Music and Drama.

By BAYREUTH.

BOOKINGS.

(Dates subject to alteration.)

H.M. THEATRE, AUCKLAND.

March 24 to April 12—J. C. Williamson, Ltd..
May 9 to 21—Brauscombe Co.
May 22 to June 7—J. C. Williamson, Ltd.
June 9 to June 25—Geo. Marlow, Ltd.
June 26 to July 5—J. C. Williamson, Ltd.
July 7 to 19—Allen Doone.
August 4 to 16—J. C. Williamson, Ltd.
August 28 to September 27—Brauscombe Co.
October 1 to 11—J. C. Williamson, Ltd.

AUCKLAND PICTURE SHOWS.
Globe Theatre, Queen Street—Continuous.

Music and English.

A GOOD deal of interest has been aroused in the Old Country by the decision of a prominent firm of music publishers to employ only English expression marks in the songs which they publish. In a song called "Dust of the Desert," recently published, the instructions were given, "Don't drag." At first sight the idea of putting English marks into English songs seems very attractive, says a vocalist, and some of the younger composers have taken to it very keenly. For instance, Mr Cyril Scott and Mr Percy Grainger in their larger choral and orchestral works have avoided foreign words; similarly Mr Rutland Boughton, in a choral work produced at the Birmingham Festival three years ago. German composers, of course, have led the way in this, and French composers have long adopted the same theory; but it has been the habit of those responsible for the English editions of French and German works to translate the instructions into Italian, and, after all, there is something to be said for that point of view.

Universal Marks.

The accepted Italian terms have after all in the course of generations become part of the mentality of musicians. Everybody all over the world knows, for instance, the meaning of Allegro, Andante, tranquillo, Ritardando. If the first is translated into "Schnell" or "Quickly," and the second into "Ruhig gehend," or "With a gentle motion as of walking," the interpreter who reads it would probably think that it means something slightly different, and a good many of the expression marks printed in works like "Pelleas et Melisande" in French are slightly puzzling to foreigners who would have no difficulty in understanding the ordinary Italian equivalents. If music is supposed to be the most cosmopolitan of the arts, putting such difficulties in the way of interpreters surely has its disadvantages.

Morever, it is difficult to know where to draw the line. If every country is to claim the right to use its own language exclusively what is there to prevent a composer in Bucharest using Rumanian, or one in Budapest using the Magyar language, or a patriotic Irishman using Erse, and also the type belonging to that language? Those who follow Russian compositions with the full scores are frequently brought face to face with a direction printed in Russian, which is quite unintelligible.

Some Contretemps.

A good instance of the disadvantage of the innovation is to be found in a story which was current some time ago of an eminent German conductor who was conducting a choir in the North of England, and came across a passage marked "Breiter," which, of course, means "Broader." He called out to the singers "Breiter, ladies and gentlemen, breiter," and could not understand why the result was the exact opposite to what he wished — the reason of course being that they understood him to mean "brighter."

The other day I came across in a German composition the instruction "Mit edlem Ausdruck," which is not easily intelligible to the average Englishman. It is, however, the exact equivalent of Sir Edgar Elgar's favourite direction "Nobilmente." It is difficult to see how it would have been derogatory to the composer's patriotism to have followed Sir Edward's example. The whole question is one on which it would be interesting to know the opinions of musicians in general.

The Divine Mozart.

Mr. E. J. Dent has issued a volume, "Mozart's Operas—A Critical Study," being an elaboration of a pamphlet he wrote for the Cambridge performances of "Die Zauberflote" a year or so since. No one can easily surpass Mr. Dent in the pursuit of his main argument. He knows all that is really worth knowing about his subject, and his enthusiasm will assuredly not prove unwelcome to a generation which is rediscovering Mozart with refreshing eagerness. Superior persons, who affect to think that music begins with Wagner, and are bored to tears by Beethoven, may not like him, and even those who endorse Haydn's estimate of his hero must make an effort to get at Mr. Dent's point of view. It is not easy to put aside all that has happened since 1791, and to approach "Don Giovanni" from the standpoint of a contemporary. But the effort is worth making, and until it is made the only operas that can stand comparison with those of Verdi and Wagner are likely to be neglected in England, where, as Mr. Dent says, "Die Zauberflote" has been presented to Metropolitan audiences only twice in twenty years. He is eminently right, says a contemporary, in his view that we are lucky in being unhampered by tradition, and his advice as to the steps to be taken before Mozart can be restored to our stage is so necessary as to be almost pathetic. First and foremost, he demands an instant improvement in the art of singing—a substitution of the bel canto for the modern declamation. His next point is that performances should be given in the vernacular, and his last that producers should learn from Wagner that an opera is a musical whole, in which orchestra, voices, and stage effects combine to form one uninterrupted symphony. The conclusion of the whole matter, as far as it has been carried at present, is happily stated by Mr Dent, when he says—and who shall contradict him?—that from Mozart more than from any other composer we may most easily learn to understand operatic ideals at their best.

The Insidious Ragtime.

There is no escape from rag-time. It took the Atlantic at a bound, and has found no difficulty in making the short stride over the English Channel. It is heard everywhere now in Paris. At all the favourite tea rendezvous—the Elysee Palace, the Carlton, at the Pavillon Bleu at St. Cloud, at all the cafes, where there is a band, in the last "revue" at the Olympia Music Hall, wherever one goes, in fact, there are sure to be found the strains of this maltreated music. It is quite a sight to see the fiddlers frowning in the attempt to master the weird and subtle syncopations. Ragtime is a different thing in the hands of a cafe orchestra from what it is in London; but it is still ragtime. There is no difficulty in recognising "Everybody's Doing It," "Oh, You Beautiful Doll," "Ragging the Baby to Sleep," and all the rest. "There's a Girl in Havannah" is another great favourite, but they all "go down" very well; they all induce the same tapping of feet and wagging of heads that they produced in London and in the country of their birth. It is difficult to say exactly how ragtime got to Paris. There are so many English "turns" on the music-halls that it seems likely that the infection was brought over by one of them.

"The Pretenders"—A Great Drama

The genius of Ibsen as a dramatist stands high, and the production of "The Pretenders" in London last month adds another success to his credit. This drama possesses intense power, exuberant variety and absorbing interest. Of it a foremost English critic says:—During the long performance I had been living with those virile, tempestuous men of thirteenth-century Norway, and not only living with them, but understanding them. Moreover, Ibsen was no dealer in the sham antique. His characters are real, and are not essentially of any period.

It is usual in writing of Ibsen to separate his creative life into periods, and the impression is given that there were at least three distinct Ibsens. "The Pretenders," according to that view, belongs to the middle period, which gave the world "Emperor and Galilean," "Love's Comedy," "Brand," and "Peer Gynt," but these divisions are arbitrary. From the first Ibsen's power was that he dealt with the human soul. In the early dramas he was still trammelled by conventions, theatrical and other, but always he tried to dramatise the soul-life of mankind. In "The Pretenders" that attempt had become an achievement, and a very great achievement.

The Genius of Ibsen.

Frankly, I do not know where to place Ibsen if it be not at the side of Shakespeare, in his keen insight into the hearts and minds of men. Where in the whole range of drama can you find such a well-drawn, consistent character as Bishop Nicholas in this play, unless you go to Shakespeare? Where is there another Earl Skule, ambitious and yet torn with doubt of himself, cunning and yet wise, egotistical and yet capable of a great self-sacrifice, doomed to loneliness by his nature and yet passionately longing for love and faith! And, then, by way of contrast, there is the simple, genial, King Hakon, the "unfortunate" man who achieves, by his very nature, almost without an effort, what Earl Skule has always seen slip from his grasp.

It has been said that Ibsen meant Hakon to stand for Bjornson, and Skule for himself, but we need not inquire into the origin of a dramatist's inspiration. He must, of course, draw on his own experiences, unless he is a barren, objective playwright. Moreover, these two characters have a world-wide significance. They represent the two struggling forces of men's souls; the geniality and simplicity of faith and optimism, and the long and bitter struggle towards the light of the more complex and darker nature—"God's stepchild on earth."

In clearness of significance, however, "The Pretenders" is not to be compared with the best of the social dramas. This play is, indeed, a kind of inverted sketch book for Ibsen's later plays. Thus it is Bishop Nicholas, too, weak and cowardly to hold his own in a world of turbulent passions, and corroded with implacable jealousy, who enunciates the later doctrine of self. "King Hakon begins his reign by banishing his mother and his friends. A king must stand alone. But he needs the love of his wife and his mother in the moment of crisis. Earl Skule stands alone and fights for himself, but he, too, learns that he must have faith and love, and he finds himself through them and through the beauty of Hakon's great King's Thought, "Norway has been a kingdom, it shall become a people . . . . all shall be one hereafter, and all shall feel and know that they are one."

Panacea For World's Ills.

Ibsen's panacea for the ills of the world in "The Pretenders" is the Christian doctrine of self-sacrifice and love. That, one would say, is the ultimate trend of the play, but here and there in the speeches of Earl Skule we can note the beginnings of others ideas. I do not think one should look for a definite meaning in "The Pretenders." It is, above all, a stirring drama, and although it deals with psychological as much as with physical action, it must not be judged as a "tendency play."

Perhaps it is all the greater because it does not seek to prove anything. One can deduce as many meanings from its scenes and characters as one can from a contemplation of life itself. And what great drama some of those scenes are! The death of the Bishop is borrowed from the conventional stage, of course, but with what subtle irony and humour and with what tense psychological interest it is treated! I can well understand that the character of the Bishop is a favourite with actors in Norway and Germany.

For quiet, restrained drama I know of no scene more thrilling than that in which Hakon bears down the rebellious Skule by sheer force of kingly temperament, and none that reaches a higher plane of pathos and poetry than that other in which Skule seeks to drag from the Scald the secret of his scald-ship. None but a poet and a great poet could have written such a scene.

Finally, passing over many a passage of beauty and pathos, there is the sustained grandeur of Earl Skule's renunciation, when to save his daughter's child from the anger of the mob, and to establish peace, he breaks sanctuary and throws himself on his enemies' thirsting weapons: "There are men born to live, and men born to die. My desire was ever thitherward where God's finger pointed out the way for me; therefore, I never saw my path clear, till now. . . . I must into the mighty church roofed with the vault of stars, and 'tis the King of Kings I must implore for grace and mercy over all my life-work."

Repertory Theatres and Drama as an Art.

It is stated that steadily the repertory theatre is taking root in the provinces of the Old Country. Birmingham recently opened such a theatre, Sheffield is due to follow, and Leeds contemplates a repertory season as an experiment. At present there are repertory