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## AMERICAN FOLK OPERA

ON August 7, 1948, American radio listeners heard their first broadcast of *Down in the Valley*, a new folk opera composed by the celebrated émigré composer Kurt Weill to words by Arnold Sundgaard. The performance was by students (vocalists and instrumentalists) of the University of Michigan. Because of Kurt Weill's high reputation as a composer, and because the opera was known to deal with the lives of ordinary people and their folk-songs, the event was received with con-

siderable enthusiasm. Recordings were made of the performance by the International Broadcasting Division of the United States Department of State, and copies have been lent to the NZBS. The first New Zealand broadcast of the opera will be heard from 2YA on Saturday, June 4.

The score of *Down in the Valley* is built around a handful of American folk-tunes, of which the best known is the title song, familiar to New Zealanders from the recorded version sung by the Andrews Sisters. The story deals with a group of Southerners who live in the hilly country near Birmingham, Alabama, and the plot is the simple tale of Brack Weaver, a prisoner in the Birmingham jail, who is waiting in vain for a letter from Jennie Parsons, for whose sake he killed Thomas Bouche. On the night before his execution, he escapes for a farewell visit to Jennie, and in flashbacks the pair tell how Brack courted her and then killed his villainous rival. When Brack finds that Jennie still loves him but did not write because her father forbade her to, he goes back to jail to die peacefully.

Interwoven in the score are five of America's best-known folk-songs. Brack and Jennie fall in love at a prayer-meeting as the congregation sings "Little Black Train." They dance to "Hop Up, My Ladies," and "Sourwood Mountain," and are reunited to "The Lonesome Dove." As a background theme, Weill has used the tune from which the opera derives its name.

The composer says that *Down in the Valley* was conceived for non-professional production, and can be performed "wherever a chorus, a few singers, and a few actors are available." It takes almost no scenery, chiefly blue jeans and calico dresses in the way of costume, anything from a 20-piece to a symphony-sized orchestra, and a chorus that can range from 16 voices upwards.

Kurt Weill was born in Germany in 1900, and studied music with Humperdinck, the composer of *Hansel and Gretel*, and Busoni. The success of his opera *Der Protagonist* in 1926 prompted him to concentrate on music for the stage, and he wrote eight operas, several operettas, and musical comedies. He left Germany in 1933 and after several years in France went to the United States. There, since 1935, he has concentrated in composing for the Broadway Theatre, and some of his successes have been *Knickerbocker Holiday*, *Lady in the Dark*, *One Touch of Venus*, and *Street Scene*, with libretti by such well-known figures as Maxwell Anderson, Ogden Nash and Elmer Rice.

## ON SHORTWAVE

THE Australian Shortwave Inland Services are at present being heard here at quite fair strength in the afternoons and evenings (except for some slight interference), carrying either the Interstate or the National programmes of the ABC.

Stations, Frequencies, Wavelengths and Times of Transmission: VLO, 9.66 mc/s., 31.06 metres (9.0 a.m.-2.0 p.m.); VLH3, 15.23, 19.69 (11.30 a.m.-8.15 p.m.); VLH3, 9.58, 31.32 (8.30 p.m.-2.0 a.m.); VLR, 9.54, 31.45 (10.30 a.m.-8.15 p.m.); VLR2, 6.15, 48.78 (8.30 p.m.-2.0 a.m.); VLI, 6.09, 49.26 (8.30 p.m.-2.0 a.m.).

Headlines in the Programmes: Guest of Honour, 9.15 p.m., Sunday, VLO; Cinema- (continued on next page)



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