

SONG QUEST Prize Winners



CAME the first of October, and we made our way to the Wellington Town Hall for the Mobil Song Quest final concert. Swept in like leaves before the wind we collected a programme en route—all proceeds to Birthright—and clambered up to the official seating. There, we were rewarded with an unusual view for a concert—the Alex Lindsay String Orchestra was assembled before a slope closely resembling a Victorian conservatory of palms, shrubs and broadleaves which completely disguised the normally bald slopes of the choir seats. Likewise the cliff from the common-floor to the heights of the stage was banked with cyclamen and cinerarias, while the pianist and double bass player sheltered shyly behind more palms. Above all hung the glittering blue and silver banner of the Mobil Song Quest.

The orchestra, in their usual impeccable form, began the evening, then the audience settled down to New Zealand's favourite pastime of picking the winners, with Peter Harcourt as an amiable guide to form; introducing contestants, adjusting the special microphone to the required height for each singer, but especially effective as he waved the contestants on with eloquent and graceful gestures.

Singer succeeded singer, the brilliant flowing gowns of the women alternating with sombre masculine evening dress. The audience made appreciative notes—"a great entertainer," "effortless," "good diction for radio"—and placed their choice. The programme was of light music, well sung, and pleasantly relaxing, although the competitors, hands clasped nervously or tensely curled by their sides, would hardly have thought so. The women's dresses swirled round the palm bases, and the men ducked their heads under the fronds, while Alex Lindsay maintained

his composure even when the applause rose as the singer, but not the strings, had finished.

Then, while the orchestra played their final selection, beginning with the lilting "Jamaican Rumba," the audience settled down to quiet discussion. Florists' tributes were brought out on one side, and photographers assembled on the other, and finally Alex Lindsay brought the orchestral items to a close and moved to the back of the stage.

The contestants, openly on tenterhooks, came on to the stage. They were followed by the judges, Stanley Oliver, O.B.E., H. Temple-White, O.B.E., and Ashley Heenan, Mus.B.; the Managing Director of Standard-Vacuum Oil Company (N.Z.) Limited, W. S. McLean, who was to announce the results of the Song Quest; Mr Blundell, of Birthright; and a decorative lass carrying the gold, red and blue sashes of the winners on a crimson cushion.

Mr McLean thanked all those concerned with the Quest and with this final concert—the NZBS Commercial Division, the Wellington Junior Chamber of Commerce, the judges for the night and for the local contests, the orchestra, the compere, and the audience. As tension mounted, he finally began to name the place-getters, in reverse order. The winner was Paul

RIGHT: Finalists pose for a group photograph on the stage of the Wellington Town Hall

Gillmore, baritone, the second place went to another baritone, Ian Morton, of Auckland, and the third place to Mrs Treasure Spencer, mezzo-soprano, of Dunedin.

The applause and tumult died; contestants posed for photographs while technicians began moving the microphones, and friends and relatives waited to congratulate the finalists. The empty hall seemed less inviting than the Royal Oak and the reception. There Mr McLean welcomed his guests, and while waiters dispensed drinks and waitresses urged guests to oysters and lobster, the contestants began to relax. Ian Morton was relieved that it was all over.

"Well, I'm still alive," he said, when asked how he felt. "No, I haven't im-

mediate plans after my part in *La Traviata* in Auckland, I'll just take the opportunities as they come. I like both opera and oratorio—I'd have thought seriously about opera if I'd been taller. But I'm happy and comfortable where I am."

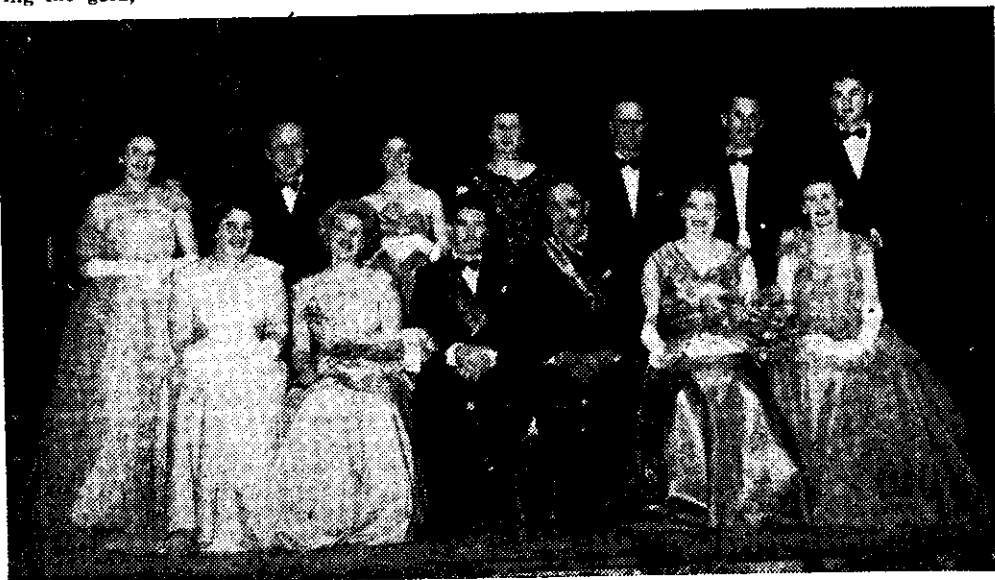
Mrs Spencer was very pleased to be the one woman to gain a place. She did admit to finding the evening a bit of a strain, saying that she'd have been happier if there had been no microphone or judges at the end of it.

Mr Gillmore was still subdued. "I've gone in for many contests," he said, "but this feeling is something quite new; just wonderful. The Alex Lindsay Orchestra is exciting to sing with—it gives you a new interpretation of every piece. I want to do some more study with my prize, and I hope to teach singing in New Zealand later. I have had two years in Australia studying in Sydney. Now I want to help New Zealand music all I can."

Mrs Gillmore was still finding it hard to believe. "It's difficult to take it in," she said, "they all sang so well!"

That remark was echoed by Mr Temple-White, one of the judges. "There were so many good singers, and so little to choose between them. They sound very different on radio, where a light voice comes over very well. On the other side of the supper table Stanley Oliver agreed. "This was a radio contest, with a slightly different angle from a concert performance. Assets in a hall can become almost liabilities on radio, which is a close-up medium. You know how an enlargement makes the quality and texture of a photograph important—this is much the same. The standard was very even, and the judging consequently very difficult."

Paul Gillmore, who was a finalist in the Quest last year, has broadcast in Auckland and Sydney, and obviously sang for the microphone as well as the hall. He has had a number of successes in competitions, including a third place in the Melbourne *Sun* aria contest, gained while he was studying at the Sydney Conservatorium five years ago.



N.Z. LISTENER, OCTOBER 18, 1957.