

This Week's Special Article

These Grim Music Festivals And the Arena Spirit

SOME years ago I attended, for the first time, the festival of the Competitions Society in a New Zealand town.

The theatre that had been engaged for the tests was a large one. Two hundred people were scattered through the darkened stalls. Though no performer was on the stage, I was hushed twice before I reached a seat in the centre of the house. On the right of the auditorium a man sat in a little curtained box scribbling wearily on sheets of paper and whispering to his assistant. Now and then he passed a handful of official-looking dockets to a second assistant, who scurried up and down the aisle on tip-toe. Then a little light winked in front of the box and a small child tripped nervously on to the great, empty stage with a fixed smile on its little white, wooden face. A chord struck hollowly in the polished, massive bulk of the grand piano, and the child sang in a sweet, fluty voice:

"Hark, hark, the lark
At Heaven's gate sings . . ."

At the end of the ordeal the audience applauded politely, the child sighed with deep relief, bowed woodenly, and pattered off.

Charming.

A second of fevered scribbling in the curtained box and once again the little light winked. On to the great, empty stage another small child came—with a fixed smile on its little white, wooden face. A chord

HAVE competitions a real cultural value or are they defeating their avowed object by an examination-room atmosphere? Maros Gray opens up a controversial subject in this article. "Art should be self expressive, free, joyous and earnest," he says. "Competitions are merely earnest."

struck hollowly in the polished, massive bulk of the grand piano, and the child sang:

"Hark, hark the lark
At Heaven's gate sings . . ."

When it had happened eleven times I rose and was hushed twice on the way out, and thought to myself, "New Zealand is a strange country!"

Since, of course, I have learned better. I have attended a round dozen of those grim festivals and have heard some excellent singing, some amazing elocution, and have seen some even more amazing dancing—but I remember nothing quite so impressive as those eleven little white, wooden faces singing:

"Hark, hark, the lark
At Heaven's gate sings . . ."

Do competitors enjoy these festivals—do they go to them eager to entertain with their music and singing and dancing and reciting—to express themselves because they enjoy expressing themselves?

Do they prepare for them joyfully: and would they prepare for them if it were not for the promptings of teachers who, after all, have a reputation to acquire or maintain?

Do people attend them to enjoy the music and singing and dancing and reciting, or do they attend merely to see for themselves if Tommy Brown is as good as his mother says he is, or if Priscilla Primms has really got a voice?

Do people require this arena-atmosphere, this grim bag-that-medal-from-Sally-Jones-or-split-my-larynx-in-the-attempt spirit to make them persevere long enough to (Continued on page 50.)

In the Wake of the Week's Broadcasts

I have a feeling that those people who listened in to the Royal Air Force display in Wellington got almost as much from it as those who had grandstand seats. As publicity for the air

R.A.F. DISPLAY BROADCAST WAS TRIUMPH

force, the running of the display itself could have given points to theatre showmen, but the broadcast arranged by 2YA was no way behind it in organisation and effectiveness. The listener-in probably got a better idea of what was happening in the 'planes than the mere spectator, because he could hear the

instructor and pupil conversing together, the squadron leader giving his commands, and the comments of those taking part in the altitude flight. Also he had the benefit of an interesting and excellently delivered commentary by Flying-Officer Johnstone, full of human and humorous touches—even if he didn't convince me that (as he said at one point) flying a fighting 'plane "is all very good fun indeed!" The broadcast was further highlighted by brief and appropriate comments by an airman of the War Years and by one who had fought Franco's bombers in Spain. The NBS deserves full credit for an out-

standingly successful broadcast under what must have been difficult circumstances.

I do not quite know what to make of 4ZB's new feature, "Impressions," put across at 4.15 every Monday and Friday afternoon. A blending of verse, nicely delivered by Alex.

"IMPRESSIONS" WERE NOT IMPRESSIVE

McDowell, and of recorded vocal and instrumental music, these 15-minute sessions are intended to convey impressions of scene or character. The last session I heard