SECRETS OF THE "MIKE"

By Bertram Fryer

Would-be Crooners and Radio Stars—here's some advice from a man who was a B.B.C. producer for ten years, and is now "headmaster" of the London School of Broadcasting.

RADIO broadcasting does, I suppose, look easy—at first glance. You just stand up and say things to a small box arrangement! Well, at first sight, so do stage and screen acting look simple, but we know that talent and training go to make up the actor.

And, though few people realise it, there is a very great deal more in radio broadcasting than saying a few words to a microphone. There is a definite technique of broadcasting, different from stage work, or screen acting—a new "third dimension" of entertainment art.

The all-conquering microphone is the cause of it. The mike is a queer affair. It does the most peculiar things to the human voice. Scarcely anybody who has heard their own voice coming from a loudspeaker (which can be done by means of the "speak back" recording system) has recognised it.

So, the mike demands a brand-new technique from all performers. It also creates a new type of audience reaction, and therefore demands new style material. It was because I realised what a startling new art broadcasting had become that I am to-day working hard teaching people the tricks of the mike in my own studios.

Your favourite radio star does not, of course, just stand up in front of the B.B.C. microphones and say his or her piece. The real radio artiste plays to the mike. The good broadcaster knows where to stand, how to pitch the voice, how to achieve the right touch. He knows what words or sounds will jar your ears; he knows how long his material should run.

The aspiring broadcast artiste has a more difficult journey ahead of him than, for instance, the stage or cinema artiste. In these two latter instances the artiste is able to "walk on," or to take part in "the crowd," which presents him with the opportunity of studying the masters of the art by close contact. If he is worth his salt, his opportunity occurs one day to take a small part, and so up and up.

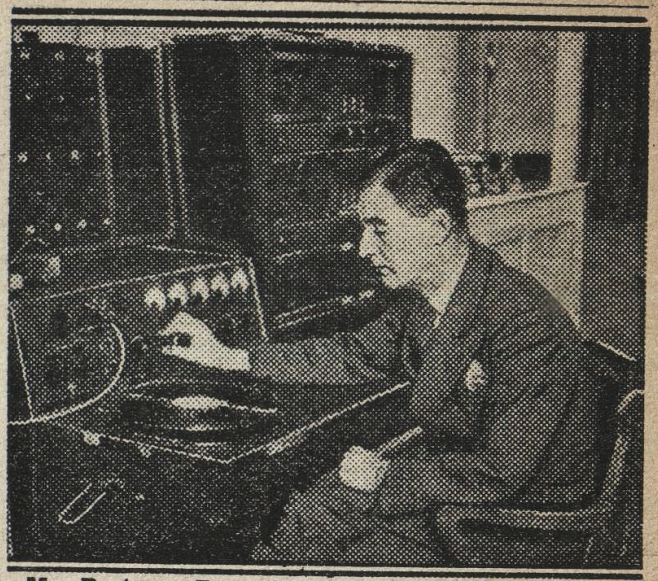
The unfortunate inexperienced broadcaster, however, confronts the microphone, probably for the first time, at his long-awaited B.B.C. audition, and fails hopelessly, either through ignorance of the "mike" or through nerves.

The most experienced orator, artiste or instrumentalist dreads his introduction to the microphone. Unfortunately, the actual meeting proves to be worse than he had anticipated. Gone are his familiar stage, his audience, his limelight; he is alone—or practically—in a futuristically decorated studio, with a glistening microphone waiting with a relentless grin (or so it seems to the unhappy broadcaster) and a strange, overpowering "deadness."

The science of sound means nothing to him, and "acoustics" is something which he probably associates with unfortunate lack of hearing. He is very, very ill at ease. A white light flashes at him; his heart commences to sink—the red light is before him; he must begin . . . and he is paralysed!

The safest policy the inexperienced broadcast artiste can adopt is to *forget* that the microphone is a medium through which he is reaching millions and to regard it as one intimate friend to whom he is speaking or performing.

Personality, in an artiste, is, more often than not, the intimate touch. Take for example, Mr. Christopher Stone. The listener adores him because he feels that each little remark is sent personally to him. This "intimate touch" is not an art—and *can* be acquired.



Mr. Bertram Fryer listening to the play-back of an aspiring radio star at his studio control panel.

The new broadcaster must study his material from the new angle, bearing in mind, whether he be orator, vocalist, or comedian—particularly in the latter instance—that his success depends solely on what the listener *hears*. No error can be covered, as on the stage or platform.

The orator must avoid redundancy, and realise that to be pedantic is fatal.

The vocalist must not linger through verse and chorus; the listener is impatient, and variety is the spice of his programme. The "straight" singer, likewise, must avoid numbers of undue length.

And now a special word to the would-be crooner: Do not attempt to copy any well-known crooner, no matter how popular. Study your own style, develop your own personality—and take your job seriously.

"I *do*," protests the potential crooner indignantly. Perhaps. On the other hand, the crooner forgets that he needs a basic knowledge of singing, that his diction must be perfect, and his breath control above reproach. Crooning, like all radio work, is a real art.