

# GEORGE FORMBY IN N.Z.

## *An Informal Interview*

"AND King said to George, 'A 'Coom oop t' Palace, George, and bring ukelele.'" It was not quite like that, of course, but it was in somewhat similar style that *The Listener* learnt from the English stage, screen and radio comedian, George Formby, on his arrival in Auckland of the six command performances he has given for their Majesties. It was of their meetings with the King and Queen, Queen Mary, the Princesses, and the Duke of Kent, and also of their proud record of entertaining troops, that the Formbys most spoke.

With anybody else to talk of such experiences would probably sound pure boasting or snobbishness, but the way the Formbys tell of them it is not. "It is good for people here to know of these things," said Mrs. Formby, "for it shows how the Royal family mix with commoners."

To meet the Formbys as a *Listener* representative did in the informality of an Auckland theatre manager's office is to meet an ordinary, pleasant English couple, whose accent betrays their Midlands origin. Both look younger than one would expect.

Many New Zealanders have heard stories of meetings with the Royal family from our own troops, and the Formbys tell of their experiences in much the same way. They have met interesting people and done interesting things; people like to hear of these experiences and so they talk about them.

### Gifts From Royalty

"They are grand people," Beryl Formby said of the Royal family, "and they always know all about you. The King said to me once: 'You are very fond of glass, aren't you, Mrs. Formby?'" I replied that I was and he sent me half a dozen of his sherry glasses with his initials on them."

Beryl took from her handbag—a Royal present after one command performance—a compact with the initials G.E.R. on it, given to her by their Majesties on another occasion with the instruction from the King to use it and not to put it away in a drawer. George mentioned that he had received a pair of gold cuff-links at the same time, and told of Princess Margaret chiding him for using some wrong words in one of his songs when he was singing at the Palace.

"I mentioned to the King that his daughters seemed to know the words of George's songs better than he did," added Beryl Formby, "and he replied: 'They ought to; they buy all his records and they are always playing them.'"

George Formby, who was sitting on a table swinging his legs, offered round his cigarette case. Inside it was a photograph of Queen Mary with the Formbys. It was taken after they had given a private performance at her request. On the day of that visit New Zealanders had been her Majesty's guard. At an auction to raise funds for some public cause Mr. and Mrs. Formby had bought a painting given by Queen Mary. The Queen knew of this and how much they had paid for it, they found, and when they were giving concerts for relief funds for blitzed towns, Queen Mary gave them three pieces of her silver to sell, with the proviso that they tell

her who bought them and how much was paid for them.

George Formby interrupted telling an amusing story about Tommy Trinder, to answer some questions about his wartime entertaining of troops — work which earned for him the O.B.E. He and Beryl had performed in Africa, Italy, on the Continent, in India and in Burma, besides in Britain. They were the last two civilians out of Europe before Dunkirk, and the first two back after the invasion of Normandy. In Maadi, among other concerts, they had performed before 10,000 New Zealanders. They had been the first two artists to go back to re-occupied Sicily, and could claim the same record in regard to Italy. They were also in Burma when the fighting was going on.

Montgomery, thanking them for a performance at the time of the Normandy invasion, paid them the compliment of saying they had made history by being the first two artists to play in a front line area. Although in all the fighting zones where they played, they lived under troop camp conditions, Mrs. Formby said that the "Normandy touch" was the worst. "We were among the dead all the time and it was awful. The smell of death got right inside me and I felt really sick. Montgomery was very sorry for me and gave me a bottle of brandy, which was a fine present when you consider he is a strict teetotaler."

### N.Z. Theatre History

The Formbys are also making theatre history here by presenting two evening shows, one at 5.50 p.m. and one at 8.30 p.m. This, they told *The Listener*, was a quite common practice in England. During the war when people did not like venturing out in the evenings because of the bombings, they even had shows starting at 10.30 in the morning.

Beryl Formby, who was a world champion tap-dancer at the age of 11, was on the stage prior to her marriage. Now she finds most of her time occupied in "looking after George," though she still faces the footlights as a "stooge to George" in some of his comedy pieces. In addition to old favourites known to New Zealanders through recordings, George Formby planned to introduce some new songs in his concerts here. At the time *The Listener* went to Press the only plans finalised were for a fortnight's appearance in Auckland, but there was then a possibility of a visit to other centres.



GEORGE and BERYL FORMBY with British, N.Z. and South African entertainment officers in the Middle East

The Formbys travelled here via the United States, to which, a cruise to Florida excepted, they were paying their first visit. In America, however, they gave no concerts, and in fact travelled successfully incognito as Mr. and Mrs. Booth. From here they go on to Australia for further concerts.

They are accompanied by their dresser, Harry Scott, who has been with them for 16 years, and toured the battlefronts with them, and by their pianist, Bert Holliday. Mrs. Formby says of Scott that he is one of those men who can turn their hand to anything—from cooking a dinner to producing increased stage clothes in a Burma troop camp. Holliday is a more recent addition to the Formby entourage, he having joined them only 18 months ago.

### Radio Interview

The Formbys were interviewed by John Gordon at 1YA on Thursday evening, September 12. In the interview, which lasted approximately a quarter of an hour, they told of their wartime experiences in the various fighting areas, including their entertainment of the 5th Airborne Division at Arnhem, when they were so close to the enemy lines that their songs and patter could be heard by the Germans. Their audience was in foxholes, and George Formby was on the edge of one of these, while Beryl Formby was beside a tree. They were warned that when they saw the soldiers duck, they had better duck too!

When strength and reliability

DAVENTRY EIFFEL TOWER

WORLD AIRWAYS QUEEN MARY

are of vital importance... Brimar is installed!

Examine two radio valves closely. You cannot detect any difference in quality. You are forced to rely on a reputable name. Such a name is Brimar. Made by the world-wide S.T.C. organisation that equipped such important gigantic radio installations as the B.B.C. shortwave transmitters, and the Queen Elizabeth radio telephone services, Brimar is well out in front.

Brimar valves are in operation in Empire Air Services. Everywhere when Reliability means lives, Brimar are in operation.

For strength and reliability always specify

**BRIMAR**  
British Radio  
**VALVES**

Standard Telephones & Cables Pty. Ltd. (Inc. in N.S.W.)

Wellington Box 636 Christchurch Box 983  
Wanganui Box 293 Auckland Box 307