

Words of Wisdom From FM's Unsung Installer—Bob Zirk



BOB ZIRK TINKERED WITH ONE OF HIS FAVORITE "TOYS"—A \$25,000 TAPE AND CONTROL DECK.

By MARTY LOKEN

"The frequency range of FM is so superior to that of AM radio that it makes little sense at all to buy an AM set."

The words are not those of an FM salesman, but come from Bob Zirk, one of Seattle's foremost radio engineers—a man who personally installed the equipment for nearly every FM station in the city.

Installation is hardly the end of an engineer's job, though, and Zirk can attest to this. Until two years ago, when he was wisely hired on a permanent basis by KETO Radio, the electronics whiz "just did a little work for everyone."

IN THE EARLIER DAYS, when Seattle FM had greater problems of transmission and reception, Zirk started the transmitter move to Cougar Mountain, from where five of Seattle's outlets now send signals. "Transmitters at Cougar Mountain can reach more listeners in Seattle and Tacoma than any other site, but when you place five stations on one hill, you're bound to run into a coordination problem," he says. All problems were solved with the founding of the Western Washington Interference Committee, however. The founder? Zirk, of course.

The roving engineer has previously had experience with California outlets, but is a strong supporter of the Seattle market. "Quality-wise, Seattle is on the level of New York or Los Angeles in the FM field," he states. "Los Angeles is actually the best area in the country because of its access to so many musical and entertainment sources, but Seattle ranks high when you compare our population with the number and quality of our FM stations."

In numbers, Seattle has nearly reached its saturation point. KTW-AM and KNBX-AM are planning FM-AM outlets in the future, but it should be a while before they actually make the change.

One of Zirk's favorite topics is FM stereo. He feels the multi-dimension feature will lead the medium past AM within ten years. About stereo, he comments, "It is the greatest thing that has happened to FM radio; if I owned a station right now, it would be completely multiplex, completely automated and completely taped—tapes are so superior to records that it is pitiful. With stereo tapes and decent equipment on both the sending and receiving ends, we can give the listener a better sound than he will ever get from his stereo records."

THE ENGINEER feels that FM shows its best form in live-remote stereo broadcasts—and he has handled many of them. They are, he believes, the nearest thing to live entertainment; even better in some ways. "If I had my choice of any remote broadcast in this city, I would quickly begin a live stereo show with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra," he says.

In a recent interview, we asked Zirk to recommend a number of steps to be taken by any tentative buyer of an FM set. These were, briefly, the factors to consider:

- 1. LOCATION:** If you live atop one of Seattle's seven "hills," or on fairly level terrain, an inexpensive set might be in order (reception is excellent in these areas). Valley-bound homes that are shaded from the weaker signals should definitely look into better equipment and antennas.
- 2. EQUIPMENT:** Never purchase a \$300 tuner to be used

TRAINING AND EXTENSION

University Station Has Dual Purpose

KUOW, the University of Washington - FM station whose call letters readily identify it with the university, has been on the air since 1952, broadcasting its own signal. But the station really gained its experience before that on Seattle's KISW-FM, which gave the university air time daily for The University Hour, from 4 to 5 p. m. for almost one year.

Ken Kager, now station manager, was production manager in the early days. He remembers well when the station's transmitter, situated on the campus, interfered with the Medical School. Some of its signals actually were picked up by medical equipment.

When the station had the opportunity to move to Edison Vocational School for transmitting, this and other problems were solved. Its wattage was increased from one to ten kilowatts. It now has plenty of power and is heard everywhere that its signal is not blocked by terrain.

KUOW HAS a twofold purpose: The training of students and the extension of the university far beyond the limits of the campus.

Because this educational station is a member of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters, it can subscribe to what Kager believes is some of the best FM broadcasting on the air—much of it "talk."

The N. A. E. B. provides such varied offerings as "Georgetown Forum," presenting government authori-

ties on a variety of subjects; a Canadian press show, "Changing Face of Europe" and "Germany Today."

"Hold Your Breath" is a documentary from Michigan State University about air pollution as a national problem while "Cartoonists' Art" has fun with some of the country's top cartoonists—both also from N. A. E. B.

KAGER PREDICTS that KUOW will, in the future, present many more University of Washington broadcasts than in the past—short courses, conferences, important talks and more live music from Meany Hall. He talks of the vast variety of

programming offered by FM as contrasted with AM radio.

Students do much of the station operation, some receiving lab credit for their work, others performing as volunteers because they like the work. Dr. Thomas Carey, Seattle physician, was a KUOW sportscaster during three years of his medical school attendance and an Ellensburg pharmacist was a staff announcer three full years—both as volunteers.

The radio-TV majors number from 20 to 30 annually. All of them get jobs. Badly needed was the FM station.

Many different courses from the drama, speech and journalism departments had courses related to radio, but most of them were theory only.

TODAY STUDENTS not only write their newscasts; they actually read them on the air.

"We did a lot of pioneering with FM," says Kager, "but now we are on the way to bigger and better things."

Kager is presently chairman of the radio board of the National Association of Education Broadcasters—a top job that attests to his competence in his field.

Stereo Offers FM Big Boost

Stereophonic sound has been credited with playing a role in increasing interest in FM.

Multiplex stereo is available only from FM stations, not from AM. It has been broadcast on an irregular basis by a number of stations throughout the country.

KLSN was the fourth station in the United States to broadcast stereo and the first in the country to do so with production-made equipment.

KISW and KETO also broadcast some stereo in the Greater Seattle area.

By November KLSN will broadcast its total schedule in stereo. Manager Cortlandt Clark believes that stereo is the greatest advance in FM broadcasting.

with \$20 speakers—the entire FM system is as strong as its weakest link. Balance is very important in components.

- 3. MONEY:** Try not to become influenced by the hi-fi bug if your interest is only mild. You may be the happiest FM fan around with a \$25 table model. Try to match your pocketbook to your desires.
- 4. WHEN YOU BUY:** Listen carefully to the set you are considering: Will it receive most of the stations clearly, without a lot of static? If it picks up the high-highs and the low-lows (especially in the store) you should not have any problems.

NOW THEN, ASSUMING you have purchased your set, just sit back, relax and enjoy the high-quality programming offered by Seattle's 12 diverse FM outlets. Bob Zirk may seem biased (and biased he is), but he is right in everything he says about FM radio (now who's biased?).



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Nowhere in radio or television do listeners have the varied programs that are offered by FM stations.

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FM stations offer you classics, Broadway musicals, jazz, folk music, conversation shows & dramatic productions.

FM

HERE'S WHY FM RADIO IS SWEEPING SEATTLE!

A fast growing number of Seattle fans are applauding the diversity, clarity and superlative listening pleasure of FM Radio.

FM gives you listening in depth. Listening to tones you can't hear in ordinary radio. Listening to music you don't hear on AM Radio. Listening to rhythm and blues, jazz, classics... a whole wide range of choice never dreamed of before. Listening to stereo and multiplex recordings that will give you a new experience in sounds. FM also brings you a variety of educational and general interest programs that have helped make Seattle's FM stations 3rd in the nation in independent FM programming.

GREATER SEATTLE FM ASSOCIATION

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