

RIGHT: Raymond Boyce, in charge of scenery and costumes for the company, at work on a model set for the production. AT FOOT OF PAGE: Rilla Stephens (back to camera), Susan Tunnington (Hermia) and Eleanor Elliot (Helena) get ready for the final dress-rehearsal

Listener attended the first full company call for the production, and heard one of the directors of the New Zealand Players, G. H. A. Swan, speak about their achievements in the past year and the prospects to come. Here, too, the producer, Richard Campion, who is also a director of the company, talked about his days on tour with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Britain and the Continent, when he was stage manager for the Young Vic production of it by George Levine.

On a mock-up rostrum Bottom was declaiming the hilarious lines of his "sweet comedy" about the deaths of Pyramus and Thisbe. The Man in the Moon stood on a stepladder, and his dog, a black-and-white mongrel collie which has been specially taken on by the company for a small barking part, joined in the fun with enthusiasm at the appropriate moment.

Mr. Campion said that after studying at the Old Vic Theatre School in London (where he worked under Glen Byam Shaw, now a director at Stratford-upon-Avon, and Michel Saint-Denis, now head of the London Theatre School) he toured Britain and Europe with the Young Vic Company in 1949. They took two plays with them on tour, Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the latter he was stage manager, and the production was by George Levine, who this year is re-producing the play for the Stratford-upon-Avon Company, with Anthony Quayle in the role of Bottom.

"There is no doubt that the Victorians, in their productions of *The Dream*, stamped it rather heavily as a masque, emphasising the pageantry and the music, so that the poetry and the magic dropped out," Mr. Campion said. "Nowadays the emphasis is the other way, and in this production we are trying to create an atmosphere of the mystery of night in the forest, with the attendant fairies conceived as spirits of the woods. This is quite different from the ideas of Harley Granville-Barker, for instance, who once produced the play with the fairies clad stiffly in cloth-of-gold, after the style of Javanese dancers."

Mr. Campion said that he was also trying to get away from George Levine's style of production, which was too sharp and too inclined to the grotesque in its handling of the nymphs and sprites for his taste. He aimed at a softer touch. He thought the cast he had assembled for the present production was a very even one, and he added that Susan Tunnington and Rilla Stephens, who play the parts of Hermia and Titania respectively, were both former members of the Old Vic School, as well as Raymond Boyce and himself.

"So, although the Old Vic School and the Young Vic Company are no longer in existence, their influence will continue to be seen in the theatre, even in such a distant place as New Zealand," he said.

In his address to the Players, Mr. Swan said that the Company was now 12 months old, and that the previous year had been largely a formative period in which naturally a certain amount of time had been devoted to finding out where the company's faults lay, and in solving problems posed by the complications of travel and transport in a difficult geographical country like New Zealand. He said that the company had been formed by Richard and Edith Campion to entertain New Zealanders in the flesh and blood theatre in a permanent way, and also to make a worth-while contribution to the social and cultural life of the country, and help mould a New Zealand idiom. He mentioned the inroads made on our thought and expression by the cinema and radio, and said that where a similar situation had arisen in Canada a Royal Commission had been set up to discover ways of preserving a Canadian outlook. "We must develop a New Zealand outlook, and what better medium is there than the theatre?" he said.

The New Zealand Players' Foundation, a voluntary group aimed at supporting the Players' Company, had committees actively at work in over 30 towns and cities, and a nation-wide membership of more than 8000. Even in towns like Otorohanga, where there was no Foundation committee, citizens had banded themselves together to ask the Players to perform in their town. The Otorohanga group sent with their request full details of the hall in which the play would be put on, and the probable numbers of audiences.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* was to be the first of an annual series of classical productions. Each year such a play would be chosen in consultation with the Education Department, so that it could also be the subject of special study in schools and universities during the year. In return, the classical play would have a more extensive itinerary than others in the Players' repertoire. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was going to Gisborne, the West Coast and other places which would normally be beyond the company's budget. A special essay and painting competition had been held in schools in conjunction with the proposed tour of the play. The competition had been advertised in the Education Gazette, and had drawn a large number of entries of a high standard.

Mr. Swan concluded by saying that New Zealanders were more than ready for the "really first-class in the arts," and that first-rate achievements could be obtained by the Players themselves only "by a process of work and yet more work."

