

# "MAMMA" HAS NO TIME TO REST

For the past four weeks, like many other Sydneysiders, Mrs Lena Gustin, of South Terrace, Bankstown, has been struggling to throw off the effects of a bout of 'flu and bronchitis.

But unlike most people, she hasn't been able to stay warm in bed to recuperate.

Four nights a week, her voice is the voice of home to thousands of Italian migrants in Sydney and Australia, the voice which soothes jangled nerves after a day wrestling with an unfamiliar language, the voice which brings them news of home, the voice which, in times of stress, brings them sound advice.

For Mrs Gustin is Mamma Lena of 2KY



Wednesday, October 11, 1967

The mother of all Italians, Mrs. Lena Gustin, of Bankstown, will meet the Minister for Immigration, Mr. Snedden, in Sydney this week.

Mamma Lena, as she is known by her thousands of listeners over radio station 2CH, will discuss with Mr. Snedden the assimilation problems of migrants.

Mrs. Gustin has been broadcasting to the Italian community in Australia for about 10 years. Her programmes include news reports, music, messages between friends and relatives and advice to Italians newly-arrived in Australia.

Mrs. Gustin hopes her knowledge of Italians will prove helpful to the minister.

In June this year the Italian Government honoured Mrs. Gustin with its second highest award —

Radio, the woman who has been honored by both Italian and British Governments for her work for Italian migrants in Australia.

Yet 18 years ago it was she, her husband Dino, and two children, who were struggling to make their way in Australia, unable to speak a word of English, unable to get a job.

It took them six months to get on their feet, and almost immediately Mamma Lena started helping fellow migrants.

She ran an advice column in the Italian newspaper La Fiamma, a job which lasted seven years, and was also editor of another paper, Settegiorni, for a year. She first started

broadcasting on 2CH and built up a huge listening audience over 15 years.

When nearly two years ago the station suspended its ethnic programs Mamma Lena moved to 2KY and during the last 18 months, the ratings on her four nights a week show have pushed the station higher than most other Sydney stations.

A motherly, friendly personality, warmth exudes from her voice whether speaking Italian or English.

And it is this warmth which makes her never refuse to help anyone requesting it, which makes her a marriage guidance counsellor, welfare worker and accommodation finder, all rolled into one.

She receives around 50 letters a day, some with requests for records to be played over the air, some with messages to be broadcast, greetings sent.

Others are problems. "My daughter has run away to Kings Cross, what can I do?"

"My daughter is 18 and has left home. How can I get her back?"

"My father was taken ill while on holiday in Italy — can he claim on his hospital benefits here?"

Many problems she passes on to the appropriate organisation, but

some still pin their hopes on Mamma Lena and refuse to go elsewhere.

There are phone calls at 7 in the morning, at 11 at night, but for all of them, Mamma Lena has a soothing word, advice, and where necessary, her physical presence at a court hearing or acting as interpreter for a difficult interview.

"There are so many problems, this job could drive you crazy," she told me.

Then after a little thought: "But it isn't a job. It's a mission."

Mamma Lena is the voice on Arrivederci Roma, but behind her she has the staunch support of her husband, "Poppa Dino," the organising brain, the journalist.

He gets up at 5.30 a.m. to listen to the news direct from Italy on a powerful short-wave radio in their "laboratory-office," a room lined with boxes of tapes and with hundreds of Italian records.

He selects the news to be broadcast that evening, translates the main points into English.

He chases up sponsors and advertisers, chooses music from the latest Italian "hits" flown straight from Italy to them.

"Australian announcers just go in and read what is put in front of them, but we have to do the whole program," he says, "and believe me it is a lot of work."

They organise con-



tests which bring in mountains of mail; a few years ago they ran a talent quest with listeners voting on their favorite artists — and produced a best selling L.P. record of the winners.

They present an award each year to the Italian person who has done most to promote the Italian community during the year.

Just recently, Mamma Lena presented this year's award to Bruno Butlini, producer of an Italian theatre company in Sydney, Compagnia Teatrale Italiana.

After 18 years in Australia, the couple have no wish to return to Italy to live, and in fact Dino plans to bring his 80-year-old mother to live with them in Bankstown.

Their children, Roberto, "Everyone thinks he is Australian," and Eos-alba, have both been educated at Sydney universities and have left

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## Pioneer for radio

Member of the Order of the British Empire and awarded Italy's second highest honour, The Cross of the Cavaliere, are two of the many honours bestowed on Mrs. Lena Gustin, or, as everyone knows her best, "Mamma Lena".

She has been nominated as Bankstown's Woman of the Year by a 19-year-old friend, Susan Tassini.

Mamma Lena and her husband came to Australia from Trieste in 1956.

Bankstown has been their home ever since.

Almost as she arrived in Sydney Lena Gustin became involved with the ethnic community.

Eighteen years ago she

pioneered the first radio programme for migrants at 2SM, then from 2CH and now 2KY.

Her programme, Arrivederci Roma, from 2CH ran for a decade and was acclaimed as one of the greatest benefits to the assimilation of migrants in Australia — especially the Italian community.

The greatest and the smallest problems of new settlers are important to

Lena Gustin. She helped people of all ethnic groups appreciate and understand Australia and Australians, in fact, she was for tens of thousands of migrants, the "bridge" between two worlds.

With the help of her husband Dino, Lena Gustin has made Australia "home" for huge numbers of ethnic people.

She is president of So-



Mamma Lena, pictured at a recent function with producer Bruno Butlini, who was presented with the Premio Italia award, from her radio program.

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