

An evening with Schatzky

By DEBORAH DUNDAS

The first in an ongoing seminar series sponsored by CHRY and *Excalibur* was held October 13 in the Vanier Senior Common Room.

The series — designed to offer information about journalism, broadcasting, and other media-related subjects — was launched by CBC's David Schatzky, host of FYI and the Radio Noon phone-in.

I met Schatzky on the night of the seminar in front of the Ross Building. After grabbing a quick bite, we made our way to Vanier College through the Ross Building, BSB and the tunnel. He paused occasionally to take a look at the posters plastered on bulletin boards and walls. "There's so much to do here," he said. "You could be doing something different all the time."

Perhaps this is why Schatzky has experienced the success he has as a broadcaster — he's such an interested person. During his days here at York during the late '60s, Schatzky wrote for *Excalibur*, worked at Radio York, got a degree in English and Theatre, directed a play, and, he says, got engaged. He also managed to pursue a wide range of activities in his professional career.

He began with the CBC in 1967 where he worked at summer jobs while attending Ryerson, for Radio Television Arts, York, and finally the University of Toronto, where he earned his B.Ed.

His career certainly hasn't revolved around the CBC, though: he taught a year of junior high school and ventured into television for a short time. But he discovered that his first love was radio.

"With radio it's so simple. You get the idea, you get the person, and you talk to them. I have a short attention span, so it's great."

Schatzky also spent a year at the CBC in Edmonton and managed a radio station in Sudbury. But Toronto is where he feels more comfortable.

"I'm not the stuff foreign correspondents are made of," he said.

It's partly because of this — and partly because he doesn't have the "ego" to uproot his family — that he wouldn't consider moving to the US, like many young broadcasters and journalists. "It doesn't matter to me whether I have a million people listening to me in New York City or 100,000 people listening to me in Toronto." This is also part of the reason, Schatzky feels, that Peter Mansbridge didn't leave Canada for the US: he was comfortable here.

Besides wanting to know how Schatzky broke into the competitive field of broadcasting, many students



DAVID SCHATZKY: Host of CBC's FYI and the Radio Noon phone-in spoke at York on October 13.

attending the seminar were interested in knowing more about what's involved in doing a live radio show — like the Radio Noon phone-in, where the range of topics is wide and where the broadcaster speaks with many different people.

For instance, how does Schatzky manage to be so tactful and diplomatic when many of the issues he deals with are contentious and often draw fiery callers?

The main reason, he said, is that he simply cannot insult his listeners. When he does disagree with someone, he can bring his personal politics into the discussion by attributing it to a source. For example, he'll note to a guest speaker that there has been some disagreement about one of their claims, and ask them to respond.

The guest may be an expert on gardening, depending on the time of year, and be booked months in advance; or if an issue has suddenly come up that the production team decides should be dealt with, the guest might have been contacted the previous day.

The formats of both the phone-in show and FYI are somewhat flexible. If, for instance, there was a shortage of callers for the phone-in, the producer could air some music. Or if Schatzky feels uncomfortable dealing with a certain subject on FYI, he has the option to not do it; this would only occur if he didn't feel he had the knowledge to deal with it.

Not that this would happen often. Schatzky keeps on top of things, and he has also a writer/researcher who helps him prepare for the show.

Some students wondered whether the CBC could be freer in its coverage than a private station because it is funded by tax dollars. Schatzky

doesn't believe this to be the case, noting that "our (the CBC's) mandate is to do interesting, illuminating stuff.

"Nobody wants to do junk," he added.

Those hoping to pursue a career in journalism, either print or electronic, quickly learned that the road is long and hard. Gone, it seems, are the days when, like Morley Callaghan, you can brazenly walk into the offices of *The Star* and wangle the editor into giving you a shot. Few people get hired now for being at the right place at the right time, said Schatzky. Far more important is education, and some sort of specialty training.

As well, Schatzky noted that people with regional experience move up through the CBC ranks more quickly since the CBC's national audience needs people who can analyse the effects of major issues in different regions.

You also have to be willing to start at the bottom. "We have a receptionist starting on Monday who has an MA," Schatzky said.

Another valuable way of breaking into the industry is to launch into it armed with some experience, such as that you can gain from university radio stations and newspapers. Schatzky emphasized his involvement with Radio York when it was still in its formative stages, and *Excalibur*, for which he wrote both theatre reviews and some news articles.

Does he find being a radio broadcaster challenging? Schatzky compares his job to driving a car. You don't think about all the different things you have to pay attention to, you just drive. "I don't notice the challenge," he said. "I just get a kick out of doing it."



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