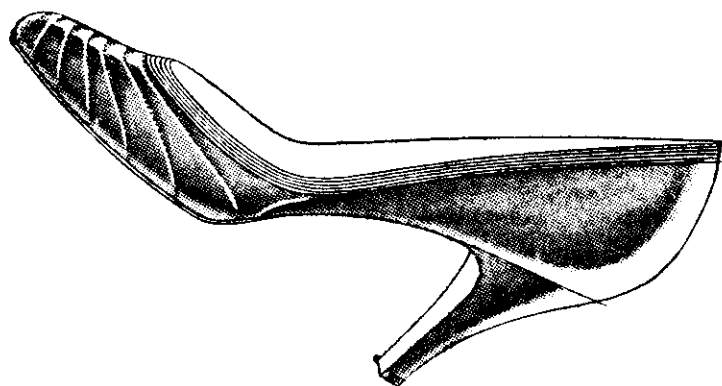




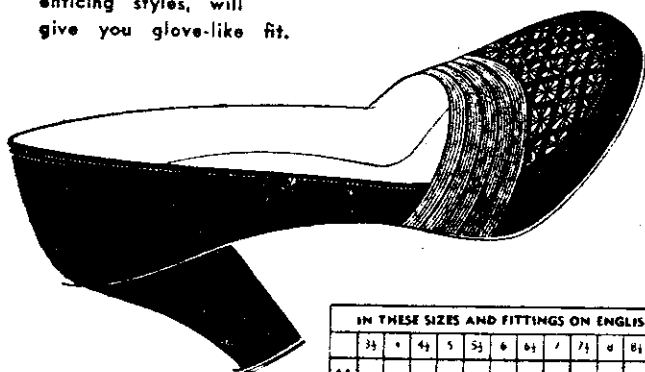
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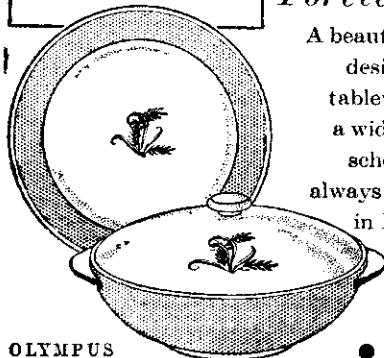
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Music for an Island

THE "desert island" theme has been used so often to reveal preferences for music, books and other consolations of mind and spirit, that its reappearance in a BBC feature (now being heard from YA stations) is surprising. A certain amount of interest may be felt in discovering the tastes of persons well known in the arts and entertainment, and perhaps also a little disillusionment; but *Desert Island Discs*, like so many of its predecessors, cannot be much more than a programme device. No man could say what his mental condition would be if he found himself in solitude. He could be sure of only one thing: that the desert would change him. Our interest in the arts is formed and nourished by contact with society, and if society disappeared the value and meaning of much that had been precious would fade in a dissonance, like music heard from a gramophone in need of winding.

The intention is, of course, merely to arrange individual programmes, and some of the items are chosen for personal as well as musical reasons. If, however, a desert island is suggested in the background, the selections are obviously meant to be final—they are what the people concerned would most want to hear for the rest of their lives. And if the choice is not frivolous (as it might well have been with Jimmy Edwards, who undoubtedly could be driven mad as quickly as anybody else by much repetition of "Police-man's Holiday"), it is hard to accept as a statement of musical taste. Can a man be sure at any stage of his life that his standards are unalterable? Changes of habit

and outlook are among the most fascinating parts of human experience. There are today many adolescents whose delight in music is to listen to jazz. Some of them will not want to hear anything else, but the great majority are passing through a phase, and in a few more years will wonder what it was that drew them down to Dixie. They may then decide that Tchaikovsky is the supreme composer, and will be impatient with Mozart, Bach and Handel—not guessing that later their taste may become severely classical.

True, it should be reasonable to expect an older man, his growing pains long forgotten, to have reached a fairly safe position. But we can never be sure about music. There are modern composers who obviously have something to say, even though sometimes we wonder what it is; and a mind that is receptive to all that is great in the past will not remain closed to the significant work of our own age. New music is not just an attempt to express the confusions around us: it is also a reinterpretation of themes that have been heard before. Modern works may succeed only in sending us back to the old; and some indeed may feel little interest in the harsher experiments. But it is nevertheless the stir and tumult of the present which brings out the value of all that is classical in the arts. The full mind stays open; and music is only an anodyne, operating with decreasing effect, unless our interest in it remains adventurous. On an island, of course, a sedative might be useful; but the man who looks for an island while he is still in the world, and is convinced that he needs no other voyage, is ceasing to be fully alive.

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 25, 1956.