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Letters from Listeners

(Continued from page 5)

MUSICAL EXTREMISTS

Sir,—L. D. Austin's letter is splendid. When Mendelssohn wrote his "Midsummer Night's Dream" overture, his mind must have been lit up by what we call "genius," which no one lacking that gift can command, no matter how hard they try. Modern extremist music needs none. Anyone who takes the trouble to write the number of notes on music paper (watching clefs and instrumental range) could do it as well as anyone; they could not do it worse. It is not music: it needs a different noun.

There is more. The richest era of beautiful music corresponded roughly with the great evangelical revival of last century. Something of the purity, sanity, and sweetness which the Gospel inculcates breathed in the world's atmosphere; and I venture to say that it (generally speaking) influenced the noblest in art. Now the evangel is being shut out; something else is taking its place; something sinister and ugly; and it is influencing (generally speaking) "modern art."

Someone has drawn attention to "modernist" pictures as manifesting some definite psychological principles of "black magic." Some of Picasso's work is wonderfully like Australian aboriginal "gods" recently discovered. Some sculptures exhibited last year in Glasgow are definitely akin to certain heathen "gods," of sinister aspect. The upsurge of jazz this century (wherever it started) brings into civilisation the music of the African jungle, where its accompaniments are unspeakable. And I venture the opinion that the modern musical atrocities of ugliness have drawn their "inspiration" (whether consciously or not), from some source the very opposite of the Gospel; from some influence from the nether regions. They should be sent back there.

SCHUBERT-FAN (Auckland)

Sir,—It seems to me that the musical watchword of L. D. Austin, who so nonchalantly dismisses "Shostakovich and Co.," is "Nothing new, nothing new. Nothing later than Brahms!" and that he apparently includes in the "and Co." such composers as Ravel, Stravinsky, Bloch, Britten, Prokofiev, Hindemith—to name only a few. He quotes "H.J.F." as saying "Beethoven, Wagner and others were incomprehensible to many in their day," and then defines the "many" as being the musically illiterate. This is true enough, but the "many" also includes that group with which adventurous creative artists of every age have to contend—the Philistines, people whose watchword is "Nothing new, nothing new," people who accused Whistler of throwing a pot of paint in the public's face, who thought James Joyce a mad trickster and Rimbaud an idiot. Alas, one cannot do much about Philistines; they are armoured-plated. But I'm certain "Shostakovich and Co." don't care a fig for the musically illiterate or, for that matter, for L. D. Austin and Co.

ELDON F. KAYE (Wanganui).

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT
"Old Timer," Wellington.—Have passed on your suggestions.

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