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Preface to Eleanor McKinney *The Exacting Ear*

Erich Fromm
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That radio offers one of the most splendid possibilities to bring to each citizen not only what art and science have to offer, but also orientation on social, philosophical, and political problems is a fact that no one will doubt. However, there is no denying another fact—that the tremendous role advertising plays in radio, as well as in television, makes a radio station to some degree dependent on the good will of its advertisers, and hence very cautious about presenting views that might be controversial or even shocking. Yet for the nation to have the full benefit of radio it is important to transcend these restrictive factors.

In a far-reaching insight Lewis Hill conceived the idea of a new kind of broadcasting institution, one supported directly by its listeners whose lives would be informed and enriched by its existence. Radio broadcasting created by individuals in direct relation to listeners could bypass the restrictions of advertising bias and vested interests, and be free to broadcast the full and uncensored range of political views in America and throughout the world. Such a radio station could explore responsibly any controversy, could communicate music, poetry, and examine in depth every concern vital to human beings.

Pacifica Radio and its three broadcasting stations on the [04] East and West coasts grew out of this idea. This original and daring experiment began in Berkeley, California, in 1949 at Radio Station KPFA. The new radio station appealed to individuals, not mass audiences. It did not seek to broadcast everything in order to please everyone, but to concentrate on a few subject areas done superbly well. Its aim was to supplement the existing forms of public communication, not to compete with them. KPFA expressed over the air its expectant trust in the responsibility of its listeners: that they would voluntarily subscribe to exceptional radio programs just as they subscribe to newspapers and magazines; that they would pay this voluntary fee even though they could hear the broadcasts for nothing.

Such a new concept appeared to be manifestly impossible, and leading periodicals reporting on the new radio experiment predicted the venture would last about six months. Seventeen years later, Pacifica Radio survives, with a history of radio broadcasting that defies analysis. Thousands of civic and political leaders, writers, composers, poets, folk singers, musicians, artists, thinkers with no public role, concerned citizens of ranging views—all have appeared on Pacifica Radio over the years, having a public platform



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unknown in America since the traditional Free Forums of pioneer days. Techniques now common in radio and television had their origin in Pacifica's informal, intensely personal, uncensored, and free-ranging discussions, interviews, conversations, and documentaries. Controversial subjects never before treated on radio were frequently heard on all Pacifica stations.

Struggling against perpetual economic shortages, with dedicated staff members devoting uncounted hours to the survival of the stations, Pacifica Radio continued to turn out programming unmatched in its consistent level of quality and diversity.

Readers of this anthology will discover why Pacifica Radio became a phenomenon not only in each local area of its broadcasting, but throughout the entire nation. Listener involvement extended far beyond the act of subscribing to support the stations—because these programs and the stations producing them became a symbol and a reality of the individual voice in a mass society. Listeners worked for the stations in dozens of volunteer jobs, from fund-raising to technical and clerical work. At times of economic crisis, or when threatened by outside pressures, the stations received listener support on every level from dollars to personal work at and for the stations.

Pacifica radio stations know nothing of the isolation common to broadcasting in America. They are personal: a two-way communication and a two-way responsibility. The current of contemporary life is reflected in its fullest range in these new institutions whose major contribution to American life is yet to be fully understood and fully appreciated.

May this volume serve to further that end.