

A FORTUNE IN OPERA

A MILLION pounds in something like 80 years—that is the record of the D'Oyly Carte family fortunes, or it will be when the copyrights of the Gilbert and Sullivan comic operas, which they retain, run out in 1961. From the chance success of a one-act curtain-raiser in 1875 to the building of the Savoy Theatre and the Savoy Hotel, this fortune was amassed mainly through the inspiration of Richard D'Oyly Carte, the "inventor" of Gilbert and Sullivan, as he is sometimes called, and the original manager of the famous Savoy Opera Company.

For those who have wondered why Gilbert and Sullivan operas are not performed more often in New Zealand, or why they are not broadcast more frequently, the answer is the high copyright fees. Some of the most popular entertainment in the world is tied up in the hands of one family, without whose permission no performance or broadcast can be made. But since the copyright applies only to the words and music combined, and not to purely orchestral selections, the operas are not allowed to be forgotten. The current BBC feature *Gilbert and Sullivan: the Story of a Great Partnership*, with its liberal extracts from the works, must be one of the most popular programmes heard on the air in recent months.

How did Richard D'Oyly Carte get his profitable monopoly of Gilbert and Sullivan? In his day he was considered one of the shrewdest men in show business, and before he ever met his future partners he was running the best musical and dramatic agency in London. He was also a musician of some skill, and had written and produced light operas, but he was mainly interested in making his name as an impresario.

"Oily Carte"

One reason for his success in this field is suggested by the fact that some members of the theatrical world knew him as "Oily Carte," and it is said that in order to find out what went on behind the scenes he deliberately assumed the role of a jolly good fellow who would go out of his way to help any out-of-work actor or singer he knew. He entertained lavishly, never made an enemy, and never forgot an old friend. When he became rich he was generous with his money, yet some of the actors who worked for him must have wondered who was the real benefactor when they learnt he had left a quarter of a million pounds at his death.

But Carte's initial success was due to his genius for spotting winners which the rest of the world regarded as outsiders, and after the long run of *Trial by Jury* (composed and written at his request) he saw the possibilities in Gilbert and Sullivan. He set about becoming their backer, and having interested some music publishers in the venture, formed the Comic Opera Company. "I know what can be done with

very little," he said, "and find that £5,000 or £6,000 will be sufficient."

He leased the Opera Comique in the Strand, and produced *The Sorcerer* and *H.M.S. Pinafore*. When his lease expired in 1879 he bought out the other backers, built the Savoy Theatre, and formed the Savoy Opera Company, in which he and Gilbert and Sullivan were the sole partners. With his usual flair for showmanship he introduced electric light at the Savoy's first night, and caused an immense sensation.

The three men thrived on their partnership until the famous quarrel in 1890. This was ostensibly over a theatre carpet costing £140 which Gilbert objected to, yet each of them had already made thousands from the operas—even from their one "failure," *Ruddigore*, Gilbert said he had made £7,000. So the rupture cannot have really been about money. Whatever the cause was, however, Gilbert left to work with another team.

In the succeeding years Carte kept making money at the Savoy with Gilbert and Sullivan revivals and new operas by other writers. He also attempted a less successful venture, the building of an English Opera House. His declared object was to establish grand opera on a permanent basis in London, and he made a promising start with Sullivan's *Ivanhoe*. But the English translation of Messager's *La Basoche* which followed proved a failure, and he immediately sold the house to Augustus Harris. To be worthwhile for him, opera had to pay.

Eventually the partnership was revived, and more money-winning Gilbert and Sullivan operas appeared at the Savoy, until *The Grand Duke* in 1896. After that date the great triumvirate never worked together again, but they had all made their fortunes out of the Savoy project. When Sullivan died in 1900 he left about £50,000, Gilbert, in 1911, left an estate of £110,000.

Besides the quarter of a million D'Oyly Carte had amassed, he left the copyrights of the operas to his family, since neither Gilbert nor Sullivan had any heirs. In 1913 Rupert D'Oyly Carte took over the Savoy Opera Company, still holding the copyrights of all the Gilbert and Sullivan works. He carried on the old tradition with periodic revivals of the operas every few years.

By law, copyright remains in force until 50 years after the death of the last surviving partner, Gilbert. A steady income still flows in from amateur companies all over the world, and the Savoy Operas will continue to make money for D'Oyly Cartes until 1961. Last month Rupert D'Oyly died at the age of 71, and it seems that the million-pound operas will now pass to his daughter Bridget.

NATIONAL FILM UNIT

THE Wellington-Masterton relay race, run in 10 laps over a distance of 63 miles, figures in the National Film Unit's Weekly Review No. 369, which will be released on October 1. In "Regular Force Cadets" audiences will be shown the new sort of training young men are receiving when they enter the army as cadets. These particular sequences were filmed at Trentham. From Taranaki comes an item entitled "Natural Gas Runs Farm."



RICHARD D'OYLY CARTE

Craven 'A'
HAVE THE RIGHT IDEA...

1/ FOR TEN Rich, fine tobacco and — the cork-tip for cleaner smoking

MADE SPECIALLY TO PREVENT SORE THROATS

7.8

Carreras, Limited, 150 Years' Reputation for Quality.

RECENT PLAYS

THE GIOCONDA SMILE, Aldous Huxley, 8/- posted. Originally a short story, this play has lost none of the wit and satiric observation for which it is remembered, and a new depth of feeling has been added.

THE EAGLE HAS TWO HEADS, 11/9 posted. An intense drama of assassination and its psychological consequences, the central character being modelled on the Empress Elizabeth of Austria.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT, Dramatized by Rodney Ackland, 8/- posted. An expert dramatization of Dostoevsky's classic, illustrated with photos of the successful Old Vic production.

TWO PLAYS, Paul Vincent Carroll, 13/3 posted. These two thought-provoking plays—"The Wise Have Not Spoken" and "Shadow and Substance"—have both been produced with great success in Britain.

WELLINGTON CO-OPERATIVE BOOK SOCIETY LIMITED

MODERN BOOKS 48A MANNERS STREET, WELLINGTON, C.I., N.Z.