

THE PRODUCER WILL BE BUSY

THE new producer to the Wellington Repertory Theatre, Kenneth Firth, arrived in Wellington on July 12; his first production, Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello*, is to be staged from October 1 to 7—which gives Mr. Firth just 80 days, including week-ends, to prepare to meet his Wellington public. The play to cast; the scenery, sets, properties to transfer from bright imagination to sober reality; costumes, lighting, music, and rehearsals, rehearsals, rehearsals; and all to be conjured from the marked scripts to the HOUSE FULL sign within a short 11 weeks. The new producer needs to be active.

And active Kenneth Firth is; he arrived in Wellington on a Tuesday afternoon; and it was Thursday afternoon and my sixteenth telephone call before I heard his voice and arranged an interview—and even then I had to double for part of it with the interviewer for 2YC's Saturday evening magazine session. He came to 2YA from a conference on costumes; and within an hour he hurried back to the Repertory rooms to talk with the secretary.

A photograph of Mr. Firth appeared with the announcement of his appointment in the programme for a recent repertory show, so I was prepared for the beard. But I was not prepared, in spite of a programme note saying that he is "still a young man of only twenty-nine years of age," for the very direct impression of youth and energy that Mr. Firth gave. He thrives on being busy, I discovered as I listened to the 2YC interview; and tearing about Wellington during his first week was just routine after his recent life with the Bedford Repertory Company—staging twice-nightly, weekly repertory.

"Twice-nightly, weekly repertory," I repeated, giddy from the impact of this statement and from the crescendo of parliamentary voices climbing the air in the 2YA lounge.

"Oh, yes. Performance at 5.30 or 6.0, another at 7.30 or 8.0 every evening.

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distinguished Spanish dancers, with whom I gave a month's performances at the Torch Theatre in London, are dancing as guest artists, namely Consuelo Carmona and Angelo Andes. Among the artists responsible for décor and costumes are Terence Morgan of Auckland, John Minton, Hans Ebenstein, Eve Swinstead-Smith, and Alan Carter himself. In addition to directing this adventurous and unique ballet company, Alan Carter, formerly of the Sadler's Wells Group, where he was prominent as their finest exponent of classical dancing, is premier danseur, with Joan Harris as prima ballerina, and Ian Macintyre as first pianist.

The company is at the time of writing in Norfolk, paying return visits to Cromer and Gorleston. It has already "done" Devon and Cornwall, Somerset, Kent, Hampshire, many towns in the north, such as Doncaster, Nottingham, Wigan, and Cumberland industrial

Change each week." Mr. Firth might easily have been talking of a train time-table, for all the excitement his statement seemed to cause him.

"But rehearsals, learning new parts?"

"Rehearsals every morning, learning your new lines after the show at night, and the new show goes on every Monday—started from scratch the Monday before."

I made a last effort to squeeze some dramatic Art-is-hard flavour from the tale: "Surely the producer works very long hours?"

But Mr. Firth was still quite Thursday-afternoon, take-it-as-it-comes: "No longer, usually, than

the actors—unless he is playing a part himself. Then, of course, he has new lines to learn on top of his ordinary work. And you have to remember, of course, that while the show is actually on, the players are working and the producer is not." I could have mentioned the weight-reducing effect of a first-night on amateur producers I have observed.

Films, Television and Touring Companies

Mr. Firth was trained for the theatre at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He has played in the Norwich, Birmingham, and Bedford Repertory Companies and during the war years joined E.N.S.A. and had varied theatre experience. Television, films, West End plays, touring companies, and professional repertory—Mr. Firth has had some experience in all of these. He took part in a televised *Romeo and Juliet*, and in a documentary called *I Want to be a Doctor*. He

centres, it has been to Scotland and the Isle of Wight, to Salisbury and Oxford, to Hertfordshire and High Wyckham, and has also dipped into the Midlands. While mammoth ballet shows are given at the Empress Hall in London (with accommodation for 8,000), and the Harringay Arena (with even greater accommodation), and the Sadler's Wells Company fills the Covent Garden Opera House, the smaller companies continue their fresh, experimental and adventurous course. The Ballet Rambert has just re-opened at the Mercury Theatre, Notting Hill Gate, the Ballets Nègres played at the old Granville, Waiham Green, the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet (a junior group) is touring the principal cities, temporarily inconvenienced by a theatre fire at Hanley which consumed all its property, and the St. James's, the smallest company (15 dancers and 10 staff) continues to serve places that have never seen ballet before.



KENNETH FIRTH

has had small and larger parts (some parts that begin by being quite long and important dwindle disappointingly in the cutting-room, he said) in half a dozen films (including *Carnival*, *I See a Dark Stranger*, *Perfect Stranger*, and *Caesar and Cleopatra*). The most interesting film, he said, was the most recent he had played in, *Warning to Wantons*.

"This is produced on a new system called independent frame," he said. "There is no actual scenery on the set, but a screen much like an ordinary cinema projection screen is run up behind the actors and a film of the appropriate scenery is back-projected on to the screen. It takes a very expert and highly trained eye to detect the difference between this and a film made in the usual way."

In the West End Mr. Firth has played in Terence Rattigan's *Flare Path*, a play dealing with the R.A.F. during the war; and in *Night Must Fall*, by Evelyn Williams.

Rehearsals for *Othello* are to begin on August 1, and Mr. Firth looks forward with obviously more zest than alarm to a couple of busy months. He had heard reports, he said, about the keenness of Wellington's play and concert patrons, including amazing tales of footpath-sleeping to book for visiting companies.

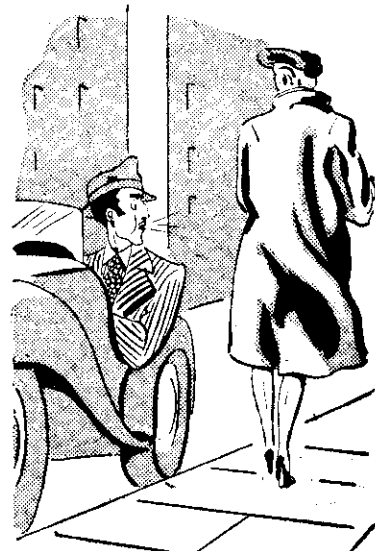
"And after *Othello*? Have you any plans for plays you want to do?"

Mr. Firth became the prudent officer of the Wellington Repertory Theatre (Inc.) "Oh, no, I have no plans. The choice of plays and such matters lie entirely with the Board."

But a new producer may surely be expected to have ideas. And I have no doubt that someone as forthright and vigorous as Mr. Firth will unfold a sheet of bright and forward-looking plans for future plays when the time ripens—and that may very well be in October, after *Othello*.

—J.

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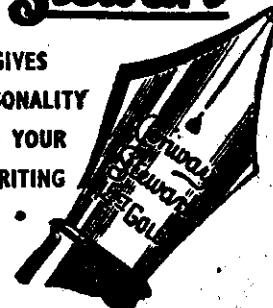
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