

and the judges. There is a long and exacting job, but what of the three official accompanists? One of them told us that it was not uncommon in competitions to play for 40 or 50 persons in one class—from 2 p.m. to 6.15 p.m., without an appreciable break. For instance, on the opening day this year, the women's lieder class started at 10.30 a.m. and continued throughout the afternoon.

The range of accompaniments presented is very wide, but the accompanists told us that they find it all interesting. It is their job to give the competitor all possible assistance, and to adapt the accompaniment to varied styles and interpretations. A competitor who, on the ordinary stage or concert platform, is all aplomb and self-confidence, finds facing the judges a different matter. Nervous singers must be given confidence. Some get excited and restless; others go cold and quiet. But in general the men are more nervous than the women—perhaps for a psychological reason. Put a girl into a new and pretty frock and she feels mistress of her fate. The average man, evening-dressed, gains no such "lift." He may know that he looks well, but he feels neither comfortable nor confident.

Calming Those Nerves

Competitors have tried various nostrums for settling the nerves. Once sal volatile was the thing: to-day some favour a glass of wine, orange juice, or raw eggs. There was a girl a year or two ago who, before going on the stage, nibbled daintily at tiny pieces of bread and butter. When asked the reason, she said: "Oh, they grease the throat, you know; Galli-Curci always did that."

Some odd things have happened on competition stages in New Zealand. A drama group presented a dramatic sketch in which thunder and lightning were in the effects. The stage manager had not been notified. When the lights flickered and the synthetic thunder boomed, he protested loudly. The audience heard his angry voice: "Here, what are you doing with those lights? For Heaven's sake stop that hammering!" On another occasion the order of the items was upset. The stage manager, so the story runs, strode on to the stage and announced, "Owin' to a slight horror, we will 'ave to take the pronunciation test now." And once,



A candidate for one of the solo vocal contests tries himself out before his turn comes

in a small hall, where the curtain was of the old-fashioned roller type, a competitor's frock became entangled in the bottom roller and rose with the curtain.

These incidents belong to earlier days. They were disastrously funny at the time and are still talked of when competition "old boys" and "old girls" get together and the conversation begins "Do you remember. . . ."

A Door to Fame

There can be no doubt that the movement in New Zealand has given opportunities to many a boy and girl, man and woman, to prove their capabilities. Some have gone overseas on the impetus given by competitions.

A stranger to any city does not need to be told that competitions are in progress. City-bound trams and buses in the early evenings contain children with their hair tightly screwed up in rags or paper curlers, boys decked out in full evening-dress, tiny dancing girls, and the older performers attempting to look blasé. Parents clutch their programmes and "competitions" is the topic of conversation.

And when it's all over for the night, there is the weary ride home — some elated, some downcast, but in many cases still wearing their make-up, for they have been "on the stage" and the grease-paint is the proof. It must not be removed until the last possible moment.



Making-up is part of the fun. At left, "The Mayor," complete with chain, is beautified

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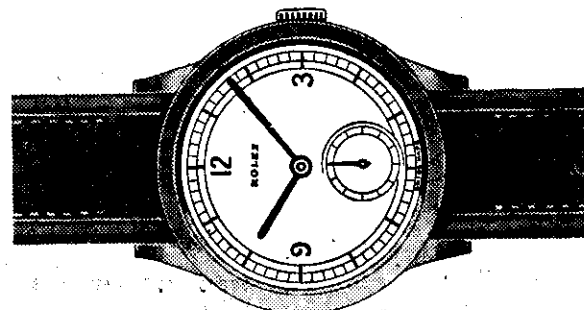


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