

MODERN BRITISH COMPOSERS

Sir,—Mr. L. D. Austin has fallen into the trap of criticising quotations from my talk No. 12, the last of a series which is being broadcast every Monday from 1YC at 8.0 p.m. He should know that these quotations are usually selected with a view to promoting the interest and "whetting the appetite" of the listener—which appears to have succeeded in his case. If Mr. Austin will do me the honour of listening to the talk as a whole, he may then see it in its true perspective.

I maintain that the Victorian era produced only minor British composers, excepting the Edwardian Elgar, about whose music I have spoken at some length, and also that of Parry and Stanford—not excluding Delius. I have left the 20th Century composers as "a climactic pendant."

There is, however, one statement of mine he maligns, in which he must be corrected. I said, "We have inherited centuries of music which is preponderantly concordant—becoming in process of evolution gradually discordant." This is not "nonsense," but an historical fact, and is therefore "inevitable." There is "dissonance" or "discordance" in all good music. In fact, "discord" is just as necessary as "concord." But surely Mr. Austin should know this!

JOHN LONGMIRE (Auckland).

Sir,—Heartily endorsing Mr. Austin's drastic comments, it is opportune to allude to a recent lecture by Mr. Arthur Jacobs, a noted English music critic, who said: "In Walton's music we find a greater alignment with continental style: there was the rhythmical freshness which he had inherited from jazz." It is most noticeable in his early compositions. The slow movement of his *Violin Concerto* demonstrated an occasional use of Schoenberg's "12-note row" technique. "Michael Tippett was another to whom jazz idioms and rhythms had made an appeal." Alan Rawsthorne favoured something more harmonic! Regarding the works of Benjamin Britten the lecturer stated (inter alia), "His name could be linked with Stravinsky. Some chords were apt to possess more than their usual quota of notes."

Following the jazz line of argument, Sir Philip Gibbs, describing cabaret customs after World War 1, says in his new book *The Spoils of Time*, "It seemed fun at first but after a while there was something ghastly in it and always the thump thump of a jazz band like the beating of a tom tom in the jungle and always the saxophone bleating and gibbering, and cackling like a mad monkey."

W. H. WARREN (Timaru).

Sir,—In declaiming against our contemporary British composers, L. D. Austin has overlooked the fact that music, if it is not to fall into decay, must progress and strike out into new fields of tonal expression. I know what Mr. Austin thinks about modern music reflecting the unrest of the age, and the influence of external strife on the subconscious. (He made his opinions quite plain in a recent broadcast.) But if music does not reflect an age, then Bach, Handel, Beethoven and Mendelssohn have been deceiving us. Just as these composers wrote in a style best suited to their eras so do our composers write in an idiom best suited to this age.

Benjamin Britten has set poems by Auden and other contemporary poets to music. If these poems were set in anything but a modern idiom they would

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look more than slightly incongruous. Could anyone imagine T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" jogging along happily with music after the style of Mozart? We must move with the times.

I am afraid that Mr. Austin, like so many music-lovers and teachers of this country, has stuck at Mendelssohn. Such a belligerent attitude towards anything faintly "new" is not at all beneficial to the musical and cultural progress of New Zealand.

The works of the modern composer are dissonant, but should not be looked upon as "harsh" or "ugly." Let us treat our contemporary music as being more adventurous than ugly. And to say that composers like Vaughan Williams, Britten, Walton and Rubbra are "not acceptable as writers of real music" is pure nonsense. In fact, "it is almost incredible that any musician should utter such nonsense." What are they writing if they are not writing music?

As for "no intelligent music-lover submitting to preposterous noise"—might I ask what does constitute an "intelligent music-lover?" Does he possess brains as well as ears? Perhaps some music-lovers do not take to contemporary music because they do not care to exercise their brains and imaginations as well as their ears.

J. M. COCHRANE (Auckland).

Sir,—One had hoped that once the Coronation was over we should be spared more of this tedious cacophony, but I see that we are down for a further instalment from 1YC of "Choral Music and Modern British Composers."

Hark to what Neville Cardus, famous musical critic of the *Manchester Guardian*, had to say of modern British composers: "The Festival of British Music continues to keep people out of Queen's Hall in thousands," etc. Again: "If only our Brittens and Tippetts and Berkeleys could think of a single melody that would take possession of the memory, one chord that would once and for all pierce the musical consciousness! If only they could hurl us, whether we were

ready to be hurled or not, into a new work as Elgar hurled us into the Violin Concerto!"

Please, please spare us more of this stuff.

E. A. AYLWARD (Rothsay Bay).

CROSSWORD NO. 659

Sir,—I wish to point out an error in Crossword Puzzle No. 659. The clue given for 13 across reads "Reigns in disorder." I take this to be an anagram which would result in the word "Resign," yet the answer given in this week's issue reads "Ensign." Is my spelling at fault or is this perhaps an error of construction?

PUZZLED (Wellington).
("R.W.H." expresses regret for a last-minute error.—Ed.)

NZBS PLAYS

Sir,—I would like to congratulate those responsible for the distinct improvement in the production of NZBS plays. If the standard of such current productions as *The Woman in Question* and *Jeannie*, both from 2YC, can be maintained, one need not be so dependent on the BBC, whose productions such as the delightful comedy *Dr. Abernethy* set such a high standard. It is realised that local talent is necessarily restricted, but it is an encouraging sign to note the inclusion of "new blood" in the casts, some members of which display real talent. I am sure that listeners who enjoy tuning in to plays will await further production with pleasurable interest.

J. V. SAUNDERS (Wellington).

NATURAL CHILDBIRTH

Sir,—On seeing a discussion on natural childbirth advertised for 1YA's Women's Session, I and three of my friends were eager to listen, as we had all practised this method at the birth of our babies. We were disappointed as the discussion seemed irrelevant for the most part. Mrs. Sutherland's questions were to the point, but seldom was she given a straightforward answer. The Deputy-Medical Officer of Health and the Matron of St. Helen's gave the im-

pression that there is opportunity and support for natural childbirth methods for mothers everywhere in New Zealand. There certainly is not. Some doctors give little or no encouragement, and many hospitals are understaffed or unsympathetic. So one does the best one can with the help of Dr. Grantly Dick Read's excellent teachings.

Several young mothers known to me, wanting to have their babies in what is obviously the normal and natural way, are deterred in their efforts by the lack of help and encouragement which is needed so much by women in labour, or sometimes by the accusation of "trying to be a martyr." Let's have more discussions on, and more support for, natural childbirth.

YOUNG MOTHER (Te Aroha).

JOHN ARLOTT

Sir,—I have read with interest your admirable article on John Arlott, with which I entirely agree. In this connection the following incident will, I think, be of interest to our blind people.

At the end of one of the Test Match series two or three years ago, there were some short speeches, one by John Arlott, in which he said that he had had some severe criticism of his remarks in a humorous vein on the personalities of the players, but he explained that he had done this because he had always had in mind the large number of blind listeners, and he wished to help them to visualise the scene in their minds.

I sent him a note thanking him on behalf of these listeners, and telling him that I could speak on their behalf as a blind listener who had had 40 years' experience of blind welfare work in England. I received a charming letter from Mr. Arlott telling me that he had been greatly cheered by this letter, and would always keep it by him. It is the human touch and the clear commentary which makes him so deservedly popular.

C. E. BOLAM (Auckland).

A BLACK SHEEP

Sir,—A story for children recently broadcast from 1YA contained an animal character (a black sheep) which was described as being "as black as a nigger." I consider it extremely unfortunate that such an expression was used in a programme designed for young listeners and wonder what would be the reaction if in a broadcast story the white sheep was described as being "as white as white-trash."

The substance of later, more permanent concepts, often depends on these early synthetic adventures in language, and I greatly deplore the attitude of mind which allows such faulty concepts to be perpetuated. My son's universe of discourse will not, I hope, include this objectionable term coined by inferior men to describe the exploited members of a subject race. He will, I hope, relegate it to its true place in the junk-heap of debased currency—and share my disapproval of those who attempt to keep it in circulation among the unwary.

O. E. MIDDLETON (Waiau Pa).

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

An Educated Listener (Auckland).—The regular policy of the Broadcasting Service is to maintain a musical programme as an alternative to sporting broadcasts, where an alternative station is available. This policy is strictly adhered to except on very rare occasions when several sports fixtures of national interest are held in the same city at the same time. On such occasions the sports programme is allowed to interfere with the alternative musical programme to the minimum extent.

CUTS BY THE SCORE

THE report below first appeared in the British Ministry of Transport Bulletin. From that source it was reprinted by the *O and M Bulletin*, and it recently appeared in the N.Z. Public Service Commission periodical *Public Service*. It is reprinted here because it is entertaining, and therefore worth reprinting, but also because it points a moral. O and M, it should be explained, stands for Organisation and Methods—a device for introducing the subject of efficiency without using the word:

The following extracts from a report by O and M after a visit to the Royal Festival Hall may interest our readers.

"For considerable periods the four oboe players had nothing to do. The numbers should be reduced, and the work spread more evenly over the whole of the concert, thus eliminating peaks of activity."

"All the twelve first violins were playing identical notes. This seems unnecessary duplication. The staff of this section should be drastically cut; if a large volume of sound is required, it could be obtained by means of electronic amplifier apparatus."

"Much effort was absorbed in the playing of demi-semiquavers. This seems an excessive refinement. It is recommended that all notes should be rounded up to the nearest semiquaver. If this were done, it would be possible to use trainees and lower grade operatives more extensively."

"There seems to be too much repetition of some musical passages. Scores should be drastically pruned. No useful purpose is served by repeating on the horns a passage which has already been handled by the strings. It is estimated that if all redundant passages were eliminated, the whole concert time of two hours could be reduced to twenty minutes, and there would be no need for an interval."

"The Conductor agrees generally with these recommendations, but expresses the opinion that there might be some falling-off in box office receipts. In that unlikely event it should be possible to close sections of the auditorium entirely, with a consequential saving of overhead expense—lighting, attendance, etc."

"If the worst came to the worst, the whole thing could be abandoned, and the public could go to the Albert Hall instead."

S. TONE-DEAF.