

CROSS-EXAMINING THE STARS OF VARIETY

THE undoubted brilliance and versatility of Noel Coward has had the effect of overshadowing the talents of other people very little less brilliant. Of Cole Porter, for instance, it has been said, "If he could only write a play he would be Noel Coward."

Then there is Ivor Novello, who does everything Coward does—is composer, playwright and actor. Novello is undoubtedly one of the great men of the London stage, and if there were no



IVOR NOVELLO

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Coward, there is no saying what his theatrical stature would be.

The story of Ivor Novello is brightly told in a new series of interviews with British variety stars, which is now being heard from all the ZB stations.

The episode in which the story is told presents in a few minutes many of the highlights of Novello's unusual career—how he launched out on a sea of fame created by the success of his song "Keep the Home Fires Burning," how he wrote musical shows, acted in films, returned to the stage, wrote more musical shows, played in Shakespeare at Drury Lane, had his big successes, his big failures.

He has many sidelights to offer. He was making £200 a week in films ("because I had the sort of face they liked"), but for a big stage part he was paid just £15 a week. "The Rat," his first stage play, written for Constance Collier, cost only £180 to stage. His present ambition is to write the first successful English opera, and he is working on an opera now.

Another variety star interviewed in this session is Lupino Lane, stage and screen comedian, the man who introduced the world to the Lambeth Walk. The story of Lane's life—he made his first stage appearance in a pantomime at Birmingham at the age of three and a half—is packed with famous stage and

music hall names. Marie Lloyd, "Little Tich," Dan Leno, C. B. Cochran, Sir Oswald Stoll—he has known and worked with them all.

In the days when Flo Ziegfeld was reigning king of Broadway, Lupino Lane starred in Ziegfeld's "Follies"; from Broadway he went to play Ko-Ko in "The Mikado"; from Gilbert and Sullivan he went to pictures, his biggest being "The Love Parade," with Jeanette MacDonald and Maurice Chevalier, and just recently, "The Lambeth Walk."

"Me and My Girl," the show in which he first presented the Lambeth Walk, came very close to being a complete "flop," Lane reveals. It opened to dismal business, the leading players walked out, and Lane, who was backing the show, was losing £900 a week. Then, by sheer accident, he was given a BBC broadcast, and almost before it had ended, crowds were queuing up at the box-office.

Another interview brings to the microphone Evelyn Laye, one of England's loveliest stars, in private life Mrs. Frank Lawton. Miss Laye, who has been featured in Cochran revues and Ziegfeld "Follies," who has starred on the stage in Coward's "Bitter Sweet," in "New Moon," "Madame Pompadour" and "Merry Widow," and in films with John Boles in "One Heavenly Night," and with Ramon Novarro in "The Night is Young," sings many of the songs she made famous.

Other stars interviewed are Flanagan and Allen, Peggy Wood, Leslie Sarony and Leslie Holmes, and Marie Burke. All of them, besides laying bare the story of their successes and failures under a merciless cross-examination, interpose musical numbers or "patter," each episode making a bright quarter-hour's entertainment.

These interviews with variety stars are heard from all the ZB stations at 9.15 p.m. on Tuesdays and Fridays.



LUPINO LANE

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