

The Week's Music . . . by SEBASTIAN

A CELLO soloist is a comparative rarity among artists touring New Zealand, and we have been fortunate in having a worthy exponent of an instrument which, to put it mildly, is capable of ghastly sounds when it loses patience with its player. Harold Beck is primarily an orchestral player, and he seems more at ease with an orchestra than with an accompanist. In studio recitals (YC links) his intonation was sometimes faulty and the tone less sweet than one might expect in, say, his Beethoven Variations. The Schubert Arpeggione Sonata that he essayed was much better and more healthy-sounding.

Yet all the studio work paled into insignificance beside a first-rate rendering of Elgar's Cello Concerto with the National Orchestra (YC link). It appeared that the harder the task, the more strikingly Mr. Beck rose to the occasion; his cantabile was rich and sonorous, his harmonics true, and his feeling for the musical sense impeccable. I am not saying that the whole performance was blameless, and my enthusiasm was partly engendered by the playing being better than I expected; but it was a virile exposition of a work which could so easily turn salt into saccharine—an abhorrent sort of spurious sweetness. More orchestra, I think, for Mr. Beck, and rather less piano, please.

Really, the National Orchestra has produced some delightful music of late. There was the thoroughly cheeky Suite of Stravinsky, with which my joy—especially at the incorrigible Neapolitana—was tempered only with amazement that such a purely comic piece should be listened to in silence, with no bursts of laughter betraying the presence of any audience at all. The Australian composer Margaret Sutherland was represented in one programme (YA link) by her Adagio for Two Violins; though well played, the piece seemed to peter out without saying anything very decisive: though it may well improve on closer acquaintance. The Orchestra then subsided into the familiar strains of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; but with Sir Bernard Heinze interpreting it as a vast leisurely canvas (rather than the usual helter-skelter tour de force) new lights shone even from its more worn facets.

Finally, one of the treats of the week was the singing of Mary Pratt in Brahms's Alto Rhapsody, with the Auckland Choral Society. Her tone, as round and full as could be wished, clung to the low dark notes as though tailored to fit them; you could go a long way before hearing such another contralto.

Radio Review

Spoken Words

IT is apparent from Mr. J. H. Hall's statement in *The Listener* (August 10, p. 8) that the NZBS Talks Section knows far more about the lacks of our radio speakers than a reviewer can do. My remarks must resolve themselves into a commendation of that article, a sad agreement that few native-born New Zealanders are naturally good speakers, a quiet cheer for what is being done to encourage them to do better, including incentive payments, a sigh for what can't yet be done. The general standard improves: there aren't now many positively bad scripts broadcast, though their delivery is still too often poor. After a run of moderately favourable comment a critic is tempted to cast around for something to be really nasty about, just to break the monotony, but that isn't easy. It's not much easier, unfortunately, to find the talk really to enthuse over. So many talks are simply ignored. Too much emphasis can be placed, though, on the smooth script and the easy manner. These are important; more important is some quality of stimulating and original thought. This is the hardest thing to find, and most heartening when it is found.

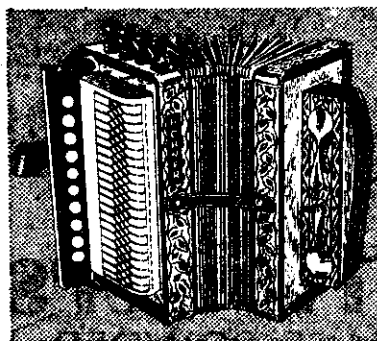
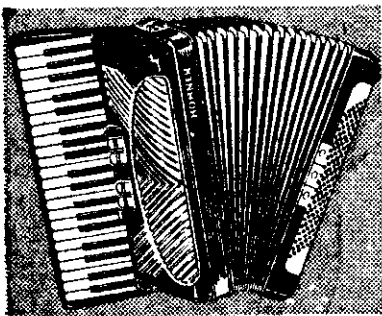
Talker

DR. H. B. TURBOTT is a New Zealander who can talk. I admire Dr. Turbott. I see him rising from a sound sleep with doors and windows open, breakfasting on one-third of the day's Balanced Diet, but no wheat-germ or molasses because these are unscientific fads. I see him walking to work, to save his limbs from becoming atrophied, and on his arrival at the office flinging wide the window to dispel the fog which offends his mucous membranes. He does not smoke, or eat between-meal snacks. When he has a cold he goes straight to bed and stays there until he is no longer a menace to the community, drinking lemon juice but nothing from the medicine cupboard. He has no medicine cupboard, for he knows that health cannot be drunk out of a bottle, that a firm step and supple arteries are the reward for a sensible and orderly mode of living. He therefore neither worries nor overworks, nor lets himself be involved in the crises or tangles with other peoples' problems which may drive careless folk to exhaustion and phenobarbitone. I don't know Dr. Turbott personally, to my sorrow, so this picture may possibly be a figment of the imagination. But not of my imagination.

—R.D.McE.

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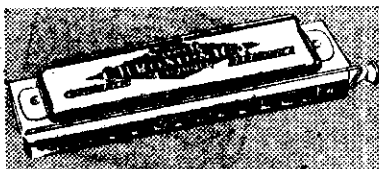
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Roman Sunset

THANKS largely to Bernard Shaw, contemporary idiom has replaced Victorian Wardour Street and fake-Shakespearian in the dialogue of historical plays—and very effective it usually is, too. Yet plays like R. C. Sherriff's *The Long Sunset* make me wonder if a more stylised language wouldn't often be more appropriate. This drama about the fate of the late Romans in Britain after the departure of the legions I thought most interesting and sometimes quite moving. The scenes in which a departing slave insists on buying his liberty and that in which the Roman, Julian, is baptised by his Christian wife had the real stuff of drama in them. But I found it almost impossible to take the polite BBC players with their polite accents speaking Sherriff's polite dialogue for anything but characters in a modern drawing-room drama, with Arthur the C.O. of a neighbouring air-field dropping in for a friendly whisky. On the stage, costumes and settings doubtless would establish the right mood. But on the radio, I feel, a more ringingly poetic speech is needed to create the illusion of a distant age. They order these things better in France. So, for me, *The Long Sunset*, interesting and thoughtful as it was, seemed as remote from the real ancient Britain as 18th century versions of Homer from their originals.

Backblocks Sleuth

IMAGINING from its title *Ininja the Avenger* that IZB's Sunday night feature was a serial either about the Mau-Mau or about a science-fiction Thing (Bug-Eyed Monster variety), I let it pass for a week or two until a knob left untwiddled revealed its true nature. A series of complete stories featuring one of my favourite detectives, Arthur Upfield's half-aborigine Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, *Ininja the Avenger*, like Mr. Upfield's novels, conveys more of the feel and the personality of the Australian outbacks than many elaborate documentary novels. The little plays

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 24, 1956.