

FREE AND EASY ROUND HERE

JACK MAYBURY, an innocent appearing, smooth-faced man-behind-a-microphone, is now past his first youth (he was born in the South Canterbury town of Ashburton an unspecified number of years ago), but he still has a youthful zest for simple gags and practical jokes, and the bounding energy necessary to put them over. Further, he has that elusive quality a mass entertainer must have—the ability to infect large audiences, seen and unseen, with his own zest.

He can't understand entertainers who label some New Zealand towns as graveyards and others as providing lively audiences. "I've never found them different," he said recently, towards the end of one of his tours. "They're all co-operative. They always seem to enjoy themselves."

When Jack Maybury says "all" he means about that. *The Listener* caught him in Auckland, but the radio audiences of his two weekly shows, *Number, Please*, and *Scoop the Pool* know that he is likely to pop up anywhere people can collect under cover, and they wouldn't be at all surprised to hear him confidently giving away refrigerators to any members of Operation Deep Freeze who could answer his questions while they took an evening coffee break at their South Polar base.

From what could be seen and heard of this Auckland audience, Mr. Maybury is also well on the right side

of veracity when he uses the word "co-operative." The big audience participation shows in Britain and the U.S. make sure of applause by employing minions who brandish placards, flash signs and go through frenzied pantomime when they want a hand from the customers. The most Mr. Maybury—"Call me Jack, son. We're all free and easy round here. Meet the wife: Dorothy Jean. She's the other half of the show." All right—the most Jack does for his claps is lean forward momentarily with one hand to his ear. That does it. Any more and the insurance company would face a claim on the roof lashings.

Nor does Jack seem to be far out on the matter of simple acceptance and enjoyment. The questions, the gags and the penalties were all huge fun, with the penalties perhaps the hugest. That night no one had to walk the plank, merely (to take two typical instances) be dunked face first in a basin of flour, and kiss Jack's feet, freshly laundered for the occasion by Dorothy Jean, using the correct brand of soap.

Jack came to radio via electricity. He served his time as an apprentice electrician, sold radios, sold washing machines, rose to sales manager, and got into commercial radio about the time it started in Christchurch. He ran the Children's Hour at 3ZB, and found it the best of training grounds for the development of the ability to improvise games and gags, a quick tongue and a quicker cover up in the face of minor hitches. Lunch hour programmes gave

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him scope for a different emphasis, and he wound up his time at 3ZB as Production Supervisor.

From 1947 onwards he was in a position to command a national audience with shows like the Quiz Kids, the Hit Parade and Money-Go-Round. Other radio tag lines listeners will remember connected with his name are the Musical Army and the Happy Feet Club.

Watching one of his shows casually reveals only that it runs along very easily. To anyone in the trade, it is obvious that a pro is in charge—an experienced pro who has kept the contagious bounce of a good amateur. Jack and Dorothy Jean brief the competitors, who function in pairs, like Noah's Ark, but the chief worth of this pre-show get together is as a morale builder. The girls are miraculously unanimous in their choice of short evening frocks; the men in our own New Zealand "best" uniform (no miracle this) of blue suits. Jack operates behind a rampart of household appliances lined across the front of the stage. The only properties not on the block are the piano and an electronic organ.

He has his hands full, with a cue sheet and a stop watch, but there are uncounted details in his head. He remembers always that his biggest audience has ears only, and he takes care to have his competitors talk into the microphone and to direct his own patter so that listeners will always know what is going on. He has to hit a bell at particular crises, keep an eye on the tape recorder, fit in a smooth, confident commercial at the right moments, dish out prizes and penalties, and exchange signals with Dorothy Jean who lurks behind piled tins of cleaning fluid. There was a time when he played practically all the instruments in a dance band, but that would be a soft touch compared with this multi-lateral gamesmanship.

After the show he relaxed backstage with a filter cigarette. One of the competitors was getting massage for a Charlie horse, well-wishers dropped in, and autograph hounds. "We're well ahead with our recording," Jack said. "You can do that with two shows a week, but we're using this free time ahead to work up our third show. No title yet, but I think she'll be a good one."

He looked pleased at the prospect of using free time to make sure he had no more free time. But that, as some primitive remarked, is Show Business.

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