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RADIO REVIEW

Memorable Performance

ONE reward of regular listening to NZBS plays is that occasionally one hears a really outstanding performance, which lifts the character above that pretty high level to which the NZBS regulars have accustomed us. For me, the playing of Linda Hastings as Mrs Sampson-Box, a tyrannical, self-centred magistrate, in Rex Frost's *Small Hotel* (YA link) was quite exceptional. The play, a pleasant enough light piece about the staff in an English country inn, did not seem promising material for striking acting; yet Linda Hastings made the dragon a substantial, believable and consistent person, uniting the comic and the pathetic, the touching and the farcical. Now and then, her voice reminded me of Edith Evans being incredulous about handbags, but the whole effect was completely individual. Hardly less successful was Roy Leywood, who also adapted the play for radio, as the Machiavelian waiter, a descendant of Shaw's William. These two played together with such verve and relish as to overshadow an exceptionally competent cast. On the stage, a first-rate performance may redeem a trivial play; in this case, I shall remember Mrs Sampson-Box after I have forgotten more substantial plays without her.

UN Whimsy

IN one respect, at least, UN Radio features avoid the pitfalls of most propaganda. They are never didactically solemn. And yet by using wit, fantasy and whimsy, they do manage to put across serious messages. *The Diplomat* (1YC) was thoroughly good entertainment, not just because it used the voices of Orson Welles, Michael Redgrave, Basil Rathbone and other notables, but because of its vivacity and spirited satire. We were conducted down the ages, from the days of Neanderthal man to the present, by Michael Redgrave as the "essential diplomat," and shown, in a series of slyly malicious scenes, the earlier conception of diplomacy as How to Put it Across the Other Fellow, Without Actually Losing Your Block. Out of this 1066 and *All That* phantasmagoria came solidly and convincingly the idea that conditions of modern life made integrity in international dealings essential, and render the Art of Diplomacy as obsolete as chain-mail. A touch of Goonery in some scenes, the training of medieval heralds, for instance, made this a delightfully unexpected feature. I wonder how many people, frozen off by the austere note "UN Programme" missed a programme that was as entertaining as it was meaningful.

—J.C.R.

The Dignity of the Crown

I MUST say how impressed I was with the talk by the late Sir Arthur Grimble, formerly Acting Resident Commissioner of the Gilbert Islands. He described a revolt by the Chinese working on Ocean Island. A Chinese prisoner had been viciously maltreated by one of the native police; the prisoner escaped and died five days later

of exposure. The entire Chinese labour force, 700 strong, went on strike, and it was up to Sir Arthur Grimble to make peace. How he did so made a fascinating talk. Sir Arthur was caught between his deep sympathy for the Chinese, whose lives were bitterly hard compared with his own, his acknowledgment of his own responsibility in the outrage, and his duty, as the Queen's representative, to preserve the dignity and authority of the Crown. His account, of how, inscrutably, the Chinese came to terms with him, was as vivid and evocative in its casual, touchingly weary manner, as George Orwell's famous *Shooting an Elephant*, and it induced the same warm respect for its author. Colonial administrators are an oft, somewhat excusably, maligned class. Sir Arthur Grimble shows that a powerful sympathy and exceptional insight are by no means incompatible with the responsibilities of his position.

Extravaganza

THE production by the Auckland studios of Eric Linklater's *Love in Albania* proved to be the most sophisticated offering we have had from the NZBS this year, though to judge from the presence of some of the players, the play was produced some 18 months ago. What this extravagant farce needs is relish and polish: Earle Rowell, the producer, and his skilful cast, gave it both. The plot exhibits the stock ingredients of farce, with characters rushing in and out of confined spaces on more or less amorous errands, but when one of them is an ulcerated poet who fought with the Partisans in Albania, when another is a dyspeptic civil servant, another a Scottish maid with a large and palpable scar on her thigh from her war service with an ack-ack battery, and when finally, a U.S. top sergeant arrives thirsting for the blood of the poet who, he is convinced, has killed his daughter in Albania, though he has not seen her since the age of

two, we are in an unusual area of *Terra farcicana*. Some of the play is very funny. I liked best the scene where the whole cast is in an air raid shelter; bombers scream overhead and drop their loads. The poet and the civil servant become friends through their ulcers, the top sergeant strokes the maid's wound, at once awed and rapacious about the immense possibilities of democracy, and the civil servant's wife plays her cello (execrably), to keep spiritual values alive in the midst of adversity. This is superb farce, and a superb comment on the English at war. But, despite the wit of the dialogue and the intelligence of the cast, the characters and situations were often too bizarre to be enveloping, and some were just silly—the alligator in the bath, for example. Still, I'd put up with a lot for that air-raid.

—B.E.G.M.

No Warts

IT is no doubt inevitable that the tribute to the work of Sir Truby King should be wholly adulatory, when it is tied to the Jubilee of the Plunket Society and to a fund-raising campaign. As such, *Tomorrow's Children*, was well done, giving a good impression of his personality and the great work he did. But it raised questions in my mind, and possibly in the minds of other listeners, which it would have been better to have faced. It stressed his belief that the application of his principles of child care would empty the mental hospitals. It ignored the obvious fact that this has not happened. Nor did it mention the possibility that a too strict adherence to some of his theories may have increased the risk of mental breakdowns. It did not question, that is, Truby King's wholly physical concept of health. I don't believe that the stature of a great man is at all diminished when the progress of his own science supersedes some of his conclusions. Only a person lacking any historical sense could suppose it to be so

The Week's Music . . . by SEBASTIAN

AS far as the broadcasting of Local Talent goes, the NZBS usually shows a good judgment, and we are rarely compelled to listen to poor musicians, at least, from the YC stations, though perhaps there is less discrimination as regards vocalists: one can seldom tell in advance whether a song recital is going to be a fugitive from the Festival Hall or from the village concert.

This week there have been two recitals of more than ordinary interest, both English and tuneful, and totally different in every other respect. There was a set of Dowland's last lute songs (*The Pilgrime's Solace*), accompanied by Malcolm Latchem's violin in lieu of viol, and Leslie Atkinson at the harpsichord, doing duty as lute. These were sung (2YC) by the contralto Alice Graham, and if you are not allergic to a little dolefulness in your music, they sounded very nice indeed. The vocal part is the main interest, naturally, but these songs have an independence of accompaniment remarkable for the period, and often the violin seemed to be singing an air of its own. All the songs are of the slow sad type, and particularly poignant is one called "From Silent Night," full of sweeping chromatic phrases and a more complex

form than the other plainer verse settings.

In contrast to these is Gerald Finzi's cycle, *Earth, Air and Rain*, which is a setting of Thomas Hardy's words for voice and piano. These short songs were given by Donald Munro, accompanied with sympathy by Doris Sheppard.

Finzi, probably best known for his cantata *Dies Natalis*, has a real flair in setting words, and unlike so many modern composers, can paint the lily without damaging its more fragile blooms. In this cycle the only sameness is that of style, linking such diverse elements as the buoyant "When I Set Out for Lyonesse" and the more folk-like "The Phantom." Donald Munro handled them energetically, and brought out most of their undoubted charms.

The Parrenin Quartet has continued to delight us, and they have showed themselves able to tackle Mozart and Haydn with delicacy and even humour. We also heard them (YC link) in the Lyric Suite by Alban Berg, whom most of us know mainly for his human approach to atonality. This Suite was no exception to his rule, and contained some very lovely passages. I do admire this group's attempts at educating us.

N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 31, 1957.

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