

Fresh Breeze from Wellington

By SARAH CAMPION

ONE of the most remarkable things we experienced in Auckland's ninth Festival was a fresh and bracing breeze from Wellington. This came with Bruce Mason's production of *The Medium*—an opera of formidable dramatic intensity which could never be uninteresting even in the most inept hands (or so one would suppose); but which was here quite brilliantly produced. The general opinion among the Auckland audience on the afternoon I went, was that no one in our city could have done it half as well: the second feeling was one of gratitude, at having Wellington to draw upon for such treats: and the third was a more typically native attitude, a Polynesian one: "Oh, well! obviously the climate has something to do with it, we can't achieve that sort of thing in our muggy air."

Probably quite true: we couldn't. The Auckland air does not make you feel full of the zest of living, nor does it, like the Wellington variety, nag at you with such unpleasant persistence that in desperation you go out and do something violently active. (An air of violence, superbly controlled violence, was one of the most notable things about this production of Menotti's opera.) In fact, after more than five years' residence, I would give my ears for the ruthless, clean and biting east wind which whistled over my childhood. I'd probably lose them in it, too, unaccustomed as they are by now to such healthful rigours.

But, if east winds from the Urals across the Fen country are out of the question, all the more reason to be grateful for such a stimulating blast of air as Wellington sent up. It almost makes one believe in festivals, after all. That is an odd thing about post-Festival Auckland life: that, added to our

perennial controversies about this or that, we have now another hardy annual starting up: "Is a festival worthwhile?" This, in the only New Zealand city which has begun to make a habit of such get-togethers, and which will be celebrating its tenth in less than a year's time, strikes me as disturbing.

Like other importees—Beauty Queen Contests, Carnivals on Ice and so forth—the festival idea seems to have become a trifle blurred in transit. For one thing, I heard more than one Whangarei or Hamilton resident moan that he wished he could get to Auckland's, but it was too far. This, when you think of the distance of London from Edinburgh, or for that matter, from Bayreuth or Salzburg, Venice or Cannes, is very odd. New Zealanders, like Australians, are not generally dismayed by mere distance. It must be that the idea of making a festival an occasion for shedding everyday life and journeying as far as may be to live another kind of life for a week or a fortnight, just hasn't caught on. The Auckland Festival at least seems here to stay, but gutted of its *raison d'être*: as shorn of real compelling significance as Mardi Gras in Little Rock, Arkansas (if Little Rock has a Mardi Gras—I'm sure it wouldn't do without one.)

Perhaps our festival needs a Personality. One man (dare I suggest that it might, alternatively, be one woman?) who is quite certain that such a cultural spree is what the city needs and must have, once a year; and is prepared, for the rest of the year, to sell the notion to the public. Someone who would treat the idea of a festival as a sort of Holy Grail, and, Parsifal-like,



BRUCE MASON

forge onwards irrespective of the formidable difficulties in the way. Unless and until Auckland finds such a one—or such a one finds Auckland—I fear our yearly cultural picnic will continue uneasily, to be just that.

SLUMS are not supposed to be an integral part of New Zealand life, but in my experience you only have to go out into the healthy countryside to find as many as the most sordid-minded could wish for. My eight-year-old and I, tired of a whole year in Auckland, decided to go bush for the May holidays; and found ourselves up to the eyes in squalor.

It was an unnerving experience at first, but one soon came to accept it. At the end of 10 days or so I was perfectly inured to doing without two brand-new hot-water systems, neither of which worked or, as far as I could find out, ever had worked since installation. I was already instinctively ducking my head as I left the kitchen on the way to the outside door, my subconscious being perfectly well aware by now that if the head wasn't ducked it would get hit in the eye by a brace of bleeding pheasants slung casually from a rafter, or a still-warm rabbit dripping ruby drops on to the dirty boards beneath. After a week, I don't think I was once foolish enough to expect the tap over the kitchen sink to yield water: only a bronchial cough came from it, and a flake of iron rust, if this were one of its *exciting* days. All the water needed in the kitchen was fetched in a couple of home-made billies. Anchor Milk and somebody's plum jam from the otherwise unused bathroom along the passage. Nor did I expect water to flow into the wash tub in the washhouse, when I turned *that* on. No! if you wanted any here you connected a length of rubber hose which leaked to the tottering tap over the crumbling copper, it wasn't long enough to reach the target and therefore drenched you, or the floor if you took your eye off it for a single instant.

Do I need to say that no single window closed properly, or, when closed, stayed closed, in this establishment? Or that rain came in not only from leaks in the roof, but also under the door, and down the chimney, not enough attention having been given to such trivial matters, when the house was first home-built? I hardly need to mention either the frustration of living with a series of useless electrical installations: once during the fortnight, when the radio, the electric jug, the iron, and the refrigerator were all needed at the same time, the power was off. Men were working "down the line"; and, having forgotten to tell us we were disconnected, they were foolishly disconcerted at being served cocoa made with luke-warm water, the jug's sole residue, when they came in rosiely expecting an afternoon smoko. For four days thereafter we were liable to be shut off at any moment: when the house tank went dry, as it did on the second of these days, the pump which jogged more water uphill from the big concrete tank was, naturally, not working. However, it started to rain that very afternoon: it's astonishing how much water you can collect in a couple of kerosene tins under the downspout of a Northland home—and how thoroughly you can use it, too.

Of course, the housewife had long ago lost heart, and dirt lay in interesting strata everywhere. What's the use of a vacuum cleaner, if half the time you can't use it? What's the use of sweeping floors, when the many outside doors are so badly hung as to admit howling draughts, blowing away your sweepings, almost blowing the dustpan out of your hand, as you stoop to collect the harvest? What's the use of washing a floor, when several very large men, in rubber boots, a raggle-taggle of small boys, two dripping dogs, and a duck, are sure to be streaming across it a few minutes later: What's the use of frequent launderings, when there's no airing cupboard to dry the linen in the equally frequent wets? We all shared the hearth with a ramshackle clothes horse every evening, but even this practice, though luxuriously steamy, didn't do the trick. I once essayed a largish wash: the rain started as I heaved the

(continued on next page)

N.Z. LISTENER, JUNE 28, 1957.

(Solution to No. 854)

B	A	T	O	N		A	S	H	A	M	E	D
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Clues Across

- Are they the despair of young American mothers? (7).
- In full, it's odd, but beheaded it's just the reverse (5).
- Is this the catch if you confuse your tutor? (5).
- Setting an example of crooked dealing (7).
- In spite of its title, this play is not to be sneezed at (3, 5).
- In this place he precedes the Sapphires (4).
- You may find them on some birds and some seals (6).
- This dance takes only a minute (6).
- And 19. This bird has a change of luck, and perhaps this is why it turns out to be a 5 down (4, 8).

"THE LISTENER" CROSSWORD

- A type of bridge requiring caution? (7).
- "O, it came o'er my ear, like the sweet south, That breathes upon a bank of violets, Stealing, and giving —" ("Twelfth Night," Act 1, Scene 1) (5).
- She appears in a farewell engagement (5).
- Love affair in Cremona (7).
- See 1 down.
- His fight with the 21 down is legendary (7).
- He painted "The Fighting Temeraire" (6).
- The government of the public house? (5).
- So Reg has become quite a pest! (5).
- See 15 down (5).

No. 855 (Constructed by R.W.H.)

Clues Down

- 1 and 13. One result of drinking schnapps? (5, 7).
- It could be annoyed if upset, but actually it's very soothing (7).
- A request to take one's meals in the doorway? (8).
- "Just for a handful of — he left us" (Browning) (6).
- Does he think the pen is mightier than the sword? (4).
- This material is nothing more than a twisted veil (5).
- "Such sweet — more taketh me Than all th' adulteries of art" (Ben Jonson) (7).
- Where you may expect ill-treatment? (8).

