HOW TO WRITE FOR BROADCASTING

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BY

HOWARD THOMAS

With an Introduction

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John Watt

DIRECTOR OF VARIETY
BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION

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WOKING

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INTRODUCTION

by

John Watt

DIRECTOR OF VARIETY
BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION

IF this book brings forth a single new writer who has something original for broadcasting it will justify all the work we shall have in reading through the contributions of the others.

Broadcasting does need new writers, but it is vital that they should be men and women with a sense of radio and with the freshness of mind to break away from existing ideas. I have only to look at the "Out" tray on my desk to be reminded that so few of the would-be contributors to BBC programmes have the remotest idea of the specialized requirements and the problems of radio. I am glad to see that in this book Howard Thomas is stressing the necessity of giving intensive study to BBC programmes in order to see what is being done and what has been done in the past. If radio writers learned only this one lesson it would save many letters beginning "We regret . . ."

There is great scope in radio, because although it is well past the whip-and-top stage,

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the medium is new enough for many angles to have remained unexploited. Most of the basic ideas have been used, but there are many variations left untouched.

The gamble of radio and the joy of it is that the unknown contributor may be able to produce the kind of idea which makes millions of people cling like limpets to their sets on the night the show is broadcast. Not one of us in the Variety Department claims to know all there is to know of broadcasting, and we owe it to our jobs to give a try-out to anything which is new and has any possibility of success. An idea which we use reluctantly and in a small way may suddenly zoom into the headlines and become the new fancy of the public. On the other hand, an idea which has a strong appeal to us and on which we are willing to bet our professional shirts may crash at the first hurdle. I suppose every writer must think he has a winner when at last his pet idea has been put on paper and posted. Perhaps this book will help potential writers for broadcasting to be more critical of their own work and to hesitate, analyse and criticize before submitting it to us.

Here perhaps I had better say a few words about our wartime requirements. At the time this is written there are two main programmes. Although the Home Service programmes are much on the same lines as before the war, with

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the exception that there are shorter units, the Forces programmes present an entirely new problem. This new problem is an unusual proposition for the BBC, because instead of concentrating on the production of programmes for the individual at home, we have to go out to please listening groups. The soldiers, sailors and airmen gather in bunches around the loud-speakers and we have to give them entertainment which will please most of them at the same time, entertainment which does not call for over-intensive listening. Let us admit it, often our efforts will only consist of background music. Nevertheless, in the Forces programmes there are opportunities for new presentations of old favourites. Dance music and organ music are in for a good thumping before the war is over, and very soon we shall probably be hard pressed for novel and attractive ways of presenting these popular forms of entertainment.

In the Home Service programme we are always on the look-out for revues or other musical entertainment which makes half an hour seem too short. Bright spots for features like *Monday Night at Eight* or new radio characters as good as "Mr. Penny" or "Mr. Walker" are always likely to interest us. Most of all, we need new humorous writers for radio, but the more I see of comic writers' efforts on writing for broadcasting, the more I am con-

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vinced it is a flair which belongs to the few and which can only be properly exploited after vast experience in the entertainment world, and in collaboration with the comedians and other people who are responsible for the programme.

If I have not put you off writing for radio and you are still determined to get an airing, don't waste a lot of time writing lengthy scripts. Far better to let us see the idea in its early stages and then if we are interested we will help you to develop it within radio's limitations.

Meanwhile, in Howard Thomas you have a guide who has travelled many paths in radio. He writes from great experience and with a real knowledge of his subject.

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CHAPTER I

THE MARKET

If a writer's ambition is for his work to reach the largest possible number of people he must eventually write for broadcasting. His novel may be read by thousands, or by hundreds of thousands if he is lucky, his newspaper articles may be read by a good proportion of the readers of a two-million circulation newspaper, but his radio work can be sampled simultaneously in anything up to nine million British homes. Multiply that by the number of listeners per set and you have a potential listening audience of thirty-two million people.

Not all of these are regular listeners. The proportion depends upon the time of the broadcast and the acceptability of the programme. Before the Hitler War, there would be six million sets tuned in to the BBC's most popular show, the Saturday night *Music Hall*. When *Band Waggon* was revived in the early months of the war this Saturday audience probably increased to seven or eight million homes.

For such a huge public there must be a

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non-stop service. Every week the BBC has to provide over two hundred hours of broadcasting. There is a huge staff at the various Broadcasting Houses, dealing out to listeners their various chunks of entertainment or enlightenment, but by no means all of the words and music are manufactured by BBC employees. Every week the BBC Copyright Department pays out thousands of pounds to writers and composers. The rates of payment are not so meagre as you may be sometimes led to believe. There are no vast sums available for famous names, but, for the ordinary professional writer BBC rates compare favourably with payments for other writing. I would say that a successful free-lance radio writer makes more money than a successful press free-lance, with less work to do and more publicity. Payments for radio work are discussed later in this book, but at this point it is worth mentioning that the BBC will fix a fee according to the amount of work put into a programme rather than pay so much for a thousand words.

The principal disadvantage of writing for broadcasting is the monopoly of the BBC. There is no competition for new material, no bargaining for exclusive material, no secondary market. An article rejected by a national newspaper can go out on its travels until it finds a home. A rejected radio play has no second life. It is

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"Yes" or "No" on the single submission. Occasionally BBC material can be re-sold in other markets, in book form for instance, or a series of stories built around some radio character created by the writer. There is also a small demand for BBC material from overseas. Australia pays rather poorly for the right to re-broadcast BBC material, but on the rare occasions when America buys British radio writing the payment is high.

Writing direct for these markets overseas is another possible outlet, but the scope is small. Both countries are well supplied with their own broadcasting writers. It is also difficult to make a close study of their day-to-day programmes, and a knowledge of the market is as essential to the radio writer as it is to everyone who has to sell words for a living.

The one remaining market for radio writers is commercial broadcasting. The conditions are so different from BBC methods that they are not, from the writer's point of view, competitive. Two million pounds was being spent every year on British commercial radio when war broke out, but now that facilities have almost ceased the expenditure is negligible. However, the commercial radio market was never very wide open to the free-lance writer and there was no single source to which material could be submitted. Programme-making was in the

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hands of advertising agencies, all running their own radio departments. It was necessary to contact these agencies, find which programmes they were handling and then to submit material.

For the moment this market had better be ignored. In spite of great opposition British commercial radio flourished in peace-time, and as a war could not kill it entirely, we can expect a revival, probably on a grander scale than before. When that time comes the circumstances will probably have changed completely and any suggestions made here would probably become out of date.

A few generalities about writing for commercial radio will be given later, for the good reason that few articles and no books on the subject have been published in this country, but mainly *How to Write for Broadcasting* must be regarded as *How to Write for the BBC*. The British Broadcasting Corporation is the main market, a market where the newcomer to writing has as good a chance as the experienced journalist or the successful novelist.

There is not much fame in writing for broadcasting, in spite of the size of the audience. How many radio authors' names can you remember? A writer's name may appear in every national newspaper, in the *Radio Times* and be broadcast at the beginning and end of a pro-

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gramme, yet listeners are not likely to notice it. One or two playwrights have become famous by way of radio, but most of their success has been won in other spheres after the way has been paved by radio work.

In the shows broadcast every week by the BBC Variety Departments dozens of authors' names are quoted, but listeners appear to close their ears to them, just as they shut their eyes to the credit titles on films. The radio author does not matter very much with the public.

Take any of the better-known BBC features and try to think of the names of the men who write them. Names which occur every week are broadcast as often as a star's, yet they are never noticed—by the public.

For example, who wrote these programmes?:

1. The famous BBC Scrapbooks.
2. The adventures of Mr. Penny, the most successful character ever created at Broadcasting House.
3. *Mr. Walker Wants to Know.*
4. The "Inspector Hornleigh" series.

The Hornleigh one should be easy. The author's name was given every Monday for months and he was well featured in the *Radio Times*, but if you asked a hundred listeners "Who is Hans W. Priwin?" I doubt whether ten could tell you.

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The BBC Scrapbooks are written by staff men, C. H. Brewer and Leslie Baily. Baily is one of the best scriptwriters in the country and hundreds of radio shows have carried his name, but for every thousand listeners who could tell you that Bryan Michie was a compére only one could tell you that Baily was a radio author.

"Mr. Penny" still lives on as a radio character, years after he has been taken off the air. His creator, long forgotten, was Maurice Moiseiwitch.

Mr. Walker Wants to Know was the making of another radio favourite, but only a minute percentage of Syd Walker fans could tell you that the junk man's adventures were written by Ernest Dudley.

The author, you see, is the forgotten man of radio. That is, unless he broadcasts. The only way to become famous through broadcasting is to broadcast. It is voices and not names that register in the memory. A. J. Alan would be unknown to the public if he simply wrote stories and let someone else speak them, instead of telling the stories himself.

Therefore if it is fame you want, and nothing else, broadcasting has not much to offer you, unless you have a personality as attractive as C. H. Middleton or Lionel Gamlin.

There are compensations, of course, apart from the money you get paid for doing the

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work. If you succeed with your broadcast writing a reputation can be made very quickly among the handful of producers who will be the buyers of your work. Continued successes will establish your name with artistes and the "profession" generally, opening doors to other forms of entertainment writing.

There have been romances of radio authors, like the writers of *Goodnight Vienna*, a radio musical which became one of the more successful British films.

Many young composers regard broadcasting as a shop window for their wares. They concentrate on a radio musical play and then try to get every manager in the country to listen to the broadcast. Since British films fell on dull days offers for stage or film rights for radio shows have been rare. Many keep on trying, hopefully, and some day when there is that inevitable boom in home-made pictures radio will again be selling authors' and composers' work for them.

Although I have said that in broadcast writing the unknown have as much chance as those with outside reputations, the way in to radio is not easy. Many, many ideas may be submitted and rejected before interest is aroused. Even when a programme idea is favourably regarded, there may be many setbacks and alterations before the script is accepted and

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terms offered. After that there may be a long wait before the item can be fitted into the programme schedule, and another wait of several weeks before the cheque comes along. I seem to remember that between the first submission and the first broadcast of my earliest radio play I had to wait twelve months.

Thus there are no sudden fortunes to be made in radio writing. When your first effort is accepted there will be a pause to see how it goes, whether it brings any response from listeners or critics. Then follows the discussion of the next programme, the fitting into schedule, already worked out in detail for two months ahead. A less heart-breaking way of entering radio, easier than submitting ideas for elaborate programmes, is the submission of radio snippets, interviews or sketches at a few guineas a time. A fair amount of work can be collected this way and useful contacts made with producers. The danger is that the writer may be placed in the "snippet" category and not seriously considered when bigger programmes are being planned.

The ideal commission for a radio writer is the series of full-length programmes, on a given theme. It is only by having big programmes broadcast regularly, and supplementing them with smaller stuff that any writer can make a living out of radio. As I

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said earlier, such a writer can earn bigger money than a free-lance journalist doing the same amount of work, but the ideal is probably a combination of the two, with the radio writer having other markets in which to sell his work during the periods when his programmes are off the air. For instance, a series of radio interviews with famous women could probably be re-sold in a different form to a woman's magazine.

I know one radio writer who was making a four-figure sum a year out of radio and television without doing any big programmes, but the amount of work he put in, working on interviews, feature programmes, and so on, was more than most could stand. If a radio writer can get half a dozen big shows every year, bringing him £200 to £500, he has the basis of an income, and he has sufficient time left to reach four-figure earnings. The total volume of work given out by the BBC, however, is not large enough to keep a great number of whole-time free-lance radio writers busy.

At the same time, there are very, very few men depending entirely upon radio writing for their living, so probably the most this book can do for you is to give you a useful extra source of income. There are no easy fortunes in radio writing.

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In a moment I am going to examine in detail the various requirements of the BBC, but before that I would like to say something about your own approach to broadcast writing.

Most newcomers to radio have some pet idea, some favourite programme they want airing. During the three years I spent running a sponsored radio programme unit I interviewed hundreds of men and women in a search for new radio writers. Most of them had these pet programmes, and they nearly all had the same ideas. The *Round the World* programme, the *Film Stars' Voices* programme. . . . Then there were others with newer ideas, but which were beautifully unsuitable for our radio audience, programmes based on themes with a very small general appeal. So often I found that those who came after radio work never listened to radio programmes (or so they said) yet they claimed to know exactly how to put radio right.

At this early stage I suggest that if you are new to broadcast writing and attracted to it, forget all about your own pet programmes. Do not think you are going to force on the poor old public what *you* want to hear yourself. Too many writers (and this does not apply to radio alone) start from the wrong end and try to push themselves on the public rather than attempt to discover what the public want and then give it to them.

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No, I am not advocating that the public are always right and that you should keep their taste good and low by giving them more of what they are getting. My belief is that first you must study what the public are getting, then find out what their reaction is (by listening to conversations, asking the right questions, and watching the results of BBC surveys). Then try to give them something slightly different from, slightly better than they are getting. We know they like dance music. After a slump it is probably on the way to another boom. If you want to sell the BBC a programme, if you want to get the public by the ears, invent a new angle on dance music. Find out what has been done before. Think hard enough and you will get something new.

Originality is needed most of all in broadcasting. Avoid the obvious, in ideas and in treatment and in dialogue. Do not say "That's a terrible programme. Anyone can write *that*," and then proceed to write and submit an exactly similar programme. Try to go one better.

That is why the newcomer to writing may have a slightly better chance than the old-timer. Professional writers collect the tricks of the trade. They drop into grooves. They get so used to writing the written word that they cannot change over to the very different spoken

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word. The new writer has less to unlearn. Once he gets over that first stage when all he writes is self-conscious and ponderous, he may be able to do something which few writers can—write spoken English.

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CHAPTER 2

BBC REQUIREMENTS

Not even a mass meeting of BBC departmental directors could give you a complete answer to this chapter heading. They all have certain general requirements and restrictions, but if you went up to them and said earnestly—

"Look here, I want to write some stuff for you. Now please tell me exactly what you'd like"

the answer you would deserve would be—

"That's up to you." The job of the outside writer should be to give the BBC what they have not thought of themselves. Apart from the obvious rules of radio, like the limitations of subject and length of plays, and the available programme spots, like the interviews in *In Town Tonight*, there are few fixed requirements.

For this reason, and because there must always be developments and changes, the only way to estimate BBC requirements is to listen to as much radio as you can. Study the programmes item by item. Note the names of producers and writers. Find out which are the BBC staff men, which are the outside con-

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tributors. Notice the fashions in listening, the types of programmes which are on the up and on the down. Pay attention to the lengths of various programmes, the number of people in the cast. The best of radio is that you can do much of your research work in an armchair by the fireside.

Make notes. Work out how the programme hours are divided between the departments. Compare the morning programmes with the afternoon programmes. You may notice that no outstanding effort is made to cater for the home-for-lunch audience between 12.30 and 2. Perhaps you can devise something new and perfectly timed for that period.

Keep cuttings relating to the unusual and unexpected things abour broadcasters. They may set you off on an idea. Write down your own valuation of radio personalities, for use when you are building a programme around them.

To get you going here are some notes on BBC programmes and my own estimate of the requirements of the departments—

VARIETY DEPARTMENT

Full-length Shows

SCRAPBOOKS: Written and arranged by BBC staff.

STARGAZING: BBC Staff or specially commissioned.

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SHOWMEN OF ENGLAND and other big series: Written and arranged by originator of the series. Idea has to be new and strong to justify a series of big and expensive shows. Life-story and reminiscence type of programme now widely exploited and hardly likely to be extended. Probably scope for really novel idea.

FILM ADAPTATIONS: Handled by same fixed team and no scope for outside writers.

MUSICAL COMEDIES: Newly written shows always carefully considered, but the supply generally exceeds the demand. Music is the important thing, and although there are plenty of composers eager to collaborate, very few of them can write catchy tunes.

RADIO REVUES: New ideas and themes for revues might result in a commission for a short series. Most scope, though, is in short sketches and revue items, a modest but valuable beginning for many new radio writers.

SINGLE PROGRAMMES: You may have a notion which lends itself to a single good programme. Half-hour is probably the maximum time limit.

SERIES: Ideas are always welcomed for short musical series, fifteen-, twenty- or thirty-minutes in length.

Short Contributions

FEATURETTES: Five- and ten-minute spots for magazine programmes like *Monday Night at*

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Eight. The BBC are always on the look out for new radio characters as good as "Inspector Hornleigh" and "Mr. Walker." Ideas like these and spots like *Listeners' Corner* and *Puzzle Corner* are fairly easy to fit into programmes, without waiting long months for a place in the schedule.

INTERVIEWS: When *In Town Tonight* and similar programmes are running the BBC is in the market for two- or three-minute interviews. The contributor is expected to provide the suggestion, make sure the person to be interviewed is willing, and then write the script. Many journalists have earned their first BBC cheque through interviews. The writer does *not* do the actual interviewing at the microphone.

ARTISTES' MATERIAL: New material for artistes is always wanted. The only successful way is to study the style of your star most carefully and then submit material either to the star or the BBC. This work has to be anonymous, of course, but if you do well and prove to be above-the-ordinary there will be plenty of radio work for you.

MISCELLANEOUS: Much material is bought for existing features like *Puzzle Corner*, and so on. A question concerning any feature should be put to the producer by letter. The BBC Variety Department is the most encouraging of all to outside writers and good material or ideas always have consideration. But remember they want originality.

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DRAMA DEPARTMENT

Features: There is not a great deal of scope for the outside contributor because so much work falls on the producer. However, really novel ideas get a hearing and have some chance of acceptance. Remember that almost all of the obvious things have already been done. Look for something new.

Play adaptations: These are mostly written by the department's own staff or commissioned from writers who have proved their skill at radio plays.

Plays: Comedies are always welcome. Straight plays depend upon good themes and good dialogue. I asked the BBC Drama Director, Val Gielgud, to give me a few lines about his present-day needs and this is his reply—

"You ask me a question to which it is extraordinarily difficult to reply within any tolerably brief space. I think the best I can do is to suggest that we want any good type of dramatic material with strong plots, well-defined characterization, and average timing of between twenty and fifty minutes, preferably written with the author's eye—or should it be ear?—firmly fixed on what the microphone can and cannot do. As far as standard is concerned, we are doing our best to retain the quality established in the years before the war."

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TALKS DEPARTMENT

Talks are outside our province except it is worth putting on record here that really interesting personal reminiscences are always welcome. This Department buys new short stories, specially written for the microphone. Make the length not more than three thousand words.

CHILDREN'S HOUR

There is a very useful market here and a real chance for the new radio writer. Let me quote a most helpful statement given to me by Miss M. E. Jenkin, BBC *Children's Hour* Executive—

"Our present weekday *Children's Hour* lasts only half an hour instead of an hour, as in peace time. This means that plays should be limited to thirty minutes, including any incidental music. We cannot use many serial plays at the moment. The best length for stories is about fifteen hundred words. Nearly all our material is bought from outside contributors. Every manuscript received is judged on its merits.

"On Sundays the *Children's Hour* lasts for forty-five minutes and therefore plays or features aimed at this particular programme can run for about thirty-five or forty minutes. We are on the look out for material specially suited for Sunday broadcasts. This need not be of a definitely religious character, but should be of a suitably uplifting nature.

"Generally speaking, we want material aimed

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at children between the ages of ten and fourteen—not too young, that is. So many books, intended for the very young, err on the side of silliness, and do not stand up to broadcasting conditions. We regard our audience rather as young adults, than as mere babies."

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CHAPTER 3

THE APPROACH TO THE BBC

THE writer trying to break into print will generally find that his best method is to write an article and send it, complete, to the most likely editor. If and when it comes back, out it goes to another editor. He has to write speculatively. Later on, if he has any success, he will probably submit titles and ideas to editors and then write the articles to order. But in the beginning, before his reputation is made, he has to submit the finished article.

The opposite applies to writing for broadcasting. Unless you have something very short to submit, it is better to send in your suggestions, in the briefest possible form. The BBC are very conscious that there is no second market for rejected radio work and they do not encourage writers to spend hours on unproductive work. For instance, you may spend weeks working on a radio play which might have to be rejected at once for departmental reasons.

You will save yourself trouble if you submit your radio notions in idea form, preferably

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on a quickly read single sheet of paper. It is up to you to present that idea as attractively as you can, in other words, to "sell" it hard.

If the idea appeals, do not expect to get a contract by return of post. The idea is only the beginning and if the BBC suggest that you should go ahead with it there is no certainty that the resulting programme will be accepted.

You have then to prove that you can write radio. You have to supply the promised goods. The advantage to you is that you have won a producer's interest. He likes the idea. If you are an established radio writer and he knows that your programme will live up to your first suggestion, he will put the idea before the programme planning committee, in its first rough form. If you are a new name he will wait to see how the idea works out in finished or half-finished form before he applies for a place for it in the programme.

A good plan is to submit a "treatment" of your idea before you attempt to write the complete script. This half-way stage between idea and finished programme should be a synopsis of the programme as you visualize it —a layout. If it is a musical show you should show where the music is introduced.

Before we discuss the treatment in detail let us go back to the original idea. Highly im-

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portant is the title. A good title will often sell a show. I agree that a brilliant new idea would probably be acceptable if it had a bad title, because the title could be altered, but remember that the title is the first thing which hits the eye, and if it has a professional slickness about it the more attention it gets.

There are fashions in titles and you should watch for them and learn to avoid the obvious. When a British newspaper "borrowed" a feature title from the American news magazine *Time*, *These Names Make News*, it started a title fashion which has not yet died out. Every editor, every radio producer, every scenario editor has seen enough titles varying on *These Names Make News* to make him wince every time they reappear.

Time Marches On was another one. The title-makers have made practically everything march on since the original was coined.

A short title is always to be preferred, but do try to make it original and pleasant to the ear. It must be easy to say, and if it is to be the title of a big show, give it a grand manner.

Punning titles are dangerous. The wit does not always seem as amusing to the listener as it does to the punster. One slight advantage radio has for the punmaker is that the phrase is spoken, not written, and the meaning can be delicately pointed. Avoid titles which look

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amusing in print but lose their point when spoken.

For preference the title should be a description of the programme. That may sound too obvious to be said, but sometimes writers become so obsessed with their subject that they forget the public know nothing about it and they give the show an over-fanciful title. The perfect title describes the programme, attracts attention and is mildly amusing.

One of the best titles was coined by John Watt for a radiobiography I had written around Clifford Whitley, the theatre impressario who had introduced the famous *Midnight Follies*. This account of success and failure was neatly titled "MIDNIGHT AND OTHER FOLLIES."

It must be remembered that a title for a series may have to be very different from a single show title. A title which is amusing once becomes wearisome when it is used repeatedly. A good topical title which bore repetition was *It's That Man Again*.

On the whole, it is a good policy to use a descriptive title for a series of programmes and an amusing title for a single show.

Your description of the idea, once you have captured attention with the title, should be as crisp and direct as possible. It is pointless to list the cast you want, unless there is some essential character best exampled by quoting

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a real person, or again, unless you are creating a character which must essentially be played by a certain artiste.

It is as well to suggest the playing time of the programme. If you are trying to sell a series, show how the interest can be maintained in the follow-up programmes. Thus, if you give a brief description of programme No. 1, say in a few lines what you would do in No. 2, No. 3 and so on.

The new radio writer is not very likely to sell a series idea unless he has something exceptionally brilliant, and it is better to start more modestly, with a single programme.

This same idea of submitting an idea in the barest form applies to plays and to talks and feature programmes, as well as variety programmes. Your job is to gain the interest of the man who may eventually have to advocate within the BBC that your programme be incorporated in the schedule.

Do not be disappointed if an idea is submitted, unanswered for days and then turned down. Many thousands reach the BBC and there is a great sameness about them. You will be lucky indeed if your first idea is accepted. There is more likely to be a succession of "No's" before the "Perhaps" comes along.

There is no harm in plugging away at the BBC so long as your ideas are worth attention.

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Do not worry the producers with trivial suggestions or you will defeat your purpose and make them shy at the sight of your notepaper. Keep on submitting ideas, so long as they really are ideas.

Sooner or later you will complain that someone has helped himself to an idea of yours. Maybe, but probably it is an idea that the BBC get submitted to them every week, or an idea that they have brought back from the early days of radio. Conscious plagiarism is dangerous and unnecessary. Perhaps there have been occasions when producers have listened to ideas without being able to use them at the time and then, months or years later, brought them out of their memory in the honest belief that they were ideas of their own. No producer who lived entirely on other people's ideas would keep his job very long. The BBC producers are not all brilliant ideas men, but they do try to do their job honestly.

This is a good moment to explain the relation of the producer to the writer, and the general set-up of the BBC programme division.

Each programme department—Variety, Drama, Music and so on, has its Director. A director controls the producers, writers and composers in his section.

The Variety Department of the BBC has one or two staff script-writers, but its main strength

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is the producers. There is a Chief Producer, working closely with the Director of Variety, and keeping a fatherly eye on the activities of the other producers.

The Variety Director allocates to the producers the programmes they are to handle. Programme ideas can be submitted to him, and if he accepts them, he decides which producer shall have the handling of the show.

Alternatively, you can submit ideas to a producer. If he is interested he will work on your behalf and try to get the programme accepted by the Director. The value of this is that if you know a certain producer likes handling the type of show you have in mind he will work hard to get it through for you. Naturally, if it is a big idea a producer is only too glad to have the handling of it and will do all he can to have it included in the programmes.

This makes it important for your study of BBC programmes to cover the individual work of producers. Listen hard enough and you will begin to see how much of the show depends for its success upon the producer. You will notice how some shows are slapped on, others are finished and polished productions. Gradually you will recognize the touch of the various producers and be able to classify their styles. It is not always easy to appreciate the pro-

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ducer's work by listening at home, and if you do ever get an opportunity to watch BBC shows in rehearsal go along and see for yourself what the producer does.

Occasionally producer and writer will work together so successfully that they will be teamed up, with many advantages to the writer. The producer will turn to him as often as he can and commission work without being asked by the writer. An outstandingly productive association between BBC producer and outside writer may result in the writer being offered a staff job.

Even when the writer submits his ideas to the Variety Director and they are accepted they will eventually go to a producer, and so every writer must accustom himself to working with the man who will eventually have the airing of the show.

If a writer's idea is liked and he gets a favourable letter from a producer there may be an invitation to go along for a discussion. This depends upon the scope of the suggestion and upon the writer's standing with the BBC. When an idea is accepted from an established writer it is obvious that the writer and producer must get together to discuss its development at the earliest stage.

On the other hand, when a producer has a promising idea sent in by an unknown con-

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tributor he is in no hurry to arrange an interview, preferring to wait to see how the new man shapes at radio. The producer has several shows on hand and others in preparation, so there is hardly time to interview the owner of every idea which appears to have possibilities.

It is then we reach the second stage, the programme idea in synopsis form.

The writer's idea has attracted interest, perhaps it has drawn some helpful comments or criticism from the BBC, and now he has to develop the notion.

The complete programme has to be visualized. The opening, the accompanying music, the cast, the treatment of the dialogue, the whole show. It is the same stage that an author reaches when he writes a story or a play or a novel—the framework. The difference between radio and the printed word is that the author should re-submit at this stage. From there on, in print, it must be all his own work and as such it is bought and printed with little or no alteration, but in radio the resulting programme may have to be very different. The producer will want to make his own contribution to the programme. He has to improve, cut, edit the programme until he believes it is in its most attractive form for radio.

The author could chance leaving the producer to get to work on the script when the

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final finished copy had been sent to him, but it is more satisfactory if the re-planning is done on the skeleton of the show. There may have to be a shuffling of tunes, elimination of an unnecessary item, addition of some contrasting feature.

The programme layout should be posted to the producer (giving him more time to consider it than if the writer takes it to his office and waits for a decision). The layout, although probably scrappy in itself, should be neatly presented. For preference, it should be typewritten and a copy retained. The layout need not be double-spaced because it will be dealt with as a whole and not line by line. There will be fewer of the alterations and blue-pencillings for which double-spacing seems to have been invented.

I believe in dressing up these layouts and scripts to make them look attractive. A small point, but a neat, professional-looking script gives you a good mark and makes your work more pleasant to handle. It is a good plan to enclose your manuscript in a thin cardboard cover, making it easier for the producer to keep everything relating to your programme together, and reducing the chance of page two being mislaid. A distinctive cover also makes your manuscript more noticeable on his desk and every time he catches a glimpse of it he

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is reminded that this is something demanding his attention.

When the producer receives your layout the fate of your programme will probably be decided. If you made your first approach to him he will decide if the idea is worth proceeding with. If not, he will reply and return the layout, probably explaining why it is not acceptable. If he continues to be interested he will open his campaign to get your show broadcast. He will probably send your typescript to the Variety Director, accompanied by his own note giving reasons why the programme is worth using.

The Director sees it, in any case, especially if it was he who first became interested in your idea and handed it over to the producer.

It is assumed that your layout is in a sufficiently clear form to enable the BBC to visualize the complete programme. If it is not complete or if it justifies alteration the producer will probably call you in and discuss alterations and improvements.

The producer will go along to his director for a decision on the programme and if the programme is sufficiently liked it will go before the programme planning board.

At that stage the idea will be either rejected, accepted but held over for a few months, accepted awaiting a suitable date, or accepted and given a date in the programme schedule.

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Your next letter from the producer will be the fateful one, telling you the best or worst. If the programme is to be used you will be invited to discuss in detail the final programme with the producer.

You will pool ideas, taking your own copy of the layout along to mark it up with his comments and suggestions. It will pay you to defend your own notions if you have faith in them because some producers are inclined to get a little heady with their own power. It is good for a producer to have a style of his own, but he should not stamp his own methods too much on every show he handles, or everything will sound the same. Some producers believe that all shows should be to a certain formula and any departure from this meets with their resistance. For instance, if you shock a producer by saying that the programme should have no opening music, and if you can justify your belief, succeeding in convincing him, your show will have gone a long way towards being different from all the others. Without being stupidly obstinate, fight for your own notions and refuse to let a new idea be crushed by someone who works to a pattern. Too many breakaways from the hackneyed are strangled at birth by unimaginative and uncreative producers.

There will be many questions to be discussed.

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The timing, the length of each song, the proportion of dialogue, the casting and so on. Once the programme has been given a date a sum is allocated to the producer and he has to engage artistes, buy orchestrations, and book instrumentalists and singers within that budget. By the way, he is not likely to discuss your price with you, for that does not come within his expenditure. Once a date is fixed for the programme you will be made an offer by the BBC Copyright Department.

You will have a say in the casting, but the final word is with the producer. Familiar old names spring to his mind at once, but if you have original ideas on casting he will be pleased to have them. Of course you will want stars, but their booking will depend upon price and availability.

The producer may not be able to complete his casting until he has your final script, but if he can his next move is to list the artistes he wants to book and then send the names to the bookings department. This department arranges all terms with artistes, and when costing their programmes the producers ring through for current prices of artistes.

At this stage the producer may also want his "billing" for publication of programme details in the *Radio Times*. Here again he will probably invite suggestions from you.

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reveals first taste of show business acquired when he saw cousin Horace Goldin in Paris. Criticised his performance, too much talk.

(Conjurer's jokes in broken American, over typical French music of 1907 period)

Lee Ephraim goes on to show that he was actually thrown into show business by an earthquake ....

(Sound picture of San Francisco earthquake. Orchestra, sound effects, American high-speed commentator)

...... by contrast Lee Ephraim's slow description of how the 'quake ruined his motor business and he became Goldin's manager. Then produced sketches and plays. We reach his first show - "The Street Singer." Dialogue with Phyllis Dare.

(Duet, Phyllis Dare and Harry Welchman "The Street Singer")

Lee Ephraim tells of visit to United States for first theatrical experience there, staging of West End play "Havoc." After first night, alongside press notices were reviews of a musical which opened the same night.

American voices:- a. reading review of "Havoc"
b. reading review of "Rose Marie."

Lee Ephraim goes backstage and secures right to stage "Rose Marie" in London, subject to his securing Drury Lane Theatre. Then the job of getting Drury Lane.

A succession of cabled messages,	(over "Rose Marie" music)
Lee Ephraim to Sir Alfred Butt -	offering show
Butt to Ephraim-	Sending Basil Dean to see show
Dean to Butt -	"Rose Marie" unsuitable for Drury Lane.
Butt to Ephraim -	Sorry. but ....
Ephraim to Butt -	Suspend decision till I come home.

Finally Butt decides to stage "Rose Marie".

(Duet - "Indian Love Call")

Followed by bored voice giving luke-warm review of "Rose Marie."

A PROGRAMME LAYOUT

Actual page from the author's layout of one of his *Showmen of England* programmes

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VOICE B: Lee Ephraim presents ..... "Sunny."

("WHO - STOLE MY HEART AWAY
WHO - MAKES MY DREAMS [illegible]")

VOICE C Lee Ephraim presents ..... "The Desert Song."

(softly*) (Harry Welchman with Orchestra:
"BLUE HEAVEN AND YOU AND I
AND SAND KISSING A MOONLIT SKY
THE DESERT BREEZE WHISPERING A LULLABY
ONLY STARS ABOVE YOU, TO SEE I LOVE
YOU")

(Dialogue over music*)

WOMAN: Lee Ephraim? Who is he?

MAN: Dunno. Seem to have heard the name somewhere.

2nd MAN: Know what the papers call him, don't you?

"The Mystery Man of the Theatre."

(Swell up few bars of singing
left over to round this off)

VOICE A: (cold) Lee Ephraim presents ... "Blue Eyes".

(Tessa Deane with Orchestra:
"BLUE EYES, THEY [illegible]
EYES", etc.)

VOICE B: Lee Ephraim presents ..... "Gay Divorce."

(Crooner with Orchestra:
"NIGHT AND DAY, YOU ARE THE ONE
ONLY YOU BENEATH THE MOON AND THE
SUN")

VOICE C: Lee Ephraim presents ..... "On Your Toes."

TYPOGRAPHICAL ARRANGEMENT OF BBC SCRIPTS

(*a*) Complicated routine

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AMERICAN VOICE A: Ballet Girl Storms Ballyhoo City.

AMERICAN VOICE B: Ballet Dancer Makes Grade in Hollywood.

AMERICAN VOICE A: 20 Dollars to five thousand dollars a week.

AMERICAN VOICE B: Goldwyn Stars Vera Zorina.

AMERICAN GIRL'S VOICE: _(Boop-a-doop style)_ Don't despair, girls. Hollywood still holds out its arms to the dancers with oomph. Listen to the story of Vera Zorina, the ballet dame who crashed Ballyhoo town, then go get yourself on Sam Goldwyn's pay-roll. London Impressario, Lee Ephraim, dithered into Covent Garden Opera House. He crossed his fingers and hoped he'd find a ballerina who could act. And he found Zorina, unloading her glamour on stuffed shirts for twenty dollars per week. Ephraim said "Sign on the dots," and Zorina was on her toes in "On Your Toes" at two hundred and fifty dollars a week. Then came Sam Goldwyn and away went Zorina to Hollywood with a contract tucked in her corsage to jitterbug in "Goldwyn Follies" at five grand per week. The motto, girls, is - on your toes.

(Orchestra and Cavendish Three - "ON YOUR TOES")

LEE EPHRAIM: NO MORE TALKING NOW, JOHN, LET'S GET ON WITH THE MUSIC. LOOK AT THE TIME.

TYPOGRAPHICAL ARRANGEMENT OF BBC SCRIPTS

(_b_) Straightforward dialogue

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When the outline and treatment of the programme is agreed, all you have to do is to go away and write the script.

Not until this stage do you get your chance to prove you can write for broadcasting. All the ideas and thought and work have been towards this one end—the script. Script writing is the most important part of this book and it will be dealt with fully in a later chapter.

For now we will concern ourselves only with the mechanics of the script, the form in which you present it.

If possible, you should try to get hold of a typical BBC script. When a producer is sufficiently interested he will probably lend you one. From this you can get the look and feel of a script, the setting out and spacing. Specimen pages are illustrated here, and some excerpts from scripts will be found in the Appendix.

It is essential for the script to be typewritten and double spacing is advisable. There is nothing more tedious than having to read a long and handwritten script, so you help yourself when you send the BBC a neat and readable manuscript. Double spacing is for the inevitable alterations.

Elaborate technical instructions can be forgotten. If you borrow a script you may notice

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terms like "cross fade." Avoid these unless you know exactly what they mean and how to use them. Better to put your instructions in plain, ordinary English. From the script pages illustrated you will see that the difference between the actual dialogue and the radio directions is clearly shown. It is better to use this familiar form of setting than to daub your script with lavish use of the red ribbon.

Do not expect your script to be broadcast exactly as you write it the first time. There will probably be many alterations before the producer finally takes it over and has it duplicated. Even then the actors will do strange things with your words.

The BBC can still reject your script when you have written it. If you are a new writer for radio you will probably be told by the producer that you proceed with the script on your own speculation. He can only use it if it is what he requires. You have not sold the script to the BBC until you receive a formal offer from the Copyright Department and you have accepted it. This offer of a performing fee will refer to a definite date or dates of broadcast.

When you have delivered the final script your part in the programme has officially ended, but most likely you will be welcomed at rehearsals, when more alterations, cuts and additions are certain to be needed. The important

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thing to remember is that in the studio the producer, like the editor, has the final decision.

The procedure I have described refers to the writing of Variety Department shows and Drama Department features. For shorter material all this routine is not necessary.

If you have an item of the *In Town To-night* type, all you need do is to submit your item, preferably with the short piece of script written in the form you would like to see it broadcast. Similarly with revue sketches and lyrics. In fact, with anything which depends entirely upon the actual writing rather than upon the idea or its presentation.

As for plays, so much depends upon the subject and upon your writing ability that I hesitate to generalize. On the whole, I think it is best to submit a synopsis of the play, to try to create some preliminary interest. The danger of this is that you might choose some very slight theme. Perhaps you are one of those geniuses who can weave magic out of thin air, and write a brilliant play around a flimsy structure, but the Drama Department producers are not to know this and they may reject your synopsis.

If you are going to depend upon the strength of your story or the unusualness of your subject, then you should submit your synopsis. If you are gambling on your writing ability, then

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write the complete play or perhaps half of it and submit the manuscript.

Talks hardly come within the scope of this book, but if you are eager to get your voice an airing the best method is to submit title, subject, treatment and perhaps a page of the talk to the Talks Director of the BBC.

In spite of the BBC's relationship with the Post Office a free postage service is not provided, so one little courtesy expected of all contributors is that submitted manuscripts should have postage stamps sent with them for return postage.

BBC addresses are given in the Corporation's annual handbook. The peace-time headquarters of all departments is at Broadcasting House, London, W.1 and all manuscripts should be sent there. Material for Regional stations should be sent to the local addresses given in the handbook, although "BBC, Broadcasting House, Birmingham," or whatever the city may be, will be sufficient address.

I take the risk of dating this book by giving you the war-time addresses of the various departments, if you are anxious to send material directly and quickly—

VARIETY DEPARTMENT: Broadcasting House, 21–25 Whiteladies Road, Clifton, Bristol.

CHILDREN'S CORNER: Same address.

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MUSIC DEPARTMENT: P.O. Box 6, Evesham, Worcs.

DRAMA AND FEATURES DEPARTMENT: Broadcasting House, Piccadilly, Manchester.

TALKS DEPARTMENT: Broadcasting House, London, W.1.

Earlier I said that commercial radio would have to be treated very sketchily here. However, in order to give would-be radio writers a complete address book I will give the addresses of the advertising agencies and the accounts they would probably be handling. These agencies exist to handle the entire advertising of manufacturers and distributors. They have many departments and so material should be addressed to "The Manager, Radio Department."

ADVERTISING AGENCY	PROBABLE RADIO PRODUCTS
The London Press Exchange Ltd., 110, St. Martin's Lane, W.C.2.	Cadbury's, Fry's, Greys and De Reszke Cigarettes, Meltonian, Mr. Therm, Reckitt's Blue, Alka-Seltzer.
J. Walter Thompson Co., Ltd., Bush House, Aldwych, W.C.2.	Kraft, Rinso, Horlicks, Lux, Rowntree's, Carter's Pills.
Lintas Ltd., Unilever House, Blackfriars House, E.C.4.	Persil, Lifebuoy and other Lever products.

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ADVERTISING AGENCY	PROBABLE RADIO PRODUCTS
Lord and Thomas Ltd., Thames House, Millbank, S.W.1.	Palmolive, Quaker Oats, Pepsodent, Colgate's.

These and other advertising agencies have control of the writing and production of their clients' programmes. They are always on the look-out for programme ideas, either related to one of the products they handle or of general appeal. The established radio writer has a better chance than newcomers. Speed and experience are the essentials, and advertising agencies have not a sufficiently large margin to school newcomers to radio writing. Free-lance radio writers can build up a connection with advertising agencies and then work is commissioned regularly. Idea-finding is not so hard because changes of programmes are infrequent. Ideas are generally provided by the agency and the writer is paid a fee for a series of say 26 or 52 weekly programmes. Staff jobs within the agency departments occur from time to time. Practically all the advertising announcements are written inside the agency, only radio entertainment scripts being bought outside.

There you have the ways and means of selling your radio work, once you have produced it. Now let us get around to the actual creation and writing of radio programmes.

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CHAPTER 4

PROGRAMME BUILDING

Every free-lance writer must have plenty of friends who say "I'd like an easy job like yours. Anybody can write that stuff. I could. If only you could just tell me what to write about. . . ."

Ideas are the bones of writing. Occasionally if you sit and think hard enough, inspiration will come to you. After many weeks. But few of us can afford to wait for brainwaves. If you write for a living you have to manufacture your ideas, just as the boys in Charing Cross Road have to manufacture their "hit" songs. Sometimes you do have a flash of brilliance, when the idea suddenly makes a present of itself to you, but those are generally on unexpected occasions, when you are shaving or having your teeth out.

Sit and wait for ideas for hours on end, if you like, but you had better have a comfortable income to maintain yourself. A regular flow of manufactured ideas must be part of your stock. Not merely the original idea, the theme of a radio show or a newspaper article, but the little unusual touches which are essential if your work is to be above the ordinary.

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Some people look for ideas they can "adapt." A convenient word. I used to know scores of commercial artistes who spent hours every week learning new tricks from the advertisements in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Some of them were skilful in their handling of borrowed brain-waves, but gradually their own creative apparatus went rusty and ceased to function.

In radio you can do the same thing. Buy a copy of the American *Variety* weekly and you will find details of American radio shows, detailed criticisms of new programmes. Yes, you can "adapt" those (it might surprise you to know how many BBC programmes have American blood in their veins) but you cannot keep on doing it. Far better to start creating your own ideas from the beginning and get into the habit of doing things your own way.

I suggest that the best approach to idea-building is to think very hard around what you are expected to produce. If you know what is wanted you can go some way towards supplying that need. Try and concentrate on one particular type of programme. Visualize the audience, their sex, their income, their tastes, what they *want* to hear. Your mind will be crowded with the obvious things at the beginning, but keep on until you find the concealed turning which will take you into new pastures.

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I have already said that you need to study radio very closely and listen as often as you can. This is all the more necessary when you come to the creation of ideas. You will be able to discard at once what you know has been done before. Remember that your first thought is probably the hackneyed one. Someone is certain to have done it *that* way. Use your first idea only as a jumping-off ground.

Too many people grab at the first thought that comes into their head, instead of turning it over and over, probing for the real ideas that lie hidden away behind it.

My own experience is that a sympathetic collaborator can be of real help. When you have a moderately good idea you can roll it over in your mind so affectionately that it expands beyond its real value. You become so bloated with it that you lose your sense of proportion.

There is nothing like a candid friend (or, if you are fortunate, an outspoken but helpful wife) to pull your ideas to pieces. In conversation you will often talk ideas out of your brain, thoughts which you never knew were there. A chance remark by the other person may set you off on a new angle. Perhaps you are describing something you have thought of, they interpret it differently, you like it better that way, away your mind whirls again, and the idea has started to brew.

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The ideal collaboration is when two people will pour out two minds to each other. Pour out every thought, however stupid, facetious, irrelevant they may be, so long as they are prompted by the subject. I have seen some fine ideas born from seemingly futile suggestions.

Even when you have found a satisfactory idea do not shut the shop, or put it on paper at once and shoot it off to the BBC. The idea is the beginning, you have to consider the variations, the treatment and development of your idea. There follows the difficult process of mental acceptance and rejection, decisions as to what you should omit from and include in the programme.

Let us manufacture a programme together. I have no preliminary ideas in my mind on this, no notes in front of me, so we shall be on equal footing.

Suppose you had read in this morning's newspaper a statement by a woman M.P. that the BBC did not try hard enough to entertain women, did not cater for their domestic interests except in the way of stodgy talks. The points would probably be discussed by the BBC. Someone might even be given the job of providing the right programme. (We have given ourselves a tough one here, domestic interests plus light entertainment, but still, we will have a try.)

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At once you think, "There's a chance for me. If I can think of a programme appealing to women, run by the Variety Department, I might get away with it."

First of all you think of the most suitable time for the broadcast. Evening? No, audience too mixed, women tired of domestic affairs. Morning? Busy with the housework, or shopping. Afternoon is the time, probably about four, when they are leisurely considering the evening meals for husbands and children.

Four o'clock and a few million women listening—what would they like to hear? Sentimental music, Irish ballad singers—yes, but that isn't domestic enough.

Housework? Drab. Cookery—they get so much of it in the women's papers, and there's no entertainment angle. Marriage—love—h'm. Easy to be trashy or sloppy. Better leave it alone. Husbands—no. Babies. Babies? BABIES!

The BBC leave babies alone. Yet it is the number one appeal with most women, certainly with the mothers who would be at home listening in their hundreds of thousands on a weekday afternoon. And all the grandmothers, and godmothers, and aunts. . . . Everybody knows and likes at least one baby. . . .

Good idea, this.

You smother the temptation to send a telegram to the BBC "How about a baby pro-

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gramme?" You have to develop the theme, find an entertainment angle. Quickly you jot down odd notions.

Babies. . . . Marie Stopes? Better not. Famous babies. Yes, film star mothers talking about their offspring, double interest there. Then a Wonderful Mother—the mother of quads. Story in that, changing four sets of nappies at a time, giving them all their bottle at two o'clock, getting them to bed . . . that's in.

A nurse to give advice, perhaps taking the entire life of a child, week by week. Something about diets, too.

That's fine for uplift, domestic appeal, now for the entertainment quota. That record of Florence Desmond's about the first mother to fly to the north pole, held her baby over the pole, etc. Must be other comic baby records.

And a lullaby. Plenty of those, one to close the programme, sung by a husky-voiced coloured girl with forty winks in every note. Sentimental verse, a minute of it, like they print in the picture papers—

> Little feet go up the stairs
> Dum dum dum, something prayers . . .

Overmuted violin, playing heart-throb music.

Would it be straining the theme too much to drag in faintly related songs, lyrics with "baby"

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or "mother" in them? *You're a Wonderful Baby*, *My Heart belongs to Daddy* (h'm), *Good-night, Children everywhere*. Perhaps.

A better idea, a tune for the children listening with you. Nursery rhymes, very well done, perhaps sung by a harmony trio. Or one of the light orchestral pieces for children.

Sentimental? Of course, but mothers are. Try our programme on your wife now. Rough as it is, I think she'll agree she might listen to something on those lines.

From that point onwards you fill sheets of paper with notes, items you might use. Perhaps there will be five times as many items as you need, many of them so trivial that they are not worth writing down, except that they give you other notions even as you write them.

Then comes the difficulty of selection. This editing work will decide whether your programme is going to be sternish, sloppy or sound. Remember, you want novelty, contrast, surprise, as well as enlightenment. It is this selection and blending which will be the test of whether or not you have the radio flair.

Highly important is your knowledge of psychology. The question is not—will *you* like it. Will *they* like it, that is what you must be able to assess.

The greatest mistake you can make is to feel patronizing towards your potential listeners.

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"It's slop—they'll lap it up." Insincerity will be the most noticeable thing in your programme. Try to give people what they want, but without being ashamed of having your name tagged on to it.

The more you know of the audience the better. Your charwoman's opinion of the new comedian is more important to you than the man in the train's lofty criticism of last night's symphony concert. You can never hope to entertain people unless you know what entertains them. One of your first jobs is to find out what makes them laugh, what starts the tears. You will have to go to cinemas, to find which of the organ solos they hum, which parts of the film make them snigger, what causes the laughs.

One of the most important moves by the BBC in recent years has been the attempt to discover what listening audiences want. Investigators have gone out, knocking at thousands of doors, asking carefully framed questions. Questionnaires have been sent out in thousands, listeners have been asked by microphones to record their own views. On the following pages you will find some of the results.

Tastes are always changing and the BBC will have to keep pace with them. They have no laughter or hisses to guide them, no box office to show popularity or failure, no fluctuating

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circulation to reveal trends. They have to find out by going to the listeners in their homes.

If you intend to make it your job to give that same public what they want you will have to do plenty of research work on your own. It isn't easy, because most people do not know what they want until they get it.

So this chapter advises you to—listen hard, study your public, originate ideas, worry the best out of them, and think for yourself. All this is preliminary to the writing of a single word of script—your next job.

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WHAT LISTENERS WANT

Ten thousand five hundred and forty-four *Daily Express* readers voted for their favourite radio artists, compères, bands. The result, published April 10th, 1939, was—

STARS

1. Gracie Fields
2. Arthur Askey
3. Two Leslies
4. Mills Brothers
5. Vic Oliver
6. Max Miller
7. Flanagan and Allen
8. Bennett and Williams
9. George Formby
10. Elsie and Doris Waters

COMPÈRE

1. Bryan Michie
2. Lionel Gamlin
3. Vic Oliver

BAND

1. Charlie Shadwell and the BBC Variety Orchestra
2. Jack Hylton
3. Billy Cotton
4. Louis Levy

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PROGRAMME PREFERENCES

On March 10th, 1939, the *Radio Times* published these results of a survey undertaken by BBC investigators, showing the programme preferences of listeners—

1. Variety
2. Theatre and Cinema Organs
3. Military Bands
4. Musical Comedies
5. { Dance Music / Plays }
7. Light Music
8. { Orchestral Music / Brass Bands }
10. Talks
11. Discussions
12. Running Commentaries on Cricket
13. Serial Plays
14. Light Opera and Operettas
15. Recitals—Singers
16. Running Commentaries on Tennis
17. { Piano Recitals / Grand Opera }
19. Violin Recitals
20. Serial Readings
21. Chamber Music

The voting showed that there are nearly 24,000,000 adult listeners who like Variety, 13,500,000 who like Talks, over 17,000,000 who like Plays and nearly 10,000,000 who like Light Opera.

The voting showed very little difference in the tastes of men and women listeners. The one exception was the Running Commentaries on Cricket, which was fifth in the list for men and fifteenth for women.

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AGE AFFECTS TASTES

This BBC survey analysed the programme preferences according to ages. Notice the position of Dance Music—third in popularity with young people, sixteenth with elderly listeners.

UNDER TWENTY YEARS	OVER SEVENTY YEARS
1. Variety	1. Military Bands
2. Theatre and Cinema Organs	2. Variety
3. Dance Music	3. Brass Bands
4. Plays	4. Talks
5. Musical Comedies	5. Theatre and Cinema Organs
6. Military Bands / Light Music	6. Discussions
8. Serial Plays	7. Orchestral Music / Plays
9. Running Commentaries on Cricket	9. Musical Comedies
10. Brass Bands	10. Recitals—Singers
11. Orchestral Music	11. Light Music
12. Light Opera	12. Violin Recitals
13. Running Commentaries on Tennis	13. Running Commentaries on Cricket
14. Talks	14. Light Opera
15. Discussions	15. Serial Plays
16. Grand Opera / Recitals—Singers	16. Dance Music
18. Piano Recitals	17. Grand Opera
19. Serial Readings / Violin Recitals	18. Piano Recitals
21. Chamber Music	19. Chamber Music
	20. Serial Readings
	21. Running Commentaries on Tennis

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CHAPTER 5

SCRIPT WRITING

RADIO scripting is one of the most difficult forms of writing because your words have to do so much hard work. They have to create their own background, describe indirectly a sequence of events, be amusing or entertaining, and at the same time sound quite natural and everyday.

The broadcasting scripts which achieve this standard are the basis of the programmes which stand out among all others. Few scripts are as good as they could be, and for that reason there is great scope in broadcasting for the writer who can put the spoken word on paper. You have only to listen to a day's broadcasting to realize how many scripts suffer from stiffness, unnaturalness, clichés, flatness and journalese. One reason for this is the scarcity of people who have taken the trouble to give serious attention to writing for radio. Notice how threadbare and hackneyed are the announcements stringing the items together in a musical programme. Count how many times a week someone says: "And now you are going to hear . . ."

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Radio is still in its youth, but already there is a fine flock of broadcasting clichés. You would be rich if you had a shilling for every time a dance band leader said: "On behalf of the boys and myself I would like to thank you for listening to our programme."

Those same clichés creep into important programmes. They come too readily to the radio writer's mind.

Probably the main reason for the great sameness of radio talk in this country is laziness. Writers cannot be bothered to try to think of a fresh way of making a familiar announcement. But another cause is the lack of good editing of scripts at the BBC. The few people who are competent to edit scripts are too busy writing their programmes. When the producers make any script alterations they are more likely to bring back the old familiar phrases, rather than create new ones. After all, a producer is not supposed to be a writer (except in one or two instances), yet he has to correct and improve a writer's work. Thus, radio writers have to teach themselves, a most dangerous practice, and they are more or less free to decide whether they will be obvious or original.

Because they write in their own way, unguided, new writers for radio generally fall into two schools.

First of all there are the professional writers,

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mostly journalists. Now a good journalist is a man or woman trained to write interestingly and knowledgeably. He can throw words together at high speed, and when you read him you know exactly what he wants to tell you. Simple English, it is, to be read in a hurry and to be read without having to turn back to pick up the thread.

In theory this should be an excellent qualification for radio writing, because English is essentially simple and direct, and "gets there" in one bound.

Where so many journalists fail at radio, however, is that their style of writing is visible, not audible. Years of newspaper reading have trained everyone to know the short cuts of journalism. "Unprecedented demand," "screen debut," "sincere tribute," "tantamount to surrender" and all the other glib phrases are as easy to understand as they are to write down. It is when these words are spoken aloud that we notice how empty and unreal they are. Many people do talk in the phrases they have picked up from newspapers, I know, but they make tiresome company. A journalist always has a phrase for everything. He has to, because he may have to work at such a pace that there is no time to pause over his choice of words. All that counts is the information he has to give.

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Occasionally a newspaperman will be given a feature to be written at leisure, or at least with a few minutes in hand to think about his words as well as his subject. You have an instance in the *Daily Express* columnist who signs himself "William Hickey." His feature always has a freshness about it because he deliberately avoids journalistic short cuts and clichés (he pokes fun at them) and by contrast with the expanses of orthodox newspaper writing around him his work has a brilliance about it.

The training of a newspaperman, to write in the way in which he is expected to be read, is cramping. After a few years of it his style becomes as stale and rigid as the business man's "The matter to which you refer is now having our best attention."

So when the journalist turns to writing he produces a script which is readable but not read-aloudable. This generalization of mine is most true when the journalist has spent all his career with one newspaper, and its style has got into his circulation. The free-lance journalist is less likely to suffer from newspaper cramp than the staff man. To make a living the free-lance has to write for many markets, for very different types of publications. He has to keep his style elastic. He must be able to go whimsy for *Vogue*, damp-eyed for the *Daily*

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Mirror and hoarse for the *Daily Express*. The exercise is good for his vocabulary. He turns over his stock of words very regularly, chooses them individually instead of reaching out to the pigeon holes.

I used to believe in free-lance journalists as the perfect raw material for radio writers, until I found that many of them were not journalists at all, but scissors and paste men. They could give you any article you wanted, on any subject—with the aid of their cuttings books. That kind of journalist has no creative powers at all, but the free-lance writer who has tried to be original, who has fought and won in many places, he is the flexible writer who should do well in radio.

At the other extreme, the opposite of the journalist who has written so much that he writes without thinking, is the newcomer to writing. Radio appeals to him because of the new chances it offers.

The newcomer has the advantage that his writing has not become cast in a mould. Against this, he has not the readiness of phrase which experience brings. Probably he is self-conscious about his writing. I think it applies to all of us, that the first few things we write are most unreal and not a bit like ourselves. When I look back on some of the first newspaper articles I wrote I can hardly recognize

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my own outlook in them. We sit in front of a notepad or typewriter and say determinedly: "Now I am going to write an article" and then try to be anyone but ourselves. Every writer has to get past that stage, the writing of articles as he believes they are expected to be written, instead of putting down what he has to say in the way he would normally say it in a friendly letter.

Assuming that a new writer has passed that stage, has had a few successes and has determined to try his luck at radio, a fault is liable to arise which loses at once the advantage his fresh approach has over the journalist's familiar phrasing. The new writer is very tempted to drop into radio's own clichés, the parroted sentences which must make even a microphone yawn. Do not try to imitate existing radio speech. Create your own phrases, for there is so little worth copying. Find the new ways of saying old things.

Nearly all radio speech that you will sell and the BBC buy takes the form of words spoken by one person to another. Occasionally you will have programmes calling for the services of a narrator, but for the most of the time you have to write dialogue. Either you can do this without effort, if you are by some rare chance a natural playwright, or you will have to learn by very hard effort.

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Few people can write dialogue. Look at this sentence from a best-seller novel:

"It has struck me that you would feel it, but it never seemed incumbent upon me to foster any such feelings."

Read it aloud and try to imagine anyone saying that. On the other hand, you dare not be too realistic about conversations because a recording of the most brilliant conversationalist you know would sound unbelievably scrappy when you heard it played back. In real life dull speech is made interesting by the hesitations and stumblings, the feeling for words, the changes of tempo, the facial expressions, the gestures that go with it.

Your job in radio is to achieve exactly the same effect with words alone. Your dialogue must not be "bookish," yet it must not be too true to life. Dialogue for radio or for the stage is a report of speech as it should be. Brilliant dialogue consists of those smashing retorts which come to you on the way home.

One of the first things you will have to determine in your radio writing is the best method of the actual production of your words.

Are you going to dictate, write by hand or typewrite? Eventually, your manuscript will be typewritten (and a radio script is something you can improve at every re-writing), but the first creation of the words is something for

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experiment. You will certainly need a room to yourself, unless your family enjoy hearing a radio author at work, because you must speak your words to yourself if you are to get the true flavour of them. A sentence which looks good on paper may be thin when you speak it. A perfectly worded sentence for print may peter out verbally because of a closing word or phrase with no "blood" in it. In speech, remember you build up your sentences to a strong finish, a trick which becomes tiresome in print. Inverted sentences are very necessary to maintain interest in a printed article or story, but in radio the result is often confusion. You cannot expect listeners to hold over something in their head until you have given them the key to what has been said earlier. Radio listeners cannot turn back to the previous page.

As radio is speech, you may find that dictation is your best method. Writing comes more naturally to me than speaking, so I cannot personally recommend this method, but I do know writers who get splendid results by dictation. If you are a sparkling, quick-witted and original speaker, dictation may be your best method. But stick to handwriting if your speaking takes this shape:

"I would not like to let this occasion pass without paying a tribute to our worthy friend,

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and on behalf of all those assembled under this roof today I take great pleasure in conveying to him. . . ."

Dictation also calls for a secretary, a luxury which does not often come the way of struggling radio writers. You could try dictating to one of your girl friends who is a shorthand typist by profession, but she will probably be a distracting influence. Radio calls for concentration.

If you write your scripts you will need to read out your own work to yourself. In time you will get to know the sound by sight, but even then there will be lines which you will have to read aloud to see if they accomplish all that you want.

My experience is that radio writing calls for a good deal of alteration as one goes along. You write a sentence, then write another which makes it necessary to make some slight alteration to the first. Choice of words is so important, too, and you are constantly going back to a sentence to make an improvement. This is easier to do by pen or pencil than by typewriter, so the good old-fashioned way of sitting down with a writing block in front of you will probably be your best method. When you finally re-write the whole thing, it is a good thing to type the revised manuscript. You get more words on a page and you get a better idea of

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the programme as an entirety. You are reminded that a conversation between two people is getting over-long, that there is too much talk, that the Count's speeches are too lengthy, that you have used the word "queer" three times within a few lines.

Repetition can be highly effective in radio, sparingly used. It can be dramatic, it can be amusing, or it can be used as a link holding the programme together. But only conscious repetition is good. A wide vocabulary is one of the radio writer's essentials because the unnecessary persistence of the same word becomes noticeable and annoying.

Length of speeches is important, affecting the speed of the entire production, and the boredom area of your work. Keep speeches as short as possible. If you have to use one important long speech, its effect is heightened if all the others are short. Short sentences are just as important. Except in character parts the shorter your sentences the faster and lighter your show becomes. Again I must qualify this by saying that the repetition of dozens of short sentences, all of the same form and length, can be monotonous. For some staccato, dramatic highspot in your show a barrage of short sentences may achieve the effect, but to maintain your listeners' attention right through a programme you will need to be skilful in varying

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the form and length of the pieces spoken by your characters.

I think I said enough earlier about clichés in journalism and radio to make you want to avoid the tired phrases. Also try to avoid false oratory, facetiousness, padding, Americanisms not known to the whole audience and out-of-date slang. Slang in itself is good, so long as it is descriptive and colourful. But slang dates quickly and your show will sag if you use catchphrases and words which have lost their first amusing sound. You should only use such expressions as "Posh," "Sez you" and "Oh yeah" when they are just beginning to get popular or when they are new but clear in their meaning. Otherwise leave them alone. Coin new catchwords of your own, if you can. Radio reputations can be made in a few words. Think what "I thang kyew" did for Arthur Askey, "Play the game, you cads" did for the Western Brothers, and "Mind my bike" is doing for Jack Warner. You may not have the opportunity to make your phrases as famous as these (they have to be driven home week after week), but you can sparkle up your dialogue by using expressions with a new sound to them.

Try to get colour into your words; use verbs with action in them, nouns that paint pictures. A good radio writer makes new use of old words, refreshes old thoughts with new allu-

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sions. The difficulty you will encounter is to know where you are ceasing to be attractively fresh and beginning to be irritatingly "literary." Not until you have heard what actors do with your words will you know where to be ordinary and where to be bright.

Heavy, stodgy, "booksy" words should be left alone and the single syllable word preferred to the multi-syllable. Listen for words which are not good radio. Make your own list of words which sound thin on the air, or which should never go together. Note the words which have a warmth and flamboyance about them when they hit your loud speaker. Every writer needs to have a sensitive appreciation of word values. The radio writer has to be able to sense their broadcasting value, too. Words familiar in print take on a new meaning when you hear them properly spoken. Do you remember how dramatic and dignified was the effect of the announcement the BBC used for historic broadcasts:

"This is London. . . ."

In print there is nothing to it, but spoken slowly, weightily, it makes you hold your breath, prepares you for vital news.

The radio writer has to use words which *might* be spoken in ordinary conversation by the sort of people who speak them in his programme. It is for you to listen to what people

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say and to note which simple words and phrases have dramatic values when spoken.

One word has to do the work of three or four in radio, because broadcasting is the medium where padding becomes the most noticeable. The art of writing a good script often lies in knowing what *not* to say. Events have to be implied or dismissed in a word. A conversation has to be pruned of every phrase which has no active use in the programme. Rarely is there room for leisurely conversation. In this whittling process, questions have to be answered by questions, statements have to hang in mid-air, polite pleasantries have to be left out. It is still possible to preserve reality under these conditions. That is the test of a writer's skill and his value to radio.

The one way to produce such a closely packed script is to make your first draft as long as you like. Say all you want to say, put in all the conversational frills. Then blue-pencil as ruthlessly as you can. There has never been a radio script yet which has not been improved by cutting. When you think you have cut the script to the bone put it away until the next day, and then go through it again.

At first you will be able to cut out whole pages. Even towards the end of your cutting you will be able to take out entire sentences without damaging the result. When you are

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convinced that not a word could be bettered or another phrase eliminated your script is ready to be submitted. In any event, the manuscript should not be over-length. Time it yourself. Generally a foolscap double-spaced page of dialogue takes two minutes to broadcast.

In the last chapter I dealt with the question of technical instructions, advising you to use simple directions unless you knew the exact meaning of the technicalities. Your script should give a complete picture of the programme as you visualize it, and the less vague you are in your ideas the more you will please the producer. However, try to keep your production suggestions as short as possible, avoiding the "bulking" of the script.

Be sparing with your use of "effects." Their novelty died many years ago. Listeners have grown weary of the BBC seagulls and screeching brakes. Only use effects if they are essential, or if they put highlights into your sound picture. Do not waste time by specifying fantastic effects like "sound of giraffe's death rattle" or inaudible ones like "sound of man turning somersault" (yes, I have seen that one on a script). When you think of using the sound of footsteps, bear in mind that there are hundreds of thousands of imperfect radio receivers in daily use. Your footsteps might sound as noisy as the neighbour's vacuum cleaner or as silent as

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the rustle of bank notes in an Aberdeen collecting box.

You will notice that I have written little about "style." Most books on writing devote a chapter to a style, but here we are going to dismiss it in a paragraph. The radio writer has little chance to cultivate a recognizable style. If he writes plays they are broadcast so infrequently that the listener is unable to notice resemblance between the play of this month and that of three months ago. Your technique becomes known, perhaps, but style goes unnoticed, because most of your work will be concentrated on writing to suit someone else's style. This is particularly the case in radio life-stories. The words put into the mouth of the leading lady must be in her usual style of speaking. It would be absurd to put into the mouth of George Robey the perky speech built to Vic Oliver design.

The radio writer has to give his characters words which help listeners to create a sound picture of the speaker. They must also be words which sound as though the man was speaking them and not reading them aloud in a classroom.

Sometimes you will have to write dialogue to be spoken by celebrities who are not trained actors. Then the radio writer has to use his skill to hide the deficiencies of the speaker, to transfer difficult lines to his interviewer, to make

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the stumblings and fumblings fit naturally into the programme.

This is good experience for any writer, because much can be learned about characterization. Deft touches can be put in to identify something in the speaker's character. Typical phrases can reveal him as modest or pompous. Expressions of opinion can reveal his outlook and ideals, all within a few seconds.

Exaggeration has to be avoided in radio characterization. Over-emphasis destroys reality and absurdly caricatured characters never come true to the listener. The stage type of Irishman who keeps saying "Begorrah" is never a real person on the radio. So much can be done with greater effect by means of accent, authentic idiom and careful casting.

Monotony is the great enemy of radio writers. Experience will tell you when your script is reaching the switch-off danger zone; but in the beginning you will have to ask yourself constantly "Is this getting dull?" Watch for these mines in your programme. When boredom shows signs of setting in, shorten your dialogue, change your scene, give your listeners a shaking up.

There are no fixed rules to help you define where your work starts being dull. If you are insensible to when this does happen, you are not likely to become successful at radio writing. So much of radio writing has to be

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based on instinct, on guessing at what the public want, on sensing that the moment has come to change the subject.

In this chapter I have had to deal with broadcast writing in a general way. Now we are reaching the stage where a few notes on the writing of different kinds of radio material will probably be valuable.

Before we turn over to that page, though, I had better put on record some of the "don'ts" of radio, most of them obvious, yet this book would be incomplete without them.

First of all remember that radio is a family audience. Many jokes are made about the purity of the BBC, but it must not be forgotten that the public itself sets those standards. The comment which gets by in a music hall or a university debate may make parents wince if they hear it in front of their family. The first rule of radio writing is to avoid embarrassing your listeners. Some comedians may get doubtful jokes past the producers, but for the radio writer it is an art not worth cultivating.

Quite apart from comedy there is no market for "sensational" material, in the Sunday newspaper sense of the word. The BBC does not like you to shock its listeners.

References to infirmities or characters with infirmities should be avoided. Again, this is to avoid hurting the feelings of afflicted listeners.

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For instance, you cannot have a character who stammers or makes jokes about stammering. You lose nothing, because this sort of thing is painful to many besides those who actually suffer from such an impediment.

You must also be careful in your references to living persons. You cannot introduce famous living persons as characters in your programmes without permission. Sometimes living relatives have to be consulted before a dead person is used as a character in a radio programme. The question of libel also comes into this, so go warily.

Manufacturers' products or any references which could be regarded as advertising are banned. Remember this when you are writing song lyrics or adapting songs you may have written for the stage, where no such restriction applies. You must also avoid any references which might offend religious susceptibilities. This limits the oaths with which your characters may need to express themselves.

Those are the chief restrictions, few enough and far less than American radio writers have to suffer, where the delicate feelings of sponsors have to be considered as well.

There you have enough about the technique of radio writing to set you to work. The best piece of general advice I can give is to keep your writing light and smooth. Make your radio writing streamlined, not bombproof.

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CHAPTER 6

SOME VARIETIES OF RADIO SCRIPTS

THERE is no one fixed radio technique, thank goodness. The radio writer is fortunate enough to have to change his methods very often if he does a lot of broadcasting work, and this constant varying of technique keeps his mind and his methods in flexible condition. The best thing that can happen to any radio writer is to work for all programme departments of the BBC, and not merely one section. All the departments have very different ideas on presentation, and by working for all of them the writer keeps fresh, gets a detached view of his work and probably collects some useful criticism.

For instance, the Music Department and the Variety Department would have very different ideas of handling your programme based on the careers of American composers, starting with, shall we say, Cole Porter. The Music Department would be content with very little in the way of presentation. Probably a short commentary would be sufficient, for they would wish to concentrate on the music. The choice of music, the casting of singers, the size of

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chorus and singers would be their most important concern. They would want to get the musical best out of the idea.

The Variety Department would probably have different views. They would have two possible methods of handling the programme. One, with a simple commentary plus highly modernized orchestrations of the music. That is, a programme of super dance music. But if this were too obvious and pedestrian they would probably think along these lines: Everyone knows Cole Porter's music. Every day someone plays *Night and Day* or *My Heart Belongs to Daddy*. All day long listeners hear his tunes played by dance bands, military bands, theatre orchestras. We shall have to give listeners the music *plus*.

Then presentation would come into its own. Facts unearthed about the composer's life, the stories behind his songs, the stars who introduced them in this country, the brilliant songs which for some reason had never been popular. In fact, the entertainment angle.

For the Music Department the writer would have to produce a short, informative, attractively written script, rather polished and restrained. The Variety Department might expect a more flamboyant script, with dramatic highspots to increase the listeners' interest in the man as well as his music.

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On the other hand, a life of a great composer in play form would call for a completely different approach, perhaps beyond the scope of the writer of the other shows. There would be drama again, but a more solid drama, with music the least important part of the programme. Where the Music department would build up to the tunes, the Drama department would soft pedal at those points. When the composer, overwhelmed with a great love, was sitting down to compose his great work, the drama producer would gently fade out the music after the first few notes. But when the Variety producer had heard the reconstruction of *his* composer beginning a tune written to some sweetheart, he would sit back happily and nod approvingly at the combined efforts of a star singer, a harmony trio, the Revue Chorus and the augmented Variety Orchestra conducted by Charles Shadwell.

Now let us get down to some points about the scripting of various shows. Here I am not quoting any official advice or opinions of BBC departmental directors but giving my own views and experience.

PLAYS.—There has been surprisingly little development in radio play technique, and the expert advice given by Val Gielgud in his book on *Broadcast Plays* written a few years ago still holds good. The BBC Drama Department went

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through its experimental period four or five years ago, but evidently the medium has now been fully exploited and plays are written and produced in a fairly straight way. The most important of recent developments has been the introduction of the dramatic serial, long popular in America, but in its early stages over here. The weekly episodes of *The Count of Monte Cristo* gave listeners a new interest in radio drama, and the weekly serial is obviously here to stay. War brought a brilliant new serial, *The Shadow of the Swastika*, which had topicality, excitement and the history of our own times.

It can be only a question of months or a year or two before the daily serial is an integral part of BBC programmes. American programmes are clogged up with daily serials, sponsored by manufacturers, mostly highly romantic or based on the adventures of newspaper strip sketch characters.

I do not think we shall reach that pitch of serial saturation over here, unless British radio goes sponsored, but I believe there will be one, two or three daily serials now that the BBC give all-day service on more than one wavelength. I stress this because it should give a chance to the outside writer of radio. Serial writers in American radio earn big money.

The essence of a successful radio script is an attractive central character and he or she must

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figure in the script as much as possible. The supporting characters must be very heavily defined if listeners are to like them and live with them. In theory each episode of a radio serial should be interesting in itself and should always have an ending sufficiently tantalizing to make listeners impatient for the next day's instalment. In fact, listeners to daily serials seem to put up with very little incident and are content with very ordinary chatter between the characters they know so well. I have read the scripts of many American serials and it appears that when anything important does happen the writer spreads it over many days. However, these serials have to go on indefinitely, being the daily adventures of homely or adventurous characters, so there is no definite plot to be worked out to its conclusion. A BBC daily serial would probably be commissioned for a certain number of weeks and more plot and action would be demanded.

There is a steady demand for radio drama and an outstanding radio play is always very welcome. I would advise writers to avoid the smart conversational type of play (unless you are a Noel Coward or a Clare Boothe) and concentrate on a play with either action or an attractive setting. It takes a brilliant playwright to turn out a radio play which can succeed on its amusing dialogue alone. Better for the

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new writer to get to work on a play about some interesting subject of which he has special knowledge. Then he can add detail which will interest the listener and give authenticity to the play. The greatest mistake you can make is to try to write a comedy about life in Mayfair if you have never seen Mayfair. You will have a far better chance if you have worked in a births, marriages and deaths office and can draw on your experience there.

In a radio play you have to limit your characters to the minimum if you want to avoid confusion in listeners' minds. As in serials, broad definition of characters is essential, because although the producer will use all the contrast he can in the casting, it is your job to help the listener conjure up mental pictures of your actors.

Avoid using effects as much as you can. They are out of fashion in radio drama. There were days when a producer won medals for using all the effects in the BBC library, but that does not happen any longer.

My points in the last chapter about short speeches and no padding apply particularly to drama, where it is easiest of all to be boring to the listener. Your main job will be to move your characters on and off the scene. There is nothing to indicate to listeners the arrival of a new character except the dialogue. Your

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task is to tell your audience that someone else has appeared, that he is an unpleasant, untrustful person of middle age, and that his name is Horatius Smith. No, you can't get away with: "Ah, here comes Horatius Smith, the old scoundrel!" You will also have some difficulty in explaining to listeners, without telling them directly, that Mr. Smith has left the scene.

When you come to write the script it will please you to find that this is not quite so difficult as it sounds, but it will take some hard thinking all the same when you have only the one dimension, sound, to create your picture.

Go out of your way to create a really arresting opening for your show. Radio plays have a large regular audience, but there is a still greater floating public, not looking for a radio play but either prowling over the sound waves or lazily refraining from switching off after hearing the *Music Hall* programme ahead of your play. These irregular playhearers will make their decision on the title or the opening of your radio play. Begin dully and they say: "It's only a play" and switch off or search for another station. Start on a top note, arouse their curiosity, and you may maintain their interest right through the play. You cannot afford to waste time on preliminaries in radio plays.

If you want to sell your first radio play, give

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t plenty of action. Do not let your characters stand in a bunch and just talk at each other. Bring in new people. Change the scene, vary the tempo, make things happen. Radio's big advantage is that your action can move at express speed, switch from one country to another, from yesterday to today. Use that advantage to the full and write a play which could be performed by radio alone. Concentrate on the scope and restrictions of your medium and the true radio play which will result will have a better chance of acceptance than that tattered three-act comedy you have had in your drawer for twelve months and which you think might sound "pretty good on the air." The more essentially radio your play is, the better its chance of being broadcast.

THE FEATURE PROGRAMME

The "feature" is the radio cousin of the documentary film. It is a slice of life, without a plot, a hero or a heroine. It is based on actual fact and its actors are real people.

Features are a little out of fashion just now, but they have boomed before and they will probably have their turn again. There is not very much scope in them for the outside contributor, because so much of the work has to be done by the producer. Many of the features

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have to be recorded in advance and this means the producer travelling with the van. He has to recollect speeches and statements as he goes, and there is very little script which can be written beforehand. The Regional station producers seem to have made a corner in radio feature programmes, particularly the North Region, where the stories of coal and cotton and other industries have been dramatized in radio form.

If you have a good radio sense and plenty of ideas, the feature is a most interesting form for radio-writing experiments. The temptation is to be too talkative, at the expense of the characteristic sounds which should be a feature of your programme. Changes of treatment, background and voice are all necessary to maintain interest and there must be high spots to counteract the dull patches which are almost certain to appear.

Suppose you do attempt a feature, then break up your story into as many parts as possible. Share it out among as many voices as you can. Your programme will need plenty of refreshers, so look for new presentation angles and for unexpected touches. Sound effects come into their own in feature programmes. Do not be tempted into using them for too long at a time, or using sounds which may be noisy but uninteresting.

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If you do attempt to write a complete script, the dialogue is going to be difficult for you. You will not only have to write parts in character, you will also need an expert knowledge of local idiom. Assuming that you are working on a programme called *Lifeboat*, dealing with the work of amateur life-savers, you will probably include interviews with lifeboatmen from different parts of the country. To write in their own language, that is, the seaman's own line of talk plus the local expressions, you have a task which could only be accomplished by your own intimate knowledge or by interviewing the men beforehand. Then you have to pick up their way of speaking and typical expressions they use. It is unlikely that you, sitting in front of a notepad in London, can put on paper the actual description of a shipwreck as told by a Cornish fisherman to his friends in the pub.

Your job is not much easier when the hazards of technical expressions and local speech have been removed. It is not simple to put down on paper an ordinary short statement to be read by an amateur speaker. If you have listened to *In Town Tonight* you will remember the awkward pauses and stumblings of people unused to expressing themselves publicly. The successful ones used to be those without any script, telling their story in their own way. The

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halting ones were men and women unused to reading aloud, working from a script which was written clearly but not in the style normally used by the reader. The result was pauses in the wrong places, mispronounced words and a general air of unreality.

Careful study of the interviewee's speech has to be undertaken before you can write in his language. I said earlier that the Regions had been most successful with such programmes, for the probable reason that they knew well the speech in their own areas. For instance, the North's best programmes were those portraying a picture of life and work in Lancashire. I am sure this succeeded because the programme makers knew a good deal about the people they were broadcasting. They knew where to encourage the use of local expressions and where to discourage a tendency to talk like the leading article of a favourite newspaper.

Pomposity is what you must avoid in feature programmes. There is every temptation to get very solemn and important about a subject, and to write resounding phrases which sound as though they came from the centenary brochure of an iron and steel manufacturer. Cram your programme with facts and leave out the literary decorations. Build excitement and surprise into the programme, and keep your listeners awake.

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THE BIG MUSICAL SHOW

There are so many ready-made phrases tailored to fit radio musical productions that you have to use the greatest care in avoiding them. If you use them, of course, your script will write itself, although it will have a rubber-stamp look about it. There must be a dictionary full of clichés which are used in radio to announce songs and artistes. From the first word you hear you know what is coming:

"We have much pleasure in presenting . . ."

"And now for some music . . ."

"For our first number today . . ."

"Now you are going to hear . . ."

"Now for a little number which . . ."

Please try to be different. Search for a new phrase or do acrobatics with an old one. The reward is that if you write a script without any of the stock introductions your programme will be the most refreshing broadcast of the week. Far too many programmes sound as though they were written with a phrase-book. You know, the sort the department stores have, approved sentences to fit every situation. Instead of wasting time dictating a reply to Mrs. Brown's grouse about getting a mango instead of a mangle they write key numbers on her

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letter and the typist delivers the appropriately apologetic answer.

Listen to your radio tonight and write down the phrases you know by heart and have to hear again and again. Then try to breathe new life into them. I suppose many radio writers keep on repeating these lazy phrases because they believe it is the accepted thing. I think the truth is that when the producers do come face to face with new ways of saying things they purr with pleasure. The pity is that they do not insist on all their writers jumping out of the mould.

I am repeating all this criticism of repetition in this chapter because so many of the charges of sameness levelled at BBC variety programmes can be traced to this cause. There are different names, different tunes, but the framework is so often the same.

Speed is always a welcome feature in Variety Department shows and you should take the brakes off your scripting. Laboured cueing of songs is not necessary. Much that once had to be said can now be left implied. For instance, if you are leading up to a song by Evelyn Laye and you have been saying some complimentary things about her there is no need to conclude heavily: "And here is Miss Evelyn Laye. She will sing that lovely tune *You Played Tricks with my Heart.*" The better method is to imply

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in the introduction that Miss Laye is waiting to sing and then let the orchestral introduction seep under the closing words of the announcement, so that her song comes on the tail of the dialogue.

Here is another example. Notice how much more effective is this slight improvement:

STAR: "It was forty years since I had made my first appearance in *The Merry Widow*."

INTERVIEWER: "Perhaps we can ask the orchestra to play a short selection from *The Merry Widow*."

That is the dull way of introducing music. The better and speedier method is:

STAR: ". . . And what a fortune there was in *The Merry Widow* . . ."

(Fade up orchestra under speech, *Merry Widow* selection.)

The objective should be to make your music flow into the programme, not interrupt it. Let the music begin before listeners realize that the dialogue has been stopped for music. Another way of doing this:

"One song I could never get right in those days was that 'Sister Shusie's shewing shirts' . . .'Shister Susie's showing certs' . . . 'Shuster Sissie's sewing certs' . . .

(Orchestra takes up song.)

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You will notice that there is no line of division between dialogue and music. The introductory words become part of the song. This can only be done once in a while, but there are plenty of simple ideas like this which will give more continuity to your programme.

Your job is to put the variety into variety shows. Ring the changes. Get all the contrast you can into your script. The best show I ever did for the BBC Variety Department hopped and skipped its way from a theatre rehearsal to an empty auditorium, to a fairground, to an old-time music hall, to the Chicago World's Fair, to Barnum and Bailey's circus, to a Ziegfeld audition, to a world's wrestling championship, to a skating rink, to a fun fair, to *The Miracle* at Olympia, to fights between Jimmy Wilde and "Pal" Moore, Beckett and Carpentier, to interviews with stars and chorus girls, to a transatlantic telephone conversation, relays from a theatre, music from shows. It was C. B. Cochran's life story. One way of doing it would have been to concentrate on the excellent music from C. B.'s shows and let him give a dignified commentary, but this attempt to give a cross-section of his exciting life story gave listeners a better idea of Cochran as the complete showman.

It is important to have contrasting types of speakers in your show, otherwise the perfor-

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mance is on one note. Try and introduce out-of-the-ordinary characters and give yourself a chance to alter the colour of your script. This should jerk you out of making your script merely a converted newspaper article, with your words shared out among one or two people.

Do not put things the way you say them yourself, or the way you would like to say them. The result becomes a monologue spoken by different voices. Give individuality to each character, each person in your script.

Let me qualify all this by stressing the need for extreme simplicity in the dialogue. In your anxiety to avoid the obvious take care not to use words which are never heard in speech, or sentence forms which sound clumsy and forced.

Do not try to be funny unless you have evidence that you are funny. Weak jokes, flat puns and mild insults to your artistes are never very amusing to listeners. Being funny is the hardest job of all on the radio. Even if your script has a laugh in it when you read it, the jokes may be lost by the style of the man who speaks them. It is a waste of time giving the fast wisecrackers a leisurely Naunton Wayne kind of joke. If you insist on trying to be funny you will have to learn a lot about the various styles of the radio funny men. Writing jokes in your own dry style is useless to the producer

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"A CROSS-SECTION OF HIS EXCITING LIFE GAVE LISTENERS A BETTER IDEA OF COCHRAN AS THE COMPLETE SHOWMAN"

Charles B. Cochran with (left) Archie Campbell, the BBC producer, and (centre) Howard Thomas

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because you are not likely to be cast in the programme. Therefore you need to be able to write amusingly in the style of any of the scores of radio characters he may cast for the show.

Be original, be direct, be quick, but do not try to be too clever.

THE RADIO CHARACTER PART

The dream of all radio producers is to unearth new radio characters. Ever since the creation of "Mr. Penny," every suburb's husband, the radio producers have been trying out new characters on a defenceless public. "Mr. Muddlecombe, J.P.," "The Plum Family," "Mr. Meek," "Mrs. Dodge," "Our Ada," "Mr. Walker," "Inspector Hornleigh." Some good, some not so good.

The radio character is extra attractive to radio writers because acceptance means a series of regular broadcasts. It takes about half a dozen airings to establish any kind of popularity for a radio character, so once a week the author hears his baby on the air, and of course, draws his cheque.

In trying to invent a new character, remember that for every one you hear broadcast scores have been submitted. A year or so ago every other writer one met had a character he wanted

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to sell to the BBC. There is the extra attraction that a radio character which does catch on with the public has a good chance of earning money for his author from short stories, the theatre, films and so on.

The difficulty of maintaining a radio character is to get sufficiently good material every week. Your creation has to have marked and recognizable characteristics. You may be so busy underlining these that all the episodes will sound alike and after two or three weeks listeners will grow weary of him. You can learn a lot from the success of the "Mr. Penny" series. He was in himself a dull little man. In a series of domestic episodes, interest in him would have soon petered out. But Mr. Penny's creator took him to all sorts of queer places, had mysterious visitors calling at his house, and generally manufactured exciting backgrounds which contrasted entertainingly with the drabness of Mr. Penny's own existence. Mr. Penny's adventures were the sort of thing many listeners would like to happen to them. They were predicaments which generally had a happy ending, the old theme of the likeable idiot blundering through.

Again, "Mr. Walker" was a very ordinary person who had extraordinary adventures. "Inspector Hornleigh" came in a different category. He was the radio version of the hero

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of millions of best-seller books, the man who tracks down the criminal.

These radio characters have only a few minutes on the air, so you have to make the most of your time. The natural tendency when you have been given one of these spots is to fill it up with too much "atmosphere" and character chatter. The result is that your radio personality is there without saying anything or doing anything. Listeners get bored with him. Crowd your five or ten minutes with incident, bring in other characters to keep him well contrasted, make every remark in the script do a job of work.

The closer you can bring your character to the listener the more likely he will be to become popular. Try to give him a trade-mark of some kind, a catchphrase which listeners will recognize and repeat. It is a fact that the public loves repetition. Give your character something to say that listeners will use as repartee to their friends and you are well on the way to success. Not to fame, though, because the author is a blindspot where the radio public is concerned. Particularly the creator of a character. When you create another "Mr. Penny" you must sink your own individuality in him. Your listeners will hate to be reminded that there was an author to think out those words. They want to believe that the character is a real, living person.

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THE HUMOROUS SKETCH

I am not going to attempt to tell anyone how to write radio humour, because either you can or you cannot. The one point I want to make here is to watch the trends. Fashions come and go rather quickly in radio humour. You have to know when a certain style of humour is popular and when it is getting tiresome. At the moment of writing "situation" humour is still found to be funny. Arthur Askey and "Stinker" Murdoch were mainly responsible for this kind of radio fun, with their imaginary BBC flat. In words they built up pictures of themselves paperhanging, putting pictures on the wall, climbing up chimneys, and so on. They taught listeners to imagine a situation as well as listen to it. They gave a new lease of life to radio humour by borrowing some of the tried slapstick devices of the cinema and theatre, then turning them from visual humour to audible humour. There is always scope for something new in comic treatment and the BBC has a special welcome for those who can be really funny in words.

MATERIAL FOR ARTISTES

My comments about situation humour apply again here, but your position is made easier.

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Instead of writing humorous stuff which could be performed by anyone, you limit yourself to the style of the artiste for whom you are writing. This sounds restrictive, but actually you are helped by having the well-defined signposts of the artiste's style to guide you. One drawback of writing material for artistes is that the performer collects all the praise. The writer is lucky indeed if he gets a credit in the announcement.

You cannot hope to write material for artistes unless you study their style, both on the radio and in the theatre. By careful examination of their stage act you may spot some new treatment which will enable you to give them a new radio angle. The closer your personal association with the artistes the more you will learn of their capabilities. If you work regularly for one artiste your duty is to supply plenty of the material for which the star is famous and also to persuade the artiste to develop slowly some new line to replace the old when wrinkles start to appear.

THE RADIO INTERVIEW

The interview is the essence of radio and in one form or other it crops up in a great many programmes. A few words on the technique might be useful here.

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The most obvious form is the straightforward interview with the amateur broadcaster, such as in the *In Town Tonight* type of broadcast. I have already written in this chapter on the importance of writing the way the interviewee normally speaks, in his own idiom. This is, of course, the most important thing in writing an interview, to make the characters talk in their language and not in yours.

Another point about the form of the interview is to make the interviewer help with the story. Instead of putting a series of blunt questions the interviewer's queries should help the broadcast along, linking the interview into a polished whole. Too often, the interviewer fires at his victim a series of questions which are unrelated to one another. This clumsy jumping from subject to subject is confusing to the listener, and especially annoying when the interviewer shunts the subject from something in which he is interested. The listener's attention has to be led skilfully from point to point, and this the writer can do if he takes the trouble to link a new question with the previous answer. The conversation then becomes more smooth and acceptable. The flow of it helps both parties to be conversational instead of sounding like two people reading lines they have seen for the first time.

Avoid the old-fashioned interviewer's familiar

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tricks, sentences beginning "Tell me, Mr. Smith. . . ." "And now, Mr. Smith, I would like you to tell listeners. . . ." These gambits have been used so often that they dull a programme and take all the spontaneity out of a radio interview.

Perhaps it is unnecessary to stress that you must have a "punch" in the last line, to rule off the interview. Now and again you do hear interviews which tail off into self-conscious exits, so this reminder may be necessary.

One other suggestion. If your interviewee is not used to broadcasting, you should never let him take the first line of the dialogue. Let the experienced man take it. There are cue lights to be watched, and this extra waiting, plus the importance of the occasion may play too much on the nerves. Let your interviewee take his cue from the man opposite and not have to wait apprehensively for the flicker of a light.

You need a good news sense in writing interviews. Your subjects will probably be either people with nothing to say for themselves when you first see them or they will have so much to say that the choice of broadcast material may bewilder you. To the newspaper-trained man it is easy to direct conversation into the right channel and to choose the most interesting angle, but anyone without this experience may

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have to endure hours of interviewing to get a minute or two's dialogue. The presentation of the interview is important if interest is to be captured at once. You need an attractive description of your interviewee and an arresting opening to the interview.

It is only in the celebrity interview that you have to trouble about capturing the personality of your interviewee. For a man-in-the-street interview you can write almost anything you like and the new broadcaster will say it, but the celebrity will have most definite views on what he or she is to say. The lines you write for your celebrity will have to be in keeping with their views and written in their own style of speech. Sometimes you will have a ponderous speaker with a domineering manner and a dull subject. You can either give in and let the celebrity have his way or face up to him and say frankly that he will have to unbend a little for radio and become more "popular" in style and treatment. Be frank and tactful with them at the preliminary interview and when they get your script for final approval they will understand why you have ignored much of their dictated views and given the time to what might seem to them the less important part of their story. I do not suggest that you should avoid serious subjects and give listeners froth all the time, but it is wiser to

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get in just a little culture and a lot of humanity rather than attempt to smother your listeners with an overdose of what is supposed to be good for them.

Do not give the interviewer lines which make him sound too deferential to the celebrity. Radio should be an intimate medium which brings the celebrity closer to the public. Leave out the pedestals. A friendly, chatty, human conversation is what you want, not the great man pouring out platitudes to his secretary.

Your celebrity is very much in your hands, because your treatment of the interview will decide the listener's attitude towards the celebrity. You may have to do some deft editing of the preliminary talk before presenting it to listeners. The big man may talk in a boastful and arrogant way which will sound even worse in the home than it does on the platform. You must try to take the wind out of the boasts and put over the achievements with modesty. Your object all the time should be to persuade your audience to like your celebrity, not always an easy task.

Interviewing an entertainment star is a very different proposition, whether the interview takes the form of a programme spot or a full-length show. The interview then becomes a dialogue between two actors and you have more scope for tricks and variety. Effective pauses

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and faked stumbles can all be acted into the interview, making come true the writer's dream of a written script which sounds as though no script is being used.

You will find, in a full-length show, that the star has not always the best idea of what makes good radio. Incidents which rank high in the mind of the star may not be interesting or attractive to the public. Small incidents to the star might sound like dramatic radio to you. Here again you need the newspaperman's technique to draw out the best and then to present it from the most favourable angle.

Never give your interviewer too much to say in a star-interview programme, because it is the star the listeners want to hear. You can use the interviewer most effectively to say the pieces it would not be modest for the star to put across, details of successes registered by the star. The star might tell you "I was a sensation at the Salford Hippodrome," but as listeners would regard that as boastfulness you would give the interviewer some such line as: "They're still talking in Salford about the way you sang that song."

Do not slow up the programme by letting the star respond to compliments. The mumbled thanks serve no purpose. The only time to acknowledge such compliments is when they are deprecated and used as a cue for some other

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story of a failure. If you let the star debunk herself a little in your script, the public will be more likely to warm to her.

If you are writing a full-length programme around a star, try not to start right at the cradle, with the star saying smugly:

"Well, to begin with, I was born in my mother's dressing-room at the Something Theatre, Ipswich. That was on March 16th. . . ."

A great groan will go up from your unseen audience in anticipation of the tedious routine they will have to suffer. Jump off in the middle and go back if you like, but do avoid cataloguing your star.

Interviews can be the most fascinating of radio entertainment if only writers will take the trouble to touch them up. Careful choice of material, ruthless editing, novel presentation —those are the ingredients of the really satisfying radio interview.

COMMERCIAL RADIO

Script writing for sponsored programmes falls into two separate categories, the entertainment and the advertising. The commercial announcements, as they are called, demand specialized experiences of selling and advertising and they are generally written by advertising agency

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staff. The entertainment sections of the programme are very much on BBC lines, except that programmes are mostly in quarter-hour units, taken at a greater speed, and with a higher percentage of music. Listeners turn to the commercial programmes for dance music and light entertainment, so that the shows are very much to a pattern. One advantage of writing commercial radio programmes is that the entertainment is aimed at a defined audience. The sponsor appeals to, say, housewives up to 40 years of age, and you know that at a specified time a minimum of so many hundred thousand women will listen. The sponsor may also have discovered the habits of his audience at that time of day and there might be concrete evidence for you on whether your listeners are lazing, having their tea, or working while they listen. Probably a regular team of performers take part in the programme every week. Listeners get to know them well and you can play on certain characteristics of the artistes and carry a good gag over week after week.

The daily serial is another popular form of sponsored show which will be a main feature of programmes when they are revived in this country. Many of these script shows are adaptations of American radio serials and they are farmed out to British radio writers for Angli-

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cizing and cutting. You may be able to borrow copies of such scripts from advertising agencies and study the serial technique. The standard of writing and dramatic quality is not high, but the characterization is such that the serials have a curious fascination for women listeners.

At the outset of your radio writing career you may care to specialize in one or perhaps two of the various script forms I have described in this chapter; but eventually, if you intend to make money out of radio, you will have to be capable of writing in most of these styles. If you have a talent for radio, once you have mastered the general technique the various forms will not present much difficulty. Otherwise, the learning period will be long and trying. Radio scripting can be as easy or as hard as you like to make it.

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CHAPTER 7

THE PROGRAMME LAYOUT

The radio writer has to do something more than write. He has to be a programme architect. He chooses his own material, settles his own scheme of decoration and builds according to his own ideas.

To me, the most interesting part of radio is the programme layout, the constructive period between the acceptance of an idea and the writing of the script. I find it fascinating to have a great wealth of material in front of me, to select the items which seem to have the best radio quality and then to piece them together. I believe in sharp contrast and frequent changes of mood, and I always search for at least one unexpected element which will give a surprise twist to a programme.

In a full-length programme, forty-five minutes or an hour, I like to go for two peaks, one towards the half and the other at the end of the show. A slow build-up to a big finish calls for hard listening. It is a good thing to shake up your audience about half-way through with something unusual or exciting. The difficulty comes when you have to avoid dropping back

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too deeply before building up to your next and final highspot at the end of the programme. I like to divide up my items into self-contained units, shuffle them until I have got them in the right order and then find entertaining ways of linking them all together.

The opening is tremendously important because it will have much effect on the size of your audience. Your opening should give a promise of the good things in store. Sometimes the subject of your show is such a certain winner that the mere name of your star is enough, but at other times you may have a poorly known subject and excellent material. Then you need to give listeners a foretaste of what they are getting, at the very start of the show. For instance, in a programme of composers your listeners would not be very interested if all they heard at the start was some unfamiliar name, but if they were told of the favourite tunes they were to hear, and the stories behind them, the bait would be more attractive.

A bright beginning is necessary. If you have a show with a trade-mark, so much the better, because listeners will get to know and appreciate the type of show. Some producers insist on the principle of always beginning with a fast tune, but rules in radio are made to be broken, and there may be the odd occasion

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when a slow, sweet number is necessary to set the mood for a sentimental programme.

All radio shows seem to start with signature tunes, but if you have a better idea the producer will probably listen to you. After as few preliminaries as possible (audiences get impatient with credit titles), plunge into your programme, beginning with something which is typical of what is to follow. In radio you must start on top, slip down to lower gear and gradually get back to top again, with plenty of changes of speed.

You can afford to be ordinary after your wake-'em-up opening. Give them plenty of music as early as you can and keep on feeding them with music whenever the talk seems to be getting long. Avoid a monotonous routine of song-dialogue-song-dialogue-song-dialogue by stepping up the show with one of the unexpected elements I have suggested. It is a good thing, if you can, to borrow some personality or some technique from another BBC Department. In a new setting they are doubly interesting to the listener.

In one variety department show I introduced Howard Marshall giving a boxing commentary. He described a pre-broadcasting fight between Georges Carpentier and Joe Beckett as though he were actually at the ringside. All the crowd noises, gongings, timekeeper's shouts and ring

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announcements were reconstructed. In a musical show this was new and unexpected and therefore most acceptable.

In another show I wanted to introduce a recording of Maurice Chevalier and refer to his visit to England. A favourite BBC feature then was *Standing at the Corner* with Michael Standing interviewing people in the streets of London. For this programme Michael Standing was given an imaginary pitch at Victoria Station to describe the arrival of the star and his welcome by thousands of hysterical fans. One or two of these women were "interviewed" at the microphone by Standing, who bore no resentment at gentle satire on his own feature.

This spot went into a musical programme at a place where I thought interest must be flagging.

A touch of realism in a musical show galvanizes the production into action. In a programme of stage memories I interspersed the scene at a famous first night when the play and the actors were practically hissed off the stage, with an actress saying to the audience through her tears that splendid cliché of the theatre: "This is the happiest evening of my life." This had noise and excitement and reality, a useful contrast with the dreamy music which preceded and followed it.

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Musical contrast should also be exploited in the programme layout. Get as much variety into the music as possible, with old and new tunes, serious ones and comic ones, fast ones and slow ones. The length is important, too. If you have a verse and two refrains of each song the programme sounds like a song-plugger's office. Short versions of some songs and full versions of others will probably make more attractive hearing. All too few songs have verses worth hearing.

Again, you can obtain contrast in the treatment of your music. Instead of the usual round of vocalist and orchestra, the use of a chorus, an organ, instrumentalists or a new blending of voices, can heighten the interest. In a full-length programme, do not hesitate to use a gramophone record or two, even though you have an expensive cast standing by doing nothing for three or four minutes. The difference in musical colour will probably justify you. It is a good thing to follow a song by Frances Day in the studio with the startlingly different recorded voice of Chaliapine. Be discreet about the use of these gramophone records, though. Only use them where the brand of music cannot be played in the studio, or for star value. The danger of too many records in a programme is that your cast in the studio grow restless during the silence while

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the record is being played (out of their hearing) and they lose interest in the movement of the programme. There is a risk of the show losing its tempo and of a depreciation in enthusiasm. The performers are all keyed up at the beginning of the programme, but if there are too many pauses for recordings the tension relaxes and you can sense your listeners yawning with the artistes.

The sleepy zone in the programme comes about three-quarters of the way through, after you have passed the first peak and you are taking a deep breath before working up to a grand finale. That is the spot for a short surprise item or for the introduction of some superstar you may have been saving up for a magnificent entry. An injection of "oomph" at this period in an hour's show is needed if you want to keep your listeners from slumping too deeply into their armchairs.

Either you have purposely kept your listeners waiting for this much-publicized star to make her appearance (with some tempting "trailers" dropped earlier into the programme to warn listeners not to lose their grip on the show) or you spring your star as a surprise, and her personality sails into the homes of Britain like morning sunshine pouring in through a bedroom window.

You must have your grandstand finish. Your

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programme can end noisily and triumphantly or it can finish sadly and sentimentally, but the listener must be in no doubt that this is the end. A strong musical finish and a substantial "ruling off" makes the end more satisfying to the listener and leaves the impression of a complete, well-rounded-off show.

This programme closing, although very definite and conclusive, should be kept short, leaving the listener wanting more. If you are ending with theme music which has pervaded the programme, do not play it out until the listener sickens of it. Just play enough to have people humming it quietly to themselves, and as they are warming up come to the end.

The rhythm and tempo of a programme must be so individual, so dependent upon the materials at the writer's disposal, that I have had to generalize in this very broad fashion. There are few rules. Instinct, "hunch," experience—call it what you like—but there is some radio sense which must tell you whether there is the correct balance in a programme. Every radio show has a layout, but so many are mass-produced that they run in a groove. A standard layout which does for hundreds of programmes no doubt makes for soundness but it takes the brilliance out of programmes. I have always considered that programme layout was too neglected by the BBC. If I were running their

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Training College (I can say this safely because it is never likely to happen) I would put "PROGRAMME LAYOUT" well up in the curriculum. If you, as a new writer for broadcasting, can get into the habit of planning your shows on paper before you begin to write a script, you will do the programmes some good. Spend as much time on the layout as you intend to spend on the actual writing and your programmes will soon begin to get noticed.

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CHAPTER 8

RADIO PRODUCTION

VERY few radio writers ever get the chance to become producers, so on first sight this chapter may seem unnecessary. I am writing it, not to inspire any production ambitions in radio writers, but to help them by giving a clear idea of the work which has to be done by the man who will be their partner in the making of radio shows, the producer.

It is not often that anything about radio production ever appears in print, mainly because it is a very reserved occupation and also because it is a job of little interest to the general public. The ordinary listener has probably heard the phrase "produced by . . ." thousands of times, without worrying what the producer is or what he does. There is a vague idea that the producer rehearses the artistes and encourages them to make jokes which bring his name into the programme, and there is no doubt that good work by a producer is rarely appreciated. It is a thankless job. An excellent show fills listeners with a glow of satisfaction and they give all the credit to the principal

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artistes. If the show is poor the listeners vaguely blame "The BBC."

So far as listeners are concerned, the producer can be a nonentity. Sometimes he is, and the tragedy is that the work he should have put into the programme is never missed. It is just a poor programme, sometimes redeemed by a mighty effort on the part of the artistes. It is the smoothness and slickness of a production, the enthusiasm of the artistes, the general fullness of the show, which are the signs of good work by the producer. All too infrequently are they appreciated.

The producer's first job is to choose his cast. Again the half-hearted or incompetent producer can get by if he chooses the stand-bys of radio, the established performers whose names appear in the *Radio Times* every week. They can always be relied upon to give an adequate performance, without being dazzling in their brilliance.

The more enterprising producer experiments a little with his casting, brings in new actors, tries out an operatic soprano in a glamour girl part, imports an outside orchestra. He tries to put something new into his shows, without wasting his time living up to precedent.

Before rehearsals begin the producer goes through the programme with the musical director of the show, making the final

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selection of the music and discussing the allocation and length of the songs. Special orchestrations are ordered, when they are needed, and perhaps extra musicians engaged.

There may be some other preliminary work before the producer begins the rehearsals he has called. Gramophone records to run through for timing and extracting, script difficulties to be ironed out with artistes, a relay from an outside source to be fixed with the outside broadcasts department, recordings to be made of a star unable to be in the studio for the broadcast.

When the producer does reach the studio, he will not only have the responsibility of getting the best out of his actors, singers and instrumentalists; he must also co-ordinate the work of the Effects Department and the technicians. The producer has to work in close touch with the balance and control expert, the producer to get the results he is after, the balance expert to control the output from the studio. The producer must know exactly what he wants, a full-throated roar from the chorus, a faraway whisper from an actress, a husky bellow from the comedian, a high-pitched scream from the child. The balance expert has to see that the producer is satisfied, experimenting with the positions of microphone and of artistes until the desired result is achieved.

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It will be seen by now why it is essential for the producer to be on the staff of the BBC. There is much preliminary work to do from his desk and there must be a close working association with the technicians. They, too, have to get used to the methods of the producer, and their task would be all the harder if a string of free-lance producers was used. The free-lance writer can never expect to produce his own show. If he wants to become a producer he will have a long wait before there is a vacancy, and if his services are wanted then he will be made an offer by the Director of Variety.

I do not suppose the Director of Variety himself could tell you on what grounds he selects his producers. The qualification he would like most of all, experience, is rare, because where else but at the BBC can producers learn their business. The technique is so unlike the stage or the film method. Probably the "D.V." makes his choice on "hunch," his own instinctive valuation of a man's possibilities. It is worth noting, if you have producer ambitions, that in recent appointments the tendency has been to select men with experience of stage repertory production. If you were offered a job as a producer the salary might be anything between £300 and £1,000 a year. This represents security, too, because one rarely hears of producers leaving the BBC.

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Perhaps this is because there is nowhere else to go owing to there being no competitive broadcasting system. Commercial radio production methods are very different, and when sponsored radio was flourishing advertising agencies imported their men from Canada, Australia and America.

Now that you have been properly introduced to the producer, come and watch him at work in the studio. Probably the first rehearsal is a gambol through the script, with all the singers, actors and actresses and the orchestra conductor. Small parts are shared out among the actors, the singers discuss their keys and cues and everyone begins to get the atmosphere of the programme. Before they all gather together again for a rehearsal of the entire show two sets of rehearsals may take place, one for music, another for speech.

It is at this stage the producer comes into power. Until now he has contented himself with hints to the soprano about taking her song in a lower key and improving her slurred diction, to the tenor about singing his song a little faster, to the compère about being too stiff in his reading of the part, to the star about a tendency to over-act.

When the producer gets them all together in the studio he tackles the show and the company as a whole. Now at last he can get a true

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idea of the tempo of the show and the time it takes to get through. He will probably have to cut in order that the length shall be two or three minutes less than the full time he is allowed. With the producer rests the decision as to what shall be taken out. He may consult the author, but the producer has the last word. It is this cutting which generally reveals the skill and experience of the producer. He may be tempted to cut out something which is an easy cut to make, but disturbs the balance of the show. There may have been items put in for contrast and colour, not essential to the programme but a great help to the general effect. The unimaginative producer will make these the first cuts and all too soon find himself with a programme familiar in its ordinariness, the simple music-plus-announcements show. The best cutting preserves all the original elements of an approved script, but reduces them in length.

Cutting will also be a test for the producer's tact, because he will have to take out chunks of people's lines and omit a song or two. Someone is bound to be hurt unless the producer knows how to break the news to his artistes. The star who is cut from four songs to two will threaten to get temperamental unless she is handled by an "understanding" producer.

Handling of artistes is, to my mind, one of

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the most important attributes of a producer. He has to be able to get the best out of everyone, he has to praise people when they are good, pull them up gently when their performance is below standard and have the gift of making his company enthusiastic. Some producers have no effect upon artistes, some simply irritate, but others have a quality of leadership which puts the artistes on their toes, eager to give their best performance. I do not say that it takes one of those noisy, slap-you-on-the-back producers to produce a bright show. More often the artistes will give their best to the quieter, competent and earnest producer whose work they respect. Some producers dash out of the control room to tell everyone how wonderful they are, giving a false confidence which sometimes makes an artiste ease up on his performance. Artistes are so used to the empty flattery of the stage and its people, however, that they are more likely to react to the helpful criticism and mild praise of the less flamboyant producer.

Another test of the producer is his firmness in handling difficult situations. Sometimes you have great stars who choose to be obstinate. It is as much a mistake to give in to them meekly as it is to try to bluster and bully them. If the producer has confidence in himself and his work he can be quietly firm enough to

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convince them to do what he wants. Generally, the bigger your stars the more eager they are to co-operate once they have realized that the producer is equally anxious for them to be heard at their best. In the studio the producer is dictator and he should hold on to his authority if he wants to get team work out of his company. A little tussle with a star does no harm at all, particularly if the producer wins, for the confidence of the rest of the company in him increases.

During the run-through of the show the producer is probably sitting in the control room with the balance engineer. This room is separated from the studio by a glass partition. The producer can either signal to the people in the studio with his hands or he can talk to them through a microphone. He may choose to interrupt a run-through (although he will not if he is trying to time the whole show) or he can wait until the end when he can go over the whole script and ask for his improvements, either to the whole company or individually.

The producer could be in the studio directing operations, safely leaving the technical side to the balance engineer, but in the soundproof control room he can listen to the programme as it comes through the loud speaker. There at last he is close to the finished product. He can listen for flaws and dull places. He can see the

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programme as a whole. As he listens he jots down notes on his script: lines to be taken faster, applause to be added, studio laughs to be omitted, actors' lines to be exchanged, the soprano to be told she was flat, the orchestra to be quicker on the cues, the star to turn away from the microphone on her top notes.

He has a final chat with the technical expert before leaving the control room. Decisions are taken about the placing of artistes and microphones, the shuffling of the orchestra into different positions, the elimination of a chorus which tends to drown a solo artiste.

It is at this point, after the run-through, that the producer can add improvements of his own, put in those individual touches which give his productions extra life and speed. A snatch of music under this long speech, a dramatic chord here, a clash of the cymbals there. By changing the reading of a line from straight to comic he can double the effectiveness of one part of the programme. By taking out a dreary introduction to a song he cuts out a time-lag and quickens the pace at an important point. He alters a word or two of script and has some orchestral changes to "build up" the first appearance of the star. He brings three violinists out of the orchestra up to the microphone to give a whispered obbligato to the crooner. Here he tells the actors to reduce their

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speed. There he tells them to accelerate. He cuts out something which was supposed to be funny but only succeeded in being tame. He tells an actor to retain a piece of spontaneous gagging which was not in the script but fitted well into the programme.

If the producer does run through the show again to test out his improvements he will probably not do it at once. He will either give his artistes a short break or resume after luncheon or on the next day. Staleness can easily creep into radio shows and everyone might grow too weary of the programme if they had to run through it too many times in succession with hardly any breaks.

Then the final dismissal of the artistes until a quarter-hour before the broadcast. One or two may be kept behind for an extra word of advice or encouragement. One of the singers may need an additional rehearsal with the orchestra. An actor may be uncertain of a cut in his part. There are usually many problems for the producer to solve, most of them minor worries but all wanting a decision. The star may be nervous about her performance and insist on going through her songs again with the pianist an hour before the broadcast.

In wartime the producer is also responsible to the censor for his script. Once the script is passed there can be no additions or deviations.

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The producer may need the few hours before the broadcast to mark up a clean script for himself. His own may have become tattered and unreadable, blue pencilled and annotated. He has to mark up his alterations, his special production notes and his technical arrangements with the balance engineer. Pencilled stars against speeches mean a light signal flashed from the control room to microphone B. The blue pencil stroke down the page means a gramophone record musical background to a piece of dialogue.

At last the hour of the broadcast. The producer sits in the control room with the engineer. No one else can be admitted without the producer's permission. Sometimes he may invite the author to sit with him. The clock hand jerks towards the advertised time. There is an air of tenseness, expectancy. The signal to begin is flashed to the control room, on to the studio. The announcer steps forward:

This is the BBC Home Service . . .

There is nothing more the producer can do. The show is on the air. He glances occasionally at the clock, comparing it with his rehearsal timing. It may be necessary to go into the studio and warn his artistes "Slower," "Quicker." There are anxious moments. A split second's

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SOPHIE TUCKER, THE GREAT AMERICAN STAR,
AT REHEARSAL WITH HOWARD THOMAS

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delay on the taking of a cue feels like five minutes in the control room. Fluffed lines make the producer writhe in agony, although the listener may not even notice the slip. A sigh of relief when the star has managed to get the top note without ruining the programme. And so on until the end of the programme and the announcer's:

. . . was written and devised by —— ——. Production by . . .

All is over. Except the mail. And the letters in the *Radio Times*. And the praise or pinpricks from the newspaper critics.

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CHAPTER 9

THE MONEY IN RADIO

In the preceding chapters I have tried to be as factual as possible, but now that we reach the financial side of radio you will have to expect a certain vagueness. This is because the BBC have no rigidly fixed scale of payments. If they had they would not publish them. The answer to all such questions is the stock reply given to the Press when information is wanted concerning anything from the cost of a complete programme to the fee paid to an individual artiste:

"The Corporation never discusses financial matters."

A professional writer may view this with dismay. If he is thinking of applying himself to learning to write for radio he has to enter a market with only one outlet and with no official scale of payment for any of his work which is used.

If the BBC made up their mind to be ungenerous, they could be, because of this monopoly. They have the radio market to themselves and they can please themselves about the fees they pay.

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When you write a radio play the BBC might offer you a certain sum for it. "Ridiculous" you might feel like saying, "I withdraw it." But there is no rival across the street to make you a higher offer, no competitor vying for your work and forcing up prices. BBC prices remain as low as the Corporation pleases. Their attitude could always be "If our money isn't big enough for you, don't bother to write for us. There are plenty of others who will."

Yet in spite of this impregnable position the BBC are not so mean as they might be. Payments are not high. They are certainly not high enough to attract big names away from writing best-seller novels or long-run plays. But the payments compare favourably with the cheques paid out by national newspaper editors to their ordinary contributors. The BBC attitude towards contributors is much the same as an editor's. A certain standard for the ordinary run of material, slightly more for better-class work and occasional big sums to famous contributors. The difference is that the BBC buy the big authors less frequently than newspaper editors do.

But the good news for readers of this book is that the plodding writer will earn from radio a slightly higher fee than the per-thousand rate of a national newspaper. There is also the chance that a programme may be repeated,

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when the writer gets the same fee again, without doing any more work, whereas newspaper articles are never repeated. A newspaper article occasionally earns extra money for its writer when it is syndicated, but a radio programme can also be bought again for overseas.

This brings us to the BBC method of assessing your fee. They do not buy the copyright or the first publication rights of your contribution, as a newspaper does. The BBC offer you a performing fee.

Sometimes it is a split fee, one section of it for broadcasting on the Home wavelength, another for relaying to the Empire. When there were National and Regional programmes and a programme was broadcast on both (this was the "diagonalized" method of broadcasting on the National at, say 6 p.m. on Tuesday, and the Regional at 8 p.m. on Thursday) you would be offered a fee for each broadcast, plus an extra payment in the event of the programme being taken by the Empire. An offer of perhaps 45 guineas for a one-hour show would probably be broken up into National 20 guineas, Regional 20 guineas, Empire 5 guineas.

I agree with the idea of paying performing fees and letting the author retain other rights, but this splitting up into divisions is a little unfair. If, by some mischance, the Empire cannot take the programme, the writer may

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find his fee smaller than he had expected. After all, he adds up the figures and regards the total offered to him as his fee.

I think that the BBC should offer the flat fee to an author and make its division their own book-keeping problem. It makes no difference to the author whether the Empire has taken the programme or not. He has put the same amount of work into the script. The fee offered to him should be a total fee, based entirely on the merits of the script he has written, and the amount of work he has put into the programme.

This I will say for the BBC. They are not inflexible on this question of fees. Their Copyright Department means it is an offer when they make you an offer. There is no question of "Either you take this or . . ." I have always found them reasonable people, sympathetic and willing to give way when the case is sufficiently strong. The writer and the producer are saved the indignity of having to wrangle about price, owing to the existence of this department and the system seems to me a good one. When a date is fixed for a programme a sum is ear-marked to be spent on artistes and another sum on copyrights. The Copyright Department is given this figure as its limit and authors are unlikely to force their fee beyond that maximum. In extreme cases the fee can be referred

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back to the programme department director, but the author should have very good grounds for complaint before he causes so much trouble.

I would say that BBC fees to authors average about a guinea a minute. This does not mean that if the BBC take a 45-minute programme of yours, consisting of music with commentary, that you will get 45 guineas. More likely in a programme of this kind the Copyright Department will base their payment on the number of minutes of script you have written. This would be a case where the performing fee would be decided by the amount of work involved. If the speech in the programme took only eight minutes to broadcast, the fact that you had spent weeks digging up elusive information would ensure your getting far more than eight guineas payment.

Another check on BBC fees is the arrangement which was made between the Corporation, the Society of Authors, the League of British Dramatists and the Publishers Association in 1938. This dealt mainly with broadcasts of material which had been used in print or had been performed. The fees I have been discussing above relate to material specially written for broadcasting.

Some of the minimum fees arranged between the BBC and the writing interests were:

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25 guineas for a single performance of a full-length play, regardless of playing time.
6 guineas for a single performance of a play 5–15 minutes in length.
1 guinea for a poem not exceeding twelve lines in length.
2 guineas for fifty lines and 1 guinea per fifty thereafter.
3 guineas for the first five minutes, plus 2 guineas per five minutes thereafter for excerpts from plays and monologues.

Short stories already published, or extracts from published prose, 750–1,000 words, £3 13s. 6d.

These fees are for single performances only. "Staggered" broadcasts from two stations would mean a double fee. Relaying to the Empire would bring an extra 33⅓ per cent. All these prices are for material already written for publication or theatrical performance.

Children's Hour rates are one-third lower than these.

One other point about BBC payments is that there is no formal contract between the Corporation and the author, as there is in the case of performers. The simple form of letter offer and letter acceptance is sufficient. Some authors prefer to cover themselves by stating in their letter of acceptance that they reserve all other rights. Occasionally there may be some special arrangement between the BBC and the author,

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when the BBC retains some controlling interest in a character created by a radio, or in some particularly successful show.

When a show or a character has enormous success, and a market is opened in the theatre and cinema, the BBC may take the view that they are entitled to some share of its outside success. The author's work is probably only part of the triumph. The producer, the artistes, the BBC publicity men have all done their share.

The BBC's interest in such an instance would not be entirely financial. They would want to preserve the programme idea at its peak value to them. If an author had a success with a radio show and then sold it to a small film company, a resulting "shoestring" film might disappoint cinema audiences and reduce the BBC value of the programme. The BBC like to see their creations going on to success in other fields, but naturally they want to make sure that the handling of it reaches the highest standard. If the show reaches the theatres, it must go to the No. 1 theatres. If it is screened, it must be in the top grade of film production. In this way the BBC often protect the author against himself, and against the temptation to sell out his interests and his property too early in the day and in the wrong market.

From this it will be seen that, indirectly, an

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author *can* make large sums out of work originated for the BBC. It does not often happen, but when it does the prices are good. An example was the "Mr. Walker" character. The BBC was Mr. Walker's shop window. There were many customers. Mr. Walker sold well in many forms. There were Mr. Walker stories and articles. There was at least one Mr. Walker film. There was a Mr. Walker stage act. There were probably Mr. Walker books and a Mr. Walker play.

"Mr. Penny" was just as popular, to the profit of his creator. The public were deluged with "Mr. Penny" short stories films, books, and even a music hall turn based on the character.

"Inspector Hornleigh" also went into fiction and films. The series was also re-sold in other countries.

There are many instances of BBC shows going out to their public, again making times the original fees for the authors. *Goodnight Vienna* became a film and also did very well for itself as a musical show for amateur performers. *Café Collette* was another radio idea which reached the screen.

Greatest success of all was *Band Waggon*, which made fame and fortunes for several people. As a show it toured the big provincial theatres and the London music halls, breaking

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box office records. Eventually it reached the film studios.

Perhaps I am wrong to dazzle would-be writers for broadcasting with these exceptional stories of big money from radio. I am only printing them to illustrate the gamble of radio. You may plod along for years in the ordinary money or you may suddenly find your bank manager beaming at you.

There is a middle course between the spectacular successes and the moderate money. There is the steady stream of radio work which builds a solid reputation for the writer in the entertainment business, leading to other things. There is the re-sale of radio material in printed form or the re-writing for the Press of material originally gathered for radio.

Yes, the objective is an attractive one for you. Your work being heard by millions at once. Your programme announced simultaneously in every newspaper in the land. A doorway to the theatre and the film studio. A welcome for you at Broadcasting House. A useful income, with a ticket in the sweepstake of big prizes.

But the way is difficult. A limited market, considerable competition, a new technique to be learned, a ceaseless search for new ideas, long weeks of waiting for news, many disappointments, rare successes.

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To succeed in radio you need inventiveness, persistence, optimism, the will to work. If you have these qualities all you need to guarantee yourself success is—a little luck.

I wish you plenty of it. May you create another "Mr. Penny," another *Band Waggon.*

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APPENDIX

A RANGE OF BROADCASTING SCRIPTS

(Written by the Author)

1. A Big-Scale Production

   Excerpt from *The Showmen of England* —No. 1. Bertram W. Mills

   (How he entered the circus world)

2. Star Material

   Gracie Fields and Maurice Chevalier in *Paris–Londres*

   (Telephone conversation)

3. Novelty Interview

   Mrs. Flanagan and Mrs. Allen in *Front Page Wife*

Two full-length radio scripts (a radio play *Blackout* and the C. B. Cochran *Showmen of England* programme) are published in the author's *Brighter Blackout Book*, published by George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.

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A BIG-SCALE PRODUCTION

THE SHOWMEN OF ENGLAND

No. 1. Bertram W. Mills

(*An excerpt, telling how he entered the circus world*)

BERTRAM MILLS: It all began with a rather foolish boast. In Christmas, 1919, I took my wife and two boys to a circus at Olympia. After the show we tried to find a place to eat, and eventually we were placed in a room for supper with the directors of Olympia. I knew two of them.

LORD D. (ENGLISH): Well, Mills, what did you think of the circus?

BERTRAM MILLS: We've had a very nice evening, thanks.

LORD W. (SCOTS): Come on, Mills, out with it. What did you really think of the circus?

BERTRAM MILLS: I say that we had a very nice evening, thanks!

LORD D.: Don't fence, man. Come on, tell us honestly. What did you think about the show?

BERTRAM MILLS: Well, if you want the real truth, it was . . . I thought it was rotten. I don't know much about circuses, but if I couldn't put on a better show than that I'd . . . I'd . . . I'd eat my hat.

LORD W.: Well, Olympia's free next Christmas, Mills, why not take it and start chewing your hat now?

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BERTRAM MILLS: I'm looking for a job. Dammit, I'll do it!

(Circus band, "Entry of the Gladiators.")

BERTRAM MILLS: I'd let myself in for something. I'd taken on a job I knew nothing at all about.

LESLIE MITCHELL: And how did you set about building your circus?

BERTRAM MILLS: I cabled to John Ringling, the famous American three-ring circus proprietor, and asked him to bring over his show!

L.M.: That was an easy way out.

BERTRAM MILLS: I thought so. I meant to import my first circus lock, stock and barrel and gain some experience of the business. Everything was fixed. Then suddenly in July a cable came from America:

AMERICAN VOICE *(over morse)*: BERTRAM MILLS. DEEPLY REGRET CANNOT BRING CIRCUS. TRANSPORT DIFFICULTIES INSUPERABLE. LETTER FOLLOWS. RINGLING.

BERTRAM MILLS: It was a bitter blow. But I had to go on. My money was in the scheme. My only hope was to put on a circus at all costs.

L.M.: Your circus was due to open in four or five months, and you had not booked a single act?

BERTRAM MILLS: No, not a single act. I went all over Europe in search of turns. I must have visited seventy circuses and variety shows. I booked French and Belgian tumblers, Sanger's elephants, Californian seals, Shetland ponies, French and Swedish horses, Italian jockeys, American aerial gymnasts, Japanese acrobats. Then I had to engage my staff. Two thousand men were put on to build 6,000 seats, to lay down the ring, to erect a mile

of sideshows, to equip and build stables for 70 horses. I had to fix lodgings for artists, ships, trains and wagons to bring them, quarantine arrangements, permits . . .

L.M.: And how did the first dress rehearsal go?

BERTRAM MILLS: That? It still comes back to me like a nightmare. It was terrible!

(*Circus band playing in distance—"Poet and Peasant."*)

BERTRAM MILLS: What's the matter with that band?

VOICE (HIRSTE): It's no good, guv'nor. It's on the wrong side of the ring. What shall we do?

BERTRAM MILLS: What else can you do but tear down the bandstand and bring it nearer. You'll have to work all night.

VOICE (SEFTON): Mr. Mills, the show has run for four hours, and you've scheduled 2½ hours. What shall we do?

BERTRAM MILLS: Cut down the acts. Speed them up. Don't waste so much time between items.

VOICE (SEFTON): Mr. Mills, we can't go on like this. You'll have to postpone the opening.

BERTRAM MILLS: I won't. This circus begins tomorrow afternoon at half-past two. We can't disappoint 6,000 people!

("*Pagliacci*" *theme. Big drum.*)

BARKER (SEFTON): Walk up! Walk up! All this way! BERTRAM MILLS' CIRCUS AND FUN FAIR. The biggest show on earth. Walk up! Walk up!

SIMPSON: One-and-three to the right. Two-and-four to the left. Show your tickets, please.

(*Big drum fade up. Circus band.*)

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BERTRAM MILLS: The beginning of that first show was worse than anything I had ever feared. Muffed tricks, missed cues. I could only see bankruptcy ahead! What a fool I had been to put on a circus! I buried my face in my hands. Then suddenly I turned away from the ring and looked at the faces of the audience. Then I saw I had won!

(*"Under the Double Eagle"—second strain.*)

(*Great roar of laughter, thunderclap of applause.*)

ANNOUNCER 1: CIRCUS TRIUMPH FOR BERTRAM MILLS.

ANNOUNCER 2: CIRCUS COMES BACK INTO ITS OWN.

ANNOUNCER 3: OLYMPIA TRIUMPH.

ANNOUNCER 1: GREATEST CIRCUS FOR YEARS.

BERTRAM MILLS: I couldn't believe it! Success. Glory. But best of all, the knowledge that I had given back to England one of its great traditions, the circus!

(*Fade up circus band, "Washington Post" with circus atmosphere sound effects.*)

(*Drum beats.*)

BARKER (SEFTON): Walk up! Walk up! All this way! Bertram Mills' Circus!

GIRL (MOLLIE): Programme. Official programme. Programme of the circus.

(*Fanfare, the band continues "Washington Post."*)

MAURICE DENHAM (*over music*): The parade! The lights go up. The show begins. Across the sawdust ring marches the circus band. In front swaggers a tiny boy drum-major. Then the men, twenty-four strong, their instruments gleaming as they blare along. Then the men and women and children of

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the circus. Stars from every part of the world. Acrobats, jugglers, trick cyclists, high jumpers, trapezists, contortionists, horses, horses, horses . . . and the CLOWNS!

(*Roar of laughter.*)

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STAR MATERIAL

GRACIE FIELDS and MAURICE CHEVALIER in

PARIS–LONDRES

A GALA VARIETY PROGRAMME

PRESENTED BY ARCHIE CAMPBELL AND EDOUARD GENDRON

(Additional dialogue by HOWARD THOMAS)

ANNOUNCER: . . . Ray Ventura et ses Collégiens,
JOHN WATT: and from London . . .
ANNOUNCER: . . . Louis Levy conducting the BBC Augmented Variety Orchestra.
JOHN WATT: Also you will hear together for the first time in any programme, two world-famous stars, one French and one English—an *entente cordiale* of radio
From Paris . . .
ANNOUNCER: . . . Maurice Chevalier!
JOHN WATT: from London . . .
ANNOUNCER: . . . Gracie Fields!
JOHN WATT: I should tell you that Archie Campbell and Edouard Gendron are responsible for this production in conjunction with the Paris broadcasting station—Poste Parisien.

And now to start the programme from this side of the Channel, here is Louis Levy and the Variety Orchestra, playing some of his famous Music from

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the Movies. So begins our gala exchange "Paris–Londres!"

(1) ORCHESTRA FILM MEDLEY $3\frac{1}{2}$ MINS.

("Donkey Serenade"
"The Sweetest Song in the World"
"Change Partners"
"Sing as We Go" —*Miss Fields singing coro.*)

JOHN WATT: And now, Gracie, how about that call of yours to Paris we put through for . . . (*gives exact time of studio clock*)? We'd better find out what's happened to it.

GRACIE FIELDS: Ee . . . but I'm all of a doo-dah. Fancy meeting Maurice Chevalier and all.

(*Telephone business, ending with*:—)

P.B.X.: YOUR CALL TO PARIS, MISS FIELDS. PLEASE GO AHEAD.

GRACIE FIELDS: THANK YOU, LUV—NOW FOR IT. Ee, but I don't know what's up with me. I've got a funny little sinking feeling inside me. I suppose my voice must be crossing Channel. . . . Hallo!

MAURICE CHEVALIER: Hallo, Hallo.

GRACIE FIELDS: Is that you, Maurice? This is Gracie.

MAURICE CHEVALIER: Hallo, Gracie. How are you?

GRACIE FIELDS: Oh heck, now the fun begins. Wait a minute! Where's that piece of paper? Ee—ah—um . . . commong . . . allez . . . vous?

MAURICE CHEVALIER: Ah, you speak French—marvellous.

(*He speaks French very quickly.*)

GRACIE FIELDS: Not so fast, lad; now come again, but take your roller-skates off this time.

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MAURICE CHEVALIER: (*Repeats same sentence in French, more slowly.*)

GRACIE FIELDS: Ay—that might mean a lot to you, Maurice, but it doesn't mean owt to me. You've given the wrong answer, lad—it's something different in this little red book.

MAURICE CHEVALIER: Never mind, Gracie. Let's talk English instead. I wish I could be in London with you tonight . . . wonderful London . . . all the theatres . . . the lights . . . the girls . . . Oh, those beautiful English girls.

GRACIE FIELDS: Girls indeed. I know what you Paris lads are. Listen, Maurice, I used to have a "pash" on you.

MAURICE CHEVALIER: No?

GRACIE FIELDS: I used to carry your picture round in my handbag—I used to go all gaga about you.

MAURICE CHEVALIER: But, Gracie, this is marvellous. I've always felt just the same about you! Honestly! We must get together soon. Come over to Paris.

GRACIE FIELDS: Give over, Maurice. There might be somebody listening. Let's talk about something else. . . . Paris . . . how is it there tonight?

MAURICE CHEVALIER: It is a very clear night. I can see the Tower from the window.

GRACIE FIELDS: By gum—you have got good eyesight, Maurice. Blackpool must be hundreds of miles away.

MAURICE CHEVALIER: No—the Eiffel Tower, I mean, Gracie, not Blackpool—you will have your joke. Are you going to see Monsieur Lebrun tomorrow, Gracie?

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GRACIE FIELDS: The French President? I hope so.

MAURICE CHEVALIER: Ask him to give you a lesson in French, Gracie.

GRACIE FIELDS: Ee, Maurice, if he tried to give me French lessons, I'm afraid he'd go home speaking broad Lancashire; but I have been learning a French song . . . nice little thing it is, Maurice . . . it would just suit you. I'll send you a copy of it. It goes like this . . .

(*Gracie Fields sings "Valentine."*)

MAURICE CHEVALIER: (*At end of song*): Ee, Gracie, that was champion. Now let me sing you a song . . . a song about a little English girl called . . .

(*Maurice Chevalier sings "Sally."*)

GRACIE FIELDS: (*At end of song*): Now where have I heard that song before? It was grand, Maurice. Well, time's up, lad. If I have another three minutes, John Watt won't be able to pay for my supper tonight. So good night, Maurice.

MAURICE CHEVALIER: Good night, Gracie—I hope I'll see you soon.

GRACIE FIELDS: So do I, but I'll have to bring my mother with me to look after me. You French lads are a bit too fascinating. Well, good night, luv, Good night, all.

MAURICE CHEVALIER: Au revoir, Gracie. And now, ladies and gentlemen . . .

(*Maurice Chevalier introduces Ray Ventura and the programme continues from the French studio.*)

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NOVELTY INTERVIEW

Mrs. Flanagan and Mrs. Allen in *Front Page Wife*

(*Fade up few bars of "This is the missus."*)

ANNOUNCER: FRONT PAGE WIFE! Private lives of celebrities, revealed by their wives. A feature contributed by Howard Thomas. Beginning with MRS. BUD FLANAGAN and MRS. CHESNEY ALLEN.

MRS. ALLEN: It does seem genuine, after all, Mrs. Flanagan. This *is* the BBC, and we *are* broadcasting.

MRS. FLANAGAN: I thought it was going to be another of their Crazy Gang tricks.

MRS. ALLEN: I was a bit suspicious about it last night when a reporter rang up and interviewed me about all this. He said, "What are you like, Mrs. Allen? Are you tall or short?" But when he asked me whether I was white or coloured I knew it was your Bud.

INTERVIEWER: You really are on the air this time, ladies, and listeners are very curious to know about you, and your husbands. Suppose you tell us how you came to get married. How did Bud propose, Mrs. Flanagan?

MRS. FLANAGAN. The four of us were all in the same show, you know. Florrie Ford's show. Bud was the comedian. I met him for the first time when I joined the show and we were married three weeks

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later. Bud took me for a bus ride, to Whitley Bay, and in a café he said: "How about it?"

MRS. ALLEN: Bud had more pluck than my Ches. We got engaged on St. Pancras station, and Florrie Ford proposed to me—for Ches. I was only seventeen and Ches thought I needed someone to look after me. So Auntie Flo, that's what we call Florrie Ford, she fixed it up, bought the house and the furniture. . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN: Bud had to borrow a week's wages from Auntie Flo to pay for our engagement ring.

INTERVIEWER: Never mind, I don't suppose either of you have had to worry much about money since those days.

MRS. ALLEN: D'y'know, I think a lot of people have the idea that our husbands come home with a big cheque from George Black and say: "There you are, dear, help yourself." But they don't. We just have housekeeping money and pocket-money like any other housewives.

MRS. FLANAGAN: For the first two years we were married I never knew how much Bud earned.

MRS. ALLEN: I don't know to this day how much Ches gets!

MRS. FLANAGAN: Well, I can only tell by what I read in the papers.

MRS. ALLEN: I generally have to buy the paper myself to see what they are doing with themselves. Do you know, we're stage widows all the week, and golf widows on Sundays.

MRS. FLANAGAN: Didn't Ches take up riding so that you could get out more together?

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MRS. ALLEN: Yes, but soon I rode so well that he went back to his golf.

MRS. FLANAGAN: The trouble with Bud is that when he does find time to take me anywhere I never know where we'll finish up. Sometimes we've packed our shorts and sweaters for a country holiday in Cornwall. Then half-way he'll stop the car and say: "Oh, let's go back and go on the Continent!"

INTERVIEWER: Are there any little Flanagans or little Allens?

MRS. ALLEN: No little Allens, but Mrs. Flanagan has her little Buddie.

MRS. FLANAGAN: He's thirteen. And he wants to be a juggler. He juggles with anything he can lay his hands on. You ought to see Dad's face when Buddie gets his hands on the vases. By the way, Mrs. Allen, Buddie always says it's his ambition to have hair like his Uncle Ches.

MRS. ALLEN: You mean hair like his Uncle Ches used to have.

MRS. FLANAGAN: Poor dears, though. They have to work so hard. Fourteen Palladium shows a week, plus filming and recording.

MRS. ALLEN: Ches is always tired. When he comes home he just sleeps and sleeps and sleeps.

MRS. FLANAGAN: Bud's the opposite. He gets home late, switches on the wireless to America, then at half-past three in the morning he walks out to Marble Arch and buys the morning papers.

MRS. ALLEN: Then I suppose he expects breakfast. Getting Ches's breakfast is an awful job. He's very

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finicky about toast. If it's a bit black he's miserable all day.

MRS. FLANAGAN: Bud expects a restaurant menu. If there are five things to choose from for breakfast he's sure to fancy something else.

MRS. ALLEN: Aren't we talking too much? Don't they put in a song or dance or something here?

MRS. FLANAGAN: Oh dear, and I haven't sung for years. What's that number the boys do? About flat feet.

MRS. ALLEN: Flat foot floogee?

MRS. FLANAGAN: No. Flat feet. Fallen arches . . .

MRS. ALLEN: Underneath the Arches!

TOGETHER: Oi!

(*They sing "Underneath the Arches."*)

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RADIO HAS A WORD FOR IT

GLOSSARY OF EXPRESSIONS USED IN BROADCASTING

AD LIB: Extemporize script or music at speaker's or musician's discretion.

AUDITION: Microphone trial for would-be-broadcasters.

BACKGROUND: Music or sound-effect used underneath speech or other element in the programme.

BALANCE: Even technical quality of programme as picked up by microphones.

BLASTING: Overloading the volume input by singing, speaking or playing too close to the microphone.

BLUE GAG: Censorable joke or expression.

BREAKS: Technical interruption in programme transmissions.

CLEAR COPYRIGHT: Obtain permission from owners of rights for special permission to broadcast music.

COLD: Announcements or opening without any sort of background.

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COMPÈRE: Master of ceremonies. Informal announcer.

CONTINUITY: Another word for script.

CORNY: Abusive description of obvious and hackneyed treatment of script or music.

CREDITS: Acknowledgments to author, composer, producer, etc.

CROSS-FADE: Fading in one sound over another sound which is being faded out.

CROWD: Sound effect or studio noise to suggest presence of large number of people.

CUE: Signal to following actor, singer or orchestra to begin their line or music.

CUT: Either a stoppage of programme by the producer or one of the performers. Or the deletion of material from the programme.

DEAD MIKE: Microphone not in use.

DEFINITION: Pure transmission and reception, aiding identification of individual voices or instruments.

DIRECTOR: Head of a programme department.

DUBBING: Transferring sound from one record to another.

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EFFECTS:	Reproductions and imitations of various sounds to be reproduced in broadcasts.
FADE:	Gradual reduction of volume.
FADE OUT:	Volume reduced to zero.
FAKE:	Ad. libbing.
FLICK:	Flash of light from producer to artiste, signal to begin.
FLUFF:	Mix up words, stumble, or miss cue.
FREE-LANCE:	Person unattached to the staff.
GAG:	A comedy line.
GRAM:	Producer's cue on script for switchover to gramophone turntable.
HOLD IT DOWN:	Producer's instruction to balance engineer to reduce volume.
KILL:	Stop or cancel.
LEAD:	Biggest role in radio play.
LIVE MIKE:	Microphone with current flowing and in action.
MIKE TECHNIQUE:	Experience of moving into and away from microphone.
MIX:	Balancing the input of several live microphones.
O.B.:	Outside broadcast, relay from an outside source.

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O.M.: Over music.

ONE AND ONE: Verse and refrain.

ONE AND TWO: Verse and two refrains.

PANEL: Instrument board in control room.

PLAYBACK: Running through a recording.

PLOPPING: Sound made by speakers who distort letters B and P.

PRODUCER: Official in charge of rehearsals and broadcast of a programme.

PRODUCTION: Organization and presentation of a programme.

RUN-THROUGH: Rehearsal of complete programme.

SCRIPT: Words and plan of programme.

SEGUE: Linking one tune to another without a break.

SET UP: Arrangement of performers in relation to position of microphones.

SIGNATURE: Programme's or performer's musical trademark.

SONG PLUGGER: Music publisher's representative out to manœuvre his firm's songs into programmes.

SOUND TRACK: Sound recorded and photographed on film or sensitized paper.

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STAND BY: Warning that the broadcast is about to begin.

STEP-IT-UP: Increasing volume.

THEME: Signature music of programme.

TRANSMISSION: Actual broadcast.

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