

OVERSEAS CELEBRITIES OR LOCAL ARTISTS

"The New Zealand Broadcasting Board has recently completed arrangements for a tour of the national stations by Madame Goossens-Viceroy, the noted Belgian soprano, who has created something of a sensation in the Australian broadcasting world. . . ."



PUT that way, the whole thing looks ridiculously simple. Just a cable to Sydney—"Would like you to sing over New Zealand national stations for several weeks.—Hands, Broadcasting Board." And a reply comes back next day—"Sounds all right. Be over in December.—Goossens-Viceroy."

Actually the procuring of world-famous artists for the New Zealand radio is about as difficult as picking apples out of a tub with your teeth. Our country, despite the publicity booklets and railway posters, is really just a South Seas minnow, and the smallness of our population means that international artists can be offered only comparatively short engagements. And artists, like all other people who toil for a living, have necessarily to look at the bread-and-butter side of the business and go in the direction of the longest contract. In this fact lies the biggest of the Broadcasting Board's hurdles, for it cannot offer the greatest artist in the world a contract for more than a month or two. Suppose Galli-Curci, Kreisler and Paderewski were engaged for twelve months to appear regularly at the four national stations. At the end of six months the broadcasting officials would probably have to go about in heavy disguise to dodge angry listeners. It is quite possible to have too much of a good thing!

In the last few months Senia Chostiakoff, the Russian tenor, and Madame Elsa Stralia, the well-known prima donna, have crossed the Tasman under contract to the New Zealand broadcasting stations. Both these artists have been successful—so successful, in fact, that they are both remaining in the country now their broadcasting contracts are completed in order to fulfil engagements at the theatres in various parts of the Dominion. In a few weeks Madame Goossens-Viceroy and Raymond Beatty will be in New Zealand under contract to the Broadcasting Board. In these two singers the YA stations will have artists who are known on concert platforms in Europe, America and Australia, and they are coming across to this country at the height of their fame. Close on their heels will follow Lionello Cecil, one of the greatest operatic tenors heard in Australia—and there have been some good ones.

The Broadcasting Board has also entered into negotiations with Percy Grainger, but this well-known artist is so full of engagements that he cannot possibly come over to New Zealand before September of next year—if then. The "fitting in" of a New Zealand tour is of considerable difficulty to a prominent artist.

But this engaging of overseas artists brings forth another problem: What about the local artists? Put quite frankly—and perhaps a little brutally—there are relatively few local artists in New Zealand

who are really worth putting on the air. The Dominion has some genuine talent, but, compared with the number of broadcasting hours each day from the national stations, the amount of real talent available is inadequate.

It is a sad fact that New Zealand can offer little to the girl with a voice or the man with a genius for the piano or violin. Our artistic scope is so limited that no musical person can really discover his full ability until he goes abroad. There are probably many who would dispute that statement—point to instances of local people who have made good without ever setting foot outside New Zealand. That may have been the case once when singers and musicians had an opportunity of earning money in orchestras and with visiting stage companies, but to-day all that is changed. The talkies dealt a knock-out blow to orchestras, and the depression and other factors have almost swept the legitimate stage out of the Dominion. The person who has made a successful living out of music in New Zealand in the past three years (exclusive of teaching) could surely be regarded as something of a marvel.

At the same time there are people who accuse the Broadcasting Board of "giving no encouragement to local artists." The difficulty seems to be that the artists are not forthcoming. A broadcasting station is not a school of music. Its duty is not to teach young hopefuls the violin or the piano, but to give decent entertainment to listeners—and for this reason it can consider none but the finished artist.

The public, listening to a broadcast, is not really actuated by any patriotic motives. When it hears Sally Smithkins, of Paekakariki, singing "The Bluebells of Scotland" it doesn't say, "The girl shows promise"; it simply switches over to a station that is giving a recording of the Berlin State Orchestra, sits back and says, "That's music." In other words, the public is entirely disinterested whether its entertainment comes from New Zealand or China, so long as that entertainment is good!