

No Tears for the Years

"THE songs of our times help bring back the past, give to memory the gentle nudge it needs. . ." So. The only trouble is that I have listened to many of the Saturday night *Songs of Our Times* (not all of them—that would be just too dreadful) and have not yet had the slightest twinge of reminiscence or nostalgia. The fault may be mine. I'm not above listening to popular songs, but they're not grappled in my memory with the times I've lived through. Yet Compton Mackenzie, with the help of songs of his time, can make me nostalgic for years I never knew. Alas, in spite of a sprinkling of felicitous phrases, James Walshe is no Compton Mackenzie. He doesn't even sound as if he's been there himself. He talks like an armchair traveller reading from a book. And not always reading very carefully—he has twice placed New Zealand general elections in years that never had any. As for the songs, their performance is so humdrum, so off-hand, that their banality is rendered too painfully obvious. If any of them ever had any spirit, let alone the spirit of the times, it has been thoroughly drained out.

—R.D.McE.

Talk or Lecture?

JUST what is it that distinguishes a good radio talk from a lecture? Is it merely more colloquialisms and less formality in the radio speaker? Or is it perhaps an ability to insert instinctively some of those normal speech hesitations and even slips which mark ordinary conversation, and thus to suggest relaxation and disguise the presence of a script? Some radio speakers used to lecturing, but not to the microphone, tend to be fluent but formal, incisive but categorical, interesting but impersonal, like two University lecturers heard this week. Thomas Rive in his stimulating *Whither Music?* series made many admirable points with the assurance of a practised lecturer, but his slightly remote manner was at times at odds with a sometimes wryly amusing script; Dr. Max Charlesworth at the end of a challenging, packed and admirably organised series, *Philosophers in Revolt*, compelled attention by his cogent reasoning rather than by vivacity of manner. Both are potentially fine radio speakers, having clarity, smoothness, and ideas. All they lack seems to be experience. It is to be hoped they are allowed to acquire it, since there are radio speakers around with experience, but quite without clarity, smoothness or ideas.

Presentation

MEDITATING on several miscellaneous programmes I've heard this year, I have come to the conclusion

that one reason why some of them vaguely disappoint is the lack of what cinema-managers call "presentation." Now that long-playing records are ubiquitous, it is comparatively easy to schedule sessions like *Jane Frazar Sings*, *Groucho Marx Entertains*, or *Frankie Carle Plays*. But it is a poor long-playing disc-cover that does not supply enough information to enliven the introduction of such programmes. Some artists and pieces are so well-known that introductory remarks would be irritating; others would surely gain something from a word about the artist or song. Rack my memory as I might, I could not remember from what particular films the Groucho numbers came, and mentally damned the announcer as a benighted non-Marxist. Nor could I follow more than a few phrases of a group of French "pops," which even a list of titles would have illuminated. Station 1YA rarely helps us out; in the more shirt-sleeved atmosphere of 1YD the nude numbers are often clothed in a decent commentary. Something of the technique used so ably in *Sunday Showcase* introductions would brighten up for me, at least, sessions which sometimes sound as if they are unwinding from some aerial sausage-machine.

—J.C.R.

The Sea-fight at Salamis

LISTENERS may remember *The Tragedy of Thermopylae*, heard last November. Beginning with 1YC and 4YC on Monday, February 18, the YCs will broadcast *Salamis and Victory*, the second BBC programme based on Herodotus's history of the Persian War.

Xerxes had invaded Greece to burn Athens in revenge for Marathon. This, after the battle of Thermopylae, he did, but the Athenians rallied the other States and defeated the Persian fleet at Salamis. Xerxes returned to Persia, leaving his lieutenant, Mardonius, to continue the fight; but Mardonius himself was killed at Plataea, and the Persian invasion was finally squashed.

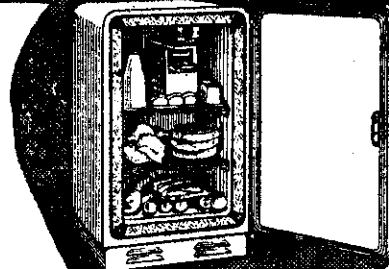
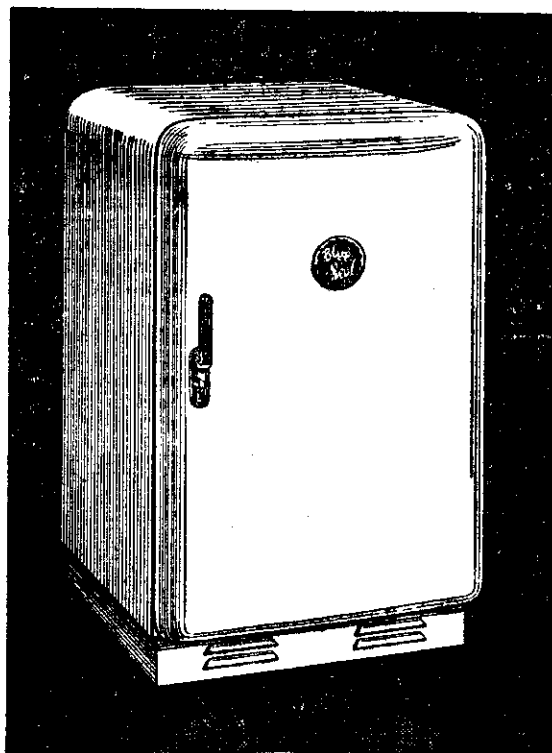
Colin Shaw has made from this a Chronicle Play for radio with a rich Elizabethan texture of language. Donald Wolfitt plays Xerxes, whose triumph over-rides the first part of the play ("I have done what I set out to do. I have burnt Athens!") David King-Wood is Themistocles, who rallied the Greeks and planned the battle at Salamis. His fellow Greeks quarrelled almost incessantly on policy and precedence, and only in desperation did they come together precariously to defeat the Persians. The play ends with Xerxes in Persia learning of the final defeat of his army and his despairing cry, "Unkind visions, whom tempt ye now?"

The lesson for us today lies not in the political quarrels and the strategies of the 5th century B.C. It lies in the invasion of a free State by a neighbour who must avenge a defeat in battle and strive to rule the world, and most of all in the final victory, despite all hazards, of free men in the defence of their freedom. Xerxes is made to say, near the end,

Richly I came to rob them of their freedom,

Yet they in Freedom richer were and bolder.

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 15, 1957.



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