risk of financial loss. That is the reason why we suffer so much dramatically in the Australasian colonies. After the ice had been broken, Dr. Richter, of the London Symphony Orchestra, and Mr. Henry J. Wood, of the Queen's Hall Orchestra, gave a certain amount of prominence to the composer's tone poems, and now last to arrive has been Mr. Thomas Beecham, with the extraordinarily successful production of the ily successful production of the opera "Elektra" in London.

"Tod and Verklarung."

Strauss' early works are now held in much higher esteem. Amongst these is the tone poem, "Tod and Verklarung," which was written in 1889, and although more closely allied to accepted form than his later programme music it discards the more arbitrary limitations of symphonic construction. A composer could scarcely take a more serious and exacting subject for musical treatment than the solemnity of death and the speculation of the life hereafter. Dr. Strauss has approached it from the all too familiar standpoint—a man dying in a garret. The programme was sketched by Strauss himself, and after the work had been composed this scenario was printed as a preface to the score:—

I.

"A sick man, at the point of death, after a struggle with the enemy, sinks back exhausted and falls asleep. All is silent, save the wall clock's gentle ticking. Over the man's wan face flits a sorrow-laden smile. He falls to dreaming, and his thoughts go back to his childhood's golden day.

II.

"Another paroxysm dispels the joyous visions, and the fight with Death recommences. A second time the man falls back exhausted.

III.

"He dreams again. His whole life passes before him—first his childhood, innocent and hopeful; then the impetuous ardour of youth; lastly, the ripened man, struggling always to reach the goal, but always baulked; full of noble impulses, but checked at every turn when once a certain point has been reached. At last he succumbs, and with a hideous clang death claims his victim.

IV.

"Now at last the man knows. Heavenly voices proclaim that strife is not all in vain, that the weary one has found Eternal Rest."

The sections of the music correspond to those of the poem given above, so that it is comparatively simple to follow once the composer's programme is understood. The piece opens Largo. Various themes unfold in the composition each depicting some episode or vital part of the poem. Thus "the wall clock's" gentle ticking, the "sorrow-laden smile," and "childhood's golden day" are depicted by the music. The paroxysm of pain that seizes the man in the second section shudders with extraordinary violence through the strings, accompanied by stormy chords, and eventually dies away to pianissimo. With the third section comes the retrospect of the dying man's life—a gorgeous piece of writing—and when the paroxysm bursts with renewed strength upon him, and he falls back overcome, one can hear the trombones over the whole orchestra panting out as it were his dying gasps. An impressive pause ensues, and then the transfiguration melody begins, and increasing in power and intensity, soars to a long-drawn and sonorous finale, reaching up like the dawn of some eternal morning.

Elektra—An Impression by One of the Audience.

A friend, writing from London, gives me a most vivid description of the event of the musical season, which was the two performances of Dr. Strauss' "Elektra," described in recent issues in these columns: All London went to see the great composer at work interpreting his music as he wanted the public to hear it. It was my happy lot to be present at the second performance. I had a splendid view of Dr. Strauss, whose methods of conducting are so quiet, so reserved, just as though he and the members of the orchestra shared a secret which was hidden from the audience, and by which they produced the most deafening and weird musical effects that have ever resounded through Covent Garden. Of course, you all know the old Greek tragedy; the translation of the beastly thing gave most of us lots of trouble in our schooldays. Elektra was the daughter of that unpleasant person, Klytemnestra, who, assisted by a man called Aegistheus, murdered her husband, Agamemnon. Elektra is very much on vengeance bent, but after a lot of harrowing scenes with various members of her family she is just about to dig out the hatchet with which her father was done to death, and with it take summary vengeance on her mother, when a brother (Orestes) appears on the scene, promptly goes inside, and kills both his mother and Aegistheus. Elektra dances a wild dance of triumph, and falls lifeless, and really you would not be in the least surprised if you knew the difficulty of the music she has to sing. The music is the most wonderful I have ever heard. I do not pretend to understand it, but I know it pleases my sense of beautiful sounds, tickles my sense of mystery, and appeals to my sense of the dramatic. If never before did musical instruments make murder, hate, vengeance and death living, breathing spirits, they did so with Strauss' music, led by Strauss' baton. The music was so weirdly grand it simply made me shiver. I never heard such tone combinations, so daring that there was only a hairbreadth between them and discord. There is no interval in Elektra, and the opera takes an hour and a-half. I was carried along on a wave of ecstatic joy. It was great. One thing Dr. Strauss can feel very sure about—his Elektra will never be whistled down the street by the butcher or baker boy on his rounds. As Dr. Strauss bowed his acknowledgments to the effusive reception given him by the huge audience I heard a man in the stalls say, "He is not a bit like a musician—looks like a gentleman." The fact is that the great composer is a quiet, pale-faced man, all noble forehead and a runaway chin. His eyes are the queerest part of him—very pale blue, with a dull, blurred look, as though they were veiled. I have only seen one other pair of eyes like them—Paderewski's. Dr. Strauss was intensely delighted with the work of the Covent Garden Orchestra. Having called a six hours' rehearsal at the end of two hours—the shortest he has ever had for an Elektra rehearsal—he dismissed the players with the words, "I want to congratulate you, and tender you my warmest and sincerest thanks for your beautiful work, which could not be bettered. There will be no more rehearsals—for you are perfect."

Entertainment at St. Andrew's.

St. Andrew's Hall, Lower Symonds-street, was comfortably filled on Saturday evening by an audience which thoroughly appreciated the entertainment arranged by Messrs. Alan McElwain and Lauri Abrahams, in which these gentlemen, assisted by Miss Blanche Garland, provided a programme of song, monologue and story that well sustained the reputations already earned by the contributors. Among Mr. McElwain's items were the vernacular whimsicalities, "Jerryhim in an Oven," "Mrs. Scooper," "Evin's Dorg 'Ospital," "It Gits Me Talked Abaht," and "The 11.69 Express"; while Mr. Abrahams' numbers included "The Game of Life," "Devil May Care," "The Poet," and his latest "Dream" song. Miss Garland sang "Waiata Poi," "Forethought," and "Yo San," in her usual happy style, and Miss Dorothy Nicol presided at the piano.

Grand Opera in Wellington

"MADAMA BUTTERFLY" IN ENGLISH—PUCCINI REACHES NEW ZEALAND.

(Special to the "Weekly Graphic.")

My Wellington correspondent writes under date Friday, the 20th inst:—

Last night I witnessed the opening performance in New Zealand of Puccini's "Madama Butterfly," by Williamson's Grand Opera Company. The Opera House was filled in every part; in fact the whole of the reserved seats had been booked a week in advance. I looked for an artistic surprise in "Madama Butterfly," but the reality was far ahead of my expectations. We are accustomed to see operas built on hard-and-fast and conventional lines; we know exactly when the chorus will come on, and we know the orthodox sequence of the music—solo, and duet, and chorus; solo, duet and chorus—and can inevitably recognise the approaching end of an act by the inrush of the chorus in all their beautiful clothes. But "Madama Butterfly" is refreshing because of its breakaway from the early Italian methods of construction. It is full of little surprises in stage situations and in the development of the pretty and pathetic story. As for the music, it is delicate, dainty, delightful. It opens for many a New Zealander a new world in orchestration. The orchestra of forty members, is, in the opinion of several of my musical friends who are better qualified to judge than I am, by far the finest orchestra yet brought to New Zealand. One's first expectation, on seeing this formidable array of instrumentalists, is that they will surely overweight the singers; the number seems out of all proportion to the performers on the stage. Nothing of the sort happens. The orchestra is as perfectly under control as if it were a single instrument; it is subdued and beautifully subordinated to the business on the boards; yet, there were times when it showed that it could "let itself go" with the grandest effect. Hazon, the famous conductor, came in for almost as much attention as the people on the stage.

Madame Bel Sorel.

Bel Sorel, as Cho-Cho-San (Madama Butterfly), is a delightful singer and actress. Her voice quite came up to expectations—a full, liquid voice that is music itself, with none of the harsh corners that we have too often found, to our disappointment, in the voices of much-heralded singers. She sings as spontaneously and with as little apparent effort as the birds of the air. Bel Sorel only learned English recently—in fact, this opera is, I believe, the first in which she has sung in English—and her pretty little foreign accent exactly suits her Japanese part. At the same time her pronunciation and enunciation are excellent. She does not slur her words, as many an English singer does, but carefully endeavours to give each syllable its proper value, to retain her final consonants. As Cho-Cho-San she has some charming lyrics to sing. Prettily pathetic is the scene in the second act, where she and Suzuki, her attendant (Miss Rosina Buckmann) strew flowers on the floor in anticipation of the faithless Pinkerton's return; more pathetic still, the opening of the third act, where she is revealed in the dawn standing motionless at the window, gazing at Nagasaki Harbour and waiting for her lost lover. I can hardly think that Miss Amy Castles will equal Bel Sorel as Cho-Cho-San, but it will be very interesting to compare them. Miss Castles' temperament, one imagines, would be more at home in a less childish and pretty-pretty part than that of the little Madama Butterfly. She and John Zerga and Antonio Zanalli appear to-morrow night in the three principal roles.

Other Singers.

Mr Frederick Blamey sang the leading male part of Lieutenant Pinkerton last

Forthcoming Productions—"The Night of the Party."

David James, who will appear as Crosbie, in Weedon Grossmith's delightful comedy "The Night of the Party," at His Majesty's Theatre, Auckland, on Monday evening next, May 30, is the principal comedian of Mr. George Willoughby's Company. He is an actor by heredity. His father, the creator of Middlewick, the Butterman, in "Our Boys," was the most famous comedian of the English stage. David James, junr., was an actor almost from birth, at a very early age he trod the boards, and in later years had the unique experience of appearing in the same play with his father, sometimes, too, acting as his understudy. The father left at his death over £200,000, including £60,000 to charities. The comedian's private name is David James Belasco, he is a cousin of David Belasco, the famous American playwright, producer, and manager, who wrote "Darling of the Gods," "Madama Butterfly," which is now being staged in New Zealand, and "The Girl From the Golden West."

Mr. David James will appear in the role of Crosbie, the valet. Crosbie is the servant of Mr. Frayne (a wealthy merchant) and gives a party during the absence of his master to which he invites all the servants of the house, and many from the adjoining mansions. The Festivities are at their height when Mr. Frayne returns. The complications that ensue are exceedingly amusing for Mr. Crosbie is masquerading as his master, and the latter's attitude towards the servants, who are having a rollicking time results in a most laughable denouement. "The Night of the Party" must be an exceedingly humorous play to have attained the run of ten years it has achieved in England. The box plan for the Auckland season is at Wildman and Arey's.

WHAT WE MAY SHORTLY EXPECT.

A well known titled lady lately appeared at a London theatre in order to raise funds to start a school on new lines.

Mr. B. Gomster, the famous novelist, has consented to appear at the Alabama Theatre, for a limited number of nights, in order to advertise his new novel.

The Rev. Silas Stiggins is appearing nightly at the Rose Empires in order to raise funds for the Mudbury Village School Treat.

The Duke of Gargoyle has, owing to the Budget, been compelled to accept an engagement at the Billingsgate Hippodrome.

Henry Higgins, a well-known West-end "growler" driver, is appearing at the Whitefriars Theatre, and telling his famous tales of old London in order to purchase himself a taxi-cab.