



MARCH is the start of the provincial tours for the National Orchestra, and very soon now the 70 players will be setting out for Palmerston North, Hamilton and Auckland. From oyster bars to mangrove swamps might be their motto as they travel about from Invercargill to Whangarei in all seasons and weathers, playing in all kinds of halls until, as one player said, "We begin to feel like chameleons."

After two or three days of rehearsals the moving begins. Bill Barsby, who is the Orchestra's studio attendant besides being a double-bass player, sweeps the hall clear of everything. The special staging which the Orchestra carries—a set for the South Island is stored at Christchurch—is loaded on to waiting trucks. Smaller instruments can go with

ON TREK WITH THE ORCHESTRA

gill. At £2 a string they did not appreciate the joke.

Music on tour is always looked after by the librarian, Henry Engel, who is also a viola player. He has been on the job for so long now and has worked out such a good system that hardly anything ever gets lost, but he will tell you that the success of it all depends as much on the co-operation he gets from the people in the Orchestra and the music library at Wellington.

The Orchestra plays in town halls, theatres, cinemas and school assembly halls, each one of which will have different acoustics and will present fresh

difficult to achieve. At Dunedin, the most graceful of the halls, the orchestra tends to become a dark, remote blur at one end. At Dunedin, too, the percussion has its own problems. A great draught whistles down through the vents in the organ pipes and catches them in the back of the neck. A piece of canvas hung along the pipes would look too unsightly, so the percussion must just wrap themselves up a little more snugly.

When 70 people set out on tour stories must abound and the National Orchestra is no exception. Many of them are about railway carriages. There was the time when ice formed on the inside of the windows as the players were re-routed around New Plymouth in mid-winter, travelling, it should be added, in an aged first-class carriage that, with its curlicews, gas brackets and curved seats, would have seemed old-fashioned in Victoria's day. A true New Zealand flavour is given the story of the small town where the hired stage hands did not appear, having all made off to a near-by Ranfurly Shield match. Nobody at all was available to help set the stage for the evening concert, and to make matters worse it was already mid-day, and there was a howling gale and a snowstorm outside. Some of the local

musicians heard of the situation, and came to give a hand. The Representative on Tour, Pat Parker, was up in the flies in his shirt sleeves hauling away at the scenery, and down on the stage the amateur scene shifters were struggling across the stage holding on to a flat when the door flew open and they were carried up into the air by a great gust of wind. "I broke my glasses and the other chap put his elbow through his coat," said Bill Barsby.

In many towns members of the audience will come backstage in the interval or after the concert. Sometimes it is to ask advice from a player about an instrument, sometimes to say how much they have enjoyed a concert. And when the Orchestra can feel that it is welcome in a town then being on the "band wagon" has its brighter side and the travel stains, the railway cramp, the suitcase fever disappear and are forgotten.

(The soloist in the concerts at Palmerston North, on Saturday, March 23, and Hamilton, Wednesday, March 27, will be David Galbraith playing the Piano Concerto in F by Gershwin. At Auckland on Tuesday, March 26, the violinist Ricardo Odnoposoff will play Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto.)

Judges for Composers' Contest



THE judges in the composers' competition organised by the NZBS and APRA have been announced. They are Ernest Jenner (left), of Christchurch, and Dr Charles Nalden, Professor of Music at Auckland University College. Entrants are reminded that the competition closes at 12 noon on Friday, March 29.

the players, but the double basses and cellos, looking like Henry Moore obelisks in their wooden cases, and the larger brass instruments, are sent on by special transport. The double basses and cellos are always something of a worry. Once five of them were dashed into the hold of a ferry—three were smashed beyond repair, and the other two "have never been the same since." Once at Gisborne, after the truck had been loaded in the dark, the morning light high up on Whararata revealed the load hanging perilously to one side and a rumour quickly raced around that all the double basses had fallen off and been smashed. Besides travel worries the double-bass players once found that rats had eaten their strings when they left their instruments on stage at Invercar-

challenges for the arrangement of the staging—"macking up" as Bill Barsby calls it—and for the lighting. The acoustical differences call for a real effort by the players, especially in theatres, with their high flies. Of our main concert halls Dunedin's Town Hall is generally considered the best acoustically, with Wellington a close second, Christchurch third and Auckland (as Professor Bishop pointed out) a bad fourth. In Auckland the difference in reverberation between the empty and full hall is most pronounced—an undesirable factor in any concert hall.

The size of halls is also important. Wellington is about the right size, and here rapport between audience and orchestra is easily established. Correct lighting is a contributing factor, and

Opera Guide

DELIBES IN INDIA

DELIBES, best known for his ballet music *Coppélia*, wrote several operas, the best of which is *Lakme*. You may not know the opera, but you will most probably have heard at some time or other its very famous coloratura aria "The Bell Song." *Lakme* is set in India in the middle of the 19th century, and was inspired by the conflicts aroused by the British occupation of the country. It has been heard all over the world, is a standard work in the French repertoire, and has been translated into every European language.

Lakme is the daughter of a Brahmin priest, Nilikantha, and with her father she worships Brahma in a secret temple so as to avoid the repressive actions of the British. Nilikantha longs for deliverance from the British yoke and plots revenge. The first act is set in a temple garden full of exotic flowers, where the songs of the worshippers are soon heard in the background. Nilikantha goes and the English characters enter—Gerald and Frederick, two officers in the Indian Army; Ellen, the Governor's daughter, and Gerald's fiancée; Rose, Ellen's friend; and Miss Benson, the English governess. During this act, when the others have gone, Gerald meets Lakme, of whose great beauty he has already heard. They fall

in love and the act ends with Gerald hastening away to avoid being seen by Nilikantha.

The second act is set in a city square where traders cry their wares and sailors and soldiers mingle. Miss Benson has her watch purloined by a sepyo and a merchant tries to sell her an elixir of youth and beauty. Nilikantha enters with Lakme and asks his daughter to sing, hoping that her lover will betray himself. She sings the famous "Bell Song." Gerald reveals himself, and the lovers arrange to meet in a secret hut in the forest. Nilikantha knifes Gerald but his wound is not fatal.

In the final act Lakme is nursing Gerald in a forest hut which is surrounded with acacias, tulip trees and daturas. Here the lovers vow to be true but are interrupted by the arrival of Frederick, who urges Gerald to return to his regiment. Lakme realises she is about to lose him and takes a poisoned leaf. Not realising she is dying Gerald drinks a pledge with her from a sacred cup. Nilikantha finds their retreat in time to witness his daughter's death.

First produced in 1883, *Lakme* was originally an opéra-comique, and the action is at times advanced by spoken dialogue. This recording has one of the leading French coloraturas of the day, Mado Robin, as Lakme, the internationally-known Swiss tenor, Libero de Luca, as Gerald, and the chorus and orchestra of the Opéra-Comique, Paris (2YC, Sunday, March 31, 8.30 p.m.).