

CLUB CORNER

Command Show Could Be Improved

WINTER, with activity in Clubland at peak level and, of course, the "Command" season, looms close ahead and we are all looking forward to new interest and increasing prospects it may bring.

A Club Command is not just a power-packed bill. It is supposed to reflect the best of specific lines of performance regularly available and presented in the area.

But in Manchester, where several club organisations stage their separate Commands—perhaps due to this categorization—assembly of the most shining talent in any one such show seems hardly ever likely or indeed possible.

It's the system—not any individual—to blame. I am well aware of all the hard, unpaid work concert secretaries and committee-men put in on these shows, and, try as they may, they will never please everyone. But they know when a job's been well done, and that personal satisfaction alone is sufficient reward for most of them.

Before long we shall be hearing what the club-goers think of this and that selection committee's choice—as ever, there will be reasons for pride and disappointment among the artists for whom an appearance can be much more than a prestige boost.

It was from such an event Toni Dalli was singled out to be groomed for stardom—Brian Budge, Brian Massey, Bruce Allan, and scores of others, similarly owe rising status to appearance at a Command.

OVERCROWDING

ON the whole, the several northern Commands I have seen over the past five years have been of a remarkably high standard. Albeit, I can recall that some of them were marred by overcrowding—a bad fault for which the artists are the worst sufferers.

When you get about 1,400 folk all trying to achieve seated comfort in a hall built to accommodate a thousand or less, there's bound to be a lot of fidgeting, pushing and shoving, or worse. And as these performances are usually quite long, at the end of three hours audience-noise has built up into a considerable distraction.

As the demand for seats is so heavy could not these special events be presented on two nights—the second a repeat—admittance by ticket only, both nights?

FRESH FACES NEEDED

ANOTHER recurring fault—well, I consider it to be such, where the well-established associations concerned agree or not—some of the selection committees have a habit of bringing back the same performers year after year.

VAF NEWS

by Melville Thomson

I DIDN'T think we had it in us! Last Thursday, members of the Executive Committee (Marion Day, Horace Mashford, Max Moran, Bert Wright and his wife, with Reg Swinson carrying the bag—some 1,000 leaflets) along with about an equal number from the local Trades Council, picketed the Assembly Hall, Walthamstow, where Dale Martin Promotions were staging a wrestling tournament. This must be the most beautiful new Civic Centre in the country, and it seems incongruous that we should be forced to adopt these nineteenth century tactics. Nearly 1,000 leaflets were distributed by hand and under windscreen wipers. The enthusiastic Trade's Council members arrived with bold placards and the whole thing must have been a severe embarrassment to the people running the shows and the Council letting the hall. Bigger things are planned for the next occasion. But the position with the wrestling promoters is not all blacklegs and pickets. Three Independent promoters—Robinson's Promotions, Paul Lincoln Management Ltd., International Wrestling Promotions, have recognised our contract and we shall be doing all we can to encourage them in preference to the others. In this respect, too, we are turning our attention to the TV Companies.

In the Variety and Allied Entertainment Council Meeting last week, agreements were finally reached on amendments to the Control Agreement. As these have yet to be ratified by member-organisations, including our own Executive, they cannot be made public yet, but very important decisions have been made after strenuous negotiations and they should be of benefit to the whole entertainment business.

A composite Report by Vic Duncan and Reg Swinson on their attendance as Observers at the 25th meeting of F.I.M. Executive in London last July has been distributed. The more important matters that concern members of the V.A.F. were mentioned last week in reference to conferences in

Why don't the well tried and tested stars down south of the similarly deserving but not so well known?



Zaraeda and . . .



Johnnie St. George.

CROWD-PULLER

IS business as brisk as it should be or do you need to create a stir with an attraction that is different?

I am thinking of Zaraeda, the mind-reader, who picked Preston Public Hall annex at every demonstration (20 or more a day) during the one-and-half weeks duration of the recent Trades Exhibition there.

It seems that Mr. Z. has already worked some large clubs up and down the country—at the expense, mark you, of Bingo.

Part of the magic of Zaraeda is his friendliness, sincerity, and complete lack of ostentation as he conducts telepathic experiments that stagger his volunter "subjects" and keep the onlookers thoroughly entertained.

Z. is an unusual sort of showman—and he is well-supported by amiable young Jennie St. George, not by L.F.A.M. because they were not at that time, able to send a representative, sought an Agreement covering Sound Broadcast (Radio) International Relays in Europe.

"Dr. Strachnov for the E.B.U. had wanted to exclude all third parties such as agents, promoters and others. F.I.M. had asked that a Deferred Relay be defined as one taking place within 48 hours from the originating broadcast."

E.B.U. wanted 30 days then proposed 15 days. F.I.M. accepted this. There would be only two classes of relay—Direct and Deferred—other broadcasts of original broadcasts then broadcast by means of a recording would be paid for at double the basic fee."

I quote from the Report but I am not sure that I understand much more than "double the basic fee". That makes sense in any language.

It is said to see that Huddersfield Continental is going to pack up at the end of the month. What will probably happen now is that a brewery or a group of businessmen will open a club in another part of the town, and a mixture of beer, Bingo and Variety will be wildly successful. This is what happened in Bolton and in other towns in the North and Midlands. A look at the Calls list will show how the pattern is changing. Mightn't it be time that places like Watford, Croydon, Kingston, Dagenham and other towns on the outskirts of London, used the Beer, Bingo, Variety formula? The big London breweries could well afford to try it.

Juke boxes that give an image of the performer whilst singing, are soon to be distributed. The secretary has been investigating to see what harmful effect they might have. The worst seems to be that not only can fingers be out of tune, in the future they can also be out of sync.

AUSTRALIANS

ADORE

THE MINSTRELS

UNKNOWN on television in Australia "The Black and White Minstrel Show" starts from scratch there, which means that its impact when it opened at Melbourne's Tivoli last Friday was even greater, since the audience had no preconception of what was in store.

From the outset, however, the show was an unqualified success. First night Tivoli audiences are seldom wildly enthusiastic; yet again and again last Friday there was wave upon wave of applause, frequently during actual performance.

Leading lady Penny Nicholls made such an impression in the first half that immediately she came on stage in the second she was greeted with deafening applause.

The show is said to be an exact duplication of the English version—costumes, sets, lighting and business. The only differences are the speciality acts, whilst some of the jokes cracked by comedian Bob Andrews have a distinctly Aussie flavour.

The team responsible for its London production travelled Down Under to repeat the success—producer George Innes, vocal director George Mitchell, lighting director Laurie Bloom, with Jackie Joyner going along for choreography and Billy Merrin musical direction.

Gimmick after gimmick, scored with the audience—it would be impossible to pinpoint anything which did not make the motor car-filmed sequence being loudly greeted with laughter, yells and prolonged applause. The singing and dancing numbers, with their nostalgic associations, are just the kind of things Australians adore. And the costumes are well in the Tivoli tradition.

The speciality acts in the show are all top class: comedy "acrobats" The Pirates (Jack Cockburn and Reg Manley), The Balloons—a comedy act with a painting routine on a ladder—and juggler Jose of The D'Anagnos duo, who received as much individual applause as anyone.

The Minstrels are most certainly going to repeat their success Down Under, where they are being presented eight performances a week by Aztec Services and the Tivoli Luff, by arrangement with Robert Luff.

R.S.

'Riot Threat' at Battersea

BATTERSEA, a home and stronghold of entertainment in the traditional manner, thanks to an enlightened municipality and to enterprising promoters, swung into the winter season with a bang at the Town Hall last Friday.

These Town Hall audiences of elderly folk are friendly and responsive, but I have never seen them rise quite so enthusiastically as they did first of all to the Scottish comedian Alec Munro, and then, later in the show, to Alec Pleon. It is something difficult to convey in words, but everyone who has witnessed such an occasion will know how it is when, for a brief interlude, everything combines into one hugely enjoyed joke: when it is no longer a question of entertainer and the entertained, but of one united, mutually reacting throng.

Nor did the remainder of the bill falter in maintaining the fun. Ascott and Roberts' impressions in dance, Doreen Leyender's charming voice and the bright, fastidious juggling of Tassie and Diana all contributed to the evening. Hetty Brayne's lively personality in familiar melodies on the accordion; the comedy adagio of Jimmy Kidd and June, and the light, gay and pleasant and colourful glimpse of yester year provided by the Gay Edwardians were all warmly enjoyed. George Ford completed with characteristic good humour, and the show owed much to the presence of pianist John Bruckner and the Country of London Orchestra and its director, A. E. Lumley-Holmes. C.M.P.

V.G.S. NEWS

DURING the past week or so the V.G.S. have played two of their end of the season matches, the first on Saturday, September 30, at Kingswood against the local team, resulted in a win for the home side by four matches to two. The winning pairs for the Society were Walter and Harding and the vice-captain, Charlie Chester, teamed with the secretary, Alex Rose. The members at Kingswood entertained their visitors in lavish style and pressed for a return match next year.

On Tuesday of last week the Society managed to halve their annual match against the Foot-balls with four games each, the winners for the V.G.S. were Leon Mack and Ken Mosley, Griff Griffiths and Don Lang, Jack Francois and the vice-captain, Charlie Chester, and Ernest Arley and Bert Waller.

On Tuesday of next week the last of the season's competitions will be played at Fulwell for the George Barclay 10% Cup, and on the following Sunday the playing season ends with a match v. Fulwell at Fulwell.

Members are reminded that their applications for dinner tickets must be made before October 23, and that a cheque to cover the order must accompany the order.

French Singer-Composer Charles Trenet Likes Spreading Joy and Happiness

EARLIER this year, as I was sitting in a Paris boulevard café on the Avenue Des Champs Elysées, talking with some French show business friends, the name of Charles Trenet came into the conversation.

"Now there's a superb performer," declared one.

"Yes, he definitely deserves to be placed amongst France's greatest artists," agreed a second.

Added a third, "As a composer he's done for France what Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, George Gershwin and Rodgers and Hammerstein have done for America."

SPARKLE

Yes, there's no mistaking the fact that Monsieur Trenet has played a big part in revolutionising the world of songs and singers in France. He is the man who inspired Frenchmen and women to put sparkle, bounce and happiness into what they were singing about. Before him nearly everyone in France had been quite happy to sing dirges and love songs of torment and pain.

This six foot artist, who thrilled one American newspaper so much during his first visit to the U.S. that it described him as being a "perfect mixture of Danny Kaye and Frank Sinatra", has, in his time, composed and sung a whole string of hit songs.

On stage his reputation has been greatly added to by a personality which has always overflowed with high spirits and uninhibited gaiety. Although I had until recently never seen or met Charles Trenet, I had for a long time held him in

great respect. Whenever any of his songs—such as "La Mer", "Boom", "Passing By", "I Wish You Love" or "Au revoir Paris"—have been either broadcast or played on a gramophone, mine have always been ready ears.

Thus, when I was recently taking a few days holiday in the Belgian seaside town of Knokke-le-Zoute it was a very pleasant surprise to find that M. Trenet was booked to appear in the town's luxurious white-stoned Casino.

And on the night in question I was lucky enough to meet and sit alongside the star's manager, Emile Hebey, as Trenet performed. Amiable, shrewd-thinking, slow-talking Emile has in his time been connected with many big show business projects and has been associated with Charles Trenet off and on for over 20 years.

Like me he sat enthralled during the Frenchman's offering—yes, he was every bit as good a singer-entertainer as I had hoped!

Afterwards I chatted with Mr. Hebey as we waited for his singer to join us.

And he candidly spoke about Trenet the artist and the man. Declared Emile: "The blunt fact about Charles is that he is a real enigma. Although he has a whole legion of fans he often appears to be alone. On the whole he has a carefree disposition and gets happiness from the simplest things. Perhaps he appears to be lonely because he is a romanticist."

He enthusiastically admitted that to him the composer of "La Mer" and "Boom" could do no wrong on stage but shook his head as he spoke of him as a businessman.

DISARMING SMILE

"He's hopeless," Emile stated, smiling and again shaking his head. Then he recalled how Charles had forgotten to pay a tax demand and had received a reminder. "He asked me how many engagements it would take to raise the money. I told him approximately and he asked, 'Why don't we put so many days aside each year and work exclusively for the tax man then we can't get into trouble?' That was Charles all over and with logic like his it's often difficult to explain what is and isn't practical."

At that moment Monsieur Trenet appeared on the scene and he skillfully dispelled a group of autograph seekers with signatures, a

friendly word and a series of disarming smiles.

So this was the man who had found fame after getting Maurice Chevalier to sing one of his songs—"It's a Jolly Day"—in the mid-30's.

"What do you think has been the key to your success for so many years?" I asked.

His smile broadened as he replied: "I have what you call a gimmick. When I entertain I try to help people forget everyday anxieties for a short while. I want to be happy and wanting my audience to be likewise. I sing songs of joy and happiness."

HEART-THROB

Over the years, this artist, who has been nicknamed "Monsieur Heart-throb", has composed over 500 songs and recorded many of them. He said he didn't like listening to his own records and explained: "The trouble is that whenever I hear them I keep finding faults and think that, they could have been done better."

Knowing of the many people throughout the Continent who have looked upon Charles Trenet as a "real heart-throb" I asked why he had never married.

He replied: "It's because I've never been interested in marriage. I'm happy being single and carefree and have no time for thinking about being tied down by a woman."

Future plans for Charles, whose home is an impressive villa at Norbonne in the South of France, include visits to Australia, America, Japan and Russia.

Speaking about his visit to the last named he commented, "I'm really excited about going to the U.S.S.R. I'll be giving a series of recitals in concert halls and will be singing in French and English. Wonder what sort of reception I'll get?"

Asked about a visit to England, he declared: "It's one of my greatest desires to return to sing there again and negotiations are currently taking place." He added: "When I was last in your country a few years ago British audiences were very generous to me. But I made a big mistake by singing nearly all my songs in French because my English was bad. Now, if I come again, I'll make my programme with numbers sung in both languages."

N.N.

GEORGE HILDREW
(The Melody Man)

Offers for
VARIETY
★
CABARET
★
REVUE
★
PANTOMIME
★
SUMMER
SEASON
1963

ENQUIRIES INVITED FROM 28th OCTOBER, 1962

All comms. to:—

FRANK BARNARD LTD.

74 Witley Court,
Coram Street,
LONDON, W.C.1.

Telephone: TER 4351/2