

The Week's Music... by GRAHAM PATON

INTERNATIONAL music festivals do not always promote joy; sometimes, as in the case of the 1959 Prague Spring Festival from which we heard a recording (2YC, October 19), they may even bring about distress. What was so joy-dampening on this occasion was a work by Prokofiev—the fifth piano concerto. The impression it left was distinctly dismal. Many of us, from such works as the Classical Symphony, the third piano concerto, the D major violin concerto, have observed the delightful scope of Prokofiev's talents: the sharp intelligence behind the concise manner, the wit that can bite like acid, his gay inventiveness, and that especial precision with which he applies hard, bright colours to the orchestra—a musical personality, you might think, just a bit like Gogol's in its flair for satiric observation and spiritedness, yet not without heart. Thus it is puzzling to try and account for the descent of such a composer into the banalities of the fifth concerto. What was once wit has weakened to an almost crass humour (the march-rhythm of the second movement), harmony is stale, much of the soloist's part sounds like fast and empty-headed prattle, and the

general feeling of the concerto is one of enervation. Despite Prokofiev's assurance when he began the work that he "had melodies enough for three concertos" it would be hard to single out any one of those used as either memorable or useful. It is also astonishing that the usual "finger-prints" of the composer's style are reduced to such a shadowy imprint. The question comes: how is a decidedly formed musical character with its own specific qualities able to relax into a performance which implies so little of its own intrinsic nature? Of course the creative impulse can not be turned on like a sluice. Obviously a composer must have misgivings about some of his brain-children. But in all of them the parentage at least should be unmistakable. With Prokofiev's fifth concerto the disturbing thing is that the artist has passed a work which, as far as one can see, is outside the line of his development, which pays scant heed to the values implicit in his body of work, and which, in the context of his career, appears as the most inexplicable aberration. Talent enfeebled to the point where confusion of identity sets in: a slight case of Hyde to Dr Jekyll.

(continued from previous page)

who read a fascinating talk on Mauritianus. If this is the fare designed to ease the morning chores, it is doing its job, and then some.

The Gifted Child

PROFESSOR J. L. Mackie, formerly Professor of Philosophy in the University of Otago, and now occupying a similar position at Sydney University, makes a strong case against the Education Department in his talk "The Waste of Talent" recently rebroadcast from 2YC. He castigates the Department for laziness and an invincible mediocrity of approach to the exceptionally gifted child, who is, largely speaking, promoted by age rather than talent. But what, it seems to me Professor Mackie ignores is

the whole question of state secular education. The state does not purport, nor cannot, to give an all-embracing view of the universa within which the talented and the less talented will find their place. Athletics, and let us say, music and science, are self-subsisting universes, in which it is taken for granted the research of the gifted individual is vital. But citizenship? What does the state want? Surely, the well-adjusted, safe person who will not kick against the pricks. In this World, the gifted outsider is a problem, and the State is wise to regard him as such. The defects Professor Mackie notes are those of State secular education, and his diatribe against the Education Department seems to me beside the point.

—B.E.G.M.

The Changing Face of Asia

LISTENERS who heard the thought-provoking series of talks *An Englishman in China*, which was broadcast on National link last spring (and later printed in these pages) will want to follow Felix Greene's further travels in a new series that starts from all YA stations this Friday (November 6), at 9.45 p.m.

These talks, which were specially commissioned by the NZBS, are a series of up-to-the-minute reports on the Asian scene; a balanced assessment by an observant reporter of the various factors—political, social, economic—that are operating in each of the countries he has recently visited, and of the effect of these forces on the people.

The opening talk is on Russia, a country that Felix Greene last visited in 1933. Things were bad then, he says, and the Russians did not welcome visitors. Now, however, like the breadshops and other signs of poverty of those days, secrecy and suspicion are past history. No longer is the traveller conscious of the silent companion fifty yards behind; the shops are full of goods, and the streets full of cars.

He was left, says Felix Greene, with "an overpowering impression of how

alike Russia and America are." Both believe that happiness is to be obtained in material things, and the great Russian dream of thirty years ago, "that they were building a new Heaven and a new earth," has "dwindled into a trivial obsession with mechanical gadgets."

Other reports to be heard in this series are on Afghanistan, India, Singapore and Indonesia. There may be two additional talks heard later, but details of these are not yet to hand. YZ stations will also take the series, 1YZ starting it on November 9, and 2YZ, 3YZ and 4YZ on November 12.

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