

# AIR CHECK

NEWSLETTER OF THE RADIO ENTHUSIASTS OF PUGET SOUND (REPS)  
VOLUME 11 • NUMBER 5 FALL • 2001

June 2nd, 2001

## Pat "Patsy Britten" Bell by Bill Parker

Patsy Britten of the *Our Gang* comedies was born October 18, 1923 at Seattle's Virginia Mason Hospital, and grew up on Greenwood Avenue. At the amazingly young age of three (in 1926), she joined her older sister on KOMO radio's *Children's Club* on Saturdays, where she sang nursery rhymes. This led to Rhodes Department Store asking her to model children's clothes at their Second and Union store. The wife of theater owner John Danz saw the radio show, and later hired Pat to sing with the orchestra on station KFOA (later KOL), in the basement of the newly completed Northern Life Tower in 1929. She remembers singing 'The Prune Song': "No matter how old the prune may be, it's always full of wrinkles."

### What is an acre?

Patsy started doing radio dramas in 1929 at the age of six, while her mother held her on her lap and whispered cues in her ear. Mrs. Danz referred Patsy to George Hickey, regional manager for MGM Studios, who recruited her for the *Our Gang* series being produced by Hal Roach.



▲ Patsy Britten - *Readin' and Writin'* 1932

> Newspaper article about Patsy - 1931

In the same studio, Roach was filming the Laurel and Hardy comedies. Patsy did three *Our Gang* films there before her family situation brought her back to Seattle in 1932. Jack Taylor showed a clip from one of them, *Readin' and Writin'* (1931) in which Patsy is asked: "What is an acre?" Answer: "An acre is a sore tooth".

### Dancing Accordionists

As she grew up, Pat toured with a vaudeville show, did three *Lux Radio Theatre* dramas, and appeared on Al Jolson's radio show. As a member of Actors' Equity, she was paid as much as \$100 a day! She learned to play the accordion from Frank Yakaluchi, learned to be an

acrobat, sang at

Seattle's Music Hall Theater with Vic Meyer's orchestra and did at least 50 shows at the Palomar Theatre at Third and University

### Six-Year-Old Seattle Girl Joins Films

Patsy Britten, youthful radio singer, signs contract with Hal Roach's gang.

Patsy Britten, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J.G. Britten of 6216 Greenwood Ave., probably is one of Seattle's youngest "movie" stars. Patsy, who is just 6 years old, was picked by Hal Roach for parts in his "kiddy" movies.

A talented young lady is Miss Patsy. For the past year she has been a pupil at the Merrick dance studio and was one of the hits of the Merrick Revue held at the R-K-O Orpheum in June.

Since she was 4 years old she has been singing over KOL and she has gained for herself a wide group of admirers. She is popularly known among radio listeners as the "sweetheart" of KOL.

Patsy will start to work as a member of the Roach "gang" on September 28.

Pat "Patsy Britten" Bell continues on page 11

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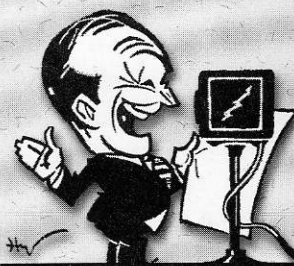
Contributors to this issue: Bill Parker and Joy Jackson wrote some of the articles; Don Tewkesbury sent the article from the *L.A. Times*; Elliott Reid shared at Showcase IX his experiences of mimicking President John F. Kennedy and thought the *Time* article might be enjoyable; Jack French; Harry Bartell and Harlan Stone submitted their articles at my request; and Paul Feavel provided the introduction to the Public Domain Controversy article. Thank you everyone for your wonderful contributions.

You, too, can contribute to Air Check. Share some of your radio reminiscences for future issues of Air Check. Here are some ideas: What are some of your favorite memories about radio? Was it goose bumps, laughter, premiums or...? What show was a "must" hear? Did you ever hear, meet or get an autograph from an OTR star? Would you like to learn more about a specific OTR star? Is there a star you think could contribute an interesting article? Please submit your entries and suggestions to Marilyn Wilt (address listed in the directory) or email (wzoem@aol.com).

## ENTER THE NEW WORLD OF CONTEMPORARY RADIO DRAMA

Since 1972 Jim French has been writing, directing and producing radio adventures in the tradition of the best of America's giants of the "Golden Age", but with a strictly modern flavor. His private investigator series, *The Adventures of Harry Nile*, has become a national favorite, and many devotees recognize *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* as a more than welcome addition to the Holmesian universe.

However, it is Jim's non-series tales that have brought the best of his imagination and skills before the public. Stories of the old west, of deepest space and the innermost depths of the mind have all been brought into our homes through these exciting audio dramas. And now for the first time ever Jim has decided to make twelve of his best "stand-alone" plays available to the public, more than four and a half hours of exciting and original *MOVIES FOR YOUR MIND*.



For only \$22.95, this includes shipping and handling, you'll get: *The Loophole* starring Hans Conreid, *Nathan's Hands* with Richard Sanders of *WKRP in Cincinnati* and *The Flaw* with *Hogan's Heroes* star Bob Crane. All these and the award winning sci-fi thriller *The Bouganville Giant* along with eight more tales of mystery and suspense, in a handsome six cassette album.

Just send \$22.95, by check or money order, to: Tapes, PO Box 2001, Issaquah, WA, 98027 and we will send you hours of pure entertainment, that will keep you enthralled and on the edge of your seat. Stories in the style of yesteryear but as contemporary as tomorrow. The best of Jim French's *MOVIES FOR YOUR MIND*.

# August 4th, 2001



*A Incident at Scarlyn cast: Back Row, Left to Right: Pat Garner, David Persson, Bryan Haigood, Dave Selvig, Les Westrum and Joy Jackson. Front Row, Left to Right: Cheri Swanson, Marge Lutton, Anna Denton and John Jensen. Kneeling: Neal Shulman.*

The REPS Radio Readers Present: *Incident at Scarlyn*, a new science fiction play, adapted from Joy's second SF novel *Masks*. Location of the play was the planet TIR, a "Beirut" in space, with broken landscapes carved by sonic winds, no roads, no planes. It has a spaceport, AnTiers, and contact with off-worlders.

Writer-director Bayadere DoNaire has taken his troupe of actors on a tour of nearby clan sites, and Scarlyn is one of them. Five years prior, a caravan of folks disappeared in Scarlyn, and Baya's caravan has come to find out what happened. Lasrty, Baya's second in command, is forced to defend the Lio (woman in charge) of their caravan, and becomes embroiled in a fight to the death with Tra'gard, Scarlyn's heir apparent. The theme that Joy was working on: the importance of law and the courage to defend someone not of your own kind.

Our cast included: Anna Denton, Pat Garner, Bryan Haigood, Joy Jackson, John Jensen, Marge Lutton, David Persson, David Selvig, Neal Shulman, Cheri Swenson, and Les Westrum. Live sound effects by David Persson and Neal Shulman. Recorded music and sound effects played by Bob Cardenas. Engineering by Donald Zongker. Directed by Joy Jackson. The cast was clad in long-sleeved shirts and vests that would have been worn on Tir. All the music used in the play was of Celtic origin.

Also included in the August 4th program were two more episodes of *Vic and Sade*, recorded for the Friends of Vic and Sade fan club. They were: Melvin Gets a Job (1937) and Neighborhood Ladies on the Outs (1941) — better known as the Rummy Game. Dave Selvig as Vic, Anna Denton as Sade, Joy Jackson as Rush, with John Jensen as the announcer.

Another question always pops up after the recreations: will there be tapes sold? Since there seems to be an interest in it, tapes will eventually be available. Bob Cardenas puts in a lot of time "tidying up the bits" before we get the recorded product. And they will always be put in the club's Library, for rental (of which you can make your own recording for yourself).

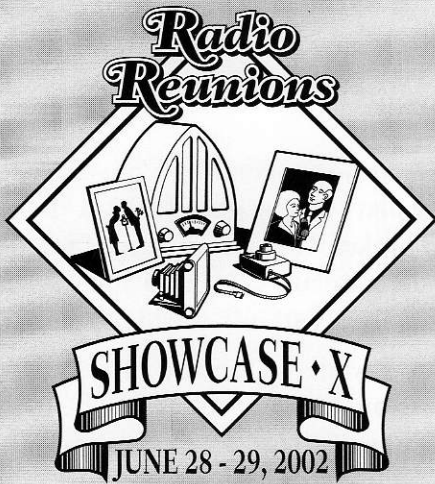
## REPS RADIO READERS

There is a great deal of activity within the club by a small group of members called the REPS Radio Readers. They meet regularly to read scripts and ultimately to re-create old radio programs or to perform new radio drama. Several resources are available to other interested members who would like to have more detail than space allows in Air Check. These are available either by contacting Joy Jackson (address listed in the directory) or at the Radio Readers page on the website.

**1. WRITING FOR RADIO.** This is a detailed look at the process of creating a script from a book or other resource. There is much more to it than meets the ear. Also, in this article by Joy, there is considerable detail on the history and societal structure involved in her *Incident at Scarlyn*.

**2. A HISTORY OF THE REPS RADIO READERS.** Here are just a few of the performances: *The Ghost of Benjamin Sweet*, *The Shadow: Tunnel of Terror*, *The Whistler: The Search for an Unknown*, *My Friend Irma: Irma's Christmas Party* and *Vic and Sade: Books*. Some of the OTR actors who have contributed their considerable talents are: John Archer, Doug Young, Merrill Mael, Ginny Tyler, Frank Buxton and Anne Whitfield Phillips. Joy Jackson has compiled an incredibly detailed log of the history of this very active group.

**3. LESSONS I'VE LEARNED FROM THE READERS.** Maybe you're going to be called on to put together a radio play sometime. This article contains some practical "in the trenches" clues from Joy Jackson.



# September 1st, 2001

## Every member an actor.

This meeting has become an annual event, allowing some hands on time with scripts and acting, even for those of us who will never do it publicly. Joy Jackson led the meeting, which was structured to help everyone experience the whole process of putting on a show. To facilitate this unusual meeting, Donald Zongker arranged a set of microphones in the center of the room, and then arranged the chairs around them. Members were divided into 2 groups, with each group responsible for one half of the script: *Yours Truly Johnny Dollar*, *The Midnight Sun Matter*.

Each group had a director (John Jensen and David Persson), and copies of the script. First business: the "audition" — which is accomplished by doing a "read-around". This is where each person reads the next character as the script progresses around the circle. Next: casting the parts. The directors and the group agreed upon who would be doing which character. Then the script was read again, this time with the actors reading their characters' lines.

## Experience a "pick-up"?

After the break, the actors gathered around the microphones and each set of actors performed their half of the play. Joy had constructed a music/sound effects tape to fill out the performance, and give the feeling of an actual performance. Marilyn Wilt performed the live sound effects. The group also got to experience a "pick-up", when the actors have to do a particular bit again, because someone screwed something up (Joy blew a music cue).

With luck, and a little magic, the recording of the event will be worth listening to, and if it is, the participants of the final show will receive a copy of their show. That is one of the benefits; actors in the Readers regularly receive a copy of their performances.

We are already preparing for our 10th Showcase. Do you believe it? How many of you have been to every Showcase? We have had some incredible OTR stars and representatives at our Showcases. How many can you come up with, besides the "regulars"? Do you remember: The panel of French, Lynch & Bartell (which is NOT a law firm)? The Gassmans radio commercials sing along or their tribute to Jack Benny? Do these names bring back any special memories for you? See if you can match them up with what Showcase they were at (many of these people were at more than one Showcase; however, to my knowledge there is only one answer for each combination).

1. Sandra Gould, Bob Hastings & Peg Lynch
2. Sharon Douglas, Barbara Fuller & Janet Waldo
3. Lon Clark, Jack Kruschen, Gale Storm & Willard Waterman
4. Katrina Baxter-Hodiak, Page Gilman & David Ossman
5. Dick Van Patten, Elliott Reid & True Boardman
6. Tommy Cook, Charlie Flynn & Alan Young
7. Arthur Anderson, Frank Bresee, Shirley Mitchell & Jeanette Nolan
8. Colby Chester, Fred Foy & Bill Murtoth
9. Alice Backes, Paul Herlinger & Ed Scott

## ANSWERS

- |               |               |               |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1) Showcase 2 | 2) Showcase 6 | 3) Showcase 5 |
| 4) Showcase 7 | 5) Showcase 9 | 4) Showcase 1 |
| 6) Showcase 7 | 7) Showcase 4 | 5) Showcase 3 |
| 8) Showcase 1 | 9) Showcase 8 | 6) Showcase 3 |

## Got Milk?

Donald Zongker, REPS engineer exemplar, had one of life's embarrassing moments recently. He was eating a bowl of cereal, and managed to drop it — on the open box full of videotapes of Showcase 9. Milk was everywhere. "I'll just unscrew the video cases and wash and dry the tapes," he thought. But the modern videotapes are no longer in cases that have screws in them. To get to the milk-logged tapes, he had to break the tape-cases, extract the tape, clean it, dry it, and put it back into tape cases that screwed together. And then quickly delivered them to Joy, so that they would be her responsibility.

*Moral of the story: don't eat cereal around boxes that contain irreplaceable tapes.*



# HI-HO! HI-HO! IT'S OFF TO WORK WE GO

by Harry Bartell

It is reasonable to assume that anyone willing to face life as a freelance actor is unreasonable. To start with, his normal state is unemployment. The show closes; the movie wraps; the program signs off.

The actor looks and waits for the next job. It is a given that since the first fellow stood in the middle of an amphitheater in Athens and did his routine, there have always been more actors than jobs.

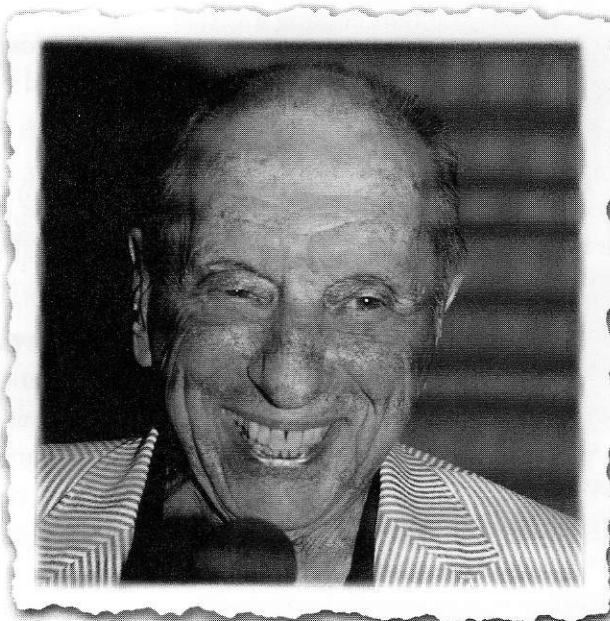
In Los Angeles, at the height of dramatic radio, there was a membership of about 3,000 in AFRA. (Notice that there was no "T" in the title. This was BT — Before TV.) Out of that 3,000 it was said that about 250 actors were able to make a living from radio alone. A handful of those had steady work on big comedy shows — Hans Conried, Alan Reed, Mel Blanc, John Brown, and Verna Felton for example. A few like Elliott Lewis, Lurene Tuttle, Virginia Gregg and the MacIntires had unique qualities or vast talents that assured them of steady employment. What about the rest?

## *Actors Recommend Each Other*

Most of the people competing for jobs had had acting experience before radio. Some had worked in theater, professional or amateur; some came from vaudeville, some were even stars in silent films who had become passé with the advent of talkies. Child actors were a special category, kids with native talent and the ability to read. Other than this latter group, there were two main sources of employment: auditions and recommendations.

Radio was unique. The "rogues and vagabonds" somehow formed a sort of mystic brotherhood. There was less infighting and chicanery in radio than any other form of show business and actors did recommend each other for jobs. Granted that the reasons for this strange action might be an insoluble conflict, or a part so wildly beyond the capability of the actor that doing it would be embarrassing, but the point is that recommendations were made. Recommendations also came from one

producer to another. I once auditioned for a part, which I did not get, but the producer handed a rave notice of me to a friend at the J. Walter Thompson Agency. And I never worked for J. Walter Thompson in my entire life.



▲OTR and REPS favorite Harry Bartell  
comments about looking for work.

Auditions came in two varieties, general or specific, by a network or an advertising agency or a producer in either. In the general audition, the actor was given a few minutes at the mic to present his own material, and if asked, give his history and experience. At a specific audition, the actor was called to read a particular part and this occurred, as a rule, only after he had established some sort of reputation or given an outstanding general audition.

## *Keeping Name Before Producers*

With rare exceptions, agents did not represent actors. Once past the audition stage there was a lot of office calls and getting

as friendly as possible with production secretaries. The idea was to keep one's name before the producer. If some reasonable talent had been displayed the actor would usually be called back. Call services were available with phones at the networks so that actors could stay in touch with possible work. A player's directory was published in which the actor, for a fee, would have his picture and credits displayed and the directories were sent to anyone producing radio shows and commercials.

Commercials were another point of entry. There should never be any doubt that radio was a business and commercials were an integral part, but actors were often trusted with one or two lines in a commercial before being allowed larger parts in drama or comedy.

## *Employment Drought*

Finally if the actor is well enough known and respected, he is called for work without a lot of preliminaries. That's when employment drought usually sets in and he can't buy a job. That's when he finds some mind-numbing chore like pulling spurge out of the lawn. Would you believe I have personally accumulated two and a half tons of spurge?



# SHOWCASE • UPDATES

## Theme

Each year REPS selects a theme around which to build the program. This year "Radio Reunions" will provide this glue. Attendees will see and hear:

- Actors greeting each other sometimes after lengthy separations.
- Professionals and fans coming together again for another Showcase, number X
- Re-creations and panels featuring shows and discussions that connects to reunions.
- Special running segments with famous people from the past.

## Special Guests

Regular attendees know that REPS has been blessed with and by a group of folks we have come to call "The Company." These devoted and talented friends come each year and take on different roles in different shows. It is our hope that those listed below will be back for yet another wonderful time together:

Douglas Young...Rhoda Williams...Anne Whitfield Phillips...Ginny Tyler...Gil Stratton, Jr...Norma Jean Nilsson...Tyler McVey...Jo Anna March...Paul Herlinger...Art Gilmore...Esther Geddes...Jim French...Ray Erlenborn...Herb Ellis...Sam Edwards...Tommy Cook...Frank Buxton...Dick Beals.

Those coming for the first or second time include Richard Svihus...Elliott Reid...George Pirrone...Barbara Fuller...Fred Foy...Jean Rouverol Butler...Alice Backes.

## Program

Re-creations, panels and other features will be woven together to make a very fast paced weekend. Definite at this point are program pieces featuring the following, always subject to change, and with some relation to our Reunion theme.

- *The Lone Ranger* - Featuring Fred Foy in his classic narrator role along with Dick Beals.
- *One Man's Family* - With several

former cast members starring and sharing.

- *Imagination Theater* - Writer, producer Jim French does a new radio script written just for our Golden Age actor friends.
- *The Halls of Ivy* - Four former cast members will lead the way, with a solid Ronald Coleman sound-alike.
- *Blondie* - At least three of the gang worked on this show regularly.

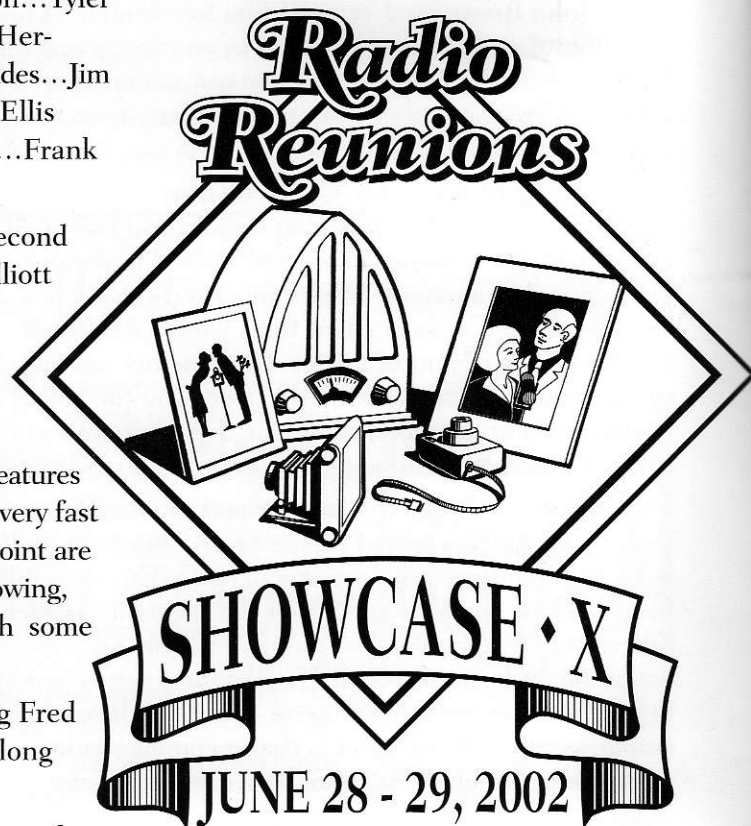
Much more in early stages of development.

For developing information, please check our website at [repsonline.org](http://repsonline.org) or contact Mike Sprague, 9936 NE 197th St. Bothell, WA 98011 [hrrmikes@aol.com](mailto:hrrmikes@aol.com)

## Showcase Committee Changes

We are so pleased that the REPS Radio Showcase is regarded as a friendly and well-run event. That is basically because of two reasons:

*The Stars.* What incredible participation and commitment we've had from the actors and other professionals who "were" radio. They come and they give their very best



each year. And their best is superb! Without them, there is no Showcase.

*The Volunteers.* They're everywhere, from script transcription to driving duty. From the registration table to the engineering crew and on and on and on. 40 plus people give of themselves to make each Showcase distinctive.

*So Why Change?* Says Mike Sprague "We try to do more and different things each year. All of us seek to make the next Showcase 'the best one ever.' It seems silly not to involve a broader brain trust of committed people in the detailed planning."

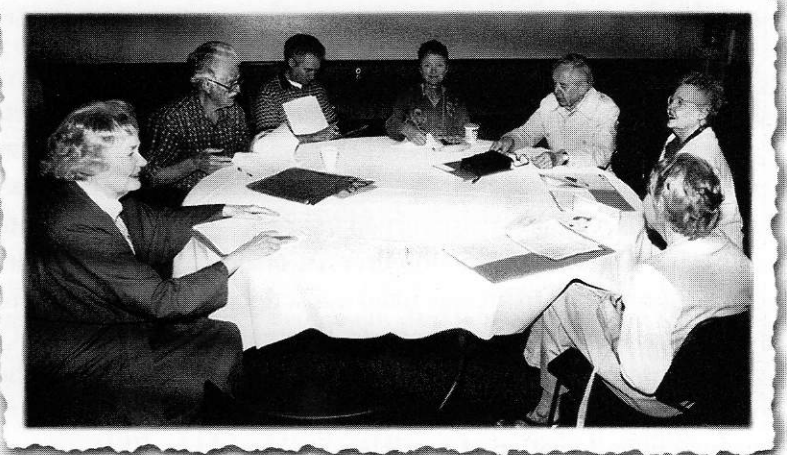
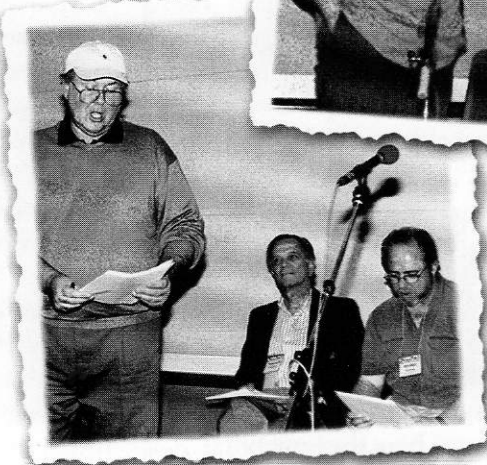
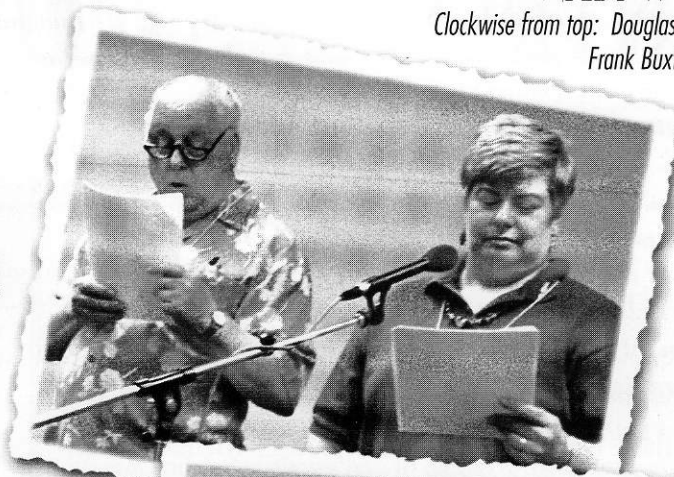
The group also provides depth. More people will be aware of the entire process of putting a Showcase together. There will be some additional changes as other volunteers take on new duties, and these will be announced a bit later.

As a result of this perspective, the Showcase now has a Steering Committee consisting of Sprague and Joy Jackson, along with president Dave Selvig and past president Terry Mahony. Dave and Terry are the additions in this capacity, but both have had active Showcase roles in the past.

The Steering Committee has met and they also communicate actively by email and phone. Serious steps have already been taken on Showcase X. Honorary Member Dick Beals serves as an advisor to the group. "This is a really good thing for REPS", commented Mike Sprague. "These talented folks give so much already, but they were willing to make an even bigger difference."

## ▼ SHOWCASE IX MEMORIES

*Clockwise from top: Douglas Young with Joy Jackson in Vic and Sade; Frank Buxton, Harry Bartell, Herb Ellis and Elliott Reid enthralled us with their performance in the Escape re-creation; Paul Herlinger and Ginny Tyler in Young Widder Brown; Jo Anna March, True Boardman, Jim Jansen, Anne Whitfield Phillips, Arthur Anderson, Rhoda Williams and Norma Jean Nilsson practice in the "Green Room"; Terry McManus, Tommy Cook and Larry Albert rehearsing for Silver Theatre.*



# THE CONTROVERSY OVER PUBLI

*The accompanying article caused waves of reaction across the collector community when it appeared. Critics of Carl Amari, his Radio Spirits, Inc. (RSI) and parent firm MediaBay lost no time slamming it as a slanted representation favorable to Amari. It was praised by others who expressed relief that Amari had laid out his position. Reprinting this extract here is not an endorsement of the article, nor any statements made, but is offered to provide insight into the arguments set forth by Radio Spirits in making claims to various rights in old-time radio.*

Since the article appeared, there have been new developments. MediaBay has been hit hard by sinking financial markets and falling sales. The company is in danger of being de-listed by the NASDAQ (symbol MBAY) and in August MediaBay retained Gruppo Levey & Co., a firm specializing in sales of distressed companies (characterized in a company press release as MediaBay looking to acquire others). MediaBay, of which Radio Spirits is only one division overshadowed by the company's largest endeavor of audio books on tape, is more than \$18M in debt, double the firm's current market capitalization, and carries a bank loan of \$6M with preliminary installments of \$300,000 due each quarter, or more than the total cash on hand at the end of the last quarter. The entire bank loan due September 2002 comes due immediately if MediaBay misses a quarterly payment. Most institutional investors have pulled out, a bad sign for any company.

At the same time, there is increased confidence in the collector community that Radio Spirits' claims are unenforceable. Two lines of thought have emerged. In one view, conflicting and overlapping claims might prevent anyone from claiming exclusive rights to OTR. Under this view, a single episode could have dozens or hundreds of separate rights holders, any one of who could block sales. These would include the performers, musicians, writers and technicians, producers, ad agencies, sponsors, their heirs and successors. Additionally, in 1939 the major radio networks and essentially every advertising agency signed a contract with the American Federation of Radio Artists restricting recordings, how they might be used and who might use them and effectively barring rights holders from selling useful rights to Radio Spirits or anyone else.

In a competing viewpoint, OTR is perceived to have been placed into the public domain by original broadcasts that didn't include disclaimers retaining rights (as is commonly heard at the end of shows today). Some claim common law copyright protection was abandoned decades before Congress extended it to sound recordings in the 1970s. Congress also turned legal control over to the states, whose laws conflict and whose jurisdiction over national broadcasts is unclear. Whether Congress intended to include radio transcriptions under the law for musical sound recordings is untested in the courts. Internet rumor is that two OTR dealers with significant financial backing have prepared legal positions on these grounds and others (which would purportedly paint RSI as a violator of rights, subject to damage claims!) in anticipation of possible suits brought by RSI.

The following is condensed

## Who Owns the Rights to OTR?

A little more than two years ago, when the digital music revolution was just beginning to take hold, an entrepreneur from Boston had an intriguing idea: if everyone else was putting music on the Web, why not old-time radio shows? Pete Kenney, or "Boston Pete", as he calls himself on the Internet, created a Web site that allowed people to download recordings of old-time radio programs, everything from "Gunsmoke to The Shadow, and he racked up thousands of "hits" a month, winning a loyal following among fans of old-style radio drama. He also got an angry e-mail from the country's biggest seller of old-time radio programs on cassette – Carl Amari.

Amari, president of Illinois-based Radio Spirits, accused Kenney of trampling on copyrights he controlled and threatened to take him to court. Kenney promptly shut down his Web site, and so did dozens of other Web site operators who had followed his lead. "Everyone thinks this stuff is in the public domain," Kenney says. "A lot of us cried and gave up."

## Opening Blow

It was the opening blow in a battle that rages today. Over the last two years, tens of thousands of old-time radio programs have been made available over the Web in the downloadable MP3 format, free to anyone with a computer and an Internet connection. Meanwhile, Radio Spirits maintains that it has sewn up the copyrights to just about every program that ever aired, and what the enthusiasts are doing is illegal.

But collectors have been trading and selling those old-time radio shows for more than 30 years, with a wink at copyright laws, and they argue, with some



# C DOMAIN CONTINUES TO RAGE

from an article by Erik Smith, February 16, 2001, *L.A. Times*.

justification, that if it hadn't been for them, most of the programs would have ended up in the dumpster. Some see the company's effort as an attempt to corner the market on old-time radio shows that not so long ago were thought to have no value whatever.

Amari says his company has negotiated exclusive agreements with radio-show creators and their heirs, and he insists that just about everyone else is a bootlegger.

Over the last two years, his company has threatened litigation against Web site operators, tape dealers and CD sellers. Still, the threat of litigation has done little to quell the Internet activity — many of the Web sites are back, including Boston Pete's — but Amari says he's gearing up for a larger-scale campaign later this year. Web site owners might be required to pay a fee for each download; tape dealers might be limited to reselling Radio Spirits merchandise.

"I know it makes me look like the bad guy," he says. "But it's protected by copyright, you're not supposed to sell it. If you went on a Web site and sold episodes of *MASH*, you'd get a cease-and-desist order. Why should it be any different with old-time radio, just because it's a little older?"

## Something Unusual

Amari, 37, heard his first radio program as a teenager and says he was hooked. By the time he was in college, he had turned a passion for collecting into a business, selling copies of his tapes through his catalog. When he started playing the tapes on his campus radio station, Amari got a cease-and-desist letter from a syndicator who controlled the rights to *The Shadow*. So Amari did

something unusual: He started paying for licenses.

Amari estimates that he sells 6 million cassettes a year. The revenue helped him buy out his two major competitors, *Adventures in Cassettes* and *Radio Yesteryear*, and it also allows him to obtain material no one else can get, from archives like the Library of Congress that put sharp restrictions on access. But the most important thing, Amari says, is that he pays for the rights to everything he uses, or he makes sure that copyrights have lapsed and the material is in the public domain. He estimates about 10% of his gross is spent on royalties. He won't reveal the full list of programs he claims to control, calling it proprietary information but he says compensating creators is the right thing to do, even if many hobbyists don't think so.

One of those creators is Irving Brecher. Brecher created *The Life of Riley* in 1944, made a star of William Bendix and arguably launched a new kind of program — the sitcom. Brecher copyrighted every script and renewed the copyrights when they expired. But when tapes of the show started to resurface in the '70s, in stores and on the air, no one paid him a dime. "These people are thieves", says Brecher, 87. "People have been stealing my stuff and other people's stuff over a period of years and I don't know who has the power and the money to stop them. At my age, I don't have the energy".

Now, through Amari's company, Brecher is finally getting a royalty. "I love him", Brecher says. But many dealers and collectors are outraged. What galls the enthusiasts, they say, is that they're the ones who saved the shows in the first place. If Amari won't tell them what he

owns, they can't tell whether he acquired the rights from the legitimate owners, and they can't dispute his claims without going to court.

## Unpublished Work

One thing is clear: Most old-time radio programs are still under copyright, even those that aired 75 years ago. Although sound recordings could not be copyrighted until 1972, the underlying script could be copyrighted as an "unpublished work". If producers registered copyrights and then failed to renew them, the script and the show are in public domain. But in other cases, no one bothered to register a copyright — the vast majority of cases, Amari says. And when copyright law was revised in 1976, those unpublished works automatically gained copyright protection. Finding out who owns them can require costly legal research because there is not central recording of ownership.

The Library of Congress and other authorities agree with Amari's analysis. Recent changes in copyright law will prevent most unpublished radio scripts from entering the public domain until at least 2050, says Dennis Karjala, an Arizona State University law professor specializing in copyright law. Until now, collectors and dealers have had little reason to worry about copyright, because the money to be made is so meager, says freelance writer and broadcast historian Elizabeth McLeod of Rockland, Maine. But the Internet has brought everything to a head: every downloaded radio program cuts into a potential Radio Spirits sale.

Amari, McLeod says, has ticked "a lot of people off. And when people are [mad], they work twice as hard. I don't know if he can stuff that genie back into the bottle".

# DON MCNEIL AND *THE BREAKFAST CLUB*

by Jack French ©2001

For over three decades, the most popular morning show on network radio was *The Breakfast Club* and its host, Don McNeill, was one of the most successful personalities in the Golden Age of Radio. This homespun variety show, which ran from 1933 to 1968, spawned half a dozen imitators, including *Breakfast at Sardi's* and *Arthur Godfrey Time*. Although the series could not find even one sponsor for its first six years, it eventually became so dominant that it made Don McNeill better known than any other daytime broadcaster.

Many OTR personalities, who would go on to network fame, got their first show-biz exposure on *The Breakfast Club*, including the Jordans (*Fibber McGee & Molly*), Curley Bradley (*Tom Mix Ralston Straight-Shooters*), Bill Thompson (Wallace Wimple) and Fran Allison (*Kukla, Fran & Ollie*).

Despite its early broadcast time, Don had no trouble attracting big-name guest stars that would get up with the roosters, i.e. Jack Carson, Dennis Morgan and Harold Russell. And on those rare occasions when McNeill took a vacation, Jack Paar filled in for him.

Of course, the real strength of this program was its regular cast members, who over the years became almost "members of the family" to the vast radio audience. Fran Allison and Sam Cowling joined the cast in 1937 and remained for years. The long-term singers, Jack Baker, Patsy Lee, Nancy Martin, and announcers Frank Ferguson, Bob "Ace" Murphy, and Don Dowd also became virtual household names.

Eventually television came in and an attempt was made to do *The Breakfast Club* on live TV. But the spontaneity couldn't translate to the visual media so the TV version sank slowly in the sunset.

The show finally went off the air in December 1968. But it had broken nearly all network broadcast records for longevity. As John Dunning describes the series: "... a run that few in radio, at any time of the day or night, could touch: 35 (consecutive) years ...."

Like many great radio programs, *The Breakfast Club* had such modest beginnings that few would have guessed it would last more than a few months. Originally called *The Pepper Pot*, it had no sponsors, no studio, no producer and no audience. McNeill took it over in June 1933 for which he was paid \$50 a week, but he also

had to announce the rest of the daily schedule, six days a week.

McNeill himself had humble beginnings. Born in 1907 in Galena, Illinois, he worked his way through Marquette College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He became a cartoonist, a radio writer, and announcer in local Milwaukee stations by the time he graduated.

A few years after graduation, Don left the Milwaukee area for Louisville, where he was an announcer, radio columnist, as well as cartoonist. When his salary reached \$60 a week, he married his college sweetheart, Kay, in 1931 in San Francisco where Don and a buddy, Van Fleming, were doing a radio show, *Coo Coo College*. But when the sponsor canceled, they returned to Milwaukee, broke.

For a while Don was working on *Saturday Night Jamboree* at a local station, but was fired by a manager who told McNeill he had no future in radio. Don left his wife with her parents and he went to Chicago where he lived in dollar-a-night hotel rooms when he scouted for work. Finally, he got the morning show for which there were few takers: *The Pepper Pot*, which aired at 8 a.m.

McNeill revamped the show by more than changing its name to *The Breakfast Club*. He broke it up into 15-minute segments or "calls to breakfast." With a small orchestra providing a variety of music for "March Time" and "Memory Time", Don was able to blend songs, poetry, and down-home humor into a show that started attracting listeners for the first time.

After several months, Don decided to stop writing scripts and ad-lib the whole hour with his small cast and his musicians. Bragging that it was "radio's most unrehearsed show", McNeill spent the first 15 minutes interviewing studio audience members. The second "call" was Memory Time, where Don read inspirational poetry. The second call in WW II became "Prayer Time" where prayers were offered for U.S. servicemen and women. This second call became so well loved, it was continued after the war. The third call was "March Time" and the closing call was "Inspiration Time."

Of course, no one actually ate breakfast on *The Breakfast Club*, although when the show went on one of its frequent tours, a table would be decked out on stage, with all the breakfast trimmings. By 1941, when over 100,000 letters came in yearly from happy listeners, the show finally got its first sponsor, Swifts Meat Company.

*continues top left of next page*

And small wonder, for it was not unusual for the show, on tour, to pack up to 10,000 people in a local auditorium at 8 a.m. to "watch" the live show.

Most OTR fans are familiar with Gracie Allen's run for the U.S. Presidency, but Don McNeill was also a candidate in 1948. It was a joke, of course, but Don's campaign captured the hearts and minds of thousands of prospective voters .... and with the support of Woody Woodpecker, how could Don not win?

Don's presidential campaign began in Philadelphia; and after his "convention", his motorcade to the railroad station attracted over 25,000 "Breakfast Clubbers" to cheer their candidate. Later, in Atlanta, he proclaimed himself "The South's Favorite Yankee" and said, if elected, he would replace "The Missouri Waltz" (Truman's Favorite) with "Rambling Wreck from Georgia Tech".

Eventually, Don had to "withdraw" so in August of that year, he terminated his mock campaign, saying, "It wouldn't be sporting to continue. I'd be the only candidate with five hours a week of radio time .... in the morning before people have started to think."

---

## Pat "Patsy Britten" Bell

*continued from page 1*

Street. She also sang many times at the Paramount Theatre. She did the *Mickey Mouse Club* at the Coliseum Theatre. During this time, Pat spent one year at Queen Anne High School, but in 1938 she was back in California as part of The Dancing Accordionists, dancing and playing the accordion at the same time. As was the case with most child actors, Pat's mother was the major influence in her career. "The hardest thing I ever had to do was to walk away from my mother and enroll at the University of Washington", which she did in 1941. She joined the navy for two years in 1944 and in 1946 got married.

### ***I was six years old for years!***

Although Pat was close to three years old when she started her career, she was extremely small and for a long time appeared younger than her age. "I was six years old for years", she says. "I was constantly on the road as a child and a teenager – Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Spokane. My memories of being in radio as a child are all good", Pat says.

Pat eventually had 10 children, seven of her own and three adopted. She now has 31 great-grandchildren. Her husband died in 1991, and she is now married to Bob Bell.

## THE MAKING OF A PRESIDENT

*Time, May 11, 1962*

Mimicry, being comedy's sharp elbow in the ribs, usually depends on the mimic's being at a safe distance from his subject – or victim; the more dignified and honored the subject, the greater the advisable distance. But an appealing showman named Elliott Reid flew down to Washington a fortnight ago with nothing less in mind than mimicking President Kennedy for the pleasure of the capital's press corps, most of the Cabinet officers, and the President himself. The result: Kennedy was convulsed, and Good Trouper Reid was once again "discovered".



▲ Mimicker Reid

Reid had finely polished the President's accents and gestures over three jobless months last fall, and once on stage, he brought down the house with his very first line; few had ever seen the President laugh so hard. His "serious mattahs" and "in my views" were unmistakably Kennedy, and his "we must move ahead" sounded like the call to federal service.

Reid had his Kennedy deliver a playful jab or two at British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, who was also present: "He has covahed

such a wide range of topics and made so many things cleah, including several centuries of British history... These are, these are not easy mattahs – even if you're British!"

After Reid, the President took the stage and deftly stole the show from the professionals – Reid, Peter Sellers, Benny Goodman, Gwen Verdon, Sally Ann Howes. Referring to an increase in the price of tickets to the dinner, Kennedy proved to be his own best mimic: "The sudden and arbitrary action to raise the price by \$2.50 over last year is wholly unjustified", he began, pointing his stern, recruiting-poster finger. "The American people will find it difficult to accept this decision..." and so on, in perfect parallel to his famous scolding of the steel industry.

Reid, who at 42 has endured 25 years of being faintly praised as the one saving grace of uniformly bad productions, is now assured a bright new popularity. He has had offers to do his first nightclub performance in Los Angeles' Cocomat Grove with Eddie Fisher later this month, and with White House approval, he will appear alongside some towering stars at a Madison Square Garden Democratic rally May 19.

# AN OTR FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

by Hal "Harlan" Stone

To Paraphrase General MacArthur's famous speech: "Child (RADIO) Actors never die, they just fade away"... certainly does not apply to OTR. (For sure, we all got older). But for many...we simply "grew up" in Show Biz.

## Training Ground

While straining my memory to assemble material for a book I'm writing about my years as a Child Performer during Radio's Golden Era, I made an interesting discovery: During that period, (the 40's and early 50's) many of my Child Actor contemporaries were spawned from one very specific and unique Actors training ground — the Mega-Hit long running Play, *Life With Father*, which opened on Broadway in 1939.

For those who may not be familiar with the plot, the comedy, set in the late 1800's, revolves around a family with 4 sons, ranging in age from 7 to 18. Whoever played the youngest child usually outgrew the role rather quickly. If he was lucky, he sometimes replaced the next oldest, (who was also outgrowing his part), or in many cases, found a new career working in NY Radio.

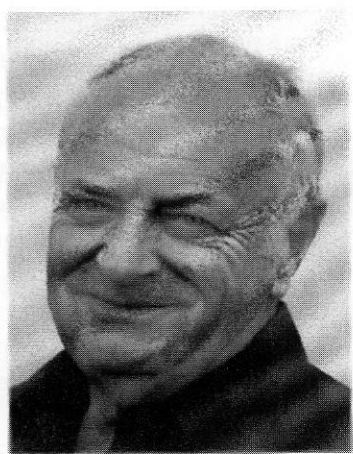
## A Piece of Cake

Although I played the part of "Harlan" (the youngest child) for 16 months in the Chicago Company starring Lillian Gish, it eventually launched my N.Y. acting career at a very early age. After returning to New York, (having earned my acting "Stripes"), it made the transition to Child Actor in Radio a piece of cake.

My Radio career spanned about 15 years, and fortunately, I survived the "awkward teen" years by playing the role of "Jughead" on the long running program *The Adventures of Archie Andrews*, (alongside my good friend Bob Hastings in the title role of "Archie"). As fans of OTR undoubtedly know, he definitely was not one of the young Actors that "Faded" away, but went on to a very notable career in Television. I "Morphed" into TV myself, but in the Production end, and became a TV Director. As for Hastings I could probably write an article about him alone, but I think I'll save that "exposé" for the book I'm writing.

## New York Was the Place to Be

Radio, as you all know, was a hotbed of activity for Actors of all ages back then, and New York was the place to be.



▲ Harlan Stone, Jughead from *The Adventures of Archie Andrews*, writes about child actors who appeared in *Life with Father*.

The four New York based Networks, (NBC's Blue & Red, CBS, and Mutual) provided many job opportunities for us kids.

Obviously, not all programs needed Child Actors. But there was plenty of work to go around. As you OTR fans well know, Nila Mack's *Let's Pretend* needed a steady stream of them. As did *Coast to Coast on a Bus*. In addition, the Dramatic Shows and "Soaps" also used their fair share.

## Name Dropping

Obviously, as the kids aged, their voices "cracked", so other younger *Life With Father* graduates took up the slack. As they matured even farther, many of the "boys" (and, young Women) from the Broadway cast, went from

Radio to working in Film and TV. Here are the names of some of the *Life With Father* alumni that may ring a bell with you.

- William (Billy) Redfield: One of the oldest "sons" in the Broadway production had a very long career in Radio, TV and Films. One of his most "Juicy" roles in Film was as a major supporting actor to Jack Nicholson in the critically acclaimed hit, *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. Billy even took over the part of "Jughead" for me, (for a few episodes) when I was sent overseas with the USAF in 1950.
- Larry Robinson: He played the original "Harlan" on Broadway. Larry did a great deal of Radio work, eventually playing "Sammy" in both the TV and Radio versions of *The Goldberg's*.
- Richard Simon: From the NY Cast, he went on to a successful career as a Producer of Feature Films in Hollywood.
- O.Z. Whitehead: Played the eldest son in the Chicago cast. He went on to play major supporting roles in film and T.V. Notably, appearing with Henry Fonda in *The Grapes of Wrath*.
- Georgette McKee: (Played a maid in the Chicago cast). Changed her name and went on to become the motion picture actress, Andria King.
- David Anderson: From the Broadway production went on to play many Children's parts on NY Radio.
- Teresa Wright: Played "Mary" in the Broadway cast, and her later film Stardom is well documented.
- Ted (Teddy) Donaldson: Ted went from Radio to a great role in film as a child actor, playing the young lead in the movie *Curlie*, starring Cary Grant. (Adopted from the Radio play written by Norman Corwin). Ted tells the story that in

his later years, while graduating from Hollywood High, Cary Grant showed up at the Ceremony to acknowledge the event and help him celebrate. Now "Grant" was obviously a class act. (No pun intended.)

- William Daniels: He went on as an Actor in TV, playing a major role on *St. Elsewhere*. And at this writing, is the current President of the Screen Actor's Guild.
- Peter Griffith: I believe Peter eventually went into Production on the West Coast. Married Tipi Hedron...result, their famous offspring, Melanie Griffith.
- Ben Cooper: Where do I start? As one of my oldest and dearest friends, he'll get a bit more space here. Fact is, I knew him long before he became a successful Child actor. Also, I guess I'm somewhat responsible for his getting into the business in the first place. Fate works in mysterious ways. Ben's older sister (my age) was absolutely gorgeous, and my first major childhood "Crush" in Grade school. We were all of 9 or 10 years old. (Ben was 2 years younger). Eventually, both families became friendly. I was fresh out of the *Life With Father* cast, and one day, my Mom said to Ben's mom, something to the effect that Ben would be ideal to play the part of the youngest child in the play. I remember "coaching" him in the lines, he went and auditioned for the Producers,

got the part, and the rest is history. Ben played the youngest child on Broadway until he outgrew his costumes, then "graduated" to play the next oldest son for a while. But simultaneously, he started working in Radio as well. His dad kept accurate records of his Radio performances (for tax purposes), and at last count, over a 10-year period; he did well over 3,000 of them. He did numerous live TV shows in NY, and eventually went to the West Coast, (following Radio's demise), and landed major roles in the films *Johnny Guitar* and *The Rose Tattoo*. He followed that up with a spate of Western films and many more TV Appearances. (He met his lovely wife Pamela on the set of *Wagon Train*). I'd also like to comment about how much fun it was, (later on in life) to direct Mr. Cooper (as well as Mr. Hastings) in a few TV projects. (It was particularly delightful to tell Mr. Hastings what to do for a change, since I was his "junior" by many, many, years, back in the days of the *Archie* show.)

If my memory has failed me, and I neglected to mention other *Life With Father* alumni who had distinguished OTR careers, I beg their forgiveness. But what the heck, that was 60 years ago. I'm lucky I can still remember my own name. As for the numerous other Child Actors in Radio that did not have a *Life With Father* connection...that's a story for another time.



## CORNER

If you donate and don't want your name listed, we'll respect that wish. So, it may be many, it may be few, but thanks to those who have given in the past. This list will be revised as contributions are made and will begin anew with the first publication of Air Check each year.

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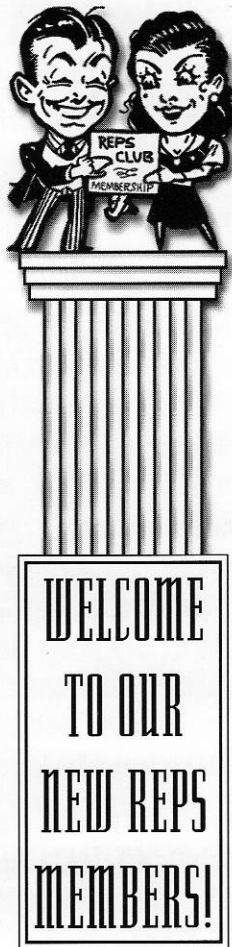
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**Monday, November 26, 2001: Imagination Theater** recording session at the Kirkland Performance Center. Doors open at 7:00 pm, program starts at 7:30. Call the Kirkland Performance Center Box Office for tickets...425-893-9900. Tickets: Adults - \$7.00, children under 12 - \$5.00.

**Saturday, December 1, 2001: Christmas Cheer.** As usual, this program will include food, cassette exchange and Toys for Tots. The REPS Radio Readers will be doing one or two Christmas shows.

**Saturday, January 5, 2002: My Favorite Radio Moments.** Attendees are encouraged to select a 3-4 minute segment from a favorite show...cue it up to the spot with a decent quality cassette. Give a 1-2 minute set-up of the segment...we'll all listen and enjoy with you.

**Saturday, February 2, 2002: Radio Premiums You Won't Believe.** Member Neal Shulman has an incredible collection of OTR premiums and will be sharing some of the stories that go with these memory stimulators in a distinctive meeting.

**Saturday, March 2, 2002: Dal McKennon.** A major voice talent in cartoons (almost all the Walter Lantz, Gumby, Disney and much more). A fellow who did radio, local and network (*Dragnet*, *Fibber McGee* and other shows) and stage work with our friend Tyler McVey. Dal will be a fascinating guest.

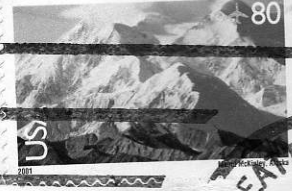
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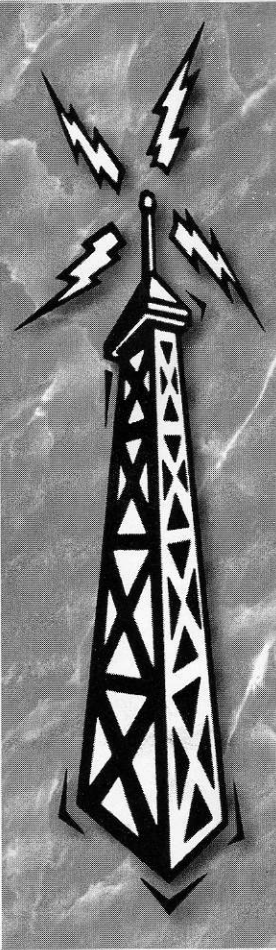
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## PUGET SOUND RADIO LISTINGS

Both Old Time Radio and current materials (designated C) are on the air. This list is currently being revised. Be sure to check future issues of Air Check for an up-to-date listing. If you know of others, or if any of these need correction, please let the Air Check editor know. Let the stations and sponsors know of your appreciation.

OTR	CFMI	101.1 FM	Vancouver, BC	10:00 pm - 12:00 am	Sunday
REN	ERRS	SAP FM	Seattle, WA	11:00 pm - 2:00 am	Monday-Friday
Odyssey (C)	KCIS	.630 AM	Seattle, WA	7:30 am - 8:00 am	Saturday
Odyssey (C)	KCIS	.630 AM	Seattle, WA	7:30 pm - 8:00 pm	Monday-Friday
Unshackled (C)	KCIS	.630 AM	Seattle, WA	10:30 pm - 11:00 pm	Sunday
Radio Super Heroes	KLAY	1180 AM	Lakewood, WA	4:30 pm - 5:00 pm	Sunday
Nostalgia Radio	KLAY	1180 AM	Lakewood, WA	4:00 pm - 12:00 am	Saturday
Radio Movie Classics	KLAY	1180 AM	Lakewood, WA	3:00 pm - 4:00 pm	Sunday
Big Band Swing	KLKI	1340 AM	Anacortes, WA	6:00 pm - 10:00 pm	Saturday
When Radio Was	KLKI	1340 AM	Anacortes, WA	10:00 pm - 12:00 am	Saturday
When Radio Was	KLKI	1340 AM	Anacortes, WA	6:00 pm - 11:00 pm	Sunday
Imagination Theater (C)	KNWX	.770 AM	Seattle, WA	9:00 pm - 10:00 pm	Saturday
When Radio Was	KNWX	.770 AM	Seattle, WA	10:00 pm - 2:00 am	Saturday
Imagination Theater (C)	KNWX	.770 AM	Seattle, WA	9:00 pm - 10:00 pm	Sunday
When Radio Was	KNWX	.770 AM	Seattle, WA	10:00 pm - 12:00 am	Sunday
Classic Radio	CKNW	.980 AM	Vancouver, BC	12:05 am - 2:00 am	Sunday-Friday
When Radio Was	KTCR	1340 AM	Kennewick, WA	7:00 pm - 9:00 pm	Saturday
Imagination Theater (C)	KTCR	1340 AM	Kennewick, WA	9:00 pm - 10:00 pm	Saturday
When Radio Was	KTCR	1340 AM	Kennewick, WA	7:00 pm - 10:00 pm	Sunday





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