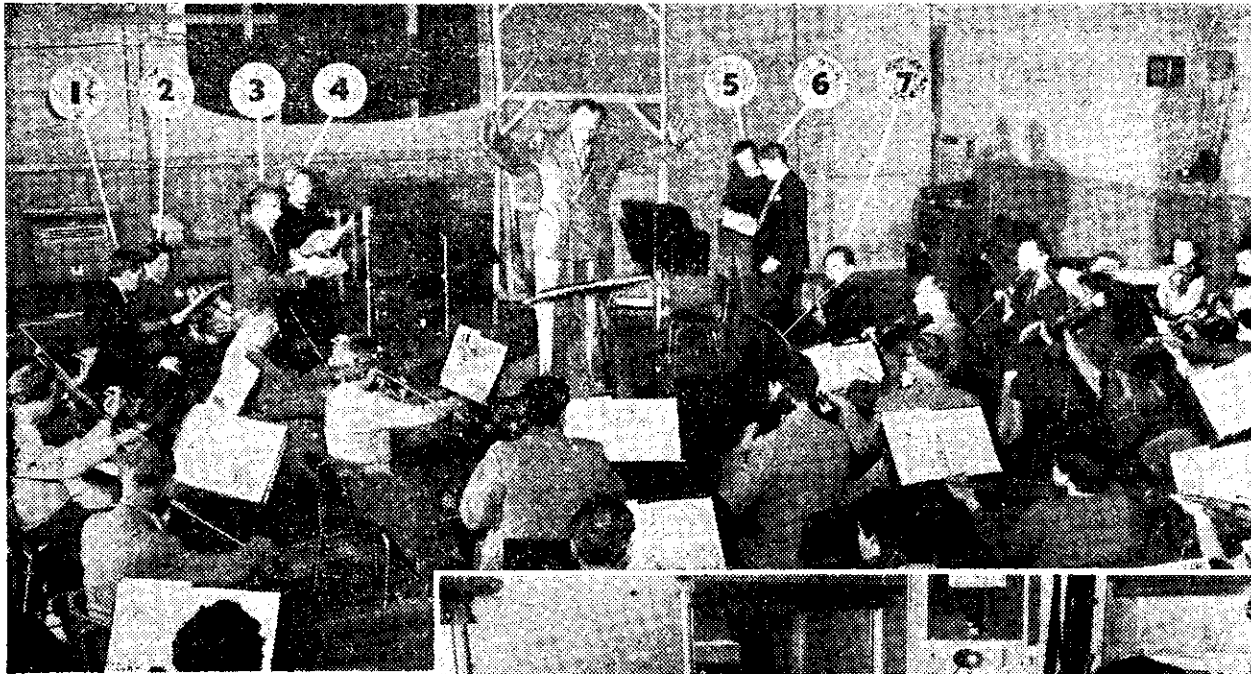
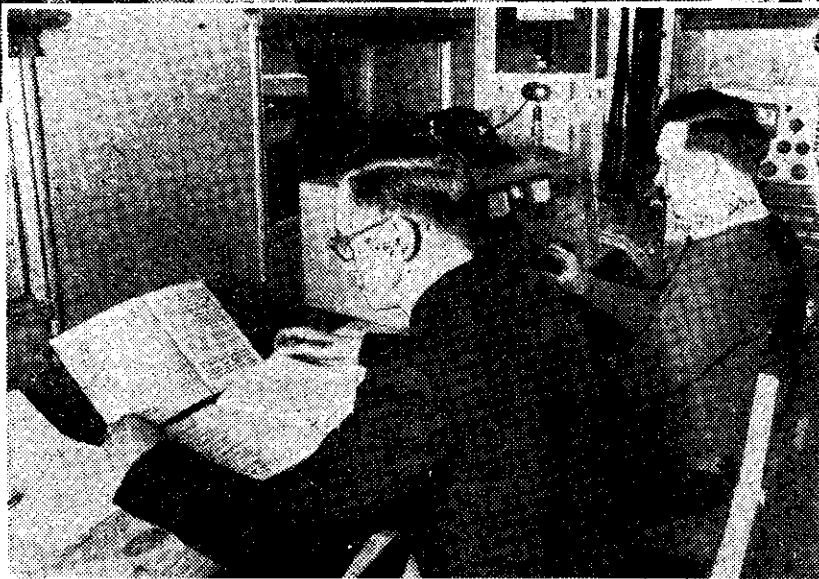


NZBS REHEARSES A RADIO OPERA



TYPICAL of behind-the-scenes work on the NZBS radio opera presentations are these three rehearsal shots taken in Wellington the other day. TOP: James Robertson conducts a rehearsal of "La Traviata." 1, 2, 3 and 4 indicate the soloists—Donald Munro, Sybil Phillipps, Robin Gordon and Alice Graham respectively; 5 is Reuben Fisher, technical officer in charge of the broadcast; 6 Roy Melford, studio manager; 7 Vincent Aspey, leader of the Orchestra. RIGHT: Brian Salkeld, in charge of presentation, and Reuben Fisher at work in the control room. BELOW: David Sell rehearses the English Singers for "Hansel and Gretel."

N.P.S. photographs



WHEN the name of Engelbert Humperdinck is mentioned, the average man, if he registers any recognition at all, says "Hansel and Gretel." Humperdinck belongs to the strange, and in some ways, rather tragic company of one-opera composers; composers who captured the public's fancy with one outstanding work, and then tried in vain to revive or recapture it with later compositions. *Hansel and Gretel* will be heard from YC stations on Thursday, November 15, at 8.30 p.m., the third in the series of radio operas broadcast by the NZBS.

The composer's sister originally wrote some verses around the famous fairy tale for a children's party, and persuaded her brother to set them to music. The modest entertainment so enchanted both librettist and composer that they set to work and extended it into a full-length opera. It was produced at Weimar in 1893, and won all hearts. It captivated everyone with its harmonies and its echoes of German folklore; children were delighted with it, and to grown-ups it recalled a time when they were uncritically capable of the same delight.

The story of the opera remains the same as in the fairy tale. The overture opens and closes with the gentle, comforting melody of the children's evening prayer, and introduces other leading themes from the score, and the curtain rises on Act One and reveals a fairy tale scene. Hansel and Gretel are alone in their father's cottage, dancing and singing together, and when their excitement is at its height their mother comes in and bursts out in anger at seeing them frolicking around instead of attending to their work. She sends them out to pick strawberries in the forest, where they are discovered at the beginning of Act Two.

There, of course, they find they are lost, and are lulled to sleep by the Sandman. When they wake, at the beginning of Act Three, Hansel and Gretel see a quaint little house built of chocolate cream, cake and candy, and are lured into it by the witch. She tries to imprison them, but while she is showing Gretel how to get into the oven, the children give her a good push from behind, and she is trapped. The mother and father reappear, and the opera ends with the two chief themes of the evening prayer.

Behind the scenes, the pattern of preparing the three operas for broadcast has been much the same. The works performed—*La Traviata* and Puccini's *Il Tabaro* were the other two—were selected by James Robertson, whose principal assistant on the musical side was Ashley Heenan, of the NZBS Concert Section. The next step was for the studio manager, Roy Melford, and Brian Salkeld, who was in charge of presentation, to confer over the script. Then came a piano rehearsal for the singers, followed by the first full orchestral rehearsal, when the ideas were co-ordinated and production points worked out, and so on to the final rehearsal, by which time the overall picture of the performance had taken shape.

The cast of *Hansel and Gretel* is Edna Boyd-Wilson, mezzo-soprano (Hansel), Marjorie Rowley, soprano (Gretel), Raewyn Lamb, soprano (the mother), Laszlo Rogatsy, baritone (the father), Corinne Bridge, mezzo-soprano (the Sandman), Sybil Phillipps, soprano (the dew fairy), Bertha Rawlinson, mezzo-soprano (the witch). The chorus—the English Singers, with chorus master David Sell—provides the voices of the children.