

THE ENGLISH OPERA GROUP

Review of the Season

The Group has been unusually busy during the past year. During October and November, 1950, "Let's Make an Opera!" visited Tunbridge Wells, Eastbourne, Brighton, Torquay, Cambridge and Birmingham, and was again presented, under the aegis of the Company of Four, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. It played there for eight weeks, celebrating its 200th performance on January 24th. On tour it was the audiences in the industrial centres who were the most appreciative and large, and at the Lyric it was evident that the entertainment had lost none of its charm, and that many children were bringing their grown-ups to see it again—it is now an established Christmas attraction.

This year it will open at the same theatre on Christmas Eve, and run for five weeks.

In May the Group was again presented at the Lyric Theatre by the Company of Four in a Festival Season. It opened on May 1st with Monteverdi's "Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda," (choreography by Walter Gore and two fine curtains by John Piper), and a new "realisation" of "Dido and Aeneas" by Benjamin Britten. Britten conducted, Joan Cross produced, and Sophie Fedorovitch designed the scenery and costumes. "Albert Herring" was in the charge of Norman Del Mar, our resident conductor, and we were particularly fortunate in the collaboration of Josef Krips in five distinguished performances of "The Rape of Lucretia." "Let's Make an Opera!" was given at three matinees; the children for these performances were chosen from Britten's birthplace, Lowestoft, and their Suffolk accents gave it an additional charm. Britten, incidentally, was given the freedom of Lowestoft in July—a delightful gesture, rarely made to an artist.

It cannot be pretended that the season at the Lyric was a complete success. Illness and bad luck dogged the production of "Dido," and the first performance left considerable room for improvement. Kathleen Ferrier's illness meant additional performances for Nancy Evans as Lucretia—she was herself far from well and already fully occupied with "Dido." Also rehearsal difficulties, in this distractedly busy year, were unusually acute. And the audiences were small; even the Group's most ardent supporters were unable to come often because of the high prices (a matter unfortunately beyond the Group's control), and it was found that the Festival visitors either had not yet arrived or were saving their money for more spectacular attractions elsewhere.

Artistically, however, the Group is proud of its achievements at the Lyric, and the audiences were most appreciative. "Dido" improved steadily, and when it was given during the Holland Festival in May the audiences were enthusiastic, and the mis-en-scene, the singing of the chorus and of Joan Cross as Dido and of Peter Pears and Bruce Boyce who shared the performances of Aeneas, all came in for special commendation in the press.

In the lovely opera house at Wiesbaden, the Group enjoyed one of the triumphs of its career. "Lucretia" was given as part of the International Opera Festival, in which companies from Vienna, Rome, Paris, Zurich, Barcelona, as well as the Wiesbaden Opera itself, also took part—a high standard to compete with. But there were resounding cheers at the end and at least twenty curtain calls, and the following extract from the *Wiesbadener Tagblatt* sums up the reactions of the critics:—

"The Englishmen have shown that their undertaking to create a national operatic style is well on the way and is in the best hands The most significant advance in musical experiment during this Festival came from the British Isles. With this excellent work they have raised themselves to the level of the Viennese and Romans."

Appreciation on this level seldom comes our way at home—nevertheless the audiences at Aldeburgh, ("Dido" and "Combattimento") and at Lowestoft, ("Let's Make an Opera!") were as enthusiastic as could be wished.

For the Cheltenham Festival the Group gave the first professional performance of Holst's one-act opera "The Wandering Scholar," a light but genuinely operatic piece which was performed with considerable gusto. It preceded the first performance of "The Sleeping Children," commissioned by the Group from Tyrone Guthrie and Brian Easdale. This was an important occasion, as it was the first new opera in the repertoire *not* by Benjamin Britten. The criticisms varied considerably—from *The Times*, who denounced it roundly and used it as a pretext to condemn the whole idea of chamber opera—to *The Express*, who proclaimed that "the legend that only Benjamin Britten can write a stunningly successful modern British opera" was "knocked for six."

This is not the place to discuss the merits of the work, but it should perhaps be mentioned that it was received with considerably more attention and respect than most of the notices implied. The performances indeed were excellent, and reflect real credit on the conductor, Norman Del Mar, on Basil Coleman who produced, and on Ralph Koltai who designed the scenery and costumes. The Cheltenham Festival deserve to be congratulated on their enterprise in putting it on, and the Group has no regrets whatsoever. In their view the experiment was justified, and it is hoped that as a result many more composers have been encouraged to write chamber operas. If good enough, they will certainly be performed.

The audiences in Cheltenham were again small; also in Liverpool, where there was an embarrassing choice of attractions for a public that was predominantly local, and the more serious contributions suffered accordingly. Nine performances were given in Liverpool—two of "The Sleeping Children" and "The Wandering Scholar," two of "Dido" and "Combattimento," two of "Herring," and three of "Let's Make an Opera!" At the end of the week the stage staff were half dead with fatigue and the whole company was very glad of a holiday.

BASIL DOUGLAS.

THE - ENGLISH - OPERA - GROUP, - LTD.

DRAFT of DIRECTORS' REPORT for the year ended 31st December, 1949.

President: The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Harewood.
Directors: Rt. Hon. Oliver Lyttelton, D.S.O., M.C., M.P.
(Chairman):
Sir Kenneth Clark, K.C.B.
Mr Tyrone Guthrie.
Mr Ralph Hawkes.
The Hon. Mervyn Horder.
Mr James Lawrie.
Mr Denis Rickett.
The Honl James P.A. Smith, O.B.E.
Mr Erwin Stein.

Artistic Directors: Mr Benjamin Britten.
Mr Eric Crozier.
Mr John Piper.

General Manager and }
Secretary:..... Miss Anne Wood.
Miss Elizabeth Sweeting. (resigned 22nd
December 1949).

Registered Office: 115, Chancery Lane, London, W.C. 2.

1. Personnel.

It was with great pleasure that the Board of Directors learned that the Earl of Harewood had accepted their invitation to become President.

There were no changes in the Board during the year.

The Board accepted with great regret the resignation of Mr Eric Crozier as Artistic Director. They wish to record their appreciation of the signal services which he rendered to the English Opera Group, of which he was one of the founders.

The number of Company members was twenty-one at the end of the year, two members having paid the amount of their guarantees and withdrawn.

2. Productions and Repertoire.

(a). The repertoire for the year consisted of "The Rape of Lucretia", and "Albert Herring", both by Benjamin Britten; and the new children's entertainment by Benjamin Britten and Eric Crozier, "Let's Make an Opera!", (scenery and costumes by John Lewis, production by Basil Coleman).

(b). These operas were given 99 performances during the year. All three were performed at the Aldeburgh, Wolverhampton, and Cheltenham Festivals; "Albert Herring" and "The Rape of Lucretia" were also given in Copenhagen and Oslo, (with triumphant success); and "Let's Make an Opera!" after a week at Cambridge and a week at Brighton, opened on the 15th November at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, for a run of ten weeks.

3. The Association.

The English Opera Group Association commissioned a new chamber opera, "The Sleeping Children", from Brian Easdale and Tyrone Guthrie, to be performed by the English Opera Group in 1951; It also financed the extra rehearsals necessary for the English Opera Group's tour in Scandinavia.

4. Accounts.

(a). The Arts Council grant was reduced to £3,000., (in 1948 it had been £5,000). Donations during the year amounted to £3,578., and subscriptions under covenant amounted to £119. Total income from all sources was £20,622.

(b). The excess of income over expenditure for the year was £1,490., which the Directors consider satisfactory.

The total excess of expenditure over income since the incorporation of the company is £4,353., and the total amount guaranteed by company members is £6,790.

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The Artists included:-

Kathleen Ferrier.	Joan Cross.
Nancy Evans.	Peter Pears.
Otakar Kraus.	Clifford Curzon.
Benjamin Britten.	The Amadeus String Quartet.

The concerts were given with the following objectives:-

- (a). To raise money towards new productions.
- (b). To present unusual works, (e.g. the Schoenberg Kammer-sinfonie, Op. 9, the new Canticle by Benjamin Britten, and the Monteverde Sestina).
- (c). To keep the name of the Group before the public during the non-playing season.
- (d). To break new ground in the provinces for the performance of operas. As a result of the provincial concerts, nearly 1,000 requests for particulars of the English Opera Group Association are receiving attention, (The Association had already increased its membership by over 100 during the year).

FUTURE PLANS.1. New Productions:-

- (a). "Love in a Village", (Arne and Bickerstaffe) in a new version by Arthur Oldham.

The Third Programme has commissioned the first performances (on May 9th and 12th); the opera will be staged at the Aldeburgh Festival in June. It is also hoped to present it in London in the late autumn.

- (b). Benjamin Britten is planning two new operas for the Group, one for the autumn of 1952 and the other for 1953.

- (c). "Christopher Sly", by Arthur Oldham and Ronald Duncan, the second opera to be specially commissioned by the Group, is scheduled for production in 1953.

2. Further Commissions:- A list has been drawn up of composers and librettists, and it is proposed to give them encouragement to write operas for the Group, by means of some financial help and a public "reading", with the intention of a stage performance wherever possible.

3. Further Concerts and Concert performances of operas will be given during the year in London and the provinces.

4. "Let's Make an Opera!". The interest in the work of the Group aroused by the provincial concerts indicates that a winter tour in these centres would be assured of support.

5. Wiesbaden. The Group has again been invited to Wiesbaden in May, and will present "Albert Herring", with the composer conducting.

6. Encouragement will continue to be given to young composers, librettists, conductors, singers, players, designers, producers, and technicians. The opportunity thus given, in a realm of art where opportunity is unusually limited, has already proved its value.

THE ENGLISH OPERA GROUP, LTD.

DRAFT of the DIRECTORS' REPORT for the year ended 31st December 1950.

President: The Rt.Hon. The Earl of Harewood.

Directors: Mr James Lawrie (Chairman).
Sir Kenneth Clark, K.C.B.
The Hon. Mervyn Horder.
Mr Denis Rickett.
The Hon. James F.A. Smith, O.B.E.
Mr Erwin Stein.
Mr Isador Caplan.
Mr Anthony Gishford.

Artistic Directors: Mr Benjamin Britten.
Mr Basil Coleman.
Mr John Piper.
Miss Anne Wood.

General Manager: Mr Basil Douglas.

Secretary: Mr Isador Caplan.

Registered Office: 115, Chancery Lane, W.C.2.

1. Personnel.

(a). The Directors regret to report the death of Mr Ralph Hawkes during the year.

(b). The Board accepted with regret the resignations of Mr Oliver Lyttelton and Mr Tyrone Guthrie, the former because of pressure of Parliamentary business, the latter because he was also acting as a producer for the Group. Their colleagues' appreciation of the valuable work which they had both done was duly recorded in the minutes.

(c). Mr James Lawrie was elected Chairman.

(d). Sir Kenneth Clark, The Hon. Mervyn Horder, The Hon. James F.A. Smith, and Messrs. Stein, Lawrie and Rickett all retire from the Board by rotation, (no Annual General Meeting having been held in 1951) and Messrs. Caplan and Gishford retire, having been appointed by the Board to fill the vacancies caused by the resignations of Mr Oliver Lyttelton and Mr Tyrone Guthrie, and all of these being eligible, offer themselves for re-election.

(e). Mr Basil Coleman was appointed Artistic Director in place of Mr Eric Crozier.

(f). Mr Henry Foy was appointed General Manager in February, following the resignation of Miss Elizabeth Sweeting. The Directors accepted her resignation with great regret but recognised the importance of the competing claims on her services made by the Aldeburgh Festival. Mr Foy resigned as from 31st October, and Mr Basil Douglas was appointed in his place.

2. Members.

The number of Company members remained at twenty-one, one member having paid the amount of his guarantee and withdrawn, one member having died, and two new members joined.

3. Repertoire.

The repertoire consisted of "Albert Herring", and "Let's Make an Opera!", both by Benjamin Britten, and also of Benjamin Britten's version of "The Beggar's Opera". There were no new productions during the year.

These operas were given 127 performances during the year, which ended with a second Christmas season of "Let's Make an Opera!" at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. The season included performances at the Aldeburgh and Cheltenham Festivals, and a three weeks run of "The Beggar's Opera" at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith.

4. The English Opera Group Association.

The English Opera Group Association commissioned a new Chamber Opera by Arthur Oldham, with a Libretto by Ronald Duncan, designed for production in 1952; they also presented the English Opera Group with twelve music stands fitted with lights, and the sum of approximately £500. The Directors and Artistic Directors deeply appreciate this assistance.

5. Accounts.

(a). The Arts Council grant remained at £3,000. Donations during the year amounted to £2,884. and subscriptions under covenant amounted to £205. The total income from all sources was £18,612.

(b). At the time of Mr Foy's resignation the company was found to be in grave financial difficulties. These were overcome by a promise of an extra grant of £5,000. from the Arts Council to cover Festival of Britain activities during 1951 and a special donation of £1,500. towards the cost of a new production, and a promise of a guarantee of £1,500. from a non-member.

(c). The excess of income over expenditure for the year was £637, which the Directors consider satisfactory.

The total excess of expenditure over income since the inception of the company is £3,808., and the total amount guaranteed by company members is £6,790.

THE - ENGLISH - OPERA - GROUP, - LTD.

M E M O R A N D U M.

The English Opera Group wishes to record its thanks to the Arts Council and to the Festival of Britain, whose combined grant of £10,000. enabled the Group during the 1951 Festival Season to undertake the following programme:-

1. Four new productions:-

Dido and Aeneas (Purcell). 20 Performances.

Combattimento di Tancredi
e Clorinda (Monteverde). 20 Performances.

The Wandering Scholar (Holst). 6 Performances.

The Sleeping Children (Easdale). 6 Performances.

This was the first opera to be specially commissioned by the Group.

2. The above operas, together with "Albert Herring", "The Rape of Lucretia" and "Let's Make an Opera!", formed the repertoire for performances at the following festivals:-

London - Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith.
Aldeburgh.
Cheltenham.
Liverpool.

"Let's Make an Opera!" was also given three performances at Lowestoft, in addition to its third Christmas season at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. By the end of the current financial year it will have been given 270 performances by the English Opera Group.

3. Out of the eleven British operas given during the Festival of Britain, six were given by the English Opera Group

4. For the fourth consecutive year the Group was invited to perform at the Holland Festival, and for the first time at the International Opera Festival at Wiesbaden, where companies from Vienna, Rome, Paris, Zurich and Barcelona also took part. The "Wiesbadener Tageblatt" summed up the reactions of the audience as follows:-

"...The Englishmen have shown that their undertaking to create a national operatic style is well on the way and is in the best hands.... The most significant advance in musical experiment came from the British Isles.... With this excellent performance they have raised themselves to the level of the Viennese and the Romans".

5. During the year ending April 5th, 1952, the English Opera Group will have given 128 performances of operas.

6. The Group organised two series of concerts during the year. They were arranged to take place:-

(a). At the Victoria and Albert Museum, (six concerts).

(b). In the provinces, (seven concerts) at

Nottingham. Birmingham.
Liverpool. Manchester.
Bristol. Southend.

Leeds.

as from: 4 Cobble Street
Halebury

May 13th 1952

My dear Jimmie,

Sorry we couldn't talk
about the case of Basil C. last
night - but here is a point
or two I'd like to put to you
before the meeting on Thursday.

Basil D. has sent me B-day - copy
of his letter to you, which shows
that keeping on Basil C. thro'
this year is not very expensive

luxury. I think that it is a
luxury we ought to indulge in.
This winter season may be rather
thin from a performing angle, but
it will be rich in planning —
Festivals, productions, concerts for
Summer 1953, besides there are
these possible broadcast operas, of
which last night was a taste, &
which keep the E.D.G. name before
the public. Basil C. has shown
himself adept at arranging &
performing these (as I think all

(2)

will agree). Another reason
I think it essential we retain
him is that for a season you
may have heard, or if not, will
very soon hear, I shall myself
be practically unavailable this
year. Basil C. is a wonderful
help & stimulus to the management,
& I think with all the executives
going to busy, & myself away, that
the E.D.G. could scarcely go on
without him. I feel sure Basil D.
is clear about this too.

I don't know the exact financial position, but I can't feel the amount involved is so great that something so important must be sacrificed.

In great haste. Thank
you so much for last night.

Yours ever

Re

THE ENGLISH OPERA GROUP, LTD.

MEETING of the Board of Directors on February, 18th,
1952 - Minute Number 10.

As requested by the Board, the Artistic Directors have formulated proposals for the next two years, with estimates of the possible financial liabilities which are attached hereto.

In preparing these estimates it has been assumed that Overhead Expenses throughout will be covered by the Arts Council Grant.

To carry out the attached programme it will be seen, therefore, that a sum of £15,000. will be required, of which £5,000. is required by August 1953.

The Losses and Profits are summarised as follows:-

	£.
Production Costs of three new operas.	10,500.
Reproduction costs from time to time.	2,550.
Running Losses	7,200.
<u>less</u> Running profits.	3,600.
	<hr/>
	16,650.
<u>Less</u> Profits on Concerts.	1,400.
	<hr/>
	£15,250.
	<hr/>

We have tried to indicate the limit of the liabilities that might be sustained, although it should be born in mind that some of the losses might, in favourable circumstances, be converted into substantial gains.

9th May, 1952.

THE ENGLISH OPERA GROUP, LTD.

Preliminary sketch for two years from September 1952.

This is a plan which the Artistic Directors hope to achieve and is placed before the Directors to enable them to review the financial aspects of the Group's position for two years ahead.

<u>1952.</u>		<u>Financial prospects.</u>	<u>Profit.</u> £.	<u>Loss.</u> £.
August/ September.	<u>London Season.</u> "Love in a Village".	Reproduction costs.		200.
2 weeks (a).	at the Old Vic.	@ 1/3 capacity possible loss		
or (b).	St. James' Theatre.	£500. a week.		1,000.
October.	Concert I. V. & A. Museum.	even.		
	Concert & Ball E.O.G.A. Festival Hall.			
November.	<u>Provincial Tour.</u>			
4 weeks.	"Let's Make an Opera!".	Reproduction costs. Possible loss £100. a week.		200. 400.
	Concert II. V. & A. Museum.	even.		
December.	<u>Provincial Tour (contd.)</u>			
2 weeks	"Let's Make an Opera!".			200.
	Concert III. V. & A. Museum.	even.		
<u>1953.</u>				
January.	Concert IV. V. & A. Museum.	even.		
February. and	Concert V. V. & A. Museum.	even.		
March. 5 weeks.	<u>Provincial Tour.</u> "Let's Make an Opera!".	Reproduction costs. Possible loss £100. a week.		200. 500.
	Concert VI. V. & A. Museum.	even.		
April.	7 Concerts. (Ferrier, Pears, Britten.) Provinces.	profit £100. a concert without advert- ising revenue.	700.	—
		carried forward:-	700.	2,700.

		2.	
		£.	£.
1953.		brought forward.	700. 2,700.
May,	Wiesbaden & Florence	{	
	"Albert Herring", and "Lucretia".		Reproduction costs recovered and probable profit. 1,000.
June 7th- 15th.	<u>St. Ives Festival.</u> "Albert Herring".		Running costs barely covered. Allow for contingencies & reproduction costs. 100.
" 20th- 30th.	<u>Aldeburgh Festival.</u> "Christopher Sly". "Lucretia".		Production costs. 3,000. Running costs barely covered. Allow for contingencies. 100.
July 4th - 12th.	<u>Henley Festival.</u> "Albert Herring". "Love in a Village".	{	
" 18th - 26th.	<u>Exeter Festival.</u> "Christopher Sly". One other opera.		Running costs barely covered. Allow for reproduction costs and contingencies. 300.
August 22nd - 30th.	<u>Lowestoft Festival.</u> "Albert Herring". "Let's Make an Opera!".	-do- Allow.	100.
September/ October.	<u>Edinburgh Festival</u> (Sept. 7th - 12th). "The Turn of the Screw". One other opera.		Production costs. 4,000. Reproduction costs. 200. Possible excess of Fee over Running Costs. 2,000.
	<u>Scandinavia.</u> (Sept. 20th-Oct. 10th). "Albert Herring". "The Turn of the Screw".		Hoped that all Running costs, etc. covered without profit or loss.
October/ November.	<u>London Season.</u> (Oct. 26th-Nov. 14th). "The Turn of the Screw". "Christopher Sly". "Albert Herring". "Let's Make an Opera!".		Possible loss of £500. a week for three weeks. 1,500. Reproduction costs. 200.
	Concert I (October). Concert II (November). V. & A. Museum.	even.	

carried forward:

3,700. 12,200.

1953.

brought forward.

3.
£. 3,700. £. 12,200.

November/
December.

Provincial Tour.
(Nov. 16th-Dec. 12th).
"The Turn of the
Screw".
"Albert Herring."
"Let's Make an
Opera!".

{ possible loss of
£250. a week for
four weeks.

1,000.

Concert III.
V. & A. Museum.

even.

1953/54.

December/
January.

London Season.
(Dec. 26th-Jan. 30th).

possible average loss
of £50. a week for
five weeks.

250.
500.

"Love in a Village".
"Let's Make an
Opera!".

-do-

100.

Concert IV.
V. & A. Museum.

even.

1954.

February/
March.

Provincial Tour.
8 weeks with 9
perfs. a week.

possible average loss
of £100 a week for
eight weeks.

800.

"Love in a Village".
"Let's Make an Opera!".

Concert V. (February).
Concert VI. (March).
V. & A. Museum.

even.

Provinces & Festival
Hall. 7 Concerts.
(Ferrier, Pears, Britten)

profit £100. a
concert without
advertising
revenue.

700.

April/May.

Provincial Tour.
(4 weeks).

Possible loss of
£250 a week for
4 weeks.

1,000.

"The Turn of the
Screw".
"Albert Herring".
"Let's Make an Opera!"

Reproduction costs.
-do-

200.
200.

May.

Wiesbaden.
"The Turn of the
Screw".

Anticipated profit.

600.

June.

Aldeburgh Festival.
"The Turn of the
Screw".

New Opera (?Berkeley).
Production costs.

3,500.

June/July/
August.

Similar programme to
1953.

Allow.

500.

£5,000. £20,250.

Net excess of expenditure over revenue for
the two years is, therefore, £15,250.

ENGLISH OPERA:

Sir, - The announcement in your April issue that Alan Bush's opera "Wat Tyler" was recently given its first performance in Berlin in a German translation, seems to call for a re-examination of the operatic situation in this country.

The policies of our three leading operatic organisations do not appear to be beyond criticism. Covent Garden have admittedly given us "The Pilgrim's Progress" and "Billy Budd" during the past year. They have, however, also spent a great deal of time and money on the production of Berg's "Wozzeck"; and while that opera is, no doubt, a work of great distinction in its own field, one may question whether it is the wisest choice at the present time, when the principal aim of Covent Garden should surely be the building-up of a school of native British opera. If one also thinks of the huge sums of money that, until recently, were expended on inexcusably grotesque productions of classical masterpieces at Covent Garden, there are further grounds for disquiet.

At Sadler's Wells no new British opera has been produced since March, 1948, when Antony Hopkin's "The Lady Rohesia" ran for only a few performances. Few who saw it will have wondered why and the only doubt that arises must concern the artistic outlook of those responsible for staging it. Last year, Sadler's Wells gave us for a novelty Janacek's "Katya Kabanova", which was also withdrawn after a few performances. If the money was there to be spent, was there not one British opera equally worthy of production? Furthermore, it appears from recent Press advertisements, that the Sadler's Wells company does not have a single British opera in its current repertoire.

There remains the English Opera Group. On its establishment in 1947, this organisation secured Arts Council support and, moreover, asked for contributions from the public to further a policy which included the statement that "it is part of the Group's purpose to encourage young composers to write for the operatic stage". Yet, in the five years that have ensued, only one new opera has been produced - Brian Easdale's "The Sleeping Children" - apart from the operas of Benjamin Britten, who is one of the English Opera Group's Artistic Directors. On the other hand, Lord Harewood stated in the May, 1951 issue of Opera that the E.O.G. "has given no less than 488 stage performances of the four operas by Benjamin Britten which are included in its repertory". (In the ensuing Festival of Britain year, this figure would doubtless have increased substantially.) A slight adjustment of this remarkable situation is apparently to be made this year by the commissioning by the E.O.G. of one further new opera, this time from the pen of Arthur Oldham.

Since public money is, presumably, involved in the productions of the operas by Messrs. Easdale and Oldham, it seems pertinent to enquire why they were chosen by the E.O.G. and whether the E.O.G. has at any time considered approaching any of the British composers who have already established their reputations in the world of serious music. Roughly speaking, the following come into the twenty to fifty-year-old age group, and may therefore be considered "young" as composers go; Malcolm Arnold, Richard Arnell, Arthur Benjamin, Lennox Berkeley, Alan Bush, Arnold Cooke, Howard Ferguson, Benjamin Frankel, Racine Fricker, Elizabeth Lutyens, Elizabeth Maconchy, Wilfrid

Mellers, Herbert Murrill, Alan Rawsthorne, Edmund Rubbra, Humphrey Searle, Michael Tippett and Sir William Walton. How many of these composers have been approached during the five years in which it has been "part of the Group's purpose to encourage young composers to write for the operatic stage"?

Finally, it will be recalled that Arthur Benjamin, Alan Bush, Berthold Goldschmidt and Karl Rankl were the winners of the competition for new British operas held last year in connection with the Festival of Britain. Yet not one of the prize-winning operas has been performed here so far. This, surely, is a state of affairs that could not be paralleled in the musical life of any other European country.

It is not the time ripe for the managers of our operatic organisations to re-examine their policies.

A. Stoney.

London, S.W.1. April 21st, 1952.

25, Wigmore Place,
London, W.1.
4th June, 1952.

For swift comment please, as the letter should be despatched this week:-

To the Editor of Musical Opinion: English Opera:

Sir, I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Stoney, (in his letter in your June issue). More should certainly be done to encourage British composers to write operas, and while Sadler's Wells and Covent Garden will doubtless speak for themselves, I would like to say something on behalf of the English Opera Group, to whom I could wish Mr Stoney had been more generous.

It is indeed part of the Group's purpose, "to encourage young composers to write for the operatic stage", and during its six years of existence it has presented no less than six new operas. Four of them are by Benjamin Britten, and Mr Stoney appears to think that this is an undue proportion. Like other composers Britten needs a stage to give his work life, and as he was the first composer to write for these resources, it is natural that the first few operas should be by himself. Nor should it be imagined that his chamber operas, despite their artistic value, are by any means box office winners - "Let's Make an Opera!" can barely pay its way, and the others definitely cannot. "The Sleeping Children" was commissioned from Brian Easdale and Tyrone Guthrie in 1949, and produced last year. Arthur Oldham, in addition to his new version of "Love in a Village", (produced at Aldeburgh this year) hopes to have "Christopher Sly", (the libretto by Ronald Duncan) ready for 1953. This opera was also commissioned by the Group.

Two of the composers mentioned in Mr Stoney's list have accepted commissions to write operas for 1954 and 1955, and discussions are proceeding with two others. If anyone else shows the smallest desire to write a chamber opera, he will be given every possible encouragement, including financial assistance as far as it lies within the Group's means. Moreover, unless they prove quite unstageworthy they will be performed; and there is a new scheme to try operas out by means of public readings with piano accompaniment.

The English Opera Group is still young, and it takes time for new ideas to make themselves felt. Even a Britten opera, as I have already said, cannot yet make money. Indeed, money makes a sordid but powerful argument, and there is a distinct limit to the sums which the Group can afford to lose each year. The Grant from the Arts Council is sufficient to pay its overhead costs - nothing more - and for each new production revenue has to be scraped together from concerts, and from subscriptions and loans, which each year become increasingly scarce. The Group will never cease to regret that the Arts Council did not include a chamber opera among its four commissions for the Festival of Britain. The cost of staging it would have been small compared with the production costs at Sadler's Wells and Covent Garden, for whom the risk is correspondingly greater.

In fact this country will never be able to do justice to our young operatic composers until it decides that it must have a strong, healthy repertory of its own, and is willing to pay for it. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the two opera Houses in Paris received a combined grant of £1,225,000 last year, while Sadler's Wells and Covent Garden received between them £195,500!

Yours, faithfully,

(Basil Douglas). General Manager.