

MUSIC, REPERTORY AND DRAMA.

Highbrows Look at Musical Comedy

"Jill, Darling," New London Show Shortly to be Seen in New Zealand, Praised by All Sorts of Critics—Wellington Repertory Theatre Has Big Plans Under Consideration.

The following note on "Jill, Darling," taken from the "Christian Science Monitor," is interesting inasmuch as that popular musical comedy has recently been bought by J. O. Williamson, Limited, for presentation in Australia and New Zealand. "Jill, Darling" was first produced at the Saville Theatre, London, on December 18, 1934.

EVERY now and again there is produced a musical comedy which the experts vie with one another in praising. Such a one is "Jill, Darling," recently presented at the Saville Theatre, London. Perhaps this entertainment may serve to explain what it is in good musical comedy that so enchants the hearts of those highbrows to whom a "Silly Symphony" is almost as amusing as Proust.

The fact seems to be that musical comedies provide certain satisfactions that used to be catered for in the straight drama, but are so, at least temporarily, no longer. In "Jill, Darling" there are several taking songs, which answer to a natural delight in rhythm and in melody. In the Elizabethan and the Caroline drama this delight is communicated in many a musical and telling phrase; and the actors of the nineteenth century, dealing with even the most fustian material, would impose upon it a melodic charm of their own, through sheer virtuosity of speaking. But this music has vanished from both modern play writing and modern acting, and a poor substitute has to be found in the simple tunes of musical comedies. "I'm On a See-Saw," which Miss Louise Browne and Mr. John Mills sing and dance with such an abundance of pleasant sentiment, is the best we can do till someone rediscovers the trick of writing things like, "If ever thou would'st hold me in thy heart, Absent thee from felicity, awhile."

Allied to this are the rhythm and the disciplined directions of the chorus dancing, of which "Jill, Darling," in common with most satisfactory musical comedies, provides a generous allowance.

Furthermore, musical comedy is the stronghold of what is sometimes called the theatre of personality. Nowadays, people go to see such and such a play, whereas 80 years ago they went to see such and such a player. But in musical comedy there are still actors like Jack Buchanan, Stanley Lupino and Leslie Henson, whose presence dominates and determines the nature of the piece in which they appear. Arthur Riscoe, chief comedian of "Jill, Darling," is not yet quite of this noble company, but he is a promising candidate for membership. His impersonation of the Atlantic Ocean and a light-house is in the very best traditions of British humour. His occasional puns are portentous, and he does one unex-

pected quick change which leaves the audience gasping with surprise and admiration.

Finally, as a friend observed. "Musical comedy always exhilarates me because it gives the impression that anything may happen." It creates a cherry and inconsequential world of its own, in which the most unlikely and optimistic events are continually occurring. Policemen dance round the Peter Pan statue in Kensington Gardens; young men unable to pay their income tax manage easily to maintain houses big enough to entertain a couple of hundred guests, and famous Hungarian singers turn out to be old schoolboy friends. Musical comedy in fact has taken possession of that universe of fantasy which the straight drama left vacant when Sir James Barrie (temporarily, one hopes) went out of business some years ago.

THE Wellington Repertory Theatre has planned a busy year for its 1935-36 season. Hitherto the society has presented four plays annually. It has been decided to increase the number of productions to six annually. Membership has increased with extraordinary rapidity over recent months. This fact has encouraged the committee of the society to take this important step. The society has been fortunate enough to secure the services of both Messrs. W. S. Wauchop and Lep du Chateau as producers. Mr. Wauchop will produce three plays and Mr. du Chateau three plays each year. Wellington is fortunate indeed in having this wealth of producing talent to call upon. The plays to be produced over the next twelve months will be drawn from the following list:—Ibsen's "The Lady from the Sea," "The Distaff Side," John van Druten: "Sixteen," by Aimee and Philip Stewart; "Six Characters in Search of an Author," by Pirandello; "Autumn

Crocus," by C. L. Anthony; "Waste," by Granville Baker and "Children in Uniform." The society intends to maintain its full programme of readings and one-act play evenings. Mr. W. S. Wauchop, who has just returned from an extended tour of the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States, will shortly address members on his experiences while abroad.

THE Wellington area of the British Drama League is again holding a one-act play competition for young people under eighteen. The judges are Miss Catherine Keddel, F.T.C.L., (Eloc.), and Messrs. A. S. Farquhar and P. Keesing, all of Wellington.

THE well-known Wellington actress, Miss Marie Ney, is at present playing in London with her company, in "Mrs. Nobby Clark." Miss Ney told "The Observer" (London) that she thinks her new part is something slightly different from anything that she has yet attempted; but this is not easy to conceive, for, since her Shakesperian days at the Old Vic., she has played a very fair variety of parts. The play is not, apparently, a tragedy, nor is it in any case—as its title tends to suggest—a farce.

THE Canterbury Repertory Society's annual report has been presented and during the year six full-length plays were produced, and four evenings were devoted to one-act plays, the production being managed by Professor J. Shelley, assisted by Mr. Bernard Beeby. One of the studio groups won the local competition organised by the British Drama League. The next play scheduled for production is "Dr. Knock," which will be presented on March 30 and April 1 and 2. Other productions will be first presented on May 23, July 27, September 28 and November 30.



THE THIRD ONE FROM THE LEFT IS . . . Well, never mind who she is. The main thing is that they are all very easy to look at. If you want a formal introduction they are the Goldwyn Girls and they help Eddie Cantor in "Kid Millions," which is due for release in Auckland and Wellington this week.