

IT LOOKS RATHER ODD

When Radio Players
Are Tested Before
The Microphone of
The NBS



Written For The "Record"

By "EMILE"



"HOLD IT!"

... cries German radio play producer, Warner Bergold, in his Berlin studio.

IN one of the studios of the NBS, a woman stands before a microphone reading from a script. Her voice comes through the loudspeaker into a small room nearby where the Play Producer sits at his table jotting down notes in a book.

"I was struck all of a 'cap," says the woman in the studio.

"Oh, really. Charles, this woman says she was struck all of a heap. Whatever that is. You had better do something about it," says the woman, in another voice altogether.

It looks a little odd to the bystander glancing through the plate-glass window and it sounds even odder. But the woman, and the man jotting down notes at his desk, are perfectly serious and absorbed in it all.

It doesn't seem in the slightest degree out of the way to them. It merely means that the woman whose voice is coming through the loudspeaker is having a voice test for radio play acting.

NOW and then the Play Producer jumps up from his table and goes quickly through to the woman in the studio.

"Yes," he says. "Quite good. Now, will you try this?"—"Have you done any dialect?"—"Can you do broken Italian or French or German?"—"What about Cockney?"—"Try that again. Listen while I do it. Can you get those pauses for me?"—"Now, I want you to try this. It's a woman speaking with a great deal of passion, but it is subdued passion, very much restrained."

Though they are in another room, it is quite a simple matter to know what he is saying. Every word of the conversation comes over the loudspeaker.

THE microphone is a wonderful detective. It shows up all weaknesses and strengths in a voice with unerring precision. As soon as the candidate begins to do the part of "subdued passion," even I, the untrained bystander, can spot that there is a weakness in this rendering, that

the passion is lacking in the voice altogether, that it is not real.

Only The Voice

ON the stage, perhaps, the actress might have been able to "get away with it." There would have been her physical presence to distract one's senses, the presence of the other actors, the mass emotion of the audience and the spectacle of the stage scenery.

But the microphone test gives nothing but the voice. The performer is invisible. Only the instrument is heard.

BUT though the sight of men and women in strange postures and with animated faces talking into a metal box may look singularly odd to the bystander, it may make all the difference to the quality of the radio play that comes to the ears of the listener. For the quality of the voice—the broadcaster's only means of reaching the senses of his hearers—depends on how far the player can whip his own emotions up to the frantic pace of those in real life.

"WHEN they first hear their own voices over the microphone," the Play Producer told me, "people are astonished, often indignant. They are sure they don't sound like that."

"They do, of course. The microphone doesn't lie. People hear their own voices when speaking imperfectly, because they hear them through the vibrations of the bones in their heads. The way one hears one's own voice is always different from the way other people hear it."

"Say I am a hopeful candidate for radio play acting," I said to him, "and I want to learn how to use my voice as a character actor can. What is the best way of going about it?"

"YOU learn through the ear," said the Play Producer. "You listen to people themselves . . . in the trams, in the shops, in the streets."

One could pick up copy anywhere. To find out how an old man spoke, one listened to an old man in the streets. If one had the part of an Italian, one sought out an Italian greengrocer and heard how he spoke. All good stage parts were built around the people whom the actor had seen or heard.

It was an absorbing pursuit, said (Contd. on page 39.)