

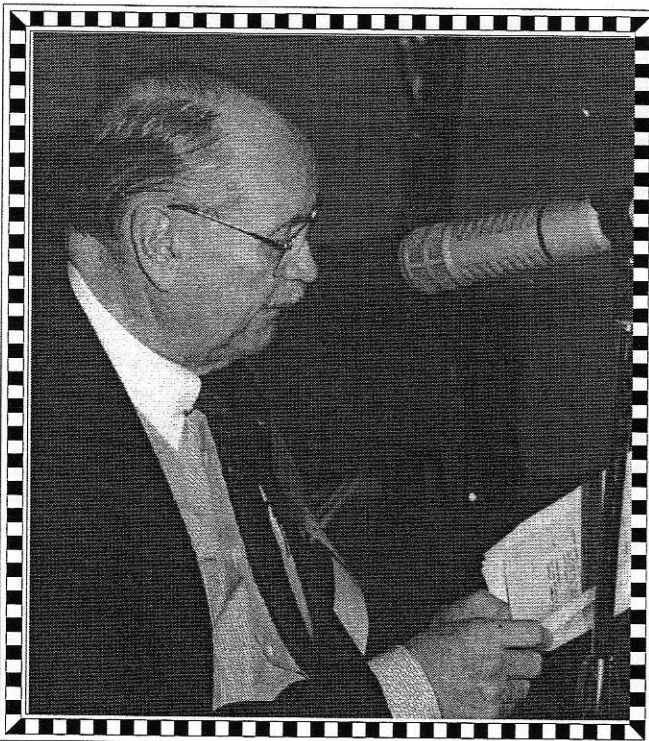
# AIR CHECK

NEWSLETTER OF THE RADIO ENTHUSIASTS OF PUGET SOUND (REPS)

Volume 10, Number 4

November 2000

## REPS Loses a Real Friend Merrill Mael Has Gone on to His Best Role Ever!



*This special man, such a friend of so many in REPS, died on October 15 of complications he had been battling for many months. Merrill Mael at the mic.*

### *A man of faith*

Friends of Merrill know that he had a strong faith and was totally peaceful about his circumstances and about his destination after his death. He would want that to be a key remembrance. His wife, Sandy, shares that peace.

### *Kind and nice to the end*

REPS member Mike Sprague had frequent visits with Merrill over the years with the last one being in the hospital the day before he died.

Mike described that last time this way: "Merrill was struggling mightily and didn't seem to be participating in the conversation in the room. When I needed to go, I put my hand on his arm and told him that I'd be seeing him soon, one way or the other."

Continuing, Mike said, "at that point, in a lot of pain, this nice man raised up a little and struggled to get out the words 'thanks for coming'."

### *What will you miss?*

- Some will miss his infectious humor, which was always there no matter how he was feeling.
- Others will miss his brilliant and sidesplitting portrayal of Uncle Fletcher in our 'Vic and Sade' re-creations.
- Still, others will miss the many crisp and believable characterizations Merrill did on so many parts in so many re-creations over the years.
- And, some of us have even missed his energy-laden voice on those mattress commercials that loaded the Seattle airwaves for so many years.

*Continued on page 4*

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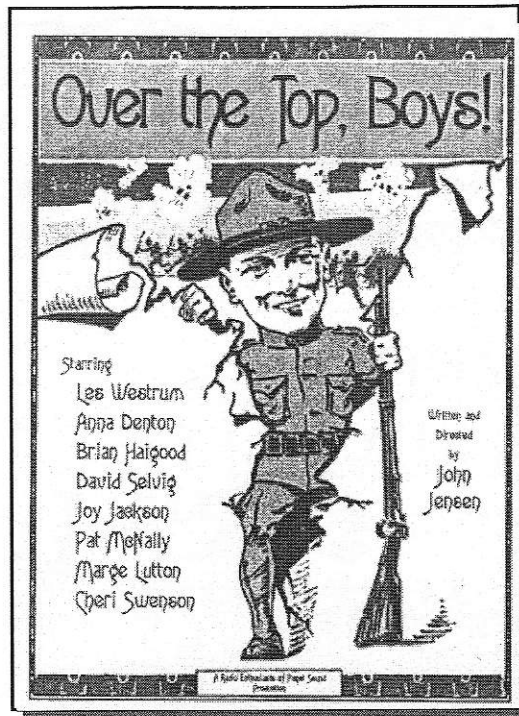
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Visit us at the  
**REPS Website**  
[www.repsonline.org](http://www.repsonline.org)



## September 2<sup>nd</sup> “Over the Top, Boys”

This play was written by John Jensen and was the featured attraction of our September 2<sup>nd</sup> REPS meeting. The story revolves around a community theater looking for a way to raise money since their funding may be cut off. George Thompson (David Selvig), the theater director, hears about the opportunity to have Nathan Downing (Les Westrum) come to participate in the play ‘Over the Top, Boys’. This is the play that made Nathan famous on Broadway decades earlier. Margaret Summers (Anna Denton), Nathan’s wife, introduced in public by Nathan as his assistant, spends a great deal of her time soothing Nathan’s battered ego since he hasn’t done anything of importance for some time. Nathan manages to squeeze into the uniform he wore when he had the lead in ‘Over the Top, Boys’. Nathan wants everything to be professional and delights in telling everyone how things should be done, including the lights and rising of the curtain. This really rubs the “star” of the community theatre, Tom Ryan (Brian Haigood), in the wrong way. Mary Wainright (Marge Lutton) is a veteran community theatre actress who is delighted to have Nathan participate in their play. Eventually, Tom and Nathan come to an understanding – thanks to input from Margaret. This cast also included Joy Jackson, Pat McNally, Cheri Swenson and John Jensen. Pat McNally and Cheri Swenson provided the sound effects and Donald Zongker was the audio engineer.

Joy Jackson, David Selvig and Anna Denton treated us to an episode of ‘Vic and Sade’ in which Rush Gook is playing with caramels. He does all kinds of interesting things to these caramels, including throwing them against a wall in flatten out the sides. It’s funny that no one wanted to eat any of them after he was finished.

This episode of ‘Vic and Sade’ was chosen as a back up for the Showcase in case Merrill Mael would not have been able to attend.

## George Pirrone Visits Seattle

At the October meeting we had a delightful special guest in George Pirrone. This was George's first time ever in Seattle and he enjoyed an extensive tour courtesy of Dick Bonesteel. George grew up in Chicago, where he had his first taste of radio acting. "Acting has to be in you... you have to have the desire," he told us.

We listened to tapes from several shows including a hilarious episode of *'The Life of Riley'*. George was Egbert Gillis, the son of Riley's pal. He was on *'One Man's Family'* from 1952 till the show ended in 1959 as Pinky who was always thinking about getting married. In a taped episode from March 1957 Pinky was writing a letter to his Uncle Clifford in Scotland. George never had a contract for *'One Man's Family'* and sometimes 10 shows were taped at a time over two or three days.

George remembers the director of *'Dr. Christian'*, Neil Reagan, complaining about the liberal president, (his brother, Ronald) of the Screen Actors Guild during rehearsals. He portrayed the ticket taker on the first Dean Martin/Jerry Lewis Show where his line came out as: "Get your tickets here for the Dean Lewis and Jerry Martin show". On live TV he had the opportunity to play the back of Frank Sinatra's head in a sketch since there was not enough time for Sinatra to get from the raft to his next scene. Red Skelton hit him in the head with a non-breakaway cello during a skit.

A passion of George Pirrone for many years was the *'Mother/Daughter Pageant'*. It still is. He was one of the guiding hands on this long running show, and seems close to getting it back on the air. "The heart and soul" of the pageant is built around the fact that there is an already established strong relationship. The mother and daughter were given the opportunity to share their thoughts about each other; these were then shared for the first time during the modeling of evening gowns.

Last, but not least, George shared a song with us. He and Brad Brown started writing songs when they were on *'Red Ryder'* together.

George wrote: "I want to thank you for your arrangement of so great an event, and the warm welcome I got from that fun crowd. Thanks to everyone!"



*Bill Parker interviews George Pirrone.*



## Do you remember ... ?

Who was at the first Showcase in 1993? Some of the names are very familiar. Some of the guests were John Archer, Parley Baer, Harry Bartell, Dick Beals, Frank Buxton, Merrill Mael, Herb Ellis and Douglas Young. Our first Showcase included *Just Sittin' Around and Talkin'*. The Gassmans led a panel on Jack Benny and Pat Cashman provided a script for a sound effects workshop.

Who played Ethel and Albert at Showcase 5 in 1997? Some of the Old Time Radio actors at this Showcase were Ginny Tyler, Sandra Gould, Tyler McVey, Rhoda Williams, Peg Lynch, Art Gilmore, Norma Jean Nilsson and Gil Stratton, Jr. We spent time *Getting to Know ...* Larry Dobkin and Bob Hastings.

The quizzes Larry Siskind created? Here is a sampling from *Air Check*, Volume 7, and Number 2. Which famous radio pair was from Crooper, Illinois?

Lum & Abner  
Abbott & Costello  
Vic & Sade

Ethel & Albert  
Martin & Lewis  
Sweeney & March

*Answer on Page 7*



### Uncle Fletcher calls

Mike Sprague mentioned that among the many things he will miss is those frequent phone calls that, with a familiar nasal twang, might start off something like, "That reminds me of a time in Dismal. Seepage". "This kind of thing is just one of the many I'll miss", Mike stated.

### So much history

Merrill started in radio when he was in his teens. Much of this time was spent in Seattle, but he worked in California and other places as well, including Europe. Maybe you've heard the classic story about his network introduction of the US Vice-President on a Seattle visit, when there was a "run-away" organist involved. Only those of solid stone could avoid doubling over in laughter.

And his involvement with Jack Kirkwood and so many others along the way in his career also evolved into stories that were guaranteed to keep us laughing.

### The Biography

Here's the biography that was used at the last Showcase. Maybe it will remind old friends of the many facets of Merrill Mael, and inform those who didn't know him so well.

### Merrill Mael

This is Merrill and Sandy Mael's 8<sup>th</sup> Showcase. A Showcase wouldn't nearly be as much fun without Merrill. He probably has had more different radio experience than just about anybody. Merrill's acted, announced, owned stations and done voice work, commercials and news casting. His radio work has taken him all over the world including Japan, Britain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany and France. Merrill started in radio in Seattle; one of those non-paying jobs that were common in the early days of radio. He went to San Francisco as the announcer on 'The Standard Symphony Hour'. On KSFO, Merrill did 'The Friendly Grocer'. He and his co-stars did 6 characters each - with no rehearsals. While in San Francisco, he worked with Jack Webb and George Fenniman on the 'U.S Steel Hour' at KGO. They were hired to do crowd noises. Their mumbled crowd lines were "L.S.M.F.T." over and over. During WWII, Merrill did fabricated news broadcasts for enemy consumption. You may know that Merrill played Uncle Fletcher on 'Vic and Sade' for a time, but you probably don't know that Merrill was all of 18 years old when he played that role. Merrill's radio credits include such diverse shows as 'Breakfast at Sardi's', 'The Camel Caravan', 'Doctor Kate', 'Fibber McGee and Molly', 'Imagination Theater', 'Junior Miss', 'KIRO Mystery Playhouse', 'Maxwell House Coffee Time' and 'Pacific Story'. At a REPS meeting Merrill said, "Radio was magic, it came at a time, during the Depression, when people needed entertainment. If you could afford a radio, the rest was free. It could take you anywhere." Merrill, you too, are magic. Thanks for being such a good friend to REPS.

### Remembrances

Some have asked about remembrances. Merrill had a very clear request on this as he saw the end drawing near. He asked that if anyone wanted to do anything (stressing that they didn't need to), it should go to either of his two favorite places.

REPS  
c/o Janet Conrad  
6530 47<sup>th</sup> Ave SW  
Seattle WA 98136

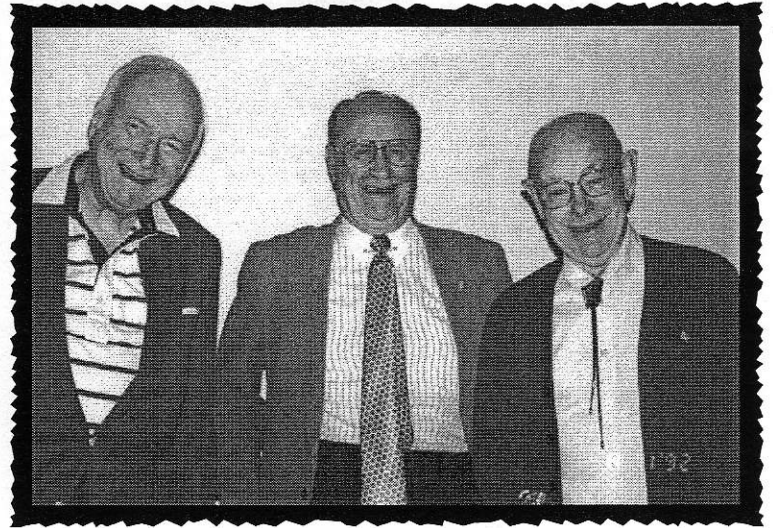
or

North Creek Presbyterian Church  
621 164<sup>th</sup> SE  
Mill Creek WA 98012

Those who want to send cards or notes to Sandy, may send them to Mike Sprague, 9936 NE 197<sup>th</sup> St, Bothell, WA 98011. He will get them to Sandy right away.

### One more time ...

"Well, he's gone on," reflects Mike Sprague, "and do you know what I'm almost certain he said as he crossed over? It had to be the famous Uncle Fletcher word we laughed at so many times - 'Fine!' " Mike added, "It was likely that and a great big 'Hallelujah!' "



Seattle Radio Pioneers

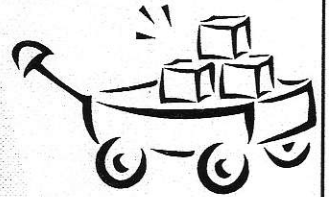
Merrill Mael is flanked by Bill Ward on the left and Homer Pope on the right.

# UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

**November 4<sup>th</sup>:** *True Boardman ... a True talent from the Golden Age.* Born in Seattle 91 years ago, to actor parents, True has had an illustrious career. For REPS fans, you'll recognize a few of the shows for which he was the writer: 'Presenting Charles Boyer', 'Family Theater', 'Silver Theater', 'Rexall Summer Theater' and 'Skippy Hollywood Theater'. There is much more and we'll learn about it all with Honorary member Jim French, at his skillful interviewing best, hosting True at this meeting.

**December 2<sup>nd</sup>:** *Traditional Christmas Meeting.* Food, cassette exchange and Toys for Tots drive. The program normally features excerpts from OTR Christmas programs.

**Toys for Tots:** This is done in conjunction with the US Marine Corps who will have a member in attendance to take the barrels away and see that the items are delivered to needy kids. This link up has been a very satisfying one. Attendees are encouraged to bring an unwrapped new toy.



**Food:** Even more than usual. Rhea Lutton will do the spread; however, feel free to add your contribution to the spread.



**Cassette Exchange:** Bring a wrapped OTR cassette of good quality to put under the tree for exchange with others.

## **December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1 pm: "A Green and White Christmas"**

Come to a "live" taping of a nostalgic radio drama specially written and produced by the Museum of History & Industry (MOHAI) for broadcast (December 16<sup>th</sup> at 9 pm) on KIXI AM 880. Visit Seattle of days gone-by, travel by train and shop at Frederick & Nelson on a snowy Christmas Eve in the past! Special guest stars include Chris Wedes, Bob Newman and Tracey Conway.



## **December 21<sup>st</sup> – December 31<sup>st</sup>: "The Holiday Big Broadcast"**

Contact the Kirkland Performance Center for tickets at 425-893-9900.



## **January 6<sup>th</sup>: Celebrating 10 years!**

The first "official" meeting was January 1991 and this 2001 meeting will take out a little time to celebrate that. Most of the founding 11 will be in attendance, with memories intact. We'll have a big cake and there will be excerpts from a few special meetings over the years.



*We meet on the first Saturday of every month at the Queen Anne Library (400 W Garfield, Seattle) from 2pm – 4pm.*

## **Kindness Corner**

*Stewart Conway* – gave his sound effects to REPS. Thank you Stewart.

*In memory of Merrill Mael* – Mike Sprague, Tyler & Esther McVey, Harry & Bev Bartell, Douglas & Eileene Young, Ray & Meridy Erlenborn, Lawrence & Gweneth Bliss.



# A BIG DAY IN REPS HISTORY

**November 3, 1990:** It was on this date that 11 folks gathered at the Merchants' Café, the oldest restaurant in Seattle. This group talked about their interest in Old Time Radio.

**Who was there?** Some were relatives just along for the ride. Some were fanatics. Some were just curious. But from this elite eleven came the Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound. The group decided to meet again, and again and again. The attendees at the first meeting were: Darrell Anderson, Michael Jacobs, Carol Pearce and daughter, Tara, Bob Herman with wife Judy and friend Dale Gray, Mark Skullerud, Frank Denton, Mike Sprague and his wife, Linda. Most of these folks will be at the January meeting when we spend a few minutes reflecting together.

**What then?** In January 1991, the first "official" meeting took place at the Queen Anne Library where the club has met ever since. It was then that the club adopted the name and become REPS. Under the leadership of Misty Dawn Lane; a cassette library was started almost immediately. A newsletter, called Air Check, was launched right away and other things began to happen as well. The club tradition of having door prizes at every meeting began at the November 1990 gathering and has continued without a miss for 10 years.

Enjoy this humorous look-back at that Merchant's Café meeting with this story written by Darrell (Andy) Anderson, a founding member.



The story you are about to read is fiction. It is based on an actual incident that took place on November 3, 1990. Real names have been used to protect the guilty.

## “THE MERCHANT CAFÉ CAPER”

### HOW THE RADIO ENTHUSIASTS OF PIONEER SQUARE (REPS) BECAME THE RADIO ENTHUSIASTS OF PUGET SOUND (REPS) WITHOUT CHANGING THEIR INITIALS

Scene 1, Take 1. It was Saturday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>. It was cold in Seattle. We were working the day watch out of robbery detail. My partner was Mike Sprague, Chief of Grade School Crossing. My name is Andy Anderson, Head of the K-9 Division. Business had been going to the dogs ....

(cut)

Scene 1, Take 2. It was 11 am and raining in Pioneer Square. I was walking past Seattle's oldest eatery, the Merchant's Café. I decided a hot bowl of soup would be just the thing on this cold

winter day so I went inside. As I entered, I noticed a clamorous scene back in the corner. Two people were talking loudly and wildly waving their arms.

“‘Vic and Sade’ is rotten”, said the fat man with the long red hair hanging on his shoulders. (I later learned his name was Bob Herman. He'd come over on a ferryboat to join this group of people to talk about old time radio.)

“You don't know what's good”, said Carol Pearce. “It's perhaps the best written comedy program ever on radio”, she said.

“It stinks”, said Herman.

I ordered my soup and when it arrived, I said to the waitress, “I hate to complain, but there's a fly in my soup”.

She replied, “I'm terribly sorry about that, sir, but our new cook used to be a tailor”.

As I ate my soup, I must have slurped a little too loud because I noticed a lady in the group watching me. She asked me to join this table of wireless wackos.

She said, “I'm Dale Gray. Do you know about Old Time Radio?”

“Oh, yes”, I replied. “Seth Parker is one of my favorites”.

“Who?” she asked astonished.

“Seth Parker”, I repeated. “Years later he would go by his real name of Phillips H. Lord and produce some of radio's best programs such as ‘Gangbusters’ and ‘Mr. District Attorney’”.

“I didn't know that”, said Dale.

I sat there looking smug, thinking maybe I would fit in with this motley menagerie of microphone maniacs.

Michael Jacobs ordered a round of sauerkraut juice for the eleven of us seated around the table. He said that he'd gotten hooked on radio when he was with the CCC boys in the 1930's. He said that FDR had created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and had I ever listened to President Roosevelt's Fireside Chats? I said I hadn't as we didn't have a fireplace when I was growing up. He asked me how we kept warm on cold winter nights. I told him that we would all huddle around the old Philco and my father would turn on Gabriel Heater.

Linda Sprague introduced herself and said she was Mike's wife. Mike seemed a pleasant enough chap, but I saw no leadership qualities about him. He certainly could not ever lead this fledging organization to any sort of success.

A waitress arrived and set before one of the men, a breakfast consisting of a tall stack of hotcakes, eggs, bacon, ham, biscuits and gravy, and a large plate of toast.



"This will be fine for a start", he replied.

"Who is this man?" I asked Judy Herman, who had ferried over with Bob to be at this meeting.

"Oh, that's Mark Skullerud, or Skully", she said, "a trencherman of great renown".

I could tell that this skinny, bushy-haired guy also possessed no apparent leadership traits. I mentally wrote him off for any organizational position for this group of kilocycle kooks, just as I had for Mike Sprague (an affable chap). If it's one thing I pride myself in, it's my ability to judge a person at first meeting.

Frank Denton started telling us about a guy named Rocky Jordon. It seems he hung out in some place called the Café Trampoline, or some such dive. His eyes became glassy as he spoke of his hero.

Tara Pearce, who was with her mother, Carol, was rather quiet during most of this meeting. She had not grown up with Old Time Radio. I was glad to see younger people who seemed to enjoy the old days of radio.

By this time, Skully had finished off his breakfast and ordered another stack of toast. He certainly is a trencherman of great renown, I thought.

"What would we do at these meeting?" said Michael Jacobs.

"Listen to old programs", someone said.

"You mean sit around and stare at the radio?" asked Bob Herman.

"Why not? It could be fun", added Carol.

"I'll bring my Rocky Jordon tape", said Frank.

"I've got two tapes of Tom Corbett I could bring", said Skully, looking over the bill of fare to see if he had missed anything.

"I'll bring my Seth Parker almanac", I said.

Bob Herman said he had an Orphan Anne shake-up mug and Captain Midnight decoder he would bring.

Frank Denton said he had a photo of Ma Perkins in front of her lumberyard. He'd gotten it years ago by sending the top of an Oxydol Soap box and ten cents.

At this point, I bid goodbye to this heterogeneous group and said I had to get to a wedding.

Mike said he had attended a wedding just yesterday. "It was a very sad affair," he said, "even the wedding cake was in tiers".

As I left and headed to my automobile, which was parked "halfway up the next block"; I kept thinking to myself ... a club for Puget Sound Radio Enthusiasts??? You know, it just might work.

## Words from the Editor

### OOPS...Bill Baldwin became Bill Brown!!!

The following note was received from Ray Erlernborn: "Happy to see so much of my TRIVIA in your TERRIFIC TABLOID! However ... in editing my lengthy tome, somehow my old friend, the announcer of the Bergen Show, Bill Baldwin, became Bill Brown! Baldwin ... was a stalwart board member of the Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters and was loved by all. For about three years, from the Pasadena Playhouse he spied the magic of Coca Cola, was straight man for my audience warm up and introduced the stars, Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy. Bill and I were known as Baldwin and the Bald One! ..."

Signed: Ray, the guy with luck and pluck and could certainly ..... do sound effects!

**Newspaper articles.** I am looking forward to spending some time in the newspaper articles from the late '30s and early '40s. I am interested in whatever anyone has that might be incorporated into future issues. Thank you, Don Allen, for all the articles that you have donated over the years. What a treasure!

**Another method?** In case this issue looks different to you, it is. I made this decision because the time frame was short. This does not in any way reflect upon the wonderful job that Secord Printing does for REPS. I know that the schedule for Air Check is behind where I would like it to be. I am doing everything that I can to get us on track.

## Miscellaneous Notes & Notices

**Membership is \$18.00 for the year.** One of the benefits of membership is our library. We will occasionally feature books from our library in Air Check.

**"TV Theater of the Mindless".** Lynda Glaspey has iron on decals for T-shirts. Please contact her for details at 425-353-7737 or see her at the next meeting.

**OTR is now on TV.** If you live in King County and have cable TV, we have good news for you. REN (Radio Entertainment Network) will broadcast old time radio six hours a day, seven days a week. The schedule is currently being revised. Watch for more details in future Air Check newsletters.

**Door prizes.** Share your tapes as door prizes at the meetings. Each meeting several lucky people are the "winners" of tapes.

**Internet.** Have you checked out any of the Old Time Radio links from our web site? There are many interesting places to visit.

Do You Remember Answer:


Vic & Sade

Tom Brown  
 1402 S. Kahuna Dr.  
 Spokane WA 99212

287  
 7.00



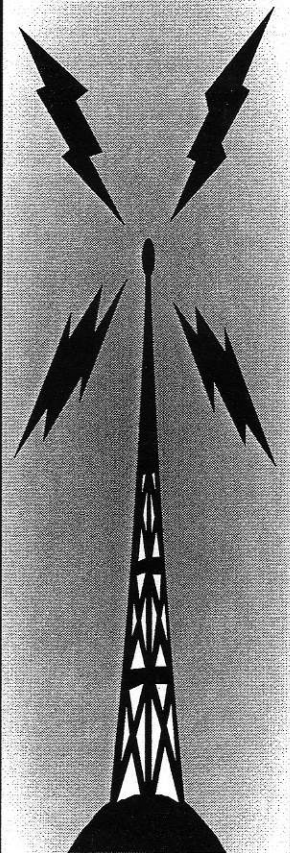
REPS  
 9936 NE 197th Street  
 Bothell, WA 98011



## PUGET SOUND RADIO LISTINGS

*Both Old Time Radio and current materials (designated C) are on the air. To the best of our knowledge, this is when and where. THE ONLY WAY WE WILL BE ABLE TO CORRECT THIS LIST IS WHEN WE RECEIVE NOTES AT THE ABOVE ADDRESS. If you know of others, or if any of these need correction, please let Air Check know. One such change is Jim Dolan's Radio Entertainment Network, now each weekday instead of Sunday. Please let the stations and sponsors (if any) know of your appreciation.*

Imagination Theater (C) .....	KNWX.....	770 AM.....	9:06-10PM.....	Saturday
Imagination Theater (C) .....	KNWX.....	770 AM.....	9:06-10PM.....	Sunday
When Radio Was .....	KNWX.....	770 AM.....	10PM-1AM .....	Saturday
When Radio Was .....	KNWX.....	770AM.....	1AM-4AM .....	Saturday
When Radio Was .....	KNWX.....	770 AM.....	10PM-12AM .....	Sunday
When Radio Was .....	KLKI.....	1340 AM.....	6 PM-7 PM .....	M-F (Anacortes)
OTR.....	CFMS .....	98.5 FM .....	9-10PM.....	Saturday (Victoria)
OTR Siskind/Herman .....	ERRS .....	SAP FM .....	8-9 PM.....	Saturday
OTR Dolan .....	ERRS .....	SAP FM .....	11 PM-2 AM .....	M-F (note change)
Odyssey/children (C).....	KCIS .....	630 AM.....	7:30 AM .....	Saturday
Odyssey/children (C).....	KCIS .....	630 AM.....	7:30PM .....	M-F
Ruby In' Galac. Gumshoe (C) ...	KUOW .....	94.9 FM .....	10:30PM.....	M-F
Unshackled (C) .....	KCIS .....	630 AM.....	9:30PM .....	Sunday
OTR.....	CFMI.....	101.1 FM .....	10PM .....	Sunday (Vancouver)
Radio Replays.....	CKNW .....	980 AM.....	11:10 PM .....	M-F (Vancouver)
Golden Age of Radio Theater....	KLAY .....	.....	6PM-12PM .....	Saturday
Golden Age of Radio Theater....	KLAY .....	.....	3PM-6PM .....	Sunday





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