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Radio Review

PRIESTLEY PLATITUDES

AT the beginning of J. B. Priestley's *World Theatre* play, *The Golden Entry*, it was stated that problems of casting had prevented its stage performance. After hearing it, I can think of several other reasons for its non-performance. Unlike many of Priestley's plays whose theatrical force has made him a respected modern dramatist, *The Golden Entry* is a dreadfully static affair, lacking cumulative power and with an ending that almost sounds like a gesture of despair. The bankrupt Harkfast, trying to keep open an art gallery he runs mainly for altruistic reasons, converses with several types, most of whom, when they can get in a word edgewise through his voluble philosophising, want to utter Priestley platitudes about Life and Art and all that. All the Priestley straw-men were belaboured furiously—gutter-journalism, aesthetic hangers-on, willowy young men ("Go and look at the Town Hall. It's fabulously horrible")—bureaucracy, the soullessness of committees and so forth. But, presented speechwise and lacking dramatic realisation, it all sounded suspiciously like claptrap. Only Frank Pettingall's eccentric old Yorkshireman enlivened this disappointing piece for me.

Voices of the Week

NOT for a long time have I been made so aware of the many possible varieties in colour and texture of the human voice as by last week's talks. Dr. W. B. Sutch, anatomising New Zealand living habits, seemed the perfection of ironical urbanity, an unaffectedly witty speaker, with something of the feel of a good tweed. By contrast, James Masterton's reading of Irene McKay's

charming tale, "The Threepenny Piece," revealed a rich Scottish voice, as friendly as a hearth-fire, as individual as a cairn. Marius Goring and Esme Percy discarded professional tricks in a joint reading of the beginning of Binyon's translation of the *Inferno*, so that Dante's beauty and terror and pity shone brightly through the English cloak. Maurice Duggan, that exceptionally gifted speaker, read his *Diary of a Voyage* with a word-pointing care that made the sentences sparkle like gems. I was struck this time, however, by something I had not noticed in his earlier broadcasts—what seemed like a conscious, if slight, echoing of Dylan Thomas in style and voice. Only the reader of the entertaining *Confessions of a Postwoman* disappointed me a shade, by a seeming unwillingness to surrender to the humanity of the script. But the patterns the radio voices wove this week for me were as interesting and as varied as those of a set of symphonies.

—J.C.R.

No Surprises Left

IT'S a sensible procedure to advertise a new documentary in advance, but not so sensible when the advertising quotes so extensively from the programme that there are no surprises left. That's what I felt happened to William Roff's report on Hungarian immigrants, *Distant Refuge*. I had heard Mr. Roff talking about it on 2YA's *Radio Digest* and I had read his article in *The Listener*, and was attracted to listen because it promised to give a more vivid impression of what this sudden translation to the other side of the world meant to these unfortunate people than I had gathered from any other source. And I believe it did; but I found that, although we heard the actual voices, it made almost no point that Mr. Roff had not already made in advertising it, so that I had a feeling of let-down and staleness. It was still a good programme, all the same, and I was glad it ended with a plea for understanding in the

(continued on next page)

The Week's Music... by SEBASTIAN

AGAIN the annual Prom season is under way; again we have a guest conductor to colour our fare with the stamp of his own personality; as in every year there is a nice juxtaposition of the serious and the frivolous; and as in every year, we are hearing a comprehensive selection of excerpts. I have nothing against excerpts personally, except that they are usually culled from the musically less worthy portions of larger works, but there is always an implied slight on the audience—perhaps they will be unable to appreciate the rest of the work. Surely there are plenty of short pieces available for the latter part of the programmes, when the audience is fidgety and needs variety above all, without mincing up goblets of suites. For the Tchaikovsky Serenade in C, for instance, to be represented only by the Waltz, is perhaps unfair to the rest of the piece; and even this snippet was somewhat raggedly cut.

We must be fair, though, and mention some of the very good music that has come out of the series so far (YC links). Francis Rosner gave an admirably virile reading of Haydn's C Major Violin Concerto, with deft surety of touch and only rare lapses of intona-

tion; and the temptation to make the slow section a smooth nonentity was resisted, to its great advantage. I was a little disappointed to hear the Schubert Fifth Symphony again, though the playing had improved over last year's effort; but there are other suitable symphonies without such obvious repetition.

One evening was devoted to the celebration of Elgar's birth centenary. A pompous (but circumstantial) opening led to the Sea Pictures, with Mary Pratt singing at her most suave; though rather overweighted at times by her accompaniment, she contrived deep solemnity and gentle whimsy with apparent ease. I liked it. The Enigma Variations were individually well played; it was difficult to judge the work as a whole, because there were lengthy pauses between the movements, while the speeds were a trifle variable even for Elgar; yet for the most part the music was given a restrained and scholarly rendering. Professor John Bishop, who is conducting on this tour, has a flexible style which perhaps baffled the Orchestra a little at first, but they have rallied and are now playing with confident precision. I think we can expect some first-rate concerts as the conducted tour proceeds.