

LANZA AND CARUSO

Sir,—In the interesting but rather pointless Lanza v. Caruso debate at present in progress, I feel that there are several facts of the utmost importance which have escaped the attention of the seemingly one-eyed admirers of Lanza or Caruso who have thus far expressed themselves in print. Firstly, Lanza is definitely (as yet) not as good as Caruso—on the admission of Lanza himself. He was not Caruso's polish and control, but with training this will doubtless come when his voice reaches maturity within the next half dozen or so years. His musical taste is unsettled, with the result that his singing, though powerful and moving, reeks with emotional "Caruso" sobs, and throbs with music hall passion.

To balance the ledger, on the credit side we have the fact that at Lanza's age, Caruso cracked on high B-flat. Lanza sings the D-flat above high C with easy abandon—a fact which is not to be lightly shrugged off, considering that the Metropolitan Opera's Jussi Bjorling is the only other present-day tenor who can duplicate this feat. And for natural quality and technical brilliance Lanza's is a voice that many critics rank with the titans of Opera.

Meanwhile, as the Lanza-Caruso admirers range themselves in opposing factions, it is to be hoped that the erstwhile fans of Kullmah, Schipa (who, incidentally, has told Lanza, "You have the greatest given voice ever heard in a young man"), Gigli, Schmidt, and the rest will retire gracefully from the field in deference to the opinion of the late Dr. Serge Koussevitzky, who said of Lanza, "There is no doubt of it. This is the greatest natural tenor since Caruso."

VESTI LA GIUBBA (Dunedin).

Sir,—I for one am proud of "Grateful to America" for daring to prefer Lanza's untrained but beautiful voice to the more polished, experienced voices of Caruso, Gigli, etc.

Perhaps the anti-Lanza correspondents have not bothered to hear Lanza record Opera. I certainly advise them to listen to a few of his recordings from *Aida*, *Tosca*, *Rigoletto*, and other works before hastening to condemn him.

Certainly, it is rather foolish to compare the voices of Caruso and Lanza. Caruso at 30 had a weak but pleasant tenor voice—and after years of study and concert work. It was not until he reached middle age that his voice matured and became true and fine. Lanza at 30 has a powerful, rich and truly expressive voice—and—with very little training.

It is unfortunate that he sings modern songs, but we hear he is soon to sing at the Metropolitan Opera House, which, of course, will be the test as far as opera lovers are concerned.

W. S. FLINT (Wellington).

Sir,—While on a recent trip around the world, I had the great pleasure of hearing and seeing some of the tenors mentioned in recent letters to you. One gets a much better idea of the quality that a voice possesses when hearing it "in the raw," as compared with the finished result that flows from our radios.

I heard Gigli in Milan, and although now at the age of 60 his great power is somewhat decreased, the beauty and tone still remain to hold the listener entranced. Infantino, Tagliavini, Bjorling and Stefano all have that same exquisitely finished tone. Tagliavini, perhaps, is the best and I think the nearest approach to Gigli.

In addition to the above-mentioned tenors, I heard Mario Lanza in a recital

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LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

given in New York, and on this basis I can give a better idea of his worth than if I were to compare a group of records consisting mainly of world-renowned singers, and some of his own recordings. His singing lacks the polish and artistry shown by the others, and particularly his low notes are rough and uneven; while his facial contortions do not help to improve the lack of classical expression. Nevertheless, I can honestly say that I enjoyed his singing, especially in a fine rendition of "Cielo E Man." With proper training it is quite possible that a fine opera singer could be the result.

As none of the present tenors can compare quite with either Schipa or Caruso, it seems ridiculous to think that Lanza at the present time can exceed Caruso in his glorious vocal interpretations, and I suspect also that the possibility of his even doing so in his future career is very small.

And yet, although some of us may criticise Lanza's singing, we must in all fairness admit that he has made opera very popular in America.

FALSTAFF (Takapuna).

(Abridged.—Ed.)

ARGUMENT OF POETRY

Sir,—M.H.H.'s review of *Poetry Year Book* (Listener, December 21) made various references to a commentary of mine which Mr. Johnson had asked me to write to introduce four poets he had decided to feature. I hope you will allow me to clear up some misunderstandings that have been created.

In this commentary my purpose was to grapple, within the very short space given me, with the problem of the growth of a national literature. I did not reject Mr. Curnow's views, which I consider very important, but I saw a limitation in those views in that they seem almost to ignore the fundamental and universal emotions which are the basis of all literature. I admire the verse of R. A. K. Mason and various others and am quarrelling with theories only. For instance, your reviewer says "it is through the immediate and local that a poet expresses what is distant and universal." Now, I agree that the impulse or inspiration behind a poem can almost invariably be traced back to something immediate and local, at least in part, but I don't think he meant that. I think he meant the symbolism and subject of the poem must be immediate and local and the implications may then be universal and generalised. Surveying in my mind the great poetry I know, I cannot see how such a theory can be entertained. Of course, some poetry uses "immediate and local" subject matter. Yeats wrote poems in Ireland, as well as Byzantium. In many of the great poets the local and the universal occur in an indissoluble mixture. In New Zealand, for very good reasons, there was a generation which concentrated on the local and immediate. I said there was a tendency now to move in the other direction. This does not reflect on the poetry of the previous period. I would say, in your reviewer's own words, that the new developments in New Zealand literature represent "an extension of method and theme."

Now, if I should say that Mr. Baxter's or Mr. Campbell's verse represents a new departure, for New Zealand, in handling of rhythm, or Mr. Witheford's in the exploration of evil, or Mr. Johnson's in the exploration of sensuality, then I am not denying that nobody has really shared R. A. K. Mason's

capacity for pure song, or J. R. Hervey's warmth and humanity. New developments in poetry are hard to describe: some would emphasise the greater complexity of rhythmical structure and the concern with the hidden regions of the mind. Others would emphasise the developments which are paralleled in England such as the pursuit of purity and essence by eliminating history, sociology and description. New Zealand poets naturally spend the greater part of their reading time on work written abroad. A direct derivation of Baxter from Curnow and Witheford from Brasch is out of the question; the two lines of descent, New Zealand and English, must both be considered. The tendency of the new generation, both in England and here, is towards the moulding, sometimes stylising, of universals. I attempted in my commentary to interpret the four poets we rather arbitrarily selected and to bring them and the partly local, partly international movement they represented closer to the public.

E. SCHWIMMER (Te Marua).

TRUBY KING

Sir,—I was interested to read in your paper a letter under the heading "Truby King." Many people wonder why the name of this great man has never been given to the Society which he founded in New Zealand. He gave the greatest part of his life, his health, his money, and finally his beautiful home, for the betterment of the health of little children. Does not the governing body of the Plunket Society appreciate this?

In Calcutta, India, clinics were successfully established and conducted by a New Zealand Karitane matron many years ago. The signboard reads, "The Truby King Baby Clinic," which surely should be its correct title.

HONOUR WHERE HONOUR IS DUE (Christchurch).

"TO A JET PILOT"

Sir,—For his manners, your correspondent David R. Watson deserves to be sat upon by heavier bottoms than mine; but, personalities apart, "one cannot condone" criticism "of this nature." To do so would be to confess ourselves "unable to distinguish between the pretentious aspirant and the genuine literary artificer."

To take up some of Mr. Watson's objections: (1) "amorous vault." Is it so difficult to feel that the airman is being received, nay, rapturously welcomed, into another element as he rises from the earth? (2) To look "from" something "to" something else means to shift one's gaze, and does not indicate the looker's position; has Mr. Watson never looked from left to right? (3) The translation of "Mene, mene, tekel . . ." and the circumstances as related in the book of Daniel may relieve Mr. Watson's perplexity. (4) "God's fire" is possibly not unconnected with the "finder" cradled in the dwellings of men, the evil in their hearts. (5) But Mr. Watson's really spectacular smash-up is his inability to see any difference between the cliché use of "bundle of nerves" and Mr. Baxter's use of the phrase. Would-be critics should abstain from writing until they have learnt to read.

D. M. ANDERSON (Dunedin).

Sir,—Has not the furore over James Baxter's poem "To a Jet Pilot" gone on for quite long enough? Even if D. R.

Watson and others of his ilk do not understand the implications raised by Mr. Baxter, they can surely say so without indulging in criticism and at least accept the poem for what I feel Mr. Baxter intended it to be, viz., an attempt to describe one man's place in this modern scheme of things.

I am no poet—for that reason alone I would not attempt to criticise the poem—but even to me "To a Jet Pilot" gives an opportunity to assess my position, to consider how I will be affected by the inventions of this age. The jet aeroplane is but one of those inventions. Is Mr. Watson so bound up in the "rather snobbish conservatism" attributed to him by D. A. St. John that he cannot do likewise?

"PER ARDUA AD JET PILOT" (Christchurch).

CHURCH BROADCASTS

Sir,—As a member of the Church of England I heartily endorse most of Mr. K. Andrews-Baxter's statements concerning church broadcasts. Being dependent on the radio for all services, except on rare occasions, I have ample experience of their varied qualities from three or four stations, and much as I love the Prayer Book Liturgy, I sometimes turn away to a non-Conformist service owing to the expressionless droning which a few clergymen indulge in, and which, in my humble opinion, is not at all conducive to devotion, nor likely to kindle any enthusiasm for sacred things among those who are indifferent.

If all services were conducted like the ones from the Napier Pro-Cathedral, there could be no complaint, for Dean Gibson reads and prays beautifully in a perfectly natural voice. One other point I should like to stress is that some ministers announce only the numbers of the hymns without reading even the first few lines. This sounds very abrupt over the air, and listeners who have different hymn books are quite unable to join in unless the hymn is a very familiar one.

EGLISE (Croixelles).

THE FACE OF VIOLENCE

Sir,—May I express an opinion on the article *The Face of Violence*, an opinion which I believe is shared by many more?

It is that the preoccupation with violence is a facet of immaturity both in the individual and the culture of a nation.

Though Britain is still a long way from what could be called the ideal, she is considerably in advance of what she was in the 18th Century, when violence apparently was so much more a part of everyday life. I believe that her comparative improvement in that direction today indicates her growing maturity, just as the love of violence of a young boy becomes sublimated as he attains wisdom and maturity in age—sometimes.

M. ROPER (Auckland).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

Gift Quiz (Kai Iwi).—The programme will not be resumed.

One Who Listens and Longs.—(1) Men are selected to send messages, not by the Broadcasting Service, but by the military authorities in Korea. Service conditions at the time when recordings are taken no doubt limit the selection. (2) Some recordings taken in the front line have been impossible to reproduce satisfactorily. (3) One U.S. serviceman broadcast a message to his mother in New Zealand. (4) The remaining point has been taken up with the military authorities.