

GRAND OPERA AND BALLET FOR NEW ZEALAND ?

THOSE who had expected the war to sound the death knell of legitimate entertainment in Australia and New Zealand will be pleased to learn that all difficulties considered, the stage is in a sound and healthy condition in Australia. New Zealand, too, appears to have emerged from a brief period in the doldrums. A Gilbert and Sullivan company is enjoying a successful tour, the magician Levante opened in Auckland last week, and according to Frank Tait, one of the managing directors of J. C. Williamson, who has been visiting New Zealand, it is just possible we may have both a grand opera and a ballet tour this or next year.

The opera and ballet tours depend first of all on what arrangements can be made regarding transfer of currency out of Australia. If this and one or two other small difficulties can be smoothed out and the Australian tours of these companies are successful, there is every chance that they will come on to New Zealand.

Americans but no Australians

The nucleus of the opera company has already been formed in America, and it includes several well known American singers. Italian operatic artists, of course, would not be permitted to land in Australia. To the artists already chosen, would be added a number of Australia's best singers, Mr.



MARIE NEY
New Zealand too cold?

Tait explains, and also, possibly, artists such as Heddle Nash and Oscar Natzke. Mr. Tait emphasises, however, that the formation of a grand opera company is no light undertaking. Not only must the quality of the company be high, but it must include a sufficient number of leading artists. Three good basses and three good tenors are needed for a start.

Mr. Tait is completely confident of the success of an opera tour of Australia and New Zealand. It is approximately 10

years since the visit of the last grand opera company.

If the tour does not take place, the Gilbert and Sullivan company which is at present in New Zealand will probably perform a series of light operas such as *Die Fledermaus*, *The Bohemian Girl* and *Maritana*.

Later again, if the war permits, it is Mr. Tait's hope that another ballet company of the standard of the one which visited New Zealand two years ago, will tour here. New York is now the world centre of ballet, and it would be an easy matter to gather together a first-rate company, including stars like Riabochinska, Lichine, Petroff and Toumanova.

Marie Ney in Australia

The bright star of the theatrical world in Australia at present is New Zealand-born Marie Ney, who has suddenly revealed a flare for comedy. She was first seen in Sydney in *No Time for Comedy*, and then, taking advantage of the interest created by Noel Coward's visit, in *Private Lives*. Her latest is *Ladies in Retirement*, a dramatic thriller played in New York by Flora Robson, and in London by Mary Clare.

Marie Ney considered a tour of the Dominion, but she is said to have unhappy memories of New Zealand winters, and it is not likely that she will be here this year at any rate.

Revivals are always popular with Australians, and Melbourne has seen *Rio*

Rita played by a company starring Elsa Stenning, who toured New Zealand as a chorus girl with Gilbert and Sullivan companies, Charles Normand and Don Nicol, who was last here with the *Charlie's Aunt* company. Next revival they will play is *Sally*.

Star From Hollywood

At Easter, Sydney will see a revue, *Funny Side Up*, starring Helen Gilliland, London and New York musical comedy star. She is in Australia now, and has been heard in several ABC broadcasts.

Helen Gilliland, who came from Hollywood, where she appeared in a film *The Storm*, was given an audition at the age of 16 by D'Oyley Carte, czar of English Gilbert and Sullivan production, and played in the parent Gilbert and Sullivan company for five years. Then she starred in revues with George Robey, in Paul Whiteman's band, and with the American comedienne Sophie Tucker. After that, she turned to musical comedy, and appeared with Fred Astaire in *Stop Flirting*. She has broadcast in numerous BBC programmes.

There are many other famous English stars who would in normal times be glad to come to Australia and New Zealand, says Mr. Tait. John Gielgud, Leslie Banks, Cyril Ritchard and Madge Elliot are four who have turned down offers both on account of transport difficulties and their unwillingness to leave their families and friends in such difficult times.

Apart from their ordinary work, Australian artists are contributing magnificently to war purpose entertainment, Mr. Tait said. Gladys Moncrieff, for instance, who is singing as well as ever, and has lately been appearing at some of the larger picture theatres, has sung at Red Cross concerts in Melbourne.

HE SANG ON THE BEAT

Kenneth Neate Went From Police Force To Concert Platform

KENNETH NEATE, the young Australian tenor now touring New Zealand with Oscar Natzke, doesn't like to be described as "The Singing Policeman." Not that he is ashamed of having been in the police force—he spent five enjoyable years there—but he thinks it may prejudice the public against him as a serious artist. After all, it is difficult to reconcile Richard Crooks the operatic tenor with Richard Crooks "the Singing Iceman."

Neate, who stands over six feet, and is developed in proportion, must have been the sort of policeman who would put an arm-bar on a "rough-neck," bundle him into a taxi and take him along to a police station with a smile and an off-hand manner, just as though he were helping an old lady across the street. In other words, he has a pleasant personality, and it is this as well as his robust voice which makes him popular with his audiences.

School-teaching First

He was born in the Newcastle mining district, which is, incidentally, one of

the musical centres of Australia. He cannot claim any inherited musical talent, but he does point out that one Charles Neate was director of the London Academy of Music in 1812 and was one of Beethoven's closest friends. It may not mean a thing, he says, especially as Charles Neate had no connection with his own family, but it does show that the name is not without lustre.

Neate finished his education in the middle of the depression. After an abortive attempt at school-teaching, he tried his hand at selling on commission. Attempting to join the police force in Sydney, he found that he was under the stipulated weight of 12 stone 6lbs., and went farming and "jackarooing" to build up his physique.

He was five years in the police force, and had the usual experiences of a young constable. He was beat constable in reputedly tough quarters of Sydney, such as Surrey Hills, chased speeding motorists on a motor-cycle, was a station sergeant, and did plain-clothes work.

It was while he was in the force that he began taking his singing seriously. Probably he sometimes sang on the beat. Anyway, he was a member of the Police Choir and a soloist when it made a newsreel short which has since been released all over the world.

Brownlee Picked Him

He had some tuition from Dino Borghioli, an Italian tenor who visited Australia, but it was John Brownlee, now singing at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, who first drew attention to the young policeman's voice. Soon afterwards came an offer of a ten-weeks contract singing at the Prince Edward Theatre. Then the ABC gave him an audition and leading parts in presentations of *Lohengrin* and *Madame Butterfly*.

This was a little over a year ago, and since then he has been exceptionally busy. He appeared as soloist at orchestral concerts given by Antal Dorati, who visited New Zealand as conductor of the Russian Ballet Orchestra, he toured Australia with Maria Markan, the Icelandic soprano, and he appeared at Professor Schneevoght's orchestral concerts.

When Natzke was in Australia the two met and decided to tour Canada and U.S.A. together. They had also discussed a holiday in New Zealand before leaving for America, but the holiday became a strenuous tour under the guidance of Dan O'Connor.

"Abo" Music

Kenneth Neate refuses to specialise, varying his programmes to suit most tastes. He sings operatic arias, lieder,



KENNETH NEATE
As Pinkerton in "Madame Butterfly"

English art songs and ballads, and anything interesting he comes across among modern compositions. Among the most novel songs he has sung in New Zealand are a group of Australian Aboriginal chants, lullabies and laments. These are genuine Aboriginal music, not Europeanised after the manner of most Maori music, and have been collected and arranged by Dr. H. O. Lethbridge, a medical man who lives in the Maranoa district near the Queensland border.