

THE RADIO RECORD

Published Weekly

REGISTERED G.P.O., WELLINGTON, N.Z., AS A NEWSPAPER

Price 3d.

VOL. I, NO. 36.

WELLINGTON, FRIDAY, MARCH 23, 1928.

Radio Spreads the Love of Good Music

Striking Growth of "High-Brow" Appreciation

"Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief"—and all other classes of men and women have been brought by radio to a realisation of the beauties of classical music," says Mary Jordan in the February issue of "Radio News."

As this question of "high-brow" has been fairly prominent in New Zealand, reproduction of this article will be of value as recording the experience of the United States, the world's greatest radio audience, to the lure of the best in music.

RADIO, more than any other instrument of civilisation, has made art popular. It has taken it out of the caviare class and put it where everyone can have it for the taking.

As one of the highest forms of art, music has been carried out of stuffy concert halls where one in a million might hear; it has been picked up from the exclusive circles of the intelligentsia, where familiarity with Wagner and Brahms and Beethoven was a sign of an alleged culture; and it has been taken in its best and most nearly perfect expression to the most remote quarters of the world.

Much as Europe and its centres of artistic learning have done to aid musical education and to develop artists, to advance the work of the student and to smooth the technique of the genius,

the broadcast stations of America have done more to further musical appreciation among masses that number millions, than any other agency which has undertaken to spread art in any form over the universe.

AND while the big stations of the country may have had some idea of enlisting new interest in music, that was a secondary motive; for the purpose of the ambitious programmes which have gone out on the air for the past three or four years was not quite so altruistic. It has to hold attention which had already been gained, and to create new interest among the unconverted hordes who, it was hoped, would become radio devotees.

Whatever the purpose, the result has been an amazing spread of musical knowledge among all types. The labourer in the street, shop or field now takes his evening recreation listening to an aria from "Il Trovatore" and, what's more, when the number is finished he knows just how to pronounce the foreign words.

Every set owner in America is a potential music-lover,

for the fact is certain that a steady diet of jazz in any household will become monotonous as will any one type of entertainment which the ether carries.

And, because the American is innately a curious being, he may not know whether he would like to hear Gigli's voice or not; but, when he hears the magic of a great name, he will tune-in on the station which offers it and he will, with the general run, remain tuned in while the artist broadcasts. Even if his is only the germ of an appreciation, he will turn his dial again when an equally-famous name is announced and, after a few such concerts, he has gained some sense of the beauty of what is offered him.

OPERA FOR THE MILLIONS.

TEN years ago, how many people in America had ever attended a concert where the talent was of the first rank? How many people in the whole nation had ever sat through an opera sung by the Metropolitan or the Chicago companies? Such a small minority as to make the statistics almost negligible. Even if music such as the Metropolitan offers were to be had in every big population centre in the country, what percentage of the inhabitants would make an effort to attend, and how many could conveniently do so?

When the great Caruso drew 3,000 people to one of his concerts, that attendance was hailed as an indication of the tremendous popularity of the singer. If Geraldine Farrar in her best days was acclaimed in a music hall by a few thousand men and women, the event was pointed to as a display of the existence of the great "Farrar public." Famous artists of the past generation, who are now gone, live only by the reputation which the envied few created for them from the experience of listening. The overwhelming majority of the public had to take this talent for granted, to accept the decisions of critics and the approbation or condemnation of the choice ones who knew. And then came radio!

NOW when a million people say that Rosa Ponselle has a beautiful voice, they may not be expressing expert opinions, but they know they are expressing their own emotional reactions. They have felt the magic of her rich tones. How long would it take John McCormack in a concert season to reach a million of his admirers, directly, with his voice? A sufficient number of times to make a rest cure necessary from overwork at the end of a tour. A few years ago, on New Year's night, he stood before WEAF's microphone and the greatest audience of his whole career, the greatest audience which had ever listened to any one artist, heard every note of his concert. And that was the beginning of a popular and widespread musical appreciation in America.

Remember the furore which was made over the first efforts of broadcasters to put high-class music on the air? And the enthusiastic reception it received, beyond all expectations and emphasised by the ton of mail that flooded station WEAF and the company which sponsored the programmes.

EDUCATION FOR THE MASSES.

HOW can any human being ever be blasé about the wonders of broadcasting when he realises that the isolated lumberjack, sitting down to his crude meal of canned billy and hard bread, may mellow his supper with the greatest music the world has ever offered? How can any one accept as a matter-of-fact the radio programmes sent out to-day, when he knows that men, women and children to whom finer music was an unknown thing now have the best of it in their daily lives?

And does the vast public really want the best in music, or is it satisfied with any second-rate entertainment which may be presented? The answer is plain. The response to the high type of musical programme is not limited to those who have always had good music. They are the sort who, while they appreciate it and are sympathetic listeners,

take the programmes somewhat for granted. The great majority of writers who pen their thanks to the broadcasters after an important musical event on the air are the industrial workers in big cities, the farmers in the rural regions.

IN spite of all generally-accepted theories to the contrary, the middle classes of America are being coated with culture and the germ of this culture, which is carried on the radio waves, is penetrating far deeper than the surface. They may be untutored in knowledge of the art of the brush and paint, they may be ignorant of the value of classic lines in clay, but when it comes to the notes of music, they know their operas and they know their artists.

All the loudly-spouted and vehement denunciations, of the commercially-obsessed nation that we are supposed to be, have been a boomerang to the denouncers. What the small cultured groups never could do, American commerce and industry have accomplished. A new coffee, a paint, a battery or a baking powder rides into a million American homes on ether-carried slogans and remain a household word. But how does it get there? On the wings of art! It is the programme, commercially sponsored by the manufacturers, producers and distributors of utilities who have used music as a bait for attention and who have indirectly furthered their own interests while they have done more for the general advance of music than any of those who have sneered at them.

THE CONQUESTS OF RADIO.

THE artists of international reputation who have not appeared on broadcast programmes are in a small minority. Four years ago, the Metropolitan Opera officials frowned on radio. The artists under their management were prohibited from broadcasting and, even though some of the more progressive ones were anxious to test their voices on the air, they were restrained from so doing. Then all restrictions were swept aside. Not only did the business management of musical art endorse the idea of radio concerts, but it went to great lengths to have some part in the lucrative field which suddenly opened to them.

Nowadays the listening public doesn't even get excited when a great symphony orchestra is announced for a two-hour broadcast. It merely accepts another feature as part of its radio entertainment. Mary Garden steps before the microphone and sings to forty-eight states at one time—and nothing unusual happens. Because, by this time, set-owners have become used to the superlative and they expect it. Mengelberg, Damrosch, Ponselle, Schumann-Heink, Hackett—they're all more than mere names now to many who had never known them before.

BROADCASTING HAS MADE THEM VIVID PERSONALITIES TO THE WHOLE COUNTRY AND, WITH THIS FAMILIARITY, HAS COME A STRONG APPRECIATION OF THE KIND OF MUSIC THEY STAND FOR. WHO WOULD EVER HAVE PREDICTED IT?