

FIRST of several celebrity artists who are to tour New Zealand under engagement to the NBS, the pianist Lili Kraus arrived in Auckland last week and gave her first studio recital from IYA on June 12. This Thursday (June 20) she will give a public concert in the Auckland Town Hall, to be followed by other studio recitals and concerts in Christchurch, Dunedin and Wellington in that order.

"Even when the children were born?"

"Even then. Ten days, wasn't it so Dicky? I was playing again in ten days."

"Yes, and on the very last day, both times, the day they were born you were playing," Dr. Mandl said.

"Yes, it is so," Lili Kraus said. "And this was a disaster, it was to me the most terrible thing to lack a piano for ten days. But now see what happened: for one whole year I did not touch a piano and yet problems were solved, were resolved. It was a miracle." Her hands were clasped across her face and her thumbs pressed against her temples. "And yet," she said, "it was not a miracle. It was a miracle only if we regard music as material and technical, the result of practice and the work of skilled hands. But it is not so. The highest is in the mind and in the heart, it is in what I call the vision; without that the hands are nothing; with that the hands will obey, the hands must obey. Yes, in that year I came to understand much that had been difficult, insoluble, before; when I began to play again it had become clear."

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"BUT," she said, "we could talk of these things for a year, for ever. In the meantime tell me this, is there a students' club here? I love to play to students if they ask me."

"Who is the professor?" Dr. Mandl asked. "Would you be able to arrange something with him? Lili loves to play for university students; of course there is no charge—in Brisbane they twice took a collection among themselves for food for Britain—but that is a matter for them to decide."

"But you see, do you not, that I cannot ask? The invitation must come from them," Lili Kraus said. I told her that the students had Sunday afternoon music recitals and that Owen Jensen arranged lunch-hour concerts on Fridays. She was delighted: "Perhaps I could play there too. Do you think I might? Do you think he would ask me?" I said I thought it was most likely, certain indeed, that he would like to ask her, but would wonder if he dared.

"Oh, please," she said, "do let him know that he should dare. Oh, this is really what I like best."

"And are there any plays?" Ruth asked. I mentioned the University Drama Club's production of *Peer Gynt*, to begin the next night. Lili Kraus, Ruth and Dr. Mandl all sprang with enthusiasm, three voices together saying, still to my surprise, "Please may we not go to that? Yes, please take us to that." So I quickly went to the telephone and arranged with the producer for three seats for

three enthusiastic visitors. I should point out that the producer was enthusiastic too. I went back to the studio and told them. Then they took me with them to their hotel to dinner.

As we walked up the hill in the flying wind we were all cheerful and those three were optimistic about *Peer Gynt*. I felt I had to remind them that it was to be a students' production done with limited resources—not a famous Viennese production. But, they said, being by students it must have a freshness and a liveliness and they were not looking for a Viennese production.

"And by the way, you know I am not Viennese," Lili Kraus said to me. "My husband is Viennese, but I am Hungarian."

"Your father was Czech and your mother was Hungarian; you are not pure Hungarian," Dr. Mandl argued.

"Yes, my father was Czech and my mother was Hungarian and I was born in Buda-Pest and I am Hungarian, truly I am Hungarian," said she.

"Your father was pure Czech, he could not speak Hungarian very well — you agree he could not speak Hungarian very well?—and you were born in Buda-Pest and that makes you —"

"Oh, please, please, Dicky, I am Hungarian, I am true Hungarian!" and she walked backwards up the hill in front of him, pleading.

"Very well, then, you are true Hungarian." It was a happy family bicker.

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AEROPLANES and ships are no friends to Lili Kraus. To travel without extreme discomfort in an aeroplane she resorts to a position which would surely be of extreme discomfort to most other people—she lies on the floor between the seats. She suffers from neck-cramps, but these she prefers to air-sickness. Her first sleep in Auckland after the Tasman crossing was a record one of eleven hours. "Of course we are permanently, always, under-slept, if one may say such a thing," she told me.

Her concert dresses, which she designs herself, had not yet arrived from Australia. "But I can make you a drawing. I love drawing," she said. So she made a drawing, her own design, of a gown made in Java by a Parisian-born dress-maker. (This is her drawing of the white chiffon and black lace dress she will wear at her concert in Auckland.) We had a conversation in praise of slacks, another in praise of



low-heeled shoes, and I drew her a plan directing her to shops where she could buy shoes for herself, perhaps a sports coat for Dr. Mandl. She was fascinated by that furry fruit, the Chinese gooseberry, learnt with interest that crisp apples as well as mountains could be found in the South Island. She told me stories of Sir Thomas Beecham's wit; I told her stories of another quality he has.

It could have continued in this way for long enough; but she needed another record sleep and I needed to stare at my typewriter. I suppose I might have been there still if it hadn't been for *Peer Gynt*. I promised to call for them next evening.

—J.

Wherever she goes



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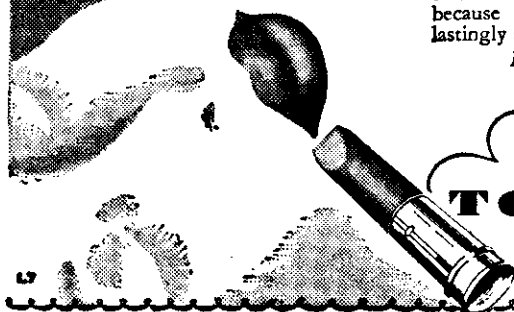
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