

AMATEUR GENTLEMEN

By
WILTON BAIRD

*...Who Enter The Music Ring
To Compete With All Comers
In Astonishing Contests*

IN the bad old days in New Zealand, so I am told, amateur trials were mainly a test of the marksmanship of the young men in the shilling seats.

When somebody came out on the stage and sang "Speak to Me, Dora," the technique was to throw your turnip or lettuce or other small offering high up on the stage curtain, so that the offering would then fall close to the singer's feet.

The trials in those days were, naturally, very popular with the audience, though perhaps not so popular with the performers.

No Personal Comment

THEY are still popular to-day, revived by the Commercial stations in each of the four main centres, though conducted on more humane lines. There is no opportunity for marksmanship when the performer is invisible.

Nor is there any "wisecracking" by the announcers about the performers, as in the famous Amateur Hour of Major Bowes in the States. This was tried once in New Zealand. Something like this:

"There is a stout lady coming on now to sing. I fear she may be going to sing 'Love Me and the World is Mine.' Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the worst has happened. She is."

THE response to this technique was so immediate and so warm in tone that it was dropped immediately. We in New Zealand, it seems, are more sensitive than people in other places. And perhaps, though the meat in the Amateur Hours would be all the better for a little mustard, it is fairer not to be funny.

"All the comments these days are left to the fireside critic," so Kingi Tahiwī, the announcer who conducts the 2ZB Amateur Trials, told me last week. "One can imagine him being very acid in his comments on some of the items, but he wouldn't have the nerve probably to give an item himself."

RADIO to-day, in its Amateur Trials at all the commercial stations in New Zealand, gives every hopeful performer the chance of being 'discovered.' With Jew's harps, accordions, violins or even just two spoons, the performers flock to the studios to find means of expression. And in these days, with the microphone for protection, there is no danger of the audience's retaliation.

THEY have had some first-rate performers since the session started. There have been some excellent singers, especially among the boys and girls. There was a blind

girl violinist. There was a man who played the mandolin and the mouth-organ at the same time, wire attachments to the mouth-organ leaving his hands free for the mandolin.

ONE way and another, there has been an astonishing array of talent, some of it most unusual.

Rhythmical Spoons

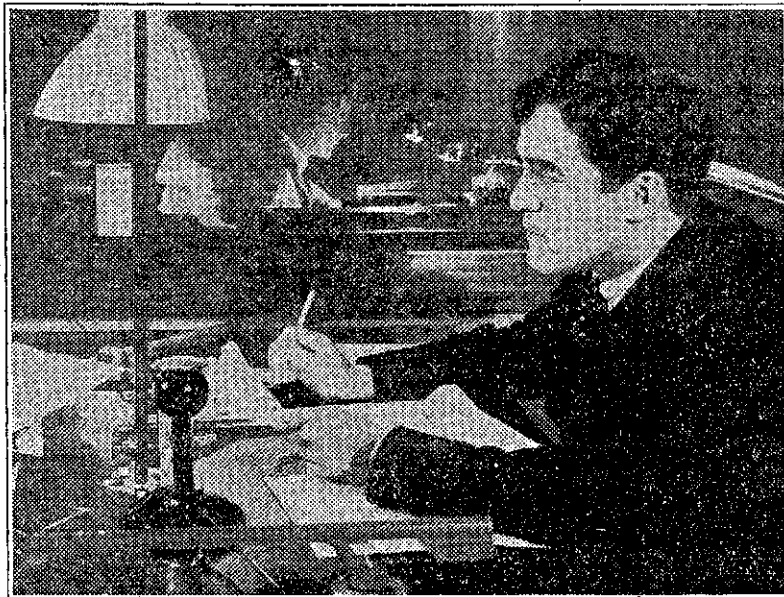
Just lately one contestant gave an item with two spoons, hitting them on his knees and his elbows to a piano accompaniment.

"Musical?" I asked doubtfully.

"Not particularly," said Kingi Tahiwī. "But very rhythmic."

These amateur hours give people an outlet, he thinks, and enable them to give expression to their love of music. Their talent may not be so striking at times, but their devotion to it is sincere.

The hour takes the place of the old gatherings in the home round the piano, when "everyone did something."



KINGI TAHIWĪ.

... As he conducts the Amateur Trials in the studios of 2ZB.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS that have sunk in the scale of popularity vie with accomplishments that have risen high. Whistling soloists compete with crooners. Several yodellers have taken part. Saxophonists have entered against the Jew's harp played to a mouth-organ accompaniment.

One lady, moving on towards 50, gave a rousing tune on the concertina, stamping her feet as she played.

EACH item is limited to two minutes, and at the end of the time the gong goes. In the audition (contd. on page 37.)