

"MUSICAL INDIGESTION AND ADVERTISING AGONY"

A New Zealander's Views of Broadcasting In America

A YOUNG man whose name may not be mentioned has returned to New Zealand by a ship which may not be mentioned, on a date which may not be mentioned, from a port which may not be mentioned. However, prior to all these fascinatingly unmentionable experiences, he was in Canada, and before that he worked for the National Broadcasting service as an operator, here and there.

In Canada he naturally took some interest in broadcasting and returned here to say, in the emphatic idiom of the moment's inspiration, that radio programmes there were musical indigestion and advertising agony.

Most of the national service was filled with programmes bought whole from the big American systems. Strictly, the Canadian National service was not supposed to broadcast advertising. But their main stars, Jack Benny and Charlie McCarthy, came over the border on discs complete with their sponsors' inserts. So, willy nilly, the service used the advertising.

Ancient Equipment

There was little originality or initiative in the programmes and any that happened to creep in was completely spoiled by transmission through very ancient and extremely decrepit equipment. One of their biggest stations, for example, had the same type of transmitter used when IYA was opened in 1926. Often, breakdowns sent them off the air for ten or fifteen minutes at a time. When they came on no explanations or apologies were offered. They started in where they'd left off.

In addition, there were very large numbers of privately controlled commercial stations. These thought nothing of interrupting items to bark publicity at listeners. Canadians, it seemed, had got so conditioned to it that the advertisers found it necessary to explode their sales bombs fairly in their ears.

As for getting any continuous programme to suit a particular mood or taste—he had found this impossible without re-dialling after every item. Everything was properly mixed up.

"A Hammer Wrapped in Silk"

In the United States he did not think listening conditions were very much better. Advertising was handled with a little more tact. It was more like a hammer wrapped in a silk handkerchief, instead of just plain hammer. But they had no compunction about throwing a puff for anti-hangover powders into the final strains of a musical item and they mixed, quite impartially, sopranos, commentators, jazz, the classics, and all the rest.

One programme feature he had admired was NBC's Sunday relays from the New York Metropolitan Opera House. This cost a tremendous sum weekly. The company financed it in part, but a great deal of the cost was met by listeners' voluntary subscriptions.

Hungry for News

Glad to get back into New Zealand with comparisons which made the local service seem ultra-modern and efficient, he said he had also been glad to get back and read some news. In Canada, the censorship had been very strict. Even Daventry news was not re-broadcast without cutting. Newspapers were all headlines and no meat. Here it was possible to secure some sort of picture of what was happening.

Canadians, of course, could listen to the U.S.A. news broadcasts. In fact, they did, and used the U.S. stations for most of their listening in default of any sort of service at home.

But American news sessions were hopeless for anyone who really wanted facts. They showed great enterprise with relays from European capitals, and

commentary by the nation's most famous radio-journalists, like Walter Winchell. But never did they broadcast a plain service of news. They broadcast people's opinions about the news, in the most dramatic fashion possible, with fireworks and explosions and a great deal of everything else except news. However, the Americans seemed to take it and like it.

Anyone seemed to be able to buy a radio transmitter and put his views on the air. He came back with the impression that America was on the verge of a revolution and didn't know what it was all about. To the fanfare of news and radio priests and political scares, Father Devine and his radio angels provided a sort of hysterical obligato.

Canada he found intensely interesting. In the West he liked the people. In the East they had adopted the American manner. This did not appeal to him. Mr. — described Halifax as an exceedingly dirty place, where people dressed carelessly and seemed to work carelessly: in a studio open to the public an announcer whom he was visiting cheerfully pro-

duced a bucket of ice, whisky, soda, and offered him a drink.

Really at War

But in Canada there really was a war in progress. In New Zealand, it might by comparison still be peace-time. There the whole nation was busy with the war, the men working for it, the women knitting for it. Facilities for troops were excellent. The Salvation Army and Y.M.C.A. had done great work providing living and recreational accommodation.

He was greatly impressed by the Canadian railway system. Branch lines there were 1,000 miles long, and all organised very efficiently. The Canadians had a saying that the Government ran the national railways and the C.P.R. ran the Government. It had certainly seemed to him that the railway was Canada.

And it was cold—another strong impression in his memory—sometimes 40 degrees below. He had heard the story and himself tested the tradition that water thrown from the train in winter tinkled as it touched the ground. It was true.

★ STRANGE RADIO SETS ★

By
Ronald McIntosh

"The Listener" does not necessarily subscribe to all the theories advanced in this article. We print it, however, as an item of scientific curiosity.

RADIO transmission has been in use much longer than most people believe. The ants employed it long before Marconi began his experiments with coils of wire and kites. If a foraging ant discovers a large store of food it waves its antenna vigorously, and, by some strange electric impulse, the S.O.S. signal is transmitted to every ant within a wide radius and they flock to help the signaller.

Even more strange is the fact that human beings are capable at least of receiving radio programmes without the aid of a conventional wireless set. A case occurred in America recently where a man who lived very close to a super-powered transmitting station was unable to get to sleep at night. Every time he dozed off broadcast music drifted through his head and woke him up again.

Investigation revealed that his was no case of the psychic. He worked by day in a machine shop grinding knives and the fine carborundum dust settled on the gold fillings in his teeth. Each night when he switched off the electric reading lamp clamped above his bed he removed a partial radio short circuit and unwittingly permitted the metal frame of the bed to become an efficient aerial system.

His jaw, falling open as he dropped off to sleep acted as a crystal detector, tuning in the radio programme being broadcast by the nearby station. A toothbrush soon removed his trouble.

Even more strange is the fact that two Czechoslovakian workmen were able to tune in to any broadcast programme at will and provide their friends with an entertainment emanating solely from their bodies.

What strange power enabled this feat to be achieved is beyond the power of science to determine,



"... Two Czechoslovakian workmen were able to tune in to any broadcast programme at will."

but experts who have investigated the phenomenon are convinced that there is no trickery.

Before they are able to make their bodies act as radio receivers the two men have to go through a spell of deep breathing exercises lasting about 30 minutes. Apparently the result of their exertions is to generate an excess of bodily electricity.

The two then interlock their right hands, while in the left each holds one contact of a loud-speaker. Immediately the room is filled with soft but perfectly distinct music. As they release hands the music ceases. The auditors are permitted to nominate the station they would like to hear, and immediately, apparently by mental action alone, the strange pair can attune themselves to its wave-length.

Perhaps this phenomenon is not so strange after all, for famous water diviners incline to the belief that the body of a "dowser" is like a radio set, the hands acting as the two electric poles, the legs as the earth line, and the divining rod as the aerial. Many of us, therefore, if we possess the highly strung nervous system of the successful diviner, may be our own portable radios—provided we practise enough!