

"People Expect Me To Be Middle-aged"

Michael Head When Only 19 Had First Song Published

(Written for the "Radio Record")

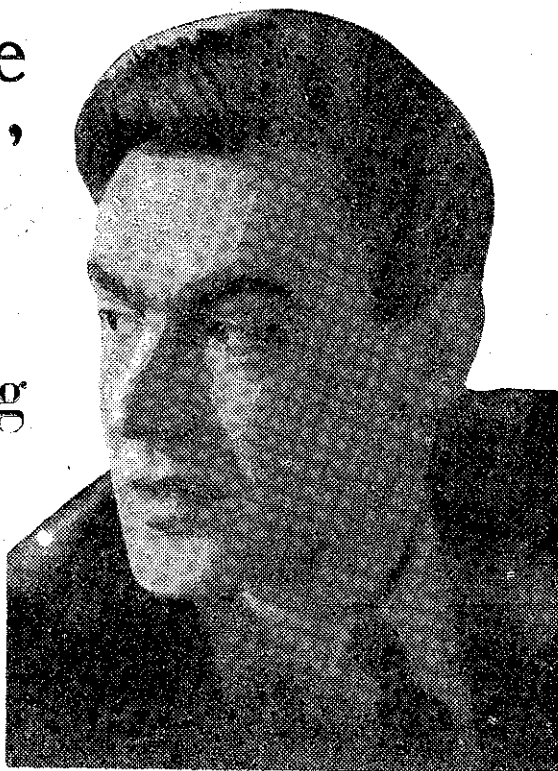
WHEN I first saw Michael Head I thought I was looking at an old school friend—a fellow who was an awful swot and who played the piano rather well. There was no need for Michael Head to tell me that he played the piano, seeing he is Professor of Pianoforte at the Royal Academy of Music, but he denied the suggestion that he was ever a swot. He seems a young man to be visiting New Zealand as examiner for the Royal Schools of Music, but that may be because he doesn't look his 36 years. Gordon Bryan, who was here two years ago in the same capacity, was then only 34.

Michael Head is best known for his songs, settings of mostly contemporary poets. In this sphere of music he has had his name repeatedly before New Zealand listeners, and last Friday night he was broadcast for the first time from 2YA in a most pleasing half-hour of his own songs, with piano interludes. More than 40 of his songs have been published, and a few are yet unpublished.

"I was fortunate in getting a publisher when I was as young as 19 years—just after the war," he said. "People have known my songs now for such a long time that they expect me to be middle-aged or an old man. I've always sung. It seems such a natural form of expression. At first I played the piano, then did orchestral work, and went through the usual round of composing at the Academy. Lately I've specialised in songs because I've become well known in that capacity."

"Do you prefer the older poets or the recent ones for song settings?" I asked.

"Well, I haven't gone as far back as the Elizabethans for my lyrics," he replied with a smile. "Most of the songs I have written are set to contemporary or recent poets—W.



H. Davies, Housman, Walter de la Mere, Mary Webb, Alfred Noyes and so on. A difficult poet to set, but interesting to try, is Thomas Hardy."

"What are the things to be most considered in song settings?"

"I feel that the value of a modern song can be estimated by two aspects of equal importance: the musical content, and its effectiveness 'as a song.' That is, as a medium of conveying the meaning of the poem to the listener, by singer and pianist. In many modern songs the spirit of the poem is lost by a musical setting of over-elaboration and exaggeration—either in the accompaniment or in the vocal line. I am an admirer of modern harmony if it is used as a means of illustrating the meaning of the poem, but the vocal line should follow the natural rhythm and accentuation of the poem to convey its meaning as simply and melodiously as possible.

"A test of the good song is whether the poem is equally effective whether recited or sung. Good examples of modern songs can be found in the compositions of John Ireland, Arnold Bax, Peter Warlock, Armstrong Gibbs, Cyril Scott and Vaughan Williams."

Michael Head is interested, too, in unaccompanied songs. He has written three. One is "London Pride" and another is a poem called "The Singer," sent by a child from Melbourne. In unaccompanied songs the effect has all to be got from the melodic line and accompanying figures.

A Television "First Night" In New York

Many Problems To Be Solved Before Television Becomes Entertainment For Everyone

(From Our New York Correspondent.)

RADIO engineers, discussing the results of a "first night" for television, held privately in New York City recently, agreed that their technique would need improvements before television could turn the corner around which it has

been hiding and be presented to the public.

But, regardless of imperfections in broadcasting and reception, they did not conceal their pleasure at having put on a "show" in which David Sarnoff, president of the

Radio Corporation of America, and Major-General J. G. Harbord, chairman of the board of the same concern, appeared in stellar roles. Both were presented at the private demonstration, made under ideal atmospheric conditions.