

YOUTH AND MUSIC

Sir.—The jocularity and bouncing enthusiasm expressed by Owen Jensen in his article "Music for the Young in Heart" seems akin to the traditional type of rather forced jocularity and enthusiasm that is manifest at "youth rallies" in general. Mr. Jensen is an able writer, but his style in this article could be irritating to many youthful, yet serious, lovers of music.

Methods of approach, and modes of speech to people in different age groups, are very stylised. There is baby-talk for baby. There is bun-light and jocular pep talk for youth. Good use of English is often reserved for the staid and seared adult. I was anxious when I commenced reading Mr. Jensen's article, in case he failed to observe that "Young in Heart" does not necessarily imply "Young in Years." His classification "eighteen to eighty" dispelled my fears.

A double coincidence occurred when I purchased a copy of *Time* (February 28, 1955) and a copy of *The Listener*. *Time* publishes an article called "Going Like 60." This article deals with a different aspect of Mr. Jensen's subject. In both articles, the opening words are the same. Here is the first paragraph of the article published in *Time*: "Music may be for the young at heart, but it is not necessarily made by the young in years. Manhattan had a brilliant mid-season fortnight, with many of the star performers over 60 and showing no signs of giving up."

Amongst these star performers, *Time* lists the following:—Pierre Monteux, 79, French conductor; Wilhelm Backhaus, 70, who gave an all-Beethoven piano recital; Dame Myra Hess, 65, who gave a "standout" performance of Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 1; Paul Whiteman, 63, who conducted a Gershwin Memorial programme; Andrés Segovia, 62, who gave a guitar recital; Benno Moiseiwitsch, 65, who gave a piano recital in Carnegie Hall.

It is music's gain that these oldsters are youngsters in heart.

CLAUDE TANNER (Wellington).

UNDER THE SKIN

Sir.—Could I interest your contributors in a product I hope shortly to market? It is an emulsion somewhat similar to that used for rubbing on too-sheer nylons in the hope that it will prevent them bursting into holes and runs. My product is designed to prevent local patriots from bursting into print (and flame) when someone takes an objective view of their particular paradise. I call it my "Epidermis Extensior for Thin-Skinned People."

Observing Mr. Lawrence Constable in the cactus over his remarks concerning the nice little town of Takaka, and the reaction of local patriots, I hope his opponents do not cap my experience. My survey of a certain locality for *The Listener* a year or so ago brought forth a militant denouncement from local businessmen who formed a "Businessmen's Association" for the express purpose of writing *The Listener*. That organisation never functioned before or since. Even the local body got into the act and approached two Cabinet Ministers to uphold the glory of the township, with the added suggestion that my gentle remarks might unduly influence a coming Government Commission on transport.

I note that another contributor to another weekly journal is at present in high disfavour because he cracked a joke at the expense of a Junior Chamber of Commerce. He will learn!

In mentioning these instances, Sir, I am aware that you will recognise them

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

as sales-talk for my product, and that these remarks should really appear in your advertising columns. May I say in conclusion that the proceeds from my sales will be used to reduce progressively the cost of the product with the eventual aim that a bottle will be issued free—under Social Security, of course—to every New Zealander over the age of 16. (Bottle to be returned if people leave the country.)

GORDON INGHAM (Brown's Bay).

TAVERNS IN THE TOWNS

Sir.—The liquor problem in this country would, I think, be better solved by troughs than by longer hours. I recently returned from England after a two-years' visit, during which I became used to the corner pub with its quiet and leisured atmosphere. If it is thought that this pattern of drinking can be initiated here, I suggest that we learn how to drink first. For in England, drinking is a social pleasure, the concomitant of small intimate gatherings and light talk. New Zealanders drink to get drunk. How often has one heard such vulgar boasts as "Went to a good party last night—sick as a dog!"

We seem, as a nation, to have inherited strong Puritan prejudices against drink; it is possibly a rebellion against these unnatural bans which sends the average pub-crawler on his epic swillings.

The New Zealand habit (or "art," as some mean minds would say) of drinking a glass of beer in one gulp is not only a maltreatment of one's stomach but a foul insult to a noble and fine drink.

BRYAN PAYNTER (Auckland).

SOCIETY AND HAPPINESS

Sir.—I feel that your correspondent Guy Powell has missed the point which James K. Baxter made when he referred to society as "that mechanical mother we have invented for ourselves." The clue word is "mechanical."

In his penetrating book *Art and Technique*, Lewis Mumford has explored the compulsive mechanisms which in fact govern our daily lives. It is in this context, I believe, that Mr. Baxter refers to society as responsible for the dehumanising effect which reduces our fellows to the "deadpan, doughnut-eyed, clawed and shambling husk of them."

The inner life of modern man has all but disintegrated under the impact of a society overcommitted to the ideology of the machine and the cult of "production" more particularly in the economic field with its murderous division of labour. As a corollary, the personalising and humanising influence of art and the artist has been all but obliterated by this idolatry of the machine.

Mr. Powell writes: "The happiness of the individual depends upon his degree of adaptation to the needs of the efficient functioning of his particular culture." He does not say that in a world increasingly being made over in the image of the machine man is rapidly being reduced to the status of a blind, unthinking, unfeeling robot. Surely, in these circumstances, there is something wrong with the "culture" rather than the "degree of adaptation."

The slaughterhouse of sensibility which is modern society is certainly not synonymous with culture. To that extent I heartily agree with Guy Powell's nice distinction between the two terms. But I stand by Mr. Baxter's poetic protest. "The deadpan, doughnut-eyed, clawed and shambling husk" which is

modern industrial man is the inevitable result of his "adaptation to the needs of the efficient functioning of his particular culture." A poet, alas, is not efficient.

A.K.B. (Auckland).

"ART IS NEVER EASY"

Sir.—Thank you for the attention paid to the above matter in your editorial: a few points of difference might yet be worth stressing.

I am by now thoroughly convinced that the artist is, if he's worth his salt, quite capable of looking after himself. Your comments on that were, for me, truisms, but I don't find that they lead to conclusions quite as heartening as you find. We are, in fact, talking about different things—for in accepting the fact that art is never easy, I'm not suggesting, on this occasion, that the artist's way should be made so. I am speaking out of turn in a democracy, voicing the unpopular belief that the public is never right (in time).

I'm suggesting that it's becoming too fashionable to discuss "trends in New Zealand art," the "state of New Zealand painting, poetry, etc.," without having, first of all, found out what it is. (If there is any.) We are surely lacking in the kind of criticism—perhaps I

More letters from listeners will be found on pages 20-21

should say expressed aesthetics—which would enable us to define a work as a sample of New Zealand art. Mr. McCormick hits this problem squarely in his book on Frances Hodgkins when he admits that of course he's interested in her because she's famous. But how many others are that honest?

I am not reassured that things are as well as they may be, culturally. There were fewer literary works published here last year than there have been for many years previously—and this despite a Literary Fund. It is not accounted for by dearth of material, as writers and publishers could testify. And then there is the complete absence of a factor which, if any may, could go a long way to helping establish and define some sort of "New Zealand" tag to writing. I mean, the official commissioning of works to mark State occasions. In the hey-day of the poets of the thirties, commissions and prizes for art were known—and some of the best work written here was brought into being—or at least public notice, by the Centennial Exhibition. Were not the celebration of 100 years of Parliament in New Zealand, or the Queen's visit, worth attempting, historically to memorialise officially through the arts? I can't see progress, or cause for complacency here.

Finally, may I comment, in passing, on the five "types" of artist you analyse. As generalisations, these may, if they're popular conceptions, explain some of the neglect. Let's hope they're not, anyway, specific portraits. The danger in them is that they present a way of looking at artists—but no way at all of approaching art. (Milton may rate no less as poet because, as man, he beat his wife.) Too often, our art is approached, reviewed, and seen, in terms of its "personalities." And this too stands, ultimately, in the way of discovery.

LOUIS JOHNSON (Wellington).

FRANKENSTEIN

Sir.—It is apparently Mr. Fieldhouse's opinion that George Orwell was disillusioned with the results of State planning. Surely that is a misconception.

1984 is an attack on the survival into the 20th Century of the age-old practice of enforcing conformity by cruelty and torture. The secret police and the *agent provocateur* were as common in Renaissance Italy, Inquisition Spain or Imperial China as they are in present-day dictatorships. What angered Orwell was that these practices had corrupted a Socialist society.

It is surely fallacious to imply that the general increase in economic planning is responsible for modern dictatorships, since capitalism and free enterprise have produced at least as many police states as have Socialism and public enterprise.

Mr. Fieldhouse agrees, somewhat reluctantly, that George Orwell remained a Socialist, although he does not seem to be quite sure why. The answer is simple. He did not believe that Socialism would necessarily become corrupted and degrade man, any more than a businessman believes that capitalism automatically leads to Fascism. Orwell believed in Socialism—economic planning, Social Security and all—and he castigated the Communists—in *Animal Farm* and in *Homage to Catalonia*, as well as in 1984—for having betrayed its aims and ideals by reverting to Czarist methods of government.

J. DUNMORE (Featherston).

EATING THEIR WEIGHT

Sir.—Referring to "Sundowner's" notes concerning creatures that eat their weight in food may I add that the platypus—a "Living fossil"—known also as the Australian duckbill, consumes its own weight of food each day. If the scientists are to be believed, Australian marsupial mice also do the same. The smaller placental mammals, and especially shrews and moles, are credited with the eating of more than their own weight of food daily.

J. MALTON MURRAY (Oamaru).

PROGRAMME SELECTION

Sir.—I wish to protest at the decreasing selection becoming available in the programmes of the NZBS as the use of the new wide-band communicating lines increases. Most modern radios in New Zealand can receive satisfactorily programmes from two main centres, at least at night, and a few years ago it was possible almost always to find somewhere the kind of programme one wanted, whatever one's tastes. The stricter division of material between YA and YC stations defined the type of programme available and made the search easier.

However, it is going too far to combine a system of solely lowbrow or highbrow stations, with a network system by which all the stations in the same grouping broadcast the same programme. The evening listener to the YC stations now often finds the same concert or recorded programme, which he may not like, being broadcast from all four stations. The YA listener is in a similar situation on Sundays. Surely adequate national coverage could be obtained by broadcasting network programmes from two stations (perhaps in Dunedin and Wellington), and some allowance could still be made for individuality?

E. S. PAYKEL (Dunedin).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Lowbrow (Dunedin): Thank you. Will pass on your request.

G. Millson (Blenheim): Sorry; cannot decipher your full address.

John Bull (Wellington): Could not have been printed before the Second Test.

Contented Sea-Cow (Auckland): Many thanks. The page 8 position cannot be constant, but when it has to be abandoned we shall try to supply the necessary clue.