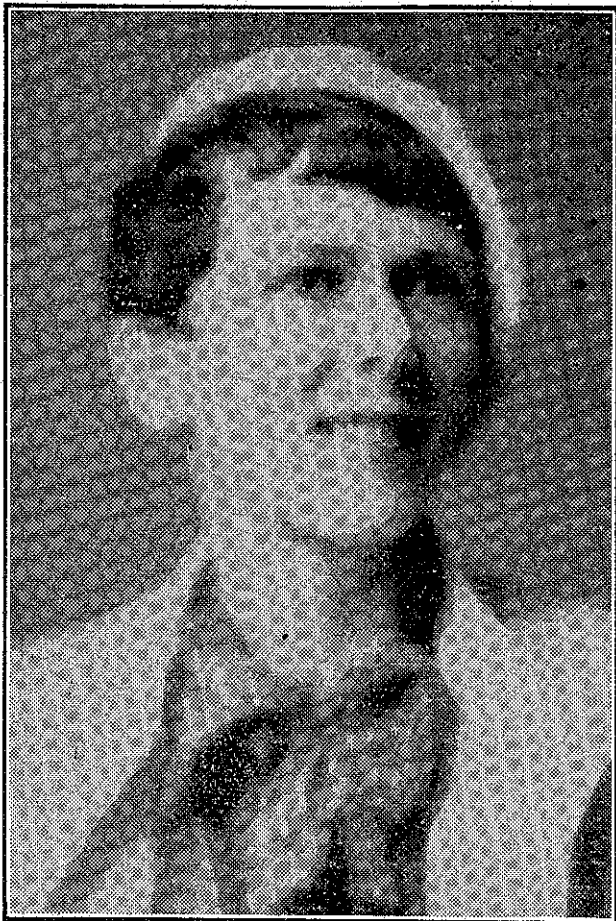




—S. P. Andrew photo.

Do not try to conquer temperament—just control it—for without temperament one cannot be an artist.

THESE words of my old singing master's have helped me through many moments of blinding nervousness—moments before the microphone when my vocal chords felt as though they were choking me and my heart was thumping like a sledge hammer. But let me go back to 1929, when I was a rather lonely girl endeavouring to "break in" on the musical world of London.

The B.B.C. was at that time forming a great new choir, now known as the National Chorus, and were inviting singers from all over London to send in applications. Armed only with a few months of vocal training but full of determination, and inspired with encouragement from kind friends, plus a very earnest desire to sing for the B.B.C. symphony concerts under the batons of Europe's famous conductors, I sent in my application. The forms stated that each choralist was to be judged for tone, range, diction, sight reading, and also required to be a good soloist. There were 6000 applicants in all; out of that number 1000 were invited to a solo test, and to my unbounded joy I was among them, but that was only the beginning. The test for the sopranos was "O Rejoice Greatly," from "The Messiah," scales, and a sight-reading test.

There followed for me days of anxiety, and then came the great day itself, when I found myself for the first time in my life before a microphone. It was not the microphone that really terrified me, but the very important men that could be seen wearing headphones who were to judge whether or not I possessed a broadcasting voice. Mr. Stanford Robinson, who had been chosen as choirmaster for the National Chorus, was there, looking very stern, though with just a faint smile of encouragement on his face. I think had he

How I Sang Into A B.B.C. Microphone—Then Burst Into Tears!

This story was written for the "Radio Record" by Joan Laird who, as Auntie Joan, was known and loved by thousands of North Island listeners in the days when the Wellington broadcasting station, 2ZW, was in existence.

really sympathised with my very apparent fright I would have burst into tears and fled, and been for ever filled with shame and remorse.

Feeling like a patient in a dentist's chair about to have the gas mask put over my face, I heard Mr. Robinson say, "Now then, just face the microphone and let us have 'O Rejoice Greatly.'" I opened my mouth but no sound came—I wanted the ground to open and swallow me. At a word of encouragement I tried again, this time more successfully. Next came the scales, followed by the sight-reading test. Here my nerves failed me, I burst into tears and said, "Oh, why do people break down at a critical time like this?" One of the judges, a very kind man (probably with ambitious daughters of his own) came over to me, patted my shoulder and said, "Never mind, you haven't done as badly as you think."

"Oh! for another chance," I kept thinking during the next few days as I tapped away at my typewriter; and more in keeping with a novel, it came in the form of a letter from the B.B.C. to the effect that they recognised my nervousness and would be pleased to give me another test. From being in the depths of despair I was up in the clouds again, thrilled with the fairness of it all, for I knew I could do it, though I didn't know they knew it, and this time I went before that little "mike" to WIN. Yes, I was still nervous, but differently somehow, for I felt that those men were not there to criticise and judge me, but to give me a chance to show what I could do, and so I went through that second audition and left the studio feeling that even if I did not perhaps possess a voice that the B.B.C. wanted, I had at least not failed myself. A few days later I was the proud possessor of a neat little card which will be a lifelong treasure, inscribed "National Chorus, Member's Pass." I was one of the lucky 250 chosen from the 1000 to represent the B.B.C.'s great new choir. There followed weeks and weeks of wonderful rehearsals and never-to-be-forgotten symphony concerts. Space does not permit me to tell you all I should like to about them, except that on one occasion when Sir Hamilton Harty was conducting, I was so overcome by his magnificent conducting that I could hardly sing. His music was scattered across the stage, and beads of perspiration stood out on his brow. At the close of the concert I could not refrain from dashing behind stage and impulsively wringing his hand. Then there were the remarkable scenes at the Queen's Hall when the Promenade Concert. (Continued on page 60.)