

Problems of an Operatic Producer

LONG before the public had heard of the coming *Carmen* season in New Zealand preparatory work had been started by the NZBS in the various branches of theatrical activity which spring into life when opera is planned. As only the two principal singers are imported from England, and the rest of the company recruited in New Zealand, the producer, chorus masters, costume experts and scenery painters have been working from the ground up, studying the music, casting, designing settings and attending to the mass of details which must dovetail smoothly before a production of this size is offered to the public.

Just as the music director must see that orchestra, soloists and chorus know the score, so the producer must be sure that music and movement will be intelligently combined to bring out the essential drama of the story. Bernard Beeby (supervisor of productions for the NZBS), who will produce *Carmen*, told *The Listener*—in a short interview between working out a lighting chart and calling at the Police Station to see about a permit for his operatic soldiers to shoulder muskets—something about

an opera producer's job. First, he said, the whole opera had to be read, word by word and phrase by phrase. Then he had to listen to recordings (they were in Italian and French, but easily followed) to get an all-over picture. From all this he built up a plan of the "business," as they call it in the theatre, to be put in by the players.

Timing is Vital

"The production of grand opera differs from straight-out dramatic plays and musical comedy because there are no spoken words," Mr. Beeby said. "The producer must study all the movements to be made on the stage and line them up with the crotchets and quavers. In many instances the orchestra is heard alone, so stage movements must be accurately timed to fit the score; nothing can be left to chance."

No two producers, he said, had exactly similar ideas, but all tried, of course, to make their productions as picturesque and alive as possible. Once the stage plan was sketched in, rehearsals started and the next job was to teach the singers to act their parts. The whole company, principals included, worked to the instructions of the producer.

Lighting an opera is a department all its own, and that, too, must conform to the producer's requirements. The general equipment on a stage of any size consists of footlights, border lights and strip lights. Localised lighting gear includes bunch or floodlights, spotlights and battens. And the localised group can further be divided into fixed and portable units. Units placed in the foremost part of the stage (behind the proscenium arch) illuminate the foreground, and another set of lights is generally used for the back-cloths.

General illumination originating from overhead is the function of border lights which are suspended and so arranged that they can be raised and lowered at will. Bunches and floods are used in many forms to light a given area to a higher intensity, or to flood scenery with a diffused or coloured light. Bridges spanning the whole width of the stage are suspended at various places to send shafts of light to different parts of the stage. The proscenium spotlights which are nearest the proscenium-arch can also be supported on these bridges.

Aid to Imagination

The true function of light in the theatre, Mr. Beeby explained, was to stimulate the imagination. There were



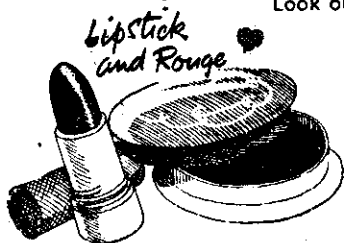
BERNARD BEEBY
Good business requires planning

no limitations to stage lighting and a producer could use his ingenuity and imagination to the fullest extent. In *Carmen*, as in other spectacular productions, all lighting went to the centre of action. In making up the plan for the electricians, the producer started with a blackout stage, gradually building up

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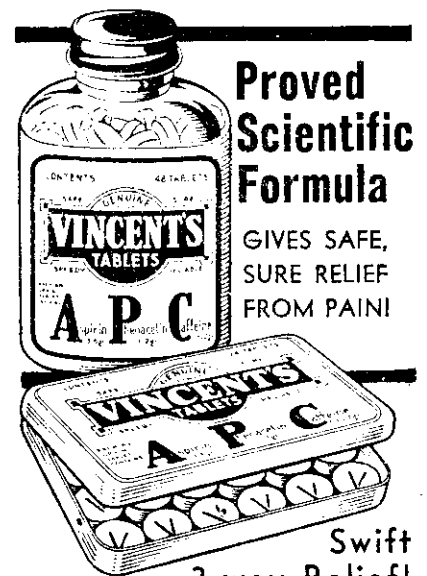
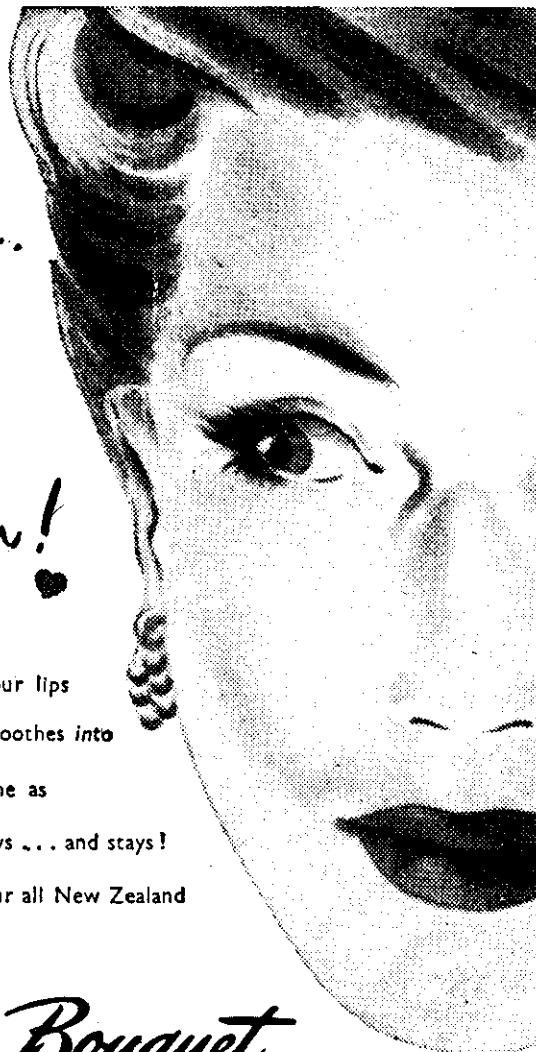
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