

## AN ARTIST OFF STAGE

### *Impressions through a Glass Door*

THE typist said that the NBS officer I wanted was downstairs somewhere, but although I wandered through various departments I couldn't find him until I looked through the glass door of the recording room. There he was all right, just hanging about aimlessly and noiselessly while somebody was sitting in front of the microphone reading a script. I knew enough not to barge in while the recording was being made, but I couldn't catch his eye, so while the room was "live," there was nothing for it but to wait. I wandered round the outer studio for a bit, then got fed up and decided to try again. No go. He wouldn't look. Who was this person recording, anyway? Some woman I didn't know, but she had a good voice, judging by the loud-speaker from the technical control-room next door.

So I got interested. She was talking about the rough spin contraltos have in comparison with sopranos, then said something about Gilbert and Sullivan, so I had a good look at her. Surely she must be Evelyn Gardiner, the Gilbert and Sullivan star from the show in town, and although I had seen her on the stage the last time they came round, I had never seen her "in real life" so to speak, and if I had thought about her at all I would have imagined her very differently. She was a pleasant woman, not middle aged, and not young, with violent ginger hair, ordinary street clothes, pince-nez, very small feet. I would have passed her in the street any day, except for the hair. You know, I am firmly of the opinion that glamorous stage folk should not be allowed to appear to ordinary mortals, except in their stage trappings—it's too dangerous to the illusion that the stage trades on.

However, this is getting away from the thing that struck me. There in a prosaic recording room under electric light in the middle of a nice sunny morning, was the miracle of the artist feeling intensely the emotion of speaking direct to her public. She wasn't speaking to a microphone, she was imagining exactly the little home circle listening to the radio with rapt attention. She spoke to Mary and Joan and Barbara and all the other girls with ambition to be singers, right face to face, and as one woman to another. But all the time of course, she was going on steadily reading the script, turning over the pages without making a rustle—and just talking into a recording machine. She gesticulated with her hands, smiled at the coy bits, frowned when she was talking seriously, her face lit up with pleasure when she spoke of her own work, looked serious when she was giving good advice, and was quite oblivious of anyone round about.

When she finished, she came out with the man I wanted, chatting in an offhand and casual manner. As I nabbed him, I overheard the control room operator asking her if she wanted to hear it run over. "Good heavens, no," she cried. "I'd hate that!"

Evelyn Gardiner will talk from 2YA on Wednesday, March 26, on "Voices of a Contralto," and from the same station the following Wednesday on "Why I Learnt to Fly."

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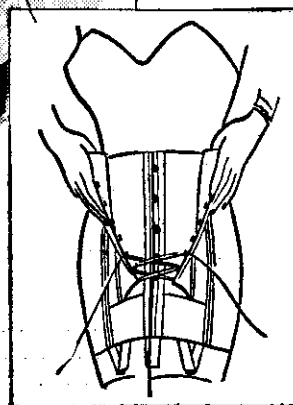
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