

Songs of ALL TIME

IN THE WAKE OF THE WEEK'S ...BROADCASTS...

WHEN in October 1871, an octet of negro vocalists started out on a tour with the object of raising funds for the extension of Fisk University, a new page in musical history was begun. These eight fine singers, who became known as the Fisk Jubilee Singers, were to take the "songs of their people" through America, Great Britain, and some countries of Europe. They were to delight Queen Victoria, other "Crowned Heads of Europe," statesmen and aristocrats, commoners, and artists of all kinds.

Since then the negro spirituals have become popular all round the world, and later bands of Fisk Jubilee Singers travelled even farther afield and visited the Antipodes, and were heard with enthusiastic acceptance all over New Zealand. To this day our old folk talk ecstatically about these negro nomads of song.

Primitive Dignity

It is, of course, pardonable to smile at the naivete often exhibited in the words, as one negro writer reminds us, but it should be remembered that in scarcely no instance was anything humorous intended. When it came to the use of words, the maker of the song was struggling as best he could under his limitations in language, and perhaps, also under a misconception or misapprehension of the facts in his source of material, generally the Bible. And often, like his more literary poetic brothers, he had to do a good many things to get his rhyme in. But almost always he was in dead earnest, and this much must be conceded—the songs were clothed in primitive dignity.

In a number of these songs there are leads, a response and a chorus—and the chorus becomes the most important part, dominating the whole song and coming first. Such a song is the well-known "Steal Away to Jesus," in which the congregation begins with the chorus, singing it in part harmony:

*Steal away, steal away,
Steal away to Jesus.
Steal away, steal away home,
I ain't got long to stay here.*

Then the leader alone, or the congregation, in unison:—

*My Lord He calls me,
He calls me by the thunder;
The trumpet sounds it in my soul.*

Then the response in part harmony:—

I ain't got long to stay here.

The Jubilee Singers spent no less than eight months in Germany, and moved the severely-critical "Berliner Musik-Zeitung" to a pitch of enthusiasm. Of "Steal Away," this journal said: "What a wealth of shading! What accuracy of declamation! Such a 'pianissimo,' such a 'crescendo,' and a 'decrescendo' as those at the close of 'Steal Away' might raise envy in the soul of any choirmaster."

The song "Steal Away to Jesus" is one of the negro's grandest contributions to music—once heard, understood and appreciated, it is never forgotten.

2YA listeners will hear the Johnson Negro Choir sing "Steal Away to Jesus," on Monday, February 20.

"If we will do the best we can in the time in which we live, then we will have done a fundamental service to the communities in which we live."—C.F. Kettering, General Motors, vice-president in charge of research.

NO place in New Zealand has a more varied and picturesque past than Waitangi, according to Te Ari Pitama, whose broadcast from 3ZB on the famous Treaty, and all that led up to it, was one of the finest radio items of the week. Elliott Lloyd was in charge of the production side. Incidental records brought a touch of distinctive realism into the word picture, by way of booming guns, mob effects and Maori themes. The whole broadcast was notable for its accuracy of detail, for Pitama possesses original scripts, both in Maori and English, and had obviously been at great pains to present an authentic word picture. This half-hour session could have been considerably lengthened without losing any of its appeal.

By far the most interesting talk last week, in my opinion, was the one given by Commander Lincoln Ellsworth, famous Antarctic explorer, and which I heard rebroadcast from Australia by 2YA. The subject of Commander Ellsworth's talk was "My Four Antarctic Expeditions," and the amount of interest he packed into the short time he was on the air was an object lesson to radio speakers. No orator—adventurers and men of action of his calibre seldom are—his voice was strongly individual and pleasant enough to listen to. A certain amount of derision has been directed at the practice of some well-publicised explorers of travelling to Antarctica and sitting by themselves in lonely snow-buried huts for long periods, but Ellsworth stoutly defended the work he had done. "After the explorer," he said, "comes the man with the pick and shovel." But he confessed, too, that the lure of the great white spaces of the last continent on the globe to be investigated by man had got into his blood, and probably that has a lot to do with it.

New Friday night session from 4ZB, "Meet the Major," is meeting with Dunedin listeners' approval. This is a session more in the interests of men than women, but judging from some of the comments I have overheard, it is just as popular with women. "The Major" is none other than Mr. Percy James, beloved as "Uncle Percy" of the Sunday night children's half-hour. Uncle Percy's friendly, persuasive voice is ideally suited to a session of this type, and he can infuse interest into every subject he brings up. And the subjects are many, for Uncle Percy has had considerable experience, knows what will interest men, knows, moreover, how to convey that interest.

I was amused to hear the other night from the Berlin shortwave station one of Dr. Goebbels's bright young announcers apologising for speaking so carefully and slowly. "I have what you call a hangover," he explained, "and if I did not speak carefully I would fall over my tongue. The reason it is that we have been celebrating carnival here, and it means dancing and

drinking in plenty, and it is always a job to get to work in the morning. For you must remember it is only eight o'clock in the morning here." The news session which followed this frank apology was devoted to an exceedingly clever and subtly-worded exposition of the official German reaction to President Roosevelt's declaration concerning America's "Rhine-frontier." The ridicule heaped on him must have made the President's ears burn, and the whole tone of the session gave a contradiction direct to the theory I have heard advanced that Dr. Goebbels's short-wave announcers aim at nothing more than amiably expounding German righteousness to the world. Perhaps Dr. Goebbels's boys do do that, but they do a lot more besides. No sooner, incidentally, was scathing reference made to President Roosevelt's alleged association with world Jewry than a most effective interference commenced and reception was completely spoiled. It may not have been intentional, but the possibility that it was brought dramatically to my fireside the

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TE ARI PITAMA, of 3ZB, whose Waitangi broadcast was one of last week's best features.

reality of to-day's clash of ideologies. In imagination I could not help picturing a secret radio station somewhere in Germany, operated by dark, furtive agents of world Jewry, jamming away like anything.

If, in the slowness of the development of crucial situations, there was ever a serial more tantalising than "Black Flame of the Amazon," I cannot recall it. Sometimes it takes several nights to dispose of a crisis which could easily be "washed up" in a few minutes. Yet this is not as annoying as it might seem—to me at any rate. Some of the action is delayed to permit Harold Noice explain to the two children under his command, details of the jungle, the habits of beasts, fish, and insects. And Noice comes to light with some wonderfully interesting material, so interesting, in fact, that one completely forgets the peril of the moment. And, when the instalment ends and the action has not advanced one step farther, any feeling of annoyance is offset by the realisation that a little knowledge has been gained. Although the actual production strikes me as being a trifle rough at times, I am not at all sure that very nearly the ideal way of spreading knowledge has not been found, especially as the serial has a pronounced juvenile appeal. I honestly believe Noice's dissertation on soldier ants to be one of the most interesting natural history talks I have heard over the air, and I listen to the serial for the sake of these side issues more than I do for the story itself.

SIDE LIGHTS ON THE JUNGLE

I don't know whether 4ZB is out to make nervous wrecks of its listeners, but the station certainly has the proper technique. Periodically throughout the day the evenness of 4ZB's programme is broken by a shouting voice: "Let's Build a Nation!" Immediately there follows a terrific bang, like the beginning of an air raid. Actually it is only someone striking the studio gong, but do they strike it, or throw a chair at it? Things have reached a stage now where as soon as I hear the first utterance of the war cry, I make a flying leap at the radio in an endeavour to drown out the reverberating explosion which I know will ensue. I nearly always reach the set just in time to achieve my object—but it's all horribly unnerving.

Some of the good folk at 2YA misinterpreted—and have taken me gently to task—the paragraph I wrote last week about "Coranto's" reference to the passing of the Irish poet, W. B. Yeats. Now, it was the briefness of "Coranto's" remarks that I complained of, and I did make mention of the fact that 2YA was presenting a tribute to Yeats's memory. This tribute, which was specially written, was presented on the Friday night following Yeats's death, and concluded with a rendering by Wellington tenor, Roy Hill, of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." But I am still sorry that "Coranto" paid more attention to Candlemas than he did to W. B. Yeats.

On Tuesday night of last week I listened to a particularly fine 1ZB production. It was labelled "Cameo from the Classics" and was, I understand, the first of a series of such cameos. It was a short—all too short—excerpt from "Oliver Twist"—performed to mark the 127th anniversary of the birth of Dickens. It dealt with the episode where Bill Sykes kills Nancy. The whole thing was admirably done, and it was a vividly condensed example of the radio playwright's ability to bring home the message and appeal of a great classical writer. The feature was adapted, produced and acted by members of 1ZB's staff, and was locally recorded. If the rest of the series are as good as this one, listeners are going to enjoy them.

4ZB's Professor Speedee and his general knowledge class went to the pictures recently. They deserted the studio for the stage of the Empire Theatre, where they provided a novelty turn. The theatre was well filled and the audience thoroughly enjoyed the reactions of the four "pupils" to the unusual questions they were asked. Whether or not it was because the performers knew they must have friends watching and listening, the surprising fact emerged that these four students acquitted themselves exceptionally well, and high marks were scored. The session was broadcast as usual, and the good-natured laughter of the audience gave listeners a better idea of the reaction of the students to the various questions. Similar sessions may be arranged at a later date.

PROFESSOR
AT THE
PICTURES

TE ARI PITAMA, of 3ZB, whose Waitangi broadcast was one of last week's best features.

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