

Phantom Mask

THE FIRST RADIO DRAMA ORGANIZATION

By ARTA MAGINNIS, '32

IT is night. In a soundproof room members of a society of thirteen stand in a silent group. All eyes are on the space above the only door. Suddenly a red light flashes on, weird music is heard, and Phantom Mask is on the air!

For half an hour WNAD broadcasts the drama of Shakespeare, the wit of Wilde, or, it may be, the successful efforts of some Oklahoma author. The eyes of temporary Romeos and Juliets or Lord Darlings and Lady Windermers slide attentively across manuscripts. Footsteps approach and depart. Bells ring and doors open at the proper moments. At the middle of page six everyone expresses horror; at the end of page ten everyone laughs.

It looks simple, this reading into a microphone. But ask any one of the thirteen persons who have talked, laughed, and cried their way through the necessary five hours on the air to become members of Phantom Mask. "For each half hour on the air, it is necessary to rehearse about twelve hours," says Homer Heck, director of the WNAD Players and sponsor of Phantom Mask. "And it was really because radio plays take so much preparation that Phantom Mask was organized. A person who spends over one hundred hours rehearsing plays deserves some kind of recognition."

Since the time when the American public ceased to be amazed by radio itself and began to prefer to be amused by means of it, drama has occupied an important place on radio programs. The importance of radio drama caused the organization of groups of radio players. Now a number of university and college stations, as well as commercial stations, have their regular station players.

From one of these groups—the WNAD Players at the University of Oklahoma—came the idea for the organization of a radio dramatic fraternity. In 1931 six members of the WNAD Players—six students who had spent five or more hours before the microphone—organized Phantom Mask, the first radio drama fraternity in the United States. The organization is chartered for national membership, and word has been received recently from the University of Illinois and the University

of Iowa that groups there are interested in installing chapters.

The program of the University of Oklahoma chapter of Phantom Mask seems to deal in "firsts." Besides being the first organization of the kind in the country, the group has sponsored the first radio-play writing contest for Oklahoma, has held the first radio-writing short-course in the state, has broadcast the radio-dramatization of a first-novel, and, in April, 1935, will conduct the first radio-play production contest for high schools in this section of the country. Each year the program includes some new activity, but no one can predict what it will be, because some member of Phantom Mask will be the first to think of it.

The radio-play writing contest which was first sponsored in 1932 is open to anyone in Oklahoma. Any type of play may be entered—comedy, tragedy, drama, or farce—on any subject from a family quarrel to an economic revolution. Both original plays and adaptations of stories are acceptable. Anyone who fears to compete with Shakespeare and Moliere may adapt Poe or Maupassant. This year's contest closes February 1, 1935, and the winning plays will be broadcast by Phantom Mask in March.

In the first contest, fifty-two plays were entered. "Radio Magic," written by Mrs. Eugenia Whyte of Oklahoma City was awarded first place by the judges who were nationally-known leaders in radio and drama. The winning play of 1933 was "An Ideal Set-Up" written by Hazel Heckman of Blackwell.

In February, 1934, when the first radio-writing short-course was held by Phantom Mask, persons interested in writing for the radio, from all sections of Oklahoma, heard members of the University of Oklahoma faculty, an Oklahoma City University faculty member, and officials of Radio Station WKY of Oklahoma City discuss the writing of continuity, advertising, and radio plays. This year a second radio-writing short-course was sponsored by Phantom Mask. It was held in November so that persons entering plays in the annual play-writing contest might have the benefit of the advice of authorities on the subject of radio writing some time before the contest closes.

In addition to the sponsoring of these events, Phantom Mask broadcasts a number of plays each school year. These plays are radio-adaptations of classic and modern plays and short stories, and plays written expressly for radio use. "Perhaps the most popular play we have ever presented was 'Murder on Tour' by Todd Downing, radio-dramatized by Ernie Hill," says Bruce Wiley, sound-effects director for WNAD, and first president of Phantom Mask.

This year the first play broadcast by Phantom Mask was "The Bell on the Sea" by Elma Levinger. The broadcasts are made on Thursdays at 8:30 P.M. Twelve plays will be broadcast during this season.

"Our program does sound ambitious," laughs Irwin Bingham, president of the group. "In some honorary organizations, membership is a reward for work done; in Phantom Mask the members work even harder than they did when trying to qualify for membership. Ask anyone—from our veterans with twenty plays to their credit to the newest initiate who still remembers what 'mike-fright' is. But the work is interesting, and we hope to stimulate a state-wide interest in radio drama."



RAY HAUN

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clusively by women. A new era of progressiveness and a new type of reader-appeal began when Haun was added to the advertising staff of the *Ladies Home Journal*, a position which he held until about a year ago. At that time, he felt that the policy of the Curtis Publishing company was too conservative for the type of work he wished to do in the future. In spite of protests from his associates he resigned and became affiliated with the new magazine, *This Week*, whose policy is to be one of progressiveness and up-to-dateness rather than conservatism.

This Week is to be published by the United Newspaper Magazine Corporation of New York City and will have its main office in that city, with branch offices in Chicago and Detroit. The staff members are: Raymond Gilleadeau, president; Mrs. William Brown Melony, editor; J. J. E. Hessey, advertising manager; Robert B. Johnston, Chicago representative; and Ray H. Haun, Detroit representative.

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