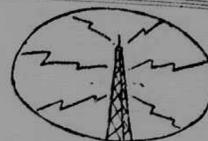


The Tribune Radio—News of the Air Routes



Conducted by JACK BINNS

Directing Radio Programs Calls for Special Talent

Setting Voices or Instruments to Register for Perfect Transmission Is Chief Problem; Behind the Scenes at a Broadcasting Station While Thousands Wait

BACK of the scenery, what? That is the question which naturally excites the curiosity of every audience. Behind the ornate curtain, which separates the realm of make-believe from that of actuality, there is always for the uninitiated an air of mystery and glamour. In the theater there is a personal touch of intimacy which actuates this curiosity, because the players are seen in the flesh and they translate drama to us through the medium of our eyes and ears.

The development of the motion picture show has placed the stage upon an inanimate screen and increased the mystery surrounding the lives of the players who portray the movement of a drama before our eyes without the aid of accompanying sound or the assistance of well modulated language.

Now we have a new form of entertainment wherein all the world is fast becoming the amphitheater and every one its audience—an entertainment where not even a stage is seen and where the personality of the entertainers is completely shrouded behind the same invisible veil of ether which transmits and translates their art to us through the medium of our ears.

How do they act? How do they play? These are the perplexing questions which puzzle the radio audience.

Realizing this I will try to lift the ethereal veil and portray for you the scenes which are enacted, so that you may visualize what is taking place in the distant studio while you are reclining comfortably within your homes listening to the music or the merry banter of the stars in the latest art of entertainment—the radio concert.

Robbing the Studio of Its Air of Mystery

Really there is no mystery in this studio, but there is a great deal that is novel. The various implements about it, unusual in appearance and character, give it an air of mystery to the uninitiated which is not at all warranted. It is, of course, in reality a stage, but it is entirely different from every other known stage. Let us take the studio in the station WJZ, located at Newark, N. J., one of the best known of the radiophone stations.

This studio has just been robbed of the greater part of its air of mystery through a very natural and human act. When it was first installed the walls were hung with heavy, rich plush curtains, which gave it a most imposing appearance, but the main function of these curtains was not to mystify but merely to deaden any external noises from other parts of the building.

In the course of events a somewhat nervous photographer was brought into the studio to record for the benefit of posterity a famous international operatic star in the act of casting her golden voice out upon the four winds for the entertainment of untold thousands. The nervous photographer, profoundly impressed with the importance of the diva, trembled in his anxiety and confusion, and his quaking hands directed his flashlight powder straight into the curtains just as he pulled the trigger. Quick action on the part of the private police force in the building saved the situation, but not the curtains.

That, of course, is merely a sidelight. You all know the tones of the announcer there. How familiar his specially enunciated "This is radiophone WJZ talking" has become to you, especially his famous "Good afternoon." It took several weeks of patient experiment to get just the right inflection for that "Good afternoon." How often have you wondered what kind of a chap he is? Well, I'll tell you. He is slender, dark, and—er, well, pretty good looking kind of a fellow. He is pretty popular with the ladies, but I can't tell you whether he's married. He operated under the unromantic cognomen of Cowan—or, when he is at the full height of his dignity, Thomas H. Cowan.

Strict Silence Must Be Maintained in Studio

Now, Cowan, in the role of announcer and director of program, is a very important cog in the machinery of radiophone broadcasting, and he has myriad duties to perform. He it is who welcomes the artists and instructs them just what they are to do when they sing or play for the radio audience. He also has the unenviable duty of introducing the stars of varying magnitude to one another, a job that needs the nicest touch of diplomacy. In the room itself there is a grand piano, a couple of talking machines, an imposing looking panel with a number of little electric light bulbs and push buttons on it, and several peculiar horns on adjustable stands. It is a long room, capable of holding forty or fifty persons.

As soon as everything is ready for the concert to begin Cowan cautions every one to maintain the strictest silence. He then picks up a telephone and talks to the operator in the broadcasting station, which is located on the roof, and gives the latter an outline of the program for the evening.

It is now ready. Cowan moves toward the piano a portable stand upon which is suspended a piece of apparatus that looks something like the new electric heater designed for use on an office desk. It is the latest form of loud-speaking telephone, but instead of having a horn it has a conical paper diaphragm. This instrument is known as a phonotron, and is used to pick up sounds from all directions.

The first thing on the program is dance music played by the Beacon Quartet. Cowan announces them, and

rear of the studio and everybody else rocking to the rhythm of the jazz.

The orchestra is followed by a duet, in which one of the artists plays the piano, while they both sing. It is here that Cowan really shines. He seats himself on the piano and in his hands he holds the Phonotron. As the two sing and play, he sways with the rhythm and turns the Phonotron first toward one and then the other in order to catch the elusive softer strains of their voices.

At the conclusion of the selection the two singers pause in utter bewilderment, as absolute and complete silence greets them. The applause that is part of their professional lives, and as necessary to them as is milk to a baby, is entirely missing. True, those about the room instinctively raise their hands to applaud, but they are restrained by the cautioning finger which Cowan places to his lips as he tiptoes over toward the panel and pulls a switch. This done, he turns around and, clapping his hands, exclaims:

"All right; go ahead now." And then the audience bestows belated recognition upon its fellow craftsmen, upon whose faces a smile now replaces the look of astonishment. It is a weird situation.

The perplexity of the artist playing for the first time to the radio audience, however, is as nothing compared to the embarrassment of the ordinary mortal who tries to deliver a speech to the silent and unseen thousands listening to him. I know it because I've tried it, and believe me it's no cinch.

He is introduced in the most matter-of-fact manner by the announcer, who then turns to you and whispers: "All right; go ahead." A deathly silence greets you. Somewhere beyond your vision you know that thousands of people are waiting to hear what you have to say. You try to picture the kind of people you are talking to and then you hesitatingly begin. There is none of the intangible sympathy or antagonism that always exists between a speaker and his audience.

At the end of each sentence there is a pause, but silence, and you begin to feel alarmed that perhaps your stuff is not getting across. You try to be funny, but not a single titter rewards your efforts, and the result is absolute confusion for you. It is no easy task.

I always wonder what a minister is thinking about as he delivers his sermon over the radiophone. The amateurs as a general body performed some remarkable and wonderful work and have conscientiously followed the rules laid down for them, even at times when such rules appeared irksome and too restrictive. A few, however, have refused to be bound by any restrictions and have openly flouted all regulations, to the detriment of the conscientious amateur. It has taken time and effort to run these individuals down and inflict penalties upon them, and in the mean time they have worked great injury on the general body of amateurs and to the latest addition to the ranks of radio—the novice.

One of the best things that could result from the forthcoming investigation which will be conducted by Secretary Hoover would be a set of regulations governing the wave lengths to be used in various parts of the country in connection with broadcasting stations.

There is no doubt the forthcoming investigation will be of material assistance in developing broadcasting, rather than resulting in its elimination or restriction. As is always the case in the first stages of the development of

absolute importance to the government itself in spreading throughout the country information of general concern which does not usually appear in newspaper columns.

How little there is to fear is well illustrated in the fact that President Harding himself has had a receiving set installed in the White House. The set was placed there last week by experts from the Navy Department and the aeriels were completed yesterday. The receiving set is installed in the President's study and he will be able to sit there and enjoy the music, entertainment and news that are part of the general program of the radio broadcasting stations.

It is understood from an absolutely reliable source that the President's mind is open on the subject, and action is being taken at this time to protect the future. The investigation itself will clear up many of the present doubts, and undoubtedly will result in radio concert work being directed into well organized channels.

Investigation Should Remedy Present Radio Difficulties

President Harding's order instituting an investigation into the question of regulating radiophone broadcasting has caused some unnecessary alarm among owners of radiophone receiving sets. The decision of the President was taken at a Cabinet meeting during which scientific subjects were discussed, and was actuated by a desire to take all steps necessary to protect the national defense of the country.

The decision orders Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover to inquire into the present situation and determine whether it is necessary for Congress to authorize control of radiophone broadcasting, and if so to what extent. The Secretary of Commerce will be assisted by experts from his own department, as well as others from the Army and Navy departments.

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The government has ample powers under present laws and agreements to control the situation and to place restrictions on indiscriminate operation. The importance of the radiophone to the general public has already become so great that no drastic restrictions upon properly conducted programs will be enacted. At least that is the general impression gained after a careful inquiry. The system in fact is

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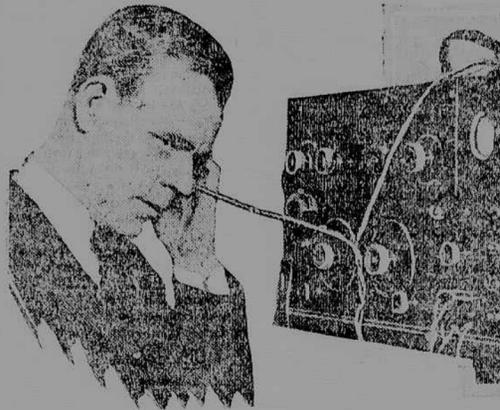
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Jack Binns, editor of The Tribune's radio department, who sent the first wireless used in a disaster at sea, thereby saving 3,000 lives when the White Star liner Republic was rammed by the Italian steamship Florida, January 23, 1909. During the war Mr. Binns, who was one of the first commercial wireless operators, was wireless instructor in the Canadian Air Forces at Toronto and later instructor in wireless compass work on aircraft in the advanced wireless school at Fairbrough, England.

A public utility, there are some drawbacks and disadvantages which are gradually overcome with experience. So with radiophone broadcasting, there have been some things which have been annoying and troublesome to the radio novice who does not understand the reason for them.

Among the troubles is the occasional disturbance from wireless telegraph stations, which is particularly noticed in the cheaper receiving sets. A great deal of this is due to the inexperience on the part of the novice in the gentle art of tuning, which he will overcome to a great extent after practice and through practice alone. Another phase is caused by the acts of some amateurs who refuse to obey the existing regulations governing their activities.

Official Wave Length Should Be Longer

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result is that in some sections of the country where the owner of a receiving set is located midway between two large broadcasting stations he has difficulty in tuning up to the station he most desires to receive from. This is quite natural until the owner becomes more expert in the tuning of his set.

It is the opinion of the writer that broadcasting radiophone stations should be operated on a much longer wave length than the present 360 meters laid down by the government. This wave length is far too close to the limit of 200 meters allowed by the government to radio amateurs, particularly in view of the disobedience of a few of them. It is also too close to the commercial wave lengths assigned to ship and shore stations in the case of coastal cities.

Messages to Congress May Be Broadcast

Under these conditions I would suggest that a general wave length of, say, 12,000 meters be established as the broadcasting wave, with a suitable leeway on either side of that figure for stations in different parts of the country. According to present plans it is proposed to establish as rapidly as possible a chain of broadcasting stations throughout the country, so that a nation-wide service can be maintained.

The plan, for example, would then work out something along these lines: New York station, 2,000 meters; Pittsburgh, 1,500 meters; Chicago, 2,500 meters; San Francisco, 1,600 meters, and so on. If such a system is agreed upon by the investigating committee it would mean that an exceptionally good receiver in New York could, at will,

Let The Tribune Help You Solve Your Radio Problems

If you are experiencing difficulty with your receiving set write to Jack Binns, the Tribune Radio, 154 Nassau Street, New York City. In your letter state what your trouble is, what kind of apparatus you are using and any other facts you think necessary. If you desire to install a receiving set and need advice write to the Tribune Radio, stating whether you live in an apartment or a private house, and if outside the city your distance from New York. Questions of general interest will be answered in this department every Sunday. Requests for personal answers should be accompanied by a stamped and self-addressed envelope.

listen to any of the stations throughout the country, free from any local disturbances. It would also mean that any station capable of receiving broadcasting service would be free from the interference which sometimes mars the program at present.

The possibilities of radio broadcasting in the future are boundless and practically stagger the imagination. There is not the slightest doubt that within a couple of years arrangements will be completed so that when President Harding reads a message to Congress in the Capitol his words will be reproduced in a million homes simultaneously as he utters them and far

more audibly than many of the Senators will hear them. Every important national speech will be so broadcasted, while international opera and concert artists will have their art brought right into the homes of every one and rural communities will be given an entertainment such as they never before dreamed of.

Listening to "Sky Jazz"
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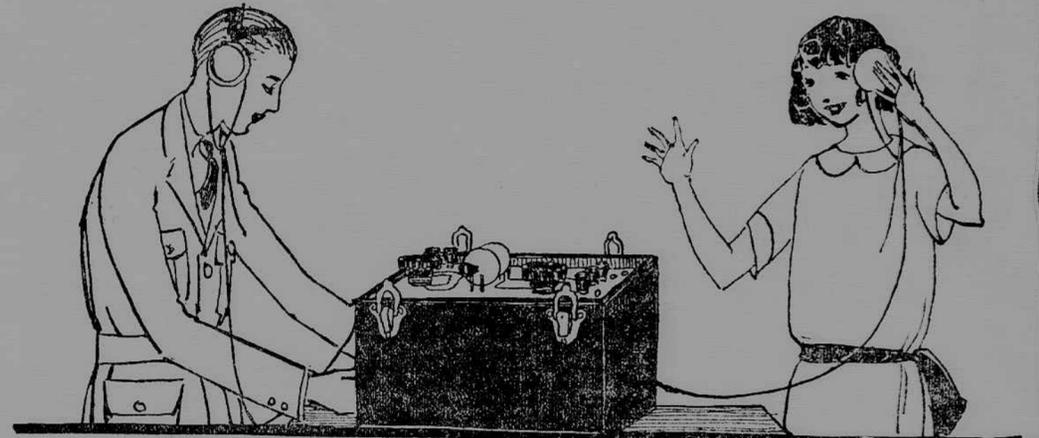
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