

Radio Profile 4

BROWN-EYED ACTRESS

SIX years ago a young St. Heliers school teacher had her first big part in an important play. It was a wonderful part—Jennet Jourdemayne in *The Lady's Not For Burning*—and to Noeline Pritchard it is still the most exciting thing that has happened to her, something that she “just lived and breathed and ate and slept.” The critics liked it, too, and at least one of them prophesied further honours for the young actress. Noeline remembers it for other reasons as well. Still at University, she missed out on a subject. What was to matter more, it led the next year to a Community Arts Service offer of an important part in *Beauty and the Beast* for a North Island tour. “My family was against it,” says Noeline, “so I went on teaching. But that winter I had a class of quite naughty children in a pre-fab hut in a football field, and suddenly I decided that if the offer was still open I was going.” She told her parents, took a year's leave from teaching, and has never gone back.

From the start, Noeline was something of an actress. Both her parents were musical, and her mother also has “a terrific sense of humour” and a gift for mimicry. Ring Noeline today and her mother, whose voice is very much like Noeline's, might answer and enjoy your confusion. “When I was quite young,” Noeline recalls, “I realised I could mimic too. Funnily enough, I could mimic people Mother couldn't, and vice versa. The first voice I can remember doing, when I was 10 or so, was the witch from *Snow White*. I was fascinated by the ghastly cackle and loved doing it.” Still interested in voices, she finds herself today imitating the accents of people she is talking to.

That early interest in drama was fostered at Kohimarama School, where Noeline would recite at school concerts, and at Epsom Girls' Grammar, where she took part in plays and in her last year carried off the reading and speech prize. At Training College and University—where she began but did not finish an Arts degree—she kept it up. The C.A.S. tour was followed by others, so that for nearly a year in her early twenties Noeline found herself a professional actress. Already she had had parts in radio plays produced by William Austin, who had played opposite her in *The Lady*, and when she missed out on a further tour and changed places in a city office with her friend Eleanor Elliot, who got the part, she was glad to take up more radio work. In fact, that year back in Auckland was to be another turning point, for weekly stories in the *Children's Session* led to her taking over the session as “Gay,” and a meeting in the street with Barry Linehan led to *Radio Roadhouse*. After three plays that year—including *Two Bouquets*, a musical show in which she had a singing part—Noeline found she had become nervous about going on stage, and she has not done so since. Less nervous now—*Roadhouse* before a studio audience could have helped—she would love to take stage parts again if she had the time. Perhaps in the future she will find the time for this and some of the other things she wants to do—time to take singing lessons, and to

travel to London and the Continent, especially Paris. She might even realise her “secret” ambition to read poetry on the air.

Aware that not everyone enjoys the humour of *Roadhouse*, Noeline thinks “without being biased” that it's a long way ahead of the corny, impossible humour of Australian comedy shows—a brave judgment from a broadcaster now enjoying a Sydney holiday. But of all her radio work, she is most devoted to, most satisfied by the *Children's Session*—it is so much more her own creation. In her home town she is almost certainly best known for the 1YD Auckland Hit Parade, also a personal programme, which brings her in a considerable mail. She gets a kick out of this, and when Asian flu kept her off the air recently was thrilled to have “Get well” cards from listeners. For Noeline the Auckland Hit Parade has fostered an interest in popular music that has always gone along happily (why shouldn't it?) with a love of opera and other “serious” music. Besides her regular sessions, there are still occasional parts in radio plays—as apples, hens, little girls, boys—and recordings of “commercials,” one of them recently a singing commercial which was good fun.

Naturally enough, Noeline's radio interests spill over into her spare time. She loves playing Frank Sinatra, Doris Day and June Christy and operatic numbers from her own fairly new record collection; and among radio shows—she's a keen listener—she wouldn't for worlds miss *The Goon Show*—an enthusiasm she shares with all the *Roadhouse* gang. She likes to take off Blue-bottle and Eccles. Hancock and Bliss she also enjoys, and before the Goons she thought *TIFH* was tops. “I don't think it ever got over the loss of Joy Nichols,” she says. Noeline has worked and works quite hard to improve her own work as a broadcaster, but it has never seemed like hard work. While an audience always makes her a bit nervous, she finds the microphone friendly; and she takes the view that once she has broadcast, “that's that, and it would be very depressing never to feel happy with what one had done.”

Although Noeline has no immediate plans to marry, she does want to marry, doesn't plan to combine a career and marriage, and adds: “Never a career instead of marriage.” “For me,” she says, “home and garden and cooking would be a full-time job, though I think some women are efficient enough and energetic enough to combine marriage and a career.” Come to that, Noeline has never thought of herself as having a career—“I've just somehow got into radio, and I love it.” Always an Auckland, she can remember when her St. Heliers home was in the country and her family had a cow, hens and ducks, and without a very strong preference for either town or country she thinks she could be very happy to live in the country. She doesn't, anyway, like the city enough to enjoy the crowds, nor Auckland so much that she doesn't enjoy Wellington. But she does like Auckland, “because all my friends are here,” and Wellington for the way it seems to snuggle into the hills, for its narrow streets, its cable-car. Nelson is another

place she loves, but she has not seen as much of the South Island as she would like.

At home, Noeline enjoys pottering in the garden, food and cooking, is interested in interior decorating—“we've just done our home out”—antiques and cars. A member of the local Art Society, she would rather have a painting by a New Zealand artist on her wall than a print. In summer she swims a lot—she's a good swimmer—and likes a beach holiday; in winter she skis when she can at National Park. Her love of snow sport is reflected in the books she reads, for besides autobiographies, which she is inclined to enjoy more than novels, her reading about other places takes in the mountains and the Antarctic. Once upon a time—it may have been a hangover from the time when St. Heliers was in the country and the Pritchards milked a cow—Noeline was an early riser. Nowadays she is up between 7.0 and 7.30. Her day's work often includes interviews, and over the years she has met an impressive number of celebrities. She enjoys doing so, for she has the best of qualifications for the job—“most of all, I'm interested in people.”

Sometimes—when *Roadhouse* is rehearsing or recording, for example—the day is long and exhausting, so it's not surprising that to keep fresh Noeline needs a lot of sleep. Still, there is time for parties, which she loves—though not too many of them, and not cocktail parties with crowds of people jostling one around. “I prefer,” she says, “a small dinner party with friends in a private home. I love food and good conversation.” And she loves to dance—slow rhythm, tangos and rhumbas. Even Rock 'n' Roll can be good fun at the right time. The theatre, too, remains a lively interest. She likes good plays (*Death of a Salesman*, for instance, is “tremendous”) rather than drawing-room comedies; and she's a keen moviegoer, whose preferences include Continental films and musicals.

Noeline is lucky in a family that takes an interest in all that she does: a mother who is a good listener, a constructive critic and a help with scripts and programmes; and a 16-year-old sister, still at school, who shares all her interests as well as “a terrific lot of fun.” She is very good at acting, too, Noeline says, and has an interesting teenage viewpoint on the Auckland Hit Parade and other programmes. Another thing they talk about is clothes for, as every woman should, Noeline likes to dress well. Here she knows the value of a man's judgment, and she has nearly all her clothes designed by a young man who did some of her costumes for *Two Bouquets*. Noeline's father died about two years ago, but she has a married brother, a stock and station manager, who lives in the country near Auckland, and is the quiet one of a family that talks and laughs a lot. She's proud of him because he really is tall, dark and handsome. Good looks, it seems, run in the family, for no camera will ever capture the glow of Noeline's own brown-eyed beauty.

—F.A.J.

NEXT WEEK: Emily Carpenter,
Back Room Girl

