

HENRY HALL'S THIRD "RADIO BIRTHDAY"

B.B.C.'s Famous Dance-Band Leader

Reviews Four Years of Broadcasting

"THREE years ago I completed with a feeling of relief a task that had occupied most of my days and nights for many weeks past—the task of bringing into being, through a lengthy process of audition and rehearsal, the first official dance band of the British Broadcasting Corporation. The B.B.C. Dance Orchestra 'took the air,' and then began a new task of seeking to please the multitude of tastes among listeners.

"Development has continued unceasingly, and the last three years have gone by very quickly for me. Yet already we have broadcast some 1200 hours of dance music, involving approximately 4000 hours of programme rehearsal.

"Hand in hand with the development of the broadcasting service generally, the scope of our work has also widened, and it is a keen pleasure to my orchestra and myself that we now have the daily opportunity of broadcasting to the different parts of the Empire. How effectively our short-wave broadcasts through the Empire station are getting over is shown by the variety of postage stamps that appear in my mail-bag each day. In recent months, too, there has been an increasing tendency on the part of Continental broadcasters to take our programmes by special land-line for radiation by their own transmitters. Such relays always bring a crop of letters, and have been the means of making many new friends.

"In the building of this reputation among listeners, the task has been, and must continue to be, an endless search for variety and novelty, both in the presentation of the individual tunes we play and of programmes, as a whole. In the latter field, guest nights have been conspicuously successful. My first guest night was given just a year ago, and brought to the microphone stars of the stage, the screen, and broadcasting, in a somewhat informal setting. The idea 'caught on,' both with listeners and with the members of the profession, and I have had the pleasure of introducing many celebrated artists to the microphone for the first time. The informality of the proceedings on guest nights has enabled me to draw

upon personalities from widely different spheres of activity, and although the feature now enters on its second year there is certainly no lack of material.

"British dance music has made enormous progress in recent years, and today 45 per cent. of the tunes in my programmes are British compositions. 45 per cent. American, and 10 per cent. Continental. I am ever on the watch



for new British tunes of original conception and outstanding merit, though I am sorry that there is still not enough first-class material coming from British composers.

"There is a group of British writers whose work is outstanding, of course, notably Noel Coward, Noel Gay, Ray Noble, Horatio Nicholls, Vivian Ellis, Ralph Butler, Leslie Sarony, and George Posford. But even several swallows do not make a summer, and my disappointment is in no way lessened when I think of the thousands of people who are trying to write 'hit' tunes. Few of these writers show signs of becoming Noel Cowards or Ray Nobles, because the work of the majority reveals that they have little idea of what they are aiming at.

"The fruits are awaiting the clever youngster, and the academies should show him the way to set about the job of picking them. Until the problem is

tackled in a businesslike and common-sense way, it is hopeless to expect the disappearance of the reproach that our popular music is largely of American origin. In recognising that there is such a justifiable reproach I am not, of course, agreeing with those who suggest that the final objective should be the complete suppression of American contributions to our popular entertainment. We must keep a sense of proportion over this question of British writers, remembering the common-sense view that art in any of its forms must be international.

"Incidentally, the international character of light entertainment has developed tremendously in recent years through broadcasting, the films and the gramophone. Perhaps the effect of the gramophone is somewhat overshadowed by the obvious achievements of the other two forms, but on reflection it is rather amazing to realise the extent to which the gramophone has familiarised us with the artists of other countries. American bands such as those of Paul Whiteman, Rudy Vallee, Guy Lombardo, and Eddie Duchin, and soloists like Bing Crosby and Ruth Etting are all well known here through their records or, it might even be said, primarily through the broadcasting of their records, for many people have made their first acquaintance with them in this way.

"In America there is no regular broadcasting of records such as we have over here, but nevertheless the sales of records by British bands reach high figures, and the American public is thoroughly familiar with the various personalities of the British dance-band world. I had a personal experience of the reputation that is achieved in advance by radio and gramophone work when I went to the States two years ago. The reception given to me was amazingly friendly, and I found a lively interest in the doings of the B.B.C. Dance Orchestra.

"May I hope that our own listeners will continue to show the same lively interest? For our fourth year of broadcasting we have many new plans and enterprises which we hope will add to the entertainment of the huge public to whom we have the honour of playing."