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MISS RUTH PRESTON  
CENTRAL FILES  
ROOM 699

*Chimes*

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U.S. PATENT OFFICE ALLOWS NBC APPLICATION  
TO REGISTER FAMOUS CHIMES AS FIRST  
'SERVICE MARK' UNDER NEW LAW

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The NBC chimes -- the famous "bing-bong-bing" notes sounded during station breaks on the network's affiliated radio and television stations from coast to coast -- today received the distinction of being the first "purely audible" trade mark dealt with by the U.S. Patent Office. The government department's Official Gazette, published today, contained the allowance of the NBC application to register the three chime-like notes as a "service mark" of the National Broadcasting Company.

The precise legalistic terminology of the Patent Office describes the resonant chime tones as "a sequence of musical chime-like notes which in the key of C sound the notes G, E, C, the G being the one just below Middle C; the E the one just above Middle C, the C being Middle C, thereby to identify the applicant's broadcasting service."

"Service mark" is a relatively new term in the Trade Mark Division of the Patent Office. In 1946, a new federal trade mark law, sponsored by ex-Representative Fritz Lanham of Texas, was enacted and gave recognition to trade symbols used in services as apart from trade marks applied directly to merchandise.

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A "service mark" such as the NBC chimes -- the first to be so officially labeled -- is defined, in part, by the act as "a mark used in the sale or advertising of services to identify the services of one person and distinguish them from the services of others, and includes without limitation the marks, names, symbols, titles, designations, slogans, character names, and distinctive features of radio ...."

The history of the NBC chimes goes back 23 years. It was in 1927 when NBC found the need for a signal -- a "go-ahead" device -- to put the programs on the air. Thus the three famous notes were linked into an audible trade mark readily identifiable by radio listeners as NBC's "signature." The NBC chimes have already been labeled as the best known sound sequence in the world.

Early days in NBC chime history were somewhat hectic, and many network old-timers recall the strange arrangements that sometimes went on the air. O.B. Hanson, Ernest La Prade and Philips Carlin each had a hand in the development of the present-day three-note signal, but not before experiments with seven-note, five-note and four-note signatures had been made.

Originally, the chimes were worked by hand, much like ordinary dinner-table chimes, according to La Prade, now NBC director of music research. "When we used seven notes," he said, "it seemed no two announcers ever got them in their proper order."

Since the adoption of the familiar "G, E, C" notes, NBC engineers developed an automatic system. Each of the three notes is composed of eight partial notes, and the 24 partials are then tuned to perfection by an oscilloscope and standard frequency oscillator.

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Hence, in today's modern radio and television studios, the chimes are put on the air by the push of a button. This trips an electrical relay in the master equipment room, setting rows of fingers on a revolving drum to plucking the eight separate metal reeds. The combined tones resulting are the three famous notes, each in perfect and automatic pitch. No microphone is used, as each of the metal reeds and a parallel strip of metal form a small condenser. The vibrations of the reed vary the capacity of the condenser, and these vibrations are amplified directly onto the NBC network circuit.

To keep NBC programs "on the nose," the chimes sound automatically at 30 seconds before the hour and 30 seconds before the half hour. They are preceded by an announcer saying "This is NBC, the National Broadcasting Company." This rule is not ironbound. They will not cut off an address by the President or one of his Cabinet members. Various special events and programs ending with the national anthem or a prayer are not interrupted by the chimes.

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