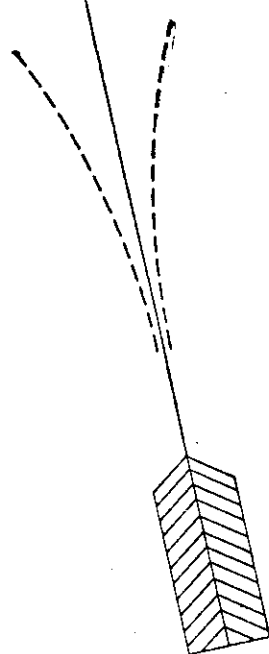


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HE HAD TO LEAD A BAND —But He'd Rather Play Liszt

“WHY Oswald?” we asked 1YA when we came across the item in the programme for this Friday, August 3: Studio recital by Oswald Cheesman (piano) and the Studio Orchestra conducted by Harold Baxter, Concerto in E Flat Major (Liszt).

“Oh,” they said, “Oswald when he's ‘long hair,’ Ossie the rest of the time. Same as Gerald Moore, the famous accompanist, is Gerry Moore when he writes a book on swing piano playing.”

So we called on the long hair and found it short: “I've always liked classical music best,” said Mr. Cheesman, “but I'd hate anyone to think that I have a derogatory idea of dance music—though I insist that it should be well done. There just hasn't been the

to Canada—with the intention of staying behind in Canada himself. But Canada didn't want poaching musicians either; it was only by the luck of a strike that the band was port-bound at Vancouver for a week or two, with a chance of picking up a few of the usual theatre engagements.

Back in New Zealand Mr. Cheesman settled down to a good steady job of teaching—for a time. But he had developed such a habit of forming bands by this time that it wasn't long before he had a contract with a shipping company to take a band of six on Pacific cruises to amuse and entertain the tourists to the Beautiful South Sea Islands. This was apparently great fun while it lasted—until the war broke out.

Ever since his return to New Zealand—after the unfortunate Canada trip—Mr. Cheesman has been playing on and off for 1YA. By 1939 he was ready to settle in with a dance band of 13 members. (He's still running this dance band with eight of the original members.)

More South Sea Islands

Japan entered the war and in 1942 Mr. Cheesman joined the army—anti-aircraft battery. It wasn't long before he had an off-time band going full blare. His unit was on the first ship to the Pacific and his band was the first in New Caledonia. In 1943 he was taken from his gun in the A-A battery to direct the music for the Pacific Kiwi Concert Party. In jeeps and aircraft and ships and barges the party travelled about the islands visiting base camps and troops stationed in comparatively forward areas. The more forward the areas the more times the shows were interrupted while the audience and the players all dived for shelter under the most inadequate stage; they had some near misses, amusing to recall but not so funny at the time.

Mr. Cheesman found that there are no such things as genuine native tunes in the sense that we know tunes. When he was in the islands he would ask and an old native would sing what he said was a native song and it would be native words with a modern American tune, or it might be native words with an easily-recognisable hymn tune. He suggests that the native singing originally had no set form but was a series of extempore chants.

As he has now visited the Beautiful South Sea Islands under holiday and non-holiday conditions, we asked Mr. Cheesman if he expects to take part in any future pleasure cruises of the Pacific.

“Not to those islands,” he exploded. Then he looked thoughtful. Then he said “Well, perhaps, under holiday conditions, different conditions, it mightn't be such a bad idea.”

A Man of Parts

Sandwiched between teaching piano and forming a band for 1YA Mr. Cheesman had a tour with a vaudeville company, a nine months' tour as accompanist to the Russian tenor Senia Chostiaikov, and about a year's leadership of a theatre orchestra in Wellington. To be able to arrange the music

(continued on next page)



OSWALD CHEESMAN
He says he's amphibious

scope in New Zealand for making your living by playing classical music alone and that's why I had to lead a band—I've had to be amphibious—at least, it's one of the reasons.” We found that another reason is that Mr. Cheesman is a man of action and likes to go places.

He began going places quite early when he had a job with an Auckland theatre orchestra which received a contract for a tour of Australia. Off to Australia young Cheesman went with this orchestra; when they got there they still had the contract but the Australian Musicians' Union wouldn't let them use it; they were poachers on protected ground and were sternly driven away. Back came the orchestra to its Auckland theatre. But not young Cheesman.

Fun While It Lasted

“I went to Australia and I wanted to play in Australia so I had to get myself a job in Australia.” So he did get a job, dozens of jobs, odd ones, for six months before he became accompanist at station 2KY Sydney. In the meantime he had had plenty of experience with theatre orchestras and touring bands. When he had been there a year he organised a ship's band to go on a trip