

British Music Critic Will Write for "The Listener"

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW once said he could make music criticism readable by the deaf. The remark, like most of Shaw's, contained an element of truth. In the opinion of a latter-day British critic, Arthur Jacobs, Shaw was certainly the most entertaining, and possibly the greatest, music critic there has ever been in English.

Arthur Jacobs, who made this admiring comment in a recent interview, is at present touring New Zealand lecturing, and studying the musical condition of this country. He will be writing five articles for *The Listener* covering each of the four main centres and giving a summary of impressions gained during the tour as a whole. The first of the series will appear in next week's issue. In addition, NZBS stations will broadcast 18 programmes he will record during the tour: six straight talks and 12 programmes of music and commentary. Reports of his impressions will be published in Britain by the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Musical Times*.

When interviewed, Mr. Jacobs had not studied criticism in New Zealand. Generally, however, he thought it dangerous for a critic to be involved either in composition or performance. "A composer has to develop a narrow view in order to compose," he said, "whereas the critic must always take the broad view. Similarly, the performer has always to develop good relations with the concert agents, which is not compatible with good criticism." Where a critic could not earn a living by one form of criticism alone, it would be healthier, he thought, to combine it with other forms of journalism rather than with other aspects of music. In Australia there was only one full-time music critic, but others combined it successfully with film and drama criticism. Even in England many of the daily newspaper critics also wrote for musical and radio periodicals and compiled programme notes for recording companies. "The critic's pay," he said ruefully, "is about as much as that of the back desk of the violins. No one does it to make a fortune."

Asked about the reception of criticism in Britain, Mr. Jacobs said it was extremely difficult to maintain a friendship with a composer or performer. "I was friendly with a composer, but once I voiced some criticism of his work he rang me up and poured abuse on me. That was the first time I ever cut off a telephone conversation." Like all artists, he said, musicians claimed to welcome criticism, but like all artists all they really wanted was praise.

The general public he had found much more indifferent. "If you judged from the newspaper correspondence," he said, "you'd think no one ever read music criticism. But it's a different matter when you criticise some popular idol. About Joan Hammond, for instance, you cannot write a sentence without some woman in Ealing accusing you of heresy. Gigli is the same. In fact, it seems to be the singers who always acquire the most fanatical and unreasonable devotees."

The critic's equipment, said Mr. Jacobs, was in part that of the ordinary journalist: the ability to write quickly and entertainingly. It took practice to have the review of a concert ready an hour after the performance. Some editors even claimed that work done with an eye on the clock was done better. "But I think our criticisms would be



ARTHUR JACOBS
He doesn't always win friends if he influences people

less open to error if we had 24 hours to consider them."

Of the critic's vocabulary, Mr. Jacobs said it was partly the vocabulary of music, which was common to all critics, and partly a wealth of analogy, which was an individual matter. "You will find art critics talking of harmony and music critics talking of line. Some, like Neville Cardus, go in for colourful criticism. The main aim is to make it readily understandable."

With a considerable demand for good criticism, Mr. Jacobs has found little time of late for indulging in music as a hobby. He does, however, enjoy playing the piano for his own amusement, and confesses to indulging in jazz—provided there are no other musicians about. Formerly a member of the Royal Choral Society, under Sir Malcolm Sargent, he now admits to finding more entertainment in criticising Sir Malcolm's efforts.

Now aged 31, Mr. Jacobs's record as a critic is impressive. Since the war he has spent five years as critic for the *Daily Express*, and was for a time acting-editor of the *Musical Times*. In addition he has been guest critic for *Musical America* in New York, and for *The Scotsman* at the Edinburgh Festival. Other publications for which he has written include the *Radio Times*, *Picture Post*, *John O'London's Weekly*, *Time and Tide*, and *Der Mittag*. Last year he published a book on Gilbert and Sullivan, and he is at present working on a new musical dictionary for Penguin Books. Before coming to New Zealand he toured Australia for eight weeks lecturing and working for the ABC and the Australian press. "I believe," he says, "that exchanges between critics are as necessary as exchanges between conductors."

TALKS WANTED

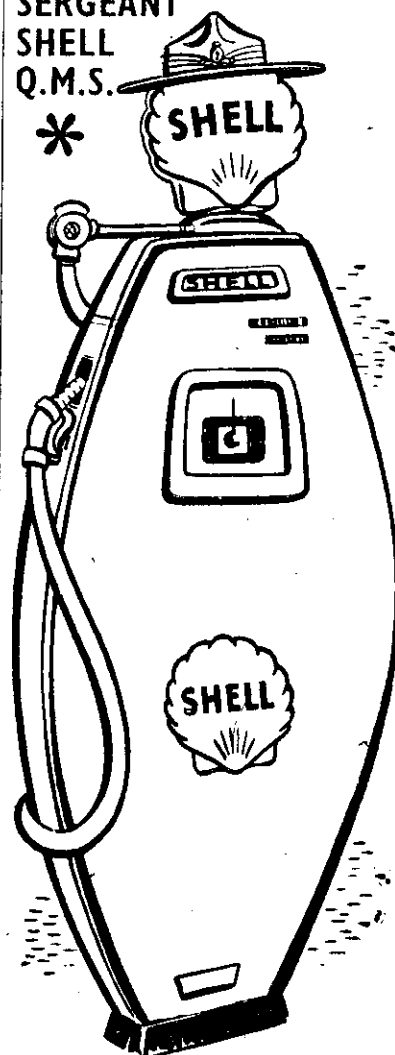
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