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(signed) ERNEST ELLIS, 22 Botany Rd., Alexandria
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Radio Review

NUCLEAR THOUGHTS

DR. MERRILL MOORE is doubtless a poet of distinction, though I have not yet read any of his work. But as a radio performer, in the programme *Three to One*, which I heard last week, he leaves himself wide open to parody. Some of us perhaps have difficulty in being able to take quite seriously anyone who talks of weighty matters with an American accent; discounting that, I am left with Dr. Moore's soap opera responses to some of the questions given him by Anton Vogt, Denis Glover, and Alistair Campbell. Ezra Pound was mentioned. "Alas poor Ezra: I knew him well," said Dr. Moore. Dylan Thomas arrived in the discussion. A deep, deep sorrow in his voice, Dr. Moore said: "Although he has left us, he did not live in vain." One can imagine all too readily what Dylan would have made of an epitaph like that! Dr. Moore has written 100,000 sonnets. This makes him without doubt the most prolific poet in the history of the world. A little arithmetic will prove it. Dr. Moore is fifty-three. Let us assume he wrote no sonnets before the age of three. In that case, for fifty years, he has written an average of 2,000 sonnets a year, or about six for every day of his life. Remarkable! Dr. Moore is also a psychiatrist, and commutes every day to Boston. He composes sonnets while en route, dictating them into a sound-scriber. "I get what I would call nuclear thoughts: little ideas from which the poems will be made," or to vary this metaphor, the ideas are cooked in the kitchen basement of the subconscious mind and are then sent by dumb waiter up the stories to the conscious mind, where they emerge as poems. *Three to One* (pointless title) turned itself without design into the funniest programme I have heard for some time.

—B.E.G.M.

Guthrie-Duff

WHEN I saw that Oliver Duff was to arrange and deliver a series of readings from *Tutira* I thought no-one could have been better chosen. Guthrie-Smith may not have spoken with the voice of an Otago Scot, but there cannot have been two men in New Zealand with minds more alike, nor two men who have done more to persuade us to care for our land and the creatures on it. Yet the first of the readings which I heard produced a curious sense of disappointment. Not that Mr. Duff didn't read well. He read freely and naturally, as if he were reading something he had written himself. That was the trouble. Hearing the Duff voice one instinctively expected the Duff style: those repetitive aphorisms of which I need give no example here since he will have done so on another page. Guthrie-Smith's prose is supple and graceful, but with the voice preparing us for plum-Duff it almost seemed flat. Then once or twice the expected almost happened and one began to think "this is more like it," when it wasn't more like Guthrie-Smith at all. However, this feeling fades after a time. Oliver Duff becomes the voice of Guthrie-Smith, whose own style shines out unalloyed. I'm sure this comprehensive series of readings is going to give many listeners some idea of why they've been hearing about *Tutira* for so long.

Gate-Crasher

FOLLOWING a change in his sponsorship in Australia, Jack Davey has disappeared from the ZBs. Except, oddly enough, from the commercial of the programme which succeeds him. This is another Australian product, a panel game called *Who Am I?*, obviously inspired by the English *What's My Line?* and *The Name's The Same*, though with some gimmicks of its own. It makes entertaining listening and has produced some surprising people, like Mr. Riff and Miss Raff, and Mrs. Bonzer. But why is it necessary to borrow such a show from Australia? None of the participants is so brilliant as to make his export imperative and much of the point derives from local references. As a New Zealand listener I feel like a gate-crasher at someone else's party, and I'd rather have my own. I feel the same way, only much more so, about some of the Australian comedy shows on the ZBs. *Laugh Till You Cry* for example. Frankly, I don't.

R. D. McE.

"I Am—Vidocq!"

MY heart sank as I heard the thick accents in the opening dialogue of *The Fabulous Vidocq* (1YC). Mercy, I thought, have NZBS producers reverted to the soap-opera convention of broken English for foreigners speaking their own language? I should have known better, for this introduction proved to be merely an extract from a 19th Century play incorporating one of the many myths about this fantastic criminal-turned-thief-taker. For the rest of the programme, impeccable English was the medium for the dramatic presentation of the career of Vidocq, forger, adventurer, master of disguise and galley-convict, who became first Head of the French Sûreté. Ernest Blair and Earle Rowle, as the old and young

Vidocq respectively, made him a convincing character, and with capable help, gave life to dramatic scenes, slightly tinged with period flamboyance, but in the main plausible. When I was a boy I devoured a series of paper booklets enshrining the legends of Vidocq, never for a moment dreaming them to be true. Yet the reality, as this radio biography showed it, was hardly less remarkable than the inventions.

A Sharp Liszt

ANOTHER "radio portrait," this time of Liszt, helped to clear away the mist from him who of all Romantic composers, save Wagner, has had the most complete glamour-treatment. *The Worshipper at Noon* (the year's most cryptic title) in *ZB Sunday Showcase*, painted a sharper and more likeable picture of Liszt than is found in, for instance, a recent French novel about Mendelssohn. Although the radio Liszt, with his keyboard pyrotechnics, his fondness for titled ladies, and his later taking of minor orders, was colourful enough, there was just that subtle difference in shading which distinguishes truth from fiction. Yet the BBC had not solved the problem of combining the life with the music. Is one to leave the music out? Impossible. Give whole works? No Time. Play snippets? Probably irritating, but no alternative. The musical snatches were understandable, therefore, but the snippets used were mainly over-familiar Liszt, with little or nothing from the great later Liszt whom musicians are just rediscovering. A pity—for Liszt the composer has still to be seen in perspective, and such a programme might have helped here. What might do the trick (script-writers please note) would be a serial version of Newman's *The Man Liszt*, along the lines of *Melba* but, I dare to think, more rewarding, if less peachy.

—J.C.R.

★ The Week's Music . . . by SEBASTIAN ★

OPERA can never be entirely successful in broadcast versions, and criticism of such versions is necessarily unfair. I propose to be unfair to *The Rake's Progress* (by Stravinsky on Auden's libretto), which I heard for the first time recently. Stravinsky has never had much fame as a tune-merchant, but the flagrantly unvocal vocal parts of this opera soon create real ennui in the listener; however brilliant the orchestration, these spiky leaping lines make for strain in the audience as well as the performers. The plot, with its typically operatic basis of fantasy, seems good and its presentation carries conviction, though the music often does not: but the chorus parts were much more human and could even convey emotion. For the performers (of the New York Metropolitan Opera) who negotiated the intricacies of the score, I have nothing but admiration; for Stravinsky the conductor, sympathy; and for Stravinsky the composer, no feeling at all.

The National Orchestra continues to give its present series of studio recitals (YC links). Vincent Aspey exchanged his bow for a baton in one programme, and conducted a concert of lighter pieces with aplomb and neatness. The three Grainger pieces are always fresh, retaining their simple charms when many more highly organised works may pall. Coates

and Coleridge-Taylor share some of the same advantages: and this, together with the Orchestra's apparent enthusiasm, made the programme a bright and entertaining one.

Distinctly less enthralling was another recital, with a well-planned programme that suffered from a pedestrian performance. Mozart's "Impresario" Overture was fluffy at the edges, probably because of the sprinting speed it was given; Delius's incidental music to *Hassan* began with an off-pitch cello and ended suddenly and unconvincingly, but was saved by some lovely woodwind solo work. The Piano Concerto in E Flat of Saint-Saens is an unfamiliar work, and I feel it should remain so, now that it has had this little outing. The first movement anticipates the Warsaw Concerto in many respects, the second is full of rather commonplace sentiment, and the finale, redolent of synthetic joy, rarely exceeds the ordinary. It seemed a pity then that Alison Edgar's undoubted talents as a pianist should be squandered on this concerto: and that her eloquent playing should redeem it so little. The recital concluded with a precise but undistinguished rendering of the *Sylvia* ballet music. Perhaps the Orchestra were a little tired; by the end of the programme, I was too.

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 1, 1957.