



LEFT: Bruce Weir and Peter Downes (l. to r.) check over the field before recording the third session of the New Zealand Hit Parade

N.Z. HIT PARADE

Songs Our Mothers Never Taught Us

DISC jockeys differ from other riders in this—they invariably ride the favourites. For example, once a fortnight Bruce Weir, of 2YA, produces a field of seven leading contenders in the radio handicap event, *New Zealand Hit Parade*. Entrants are selected from the favourites in hit parades run off earlier by five other stations—1XN, 2XG, and 2, 3 and 4YZ. The results of these local hit parades, with the votes the various numbers gained, are sent into 2YA, where Peter Downes aggregates the scores and prepares the final ratings for the *New Zealand Hit Parade*, which is heard at 7.30 p.m. every other Wednesday (next broadcast, May 7).

At the time *The Listener* went to press only three *New Zealand Hit Parades* had been broadcast, but already patterns in taste, as well as some of the factors which influence the final outcome, were beginning to appear. For instance, the choices sent in from 4YZ seem to indicate that the population there is a week or two behind the rest of the country, either in receiving the latest hits from overseas, or in making up their minds that the numbers are to their liking. Despite this, the *New Zealand Hit Parades* so far indicate that from Whangarei to Invercargill the country is in fairly close agreement on popular modern music. There has as yet been little disagreement over the top favourites on the list, and only among the contenders for the lower positions has there been much variation.

Commenting on the unofficial survey of the *Hit Parade* which he has been able to make on present returns, Peter Downes said that it appeared that New

Zealand was at least six months behind the United States, where the popularity of recent songs has a strong effect on what tunes are to be found on New Zealand's hit parades. Although an



ESME STEPHENS
Between two trees . . . pop throbs

authentic survey of this country's tastes in modern popular music, *N.Z. Hit Parade* is perhaps more accurately described as a local reaction to overseas contributions in the field of popular music and songs. And in this field, America has, of course, undisputed leadership. Nevertheless, New Zealanders show their originality of taste when the chance offers and the leading vote-gainer on the second and third *Hit Parades*, "Tulips and Heather," is a British contribution that has not received much support from Tin Pan Alley.

There are several factors which affect the placing of a tune on the *N.Z. Hit Parade*, the most important of these being, probably, what the Americans call "plugging." In the U.S.A., and to a lesser extent in Britain, plugging is carried on by "name" singers and is, in reality, another form of publicity or salesmanship. Here, however, it is less consciously practised since not many people are interested in pushing one number rather than another. In the United States also, movies which incorporate recent songs, help to boom the sale of sheet music and "platters" and to swell the demand for "another nickel in the nickelodeon." The same is true in New Zealand. When at last the movie arrives the popularity of any "hits" which it includes increases considerably. "In the Cool, Cool, Cool of the Evening" is probably a good example, as is "The Loveliest Night of the Year," these two songs scoring heavily on the local hit parades about the time the movies *Here Comes the Groom* and *The Great Caruso* were in circuit.

Radio stations play their part, too, by increasing audience interest in the latest

overseas popular songs which they include in their normal programmes. These broadcasts affect listener interest and tend to mould request sessions, and this frequent playing of certain numbers has a bearing on the voting which is received by the five stations contributing to the 2YA feature.

A complete estimate of the popular musical taste of New Zealand listeners would entail more work than is possible and the present arrangements, as Mr. Downes admitted, do not provide a totally unbiased estimate. The method used most frequently by the district stations is to place voting cards in music stores. These cards are filled in by customers and then returned to the local radio station. From the three top tunes listed on these cards, a list of seven songs in order of favouritism, based on the number of votes each received, is arranged, and the tunes played on the local hit parade. -

"Pops for Teenagers?"

It is clear, therefore, that the section of the public which most frequently visits music stores represents public opinion when it comes to a question of taste in popular modern music. Probably teen-agers hold a majority vote in this case. Yet such a situation may not be a fault in consideration of modern song popularity, since the bible of American show business, *Variety*, stated last year in its colloquial way, "The major disk companies are frankly pitching their pop releases to buyers in the 12-16 year age bracket . . ." This audience age group corresponds closely to the comic book reader class, and may account for the flood of sentimental and novelty tunes which the U.S. has labelled as "hop" and which New Zealand audiences seem willing to accept. The pattern of these two styles is at present being set here by such numbers as "My Truly Truly Fair," "Because of You," "Come On-a my House" or "Abba Dabba Honeymoon."

Once the order of favouritism in this country has been established by these means, and lesser agents, change is gradual, but inevitable. There are no real classics in popular music, in the sense that none of the tunes on the hit parades remains there for very long, even though some few may retain a general popularity for many years.

Unpredictable Public Taste

In the three *New Zealand Hit Parades* which have so far been studied, the English song "Tulips and Heather" has been the most consistent vote-getter. Third in the first hit parade it rose to the top of the second and held that position on the third, in all accumulating 2696 votes. With this expression of taste, New Zealand audiences reveal a local musical attitude distinct from anything manufactured in the American drug-stores. However, the U.S. leadership in the popular music field is confirmed by the high rating of "My Truly Truly Fair," first, second and third in the three *Hit Parades*, and winner of 1986 votes. "Too Young" and "Mr. and Mississippi" have also been consistent place-getters, while "In the Cool, Cool, Cool of the Evening" has flourished under movie patronage.

The third *New Zealand Hit Parade* has brought to light another important
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