

Radio

Backward glances

With one year gone and another come—not even a decent interval—this is a time for retrospects and summings up, or would be if a quick glance at the last twelve months' cuttings had not made it obvious that any attempt at a short and comprehensive tour of the year's ups and downs is likely to be in vain: there is too much, too different.

It will be no news to any reasonably regular readers of this column that, in the view of one shop inspector, among the grocery's worst depleted shelves has been the one labelled Science Broadcasting, so it is encouraging, if one also looks ahead, to see that this may be about to improve. *The Listener* for December 27 published the coming quarter's "Radio Plans" and amongst them is a return of Brian J. Ford's *Where Are You Taking Us?* (January 13, R4) while Radio 3 is to launch on January 28 a new fortnightly series, *Scientifically Speaking*, presented by John Maddox and designed to "reflect significant scientific development and examine major national and international scientific issues". Something like this is long overdue and I welcome it most warmly, reserving only the hope that it will live up to its design and correct the technological and ethical imbalance of radio science until now. Mr Ford's second innings also looks promising, in particular the programme which is to examine the biochemistry of mood.

It may have appeared that I consider science to be the only ill-provided shelf in radio's

store. It has been the most obvious and easiest to exhibit, but there are others and one of them is in Arts. Most people probably know by now what *The Listener* also announces, that *Critics' Forum* starts this week and is in effect a reappearance of *The Critics*, very scantily disguised. Personally, I'm delighted: here

talk, it conveyed incomparable depth of experience. Normally when radio (or the other media) talks of "in depth" that means assembling a collection of diverse opinions to cover the subject over a huge area and in shallowness. Like a marsh or mudflat.

Curiously enough, Alistair Buchan's lectures had some of the quality I mean—a kind of informality which was missing from the preceding interview with him by Robert Kee. When Ian McIntyre interviewed Dr Ramsey on *Analysis* that was of the same type: both were carefully structured, the interviewers had done their homework, listed their questions; there was nothing unprepared, nothing unexpected would take place. The best talk on radio gives the impression that it is made up as it goes along, that it is an organic, living thing which may take on all sorts of shapes. Not only does question lead to answer, but answer leads to question and to hell with the list. There is nothing to encourage it in the quarter's "Radio Plans" but my hope for 1974 is to hear more talk like that.

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