

Another Ngaio Marsh Thriller for Listeners

WHEN *The Listener* saw Ngaio Marsh on her way through Wellington not long ago, she had just finished adapting *Othello* for broadcasting by the Stratford-upon-Avon Company and was carrying in her brief case a copy of her book *First Night* which she was cutting for a series of broadcast readings commissioned by the NZBS. How, we asked her when she showed us a copy of the book with many heavily scored pages, did she go about a job of this sort?

The aim in this case, Miss Marsh said, was to reduce the work to something like 20 readings of 10 minutes each. Actually she had already cut the book once before, for serialisation in an American monthly, but she was not making use of that adaptation and this time was cutting quite differently. For one thing, American magazines considered that their readers would not remember from month to month more than a certain number of characters, and so the cast in the original work had been very much reduced. The version to be broadcast from NZBS stations would be heard daily, listeners should not have much difficulty in remembering the characters, and so in the radio version the cast had been virtually left as it was. However, the book was being cut to less than half its bulk as written, and this meant that all the "writing" and all the "fancy touches" had gone. "It was a case of everything coming out that wasn't absolutely essential to the plot," Miss Marsh said. "It's just down to the bare bones of the story." And as a glance through the

book showed, this has been accomplished by cuts of all kinds, from a few lines here and there to pages at a time. This is the second book Miss Marsh has adapted for the NZBS. She cut *Surfeit of Lampreys* several years ago.

First Night, as its name suggests, is about the theatre, but as readers of Miss Marsh's books will know, it's not the first time she has written a thriller with theatrical associations. *Enter a Murderer*, *Vintage Murder* and *Final Curtain* all had a theatrical flavour of one kind or another. But *First Night* was written when Miss Marsh was working very hard in the theatre, getting ready for the tour of her Commonwealth Theatre Company. "It was begun in New Zealand three years ago and published two years ago in London," she said. Strangely enough its publication coincided with an important first night—the opening of the Commonwealth players' Sydney season.

Assuming that Miss Marsh had been working on a new book we asked her what it was about. Yes, she had finished a new novel about three months ago, she said. It was about the narcotics trade and was set in the south of France. She had called it *Triptych of Spinsters* which she thought—"Don't you agree?"—was rather a good title, but she was afraid her publisher might think that "a bit highbrow" and had provided as an alternative *Spinsters in the Sun*.

"I think my books are getting progressively more like novels and less like thrillers," Miss Marsh said. "In this new one the actual fatality occurs something like half-way through. I read up quite a lot about the trade in narcotics, League of Nations reports and that sort of thing, and became very interested." She felt

it was such a vital matter that it apparently influenced her approach to the book. While this is a detective novel, it is, she says, her biggest departure from a straightout detective theme. Incidentally, her publisher thinks it the best book she has written.

Did she think she would ever write a novel, as distinct from a detective novel? "It's very difficult to break away from the detective novel once you've become established," she said. "If I wrote a novel the people who don't read thrillers wouldn't read it, and those who do would be furious because it wasn't one. It would, of course, be possible to do it under another name as I believe Agatha Christie has done. I do hope I get round to it."

When we asked Miss Marsh about her radio adaptation of *Othello* she explained that it wasn't an adaptation in the usual sense. The production was originally planned to run for about an hour and three-quarters. Anthony Quayle considered that cut to this extent the play would be only a potted *Othello*, which would ruin it. So Miss Marsh



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was asked to write an introductory essay followed by a narrative linking the great scenes. As *Listener* readers will know Anthony Quayle thinks the script "a very good one."

"I thought it was rather a cheek for me to do the job for this company, but it was a most interesting experience which I enjoyed immensely," said Miss Marsh. "They're an awfully nice crowd to work with, real enthusiasts, in love with what they're doing. You'd hardly recognise New Zealand audiences up there," she said, referring to the company's Auckland season. "They cheer and stamp—it's most exciting."

Miss Marsh considers the visit of the Stratford-upon-Avon company easily the most important theatrical event that has happened to us. "They are 'tops' in England, and under Anthony Quayle they have soared to the top," she said. "Anthony Quayle thinks it important that the lifelines between England and New Zealand should be maintained. He really is an Elizabethan himself. He has the spirit of the first Elizabethan age—he's tough, masculine and a glutton for work."

Read by Ngaio Marsh herself, *First Night* will probably be broadcast for the first time about the middle of the year and in due course will be heard from stations all over the country. Her adaptation of *Othello* has already been heard from 2YC and 4YC and will be broadcast from 1YZ at 2.0 p.m. this Sunday (April 12) and 3YC at 9.45 p.m. on Saturday, April 18 (repeating from 3YA the following day). Starting in the week beginning April 20, it will be heard at roughly weekly intervals from 1XN, 3YZ, 2XP, 4YZ, 1YC, 3XC, 2YZ, 2XN, 2XG, 2XA and 1XH.

VIOLINIST INTO VIOLIST

ROBERT PIKLER, well known to musical audiences as a violinist, will shortly begin his fifth tour of New Zealand, this time with the viola. Formerly leader of the Musica Viva Chamber Players, Mr. Pikler exchanged the violin for the viola in 1951. Since then he has been principal violist in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

In the course of a concentrated 18-day tour Robert Pikler will appear twice with the National Orchestra, and, together with the pianist Owen Jensen, will give five public recitals and six studio broadcasts.

At the first National Orchestra subscription concert in Wellington on April 14, Mr. Pikler will perform the Concerto arranged by Lionel Tertis from Haydn's Concerto for 'Cello and Orchestra. This work has been described as "the essence of the 18th Century; not dispassionate, but transcending passion; decorative, but something more than superficial; often vivacious, but never unrestrained." It is largely in the style of the modern instrumental concerto, but retains elements of the older concerto grosso.

At Auckland's first orchestral concert of the new season, on April 21, Mr. Pikler will perform Bartok's Concerto. This was originally commissioned by William Primrose, the celebrated Scottish violist, and was considered by Bartok

himself to be a virtuoso work. Before the work was completed, Bartok died, leaving "a mass of tangled sketches" which it remained for Tibor Serly to piece together. The concerto is said to contain a note of despondency and of renunciation which may indicate that Bartok knew it to be his swan-song.

Other major works Mr. Pikler will perform during his tour are Hindemith's Violin Sonata, Delius's Sonata No. 2 for

Violin and Piano, arranged for Viola by Tertis, and Brahms's Sonata in F Minor, a clarinet sonata which Brahms himself arranged for viola.

Mr. Pikler's tour, which was arranged by the N.Z. Federation of Chamber Music Societies in collaboration with the NZBS, will include recitals at Hamilton on April 18, Wellington on April 23, Solway College, Masterton, on April 24, Christchurch on April 27 and Nelson on April 30. There will be studio broadcasts from 1XH on April 19, 1YC on April 20, 2YC on April 22 and 25, 3YC on April 28 and 1XN on May 1.



OWEN JENSEN

Sparrow Pictures



ROBERT PIKLER