

These 'Golden' Melodies

Special to the
"Record"

Do You Know This?

If you wrote a song that every radio and every gramophone in the world blared out for months, you would receive for it only about £500?

If you were a world-famous composer—a Gershwin or a Friml—whose work was played by the world's leading orchestras and bands, sung by stars earning £100,000 a year, recorded by every leading gramophone company, it is unlikely that your income would exceed £1500 a year?

That six London hotels in 1934-35 paid £96,000 in providing music for guests, and of this the authors of the music played received the noble sum of £600 to be divided between them?

That if it doesn't stop soon composers are going to wake?

By
E. M. Dorkin

MUSIC, like the poor, has been with us since the beginning of history—but never has it been with us so constantly and obtrusively as it is to-day. The performance of it has become so much a part of life it would seem almost impossible to conceive a world over which music was no longer poured in never-ending streams.

To-day a man may, if he so morbidly desires, breakfast to music lunch and dine and sup to music, read and talk and drive and play and sleep to music. It is a luxury available to all the civilised world for the mere twiddling of a knob or the pressing of a button.

Playing, singing, recording and distributing of music are prosperous branches of one of the world's greatest and most prosperous industries. Though music may seem "free" it costs the world countless millions of pounds every year. Orchestra leaders, singers, dance bands—great individual performers are paid thousands of pounds for a single performance. Calculated pro rata to its part in programmes, the New Zealand public pays £300,000 a year for the music it gets on the air.

There's money in music—more money in music than there has ever been before.

But here is the great anomaly—surely one of the greatest and strangest anomalies of civilisation:

The composer—the real creator of music—has the poorest paid job in the world. He has less chance of earning his living, less chance of winning riches in reward for his genius, than he had twenty years ago when the world's consumption of music was not one hundredth part of what it is to-day!

For the moment, take that statement at its face value. What is going to be the end of it all? Is the composer going to be starved out of existence and music itself walk the slow road of self-destruction—or will some more equitable system of profit-sharing be devised under which the composer can once more claim financial independence and receive rewards commensurate with his services?

It's a long, strange story.

WAY back in the beginning of the century, myriad homes obtained their recreation of music when little Willie played the latest popular hit on the piano, from records on those "new-fangled" gramophones, from occasional concerts, minstrel shows, visits to the

theatre. No fewer than 8000 sellers of sheet music did a thriving business in the United States alone. The composer of a popular song might expect to receive royalties on anything up to a million copies of his music.

Those were, indeed, palmy days. The composers of real hits made fortunes; the composers of "stock" numbers made comfortable incomes.

But the palmy days were not destined to last long. As record sales crept up sheet music sales crept down.

There was, however, still enough to be made from gramophone rights to keep the composer in modest comfort.

Then came radio. Within ten years of its birth it had almost completely displaced the gramophone in the field of mechanised music. Snap goes the composer's second string.

But the composer still held the copyright of his music. He demanded a small sum for each public performance of his music so that his profession should in some small measure at least receive compensation for the delivery of art in the stamp-mill of science. To-day, after interminable legal battles, receipt of this performing right provides a means by which a composer can assure himself of about one-quarter of the income he previously received from other sources.

Now consider these actual cases:

A is a successful composer of ballads. In 1925 he made £1547 from the sale of sheet music. In 1934 he made £313 from the same source and received £233 in performing rights. His earnings were diminished by two-thirds in ten years.

B is a well-known composer of ballads and light instrumental music. In 1923 he paid income tax on £924 from the sale of sheet music, and in 1934 paid tax on £336. The same composer received £330 for mechanical rights in 1924 and only £54 in 1934. Against that he received £614 in performing rights.

C is on the topmost rung of the composing ladder. In 1928 he made nearly £5000. Six years later his income had dropped to less than £1500!

YOU may protest that these are all pretty comfortable incomes, despite the startling decreases. True. But remember that these men are world leaders in their profession. Remember that the people who sing or play their music may receive almost as (Contd. on p. 41).

