



LEFT: Michael Glinka—Homesickness led him to write music in Russian

the Russian peasant towards his Tsar, and the opera, successful from its first performance, has always been regarded with great affection. After the Communist Revolution this national work became something of an embarrassment. A story dealing with the Romanov Dynasty could no longer be tolerated, although the well-known music could hardly be altered. For many years nothing was done. Then in 1939 S. M. Gorodetsky produced a libretto which left the historic setting unchanged, but now focused the interest of the opera on the actual leaders of the national uprising against the Poles, instead of on the young Tsar. The name of the Tsar disappeared completely from the opera. This version is the one now performed in all Communist countries, and is the one produced by the National Opera, Belgrade, in the recording to be broadcast. The NZBS, in their presentation of the opera, have decided, however, to restore the original plot. As it does not affect the music in any way, this can easily be done.

Glinka uses many native Russian melodies in the work, and tries to contrast the characters of the two nations, Russia and Poland, by means of their national music. The brilliant festival in the second act is wholly Polish, and here his knowledge of Polish ballroom music serves him well. But his knowledge of Polish music seems limited to dance music. For when the Polish soldiers burst into Susanin's cottage and order him to act as their guide the strains of a stately polonaise can be heard; and when the soldiers have lost their way in the forest and the situation becomes increasingly tense, their danger and alarm is expressed in mazurka rhythm. These musical mannerisms do not, however, obscure the fact that *A Life for the Tsar* is of more than history book interest, as listeners will discover.

(Sunday, April 28, 7.0 p.m., all YCs.)

REEDY RIVER

IN contrast with grand opera, there is flourishing in Australia at present a kind of entertainment that seems to be found nowhere else in the world—a cross between a folk opera, a ballad opera and a musical play. Two of the most successful of these entertainments have been *Reedy River* and *Under the*

Coolibah Tree, both written by the Australian playwright Dick Diamond. They were staged in Sydney and performed by non-professional casts. Some of the songs from the first of these, *Reedy River*, can be heard in *Theatre of Music* from YAs, 3YZ and 4YZ on Saturday, April 27. Dick Diamond based *Reedy River* on some of the best of Australian folk songs. They are taken from the days when squatters, swaggers and bushmen thrived, and the campfire, the dance and the bar-room were natural places for singing. There were shearers' songs, songs about transportation, love songs and Australian versions of folk songs that originally came from overseas.

A member of the audience at *Reedy River*, Ken Hallam, described his reaction to the production in this way: "I suppose that if I had not been pestered by members of the cast who were friends of mine, I would never have seen *Reedy River*. It's funny how reticent most Australians (myself included, I must confess) feel about seeing and hearing the characters of our own country in epics about Australia. Australia to us often seems to lack the romance and colour of other countries, whose histories are forced with monotonous regularity down our throats, often in a very subtle and palatable way per medium of novels and films. That's how I felt about it all anyway. I was very wrong. . . For here in Dick Diamond's play and in the authentic Australian bush songs that wend their way through it as surely and calmly as *Reedy River* (if it really exists!) you will meet living people . . . squatters, swaggies, country schoolmarmes, shearers, and, of course, the eternal lovers. You will be carried by them to their campfires; to the country hop at the old schoolhouse, the *Reedy River* pub, and even into the shearing sheds. . ."

The songs that listeners will hear include "Click Go the Shears," perhaps the most famous of all Australian bush songs, which introduces the famous Bushwhacker's Band of lagerphone, bush bass, harmonica and guitar. Another favourite is "On the Banks of the Condamine," with its music restored by the composer Margaret Sutherland to words by Vance Palmer. It tells the familiar folk song story of the girl who must follow her lover, to the war or to sea; but here all she wants is to become a shearer. The last song in the selection will be a swagman's lament, "Reedy Lagoon."



"REEDY RIVER" revives the songs of campfire, dance-hall and bar-room. . .

OPERA GUIDE

A Life for the Tsar

IF, in the past, you have found Russian opera gloomy and forbidding, this month's YC opera broadcast of Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* will come as a surprise, for it is much lighter than the massive works of Moussorgsky or Rimsky-Korsakov, although it does share their liking for length. In Russia *A Life for the Tsar* is given the respect and worship due to it as the first truly Russian opera. Glinka's work brought to an end a long period of groping, of tentative attempts to found a native Russian opera, and it was later to be followed by a great national outburst of musical activity. Glinka (1804-57) was a wealthy amateur of music more gifted than his predecessors, who, after musical studies in his own country, set off on a voyage to Italy in 1830. Here he fell under the spell of Italian opera and tried to write music in the manner that was then all the rage. While lounging in the theatres and concert rooms of Italy listening to Italian singers he began to realise that his real place was back home in Russia. "Homesickness gradually led me to the idea of writing music in Russian," he wrote.

Eventually he returned to Russia, where he set about finding a story that appealed to him. In 1835, shortly after his marriage, he set about composing a patriotic Russian plot.

His choice of plot fell on an incident supposed to have happened during the Polish invasion of Russia in 1611-13. In the story the Poles who have been supporting the claims of their own candidate for the Russian throne form a conspiracy against the life of the young Romanov Tsar, who already occupies it on behalf of the Russians. A Polish Army Corps is despatched to Moscow, supposedly on a peaceful mission, but in reality to carry out their own sinister designs. On the march they enter the hut of a loyal peasant, Ivan Susanin, and compel his services as a guide. Susanin suspects their treachery and sends his adopted son, the orphan Vanya, to warn the Tsar of his danger. In order to gain time Ivan Susanin misleads the Poles in the depths of the forest only to fall a victim to their vengeance when they discover the trick that has been played upon them.

Ivan Susanin became in Russia the very embodiment of the loyalty felt by