



LEFT: Richard Bentley makes the most of an interlude with Alma Cogan and June Whitfield

begun craning their necks in the hope of a glimpse, but from behind the curtain—June Whitfield, a slight figure in black, looking quite unlike the possessor of so many voices; singer Alma Cogan, her shapely form clad in one of the home-designed dresses which cost her upwards of £100 (but which, we were informed when she was safely out of earshot again, was entirely made from old gramophone record labels).

Dick Bentley, in a natty blue suit, gave us five minutes' slick ad-libbing. And finally came the Professor himself, wearing a tweed hacking jacket and carrying his tuba, upon which, after cracking a few jokes and haranguing "those at the back" for talking instead of laughing, he played a street-corner version of "In Cellar Cool," breaking down only on the last and deepest note of "D-R-I-N-K-I-N-G" when a member of the orchestra advised him to kick it to shake the note loose, and he spluttered all over the microphone.

This impromptu entertainment ultimately dissolved into slapstick when one of the script-writers, having dashed away to get Jimmy Edwards's script which he had forgotten to bring in, tripped and fell on remounting the stage, sending the typed pages showering in the air like propaganda leaflets. They were seized by the Professor and stuffed into the mouth of his tuba, from which he redistributed them to the audience as he marched up and down the front of the stage.

All this had gone on for some thirty minutes, when, without warning and with no consolation or cries of "Stand by!" the red light glowed, the *TIFH* chimes sounded, and the familiar combination of orchestra, Keynotes and David Dunhill opened the programme.

From there on we were all on familiar ground. Perhaps from a studio audience's point of view there is the added pleasure of the little spontaneous actions which go with the script-reading, the winks, grimaces and gestures which the microphone doesn't pick up; and the pleasing self-amusement of the cast and all those abetting them. Apart from that, *Take It From Here* looks just as it sounds—if that conveys anything. And after seven years of laughs, it still sounds as good as ever.

TAKING IT FROM THERE—

BBC photograph

LIKE most everyone else I know, I've been a follower of *Take It From Here* for as far back as I can remember its figuring in the NZBS programmes. I certainly can't recall it going back as far as 1948; but according to a man who should know—its producer, Charles Maxwell—*TIFH* is now seven years old.

I heard him say so on Sunday evening when I went along to fill one of the bright red-upholstered seats in what used to be the Paris Cinema, in Lower Regent Street, but it is now the studio in which the BBC records many of its audience-participation shows. *Take It From Here* is recorded there every Sunday evening, the only one free for Jimmy Edwards, who looks like being detained at the Adelphi Theatre in "The Talk of the Town" for a long while yet.

The Paris scarcely resembles a cinema now. Instead of stills from coming attractions, there are copies of BBC publications in the showcases lining the stairs. Instead of torch-bearing usherettes, there are two hatless gentlemen in storemen's khaki overalls who, presumably, combine their ushering with more professional duties about the studio. And—for reasons of acoustics or economy—there is no longer carpeting beneath the seats.

There is, of course, no screen; and if there ever was a proscenium arch, it has been removed. The stage platform has been lowered to about two feet in height and extended to within touching distance of the front row of seats.

The instruments and music stands of an orchestra, a conductor's dais and seven microphones occupied the stage. Down its sides and along the back ran red curtaining which bulged and bil-

Portraits from *TIFH*, by J. M. D. HARDWICK

lowed when any unseen person passed behind it, like a backcloth in school dramatics. A clock with a large red (seemingly a popular BBC colour choice) second hand jerked the time away, division by division, as the audience settled and speculated on what would happen next.

The BBC Revue Orchestra shouldered their way through the curtains at the back. They wore uniform—navy blue with pale blue lapels—which I thought considerate of them compared with the disappointingly informal dress usually favoured by broadcasters.

The BBC was out to entertain. Creditably, it puts on a show for the studio audience as best it can, despite the impossibility of creating any illusion in such severely functional surroundings. When the show was under way, for instance, the performers did not remain grouped about their microphones when they were "off," but made exits and entrances through a gap in the red curtains.

Brown-suited and bespectacled, Charles Maxwell mounted the stage from the front row, which had suddenly filled with people conspicuous from the rest of the audience because they had no overcoats and were obviously "something to do with the show."

Signalling the orchestra for the *TIFH* signature notes, he welcomed the audience and introduced the conductor for the evening, Basil Deans. Harry Rabinowitz, he apologised, had visited the Ideal Home Exhibition that morn-

ing and caught his beard in an electric wringer. Then he summoned from the front row, where they had been sitting unrecognised, *TIFH*'s script writers, Frank Muir and Denis Norden, two tall, lithe young men who proceeded to warm the audience up with cross-talk of their own.

The Keynotes—four young men in grey suits and a lady in black—lined up for a bow, followed by Wallas Eaton, and an unexpectedly young David Dunhill.

Then came the stars, not from the front row towards which everyone had



★ "Two tall young men from the front row"—Frank Muir and Denis Norden ★