

# A Talk With Loma Jones

THE piano music ended in laughter.

"No, no, it's too fast," Loma said, and she went down on all fours like a cat as Freda began to play again, more slowly. "Yes, that's right, only we'll make it bounce more."

Loma Jones and Freda Langman were practising the music and songs for Kindergarten of the Air; setting the right pace for the music and making sure that the songs were not too difficult for young children to sing. The technician finished checking the sound, and the recording began. (The programmes are recorded at night because the studio with the most suitable piano is not available during the day.) Loma did not just read the script. She spoke and acted, laughed and moved with a child in the microphone, and the gaiety and liveliness came over the air.

From the beginning of the programme Loma emphasised that her own children were listening and singing with her, and she made a link between her family and the children in homes all over New Zealand. The programme began with what she, Deborah and Judith had been doing. Perhaps the children listening might like to do it too, and she added a word of advice to the mothers.

Mention of her daughters aroused our curiosity. We felt sure that listeners would like to meet them, and so we visited Mrs. Jones in her home at Ngāio. We found two delightful children, self-possessed but not at all intrusive. Deborah, at four and a bit, is the quieter one, very interested in her mother's work. Judith, two next April, was less at ease at first, but her lively interest in what was happening soon had her "helping" the photographer.

They do listen to the session. Deborah had always been able to concentrate well, Mrs. Jones told us, and even the more

active Judith has acquired the listening habit from her. She is intrigued by the broadcasts, and at an early age picked that it was "really Mummy." Of course, she said, Judith was still too young to appreciate the programme, although very young children could derive a good deal of pleasure by just listening to the music, which had always been kept very simple. It was often very hard for pianists to remember that the little trills that made the music interesting for them were also making it very hard for the youngest children to hear.

"Although I like to see the children's reactions to the programme I have never encouraged them to go to the studio," Mrs. Jones said. "Even when they're listening hard, most children wriggle about and make sounds which the microphone would pick up. So a studio class wouldn't be suitable for Kindergarten of the Air, and I feel it could make the programme into one designed for that class, instead of one that's both personal and yet general enough to mean something to children all over New Zealand."

Many listeners have wondered where Mrs. Jones finds her material. "In the beginning," she told us, "my songs and stories came from a collection I'd made during my training and years as a kindergarten teacher. Other friends in the kindergartens have given me material they have used successfully; and as the Broadcasting Service got an idea of the sort of material wanted, they sent away for suitable works—mostly stories from the excellent *Listen with Mother* series. I do write a few of the stories myself. For songs, I use one or two good books of children's songs, and there's a large amount of traditional material which all children love—nursery rhymes and stories like 'The Gingerbread Boy' and 'Little Red Ridinghood.'"

Now Mrs. Jones is consciously on the lookout for new material. A friend has

just given her a new book, and mothers sometimes send in suggestions. She likes to talk to mothers, at Play Centres, Kindergartens, and any meeting, to hear any criticism and find what has been enjoyed most. Deborah, too, often offers suggestions. She's used to Loma asking, "Do you think the children would like this?" when there's a new idea for the session, and she often reminds her mother that a certain story or song would be nice for the children.

Mrs. Jones said that in her introductory remarks she likes to help the children to become aware of their surroundings, of seasonal changes and events. "Once, when I took Deborah's xylophone to the studio, it led to a brief discussion of the natural sounds they could hear in their own surroundings—bird songs, water falling and running, pot lids banging, and bells ringing. I'm putting the story earlier in the programme than I used to," she went on, "for I've found that many children find it hard to concentrate for a long time, and the activity at the end of the session holds their attention better. We can't rely on pictures, but must tell the story with voice only. In some kindergartens teachers illustrate a story on the blackboard as they tell it, and parents may like to do this occasionally—the children don't demand great ability."

The series for the year will begin with the more familiar nursery rhymes, to help the new children to become used to listening to the radio and singing with Loma before they start to learn something new, but she doesn't like to take it for granted that children will know even the most familiar songs. There may be some children whose parents don't sing with them or teach them these songs, and many children have not heard a piano accompaniment to them.

Loma has been very pleased at letters from isolated places praising her work, and expressing gratitude for this opportunity for children to join in kindergarten activities. From country districts, from town areas without kindergartens, from lighthouses and islands, and from parents of handicapped children, come letters "all thrilled to bits with my work." One letter that especially pleased Loma came from the mother of a child who had been very backward in learning to walk. One day the child, absorbed in the session, heard Loma asking the children to walk somewhere in the room. He just got up and walked. And one mother had praised the Christmas stories, wondering how many children would not be hearing them anywhere else.

Loma was delighted, too, at the many Christmas cards sent to her. "I was so proud that the children had wanted to make them for me. They made some very attractive ones by cutting out pictures and pasting them on paper with a message added perhaps by mother or an



National Publicity Studios photograph

LOMA JONES  
"My work is a real joy"

older child—sometimes the writing was just a few kisses and an initial written by the child himself. They made me some very pretty calendars too. I've tried to answer them all, and I think the last letter was sent away yesterday."

The surest indication of the popularity of the programme lies in the many requests for more broadcasts, and many mothers have asked that when the schools start in February the Kindergarten of the Air should start too, so that the little ones should not feel left out. That has been done this year for the first time, and the first broadcast will be heard on Thursday, February 7. Loma is also considering a programme for the holidays, one of a general type in which the children who don't hear the programme regularly could join.

For the future, there are tentative plans for three broadcasts a week instead of the present two, but all of 20 minutes, which Loma feels is quite long enough for a child to concentrate. There are also plans for a series of very short talks for parents, discussing the contents of the programmes and the way in which the parents can help, as well as giving details of books, songs and materials which parents can get and use with pre-school children. This would help the many parents who have written asking for such advice.

When we asked what changes she had noticed in the programme over the five years it has been running, Loma said: "I think that now we're all more confident in our approach and more familiar with the material. We've been fortunate in building a team of technicians and advisers who are extremely interested in the work and will do everything possible to make the programme go smoothly. When I started in 1952 there had been no similar programme anywhere that I could use as a pattern, and the work was a great worry. We're still learning, and no doubt there will be many more changes in the programme. But now that I know the parents and children like the programme, my work is a real joy."

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coprosma, the well-known Phormium tenax or common flax and the less common mountain flax Phormium Colensoi, together with many other New Zealand plants.

The Nouveau Petit Larousse has this to say of the first internationally known New Zealand writer: MANSFIELD (Kathleen Beauchamp) dite KATHLEEN, femme de lettres anglaise, né en Nouvelle Zélande 1888-1923. Auteur de nouvelles (Le Prélude, La Félicité) et d'un émouvant journal.

In its review of the definitive edition of the Journal of Katherine Mansfield published some months ago, *Le Figaro Littéraire* of Paris said that the additional material published for the first time, showed this "English woman of letters" to be even more pathetic than we had previously imagined.

In a letter I wrote criticising this review, I pointed out that Katherine Mansfield, far from being just another English writer, was the first New Zealand writer of consequence and that we in this country honoured her as such. I added that the whole ambience of her work was New Zealand, and that if there were anything foreign, it was rather a French influence. (Indeed to read her in a French translation is like reading the original prose of a French writer.)

In my later conversations with Monsieur Francois-Primo I mentioned my

views on this subject and my host agreed wholeheartedly, saying among other things that Katherine Mansfield WAS New Zealand—at least so far as he was concerned. He went further, saying that for him she was supreme among the writers of her time because while being, in the best sense of the term, a realist, she yet did not abandon poetry.

In the bookshop windows along the Paris boulevards you will still see the titles *LE PRELUDE* and *LA FELICITE* prominently displayed, and in spite of recent translations into French of the work of Frank Sargeson, Katherine Mansfield is still the best known New Zealand writer in France.

The French seem with their peculiar flair for discovering and fostering talent to have understood her, and in spite of frequent changes of mood induced by the vagaries of her illness and by the limitations of her Anglo-Saxon background, she seems to have liked and appreciated the French. It is therefore in many ways fitting that this unusual memorial to a gifted New Zealander should have been set up on the shores of the Mediterranean.

It is perhaps also appropriate that the prime mover in the memorial scheme, and the one who, above all others, carried it through to its successful end, is a French-speaking man of letters—and not a New Zealander.