

Markedly Devoid of Initiative

asserts

EDGAR H. FELIX

in summing up American Programmes
for 1930



THIS is the season for *premieres* on American broadcasting networks, when the programme originators bring forth their new wares to tempt the broadcast listener. In recent years, the months of September and October mean the launching of new features and the presentation of novel and original programme ideas. Great names are added to the list of radio stars, and new heroes and heroines for continuity skits and musical features make their bow.

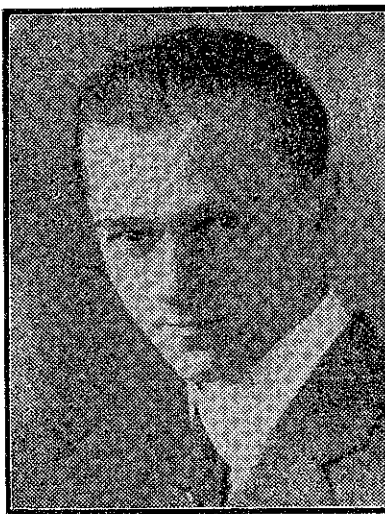
But 1930 has been markedly devoid of initiative. Nothing has rocked the radio firmament since the appearance of Amos n'Andy on the national network over a year ago. The casual analyst might ascribe this dearth of attention-winning events to business depression, but there has been little depression in the newest of mediums for reaching the public. Broadcasting revenues have surpassed last year in almost every report issued. I attribute the situation to lack of new blood in the field of programme development. Staffs have largely stabilised, and the few newcomers who appear become part of a machine-like routine.

THIS is not an unusual situation in creative arts. But no entertainment enterprise can thrive permanently on an established diet. We have had retrenchment, not in revenue, but in creative power. The public accepts the situation with a shrug; to them radio has merely lost its novelty. It is that feature of the listener attitude that contributes to the general lethargy.

In the field of receiver and transmitter development, however, commercial ambition has produced marked changes and improvements. The trend to greater selectivity is expressed by the appearance of an increasing number of low-priced super-heterodynes. One popular brand uses but a single stage of intermediate amplification, and justifies this relatively scant employment of the capacities of that circuit solely by the added selectivity gained. The Radio Corporation of America not long ago released to all of its licensees the rights to that circuit, which it had heretofore retained solely to its own use. The continued trend toward higher and higher power is making greater selectivity than can be gained with

tuned radio frequency receivers a service requirement.

Remote control tuning has been mechanically and electrically improved to the point that it is now a reliable and rugged device. But cost still restricts it to expensive receivers, although I believe it will ultimately become universally used. Tone controls, consisting



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usually of a variable resistor and a series capacity in parallel with the primary of the first audio transformer secondary, are being featured in advertising, although there is still lively debate as to the value of such distorting devices. Accentuation of the lower frequencies is attained by passing the higher frequencies, an expedient obviously of a distorting character. The search for something new has not been constructively directed, at least in my opinion, by a development which is obviously intended to produce advertising copy. It has been noted that the average user, knowing nothing of the nature of sound and the contribution of the higher frequencies to clarity and fidelity, tends to adjust his receiver so as to produce the maximum of distortion.

ONE result, however, has been attained beyond question by all of these developments in receiving and transmitting equipment, such as high gain receivers, increased transmitting power, high percentage modulation, and means for reducing high fre-

quency response. It is the definite establishment of radio as an all-year service. This means increased listener support, and in that way justification of the extra cost of rendering that brand of service. The benefits resulting from all-year service have been of a widespread character.

Mr. Edgar H. Felix, the American consultant of the N.Z. Broadcasting Company, in this article reviews radio events during the last month. He looks upon radio from both the entertainment and technical points of view, and his conclusions are of vital importance to New Zealanders, as the trend of radio is thereby indicated. Mr. Felix is a prominent engineer, and his observations are particularly accurate. He finds that radio has to a great measure become stabilised, though the release of certain patents has introduced a difference in the design of radio receivers. Some of the new "selling" devices Mr. Felix condemns as merely introducing distortion.

A SLOWLY-SHAPING development is the availability of specially recorded broadcasting features, distributed to stations in the form of electrical transcriptions. This term is used to distinguish such recordings from ordinary commercial phonograph records. Although there have been numerous attempts to enter this field by many companies, so far the results have been meagre and unsatisfactory, except in the case of areas remote from population centres and from stations distributing network programmes. Here the improvement over local talent is so marked that the electrical transcription is hailed as a boon to better programme standards. But since the distribution of such features is limited to secondary stations remote from major population centres, the talent offered is, in general, of a standard substantially below that employed for making ordinary phonograph records for use on home phonographs. The fact that major station managements do not look upon the specially recorded electrical transcription with favour is retarding the day that superior features can be procured in recorded form. Obviously, that day means the availability of high quality programmes everywhere, and a decided benefit to countries like New Zealand, which are limited by their population and relative remoteness in their choice of talent.

The outstanding programme event of the month of September was the broadcasting of the America Cup races off the coast of Rhode Island. I hope that short-wave listeners had the opportunity to hear some of the descriptions of this series of events directly from the United States. Yacht racing did not prove an ideal subject for the announcer. It lacks the rapid fire action of football or polo. But this inherent deficiency in the races as a broadcasting subject was overlooked in view of the exceedingly elaborate means used to secure a comprehensive description of them. The networks employed portable short-wave transmitters to feed the various descriptions of the events in their re- (Concluded on page 29.)