

# THE STAGE

## HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.

### "POSSUM PADDOCK."

The wonderfully successful laughter-making Australian comedy, "Possum Paddock," which is described by our contemporaries as one long riot of mirth and merriment, will be presented at His Majesty's on Tuesday, April 20.

This much-heralded play, with its heart to heart story of life in the great "Outback," has so far had a career that may safely be described as meteoric. It is presented by a company of sixteen specially selected Australian artists, notably amongst whom are Mr. Fred. Macdonald, the inimitable "Dave" in "Our Selection"; Mr. Jack Kirby, Australia's most popular leading man (late A.I.F.); and Miss Kate Howarde herself, who has written, produced, and personally presented this greatest of all Australia's laughing successes. The opening night of "Possum Paddock" at the Theatre Royal in Sydney presented a scene of wild enthusiasm. In spite of the tremendous counter attractions the theatre was packed to the doors. The booking alone prior to the opening was enormous, and it clearly demonstrated Miss Howarde had struck a winner. Fred. Macdonald, it is said, was the star performer, and he was received in a way that clearly proved Australians have a keen appreciation of art in their own kind. The play teems with true local colour of the bush, the reason is because Miss Howarde went to the bush to get the atmosphere. There are no crude caricatures of Australian outback types in this play, rather are all the people real. This fact tends to make its great human appeal. We know that "Dad McQuade" is a real old farmer, that "Mum McQuade" is the actual lovable type of bush mother.

### OPERA HOUSE.

The current programme at the Opera House has a variety of features to commend it to public approval. Mr. J. Wallingford Tate is the principal newcomer on the bill, and having established his reputation as a pianologist on a previous visit, he is in keen demand with all sections of the house. He has some good numbers with an original way of getting them over, his biggest hit being his coster in the gallery sketch. Theodore, a magician, is making his first bow before the Auckland public, and he has a wealth of conjuring tricks to make up an entertaining interlude. Pollard and Jackson provide the artistic side of the programme in their vocal offering, and meet with an enthusiastic reception. The Gazahs, in a juggling and balancing act, and the Margaret and Willie trio, contortionists, contribute to the first half. "The Kissing Maids" is the delectable title of Harry Burgess' new revue, which has an abundance of catchy musical oddments and comic moments to make it well worth while. An outstanding feature is the jujitsu dance by Mr. Ernest Lashbrooke and Miss Ivy Moore, the weird and terrifying movements indulged in by the denizens of the underworld of Paris being realistically depicted by these clever artists. Mr. Burgess shines in a ditty, "Ze English Language," and Mr. Ernest Crawford makes excellent advantage of his agreeable voice in "Memories." Miss Lola Hunt and Miss Linda Dale act exhilaratingly all through, and Mr. Les Wharton and Mr. Gus Franks do their part towards the fun conspiracy. The choruses and ballets are sprightly as ever. Next Monday those firm favourites Miss Maude Courtney and Mr. C. will make their reappearance after a long absence.

Mr. W. A. Low is in Auckland preparatory to the showing of the big educational film "The Land We Live In."

Mr. Leo D. Chateau came up from Wellington for a few days in connection with the Auckland screening of the E. J. Carroll film "The Man From Kangaroo."

## MR. JOHN D. O'HARA.

### "LIGHTNIN'" BILL JONES.

"There goes Lightnin' Bill Jones." That's what I often hear in the streets from strangers," and Mr. John D. O'Hara, of the silvery locks and polished style, gave the writer some amusing reminiscences of the period which saw his own courtly personality covered by the graces or disgraces of the shining light in "Lightnin'." After 15 weeks in Melbourne and 17 in Sydney, his clinching remark "I'll fix it" carried such conviction that one day he received a letter from a young man about to be married, saying the event would have to be postponed unless he could find a house; and knowing the actor's capacity for "fixing" things he appealed to him for help. He showed the letter to an estate agent, who was able at the opportune moment to fix him up with a desirable house. "And so," said Mr. O'Hara, "the wedding came off, and I duly received a piece of cake in remembrance."

"Lightnin'," as he remarks, is a play that appeals to everyone on account of its simplicity and wholesomeness—anyone can discuss it without having to blush—and its admirably blended emotions are so very natural in their sequence. It is full of laughs, but it has its tearful moments, too. "My conception of the old reprobate is the result of analysis and long study. The audiences seem pleased with my efforts in the part, and that's half the battle."



MR. JOHN D. O'HARA, the incomparable impersonator of "Lightnin'" Bill Jones.

"But don't attribute its success to any personal merit of mine. It is just an accident that I happen to fit the part. Bill Jones—Lightnin' for irony, on account of his slowness—is a character that plays itself, if the individual is the right type. I'm the type, so there you are. Types are so essential to success. And in playing it you must be simple and natural, and avoid acting. But of course you must portray it to keep the sympathies of your audience. 'Lightnin'" Bill has all the vices, but he makes them so adorable they almost appear virtues. For instance, to have him stagger on the stage noisily drunk would spoil the illusion of his real down-to-bedrock character, so any effect like that must be carefully considered."

Mr. O'Hara, in the course of a life of constant study and application, has played close on 1000 parts. "And," he emphasised in that measured stately way of his, "it needs constant study to get on. That is the only road to success. And young people aspiring to the stage who only look on the glamour and applause should bear it in mind." He has just completed arrangements to remain with the J. C. Williamson firm for another year, which brings him to August, 1921. "I'm so much in love with Australia and its hospitable people that the chances are I'll become a resident," he says, "though the only

trouble would be leaving all my old friends of a life time."

The J. C. Williamson firm have accepted from the distinguished American actor for production in Australia an Irish play entitled "Peggy Machree." It is equally clean and as delightful as "Lightnin'," and is elaborated with songs and choruses. The authoress is Mrs. Denis O'Sullivan, who wrote it for her husband, a celebrated baritone. In it Mr. O'Hara plays a Scotchman in kilts who is compelled to live in Ireland against his will. One can see our friend Lightnin' handling the humorous possibilities.

Mr. O'Hara was eleven years with George M. Cohan, and it was due to his endorsement of our visitor's ability that he was engaged by J. C. Williamson for the Australian tour. In passing, he pays a glowing tribute to the latter firm. "They never do anything by halves," he says, "and in my long career of over 40 years with different managements I have never yet encountered such an earnest desire on the part of a theatrical firm to cater to the tastes of the public as is exemplified by the individual membership of the J.C.W. organisation." Another thing that impressed him during his stay in Australia was the fine talent displayed by the actors and actresses in that country, and he went so far as to say that in the present cast there are several whose parts are played in a superior manner to the New York production.

A hurried trip to Rotorua was managed before the company opened in Auckland, and both Mr. O'Hara and his equally charming wife were warmly enthusiastic over the wonders of the place, and look forward with interest to the remainder of their Dominion tour.

### A LIVE STREAK OF "LIGHTNIN'."

#### MISS DIANA WILSON.

There must always be a woman in it to stimulate interest in a play. That goes without saying. So next to Bill Jones in "Lightnin'" comes the fascinating young dancer and divorcee who vamps the judge. It needs to be someone of extra special charms and allurements to hold that position, which explains why Miss Diana Wilson was chosen to fill the role. With the gift of exuding vitality, she has that sense of comedy, too, which enables her to play her cajolery wiles with an amusingly exaggerated emphasis that gives her a sure individual score. Her own deep expressive voice she sacrifices for the resultant laughter.

This young English actress with the junoesque stature and graceful carriage, has brains to set off her beauty, and it's plain to see that she does not despise the value of dress as part of the stock-in-trade for inveigling the unwary. Vide "Lightnin'" for confirmation.

Her first entrance is made in a light tan cloth frock richly embroidered in soft brown chenille and topped with a cavalier cape in similar design. Then she is seen in a de-collette frock of flame-coloured velvet strikingly entwined with venetian-blue charmeuse and draped in long sinuous lines. In the court scene she looks enchanting in a voluminous cape of black satin adorned with vivid flame tassels, revealing a one-piece frock of black charmeuse and coppery gold-traced satin. With this she wears a smart black straw hat bunched in front with narrow loops of ribbon.

Miss Wilson, to try and quench her early desire for a stage career, was sent by her parents for a holiday in New York. There she met Isidora Duncan, the famous classic dancer, and appeared with her in a great Grecian production. Subsequently the King of Greece presented Isidora Duncan with an island in the Aegean Sea, where she was to take her pupils and found a new colony that would be symbolic of beauty and poetry. "It was an inspiration and an education to know this great purist," said Miss Wilson, "and I was keen to go with her, but relinquished this Arcadian scheme in favour of an invitation

to accompany Miss Ellen Terry to London. And she has been an adviser to me ever since, watching my career with loving interest." It was while studying Shakesperian roles on Miss Terry's suggestion that she was given a small part in "Sealed Orders" at Wyndham's, and later was engaged for significant roles in Somerset Maugham's "Caroline," and Barrie's "A Kiss for Cinderella" and "Seven Women." She also played a promin-



MISS DIANA WILSON, who plays Margaret Davis in "Lightnin'."

ent part in "Her Dearest Friend," written by Miss Rosemary Rees, the New Zealand dramatist. She was also engaged by Grossmith and Laurillard as leading lady for the Australasian production of "Chu Chin Chow," but other contracts have intervened, and it looks as if her eight months already spent with the J. C. Williamson management will stretch out over a good many more.

To watch good acting is one of her keenest joys, and making up is a craze with her, "so if all else fails I can be a lightning change artist," she says.

### "PRINCESS JU-JU."

A performance of the charming Japanese operetta "Princess Ju-Ju" will be given at the Town Hall Concert Chamber on Saturday next and Monday by Central Choir No. 1, under Mr. Sydney Butler's direction. Similar previous entertainments under the auspices of Auckland Associated Choirs have been very successful, and rehearsals point to another very enjoyable production. The dances, which form an important part of the piece, have been arranged by Miss Daphne Knight.

Mr. C. M. Berkeley, recovering from a severe injury to his hands, has gone to Wellington to open up the campaign for "Lightnin'" in the southern city.

"Lightnin'" will flash at His Majesty's Theatre for the last time on Thursday night, and will then shed its rays at Hamilton on Friday and Saturday.