



YOU Asked For It!

LEFT: Ian Watkins and Jan Massingham, of 1ZB, sort out the latest batch of mail for the Sunday morning Junior Request Session

THE sapphire needle drops into the ebony groove. Out of the speaker curls the persuasive, pervasive voice of hill-billy Lefty Frizzell crooning "I Love You a Thousand Ways," and all over New Zealand cooling electric irons poise motionless over damped-down shirts, lawnmowers grate to a standstill. . . . A thousand people listen, in a state of suspended ecstasy, to cow-poke Frizzell. When the announcer says, "And that was for Mrs. Lottie Harbinger, of Eastbourne," or "Hello now to Mr. Bluey McTavish, of Miranda Street, Stratford," then the cup of happiness runneth over indeed. You can be sure that the Request Session is on the air. In popular listening Request Sessions head the bill with the same monotony that (presumably) pate de foie gras appears on the menus of the Four Hundred. There are even people who have been known to listen to

nothing else—playing a kind of snakes and ladders game with themselves up the columns of *The Listener* and down the markings of the dial, with an overlap of two Request Sessions the penalty for losing.

There is, indeed, something about Request Sessions which has made them popular ever since the days when the cloche tolled and the Charleston fringes swung. A certain radio announcer recalls that they used to put gramophone in front of microphone and play records time after time after time as listeners rang and said, "More! More!" and "Play it again!" Perhaps it's just that feeling of having a finger in the pie, of being able to loll back and say to your attentive ego: "They're playing this for me!" It doesn't seem to matter whether Mrs. H. or Mr. McT. are part of a long string of names. There's a certain glamour about choosing a popular request tune that apparently puts you in the swim. One harassed Request Session compiler checked up on a letter of complaint from a woman that her request had not been played. It was one of the most popular tunes on the Hit Parade which had been heard in the Session week after week. It just happened that her name had not figured in the list of requests and that was all that mattered.

Most stations of the NZBS have their Request Sessions. These vary in style quite considerably, according to whether they have a predominantly rural or urban audience. Aucklanders and Wellingtonians have a keener ear for the more esoteric in jazz—the music of George Shearing and Louis Armstrong, for instance, and the very latest on overseas Hit Parades. Down South, though, they follow keenly their own local Hit Parades, which consist of the more tuneful of the latest overseas hits and a leaven of the older hit numbers which have remained favourites.

As soon as you start discussing Request Sessions with their compilers you strike the vexed question of cowboy

songs. It seems that of all popular songs they have the most devoted corps of listeners. "If we put over all the cowboy numbers requested," one officer said, "we'd have a session of nothing else. And there's no doubt about it, they do set the non-fan's teeth on edge, with their peculiar vocal tone and diction, so in our Session" (his was a city station) "we try to keep the number of cowboy songs down and leave them to stations which have more of a country listening audience."

Listeners might not realise it, but Request Sessions are very carefully planned. From out of the mass of mail received (on major stations some three hundred letters a week) a pleasant, well-balanced programme has to be made up, with the aim of pleasing not just the few whose requests can be answered but also a mass audience. There are further complications. Many popular requests must be used in ordinary programmes as well, so that often a particular disc may not be available. In that case another artist is often substituted. Sometimes merely picking out the proper title of the song the listener wants to hear presents a problem. Could you translate "Drifting Along with the Rumbling Bee," or "A Wee Man in a Red Coat" into "Tumbling Tumbleweed" and "The Cherry Rhyme"?

Some tunes are practically indestructible. Station 2YD's Request Session featured "The Blond Sailor" and "The Nuns' Chorus" every week for years, and although the sailor is now resting on his oars, "The Nuns' Chorus"

is still going strong. Down South 4YZ lists among its "everlastings" George Formby's "Baby Show," "Laughing Gas," "The 'Dear John' Letter" and Gil Dech playing "Remembrance." With the pile of unplayed requests which every Session has acquired, a clearance has to be made from time to time, or no up-to-date tunes would ever be heard. However, 2YD is offering a new scheme to its listeners. It endeavours to play requests on a definite date so that listeners can be sure of hearing their choice within a fortnight of writing.

The evening Request Sessions attract an older, more settled type of audience, it seems, than the Sunday mid-day sessions of the ZBs. Classical music and religious songs are quite popular, ranging from Marguerita Grandi singing "The Sleep-walking Scene" from Verdi's *Macbeth*, to "The Old Rugged Cross." Programme officers sometimes imagine their listeners as a race of schizophrenics when they are confronted with a letter asking for Beethoven's "Romance" for Violin, or alternatively "Rags to Riches," sung by Tony Burnett.

The volume of mail received by the Children's Request Sessions equals that of the Senior Request Sessions, and every letter received is acknowledged, if possible, on the session. At 1ZB the Session is always conducted by Ian Watkins, to whom as a family man, the fatherly approach comes naturally. He has a word for sick and handicapped children, and parents often write requesting his co-operation in telling Little Billy to eat up his food and learn his lessons. The children themselves send entertaining accounts of their doings, often accompanied by illustrative drawings, e.g., "Mum, Dad and me with our hair washed." One little Maori boy wrote to 2ZB: "You remember I told you that Mum was going to have a new baby. Well, it was a boy."

A number of people like to send a message with their requests, but stations have burnt their fingers handling these. If Mary breaks her engagement to Bill and he sends a request for "You Broke the Only Heart That Ever Loved You"—to Mary Smith from Bill Brown, then the fat will be in the fire. So thumbs are down on messages.

In those interminable discussions about radio fare which go on in Parliament, in clubs and pubs, you'll hear a lot about giving the public what it wants. Theoretically, then, you should get a Request Session which is a cross-section of public taste. But, of course, it isn't so. Requests come only from a very limited class of listeners. The keen

Kenton-ites collect their own recordings and, at the other extreme, no one in his right mind would request that a whole Sibelius symphony be played. Then again, Request Sessions tend to operate on a law of diminishing returns. The more you listen to Request Sessions the less time you have to take note of new programmes or new recordings—and new material is the life-blood of radio.



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Addresses by party leaders, however, will be heard from all YA and YZ stations. All 16 quarter-hour studio addresses to be broadcast during the campaign will be heard from all YA and YZ stations.

Names of speakers and details of stations from which they will be heard will appear each week in *The Listener*, but in general terms public addresses by speakers for the two established parties will be heard on the Monday and Tuesday of the second and third weeks of the campaign, with the Social Credit leader making a third on Wednesday, October 27. In each of these weeks also there will be studio broadcasts each night from Thursday to Saturday. In the last week four public addresses will be broadcast, and there will be broadcast statements by the National and Labour Party leaders on the night before election day.