

£1000 A Broadcast

*Kirsten Flagstad Is Highest-Paid
Opera Star In The World . . .
But She Still Sings For Love*

THE other day I met the highest-paid opera star in the world. I met also a charming and unaffected woman who has two great loves—music and Norway.

Kirsten Flagstad, the famous singer who is scheduled for a New Zealand tour in August, was totally unlike the prima donnas of my imagination. No "temperament," no deliberate building of glamour—just a gracious and friendly person who has for hobbies such homely pastimes as knitting, reading and playing at solitaire.

When you ask about her fame, she smiles: "It just happened. . . ." You would never guess those casual, deprecating words concealed the story of a long and bitter struggle for recognition, of a dramatic rise that startled the world.

Kirsten Flagstad has taken her success as she took her early obscurity—quietly, without conceit and without resentment, as something that is quite incidental to the vital, disturbing power of the music that is in her. She sings not for fame or money—her husband, Mr. Henry Johansen, is a wealthy Norwegian lumberman with agencies all over the world—she sings because she loves singing and has always loved it, always will.

INDEED, I suspect that the love of this prima donna for her art is the only thing that could ever take her away for such long periods from her home in beloved Norway. One can read that in an occasional word or gesture.

When we spoke of New Zealand and her contract here, she asked, with a touch of nostalgic longing, "They tell me your country is very like my own Norway."

And there was eager interest in her voice when I remarked upon the photograph of her lovely grown-up daughter, which hung in her boudoir cabin on the *Mariposa*. But she said her daughter was not to carry on the singing tradition. She smiled ruefully. "She has not the inclination."

PERHAPS then she recalled her own youth, and the difference now.

"It just happened."

Ever since she could remember, Kirsten Flagstad had wanted to sing. When still a young girl she

WHEN Kirsten Flagstad tours New Zealand about August, the public will have an opportunity of hearing opera's most expensive voice. But "Wirihana," who interviewed the Norwegian soprano on her way through Auckland to Australia recently, shows her in this article as not only a great artist but also a simple-hearted woman unspoiled by success.

learnt the score of D'Albert's opera, "Tiefland," in the space of a few days, and won an opportunity to take a child role in it at the Oslo Opera House.

At the age of 10 she had mastered the role of Elsa in the Wagnerian opera, "Lohengrin." Hers was a glorious voice and hers, too, a glowing personality—yet for years she sang at the Oslo Opera House almost unrecognised.

Then, when she was singing as a valkerie and a norn at the Bayreuth Festival in Germany, she was heard by Gatti Casazza, of the Metropolitan Opera Company, New York. He gave her an audition—and a contract.

That was in 1933, after she had sung for nearly 20 years at the Opera House in Oslo.

As soon as she appeared in New York she was proclaimed a sensational "find"—a pure dramatic soprano of the highest quality. Triumph followed fast on triumph. In New York, San Francisco, St. Louis, in Covent Garden, London, thousands gathered to hear and applaud her.

To-day she is the world's best-paid prima donna, with a clause in her contract with the Metropolitan Opera Company guaranteeing her the highest salary among its stars. For each radio broadcast she is to receive £1000 sterling and £750 for each concert appearance. From October, 1937, until May 19, 1938, she gave 103 performances, 40 of them at the Metropolitan.

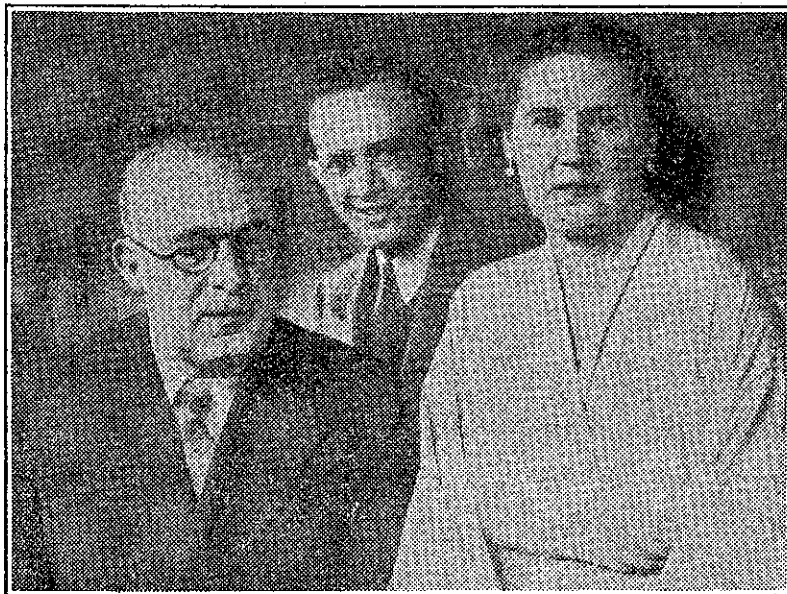
AND now Madame Flagstad is bound for a season in Australia—strictly a limited season. Mr. John Farrell, of J. C. Williamson, Ltd., which is bringing the singer

to Australia and New Zealand, suggested that she would probably be held in Australia longer than the arranged season, although she must be back in America within a few months. If she is delayed in Australia it may mean her season in New Zealand, at present fixed for August, will be curtailed.

All the same, I think Madame Flagstad will have something to say about that rearrangement.

With my mind's eye, I can still see the look on her face when she asked, "They tell me your country is very like my own Norway?" I can still hear the nostalgia in her voice.

No, I am trusting Flagstad's season will not be curtailed. New Zealand has more than a contract to offer her.



KIRSTEN FLAGSTAD AT AUCKLAND

Her husband, Mr. Henry Johansen, is beside her, and pianist Mr. Edwin McArthur, who does not mind "swinging it" on occasion, peeps from behind.