

MUSIC IN NEW ZEALAND

Sir,—In the Sunday night talk which he recorded for broadcasting after his departure from New Zealand, Mr. Arthur Jacobs said: "I have heard some New Zealand music that is supposed to be modern—I mean some piano preludes by Douglas Lilburn—but I was unable to see any value in it at all." I myself have read some English concert notices that were supposed to be criticism—I mean some short reviews in the *Daily Express*, by Arthur Jacobs—but I was unable to see any value in them at all.

I do not know by whom it was supposed that these notices were criticism; but I am content to saddle them with this claim. Nor do I know whether the reviews in question fairly represent their author's work. They were written some years ago (when I was in London and reading all the music critics there), and their author may have since built his reputation on more substantial, perhaps unpublished work in other mediums. But I have no information about this other work.

It may be, of course, that the brevity and slightness of these examples were connected with the circumstances of their publication; but I have no information on this point, either. I am content to give the appearance of judging Mr. Jacobs's present-day work, if not of judging English music criticism generally, on the strength of these old examples of strictly limited intention. Some readers may give my opinions more weight than they properly deserve. This does not matter. I shall not be on the same side of the world as Mr. Jacobs when they appear, and shall not have to answer for them, at least to him.

ANTONY ALPERS (Auckland).

MAORI PLACE NAMES

Sir,—In your issue of November 6 is a photograph of a signpost which makes a prize example of how names should not be shown. Below it is the question, "What's in a name?" There is a good deal in Maori names—history, geography, poetry, interest. Some names have obvious meanings; some are obscure. (One could say the same of English names.) In the illustration, the first thing that caught my eye was the familiar Pokai Whenua. This is a tributary of the Waikato, which joins the main river at Horahora. Pokai means a coil or a loop, and Whenua is simply Land. Pokai Whenua is commonly translated as "a wanderer across the land." It seems to me a simple and pleasant name, one which should be far more obvious to New Zealanders than, say, Saskatchewan.

The difficulty with Maori names lies in our bad habit of writing a number of short easy words in the form of one long word. There are no doubt many English words that could be made unreadable by the same means. People of British descent usually find these long words difficult, no matter what language they are written in. We have no responsibility for the peculiarities of German, but the difficulties of Maori are of our own making. They tend to destroy correct pronunciation, and also to obscure the meaning. For example, it does not take long to learn that "rua" is the numeral "two," and that Roto Rua was "the second lake" which the Maori travellers reached when they came inland from the Bay of Plenty. The name Waikare Moana is understood by many people. But when two words or more are written as one (as in Waikaremoana and Rotorua) the simple meaning becomes lost, and then a redundant word "Lake" is added, as if to emphasise ignorance of the names of

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our native land. I wonder if the NZBS recording mentioned includes Wairarapa, with each syllable ending in a vowel, as it should?

I am sorry to have to admit that I do not speak Maori, but I cannot agree that it is a difficult language, unless you set out to make it so by mishandling the words. A. LUSH (Christchurch).

"DAPHNIS AND CHLOE"

Sir,—Your critic "M.K.J." in Radio Review of November 20 is correct in his evaluation of *Daphnis and Chloe* as being "music too strong and 'absolute' for ballet," but incorrect in stating that the ballet as such "appears to be unknown in revival and to figure in no repertory."

The ballet was first produced at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, in June, 1912. The performance of 1914, to which "M.K.J." refers, could be the first London performance, when the second version of the work, without chorus, was given. Fokine revived the ballet at the Opéra, Paris, on June 20, 1921, and Anton Dolin made his debut with the Diaghilev Company in the role of Daphnis on January 1, 1924.

While *maître de ballet* at the Colon Theatre, Buenos Aires, during the seasons of 1926-27 and 1933, Bronislava Nijinska also produced this work.

Most unforgivable omission in "M.K.J.'s" criticism is the recreation of the ballet, with chorus, by Frederick Ashton, for Sadler's Wells Ballet at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, with John Craxton as the designer, on April 5, 1951. Despite the ballet (which Ashton had not seen in the Fokine version) being regarded as a disappointment—a logical one considering the strength of the music which is so richly evocative and complete in itself—the ballet was given 13 performances in the 1950-51 season, and another 36 performances in the 1951-52 season.

ERIC BALL (Auckland).

CLASSICS PARODIED

Sir,—I sympathise with your correspondent, Wm. Cranna (*Listener* November 20), having heard the "improvement" of Brahms's Third Symphony. Yet even that falls in comparison with my experience when I heard a *Hit Parade* programme.

It appeared that the latest "hit" is a song entitled "You heard me singing in the Chapel." It has always interested me to note that, through the ages, religious themes have called forth probably the greatest works of all the composers. This latest "hit," with stupid words describing an awakening of religious faith, sung (oh! suffer the word!) in slow blues tempo, is an affront both to the music-lover and to anyone for whom religion has any significance whatever. Worse than bad, it is indecent. The last line of the song is, I think, "to sing and praise the Lord."

The announcer closed the programme with the remark that "This is it for this week." As far as I am concerned, it certainly is.

P. CLAMAN (Wellington).

"LA SERVA PADRONA"

Sir,—In the article "Mistress and Maid" in *The Listener* of November 20 describing the forthcoming broadcasts of the C.A.S. presentation of "La Serva Padrona," one of the characters listed is called "Pandolfo" (the dotting old bachelor), and another "Scapin" (the valet). Now I have no objection to this (apart

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from the mixing of French with Italian in the nomenclature which, so far as I know, does not happen in opera buffa); the names of Cinderella's father and one of the Comedia dell'Arte masks would fit these particular characters very well. Pergolesi's librettist, however, called them "Uberto" and "Vespono." Perhaps the writer of the article was elliptically showing us his knowledge of the generic origins of the plot, or perhaps he just hadn't bothered to look at the score he was chatting about so familiarly.

LAYTON RING (Auckland).

(Our synopsis of the plot was taken from Oscar Thompson's *Cyclopaedia of Music of Musicians*.—Ed.)

CAPITALS ARE CAPITALS

Sir,—May I voice a strenuous objection to a waste of valuable time in the monthly review of new records in the broadcast of the pathetically weak setting of Gertrude Stein's "Capitals," by Virgil Thomson. This horror sounds like a setting of one of the nonsense poems by Edward Lear to church music. Surely, since the review is only monthly, the time could be better used. As record dealers do not allow one to play an LP before purchase, many people will look to the NZBS to provide them with the first hearing of a new issue of importance, as in the performance by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra of part of Smetana's *Ma Vlast*.

A.G.C. (Dunedin).

FOR MIDDLEBROWS

Sir,—Of the three types of brow, I believe it is true to say the middlebrow is least articulate. He is energised less by a passionate enthusiasm than by an easy-going desire which just falls short of rousing him to state his wishes. Nevertheless, I believe he receives more real pleasure from music than either of the others. The highbrow gets his pleasure chiefly from perfection of technique—a specialist pleasure. Where the boogie-woogie artist gets his, I am at a complete loss to understand, so speculation on my part would be a waste of time. But I believe the middlebrow gets more real pleasure than either of them, and, because of his silence, receives least consideration.

It gives me great pleasure, therefore, to point to a programme which seems to me to fit exactly the middlebrows' wants. On Sunday, November 15, from 2YA Wellington, there was a session called "When Song is Sweet," by Betty Gatehouse, John McDonald and Peter Jeffery, which was beautifully chosen and sung, and just the programme which middlebrows have been asking for for a long time. I hope it will be made available to the other YA stations.

I also hope that the two programmes of Gisele, the Canadian singer, are to go the rounds of the National stations. They are much too good to be shelved.

W. H. GRAHAM (Auckland).

A NEW ORATORIO

Sir,—The critical articles by Arthur Jacobs have served a useful purpose in stirring up the listening public of New Zealand. Perhaps a more considered, discriminating standard of appreciation will result, though adverse comment is never popular here and Mr. Jacobs was outspoken. In some instances his judgment seemed harsh and in others might have been more tactful in expression, but in most cases it was sound and constructive.

In respect for the good work of the Christchurch Harmonic Society, we en-

deavoured to listen with open minds to the Eric Curtis oratorio but found our distaste in entire agreement with that of Mr. Jacobs. It may be granted that standards have flexibility when quality of performance is assessed, varying in relation to the skill, training and experience of the performer. A musical composition is a form of creative art: it must be judged on its own merits by universal standards. *The Christ* has no continuous musical idea but wavers from one reminiscence to another as if uncertain whether *Elijah*, *Samson* and *Delilah*, or Savoy Opera shall gain ascendancy as inspiration. There is even a hint of *Belshazzar's Feast* to supply some modern dissonance and a strong flavour of Ketelbey's "Persian Market" about the "Jerusalem" chorus. The whole mixture is presented in rhythms which alternate between secular triviality and pompous reiteration and over-emphasis.

CHORISTERS (Christchurch).

SCHOOL CERTIFICATE SYLLABUS

Sir,—Having just listened to a programme on School Certificate and University Entrance Exams, may I voice a complaint which I feel will be echoed by many post-primary teachers, and for that matter, parents and pupils? I refer to the anomalous state of the English School Certificate Syllabus. A number of remits have been sent by teachers to their representative organisations, but judging by this year's School Certificate paper, without effect. English is surely a pitiful and meagre subject, if that to which the language owes its greatness is excluded from study. Yet how can teachers be expected to spend time on a comprehensive literary course when there is only a remote chance that the novel, play or poem asked for will be the one that has been studied? The possibilities of missing out in Question No. 9 are so great that the matter is reduced to the level of the New Zealander's favourite sport, which is hardly appropriate when a pupil's future is at stake. The only sensible course is to concentrate on certainties and cut out the literature. But is this desirable? A fair solution would be to have either a more generalised question on literature or "set" books. The present half-way house is most unsatisfactory.

W. H. THOMAS (Auckland).

DAVID JONES'S THRUSH

Sir,—Perhaps it is a bit late to comment now, but I was surprised by Mr. Fairburn's remarks in your November 6 issue on a drawing of a thrush by David Jones. David Jones does not always paint (or draw) the purely visual, but none the less his works are works of art, expressions of sensuous pleasure not only of his own living but of the living of all things: billowing curtains, a gush of cool air in the room, the love of both the physical presence and spiritual presence of his landscapes and sitters, and his sudden inward hearing of a thrush's song. One can never watch a bird balancing on a bough in the wind without remembering Chinese paintings of that subject. Neither can one now hear a thrush singing without being aware of both the artist's and the bird's delight in living.

I enjoyed Mr. Fairburn's too few other remarks on the exhibition, and wonder if we will hear more about it.

WM. ROGERS (Christchurch).

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENT

Frances Montagu (Mangonui).—It was merely an alternative wavelength, used in the evenings when Parliament was sitting.