

CARPETS UP FOR CROWTHER!

The Story Behind An Old-Time Dance Orchestra

BARN floors are waxed, drawing room carpets raised, guests invited, and (sometimes) the barrel rolled in, when Frank Crowther is on the air from 2YA with his Old-Time Dance Orchestra.

Only one complaint, to our knowledge, has been made about this radio feature. Once, it had to be cut off the air because of an emergency broadcast. Country listeners wrote in to say that they were all ready for the dance in the local hall. Supper had been bought, the guests had arrived, and what was the NBS going to do about that?

Success for this orchestra depends, as it does for all group items, on the proficiency of each member; but in this case individual proficiency is added to the leader's ability and enthusiasm. Mr. Crowther uses his forty years' experience of light entertainment to build up an orchestra which plays genuine old-time music on the proper old style instruments: strings, piano, some brass; but never saxophones, or those weirdly shaped nightmares that modern players call effects.

Forty, Fifty, Sixty Years Ago

Players must also renounce modern methods of playing. Mr. Crowther insists that all their music shall be true to period, and enforces this contention by doing most of the orchestration himself. This is necessary in any case, for most of the old songs are now only memories. From forty, fifty, sixty years ago, he collects them, writes them down, and arranges them for the orchestra. Then listeners dance to them, pleased, no doubt, as much by their presentation as by the novel reaction from hot rhythm to merry melody.



Spencer Digby photograph

FRANK E. CROWTHER: His old-time dance music puts wax on the old barn floor

With the Shows

Born in Dunedin, he was a well-known accompanist at 17. The theatre had a strong appeal for him. He joined the orchestra of the Pollard Opera Company, then the most popular company touring New Zealand. During his two years' engagement he took part

in the first performances in New Zealand of "The Belle of New York," at Dunedin; and "The Geisha," in the old Opera House at Wellington. Later he worked with the P. R. Dix Gaiety Companies, then running permanent vaudeville in the four chief centres. First he was violinist, then pianist-conductor.

About 1903 the Fuller shows were gaining in popularity. He transferred to them, first in Dunedin, then Auckland. In 1910 he settled in Wellington.

His work with Fullers extended over 25 years, most of them spent working in the old Majestic Theatre (now St. James'). Readers who patronised this theatre during the last Great War years will remember the popularity of the many shows they produced. Mr. Crowther remembers that two of the artists in those days were Malcolm McEachern (bass) and Lauri Kennedy (cellist), both now in the first rank in England and well known over the air.

"Good Music" His Hobby

In 1935 he conducted "Cavalleria Rusticana" for the N.Z. Grand Opera Society at St. James's Theatre. Admission of this fact led Mr. Crowther to an admission of his hobby, which is "good music." Although he is most in demand for lighter entertainment, he has a leaning towards serious music. From 1921 to 1925 he conducted the Professional Orchestra, then the only combination performing symphonic music in Wellington.

His connection with 2YA dated back to 1928. He has been official accompanist for four and a-half years and, among his several sidelines, he includes the musical work for the Government Film Studios, at Miramar. Music for "Rewi's Last Stand" was his latest job there.

WAR IN THE ETHER

Words As Explosive As Bombs

SOME years ago, a message which now has become a household phrase in millions of homes as far apart as the poles, began crackling out over the air from England: "This is London calling!" No sooner had it begun than it quickly became a part of many thousands of lives—in dwellings all over the world English people gathered to hear the news from the "Old Country." That measured, calm voice, those names, like Cheltenham and Bredon and Stow and Trent, were as English as a fine joint of roast beef. And many a lonely exile in some inaccessible part of Africa or South America thrilled with pleasure, and perhaps pride, as the pointer on the lighted dial of his radio set came to rest on Daventry and the famous greeting came through.

But behind that lighted dial, many things were going on, a hundred plans were being formed. Soon other voices came on to the air speaking English—but they announced: "This is Moscow Radio, presenting the news in English," or "This is the German shortwave station," or "Here is the news in English from Rome." Thus, five years after the inauguration of the English overseas service, the BBC began its foreign broadcasts in order to counteract this barrage of propaganda. How this service has grown, its work and its effect, is told in a series of three new BBC productions called "The War in the Ether."

"London Calls the World"

The production dealing with foreign broadcasts in particular is "London Calls the World." It will be heard at 8 p.m. on Tuesday, June 18, from 2YA Wellington. First foreign language to be broadcast from England was Arabic; news was given, and is

given to-day, to counteract the anti-British propaganda carried out by radio in the East from other European nations.

Curious item: The English interval signal is Bow Bells, but as bells mean worship to Arabs, a flute passage is used to mark the interval in Arabic transmissions.

Later were added transmissions to South America, which has been for a long time the scene of violent propaganda wars.

During the September crisis of 1938, broadcasts were wanted immediately in German, French, and Spanish. There was scarcely time for shorthand writers and translators to put Chamberlain's words into these languages before the foreign copies were being read over the ether. So began, in a moment of crisis, a new field of foreign broadcasting for the BBC. Sessions in Czech, Magyar, Serbian, Greek, and other languages, including Polish, followed soon after.

The BBC German broadcasts have been some of the most important in this category. One BBC way of showing Germans the lies and deceptions of the Fuehrer has been to broadcast his speeches and interpolate comment by an announcer. The programme brings back vividly incidents which led up to the present conflict. Hitler proclaims that Germany has no more territorial demands to make in Europe—"in theory or in practice." "We want no Czechs," he shouts. "With no nation have we more peaceful relations than with Poland." The announcer dryly gives the facts.

"The Ears of Britain"

Another programme entitled "The Ears of Britain" tells the story of the BBC's watch on all foreign

broadcasts—each day 250 foreign bulletins (roughly the length of eight average novels) have to be noted, analysed, summarised, sub-edited, co-ordinated into a digest of foreign opinion and propaganda. The scene of the radio production shows an average English home, with Dad and Mum, Bill and Mary listening in to foreign stations, discussing propaganda. Foreign broadcasts "don't make a ha'porth of difference," declares Bill; "They're terribly serious," says Mum. The BBC takes the middle path. They do make a difference, but we should not play into the hands of the Fifth Column by taking them too seriously. There is presented an imaginary scene in Dr. Goebbels's office when broadcasting campaigns, such as the ones which Britain watches so carefully, are being planned. As dramatic climax to the production comes the story, told from all sides, of the River Plate action—and if you haven't heard the full story yet, this part of "The Ears of Britain" makes thrilling hearing—how Germany persisted, hour after hour, while American and British commentators were giving the truth, with the falsehood that the Graf Spee had completely destroyed and vanquished the English ships, that South America was jubilant at German victory, that the British vessels had used poison gas; and how, shamefacedly, the German wireless at last had to tell the truth.

"The World Hears London"

"The World Hears London," the third programme in the series, is a programme built up on letters received from listeners, British and foreign alike, in all parts of the world. All the comments are interesting, many amusing. The programme ends:

"In this picture of fellow-listeners to the BBC in all parts of the world we hope that you have come to feel that in other countries a great company of simple folk, men and women of goodwill, are looking to Britain for the truth and are giving to her and to France the only aid they can give, but a precious aid . . . their prayers."