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RADIO REVIEW

Adventure and Experiment

THIS year's radio could or should be interesting. Will, we wonder, the face of broadcasting suffer any sort of change now that we have a new Minister, a new Director and a new Assistant Director?

Will politics be allowed to rear its ugly but interesting head more than it has done in the past? Will the touchiness regarding controversial subjects of any kind be replaced by some sort of latitude? Will the rather ladylike refinement which permeates much of the YA programmes continue to be countered by the blasts of hot air which come periodically from the Commercials? Could some of the intrinsic liveliness and gusto of the ZB's be used with more discrimination?

Could the whole of the enormous, complicated and confusing problem of broadcasting be approached in a way less gingerly, less touching-it-with-the-tip-of-a-finger in case it goes off, and instead be grasped firmly, nettles and all? Will the voice of the shocked and vociferous "Interested Listener" who complains about a certain song or programme be listened to over and above the murmurings of those who quite enjoyed it? Will programmes from the BBC continue to be treated with reverence just because they come from the BBC? And will, or can, the whole panorama of broadcasting in New Zealand take on the aura of a more indigenous product, or will importations still make it too much of a hybrid?

This last, of course, is not easy, as demands for original scripts and talents far outrun supply. Our reserve of active and effective artists in all fields is too limited; but the limits could be widened. Art for Art's sake does not often pay the grocer's bill.

The above was written before the statements of the Hon. F. W. Doidge, the new Minister in Charge of Broadcasting, appeared in *The Listener*. Mr. Doidge says, "My hope is that the New Zealand Broadcasting Service will adventure and experiment freely and boldly. We shall make mistakes and arouse controversy."

This, for my money, is the line to take. Will this mean the attainment of the very thing I have been pleading for—an indigenous "feel" about our broadcasting programmes. To "experiment freely and boldly" is, naturally, to invite mistakes and controversy. But it is also, surely, the first move towards building up an organisation which has a personality, character and imagination of its own.

The man who walks tidily on the footpath all his life is no doubt a worthy citizen, but we all pass him by in a crowd. The man who steps into the middle of the traffic waving a flag and blowing a whistle may give the wrong signals every now and again, but we cannot help watching him and admiring his—now what's the right word—would it be *panache*?

—Sycorax

Work of Art

THE value of Owen Jensen's preview of the week's music was brought home to me recently when, as a direct result of his recommendation of Gerald Finzi's *Dies Natalis*, I listened to it a couple of days later from 1YA. I had not heard of Finzi before, and but for Mr. Jensen's comments would have overlooked his cantata in the programmes, and so missed a magnificent experience. This beautiful work, performed by Joan Cross and the Boyd Neel Orchestra, is a setting of Thomas Traherne's mystical poems of childhood, one of the most exquisite weddings of text and music I have ever heard. The mood of ecstasy and mystical vision is sustained throughout the whole cantata, making it a finished work of art, controlled, sensitive, imaginative. This, I think, is a piece which needed some introductory explanation to help those not fortunate enough to have heard Mr. Jensen's broadcast. As it was, the work was presented naked, and because of over-tight programming, the time-signal broke in almost on the last word of the very lovely setting of "The Salutation," leaving me in doubt as to how the music really does end.

Plays and Pantomime

CHRISTMAS week brought its inevitable crop of Scrooges and Dickensian readings—good, solid stuff which I personally would unwillingly forgo. This time, however, the period was noteworthy for a group of new and interesting plays. I was particularly impressed by John Gundry's *Quietly History Enters*, neatly produced by the NZBS. John Gundry is, in my view, the most versatile, thoughtful, expert and satisfying radio dramatist we possess. Although this play was not one of his best and the manner suggested the influence of Dorothy Sayers, it was admirably suited to radio, sincere and moving. D. G. Bridson's *The Christmas Child* was remarkable for the achieving of colloquial fluency in formal quatrains and couplets and for the appearance of Wilfred Pickles in a well-played straight part. I found the dream sequence here artificial and too much in the hectoring Corwin style. A special delight was 12B's pantomime, *Cinderella*, a traditional frolic, crisp, gay, nostalgic, music-hally, featuring a host of familiar local players in unfamiliar roles. The only disappointment was the pretentious *Five Wishes for Christmas*, which used about 20 of Arthur Rank's most capable actors in one of the most banal and vacuous stories ever produced for radio.

—J.C.R.

Christmas Fare

SHOULD the critical faculty, I wonder, be given a day off in a time of general goodwill and tolerance such as Christmas Day? Perhaps Station 4YA was counting on this when they introduced such a weak concoction as the BBC play *The Skeleton Key* into their Christmas programmes. Or possibly the time chosen, two o'clock on Christmas afternoon, is significant. However, all

(continued on next page)

N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 13, 1950.