

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

WHEN Easter appears, we can confidently expect appropriate music, bolstered by a recorded Passion or two and perhaps a live performance, if any local societies can manage it so soon after the Christmas holidays. This year the Royal Christchurch Musical Society distinguished itself by beating the deadline and singing (3YC) Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*—more credit to them still, since no one can deny that it is taxing music for all concerned. In particular, it is super-taxing for the much-pitied tenor who agrees (or is persuaded) to sing the Evangelist, which means negotiating treacherous rapids and rocks of recitative continually throughout the performance. Maurice Newman must have drawn the shortest straw, but he did well and hardly had to bail out his musical boat at all. Lapses of intonation there were, quite obviously at times, but they were by no means confined to one soloist; and in any case, if you listen to German recordings of Bach, you will find that their soloists are none too particular about the right note as long as the musical sense and the meaning are intact; but there was no doubt about the integrity of this singing.

Mary Pratt was richly reliable as ever in her arias, while Marjorie Rowley in the soprano solos proved to have a sweet, not-over-penetrating voice; the two basses, whose identities my ear did not resolve, were more than adequate. Mr. Field-Dodgson had trained his choir well, and their tone and especially definition of line and variation of colour were evidently the fruits of hard work: the venom of the multitude, contrasted with serenity in the chorales, was most effective. One point here—need the chorales have been taken all at the same slow speed, with a long hiatus between each pair of lines? I don't think either style or words imply such flatly consistent treatment. This is mere cheeseparing, of course, and apart from a rather weak orchestra I wouldn't criticise the performance too destructively. At least it's streets ahead of sitting through yet another Stainer's *Crucifixion*. Gerald Knight, director of the Royal School of Church Music, gave a surprisingly uninspiring recital of organ music (NZBS), which included a pedestrian and heavily Victorian fugue by Parry—not one of his brighter moments. A Bach Trio was so softly registered as to sound thin and baseless, which it certainly shouldn't be. The playing was meticulous.

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Alas, poor William Austin! Was this valiant north-countryman our best-known radio actor? And, alas poor me, listening to it. Alas, all round.

A Programme Astray

OLIVER A. GILLESPIE'S programme, *Love Among the Novelists*, promised well. My Listener told me that it would give an account of romance through the ages, a somewhat large claim for a survey which began with Clarissa Harlowe in 1742. However, if the love was to be among the novelists, then I suppose it was fair enough to start with Richardson. But I became aware later, as the cast voyaged through passages of Mrs. Henry Wood, Elinor Glyn, Marie Corelli and Hall Caine, that the true purpose of the programme was to mock the more inflated aspects of Victorian writing; old-time Theatre as it were, so that we could giggle at its absurdity and think to ourselves how very sophisticated we are now. *Love Among the Novelists*, even. 19th century English novelists, can hardly give a true picture without some reference to Jane Austen. Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope and Hardy; it is monstrous to assume that all writers of the 19th century wrote romantic nonsense. At the end of the programme, we were assured that it was the ideas of love in best-selling novelists; all right, then. Was not Dickens a best-seller? Did not Queen Victoria weep at Little Nell? And in the script itself, one ferocious love scene was acted with such abandon, that for me, it transgressed the limits of good taste. I despise the practice, so easy and so common now, of assuming that 19th century literature is a sea of women scorned and vile seducers. This programme did nothing to dispel this assumption.

—B.E.G.M.

N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 13, 1956.

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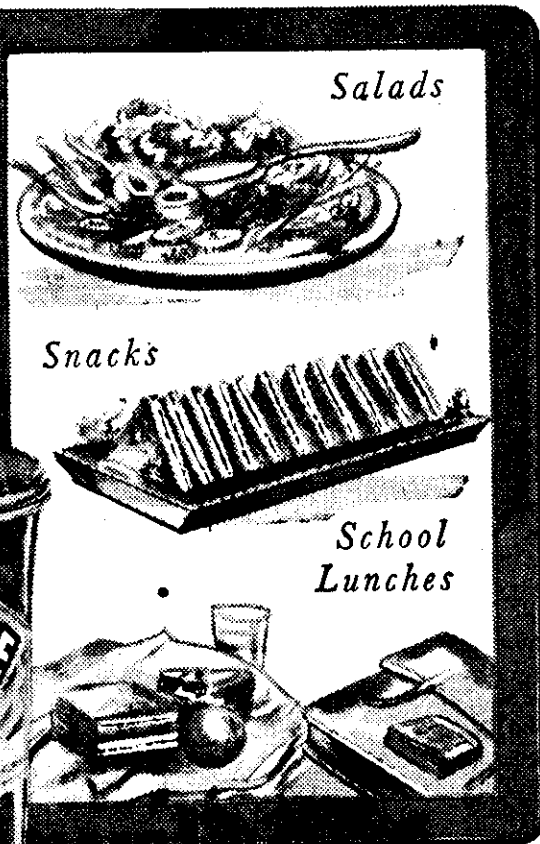
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