

THE first thing one notices about Grace Green is her voice. It is a rich dark brown voice to which she can probably attribute the beginning of a radio career which has taken her over 28 years to her present position of programme organiser at 3ZB—the only such job in New Zealand held by a woman. In 1929, when she was studying at Canterbury University College with the intention of becoming a journalist, she applied for the position of announcer at 3ZC. She knew nothing about radio and wasn't interested in it. She had seen the station's advertisement in the paper and her application was made mainly for the benefit of two brothers who used to tell her she would make a good loudspeaker. There may also have been some thought of proving wrong the teacher at school who had warned her that she would never make a living by talking. After an audition which consisted of being pushed in front of a microphone on the air and given a script to read, she found herself selected.

The station, 3ZC, was a small home-made affair, built and operated by a Pole, F. R. Plominski. It was connected with a shop on the ground floor of the same Armagh Street building and it was on the air for an hour each morning, a few hours in the afternoons and twice weekly at night. A. R. Harris's 3YA was the only other station in Christchurch at the time. Later 3ZC moved to Edison Hall, the local headquarters of the Edison Phonograph Company.

Grace began her career by conducting the women's session, as several other women had already done at other New Zealand radio stations. In a short time, however, she was selecting all the programmes and doing all the announcing, something no other woman had done anywhere in New Zealand. She was still very young and did not place any value on radio. Indeed, she was still interested in writing and was doing odd jobs as a free-lance journalist for Christchurch newspapers. She began to ponder a little on radio when 3ZC began short-wave broadcasting for the first time in the country. Letters began to arrive from overseas, among them one from a musterer in the Australian outback, who told her that hers was the first woman's voice he had heard for six months.

In 1932, 3ZC closed down. Jim Younger, the station's technician, decided to build his own station. Grace's brother, William J. Green, a journalist, was also interested in radio—probably more interested than his sister—and he helped Younger with the task, which even included making microphones. More important, he pestered the Government until permission for the new station to broadcast sponsored programmes was granted. In March, 1933, 3ZM, New Zealand's first commercial station, introduced radio advertising to an eager audience. The sponsor paid a small fee to have a programme presented with his compliments. The staff of this progenitor of 3ZB numbered two—Grace Green, announcer, and Jim Younger, technician. 3ZM operated in an old house attached to Jim Younger's father's furniture factory in Brougham Street, Sydenham. The house had been condemned, but by the time the staff of 3ZM had finished renovating it there were few other radio stations which were more resplendent.

It was at 3ZM that Grace Green began to produce ideas for programmes which have since become basic principles of commercial broadcasting in New Zealand. One introduction was the custom of presiding over listeners' breakfasts. After an old clock had

sounded an alarm listeners went to the bathroom to the accompaniment of a special march. Then they were cheerfully urged to wash, swallow their breakfast and hurry away to work or school.

After about a year of highly successful broadcasting 3ZM was no longer permitted to broadcast sponsored programmes. It was left with a large audience and no source of income. The revenue problem was more or less solved by the audience. They formed a radio club which was open to all at 2/6 a year. In return for the half-crown the station broadcast birthday greetings and requests. As the result of a contest held by the club, 3ZM was named the Sunshine Station. Grace Green became the Sunshine Girl. Encouraged by the loyalty of her audience, Grace began turning out new types of programmes for their amusement and, at times, astonishment. One which astonished was New Zealand's first ball-by-ball cricket commentary. England were playing Australia at Sydney, and, with the permission of the local radio inspector, the Australian short-wave broadcast was relayed by Post Office telephone from a radio in the Youngers' house to the station. The experiment aroused not only intense public interest, but also official disapproval, and it could not be continued. When eager cricket fans tuned in for the second day's play all they heard was a record of "We Can't Let You Broadcast That."

3ZM was the first New Zealand station to broadcast studio performances of plays. There were always plenty of willing actors, among them Professor James Shelley. In the days before the advent of the soap opera 3ZM also had books dramatised especially for broadcasting. One of these was *Love On the Dole*, then at the height of its popularity. In the 3ZM dramatisation of *Love On the Dole* there was a riot scene and sound effects staff were needed. These were even easier to find than actors. Grace Green only had to go to the street door and whistle for hordes of small boys to appear. For the riot scene the boys were given old pieces of glass and bricks to smash them with.

In 1937, with the end almost in sight, 3ZM was having a lean time financially, and the technician and the announcer had to take turns at receiving wages. When funds ran out Grace would send a call for assistance over the air to the club, and the members paid up. On September 26, 1937, 3ZM broadcast for the last time, and the Sunshine Girl went to 3ZB. Her most difficult job at the new station was expressing to the listeners her delight at being there. She was the only woman announcer among 12 men, but by the outbreak of the war she was senior announcer.

During her career as an announcer at 3ZB Grace Green conducted every session except the devotional session, and she probably could have taken that had it been necessary. She has even had the distinction of being Aunt Daisy for a day. There had been a fire at the Colombo Street studios of 3ZB and the staff were at the emergency station at New Brighton. The first lady of radio was in the United States and it was not possible to play her recorded programme, so preceded by two announcers singing "Daisy, Daisy," the contender for the title took her place.

She greatly enjoyed her work at 3ZB during the war years, although her private life, which had never been extensive, disappeared completely. The community almost revolved around the radio station in those years, and 3ZB announcers were in great demand for all manner of patriotic fund-raising functions. Grace did a lot of audience participation and quiz shows with Jack Maybury, with whom she was associated for many years in children's sessions. There are few adolescents or parents who do not remember the exciting journeys on the "Magic Carpet" or the "Happiness Express," the wonders of the "Magic Bell," and the many studio shows devised by Grace and Jacko.

The hours she spent with the children, says Grace, were the happiest of her radio life, and even today she is greatly in demand for judging children's contests and shows. Often she had more requests than she could handle. One man wanted her to travel 30-odd miles in her own car to judge a children's decorated cycle contest. She hesitated, for time and petrol were scarce. "You are a public servant, aren't you?" he said. She has indeed served the public well, for one of her records of which she is proud is that she has never missed an hour's duty.

Perhaps Grace Green's most popular session from 3ZB was "Views, News and Interviews." Many listeners came to know this as a session where they could hear Grace cheerfully coaxing from people information and opinions which they would seldom hear or read elsewhere. She has no special formula for doing this, although she believes that when a person is face to face with an interested interviewer the microphone is forgotten. The main thing is to be thoroughly human and natural, she says. "Views, News and Interviews" was also Grace Green's last session. She made her last appearance in it in March this year. Now at her desk as programme organiser, she occasionally thinks nostalgically of the old days at 3ZM or wishes that she was on the road doing outside broadcasts again. After working at all hours and at times around the clock she finds regular hours strange, but satisfactory. Even now she finds that in practice she is never off the job.

She believes that in most homes the radio is treated rudely—switched on and forgotten about. She had confirmation of this theory in 1949 during a power short-



age. From the top of 3YA's mast she asked listeners to switch their lights off and described the response to her appeal. The listeners thought the programme was marvellous and wrote to the station saying so. The programme was no better than usual, she thinks. It was just that in the dark there was nothing to distract their attention and they just had to listen. She is not a feminist, but she believes that many women could have been as successful in broadcasting as herself. She also believes that women prefer to hear a man's voice on the radio, especially when they are at home alone. She has learned singing with her own dark, resonant voice, but she has never sung in a broadcast. "I never had enough confidence to do much," she says. "I just had the gift of the gab." —J.K.

Next Week: "Turntable"