

WOMAN PRODUCER

EVA MOORE is a professional theatrical producer — perhaps the only woman so employed in New Zealand. That, in itself, is a distinction. But what makes this woman the vital, interesting personality she is, is the colourful, spreading panorama of the past of which she was a part.

The older generation will pause and reflect when they hear that name—Moore. It will recall a star twinkling behind the footlights in the days of yore. That star was Carrie Moore, idol of two continents. To-day she is living in Sydney; an elderly lady now, but still zestful, amazingly youthful—and still of the theatre.

Eva Moore is her sister.

When one speaks of the Moore family, one has to stop a moment to sort them out. For three sisters, at least, reached fame in the theatrical world.

Love of the Stage

"I've always puzzled," said Eva, "to know where we got our love of the stage. My mother and father were both country people, and till Carrie first appeared on the stage, they had never been in a theatre. Carrie was the eldest, and from quite a small child showed extraordinary talent. When she took up the stage, as inevitably she should, Olive, Lily, and I were fired with the same ambition. I adored dancing—and it was through Carrie we made our debut in the Aladdin Pantomime with Nellie Stewart.

Behind this tall, graceful woman, with her dark eyes and silver hair, I could see that small girl making her first bow in pantomime.

"The following year," she said, "my big chance came. Pollard's Lilliputian Opera Company was touring Australia at the time, and I was engaged to travel with them."

"It sounds like Tiny Town."

"Well, it was a kind of Tiny Town. They were all child players—the youngest six and the eldest sixteen. Gilbert and Sullivan was our most popular presentation, and I have played lead in nearly all of them. I think my favourite was 'The Mikado' in which I played Nanki-Poo. I rather used to enjoy putting on the Chinese make-up—till I grew up to fourteen—and started to have ideas about myself. Then I resented bitterly having to cram my hair under a wig and a pigtail—and covering my face with yellow paint."

"Wonderful Years"

"How long were you with the Company?"

"Eight to nine years. And what wonderful years. Even though I was a child then, the smallest memory is vivid to me still. We toured the world. All through America and the East. The recent news that the British warships had vacated

Hong Kong saddened me so much. When we played there years ago, H.M.S. Albion and all the old British warships were in port. The men practically adopted us children; stuffing us with chocolates, and entertaining us on the warships. I've always remembered their kindness."

"Did you like travelling?"

"I loved it—it never lost its thrill, though one experience we had was anything but pleasant. Crossing from Japan to Hong Kong, we were caught in a typhoon. All the children were strapped in their bunks, and I remember worrying dreadfully because I could not get out to say my prayers."

The Law Stepped in

When she was seventeen, and during their tour of America, the law was passed prohibiting child players—and so the Lilliputian Opera Company came to an end. Eva now joined a Dramatic Company, and had the distinction of being the youngest leading lady in America. The papers all commented on her remarkable resemblance to Anna Held, Ziegfeld's first wife.

In the 'Frisco Earthquake

Added to her other unique experiences, Eva also has her memory of the San Francisco earthquake.

"Our company was stopping at a small wooden hotel at the time, and though the building was damaged and we lost all our possessions, we escaped in safety. I remember that the famous Elsa Maxwell was there at the time. It was a

shocking experience—but the worst damage was done by fire. We moved on immediately to Portland, Oregon. That city was jammed with refugees, and the trains were coming in from 'Frisco filled with dead!

"The three leading newspaper offices in 'Frisco, the 'Call,' the 'Chronicle,' and the 'Examiner,' were all destroyed—but not daunted. As soon as they could get paper and machines together, they brought out a two-page paper called 'The Call, Chronicle, Examiner.' I paid two shillings for my copy and sent it home to Mother."

Billie Burke Replaced Her

Meanwhile Carrie was starring in London, and she wrote over suggesting that Eva should play Principal Boy opposite her Girl in a London Pantomime. At the last minute, ill-health prevented Eva from fulfilling her engagement, and an unknown young American actress took her place. That girl was Billie Burke. And at that time she was acclaimed the most beautiful woman in London.

Carrie and Billie have remained great friends ever since, and last year Carrie went to America to attend the marriage of Billie Burke's daughter in Hollywood.

When Movies were "low"

"Did you ever try your luck on movies, Miss Moore?"

"Well the only time I was tempted was in Australia—the first pictures to be made there. They were propaganda films for the Salvation Army, and I played Daniel in the lion's den, and other Biblical characters. A curious thing happened at that time. I was approached by a dapper little Frenchman connected with the famous Pathé company. He asked me would I consider going to France to make pictures. I would not listen. Pictures were very low in the

entertainment scale then—and I could not foresee the future—besides, I was too interested in theatrical work."

"What was your favourite show?" I asked.

"I think 'The Merry Widow.' I played it for two years in Australia after returning from America. I was only eighteen then, and as The Widow was supposed to be about that age, I lived it in spirit."

Change to Production

"How did you come to New Zealand?"

"Touring with a company—and instead of leaving, I stayed on for domestic reasons. That was twenty-six years ago. For the last sixteen years I have been interested in production."

"What type of work do you produce?"

"Chiefly musical comedy—and, of course, my beloved Gilbert and Sullivan. I have also taught dancing and judged competitions. New Zealanders are lovers of music, I find."

She showed me a little silver badge—a prized possession. It is the Dunedin Competition Society's Official Badge—and she is the only woman entitled to wear it. Another valued memento she showed me was a turquoise ring, presented to her by the Queen of the Hawaiian Islands. Eva often sang at the Palace, and the Queen, who was educated in America and spoke English perfectly, delighted in Gilbert and Sullivan.

Eva Moore has one son, who at present is in camp with the N.Z.E.F. She is very proud of him—but a little sad at their separation.

"You see, we only have each other," she said.

But despite everything, the Moores carry on.



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