

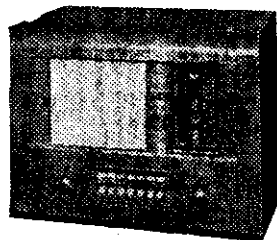
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TRAINING THE CHORUS

"Faust" Up And Down New Zealand

IF the Centennial Music Festival has done nothing else, it has certainly put the name of "Faust" into the musical vocabulary, large and small, of nearly everyone in New Zealand.

Among all the great operas, Gounod's "Faust" is performed all through the world more times than the combined performances of the five next operas in order of popularity.

In New Zealand during the last six months hundreds of people have sung in the choruses in the different centres, or played the music; thousands have listened to it. In town halls and concert halls from one end of the country to the other the word-of-the-moment has been "Faust."

Accidental Advertising

It has attracted attention among all classes, not only on its own merit but also from the undoubted pulling-power of such accidentally excellent advertising as this bold poster line, which appeared in large letters beside the Wellington Opera House:

FAUST: GOUNOD'S IMMORAL OPERA

The success of the tour of the Centennial Festival Symphony Orchestra and the celebrity artists has not been achieved by the wave of a wand. Months before the first performance in Dunedin choruses were being assembled in each centre and musicians were being selected for the orchestra. And the selection of the singers and musicians was only a preliminary. Once they had been assembled they had to rehearse, and there was the additional difficulty that in each centre the main artists and the orchestra had to play each time with a different chorus. The fact that each performance reached a standard previously unequalled was a tribute to the near-perfection of an immense piece of musical organisation.

It was work, and hard work, from first to last.

A Strenuous Memory

For the orchestra, the tour is now a strenuous memory. For Isobel Baillie, Gladys Ripley, Heddie Nash, and Oscar Natzke, one tour has finished only for another to begin. Already they are back in the South Island beginning a provincial circuit which will cover more ground in less time than the tour of the centres. The only relief for voices which have been constantly in use since they arrived in New Zealand will be the fact that this time there will not be one rehearsal to attend after another.

They at least had the variety of travel and performances of different works. In each centre, for the chorus, the call, day after day, hour after hour, was for "Faust," "Faust," and more "Faust."

Sometimes they were allowed small relief. In Wellington, for example, before the orchestra and artists arrived to begin the final series of concerts, the Wellington Provincial Centennial Council arranged for a member of the Festival Committee, Karl Atkinson, to talk to the chorus one evening about the opera and its composer.

Wagner Was Jealous

Wagner's jealousy of the French author of "Faust" was one topic discussed by Mr. Atkinson. Gounod had more or less beaten Wagner to it, he said, and the German was anything but pleased with the success of a French composer in what was regarded as a specifically German subject. Wagner refused to attend performances, although Gounod had offered friendship by championing Wagner's cause during the difficult days of the production of Wagner's "Tannhauser" in Paris in 1861.

Discussion of points such as this gave the chorus a more intimate interest in the work they were covering and, by way of variety, the Festival Committee arranged for them to hear a recording of "Faust" performed by Miriam Licette, Doris Vane, Heddie Nash, Harold Williams, and Robert Easton, with Symphony Orchestra and the BBC choir under Sir Thomas Beecham.



"OOO! THAT WICKED CHAMBERLAIN! SEE WHAT HE'S GOING TO MAKE ME DO NOW!"

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