

REPERTORY IN N.Z.

Visiting Player's Enthusiasm

GORDON CHATER, a young English actor recently demobilised after war service with the Royal Navy, and now touring New Zealand with a theatrical company, says he has become keenly interested in New Zealand's repertory movement. He has hopes that we will establish our own National Theatre with its own company of players. And he is amazed that no expert from overseas has seen fit to take a musical play, depicting Maori culture, on a world tour. Here are some extracts from a talk which he gave recently from 2YA.

IN London's West End there are 32 theatres each performing eight or twelve times a week. Seats are almost unobtainable unless they are booked from four to eight weeks ahead. And now, though it was not so before the war, people who go to the pictures once a week will also go to the play once a week. The interest in flesh-and-blood shows is intense. Here there is a dearth of professional theatre. In Sydney there is the beautiful Minerva, where one can see plays of a London standard, but here in New Zealand one must wait for a touring company and depend on repertory.

For that reason the standard of repertory is high. I have found since I have been here that the proportion of people interested in the repertory movement per thousand of population is phenomenal, and quite incomparable with any other country in the world. Not only this, but the facilities for promoting and fostering the stimulating and rewarding art of the theatre are immense. Hastings, for instance, has a municipal theatre of which Oxford University would be proud, and Waipawa, with a population of 1,116, has a theatre

as attractive and full of atmosphere as the Old Vic in London.

Most interesting of all in New Zealand is the attitude of the repertory actor. In England and Australia the amateur goes to see a professional play rather in the spirit of seeing how much better he is than the professional player. In New Zealand the amateur actor goes in the spirit of learning something.

Here in New Zealand it seems incredible that there is no National Theatre. Perhaps I am ignoring the availability of theatres, the difficulty of backing, or some such other obstacle; but I can visualise a national theatre company of New Zealand playing a repertory of plays throughout the centres and the smaller towns for six months, then touring Australia or Malaya or China, and returning for three months in which they could prepare the next year's repertory.

I can see it not only as a bunch of actors and technicians, but as a community movement, like a ship, where the company is composed not only of general technicians, but specialists—doctors, lawyers, welfare officers, and accountants. I am certain from audiences I have studied that, provided they are given theatre of the highest standard, they will relish it, and that a National Theatre would not only fulfil a great artistic need for this advanced and progressive country, but that it would be a stable and paying business.

The Maoris Thrilled Him

I must end by saying that, having seen a great deal of the Maori repertoire, it astonishes me to realise that no one from overseas has organised a musical play on spectacular lines with a company of Maori artists, written by a Maori, and designed by a Maori, to tour the world. There is no equivalent of their inherent histrionic art anywhere but in New Zealand. To have sat listening to their beautiful natural voices, to have thrilled to their rhythm, and to have been carried away by them, was as unforgettable as my feelings that very first time I sat through a theatrical performance 20 years ago.

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into gullies, and sometimes he is too late. He was too late one night after we had raced round so many corners and climbed and descended so many hills that I had no longer even a foggy notion of our position and had followed that with a descent by torchlight for half-a-mile down a slithery hillside. The child he had been called to see was dead, and I sat for two hours with him at the inquest next day, and thought, when the nurse was called first to enable her to get away to see other babies, and Dr. Welch sat bolt upright sleeping while the police questioned the mother and other relatives, that if I ever again grudged my social security payments I would deserve to be overtaken by sickness in a deep gully on a dark night with every private practitioner too busy to answer my call for help.

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I HAVE intentionally said nothing about the organisation of this service—how it is financed, what equipment it

has available, where the Hospital Board and the Health Department come in, and so on. All of that exists already in official reports. But the sum of the matter is that Hokianga County, with a population of more than 8,000, about 60 per cent. of them Maoris, has no other medical service: two doctors and six resident nurses attend to all the sick in the whole county, treating the urgent cases in a central hospital, the others in their homes or district clinics; the people of the district pay nothing but the ordinary social security charges; as often as they can, both doctors and nurses visit the schools and see all the expectant mothers in their districts; and on top of all this, public meetings are held in the various settlements at which local health problems are brought up for discussion. The controlling authority is the Hokianga Hospital Board, which has the co-operation of the Department of Health, the Social Security Department, the Department of Education, and to some extent also of the Department of Native Affairs.

(to be continued)



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