

quite irrelevant 'to the ideas and expectations of 1840' but welcomes 'the present outburst of Maori resentment and nationalism' as 'a hopeful sign of renewed vitality.'

As he grew older his pessimism deepened and his mood grew blacker. He faced old age and the prospect of death with resignation (and sometimes despair) rather than Yeatsian rage – but he does not dwell upon it, except to hope for 'a quick exit'. He suffered a good deal from what one might call 'Darwinian despair'; this evolutionary cycle was ending and perhaps another would begin after

the cataclysm. He came to think little of his own achievements, while all the time continuing with them – his own garden and those of his friends, his autobiography as well as his historical writings. He contemplated a further memoir which would be a more personal account of his life. It was not written, but it seems likely that the full body of letters, now in the Turnbull, would fill that gap and make a very fine book.

Ormond Wilson could hardly be considered typical of his times – he was too quirky for that – but few could match him for energy, variety,

independence of thought and (in spite of his denials) usefulness. Though he is realised more fully in this book than the other letter-writers, most of them give often valuable insights into their lives and their times. It is clear that Peggy Garland had a remarkable capacity to attract affection and loyalty. That is, strangely perhaps, shown not so much by her own writing as by the admiration (and in some cases the love) she inspired in the friends she made in New Zealand. Given that they were a diverse company, this was no mean feat.

BOOK REVIEW

by John Drummond

Entertaining & informative

Opera's farthest frontier

Adrienne Simpson, Auckland, 1996, 288pp, \$44.95.

NEW ZEALAND MAY BE as distant from Europe as it is possible to be, but Adrienne Simpson's well-researched volume shows us that geography has not prevented us from enjoying an almost constant access to European opera during the past 136 years. For that we may have cause to be grateful to our proximity to Australia, for it has been Australian (and some European) touring companies that have offered us the meat in our operatic fare, at least until more recent times.

What it is immediately astonishing to discover in Adrienne Simpson's book is the extraordinary versatility, capacity for work and sheer tenacity displayed by members of the international touring opera companies in the 19th century. Performing and living conditions

were often a nightmare; travel was awkward, streets were muddy, theatres were draughty and cold, orchestral players not always up to scratch. But the members of Lyster's and Simonsen's troupes, the Pollard Liliputians, and the J.C. Williamson companies continued to deliver opera to enthusiastic houses in the main centres and in many smaller ones too.

Even at the farthest frontier our operatic fare was often up-to-date. Many operas were given here in New Zealand within five or six years of their European premieres – works such as Verdi's *Aida*, Wallace's *Lurline*, Puccini's *Madam Butterfly*, Gounod's *Faust*, Bizet's *Carmen*, and the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas (of course!). We saw Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* in Dunedin in 1864 and his *L'Africaine* eight years later in

Auckland. We enjoyed *Tannhäuser* and *The Flying Dutchman* in German as early as 1901. In a 28-day period in Dunedin in 1864 Lyster's Royal Italian and English Opera Company performed 18 different works, by Donizetti, Balfe, Wallace, Bellini, Auber, Verdi, Flotow, Rossini, Meyerbeer, Verdi, Mozart and Gounod.

Of course some of these performances would not have satisfied a purist. Often the operas were cut – occasionally butchered – and not everyone in the cast would be singing a role entirely suited to his or her voice. But in terms of access to music theatre, often great music theatre, seasons like this were amazing, and they will have had an enormous affect upon audiences. One lady complained that she wasn't receiving rent from her tenants because they were spending all their money on going to the opera.

We were lucky: quite how lucky is

made evident in Adrienne Simpson's book. Not many of the companies who toured to New Zealand made much money, even though houses were good. The costs of transport over the distances involved were high, the risks were great, and the profits were to be made not here but in Australia. After World War 1, touring largely fell away for these financial reasons. It is a familiar story, and as the history is traced up to more recent times we are reminded of the difficulties experienced by the New Zealand Opera Company.

If there is a message to be gleaned from the book it may be this. The successful opera companies had, first of all, excellent, experienced and knowledgeable management, capable of making both artistic and financial decisions. Lyster, the Simonsens and the others were all opera people, not managers brought in from outside, but at the same time they had administrative and people skills. Secondly, the companies provided a mix of works, but made their selections according to audience taste. They learned what their audiences would accept. Attempts to provide audiences with what was good for them always led to financial disaster. Lastly, they quite properly relied on audiences to be able to recognise high quality. It might be the quality of a work, or the quality of a performer – either would fill the house, but the latter was more reliable in this respect! The performer need not be particularly well-known before his or first performance in a town, but if the word would get around that he or she was worth hearing, tickets would sell like hot cakes.

Adrienne Simpson's book is,

despite its wealth of detail, eminently readable. We may occasionally be tempted to skip the finer points of who did what when – except, of course, when it's our town she is talking about! – but anyone with an

interest in opera in New Zealand will find this an entertaining and informative volume. We look forward to more: perhaps a book on the amateur scene, or on the operas written by New Zealanders. ☞

📖 BOOK REVIEW

by Tony Nightingale

A vigorous fermentation

Quality Bakers of New Zealand: The First 25 Years

Susan Butterworth, Quality Bakers NZ Ltd, 1997, \$49.95, 265 pp.

TO A CHILD IN THE 1960s, bread was brown or white (or grey), and if you were prepared to pay a little more, you could purchase the mysterious 'milk loaf'. Bread was cheap; nutritious, and its consumption was considered such a virtue, that it was subsidised.... Bread was also excruciatingly boring! What ever happened to those days and how did we get to the stage today where New Zealand is a world leader in bread production? Susan Butterworth's lively history *Quality Bakers: The First 25 Years* will certainly help you start to pick away at the crust of this culinary question.

This is a story of a revolution in breadmaking, from production by small groups of artisans to industrial organisation on a scale which made the New Zealand industry a model for other countries. The smaller provincial bakers of central New Zealand banded together into a cooperative that included, amongst others, Ted Debrency of Wellington's Magnet bakeries, Noel Yarrow of A.H. Yarrow Ltd, Manaia, and Pat Goodman of GBH bakeries Nelson. It was no coincidence that these companies were all in the WNTV1

(you have to be over 30 to remember that) reception area, because the cooperative quickly developed distinctive branding and a coherent marketing strategy for their products, based on TV advertising. It grew, took on the bigger bakeries, and guided by Sir Pat Goodman and his team's entrepreneurial skills, developed commercial procedures that worked. As part of this process the cooperative became a company.

Susan Butterworth is aware of much of the theory that has been used and abused to explain the growth of multinational enterprises, but she has chosen to concentrate on a broad range of themes that allow the readers to judge for themselves what made Quality Bakers so successful. Given the lack of agreement amongst theorists on what makes a successful company, and the uncomfortable fact that much of the initial development took place under a highly regulated market, this is sensible. It also makes a much better read where chapter headings such as 'Mixing the Dough' and 'Vigorous Fermentation' give tongue-in-cheek insights into quite complex developments.