

The stars put on 4-hour show as salute to Novello

THE DOWAGER FAIRY QUEEN

By JOHN BARBER

SHOW: Salute to Ivor Novello
THEATRE: Coliseum

STARS of stage and screen led a company of 400 in this four-hour show. Most of them rehearsed seven hours yesterday before curtain-rise.

Even during lunch-break **Jack Buchanan** was working out a soft-shoe shuffle alone on the stage.

The object was to raise £15,000 towards establishing **Ivor Novello's Maidenhead** house. Redroofs, as a convalescent home for actors. Many of the 2,200 audience had paid ten guineas for a seat.

Footlight tears

The actor-playwright-composer's death last March had awakened "what **Noel Coward** called a "deep personal dismay." And when **Gracie Fields** sang "Keep the Home Fires Burning," Novello's first hit-tune, tears were shed on both sides of the footlights.

"He was the unchallenged Prince of Never-Never Land," said **John Gielgud**. "He made a tragic epoch laugh and sing," said **Edith Evans**. **Ralph Richardson** spoke of "a gift as comely as his gift for music—the drama of his face."

As well as excerpts from current Novello shows, many forgotten songs of his were revived. **Tiny Beatrice Lillie** sang "March With Me"—and herself was marched over by 16 strapping chorus girls.

Fay Compton was Principal Boy, and **Eric Portman** a red-breathed Demon King in a

Novello panto sketch, which climaxed in **Anton Dolin**, at his most regal, partnering **Cicely Courtneidge**, at her most harried.

Other songs included Novello's last, "Pray For Me," written on his last plane journey to Jamaica. Other singers: **Donald Peers**, **Kirsten Flagstad**, **Mary Ellis**.

Emlyn Williams wrote and acted in a sketch. Unexpectedly, it suggested that the boy born **David Ivor Davies** inherited his music from his father's side of the family. For this, **Lewis Casson**, **Mervyn** and **Glynis Johns** and **Sybil Thorndike** dressed in black to remind us of Novello's glum Welsh village background.

Stars on stage for the finale—**Margaret Rawlings**, **Richard Attenborough**, **Douglas Byng**, **Roger Livesey**, **Eileen Herlie**, **Gladys Cooper**, **Michael Redgrave**, **Dorothy Ward**, **Leslie**



CAN THIS BE CECILY? . . .

It certainly can . . . in her famous Dowager Fairy Queen sketch, costumed by . . .