

ON THE AFRICAN AIR WAVES

by Marie Oriesa Tabiowo

When the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation arranged to broadcast special programmes from the Holy Child College, Lagos, Marie Tabiowo, a student with an exceptionally good voice, was chosen to sing solos. Later, NBC employed her in various positions. A very loyal Old Girl (Alumna), Marie has never lost her sense of perspective – or her sense of humour.

Broadcasting can be very exciting, frustrating and at the same time very satisfying! One of the most tricky jobs here in Nigeria is perhaps that of the announcer. The most heart-rending one sometimes is that of the producer. I have performed both duties and managed to survive so far...

Just a word first about the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation itself. Today there are over 1,500 people employed by the Corporation. Broadcasting facilities have spread to every section of the Country, with four major stations in Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu and Kaduna, and many smaller provincial studio centres which relay National programmes as well as originate local ones each day. The Corporation is similar to the British Broadcasting Corporation in organization, programme titles and style and in fact has B.B.C. staff seconded to it to take charge of training Nigerian broadcasters in spoken English, Production, Engineering, Studio Management etc.

The work of an announcer calls for a hundred per-cent concentration during his (her) tenure of office which is about four to six hours a day excluding other duties. My two years as a Continuity Announcer were very interesting because this was the period of learning for me and it really dawned on me that there's a lot to learn

everyday of your life in a Broadcasting Organization.

As an announcer I worked in shifts with sometimes a day off in a week and sometimes none at all for about three months, depend-



ing on how under or over-staffed Presentation (my section) was. The early morning shift lasts from 5.30 a.m. to 10 a.m.; mid-morning from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.; afternoon from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m.; and night from 6.30 p.m. to 11.30 p.m. when we close down for the day.

For the first few months I had a constant nightmare - that of not arriving on time for duty. You might ask why not leave home in time and get there on time. Well that is easier said than done. There are things like over-sleeping, or the alarm clock refusing to go off or mistiming one's movements. One of these things happened to me one fine morning. I was on duty and the night before I had my dress ironed, the alarm set, and everything lined up for the morning, and I went off to sleep. The next morning I woke up and thought I heard the NBC Station Identification "This is the National Programme of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation" - and it was my own voice I heard! "It can't be," I thought. "This is crazy!" I sprang out of bed and made for my radio and with trembling hands switched it on, only to hear "Assalamu Alaikum," and then, "You've been listening to Reading from the Holy Qoran by..." I did not wait to hear the rest. How I got dressed is what I cannot now tell but I know I sprinted to the nearest taxi park (about a quarter of a mile away) and jumped into the only waiting taxi. Of course from the last announcement I knew that the time was half past six when I woke up, which meant that the station had been opened half an hour earlier and I was already one hour late. "Move - go - *Oya kalo* - don't waste time - *Ejo oya*", I called breathlessly to the taxi driver.

Sleepily, lazily, the man turned to me and said:

"Yes?"

"Go, go, go, go..." I shouted.

Still lazily and completely unconcerned, he said, "Where?" By now I had lost another twenty minutes and it was almost seven o'clock. I was nearly in tears. "Please just start to move to NBC".

"Hm... you mean, Radio Nigeria?"

"Yes! Radio House - *Ikoyi!*"

That woke him up. "Ho! Ha! Ah! Why you no quick say so?" he demanded. "*Oya! Na go we deh! So.* (We're off!)" ... And we were...

At break neck speed we roared to NBC. How we did not have a serious accident or kill someone that day is beyond me. However I arrived at Broadcasting House at 7.30 a.m. two hours late and as if that was not enough trouble for the day, when it was nine o'clock and I had to announce Time Check, I confidently sat upright and said, "The time is a quarter to twelve. This is the National Programme of the N.B.C." That of course was the last straw! I nearly collapsed when someone walked into Continuity Suite and said, "Marie, look at the clock. What's the time? Talk about wanting to go home early after arriving two hours late!" I thought I was going to be dismissed but I found that the Controller and Director were most reasonable.

Talking about making wrong announcements calls to my mind the announcer who was on duty one evening when the Chief Secretary to the Nigerian Government, then Mr. Hugh Foot, came to broadcast. The announcer was to introduce him before he started his talk and he said, "This is Radio Nigeria. Here in the studio



Marie shows Mother M. Anita some of the apparatus in the control room of the radio station.

to give a talk is the Chief Secretary to the Government, His Majesty Foot." Poor man! He must have lost concentration for a second and the result - he forgot that the initials "H. M." stood for Hugh MacIntosh and not His Majesty. Mr. Foot of course was most understanding and amused. The talk went out and as Mr. Foot left he requested that the announcer should not be penalized. Poor announcer, he had nearly died of fright.

Such incidents, little though they seem, emphasize the important role of the announcer in any broadcasting organization. So much responsibility is shouldered by him as he is entirely in charge of the whole network during his period of office and it is his business to make listeners want to hear programmes that he is putting out. We have to compile and present record programmes, and also introduce live bands, either Dance bands or those which play Nigerian Music.

Producers also call on announcers to help do narrations for their various programmes. On the whole the announcer is the mouthpiece of the Corporation, although the work is mainly done in the studios.

For the last year, I have been a producer attached to the Women and Children's Section and we are responsible for putting out a halfhour magazine programme for Women, a half-hour magazine programme for Older Boys and Girls (the teenagers and young adults) and the Younger Children (5-12 year olds). Our programmes are designed to inform, educate and entertain our audience and so we have discussions, debates, talks on current affairs, features and playlets, talks on Home Economics, Child Welfare, Cookery, Beauty Hints, Fashion etc. We do hear from our listeners from time to time asking for more of certain items, especially from the women, and this is very encouraging.

My life as a producer has been much more hectic, faster and more exciting because we have to plan and originate programmes, draw up suggestions, pick the best, and then find suitable artists to take part in the programmes. For this, we have to call to see people or telephone or write to them and sometimes go out and interview them with our midget recorders.

This part of the work offers me an opportunity of meeting people from different walks of life and of understanding people better through personal contact. I've had the honour and pleasure of recording and interviewing Her Excellency Mrs. Flora Azikiwe, wife of the Governor of the Federation of Nigeria; Chief Fadahunsi, Chairman of the Nigerian Airways; Lady Alakija, Lady Ademola, Mrs. Jane Dick, member of one of the United

Nations Agencies, members of the American Operation Crossroads Africa and hosts of other important personalities from different parts of the world.

Nothing can be more disappointing and frustrating to a producer than to have everything planned and ready and then have the artist ring on the day of broadcast and say, "I'm awfully sorry, but I can't make it this evening".

Or you are all set to finish off programme, an insert for which you have taped, and the artist is out of Nigeria. You hand the tape to the Engineer Assistant who is to help record the rest of the programme; he presses a wrong button and your whole insert is wiped out!!! Well, you just have to find a substitute and hope for the best. On the other hand it can be very satisfying and heart-warming to watch your programme grow gradually until eventually it gets completed. It goes on the air, you hear it, and genuine, constructive critics compliment you on your effort. You heave a sigh of relief and next day you are on the move again collecting materials for your next magazine programme.

I have learnt a great deal in my three years of broadcasting. No matter what my personal troubles are, I know the show must go on and on time too. So I just carry on cheerfully, and try to make my listeners feel that they are all welcome to my programme, that I'm happy to be serving them and my country and I thoroughly enjoy every moment on duty. I have learnt above all the essence of co-ordination and co-operation in such an organization which is like a chain, a link of which must never be broken. And I, as one of these links, should always contribute my quota to keep that all important chain intact.