

HEROIC SOPRANO

THE story of Marjorie Lawrence, whose first New Zealand tour starts in Wellington next week, is that of a woman who reached the highest pinnacle of success in her chosen profession, was stricken with poliomyelitis, but triumphed over her affliction to sing again in the world's great opera houses. Although she is unable to sing all of the roles for which she became world-famous in the '30's, in the last few years she has continued, with her magnificent voice unimpaired, to enthrall large audiences at the New York Metropolitan Opera House and London's Albert Hall.

Marjorie Lawrence was born in 1909 at Dean's March, a small Australian township (five shops and a bowser station) about a hundred miles south-west of Melbourne. When she was 13 the family moved to the rural centre of Winchelsea, where her father had bought a farm and five years later she took the first step towards the fulfilment of her musical ambitions by going to study in Melbourne. It was not long before she went to Paris to become a pupil of Mme. Cécile Gilly, and she made her operatic debut at Monte Carlo in 1932, as Elisabeth in *Tannhauser*. A few weeks later she made her first appearance at the Paris Opéra in *Lohengrin*, and she continued singing there during the next three seasons. She made her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1935 as Brunnhilde in *Die Walkure*, and gave many song recitals in Canada, the United States, and Britain.

In 1939 she paid the first visit to her home town since she had achieved world recognition, and her friends and relatives rejoiced in her radiant health

and vitality as she danced in the local hall and rode over the paddocks of her father's old farm. Five years later she sang to them again—this time in a wheel chair—and they applauded her remarkable triumph over the paralysis which doctors had said would leave her unable to walk or sing.

According to the magazine *Time*, Marjorie Lawrence, once described as the most glamorous of the Metropolitan's Sieglindes and Brunnhildes, gave her last performance there as Brunnhilde in March, 1941. Soon after she rode off the stage that night on her bay charger she became ill, but in February, 1943, after a long fight, she made her comeback as Venus in *Tannhauser* with Lauritz Melchior. She chose the part, usually sung by a contralto, because it is perhaps the only one in all opera that can be sung from start to finish without having to stand or walk. Her voice was as great as ever, and in June she followed up this triumph with an outstanding performance in Montreal as Isolde in *Tristan and Isolde*, with a cast of top-flight singers conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham. In 1945 she made the headlines in Britain for her singing at the Royal Albert Hall.

Last May she returned to Winchelsea to start her third concert tour of Australia, and Winchelsea's reception of its favourite daughter began a mile or so out of town, where 40 men and women on horseback and 60 cars were waiting to meet her as she drove along the highway. The cheers rang out as she was helped aboard a flower-decked wagon once owned by her father. Outside the local hall were farmers who had driven in from miles around, storekeepers who had closed their shops for the afternoon, and children who climbed up to the high window sills to stare at the flowers and ferns and flags, and the trestle tables sagging under the weight

of home-made cakes, sausage rolls and cups of tea.

"After all," said Marjorie Lawrence, "when all the triumphs in the world are boiled down they won't come half-way in measuring up to the value of how they regard you back home."

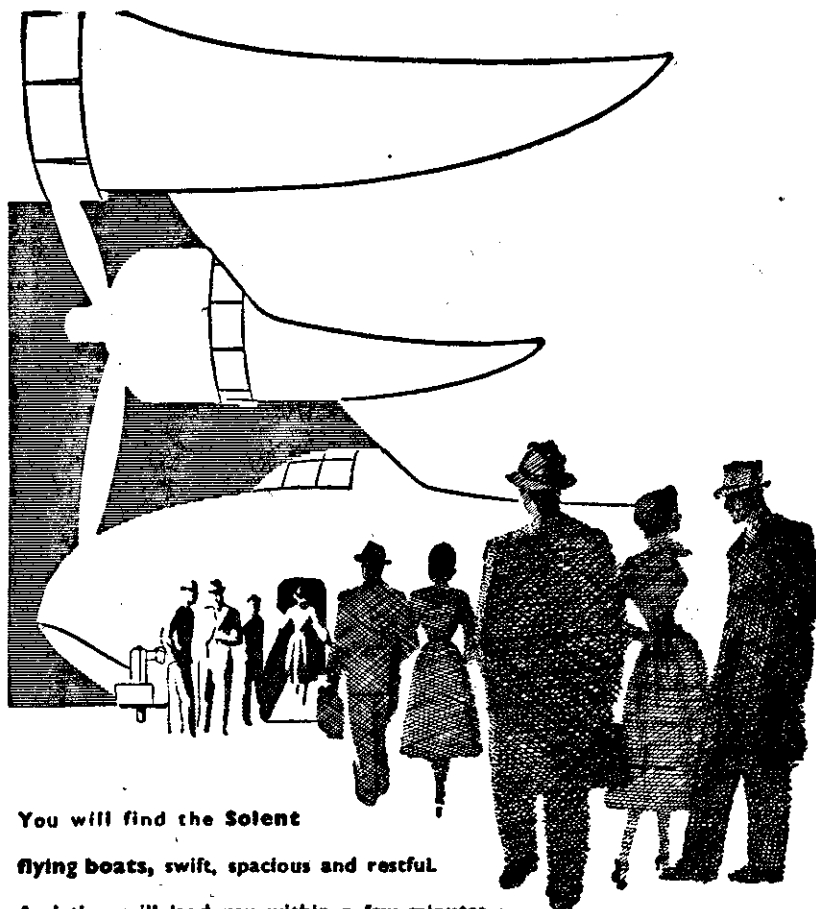
But her greatest triumph was the untold story of the courage and determination with which she had overcome her physical handicap. Now she no longer needs to sit down to sing, and her husband, Dr. Thomas King, thinks that if her recovery continues at the same rate during the next five years she will be able to walk again.

Broadcasting arrangements for her New Zealand tour consist of a relay of the first half of her first concert in each of the four main centres. The dates are: 2YA on August 2; 3YA, August 9; 4YA, August 16; and 1YA, August 27.



MARJORIE LAWRENCE

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 29, 1949



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