

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS BY RADIO

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IF you want to build an audience for modern music on the radio, there are two very simple rules to observe. One is not to play too much modern music on any one night's program. The other is to avoid telling the audience that modern music is modern music. In fact the less you say about music of any kind on the radio, within certain limits, the better.

The first of these rules is obvious enough. Programs made up entirely of unfamiliar music have their place and their value, but their place is not before the broad, heterogeneous, catch-as-catch-can audience that tunes in, except as special, particular and isolated events. In planning an extensive series of radio programs you will get a bigger and more sympathetic audience for modern music if it is contrasted with the music of other periods.

The second rule is not so frequently adhered to. There is a lot of chatter about composers on the air, and I am convinced that most of it is not only futile, but actually defeats its purpose. Striking evidence of this came my way about two years ago when KSFO, which had for many years been the San Francisco outlet for the Columbia chain, lost its connection with C.B.S. and with that lost the Sunday Philharmonic broadcast. In an effort to hold the type of audience it had had for the Philharmonic, KSFO engaged me to conduct a record program along the same general lines, and I did so for about eight months. The Hooper measurement of audiences during this period showed one very curious result. During the first hour the Philharmonic usually had a bigger audience than we did, but during the last thirty minutes we always had twice the Philharmonic's hearers. This happened regularly and consistently, regardless of programs, and the only explanation can be that people switched to us as soon as Deems Taylor began his intermission commentary. If the Hooper measurement were not divided strictly into half hour periods, we should have had a closer check, but I can devise no other explanation for the evidence provided.

It is, of course, possible to go to the opposite extreme, and this fault is frequently committed on radio programs conducted by people who are not too well acquainted with music. Programmatic and descriptive works, which require a little verbal prelude, and songs, choral pieces and operas, which demand a brief summary of text, are frequently sent out on the air without a word of clarification. You have to know what is essential and you have to know how to put it in the briefest possible terms.

When I began my efforts in radio, about fifteen years ago, there was a distinct prejudice on the part of broadcasters and sponsors against the professional musician as program director, on the ground that the professional musician would be likely to provide too rarefied and high-toned a selection of material. This prejudice has decreased in recent years, and the sense of balance and contrast in program making which only professional musical experience can provide is now permitted to make its point more often than formerly. But it is still frequently a revelation to radio announcers and others sometimes entrusted with this kind of work to realize that, if a Mozart symphony is desired as a foil to, say, the Brahms violin concerto, the professional musician will choose the *Jupiter* rather than the *Haffner* because the *Haffner* and the Brahms concerto are in the same key.

Most of my work in radio has been in connection with record programs, which have certain marked advantages over "live" broadcasts. If you know your records, you can always be sure of good performances, and always be sure of your timing. Records provide an immense variety of material, and make it possible to broadcast, on one and the same program, a motet by Orlando di Lasso, a symphony by Schubert, and a wind quintet by Charles Ives, which you could not possibly do in any other way. They make available within the limits set by the capricious and inexplicable editorial choices of the recording companies, all manner of explorations of the literature and all manner of interesting juxtapositions and contrasts obtainable only in this radio form. But you have to know the difference between a program and a hodgepodge, and you have to avoid extremes.

Richness of contrast, variety and extent are, of course, particularly welcome on programs of the type I now conduct under the sponsorship of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company, a record program which goes on two hours a night, seven nights a week. The sponsor is notably cooperative, and has given me a free hand. And even if our audiences were not inter-

ested in the older and the newer music – which is not the case – we should be forced under the conditions of the program to venture into less commonly trodden fields because of the inexorable fact that there are, after all, only nine symphonies by Beethoven, four by Brahms, six by Tchaikowsky, and one by César Franck, and you can't play them over and over and over again.

Naturally the *primary* interest of radio audiences lies in music of the nineteenth century, but their interests within that century are subject to constant variations. My experience with request polls is that people will request specific works for two diametrically opposed reasons – first, because they have been hearing them, and second, because they have not been hearing them. Certain compositions sometimes attain a fantastic, irrational vogue, which may last quite a while, and the public taste for them seems to be insatiable until the vogue has run its course. Others, well known and widely respected, but not victims of a temporary public craze, will be asked for to a marked degree only if they have not been recently performed. Beethoven's ninth symphony was the work most frequently requested in our most recent poll, and I believe it would not have been given first place if we or the Philharmonic had presented it just before the poll was taken. On the other hand, Tchaikowsky's B \flat minor piano concerto came in second, and I believe it would have been there even if we had given it every day for six months before the announcement had gone out. Freddie Martin is responsible for this, and the public's B \flat minor concerto jag will probably continue until long after Maestro Martin's version has been forgotten.

Audience polls for record programs suggest that the public has rather definite ideas about the "classics," but rather vague ones about modern music. It will ask for specific "classic" works by name, so that you know it wants the ninth symphony and not the eighth, or, as happened not long ago, the Chopin études and not the preludes. However, the public will *not* conspire to set a trend toward any particular modern work, although it will very definitely ask for modern music. Approximately one third of the total number of requests in the poll I have been talking about were for modern works, all kinds of modern works, in every form and manner, by composers of every country, but no one modern work seemed any more desirable than another. This, of course, would not have been the result if we were at present going through any such furore as greeted the Ravel *Bolero* some years ago, or Honegger's *Pacific 231* some years before that.

It would therefore be a great mistake, for the most practical of reasons, not to provide a good deal of modern music on any radio program. At times people won't like it, but there are also people who don't like Bach and Beethoven, and the degree of unfavorable reaction to modern music on a well balanced radio schedule is no greater than the degree of unfavorable reaction to the "classics." Harold Bauer once remarked to me that the harmonic and other audacities of new music at any given period are likely to incense the professional to far greater degree than the uninstructed listener and that new music often succeeds with the broad public before the profession is willing to give it its blessing. I am not sure he is altogether right, but I do know that the broad public does take a lot of modern music in its stride when it hears it on the radio. Modern music goes down particularly well when it is simply given as a matter of course, when it is contrasted with the "classics," when the "classics" have preceded it and made the hearer comfortably receptive to the whole program, and when it is not hedged about with "explanations" and excuses, which tend to make the hearer suspicious. Virgil Thomson recently wrote that the radio listener may react to music differently from the listener in the concert hall because the radio listener is an isolated individual and the listener in the concert hall is conditioned by crowd psychology. The reaction to modern music on the air may be good evidence of this. It is at least possible that the unfavorable reception sometimes given new things on the concert stage is a crowd affair, and that the individual reaction in the home may be more perceptive and more sympathetic because crowd pressures are absent.

That may also explain why records of modern music are sold to the degree they are, since they are made primarily for the public to use at home. The recorded literature in this field is, of course, extremely spotty and scrappy, and particularly weak on the American side. American recording companies have not made an effort to encourage the native composer to the same degree as recording companies abroad. Organizations and patrons interested in American music could do more than they are doing to produce more discs in this department. If the money spent in subsidizing and preparing a "live" network broadcast of a particular piece were put instead into recording it, it could be sent over the air hundreds of times instead of once, it could be repeated until the public comes to understand it, and American music could attain a much solidier structure of public knowledge and respect.