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## Radio Taste

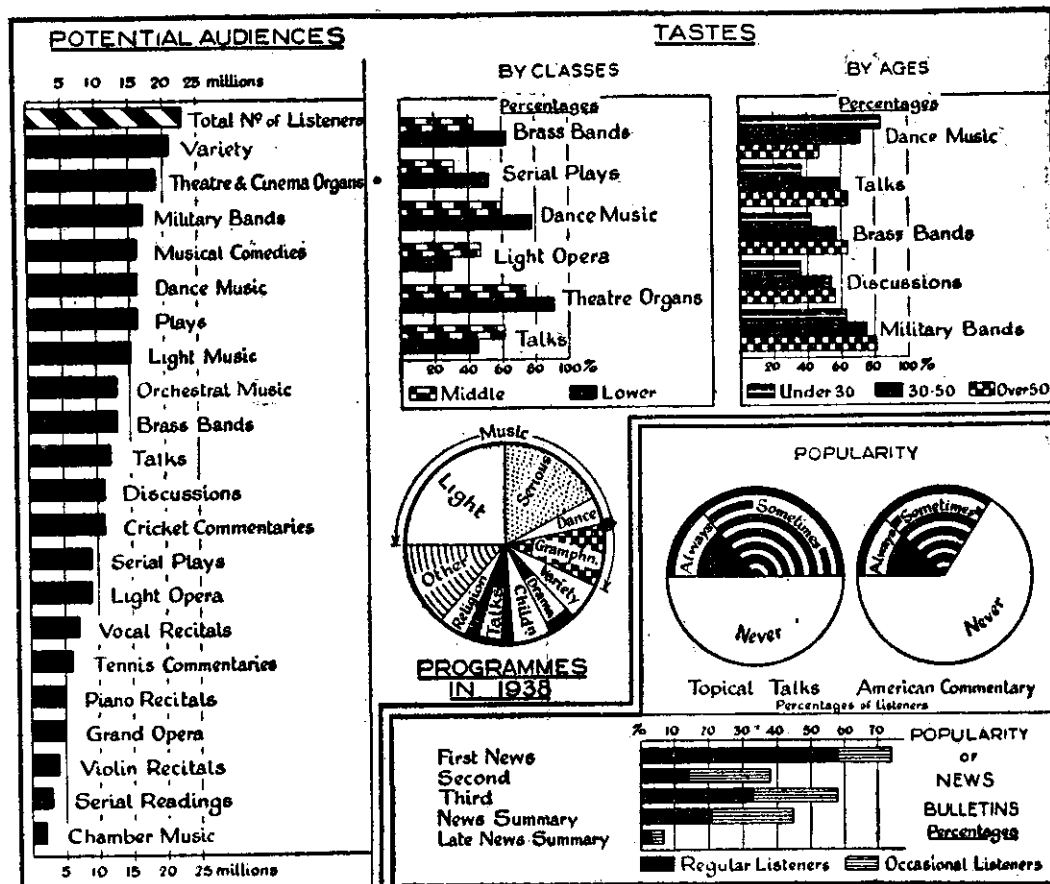
THE chart on this page will interest those readers who like seeing themselves as mathematicians see them. If we could know ourselves as we are, it would not be necessary to know ourselves diagrammatically, but no one accepts the testimony of his own inclinations. Far less can we accept what seem to be the inclinations of others.

But although figures and graphs give us confidence they do not give us taste. However we turn out statistically we remain where we were aesthetically before the brow-measuring began. We may, of course, following our mathematical exposure, consent to a change of diet, and in a few cases even demand it. Some such high hope as that lies behind the BBC inquiry. But we are far more likely to be given the same diet minus the few improving ingredients. For the customer is nearly always right. If he pays he gets what he wants; and we can no longer say, when his wish-graph has been drawn, that we don't know what he wants.

It is the old story of the accommodating politician: "Them's my sentiments, ladies and gentlemen, and if they don't suit they can be changed." It is easier, too, to change down than to change up. Even the BBC the other day found it expedient, after dropping swing, to listen to the shouts for its reinstatement. But when the worst has been said, facts are the beginning of wisdom. Radio is after all a very recent experience, and it is perhaps necessary that we should do our worst with it before we begin to do our best. When one of our first settlers built cottages for his Maori labourers the result was a glorious bonfire. At present we may be having the radio bonfire.

# LIMELIGHT ON LISTENERS

## The BBC Investigates Its Audiences



BROADCASTERS have been so busy letting the noise out that they have scarcely had time to let the light in. Straw polls conducted by magazines have done something to keep programme-planners in touch with listening tastes, fan mail has helped; but these methods have never been accepted as accurate, for there has been no guarantee that the response has come from the most representative cross-section of listeners.

A Listener Research Station, now working successfully for the BBC, seems likely to prove the best answer so far to the broadcasting authorities' prayer for illumination.

Working as a separate section of the BBC organisation, it has already made many interesting discoveries, as will be seen from a study of the chart reproduced on this page.

Several accepted ideas have been blown out. The often criticised chamber music programmes are found to have a regular audience of about two million, a figure which cannot be ignored, even if it is compared with the 21 million for variety. Every one had thought that the third BBC news session was most popular, but research discovers that it is the first which attracts the largest percentage of listeners.

The diagrams printed above are based on inquiries made last year. The only obvious

possibility of fallacy lies in the orchestral music total of potential audiences. The term has since been found to be too wide. A closer definition is wanted to ascertain the comparative attractions of symphony concerts and orchestras playing lighter music, for instance.

The system adopted so far is called by the Research Section its "random samplings." Impartial experts from the Post and Telegraph address the Section's letters to a selection of licence holders claimed to be a true microcosm of the listening public.

Other methods are used in conjunction with the random samplings. The Section searches out about 4,000 fully representative listeners and asks them to watch the progress of the programmes carefully over a period. Their observations are recorded for analysis in a system called "Listeners' Panels."

Discovery of what people listen to has led to a curiosity to know how much they listen, and this is worked out by "Listening Barometers"—people who keep careful logs of their listening. Ninety per cent. of those asked return their logs regularly, and officials are beginning to know more definitely when sets are in use.

The diagram includes an analysis of programmes in 1938, showing what was actually broadcast.