

after ninety sessions. *Grand Opera Requests* (1YD on Sundays) will, I presume, continue to provide the occasional off-beat record and a gem or two from the great singers of the past. But *Golden Age* is, alas, no more. Here, drawing upon the more cobwebby of the NZBS stacks and helped by listeners with valuable private collections, the organisers have given us a real banquet of outstanding performances of many of the more celebrated arias and, what is even more interesting, of many little-known pieces from little-known operas. Sometimes, to be sure, bad surfaces, older recording techniques and the mere erosion of time have meant that less than justice has been done to Caruso, Melba, Chaliapin and others. Yet it was astonishing how, despite technical difficulties, so many of the singers came across with sufficient beauty and force to justify the name of the session. *The Golden Age*, which was always fortunate in its announcers, will be greatly missed. I hope that someone comes up with another idea which will enable some of the discs to be heard again, or, failing that, decides to launch out on the same series from the beginning.

—J.C.R.

Listening-In To God

[I]T is not true that the Devil has all the good tunes; the Salvation Army has several, and the Moral Rearmament movement evidently numbers among its flock some very talented light composers. I was reminded of this last Sunday when listening to the MRA play, *The Vanishing Island*, their moral and cautionary tale of self-will, grace and The Way. The symbolism was often crude, the islands of *I Love Me* and *We Hate You*, for example; and the dialogue, in couplets of a sometimes offensive gaucherie, made me shiver. The ending, where The Way becomes manifest, sought to project great truths in the language of the gummiest popular religion, and this I found distasteful. But I cannot deny that the tunes are charming; inventive, gay and sprightly, often genuinely musical, and on the whole, very well sung. The orchestration is apt, and the Moral Rearmament Chorus and Orchestra (intimidating title!) well-drilled and competent. Jane Wax's song, *Son of Mine*, was even deeply moving, and the recurring line, "blood of my bone," shocked me into awareness by its rightness and force. The words of the songs, often reminiscent of patter songs by W. S. Gilbert, and more than reminiscent when that superannuated Savoyard, Ivan Menzies, sang them, were far wittier than the dialogue, and often had a sardonic bite and relish. The whole work was far more successful in its sarcastic, mordant, folly-exposing vein than when it dealt with the basic verities. So perhaps the Devil does have the best tunes after all. I am glad to have heard it, and as entertainment, at least, it is far from negligible.

The Way of Mr. Eliot

THE COCKTAIL PARTY makes a neat counterpoint with *The Vanishing Island* because its subject matter is the same. Suffering, atonement, grace and The Way are its substance, dealt with in the highly defined style of one of the great literary masters of this century. Am I being fanciful in detecting in the recorded version of the New York cast, a striking resemblance to *The Importance of Being Earnest*? As Cathleen Nesbit played Julia Shuttlesworth, the gossiping busybody who is also a guar-

dian of other people's destinies, I caught echoes of Lady Bracknell, and surely Lavinia's ailing and imaginary aunt, Edward's excuse for Lavinia's absence, is blood sister to Algernon's Mr. Bunbury? And it seemed to me, listening to Eliot's dazzling first act, that he was contriving to make the same explosions in the moral and religious fields, that Wilde managed to provoke in the social and political world. And as much as *The Importance, The Cocktail Party* depends on style. The New York cast, all English, headed by Alec Guinness and Irene Worth, showed themselves superbly aware of style. The first and second acts, beautifully paced, crackled with brilliance; the third, which I find somewhat portentous, escaped heaviness through the understanding of the wholly admirable cast. Eliot has made one howler, a sharp descent into Tennysonian bathos, which I must maliciously record: Celia says, after breaking with her lover, Edward, somberly: "I shall never go into your kitchen again!"

—B.E.G.M.

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