



Tours for Divas

THE biggest headache in the field of travel is endured every year by Miss Mary Crennan, a short, rotund lady who annually spends a million dollars making hotel and transportation arrangements for people like Lily Pons, Yehudi Menuhin, Jascha Heifetz, and Mario Lanza.

As transportation manager of Columbia Artists Management, world's largest concert representatives, Miss Crennan has been known to import whole orchestras from Europe, booking their space from the time they leave their home town until they complete a whistle-stop tour of the United States eight weeks later. She fills rooms in the nation's hotels 32,500 times a year, runs up a weekly bus bill of \$10,000, keeps over a thousand performers on the road from September to May.

Most of the thousand traveling artists are brimful of temperament, not to mention superstitions. Oscar Levant won't ride in berths, sleep in rooms, or travel in planes numbered 13. Once he called up to find out what space he was holding on the Century for Chicago. "You've got drawing room G," said Miss Crennan. "G for George." There was a scream at the other end of the phone. "Don't say George to me," said Mr. Levant, who won't travel in Pullman cars bearing that name either.

Irate pianists think nothing of calling Miss Crennan in New York to complain because their hotel room in Spokane is not ready. One famed singer will not be booked into towns with fewer than three movie theatres because she is an avid cinema fan and she figures that three theatres

will give her a fair chance of catching one she hasn't seen before. The late Bronislaw Huberman was an insomniac and used to enter his train and make a mark on the window alongside the space he was holding. Then he would walk outside and see if his berth was over the train's wheels. Managers like Schuyler Chapin and Humphrey Douless, who are employed by Columbia to travel with the top stars, have been required to measure the length of a railway car with a ruler in order to assure some fluttery contralto that her compartment was in the exact comfortable middle of the carriage.

Big-name artists travel the main roads using plane and train, but outsized attractions like the St. Paul Cathedral Choir, the Boston Pops, and the Garde Républicaine Band of Paris are moved cross country by bus. Rolling across the wide spaces of the West, they can cover 300 miles a day, sleep in a hotel room every night instead of over the rails. Moreover, the performers cut down on tips that are required with frequent changes of conveyance. Piano teams present special problems because many auditoriums keep only one piano on hand and, besides, most accomplished pianists have agreements to use only one manufacturer's piano. Columbia now has three piano teams on its roster, all of whom travel by trailer truck, bringing their instruments with them.

Solo stars who worry about transportation frequently carry duplicate accommodations on both plane and train as an assurance against the weather. On a tour of the U.S. with Jascha Heifetz this year Schuyler

Chapin had to check the local weather bureaus three times a day. If clear flying was assured Heifetz flew, sitting in the front of the plane, alongside the engines, one seat for Jascha, one for Chapin, and one for the fiddle.

The all-time multiple ticket buyer, however, is Lily Pons, who adores trains, and buys six tickets every time she travels. Two fares cover her own private drawing room, one roomette is for her pianist, one for her flutist, one for her maid, and one for her manager. In deference to her affinity for railroads, not to mention her patronage, both the Boston and Maine and the Central Railroad of New Jersey have named locomotives *Lily Pons* and the Pullman Company is christening a car in her honor.

WHILE divas like Pons are the delight of the railroads, they are also their dismay. Singers fret continually over air-conditioning, which might render them voiceless on concert night. When Pons enters a railroad car her manager is required to have the air-conditioning shut off, a feat which he can frequently turn by dispensing a ten-dollar bill to the right party. But an hour later some sweltering traveler usually ups the ante and the cool air comes on again. It is a duel all night until she drops off to sleep. In Pons's case there is also the matter of her three Lhasa terriers imported from Tibet. They must be smuggled in each parlor car and inside every hotel in contravention of whatever regulations might exist. A flash of the Pons keyboard, a burst of the Pons personality, however, and railway vice presidents are normally reduced to murmuring baby talk to the three mutts from Mongolia.

Miss Pons, who is given to broad-hooped skirts, which she refers to as her "oops," prefers big, roomy, old-fashioned automobiles to accommodate her mode of dress. At home she drives a 1934 Packard with a



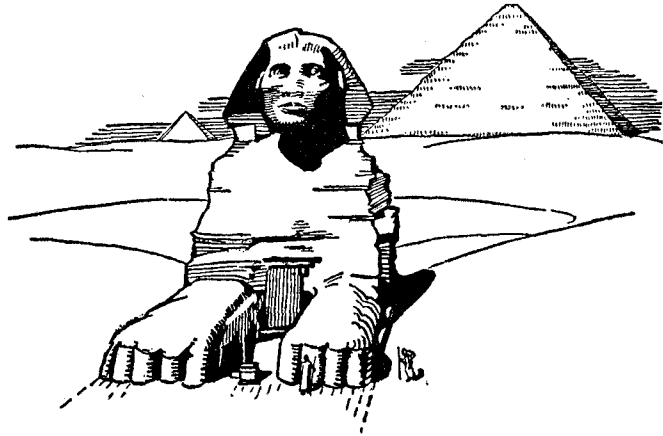
special Brewster body. Ancient hacks being hard to come by in places like Centralia, Illinois, her manager, Humphrey Douless, generally rents them from mortuaries which keep them on hand as funeral cars. The morticians are usually so pleased by the prospect of Miss Pons using one of their funeral cars they rarely charge Douless for its use.

ALTHOUGH Miss Crennan gets preferred accommodations for her traveling stars in the nation's best hotels, Pons is now presenting a new problem. She prefers motels, seeking them out in Little Rock, Beaumont, Baton Rouge, and Montgomery. Observers say it is somewhat unnerving to see Pons, her furs, her jewelry, her French maid, her pianist, flutist, manager, and three Lhasa terriers pour out of five cabins in the tourist belt of Texas, but there is no explaining the preferences of a prima donna.

Says Mary Crennan, "I know the hotels of this country by heart. I know which have cockroaches. I know the artists and I know that if I put them in certain hotels they couldn't yodel a note the next day." After fifteen years with Thomas Cook, three with American Express, and seven with Raymond Whitcomb, Miss Crennan thinks that being a travel agent is a vacation compared to booking tours for concert artists. She now keeps three girls who do nothing but route trips and two stenographers who spend all their working hours typing itineraries. Although hot calls from an overheated Heifetz in the middle of Kansas have made her dream longingly for her quiet travel-agent days, Miss Crennan has stuck by her promise delivered twelve years ago that she would never quit in the middle of a season.

Still, she wishes that all her talented travelers would be like Dorothy Kirsten. Should a mixup occur and Kirsten find herself with no transportation out of a town she has been known to ride a cab to the city limits and sit on her luggage until a motorist, flagged by her dutiful manager, picks her up. Some days, faced with a problem of finding space for the 116 members of the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam in forty-three American cities, including Lake Charles, Louisiana, and Anderson, South Carolina, Miss Crennan thinks how wonderful life might be if all her wandering minstrels would be like the singer who flies to her out-of-town engagements in her own private plane. Her husband is the pilot, and after he stows the plane in the hangar he puts on his full-dress suit and becomes her accompanist. It keeps down the overhead.

—HORACE SUTTON.



—From "Builders of the Old World."

Of Pharaohs and Fellahs

IN THE past several weeks the British have begun to evacuate the Suez, M-G-M has released Robert Taylor in "The Valley of the Kings," and a Gotham beautician has dreamed up a Cheops coiffure. But none of these stimuli existed a short time priorly when, vacation-minded, I stumbled on an ad in this organ for a fifty-one-day round trip to Egypt for \$580, a good working-girl price if there ever was one. Everybody warned me against it: "You'll have trouble getting a visa." "You'll spend days going through the redtape." "The dragomen will drive you insane." "You'll catch yellow fever, typhoid, diarrhea." "There are riots in the streets." "Be sure to wear a nightie because the Sudanese chambermen will enter your boudoir without knocking." "It's baksheesh, baksheesh, baksheesh." "Watch out for those Egyptians. They aren't like American men," said American men. Well, I'm an intrepid woman where a bargain's concerned, and two weeks after having secured a visa overnight in New York I found myself drifting into the harbor of Alexandria, still dizzy from the sights of the Riviera, Florence, and Naples. I even liked Naples.

There was a light drizzle and the coast of Africa looked hazy, but I was assured by the nationals aboard ship that it never rains in the land of the pharaohs—Egyptians being quite as stout about their climate as our own Californians. So I snapped blurry pictures of cuttersful of uniformed gentlemen boarding the boat until I could no longer delay getting into line for the health and immigration inspectors. Two minutes later one of the ship's stewards approached, saying a couple of officers wanted to see me. I blanched, and the corpuscles trickled down to my toes. "This is it!" I thought sickly. "Oh, why did I ever leave Missoula?" Two khakied captains thrust

out their hands. "Miss Zheer-son?" one asked. "On behalf of Mohyeddin El Shazli, director general of tourism in Egypt, welcome to Egypt! Let me get you some coffee." And he trotted off after the country's ubiquitous demitasse. "May I help you through customs?" asked the other politely, and I said, "Oh, sure," having recovered my poise. I had another quick Egyptian java with the boys in the customs, who seemed to find me quite charming, only I found out later that their instructions say "SMILE AT THE PEOPLE!" Then the two tourist police captains (that's what those nice fellows were) drove me to my hotel, where the bedrooms had inside locks like Rome, Paris, and NYC.

There are now about twenty tourist police captains and thirty-five women guides for tourists available to all travelers, without charge, through the Egyptian State Tourist Administration, which expects thereby to put the unsavory dragomen out of business. The captains, whose function is to meet all carriers and assist people through customs, have been selected from the regular police force for their superior education, knowledge of antiquities, facility with languages, and good manners. In addition to all that, the young ladies must be informed on the lands from which the visitors principally hail, and they have been further encouraged to invite us foreigners to their homes so we will be happy in the "new Egypt."

They made me happy in Alex during the few hours I was there by squiring me through the Graeco-Roman Museum (where all the statues had been beheaded by disapproving early Christians) and allowing me to snoop at my leisure in Farouk's official palace, Ras El Tin, a resplendent little shack.

I took a big Greyhound from Alex to Cairo, because it seemed slightly