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OR most of us opera is something we read about in books or hear excerpts from over the radio, and seldom see on the stage. Occasionally on Sunday evenings we can hear a recorded version of a well-known opera over the air, with interspersed narrative taking the place of the drama and stage spectacle. But as such programmes last for one or two hours, they are not so frequent as some opera enthusiasts would like them to be. A new attempt has been made to adapt opera for radio in the series of programmes called Opera for the People which will start shortly from the Commercial stations at 9.0 p.m. on Wednesdays. The series includes many of the better-known operas, and opera lovers who listen in will be assured of a regular feast of their favourites, as there are 26 programmes all told, to be broadcast at weekly intervals.

The series is a recorded one presented by an Australian cast of actors and singers, and is perhaps the nearest approach to an actual stage presentation that radio audiences in this country have yet had the opportunity of enjoying. Conscious that the use of long involved narrations explaining the story of the opera would reduce the entertainment value of the programmes, the producers of Opera for the People decided to cut down the story into its briefest form and then dramatize that plot up to a point where dramatic dialogue merged with aria in simple story form. Unnecessary characters which could confuse the simplified story were eliminated.

Each episode of Opera for the People is thus designed to give the listener a clear-cut picture of the plot, with the dramatized extracts highlighted by those favourite arias for which each opera is famous. Sung in English, the operas are presented in half-hour programmes, the number of programmes devoted to each depending on its length.



GLENDA RAYMOND, who is heard in main singing roles in "Opera for the People"



HECTOR CRAWFORD, conductor of the Australian Symphony Orchestra and director of "Opera for the People"

The series has already been heard over an Australian network of stations, and is also booked for presentation in South Africa. It has received considerable praise for its success in introducing the average man and woman to the classics, without sacrificing that high standard of artistry necessary to satisfy the more experienced listener.

Each opera character in the series has been given two performers in the radio version, a singer and an actor. Before recording, the roles of actor and singer were rehearsed together to a point where their voices matched, and the singing note was taken from the spoken word without apparent change, producing a realistic, theatre-like effect.

Since most of the operas are in more than one programme, careful writing of dramatic dialogue and selection of arias had to be employed to present a satisfying unit within each half-hour. The music was generally used both as dramatic background and as a bridge between dialogue and aria, although in Romeo and Juliet, for instance, the story was built direct from Shakespeare and patterned to fit the mood of Gounod's music.

Among the singers in the series are Glenda Raymond, John Lanigan, and David Allen, while those taking speaking roles include Douglas Kelly, George Randall, and Betty Leggo. The orchestral music is by the Australian Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Hector Crawford, and the choral work by the Westminster Singers. Spoken narrative is by Eric Pearce, while the whole series was produced by Dorothy Crawford and directed by Hector Crawford.

The operas included in the series are Verdi's Rigoletto, La Traviata, and Il Trovatore, Gounod's Faust and Romeo and Juliet, Rossini's Barber of Seville. Wagner's Tannhauser, ' izet's Carmen, Puccini's La Bohème, Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana, Leoncavallo's Pagliacci. Wallace's Maritana, and Donizetti's Lucia Di Lammermoor.