

Shakespeare To Music

Much Discussed Opera From 3YA

THE recent broadcast of the complete tragic opera, "Otello," by Verdi, constitutes something of a red-letter event for 3YA, Christchurch. Did Verdi really understand our national bard? Some think not. Did he give us Shakespeare's characters pure and simple? Mr. Bernard Shaw retorts that he gave us monsters, and the famous actor, Tommaso Salvini, blunt-

ly informed Verdi that his Iago was not Shakespeare's Iago at all.

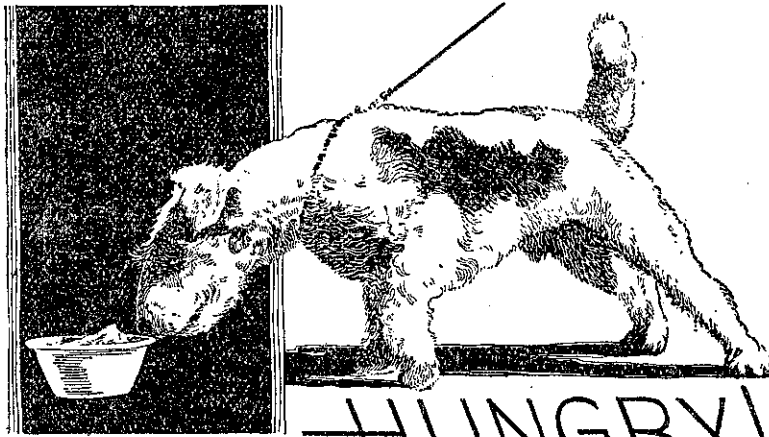
"You, Verdi," he exclaimed indignantly, "have made him a melodramatic villain with his Credos and his outcry of 'Becco il leone'" (for both of which Boito, the librettist, and not Verdi, the composer, was responsible, by the way). The Iago of Verdi's imagination, "the spare tall figure with the high receding forehead and the little piercing eyes close to the nose like the eyes of a monkey," is indeed no longer a fiendish man, but the very devil incarnate.

Nevertheless, he shares with Hagen (in Wagner's "Twilight of the Gods") the rare distinction of being the most

arresting villain in the whole range of opera. Gounod's Mephisto is a mere milksop in comparison. Iago's "Credo" may be a trifle empty and theatrical, but it is, notwithstanding, both powerful and dramatically effective. Moreover, his malicious tale of Cassio's dream has never been equalled in its haunting and deadly suggestion of sinister mystery. This music has, indeed, "the velvet tread and the dangerously alert eye of a panther stalking its prey."

Salvini's accusation has occasionally been echoed by persons of literary culture, who have evidently not yet realised that—for better or for worse—Verdi is the only composer who has proved himself worthy to collaborate with Shakespeare. He delighted in calling the dramatist "Papa." In early manhood "Anthony and Cleopatra" had awakened his interest. He wanted for a long time to set "King Lear" to music. The pitiable travesty of "Macbeth" supplied by the librettist, Plave, is not forgotten, however. In this amusing effort we find Lady Macbeth sings a Drinking Song (Brindisi) a la Iago, with a chorus of lusty murderers in hot pursuit of Banquo. "Otello" is the first work in which Verdi's power of character drawing is fully developed, and his mastery of dialogue is superb.

The opera is in four acts. It differs from the play, inasmuch as it passes over the first act of the tragedy which treats of the courtship and marriage of Desdemona. For sake of operatic economy, Boito, the librettist, makes the opera commence with the arrival of the Moor in Cyprus. The time is the fifteenth century, and the scenes are laid in Cyprus, of which Otello is Governor, on behalf of Venice. The opera was first produced at La Scala, Milan, on February 5th, 1887. The broadcast version was by a present-day La Scala company.



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MUSSOLINI wants every Italian village to have its own wireless set, and has appointed the Secretary of the Fascist Party, Signor Starace, to be President of Radio Rurale, or the Rural Radio Corporation. There are 50,000 rural schools, and the Government has decided that Radio Rurale must force the radio manufacturers to sell a five-valve set, the "Radio-rurale," to schools at 600 lire; the cost must be borne by the schools themselves, or by private persons. The scheme has run eight months, but so far only 3000 schools have sets.

IF Nelson were alive to-day he would be an airman.—Captain Norman Macmillan.