

Do We Really Listen?



L is an extraordinary coincidence that the word "listen" and the word "loud" come from the same source. "Listen," in Anglo-Saxon, was once hlistan, from hlust, the ear; "loud" was originally blud—and both words are derived from the Greek verb kluo, to hear. So that we ought, one would think, to "listen" to our "loud"-speakers.

Are we doing so? Do we give the attention to—at least—the better type of music that is broadcast for our benefit?

Those Musical Evenings!

IT is not so long since the days when we used to congregate in the houses of our friends to endure that form of purgatory known as the musical evening. We all remember how everyone was expected to do something, whether they were qualified or not—to play, to sing, or to recite. It was generally a case of the survival of the fittest in the audience, and often amongst the "artists" also.

So far as the latter were concerned only he (or she) who had sufficient personality (or effrontery) to "get over" could restrain the audience from continuing its conversation as if nothing had happened to make it do otherwise.

A pianist stood not even the proverbial dog's chance; he generally had to perform upon an upright piano on which ornaments and photo-frames rattled their disapproval, and was forced to be seated with his back to his hearers. No matter what he played or how he played it, the audience accompanied him vocally with loud and animated conversation.

The vocal aspirant fared a little better; he could at least face his audience (so long as he knew his words or had an extra copy of the song) and generally managed to keep his victims in better order.

They were queer days, those; the seeds of a bad habit were undoubtedly sown, and we, in these enlightened times, are reaping what others sowed for us. *We are not listening.*

If we go to the opera, of course, we are *made* to listen. We dare not do otherwise. The man is not yet born who would dare to light a cigarette or chew a chocolate during the performance of an opera.

I suppose it is only reasonable to realise that one is more at liberty where wireless music is concerned because one is at home (or in someone else's home) and because, as one cannot see or be seen, it does not greatly signify.

When we like somebody, we may find ourselves at a loss; we cannot recall him. But when we do not like him, we can rudely push in the knob which controls our set and consign him to the four corners of the earth.

Natural Carelessness?

PERHAPS it is only natural that we should become careless in the matter. Being at home, amid domestic influences, we may find ourselves listening to a Beethoven symphony while

the table is being laid or the dog being washed. All the same, I am not sure that it is really good for us. We can easily take a bath and take in most of a foxtrot without either losing the soap or blowing up the geyser; but we cannot take in a Beethoven symphony and do something else at the same time. It simply cannot be done.

The wireless is just the reverse; our untimely conversation interferes with our reception and "digestion" of it. It is unreasonable to suppose that we can be expected to remain in one position for the whole of an evening—even though we do so at a concert; but it is quite within the dictates of common-sense to suggest—as a piece of psy-

An article by M. Whitaker-Wilson, a noted English musician (published in "Wireless Magazine") on an art which few of us really possess—the art of listening.

For this very reason there is something to be said for earphones; we do stand some chance of keeping our ear on the ball, so to speak. Of course, if we begin reading novels at the same time the less said the better. I have seen that done.

With a loud-speaker we are apt to do things by halves. My study of psychology tells me that this is not good; one of the operations must suffer; but any remarks which follow here must be taken, of course, to apply only to serious music. I hasten to add that I do not wish to appear to belong to the section of the public generally known by the name of high-brow; I appreciate fully the uses of light music.

In Great Value.

THAT generally heard in a restaurant, if suitably subdued, is of great value. It mingles with our conversation; it forms a misty mirage to our musings; it is incidental music to our unwritten plays. If it becomes definite it also becomes a nuisance! It interferes with our conversation and probably with our digestion also.

chology—that if we study the programmes and take the trouble to select some attractive-looking item and listen to it, we shall derive considerable benefit from the mental activity involved.

There used to be a notice in the corridors outside the studios of the London broadcasting station to the effect that if the words of a song were not said, and well said, the song was lost. The injunction was obviously intended, from the B.B.C. point of view, for the broadcaster; it would have been a truism to have written: "Say your words so that your audience cannot avoid hearing them, remembering that very few really listen."

Straining—to Train.

NOT so many of us care to listen—by which I mean that we act as though we imagined that it is as injurious to strain the ears as it is to strain the eyes in an indifferent light. It is not so. The more the ears are strained the more they are trained, consequently the more acute they be-

come. If we wish to hear the grass grow we must begin by hearing the wind in the grass first.

There is no doubt that we are becoming so used to wireless transmission that we are falling into the habit of turning it on during meals, during periods when our friends visit us, and during the evenings we spend alone with an attractive novel.

I do not attempt to try to persuade you (or myself) that there is any actual harm in it; but I do feel inclined to urge that we ought to make suitable selections from the broadcast repertory for occasional serious listening.

If I may presume to preach to those who know so much more about wireless construction than I do myself, and who build sets from what I want to call *recipes*, it will be to suggest that it is easily possible to become so interested in the reception in the technical sense that the reception in the artistic sense is practically missed altogether.

I know more than one man thus affected. I know an enthusiast who has (I believe) a five-valve set of considerable power. He can, apparently, "get" every station on earth; he has a small fleet of loudspeakers in the room where his sets live; and what he does not know about wireless from that point of view is scarcely knowledge.

Yet he never takes the trouble to remember the name of a work or of its composer; to recognise a composer by the style of his music; to remember the name of more than one singer in ten, or to take the slightest interest in the quality of what he hears from the artistic point of view. He has developed an absorbing interest in wireless, not in wireless art.

I suppose he would say that I am just the opposite. I confess to abysmal ignorance of wireless technically. I know what to do to my set if it will not do what I want it—up to a point. I fidget with the knobs until the thing stops howling like a diseased dervish and music floats into the room. When the tone is satisfactory I settle down and listen. I can honestly say I do that.

The Influence of Music.

I THINK the whole point of view may be summarised in this way: music was not written by fools, nor yet for fools. Music is a powerful influence, one of heaven's greatest gifts to earth. We can now send it from the flood into the world's end; we can call the world; we can speak, sing, and play to millions. It is a bit of a thrill, when we come to think of it.

We should not be the intelligent race we are if we were deprived of art. But because it is unseen, and additional strain is thereby imposed upon us, there is no argument for our not standing up against that strain. After all, it is only for the time being.

I say that advisedly, for the time is coming, slowly but none the less

—D.P.

The Rainbow

WHEN earth was in its dawning
In ages long ago,

Between the sun and rain-cloud

The rain god wrought a bow.

'Twas hewn from precious jewels,

And woke mad greed in man,

He sought it out and shattered it,

He fought about and scattered it,

Thus precious stores began.

The god was filled with sorrow,

He made a bow again,

He fashioned it from sunlight,

From sunlight and the rain,

And laid a spell upon it,

This glorious arch of gleams,

That made it as intangible,

Untouchable as dreams.

The spell was laid for ever,

The spell endureth still,

For rainbow ever hovers

Beyond the nearest hill.