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SHE LIKES OUR SHOES

We Talk to Thea Philips

A COUNTRY can build up a reputation on many things. For Miss Thea Philips, the English soprano, who is giving a series of studio recitals from 2YA, New Zealand ranks high as the home of comfortable shoes. And that's no small reputation, for Miss Philips has worn the shoes of many countries.

She was trained in Italy and made her operatic debut at the San Carlos, Naples. Returning to England, she became prima donna at the Covent Garden Opera and was the principal English singer during many seasons directed by Sir Thomas Beecham. She first went to Australia as a member of the Fuller Grand Opera Company and during that time she made her first visit to New Zealand. Since then she has been under contract with the ABC, fulfilling concert and operatic engagements as well. Her final appearance in Australia before coming over here was with Eugene Ormandy and the Australian Symphony Orchestra.

Singing in the Rain

With this experience of different climates behind her, we asked her which

climate she found the easiest for singing.

"The only climate I dislike," said Miss Philips, "is the humid climate. I remember standing on Covent Garden steps with Bruno Walter one very humid day in London. 'This is not a good day,' I remarked, and he agreed. 'The best time to sing,' said he, 'is on a rainy day,' and from my own experience that seems quite true too."

"It would be interesting to know," we suggested, "how much a nation's singing ability is affected by its climate. Italy, for example, has extremes of every kind of weather, yet, according to legend, almost anyone off the streets can sing with a golden voice." Miss Philips agreed. "The first consideration in even the tiniest township in Italy is the Opera House," she illustrated. "Singing means just as much to the Italians as eating, and they love eating." But the question of climate was too wide for our limited time, so we passed on to another subject.

The Radio Artist's Best Friend

"How do you like broadcasting?" we asked as a kick-off. "Is it very different from giving a concert?"

"No," she answered, "it's not so very different from a stage performance. I always imagine the audience is present when I sing over the air. As far as mike technique goes, well, there's no such thing. If you are taught to sing correctly then your technique for stage and radio is the same. A good voice if properly handled will always give out its own beauty. Or you might say that there is only one technique for the mike-singer—to sing: all else depends on the Control. The Control-man is your best friend. If he is good at his job, he takes an interest in your voice and lets you sing naturally. He can always modulate the volume. These people who hug the mike and try to develop a special manner of singing are useless away from the air. The only power in their voice is given to it by the man at the controls. But if you've been properly trained you can sing equally well with or without a microphone."

"How about television? Have you done any of that?"

"Yes, I was one of the first to do television, and it was a dreadful sensation in those days. We were made up with yellow and our lips were painted black. We were only allowed to wear black and white. My dress was trimmed with mauve, so, before I could sing, black material was produced and tacked over the trimmings. During the broadcast I had to stand in a square on the floor and sing into a square window, and all the time I was singing the square I was standing in was lit up with zig-zagging lights. It was certainly an unusual experience the first time."

"Then television is not as flattering to singers as the films?"

"No. On the films the actual singing is done beforehand so that during the screening the singer is able to hold a top note with his mouth curved in an alluring smile. The singer during television has to stretch his mouth to capacity on the high notes and just hope for the best with his appearance."

(continued on next page)

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