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The Music Goes Round...

THE LIVES OF HARRY LIME, announced on page 6 as a programme to come from ZB stations, may give new life to the zither music used in the film *The Third Man*. This prospect will give pleasure to some people and uneasiness to others. The Harry Lime Theme is one of those light compositions, of no intrinsic value, which somehow lodge themselves in the mind. Its popularity obviously came in the first place from its association with a good film. People who heard it before they had seen *The Third Man* may not have been impressed, or even interested; but after they had heard it from a screen the effect was different. The music had taken suggestions from the drama, so that the strumming fingers of Anton Karas could bring back the streets and cafes of Vienna, the suspense and surprise of the story, and perhaps a hint of mystery from a background which had been kept heavily in shadow.

Light music lends itself to this sort of transformation. There can be few people for whom no song or melody has a personal meaning. The most inane composition can be significant to lovers who have heard it together; it cannot be separated in later years from a ghostly reconstruction of some scene or moment which promised unlimited joy, and perhaps the nostalgia is sharper because it is a reminder of what could never be attained or, being attained, could not be held. Many people like to hear dance tunes which were favourites 20 or 30 years ago. The music passes lightly across them, but in memory they are back in their first ballroom; youth has returned, and the world is full of possibilities. These memories may become, with musical assistance, a little brighter than the actual events. Young dancers

are not always as happy as they seem to be, but may be anxious about studs and ties, damp hands and stumbling feet, or the indifference of partners. Moreover, music may sometimes attach itself to events with a darker colouring. It is conceivable that a man committing an act of violence while the tinkling notes of "Those Old Piano Roll Blues" came incongruously into the room would have the tune racing and clashing among his thoughts when later he heard sentence passed upon him, or came to punishment.

It is generally the light and trivial theme which prevails. In happiness or tragedy a phrase or two from a Beethoven quartette might pass unnoticed—unless, perhaps, the persons hearing them were trained musicians. Most of us have to listen carefully to good music, whereas a simple melody needs no attention. In states of aroused emotion, when messages from the senses are vivid, a tune heard accidentally may be joined forever to the impressions of the moment. There are times when a popular song, heard too often, makes us speak harshly of programme organisers; but even as we switch over to another station someone else may be moving back through time to the edge of rapture. This does not mean that we should give up our musical grudges: it may be better to long for a disc to be broken than to have violent thoughts about our neighbours, and the range of music is wide enough to provide scapegoats as well as idols. The fingers of Mr. Karas, engaged with his zither, may pluck impartially at heart-strings and protesting nerves. There are deeds enacted briefly in the mind from which even Harry Lime would shrink if he were asked to perform them.

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 1, 1952.



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