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RADIO REVIEW

Douglas Lilburn's Symphony

MAY 12, 1951, was an important day in New Zealand radio listening: Douglas Lilburn's first symphony was given its first performance and its first broadcast. The performance was, very suitably, by the National Orchestra under Michael Bowles: the broadcast was by 2YC. I wished that it had been broadcast by a network of stations, so that the greatest possible number of wishful listeners could have heard it. At this moment of typing, after one hearing, I do not know—and I cannot believe that any other one-performance listener knows—much about this symphony; but I am sure it should have had the widest possible audience. If A or B or C was unable to hear the performance because 2YC would not come through, then all was far from well; of course, this was so, and all was far from well—and the only possible recompense, for A and B and C and many others, is a series of repetitions of the broadcast of May 12. This suggests, of course, that a recording was made, and that that recording can be sent round the country to the various stations for repeated playing. Now, I suppose, I shall be told that the performance was not recorded; then I wish it had been. For how long is it going to be now before I, for one, have the chance to hear this symphony again? And if I do not hear it again soon, and again and again soon after that, what possible hope have I of knowing anything about it, apart from the apparent facts that it has three movements and takes approximately thirty minutes to play—and, of course, that I listened to it with fervid interest and wait impatiently to listen to it again.

The days after the concert found the music critics ready to talk and to write about this symphony in the kind of language that has been used for hundreds of years about other arts—literature or sculpture, or painting. It is not found satisfactory or profitable to talk very widely or to write about symphonies in the strict language of music, for the very simple and final reason that few can understand this language. And how insufficient that language is, even for the few who can understand it: so the critics borrow and re-borrow from the other arts and thus do less and less to encourage the non-music-practising public towards a developing appreciation and knowledge of music.

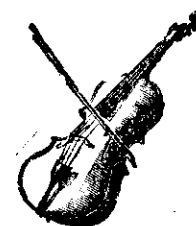
So I believe the musically unskilled radio listeners are now, and are likely to remain, in some degree deaf to "live" as opposed to recorded music in a way that art gallery visitors who have never touched a brush need not remain blind to paintings. Repetition of broadcasts is the first step towards a cure—but scarcely anyone will have the courage to suggest that the National Orchestra should play Douglas Lilburn's symphony several times from the studio: such a thing is done only rarely in the BBC Third Programme. Even one repetition, especially if clear annotations had been

appeared first in *The Listener*, would do much to make Douglas Lilburn's symphony clearer than it can possibly be from that one tantalising hearing on May 12.

—J.E.B.

'Cello

WHEN the Australian Musica Viva players were lately in New Zealand we were very much impressed with the power and authority of their 'cellist, Theo Salzman. Mr. Salzman has now been again here, this time playing solos. I heard a number of his broadcasts, and the public performance with the National Orchestra of the Dvorak 'Cello Concerto, and I am more and more enthralled with his playing. The concerto was a magnificent piece of work. It is to my mind one of Dvorak's very finest compositions, one in which his inspiration does not flag. Mr. Salzman's playing was most exciting; he gave the first and third movements an abundance of dash and fire, while in the slow movement, and in the magical page



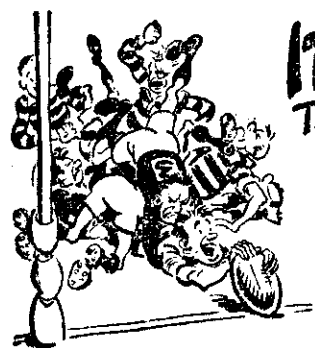
where, just before the close of the finale, Dvorak relaxes into calm contentment, his beautiful tone floated over the orchestra. The latter played excellently, though tempos in the last movement were not always in agreement with the soloist. The most notable items in Mr. Salzman's studio broadcasts were perhaps the Bach unaccompanied sonatas, always a test of a 'cellist. Not only does the music need a master to handle it but most listeners know the Casals' recordings, one of the finest sets of records ever produced. Mr. Salzman was at his best in them, for his variety of tone and treatment, as well as his more than adequate technique, allowed the music itself to appear through the notes—which happens only when these sonatas are handled by a musician.

—D.M.

Semi-detached

I SAT down to listen to *A Winter's Tale* in a mood of pleasurable anticipation, tempered by slight regret that I had not been able to hear Mrs. Sullivan's introduction. But after all I was tolerably familiar with the play—had we not done scenes from it for the School Concert?—and I was quite prepared to sit through three acts of Leontes (whom I have always regarded as an impossible and improbable character) for the sake of Perdita, Florizel and the happy ending later on. However I had reckoned without Shakespeare's ability as a dramatist and the BBC's technical resources. Given a Hermione who exudes warmth and charm as does Phyllis Neilson-Terry then Leontes' jealousy, hard to anchor in cold print, becomes possible if reprehensible. For all that, I managed to preserve something of my Habitual Listener's detachment till the trial scene, when my regard for the niceties of probability was well and truly buried

N.Z. LISTENER, JUNE 1, 1951.



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