

NO BONES About Her WHITEBAIT!

EILEEN BOYD

Baritone-Gone-Contralto Revisits New Zealand



FAILING to find a bone in her whitebait gave Eileen Boyd a severe shock as a child, and if for no other reason she remembers New Zealand. She was last here in 1901 with Dix's Gaiety Company billed, believe it or not, as the Baby Baritone! Now she's a grown-up singer, but no longer a baritone—she's turned contralto. But even apart from being a first-rate contralto Eileen Boyd will appeal to New Zealanders particularly when she makes her charity concert appearances, for she is, in the words of the lesser classics, "a bundle of personality."

"They tell me I was the rowdiest on the ship coming across," she confided. "That was for the last couple of days of the voyage, and I rather felt like making up for the other two days—pretty blue, those."

Eileen Boyd is one of the contingent of six artists who arrived by the liner Wanganella at Wellington last Friday to undertake a broadcasting tour of the Dominion. Although she's been here before she didn't remember much about the place after thirty years, except that all the houses then were weather-boarded. Wellington on a windy, rainy day held no terrors for her, for she soon invented a new game called "Jump the Tram."

"I'm awfully glad I did a bit of dancing once upon a time," explained Miss Boyd. "If I'd had no training I don't know how much I'd pay for taxis before I got out of Wellington, with the tram steps 'way up here."—Should have mentioned that Eileen Boyd is no giant, although she has an O.S. sense of humour.

"Never mind. I'm jolly glad to be here and finished with 'age and the day you were born'," she continued.

"Pardon?"

"Age and day you were born," repeated the visitor. "Haven't you ever played that?"

"'Fraid not," I admitted, feeling a trifle backward.

"Oh, I've been doing it for a month. Every paper I've seen for a month just seemed designed to find out 'age and the day you were born.' Before we left Australia I remarked to Thea Philips, 'My heavens, it'll be all over New Zealand how old we are before we ever get there!' But I've been dying to get back here for a look round.

"The main things I remember about Wellington are an earthquake and a fire. The earthquake brought down a fall of earth which covered the fowlhouse behind the hotel, and when the hotel caught fire—later on—I remember nobody could tell who was who, because everybody was wearing pink nighties!"

Miss Boyd has since then been in England and Australia singing all the time. During her 12 years with English people she did everything from opera to costume

comedy. Two years were spent on a tour of the East. One of her most treasured memories is the occasion when in the Queen's Hall in May, 1917, she sang before the King and Queen. She has sung with Tetrassini and Peter Dawson, and has also toured with Mark Hambourg.

This Australian artist was one of the first ever to broadcast in her own country, for her first introduction to the microphone was in the days when 2FC was popularly known as "Farmers' station," as it was in the big Farmers' Building in Sydney. Her latest engagements before coming to New Zealand were with the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

A picture of health—or perhaps it was the wind teasing her cheeks after she had arrived—Eileen Boyd is as fit as her voice for the tour of New Zealand stations. Last Christmas, however, she had a few pains (before the Christmas pudding), and a doctor ordered an immediate operation. But Eileen Boyd would rather spend the Christmas season with her own folk, so she just wouldn't have an operation. As Miss Boyd herself said, "I had everything but the mange, and even that wouldn't have stopped me from spending Christmas where I wanted to. I haven't had the operation yet."

That is at least one way to keep out of hospital, and gives you an idea of her spirit.

"If I go everywhere I've been asked here, I won't need to stay at a hotel!" continued the contralto. "I like the country, and I like the people I've met on the ship coming over. One New Zealand lady didn't like Australians, and she had rather roused another Australian on the ship by telling her so. When she approached me as a sort of peacemaker or something I told her to fire ahead, because it'd take more than an argument like that to worry me. You really meet somebody to interest you some way or another every day on a ship, even if the weather is nasty. It was amusing to see additions to the saloon as the days went by. Thought we must have been making quick calls at islands in the night, the way new faces kept bobbing up each morning.

"Last night aboard, by the way, some of us listened to Elizabeth Retherb and Pinza from (Cont. next page)