

AMATEURS FIRST!

*N.Z. Station Whose
Announcers are Drawn From
Ranks of Little Theatre*

Special to the "Record"

by

NORMAN McLEOD



DON DONALDSON
Thanks the BDL.

WHEN the able Miss Elizabeth Blake founded a branch of the British Drama League in New Zealand several years ago, with the object of co-ordinating and directing the work of the Little Theatre and similar organisations, the voice of the critic was loud in the land. The doubters asked, as always, "What good would it do?" and refused to be convinced. Success of the movement is now, of course, too well-known to need further emphasis.

In such community services it is not, however, always easy to point to definite and tangible evidence of its value to the individual, apart from the cultural stimulus to him and the audience.

But the B.D.L. and the hundred odd local groups of players affiliated to it may find some material encouragement in the fact that amateur dramatic training has founded careers for more than 50 radio announcers to the Commercial Broadcasting Service.

The amateurs turned professional are particularly strong in Dunedin's 4ZB, where the whole of the regular announcing staff has, at one time or another, been associated with Little Theatre movements under the bright aegis of the British Drama League.

VERSATILE Don. Donaldson, of the same team, has a high regard for the value of the dramatic training in equipping radio announcers to do their job efficiently and intelligently. An old boy of Otago Boys' High School, Mr. Donaldson first studied speech under Mr. Russell Wood, of the Dunedin Playbox, and made his first appearance in radio plays at 4YA under the watchful eye of 1ZB's John Gordon. Since then he has made more than 50 appearances in radio and stage plays, the latter including the productions of the Dunedin Repertory Society, Little Theatre Society and the Playbox. He won the latter organisation's much-sought trophy for the outstanding performances of 1935 and 1937.

One of Dunedin's most popular announcers, he is well qualified to discuss his pet enthusiasm. "I believe sincerely," he told a "Record" representative recently, "that a certain amount of dramatic experience is of inestimable value to an announcer. In ideal announcing speech must be perfectly sincere and natural, there must be no affectation of any kind, and, above all, an announcer must be audible."

A THOROUGH dramatic training assists considerably in attaining these qualities. When studying drama one must have, first of all, an understanding of the essentials of voice production. The voice must be flexible and pleasing to the ear, and you will find that all successful announcers have the well-modulated voices of trained actors, combined with flexibility and microphone quality. You will, therefore, discover that the majority of really good announcers have had some dramatic training at some stage of their careers. Surely this is no coincidence!

It is also noticeable that in commercial work various advertisements require different treatment, and a stage experience helps a man to adapt himself easily to this type of work. As an actor he has had to lose himself completely in his particular role, and as an announcer he is required to put all he has into the work he has in hand, whether or not he likes the script.

Stage training and experience give poise and confidence. Without them a voice is unconvincing.

"And last of all, but by no means least, a successful announcer must have the type of 'showman' personality that the stage does develop.

"Some people will ask: But why do you say that only dramatic work helps an announcer? What about singing? My reply is this: Very, very often a really good singer has a most uninteresting speaking voice, whereas practically every competent actor or actress possesses an interesting voice—full of life, personality and charm.

"Finally, there is the critical factor. An actor who cannot stand criticism is a failure, and an announcer who cannot take criticism, and be taught, is also a failure."

Mr. Donaldson's training in the drama was a spare-time enthusiasm during his five years' study of horticultural science under Mr. D. Tannock, A.H., R.H.S., noted writer and authority on the subject. This was undertaken with a view to being attached to the staff of London's famous Kew Gardens. Garden talks at 4YA gave him his first introduction to radio, which has now become his chosen profession. His specialised knowledge of horticulture and vegetable growing is used to advantage in his "Garden Club of the Air," always a popular 4ZB session. He has lately been to the fore with his "Old Folks" session.

Voice—and the Actor