



THE MISSOURI STATE PRISON CONCERT BAND

When the Prison Band Goes on at WOS

How the Missouri State Prison Musicians Captivate Their Radio Audiences to the Extent of 2000 Letters a Concert, not to Mention Sympathy, Cigars, and Cigarettes

By J. M. WITTEN

Announcer, Station WOS

IF IT has been your good fortune to tune-in one of the delightful concerts of the aggregation known as the Missouri State Prison Band I know that you have been well repaid, and that you still had your head-set on, or the loud speaker going, when the blowing of Taps—the last feature on an M. S. P. B. program—was rendered.

This band broadcasts every other Monday night at nine o'clock (C.S.T.), from WOS, Missouri State Marketing Bureau, Jefferson City, Missouri. The broadcasting equipment at WOS is a 500-watt Western Electric installation in the dome of the State Capitol. It is a Class B station, transmitting on 441 meters or 680 kilocycles. The concerts by the band have been distinctly heard and greatly enjoyed, according to reports, in Honolulu, Hawaii, Alaska, Cuba, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Newfoundland, British Columbia, every province in Canada, several states of Mexico, every state

in the Union and ships in the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic Oceans and the Caribbean Sea.

This organization has very probably received more radio mail in appreciation of its efforts than any band or similar organizations in the country, as the mail following each concert had averaged two thousand cards and letters. Eighty telegrams and forty-five long-distance calls have been received during a single concert.

In addition to the cards and letters of appreciation on the entertainments, the "boys" of the band are the recipients of hundreds of "tailor-made" cigarettes and cigars which they would otherwise be unable to procure.

Many of the letters and cards offer help and consolation to the boys. Letters from welfare workers are not uncommon and are generally offers of assistance. A certain member of the band, by his beautiful rendition of a solo part, aroused the interest and sympathy of a welfare

worker. She addressed her letter to the announcer and wanted to know what crime he was confined for, about his appearance, age, family, and did the announcer think he would make good when discharged. I promptly replied to her letter answering all the questions possible, and I know from talking to this prisoner that she is making necessary arrangements to assist him in making a fresh start in life upon his discharge.

Another member has secured a position in a community band in western Kansas, because he favorably impressed the band-master, over the radio, with his ability.

Many telegrams read like this: "Take the band out of jail—they ought to be in heaven"; "If I were governor of the state I would open the gates of the prison to them tonight after their wonderful concert"; or "Buy the boys a box of cigars and send me the bill." And then there is the millionaire banker's daughter somewhere in Arkansas, who, according to one of the cornetists, sends him cigarettes, candy, etc.

During a concert, the "boys" have a spirit that goes far toward putting a program over in fine shape, and a willingness and obedience that are hard to find elsewhere.

The "boys" of the Missouri State Prison Band have been convicted of about all kinds of crime from embezzlement and burglary to

murder, and the sentences imposed on them are from two years to life.

They were recently given a complete receiving set with loud speaker by a large Chicago radio jobber, and they have derived much pleasure from listening-in to the outside world. Ninety per cent. of the members of the band had never heard a radio concert themselves until the set was received by them but had played and furnished entertainment for many thousand radio fans.

Because of the small size of our studio—fourteen by seventeen feet—the band that regularly furnishes the concerts from WOS is cut down to nineteen members and a band-master. The man who has made the prison band concerts possible is the warden of the Missouri State Prison, Judge Sam Hill, who takes a very warm interest in the welfare of all the boys, especially the prison band, and his first words when he meets the station staff are: "How many did we get on the last one?" referring to the number of letters and cards received on the last radio concert by the band.

The station force at WOS is probably the smallest station staff in the United States operating a Class "B" station. It is composed of Arthur T. Nelson, Commissioner; R. J. Engler, Chief Engineer; and J. M. Witten, Announcer and Program Director.

THE OPERATING ROOM AT WOS, JEFFERSON CITY, MO.

At the desk is J. M. Witten, Announcer and Program Director. Behind him is R. J. Engler, Chief Engineer of the station

