

ating Tree, Serpent and Apple, one with particularly seductive lines.

She's a Glutton for Puns.

PUNS may be the lowest form of wit, but in *Hatsamania* they tended to result in the wittiest form of hat. Two eye-catching models, based on the human eye, with wire tentacles outstretched to catch lesser eyes (Dali would have liked these), a Striking Model, made entirely of matches and match-box sides, and shapely enough to be entirely wearable, and two elegant Spring Models, incorporating large furniture springs, and a Teak-Toque made of wood shavings (though probably rimu).

And there were endless variations on the Eat-My-Hat theme—complete breakfast trays, garlands of fruit, vegetable cocktails, and confections of iced wafers and lollipops.

She's a Superb Needlewoman.

MANY of the models were little miracles of craftsmanship. One represented a complete millinery showroom in miniature, meticulous in every detail. Another a showcase with model hats. Then a delicious model of a maypole with dancers. And "The Wheel of Fashion," surmounted by dolls in national and period costume.

BUT there's no more time for idle generalisation. A flourish of microphones, a battery of cameras and the judges are mounting the platform.

I find it easy to believe their opening remarks, that they've had a very hard job, and that the standard has been unexpectedly high.

What is a crazy hat? I ask myself, allowing my attention to wander from the stalling tactics ("Reasons Behind the Decision") which invariably precede the climax. My personal preference is for something a little on the subtle side, something schizophrenic, the leg-pull rather below the surface. . .

Ah, "The Week-End Joint"! My favourite has romped home!

Yes, it's a beautiful example of a crazy hat that's definitely a hat. A perfect pill-box, made from rolled nylon stockings backed with red or white cotton wool, tied with string and hat-pinned with wooden skewers. Only at second glance do you realise it's a perfect sirloin.

Second, "Busy Line"—a triumphant scarlet telephone, made of conventional millinery felt, but with enough exaggeration of line and proportion to make it almost completely unwearable. Though on the right person . . . ?

Third, "Bats in the Belfry," a nice echo of the Crazy Hat theme. Actually, pronounces one of the judges, a perfect coolie shape. But as well as being a hat it's a yellow-tiled belfry, as the wearer walks the bats flap and a bell rings.

Madness, but there's method in it.

We clap the judges. It's a most popular verdict. We clap the prize-winners—absent friends, probably skulking modestly at their radios. Then we, the also-rans, melt away, happy for the most part with the results but a little wistful at the thought of those other perfectly lovely hats that deserved but couldn't get a place because somehow there weren't quite enough places. What will become of them? Too crazy to be exactly wearable, yet perhaps the right person might get away with them.

At any rate, I needn't worry about "Squaw." My five-year-old son's all set to get away with it.

"Merrie England" . . .



ACCORDING to recent cable news the works of Edward German, and in particular his light opera *Merrie England*, are well on their way to being proved Britain's favourite Coronation year music. More than a hundred amateur dramatic societies there are said to be performing *Merrie England*, which is, says one critic, "a robust, light-hearted, and altogether delightful picture from the glorious days of Queen Elizabeth, peopled with famous personages from her reign and reflecting in music and drama something of the stirring spirit of the times." And here in New Zealand *Merrie England*, produced by Bernard Beeby in the Auckland studios of the NZBS, will be one of the highlights of Coronation week listening. It will be broadcast from all YA stations at 7.15 p.m. on June 2.

Probably the most ambitious studio production yet attempted by the Service, *Merrie England* required several days of sustained effort to record, and will occupy one hour forty minutes of playing time. A dramatic cast of over twenty was employed; the orchestral accompaniment was by the Auckland Radio Orchestra, conducted by Oswald Cheesman, who was the Musical Director, and led by Felix Millar; and the chorus was provided by the Auckland Choral Group, with supporting soloists, under Stewart Harvey.

Some of the principal parts are: Queen Elizabeth, spoken by Honor Sim and sung by Nell Leather; the Earl of Essex, by Christopher Venning and Stewart Harvey; Sir Walter Raleigh, by Lawrence Hepworth and Ramon Opie; Jill-All-Along, by Joy Greer and Beatrice Jones; the May Queen, by Margaret Simmonds and Constance Manning; Bessie Throckmorton, by Shona Smale and Olga Burton; Big Ben, by Ronald Montague and Gordon Tuck; Long Tom, by Patrick Smyth and Malcolm Boles; the Butcher, by Paul Browne and Raymond Wentworth; and Walter Wilkins, by Peter Gwynne.

For various reasons, including the time factor and the difficulty of keeping together such a big amateur cast (all of whom also had their own business or private responsibilities), it was

. . . Light Opera from NZBS Studios

found necessary to record the drama section of the work apart from the musical section, and to combine the recordings later, adding sound effects as well. Recording took seven hours for the dialogue and two and a half hours for the music, while the work of combining the two separate sets of recordings occupied about five hours. Two people, a dramatist and a vocalist, were selected for each role requiring first-class solo work, to ensure the highest possible standard in both singing and speaking.

This method, Mr. Beeby explained to *The Listener*, presented its own special difficulties. "There are some thirty-seven minutes of spoken word in *Merrie England*, and in recording this we had to build up the voices to the frequency level of the strings and soloists—higher than usual in dramatic work. Then the players had to get into character, keep there, and give their best without the stimulus of the music and in spite of the fact that the libretto, considered apart from the vocal and orchestral scores, of course gives only part of the story. On its own it might appear something of a hotch-potch."

Technical recording problems arose from the fact that because of the size of the casts 1YA's main studio had to be used instead of the specially equipped recording studios. Equipment in the latter was directed by remote con-

trol—sometimes a ticklish matter, says Ken Latham, who was technician in charge of the production. "We had to be more than ever alert to catch all cues. With the music section we found during rehearsals that the brass of the orchestra was inclined to come over the microphones placed for the chorus and soloists, swamping them. That was solved by separating the two groups by eight feet or more and employing a total of four microphones simultaneously, two for each group. This achieved an excellent balance for the whole."

However, say Auckland officers of the NZBS who have heard the completed production, all difficulties were more than satisfactorily overcome, and the NZBS *Merrie England* should make a very worthwhile programme.



RIGHT: Oswald Cheesman, musical director of "Merrie England," conducts the Auckland Radio Orchestra during the recording of the opera. At top of page: Ramon Opie (Raleigh), Constance Manning (May Queen), Beatrice Jones (Jill), Malcolm Boles (Long Tom) and Gordon Tuck (Big Ben) sing "Love is Meant to Make Us Glad"