

AIR CHECK

NEWSLETTER OF THE RADIO ENTHUSIASTS OF PUGET SOUND (REPS)

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November 2003

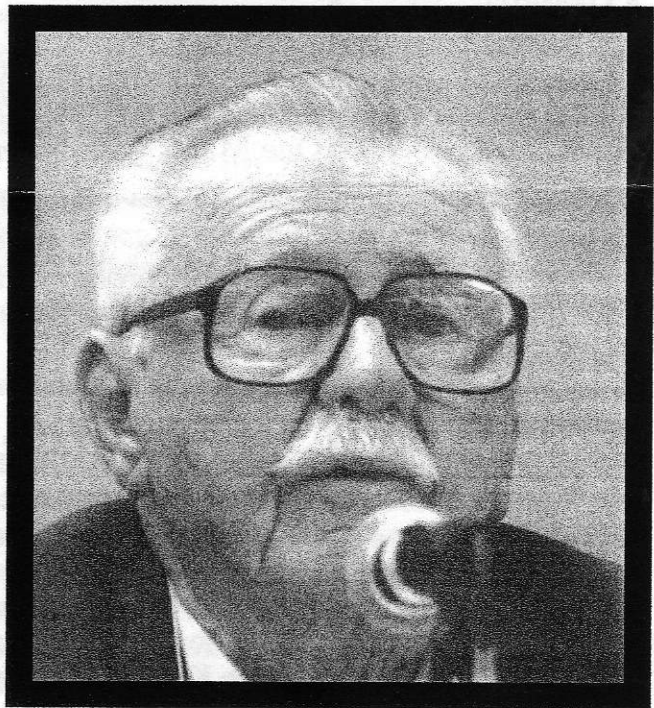
Jimmy Lydon September 6, 2003

When William Conrad was the director on *Wagon Train* and needed a producer, he tapped Jimmy Lydon. Jimmy's rule as a producer is to "absorb all you can, but never bluff." The producer handles all ingredients — dialogue, effects, music — and frequently serves as the "hatchet man". Jimmy was also the producer for *Frontier Circus*, *McHale's Navy*, *Alfred Hitchcock Hour* and *77 Sunset Strip*.

Getting Started

Jimmy got his start on stage at the age of 10 when his mom was bemoaning to a neighbor her drunken husband. The neighbor suggested that she put one of the kids on stage where they could earn \$45 per week. Jimmy walked into the room just about that time and thus began his acting career. Once Jimmy started on Broadway, his father stopped working altogether.

In 1938, he was the third lead in *Prologue to Glory*, (a story about Lincoln) which had 16 weeks of rehearsal and ran for a whole year. He worked on a WPA project which had no scale for kids so he was paid the Broadway scale even though everyone else was paid \$26.50 per week. One night was special — they had 1400 blind people in the audience. The only change made to the play was to have an announcer come on stage and describe the scene. Jimmy was amazed that the blind audience laughed at the same spots during the performance as the seeing audience.



Radio & Movie Work

After he passed Nyla Mack's audition, he was on *Let's Pretend*. On three of the four pages of script he had, his character was unhappy because his dog had been run over. The one hour show had a read through at 8 a.m., then a mic rehearsal so the script could be cut, and the broadcast at 11 a.m. His pay for the morning of work -- \$5! Jimmy discovered how marvelous radio actors were despite the tendency of stage actors to turn their noses down at radio actors. He also had roles on *Young Love* and *Pretty Kitty Kelly*.

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Kindness Corner

This important section is here to recognize and thank donors. It may be many, it may be few, thanks to those who have given. All of your generosity has made a real difference. If we left your name off, or misspelled your name, please let the editor know so that the information can be reflected correctly. Current donations may be sent to REPS, c/o David Speelman, 417 N Bowdoin Pl, Seattle, WA 98103. These are tax deductible and receipts will be sent to donors.

The money received from the Showcase XI Auction goes toward the Guest Travel Fund for Showcase XII.

Harry Bartell, Dick Beals, Ron Bowser, Bill Brooks, William Buckley, Jean Rouverol Butler, Frank Buxton, Terry Campbell, Michael Comstock, Janet & Christopher Conrad, Jim Cox, Bill Davies, Frank Denton, Sam & Bev Edwards, Ray & Meridy Erlenborn, Paul Feavel, Mary Fichtenberg, George Fowler, Robert Fudold, Al Gil, Art Gilmore, Cliff Glaspey, Anne Hockens, Steve Holden, Joy Jackson, John Jensen, Don Lacky, Rhea Lutton, Danean MacAndrew, Terry Mahony, Brent Martin, Judy Miller, Jerry Miller, Kate Molling, Millie Morse, Norma Jean Nilsson, One Man's Family family, Bill Parker, Anne Whitfield Phillips, Robert Rohrer, Andrew & Marjorie Rosen, Joan Selvig, Neal Shulman, Sam Simone, David Speelman, Mike Sprague, Ray Thweatt, Carolyn Van Jepner, Janet Waldo, Helen C. Warburton, Janet Wilt, Marilyn Wilt, Stewart Wright and Harlan Zinck.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

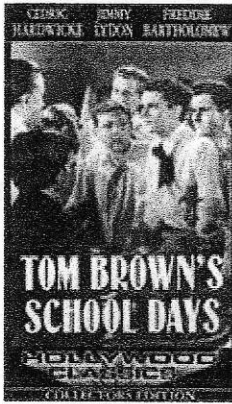
We meet on the first Saturday of every month except July at the Queen Anne Library (400 W. Garfield, Seattle) from 2 pm – 4 pm. Directions to the library are on our website: www.repsonline.org.

November 24, 2003: *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.

December 6, 2003: Annual Meeting and Holiday Cheer. Bring your gift for the gift exchange and an unwrapped toy for Toys for Tots. Share the holiday spirit with REPS.

January 3, 2004: Evolution of Home Radios. This meeting will be in conjunction with the Puget Sound Antique Radio Collectors. Check out their website: www.eskimo.com/~hhagen/psara. This organization has regular meetings, swap meets, a museum and an annual contest.

February 7, 2004: Guest Star. REPS reserves several meetings each year for those who were there when radio was in its prime.



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He was 16 years old in *Tom Brown's School Days*. When Jimmy was in England, it was "very strange" to realize that the school was just like the Hollywood sound stage! *Life with Father* was filmed when Jimmy was 23 (playing an 18 year old) and he was the only natural redhead in the movie. He took over the role of Henry Aldrich from Jackie Cooper and eventually appeared in eight of these films. William K. Howard, an Irishman like Jimmy, was his favorite director. Jimmy said, "We got along like two thieves."

Television and Beyond

Jimmy played a newlywed in the 1952 live TV daytime serial *The First Hundred Years*. He didn't think much of early live TV – "the worst of movies, the worst of theater and the worst of radio," was Jimmy's summary. The sets would fall down, maelstrom of noise, and cameras and grips in the camera shot were just a few of the problems.

Growing weary of the headaches and heartaches of acting, he started looking for work on the production end. Then along came Bill Conrad. Warner Brothers offered Bill and Jimmy a package deal: \$1 million to do as many budget films as they could finish in one year. They finished and released seven Technicolor films with three more ready for release when the year was up. Jimmy worked 11-14 hour days, two Saturdays and one Sunday a month while on this project. Robert Altman directed *Countdown* and that led to an offer for M*A*S*H.

In 1980, 20th Century Fox/Movietone news wanted to put together a composite of news footage. Two fifteen-minute newsreels were issued each week from the work of a thousand cameramen stationed around the world. Over a hundred million feet of negative film was shot from 1903 – 1963 but only seven million feet was ever used. 20th Century wanted to give this to the American public but it needed to be converted to non-nitrite film. Congress offered five years of tax deductions for doing this. The five years was over but the project was not completed; so Jimmy, who had written most of the narration, gave a presentation to Congress. Congress granted two extra years for completion. Orson Welles, Lowell Thomas, Dick Van Dyke, President Ford, Margaret Truman and Buster Crabbe were some of the narrators.

Editor's Comments

Oops ... I blew it! I forgot to acknowledge those who had contributed to the Showcase issue. The photographs were taken by Warren Jensen, Danean MacAndrew, and Paul Secord. The articles were written by Terry Campbell, Bill Davies, Mary Fichtenberg, Bill Parker, Carolyn & Joel Senter, Neal Shulman, Janet Wilt, and Stewart Wright. Keri Secord at Secord Printing was a tremendous help in getting the issue printed. Thank you all for your help. It could not have been done without you.

Missing Picture. Did you all notice that empty space on page 11 of the Showcase issue? There was supposed to be a picture of Anne Phillips. My apologies to Anne for leaving your picture off the award page. So, here is the missing picture!

McGee's Closet. This new feature got lost along the way — so this is just a reminder. OTR related ads, of 25 words or less, are free to REPS members. Ads will run on a first-come first-serve basis and are subject to editing (from the bottom up) when there are space limitations. Ads must be received, in writing, on or before the 10th of January, April, and October. Ads must be resubmitted for each issue printed. The three categories will be: "For Sale," "For Trade," and "Wanted". Submit ads to Bob Cardenas at bobcar@eskimo.com with a subject line of McGee's Closet or by snail mail to McGee's Closet, 517 29th Ave, Seattle, WA 98122.



AND HEEEEERE'S THE CINNAMON BEAR

by Dennis Crow



A bumper sticker on my car reads, "I Love Old Time Radio." I am a fan, tried and true, of all old time radio shows; my collection of programs just grows and grows.

I joined the now inactive Cinnamon Bear Brigade because it has been an advocacy group for the Cinnamon Bear, which edged out other radio broadcasts when it came to sheer suspense, artful characterization, and adroit plotting. *Cinnamon Bear* is a catalogue of everything that is good about "The Golden Age of Radio." Radio as it was meant to be are the adventures of Paddy O'Cinnamon, the Crazy Quilt Dragon, and the Barton twins in their search for the silver star. (If you have the show, its episodes are designed to be played from the day after Thanksgiving to Christmas Eve. There are 26 delightful installments.)

I never had the pleasure of meeting Buddy Duncan, but if I had I would ask him, "Whatever became of Jimmy Barton?" The radio actor who played "Jimmy" has so far proved elusive to all the OTR clubs. Maybe we should enlist *Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons*.

Buddy Duncan, the original "Cinnamon Bear," who was a little person in real life and appeared in many slapstick "shorts," and was a sometime recording artist for Capitol Records, probably never imagined the cult which would grow around this wonderful children's serial. Entire conventions center on the saga of Paddy O'Cinnamon, the little bear "with the shoe button eyes," and a penchant for adventure, cinnamon buns, and exotic, fabulous make-believe places.

As a fan of the show, I experience not only the suspenseful fun of the cliffhanger episodes, but also curiosity about how Glan Heisch wrote the show, how the great and versatile Felix Mills arranged the music (when Mills died, there weren't any Cinnamon Bear songs in his music collection), what a



typical recording session was like at the old Radio Recorders Studio where the program was transcribed in marathon readings during the fall of 1937, and what spin-offs into the commercial world originated because of the story's content (we know there was a coloring book, now worth \$75, and a foil star, and wonder what else?)

When I visited radio conventions in the late eighties and early nineties, I always enjoyed seeing Elvia "Penelope, the Pelican," Allman. She remembered being in CB's cast but recalled little else about the series. Neither did Gale "Weary Willie" Gordon or Dorothy "Fraidy Cat" Scott. "I can't remember what happened five minutes ago, let alone 50 years," Scott commented to SPERD-VAC's Larry Gassman.

I could go on and on about the remarkable gallery of players assembled by CB Director, Lindsay MacHarrie. Mr. Presto the Magician was played by Elliott Lewis, who to many radio fans was the quintessence of the multi-purpose radio character actor and director. He spent his well-deserved retirement in Oregon with his wife, radio star, Mary Jane Croft. Barbara "Judy Barton" Wong [Lee] died only recently. She spent 31 productive years in the Los Angeles Public School System. You might remember her on *I Love a Mystery*, *Halls of Ivy*, and other radio shows. Before her teaching career, she was a very busy child star on radio and in movies.

The narrator, Bud Hiestand, who was Glan Heisch's brother-in-law, was even more active in television than radio. He announced many of the top rated shows throughout the eighties. Some nights, his voice was heard on several programs, and more than one network! Remember "Daddy" of *Baby Snooks*? That was Hanley Stafford, who was CB's Snapper Snick, the Crocodile. Frank Nelson, Captain Tin Top, played the hilarious Yeeees man on *The Jack Benny Program*. The

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versatile, Verna Felton, who was Judy and Jimmy's Mother, co-starred with Spring Byington on TV's *December Bride*. You may remember her as Dennis Day's Mother on *The Jack Benny Program*. And, Howard McNear was the cowboy on CB. He was Doc on radio's *Gunsmoke*.

Joseph Kearns, the Crazy Quilt Dragon on CB, appeared as "The Man in Black," on the show *Suspense*. He was the original Mr. Wilson, the frustrated, harried next door neighbor, on TV's *Dennis the Menace*. He was so popular in this role that he got more fan mail than Jay North who played Dennis. Lou Merrill played Santa Claus on CB. His family donated his extensive collection of discs to SPERDVAC. You have probably heard his voice on *Big Town*, *Lux Radio Theatre*, *Point Sublime*, and *Smilin' Ed's Buster Brown Gang*. I remember him from my favorite science fiction film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

Like little Paddy O'Cinnamon, I am "much obliged" to these radio pioneers who brightened my days and nights for most of my childhood. Imagination was King in early radio and mine soared and soared again. The *Cinnamon Bear* held me spellbound year after year, creating mental pictures that are unforgettable. Nothing remotely comparable to the *Cinnamon Bear* has been produced for children in recent years, certainly not on the radio, where dreams are formed. Somewhere out there, maybe, is another writer like Glan Heisch, who will transport us to equally magical realms through the glory of imaginative sound. May he be discovered in all of our lifetimes.

Dennis Crow is the "expert" on Cinnamon Bear. He is a frequent contributor to the OTR Digest where he encourages readers each holiday season to listen to his favorite program, *Cinnamon Bear*.



RADIO ENTHUSIASTS OF PUGET SOUND BALLOT

Neal Shulman, President

Write In _____

**Ballots must be postmarked by the
last Saturday in November (11/29) or
brought to the December meeting.**

Greetings! Your REPS Board has been very busy planning for 2004.

Work is underway on another outstanding REPS Radio Showcase to be held June 24-27, 2004. Look for more details in AirCheck and on our website.

An exciting lineup of monthly programs is being prepared and will include more guest stars, a greater variety of special features, more audience participation, and partnerships with other radio-related organizations.

The Board has also been preparing a budget for 2004. They have faced the fact that the cost of member benefits has been increasing each year. On the other hand, membership dues have actually been reducing each year in terms of today's dollars. Annual membership dues will be \$23 starting January 1, 2004. The Board has committed to:

- (1) continually improving member benefits such as quarterly AirCheck, website, tape library, script library, monthly programs, Showcase, member discounts, and connections with other OTR resources and
- (2) holding the dues constant for at least two years.

I belong to several other organizations in the Puget Sound area and their dues continually increase, average 2-3 times more than REPS, and yet I get more enjoyment from the REPS benefits. REPS is a bargain!!

It has been a pleasure working with all of you over the past four years. Please continue to give your full support to new president Neal Shulman; officers John Jensen, Mary Fichtenberg, and Dave Speelman; Showcase chair Joy Jackson; and the REPS board. REPS is truly a unique and special treasure and you make it happen.

Dave Selvig, President

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Lynda Glaspey
4709 84th St SW
Mukilteo WA 98275

Frank and Anne Hummert's Radio Factory

The Programs and Personalities of Broadcasting's Most Prolific Producers

A book review by Stewart Wright Through their Air Features Inc. production company, Frank and Anne Hummert, were a dominant force in network radio for much of the Golden Age. While this very private couple were the most prolific producers of radio series, they were reclusive and very little has been written about them. Author Jim Cox has rectified this omission with his enlightening new book, Frank and Anne Hummert's Radio Factory. His book not only provides insight into their private lives, but also the professional activities of Radio's Golden Age most prolific series creator-producers.

Jim has unearthed extensive biographical information on the Hummerts. He discusses their early years, how they met, and their backgrounds in journalism and advertising. Additionally, Jim provides many intriguing vignettes that give glimpses into the Hummert's private and business lives.

In the pages of Frank and Anne Hummert's Radio Factory, we learn that the Hummerts were astute business people who were acutely attuned to the likes and dislikes of American radio audiences. They were responsible for least 125 radio series. Twenty-four of these series were on the air for a minimum of a decade. At least 25 Hummert series were on the network air-waves **each year** between 1934 and 1948.

While mostly remembered as pioneers of the radio soap opera (the Hummerts did produce 61 daytime serial series), they did not neglect other popular genres. Among their many other production efforts were 37 musical or variety series, 10 mystery series, eight children's series, and nine series of other genres.

There are highly informative chapters describing the Hummert's endeavors in each of the major genres. The eccentric Hummerts were often seemingly contradictory in their dealings with their employees. They paid the lowest wages in the industry, gave little artistic



credit to their writers and performers, and were quick to fire those who displeased them. However, they were loyal to those who met their standards and observed their edicts. During the Communist scare of the late 1940's and early 1950's, they refused to fire employees who were blacklisted.

There is also a very interesting chapter on the Hummerts' primary competition in the production of daytime serial dramas: Irna Phillips and Elaine Carrington. There are biographical sketches of both women. The styles of the soap operas of Carrington and Phillips are

compared and contrasted with those of the Hummerts.

As readers have come to expect from books by Jim Cox, there are several informative appendices. They are: a chronology of the Hummerts' lives; a description of each of the 125 Hummert-created, adapted, supervised, or influenced radio series; a collection of quotations attributed to the Hummerts that express their philosophy of broadcast programming; a list of the most active radio producers of Radio's Golden Age with their most famous series; and typical broadcast schedules of Hummert series.

Fans of Old-Time Radio will enjoy Jim Cox's new volume that entertainingly fills a long-standing void in Old-Time Radio history. This book gives the reader a new insight into and understanding of two of the most influential, but enigmatic icons of Radio's Golden Age.

Frank and Anne Hummert's Radio Factory
The Programs and Personalities of Broadcasting's Most Prolific Producers

By Jim Cox — ISBN: 0-7864-1631-9 — \$32.50 softcover

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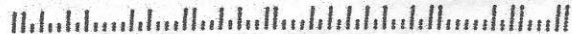
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Showcase XII June 24 - 27, 2004

Mutual Broadcasting and its West Coast Affiliates

There are at least 153 shows to choose from for recreations!!!

Past attendees ... Alice Backes, Harry Bartell, Dick Beals, Frank Buxton, Herb Ellis, Ray Erlenborn, Jim French, Barbara Fuller, Esther Geddes, Art Gilmore, Phil Harper, Paul Herlinger, Jimmy Lydon, Jo Anna March, Norma Jean Nilsson, Anne Phillips, Hal Stone, Gil Stratton, Jr., Ginny Tyler and Doug Young ... have all been invited to return for another year.

Sam Edwards will be honored during the Thursday night spotlight tribute. Jack Edwards and Jane Webb have promised to come.

The location will be the Seattle Center again and the hotel is Comfort Suites. We are working on something unique for this year's banquet.

See you all at Showcase XII!!

Check our website (www.repsonline.org) for more details as they become available.

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