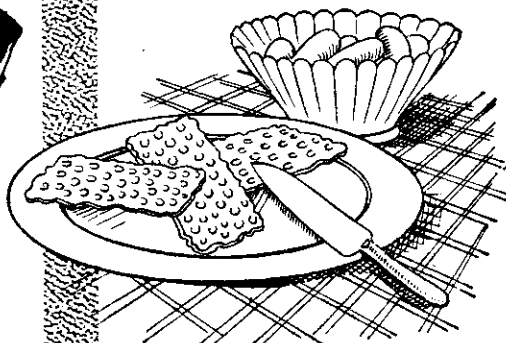


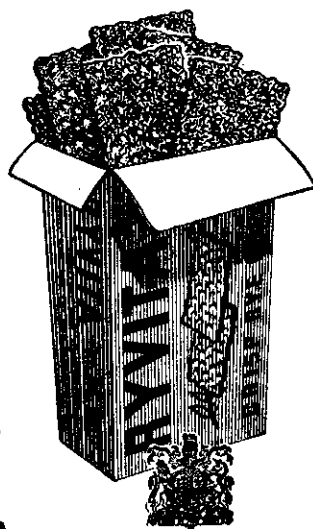
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### RADIO REVIEW

## La Belle Dame Sans Merci

**G**UESS who! Anna, of course. Musician friends of mine, while admitting Anna Russell's superb gifts, her flair for satire, her eye for the incongruous, her wonderful ear and sense of style, have registered some uneasiness about the propriety and taste of satirising forms like *Lieder* and the French Art song before audiences here have become acquainted with the real thing. "Town Hall packed for Anna," said one, "but when Ninon Vallin comes, 200 people will shiver in the front block." All too true, but I wonder if the argument is as cogent as it sounds. To get the real flavour of "Schlumph" and "Je n'ai pas la plume de ma tante," one must have heard a good deal of Schubert and Chausson, and Anna will not prevent such people from going to hear Ninon Vallin if she comes again; those who think all serious music is pretentious tosh will certainly not be disabused by Anna, but would they have gone to hear Ninon anyway? For no one can say Anna is not catholic in her assaults. For those who find the Hit Parade the summit of musical achievement, a session with Anna's hilarious "lousing up" of the popular song might be instructive.

Where I think Anna defaults is in her patter, which on a second hearing becomes obvious and on the third, wearing. Three times in a week we have heard that stentorian "Good Evening!" followed by the ritual discarding of her boa ("It was just to let you know I had one!") Her musical satire is sophisticated and extraordinarily perceptive; her verbal quips however are heavy-handed and

force the pace, bludgeoning you into finding her songs hilarious, where they are so good in themselves that such buttressing is supererogatory. Perhaps Anna does not realise that a joke delivered in Auckland is heard with perfect clarity at all points south to Invercargill, and that not many jokes will stand repeating. —B.E.G.M.

### Imperfect Likeness

**H**EARING the first few episodes of the ZB serial *The Picture of Dorian Gray* I availed myself of Dr. Johnson's comment on hearing a woman preacher—not surprised that it should be done badly, I marvelled that it should be done at all. But my criticism was from the viewpoint of the listener rather than that of the *littérateur*. Adhering too closely to its original, the serial suffered from too little action and too much talk, especially Lord Henry Wotton's. But later the situation improved. The plot was thickened (with home-made ingredients) at the expense of the purple prose, and Evil became explicit. For example, those nameless creatures with ravaged faces who skulk round the dark edges of the novel were dragged into the limelight and cleaned up somewhat, emerging as nice Cockney girls prone to murmur "I love you, Dorian Gray," though this did tend to reduce Dorian Gray himself to a kind of upper-crust Hyde, with sex-appeal. Where radio scored, however, was in the dreadful life it imparted to the scenes of violence, which in the book take a welcome artificiality from their surroundings.

### Before the Explosion

**T**HE DOMESDAY STORY (the NZBS play from 2YC on April 1) was that gift to listeners, a live play on a live topic. At first I thought too live; there was a kind of high-pressure salesmanship in the telling; it was cursed with a multiplicity of characters, and

(continued on next page)

### ★ The Week's Music... by SEBASTIAN ★

**EDMUND RÜBBRA** is a composer whose work makes headway in the esteem of the musical public, though the progress is undeservedly slow. He is probably best known for his little carol "Dormi Jesu," the Scherzo of his Fifth Symphony, and certain of his choral works, while the Griller Quartet gave his second string Quartet some good publicity here last year. It was interesting, then, to hear a local performance (NZBS) of his setting of five Spenser sonnets under the title *Amoretti*, sung by the tenor Andrew Gold with the Alex Lindsay String Quartet—a very felicitous combination. This is difficult music to sing; the style is "normal Rubbra," with a contrapuntal bias and a rather crawling mode of progression, and with many unexpected intervals for the voice; but in this case the intonation was good throughout. The main fault was one of balance, since at times the all-important accompaniment was almost inaudible, with the voice predominating unduly. This is a work which may well demand repeated hearings, but with a certain amount of dial-spinning, these should be readily available.

A short 'cello recital by Fleur Burry (NZBS) gave us some neat playing and good balance, especially in the *Elégie*

of Fauré. Mozart's "Ave Verum, Corpus" does not succeed in a 'cello transcription, mainly because it depends for its effect on a blend of voices rather than a solo tune. There was also a certain lack of the rich tone that one expects of a 'cello, but this was offset by the clarity of the whole.

What shall I say of Anna Russell? She has swept down upon us on the wings of satire, she has filled our largest halls with admirers, she has turned the musical world upside down and rearranged it to suit herself. She admits that her voice is not remarkable for its purity—"unearthly" was the actual word—and its main attribute is its flexibility, in the same way as chewing gum. A few new songs were presented—the Habanera from *Carmen* was metamorphosed into a non-stop square dance, while Schubert's and Handel's versions of "Night and Day" were cruelly barbed. I must admit I capitulated and saw as well as heard Miss Russell, so that the impact is a little more intense in my memory, but in the broadcast concerts there was no lack of impact, apart from the frustration of hearing unexplained audience reactions. For those of us with any musical pretensions, she had all the effect of a pneumatic drill on a pound of cheese.

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 22, 1955.