

BEBE, VIC, AND BEN

Three American Stars Well-Known To Listeners

By Bettine Peachey Brenard

(Special to "The New Zealand Listener" from the BBC)

BEBE DANIELS, Vic. Oliver and Ben Lyon, joint stars of the British Broadcasting Corporation's comedy production *Hi Gang* and firm favourites with listeners to the BBC's short wave overseas service, travelled widely

and under their direction she made her first stage appearance at the age of 10 weeks! She was filmed in Hollywood at seven, was leading lady to Harold Lloyd at 13, and reached stardom in the early screen musical, *Rio Rita*.

Ben, her husband, comes from an American southern family, and was educated in New York. He finally ful-

Vic, born in Vienna of a banking family, with a silver spoon in his mouth, played the piano and violin for amusement, but he hated practising. His father said "Practise! One day you may need it." And he did need it. In 1923, Vic found himself in America—where he was soon to become naturalised—without a job and penniless, his family's fortune having gone in the aftermath of war. He became pianist in a beer garden, and graduated to orchestra leader in a New York night club. It was here that he discovered his genius for patter, and from here as a solo act, via the music halls, he reached the New York Palace in 1929.

In 1931, George Black, now Britain's foremost producer of revue, brought him to London, but Vic missed fire and returned to America. Black persevered, brought Vic to England again on contract. This time he caught on: C. B. Cochran engaged him for *Follow the Sun*. He met Sarah Churchill, who was in the chorus of the same show, fell in love and married her.

Bebe and Ben by now were also "in town" — incidentally in one of George Black's shows—but it was not Black who brought Bebe, Ben and Vic together. It was Radio Luxembourg. Bebe and Ben first broadcast with Vic on Radio Luxembourg during the years immediately preceding the war, where, working for separate sponsors, both acts built up tremendous reputations. Then Vic invited Bebe and Ben as guest stars on his programme, and the perfect co-ordination of the trio led listeners to demand their team-up, but Hitler kept listeners waiting nearly two years.

Then Bebe and Ben had the idea of a slick, fast-moving radio show to appeal to the Canadian forces stationed in Britain, and they remembered Radio Luxembourg and approached Vic.

And so, with the support of Harry Pepper, of the BBC's Variety Department, "Hi, Gang!" made its debut. Cheerfully, noisily, these three Americans bring listeners the quick-fire jokes and breezy atmosphere of their country's humour.



STARS of the BBC's "Hi Gang" Shows: Left to right, Vic Oliver, Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyon. Radio Luxembourg brought them together

different and by no means easy roads before coming together in this popular broadcast feature.

The Correct "Send-off"

Bebe (pronounced Bee-Bee), is the only one who had the "correct" send-off for stardom. Her mother was an actress, her father a Texas theatre manager,

filled his schoolboy ambition to be a film star, but only after an arduous climb from a lowly "extra." Hollywood remembers him in a battered old motor-car continually looking for jobs. His first starring part was in *Hell's Angels*, with the late Jean Harlow, but it was not until his partnership with Bebe that he became a favourite.

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"Men of vision cannot fail to see that humanity is passing through the fire of social revolution as well as a major war . . . There is much that we can learn . . . from Soviet Russia, whose traditions are alien and even repellent, but whose social and economic ideals have already influenced the thought and practice of many countries, and are bound to play a large part in any future ordering of the world."

In common with the democracies, the Soviet social and economic ideals make the well-being of the mass of the people the supreme test of what is just. They have perhaps gone further towards the goal than Britain and the United States so far as economic life is concerned. Perhaps also, due to the peculiar history and the grave handicaps under which they have had to build, they lag behind so far as political and intellectual liberties are concerned.

For them, as for us, this war is fought to preserve a way of life, not merely as it has been lived, but as, with high principles and wise planning it can be, shall be, lived in the future.

BBC Mystery Man

FOR several years BBC listeners enjoyed the stories told over the air by "A. J. Alan." New Zealand listeners have also had the opportunity from time to time of hearing this radio star who would fit into none of the ordinary radio categories. He was just "A. J. Alan", and as a raconteur held a place that was unique in the BBC.

But this was not all. There grew up a legend that he was somebody else. It was known that "A. J. Alan" was a pseudonym and because he wished to keep his own pseudonymity listeners became more and more curious as to who he really was. Letters poured in. Was he Sir John Reith? Could he be this or that famous author? Any one working at the BBC was invariably asked two questions. "Are you an announcer?" and "Who is 'A. J. Alan?'" His death occurred last December and the secret is at last revealed, though it turned out to be no particularly startling revelation. His real name was Leslie Harrison

Lamber, an experienced amateur transmitter who lived in Notting Hill, London.

This is what the *Radio Times* said about him:

"There can never be another A. J. Alan. But there are thousands who will never be able to think of Jermyn Street, or Chislehurst, or ship's doctors, or dead sheep, or pink blotting paper, or visitors' books without hearing again that urbane voice, that studied casualness, those little hesitations, that wanton emphasis on circumstantial detail, and above all that sudden inevitable anticlimax that left us all in mid-air at the most breathless moment — 'Good night, everyone!'"



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