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ON my rounds of the NZBS the other day I met a new-comer to the staff, Antony Vercoe, who has been appointed assistant programme officer, Head Office. A Nelson boy, Vercoe learned singing, and it wasn't long before he was giving baritone recitals



ANTONY VERCOE
Sang to a guitar

over NZBS stations. Later he sang and acted with the Old Vic Company, London. After war service with the New Zealand Forces he was awarded a bursary, and studied singing for 18 months under Kennedy Scott at Trinity College. Then came a scholarship which enabled him to study opera and drama at the Royal College of Music. In 1951 he had a leading role in a new opera, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge, and immediately after that season he was invited to sing at the Old Vic in Tyrone Guthrie's production of *Tamburlaine*, which ran for seven weeks and a further week at Stratford-on-Avon. The Old Vic people asked him to stay for the rest of the season, and he took the baritone lead in some performances of the Scottish ballad opera *The Highland Fair* at the Edinburgh Festival. Next came broadcasting, television and concert work. After playing Beppo in *The Maid of the Mountains* at Petersfield, Antony Vercoe appeared with the Harrow Light Opera Company in excerpts from *Merrie England* and *Tom Jones*. He returned

Open Microphone

to New Zealand at the beginning of this year.

Antony told me that he composes songs, a little other music, and swims and plays tennis. Very few stage people escape awkward moments. Here is one of Vercoe's, as he recounts it, and it occurred when he was playing in *Timon of Athens* at the Old Vic.

"Tyrone Guthrie asked me to take up a guitar, walk across the stage just as the lights were coming up, and sing a couple of phrases. I had never even held a guitar before. Guthrie's advice was not to bother about words. 'Sing anything you like,' he said. But it seemed to me that if I just carolled something unintelligible the audience would think my diction was bad, and that wouldn't do my reputation as a singer any good. So I decided to sing two phrases in Maori, beginning with 'Tabi nei taru kino'—using an ancient type of mode—and pluck a chord or two. I'm pleased to report that it seemed to fill the bill."

Antony Vercoe added something that might interest Vic Oliver fans. "In his television shows the comedian really does conduct and he actually *does* rehearse the orchestra—quite capably," he said. "There's a good deal more music behind Oliver than just playing the fool with a violin."

A FUND is being raised to perpetuate the memory of Kathleen Ferrier, the famous British contralto, who died recently. It will

KATHLEEN FERRIER MEMORIAL

provide for an annual scholarship or scholarships for British-born singers of all voices. It will be administered by the Royal Philharmonic Society, of which Kathleen Ferrier was a gold medallist. The trustees are Sir John Barbirolli, Hamish Hamilton, Roy Henderson, Gerald Moore and Sir Malcolm Sargent.

VICKI ANDERSON (Miss), Opatiki: Woody Herman was born in Milwaukee and began playing the saxophone at nine. In 1936 he formed his own orchestra, then known as "The Band That Plays the Blues." Because swing was then at its height, blues found little

public favour, and it was not for several years that the orchestra really got into its stride. The addition of many young men and their ideas to the band, the accumulation of a large number of original scores and a growing feeling among the public that popular music had lost much of its favour through over-standardisation, contributed to the swift success of Herman and his orchestra. He followed his success with a series of recordings in the modernist vein. They were greeted with both popular and critical approval, and the orchestra's place in the front rank of American bands was secure.

PHOTOGRAPHS of the Italian tenor

Ferruccio Tagliavini and the soprano Francka Sacchi are not available, but here is some information about these opera singers for (Mrs.) G. Leaning, of Papatoetoe, Auckland.

Tagliavini was born in 1913. When he made his debut at the Metropolitan Opera in 1947, Irving Electric Kolodin, New York Sun critic, wrote: "A quantity of listeners limited only by the fire laws, took Tagliavini to their



JEAN JOHNSON, who will conduct 4YC's "Review" programme this year, starting on the evening of Thursday, March 18



BBC photograph

KABI LARETEI, a young Estonian-born pianist, appearing in a television broadcast with the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Clarence Raybould. Her concert, when she played Schumann's Piano Concerto in A Minor, was her first appearance in British television.