



DESIGN FOR MUSIC

Sir,—It would seem that Mr Patience has quoted my article out of context. I did state that the musicians were making controlled sounds—namely, music, not just sounds either within or without the category of noise. Does not music consist of sounds of organised or controlled relationship?

I am sure Mr Patience will agree that one must be at times implicit rather than explicit, when the subject of auditorium acoustics is condensed into some 1600 words. It would have been interesting, had space permitted, to discuss the resonance theory as applied to the basilar membrane of the inner ear, where mechanics and physics cease and the miracle of hearing begins. But then, Sir, had I done so, my head by now might have lain beside some authoritative chopping block, instead of taking your correspondent to task for splitting hairs over a definition.

I am not favourably disposed to the multi-purpose concert hall. The location and density of our population, in some localities at least, demands that our flat floored, general purpose auditoriums must serve, for the time being, as concert halls. However, a flat floor can be planned in two or three levels or steps, and still satisfy functional requirements and give improved sight lines. Good sight lines are good sound lines in terms of direct sound only. It is the overall acoustical design which determines the quality of music we hear, namely, the direct sound plus the reflected reinforcement; and this, dependent on the ability of the designer, may result in good, bad or indifferent acoustics.

I fully endorse Mr Patience's suggestion that a number of good concert halls are essential. In New Zealand, where good music and theatre are appreciated, it is surprising to say the least, that as yet no active movement has arisen or no authoritative lead been given towards the establishment of such cultural facilities.

Perhaps some day authoritative steps will be taken, and the same legislative facilities afforded to the arts as have been accorded horse racing and betting in the past. Pleasure is our oldest and rarest heritage, and given the proper environment it is the very basis of our cultural development.

R. GILLESPIE MELDRUM
(Wellington).

Sir,—It is clear from the trend of Mr. Meldrum's article that in designing a hall for both concert and dramatic performance, the emphasis was placed on music. The result is that [the Lower Hutt Town Hall's] suitability for theatrical productions is now limited, as we found when we staged Extravaganza there.

The flexible proscenium arch was of no practical value, and had to be used closed to its narrowest limit. We would have preferred, in order to use more stage, to have extended the sliding doors, but found that by doing so the mechanics of the stage became visible to the audience, as did the cast proceeding to the rehearsal-room, so called, which had to be used as a dressing

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

room. The possible advantage of the flexible proscenium wall is offset by the fact that the "side splays" (solid wooden wings, made of 4in. by 2in. timber, and covered with 3-ply, bolted to the floor) are not equally mobile.

No theatrical performance can be satisfactorily staged while these side splays remain in position. Not only is it difficult to move properties and scenery on to the stage, but also access for the players is restricted. The diffuser reflector presents the same drawbacks, and with the side splays forms a continuous barrier to access to the rear of the acting area.

Mr Meldrum says all this can be easily removed, but we were informed that this would take a team of men at least three hours and that it would involve structural damage.

Because a large rehearsal room has been placed immediately above the stage it is not possible to fly any backdrops or elaborate scenery of any sort. This is a major defect in a theatre which, because of its size, can only house the larger and more spectacular type of production. The simpler staging of intimate drama is catered for by the Lower Hutt Little Theatre, and would be lost in the vastness of the Town Hall.

The same difficulty besets the overhead lighting of the stage from the light battens. It is not possible to raise or lower these battens to any effective extent because of the limited space. As there is no means of masking these battens other than with the head reflectors, these reflectors must remain in position, thus effectively preventing the introduction of any further sources of light, traverse curtains or other stage effects, such as flying Peter Pan. The spot bar is so placed behind the tabs that it is visible to the audience, and if it is raised out of sight it becomes of little use. Thus the stage is inadequately lit. The five front of house spotlights (clearly an afterthought) do not reach the main acting area. Footlights have been installed but they are so placed as to cast unfortunate shadows which cannot be eliminated because of the absence of any other source of light.

Acoustically the actor finds the theatre a difficult one to play in. He is constantly under the impression that he is not making contact with his audience. As a result, actor and audience drift further apart.

Our experience was that, as a theatre, the Lower Hutt Town Hall was a disappointment. Every other city in New Zealand has a theatre capable of accommodating visiting professional theatre companies and amateur productions of opera and musical comedy. It is a pity that Lower Hutt will be unable to enjoy these attractions with the facilities as they are at present. Once again, through failure to seek expert theatrical advice, a vast sum of public money has been spent to build, not a multi, but a semi-purpose hall.

W. N. SHEAT and G. I. RICH
(Wellington).

NO ROOM FOR MR MICAWBER

Sir,—Shame on you! Churchill, Senator McCarthy, Dave Beck, Picasso, Dylan Thomas, L. D. Austin, Denis Glover, Nasser, Hitler and Mussolini rise up to confound you. My father-in-law, who looked like General Smuts and could hold the floor against all comers. People I have known who, when thwarted, smashed the furniture. Any gathering of yachtsmen or any kind of artists. The man we all know who has two wives, two homes, two families. My

milkman neighbour, who was also a poet. His name was Count Geoffrey Potocki de Montalk. The last I heard of him he was wandering London in sandals and toga. Admittedly this would look conspicuous in Christchurch, but Indian women living here wear saris. The list could go on indefinitely. Surely people are still, even in these days, intensely interesting.

Eloquence may mark the "character," but don't forget that loquacity grows with age. It is scarcely fair to expect it from Teddy Boys. It comes later, that is, if not side-tracked by the team spirit, psychiatry, and marriage guidance. All leading, of course, to your dismal prophecy of "case-histories" instead of "characters."

What hope then for gusto, colour, character, eloquence? Dare one say that that is the business of the artist, who naturally does, or should live, vigorously, to a far greater extent than you indicate? The characters of Dickens, Dostoevsky and Chekhov are still among us. What is needed is another Shakespeare, another Dickens to reveal them.

RUTH FRANCE (Christchurch).

(We doubt if Sir Winston Churchill, Senator McCarthy, Dave Beck, Picasso, Dylan Thomas, Nasser, Hitler and Mussolini are quite the sort of people to be described as "cards" or "characters." But we agree (and said so in the editorial) that the varieties of human character are infinite. What seems to be changing is our attitude towards the oddities—one reason, perhaps, why no new Dickens comes along to reveal them.—Ed.)

A PLAY FOR SOUTHLAND

Sir,—Following the correspondence in your columns under this title, I took the trouble to secure a copy of the prize-winning play, since I had something to do with the competition in its initial stages, and my opinion was sought as to framing the conditions.

Though I maintained from the beginning that one judge should not bear the complete responsibility, the committee stuck fast to leaving the decision, entirely to Mr Newman. It can only be lamented at this stage that the prize was awarded at all if *The Montgomeries* was the best offering. The play is an affront both to New Zealand writing and the theatre, and the judge has done no service to either in making his choice.

L. JOHNSON (Wellington).

Sir,—M.W. (Wellington) asks me to state the theme and the merits of *The Montgomeries of Glenholme*. The theme is simple and straightforward, not new but perfectly sound; that of people involved in the problems of adapting themselves to a new environment. I am sorry that time and space have to be wasted in telling someone who has read the play something so obvious. He finds the construction of the play laughable because the characters appear just when they are wanted. What does he mean? Can he name a play in which characters don't appear when they are wanted? Construction can be criticised if characters appear when they cannot reasonably be expected to be available to do so. If this is what is meant, I agree that it is a common fault, but it is not one that is to be found in *The Montgomeries*. The plot is thin, but it is absurd to say that there is no dramatic action: there is quite sufficient to carry the play and establish its merits which lie in its atmosphere, style, charm and quality. If some people do not appreciate these, it does not follow that they do not exist or are not valid.

The point of having a theatre person rather than an academic one as a judge

of plays is not that he is better at spotting a good play from a bad one, for nobody, dramatic critics included, ever agrees about this: it is that he is better able, as a rule, to tell from a script whether it will play well or not. If this is not to be considered important it would seem that, after all, the proper judges are professors and we must all return to the old-fashioned idea that plays are to be considered not as theatre material but on their merits as dramatic literature.

Since my previous letter I have learnt through your columns that Mr E. Martin Browne, as well as myself, placed *The Montgomeries of Glenholme* first in a country-wide playwriting competition. Mr Dunlop has said that it proved itself in performance at Invercargill. I saw this production and I agree with him. Clearly the play cannot be brushed aside in the scornful tones used by those who have written against it. If Mr Harcourt and M.W. can be in Christchurch between October 18-26 they will be able to see the play, after which I shall be delighted to continue the discussion with them—the criterion being not what a play looks like on paper but what it looks like on the stage.

FRANK NEWMAN (Christchurch).

THE DREAMING ISLANDS

Sir,—I hesitated to reply to Mr O'Brien's letter in the knowledge that your publication must avoid the political, but not to reply might be taken as an admission of agreement. I do not, however, propose herein to do more than dot the "i's" and cross the "t's."

The economic theory in which "a firm can charge whatever price it pleases for its products"—if anyone dare propound it—has no place in a free market with supply and demand as its basis. Like so many others Mr O'Brien has used the hoary legend of Canute to point the wrong moral. I shall not burden you by enunciating policy. I would not expect you to permit such an intrusion. However, if Mr O'Brien is anxious he has but to invite me to meet himself and his friends and there they can question in general and particular and I trust eventually benefit.

D. GOLDBLATT (Auckland).

WINTER SHEARING

Sir,—There are times when it is wiser for David to stay with his sheep than go forth to slug Goliath. After the amusing reading course prescribed for me by Mr Story (July 5)—some thousands of words of his and some hundreds of my own—I conclude that this is one of those times.

SUNDOWNER (Christchurch).

WASTE-PAPER BASKET

Sir,—Who is your waste-paper basket man, please? Will he take a bet with me that he can't keep it up for the rest of the year?

C. T. COOKE (Otorohanga).
(We suspect a poltergeist.—Ed.)

