

MODERN BRITISH COMPOSERS

Sir,—“It is almost incredible that a musician should utter such nonsense,” says Mr. L. D. Austin (*Listener*, September 11), in words which I find equally appropriate as a criticism of Mr. Austin's letter. Perhaps Mr. Austin, reared no doubt in a musical atmosphere of extreme Victorian conservatism, prefers the gutless commonplaces of Coleridge Taylor and Edward German (to mention but two of the more third-rate composers included in his list) to the music of our contemporaries. I do not, and therefore resent strongly, Mr. Austin's flat denial of the existence of a large amount of fine music written by British composers during the last 25 years. If Mr. Austin had listened to the later symphonies of Vaughan Williams; the *Viola Concerto*, the symphony and *Belshazzar's Feast* of William Walton; the *Spring Symphony* of Britten; Michael Tippett's second string quartet; the Rubbra fifth symphony (this list could be extended considerably) with a mind undulled by constant application of the harmony rules of the once worthy but now outmoded Ebenezer Prout, he would not have found untenable Mr. John Longmire's assertion that the Victorian era produced only minor British composers.

Mr. Austin's second point deals with that good old red herring “jarring dissonance.” Surely any attempt to evaluate a musical composition by the number of dissonances it contains is inexcusably lazy. Has Mr. Austin forgotten that only two sorts of music exist—good music and bad music? The category into which a piece of music is placed must be determined by a careful consideration of the fitness or otherwise of all the musical elements used by the composer. Surely if dissonance, however acute, is appropriate to the other musical material in a composition, then that composition is unworthy of censure on the score of being ugly to the ear? May I remind Mr. Austin that the story of the critic who denies that a new work has any musical value because it contains unusual tonal combinations, and is proved wrong by the evaluation of a later generation, recurs frequently in musical history?

CARRICK THOMPSON (Auckland).

Sir,—In your issue of September 11, L. D. Austin claims that “the 20th Century has yet produced no British composers of the calibre of Elgar, Hubert Parry, Villiers, Stanford, Edward German, Coleridge Taylor, etc.” To use the correspondent's own words, “it is almost incredible that any musician should utter such nonsense.”

Elgar, I would agree, has written some magnificent music, the two symphonies, the two concertos, *Enigma Variations*, *Falstaff*, *Gerontius*, and so on—but so, too, has Vaughan Williams, and he certainly never wrote such trash as “*Salut d'Amor*,” the “*Pomp and Circumstance Marches*,” or the “*Crown of India*.” If performance is any guide, Parry's music is forgotten except for “*Jerusalem*” and “*Blest Pair of Sirens*,” and these are surpassed by the choral works of Vaughan Williams, Holst or Bantock, to name but three 20th Century composers. Stanford is a composer perhaps unjustly neglected—his clarinet concerto, doing the rounds in a BBC programme at present, is an attractive work, while his Irish Rhapsodies are always well received. German's *Merrie England* and *Tom Jones* receive an occasional performance, as does Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha*. But none of these composers has written music which compares favourably with such works as the *Bliss* piano concerto, or that of John Ireland

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for that matter; the songs of Peter Warlock or Roger Quilter; the tone poems of Bax; the symphonies of Edmund Rubbra or the operas of Benjamin Britten.

I advise Mr. Austin to begin with *Albert Herring* or *Let's Make an Opera*, or even Vaughan Williams's *Hugh the Drover*. He might later try *Riders to the Sea* or *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Peter Grimes*. By then he should be able to “take” the music of William Walton, who may turn out to be, with Vaughan Williams, one of the greatest British composers since Purcell. After having given a fair and impartial hearing to these works, if Mr. Austin still believes what he claims, then I will be prepared to bow to the judgment of his authority.

ASINUS AD LYRAM (Lower Hutt).

“BREAKFAST SYMPHONY”

Sir,—I am one of the many Auckland listeners who have felt considerable chagrin at the sudden disappearance from 1YA's morning programme of a precious quarter of an hour of classical music, namely, the *Breakfast Symphony*, and feel that too strong protest cannot be made at its unannounced withdrawal.

The early morning programme has now deteriorated entirely, and is little better than a hotch-potch, and might as well come from one of the Commercial stations where noise and so-called “popular” music hold entire sway. Cannot something be done to elevate the principal New Zealand broadcasting stations to a standard nearer that set by the BBC? One has only to speak to a newcomer from England or a New Zealander returning from England and discuss radio here in this country, to find that it is considered to be extremely poor entertainment indeed. I know it is so, as I am a New Zealand resident returned from England and also have recent comparisons to make.

Having written the above in a spirit of criticism of things as they exist here, it is only right that I should make some small contribution towards constructive policy, and I must first say that as a musician who plays a stringed instrument I have an ear to judge, and am also keenly interested in the betterment of musical entertainment on the air and the improvement of programmes generally. The *Breakfast Symphony* was an oasis and a solace amidst the predominant jangle which pervades the morning programmes, for the very

simple reason that it was a set period given over to a particular type of music and could be anticipated by the listener, and I think this aspect needs much more study by broadcasting authorities than it ever gets when programmes are arranged. Types of music should be listened to for a longer period than a paltry three to five minutes—at least 20 to 30 minutes should be given to any particular department of music—orchestra, solo instruments (piano, violin, etc.), chamber music, and the like, in order that one's enjoyment (and education) could be catered for in some good measure before an entirely different subject is thrust upon one's hearing (“to give balance” as we were recently informed by the local YA).

There is no doubt the *Breakfast Symphony* should be reinstated, and indeed, extended to at least a half hour from 7.30 to 8.0 a.m., and on each day in the week.

WINIFRED MOORE

(Auckland).

(Abridged.—Ed.)

NATURAL CHILDBIRTH

Sir,—I write from a maternity hospital, where I have had a very happy natural birth. Its success I attribute largely to the education I received at the Mothers' Classes arranged by the Wellington Parents' Centre, where relaxation and breathing techniques, mothercraft and the processes of pregnancy and labour are taught by experts. I therefore welcome your correspondent “Bruag's” suggestion that a radio panel be selected from mothers who have had such education, so that listeners may hear a genuinely informed discussion on training for childbirth. As another correspondent, “Experience,” points out, the experts on this subject are those who have given it a fair trial.

The term, “natural childbirth,” however, is not used in these Wellington Mothers' Classes. “Training for childbirth” is the accurate description, as the education given is designed to make labour easier for all women, regardless of their doctor's approach to the actual birth. Nevertheless, many women have confidently had their babies without analgesia or anaesthetics, although these are always available.

As I write this I am listening to a woman crying out in labour. It is taking some of the joy from my own experience, as it seems so wrong that the great majority of New Zealand women

are still without the simple information and training which can help turn childbirth into a supreme achievement, and the happiest possible beginning in life for mother and child together.

DARIEN (Wellington).

Sir,—On the question of natural childbirth could I make two suggestions? One is that more attention be paid to the staff of maternity hospitals to ensure that they appreciate the real significance of their work; the other that they be helped by the employment of “sitters-in”—part-time women of some experience of childbirth, possibly retired nurses, who would be capable of staying with women in labour, and giving them that moral support and encouragement recommended by Dr. Read. Surely this could be arranged for mothers of first babies, at any rate; it would free the overburdened nurses for coping with more advanced stages of labour, and lessen the atmosphere of bustle and harassed impatience that seems to cling about maternity wards.

I could not doubt the sincerity of Miss Sparks, who said in the discussion that women in her experience were not unattended in labour; but unfortunately this is not usually the case. Whatever the attitude of the head staff, many nurses are apt to regard each confinement as just another job to put through. Education of mothers will not achieve much if nurses also are not taught to regard childbirth in the light of such teaching as Dr. Read's.

M.J.B. (Christchurch).

“NEWS FROM HOME”

Sir,—It is hardly fair that the Sunday morning talks to new settlers on 1YA and 2YA should be monopolised by a Tory party propagandist. To old readers of *The Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* his weekly digs at the British worker have a familiar ring, but some listeners to these talks may have formed a very poor opinion of those poor, misguided souls who will not vote for Mr. Churchill's party. Anyway, Mr. Pollock's jokes must be causing grave concern to all who are proud of the British sense of humour.

D. EDWARDS (Auckland).

MODERN ART

Sir,—Judging by the illustrations in your issue of September 18, purporting to portray the paintings of Frances Hodgkins, it would appear that contemporary wielders of the brush and palette, like modern composers, either lack or deliberately ignore the fundamental principles of art.

Mr. Stuart MacLennan hit the nail right on the head when he told your representative that the artist's early work revealed “struggles with draughtsmanship”; he would have driven the nail right home had he added that these struggles persisted to the end. If Frances Hodgkins was New Zealand's “greatest painter,” then Heaven help all the others! L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS

J. Wilson (Auckland).—Sorry; not practicable.

Vivienne H. Montgomery (Wellington).—As early as possible next year.

D. Bruce (Kerikeri).—Official figures for October, 1952 (the latest available) were 21,000,000.

Two Puzzled Pals (Franz Josef).—After the recording had been broadcast for some time, it was reconsidered; and no good reason could be found for broadcasting it again.

W. H. Ward (Lumsden).—Frequencies are allocated, by arrangement between the New Zealand and the Australian authorities, so as to minimise the interference; but when there are twice as many stations as there are available frequencies, it cannot be avoided entirely.

DUNEDIN'S ROYAL CONCERT

SOME details of the arrangements for the Royal Concert to be performed before Her Majesty the Queen in the Dunedin Town Hall on Tuesday, January 26, 1954, have been announced by the NZBS.

Admission prices for the concert will be, circle £2/2/-, front centre stalls £1/1/-, side and rear centre stalls 10/-, back stalls 5/-, upper gallery 5/-.

The Minister of Broadcasting, the Hon. R. M. Algie, has approved of the net proceeds from the concert, without any charge for the Orchestra, being divided equally between two Dunedin bodies nominated by the Mayor of Dunedin, namely, the Old People's Welfare Organisation and the Dunedin branch of the Plunket Society.

Allocation of seats for the concert will be from mailed applications with a limit of two tickets for each applicant. A further announcement regarding the dates on which mailed applications should be received and the procedure for the allocation of seats will be made shortly. In the meantime, those wishing to attend are asked not to send in applications or money as these cannot be accepted until booking details are completed.

The programme items by the National Orchestra have been tentatively chosen by the Conductor, Warwick Braithwaite. Dunedin will be particularly interested in the inclusion in the programme of a girls' choir of 100 voices which will sing excerpts from Humperdinck's “*Hansel and Gretel*” to an accompaniment by the National Orchestra under the conductorship of Mr. Braithwaite. The choir has been selected on a proportionate basis from the main Dunedin post-primary schools, and it is being given its preliminary training by the chorus master, George E. Wilkinson, of Dunedin.

All arrangements for the concert are being made in consultation with a Dunedin Advisory Committee, whose assistance the Broadcasting Service gratefully acknowledges. Members of the Committee are Dr. V. E. Galway, Chairman; the Mayor of Dunedin, Mr. L. M. Wright; the Town Clerk, Mr. J. C. Lucas; Mr. G. E. Wilkinson, and Mr. C. Trim.