



THE SINGING BLACKSMITH

Auckland Relief Worker
Whose Great Bass Voice
Has Startled London's
Critics

Special to the "Record"

by

"WIRIHANA"

THIS is the story of the career of Franz Oscar Natzke, New Zealander. Among the critics his personality is arousing interest keener than that awakened by any other contemporary student. They expect him to bring fame to himself and to the country of his birth.

All those who heard Natzke's voice reproduced from two sample records played from IYA last Wednesday evening expect it, too. The discs were recorded specially by His Master's Voice—the operatic aria, "l'Ebreo," in Italian, and "The Pilgrim's Song" (Tschaiikowsky) were sent from London a few weeks ago by the company to his mother, Mrs. F. E. Natzke, and friends in Auckland.

FRANZ OSCAR NATZKE was borne at Matapara, in the Waikato, 26 years ago. He was discovered by Mr. Anderson Tyrer, examiner for the Trinity College, a little more than four years ago, when Mr. Tyrer was on a visit to Auckland. So impressed he was with Natzke's voice that on the examiner's recommendation Trinity College offered him free tuition for three years. A number of Auckland people combined to find the necessary money to provide for the singer's passage to England and his keep during the period of his training.

Upon his arrival at Trinity College, Natzke took lessons with Signor Garcia. Peter Dawson and other famous singers heard him. All agreed that Natzke had everything in his favour—voice, range and stage presence, and that, with proper tuition, he would become a world-famous singer. In February, 1937, two years after Natzke's arrival in London, Sir Granville Bantock, leading musical authority in London wrote:—

"I think it only fair to Mr. Oscar Natzke to write and tell you how much the audience and I enjoyed his singing at the vocal recital here this afternoon (at Trinity College) when he sang with fine vocal expression two exacting excerpts from my works. I consider him to be an exceptional singer of unusual promise and attainment, and I feel confident that he will reap a rich reward and win a great success. He deserves every encouragement, and should be given the opportunity of acquiring a more extended experience. I have great faith in his future."

IN November last it was reported from London that Natzke had won a special prize for the best pupil in Trinity College, with 94 points out of 100—the highest number of points that has ever been attained in an examination con-

FIVE years ago he was a blacksmith in Auckland—before that a relief worker on Waiheke Island in the Hauraki Gulf. Today his great bass voice has startled London. He is in the charge of Signor Albert Garcia and one of the most brilliant students at the Royal Trinity College of Music.

ducted by the college. Natzke had worked with tremendous vigour and had amply justified Mr. Tyrer's recommendations.

Soon, it is predicted, he will be allotted a place among the stars of the first

magnitude. Great as his voice already is, the orbit of his power has yet to be seen. He is still young and still learning with astonishing industry and intelligence.

Natzke has everything in his favour. He has height, good looks, physique.

But even Natzke, the man of remarkable gifts, has not got where he is to-day without a struggle against adversity and disappointments. He owes much to the great help given him by his mother. He spent the better part of his youth in the country. He used to talk of his job as a blacksmith and the days when he was a relief worker. Perhaps those days were excellent things. They were the rocks and boulders without which the progress of the stream would be so painfully uneventful.

As yet he is unspoiled by success. He came to prominence with curious suddenness. General recognition suffers as a rule so many disappointments and inexplicable delays. But now even the world outside London is beginning to talk of Natzke as the great bass singer.

THE other afternoon I spent a couple of most interesting hours with Natzke's mother, a white-haired lady who lives with her other two sons in a cottage in Wellington Street, Auckland. With obvious pride she showed me letters from her son, telling of his studies and the great people he has met in London. She also showed me dozens of programmes in which Oscar was featured in recitals at Trinity College. I observed that he sang the most difficult of operatic arias.

But Oscar says little about himself. He is still the same humble fellow he was before he went to the world's greatest city.

Mrs. Natzke described her son's schooling at Fairfield, near Hamilton. "We left the Waikato district to take a private hotel at Ostend, Waiheke Island," said Mrs. Natzke. "There Oscar finished his schooling. When did he first start to sing? Oh, he used to sing when he was a baby. I always knew he had a voice. I knew, because I understand music. I still play the violin, and for some years I was a church organist."

OSCAR'S father died in 1922, she said. Oscar went to learn blacksmithing. Then the (Contd. on page 40.)