

FROM THE ZB'S THEATRE ROYAL

A NEW series of programmes starring Sir Laurence Olivier is scheduled to start from ZB stations next week. Entitled *Theatre Royal*, the series consists of dramatised short-stories chosen by Sir Laurence himself. Five of the programmes will feature guest artists: Sir Ralph Richardson, Orson Welles, Michael Redgrave, Robert Donat, and Sir John Gielgud.

Sir Laurence Olivier, who toured New Zealand with the Old Vic Company in 1948, is a comparative stranger to the microphone. According to Felix Barker, writing in the *Radio Times*, he has not only been busy with stage and film productions, but has always tended to be cautious of new ventures until he is absolutely sure they are worthwhile. But on this occasion he was convinced by Harry Alan Towers, of the independent production unit Towers of London (with whom he is seen at right), and, given his head, he cheerfully ransacked literature for authors of every age and nationality. Before each half-hour play he tells listeners the reason for his choice.

Starting with Gogol's *The Inspector-General*, the series continues with stories by R. L. Stevenson, Bret Harte,

Dickens, Graham Greene, Max Beerbohm, Paul Gallico, Balzac, Conrad, Dumas, Wilde, Pushkin, de Maupassant, H. G. Wells and Herman Melville. Many listeners not otherwise familiar with Gogol's work will know the opening story through a film version starring Danny Kaye. True, the film was merely "suggested" by the Gogol satire, and made no attempt to follow it faithfully, but the main elements of the story were there. A down-at-heel tramp is taken for a government inspector travelling *incognito*, and is flattered and fêted by the townspeople, many of whom have reason to fear the inspector's investigations.

It was the temptation to play the wide variety of characters in the various stories, says Felix Barker, which lured Olivier back to the microphone he had deserted for so long. "I suppose there is no actor



of comparable eminence," he says, "who has done so little broadcasting. It is my private opinion that until now he has not been particularly interested in broadcasting as a medium. As an actor he has found the spoken word by itself too limiting."

While this is understandable, says Barker, it is a little ironical when we consider what one of his few previous broadcasts led to. Early in the war, when he was in the Fleet Air Arm, he was given leave from his duties to take part in a 15-minute programme called *Into Battle*. In it he delivered the "Crispin" speech and the Harfleur speech from Shakespeare's *Henry V*. As a result of this, the BBC invited him to take part in a full-length version of the play produced in Manchester in the autumn of 1942 by Howard Rose. On the night it was broadcast, the film producer Filippo del Giudice was list-

ening in, and the sequel, of course, was one of the most famous films that has ever come out of a British studio.

About the only other important broadcast Olivier has done for the BBC was in *Christopher Columbus*. The rest of his radio career consists of a few broadcasts in the United States and one in Australia. When the Old Vic went to New York in 1946, he broadcast in *Richard III* and *Peer Gynt*, and also did a few Sunday shows, "to help pay the hotel bill." The Australian broadcast was during the Old Vic tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1948, when he and his wife Vivien Leigh played in a farewell programme which included a scene from *Gone With the Wind*. Miss Leigh took her original part as Scarlett, and Sir Laurence was Rhett Butler, played in the film by Clark Gable. Asked which actor was the better Rhett, Miss Leigh had a brief struggle with her natural loyalty, and said Gable!

In some of the plays of *Theatre Royal* it will take a trained ear to recognise Olivier, even though the listener knows the part he is playing. He has always studied foreign accents and dialects carefully (remember the policeman in *The Magic Box*?) and enjoyed the variety provided by this series.

Harry Alan Towers, one of the few independent producers whose shows are used by the BBC, thinks of broadcasting in global terms, and shrewdly guessed that *Theatre Royal* would have a world-wide appeal. Even before the BBC decided to broadcast the series, the American NBC network was clamouring for it. The plays have been broadcast coast-to-coast in the United States and have been scheduled in Canada, Australia and South Africa.

New Zealand listeners will be able to hear *Theatre Royal* at 9.0 p.m. on Wednesdays from the four ZB stations and 9.0 p.m. on Fridays from 2ZA. It starts from the ZBs on July 14 and from 2ZA on July 23, following the last episode in each case of the popular *Horatio Hornblower*.



RICHARDSON



GIELGUD



REDGRAVE

Broadcast from Allan Jones Concert

PART of the final concert in the Auckland Town Hall of the visiting American tenor Allan Jones (left) is to be broadcast on link by the NZBS. Allan Jones first became popular with New Zealand listeners through a single record, one that contained two songs from his film *Firefly*: "Gian-nina Mia" and "The Donkey Serenade." Other films in which he has appeared are *Show-boat*, *The Great Victor Herbert*, *Everybody Sing*, *Rose Marie*, and the Marx Brothers' *Night at the Opera*.

He was born at Scranton, Pennsylvania, the

son of a Welsh coalminer, from whom he inherited a good voice. His vocal lessons began when he was a child, and to earn money for later studies he took a job in his father's mine. His education was continued at Syracuse University and New York University, after which he trained under good teachers in Paris. He returned home and became soloist with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, then toured as an oratorio soloist and concert recitalist. In 1929 the Shubert brothers, American leaders in the field of light opera, gave him a five-year contract. He appeared in 30 operettas in three years, before beginning work in films in 1935. He was married in 1936 and has three children. Since the war he has toured in England and sang in the Cole Porter show *Guys and Dolls* in America. He is accompanied on his New Zealand tour by the Wellington pianist Finlay Robb.

