

The Fascination of the

BALLAD

On December 28 an unusual programme will be featured from 2YA. It will be a recital by Miss Clodagh Russell, who will contrast the Ballad with Modern Poetry. In this interview with the "Record" she makes some interesting comments on the form of art known as the ballad.



CLODAGH RUSSELL

Miss Russell, who has had broadcasting experience from 2LO, London, can be heard at 2YA on December 28.

YOU want me to talk about the ballad. That is not difficult, for it is such an interesting subject that one could talk for a very long time and touch only the fringe. Really, in a short talk, it is more difficult to know what not to say. Ballads have interested me, and I have studied them and specialised in their presentation—few people do so—and I think that makes them all the more interesting.

Many people have only a hazy perception of the meaning of the word "ballad," and not a few associate it with a dance. They are not to be blamed, though, for not only are certain elementary dances associated with a type of ballad but the words "ballet" and "ballad" are very similar and, having their origin in the same root, are likely to be rather too closely associated. A ballad is a special type of verse, sung or recited, which deals with episode or simple motif rather than with a sustained theme. These episodes are handed down like traditions, and are subject to modification on that account. But like most things that are handed down, they improve with the process.

It is said that ballads have no authors, but that they are the outcome of oral improvisation before an audience in close emotional contact. Whether that is so or not is for us immaterial. The fact remains that at some time or other there was an author, but the point is that whoever he was, his name has been forgotten, and the ballad has become common property.

The diction and metre of the ballad are altogether different from modern verse. It is simple and unkempt art,

strikingly different from all known styles.

Its history is interesting, and to a great extent explains its form. In the absence of printing and definite records, it is difficult to make any statements with certainty, yet it is certain that many of the ballads dated back to pre-Norman times. They were perpetuated by itinerant minstrels, and in this manner became known over wide areas.

SOME minstrels, of course, remained in one district, and that may explain the locality factor entering into some compositions. But the majority moved on. They sought their night's lodging by playing, singing and jesting. Their stories had to suit their audiences, or they would lose their meal and rest—perhaps their heads, if the Royal monarch had had a poor day's hunting. Consequently the minstrel made alterations to the ballad. This explains why many built on the same theme, though they are found in widely-separated countries whose people are of entirely different temperaments.

Until the time of Sir Walter Scott, little was done to collect these ballads. But Scott, in his book, "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border," threw the subject into the limelight and founded the study of this fascinating subject.

The ballad may be regarded as the forerunner of the arts. From it has sprung the Drama, the Song and the Dance. Let me explain

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