

Broadcast Music for the Coming Week

The Druids' Opera.

Few operas can boast of as good and effective a libretto as that which Romani wrote for Bellini's "Norma." The fact that the Woolston Band is playing a "Norma" selection next Monday at 3YA makes the subject of this remarkable work appropriate of discussion. Felice Romani as poet for the Royal Italian theatres wrote 100 books for the operas of Mayr, Bellini, Rossini, Donizetti, and others. He took for his subject a French tragedy which he turned into lovely Italian verse.

The story concerns a Druidess, who gives the opera its name (Norma), Adalgisa, a Virgin of the Temple of Irminsul, Pollione, a Roman Proconsul, and Oroves, an Arch-Druid, Norma's father. Herself a Druid High Priestess, Norma has broken her vows and secretly married Pollione. They have two children. But their father's love has vanished. In the first act we find he is, on his own confession, enamoured of another young priestess, Adalgisa, of the Druidic Temple of Irminsul, the Druids' god. We have at once an entanglement that grows more complicated as the opera progresses. The story is in the main a fascinating one, but too long to un-

fold in these columns. The finale sees Norma and her husband burning to death on the pyre built for the express purpose of consuming Pollione, who has been discovered intruding in the sacred grove whither he had gone to carry off Adalgisa by force. Norma tells an enraged populace that with the Roman must die another victim—namely, herself. They perish together. With this work Bellini won his fame and crowned his successes.

It is in the richness of melody where Bellini excels, and this has made "Norma" the favourite opera it always has been for the past ninety years or more.

"A Sigh."

THE "Etude in D Flat," by Liszt, which is to be played at 1YA on Thursday, March 28, has a sub-title, "Un Sospiro" (a sigh). It is hardly a sigh of regret, but if of regret, then it is coupled with the happiest memories which crowd themselves into the musical utterance until it overflows with fervour. Its exquisite melody with its running accompaniment is typical of Liszt, and the manner in which he enriches it as the work

By Bolton Woods

proceeds gives us a fine example of his genius for writing effectively for the piano.

The beautiful sweep of its arpeggios has made it a great favourite, and it shares with "Liebstraum" and the second "Hungarian Rhapsody" the palm of being the most popular of Liszt's compositions.

"The Toreador's Song."

IN Bizet's opera, "Carmen" the scene of the second act is laid in a room in the tavern of Lillas Pastia, which is the meeting-place of the band of smugglers of whom Carmen, when not engaged in other immoralities, is occasionally one. Before very long there is a great stir among the characters on the stage, and the cry goes up, "Hurrah! The Toreador! Hurrah! Escamillo!" A torchlight procession is passing in honour of the conqueror at the Grenada bull fight. Those present drink the health of the toreador, who enters, is greeted joyously by all, and in the famed song, tells of the scene in the arena when a bull fight is toward. A great deal of the superb effect of the song comes from the strength of the very original rhythm.

To each stage of the graphic description of the bull fight is appended a refrain in the major, in which the toreador turns to thoughts of the bright eyes that are fondly regarding him, and the impressionable hearts awaiting him. In this refrain everybody joins, and at the second time the whole company carries it to a vigorous conclusion.

THE singer of this glorious operatic solo at 2YA next Tuesday is John Brownlee, a worthy protege of Dame Melba. As one who has added to the lustre of Australia's musical fame, John Brownlee scores heavily on the record, H.M.V. D1396.

Grieg's Only Concerto.

GRIEG'S Concerto in A Minor is the only composition by him in this form. It was first performed by the composer himself in Leipzig in 1879, and immediately established his reputation as a composer and pianist. It displays his remarkable gifts for the invention, of exquisite melody and deep feeling for effectiveness in orchestral writing. The various movements of the work are admirably contrasted.

There is a haunting beauty in his harmonies, and the whole composition glows with the Norwegian colouring with which Greig painted the musical picture. Composed when he was in his twenty-fifth year, while spending a summer holiday in Denmark. It has all the freshness of a youthful work. At the time he was deeply influenced by two remarkable compatriots, Ole Bull, the violinist, and the young musician Nordrask, who died before he achieved a reputation. The love of his land and its music clung to Grieg throughout his whole life.

Like Chopin and Glinka he was a national poet, and to hear his music is to recall a line of our own poet William Watson: "The north has my heart to the end of the way." Ignaz

Friedman, pianist, has recorded the work with an orchestra on four superb records, two of which, containing the second and third movements, will be broadcast by 4YA next Tuesday.

A greater English poet than Watson, Tennyson, says, somewhere, "Dark and true and tender is the North." Grieg's Concerto convinces on this point. It fairly breathed Norway.

"Home, Sweet Home."

THE words of this song, which is to be sung as a quartet at 1YA by Madam Mary Towsey's vocalists on Thursday (March 28), are by J. Howard Payne, an American actor, journalist, and dramatist, who flourished in London at the beginning of last century. In one of his plays, "Clari, the Maid of Milan," he introduced the immortal ballad which was set to music by Sir Henry Bishop, the opera being produced at Covent Garden on May 8, 1823. In the published music it is called a "Sicilian air," but no evidence is forthcoming that such an air has ever been known and sung in Sicily, nor was the collection of folk-melodies begun in Europe—at all events in the south—at this date. It is most probably a melody of Bishop's own, but Parke in his "Musical Memoirs" states that he took it from a German opera—a doubtful statement, as, had that been the case, its origin would certainly have been discovered.

Sullivan, the Procrastinator.

FORTY-FOUR years ago to the date when this note was penned (March 14) Gilbert and Sullivan's Oriental opera, "The Mikado," was produced at the Savoy Theatre, London. That the composer was a hopeless procrastinator in his work was, alas, all too true. His diary entries are frank confessions of this weakness, which attacks less brilliant men than "The English Schubert," as he has been called.

Between February 21 and March 1 he did not emerge from his room except to attend the Savoy rehearsals, and one solitary conducting engagement. His own diary reads:—"March 2: All these days since February 21 writing and rehearsing ('Mikado'). No drives, parties or recreations of any kind." And again on March 3: "Worked all night at Finale, first act. Finished at 5 a.m.; 63 pages of scoring at one sitting!"

Three days later he finished scoring Act II at 5.45 in the morning. He composed "The Flowers That Bloom in the Spring" one evening between tea and dinner. The completed music of "The Mikado" was in the hands of D'Oyly Carte just a week before the date fixed for the first night. One may suppose that there was no need for this rush, that the first night might well have been postponed.

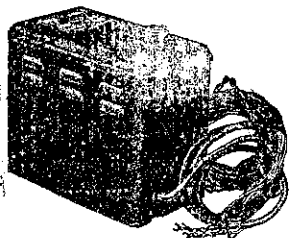
But Sullivan always worked best in light opera when the calendar stared him in the face. His temperament, unlike the usual temperament of genius, was willing to yield to discipline when discipline was required.

Because he loved his music he was always as happy under discipline than brought production as in those days when he was a free agent to enjoy himself in leisure.

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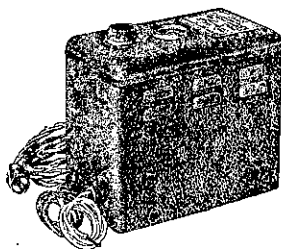
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