

1949 OPERATIC SEASON

Brilliant Italian Company's Twelve Weeks' Tour

THE three months' tour by the Italian Grand Opera Company early next year will be the first season of all-professional opera New Zealanders have been able to enjoy for 15 years. The tour will open at Auckland about February 24. There will be 25 Italian opera stars in the company and they will be assisted by Australian and local singers and a portion of the National Orchestra. With runs of two and three weeks in each of the main centres and a repertoire of 10 famous operas, the Company should be able to present three different operas a week during the season. The Company is at present in the middle of an extensive tour of Australia, and their New Zealand tour will be organised by J. C. Williamson Theatres Ltd., by arrangement with the New Zealand Broadcasting Service.

Famous Conductor

The artistic director of the Company is the famous Italian conductor Franco Ghione, of La Scala, Milan. The Italian principals are, *Sopranos*: Germana di Giulio (dramatic), Mercedes Fortunati (lyric), Rina Marioso (coloratura), Rina Malatrasi (lyric), Maria Huder (mezzo), and Dora Minarchi (mezzo); *Tenors*: Raffaele Lagares (dramatic), Aldo Ferracuti (lyric), Alvino Misciano (lyric), Rodolfo Moraro (tenor leggero), Adelio Zagonara (lyric), Francesco Battaglia (dramatic); *Baritones*: Ferdinando Li Donni (light), Leo Piccoli (medium), Mario Basiola (strong), and Enzo Titta; *Bassos*: Antonio Cassinelli (dramatic), Plinio Clabassi (dramatic), Augusto Romani (dramatic), and Carlo Badioli (comico). The orchestral conductor is

Manno Wolff-Ferrari, the assistant conductor Umberto Vedovelli, and the stage director Bruno Nofri.

The Company's repertoire will probably include *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and *I Pagliacci*, *La Bohème*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Rigoletto*, *Tosca*, *Faust*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Aida*. With an expected stay of three weeks each at Auckland and Wellington, two weeks each at Christchurch and Dunedin, and two weeks at various provincial centres, their tour of the country will cover about 12 weeks.

In Australia particular attention has been given to the staging and mounting of the operas, and the same thing will be done on the New Zealand tour. Most noteworthy will be the production of Verdi's *Aida*, always a difficult opera to stage because of its elaborate sets.

The Italian Grand Opera Company is in the main a youthful one. Its members



FRANCO GHIONE (centre), of La Scala, Milan, the artistic director of the touring Italian Grand Opera Company, photographed with Mercedes Fortunati and Alvino Misciano before the curtain rose on a recent performance of "Tosca"

are keen and enthusiastic and lack nothing that other grand opera companies might possess in the matter of singing and acting endowments. They are also said to be a very happy company, with none of the bitter jealousies between singers, or the back-stage tantrums of tempestuous prima donnas, that are sometimes associated with grand opera performers. Their freshness and charm are two of the things which have made them so popular with Australian audiences.

Reaction of Critics

Those singers who have attracted particular attention from the critics are Mario Basiola (as the clown Tonio in *I Pagliacci*), Germana di Giulio (as Santuzza in *Cavalleria Rusticana*), and Antonio Cassinelli (as Mephistopheles in *Faust*). As Cho-Cho-San in *Madame Butterfly* young Rina Malatrasi was described by John Sinclair, music critic of the Melbourne *Herald*, as "perfect beyond description."

The Italian Grand Opera Company has great entertainment to offer in its flesh and blood performances, sung in the language traditionally associated with grand opera, and produced at a standard comparable with the highest overseas. But they should also bring considerable cultural benefit to New Zealanders. For many young people they will provide the first opportunity of actually seeing and hearing the great operas of Rossini,

Verdi, Puccini, Mascagni, and Leoncavallo sung in the language in which they were originally written.

Associate of Toscanini

Franco Ghione, the Company's artistic director, was born in Acqui in 1889, and studied at the Regio Conservatory, Parma. He was a violinist in the orchestra of the Teatro Regio, and at the Augusteo in Rome, under Molinari. He made his debut as a conductor at the Puglie Opera in 1913, and was conductor of the Italian repertoire at Barcelona in 1919-20. Ghione was appointed associate conductor under Toscanini at La Scala in 1922, became conductor of the Regio, Turin, in 1929, and subsequently became conductor at La Scala, Milan. He made his American debut as conductor of the Detroit Civic Opera Company in April, 1937, and thereafter was appointed conductor of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. He is also a composer, and his works include *Suol d'Aleramo* (for chamber orchestra), songs, a violin sonata, and piano and symphonic works. He conducted, incidentally, the first Italian performance of Puccini's *Turandot*.

As many as possible of the Italian Grand Opera Company's New Zealand performances will be broadcast, and details of the broadcasting arrangements will be announced at a later date.



• LEFT: RINA MALATRASI (lyric soprano) in costume for the part of Cho-Cho-San in "Madame Butterfly." RIGHT: MANNO WOLFF-FERRARI, the orchestral conductor