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FROM CINDER TRACK TO COVENT GARDEN

THE story of many leading members of the musical world is one of early struggle through financial difficulties, rebuffs and disappointments; others again have had their progress made easier by having moneyed and sympathetic families or friends. Both these groups have in common, however, a continuous career in music. But there is a third group—that of those who turned to music after starting their adult lives in other completely unrelated callings.

New Zealand's Oscar Natzka could perhaps be placed in this last category and so can the noted English dramatic tenor Walter Midgley, who is at present giving concert recitals here under contract to the NZBS. In an interview with *The Listener* on his arrival in Auckland Midgley said that some 15 or so years ago he had been a dirt track rider in Bramley, Sheffield. "We were pioneers," he said. "We laid our own track with ordinary cinders and converted our own road cycles to racing models. Of course, they were higher than the specially-built track cycles of to-day and we had to do more miles per hour to get into the skid on the corners than you do now." The singer was familiar with the names of New Zealanders who had gone to England for contests there, but said that he had left the track just before their first visit. About the same time as he was taking part in motorcycle racing, Midgley was also a professional Soccer footballer. He was currently interested in music, but in instrumental rather than vocal music.

After studying under Professor Joseph Lyset, of Sheffield, he joined the Carl Rosa Opera Company, and from then on his story is the usual one of the climb from small parts to leading roles. He has also sung with the Sadler's-Wells, Glyndebourne and Covent Garden Opera Companies, has taken part in many BBC opera programmes, and has given concert recitals throughout the British Isles. Amongst his many leading roles have been those of Calaf in *Turandot*, Rodolpho in *La Boheme*, Canio in *Pagliacci*, Turiddu in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Manrico in *Il Trovatore*, and Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*. At the first Edinburgh Festival he played Macduff in *Macbeth*. The war was a serious setback to Midgley's career, the outbreak preventing the fulfilment of two important contracts, one with the Covent Garden Company and the other for a tour of Italy. Midgley joined the Army and during most of the war was stationed in London with the Engineers.

Strong hopes were expressed by Midgley that New Zealand would form its own national opera. It would be neces-



sary for the first year or two to import its principal singers, but after that it should be a New Zealand company and it should, he felt, undertake exchange tours with companies in England and other countries. "A New Zealand national opera company touring abroad will do more to create friendly understanding than the best politicians and diplomats can do," he added.

Living English Novelists

A SERIES of six talks on living English novelists has been recorded by Professor G. W. von Zedlitz, of Wellington, and they will shortly be broadcast from the main National stations. They will be heard in the first instance from 4YA, starting on Thursday, April 14, under the title *They're Writing Now*.

The first talk is in the nature of an introduction, and deals with the foundations on which contemporary novelists have built, and attempts to put them in their correct historical perspective. The second deals with the work of E. M. Forster, the third with Graham Greene, and the fourth with some women novelists. These include Elizabeth Bowen, I. Compton-Burnett, and Rosamond Lehmann, amongst others. The fifth talk deals with the writings of Joyce Cary, and the sixth with what Professor von Zedlitz calls "lesser stars," namely, Aldous Huxley, Somerset Maugham, and Evelyn Waugh. Professor von Zedlitz joined Victoria College as professor of modern languages in 1902, and on his retirement in 1915 he was made a professor emeritus. He was a member of the University Senate from 1936 to 1941, and from 1938 to 1940 was chairman of the literary competitions committee for the National Centennial. In recent months he has been frequently heard from the National and Commercial stations of the NZBS in book reviews, talks and discussions.