

UNCONVENTIONAL CORNETIST

THIRTEEN years ago a boy bandsman named Ken Smith gave up the tenor horn, which he had played for a year, and switched to the cornet. He liked the sound better, and thought it could do more. Since then the young musician has done much to demonstrate the capacities of the instrument, and has, in doing so, become one of the world's top-ranking performers.

One of the few musicians to return home after successes abroad, Ken Smith recently arrived back in New Zealand to take up an appointment as conductor of the St. Kilda Band. In Wellington, he told *The Listener* something of the work that led to success. "Almost from the start," he said, "I disliked the conventional cornet solo—the air and variations always played, and still played. As a result I looked into the repertoires of the violin, oboe and clarinet. I even made use of songs and operatic arias to develop technique."

During his stay in Wellington, Mr. Smith showed some of the results of this extension of the cornet's repertoire. With the All-Star Band, he performed two movements of Mendelssohn's violin concerto, arranged for cornet and brass band. "The concerto was adapted," he said, "to show the extent and sheer

musical beauty as well as the technical possibilities of the instrument. I can understand the purist's objections. I personally prefer to hear the work as originally written. But if you approach it in the right way musically, and try to do justice to it, then there shouldn't be too much controversy." The trumpet repertoire, he said, was quite extensive, but much of it was "too academic and dull" to be played or listened to with pleasure.

As the son of an eminent band conductor, Ken Smith developed an early interest in brass instruments. He was 11 when he started playing the tenor horn, and almost immediately he joined the Westport Municipal Band. This disbanded soon after the outbreak of war, and Ken entered the newly-formed Westport Boys' Band, staying there till 1947, when his father, K. G. L. Smith, became conductor of the St. Kilda Band and the family shifted to Dunedin. At school in Westport, the young cornetist was encouraged to enter architecture or banking as a career, but he had other ideas. When he left school at 16, he entered a bank, but only to avoid the limitations which university study would impose on his opportunities to practise. Then, after two years, he left the bank, because of the limitations it imposed on his time for practice. For a year he was an NZBS programme officer, and then, in 1950, came the opportunity he

wanted. He joined the staff of Fairey Aviation Works, and, more important for him, he became a member of its famous band.

During his years with the British band, Ken Smith became known for his solo performances and received a growing number of invitations to play in oratorio, symphony and other concerts, and for the BBC. With the Birmingham Symphony he performed the Haydn Concerto in E Flat, and with the BBC Northern Orchestra the McMahon Concerto for Two Trumpets. "To do work more sonorous—or even more delicate technically—my choice is the cornet," said Mr. Smith. "But for more classical work, of course, one must use the trumpet."

Readers may be surprised to hear that Ken Smith has attained his present dexterity with

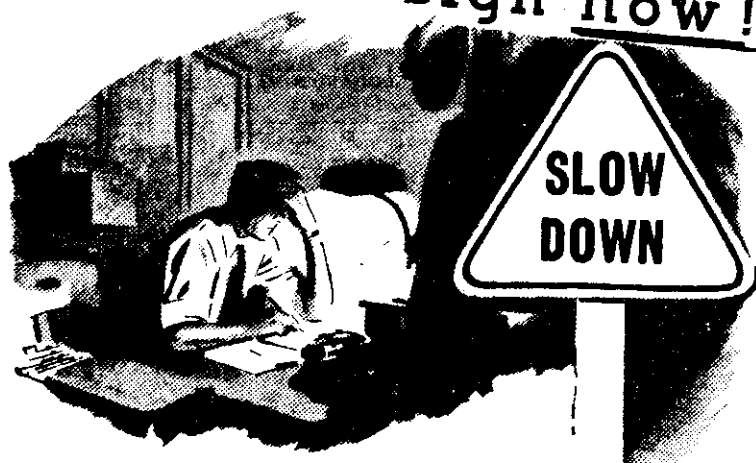


KEN SMITH

N.P.S. photograph

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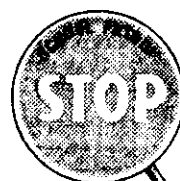
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