

Can You Write Radio Plays and Poems?



At the suggestion of the IYA Musical and Dramatic Committee, a competition is being conducted by the Broadcasting Company, and prizes are being offered for the best one-act radio play. The entries are to close on

February 28.

In this connection we cannot do better, for the information and guide of intending competitors, than publish the text of a recent talk by Mr. F. E. McCallum, a member of the IYA Musical and Dramatic Committee, from IYA, when he gave some very useful hints on the writing of one-act plays. Mr. McCallum spoke as follows:—

Some Hints for Competitors.

THE reasons that the company has decided on this competition are: Firstly, to endeavour to discover what literary talent is lying dormant for want of an outlet; secondly, to provide for competitors an interesting and remunerative subject for their efforts; thirdly, to secure for listeners a play or plays of a type both interesting and suitable for broadcasting. It has been mentioned that the play should be of local interest, but I would remind you that this is not a condition of the competition.

"In order to assist competitors we have drawn up a few preliminary suggestions. These deal mainly with what is necessary in a one-act play, how to go about writing a short play, and the type required or most suitable for broadcasting. For this purpose I can-

not do better than to include some extracts from Mr. John Hampden's commentary on writing one-act plays:—

"The one-act play, is as distinct from the long play as the short story is from the novel. The difference is not merely one of length. A true one-act play is not a condensed three-act play, nor can it be elaborated into a three-act play. The difference is not in continuity of action. The difference is a question of structure and of nature. A one-act play deals with a single dominant dramatic situation, and aims at producing a single effect, though the methods used may vary greatly, from tragedy to farce, according to the nature of the effect desired. And since the play is to be enacted in a short space of time, the greatest artistic unity and economy are essential to success. The attention of the audience must be seized at once and held to the end. There is no time for weak exposition, or dull or superfluous speeches, because the play is too short to recover from any such defect.

First, as to the material. If you can take this from the life around you, and create plot and characters of your own, so much the better. Accurate observation is the basis of good writing, and you will almost certainly write about the things which you know best. Everyday life is full of suggestions for plays—to those who know how to use them—though it may be necessary to warn a beginner of the danger of trying to put on the stage the incredible people and improbable events which are not at all common in real life!

"There is another method, to take an incident from a story and dramatise it. This is inadvisable for purposes of broadcasting, as the author's permission must first be obtained or otherwise his copyright is infringed, far better is it to devise your own plot. You will be well advised to begin by writing a scenario, that is, a brief outline of your projected play, and work your plot and situations up from that. In most types of play, characterisation is of very great importance. The characters in your play must be different from each other and from you, and the differences will appear in their attitudes towards each other, and towards what is happening; in their actions, their opinions, and their modes of speech. This is particularly important when writing for broadcasting, as it must be remembered that the ear is the only organ used to distinguish the characters.

"A simple and obvious method of differentiating a character is to make him speak in dialect (if you know one) or in bad English. Self-important people use formal, and sometimes affected, modes of speech; a talkative, shallow man may gabble on while everyone else is awed into silence, and thereby make their silence more impressive; a coward will meet a sudden danger in a very different way from a brave man; and so on. Moreover, the characters must be fairly consistent, and if any

changes are to appear in them the audience must be carefully prepared in advance. If one of your persons suddenly does something which belies his whole character, merely in order to make your plot work out, then your play will be a failure. If, for example, your unselfish man is going to act selfishly in a particular instance—then the motives and circumstances which work the change in him must be carefully and convincingly shown. Above all make your characters human. The entirely faultless hero and the entirely fiendish villain belong to melodrama, not to real life. We all know the hero who is invariably lassoed from an aeroplane, just as the howling Redskins set fire to the brushwood piled around him, and after a few chapters of similar events we wish he would get killed for a change. Leave him to "blood and thunder" stories make your hero a human being in whom your listeners will be interested. A one-act play should have a beginning, a middle and an end. This piece of advice is necessary, because many first plays by young writers do not possess any of these desirable things.

"Well, we have now dealt with the beginning and middle of the play, let us consider the conclusion. Climaxes might be divided into those which involve surprise and those which fulfil expectation. At the climax the play reaches its highest level of emotion. Don't forget to build your play gradually to reach that emotion.

"I would like to close by wishing all competitors the best of luck in their efforts and advise them, in the event of their not succeeding in having their play accepted the first time, to try again."

Conditions of Competition.

- (1) Play not to exceed 25 minutes in performance, but 20 minutes' duration preferred.
- (2) Not more than five characters, but three characters preferred.
- (3) Writers are advised (it is suggested) to depend on smartness of dialogue and originality of plot rather than on "situations," "sounds," "noises," etc., permitted, providing they are workable.
- (4) A New Zealand setting of the play is preferred.
- (5) A guarantee of originality from the writer to be asked for.
- (6) Matter to be written on one side of the paper only. Typewritten copy preferred.
- (7) Each entry to bear a non-deplume only, and the name of the writer to be sent in a sealed envelope addressed to the station director in each or any of the centres, specially addressed "One-act Play Competition."
- (8) The first prize to be £5 5s., the second £2 2s., and the third £1 1s. The company to have the sole broadcasting rights for New Zealand. Other

rights of every kind to be the property of the respective authors.

(9) Judging to be done by the Literary and Dramatic Sub-Committee, whose decision shall be final.

(10) The Radio Broadcasting Company reserves the right to broadcast the successful plays.

Prizes for Best Poems

ANOTHER competition is being conducted by the 2YA Musical and Dramatic Committee. In this instance prizes are to be given for the best original poems, humorous and dramatic. Cadbury's Limited have kindly donated the prizes, which in each case will be boxes of chocolates valued at: First prize, £3; second prize, £2; third prize, 10s. 6d.

Entries close on March 1. The conditions covering both poem competitions are:—

Entries not to require more than eight nor less than three minutes to broadcast.

The judges to select the three best entries in each section and announce their award as to the order of merit after the selected entries have been broadcast.

All entries to be original and specially written for the respective competition in which they are entered. Previous publication to be a disqualification.

The selected compositions to be broadcast by performers approved by the Broadcasting Company, the authors to be eligible.

Parodies not to be eligible for entry.

With the exception of the right to broadcast in New Zealand, which shall be exclusively vested in the New Zealand Radio Broadcasting Co., Ltd., all other rights and interests to be vested in the the authors.

If in the opinion of the judges the entries are of an inadequate standard, any or all of the awards may be withheld.

Acceptance of the judges' decision as final to be a condition of entry.

Publication of the prize-winning compositions in the "Radio Record" to be subject to the consent of the authors concerned.

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