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Future Features in Broadcasting

THAT the "Highbrows" have definitely contributed to the modern development of the feature film and that it is to their influence that broadcasting in turn must look for the brains to make it more than ordinarily useful is the theme discussed by a writer "Astyanax" in a recent issue of the "Radio Times."

WHAT is a highbrow? Very few people will give the same answer to this question. It depends on the comparative height of the brows of the people you ask! One man will tell you that the highbrow is a man who snobbishly pretends to appreciate the unintelligible.

There are, of course, silly highbrows, much as there are silly people of every brow. Another, rather more sincerely, will answer that the highbrow is a person of genuine good taste, who is not ashamed to say so. On the one hand, I think you will agree that the highbrow is intelligent and appreciative—rather beyond the ordinary; on the other, that he is inclined to be self-assertive, intellectually rather priggish and vocal—also beyond the ordinary. His real taste, the subjects of his assertions, will vary. But he will possess both. And, though you will probably dislike him, you will also quite probably admire him—in a slightly furtive way.

Now, it may be disturbing, or repulsive; it may be a sign of decadence, or it may not; but the fact remains that the two outstanding artistic products of the present century are the Radio and the Kinematograph. Our present civilisation gave birth to both. The question is whether, in their turn, they will not put an end to this civilisation of ours altogether.

A good many people say that they will. They point to wireless and the screen as the outstanding symptoms of an age of vulgarity alike in living and thinking. They assert that the universal is always the third rate, and talk about selection being the basis of all true art. They are, in short, highbrows in their attitude towards modern life. (And there is a certain amount of truth in what they say.)

We find, then, that such people tend to cast disparagement on the kinema and the wireless. That is the first great point of contact between these two new Art-crafts. The second lies in the vital fact that no mere opposition, however much it may be

justified, or however well it may be expressed, has the remotest chance of interfering with their increasing possibilities and, consequently, with their influence. Both have come to stay. But it is rather curious that while the highbrows have now in great numbers gone over to and adopted the kinema, they are showing far greater hesitation to come to terms with wireless in the same way.

Not long ago it was almost impossible in this country to see any film which had not come from Hollywood with the trade-mark "for consumption by hicks" almost printed upon it in letters of flame. People talked with humour, and truth, of films "being made by half-wits for half wits," and so forth.

Then some highbrows, who had come to believe in the screen as a possible art, announced a great discovery. They proclaimed that any film made in Germany, and one or two made by certain favoured Americans, notably Mr. Chaplin, were not vulgar entertainment at all. They were serious works of art, to be treated with reverence, and criticised as carefully as a Beethoven Symphony, a Greco painting, or a novel by Tolstoy. In short, films were made safe for highbrows—and ultimately for intelligent people of all kinds.

NOW, as I have said, highbrows, though in themselves a small minority of the people in this country, make up about two-thirds of public opinion. They write and talk and move about, whereas most people are obliged by circumstances to remain more or less static, and lack the gift of expression with tongue and pen. The result was that a more critical and intelligent point of view with regard to films swept the country, not only here, but also in America. People began to take the kinema seriously—to go to special films as they go to special plays. German films found a market everywhere. German actors and directors, such as Dupont, Pommer, Leni, Murnau,

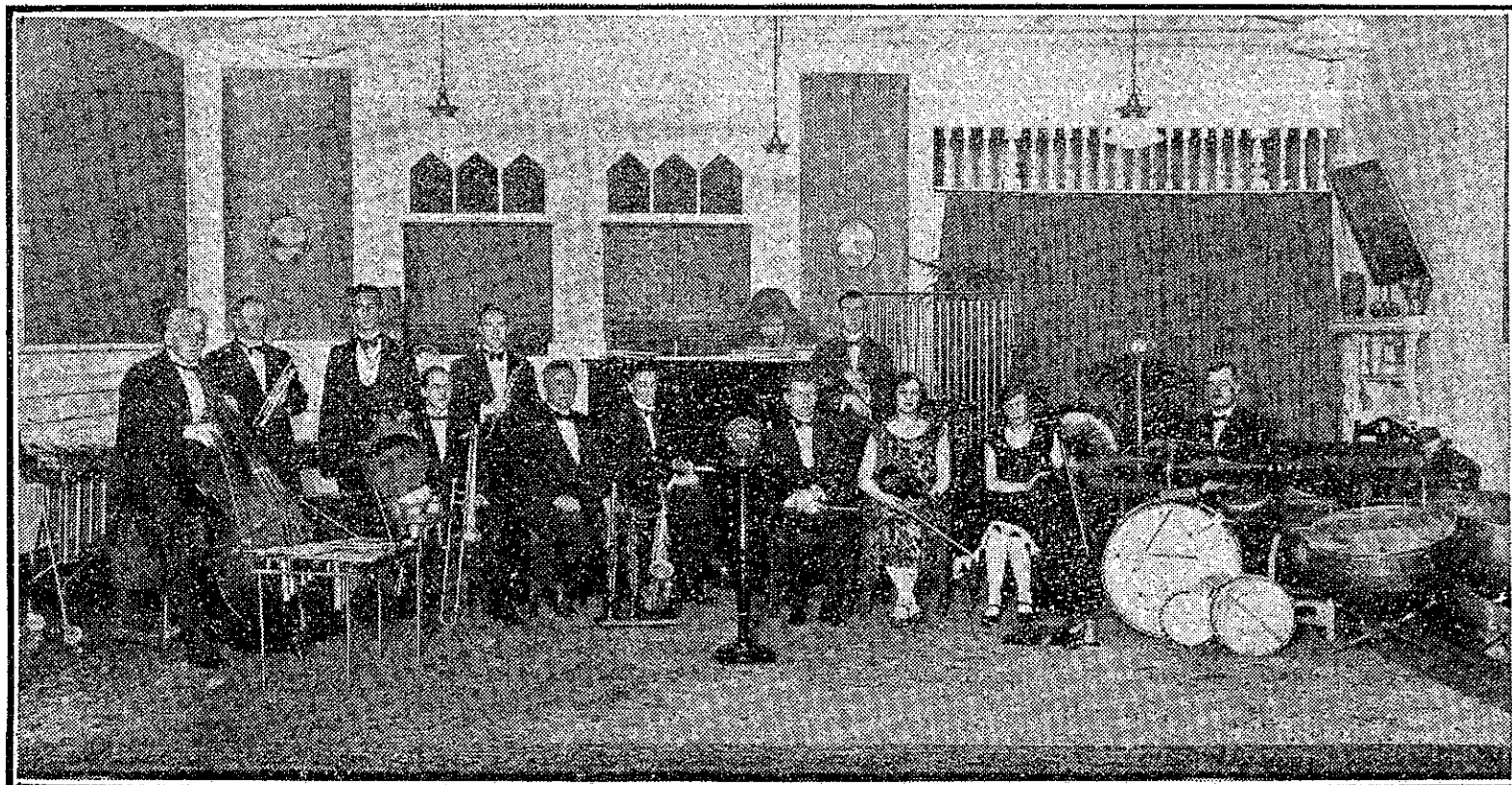
Jannings and Veidt, were seized upon by Hollywood. And even the most ordinary films began to be produced under the influence of so-called "highbrow" methods and technique.

Here comes the point that I wish to make. The highbrows had created a serious interest in a new art. It happened so, because the possibilities of the new art were always there, but could not be developed without the degree of vocal opinion which only the highbrows could supply.

THE highbrow is, so to put it, a John the Baptist crying in the wilderness. He preaches a new thing, which is strange at first, but yet, through its universality, predestined to be taken into the heart of the people, as soon as the people come to realise and understand it. He is just an intelligent person who spots the best a little in advance of his fellows. He spotted Wagner, he spotted Conrad, he spotted Emil Jannings. In time, the highbrow taste becomes the general taste, because the ordinary intelligent man likes the best in every department of art and life.

It is this serious interest and belief in the limitless possibilities of a new art which is the present crying need of Radio. I believe this interest and belief is being created, but too slowly. There is something impersonal about Radio artists and directors, which makes it difficult to achieve. Of course, it is far easier to see than to listen. And a film can be repeated and revived again and again all over the world, on the strength of a minority's enthusiasm, till it is finally recognised and generally acclaimed as a milestone or a masterpiece. To do the same thing with a new experiment in broadcasting, which occurs only once ephemeraly, somewhere in the middle of an average Radio programme, is much harder. The original cannot be repeated indefinitely, since in broadcasting, as opposed to the kinema, practically the same audience listens everywhere every night.

—(Continued on p. 3.)



The new professional orchestra of 2YA, which has met with such favourable reception from listeners. —Wallace Photo.
The names, reading from left to right, are:—Messrs. Frank Huggins, Harry Berry, A. H. F. Wright, C. J. Forrest, Claude Tucker, W. J. Bellingham (Music Director), M. T. Dixon, Geo. Ellwood (Conductor), W. E. McLean, Miss Ava Symons, Miss Lilla Hill, and Mr. L. W. Probert.