

Aerial Night's Entertainment—and Otherwise

Cleveland's Station WTAM Seems to Fill Need of Radio Public

By DOROTHY B. STAFFORD

THE Chief Engineer was attempting to discredit our contention that there wasn't a decent detector tube in the entire thirteen he had sold us, when the discussion started. The amateur Engineer, who usually plays the role of innocent bystander in these sometimes hectic exchanges of opinion, suggested that it should be entitled, "Why Is a Radio Station?" and it was brought about by an announcement in a WGY program. The item read,

"An address on 'The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent,' will be delivered by Dr. John Erskine, of Columbia University, Wednesday night."

The Chief guffawed. *We* thought it worthy of serious consideration.

"There," we said, "is a station that has some excuse for being. When a broadcaster reaches the point where he has the courage of his convictions,—and it takes some courage to be intelligent these days,—he has gone about as far as he can go. But the standard of Schenectady has always been high. If one heard no other station he would be well entertained by the variety and quality of broadcasting that comes out of WGY."

The Chief has spent several crowded years sailing up and down the seven seas in the wireless cabins of ships, and therefore takes a rather snuffy attitude toward broadcasting stations in general. In fact, he is the only person we know who agrees with the pessimistic violinist in his dire prophecy that in a few years broadcasting is going to die a horrible death from inanition. In vain we

remind him that the same was said of the movies ten years ago, and still they are flickering merrily on their way, becoming more prosperous though more impossible each year.

"Intelligence, piffle!" he now commented, as he industriously



Art Herske is announcer and master of the Saturday night revel at WTAM, Cleveland

switched tubes, "It doesn't matter what they broadcast. People listen to the station that comes in the clearest nowadays, and this trying to do something different is mere wasted effort. You know we are to have a broadcasting plant on the new Superba Hotel, and with a hundred-watt station right here in town they won't listen to anything else."

What To Do?

WHILE we were wondering how an otherwise logical person could be so obtuse, the Amateur bobbed up.

"We are to have a broadcasting station?" he inquired, "and

what, may I ask, are *we* going to broadcast after we get it?"

The Amateur, we regret to say, has no civic pride, and would be hopeless material for a Rotary or Kiwanis club. But his question was justified. We know of no community of equal population that is so utterly devoid of any outstanding musical organization as this particular city. We haven't even a good hotel or cafe orchestra, not even a "silver cornet band," and while the local saenger-bunds are as fair as the average, there is nothing to distinguish them from the hundred and one similar amateur entertainers that are already cluttering up the air lanes. While the natives storm the concert-halls when anybody of note comes to town, and trying to hear the Philadelphia Symphony is about as strenuous an undertaking as getting on to a foot-ball field when Red Grange is playing, the community seems incapable of producing or supporting anything of outstanding musical excellence within itself.

So what it could possibly have to offer the outside world,—a world already fed to repletion with the best in music,—is something of a mystery. It is all very well to talk about wearing paths to your door for mouse-traps, but if your mouse-traps are constructed along the same mediocre lines as the other fellow's, you'll have to buy a lawn-mower to keep down the grass in the path. And we can't imagine anyone wearing grooves in the air trying to get what is going to come out of this station.

No Excuse for Existence

IF THE radio commission, or whoever hands out the spe-



Three wielders of the banjo are found in the Dixie Trio who frequently appear over WTAM

cial dispensations permitting communities and individuals to shoot forth their broadsides of Hertzian waves upon a defenseless public, would but ask, "What have you got to tell the world?" there wouldn't be such a crying need for straight-line condensers to sort out the stations. Any of us can mention a score of broadcasters right off the reel who have no legitimate excuse for messing up the atmosphere, and yet, just because some misguided soul has money enough to maintain a plant for the purpose of getting his name upon the air, or whatnot, this small, unimportant fry continues to blatt forth its purposeless programs night after night to the exasperation of the listener, who is trying to get some worthwhile station in clear and clean. About once a week something like the following comes over the telephone.

"Oh, Mrs. Stafford, Lillian is going to broadcast from WJX tonight. She is visiting over there, and they've asked her to sing."

Our subconscious mind always retorts, "Well, what of it?" but the conscious mind, trained by years of polite hypocrisy, murmurs, "How nice! So glad you told me."

Forewarned, we stay away from WJX that night, for why

should we want to hear Lillian? We have had to listen to her since the day she sang her first solo in the Unitarian church, have painfully followed her struggles through the Chimes of Normandy, the Mikado and Elijah; and with the best sopranos of the country at our beck and call by the mere turning of the dial, why waste battery-juice to hear Lillian annihilate the "Shadow Song," (which we feel in our bones

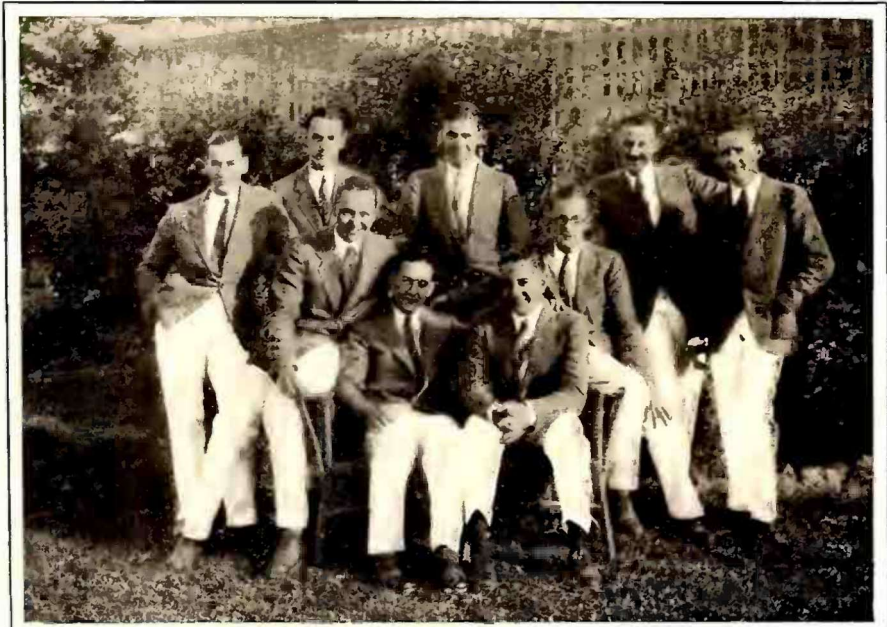
she'll attempt,) just because we went to school with her mother? We firmly believe that a station that has nothing better to perpetrate than Lillian should be put off the air.

"Then," said the Chief, "I suppose your policy would be to eliminate all stations like Tuinucu, Shenandoah and Beaumont, just because they have no grand opera stars and million-dollar jazz-hounds to broadcast. Where are the people, with a range of a couple of hundred miles, in remote districts going to get their radio?"

Who Have Alibis

OF COURSE our cowardly Opponent was evading the issue. He knew perfectly well our argument was applied solely to the over-congested districts of the East and Middle West. And besides we told him we didn't believe there were any listeners any more with a radius of only two hundred miles.

And as a result of so much having been said about legitimate broadcasting, and it being the time of year when a review of the season seemed in order, we went into executive session with half a dozen other seasoned listeners and began checking up the stations in this crowded area that had good alibis. We elim-



These gentlemen, attired so nattily, belong to Guy Lombardo's Royal Canadians and furnish much of the high class jazz music broadcast from the Willard Storage Battery's Cleveland station



In this photograph may be seen the members of the Willard Symphony. Walter Logan is the director of this ensemble

inated most of the stations with eastern hook-ups, for they were supposed to furnish the best.

And after the smoke had cleared away,—for general all-around popularity with all kinds of listeners, for a six days a week diet,—lo WTAM led all the rest.

Write ups of radio stations, as a rule, intrigue us about as much as the canned reviews on the covers of books. Usually the fine Italian hand of the press agent is plainly discernible, or it is apparent that the reviewer has visited the studio, and been so royally received and entertained by the gracious hostesses and announcers that he can, in decency, write nothing but the most glowing praise.

Not a Clevelander

WHEREFORE, we conscientiously disclaim acquaintance with anyone connected with the Cleveland station, and solemnly affirm that we haven't been in that city since the war. Our viewpoint is entirely that of the listener, and while we hesitate to trust the judgment of our best friends in anything connected with the musical arts, from our own observation and that of various curious scouts, who spend half their waking hours with pricked-up ears,—WTAM seems to stack up as a mighty satisfactory radio station.

Situated in the largest city in Ohio, it naturally has much to draw on; the hotel and cafe orchestras broadcast are the equal of anything similar that comes out of the east, the special concerts of high-class music present artists of reputation and distinction, and the mechanical performance of the station leaves little to be desired. One thing we like about WTAM is, that contrary to the course pursued by many Middle Western stations, it doesn't wait until night to wake up. It is on the job every noon

with a lively cafe orchestra, and a couple of times a week puts on a morning lesson in Music Appreciation.

While comparisons are odious, personally, we regard the gay Lombardos,—more properly known as Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians—as having little competition on the air in their particular line, with the possible exception of the few Meyer Davis orchestras that still broadcast. There is a rhythm and lilt to their dance orchestrations that we haven't heard since the famous Lido-Venice faded from the air by reason of one of Mr. Buckner's padlocks. And despite all ridicule to the contrary, dance orchestras do have a definite place to fill in radio, particularly since program directors seem prone to fall victims to classical epidemics.

We recall one night last winter when there was an appalling Dvorak outbreak. We don't know whether or not it was the composer's birthday,—but north, south, east and west everybody seemed to be "Goin' Home," and it was with a feeling of genuine relief that we turned to WTAM and the Lombardos. Apropos of these strange epidemics a musician inquired not long since if the radio stations were having "a 'Glow Worm' week." He complained



Louis Rich and the Blue Room orchestra, in the public auditorium at Cleveland. They are frequent broadcasters at WTAM