

# NEWS OF BROADCASTERS, ON AND OFF THE RECORD,

By *Swarf*

## SOMETHING TO SING ABOUT

OF the origin of "Two Eyes of Grey," the composer Daisy McGeoch, has told this story: "I was staying at a small hotel at Corrie in the Isle of Man, and one day I was some distance out to sea, fishing alone, when suddenly I heard a melody, very sweet and sad. Whence it came I did not know; what I do know is that I felt compelled to return to my hotel and write it down. I did so, and to my surprise and delight I found that it exactly fitted some words I had written the day before which ended with the line, 'It breaks my heart to see your dear grey eyes so sad.'"

Prince of Philadelphia' is a bit of heavy-handed reaching, and her obvious dig at a French chanteuse doesn't come off as funny as her introduction to it. . . Anna Russell's recording first set New Zealand radio listeners talking about six months ago.

**SERGEANT H. C. STEPHENS** (R.N.Z.A.F. Station, Whenuapai) has sent me some extra information for "R.J.N." (Titirangi) about David De Groot. He says: "Between 1925 and 1928 De Groot was musical director at the New Victoria Cinema, London, and I remember him at that

**MORE ABOUT DE GROOT** time with his 30-piece orchestra which played for silent films. It was customary to have the orchestra on stage during the evening performance, and De Groot generally played a solo. With the advent of the talking film this orchestra, and most of the others in the big London cinemas, was disbanded, and I next heard of De Groot touring the smaller provincial music halls with an act known as the De Groot Trio; who the other two members were I do not know. This would be about the early part of 1932, and I think he went to the Piccadilly Hotel soon after. So far as I know the only record of De Groot playing with the New Victoria Orchestra is now out of the catalogue and unobtainable, but some of your older readers may still have a copy: it was a selection from Kalman's operetta *The Gipsy Princess*—H.M.V. C 2274."

Many thanks, Sergeant.

**THE** French violinist Stephane Grappelly, known for his highly individual style of playing, first made his name in England when he played with Django Reinhardt and the Quintette du Hot Club de France. When Django

went back to France at the beginning of the last war Grappelly stayed in Britain and went into partnership with George Shearing, the brilliant blind pianist. They toured Britain together and it was then that Grappelly received what he described in the BBC's *In Town Tonight* programme as the biggest shock of his life. He woke in the middle of the night to hear roars of laughter in his room. It was quite dark. He switched on the light and found his blind partner sitting up in bed reading a funny book in Braille.



N.P.S. photograph  
**ROYAL TOUR TECHNICIANS:** Standing, left to right, N. K. M. Keen, B. W. Major, R. L. Miller and K. W. Frank; sitting, A. R. Lewis. Noel Keen and Ashley Lewis will "leapfrog" round the country with the Royal Tour broadcast producers and the other three technicians will be attached to the three full-time observers

## No Laughing Gas For Cicely's Guests

IT was by one of those coincidences that add gaiety even to the grey threshold of the English winter that, on the morning of the literary luncheon to launch Cicely Courtneidge's autobiography, I read the news agency report on the Japanese family who could not stop laughing. Father, mother, and three children were prostrated by uncontrollable laughter until, after 36 hours, doctors discovered that they had eaten a species of fungus known as "laughing toadstool."

My mind went back to a day at New Plymouth—I have to admit that it was similarly grey, but I like to think it was less chill—when I last heard Cicely Courtneidge's "Laughing Gas" on a radio request programme. I used to wonder how often the broadcasting service had to replace that actress's records. Are they still as popular?

There was no need for laughing gas at Foyle's literary luncheon when the reward for stardom was an invitation to the Dorchester Hotel, and the price of unimportance was 17 6 for a ticket, with all drinks extra, even coffee. As Mr. Stephen Potter said in his dissertation on the secrets of Courtneidgeship: "Gay's the word."

That was the title of the revue in which Cicely, then aged 57, added to her successes and belied her age in 1951, the same year that she received the award of C.B.E. Even as she shuffled her notes, wrinkled her brow, and replaced her spectacles, it was difficult to believe that she had made her stage debut in 1901—admittedly as one of the Midsummer Night's fairies.

When she stood up, switched off the nervousness, and let flow the full steam of Cicelyan fun, it was quite impossible to believe that she had been entertaining us for as long as many could remember.

Of her book she said: "I was so surprised when I saw it on the bookstalls at Waterloo station, I nearly rushed up and bought a copy."

Of the stage: "People often say, 'Don't you get tired doing the same thing over and over again?' Tired? I'm too busy counting the house." Of course,



CICELY COURTNEIDGE

there were sometimes failures: "First an empty box, then a few empty stalls, several rows of stalls. Then you know. Tired? I'm much too busy making excuses: it's too hot; it's too cold; it's too wet; it's not wet enough. Think of all the wonderful notices: it should run for ever. But why doesn't it?"

Of television: "As long as there's a human race, the live theatre will always survive. If you see Spencer Tracy in a film, you behave normally. If you see him walking in Regent Street, you run after him to have a look. I know—I've done it."

With so many lesser entertainers present, including Robertson Hare, Yvonne Arnaud, Frankie Howerd, and Bobby Howes, it is not to be wondered at that there was a feline purr: "She does it all from script. Jack Hulbert helps her write it." Her husband, he sat beside her.

What does it matter? The greatest entertainer of them all continued: "It gives me tremendous pleasure to amuse people—I get paid for it."

No need for laughing gas here; the gaiety is so infectious that no one thought to ask whether she had yet succeeded in buying that double dozen damask dinner napkins.

—J. W. GOODWIN (London)

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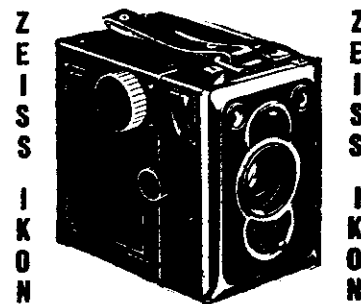
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