

# He Sees With His Ears — and Thinks With His Hands

THE first time I really got to know Joseph Papesch was at one of the Cambridge Music Schools. He had just come in from a stroll round the grounds with another student, and as we went along the passage and up the stairs he told me what a fine day it was outside and how beautiful the trees and lawns were looking this year, and he described the gay shapes of some of the clouds. It was enthusiastic, it was eloquent; but what made it a little strange was—well, you see, Joe Papesch is blind.

Joe—no one ever calls him Joseph—has always been blind. When we looked at Joe's application for the Music School, we were all a little dubious. New students find it more or less difficult to make their way about St. Peter's for the first day or two, and for someone who would not be able to see where he had to go, it seemed as if the frustration for himself and the anxiety for the staff might involve a bigger responsibility than we could undertake. So we insisted that if he came, Joseph Papesch, Mus. Bach, L.R.S.M., should bring a guide with him. But we need not have worried. Every student constituted himself—and herself, too—a guide, so much so that soon a quiet word had to be sent round that, as it turned out, Mr. Papesch was quite able, thank you, to look after himself, even though he liked company as much as anyone else.

Joe soon made himself very much at home at the school, a live wire in the Composers' Group, and the life and soul of the party when it came to dancing or playing for the dancing. One day I asked Joe how he was enjoying himself—although I was already pretty sure of the answer. "Very much," he answered, "but there's just one thing. Two or three of the chaps come along each day before lunch and sit on the next bed to mine having a noddin or two before going down to the dining room. You know—" I interrupted Joe to mention that I'd see right away that they took their refresher to some spot where they wouldn't disturb him. "It's not that," he

said hastily, "It's just—well, you know, it makes you very thirsty when you can hear them and they never ask you to have one, too." For some reason they had come to the conclusion that being blind Joe must be allergic to aperitifs. Discovering otherwise, they at once made him one of the party, to discover also, they told me, that Joe Papesch was "a great scout."

But then, Joe Papesch is a very unusual man, even among the blind, the overcoming of whose disability is always a continual astonishment to those with eyes, who imagine they see so well. He is not only a musician of some considerable accomplishment but the only blind musician that I know of who has taught successfully both in a blind school and an ordinary high school.

Mr. Papesch was educated at the New Zealand Institute for the Blind in Auckland, where he gained the diploma of L.R.S.M. for organ, and at the Auckland University College, where he received the degree of Bachelor of Music. He also undertook a four-year course in piano tuning. He plays the organ, piano, clarinet and saxophone. When Joe Papesch left the Institute in 1930, it was—remember?—the depression. Musicians were two-a-penny, and being blind didn't make it any better. Joe, however, was quite undaunted. He packed up, went down to the Waikato, and for five years, travelling by cream lorry, the passing car, train or even shanks's pony, covered the countryside tuning pianos or playing for the odd dance or so.

In 1935, Mr. Papesch, as we should call him, I think, just now, returned to the Blind Institute to assist with the band work, and in 1946 he became the Institute's Director of Music. Two years later the Institute gave him a bursary to study overseas, where he made his principal study, what had been a love of many years, the history and performance of Gregorian Plainchant. He visited the Abbey of Buckfast in Devon, where some of the first modern studies of this ancient music were begun, and from there went to the Abbey of Quarr, and then over to France to Solesmes, whose Benedictine monks have been long de-



JOSEPH PAPESCH at the organ in the N.Z. Institute for the Blind

voted to scientific research into the origins of plainsong. In between, Mr. Papesch found time to continue his organ studies. And now he is on the staff of Auckland's newly-opened Kelston High School.

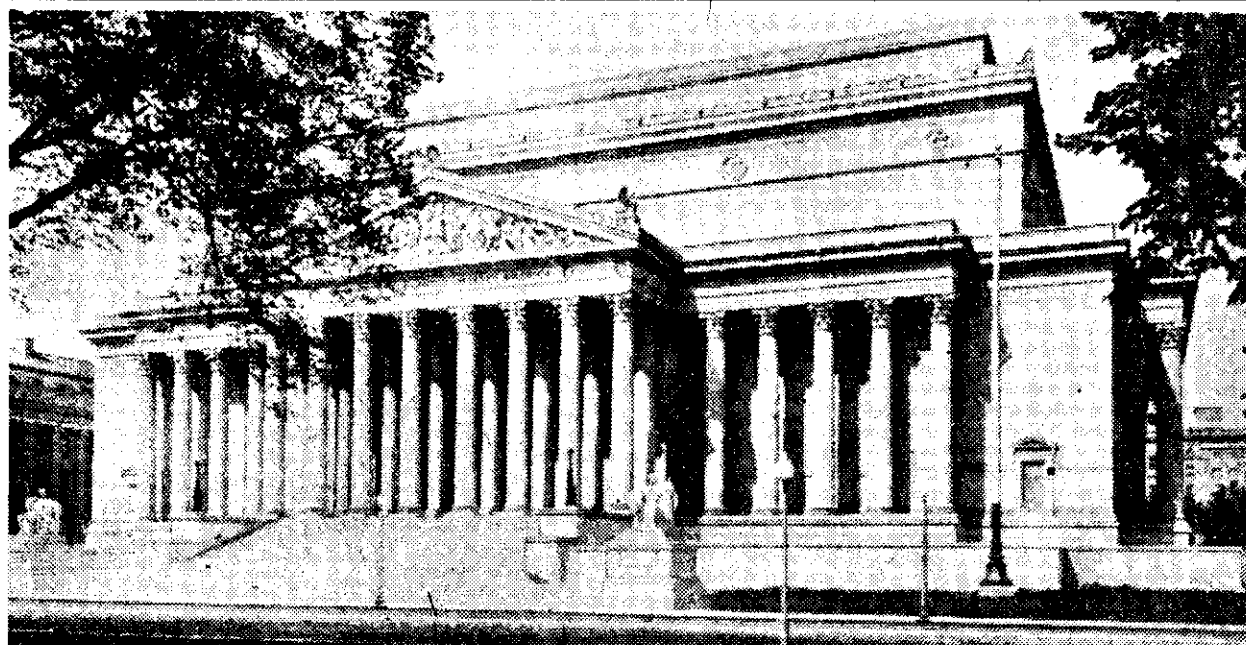
Teaching the blind and then children who can see seems to require less of a different approach than one might imagine. For one thing, says Mr. Papesch, the popular idea that the blind have a better natural sense of pitch or rhythm than those who can

see, is a fallacy. Whether they can see or not, children are all the same in music—or mischief; although the children at Kelston, he says, "never try to put anything across me. They just chatter a bit sometimes." Of course, blind music students have to learn everything from Braille script—there is quite a repertoire of music in Braille—and must memorise everything they play, whereas the others may come to depend too much on their eyes and not enough on their ears. Blind children cannot see the beat and it is, therefore, more difficult to conduct them; and to correct their playing movements, the teacher has to touch them lightly on the hands as they play, feeling what they are doing. But the boot is on the other foot when it comes to the blind teaching the seeing to hear, for the teacher has to invent a way of writing on the blackboard. Mr. Papesch has solved this problem ingeniously by developing a blackboard on which he fits plastic musical notes and signs.

After all this, you must think that Joe Papesch leads a very full life. He does, for he has hobbies as well. As a carpenter-cum-cabinetmaker, he has knocked up a desk and a bed or two among other things. He has, too, designed his own gramophone amplifier, which was constructed, incidentally, by another blind man. He has also his own short-wave transmitter. One way and another, he has many friends. As you can see, Joe Papesch is a very happy man.

—O.J.

(Joseph Papesch was heard in *Music Magazine* for August talking about Gregorian plainsong, and will broadcast again in October *Music Magazine* on his work as Director of Music at the New Zealand Institute for the Blind, and as a teacher of music at Kelston High School when, also, one of his "Dances for Viola and Clarinet" will be played. Others of his compositions are being broadcast in the "New Zealand Composers" series.)



THE National Archives Building in Washington, shown above, is reproduced from a photograph supplied by Mr. Stuart Perry, Wellington City Librarian. In the caption to a photograph of the Library of Congress, printed in "The Listener" of September 3, the Archives Building was said to be at the left of the library; but Mr. Perry has pointed out that it is on Constitution Avenue N.Z. LISTENER, SEPTEMBER 17, 1954.