

BYZANTINE

FREDERICK PAGE'S introductory talk in honour of Stravinsky's 75th birthday was a model of what such things should be, the personal statement of one deeply involved in the work of this most elusive and enigmatic of modern composers. Mr Page does not find Stravinsky's celebrated and notorious dryness intimidating though, as he points out, Stravinsky has not always acted up to his declared principles of classical coldness, and in works like *Symphony of Psalms* and *Apollon Musagètes*, a vein of deep feeling is uncovered. There is a majesty about the man, in his absolute refusal to compromise, in his scorn of dim-witted critics (which recalls the celebrated saw of Sibelius: "Look hard; where will you find a statue of a critic?"), and his resolute pursuit of the musical images to which he has been drawn. To those nurtured in the lush German and Italian idioms, Stravinsky's Byzantine austerity is at first chilling, but his dry gaiety and sardonic humour and the strange piety of which one gets from time to time a glimpse, make him, if not lovable, then at least seizable and human. Mr Page's talk was followed by the opera *The Nightingale*, the Octet, and part of the *Histoire du Soldat*. Chosen from different periods, these works were fitting testimony to an enormous, many-sided talent.

Baroque

THE NZBS have embarked on a mammoth series on the life of Bach, with musical illustrations provided by North-West-German Radio. I heard last week the second episode, the Man of the Baroque Age. The purpose of the series is admirable; to effect a synthesis from the two ideas of Bach that are today current: first, the religious composer of imponderable weight, lying across music like a colossus, the Bach of the Mass in B Minor, and the *St Matthew Passion*; and second, the genial, small-scale

twiddler of the Brandenburg Concertos, the French and English suites, the Partitas, the Preludes and Fugues. What this episode suggested is that both aspects are covered by the term *baroque*, and it was stated many times that "Bach was a man of the Baroque Age," but what this meant in the life of the times was never made clear; the word *baroque*, as previously *gothic*, was first a term of abuse; why? Bach's colossal musical genius, at once worldly and deeply spiritual, did no doubt express the first half of the 18th century with unique clarity, but his relation to the intellectual world of his time, the transformation of architecture into drama, for example, I missed. But it is early days to carp; no doubt later episodes will be devoted to an exegesis of this nature. The recordings were splendid, at once rich and devout. All in all, this promises to be a memorable series.

—B.E.G.M.

Liberty! What Crimes . . .

I COULDN'T resist that heading, but I don't really grudge Adult Education their annual spree on *Question Mark*, when they discuss some vast topic in order to start hares to be followed up by discussion groups. It doesn't usually make for a wholly satisfactory radio discussion from the point of view of the listener who likes to know where he is by nine o'clock; though this year's considerations of liberty have been more selective and disciplined than some in the past. One panel seemed agreed that New Zealanders are too conformist. I



(C) Punch

should like to hear an advocate for conformity. It gets a bad press these days, but there may be a few things to be said for it. It would seem that human societies in which conformity is the rule are normal. Societies encouraging liberty are sports, rare, incomplete and short-lived. They may make enormous advances in many fields, but somewhat to the discomfort of many individuals deprived of direction. Societies in which people know what is expected of them and that they are expected to do nothing else may possibly produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number. That is at least an argument I should like to hear argued.

Beautiful Thoughts

HISTORY is so full of a number of things that it's hard to credit the mass people can make of telling stories from it for the ZB public. *You Are There* is over, but we still have *Their Finest Hour*. These half-hour biographies of famous Englishmen are written in so maudlin a fashion that I have squirmed through every episode I have heard. A few weeks ago Rupert Brooke showed his mother one of his first poems. "O, Rupert," said she, "I never knew you had such beautiful thoughts!" (Why does my mother never say such things to me? I have beautiful thoughts, too.) The YAs recently broadcast *The Plymouth Adventure*, a straightforward but intelligent BBC play of the voyage of the first Mayflower, timed to coincide with the arrival of the second, though that arrival had gone a bit sour by then. This kind of thing would admirably suit ZB requirements, I'd have thought. But anything so simple is apparently beyond the capacity of the Australian commercial studios from which most ZB stuff comes.

—R.D.McE.

Roadhouse Returns

LAST year's reports that *Radio Roadhouse* was to cease as Barry Linehan departed for pastures new have fortunately proved to be premature. The first show of the new series came with something of the familiar glow of expectation that a new season of *TIFH*

used to arouse. On the whole, the programme justified the widespread impression that *Radio Roadhouse* is the most acceptable and durable radio comedy feature ever dreamed up in this country. There were some weaknesses. I felt that one falsetto voice would have been more than enough, without three, that Barry Linehan sounded a trifle jaded, and with an American overtone I hadn't heard before, and that the timing wasn't always crisp. But these roughnesses, I am sure, will soon be smoothed away. The opening script showed advances over earlier ones—an integrating idea rather than a series of short bits, and more sharply realised characterisation. And the Dad and Hori interlude—for many, the gem of *RR*—was a real delight. The only thing that puzzles me is that the NZBS hasn't yet got round to the idea of a repeat weekly at a more comfortable time than late on Wednesdays.

Bouquet for the Orchestra

PERHAPS the National Orchestra, especially under James Robertson, has so slowly grown into the consciousness of the regular musical listener that we have come to take it for granted. Do we always, I wonder, realise just how good it is nowadays—equal, I dare assert, to most orchestras of its size in the Commonwealth? Do we recognise what gaps there would be if we could not hear the many concerts, the studio recitals and the sustainment given to opera and oratorio? Listening the other night to a Christchurch concert, with Spivakovsky playing Liszt with the Orchestra, and the Orchestra alone in Delius, Rossini and Strauss, and enjoying every minute, I felt moved, as one sometimes is obscurely, to a burst of affection for the Orchestra and all its works. A banal thought, perhaps, and banally expressed. But these things do often go by default. The concert-hall atmosphere, the shuffling and scuffling, the dim cough, the announcer's comments, the engaging explanations of the conductor—these give the Orchestra's concerts a tangibility and a personality, which it is possible to feel genuinely attached to.

—J.C.R.

The Week's Music . . . by SEBASTIAN

ONE of the most exciting of local musical events for a long time was heard last week, when Verdi's *Requiem Mass* was broadcast from Wellington (YC link). The music itself is exciting, of course, with its dramatic methods of interpreting religious words, and its almost operatic possibilities in the emotive field, with continually changing moods and colours; but the performance was exciting, too, for it brought together the best in the country in orchestra, choir and soloists, all of whom have exacting parts to tax their musicianship and stamina. The Christchurch Harmonic Society and the National Orchestra combined their tones to perfection, especially in the massive effects that Verdi loved so much, and in which much of the power of this work rests.

The soloists were well chosen for their roles, as was shown by their blend in quartet sections no less than their complete individuality in their solos. The visiting English tenor Richard Lewis was outstanding, not only in his beautifully sung solo work, but in combination with the others, who most commendably made the necessary effort to match his work. The soprano was Vincente Major, whose brilliant upper register and intensity of feeling carried

the most difficult parts by storm rather than by technique, while her most worthwhile singing was in the final section, the *Libera Me*. Mona Ross, recently back from overseas, was in very good voice in the mezzo part, while Laszlo Rogatsy produced his most impressive bass and invested his reading with a satisfying dignity of delivery.

This large musical machinery was controlled with nice judgment by James Robertson, who always seems more assured when he is faced with a difficult piece and multiple forces; and the result in this case was fine music finely performed.

Richard Lewis has also been heard with the National Orchestra strings (YC link), singing Britten's imaginative cycle *Les Illuminations*, a set of fantastic descriptive pieces, very highly coloured and charming. In this his voice sounded in its right setting, and he summoned up all his finesse to make the pungent points of the musical pictures. Particularly telling was the quiet number "Being Beauteous," with its play of light tones; and the whole was pointed by the strings with a positively Gallic accuracy. It's rare in any country to hear a concert tenor of Mr Lewis's quality, and if we can hear less familiar works of this calibre as well, we should be duly grateful for his visit.