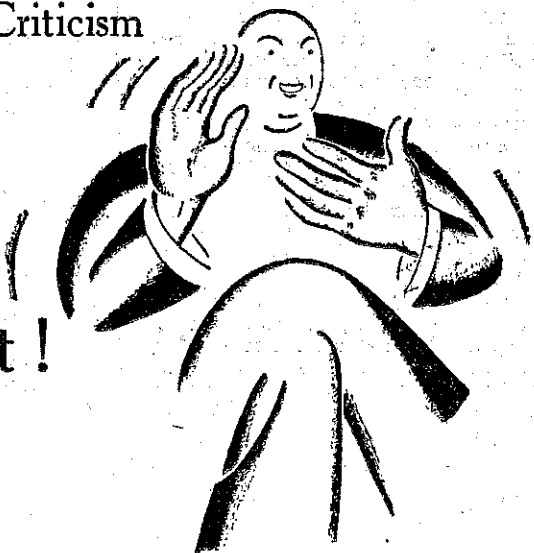


There Must be Something Wrong with Criticism When the Public Applauds a Picture And Critics Condemn It!



ONCE upon a time there was an Australian film called, "On Our Selection." I went to see the picture; didn't like it—and said so in these columns. Did that keep the public away? It did not. In fact, "On Our Selection" took more money in New Zealand than any Australian film has taken before or since, and, more than that, the gross takings measured up to those of such outstanding films as "The House of Rothschild" and "The Thin Man."

Not so long ago "Smith's Weekly" gave a gold cup—its highest award—to an English picture adapted from the play, "Many Waters." And yet this picture was such a sad failure on its initial release in New Zealand that very few theatres could be persuaded to take it. I mentioned last week that Eric Baume, editor of the "Sunday Sun," Sydney, had heartily condemned the latest Marx Brothers film, "A Night at the Opera"—at the same time it was being screened to overflow houses in Melbourne.

Which brings us to the problem: What's wrong with film criticism? Looking over the daily papers in New Zealand we would answer: everything. There's not a daily in New Zealand that gives anything approaching a genuine criticism of a film; the editors of the Saturday feature pages are, often enough, underpaid juniors who, with scissors and paste, "write" their pages from the weekly publicity sheets supplied by the film companies. We have remarked before—and we do again—that, while papers are willing to pay large salaries to men writing about football and golf, they seem to think that any hack is good enough to write about films, a form of entertainment that attracts more followers in a single evening than golf and football

do in a whole month. And, while theatre managers provide "critics" with free seats on the opening night of a film, the "criticism" is often written from the publicity sheet before the reporter has ever seen the picture.

There seems to be a general idea that theatre managers are a pack of big, bad wolves waiting to pounce on the first critic who dares to say a word in criticism of a film. This is nonsense. The "Radio Record" has criticised films on many occasions and just how many enemies it has made in the process can be gathered from the following paragraph taken from a letter received from a well-known Dunedin theatre manager: The writing up of pictures in the "Radio Record" has a distinctiveness, the keynote of which is sincerity, which in turn gives it authority. This makes it more valuable from everyone's point of view.

It's no use writing film criticisms if the critic merely uses his column to air his literary cleverness. When I reviewed "On Our Selection" I thought it "smart" to be cutting and uncomplimentary; wasn't it George Jean Nathan, the famous American writer, who said: "It is only the very young critic who thinks it a sign of weakness to praise anything"? To-day experience has taught me that the genuine criticism—constructive, reproving maybe, generous on some points—commands far more attention (and respect) than the clever flippancies of the critic who tramples on everything or the rapid meanderings of the newspaper critic who can't see farther than the publicity sheet under his nose.

Prize Money Totals £80 For Those Who Know All "Brows" of Music

Details Of New Competition For N.Z. Listeners

"LISTENING for profit" will be the cry when in a few weeks' time the four main national stations start a Music Lovers' Competition, which will last for six weeks at each station. Prizes totalling £80 for the whole competition will be distributed, allowing for £20 for each station. Any listeners who can pull in the four main stations, however, have the opportunity of entering for the respective competitions from each.

Each station will provide a series of six weekly programmes of 10 items each—that is, 60 items from each station—to be broadcast in each case from 8 p.m. to 8.25 p.m., and always on the same night of the week.

The first night of the competition will be from 4YA on Wednesday, July 8. This station will then broadcast its competition sessions on the five succeeding Wednesdays. Saturday, July 11, will be the first

night of 3YA's competition series, to be followed on succeeding Saturdays. Next is 1YA, which starts on Monday night, July 13, and follows every Monday. Wellington's main station, 2YA, will begin its series on Tuesday night, July 14.

Separate programmes will be provided throughout the series from each station, and in each case the items will be numbered from 1 to 60 (not 1 to 10 for each night).

Each station's prize-money will be divided as follows:

First prize, £10; second prize, £5; third prize, £3; fourth prize, £2.

Each evening of the six in the series from each station will contain a mixed bag, ranging from operatic, symphonic and chamber music to rhythm numbers. This will doubtless have the effect of confusing the lowbrows and confounding the highbrows, but the result will be that listeners will hear items representative of the general programmes, and in every case the number will have been heard—prob-