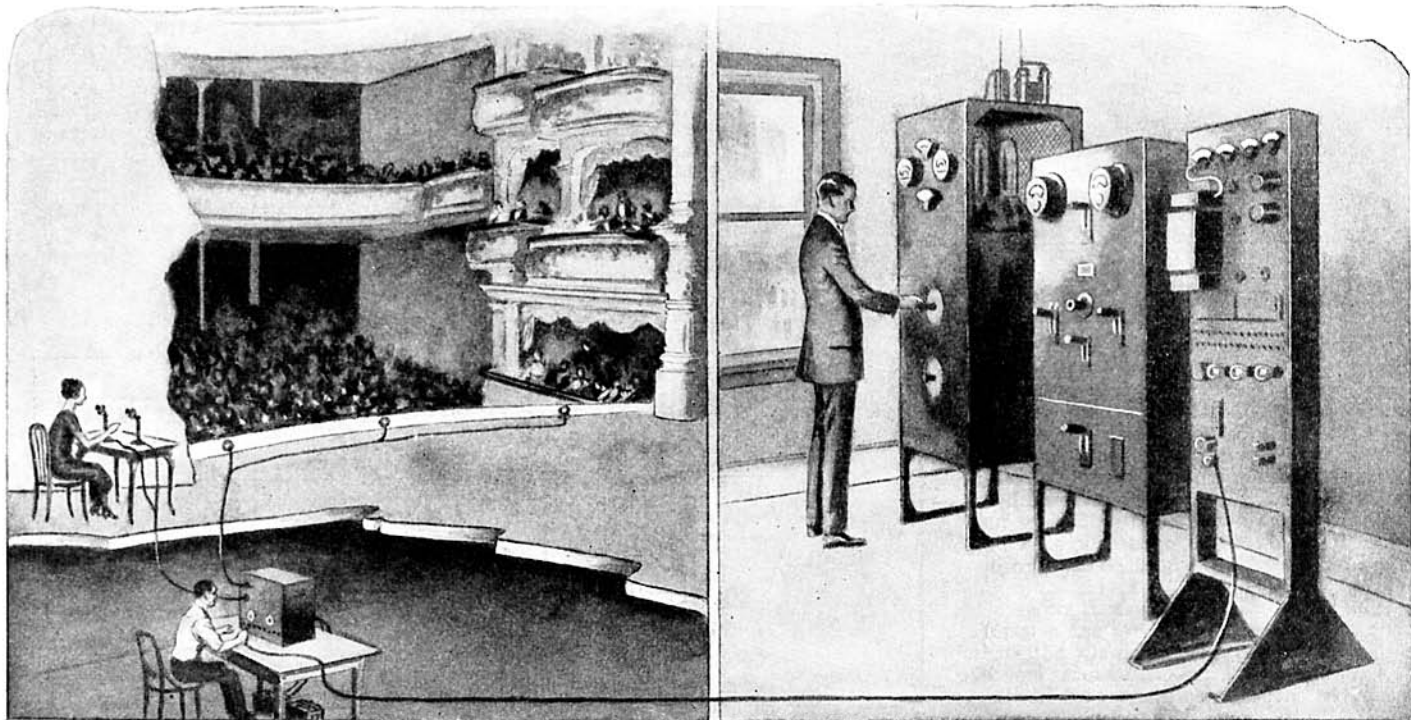




How Bertha Brainard "Broadcasts Broadway"

By GOLDA M. GOLDMAN



Above is Shown How a Play is Broadcast Directly from the Stage of a Theatre. A Telephone Line Connects the Theatre to the Station, an Amplifier Being Used Under the Stage to Boost Up the Music and Voice Before it is Relayed.

Photo by Courtesy of Radio Corp. of America

"I WISH you could see this dance," says Miss Brainard as she talks to you from the wings of a theatre.

"I wish you could see Bertha Brainard as she 'Broadcasts Broadway,'" is what I thought the first time I saw her in the old Westinghouse studio WJZ in Newark. She is, to be as alliterative as her name, a dainty, delightful, debonair little lady, who would make as charming a picture on the stage as do any of the popular favorites whose work she tells you about. Her hair is her crown of glory, and a very gleaming crown it is at that. She herself said of it once:

"When I want the people to remember me I take off my hat. When I don't care I keep it on!"

Since Miss Brainard's mind is as agile as is her small person as it flashes about the studio, she originated her own "stunt" over a year ago. It occurred to her that radio reaches vast audiences in out-of-town sections, who see, at the most, only one metropolitan newspaper each day,



On the Left Miss Brainard is Seen Broadcasting "To the World," Which Conceals the Microphone of Station WJZ, the Last News of the Theatrical District of New York City.

and in the majority of cases see none at all. These people find it exceedingly difficult to keep abreast of the modern dramatic movements, as such information as they can obtain is culled from the criticisms in the various periodicals. These in most instances are comparatively colorless recitals, lacking the flavor of personal contact with the people and affairs of the theatre.

To Miss Brainard came the idea of giving informal talks by radio on the interesting plays of the day. Mr. Poponoe, studio manager of WJZ, now the Broadcast Central of the Radio Corporation of America, agreed to this plan, and so for the first time Bertha Brainard "Broadcast Broadway."

The selection of plays for this feature is a very careful one, for so many youngsters listen in that sex and problem plays in general, regardless of their individual merits, must be avoided. Comedies and musical shows predominate, and for each of these in her pleasant fashion Miss Brainard gives the name and producer of the play, the star

(Continued on page 226)

U.S. PATENTS



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How Bertha Brainard "Broadcasts Broadway"

(Continued from page 134)

or stars, author of the book and lyrics, and a brief and interesting summary. The conclusion is a short paragraph on the types of persons who might be interested in this particular presentation.

BROADCAST INCREASES AUDIENCE

Letters to Miss Brainard indicate that her informal talks have had exactly the result that she anticipated. As she frequently adds to her outline a description of unusual gowns or stage-settings, those who cannot get to see the plays at all feel that they have been visualized for them, while those who make periodic visits to the big town, as buyers, etc., know when they come here just what there is on Broadway to appeal to their tastes, and so get the utmost enjoyment out of their time and money.

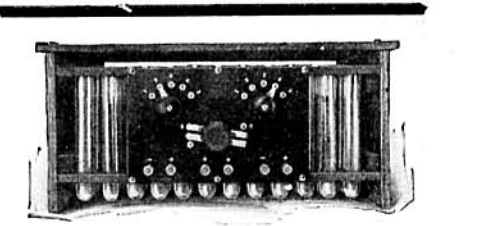
But when in one of the charming new studios of WJZ or WJY, Bertha Brainard stands before the great globe in which a microphone is cleverly inserted, and Broadcasts Broadway "to the world," she is performing only a part of her interesting duties. An equally important activity is that in which as A.B.N. (Announcer Brainard of New York) she broadcasts Broadway productions directly from the stage and wings of the theater.

When some production has been brought particularly to her attention Miss Brainard sees the show. If it strikes her as being proper material for her widely varied audience, she brings it to Mr. Poponoe's attention. His approval obtained, the next stage is to gain the manager's permission to broadcast. Once he agrees, Miss Brainard sees the play four or five times from the front, notes costumes, scenery and action, and particularly times every detail, such as overtures, curtains, and dances. She then works out a careful introduction covering the same main details as in her other talks—that is, the author, producer, cast and a summary of the scenes to be broadcast. She also explains anything in the action which may tend to confuse those hearing the words but not seeing the accompanying action; for instance, a burst of applause always marks Miss Ethel Barrymore's first appearance on the stage, and the listener-in would naturally be unable to account for this. Or in a musical comedy, the dialogue is interrupted by a dance, so Miss Brainard speaks of it in advance. Stage settings and costumes come in for a particular emphasis in this type of broadcasting, and here our announcer feels that a woman certainly has an advantage over a man announcer, since she observes clothes and other accessories so much more naturally.

"I think," she smiled at me, "that a man saying, 'Miss Peterkins is wearing a black velvet gown with a rope of pearls,' would be just too sweet!"

SPECIAL WIRES CONNECT STAGE TO STATION

In order that Station WJZ broadcast directly from the stage, the Western Union gives them a special direct line from Aeolian Hall to the theater. To the end of this heavy wire the Radio Corporation engineers attach two finer wires inside the theater. One of these is connected with the stage microphones, one with A.B.N.'s special microphone in the wings, all of which are joined to a portable voice amplifier. The microphones on the stage, which may number anywhere from two to five, are almost always placed down by the footlights and are quite invisible to the audience. If there is an unusual amount of work done toward the back of the stage, one may be placed



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there, and two are occasionally attached to the fronts of the stage-boxes. Usually, however, those in the footlights suffice. When Miss Brainard finishes talking through hers, it is switched off, and those on the stage thrown open. This change may be made either way at any time during the performance, so that she may talk during the intermissions, or explain during one of the aforementioned pauses exactly what is transpiring.

So keen are the stage transmitters that listeners-in may even hear the click of a telephone receiver, or the staccato tap-tap of a dancer's heels as she does a spirited Spanish dance. Engineers in the wings keep the receivers on constantly, so that they can judge how the sound is going out, and the transmission is kept on the mark by means of their portable voice amplifier.

At perhaps five minutes before the overture begins, Miss Brainard, standing in the wings on the prompt side of the stage, begins her carefully timed introduction. The house electricians watch her, she raises her hand, and simultaneously with her last words the overture begins, her microphone is switched off and the stage microphones are switched on and for the next hour or two, "The Play's the thing."

Ordinarily a large company is not told in advance that they are going to broadcast, and learn that fact only as they are about to go on. Then excitement reigns, and the chorus immediately begins to wonder whether mother and wife and little brother are listening in. Of course the entire company plays at an unusually high pitch that night, realizing that their audience is unlimited, so that an especially fine performance is presented.

ACTORS SUBJECT TO "BROADCAST FRIGHT"

Miss Brainard tells many interesting anecdotes about the effect produced upon the actors when told what is about to happen. Even the greatest among them are not immune from the excitement, and are for a little time at least a trifle nervous. When the "Laughing Lady" was sent out, hardly a voice was natural for the first few minutes and even Miss Barrymore talked at a mad pace. The effect seems to be much the same as on a first night, for the company is so impressed by the size of its audience and the distances to be reached that they feel unsure of themselves for a brief space. Mr. Wallace, the publicity manager, relates that on the above-mentioned occasion Mr. Harrison Peters hoped that no outrageous offers would reach them from Finland!

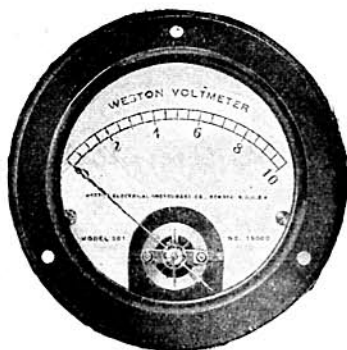
It is also circulated that when one very successful play which had already been enjoying a six months' run was broadcast, some of the principals were found on the stage before the curtain went up, and one of them was saying.

"Let's just run over this scene. I don't feel quite sure of the lines!"

The great majority of the actors, particularly the stars, welcome the innovation as a great and interesting advance in the art of the theater, and rush off into the wings between their scenes to listen-in on the engineer's phones. Their greatest regret seems to be that they cannot hear their own voices as they go out. Some of them even say a word of greeting at the end of the performance. One youthful star, who has made a particularly strong and lovable appeal this winter, became so nervous while doing this that quite unconsciously he hugged Miss Brainard with his left arm as tightly as possible during the whole speech, and gazed at her in dumb amazement when he found himself in that position as he concluded.

MANY PLAYS ALREADY BROADCAST

The musical comedy artists seem to feel the strain less than the others, and will play just as high if Mr. Gus Edwards is re-



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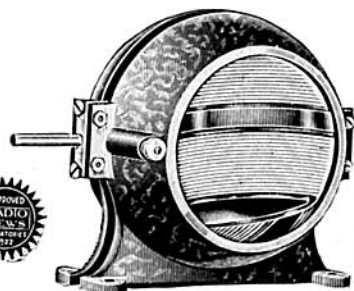
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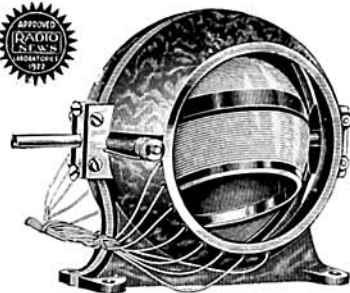
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ported in the house as they will for a radio audience.

The first play to be broadcast in this fashion was "The Gold Fish" in which Miss Marjorie Rambeau was starred last year. Since then a great number have traveled far through the air, among them such popular attractions as "The Old Soak," "Sally, Irene and Mary," "The Dancing Girl" from the Winter Garden, "Caroline," "The Fool," "Romeo and Juliet," with Jane Cowl. The majority of these have broadcast only a portion of the play, but some of them have gone out in their entirety, including such fine productions as "The Mikado" by the De Wolf Hopper Opera Company from a New-ark theater; the Augustus Thomas production of "As You Like It"; and one of the biggest coups of all was "The School for Scandal," which the Players' Club presented with an all-star cast containing John Drew, Ethel Barrymore, Richard Mantell, Walter Hampton, and many other notables.

From this impressive list of plays, producers and actors, it is obvious that this broadcasting of plays must have justified itself not only from an artistic and recreational standpoint but from a business standpoint as well. When Miss Brainard conceived the idea in the spring of 1922, producers laughed at her and predicted that such a procedure would result in empty theaters. To one such man she said:

"This thing is going to be a success just as all the other broadcasting has been. Why not be one of the first to put it over? If you don't you'll come to me within a year and ask me to do one of your plays."

And he did.

Statistics are to be had for the asking from any of the theaters which have broadcast, indicating the numbers who have come to the box offices for tickets stating that they heard the play on their radio sets and felt they had to see it. Gallery and balcony receipts especially show results. On one occasion 16 men sat in their club room and heard part of a performance through their loud-speaker. So surprised and impressed were they with its enjoyable qualities that they suggested the play for a club outing at their next meeting, with the result that the club took the house for one night.

Producers to a man make the obvious answer to questions on the value to them of this work.

"It's the greatest advertising stunt that has yet been invented, and if it did not pay we wouldn't be doing it."

And ordinarily they add:

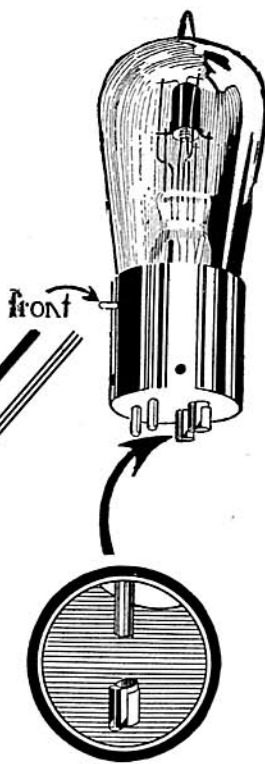
"Of course, Miss Brainard is largely responsible for its success. She seems to know what the public wants, has the personality to put it over, and has the ability to think on her feet, which is essential to any undertaking."

The only possible objection which could be made to this type of broadcasting is that which was made in the beginning by those producers who held out against it, namely, that hearing the play in this way, there would be no incentive to visit the theater, and so the theatrical business would be ruined. I think Mr. Charles D. Isaacson, who has broadcast over two hundred fine concerts, answers this most ably when he says:

"Human beings will always be more interesting than their pictures or voices. I may telephone to the woman I love and listen to her voice over the wire, and I may lift her photograph and gaze tenderly upon it, but I prefer to be with her herself. . . . When people are listening to the radio they are not being fully satisfied and never will be, not while human beings are in existence."

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