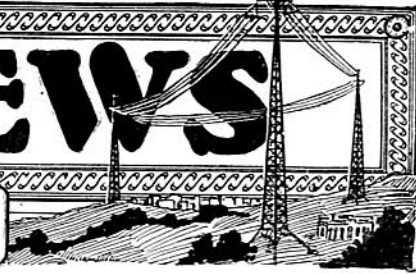




RADIO NEWS

H. GERNSBACK, Editor and Publisher
ROBERT E. LACAULT, Associate Editor

EDITORIAL AND GENERAL OFFICES, 53 PARK PLACE, NEW YORK



Vol. 6

MARCH, 1925

No. 9

Radio, the Phonograph and the Theatre

By HUGO GERNSBACK

TO THE student of history, the evolution of utilities is well understood and, as a rule, can be charted in advance. When our only means of transportation was the horse-drawn vehicle, the railroads suddenly appeared. Immediately cries went up that the horse-drawn vehicle was doomed to meet its death. But, decidedly to the contrary, there are more horse-drawn vehicles in use today than there were when no railroads existed. In other words, the railroad has supplemented the older form of transportation and created new uses and new business for it which were not dreamt of before the advent of the steam car.

Not so many years ago, when the telegraph first appeared, it did a great business. Then the telephone came along and at once the cry went up, as usual, that in a few years the telegraph would be obliterated. As people could talk together, they certainly would not waste the necessary time to telegraph and send long messages, when the spoken word was so much cheaper. The prophets, however, were wrong, as usual, and the telegraph business today, despite the telephone, is thousands of times larger and does more business than it did before the advent of the telephone. It is just another case of one utility aiding and enlarging another.

When the bicycle first was invented, everyone hailed it, until the automobile came along. And then again the cry went up that, surely the bicycle—"which is nothing but a fad, anyway"—was doomed. As the people could ride in automobiles they certainly would not ride on bicycles. Again the prophets were wrong. As any statistician can tell you, there are today actually many times more bicycles in use than there were before the automobile. But why go on with a long list? It becomes monotonous in its sameness.

This introduction is given simply because, in 1922, the usual cry went up that people with radio sets in their homes would have no more use for the phonograph, and that the latter would soon disappear from the face of the earth.

Great was the shout that went up, three years ago when broadcasting first appeared, from all phonograph manufacturers and dealers, and their gloom was matched only by their short-sightedness. Many articles appeared in the leading journals, particularly those devoted to the phonograph interests, depicting dark and dismal views upon the future.

It is interesting to note that available statistics now show that there are more phonographs used at present than before the advent of radio, and that more records are being sold than at any time during the history of the phonograph.

IN THE June, 1922, issue of RADIO NEWS, the writer made the following predictions, which are interesting now, chiefly because of their fulfillment. In that issue, the writer said as follows:

"It costs money to buy phonograph records once you have the machine. It costs nothing to have all the music in the world which you desire, once you have a radio outfit. But there is no reason in the world why the two should not get along harmoniously, even as conditions are at present.

"You will no doubt find, during the next two years, that every phonograph store will be selling radio appliances. In many cities throughout the east they are already following such a plan, having been driven to it by a slump in business. The leading phonograph trade journal now has a radio section. The logical upshot of it all will be met when the phonograph interests, instead of opposing radio, open their arms and welcome it.

"This is precisely what we are coming to. The machines of the future will serve the double purpose of record-music and radio. Thus the public will be given a new incentive to buy phonographs, which incentive seems to be lacking at the present time. The more the two can be cemented together, the better

the results, not only for radio—which does not need any assistance—but certainly for the phonograph."

The preceding paragraph is interesting, because this very prediction has come true. The largest phonograph manufacturer in the country is actually making a phonograph now that has space for a radio outfit, while another very large phonograph manufacturer is equipping his product with a set made by one of the largest radio manufacturers in the country.

We may, therefore, say that the writer's prediction that the radio and phonograph industry would be welded together has become an accomplished fact.

A few weeks ago, on New Year's Day, there arrived the big event for which the entire radio industry had been waiting, namely, the advent of grand opera stars into the field of radio entertainment. John McCormack, famous concert singer, and Lucrezia Bori of the Metropolitan Opera Company, through the courtesy of the Victor Talking Machine Company, broadcast to an audience that is variously estimated as being composed of from six to eight million listeners. It is also estimated that the broadcasting of these two artists sold no less than 150,000 phonograph records of the selections they sang before the microphone. We do not believe that manufacturers of phonograph records, in their wildest dreams, before the advent of radio, ever imagined that they could sell as many records during one single occasion as they did on this one. And so it goes.

THE latest ravings are from the theatre. The theatre has as yet not learned its lesson from the phonograph manufacturers, and when, during the broadcasting of the stars just mentioned, on January 1st of this year, half of the theatres in New York were empty, the theatrical magnates at once had a bad case of nerves, because they claimed that their theatres stood empty while people stayed at home and enjoyed the free radio concerts.

So far, the theatrical interests have always worked against anything connected with radio. Some of them go so far as to forbid their actors appearing before the microphone. Others, if allowed to broadcast a play, find it necessary to pay their actors double salaries if such a play is broadcast. It is about time that the theatrical interests learned that they cannot fight radio with such prehistoric weapons. The thing to do is to work with the radio interests, as the phonograph interests have found it profitable to do.

The writer has not changed his mind since 1922. In June of that year, in RADIO NEWS, page 1146, he broached the subject and said as follows:

"Of course, any one who thinks about the matter calmly must appreciate the fact that, if anything, radio certainly gives the theatre, the actors and the singers the best possible advertising medium. One surpassing their best imagination. Think of an audience of 300,000 people listening to a singer! What better advertising could there be? And some of these 300,000 people, when they get to town, as they invariably do, will wish to see and hear that singer in person. The radio audience is not always a radio audience; it frequently becomes a theatre audience as well. To think that a radio man is shut in all the year around is ludicrous.

"Even the most ardent radio fan, after listening in for five or six days in the week, will wish to go to a show on the seventh day. One of these days the theatrical interests will wake up to the fact that in radio they have the greatest possible and the very cheapest advertising medium ever available to them."

What was true in 1922 is even truer in 1925.