Fairy Tale Opera Role "Just Happened"

77HAT a night it was for Irmelin! She spent all afternoon sitting on her bed in an old blue dressing gown reading a detective story called "Flowers for the Judge." Then she was turned into a fairy princess by a wave of Sir Thomas Beecham's batonand lo, there were flowers in her dressing foom for Irmelin.

There was something of a fairy tale about the way she came to play the title role in Delius's fairy tale opera which has waited 60 years for its first performance.

Twenty-seven-year-old Edna Graham came from New Zealand on a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music. Since Carl Rosa's last opera tour a



EDNA GRAHAM "A soprano of rare sweetness"

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(Solution to No. 646)

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LISTENERS

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4. Samuel Pepys, for instance,

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Clues Across

1. The doctor has his own Scotch, ap-

9. Behead a small hound to get the

10. Capable, even without the headgear.

form of the Queen's title.

parently to drink it to the last drop.

ACRIMONY

RUBICON

8. One's art (anag.).

13. Danger (anag.).

15. Tendencies.

18. Astonishes.

19. Daily fruit?

bird.

S TA LEMATE

ARGOT

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IN "The Listener" of April 24 we published a report from London on Sir Thomas Beecham's plan to present the Delius opera "Irmelin" at Oxford in May, and his selection of the Christchurch soprano Edna Graham for the title role. Here now is a report on the performance. airmailed by J. W. GOODWIN

year ago she has been teaching music to kindergarten children of five and seven. They had been used to nursery rhymes: she had been used to music-'so I shoved them on to Brahms.'

One day her agent telephoned: "Sir Thomas Beecham wants you to go and sing for him at his home on Tuesday." Every Tuesday for weeks Miss Graham went to sing for the great conductor and was shown out with the promise: "You'll hear from me again."

She did, and was handed the score for "Irmelin."

"Nobody ever asked me if I wanted to sing this opera," she reflected. "It just happened." And now she has been booked to sing at Glyndebourne this summer.

Surprise for Composer

According to one study of Delius. written during his lifetime, a performance of this opera "was never seriously contemplated by the composer." His haughty shade may therefore be surprised and, it is hoped, grateful.

For the singers, however, this was a disadvantage, because the music critics have all been more interested in the music and the libretto than in the performance. The Times critic wrote that the singing of the two principals, Edna Graham and Thomas Round, was well matched and "was exactly the sort required, light, smooth,

Birmingham Post said she was a soprano of rare purity and sweetness.

Neville Cardus, in the Manchester Guardian, was, appropriately, more guarded. The singing was adequate and often pleasing, he commented but in all the leading voices he detected a lack of purity of tone and delicate inflection of phrase.

Conceived by Delius between his 28th and 30th birthdays, the plot is childishly simple and his libretto often exceedingly naive and always undramatic. It is music or nothing, a flowing current of sensuous melody which expresses the fragility of young love and the fading beauty of the world.

Irmelin, a princess, declines three suitors in Act I, completing her hundredth rejection. To her maidservant, she sings-soaring an octave to the word "old"—"I tell thee that to me all these knights are nothing. Some are young and some are bold, some are rich and some are old, but they all leave me cold." No, no, a hundred times no; she is content to wait for her dream lover who comes in the guise of the swineherd Nila, serving Rolf, the outlaw chief. He has lost track of the silver stream which he maintains, as the curtain rises on Act II, "was leading me on thro' valley and grove to the princess of my dreams."

The outlaw is as conventional as his band of robbers, who actually engage in a laughing chorus and declare that they "drink to old Rolf, to our reckless old chief, may he never come to grief"
—boisterous "Ha! Ha's!" and clinking of glasses.

Orchestral Success

It is scarcely the stuff of which opera is made, even when produced at some cost complete with a rippling stream.

We doubly feel ourselves -

21. "The heir of all the ---, in the

DELIUS "It is music or nothing"

It is scarcely what a sophisticated audience now expects, especially when its one week at Oxford is sandwiched between a season of Ruth Draper and of Fred Emney in a New Musical Frolic. However, the supreme enchantment was conjured up by Sir Thomas Beecham and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra-which had to be back in London 60 miles away by midnight to avoid subsistence payment.

For the conductor it was as great a transition from the gold and white dignity of Covent Garden to the orange light and air-conditioned opulence of Oxford's New Theatre as it was for one of the leading singers snatched from South Pacific at Drury Lane.

For the audience, asked to pay 3/6 to 21/- instead of the usual 1/6 to 8/6 and then disappointed to find that rumour was wrong and that the swineherd was swineless, it was a surprise to see Sir Thomas entering from a door labelled "Bar and Toilets.

For Oxford this Delius disinterment suggested that the university town is still loyal to, if no longer the home of, lost causes. But for Beecham it was an act of piety and for the New Zealand foremost files of Time" (Tennyson). singer a great occasion.

Going With All Blacks

THE well-known sports commentator Winston McCarthy is to provide radio coverage for the NZBS of the coming All Black tour of Britain, France, Canada and the U.S. He is rejoining the service under contract, and

will be covering the trial matches later in the season which precede the

overseas tour. Mr. McCarthy has had extensive experience of sports broadcasting, both at home and abroad. He travelled with the Kiwi Army Rugby team in Britain and Europe



in 1945-46, and with the All Blacks in Australia in 1947 and 1951, and in South Africa in 1949. His New Zealand assignments include the Empire Games at Auckland.

"THE LISTENER" **CROSSWORD**

of a fuss.

No. 647 (Constructed by R.W.H.)

20. Diminish.

24. "O you mortal ----, whose rude 17. The lovely youth begins with a bit

The immortal Jove's dread clamours 18. "When musing on companions gone, counterfeit"

("Othello," Act 3, Scene 3.

25. Spare weapon.

Clues Down

1. "A castle called Doubting Castle, the owner whereof was Giant -- " ("Pil-

grim's Progress").

credit?

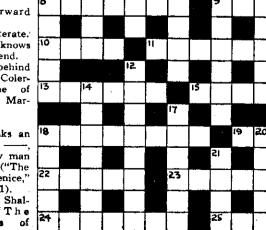
a frightful fiend.

12. Sky-blue.

infinite deal of more than any man in all Venice" ("The Merchant of Venice, Act 1, Scene 1).

22. A branch of this tree is an emblem of reconciliation.
23. Drag gin backwards from a stingy
26. Slim cousin to Shallow? (See "The Merry Wives of Merry Wives Me Merry ... Windsor").

Cancel. 3. Part of piano technique. 4. Straightforward 5. Gap. 6. Inveterate. 7. "Because he knows Doth close behind him ——" (Coler-idge, "Rime of The Ancient Mariner"). 11. Some of its inhabitants dispute the 14. "Gratiano speaks an



Derson.

N.Z. LISTENER, JUNE 5, 1953.

Commission (Figure 1917)