



## RADIO PROFILE ①

# Breakfast with SHONE

PHIL SHONE, who keeps the Auckland breakfast a fairly lively feast, is a specialist. He has been a radio man all his working life; a long enough time for him to have acquired a wife and young family, to have moved from an awful flat into a hard-earned, sweat-of-my-brow house, and to have swum an impressive number of daily half-miles, winter and summer, just to keep fit. He's not claiming this exclusive devotion to radio is a record, but it does put him in a relatively small minority. After all, even Aunt Daisy, Lady Radio herself, worked for a while as a teacher before the device was invented. So if it's no more than a matter of timing when to come on the scene in order to be able to devote himself exclusively to radio, Phil Shone has that. He also has lively ideas, highly individual presentation of these ideas, and a persistently stubborn resistance to being bowled over by the emotions, often clamorously expressed, of listeners or more senior radio men.

Shone (his surname fits him perfectly. "Mr" Shone is somehow an insulting handle to hang on him, Phil Shone reiterated is more cumbersome in print than on the air, Phil might be anybody, but Shone is Shone)—Shone was born in Picton, and put in his early school days at the near-by centre of Kiwi, which he now identifies as a place where a number of ladies sat in protest on the railway lines, one of the few stunts he didn't originate in the last 15 years. His next home was Gisborne, where he left school when the State told him to, and got a job in a radio shop whose owner also ran a local radio station practically under the shop counter, but let it be added hastily, all perfectly licensed and legal. This was 2ZJ, and one authority states the year was 1933, and Shone's age 15. It was certainly a time of coin as well as credit squeeze. Shone thinks he might have made as much as 10 shillings a week. He admits he didn't have four children then, but he still maintains it wasn't much money. However, it was a job, first solely on the sales and repair side, and then, inevitably, helping out with operating and announcing chores. This started through no act of faith and foresight on the boss's part—just a simple emergency. 2ZJ was due to go on the air any minute, and the boss had a phone call from Christchurch. "Start the station," he said, disappearing towards the phone. So Shone started the station with a record of Paul Robeson, who, he said, was a bass. Which is very true, but it is unconventional to pronounce the word like the fish or the beer. Other mistakes have followed ever since, some funnier than others, but in between the fluffs have been millions (estimate only) of words audibly and correctly spoken, if with a faint American inflexion since the war. (Service in the South Pacific.)

In those times the policy of the private radio station depended on the personality of the owner, and the quality of the gear on what he could afford to buy or was handy enough to make. 2ZJ used to venture outside. Sometimes the boss hung a live microphone out of the window so that fascinat-

ated listeners could hear bird song, traffic noises and snatches of street talk. To shield the microphones a bit for outside broadcasts, the technicians heated their soldering irons and built the mikes into the interior of malt tins. This package weighed 10 or 12 pounds, and must have given wonderful reverberations. Staggering round the countryside with gear as heavy as that would not please a 1957 outside team, but that was all they had in the mid-thirties, and as often as not it worked.

The local citizens liked to make their own contributions to radio entertainment, not so much by standing up and singing as by bringing along a favourite record for broadcast in a request session. This helped to keep down 2ZJ's overhead costs, but some of the records had been great family favourites for a long time, and the quality of reproduction had, to put it mildly, fallen away with much playing. The owners recognised them with joyful cries, but to the majority of listeners the surface noises swamped the music with menacing crackles like the approach of a bush fire.

This custom eased that side of life at 2ZJ. Hard work and grief came with outside broadcasts. Shone recalls with vivid clarity his part in the Duke of Gloucester's visit to Gisborne. There was a mass of welcomers. People turned out to public occasions then, because unless they were there in person they missed. Shone, with his talent turned on the spot coverage, was doing his best to alter that state of things, but there were several flaws in his gear. He had no direct phone to the studio. When he judged it nearly time for him to come on the air, he arranged to tug the mike cord twice. His helper, under the staging boards, would then rush off and phone the studio. Shone would listen for the announcement on a receiver which was part of his bulky set up, and away he'd go with fluency and snap. This time the microphone cord was too short, but Shone was on the air before he realised that he'd have to squat down to talk into the mike, and in that position he found he could see only the crowded lower halves of the nearest people. Roars of cheering rose up and Shone dealt off a blind description of Gloucester's Royal arrival. But it was the Mayor of Gisborne who came up on to the platform. Shone bit his finger nails, hoped no one was listening to 2ZJ, filled in a pause and responded to further cheers by describing the entrance of the Mayor of Gisborne. This time it was in truth Royal Gloucester. 2ZJ had no complaints.

A keen long-distance cyclist then, Shone wheeled his way back to Gisborne one Sunday evening dead beat and with a church service relay on his immediate schedule. He set up his gear, and saw it was working, but could not keep watch one hour and fell asleep. He slept on after the service. The congregation filed out, with sound effects like a herd of destructive elephants. The organ voluntary died, silence gradually fell. Shone slept on until his boss rang a neighbour and asked him to investigate.

Shone took another weekend ride to Auckland when 1ZB started, with the idea of asking for a job, but his courage failed him in the big city and he bicycled back to Gisborne without an interview. A week after 2ZB went on the air he got a working ride to Wellington with a delivery van and landed himself a job as a junior announcer. He was transferred to Auckland in 1939, walking nonchalantly through a door to which he now had entry without interview.

After a fairly frustrating war in the Pacific (Radar Mechanic, Air) he broke out with tremendous verve on 1ZB's Breakfast Session. Most of his stunts are quite well remembered as single incidents by those who heard them. Shone thinks the official cumulative memory of them adds up to a weighty dossier which may well keep him from ever becoming Director of Broadcasting. If it does, and he stays with the microphone, his listeners will at the very least continue to be stimulated. He has always had a lot of stimulated listeners, some of them buzzing mad like his ferocious April Fool's Day wasps (probably his best-known stunt), some of them in roars of laughter, and some just eager to hear what's going to happen next. If he has a secret, that's it, but it is hardly a personal secret. To keep the customers coming on is good broadcasting, and good broadcasting in Shone's more elaborate sound pictures needs a lot of work and attention to detail. Shone pays tribute to Bernie Spackman, a 1ZB technician who combined high technical ability with the qualities of a good stooge and worked tirelessly with Shone during a particularly fertile period of stunts.

Shone's microphone presence is an integral part of the whole effect he creates. He can seem diffidently uncertain. The words don't come easily, the meaning of the script is a little beyond him. He may mumble it over a little before attempting the official version. Then, when he has you puzzled and sorry for him, he springs some fearful bear trap that leaves you mangled, and his light-toned, delicately-

controlled, almost whispery voice, dances on like fiendish blue fire over a swamp, irresistibly beckoning you to further traps and final happy destruction.

—G. leF. Y.

Next Week: William Austin, Man of Many Parts

