Radio Review

JAZZ FOR SQUARES

A FEW more programmes like Leonard Bernstein's illustrated lecture on jazz *(Sunday Showcase)* and writers of indignant letters to *The Listener* on jazz band cacophonies will become things of an ignorant past. Mr Bernstein, himself an interesting composer, is the best kind of American speaker, witty, relaxed, cultivated, without a trace of that possibly unconscious note of patronising superiority I am not the only "colonial" to find galling in some BBC speakers. His exposition of blue notes, syncopation, improvisations and so on was just the kind of presentation to awaken the interest and enthusiasm of the indifferent or the prejudiced. It was tremendous fun to follow "Sweet Sue" through its various transformations; and what could be more calculated to throw a new light on the blues than the revelation that they are written in iambic pentameter couplets, and the shaping of "The Dunsinane Blues" from two lines in *Macbeth!* I hope that this delightful programme gets a good airing, for those most in need of its message are surely not serious musicians, but Hit Parade devotees, and those who call all "pops" music jazz.

Columbus Returns

A SECOND hearing of the NZBS production of Louis MacNeice's *Christopher Columbus* (1YC) increased, rather than lessened, my respect for this ambitious work and the excellence of Bernard Beeby's production. The second time round, I noticed many things which had escaped me a year ago—the beautifully controlled shape of the play, cast almost in epic form, with the ascent of interest to a climax in each part, the calculated dissonances of Walton's music, portraying both conflict and aspiration, and his haunting use of Gregorian chant, the subtle variations in the choral rhythms. William Austin's Columbus, a performance only a gifted and highly-experienced actor could have given, cancelled out the memory of the less rewarding parts he has played recently. And in the innumerable minor roles, hardly anyone put an accent wrong. After hearing this play, only a triple-dyed reactionary could assert that radio drama is not an art. *Christopher Columbus*, like *Moby Dick*, is a play the NZBS can revive every couple of years or so, in the confidence that it will not date. I have personally no qualms about hearing it again.

—J.C.R.

Cook's Tour

SOMEWHAT at a loss for entertainment last week, sick of music, tired of plays, I decided to make a Cook's Tour of speakers. Several were busy, and I called on them all. The first was Sir Douglas Copland, speaking in the series *What Price Freedom?* "Fair Shares for All" was the title of his talk, and the humanity of his sentiments was unexceptionable. He spoke warmly of the Technical Aid Programme of the United Nations, and of the Colombo Plan; he showed a large heart and a practical sympathy with the under-privileged and dispossessed. But as radio, his talk was crushingly, stupefyingly dull. When leading Commonwealth statesmen trumpet their calls to barbarism and down with the United Nations, the voice of reason and humanity must be more eloquent than this. What price freedom? Much dearer, I'm afraid, if it is to be possible. Next, to *Book Shop*, no vintage brew this week, with only Dr Angus Ross's lively account of Sir Arthur Bryant's *The Turn of the Tide* to command the torpid attention, and effectively extinguish Sir Beverley Baxter's syndicated article on the same subject; finally, to Andrew Shonfield for a talk in his series *Blueprint for Prosperity*, a melancholy title in view of the day's news. He called this talk "Making the Pace," and compared, in a relentless BBC accent the advantages of a despotic economy like the U.S.S.R. with the nervous and fluctuating West. I found it twaddle, stodgy padding, unreal and pointless word-spinning. So, except for Dr Ross, my Cook's Tour was scarcely a success. But I must mention a talk I heard last week and lacked space for: James Bertram's most moving tribute to A. R. D. Fairburn. Mr Bertram placed him as an artist with the precision we can expect, and concluded with a personal memoir which made his vivid personality sing in the minod.

—B.E.G.M.

No Fatal Results

IT'S a dangerous proceeding to try to bring a fantasy to life, of which truth the Emett railway at the Festival of Britain provided an almost allegorical instance. It was just too real—one day two of the trains collided and a passenger was killed. I listened to the Hoffnung Music Festival with some foreboding therefore, not expecting any such literally fatal result, but wondering what fancies might be killed. Few were—reality was kept firmly at bay. It would have been more fun to be there, of course. To hear the occasional drone of vacuum cleaners and floor polishers during Malcolm Arnold's "Grand, Grand Overture," was not as delirious as it must have been to see them, and I'd never believe Dennis Brain was really playing on a hosepipe unless I saw it. The roars of laughter

The Week's Music . . . by SEBASTIAN

A LITTLE debunking is good for all serious-minded artists and audiences, since no art can be free from its own particular cults of snobbery. Orchestras must get tired of their serried ranks of owl-like listeners who, after the concert become the high-toned critics and the vapid gushers. Thus it was with a keen anticipation that I listened to the Hoffnung Music Festival (YC link) presented in the Royal Festival Hall last year: Gerard Hoffnung being a musical debunker of the first water through the medium of his cartoons, with which most people are familiar.

I must confess I was rather disappointed, though had I been present at that fantastic performance I would have been rolling in the aisles with the rest of the audience. Much of the humour was too obviously visual, and there were too many unexplained guffaws which depended on stage "business" during apparently innocuous passages. To descend to detail, Dennis Brain's playing of the hosepipe was far too good to be very rib-tickling; and the setting of "Young Lochinvar" for readers and percussion was somewhat pawky humour, and could not have enthralled many tin-pan addicts. Malcolm Arnold's Grand Grand Overture was a perfectly formal piece in his high spirited manner, and its protracted close merely an extension (or explosion) of an idea Beethoven exploited over a century ago; while its barbaric instruments—vacuum cleaners and floor polisher—created hardly an auditory ripple on that vast orchestral sea.

On the credit side, Gordon Jacob's brilliant variations (for some outlandish wind instruments) on "Annie Laurie" were well worth hearing: and his inclusion of serpents lent to the work a sound as of ships that groan in the night. Superimpose a Lisztian Hungarian dance, and you may have some shocking idea of the effect. The Concerto to end Concertos was a howling success, its ingenious plan being that piano and orchestra consistently disagree as to which piece they are supposed to be playing, reaching no real decision: a first-class piece of aural wit. Finally, the Surprise Symphony left no tones unturned, no surprises untouched, from the wrong keys to the wrong instruments; had the rest been up to this standard I would have liked it all. As it was, however grateful we may be to Hoffnung and company, they have still much to learn from artists like Victor Borge and Anna Russell, who can make their music both amusing and clever without leaning heavily on the visual element.