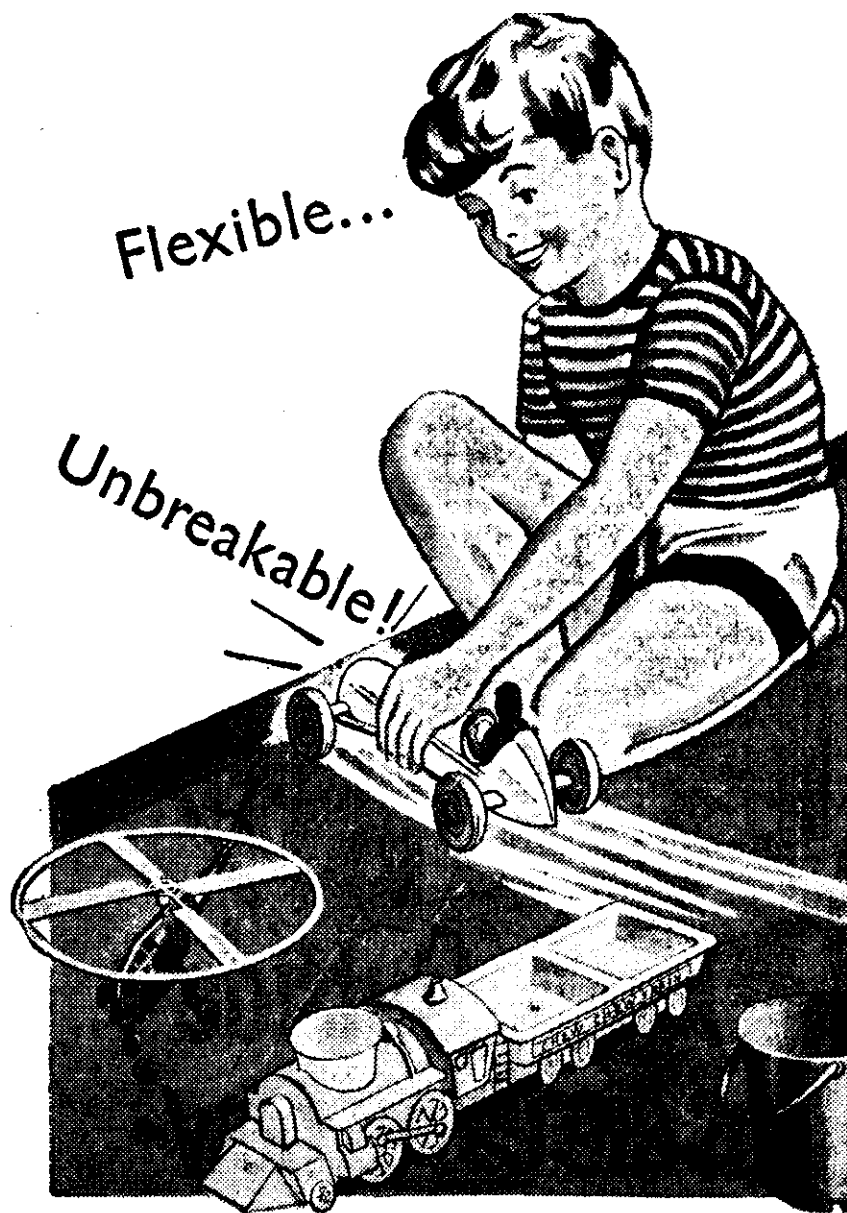




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RADIO REVIEW

Double Choice

HAVING often sacrificed a couple of hours to a radio play, only to be subjected to the equivalent of those nice little jobs which are performed by unadventurous drama societies, I have something of a weakness for *Double Bill* programmes. For out of two half-hour plays one, at least, is likely to be acceptable. And, in fact, in most *Double Bills* I have heard, both pieces have been diverting listening. Last Friday's pair (1YA) contrasted the BBC presentation of Evan John's very fine *Prelude to Massacre* (of Glencoe), with an NZBS version of M. R. James's ghost story, *The Man in the Black Cloak*. Both were capably done, even if the James story seemed rather old-fashioned now that Kafka has introduced us to a world more dreadful than the James-Machen-Blackwood one of old documents, revenants and faceless fiends. Yet I find it surprising that so few original New Zealand plays are heard nowadays. Surely *Double Bill* would offer a fitting niche for some of the original pieces which the Drama League Competition calls forth each year. I've seen at least two plays there recently which should suit the air as well as adapted short stories. Does the NZBS need, perhaps, one or two talent scouts?

Victoriana

SOME of the best listening radio has given me has been the skilful BBC adaptations of novels by Dickens, Trollope, Hardy and George Eliot. There are obvious disadvantages in serial versions of great Victorian books, but the advantages, I feel, outweigh them. The dull, embarrassingly sentimental and padded passages, go, and the BBC's combination of piety and know-how preserves the essential spirit of the works and brings the characters to life with excellent acting. How differ-

ent all this is from Hollywood vulgarisations! The current dramatisation of Besant and Rice's *The Golden Butterfly* (YA Sunday link) takes us into less well-known, but hardly less satisfying, fields. The story, with its delightfully illiterate heroine, paternalistic lawyer, dilettante twins, and American oil-king, offers a feast of character in the grand manner. The careful, polite language, full of exquisite formalities and leisurely courtesy, strikes happily upon my ear. And we know, happily, that unlike a soap-opera, it is moving towards a planned, satisfying end. I have no doubt that Dickens and Trollope have gained readers through such adaptations. Certainly, two episodes of *The Golden Butterfly* sent me hot-foot to my first Besant and Rice—*Ready Money Mortiboy*, which I offer as a suggestion to NZBS adaptors.

—J.C.R.

Prose Fairy Tales

RADIO magazine programmes serve the same purpose as photographs in a newspaper. They provide the verisimilitude which helps us believe we know somebody we don't know, and that helps us to escape the people we know too well. I've seen the opinion expressed that this passion to live vicariously other people's lives is the most dangerous aspect of radio and other mass media. But it isn't really a new urge: the only new thing is that being less sophisticated than our forbears we like to think our fairy tales are really happening, here and now. On a recent Sunday the eleven items contained in 2YA's *Radio Digest* and 2ZB's *Sunday Supplement* ranged from the pilot of a plane that got into difficulties over the Campbell Islands to a 'Pets' Parade, from attempts to salvage Maori chants which Sir Apirana Ngata recorded on Edison cylinders in the 1900s, to a piano tuner at work on the Town Hall Steinway, from Sir Edmund Hillary and his dogs to Rita Snowden and her motor-cycles. Rather more prosy, perhaps, than Rumpelstiltskin and Jack the Giant-Killer, but not (continued on next page)

The Week's Music . . . by SEBASTIAN

THE harpsichord, like many another old instrument, is not to everyone's taste. On one hand it lacks some of the shades of meaning of the piano, and some of its thunder on the other. For all that, in the right hands it is a beautiful and sensitive thing, combining features of harp and organ—the plucked sound and action of the former, the registration changes and manuals of the latter, while contriving to look vaguely like a piano. Not that it is a hybrid—the piano is really more of one; but these features make it an instrument unlike any other, and the quantity of music written for it in the 17th and 18th centuries makes it indispensable for Baroque enthusiasts, of whom there must be a number even in this country.

Some weeks ago I wrote that Rosalyn Tureck's piano playing of the Goldberg Variations was a modern answer to the challenge of the harpsichord; and so it was. But the older instrument has its moments of supremacy, one of which was the first concert that included the new Goff harpsichord of the NZBS, when Dr. Thornton Lofthouse played Bach's F Minor Concerto with the National Orchestra (YC link). I have nothing but praise for the instrument,

with a clear ringing tone both in the loud and soft, and a diction for any piano to envy: the tonal changes were magical in effect, and the unpleasant twanging of some harpsichords was entirely absent. Perfect the playing certainly was not: apart from a few flurrings and a rather turgid final movement, the soloist and orchestra often lost contact. Yet this was a first, and in some ways, experimental performance, and we should hear great things of this new possession once it and we are acclimatised.

This programme also included the somewhat heavy *Faust Overture* of Wagner, and Elgar's first *Wand of Youth Suite* at the other end of the musical portentousness scale, both well played. Even better, both in performance and ease of listening was Holst's *Somerset Rhapsody*, which is at once ingratiating in its use of folk melody. The use of some of the same tunes as Vaughan Williams has set made one realise the latter's weighty tread where Holst is more sprightly, his mistiness where this was sweet and clear—a contrast much to Holst's advantage. Here the woodwind were at their best—and the best is certainly the least that will do for this work.