

★ THE HON. W. PERRY, M.L.C., Minister of Armed Forces, is seen in the NBS Recording Unit's Hut sending a message to New Zealand during his recent visit to New Caledonia. D. Cameron is operating the recorder.

SILLY WAR SONGS

(Continued from previous page)

ton, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Chicago, Milwaukee and San Francisco—making it possible for publishers to be near the various roots of American life, and to discover new song writers with fresh regional material.

To-day, the "pop" music industry is concentrated almost entirely in New York. Two huge combinations dominate the industry: the group controlled by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (the Robbins, Feist, and Miller music corporations), and the Warner Brothers group (Remick, Witmark, and Harms). Paramount Pictures controls Famous Music Corporation and Paramount Music Corporation.

The film companies are not so much interested in good music as they are anxious to see that their music subsidiaries plug the film songs on the air, because every time a picture song is played, the announcer must credit the movie. This is good publicity for the movie, but it's bad for music—because most picture tunes are "situation songs," written to fit something in the plot of the picture or tailored for one of the characters, and not having any intrinsic lyrical quality.

Merit Doesn't Matter

As a matter of fact, there is no relation between the merit of a tune and the number of times you hear it on the radio. Sollie Loft, president of Campbell, Loft and Porgie, one of the large independent publishers, told me: "Merit is strictly one per cent of a song's popularity. Any good publisher, if he puts on the heat, can get action and push his number-one plug song up there on the sheet."

Somebody once remarked of Harry Link, the professional manager of Leo Feist, Inc., one of the smartest song pluggers in the business, that he could set the alphabet to music and make it a hit song.

Besides the Hollywood-controlled publishers, there are some 20 other important independents. All the publishers have a permanently-closed door against newcomers. If another Julia Ward Howe were to arise, she couldn't get past the reception desk of any publisher (says Bookman).

The situation is without analogy in any other field of creative work. Magazine editors and book publishers, for example, look at every manuscript that comes in. If they didn't, such discoveries of the last decade as William Saroyan, Irwin Shaw, John Steinbeck, John O'Hara and Jerome Weidman would still be unpublished. But the music publisher takes the attitude that being young and unknown and not understanding the jargon of Broadway is a stigma. Unsolicited musical manuscripts are invariably returned unopened to the sender. They are never, never read—yes, never.

Popular songs are, consequently, produced by the same clique of writers, grinding out their annual quota of six tunes, good or bad, and mostly indifferent. The song writers, like any other group of creative artists forced to turn out a quantity of work regardless of whether the inspiration is there, gradually tend to rely on formulas and a convenient repertoire of stock words and phrases.

The Woods Are Full of Talent

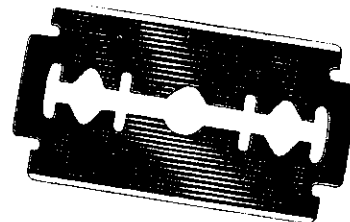
What is needed, then, for Tin Pan Alley's salvation is an infusion of new blood. Music publishers must open their doors to the amateurs. There is many a mute, immortal Gershwin sitting around Idaho and Maine and Oklahoma. The publisher's standard reply is that he can't do this, because all popular songs are so vaguely similar that amateurs are always suing him for plagiarism; the only way he can protect himself is to return the manuscript envelopes unopened.

I believe there's a simpler solution to this: let the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers draw up a standard release form, which every non-professional would have to sign before submitting a song; the release would absolve the publisher of legal responsibility in the event that he later published a roughly similar song.

Tin Pan Alley has forgotten that the universe is not bounded by 49th Street on one side and 51st Street on the other. It is good to recall that Robert Burns, probably the sweetest singer of popular songs in our language, was an Ayrshire farmer when his first lyrics were published.

Old Friends and New Faces

Men of the United States and New Zealand find much that is new about each other—and much that is familiar. If we are charmed, for instance, to find old turns of phrase in their speech, aren't they also pleased to find their familiar friend Gillette "down under"—still giving that same keen service that no Serviceman anywhere would be without.



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