

Roadhouse Vacant

AN announcement that the guiding spirit of *Radio Roadhouse*, Barry Linehan, is to follow his star in Australia next year, indicates that the current series is the last. It is, then, an opportune time to pay tribute to the only successful comedy show New Zealand radio has fathered. In three years *Radio Roadhouse* has developed from a kind of camp concert, with echoes of BBC sessions, to a lively, sophisticated show with a genuinely Kiwi flavour, which has won an army of faithful listeners. Despite weak spots, inevitable perhaps, with one man writing all the scripts, the proportion of bull's-eyes has been remarkably high. *Radio Roadhouse* stands so firmly on its own feet now that comparisons with overseas programmes are irrelevant. It has proved that a first-class radio comedy feature can be produced here, winning acceptance by all save the stubbornly humourless types who regard the Dad-and-Horri jokes as insults to the Maori race. The gifts of Noeline Pritchard, Mervyn Smith, Athol Coats, Eddie Hegan,

Crombie Murdoch and the Stardusters have all helped to establish *Radio Roadhouse*; but the main credit goes to Barry Linehan, notion-man, script-writer and leading comedian. It is a thousand pities that there is not enough scope in New Zealand for his talents. His distinctive personality will be sadly missed on Wednesday nights next year.

Coffee and Corn

WILLIAM AUSTIN'S *Won't You Come In?* seems designed to appeal to lower-middle-brow listeners in late middle age, since it deals heavily in nostalgia and bits of gossip, and the corn is often as high as an elephant's eye. Out of recordings of the inoffensive café-music kind, with an occasional piece of ancient comedy and the odd novelty, plus the rattle of coffee-spoons, an attempt is made to create the illusion of a cosy half-hour with Mr. Austin in his drawing-room. It is clear that the session has its following, but, after hearing it several times now, I am forced to the conclusion that it is a waste of Mr. Austin's considerable abilities. Not only is the script colourless, repetitive and devoid of wit and originality, but the compère's tricks, those of a practised radio actor, become, to my ear, tryingly artificial—the little calculated pause, the suave aside, the unconvincing coffee-drinking

ceremony. I feel that the whole notion of the session and the style of its presentation belong to the earlier days of radio rather than to 1956. Possibly a better script might lift it up somewhat, but at present it seems decidedly below the standard of programmes thought worthy of consuming a linked half-hour every week.

—J.C.R.

Il Tabarro

I THOUGHT the broadcast version of Puccini's *Il Tabarro* in all respects most creditable and enjoyable. In a preliminary passage, with orchestral background, William Austin sketched the plot, then the work ran its course. The opening was beautifully played, and sustained most sensitively the mood of dark, lulling water, from which menacing events would presently spring. I was interested to observe as the opera proceeded on its high, melodramatic road, how much Gian-Carlo Menotti draws from Puccini, not merely the lush purplish passages, easily identified, but quirks of orchestration like the barrel organ noises early in *Il Tabarro* which one hears again and again in Menotti. The singers seemed in no way hampered by the strange, operatic English they were often forced to cope with, and worked together to produce a fine intensity, which enables one to create, and even

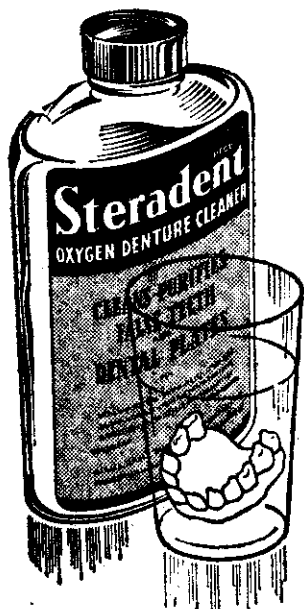
experience, this minor masterpiece of modern opera. It was an interesting experiment by Mr. Robertson and, I thought, wholly successful. May we hope now for a similarly distinguished *Gianni Schicchi*?

The Cause of God

The Sunday Showcase offered a fascinating programme last week. *The Enterprise of England*, an account of the Spanish Armada made up entirely from contemporary letters, diaries and State papers. I had no idea that this decisive engagement was so well documented, but it is, point by point. We can hear Philip of Spain giving his orders to his reluctant Admiral, the Duke of Medina-Sidonia, premier grandee of Spain, but as he confessed to his sovereign, no soldier, and perilously prone to seasickness. The enterprise, nakedly imperialist in motive, was represented to the thousands embarking from the Tagus as the Cause of God. Striking parallels occur, do they not? The Armada set sail, dogged by bad weather, but arrived finally in the Channel, and here fought out the engagement on the lines familiar to us from our history books. Interesting sidelights on it, which histories omit, are the rivalry between the testy Frobisher and the volatile Drake, who lived warmly in this

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