

OPERA for TODAY

Your name is a number,
Your story's a case,
Your need a request.
Your hopes will be filed.
Come back next week.

THAT is the refrain the Secretary chants to all comers in Gian-Carlo Menotti's *The Consul*—his first three-act opera—which is to have its first New Zealand broadcast from the YC stations at 7.0 p.m. next Sunday, January 23. The story is about a young woman, Magda Sorel, whose husband, a leader of the Resistance in an unnamed country, has had to go abroad because of the activities of the secret police. She applies for a visa so that she can join him but in the end is driven by bureaucracy and the secret police to suicide. Menotti based his opera on a story he had read of a refugee woman who committed suicide when she was turned down for a visa. "I know," he says, "we must have some bureaucracy . . . but I cannot abide little people who, given a little power, wield it inflexibly and cruelly." Such a "little person" is the Secretary of his opera—for the Consul himself never appears.



When *The Consul* opened on Broadway nearly five years ago tickets to the value of 100,000 dollars had been sold in advance. "I guess we have a success on our hands," Menotti told one of his producers. "Now is when we must be humble." Later *The Consul* was to be warmly received in Britain also, though La Scala, in Menotti's homeland, was by no means unanimous in its praise. Menotti was then 38—he had come a long way since he first thought of becoming a composer at the age of six. As a youth he had gone to America to study and work, and there he stayed on to write the works which won him growing fame—the most successful of the earlier ones *The Medium* and *The Telephone*. Menotti, who is known principally as a composer, also writes the librettos of his operas, and then stages and directs them as well. In this way, as he puts it, he is "always faithful to the composer."

With a theme that belongs very much to today and with its story told in English, *The Consul* will probably appeal to many people who become impatient with opera sung in a foreign tongue. On Broadway it was billed as musical drama, and Ivor Brown used the same term to describe it when he reviewed the London production in *The Observer*. Writing of its music in the same paper Eric Blom

said: "We had better regard *The Consul* as a play which has become fitted with music because it happens to have been written by a composer. And then it is very good of its kind."

The cast of the production which YC listeners are to hear includes the soprano Patricia Neway, whose playing and singing of the part of Magda Sorel was so warmly praised in both New York and London, and Marie Powers, who had already made her name in *The Medium* when she gave a moving performance in *The Consul* as the resistance leader's mother.

During the broadcast of the opera Donald Monro will give a brief evaluation of it.

Now is the Hour — for Student Songs

"OF course," pontificated the Rather Pompous Student, "it's only the older universities which have the traditions which give rise to student songs."

"Surely students are the same all over the world. They will always find something to sing about," mildly replied David Jones, one of the BBC's music studio managers.

That was a year ago during a stimulating discussion among Cambridge undergraduates after a series of recordings of student songs. David Jones says now that he had his fingers crossed when he tried gently to deflate the Rather Pompous Student, but he was reassured when contributions of national student and folk songs arrived in London as a result of his inquiries among 12 Commonwealth universities.

The result was a series of Christmas broadcasts, *Commonwealth of Song*,

which featured contributions from Auckland and Christchurch.

"Maori" Marsden, of Auckland University College, introduced four Maori songs, a welcoming "Haeremai," "Toia mai te waha," the haka "Kamate, Kamate," and a farewell "Haere Ra."

From the Canterbury College Madrigal Group came a hiking song, "Double Bunking," and what David Jones calls "a rather unusual version" of "Now Is the Hour." It is probable that the harmonies were nearer to the original Maori than the version which Gracie Fields popularised in Britain after her wartime visit to the Dominion.

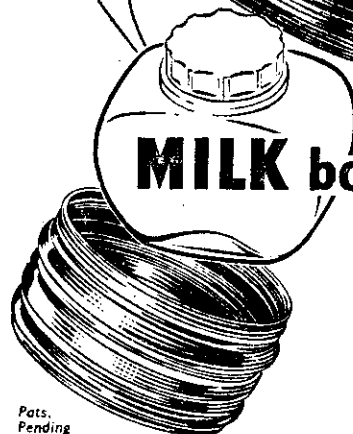
This section of the programmes was introduced by Bill Hawkey, of C.U.C.

Altogether, a pleasant broadcast which, I should think, the students enjoyed as much as did their audience—and all the result of that Rather Pompous Student who gave the BBC the idea.

—J. W. GOODWIN (London)

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