

# Theatre in New Zealand

**B**ERNARD SHAW'S hints to play producers should be of interest to considerably more people than the layman might imagine. An investigation conducted by *The Listener* last week of the amateur theatre movement in New Zealand revealed some surprising facts and figures. Five questions, dealing with production, schedules, membership figures, money expended and so on, were put to leading organisations in the main centres, and the most interesting discovery was the fact that theatrical activity has increased rapidly, in many cases having almost doubled itself, in the post-war years. The reasons for this increase lie of course within the field of the sociologist, but the figures supplied to us are listed here for what they are worth.

In the past year the Christchurch Repertory Society has produced six plays, providing 48 nights of entertainment for the public — or about one a week. This compares with 16 nights in 1945 and a similar figure in 1939. Membership has doubled since 1939, and Christchurch recently engaged the services of a full-time producer from England. The capital sunk in the Christchurch Repertory Society, apart from the salary paid the full-time producer, amounts to about £1,200—£400 for a new lighting set, and £800 for scenery, furniture and costumes. Every play costs between £500 and £600 to produce, but the total outgoings each year, including such things as overhead, amount to nearly £4,000.

The Canterbury College Drama Society has put on 22 nights of entertainment in the past year, with an additional 40 performances on an Australian tour. So far this year four plays have been produced, as compared with two (plus three one-act plays) in 1945; there are no records of production in 1939. Active membership is 60, capital expenditure in the region of £1,000, and annual commitments about £400.

In Dunedin the Repertory Society has put on 22 nights of entertainment in the past year, compared with 20 in 1945 and 16 in 1939. Total membership (as

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and money. These evils will cure themselves. Meanwhile the art of the playwright and producer remains basically the same. The playwright has to tell a good story, and the producer to "get it across."

This is all that can be learned by a producer from anything but experience and natural vocation. Like all methods, it depends for success on the taste and talent with which it is practised.

There is no sex disqualification for producing. Women producers are at no disadvantage in comparison with men. As in marriage and queenship, the grey mare is often the better horse.

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distinct from active membership) is at present 1,300, compared with 1,500 in 1945 and 1,000 in 1939. Capital expenditure is £15,000, and annual expenditure £2,500.

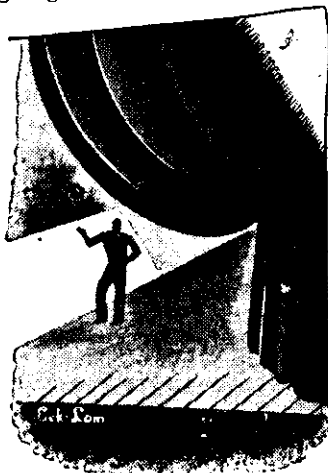
## Ninety Shows a Year

In Wellington the Repertory Society has put on 90 nights of entertainment in the past year. Six full-length plays and 15 one-act plays have been put on in each year since the war ended, compared with 11 plays only, in 1939. Membership is twice as large as in 1945, with about 450 active members, and the number of non-active members running well into the four figure mark. Directors' fees alone since the Society's inception have amounted to about £7,000 (this Society also has recently engaged a full-time producer), while capital expenditure amounts to about £20,000. Annual outgoings are in the region of £8,000.

The Wellington Theatians have put on 46 nights of entertainment in the past year, with five major productions as compared with four in previous years. Membership has increased from 400 to 600 in the post-war years. The value of props. and so on is about £900, and the annual outgoings about £2,800. The Unity Theatre, also of Wellington, was not in existence before the war. Last year 11 nights of entertainment were presented to the public, compared with 15 in 1945. Active membership has increased from 90 to 105 in the past four years. Equipment is insured for £200, and the annual outlay is in the region of £350 to £400.

In Auckland only the Repertory and W.E.A. figures were available from several groups. The Repertory Society in Auckland is on a smaller scale than elsewhere in the Dominion, and presents three plays every year. Membership (active) has increased from 100 to 200 since 1939. Equipment is insured for £300, and the annual expenditure is in the region of £600 to £650. The Auckland W.E.A. Dramatic Club, which lost almost everything in a fire last January, put on 20 nights of entertainment last year before the fire, compared with 12 nights in 1945. Active membership has increased from 39 in 1939 to 80 this year, and the value of equipment is in the region of £1,200. In general, however, the public in Auckland is catered for only on a small scale, as the city is handicapped by lack of suitable theatre space.

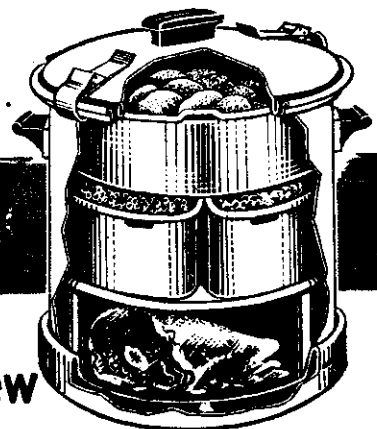
These figures do not include those for the countless theatrical groups that exist in the smaller centres, but previous articles in *The Listener* on the Community Art Service Theatre and rural drama activities generally have given some indication of the amount of time, energy, and money that is devoted to amateur theatricals in almost every country town with a population of more than a few hundreds.



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