

Radio

Radio UNAM's Fifty Years of Arts and Culture

Radio UNAM has just celebrated its 50th anniversary. University officials, intellectuals and radio listeners all agree on the importance of this station, particularly for cultural issues.

Radio UNAM started work on June 14th, 1937. Beatriz Barros Horcasitas, its present director, has said that this station prides itself on keeping an open mind, even during troubled periods.

The idea of having a radio with an arts and cultural emphasis dates back from the time of the movement for university self-government. Its principal aim was to reach sectors which had nothing to do with academic life, to come into contact with a society of 16 million people, out of which

9 million (66.6 per cent) were illiterate.

Radio UNAM started out with few resources, but as the people who got it going have remarked, enthusiasm was such that it outweighed many financial difficulties.

In this, Radio UNAM is not very different from other non-profit radios stations. In an article which appeared in the *UNAM Gazette*, Alma Rosa Alva de la Selva says that its main concern has been to survive. This has made competition with commercial radio stations very tough.

Even so, this university station has managed to provide its listeners with a new concept in radio. Alejandro Gómez Arias, its first director, has said that from the very beginning Radio UNAM tried to "be different from other great commercial radios, both in

its aims and its programs, and to create a new style in transmissions, without, of course forgetting the main purpose of all university departments: spreading culture".

That is why this radio is considered the first of its kind in cultural aspects. Also, it was the first one to organize its programs so that they would link the university with the rest of society. Radio UNAM has coordinated efforts with radios with a similar outlook, while making very clear how different it is to other commercial stations.

When Radio UNAM first appeared only commercial radio stations existed, and they were in full swing. This gave it the opportunity to come up with and test plenty of new ideas. Today, this radio together with Radio Education (which belongs to the government's Education Depart-



Jorge Carpizo, UNAM Rector, and Beatriz Barros, director of Radio UNAM.

Photo from Gaceta de la UNAM

National Broadcasting



"Shoot Margot, Shoot, a Fair report on Mexican RADIO", by Fernando Curiel, Premiá Editora, México, D.F. 1987. 149 pgs.

"Shoot Margot, shoot" is the end product of the author's explorations in one of the less-known fields of our national culture: broadcasting (radio and t.v.). Here is an account, with knowledge of motive and malice, another history of the facts: a history very different from the view taken by private industrialists, and sometimes even adopted by the state.

Fernando Curiel, critic, essayist and narrator, was on two occasions director of the broadcasting service of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) (see note in this same section). At present he is coordinator of the Difusión Cultural (Cultural Diffusion) of the UNAM.

ment) are just about the only two cases as far as radio is concerned in the Valley of Mexico.

Mexico has a total of 703 radio stations, out of which only 27 are cultural ones; 2.5 per cent are AM, 2.96 per cent are FM and 36 per cent are short wave.

Alva de la Selva says "the university radios, with Radio UNAM in the lead, have shown us their importance when it comes to spreading culture through different sorts of musical, literary, historical and political programs, all of which have contributed greatly to Mexican transmissions. They have also made clear how useful they can be for furthering social causes and how vital it is to work in an atmosphere of freedom and respect whatever one's political point of view may be".

This attitude towards radio transmissions has always existed in Radio UNAM during critical moments. Beatriz Barros gives a few examples:

— The programs transmitted during the U.S. invasion of the Cuban Bay of Pigs which included interviews with people from the university and with well-known experts on Latin America.

— Radio UNAM's presence in the 1968 student movement in Mexico. Important aspects of this

were the recordings of Rector Javier Barros Sierra's speeches and the account of the famous silent march in which thousands of teachers and students took part.

— Covering the consequences of the September 1985 earthquake. Telephones were set up in the transmission booth to provide help and information. Radio UNAM received a number of distinctions for this.

— Last February, when the student movement pressed university authorities to grant a number of reforms Radio UNAM transmitted the ongoing negotiations between the student organization and the officials.

Radio UNAM has had its ups and downs, its good moments and its bad; nevertheless it has managed to overcome all sorts of difficulties during these fifty years.

Arias insists the radio should carry on as it has up to now. He also says "One mustn't forget that Radio UNAM is paid for by the Mexican people both to help them and to defend their identity which is becoming more endangered each day. In this it differs radically from many other radios which are a constant source of foreign influence".

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