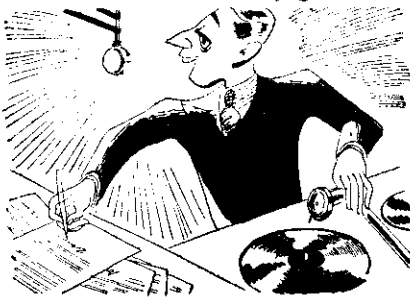


# ANNOUNCING IS NO JOKE

Written for "The Listener" by D.L.S.

"COMING up!" I paused as I opened the announcers' studio door. Then, not exactly sure who or what was coming up, I entered. "Coming up!" repeated the announcer, and then ignored me. The coolness of the reception rather abashed me, but I said nothing. The announcer's hand twisted knobs and flicked keys. The music stopped, a red light flashed on, and he proceeded to expound the merits of a cough mixture. More Houdini passes and the light went out, music started again, and he looked up with a smile. "Welcome to the dog-box," he said. "Take a seat."

I took the vacant co-announcer's chair on the opposite side of the desk, and looked at the microphone suspended between us. He translated my glance.



"No chance to relax"

"No, it's only dangerous when the red light's on."

As he spoke he was liberally initialing sheets, changing the record, stamping its bag, and screwing a new needle into the second gramophone pick-up. "You seem to have enough to keep you busy besides announcing," I suggested.

"Yes, while a record is playing—for three minutes on the average—there's the last record to be changed, the details to be entered in the log to cover copyright, the advertising schedule to be signed to show that a commercial has been broadcast, the next commercial to be prepared, next record to be set up..."

"Which just gives you time to settle down before going through it all again," I finished.

"Exactly," he smiled, and transferred his attention to the next piece of advertising copy in front of him.

## The Major Drawbacks

"Tell me," I asked when he had perused it, "what do you find the the major drawbacks of the job?"

"Well—excuse me, we're coming up!" I had by now decided that "coming up" signified that the studio was going on the air, so I sat still. He read a soap commercial, closed the microphone, and gave me his attention again.

"Where were we? Oh, yes, the drawbacks. Well, there are the broken hours, of course. We are liable to be rostered at any time between 5.45 a.m. and midnight, usually for two sessions per day, and meals don't count. Then, when we are actually on the job, we are always fighting against the clock to put commercials and features on the air on time—and that becomes really difficult if there's a breakdown for even a few minutes and we are behind schedule. That,

plus the responsibility of the microphone, plus the possibility of something beyond our control going wrong, adds up to a considerable nervous strain. It means we must always be on the alert—we don't get a chance to relax. We're really working in top gear for three or four hours at a stretch."

He consulted the advertising schedule and pushed a buzzer. The technician in the control room looked up, and the announcer smacked the back of his own hand and pointed accusingly at him. I expected the technician to look hostile, but he merely nodded his head.

## Pushing Buttons

"Doesn't he ever object?" I inquired.

"No, it's merely our signal meaning 'I'll back-announce record and over to you to play a recorded commercial.'"

"I suppose you have quite a selection of signals?"

"Not so much now. Our inter-comm. system cuts out most of it." He turned to the box arrangement at his side and pushed one of the three buttons.

"Would you mind saying something to demonstrate the 'talk-back?' he said, looking at the technician through the window. The technician had been regarding him with a bored expression. He turned to a corresponding box in the control room and selected a button. His voice came through the speaker:

"If you would push the right button I might be able to hear you."

"Well, you see how it works," said the announcer. "Just a moment."

"Coming up?" I asked.

He grinned, announced the record and waved to the control room. I heard a female voice eulogising a brand of tea. Then a returning wave from the technician and the announcer started the next record. He was busily signing his schedule when the recording began to give screeches of distortion. With a hurried "Quiet!" he faded it out, opened the microphone, and, as he apologised to the listening audience, changed it to the other gramophone turntable and restarted it.

"And there's an example of the necessity of being on our toes," he said. "The point broke off the needle. That's liable to happen any time, but that particular grohm—a first cousin to the gremlin family—generally makes his appearance at the most inopportune moment."

## "We Do Really Work"

"I suppose a number of people ask you questions about the job. What's the most usual?"

"Whether we may converse while the records are playing is one. But a surprising one that's general is: Do we hear the records? Yes, we must listen to them, regardless of whether we like them or not. We don't have the listener's privilege of switching off when we are tired of listening, either."

As I rose to go, he said: "And I hope you'll make this an announcer's plea. Despite the general impression that we have an enviable job, we do really work."

On the way out I passed a member of the station staff on the way in. I listened and was rewarded—waited through the doorway came "Coming up!"

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