

Radio helps her bridge a gap

Talking to "Mamma Lena" in her South Terrace home is like renewing an old and dear friendship that has lapsed some 20 or 30 years.

This is the impression even if you happen to be meeting her for the first time, as she exudes an uncommon warmth and friendliness.

'Mamma Lena' (pictured at right), is perhaps more strictly called Mrs. Lena Gustin.

But to a radio audience of hundreds of thousands each day of the week she is their own "Mamma Lena".

She is friend, counsellor, confidant and bearer of news from their native Italy.

And she is also a disc jockey of sorts—but in a restrained and restful way, playing the soft airs of Italy from places like Venice, Florence and Naples.

Radio programme

She began a radio programme in Sydney about nine years ago. A year previously she had arrived from Italy with her husband, Mr. Dina Gustin.

She could not speak a word of English, although during a university course in journalism at Florence she had learnt fluently the French and Spanish tongues.

Soon after arriving she began working for "La Piumma," the newspaper of Sydney's Italian community.

It wasn't long before she was conducting three women's pages—writing stories of her own, answering reader's problems and organising a cooking and diet feature.

She was approached by the head of the Capuchin Order in Australia, Father Anastasia, to go on 2SM.

For more than a year she was on air one-and-a-half hours per week.

Switching to 2CH she slowly built up a listening audience to the stage where now she commands nine hours of the station's weekly air time.

Her mail averages more than 400 letters per week. Some she answers on the air, others require personal letters in reply and still others call for a visit to the writer.

This creates a tremendous demand on her time and energy—it is seldom she gets to bed before 2.30 a.m.

Yet promptly at 6 a.m. each day either she or her husband sits by the overseas radio which 2CH installed in their home to listen to the Italian news broadcasts.

Overseas news

This is supplemented by another session at the overseas radio at 10 p.m.

She then passes on the latest from Rome or Trieste or any other place in Italy in her daily Italian news session between 6.30 and 6.45 p.m.

'Mamma Lena' and her husband select the records to be played and arrange the schedules for each of her shows.

This production work is done from their home in Bankstown. Almost 2,000 records are contained in special files in the home.

Included in this number is one special record which a publishing company composed and had recorded for 'Mamma Lena.'

Its title is, naturally, Mamma Lena. For her interest in Sydney's Italian sport she was honoured by the Sports Association of Rome.

She is well-known not only among Italians in Sydney and Australia but among Italians in Italy.

