

FULL-LENGTH GRAND OPERA

SOMETHING of a new deal for grand opera listeners is planned by the NZBS for this year, with the use of LP recordings that will ensure high fidelity reproduction. The first work to be heard in a link of the four YC stations (from 7.0 p.m. to 9.45 p.m. on Sunday, February 28) is one of the earliest operas, Claudio Monteverdi's *The Coronation of Poppea*. It has been recorded by the Concert Hall Society of New York under the direction of Walter Goehr. The broadcast will be preceded by a short talk in which Frederick Page, of Wellington, will give an evaluation of the work, noting its essentially dramatic nature and outlining its importance in the history of opera.

Monteverdi has been described as opera's first genius, but he did not write the first opera. That honour probably goes to Jacopo Peri, whose *Dafne* was staged at Florence in 1597, the year when Shakespeare was writing *The Merchant of Venice*. Peri's success with *Dafne* and the work that followed it, *Euridice*, led to Monteverdi, already well known as a writer of madrigals, being invited by his patron the Duke of Mantua to try his hand at the new art form. His *Orfeo* had a quick success, and was followed by other operas, the last of which was *The Coronation of Poppea*, which had its first performance in 1642. Monteverdi was then 74.



N.P.S. photograph
FREDERICK PAGE

but nothing in the lively and sensuous score reveals signs of age. The opera recreates Imperial Rome, Nero, his wife Octavia, Seneca his tutor, and Poppea's husband Ottone play leading parts. "The libretto by Busenello," writes Oscar Thompson, "gave Monteverdi the opportunity to depict scenes of love, of crime, of orgies, of fetes, of banquets."

The intensity of the dramatisation takes possession of the audience from the moment when the first act opens to Ottone's restless "E Pur Si Torno," until at the end Poppea and Nero sing the triumphal "Pur Ti Miro. Pur Ti Godo." The *ritornelli* are few, fewer still the *sinfonia*. Nothing interrupts the unfolding of the "bitter and extremely immoral" plot between the singers. Scenes such as the death of Seneca and the lullaby sung to Poppea by her nurse in Act Two, or the love scenes between Poppea and Nero in Acts One and Three, are more deeply felt and more delicately treated than anything that Monteverdi had previously written. The characters are finely developed and keep their individuality to the end.

The plot, based on a story by Tacitus in his *Annals*, centres on the passion of Nero, the Roman Emperor, for Poppea, the wife of a courtier. Poppea herself schemes cunningly to become Empress and to oust Nero's wife, the childless Octavia. Her main adversary in this intrigue is the philosopher Seneca, who is compelled to commit suicide. Ottone returns secretly to Rome, discovers Poppea's adultery, and at Octavia's urging steals into her garden at night disguised as a woman, and tries to kill her. Poppea is rescued by Amor, the God of Love, and the opera ends with the banishment of all participants in Octavia's plot and Poppea's final elevation in a solemn session of the Imperial court.

RICHARD OF BORDEAUX
GORDON DAVIOT'S *Richard of Bordeaux*, the BBC World Theatre play to be broadcast from 1YC, 3YC and 4YC next week, was one of the outstanding successes of the London theatre of 1932-33. It marked a notable step in the progress of the costume play from cloak - and - dagger melodramatics to an honest attempt to analyse the minds of people of a past age and view their motives and passions in relation to our own. London flocked to see the play, which was put on by John Gielgud at the New Theatre with himself in the leading role. It was magnificently mounted and splendidly acted, and it left in the minds of those who saw it a memorable picture of the young Richard II, charming and gracious in youth, petulant in controversy and dignified in adversity. In the BBC radio adaptation, Sir John Gielgud plays the part he made famous. The play is in two parts. The first covers the years before 1389 when the young king was planning to remove his uncles from power, and the second follows the course of his revenge upon them. It will be heard from 1YC at 7.30 p.m. on February 24, from 4YC at 8.0 p.m. on February 25, and from 3YC at 9.30 p.m. on February 27.



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Ingredients:

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup (7oz. or $\frac{1}{2}$ tin) Highlander Sweetened Condensed Milk, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (5oz.) water, 1 teaspoonful powdered gelatine, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoonful Vanilla Essence, 1 (4oz.) tin Nestle's Reduced Cream

Method:

Soak gelatine in a little cold water, then add balance of water hot to thoroughly dissolve. Mix thoroughly Highlander Sweetened Condensed Milk, Nestle's Cream and Essence. Pour dissolved gelatine into mixture. Stir well. Pour into freezing pan. Place in refrigerator.

After mixture has frozen to consistency of thick custard, remove from refrigerator. Scrape mixture from sides and bottom of pan. Beat with egg-beater for half a minute. Smooth out and replace in refrigerator until frozen for serving.



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