

NEW AUDIENCES, NEW VALUES

Music and Drama Flourishing in Britain

DOROTHY HELMRICH, who was in New Zealand at the beginning of this year, is now in Britain as the guest of the British Council, to discuss future cultural relations between Australia and Britain. Speaking in the Pacific Service of the BBC the other evening, she described the new enthusiasm for music and drama which has been awakened in all parts of the British Isles. The talk was recorded and re-broadcast here by 2YA, and we reprint extracts from it below.

SINCE I arrived in London some weeks ago life has been such a whirl of excitement that it is difficult to give a precise picture of my impressions of post-war England. First of all let me say that the most striking feature is the sane and philosophical outlook of the people. They seem to have forgotten the nightmare existence of the past six years and are getting on with things in such a way as to excite one's deepest admiration. Only when you've seen the devastation of the bombed areas can you realise just what they have been through. The British character has emerged triumphant from the ordeal by fire.

Since I was here last I notice a marked change in the world of entertainment. All the theatres and concerts begin at 6.30 or seven and finish not later than 9.30. This means that the West End of London, for instance, which was a blaze of lights, with crowds of people milling round theatre-land until midnight at least, is now as quiet as a country village by 10.30. This is a very interesting change. It was brought about in the first place, of course, by air raids which made it imperative for people to be home early. I have spoken to several people in the theatre world about this early closing. They seem to think it has come to stay because it is so much more convenient for people to go straight from their jobs to a show or concert.

Eager Audiences

It is impossible for a nation to pass through such an experience as these war years and not to have found new values. Speaking of new values, the most gladdening experience is to go to a concert and see the new audience. So many young people, filled with enthusiasm, eagerly drinking in music and drama, poetry readings, art exhibitions—it's wonderful. Just imagine having upwards of 30 theatres to choose from, with musical plays, historical, farce, psychological—Shakespeare, Tolstoi, Dostoevski. And for musical people, orchestral concerts all over the place, with famous conductors on every hand, and in addition to all this, recitals of every kind of music, by the world's finest artists. And this does not only apply to London.

Culture in the Counties

The Arts Council has taken cultural things to the people all over Britain. For instance, when I was in Bristol, I saw three different plays by three different companies during a week-end. The Old Vic's Second Company is installed for the season at the lovely old Theatre Royal—a perfect gem of a playhouse, the oldest in the realm and rescued from destruction by the Arts Council. In Bristol, I found a new audience as in London. I saw Emlyn Williams there in *The Winslow Boy*. The theatre was packed. The Hippodrome in Bristol seats 2,000 and the audience was so thrilled with the play that they applauded the players

at every exit. It was disturbing until one realised that here were people, learning to love the theatre, who had not yet learned the rules of the game. The important thing was that they were enjoying a play of an extremely high standard.

I went from Bristol to visit the British Council House at Stratford-on-Avon, and had a most interesting time there. It is truly international. There were visitors from Holland, Poland, France, China and Australia, with the players from the Memorial Theatre dropping in for lunch. Sir Barry Jackson came too. He is directing the Shakespeare Festival Company this year and was most interested to hear about our aspirations in Australia. I met a young Australian actor playing there. He comes from Melbourne. What a marvellous experience for a young actor! It is good to see our young artists doing so well over here. Peter Cooper, the New Zealand pianist, gave his first recital in London last week, and had a splendid success.

Britten's New Opera

Another pre-war activity has come to life in Regents Park. A season of Shakespearean plays is running at the Open Air Theatre. *Troilus and Cressida* is on at the moment. Great excitement is centring round Glyndebourne Opera House because of the first performance of Benjamin Britten's new opera, *The Rape of Lucrece*. This opera is unique in so far as it has only eight soloists, no chorus, and twelve solo instruments in the orchestra. All musical London is agog with excitement and interest. Benjamin Britten has succeeded in capturing the imagination and interest of all opera-lovers, since the performance of his extraordinarily successful opera, *Peter Grimes*. *Peter Grimes* is undoubtedly a most outstanding work and holds the interest of the audience from start to finish.

Glyndebourne, as you probably know, is a charming village in Sussex, where John Christie has his very beautiful home. A few years before the war, he had the brilliant idea of building a perfect Mozart opera house in this glorious country setting. He has certainly achieved his ideal, for Glyndebourne now stands for perfection in production and performance. It cost a great deal of money and is technically one of the best-equipped opera houses in Europe. Of course it is an expensive pleasure. In order to enjoy the opera you have to set aside an afternoon and evening, taking a train about 3 or 4 o'clock to Lewes, and thence by car another five miles. The performance begins about 6 o'clock. There is a break of two hours for dinner and you arrive back in London at midnight.

At the invitation of Clive Caley, the director of Sadler's Wells, I went to the closing night of the opera season there and saw *The Bartered Bride*. Here again the standard was extraordinarily high. They had the assistance of a Czech producer for this opera, consequently the

dressings and scenery all carry an authentic flavour. This company, after a couple of weeks' rest, takes to the road on a tour of Britain.

It is quite impossible to deal over-quickly with the cultural life that is going on all over Britain in a few minutes' talk, but our favourites are coming back again, including Elisabeth Schumann, Schnabel, Menuhin, Elman, to mention only a few, with Jeanette MacDonald and Grace Moore giving recitals at the Albert Hall. I think this is one of the things people here appreciate most at the moment—the free traffic once again of the great artists from abroad.

Repertory in Glasgow

I have recently returned from a tour north, which included Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester and Liverpool. In each of these cities I concentrated on the Repertory Theatres. The thing of most interest during this tour was my visit to the Citizens' Theatre in The Gorbals in Glasgow. This movement was started by the famous Scottish playwright, James Brodie, first to encourage Scottish writers, and also to bring the theatre within the reach of Mr. Everyman. Already this season six new plays by Scottish writers have been produced, and a most interesting play was running at the time of my visit, called *One Stranger Returns*, by Molly McLaren.

The theatre is supported by guarantors and has become sufficiently established now for them to move into the larger Prince's Theatre, which they are filling nightly. The Repertory movement all over Britain is very active and healthy and the Arts Council is doing a marvellous job in subsidising and helping in every way the development of these theatres.

The extent and range of the cultural life in Britain has been so expanded that what could only be enjoyed by the well-to-do in past days is now available to the masses, if they want it. This state of affairs is largely due to the work of the Arts Council, which, as you know, receives a grant of £300,000 from the Treasury, which makes this work possible. We have a certain amount of first-class artistic material in Australia, but not nearly enough, nor of sufficient variety. I feel so strongly that this is the time for us to do something concrete. Australian CEMA has established the foundation of such a cultural movement but we must have the interest and help of all culturally-minded Australians to do what has been done here so magnificently.

Mr. Lemmy Caution

CHRISTCHURCH admirers of Peter Cheyney and his hardboiled detective character Lemmy Caution are now in a position to indulge their weakness for staccato American dialogue and fast action. Cheyney's serial-thriller, *Never a Dull Moment*, started at 32B a few days ago and is heard at 10.15 p.m. on Tuesdays.

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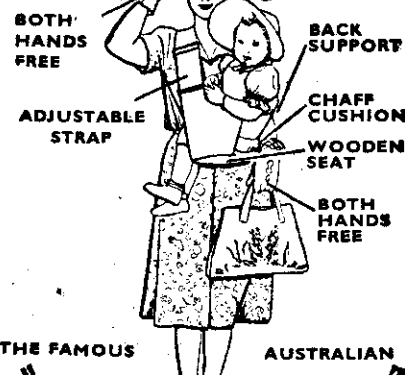
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