

FATHER CIARAN KANE

'Any kind of beauty reflects God, and music is a reflection of that,' says Father Ciaran Kane. 'Music is life and life is religious in that sense.' It is not unexpected that music and religion should be so closely linked for this Jesuit priest who has spent so much of his life in Hong Kong. He has sung with the Hong Kong Phil. Chorus and 'been hijacked by the Bach Choir because they were short of basses.' Father Kane is a regular subscriber to the Phil. - though he fears for the future of the orchestra. 'Hong Kong is a very hedonistic place, more so than it was', while the Government pumps money into cultural events, 'society as a whole doesn't support music. I wonder how long the Phil. will last, its of no use!'

Father Kane began presenting 'Morning Prayers' when it was in fact 'Midday Prayers' and it was *live* and came from Radio Hong Kong's studio in Mercury House. He looks back with affection to those early days in broadcasting and the friends he made: Ken Scott, Ian Stuart, Ray Cordeiro, Ted Thomas and Ralph Pixton. 'I'm happy to have been involved in radio, I've developed a strong philosophy of the spoken word. We've become a very visual society and sound is a very different experience. In 'Morning Prayers' I've often read passages from the scriptures so people can listen, not read - it's not the same.' While the future of religious broadcasting may be unsure, Father Kane is convinced that in his years as a broadcaster here, he has had far more freedom to say what he likes than he would have done in many other parts of the world. Playing cassettes of 'Morning Prayers' to a colleague in Ireland, he was told in no uncertain terms that it was far too explicit to broadcast there. Here is it quite permissible to be obviously Anglican or Catholic or whatever because there is a balance of input from the various churches.

Ciaran Kane has been a regular presenter of 'Morning Prayers' since 1967, but more recently he has produced and presented 'Kyrie' - a programme of choral music. In recent surveys and audience feedback sessions 'Kyrie' has emerged as Radio 4's most popular English programme, and one that will clearly be much missed when Father Kane leaves Hong Kong for a sabbatical semester in theology in Boston, and a period at a Jesuit spirituality centre in Wales where Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote some of his poetry.



Father Ciaran Kane with Miss Cheung Man Yee

It was 1958 when Ciaran Kane first arrived in Hong Kong as a Jesuit student, he had already spent a very intense two years as a novice living a reclusive life - learning to pray. 'It was meant to be a testing period.' The young novice enjoyed his 'time out' looking after old men in the local poor house, at least he had the opportunity to read a paper and hear the news, it was there he remembers learning of the death of King George VI. A degree from Dublin University was followed by a return to the countryside studying philosophy. It was fresh from this green Irish countryside, the walks, the swimming, the boating and the companionship of other students that he came to spend two years on Cheung Chau to learn Cantonese. 'There was a culture shock of course, the heat, the smells, the people, but Cheung Chau, still a fishing village was quiet and rural, then there was the summer house in Stanley where all the young Jesuits would gather, going swimming at Shek O or Big Wave Bay - the beaches were deserted in those days, or walking to Brides Pool or seeing films at the Fleet Club. Hong Kong was a quieter place then. Kowloon ended at the airport, industrial development was only just beginning.'

In 1967 Father Kane returned to Hong Kong to take up his teaching post at Wai Yan Jesuit School. He was now an ordained priest, there had been four years of theology, a retreat for a year and another year spent studying media techniques, radio and television at Hatch End in London. 1967 was of course the summer of the riots, bombs going off around the colony, no buses running, the death of a close friend in the police, communist schools chanting their propaganda through megaphones - and everyone wondering if China would turn the water back on October 1st. Father Kane became director of the student hostel at Chinese University in 1972, but continued to be involved in both radio and television.

'Youth Wants To Know' was a programme where a panel of students interviewed local personalities, amongst the students were Margaret Ng and T.L. Tsim. Another broadcasting highlight was his TV commentary when the Pope came to Hong Kong.

There are many people in Hong Kong who will miss Father Ciaran Kane, not least Radio 4 with whom he has shared his faith, his humour and his knowledge and love of music.

Susan Kay