

AIR CHECK

NEWSLETTER OF THE RADIO ENTHUSIASTS OF PUGET SOUND (REPS)

Perry Mason, Aural Barrister

by Jim Cox

In its halcyon days, the award-winning CBS Television courtroom drama Perry Mason starring Raymond Burr as the infamous witness-stand-revelation defense lawyer drew millions of viewers every week (1957-66). Nevertheless, possibly only an infinitesimal number of those fiercely loyal fans were aware that—for a dozen years prior to the counselor's inception in a visual manifestation—he was a popular figure five days a week in an aural matinee melodrama. In fact, a potent argument can be proffered that the daytime drama surpassed anything on TV for its power to spellbind an audience.

From October 18, 1943 to December 30, 1955 the unconventional defense attorney enthralled a vast audience of homemakers—largely feminine—plus a worthy number of males who were available to tune in for some matinee mayhem. It was unlike anything else on the dial at that hour for it purveyed a particularly chilling effect on its listeners. Furthermore, the habitual reminder from an announcer at the end of every episode to “tune in again tomorrow, won't you?” seemed utterly superfluous. Mesmerized fans had little choice but to be on hand for the next installment of the gripping saga. It was, most often, that compelling.

Before exploring the radio incarnation in greater detail, a little Perry Mason history is in order.

The origins of the crusading attorney date from a decade before the radio incarnation when real defense lawyer, Erle Stanley Gardner, turned his attention to writing fiction as a moneymaker. The first of more than 80 Mason novels was published in 1933 titled *The Case of the*

Velvet Claws (Grosset & Dunlap) with a cover displaying these immortal words: “Perry Mason—criminal lawyer. Remember that name. You'll meet him again. He is going to be famous.” The copywriter who penned that piece of marketing verbiage had keen insights.

But Gardner was publishing extensively before that. In the 1920s he wrote fiction for *Black Mask*, a popular pulp detective magazine. By 1925 he created a series of stories based on a mythical character that he labeled Ed Jenkins, Phantom Crook. He persevered as a *Black Mask* contributor for two decades. He was to author legions of added fiction tomes later, frequently featuring a detective, a lawyer or a combination of the two. His works often appeared under the pseudonyms A. A. Fair, Charles M. Green, Carleton Kendrake, and Charles J. Kenny. Between 1939 and 1970, for example, he published 29 mystery novels as A. A. Fair that cited the detective team of Donald Lam and Bertha Cool.

Born at Malden, Massachusetts on July 17, 1889, Gardner grew up in multiple Oregon mining towns before graduating in 1909 from Palo Alto High School near San Francisco. Although he was dismissed from Valparaiso (Indiana) University for fist-fighting, he was nonetheless



Erle Stanley Gardner as the judge in the final TV episode, with William Tallman as Hamilton Burger.

Stuart Canin will be the telephone guest for the REPS February 6, 2010 meeting. This was the boy (at that time) that played the Bee on the violin starting the feud.

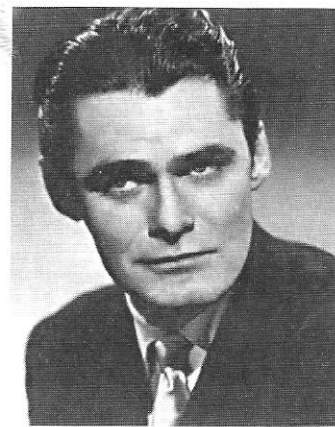
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admitted to the bar without formal instructions in 1911 after merely typewriting for a living in a California law office. Gardner hung out his shingle at Merced afterwards and then worked for a corporate attorney at Oxnard (1911-18). He tried sales from 1918-21 but returned to law, practicing a dozen years at Ventura (1921-33). By then he was heavily subsidizing his income with pulp writing, earning a penny per word for fiction in the Depression epoch that he sold to *West Weekly*, *Western Round-Up*, and *Western Tales* magazines. He published 144 short stories and 301 novelettes by 1934.

The appearance of Mason in 1933 caught on with the public who were fascinated by the tales of the mythological criminal lawyer's ability to separate truth from illusion. The stories became so popular so quickly that Tinseltown took notice. Warner Brothers purchased the film rights to several of the Mason volumes. At least three were produced in quick succession, each with a different actor playing Mason. All of them flopped: *The Case of the Howling Dog* (1935 with Warren William), *The Case of the Black Cat* (1936 with Ricardo Cortez) and *The Case of the Stuttering Bishop* (1937 with Donald Woods). "Gardner never forgave Hollywood," a critic pontificated.

The books, on the other hand—which Gardner had ultimate control over—kept coming, and a grateful public kept reading. He released new ones until his death on March 11, 1970 at Temecula, California. Successors of his estate continued to create new volumes following his demise.

In the meantime, in 1943 the Procter & Gamble Company was seeking something different to offer milady in weekday radio to increase the sales of its perfumed toilet soap, Camay. Someone suggested developing a daytime serial drawn from the popular novels and short stories that Erle Stanley Gardner was releasing and centered on the fabled imaginary criminal lawyer Perry Mason. While this would be a departure from every other drama offered on CBS, the idea clicked and CBS offered P&G a quarter-hour slot Monday-through-Friday at 2:45 p.m. Eastern Time. (The program shifted to 2:30 p.m. in 1944. It permanently transferred to 2:15 p.m. in 1945.) Actor Bartlett Robinson was engaged to portray Mason in the debuting drama with actress Gertrude Warner playing Della Street, Mason's confidential secretary. Matt Crowley originally won the part of private investigator Paul Drake while Mandel Kramer was hired to appear as police lieutenant Arthur Tragg. Those recurring roles were to be recast at least once over the 12-year run and some multiple



John Larkin, Perry Mason on radio for many years. times. A strong supporting stable of New York aural actors complemented the contributions of the regulars.

At the narrative's start, Erle Stanley Gardner wrote the scripts himself. In those pioneering days, the format more closely paralleled what the TV version was to become than at any other time for it was prepared in titled sequence, a Gardner trademark. The premier story was labeled *The Case of the Unwanted Wife*. But it was soon evident to everyone, including Gardner himself, that he didn't possess the credentials and possibly the stamina to pull off a grueling pace of five shows weekly for 52 weeks per year. Others were brought in to pick up the slack.

Most likely two of the best things that happened to the show in its radio incarnation occurred within a few months of one another. In the fall of 1946, Irving Vendig arrived. He was a man whose inspired scripts turned the series into a work of magnetic art. The concept of the titled case format was virtually abandoned; Vendig's terrifying tales had the listeners descending to deeper and deeper levels of intrigue, allowing them to linger as new details surfaced which made turning the dial totally impossible for most addicts of the series. As opposed to the murder mysteries subsequently solved in the television in an hour, Vendig's audio Mason might mete out one storyline for as long as 18 months. Another big difference characterizing his narrative was the fact the audience almost always knew up front who the bad guy was and what he was capable of doing to a witness or potential victim. Some culprits had killed already and wouldn't hesitate to do so again, provided they could locate a hunted figure before Mason found him or her. It was imperative that the inveterate protector ("defender of human rights ... champion of all those who seek justice") locate an individual in hiding before the mob or a crazed murderer struck first.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OF YOU OUT THERE IN REPSLAND, HAPPY 2010!!!

(By the way, the year is spoken
TWENTY TEN, not TWO
THOUSAND TEN, let's all be clear
on that.)

Another year of REPS is now in the history books and it was a year packed with a lot of neat stuff.

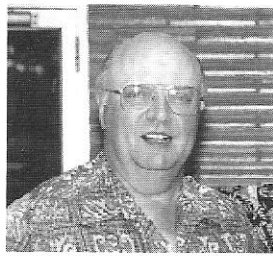
The election of members to the REPS board was announced at the December meeting. The officers for 2010 will be Bryan Haigood, re-elected as vice-president and Mike Toennesen, newly elected as secretary, both for two year terms. The positions of At-Large Members, for one year terms, are Al Gil in Position 1, Frank Rosin in Position 2, and Shaun Clancy in Position 3. They join Secretary Mary Fichtenberg and me to complete the board. As a reminder, the board is seeking a person to step into Frank Rosin's role on the board. Frank has done so very much over the years in support of REPS and he still is wearing several additional hats. We'd love to give him some relief. Please contact me if you are interested.

In June we had Showcase XVII, 2009, another very successful event with a mix of stars from Golden Age of Radio, plus many of our talented local performers and programs that included just about something for everyone.

Showcase was followed by Radio Memories in November. It was a one day afternoon program and again brought stars to Seattle and support from our local performers. The brunch that preceded the programs was a big hit. The half day of shows were very fitting and enjoyed by all.

We owe a big thank you to Bryan Haigood and Walden Hughes for producing both Showcase and Radio Memories. Together they have brought these events to a new level of quality for our enjoyment. The hours and perspiration they expended to put the programs together were almost beyond human endurance and would have done-in most people. In addition the technical support we received throughout the year is truly one that deserves a lot of thanks from all. A big thanks too for the many other volunteers and to all of you for supporting these events and REPS throughout the year. Thank you and keep it going!!!

There were a lot of other events that took place at our monthly meetings. Larry Albert did his one man trivia show which is always a big, big hit. Shaun Clancy did several interviews. One with Noel Blanc and another with our own Bob Hudson. In August, Vi and Darrell Anderson open their home and let us descend on them for our traditional pot-luck picnic. In September the whole meeting was set aside to pay tribute Donald Buka. Donald was a superb actor and gave us many memorable performances at Showcase.



Also, REPS Radio Readers gave us entertaining performances of an Escape program Evening Primrose, Candy Matson, the Black Cat Caper, and the Mummers in The House of Purple Shadows. For the December meeting we brought the readers back for an Our Miss Brooks program and short sketches of Lum & Abner and Junior the Mean Widdle Kid. The meeting also included a pot-luck-lunch, media swap and the Toys for Tots donation which you all generously supported. We kind of overwhelmed two Marines, Kristin Jensen and Anthony Faigh-Bruno, that came by to thank us and pick up our donations.

As you can see there was a lot going on throughout the year. If you missed some of the meetings last year you missed a lot, so circle the first Saturday of the month and mosey over to the Norse Home and join in the fun. REPS needs your ongoing support and your input and suggestions so we can continue to have worthwhile programs. The club belongs to the all the members so let your voices be heard.

See you all on February 6th, twenty ten. Thank you, Paul K. Secord, President

PS. Check out our website www.repsonline.org It has been vastly improved and upgraded.

Pontiac Bay Symphony Orchestra Presents "The Pontiac Bay Old-Time Radio Show"

Come join Pontiac Bay for another 1940's style, old-time "radio" show on Sunday, March 14 at the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle.

This wildly popular event draws huge audiences and features classic Big Band and popular music of the era performed by Pontiac Bay Symphony Orchestra, guest actors performing classic old-time radio skits, and a guest vocalist singing popular tunes of yesteryear!

Produced and directed by Sheila Espinoza (a REPS member), the show will also feature REPS members Larry Albert, Anna Denton, and Dave Selvig as the guest actors, and guest vocalist and local actor Cliff Watson. The orchestra's Guest Conductor is once again the entertaining and renowned professional musician and conductor, Lauren Anderson.

Sunday, March 14, 2010,
6:00 PM to 7:30 PM

Museum of History and
Industry, 2700 24th
Avenue East, Seattle
98112

Tickets: \$17 General,
and \$15 Students,
Seniors, and Children



Information and Advance Tickets: www.pontiacbay.org, www.brownpapertickets.com, and 206-364-0907

By the late 1940s the serial hit its stride. The central character had gradually developed into one whose prolonged yet absorbing action-packed exigencies caught the fancy of hordes of followers. Vendig's central figure dispelled the old wives' tale that most men on radio soap operas were weaklings. The crusading attorney was brilliant—cool, calculating, a good match for even the most formidable foe who challenged good with evil. Mason was also attractive to the housewives. Exploits of the dashing, brilliant young lawyer gave the homebodies something to drool over amid the drudgery of performing their day-to-day routines: laundry, dishes, ironing, cleaning and cooking often without any modern time-saving conveniences. Mason fleetingly transported them to far-off enchantment. Vendig's carefully crafted plots temporarily ferried them away every single day.

The second good fortune that occurred to Perry Mason during its radio adaptation was the arrival of actor John Larkin to play the namesake character. Perhaps no one could have brought the part to life better than he. He won it in the spring of 1947, debuting March 31 that year, and kept it until the series left the air nearly nine years hence at the end of 1955. Larkin imbued the part with inflections earned from a myriad of radio serials in which he earned his living. Over that period with Vendig providing matchless scripts and Larkin's quick-tempered, no-nonsense, authoritative reflections, Perry Mason reached the zenith of striking radio dramatization.

Procter & Gamble was obviously satisfied with the collective effort, too. Upon introducing its "new washday miracle," Tide detergent, in 1946, the firm appropriated that commodity to Perry Mason, reassigning Camay elsewhere on its many shows. Tide became the most popular brand-name laundry product in history. By 1949 it was the best selling washday cleaning agent in the United States. While all of the credit for Tide's early success can't be measured by a single soap opera, the drama featuring it in all of its commercials contributed heavily to the product's launch.

P&G was so pleased with the results of its crime drama in the afternoons that—in the early 1950s—it began to look for a method of transforming that serial

into a daytime television property. Negotiations were conducted with Erle Stanley Gardner who adamantly refused. Possibly because of the failures in film in the 1930s over which he had no control, he was unwilling to allow the highly successful Mason to go to video, fearing he would have little authority. P&G wasn't about to relinquish what it believed would be a strong show, however. When Gardner nixed it, the soapmaker turned to Irving Vendig and asked him to create a Mason-like protagonist for a serial with dark undertones for afternoon viewing. The result was *The Edge of Night*, a half-hour soap opera that debuted on April 2, 1956 just three months after Perry Mason left the aural ether. And who was hired to play Mike Karr, the crusading assistant district attorney there? None other than John Larkin, of course! With such a winning combination—sponsor-network-author-actor—it could hardly have improved the concept. While Larkin and Vendig eventually departed from the fold, the serial remained a hit for years, not leaving the airwaves until December 28, 1984, nearly 29 years after it premiered.

Perry Mason on radio never wavered in its ability to keep the listeners returning for more. Its 3,221 installments rivaled and often surpassed the dramatic series airing in radio's primetime hours. While the famous counselor's crime and mystery fare could be branded as chilling, Mason's audience perpetually provided a warm reception for those daily exhibitions. -30-



Raymond Burr as Perry Mason and Barbara Hale as Della Street in the long running TV version.



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Showcase 2010

June 25, 26, 2010



Showcase 2010 will be upon us almost in the 'blink of an eye'. Preparations are being made at the *Coast Bellevue Hotel* in Bellevue, the site of previous Showcases.

We will be having most of our regular guest stars that we have had in the past as well as some that have only appeared a few times in the past and some that are new to us here at REPS.

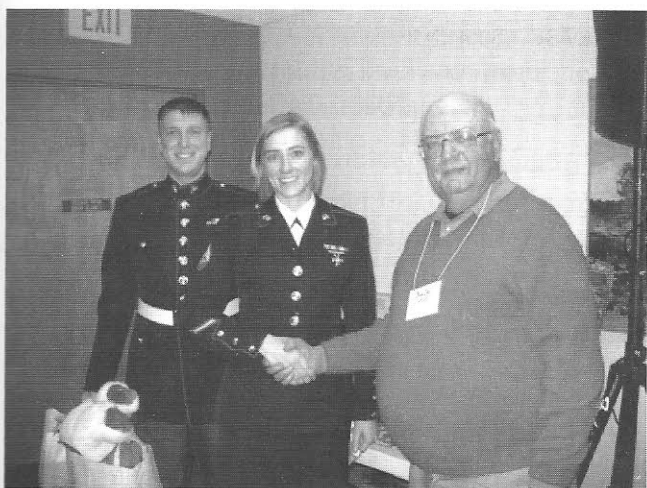
If there is someone that you would like to have invited, please contact one of the board members and we will see what we can do.

We are thinking of something new this year and would like to have your input. Alaska Airlines that most of our guest stars fly to Seattle has changed their schedules. Most flights don't leave Seattle to California until afternoon. ~~That leaves all Sunday morning with nothing to do.~~ A breakfast/brunch can be hosted by REPS at the hotel. No recreations, no program, just a breakfast/brunch and one more time to sit and visit with our guest stars before they go to the airport and home.

We have a new web site just for Showcase 2010 with the most recent up to date information.

www.showcase.com

Let us know what you think!



Toys for Tots at the December 2009 meeting

TOUGH AND EASY Old Time Radio Quiz

By Larry Siskind

Name the famous radio personality using as few clues as possible. Numbers 1 – 3 are easy; 4 and 5 are tougher.

1. A) His real name was Benjamin Kamelsky. He was Jewish and he was born in Waukegan, Illinois.
 B) He was one of the most famous radio personalities of all time but he was also a movie star. His movie credits include: *Charlie's Aunt*, *Meanest Man in the World*, *Big Broadcast of 1937*, and *To Be or Not to Be*.
 C) Cast members of his show Phil Harris, Dennis Day and Mel Blanc, each had their own programs.
2. A) His real name was John Florence Sullivan. He was born May 31, 1894 in Cambridge, Mass.
 B) Although he was most famous as a radio personality, he was also in the movies. His movie credits included: *It's in the Bag*, *Love thy Neighbor*, *We're not Married*, and *Sally, Irene and Mary*.
 C) Famous characters on his show included Falstaff Openshaw, Pansy Nussbaum, Titus Moody, and Ajax Cassidy. Two of his programs were titled *Linit Bath Club Review* and *Town Hall Tonight*.
3. A) His real name was Isadore Itzowitz. He was born in New York City on January 31, 1892. Both parents died when he was barely out of infancy and he spent his childhood in extreme poverty.
 B) Although he was most famous on the radio, he was also in the movies. His movie credits include: *Strike Me Pink*, *Show Business*, *Kid Millions*, and *Palmy Days*.
 C) The Mad Russian was a regular on his show and Harry von Zell was his announcer. He closed his show singing:

*I love to spend each Sunday with you,
As friend to friend, I'm sorry it's through.
I'm telling you just how I feel.
I hope that you feel that way too.*
4. A) He was born May 26, 1915. His first radio show was the *Adventures of Sonny and Buddy*, which he co-starred with his father and brother.
 B) Although well known in radio, he was also in movies and TV. His credits included: *12 O'clock High*, *Operation Pacific*, *Gangbusters*, and the *Beatniks*.
 C) On radio he never had his own show but played bit parts on a long list of radio programs. He was best known as Dexter in *Meet Corliss Archer*.

5. A) He was born July 12, 1908 at 68 118th street, New York City. His father was a paint and varnish salesman. He was a child actor and performed in many silent films.

B) In 1934 through 1936 he was a regular on the *Rudy Valle Hour*. Later he became the host of *Stop Me if You've Heard This One*.

C) He had his own radio show from 1936 to 1949. Campbell Soup, Philip Morris and Texaco were some of his sponsors. Frank Gallup was his announcer. In later shows he would comically satire by means of salutes, subjects such as "Brooklyn", "Gambling", "Politics" and "Women."

6. Match the radio lady to her male counterpart.

RADIO LADY MALE COUNTERPART

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Ann Williams | A. Boston Blackie |
| 2. Effie Perrine | B. Casey of Crime Photographer |
| 3. Carol Curtis (Glamourpuss) | C. Dennis Day |
| 4. Lorele Kilbourne | D. Jack Benny |
| 5. Mary Westley | E. Fred Allen |
| 6. Mildred Anderson | F. Nick Carter |
| 7. Patsy Bowen | G. Sam Spade |
| 8. Sadie Marx | H. Ozzie Nelson |
| 9. Portland Hoffa | I. Steve Wilson of Big Town |
| 10. Harriet Hillard | J. Chuck Morgan of Standby for Crime |

7. Match the newspaper to the radio show.

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| NEWSPAPER | SHOW |
| 1. Daily Sentinel | A. Front Page Farrell |
| 2. Daily Planet | B. Front Page Drama |
| 3. Illustrated Press | C. The Big Story |
| 4. Morning Express | D. Crime Photographer |
| 5. Numerous newspapers | E. Big Town |
| 6. Hearst Sunday Newspaper (American Weekly) | F. Superman |
| 7. Brooklyn Eagle | G. Green Hornet |

8. Five of the shows below are real and one is phony. Pick the phony.

- A) Fear Takes no Prisoners
- B) Adventure Into Fear
- C) Clara Lou and Em
- D) Down Our Way
- E) Dreamtime
- F) Hawthorne and Egbert

SCORING

For questions 1 through 3 give yourself 5 points if you correctly got the answer from clue A; 3 points if you got the answer after reading clues A and B; and one point if you got the answer only after reading all three clues.

For questions 4 and 5 give yourself 10 points if you got the answers from clue A; six points if you got the answers from clues A and B; and three points only after reading clue C.

For question 6 and 7 give yourself 3 points for each correct answer.

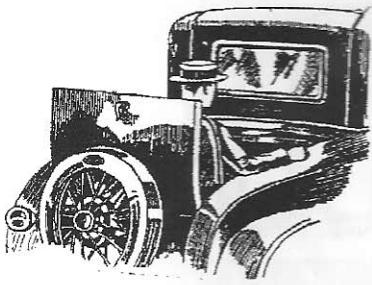
For question 8 give yourself 10 points if you had the correct answer.

ANSWERS

- 1. Jack Benny
- 2. Fred Allen
- 3. Eddie Cantor
- 4. Sam Edwards
- 5. Milton Berle
- 6. 1-B, 2-G, 3-J, 4-I, 5-A, 6-C, 7-F, 8-D, 9-E, 10-H
- 7. 1-G, 2-F, 3-E, 4-D, 5-C, 6-B, 7-A
- 8. A

How good were you?

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| 85 or above | Quiz Kid |
| 71 - 84 | Very good |
| 50 - 70 | OK |
| 31 - 49 | Need improvement |
| 20 - 30 | Candidate for It Pays to be Ignorant |
| 0 - 19 | Go back to bed |



Rumble Seat

Franz

Our CD Library now has 3122 CDs ready to check out. There have been seven here-to-fore uncirculated Lux programs added and in the next few months there will be eight more that are on the way here now. There will be at least 150 more other programs in the next few months.

Quite a few big band and musical programs are in the last bunch of the 3122. Doris Day programs have been rare but we found ten of them to add. The Roy Rogers show has western music and a short story line, there are 32 of those. Jack Smith and Ginny Simms, lots of those.

We have all the *Jungle Jim* episodes on CDs and as soon as they can be cataloged, they will be added.

If you want to listen to what is about the worst radio program ever to be broadcast we have those too. There is one episode of *Can You Match That*. Maybe there was never a second episode saved. Boy what a stinker, even Bing Crosby and Bob Hope couldn't save it.

The *Whisperer* was pretty much a dud too. We have all thirteen episodes of it. I was able to listen to the first episode and then part of the second episode before turning to something else, ugh!

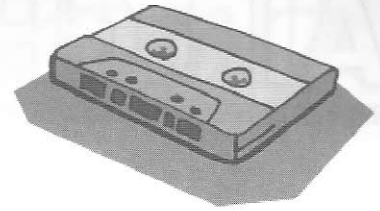
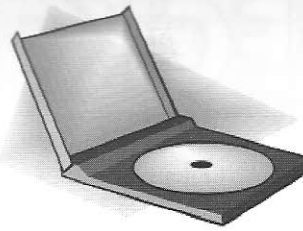
Well, not all of our vintage radio was good, but we have to have a few example of the not so good too in the CD Library. You may have a different opinion than I do. Almost everything is splendid.

What we do have is great sounding programs. With only a few exceptions everything has come from the original ET Disks or Network Master Tapes.

We think having a library of vintage programs is part of the function of REPS. What is sad is, not many people are taking advantage of what our Libraries have to offer.

It costs REPS about \$1.00 for every CD that is added. That includes the Jewel Case, the Library CD and a backup CD that is kept at a different location.

Give it a try, check something out. You will not be displeased with the quality and it certainly is not very expensive.



How to use the Cassette, CD, DVD Libraries.

First of all each library is distinct. Catalog numbers in one library will have a completely different content than another. It is necessary to identify CD, Cassette, OMF, or DVD along with the catalog number. The OMF Library is CD only. At the present time there is no plan to have MP3's in the library.

REPS Members may check out 10 CDs or 10 Cassettes or 10 DVDs for \$6.00. It is also possible to check out a double order 20 CDs or 20 Cassettes for \$12.00. This covers the cost of mailing and maintaining the library. You may mix Cassettes, CDs, and DVDs in your order.

At some of the meetings a few *grab bags* of 10 Cassettes or CDs are available for checkout from the library. New members may be confused, these are for checkout and then returned to the library after use. The *grab bags* are not for sale.

Checkout forms are available at the meetings, by request in the mail, on the web site, and a new form included with each library checkout. The library may also be used with the internet using PayPal. Instructions for that use are on the web site.

We get the CDs for our library from several different sources. Most of them are remasters taken from the original ET disks or original tapes. We try to have the best available sound on the CDs. Any lesser quality is indicated on the catalog pages. On some popular series there are a few episodes that have never surfaced in quality sound. These poorer quality sounding episodes are included to fill out the series. The cassette library was aquired over many years in the past and often from lesser quality copies of copies. While most of the cassettes are fine, you will find a few that aren't. Check for a CD if a cassette comes up short of expectations.

Although the content of the CDs in our library is correct, a few of the CDs will show an incorrect title in a computer. In any case that CD is correct for content and catalog number. Even though there are not very many of those, it may take us awhile to find the ones that have errors.

Contact:

Darrell Anderson, REPS Librarian, 17232 174th SE,
Renton WA 98058.
425-226-7005, woods_inn@aol.com

Aircheck is created on a Mac G4 computer with *Adobe Indesign CS* and *Adobe Photoshop CS*. Most of the text is *Adobe Garamond Pro* at 12 points with the headlines at 12, 14, and 18 points bold. If you would like a copy on a CD, write to Frank Rosin, 9811 NE 139th St, Kirkland WA 98034.