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## Grand Opera In Modern Dress

"FAUST" in modern dress may sound fantastic, but it ran a week in Birmingham in 1926, as a bold experiment on the part of the local Grand Opera Society.

One critic tells us that "Faust" sang his serenade leaning against a garden table and clad in a lounge suit. Margaret did what looked like crochet-work during the passage when normally she spins. Siebel wore plus-fours. Mephistopheles might have been a stock-broker.

In the Kermesse scene, his Satanic Majesty paid for drinks all round with a "five"; for all we know, it might have been a forged note.

These diversions apart, the production had points deserving the attention of professional producers. The rejuvenation episode of the first act did away with the usual retreat into a dark corner to change a wig and get rid of a cloak. The curtain fell on a "Faust" still looking like a learned doctor, but obviously feeling new life in his body.

By his changed appearance in the Kermesse scene, one surmised that, during the interim, he had been to his hair-dresser and his tailor. He had dressed for the part of youth, which was a natural thing for a man to do.

Of course, any judgment on such a production is bound to be more or less biased through contact with the unusual. The older hands probably felt some incongruity between the dressing of the opera and the style of the music. Not that there is anything mediaeval in the idiom of Gounod's music. But "Faust" belongs to the land of make-believe, and those who listen to broadcasts of this and other operas would not be happy if they saw people in the studio in modern, often slovenly, dress throwing themselves about in the effort to reach something in art.

(Continued from previous page.)

Lawrence Tibbett was enthusiastic about his Australian audiences—and his first New Zealand one. "Taken all in all, you find better audiences in Australia than in many other parts of the world. They know what they like and they let you know—and that's meat and drink to the artist."

"I wouldn't say that the Australians were better educated as an audience—the Viennese are probably the best-educated and the most sensitive musical critics in the world—but your people have a fresh enthusiasm which means a great deal."

"I've heard about the spontaneity of Australian and New Zealand audiences from many people—from Heifetz and Galli Curci and Paderewski—and now I'm getting a taste of it."

The interview was over. We walked through the deserted hall with Mrs. Tibbett, wonderfully dressed in a mink coat which reached almost to her feet. Lawrence Tibbett looked the complete opera star in his cape and top hat.

In the lobby were some autograph hunters. Tibbett obliged.

But outside the main doors was a tremendous crowd. Mr. and Mrs. Tibbett paused a moment in bewildered surprise. "Three cheers for Lawrence Tibbett," called a man in the crowd.