

WORK IN THE PLAY DEPARTMENT

Repertory Artists Visit NBS Studios To Prepare Year's Programme

EACH year at Easter repertory players from all over New Zealand are collected at the NBS headquarters studios to prepare play programmes for broadcast during the ensuing twelve months.

This year the war lessened the quantity of talent available, but the quality was there as usual.

Augmenting casts formed in Wellington were May Macdonald (Napier), Anita Winkle (Dunedin), Alan McElwain (Auckland), Harold Shaw, O. L. Simmance, Cyril Collins (Christchurch). The Wellington players, with one exception, are incognito.

Seven New Plays

They recorded seven plays.

James Hilton's "Good-bye Mr. Chips" was first on the list.

"Behold the Judge," by Jack Inglis, has been written specially for radio. It is a most unusual play, and unusually effective. Bernard Beeby, producer, says it is "a very strong play." Most of the story takes place in the mind of the judge. There are echoes from the court room as he watches a trial proceed, and the dialogue, or monologue, gives his thoughts as each witness makes his deposition. Cross currents of evidence and secondary plots are constructed into a dramatic and novel piece of radio entertainment.

George R. Preedy, who is a woman writer, wrote "Captain Banner." It is founded on the tale of Caroline Matilda, Queen of Norway and Denmark, sister of George III. of England. She was accused of adultery and abducted to a "dark and very dreadful" castle, there to be put to death. Her lover had his head chopped off for treason. Names have been changed, but the plot follows fairly closely this old, and true, story.

Child Star from Wellington

Feature of the production of Rabindranath Tagore's "The Post Office," was the performance of the main part by Rosemary Miller, of Kelburn, Wellington, aged 11 years. Mr. Beeby had believed it would not be possible to produce this play owing to the difficulty of finding a child star who could take the responsibility of carrying the whole weight of the performance. By accident, he found young Miss Miller and says she has put up a really excellent performance. She is natural, sensitive to the emotions of the play, and completely at home with the microphone.

Other productions are P. G. Wodehouse's "If I Were You," and a character sketch by W. Graeme Holder titled "A Lady of 56."

Dates for broadcast have not yet been scheduled. Additional information for listeners will be published as the plays come into the programmes.



IN THE RECORDING STUDIO: Bernard Beeby signals to the controls operator at the beginning of a play recording. With no lines to learn verbatim, the players can concentrate on expression and the producer's signals, much as an orchestra follows its conductor

to be produced, some requiring adaptation, revision, editing, or some waiting for special occasions such as anniversaries, for which they have been written. New plays are added daily; others having outlived their usefulness are discarded. Many authors expect their scripts to receive immediate production, but except on rare occasions scripts are held until a suitable opportunity offers.

Even before the plays get as far as production stage—which involves the preparation of sound effects, collaboration between technicians and producers, New Zealand actors and actresses, in one of the service's most important and busiest departments—a great deal of work has been put into them. If a script is accepted it must be examined for defects and polished ready for production.

Where Radio is Different

Few scripts are entirely suitable for broadcast. The NBS readers must be sure, for example, that there is nothing in the scripts which will "miss" for listeners who cannot see any people

talking. Entrances which in an ordinary play script are simply marked as stage direction, must be included in the dialogue. A new voice cannot simply arrive unannounced. Great care has to be taken in handling mixed dialogue among more than a few actors. On the stage, the source of each voice can be seen and recognised. On the air, if there are too many voices, listeners will be confused and will not know which character is which. Very rarely are there more than two or three voices talking in the same scene of a radio play.

Then there is the question of length—very few radio plays run longer than an hour, and a play that lasts less than 20 minutes is little more than a sketch.

Avoiding Offence

There is the unavoidable question of propriety. On the stage and screen, certain references may "get by" in spite of a questionable nuance. Over the intimate radio anything *risqué* must be excluded. It is being broadcast into a purely domestic atmosphere. It comes without warning, and may give offence in fifty per cent. of the homes where it is heard, even though it may be accepted in the other fifty per cent. Besides, the theatre charges for admission. If people do not like the play or references in the play, they can simply refuse to pay for admission and stay away. The radio play is on an entirely different basis.

So all these things, and a hundred other points of detail, must be considered by the drama experts. After their examination of every line of talk, of every action, in the light of these considerations, they must set about editing, sometimes with the author in consultation.

Helping Budding Authors

If a script contains a good idea but is well away from the mark in style and method, the readers will call the author in if possible and discuss it in detail, perhaps asking him, or her, to re-write it in the light of this discussion. Often this "makes" a new writer.

Regular contributors to the NBS Drama Department include many well known writers, such as Dorothy Sayers, P. G. Wodehouse, Max Afford, L. du Garde Peach, Patrick Hamilton, "Taffrail," and Edmund Barclay; but New Zealand authors are well represented and it is the constant aim of the NBS to encourage and use them as much as possible while maintaining the standard.

Can YOU write a radio play?

IN THE MARKET

NBS Will Always Consider Scripts By Local Authors

ALTHOUGH W. Graeme Holder was the only local author represented in the Easter productions, detailed above, the NBS receives and broadcasts each year many locally-produced plays. Local authors are annually given the opportunity to submit plays for broadcast in the radio play competitions, but quite apart from this special encouragement, the NBS is at all times glad to receive scripts.

Actually, the Drama Department each year reads hundreds of submitted scripts. About a third come from New Zealand, a third from Australia, a third from Great Britain and other Dominions, or America.

Each one is read carefully. Some contain an idea which makes the script worth buying. Some are good enough to be kept for adaptation by the NBS experts. Some can be accepted and produced almost as they stand. All receive the same careful consideration.

Authors' Fees

Many dependent factors have to be considered before the author is offered a fee for his script. Some budding authors believe, erroneously, that acceptance of their work will mean a windfall of several hundred pounds from royalties. But broadcast plays are not quite the same as flesh-and-blood productions. From the stage, authors can get big royalties if their work attracts big audiences over a long run. But royalties from radio productions must be assessed by the broadcasting authorities on the basis that the play is only one part of an entertainment made up of many other interests. Generally the NBS prefers to purchase the sole New Zealand broadcasting rights of a script. Authors realise that this is the best plan for them except in the most unusual cases. Where they agree only to accept royalties—a payment for each performance—they can never be sure that their work will prove sufficiently popular to warrant repeated broadcasts, and repeated payments. The lump sum is more attractive.

On the Waiting List

Literally, the NBS has *hundreds* of plays in its Play Library—some already produced, some waiting