

Stage and Screen Celebrities in New BBC "World Theatre"

CAN plays that are great from the literary point of view also be great fun and good listening? More than six years ago BBC *World Theatre* set out to prove that they could. Since 1947 New Zealand listeners have been able to hear some of these plays, and next week a new series will start from YC stations.

Many people who have heard of *Everyman* but have never experienced it tend to label it as "quaint" and to think that any play in the English language as it was in the 15th Century must be difficult or impossible to understand. But *Everyman* isn't at all like that. Half allegory and half plain tale, it is the story of Every Man, as he journeys through life to the grave, and also makes another, more homely journey, from market-place to home, from home to church, and thence to "a desolate place." The English author of this most famous of English morality plays is unknown, and many authorities hold that it is a translation of the Dutch *Elckerlijck*. If it is, it is an inspired

one, with the feeling of an original masterpiece.

Raymond Raikes, who prepared and produced the *World Theatre* version, compiled his script from the four extant texts of the play, and music by John Hotchkis (who frequently collaborates with Raymond Raikes) is used extensively throughout to identify the characters. The production aims at swiftly establishing for the listener something approaching the play's original setting: in the market square, on a raised platform, with the church next door and the action moving smoothly inside the church when Knowledge leads *Everyman* to meet Confession "in the house of salvation." Godfrey Kenton plays *Everyman*, and others in the cast include Carleton Hobbs, Deryck Guyler, Ralph Truman, Vivienne Chatterton and Hermione Hannen. The Angel is sung by Alfred Deller with the BBC Chorus and Orchestra.

Everyman will be the first play heard in the new *World Theatre* series. Preceded at 6.0 p.m. by an introductory talk by Allona Priestley, it will be heard from 4YC on Wednesday, April

30, at 8.0 p.m. and on Friday, May 2, Mrs. Priestley's talk will be heard from 2YC at 8.25 p.m., and the play will be broadcast from this station next day at 7.30 p.m. Stations 1YC and 3YC will broadcast *Everyman* in the week starting May 12. After their *Everyman* broadcasts, these four stations will broadcast a *World Theatre* play each week.

The main Stratford-upon-Avon contribution to the Festival of Britain was the production of four of Shakespeare's historical plays. The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Company opened this pageant of monarchy with Michael Redgrave as King Richard and Harry Andrews as Bolingbroke in *Richard II*, produced by Anthony Quayle. An adaptation of this production by Peter Watts will be the second play in the new *World Theatre* series. Discussing this "study of gentle failure and of tough success" in which Bolingbroke drives Richard from his throne, Ivor Brown wrote in the *Radio Times* that the actor playing the king has two Richards to portray, "the failure with the sceptre and the triumphant artist in fancy and in phrase." Mr. Brown found Michael Redgrave's performance on the first night at Stratford admirable in both. "He first arouses our contempt for the careless petulant monarch and then our compassion for the lonely prisoner with only his restless imagination to lighten the darkness of his imprisonment and the poignancy of his doom." Others in the cast include Hugh Griffith as John of Gaunt, Heather Stannard as the Queen, William Fox and Michael Gwynn.

Richard II is followed by *Henry VIII*, described by R. D. Smith, who adapted and produced it, as "a good play dogged by ill-luck." He wrote, in the *Radio Times*: "In 1613, the year after it was written, its property cannon caused the Globe Theatre to burn down; and 'one man had his breeches set on fire, that would perhaps have broiled him, if he had not by the benefit of a prudent wit put it out with bottle ale.' Later, the critics and scholars got to work. . . Since then Shakespeare has vindicated himself by the success of *Henry VIII* on the stage." Like the other histories, *Henry VIII* is a study in politics. It exposes the dog-eat-dog squabbles of the feudal lords, the rise to power of the new money men, the power of Rome even as it wanes with the Reformation, the horror of anarchy and disorder, and the need for a stable government in the hands of a strong king. In the *World Theatre* production Bruce Belfrage plays the king, Catherine Lacey is Queen Katherine, Geoffrey Wincott is Wolsey, and Derek Birch is Buckingham. The music was composed by Elisabeth Lutyens.

Opportunities of hearing *Measure for Measure* are rare enough to give added interest to the *World Theatre* production by E. A. Harding. A comedy so-called, it contains much writing up to Shakespeare's highest tragic standard. Generations of scholars and producers have been puzzled by this work which, unlike the tragedies, has no clear-cut theme and is built around no single dominant character. Both the Duke and Angelo have important places, but for most of the time we do not see events through the Duke's eyes, while Angelo



CLAIRE BLOOM, who is to be the feminine lead in Chaplin's new film "Limelight," plays Isabella in the *World Theatre* "Measure for Measure"

is a repellent character who does not win the sympathy we give to, say, Macbeth. As for Isabella, our main interest lies in her choice between letting her brother die and yielding to the lust of a man she hates. But her conflict is resolved half-way through the play. In the BBC production the cast includes Laidman Browne as the Duke, Stephen Murray as Angelo and Claire Bloom as Isabella.

There's no need to give listeners any introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, that "most succulent feast of unreason ever served" set in "a wood near Athens." Howard Marion-Crawford plays Shakespeare's sublime clown, Bottom, and other leading parts are taken by Frederick Allen and John Hart as Oberon and Titania, and Brewster Mason and Molly Rankin as Theseus and Hippolyta. Peter Watts produces and Mendelssohn's incidental music is played by the BBC Midland Light Orchestra.

Automatic Casting

Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which has been called one of the six finest comedies in the English language, was adapted and produced by Peter Watts as one of the special *World Theatre* broadcasts for the Festival of Britain. The players seemed to pick themselves. Somehow or other John Gielgud, who was in South Africa, heard of the impending production, and cabled Peter Watts that he'd be delighted to play John Worthing. After that Dame Edith Evans (as Lady Bracknell), Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies (as the Honourable Gwendolen Fairfax) and Angela Baddeley (as Cecily Cardew) just happened. They had all been together before with Gielgud in other performances of the play, and as one British radio critic wrote, "the obvious gusto of the distinguished cast and their obvious enjoyment of this supremely actable play came over to the listener, and by virtue of their impeccable speaking of the lines, none of the delicious paradoxes was lost."

All of these plays will be introduced by talks specially recorded by the NZBS. They are given by Joan Stevens (*Richard II*), Patricia Godsiff (*King Henry VIII*), M. K. Joseph (*Measure for Measure*), Pippa Robbins (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), and John Thomson (*The Importance of Being Earnest*).



RALPH TRUMAN

JOHN GIELGUD

MICHAEL REDGRAVE

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point, and one which pollsters in America learned bitterly at the last Presidential elections—it is useless to attempt to predict public taste. In the first two *Hit Parades* from 2YA, "Between Two Trees" did not even make a showing, but for no apparent reason at all it jumped into second place on the third. The same might be said of "Kentucky Waltz," which ran into fourth place on the third session without even a sign before of its existence in the public awareness.

Local Girl Makes Good

The question how true to public taste this *New Zealand Hit Parade* is, was answered by Peter Downes when he said that "it's as authentic as we can make it. It's true locally for the districts covered by the five stations who send their results to us, and in that respect it does show something of the trend throughout New Zealand." The truth of this statement is perhaps most clearly seen in the high scoring of "Between Two Trees." An American song, it has pushed out many other tunes which the American public placed far above it in their own hit parades—but more important is the fact that the record which has won such popularity in this country is a local product, being recorded in Auckland and featuring the "voices" (via intricate control room tactics) of

the Auckland vocalist Esme Stephens and the guitars of Buddy Kaine. New Zealanders then, would seem to know what they like, and although America provides them with most of their staple diet they recognise promising local talent when it appears. Some people might be inclined to assert that some of the local productions improve on the American versions if "Between Two Trees" is a fair indication of New Zealand's own popular artistry.

Loyalty to local talent may not, however, be the only reason for the popularity of this record. The song's adherence to the style most in vogue at present may explain its rise to the top. Six of the tunes on the third *Hit Parade* deal with the inevitable love theme, and five of them treat the subject with a deep sigh—the "throb" style. The sad love theme is perhaps even more popular with the British than with the Americans, but certainly New Zealand voters show a liking for the softly sobbed, hand on heart story of a beautiful, if tearful, romance. "Between Two Trees" fills the bill in this respect, as does first-place tune "Tulips and Heather" and fourth place "Kentucky Waltz," and offers also a popular "one-voice duet" styling. But as *New Zealand Hit Parade* continues its progress from hit to hit, this country's audiences do show signs of developing a new consciousness of their own likes and dislikes.