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EIGHT CROWDED YEARS

Isobel Baillie Returns to N.Z.

EIGHT years ago a famous British soprano was aloft over Cook Strait on her way from Wellington to Nelson. It was her first flight and fortunately she liked the experience—fortunate, for in the years that were to follow the singer was to travel many thousands of miles by plane, including in the last few days a round-the-world trip that was to bring her back to New Zealand.

The soprano who had her introduction to air transport on the Cook Strait run was Isobel Baillie and the occasion was her visit here in 1940 to take part in the Centennial celebrations; now Miss Baillie is in the Dominion again, this time to appear as guest artist with the National Orchestra of the NZBS and to give public recitals and studio broad-

were falling and she spent her first evening at home in an air raid shelter.

It was a foretaste of what was to come. In London she was to experience many more raids, including V1's and V2's. Her narrowest escape occurred one evening when she was in her flat at St. John's Wood. She disliked being in a darkened closed room when a raid was on and so had opened the curtains and as she lay on her bed waiting for the raid to end she saw a V1 sail past the window. She thought this would be the end but the bomb went a further 500 yards before exploding.

During the war years Miss Baillie made regular appearances at the lunch-hour concerts at the National Gallery and the Royal Exchange—performances usually of 50 minutes each. In addition she entertained at R.A.F. stations,



Sparrow Pictures

ISOBEL BAILLIE discusses travel arrangements for her tour with Colin Trim, manager of IYA

casts in the four main centres and in Hastings, Napier and Invercargill.

The years between Miss Baillie's two New Zealand tours have been crowded ones. It may be recalled that following her Centennial engagements, which included her one and only appearance in opera—Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust*—Miss Baillie spent a month, while waiting for a shipping passage, touring with a string quartet, during which she travelled 20,000 miles. Her journey to the United States was uneventful, but the voyage across the Atlantic had to be made, at a time when submarine warfare was at its height, in an unescorted ship, the *Samaria*, which placed its hopes of a safe crossing in its speed and the zig-zag course it ran taking it almost to Iceland. On arrival at Liverpool an air raid was in progress and the *Samaria* had to hove to in the Channel for five hours. The hardest part of this experience, Miss Baillie says, was not being able even to telephone friends or relatives. The next evening Miss Baillie arrived in Manchester, but there also the bombs

Navy Yards, hospitals and convalescent camps. Following the landing in Europe, a Continental tour was planned, but victory came sooner than was expected and it was actually six weeks after VE Day that Miss Baillie landed in Paris, and from there went on to Brussels, Luneberg and Antwerp, giving recitals to the troops—ten concerts in eleven days. As a tribute to her Thibaud played a solo in the middle of her first programme in Paris.

In the past eight years, Miss Baillie says, she has given more concerts than in all the rest of her life, and the fact that she had her first big concert success in 1923 and has been singing ever since gives some idea of what this means. But perhaps it can be better gauged from a glance at her diary for January prior to her leaving for New Zealand:

January 1: BBC broadcast.
 January 3: Royal Choral Society at Albert Hall.
 January 4: Liverpool Philharmonic (*Messiah*).

(continued on next page)

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