

BITING at the BITERS



"Record" Critic Sits
Up To Take A
Little Of His
Own Medicine

By
"EMILE"



SINCE there is a critic lurking in every listener to a radio set in New Zealand, this little homily of the Radio Man means as much to you as to me.

Criticism of radio programmes, says the Radio Man, can have a twofold object. First the guidance of public taste, and secondly the guidance of programme arrangers.

All this provided the critic does not allow himself to become dogmatic and governed by private prejudices.

THERE is a difference between the radio critic and the theatre critic, says the Radio Man. The theatre critic listens to the play in company with many other people. To some extent his opinion is formed by the reactions of these others.

At least he is well aware, as he goes away from the theatre, if his opinion has been endorsed or not by his audience.

But the radio critic has been listening alone, cut off from the thousands of other listeners. He can give only his own opinion.

But, to the programme organiser, says the Radio Man, the consensus of opinion is what is important. The opinion of all the people with whom the critic has lunch would be more valuable than his own to the programme organiser.

So many things affect the solitary radio critic—his home life, his digestion, his wife—all of which may have some influence on his frame of mind toward a certain item. And there is no mass-consciousness, as there is in a theatre to rouse him out of this condition.

"**D**ON'T think that programme arrangers dislike criticism," said the Radio Man. "They welcome it, so long as it is honest and unbiased. How else could they learn their faults. In fact, they much prefer honest criticism to fulsome praise."

There is a difference, however, between the art of radio and the arts of the films and the theatre. It comes about through the nature of the services given.

RADIO is, as it were, a co-operative concern in which every listener is a small shareholder, through the fact that he pays his licence fee. He feels he has a personal interest in the fare provided and a distinct right to voice his critical views. He is much more vocal about the material presented than he is about what he sees in the films and in the theatre.

It is this way, says the Radio Man. If you go into a private restaurant and order lamb and you get mutton, you may be annoyed when you pick up your hat and go, but you don't often kick up a fuss.

But if you belong to a staff cafeteria—a co-operative concern—and the same thing happens to you, it would be extremely queer if you didn't chip the cashier about it on your way out.

Just as the criticism in the cafeteria, if well directed and free from personal bias, is useful, so it is most useful in radio.

THE radio critic, however, should realise that he has tremendous power. To start with, if he strongly criticises a production, he may be jeopardising someone's livelihood, the livelihood of a producer, an actor or a performer. If he is unfitted for his job, if he is weak enough to yield to the temptation to sacrifice truth for the sake of being facetious and making a "wisecrack," he can do a great amount of harm.

Then, too, he should consider the effect of his criticism on the artist. The artistic temperament flourishes on praise and gets strongly set back very often by criticism. So the critic should remember to praise where he justly can as heartily as he damns.

THERE is one kind of praise, however, that the Radio Man deplores.

Sometimes, he says, through having a keen sense of publicity and a knowledge of the art of pushing his wares, one artist may prevail on periodicals to puff up his work and himself in its pages out of proportion to its merits.

This can do incalculable harm. The other artists, quieter by nature and not of the pushing type, who perhaps give a finer kind of work to the public, see the response that is apparently won by the work of the showman.

They say, "This man's work is poorer stuff than mine, but it seems to go over better. He gets publicity for it and praise. It seems to be what the public wants. I had better go in for it, too."

This means, often, that the artist will be tempted to debase his art and give work of a much lower standard, simply because of injudicious praise or publicity to a man whose art was actually much inferior to his own.

THEN again, says the Radio Man, the critic should always try to keep the thing he is criticising in its proper perspective. If he goes to a

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FOR 364 days out of the year the radio critic has a free hand at criticising radio programme organisers. But on the 365th day, the radio programme organiser criticises the radio critic.

The critic growls at him on most days; to-day he growls at the critic. . . .