



# New Writing Takes the Air

EARLY last year the BBC introduced for a trial period of three months a programme called *New Soundings*—a miscellany of verse and prose which was to take the place of the now almost extinct English literary magazines. Edited by John Lehmann—best known for his founding of *New Writing*—the new programme was well received. When the broadcast of the fourth edition indicated that *New Soundings* was to continue, Giles Romilly, radio critic of *The Observer*, said that it had become "the most interesting programme in English radio." How interesting it was New Zealand listeners may now decide for themselves. A transcription of one of the programmes is to be heard during the next few months from National stations, starting from 4YC at 8.1 p.m. on Saturday, May 2. In this edition William Plomer, the novelist and critic, discusses trends in contemporary fiction from his point of view as adviser to a firm of publishers, Laurie Lee speaks of his travels in Spain, there is a short story by William Sansom, and there are a number of poems.

Mr. Lehmann thinks that *New Soundings* is the first attempt that has been made to offer a substitute or parallel on the air for a serious literary magazine, and he admits that when the BBC invited him to edit and compère the programme he foresaw that there would be many tricky problems to be solved. Some of these difficulties he has discussed in the *Radio Times* and the *BBC Quarterly*. One of the most obvious is that a radio programme cannot be picked up and dropped again—the listener cannot "go back and chew the cud of a difficult poem or a teasing critical study." Though *New Soundings* was repeated once in the Third Programme and some parts were printed in the *BBC Listener*, Mr. Lehmann thinks that ultimately,

in some form or other, a good radio magazine should be available in print as a whole. With that limitation in mind, he says the radio editor-compère should aim to prepare listeners' minds for each contribution by judicious introduction and comment.

Though *New Soundings* runs for an hour, "a long stretch of time on the air," its editor considers restriction of time the most intractable of all the problems involved in a radio magazine. Compared with 20,000 to 25,000 words in a printed literary magazine, it runs to between 6000 and 7000 words: 10 minutes for editor and announcer, 20 minutes for seven or eight poems, and seven or eight minutes for another critical piece—leaving enough room for only 3000 words of imaginative prose, compared with 3500 to 6000 words, or even more, for the most memorable contributions to *New Writing*. But far from thinking that only a very rare short story can be found for the programme, Mr. Lehmann is inclined to believe that the opportunity it gives, the excitement of the medium, may lead authors to make discoveries in what they are capable of doing.

The encouragement of new authors has always been an important concern of Mr. Lehmann. He thinks *New Soundings* will not necessarily attract new authors, but that it will at least give "that powerful incentive that would-be authors need to step forward and pursue their experiments to some conclusion"—and "the stir and stimulus are what is vital." Writing in the *Radio Times* a few months after the new programme began, Mr. Lehmann stated his belief that the discipline it imposed on the author was good. Hundreds of manuscripts had come in, but to the many good young writers still too daunted by the technical demands he said: "If you stay on the brink you will never learn how simple swimming really may be."

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WRITERS who figure in the BBC programme, "New Soundings," which is to be heard here soon: Top left, John Lehmann; below, left to right, William Sansom, William Plomer, Laurie Lee



## SLIGHTLY OUT OF TRUE

SLIGHTLY OUT OF TRUE, which takes the air from Christchurch next week, is, like *New Soundings*, devoted to imaginative writing—but there the likeness ends. For *Slightly Out of True* grows out of the idea that the "literary" short story seldom comes over well on the air and that radio requires the revival of the old story-teller's art. Of course, there have been writers of "literary" short stories (hasn't A. E. Coppard been called the English Chekhov?) who belonged to the story-telling tradition, but Arnold Wall, Talks Officer at 3YA, who arranged the series of stories listeners are to hear from 3YA and 3YC between now and mid-September, had in mind something of the atmosphere A. J. Alan used to create in his stories for the BBC in the 20's and 30's and which these who heard his stories broadcast in New Zealand will know so well. The ideal, in other words, was not a slice-of-life sketch of the sort Katherine Mansfield wrote, but something with a plot and a twist and a sense of suspense and crisis. With this in mind Mr. Wall has gathered together the rather surprising number of 22 stories. They are all told in the first person and in a more or less matter-of-

fact way—they're not meant to be good reading. Most of them have a meta-physical-supernatural streak.

*Slightly Out of True* will be heard in the afternoon *Mainly for Women* session from 3YA on Thursdays, and from 3YC the same evening. The first broadcast will be on April 30, a story by Leslie Cleveland, some of whose work has appeared in *The Listener*. Mr. Cleveland is known to a great many people as a journalist and a mountaineer—a man well qualified to write about the wild country of the south which is the setting for his story *The Prisoner*.

*The Prisoner* will be followed by *The Leprechaun*, by Anthony Bartlett, a young Englishman who has written for *Punch* and other London magazines, and who has been working for the NZBS (now announcing from 4YA) since he arrived in New Zealand

last year. Other writers whose stories will be heard are Emily Baizeen, an Australian-born free-lance journalist, now in her mid-seventies, who has written for many New Zealand and Australian papers; G. C. A. Wall—none other than the 3YA Talks Officer himself, whose original work is already well known to listeners; Elizabeth Studholme, wife of a runholder at Coldstream, Mid-Canterbury, who only recently started writing; Dennis McEldowney, who last year broadcast

an impressive series of talks, *The World Regained*, about the gradual return of a "blue baby" to normal life; Nora Sanderson, a regular contributor to several New Zealand weeklies, and author of a book of children's stories soon to be published; Cicely Wylie, an officer of the Country Library Service; and Robert Young, producer for the Canterbury Repertory Society and author of a series of broadcast talks mentioned on page 16.



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ELIZABETH STUDHOLME