



N.P.S. photograph

# Menotti's Iron Curtain Opera

"Tell me, Secretary, tell me . . . is there anyone behind those doors to whom the heart can still be explained? . . . Explain to the Consul—explain that the web of my life has worn down to one single thread, and the hands of the clock glitter like knives . . ."

"Did you bring your birth certificate, health certificate, and your vaccination affidavit, statement from the bank, passport, three photographs? . . . Your name is a number, your story's a case, your need a request. Your hopes will be filed. . . Fill up these forms. . . Come back next week. . ."

**GIAN-CARLO MENOTTI'S** *The Consul*, will have its first New Zealand stage performance by the New Zealand Opera Company in Wellington on August 16. This is a modern opera in every sense, but more especially in its grim comment on the age we live in. Menotti, both composer and librettist, weaves his music and story to give a picture of the Iron Curtain's fringe, where distraught men and women plead for visas to reach another land supposedly free. The Consul, never seen, is the symbol of red tape, delay and hope deferred; though torture and death are the issue, forms must be filled, rejected, filled out again, until all the humanity of the applicants is degraded to a cypher and a stamp.

The composer found the inspiration for this, his first full three-act opera, when reading about a refugee who committed suicide when she was turned down for a visa. Said Menotti: "I knew we must have some bureaucracy . . . but I cannot abide little people who, given a little power, wield it inflexibly and cruelly."

The chief characters in *The Consul* are John Sorel, a resistance leader; his mother, his child, and Magda his wife, who all suffer through John's perpetual war with the secret police. When her husband is at last hounded out of the unnamed country by the latter, Magda applies to the consulate for a visa so that she can join him. And there she finds one of the "little people"—the Consul's secretary, with her inhuman chant, "Your hopes will be filed. . . Come back next week." Frustrated by red tape and dogged by the secret police, Magda finally kills herself.

This first stage performance of an important modern work in New Zealand has been tackled by the New Zealand Opera Company with the assistance of the New Zealand Players, who are providing production, design, and technical equipment. Talking to Richard Campion, who will produce *The Consul*, *The Listener* found him intrigued with this departure from the work he has done in the past.

"This is the first time I have worked on opera," he told us, "and I find it very interesting, particularly working with James Robertson in his capacity as musical director of the company."

"This is a real step forward to the National Theatre conception, where opera, ballet and drama will all have their part. The New Zealand Players have taken the lead with drama and are now well established, the New Zealand Opera Company is fast getting established. *The Consul* offers us an

opportunity to get together and do something that neither company could very well do separately."

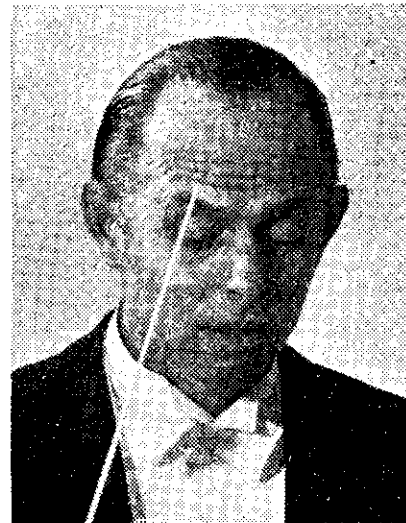
Since *The Consul* made equal use of music, acting, singing, lighting, and so on, one needed to balance everything carefully to persuade the audience of the reality of the situation, said Mr Campion. Not that they would need much persuasion, he added. "After Hungary especially, people know that the situation is true, and that the same situation confronts people wherever there is a tyrannical government."

To get a balance between the music and the acting, the singers would have to concentrate both on the conductor and on what could be called the poetic reality of the scene, said Mr Campion.

Some of the cast had valuable previous experience. Vincente Major, who plays Magda, is not purely a concert singer, but has a background of acting through doing musical comedy. Mona Ross as the Secretary understudied this part under Menotti in England. Donald Munro (John Sorel), Alice Graham (the Mother), Antony Vercoe (the Secret Agent), Mary Langford (Anna Gomez), Terence Finnegan (the Magician) and Martin Wilson (Mr Kofber), have all had previous experience of the special demands of Menotti's intimate operas. Others taking part are Beryl Dalley



RICHARD CAMPION



**JAMES ROBERTSON**, who will conduct the performance of "The Consul" and, at top of page, some of the soloists. From left, Corinne Bridge, Mona Ross, Antony Vercoe, Alice Graham, Beryl Dalley, Donald Munro.

(soprano), as the Foreign Woman, Corinne Bridge (contralto) as Vera Boronel, and Anthony Larsen (baritone) as Assan, and members of the National Orchestra conducted by James Robertson.

(All YCs, Saturday, August 17.)

## FROM TAKAHE TO RICHARD FARRELL

**NEW ZEALAND** certainly provides the BBC with variety—and not variety ha-ha, as Noel Coward might have phrased it. In recent weeks British listeners and viewers have had the varied attractions of what was billed as "the takahe, a nearly extinct bird of New Zealand," the pianist Richard Farrell, the economist F. W. Holmes, from Victoria University College, and the baritone Denis Dowling.

The takahe made its bow in a television series in which Peter Scott, who visited the Dominion at the beginning of the year, introduced viewers to far-away places with strange-sounding names and even stranger creatures.

Also on TV, Richard Farrell was the soloist in a Sunday afternoon concert with the Philharmonia Orchestra. "At 30 he is regarded by critics as an artist of exceptional talent," stated the BBC programme details sent to all United Kingdom newspapers.

The only musician in his family, Richard Farrell gave his first broadcast at the age of four, and first concert performance at seven. When he was not much older he composed a lament on the death of Archbishop Redwood. His later musical training was in Australia and the United States.

The senior lecturer in economics at Wellington took part in a discussion on "Farmers on the Free Trade Area," which was broadcast twice on the Third Programme. Others taking part were a former president of the Agricultural Economics Society and a Dane, who is head of the Department of Agricultural Economics at Nottingham University. While putting the official New Zealand attitude to the European Common Market plan, Mr Holmes said that he did not completely share it.

### Opera the Hard Way

Denis Dowling, the Dominion-born singer who has been acclaimed in leading roles at Sadler's Wells and BBC operas, took the title part in *Blind Rattery*, a new opera commissioned by BBC television and based on Donn Byrne's romantic novel. His singing was approved by leading musical critics, who also enjoyed the tuneful music, so much easier to sing than many modern operas.

The music was composed the hard way by Joan Trimble, well known in Britain as a pianist, but less well known as the busy wife of a London doctor. With three children and a time-taking extra job as her husband's receptionist and telephonist, she had to admit "it



RICHARD FARRELL

was a slog." A sound recording of the opera is being made for overseas broadcasting services.

—J. W. GOODWIN (London)

**N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 9, 1957.**