

A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN

2ZB Fiddles While Home Burns

IT is the common experience of the ZB Stations to receive many 'phone calls when the fire alarm goes—people apparently believe that the CBS is also a GI (General Information) Service. But when the fire alarm goes, and the fire happens to be next door to the studio, five trunk lines and the combined efforts of station officials are hopelessly inadequate to cope with the public curiosity—which is, in addition, tempered by genuine concern.

When the Hope Gibbons Building in Courtenay Place, Wellington, in which the studio of 2ZB is located, caught fire recently, it did not take more than a few minutes for the news to spread almost around the whole city, and within seconds of the sounding of the alarm, 2ZB's 'phone switchboard was studded with little dots of light, each one representing an anxious enquirer.

Preparing for Emergencies

Fortunately the fire did not spread beyond a portion of the building separated from the studio, but when it became apparent that the blaze had assumed somewhat dangerous proportions, station officials lost no time in making preparations for a possible emergency. Arrangements were completed for the shifting of equipment to the transmitter on Mount Victoria so that the programme could be continued from there if need be. 2ZB took no chances of leaving anything undone which might seriously interfere with its scheduled service.

Meantime, a large crowd had collected in the vicinity of the building, for the fire had become really spectacular. Across the street, 2ZB's programme could be heard from the radio of a parked car, and in a short while a knot of excited people gathered about it to hear if 2ZB had any special announcements to make.

"Hot" Music

The comments were enlightening. "Are they still on the air?" asked one female voice, squeaking a little with excitement.

"Yes," came a reply from the depths of the crowd. "They're putting across some 'hot' music right now!" There was a laugh at this, but the man in the car shook his head. "It'd be too bad if the station were put out of action," he said. "That's a pretty big blaze."

The girl at 2ZB's switchboard by now had to send out an SOS, and the announcer came to her rescue by requesting listeners not to ring the studio. The 'phone calls were quite impossible to handle, and a very weary girl was relieved to find that the reassurances over the air had the effect eventually of diminishing the insistent winking of five banks of plugs.

There is, of course, a sequel to the story. When the fire had been brought under control, the only part of 2ZB affected by water was, of all things, the outside 'phone circuits in another part of the building. The station's outward telephone traffic became badly jammed, and, in place of the queue of anxious listeners ringing the station, there formed a queue of studio officials trying to ring out. Which certainly seems to suggest that the theme song for the girl at the switchboard should be, "I'd go through fire and water for you."

Meet the LADIES



MRS. MURIEL LEWIS, who conducts "The Woman's Forum" over 2ZB at 11 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, is one of New Zealand's pioneer broadcasters, for she began a series of weekly talks over 2YA in 1931. Though these were entitled "Fabrics and Fashions" and began as purely fashion records, they de-

veloped during nearly three years into general talks for women on all kinds of subjects, and her fan mail became extensive. Mrs. Lewis then joined the staff of a Wellington daily paper as woman editor, and did no more broadcasting until she acted as commentator at the Ball given by the Mayor of Wellington during the visit of the Duke of Gloucester.

In 1934 Mrs. Lewis went to Hong Kong, and while there, did a series of broadcasts on Maori mythology over ZBW, as well as one talk a day before the New Zealand Football team played a return match in Hong Kong after their visit to Japan. "New Zealand Universities and New Zealand Young Men" was the subject of the talk. It roused much interest, and was said to have been responsible for an unexpectedly large attendance at the match. Not only in broadcasting is she "One of the oldest"; for as she says, how could she be the possessor of a grown-up family, plus grand-child, unless the years allowed it?

(Next week: Anne Stewart)

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