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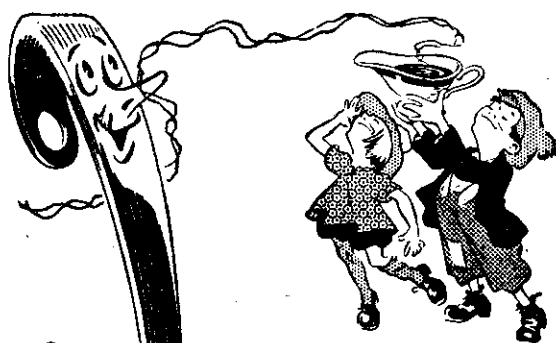
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RADIO REVIEW

The Dead Poet

THERE is an advantage to a poet in being dead. His friends tell all; he becomes immensely interesting. This is the advantage Dylan Thomas has over his contemporaries, though it seems unlikely that any of them is building up such extravagant memories as he did. And it isn't irrelevant to a poet's work to know what kind of man he is: it illuminates places which remain dark so long as he is alive and unknown. So when Thomas's turn came on Wednesday poetry readings, after a couple of weeks when Judith Anderson made Edna St Vincent Millay sound remarkably trite (I don't know if she really is), that marvellous voice, and the talk there has been about him, were enough to make one sit up and take notice. He began with remarks on poetry in his best radio-script style, a richness of words. And then three of his poems. I have a lazy preference for poems I can grasp, and much of Thomas I find ungraspable. I enjoy the roll of words, the pictures they make; but of what the pictures make I can often see only in a glass darkly. Yet this reflection is exciting enough to drive me back to the poems and to make me decide that the voice, *Milk Wood*, the journalism, the legend and John Malcolm Brinnin are nothing to this. And that is how the reading left me.

Moral for Critics

PERHAPS the BBC Gilbert and Sullivan is not quite as good as we thought it ten years ago. There are bits of business which might not have been radio clichés then but are now, like the gushing voices *adoring* Sir Arthur. But unlike most of the imitations, it really does give some insight into its subjects. Or at least into Sullivan. The new version suffers from the loss of Cecil Truncer: the new Gilbert has not so far managed to infuse any nuances of

feeling into the military manner. But Sullivan is always more interesting. His drama comes in two ways: the fact that so many of his sparkling tunes were written while he was in dire pain; and his guilt that he, expected by the Queen and all other solemn people to uplift British music, should waste his talent with theatrical frivolities. And the irony is that the frivolities only are remembered, and that because the discipline of restraining his music so that Gilbert's words could be heard, which so frustrated him, kept away the turgid sounds he was apt to produce otherwise. There may be a moral in this, especially for critics. It is not given to everyone to play Hamlet, and some would be better not to try.

—R.D.McE.

The Lost Axlepin

LEOS JANACEK'S *Diary of a Man Who Vanished* is one of those works for whose rare performance one must be grateful, and having heard it finely performed last week by Richard Lewis, Mona Ross, three anonymous ladies and Maurice Till, piano, one's gratitude should mount and mount. But I cannot say that gratitude was uppermost in me when the work ended with a tenor salvo and the solemn plunking of tonic chords in various inversions: bafflement would be nearer. No doubt, in its original tongue, the *Diary* has considerable earthy force; in English, fitted arbitrarily, as all translated libretti must be, to the music, the text has a repellant, glutinous coyness, that I can liken only to George Borrow strained through Thomas Hardy. Further, the text is studded with unfortunate imagery that offers splendid opportunities to those of a bawdy or irreverent turn of mind. And finally, the ploughboy and his tawny Gypsy bride ("God all powerful, God eternal, why create the gypsy race?" she might well ask, after this) are such mooning asses that I could not treat their very commonplace situation with any respect whatever. With these feelings in mind, it would be unwise

(continued on next page)

The Week's Music . . . by SEBASTIAN

WHETHER they find it more rewarding financially or musically, many overseas artists are making return visits to us this year, and on the whole we are being supplied with all varieties of performer in the good to excellent range of quality.

Latest comeback was staged by the Australian violinist Ronald Woodcock, who has been heard in some interesting solo recitals and with the Alex Lindsay Strings (YC links). With the latter group he played a G Minor Concerto of Vivaldi which was one of the most effective I have heard: an angry first movement full of aggressive glissandi, a sweetly antiphonal slow section, and a jerkily cogent finale combining the characteristics of the other movements, with the violin being alternately singing and brilliant. This came off very well indeed, and the solo tone seemed to change with the moods, edgy or smooth as the occasion arose. Just as unusual was the Bach G Minor Concerto, known better to most of us as that in F minor for clavier. This version made it perfectly clear which instrument was intended originally; that which on the keyboard is rather bare and unenterprising becomes, on the bowed instrument, a magnificent study in full sonori-

ties not unmixed with humour—as in the echo effects, whose next appearances one can somehow never predict. The "ariso" that forms the slow movement was particularly lovely, and again particularly suited to the violin. Let this be a lesson to any super-purists who decry any form of transcription in Bach.

The National Orchestra continues its subscription concerts, working southerly (YC links) and perhaps tiring a little. Seldom heard is the Third Symphony of Schubert, one that might justify the epithet "pretty" were it not for boisterous touches that take it into the realm of full-blooded music. The slow movement especially was well done, the wood wind decided to remain in tune, and the whole sounded perfectly happy.

With Jascha Spivakovsky a Burlesca of Richard Strauss was played, an unpretentious piece but a pleasant one, which in this performance seemed a trifle uncertain. As for Liszt's Hungarian Fantasia, I can only say that this was one of the worst things I have yet heard perpetrated in a public concert: the pianist's tempi were unjust, his notes imperfect, and the Orchestra shared in this confusion of sound to the exclusion of sense. I conclude that either the wildly applauding audience was hallucinated, or I was.

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 12, 1957.