

The Listener

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Schoolchildren of Hiroshima awaiting the arrival of the Emperor of Japan, when he visited the town for the first time since the war: a photograph by the late Werner Bischof (see page 330)

In this number:

The Germans in Search of Reunification (Terence Prittie)

Social Criticism of the Arts (Richard Wollheim)

The First Mathematician in Europe (Sir Edmund Whittaker)

CRITIC ON THE HEARTH

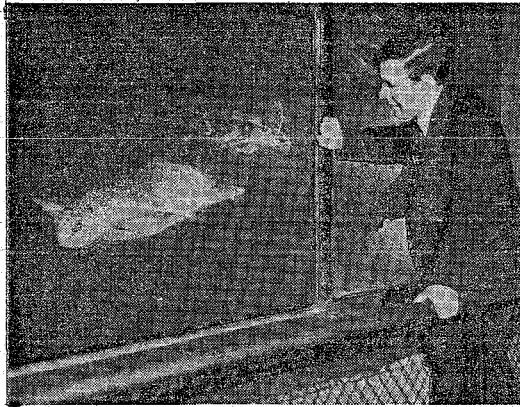
Weekly comments on B.B.C. programmes by independent contributors

Television Broadcasting

DOCUMENTARY

'War in the Air'

READERS OF THE LISTENER who rallied in protest against the background music nuisance will be heartened to know that their warrior cries have been taken up by a strong second wave of attack. Representing its most northerly flank, Miss G. Stewart Somerville, of Comrie, Perthshire, urges me on with the invigorating threat that if I show signs of wavering she will cross the border and lay about her with a claymore at Television Centre—and she hopes that



'Facts about Fish' on February 19: James Fisher looking at the turtle tank of the Aquarium in the London Zoological Gardens

I will save her the expense of the journey. 'Please go on fighting for us and for a sense of proportion. You can have little idea what hope and encouragement your words are bringing to sufferers from the background music plague'.

In the south, Sir Geoffrey de Havilland writes from Hatfield Aerodrome: 'I notice that you are trying to get an improvement in the matter of background music and noise. I was very glad to see this and would like to tell you how much I agree with what you say. To my mind—and I know many of my friends agree with me—much of the pleasure of television is spoilt by the so-called "background" music which often becomes "foreground" noise'. For the centre, I take a letter from Dr. Henry Hudson, of Prestwich, Manchester, who says: 'I do not look in a great deal, but I like documentary and instructional programmes—(or—most of them) and for these one wants peace and quiet, so that one may take in what one is seeing as fully as possible. Instead of peace and quiet, one gets background "music", too often nothing but a noisy jangle'.

Suggesting that there may be no affinity between vision and sound, Mr. J. M. Harries, of Norbury, points out that 'music is purely emotive and, by-passing analysis, works immediately on the subconscious (Wagner paraphrased), whereas the eye is intensely analytical; indeed, the eye is an analyst'. Here, Mr. Harries thinks, we have the root of the conflict reflected in the

widespread dissatisfaction with background music. I am obliged to condense his views somewhat brusquely. Our present discontents are founded not on the use of music in television programmes but on its extravagant and ill-considered application to subjects and themes designed to provide us with information and instruction and, perhaps, insight too.

To many viewers there seemed to be a wilful misuse of music in the 'War in the Air' series, just ended. Not content to let the horrid din of war supply its own sound-track, the producers superimposed pompous instrumental noises characteristic of the cinema but unwelcome in the home. There is no criticism here of the title music by Sir Arthur Bliss. Some other composers who contributed to the series also knew their place; there were passages in which the mood of elegy, for instance, was movingly conveyed. Too often the episodes were overlaid by volumes of sound which swamped one's attention. Music should help to ameliorate human suffering, not amplify it. As a result, 'War in the Air' is prominently arraigned in the letters I am receiving just now.

As television, I fear that the series has not been the success hoped for by those who saw it as our reply to the American 'Victory at Sea' series of two years ago. Background music was sometimes intrusive in those programmes, but the pervading musical quality was such that many viewers still remember it. I doubt if that compliment will be paid to 'War in the Air'. I am told that the series has not been accepted by American television, which may or may not be a reflection on its merits. Its merits are conceded mainly by those viewers who saw themselves or their friends in the various war scenes. My own impression is that the last programme, 'Past and Future', was the best. The attempt to digest twenty years of air progress into a total of seven and a half hours' viewing time was gallantly impracticable. There were few of the clear-cut, sustained sequences which in 'Victory at Sea' made us feel that we were eye-witnesses



The first episode of the new serial 'Portrait of Alison', on February 16, with Patrick Barr as Tim Forester and Elaine Dundy as Jill Stewart

of tremendous happenings. An explanation may be that the Americans had more combat cameramen. We were required to sit and watch too much bomb-fall, too many single aircraft taking off and touching down, too much incident, not enough event. 'War in the Air' was one of those programme undertakings which cry out for editorial genius, an asset which the B.B.C. has always undervalued if not ignored.

'The forest laments in order that Mr. Gladstone may perspire', said Lord Rosebery. A programme called 'Fight for the Forests' had for its subject the present state of the nation's trees, an encouraging report on the work that is being done to preserve and increase them. Until this programme told us, many of us did not know that all our woodlands, great and small, are mapped by the Forestry Commission or that it employs studious young women to stare into microscopes, fathoming the behaviour of the more minute tree enemies. The programme was stimulating in its assurance of official devotion. I enjoyed it. Another kind of heritage was the inspiration of 'Made in Sheffield', a B.B.C. television film which unveiled the arcana of the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire. That was an informative programme, too.

Two new evening productions made a determined bid for the attention of women viewers with topics more usually presented in the afternoon viewing domain. They were 'Kitchen Magic', in which a husband and wife gave a cookery demonstration with a difference, and 'Can You Tell Me?' with Phyllis Digby Morton answering questions about fashions. Both consigned a large part of the male viewing population to the sidelines. The first was one of those put-up-job programmes in which the characters try hard to appear as if the inspiration for it has only just come to them. These two succeeded no better than most, but they gave a gloss of domestic novelty to a subject which television is apt to treat too theatrically. 'Can You Tell Me?' was glossy, too, and used Channel Number 5 in place of paprika.

In THE LISTENER for April 1, 1954, I drew attention to the anomaly of 'In the News' not being allowed to discuss topics coming up for parliamentary debate within two weeks. On February 18, 1955, 'In the News' registered its own protest, omitting to make the point that it is denied a right exercised by the newspapers.

REGINALD POUND

DRAMA

The Good Bid

'THAT'S A GOOD BID, Eugene!' says Candida when the little poet has offered her his 'weakness'. If the play is going at all well at that moment we accept the scene without question. But in cold print, afterwards . . . is not this fascinating play beginning to show for one of those comedies which seemed immortal but are gently but firmly being relegated by the advance of time to the status of the drama which reflects only its day and age?

I speak under correction and I hasten to add that I greatly enjoyed the performance on Sunday night and confidently suppose that it will go, if not better, at least more smoothly, at the repeat tonight.



'Candida' on February 20, with (left to right) Edward Chapman as Mr. Burgess, Charles Stapley (behind) as the Rev. Alexander Mill, Tom Criddle as Eugene Marchbanks, Irene Worth as Candida, and Michael Hordern as the Rev. James Mavor Morell

Candida herself was a little too tense and was too anxious to be up on her feet, patting and smoothing—or at least so it seemed to me. Then that fascinating actress Irene Worth, though a Candida you are unlikely ever to forget, seemed to me to put a shade too intense a degree of unspoken thought behind her every utterance. Isn't part of the charm of this 'Great Mother' figure of Shaw's fancy that she is instinctively as calm as the Mediterranean usually is and that the hints about getting 'very, very angry' are only wise Mummy's way with the boys? It must be much harder a part for a modern actress to play than it might seem on the surface. St. Joan would be child's play by comparison—and who, anyhow, has ever seen a bad St. Joan? Like Hamlets, they are all good, all proof against misplaying.

With Candida, however, one could go badly astray. Miss Worth is much too clever an actress to go wrong by a hair's breadth, but between perfect self-identification with the part and the projection of a character which has to be 'assumed' there is just that millimetre of light showing which the television screen can magnify into a gulf. Perhaps the alien self-critical awareness which at times I sensed behind the bright and alluring eyes of this Candida was simply 'Oh, let it all go right'. The prayer answered, she may tonight look quite different—with that bovine something which seems to belong. Or am I unfair to Candida?

Perhaps I read too much into the part anyway. Because Shaw gave himself out for a feminist, mere males have a notion that women will tend to like *his* women more than they do themselves. Not so, or not always. I have never known a more restless theatre companion than a lady of advanced views who accompanied me to a not so distant revival of 'Candida'. She kept up a steady barrage of snorts, like a minute gun at a military funeral, and followed each one with a muffled cry of 'Help us; what a woman!'—which gave me new ideas. I am quite ready to be told that I am wrong to have looked so keenly for inner quiet in Miss Worth's portrayal. It was in all other ways a most distinguished and exciting assumption.

The close-packed argument and the verbal battles were, of course, planned for a stage, and looking at a stage one looks quite happily back and forth to observe the sighting of the guns

and the shots hitting or missing the target. At some points in Harold Clayton's production we could have done with more cross cutting and less of that standing about tightly bunched in threesomes like Florestan and his sisters in the ballet. Indeed we suffer so much from choreography on television that it entered my head at one moment the Rev. Gentleman might be going to 'lift' Candida and turn her over, Swan Queen fashion, to young Marchbanks. The moment passed. Generally the camera was looking close at the right face at the

right moment; save once, when we badly wanted to know how something had affected Morell. As the socialist parson Michael Hordern was marvellously effective: I don't think I recall this brilliant actor giving a better performance since his Ivanov. The clerical cast of visage and cast of voice, the desperately unself-questioning sincerity in the eyes, the crumbling façade, only a little too quick, were perfectly delineated. The only thing missing, perhaps, was that 'muscular Christian' side of the man on which Shaw rather cruelly seems to insist. As between this Morell and this Marchbanks one felt that there would be nothing much in it when it came to 'lifting a box off the roof of a cab' and that in the end Mrs. Morell would probably have fetched the thing down herself.

Tom Criddle began Marchbanks in a hypnotised trance and with monotony—out of nerves, I thought; but very quickly got better, making the main points well if without quite making me able to forget the variety, grace, and humour of Stephen Haggard in the part. But, all in all, the intimacy, the interaction, and dramatic intensity of the big scenes of this play were such as to honour the whole notion of television as a serious medium for drama, and one can hardly say fairer than that, though I would certainly be failing in duty if I left out any mention of Avice Landone's exquisitely sharp-edged picture of 'Prossy' (even the drunk scene done to the flick of an eye) and Edward Chapman's firmly placed Burgess, which relived his performance in an earlier revival of the play.

I shall watch this again tonight, feeling faintly guilty at allowing a mere revival to keep me from mention of all the other gems of the week (rich in comedy from Messrs. Hill, Askey, and Barker, and

notable for the start of a new Durbridge serial). But it seems to me that what we have with a revival such as this of 'Candida' on Sunday is nothing less than a performance at the 'National Theatre' which, after all the years of agitation, has suddenly 'happened'.

PHILIP HOPE-WALLACE

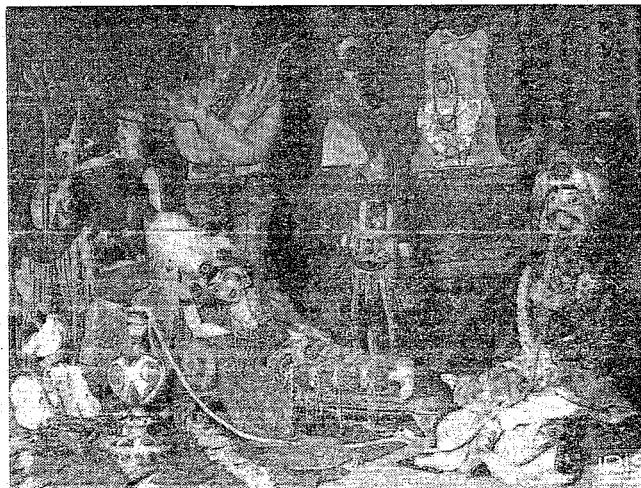
Sound Broadcasting

DRAMA

Murder Most Foul

IT WAS A SUNDAY for Anouilh-tasters. They faced their sets much, I imagine, as Shakespeareans wait for one of the parts of 'Henry VI'. Here was 'The Ermine' (Third), not Jean Anouilh's first play, but his first of any importance, a *pièce noire* written at the age of twenty-one, and without—so we gathered—anything to lighten it. True, it had a Duchess; but this dear woman would be hit very hard with a hammer wrapped in cloth. In performance the play proved to be a small matter that developed into murder-melodrama. There were one or two cutting theatrical scenes; little else to remember. All rested on Frantz, a proud, needy young man with a fierce conviction that poverty and purity, unswayed love, could not go together. 'Money', he said in effect, 'is the only thing that can protect you from nastiness'. No good to talk to him about an idyll in a cottage, or to tell him that he would be loved, however poor he was. He must have wealth; wealth, it seemed, would ensure 'purity', and in order that his marriage with Monime should be spotless, he killed her wealthy and tyrannical aunt with a hammer. One might fail—maybe one's own fault—to follow the reasoning of a young man who seemed to have got his blacks and whites muddled; but on the air the scene of examination after the murder did seize us as this sort of thing usually does in plays of less pretension.

The fact was that here, as in most of Anouilh's work, the dramatist's sense of theatre mattered more than his arguments. Raymond Raikes' production kept the piece taut, and it was lucky indeed for Anouilh that he had so impressively varied an actor as Peter Wyngarde to go through the emotional exercises of Frantz (in the last half of the play some must have thought for a moment of 'Crime and Punishment' seen through the wrong end of a telescope). The most telling passage was the short talk in the Duchess' bedroom before the hammer



'Ali Baba': a scene from Podrecca's Piccoli (the Italian Marionettes), televised from the Saville Theatre on February 16

fell. Dorothy Holmes-Gore, as the old woman, had a horrible authority, and Beth Boyd achieved the one real note of heartbreak in the piece on her cry, 'You've killed her just the same'.

The week's other murderer used poison, and his motive was one of greed and desperation (he disliked poverty as much as Frantz did, but for different reasons). Jeffrey Dell's version of C. S. Forester's 'Payment Deferred' (Light) is a relentless business; though its twist should be generally familiar now, we must still feel the tension while, as another dramatist says in effect, 'Retribution, like a poised hawk, comes swooping down upon the wrong-doer'. Richard Williams acted the wrong-doer, Marble, the bank clerk who administers cyanide of potassium to his new-found nephew, only for Retribution to swoop from another quarter of the sky. It is a harassing part, on the edge of monotony; but Mr. Williams knew how to summon the man, coarse-grained, boastful, apprehensive. Betty Hardy and Barbara Couper were exact as two women in Marble's life.

Charles Lefaux, who directed, was also the producer of 'One Bright Day' (Home), where we had, in an American setting, the brand of problem once dear to Galsworthy: a choice between self-interest and duty to the public. There was a stockholders' meeting that Galsworthy would have appreciated—quite the most charged moment, though the scene ebbed suddenly at the last. Here we were not involved with murder but with death by misadventure, and the possible effects if a firm failed to make it clear that certain supplies of a drug still upon the market were, in fact, dangerously toxic. The play (adapted by Peggy Wells from Sigmund Miller) gained in confidence as it proceeded. Some of the speaking held dangerously to one note, but Malcolm Keen was easily in command of the situation. On Saturday night the announcer's voice broke in hard upon the play's unexpectedly sharp ending and ruined the effect. One badly wanted a space here, an imaginary white line.

I cannot recall any casualties in the latest Ustinov-Jones programme, 'In All Directions' (Home). Opera-lovers, of course, may be fostering hatred, but we shall know about that later. In this highly cultural edition the partners considered the growth of British opera with irrelevant illustrations—from Thomas Corn-crake's 'Hamlet', for example, which will be given in the crypt of St. Asaph's, Dewsbury. We heard an uncommon rendering of the aria, 'To be or not to be'. (What pipes and timbrels!) Encouraged, Ustinov and Jones considered opera for some time before turning to a fantastic collection of aphorisms—I fear of doubtful provenance, though attributed to everyone from Confucius to Roosevelt. A mock-aphorism can sound all too real when uttered with gravity, just as Sir John Squire's sham sonnet, 'No purple mars the chalice . . .', can still hold an audience in respectful, if slightly bewildered, admiration. Again the programme tailed off with Dudley and Morrie, who are usually about to be funnier than they are. Never mind: 'In All Directions' remains the gayest thing on the air—and it is sound-radio's own.

J. C. TREWIN

THE SPOKEN WORD

Life's Variety

I REMARKED A FORTNIGHT AGO that while the first of Isaiah Berlin's four talks, called 'A Marvellous Decade', which was specially recorded for the B.B.C., imposed hard work on the listening ear, the second talk, recorded at University College, London, came through clearly, and I suggested that the difference might

be due to the conditions under which they were recorded. But, alas for amateur theorising, the third and fourth talks proved me wrong. Both came across perfectly and so the trouble with the first must have been due simply to bad reception here. The fourth talk was devoted to 'Alexander Herzen', and in his brilliant delineation of Herzen's character and opinions Mr. Berlin kept me engrossed throughout the hour. Herzen, by exposing abuses and daring to name names, was the chief influence in bringing about the Russian revolution, despite the fact that, unlike Bakunin, he was opposed to violence and ardently advocated individual liberty. Mr. Berlin has the gift of imparting his enthusiasm. Herzen's challenging and seemingly paradoxical opinions emerged, as expounded by him, as the quintessence of sanity. Although he wrote only in prose Dostoevsky described him as a great Russian poet. This talk was one of the most exciting I have ever heard. I hope some day to be able to read and enjoy it at leisure.

Thomas Hardy was a great English poet, but he wrote poetry as well as prose, or rather prose as well as poetry. On the previous evening Henry Reed gave an hour's discourse, with copious illustrations read by Mary O'Farrell, Michael Hordern and James McKechnie, on 'The Poetry of Thomas Hardy'. Listening to Mr. Reed I sometimes feel that I am back in the old classroom under the eye of one of the sterner and more intelligent of my schoolmasters and that if I were to venture a giggle or an independent view I would receive a disapproving glance. Nevertheless I enjoy myself and am the better for my lesson, and I found this hour a particularly rewarding one. Mr. Reed presented Hardy's poems in the light of his life history, and this approach considerably enhanced one's appreciation of them. He suggested that a new edition of the poems is needed in which they run parallel with the biography—an admirable notion, it seems to me, but one that would involve a herculean job for its editor. The poems were excellently read by all three readers. Mary O'Farrell proved, if proof were necessary, that she is one of the two best women readers of poetry on the B.B.C.

Patric Dickinson's 'Time for Verse' on John Donne was a good one, and the reader, Anthony Quayle, was good but not perfect. 'The Apparition', that most terrifying of all ghost stories, must be one of the most difficult of all poems to read aloud, and Mr. Quayle didn't quite give it that particular tone of restrained ferocity which it requires.

'The Lonely Virtues' is a fine theme for a series of talks. The first, on 'Solitude', was given a fortnight ago by Edward Allcard who has three times crossed the Atlantic alone in a thirty-foot boat and so has had ample opportunity to find out what solitude is. He confessed that on leaving Gibraltar for the Atlantic he was assailed by a fear of loneliness, but he found that demoralising thoughts can be abolished by making the mind a blank. Solitude on the sea, he said, made him realise his total insignificance in the universe. Talking to himself soon became a habit and he sometimes broke into loud, uninhibited singing, but if he stopped he didn't like to break the silence again. Classical music affected him much more than on land. As for reading, all he wanted was an atlas and an English dictionary. Such details, without directly telling us much, are curiously suggestive of the state of mind induced by solitude.

Last week Monica Baldwin talked of 'Silence'. Thirteen years ago she emerged from years of seclusion in a contemplative order where absolute silence was enjoined. Go about like a thief, she was told; walk on the tips of your toes; without silence there can be no spirituality. When she left the convent she found a world from which silence was being driven out. It is dread of

silence, she said, that makes people afraid to be left to their own resources. That reminded me of a note of Pascal's: 'J'ai découvert', he wrote, 'que tout le malheur des hommes vient d'une seule chose, qui est de ne savoir pas demeurer en repos, dans une chambre'. It was an impressive and disturbing talk.

MARTIN ARMSTRONG

MUSIC

A Neglected Masterpiece

SIR MALCOLM SARGENT returned last week from America like a giant refreshed, and in two programmes directed the best performances he has given for some time. His Wednesday concert in the Home Service had an oddly assorted programme, consisting of two highly sophisticated works by Strauss and Frank Martin, followed by the 'Pathetic' Symphony. Perhaps the idea was to show that Tchaikovsky's well-worn masterpiece can take its place in intellectual company. The fashion now is to prove that it is something more than a 'tear-jerker' by playing down the pathos. But this is apt to result, as happened last week, in reducing the temperature of its perfectly sincere and white-hot passion. Still, this is better than over-playing, till the tears dropped by the trombones upon that *fortissimo* pedal-point become as theatrical as the glycerine-drops on a film-star's face.

The Suite from Strauss' 'Die Frau ohne Schatten' was interesting to hear, though it added nothing to our knowledge of the composer in his most luxurious mood. It was extremely well played by the B.B.C. Orchestra. Frank Martin's Violin Concerto, in which Henry Holst gave an expressive performance, on the other hand enlarged our experience. For Martin's music has sometimes seemed of that rather aseptic, efficient character which one associates with the modern architecture of his native Switzerland. The concerto has those admirably clean lines, and the efficient technique, but there is something else in it—a soul. It is a 'success' in the sense implied in the composer's dictum, 'En musique la réussite est beauté.' This is the kind of work one wants to hear again, and quickly, before its first impact has softened in the memory.

Constant Lambert's masque, 'Summer's Last Will and Testament', was more fortunate in having an immediate repeat in the second of Sir Malcolm's programmes, given on Friday and Saturday (Third). This, Lambert's most substantial concert-work, has been unjustly neglected, possibly because it is not economical of means and must be difficult to perform well. So we really know only the orchestral Rondo ('King Pest'), which is sometimes played independently. Yet, though it is extravagant to reserve a soloist to the last of seven movements, and though the wordless choral passage at the end of the fourth movement ('Brawles') must tax the singers exceedingly, the results amply justify the means.

Lambert had the true Elizabethan spirit—the gusto and vitality coupled with sensibility and an awareness of man's tenuous hold on life. For Nashe in 1593, it was the plague that sharpened this awareness; for Lambert twenty years ago, it was the shadow of war. Twenty years, and we hardly know this masterpiece, whose success in achieving beauty makes one regret more than ever Lambert's preoccupation with ephemeral work at the expense of his creative activity, and his early death at the very moment when he had decided to devote himself to composition! The Masque, by turns pensive, robust, and grim, and, in the end, profoundly tragic, without any touch of that morbid self-pity that spoils for some of us Tchaikovsky's pathos, was given as good performances as one could wish to hear. The B.B.C. Chorus and