

"I WANT TO COME BACK TO NEW ZEALAND"

Noel Coward Plans To Give Us More Theatre

"I want to come back to New Zealand and Australia after this war is over, and bring a repertory company with me," said Noel Coward, when interviewed by a representative of "The Listener" in Auckland at the opening of his tour of this country. He is certain that, whatever may have been the position before the war, art and the theatre will inevitably gravitate to the Dominions in the post-war years. And he is also certain that that will be as good for art and the theatre as it will be for the Dominions

ANY doubts which might have been entertained here about the wisdom of the choice which made Noel Coward a kind of roving goodwill ambassador for Britain, were effectively dispelled by the man himself from the moment of his arrival in New Zealand. One might also suggest that any doubts which Noel Coward himself had about his qualifications for this, his latest and his most important role—and even such a self-possessed person can have doubts at times—must have been just as completely removed by the quality of his welcome. It may have been the Coward "legend" which he deprecates so much, more probably it was the impact of the Coward charm, but whatever inspired it he was given a right royal greeting on his arrival in Auckland.

His Own Best-Seller

But if he has been his own best-seller in both the Commonwealth and the Dominion, Australians and New Zealanders have been just as much a hit with him. He has been immensely impressed by the hospitality he has received in both countries, and he was at pains to impress on one that his appreciation went much deeper than mere politeness to past and present hosts.

"You know," he said, "your people in New Zealand may be quite small in numbers but they are large in heart. I

have been here only a day but I can almost feel hospitality in the air."

As might be imagined, his reactions to Australians differ slightly from those of Sir Thomas Beecham, also a recent and celebrated visitor to the Commonwealth.

Australians And Culture

Mr. Coward, for example, shares the view, rather more realistic than Sir Thomas's, that perhaps civilisation and its culture are indebted to the Australians for what they have done in the past, and are again doing now, to protect it, and that if the symphony which the Anzacs recently produced at Bardia was a little discordant it was at least an essential preliminary to the more melodious harmonies of peace.

On the burden of Sir Thomas's complaints he had but one comment to offer: "The first contribution to culture is good manners."

No More Films

Though he had been rehearsing two plays, one serious and the other light, before war broke out, he had done nothing since, either in the writing or the production sides.

Asked when he was going to make another film he said that he had not intended to repeat the experiment of "The Scoundrel," the Ben Hecht-Charles Macarthur production of some years ago, in which he took the title-role.

"I made 'The Scoundrel,'" he said, "because I wanted to see if I could act in a film, but I did not at any time consider going into films seriously. My place is in the theatre." The film had certainly met with some success but he had no intention of deserting his first love, the stage, on that account.

As an argument in favour of his taking a more prominent part in film work it was pointed out to him that in a small country like New Zealand films were the main source of entertainment, the theatre proper through the natural limitations of the small community, filling a very minor place. Good theatrical companies did occasionally tour the Dominion, but the bulk of the people could not expect to see, for example, Noel Coward act unless he acted for the screen.

To this, he replied that he was sure that the Dominions, particularly Australia and New Zealand, would not be so badly off after the war as they had been up to the present.

Wants to Come Back

"It is certain," he said, "that art and the theatre will gravitate here after the war. I myself want to come out here, to Australia and New Zealand, when the war is over, and play in repertory here for you. More, when I get back to the United States I am going to impress upon all my friends in the theatre there how important it is that they, too, should come to this part of the world."

Among those whom he mentioned specifically in this connection were his friends Alfred Lunt and Lynne Fontanne, and Helen Hayes. Not merely would these people be doing a service to the theatre here in undertaking tours, but, he thought, they themselves would benefit from it.

"Nowhere else has stage acting reached such a pitch of perfection as it has in the United States to-day," said Mr. Coward, "and these people are at the very top of the profession. You in New Zealand should certainly have an opportunity of seeing them in the flesh. No matter how good they may seem on the screen they must be seen on the stage to be fully appreciated. It is quite probable that a leading American company might do a season in New Zealand or Australia without making an immediate business success of it, but that kind of success would come later."

Personally, he repeated, he did want to bring a company to New Zealand later, and if he could he would persuade others to come too.

"Is that a definite promise?" he was asked.

"As definite as any promise can be made in the circumstances in which we all find ourselves at present," was the reply.

Minus the Bow-tie

For those who may not have the opportunity of seeing Noel Coward while he is on his present tour, it might be



NOEL COWARD

"As definite as any promise can be"

mentioned that the famous spotted bow-tie was not in evidence, either at the Auckland Town Hall, when he was officially welcomed, or at 1YA when he gave his first radio talk, but all the other adjuncts of the Coward personality were much in evidence—the expressive hands, the ubiquitous cigarette-case which emerges so inevitably from the pocket, the slim six feet so unmistakably Savile Row, and the smile. It's a pity it can't be televised.

1YA IMPRESSED HIM

Sefton Daly On The Tour

SEFTON DALY, the young New Zealand pianist, who has been Noel Coward's accompanist during his Australian and New Zealand tours, was most impressed by the studio appointments at 1YA when he visited the station on the occasion of Mr. Coward's first broadcast talk to New Zealanders.

"I was not in a studio anywhere in Australia which could compare with this," he said.

Like most who come into close personal contact with Noel Coward, Mr. Daly was impressed both by the Englishman's capabilities and by the charm of his manner.

"He knows what he wants from his accompanist and I have found him very easy to work with. He has an extraordinary sense of harmony and he has also the gift of perfect pitch—of knowing at once in what key any particular piece is being played."

He added that Mr. Coward was himself an accomplished light pianist—as well as actor, author, producer, designer,

short story writer and so on. He confined his playing entirely to light music, to which his technique was admirably suited, but he also appreciated more serious work.

Speaking of the Australian tour, Mr. Daly said that it was an outstanding success from start to finish. It was difficult to recall any highlights, since it had been highlighted all the way, but he would not readily forget his first appearance as accompanist when the tour opened in the Melbourne Town Hall.

"There were over three thousand people packed into the building," he said, "They were almost hanging from the chandeliers. Frankly, I don't know how I managed to thread my way, with my knees shaking, through the stands of the orchestra to the piano. But I got there."

Melbourne had given Noel Coward a tremendous reception and it was repeated in every centre in which he appeared.



SIR THOMAS BEECHAM

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