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RADIO REVIEW

The Music Faced

CONGRATULATIONS to the NZBS for launching *Facing the Music* (YA Sunday afternoon link). The two programmes I have so far heard have been very pleasant listening indeed, as much for the ingenuity and variety of the questions put by chairman Peter Zwartz, as for the articulateness and far-reaching musical knowledge of the panel. The idea of having a guest-musician answer a question is a good one, even if it seems going to rather much trouble for a single answer. Last week we heard L. D. Austin, predictably disliking something, this time Chopin arranged for ballet, and the week before Alex Lindsay dealt less garrulously with another piece of identification. The four members, Margaret Campbell, Bruce Mason, Don McKenzie and Pat Macaskill, established themselves as individuals in the first session, with Professor McKenzie's somewhat falstafian personality nicely balancing that little touch of knowingness in the amazingly knowledgeable Bruce Mason. The programme is decidedly entertaining, and the panel gives that little extra satisfaction to the listener by missing one or two easier ones while hitting on some real toughies. The success of this session shows the wisdom of the NZBS in seeking a different pattern for a quiz-panel instead of heeding the, to my mind, ill-advised opportunities to mock up a kiwi imitation of *My Word*.

Late Night Bonus

I GET quite as much delight out of coming across a first-class unscheduled radio feature as of hitting upon a really good book by an unsung author. This is one of the bonuses for the well-behaved listener which add spice to listening, and make me not want every single radio item always specified in *The Listener*. Last Sunday night, at the end of the excellent Siobhan McKenna version of *Saint Joan*, in praise of which I can only echo words already uttered by another reviewer on this page, 12B gave us a most interesting, unscheduled talk by the celebrated musician, Dennis Matthews on Liszt's arrangements of Beethoven symphonies for piano, followed by a recording of Ronald Smith playing Liszt's version of the Fifth. Although, like *Saint Joan*, I shall probably be handed over to the secular arm for saying so, I found this piano arrangement a welcome change from the oh-so-often-heard orchestral version. What a musician Liszt was! His craftsmanship and real reverence for Beethoven, even if strangely expressed to modern taste, were evident in the whole work, and, if challenged as to why he had to make the arrangement, he could surely have replied in Shaw's words when asked why he had selected Joan as a subject: "To prevent someone worse doing it."

—J.C.R.

No Ivory Tower

A SPLENDID *Portrait from Life* (2YA) was the autobiographical reminiscences of Sir Ronald Syme, one of the most distinguished scholars to have graduated from New Zealand. For half an hour Sir Ronald managed to convince us of the rewarding life of a scholar and for a time ancient history became a lively, robust subject, demonstratively rooted as much in the present

as in the past. It was easy to accept that the speaker's own background as a British colonial had deepened his awareness and appreciation of the period of ancient history which is his own particular concern, the time of Tacitus when anybody who was anybody came from the colonies, and colonial was a term without a derogatory reflection. This form of portrait where the interviewer (here, Cherry Raymond) allows the subject as far as possible to draw his own picture can be very good, and this was one of the most satisfying that I have heard. Undertaken obviously with some misgivings, Sir Ronald's excursion into his own time past succeeded to a marked degree in reducing the gap between the average New Zealander and the scholar. Besides, it gave us an opportunity to meet a most pleasing personality as well as a distinguished native son.

Shakespeare Today

THE liveliness of Shakespearian study and practice today has been well illustrated in the BBC series *The Living Shakespeare* (2YC). The final of these in which Bonamy Dobree spoke of the last plays and John Gielgud, with Dorothy Tutin and members of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company, read short scenes, was the more interesting to me since *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* are among those I know least. Producers John Allen and Robert Gittings have finely blended a mixture of comment and quotation throughout the whole series, and the choice of speakers has consistently reached a very high standard. To those who would listen, *The Living Shakespeare* has offered a stimulating reassessment of Shakespeare today; and though the approach has necessarily been scholarly it has never been in the least dry-as-dust. And the reading of the scenes, especially some passages by John Gielgud, has fired enthusiasm for the plays and for a personal look again at several of them. It seems a pity that these talks should not survive in a more permanent form as a contribution to Shakespearian study for students here and elsewhere. Their particular style of presentation has much to commend it.

—N.L.M.

Morning Miscellany

I CAN imagine few programmes more beguiling than the 2YA Women's Hour, at present so ably conducted by Claire Mazengarb. I tuned in the other day to hear Russell Reid and Nola Millar ably expatiating on their year's work on this session, summing up the value to listeners of their many discussions. Are drama schools of value? To some they conclude, not for others. What is stage technique? Russell Reid thinks it applies mostly backstage, Miss Millar insists that for actors it is only a means to develop and extend the area of the imagination. She asks for an imaginative response to what actors find in the script. What a great deal these two amiable sparring partners have contributed to this session and to thought on the theatre all over the country over the last year! But there is more. This discussion was followed by the wholly admirable talk by Owen Jensen in his series *The Pleasures of Music*. Mr Jensen, as I have remarked before, has a unique gift for placing musical issues before listeners in a manner which relates it wholly to life. The session was concluded by Miss Mazengarb herself,

(continued on next page)



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