ellery Queen show was on the air in the United States from 1939 to 1950. Like many another radio character hot on the scent of even greater popularity Ellery went over to television and there he's sitting very pretty still.

A series of *The Adventures of Ellery Queen* have now been personally selected by Manfred B. Lee (co-author, with his cousin Frederic Dannay, of the famous character). These scripts have been produced in Australia to make an unusual kind of mystery show. Each of the private eye's adventures is self-contained. For each show, besides the regular *corpus inanime*, another more-or-less willing victim is first of all introduced to listeners, then ushered into an audition booth, where he hears most of the exciting tale. Then he is invited to give

his solution of the case. Most often he is wrong and he and radio listeners are left marvelling at the ingenuity of that wily and practised team of professional dupesters, Messrs. Lee and Dannay. Charles Tingwell plays Ellery Queen and his guest list includes such varied personalities as Frank Clune, Robert Newton, Gene Krupa, the artist William Dobell, Adrian Quist, the boxer Jimmy Carruthers, Darby Munro, Chips Rafferty, and Professor Harry Messell, Head of the School of Nuclear Physics, Sydney University.

Even more interesting to the unfanciful detective-story fan is the strange mystery of "Ellery Queen" himself. These two young men from Brooklyn, aged 24 and 25, at the height of the depression, entered a detective-story competition. Much to their surprise they won, but the magazine failed before their effort was printed. However, a publisher took their first novel *The Spanish Hat Mystery*, and it sold 9000 copies. The two authors reasoned that to make a living writing Queen novels they would have to turn out four a year, which would flood the market. They decided to become Barnaby Ross as well, who wrote stories about a detective called Drury Lane. They kept up an elaborate anonymity, even wearing masks to attend promotion parties publicising their books. Once they teamed up for a debating tour, one impersonating Queen and the other Ross.

The two do not collaborate in person. They exchange all their ideas by telephone and have managed to persuade the tax collector to deduct their astronomical telephone bills as business expenses. For each novel one manipulates the plot while the other does the writing and, as like as not, the process will then be reversed. Lee is an avid stamp collector, while Dannay collects—of all things—detective novels.

The Adventures of Ellery Queen will be heard from ZB stations at 9.0 p.m. each Wednesday, beginning April 13, and from 2ZA at the same time each Friday night, beginning April 15.

THE ORCHESTRA

THE GRIEG CONCERTO

THE Grieg piano concerto makes a welcome reappearance at the Wellington Youth Concert on April 16 (2YC). Although Grieg's one major excursion into the symphonic field must figure near the top of the popularity poll for piano concertos, it's quite a while, if memory serves right, since we had it with the Orchestra.

The Grieg gains its popularity from quite different sources to the titans of the concerto field like, say, the Tchaikovsky in B Flat Minor. Grieg makes no battle royal between soloist and orchestra, although the piano has plenty to do—and real piano writing, too—and the orchestra is far more than a camp follower. It is, indeed, the happy balance between the two partners and the admirable mixture of poetry and virtuosity that gives the work its charm.

Two sides of the composer's character come out in the concerto. There is Grieg the pianist—and a very good pianist he was, too—and Grieg the Norwegian tone-poet, the miniaturist. Every pianist has his own ideas on which of these two facets should stand out.

There used to be a recording of the concerto—a very pre-electric one—by

Arthur de Greef, who was said to have studied the work with Grieg himself. De Greef lovingly brought out all the subtleties of the poetic first theme and that attractive tune which follows the scherzoesque second theme. His slow movement was a masterpiece. While he was by no means neglectful of the brilliance that lies in the music, the general impression was as if one of Grieg's delightful small piano pieces had been gloriously enlarged.

Another recording by Backhaus, now probably unhappily gone the way of so many good recordings of the "78" era, was quite a different picture. Backhaus announced his first theme a little as he might the opening of a Beethoven concerto, not in any way perfunctorily but rather as a prelude to the exciting moments to come. He gave the music majesty and spaciousness.

The ability to be transformed without losing its essential character is one of the qualities of great music. And so, when Janetta McStay plays the Grieg Concerto on April 16, it will not be just hearing the work again. We will be enjoying it anew.

—Owen Jensen

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 7, 1955.