



On arriving for the general audition the prospective radio star is asked to sign a card describing her experience, etc.



The author makes some notes on the personal histories of those taking the general audition at the NBC Studios.

DO YOU WANT AN *Audition?*

by NORMAN D. MODELL

For anybody who thinks that they should be on the radio, it is easy to get an audition. The author tells what to do, and what not to do. By following the suggestions,—if you have talent—you have a good chance for success.

A GENERAL audition is something like sifting a school of minnows through a coarse-holed net which retains only the giants and lets the pee-wees slip back into the obscurity of the lake. To the uninitiated spectator, it is a drama charged with thrills. The career of a future radio star may be in the making. To the auditioner, it is a nerve-tautening ordeal. The mike leers at him like a hobgoblin escaped from the nether regions.

The story goes round that only the select have the privilege of getting the wits scared out of them. I decided to investigate this grave situation, and made a tour of the major studios. The rumor was altogether untrue. Anyone and everyone is admitted to the general audition. And for a very good reason too, which will be disclosed at the end of this article, unnecessarily of course, because by that time the reason will be as evident as the hammy flavor of some of the amateur acting.

The audition is held in any studio that happens to be unscheduled at the time. The room is carpeted, the walls lined with soundproofing materials and covered here and there with thick, plush draperies. In

one corner of the studio is a concert grand piano with an upright microphone standing guard beside it. Another mike for the dramatic talent reigns over the center of the floor. The back wall is a pane of thick plate glass through which the production director and the audition committee peer at you and scribble notes. The engineer twiddles the microphone faders on the control panel.

But before you get to these inner sanctums, you have to register several weeks or months before at the outer desk. "You do character parts? Well then," says the girl in charge of applications, "be prepared to bring several *short* selections. Try to make them as varied as possible so that we might get an all-around idea of your ability." Or if you're a vocalist, you will be advised not to sing only swing songs.

She's very sweet in instructing you. That's the trouble. She is too afraid of hurting your tender senses to tell you everything you have to bring. Your courage, for instance. Your self-assurance. Like everybody else who takes an audition, you'll park them at home on the parlor mantel along with your good sense, judgment, and microphone manners. Very

probably you will be like the young lad who quivered like a seismograph recording an earthquake while he sputtered his way through his piece. Finished with it at last, he was so oblivious of the rest of the world that he walked straight into a hanging mike which hit his forehead a resounding smack, and proceeded out of the studio as though he didn't realize how silly he had looked.

Finally you get your notice to come down to the station. If your audition is at NBC, you find yourself sitting along the wall right in the studio beside a dozen others like yourself. Columbia and Mutual have you wait your turn outside. But the National Broadcasting Company has a theory that you will perform better if you have an audience. You can focus your performance upon visible listeners, as in a friendly theatre. This helps tremendously. You see, you are given every opportunity to entice your hidden talent out into the open.

You practically expire from tension as you hear without comprehending the efforts of the other auditioners. The voice of the production director is very kind. You grow calmer and you concentrate with



Be yourself when your chance comes. Only by doing this do you give yourself the opportunity to show what you can do.



The director at NBC sits alongside the engineer. With the "talk-back," he gives out helpful constructive criticism.

dogged determination upon the script before you to make sure you'll give the correct interpretation to the lines. Your name is called!

Suddenly courage pumps into your blood. You are no longer timid. In much too dulcet tones you go into a school child's version of the speech that starts "To be or not to be that is the question!" You are too absorbed in histrionics to observe that the men in the control room have turned their masked faces aside for momentary relief. In the throes of drama, you have a feeling that this was the way you acted that night when Uncle Joe and Cousin Charlie applauded so heartily. Your time is up. The production director says "Thank you" very graciously, and "We'll call you if we need you." You go home, proud of the fact that you sparkled up there before the mike. You wait and wait and you think maybe the station misplaced your name. You cannot understand why they forgot to call you.

Well, I'm sorry. You were putrid! You ought to have heard what the production

director said about you.

If only you could have been instructed before you took your audition! If only you could have seen this list of don'ts!

Don't stand too close to the microphone. It is likely to distort your voice. Crooners have given the public the idea that the only way to broadcast is to crawl inside the microphone. That is not true with the present equipment. A position of from one to three feet away from the mike is usually better.

Don't rattle your paper. Amplification in the equipment will make it sound like tearing down a house.

Don't wear a taffeta dress. The rustle of the cloth will sound like static. Don't wear beads, either.

Don't throw your voice at the microphone. Use your voice in a normal manner and let the power of the equipment be responsible for picking it up.

Don't sing or talk as if you were before a large audience. There is no balcony in radio and your audience consists of persons all in front row seats. Sing or talk to

them as you would to a person close to you.

Don't be content merely to read the lines. Characterize. The story should be told so vividly as to stimulate pictures in the minds of your audience.

Don't try things that are out of your line; either as an actor or as a singer.

Don't insist on reading long passages or singing several songs of the same type. An experienced listener can get a good idea of your ability in a very short time.

Don't forget that radio is auditory. What you do in front of the microphone is not important. It is what you sound like that counts.

Don't leave out the imagination. Inject the character's entire make-up into your reading, song or act.

Don't be angry if the man who hears you tells you the truth about your voice or your acting.

Sitting in the control room during an audition, I solicited a few words of constructive criticism from Gordon T. Hughes, director at the NBC Chicago studios. He had just gotten through instructing the aspiring actors not to waste their limited time by prefacing their selections with an introduction. It's his business to be acquainted thoroughly with almost every play produced or published.

No sooner had he spoken than a lad of about twenty stepped before the mike and said:

"This is from the movie *Parnell*, a story

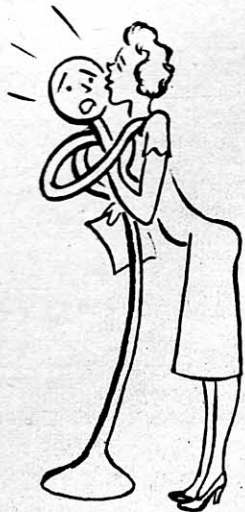
This is the type card that you will be asked to fill out at one of the large chains.



If you are successful, you may find yourself at the last rehearsal before going on the air for the first real broadcast. Even old-timers say nothing surpasses this for thrills.

W.G.N. requests that you fill in this card—and assures you that a call will be given you when your services or talents are needed.

Name John D. Jones
 Address 210 South Dearborn Street
 Phone AL 4-1111
 Entertainer (describe in detail) Also see record on page 10
 Experience Shirley Jones
Chickie Jones
Mrs. Jones



Don't Hug the Mike



Don't Rattle Your Papers



Don't Blast at the Mike

about the Irish revolution. I'm taking the part Clark Gable played, the part of Parnell." Then after a further synopsis, again he announced "Parnell" by way of entitling the piece, like a toddler reciting his elocution lesson before his mamma's bridge guests.

Mr. Hughes shrugged his shoulders in despair. Thirty seconds ticked off on his stop watch. Then the boy read from his paper. It was a bad choice.

"Here's an example of selecting the wrong material," said Mr. Hughes. Of course, only we in the control room could hear him. "This boy's trying to act the rôle of a man thirty years his senior. He has neither the voice nor the dramatic ability to play the part. He isn't even mature enough mentally to interpret the character properly. If he *could* act, he should have taken material on teen-aged characters."

The next to audition was a girl who started with something from *Elizabeth The Queen*, played a colored rôle and an Irish washerwoman, and ended up with a monologue about how she shot a Frenchman. Now this girl would be a rare treat at a fagging house party, but over the radio—!

Said Mr. Hughes: "Here's an excellent elocutionist. But she stops there. Someday she may learn to act. Now she's just reading. That defect is true in at least 80% of the cases. They don't make their characters come to life. They're lacking in spontaneity."

A middle-aged man came to the mike. The fact that he was minus a set of upper's was nothing against him. You half way anticipated his "Lionel Barrymore" and "Edward G. Robinson." They were even done well enough to win seventy-five dollars and a seventeen jeweled watch on an amateur hour. He had an acute sense of timing.

Mr. Hughes agreed with me. "Yes, he has a sense of timing. And that's a quality that a majority of amateurs lack sadly. They don't know when to put their point across with a sock. They don't know when to shade their voice and when to put feeling into it. But—" The production di-

rector stopped and drew my attention back to the actor.

If the elder Barrymore had ever waved his arms dramatically before the camera, this man would have flailed them wildly as though he were threshing wheat.

"That alone," continued Mr. Hughes, "would keep him from getting into radio. Not his gestures, but his voice. He's making a character into a caricature. The best indication of a bad actor is that he draws a character too broadly. It's either that or drawing it so fine that it falls flat."

The audition was over. Mr. Hughes asked several of the participants to remain. A few minutes of friendly advice could do wonders for them.

Muriel Landers, a high school junior, who had attempted Luise Rainer's *Anna Held* from *The Great Ziegfeld*, was told that she had a really fine voice for radio, but she had no business trying anything but ingenue parts from 14 to 17 years of age. She went away very much encouraged, and justly so, because she was invited to return for another audition in several months.

Herbert Zimmerman, a young man who graduated recently from the University of Chicago and is now going after his teacher's certificate, was praised as the best of the group. He had a little experience on small stations and amateur shows. His voice was excellent; he had a fair sense of comedy and timing. With a little coaching he may find himself earning his daily cake from a live mike instead of a school classroom.

Encouragement is very good as long as it is given to the right people. Many a non-professional artist, who is not yet ready for radio, may in a couple of years blossom into a celebrity. However, discouragement would be better medicine for the multitude of "parlor" players who bring no more than a fervent wish to the general audition.

At WBBM, Columbia's key station in Chicago, over 50 auditions are heard each week. In a six months' period of auditioning only one potential artist landed a microphone job. She is Shirley Sadler, now

staff blues singer.

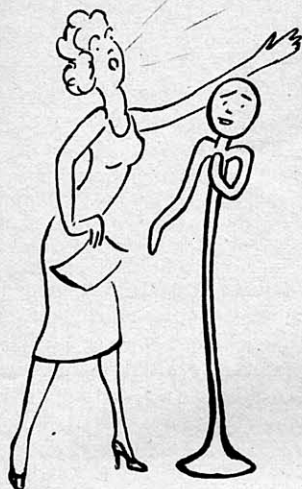
WBBM takes every precaution to give a fair hearing to the thousands who flock to the Wrigley Building, Chicago, for general audition. No matter who they are, or what their life has been, they are given their chance, because *maybe* one out of the entire bunch may have the voice or do the dialect needed. In one day, several school girls, a housewife, a butcher's apprentice, an NYA actor, a dramatics teacher, a Broadway actress, a man who was hoping to sing his way through optometry college, and a Lettish baritone who had sung in the Milan opera house were auditioned.

In order to judge the artists without being swayed by their personal appearance, the audition committee often sits in a special lounge, remote from the studio, and the voices are piped over. While the judges relax upon comfortable chairs and couches, they make notations on the talent. Their recommendation may mean a job for some hopeful artist. Occasionally they observe the audition from the control room. But in order to avoid the criticism that sex appeal is often the deciding factor in auditioning, WBBM assigns women staff members to talent of the same sex.

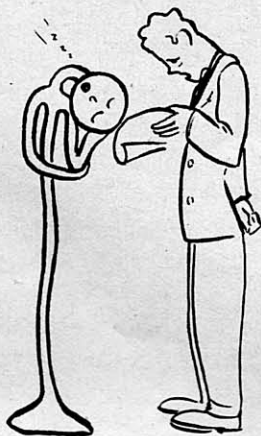
Kaye Brinker, the head of this committee and in charge of program production research, commented on the vocalists.

"It's pathetic," she said, "but either they have beautiful voices and they can't express their souls or they know how to put their feelings across perfectly and they haven't the instrument with which to sing. And on the rare occasions when they have both, they're utterly lacking in that certain something that makes for box office appeal."

In 1934, 1935, and 1936, WBBM tried to "discover" the one voice in a wilderness of voices that could command the attention of millions. Through competitive auditions of the public, it found Rowena Williams, former Minneapolis opera singer, who won the regional audition, then the national contest, in the famous *Hollywood Hotel* talent quest in 1934. Miss Williams was signed to star opposite Dick Powell as the result of the contest. Her candle



Don't Sing as Before an Audience



Don't Be Boring



Don't Turn Your Back on the Mike

was bright but woefully brief. She stayed with the CBS *Hollywood Hotel* program for just 13 weeks. Then after a short spell with NBC she dropped out of sight.

The second "find" of the Chicago Columbia station was Vivian della Chiesa, 19-year-old Italian girl who won WBBM's *Unknown Singer* contest in the spring of 1935. More than 3200 girl singers were auditioned in this contest. Vivian shot to stardom overnight, headlining her own coast-to-coast program.

Pleased with the success of the *Unknown Singer* contest, WBBM launched a new *Twin Winners* contest in the 1935-36 winter season. Winners of the twin contests were Alida Sturman, a legal stenographer, and Phil Crane, an office boy. Although they represented the best talent among 5,600 men and women auditioned, the *Twin Winners* lasted only 13 weeks on the air, and soon returned to their former occupations with their \$1300 prize money tucked away in the bank.

Does this suggest anything? It should.

In the general audition, luck is a word without meaning. You have to depend solely on talent—the kind of talent the public goes for in a big way. And still not one in the *fifty-six hundred* contestants mentioned before was able to keep John Q. Public interested for more than a few weeks.

What is the why and the wherefore about this deplorable failure of the general audition to discover a greater number of commercially worthwhile artists? I think the reason may have lurked in the back of Lou Jacobson's mind when he commented on the vocalists who came to audition before him. He is production director at WGN, Chicago's MBS station.

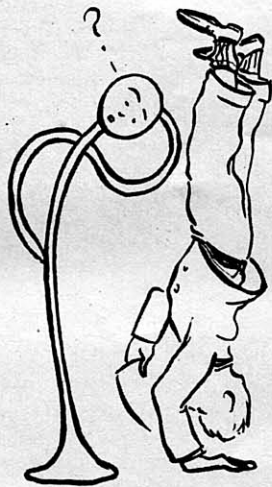
"They won't start at the bottom," he said. "They think they're too good to begin on the little hundred watters. They want a big station, and so they come up here before they're really prepared to audition."

"Understand, they're not all hopeless, as far as ability is concerned. Many of them have a very high grade of talent. But they

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Don't Read Long Passages



Don't Forget the Audience Can't See You



Don't Leave Out Your Imagination



Don't Argue with the Director

Audition

(Continued from page 29)

shouldn't expect to land a job on a 50,000-watt station before they've served their apprenticeship. As soon as they've obtained that experience, they'll appreciate how corny they sounded to us when they took this audition."

Mr. Jakobson was referring to the half

score of singers who had filed in and out of the studio for the past thirty minutes. A young fellow who sang *While Irish Eyes are Smiling* and forgot to put the smile into his voice instead of his face. A flat, midwestern voiced baritone who rendered a selection from the opera *Manon* and was blissfully unconscious of the difference between the notes, F, G, and A. A tenor came who sang only religious songs and should hide himself in the back line of a church choir. A lad who cupped his hand to the back of his ear while he sang, advertising the fact that he was unable to tell whether he was in pitch.

Were these singers to take the long road up to commercial entertainment; were they to look upon their chosen profession as a trade like carpentry and really learn it; were they to drop their dreams upon finding out that their voices are commonplace; the percentage of "discoveries" from the general audition would leap like a thermometer thrust into a blast furnace. The pig iron would be strengthened into bars of tempered steel. The premature hopefuls would stand by until they were sufficiently molded.

Just as we began to despair of hearing a potential WGN singer, a personable young lady stepped before the mike and asked Harold Turner, staff pianist, to play *Once in a While*. The girl was good. She had enough personality to give a listener a mind picture and make him think it was television. Mr. Jakobson asked her to do a number with more swing in it. She chose *Bob White*. And swing? Wow! But remember, it wasn't the numbers she sang, but the manner of delivery that put her across.

The swingstress was just a secretary at an Evanston, Ill., insurance company. She played in the Waa-Mu shows on Northwestern campus, where she was a popular Alpha Pi. Not long ago she won a contest conducted by Jimmy D'Orsey at the Congress Casino. All of which proves that her talent didn't just spring out of a vacuum when she auditioned at the radio station. It's been brewing for years. Some day she'll make a hit either on the air or on the stage. WGN plans to recall her.

By this time the reason for the "Welcome" mat and "Open House" sign at the door of the general audition doesn't have to be stated. But just in case:

The networks are forever graduating their artists into the movies or into the discards. They are always needing new clay to plug up the holes in the dyke—new singers and actors to take the place of the old. In spite of the small percentage of potential talent sifted from the general audition, the networks still find it wise to invite the public to their portals. To survive they must continue to raise their standards. Dropping the general audition would lower them. For when the dyke needs plugging, they would have to take the first excuse for an artist that came along instead of looking over their audition records and selecting the best.

Your chance of being amongst those records depends, first, upon whether you've prepared yourself sufficiently *before* you take your audition; and secondly, upon whether you've minded your "don'ts."

Not for Rebroadcast

(Continued from page 32)

in a test. . . . The *Chicago Daily News* and Radio Editor Charles Gilchrist have parted company—and no column has been substituted at time this is written. . . . One big publisher is eyeing the situation . . . wondering whether the public wants anything other than printed program tables.

Advertising managers are most irked of all. Having big space buyers say, "We're using radio entirely, now," is bad enough. Having the same bellwethers then come begging for free press publicity on radio-spent dollars—

That burns the ad men!

* * *

ROOM 600:

Bob Hawk is the sort of freelance m.c. who believes in being explicit. So, instead of merely saying, "write to me in care of WGN," he said, "Address your letters to me in care of Room 600, Wrigley Bldg."

Days went by and no avalanche of mail. Knowing something was wrong, Hawk called the post-office.

"You probably gave the wrong room number," the men of letters explained. "You see—your letters were all returned because. . . . Well, it's hard to explain over the telephone—but Room 600 is the sort of room where our postmen *never* deliver mail!"

* * *

SPY SCARE?

Lew Herman, a friend of mine, writes from England: "The BBC studios are not honoring letters of introduction when epistles ask bearers be allowed to tour studios. . . . They request letters be deposited with them two weeks before the tour is desired!"

* * *

Sponsors of the Louis-Thomas fight broadcast paid \$3,500 for microphone privileges.

* * *

DICTATOR AMERICAN STYLE?

What manufacturer has gotten such a hold on the radio industry catering to the amateurs, that he can dictate the policies of the A.R.R.L.? . . . that he can have his views endorsed by a body-politic of hams and presented to the FCC in Washington? . . . that he can reach out cross-country and tell Chicago amateurs what they should and should not put on their personal QSL cards? . . . that he can run a rival's advertisement off a page? . . . that he can order a national store what to run in its advertisements which do not concern themselves about his product? . . . that he can make a radio parts manufacturer change the tenor of his own "house paper" so that it does not show another rival's set? . . . that he can see to it that his drag with a certain publication is powerful enough to send its emissaries scurrying all over the country killing off any moves to oust them and him from a seat behind the governing body of an association? . . . and when will the hams wise up to him and his tactics? . . .

THE FIRST STEP TO CODE SUCCESS!

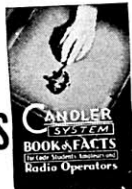
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NOW WORLD CHAMPION RECEIVER—
OLIVER AMILE

HOT from the judges Sanctum Sanctorum comes the news that Robert Rossi of 733 Watkins Street, Philadelphia, Pa., has just won the short wave distance contest run by the International 6,000 to 12,500 Mile Broadcast-Short Wave Amateur Club, with 225 verifications of reception of short wave stations, every one over 5,000 miles away. Congratulations, Mr. Rossi!

You can't do better than to choose the "world's champion" receiver Robert Rossi uses—you can't lose if you follow the choice of this International D-X Champion, and, yourself, pick a custom built McMurdo Silver "15-17."

Write for complete details of this, the "world's champion" all-wave receiver—or, hear it at your nearest progressive music merchant.

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