

# BAND CONTESTS AND BROADCASTING

## Value of Recordings Debated

IN a recent article in *The Listener* on radio's part in the 1947 New Zealand Brass Bands Championship at Wanganui, T. J. Kirk-Burnand suggested that the time might come when band contests would be judged from recordings made at public performances, instead of on the spot at the performances themselves. And he supported this idea by saying that an adjudicator would be able to play over a recording as often as he pleased, checking it immediately with the playing of another band.

Some band conductors appeared to be against this system, we found, when we interviewed two of them, one saying that he thought he could safely speak for almost every other conductor in New Zealand. But a third rather favoured the method, provided agreement could be reached between conductors and technicians on the best possible placing of microphones.

The essential factor in a band contest was the fraternisation of the players, said H. J. Dutton, conductor of the Petone Salvation Army Band. "If, by switching over to recordings, the joys of meeting old-time and new bandmasters and young and old players are cut out, all the fun and enthusiasm is lost. And I would not like to see that happen. On the technical side, if recordings were used, the bands—and they come from Auckland to Invercargill—would have to play, in fairness, on the same set of instruments."

We pointed out that it wasn't suggested by the writer of the article that the contests should not be organised as at present, with bandmen foregathering from all over the country to play in public, but merely that the judging should be done differently. "Even so," said Mr. Dutton, "conductors of some bands might know nothing about the placing of microphones; others quite a lot."

"I have heard recordings of many bands and noticed that, through microphone placings, a band of 16 can sound a good deal fuller than one of 24. And

the mood of the technician or operator enters the picture. Some years ago in Melbourne, I came across a case of a technician considering that a band being broadcast was too soft in its pianissimo passages and too loud in the fortissimo parts, so he took a course to suit himself, ruining the climaxes and contrasts sought by the conductor."

When Station 3LO Melbourne gave its first public broadcast Melba was on the programme, and the first band to play was the Salvation Army Territorial Staff Band, of which he was then conductor, said Mr. Dutton. Other bandmen listening in reported that there was plenty of noise but no balance, and many hours were spent trying to arrive at the best microphone position. No sooner had they found what appeared to be the best spot than a technician changed the arrangement of the microphone, upsetting the whole tone production.

"No, I don't think judging from records would work at all," said Mr. Dutton. "The microphone enters into it so much that it would tend to become a technical rather than a musical performance. Recordings would be of little advantage and I think I can safely say that every other band conductor in New Zealand will agree with me on that." But a good deal could be learned from records. "And while we're talking about bands I would like to make the point that three judges would be better than one for a contest. That system is used a lot in Australia."

### The Ear on the Ground

The conductor of the Lower Hutt Municipal Band, George Kaye, said that some records of the Wanganui contest seemed to him to have lost instrumental detail through wear. And in one or two cases undue prominence was given to some particular instrument, but that might have been the fault either of the microphone or the band itself. If a judge had to play a record over several times to make his decision, the wear of the needle on the disc would produce a result unfortunate for the band. "All the freshness would be lost; I don't think you can better the actual human ear on the spot in judging a band's capabilities."

We suggested that in open-air playing, variations of tone might be caused by wind changes, giving the judge an imperfect sample. Would not recordings prevent such distortion?

Mr. Kaye's answer was that if the weather was unsuitable, the band could transfer to a hall to play its piece. The contest authorities might not like losing the larger "gate," but players, when being judged, did not worry about the financial side; they were out solely to impress the judge by producing a good tone and balance, and getting as near to perfection as possible.

Recordings, he said, might be excellent for judging solos where the microphone had to pick up only one instrument instead of about 24. And they would be valuable to a conductor for, from his position in the band, he could not hear the music exactly as the audience did. From records he could pick out faults and eliminate them. "I would like to add," said Mr. Kaye, "that as far as I know no band contest has ever been better catered for by radio than



R. H. FENTON

Difficulties could, no doubt, be overcome

the Wanganui contest, and all bandmen appreciate what the NZBS did for them."

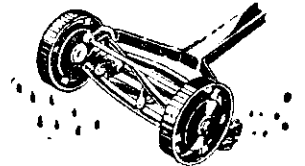
"Mr. Kirk-Burnand's scheme is a very good one and would be most acceptable to many bandmen if we could be sure of getting unanimity on the placing of microphones for all bands," said R. H. Fenton, conductor of the Wellington Watersiders' Band. "We have made tests, but we don't seem to be able to agree on the best point of balance." Any difficulties there were seemed to be purely technical and no doubt they could be overcome after exhaustive tests with various bands.

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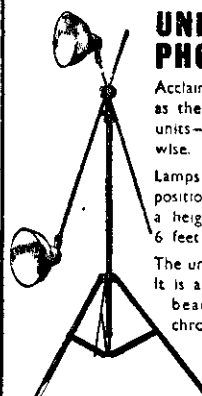
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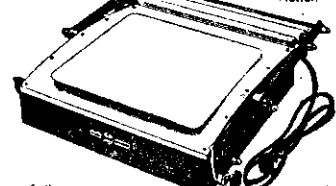
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