

Open Microphone

NEWS OF BROADCASTERS
ON AND OFF THE RECORD

"ONE of my earliest memories is sitting on a piano stool beside my uncle while he played and whistled the lovely melodies of Gilbert and Sullivan." Hamilton Dickson, whose light opera company was heard recently in a performance of *The Emerald Isle*, told us this when we called the other day to

ENTHUSIAST ask how he became interested in light opera. "Those haunting melodies of Sullivan have come with me down the years," Mr. Dickson said, "so it was no accident that one of the first comic operas my Singers presented was by Sullivan." Apart from that stimulus from his uncle's love of opera, Mr. Dickson recalls an early association with Tom Pollard, director of the Pollard Opera Company of many years ago. "He was a personal friend of my family, and when I was a lad approaching my teens he told me many stories of the stage and its fascination."

While he was still quite young, Mr. Dickson decided to make music his profession, and studied first in Christchurch, his home town. Later, in Sydney, he took voice production and singing with Roland Foster and composition with Alfred Hill. When he came back to New Zealand about 20 years ago he settled in Wellington, where he established himself as a teacher. He is also well known as a competition adjudicator, and has judged at most New Zealand festivals. As *Listener* readers will have gathered from Mr. Dickson's remarks when we talked with him about *The Emerald Isle* a few weeks ago, light opera is more than an interest with him



Hamilton Dickson

ALMA

"AT 23, Alma Angela Cogan has travelled far and fast," declared the *Radio Times* last year, and it could be that they were referring to the new American car in Rio Red and Smoky White which she had bought only a few weeks before. Owning that car (here seen outside the BBC) was, she admits, a life-long ambition. Alma, who is being heard in the current *Take It From Here* series from the ZB stations on Sunday nights, is quite definite that her name "really is Alma," and adds: "I think I was named after a film star." Her success has brought her a steadily growing fan mail. Now 800 letters a week, it includes many proposals of marriage. "They must run into hundreds by now, mostly from servicemen overseas," she says. "I suppose they think they're pretty safe over there." Alma's bubbling, exuberant voice has been



heard in some of the catchiest tunes ever broadcast. One of the most recent of these had the intriguing title "Never Do a Tango With An Eskimo."



BBC photo

BARBARA JEFFORD



Spencer High photo

ALAN MULGAN

"I WROTE it about 20 years ago, and it was published in London and has become pretty well known since then," Alan Mulgan said when we asked him for a word about his narrative poem *Golden Wedding*, which some North Island listeners have recently heard read

—it's an enthusiasm; and now that he has a group around him to share it, he expects to produce many more operas, including at least one more of his own, in the years ahead.

NOT long ago, you will remember, we mentioned on this page an act by "five singing dogs." It appears now that if the dogs woofed their singing teacher spoofed. After the recording of their performance was issued, American entertainment agents tried to book their act—only to find that there wasn't one. The recording company's publicity officer got around it this way: "We have never claimed that there was a singing

dog act. All we claimed is that the sounds were made by actual dogs." What really happened was that Carl Weismann, who "presents" the dogs, tape-recorded innumerable barks from the animals, and then edited them before re-recording them with musical backing. Weismann has apparently made several other recordings of this kind, not yet released. One of them is a rhythm number.

IT'S more than 20 years since Peggy Ashcroft first played Juliet—in an Oxford University Dramatic Society production of Shakespeare's famous play. This part, which she plays again in a BBC *World Theatre* production of *Romeo and Juliet*, to be heard from YC stations next week, is her favourite Shakespearean role. Back in the days when she first tackled it, the OUDS always called upon the services of professional actresses and a professional producer, and the company assembled to take part in *Romeo and Juliet* made it a particularly memorable production. It was the first play that John Gielgud had ever produced, and the cast included Edith Evans, Christopher Hassall (as Romeo), William Devlin and Hugh Hunt. Terence Rattigan had a one-line part.

LISTENERS will be sorry to hear that Frank Broad, who has fairly described himself as a "veteran of variety," is in hospital in Auckland. "I am slowly getting better," he writes, "but I shall be here for some time." Mr. Broad has been in hospital many times since he was wounded in the First World War, but he sends us this assurance: "I may be down, but I am not out, and will stage a comeback."

by the English actress Barbara Jefford. Mr. Mulgan described the poem as a reminiscence of his childhood in the country; the scene is Katikati, in the Bay of Plenty, where he was born. The landscape and surroundings, he said, were "more or less taken from life," and "Hillside," the name of the house in the poem, was the name of his grandfather's house; but the characters are imaginary. Mr. Mulgan said that both his grandfathers were early settlers in Katikati, where they arrived in the 1870s. Some listeners may have heard the poem before, when it was read some

years ago by Diana Craig, and it has been much quoted. The present recording was made by Barbara Jefford when she was in New Zealand not long ago. *Golden Wedding*, which was heard this week (April 16) from 2YC, will be broadcast next from 3YC on April 28.

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Peggy Ashcroft

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