



IN 12 short weeks Anthony Quayle established himself among us as a man with something to say about the theatre and the undisputed right to say it. One of the things he said most often was that in Richard Campion's New Zealand Players we have a professional theatre that is worth supporting.

This was not idle enthusiasm and not merely a generous gesture from one man of the theatre to another. Mr. Quayle found time, in the midst of winding up his own tour, to see the New Zealand Players at work. Watching the players in rehearsal, chatting with them over morning tea, he had some opportunity to judge their quality. With the costume sketches for *The Young Elizabeth* he was delighted. "These are very good," he said to the designer Raymond Boyce. "They look as if they have been worn and they give an indication of character."

But what impressed me most as I lingered on the outskirts of the hub-bub about the great man, was what he had to say about our New Zealand audiences. Playing to packed houses, to people who had travelled long distances to see the Stratford plays, he had discovered our national hunger for good theatre.

"The response is there," he told me. "But people must realise that good theatre is a mutual affair between the actors and the audience. It's no good standing back waiting to see how this company shapes. If you want good theatre you must go to the theatre. If you don't go, how can you decide what is good and what is bad?"

This was, I suggested, a brave venture. "Very brave. The overhead on a long tour like this one is tremendous. But I haven't the slightest doubt about what the company has to offer." As I left him murmuring enthusiastically

over a set-model for *The Young Elizabeth*, I looked round the company itself and its headquarters. The Players are housed in some deserted army huts above the Wellington Winter Show Building. There, in splendid isolation, the actors can give full voice to their lines without disturbing anyone. The rehearsal room is large, with a large fireplace which attracts the actors when they are off-stage.

The acting space for both plays is clearly lined-in on the floor, and the rostra in place. The room already has a character of its own with sketches round the walls, and books on the Victorian and Tudor periods lying about. As if all this were not enough to set the mood for the most serious-minded actor, the rehearsal for *The Young Elizabeth* began with exercises in the kind of movement and stance required when men wore doublet and hose and women submitted to the discipline of the farthingale.

Rilla Stephens, just returned from two years in the Old Vic School, demonstrated for the rest. "Don't creep round," she said. "Feel as if the rest of the Elizabethan court is looking at you. . . ." And so the limbering-up went on as the actors swung into the deliberate stateliness of a pavane.

To the Campions, to Rilla Stephens and Raymond Boyce, who all trained at the Old Vic, this serious approach comes very easily, and it is one of the things Anthony Quayle remarked on: that it is unique for as many as four graduates of the school to be pooling what they learned there. We shall be seeing the direct result of their intensive training under such craftsmen of the English theatre as Glen Byam Shaw and Michael St. Denis.

Every member of the company seemed eager for the tour to begin. But however exhilarated the players are by the prospect before them they have

obviously given up a certain amount of security. Several of them have joined the company from the Broadcasting Service: John Gordon, from the microphone at 1YA, John Carson-Parker and Michael Cotterill, from Productions, and for this first tour Bernard Kearns has leave of absence from 3YA.

When I went out a second time the props, the sets and the costumes were in that exciting stage when the designer's intention begins to take shape. All these things come into the province of the Stage Director, Ken Southgate, who took me up the hill to find the Wardrobe Mistress, Mrs. Marchant, among a flurry of power machines, boxes of whalebone and yards of elastic, fit-

ting Gay Dean, of Auckland, for her role as Georgiana Tidman in *Dandy Dick*. Raymond Boyce arrived to give his expert opinion on the Victorian line she was striving for. He showed me the bolts of fabric, mostly woollen, which he had found in Wellington warehouses. "All the materials will be lined with canvas, calico or tailor's wadding," he said, "and all those padded linings are to give character and line to the Tudor costumes."

We went together to the next workshop where the canvas-covered flats for *The Young Elizabeth* lay stacked ready for painting. The props room was crowded with ferns and aspidistras made from cane and tar paper. I asked the designer whether it was easy to find Victorian bric-a-brac here.

"No," he said. "I was surprised. I'm looking right now for a sofa and chairs for *Dandy Dick*. It looks as if a lot of Victorian relics are not yet in auction-room circulation. I only hope people aren't busy burning the very things the theatre could use."

"What about stage jewellery?" "We're luckier there. A jewellery manufacturer in Wellington has been most generous to us and we're having some pieces made up. We are also using some ceramic jewellery that was fired at the Stephens Potteries in Dunedin. It has great possibilities because it's so heavy and rich-looking."

I left Raymond Boyce working on some details of the set for *Dandy Dick*. This Pinero farce presents an excellent contrast to *The Young Elizabeth* in period and in style. Both plays have been carefully chosen to attract a wide audience, a family audience, to the theatre.

Richard Campion has shown excellent judgment in building his company. He has called on the advice of people who have worked long and hard to establish a National Theatre in this country. Every scheme for the National Theatre has collapsed before the hurdle of finance, but now at last we have a professional company broadly-based and nation-wide in its scope, that is not saddled with state supervision. Since the first plans were announced six months ago, interest has quickened all over the

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THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE: Anthony Quayle with Richard Campion and members of the New Zealand Players Company