

AIR CHECK

NEWSLETTER OF THE RADIO ENTHUSIASTS OF PUGET SOUND (REPS)

NORMAN CORWIN:

A Biographical Sketch

by Michael James Kacey

Widely acclaimed as the greatest writer-director-producer of the Golden Age of Radio, Norman Corwin commanded a devoted following throughout his years at CBS. He perfected his own unique recipe for success: begin with the human mind and kneed gently; add a dash of poetry, wit and wonder; to this, add a cup of raw passion and stir vigorously; garnish with sound effects, and allow one half hour to marinate in a musical score. Finally, season liberally with intelligence and digest slowly.

Norman Lewis Corwin was born in Boston on May 3, 1910 and lived in a tenement with his parents, two brothers and a sister. Young Corwin had a gift for memorizing poetry at an early age and often performed recitals for his family. When he discovered the poetry of Byron, Keats and Whitman, it was love at first sight; Corwin was intoxicated with the language.

His passion for writing led him to a career as a reporter for the *Springfield Republican*, a leading Massachusetts newspaper. Radio was a happy accident. When the *Springfield Republican* acquired a regular slot on WBZA to broadcast the news, the task fell to Corwin.

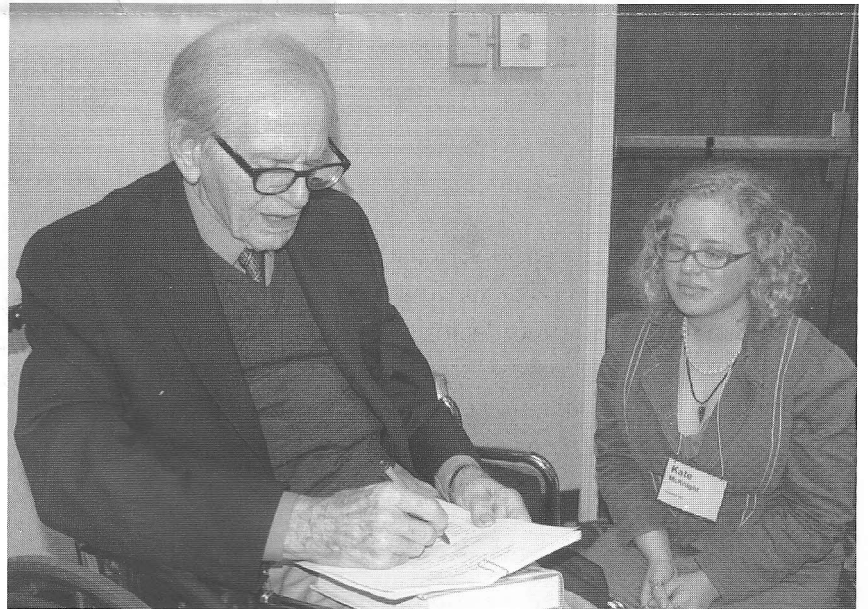
Aware that WBZA was in need of content to fill unsold airtime, Corwin proposed a poetry series called *Rhymes and Cadences*. Now the writings of Byron, Keats and Whitman danced on the ether courtesy of the voice of Norman Corwin. By 1929, young Corwin's family recitals had gone regional.

Joining the staff of Cincinnati's WLW in 1935 as a newsreader, Corwin questioned the merits of a memo banning all mention of labor unrest in the city. He felt

that WLW was shirking its responsibility. His job was eliminated in just two weeks.

Unemployed, he moved to New York City and found work writing publicity for Twentieth Century Fox. Creatively restless, Corwin contacted WQXR about recreating his poetry series and *Poetic License* was born. One of his most ambitious programs was an adaptation of Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*. William B. Lewis, the vice president of programming at CBS, heard this particular performance. Impressed, he arranged to meet Corwin.

Corwin walked out of the April 1938 meeting with Lewis as a program director for CBS. He was not yet 28-years old. He threw himself into the challenge with typical



razor-sharp focus. Early assignments included *Americans at Work* and *County Seat*. In December 1938, CBS premiered *Norman Corwin's Words Without Music*. Essentially a rebirth of *Poetic License*, Corwin was given a free hand (plus his name in the title of the series).

The fourth week of the series landed on December 25, 1938. Since Corwin could not think of a Christmas poem

he wanted to adapt, he decided to write one instead. When the Publicity Department pressed him for the title of the show, Corwin instantly replied, *The Plot to Overthrow Christmas*. Miraculously, the rest of the play came as easily to Corwin as the title had. The cleverly rhymed program earned Corwin notice.

Corwin's next original script was quite different in content and tone. Enraged by Vittorio Mussolini's description of dropping bombs onto Ethiopians and calling it a beautiful sight, Corwin wrote *They Fly Through the Air with the Greatest of Ease*. Broadcast February 19, 1939, the program was dedicated to "all aviators who have bombed defenseless civilians." The listener joins Bomber Number 6 as it strikes the Enemy. Accents are avoided. In fact, whom Bomber Number 6 flies for and who the Enemy may be are immaterial; it is only the consequences that matter. *They Fly Through the Air* was promptly rebroadcast on the prestigious *Columbia Workshop*. *TIME Magazine* announced Corwin's "bid for a front-row seat among radio poets."

Corwin's profile increased. He wrote, directed and produced the series *Seems Radio is Here to Stay*, and then helmed *The Pursuit of Happiness*, hosted by Burgess Meredith. He continued to write and direct for *The Columbia Workshop*, *Forecast*, *The Cavalcade of America* and *The Gulf Screen Guild Theater*. In less than two years, Corwin felt fully versed in the medium.

In 1941, Corwin was offered twenty-six consecutive weeks on *The Columbia Workshop*. Under the prestigious title *26 By Corwin*, he would write a new script each week, have its musical score composed, cast and rehearse the show, and direct the live broadcast for six uninterrupted months. *26 By Corwin* allowed his artistry full expression. Programs included musicals, fantasies, dramas, satires, and Biblical stories. Corwin's poetic language and progressive world-view combined to set him even further apart from his contemporaries.

Yet CBS decided not to offer Corwin a new contract.

President Roosevelt wanted a radio program to celebrate the sesquicentennial of The Bill of Rights on December 15, 1941. Corwin was the ideal man for the job. Although greatly fatigued, following the conclusion of *26 By Corwin* on November 9, 1941, Corwin headed to Washington DC to begin research. Compounding the pressure, for the first time in history all four major networks would carry the same program.

Corwin was still writing the show, *We Hold These Truths*, on December 7, 1941, when word came that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. Now at war, Corwin had stars lining up to be a part of this patriotic program. James Stewart headed a cast that included Edward G. Robinson and Orson Welles. Originating from Studio A at KNX Los Angeles, the program switched to Washington so President Roosevelt could speak. Leopold Stokowski conducted the New York Philharmonic Orchestra playing *The Star Spangled Banner* to conclude the show. *We Hold These Truths* won Corwin the George F. Peabody Medal.

CBS immediately resigned Corwin just as the government asked him to oversee the four-network series *This is War!* Corwin agreed, even writing and directing several of the shows himself. Although great writers such as Archibald MacLeish and Stephen Vincent Benét contributed scripts, the series was little more than government-sponsored propaganda. Corwin was happy to move on to projects where he could better control the content.

In June 1942, Corwin flew to England for *An American in England*. Edward R. Murrow produced the joint CBS-BBC venture. Corwin's mission was to explore wartime England and report back about what he observed. The show was short-waved from secret BBC facilities. Corwin returned to America after the final show.

Continuing his labors on behalf of the war effort, in 1943 Corwin wrote, directed and produced another CBS-BBC series, *Transatlantic Call*. He also wrote and directed the audition program for *Passport for Adams*, starring Robert Young as a reporter who travels to Allied nations.

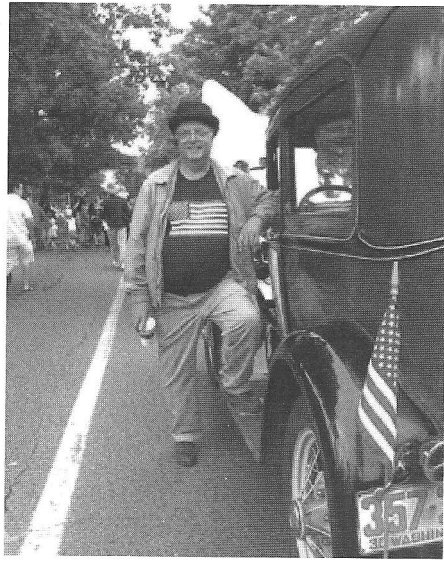
It wasn't until 1944 that Corwin returned full-force to the format which best displayed his work. From March to August of 1944 Corwin was again given control of *The Columbia Workshop*. Under the title *Columbia Presents Corwin*, Corwin wrote pieces that allowed him to take the listener anywhere his own muse led him. The series returned for eight weeks in 1945.

With the war in Europe winding down, CBS asked Corwin to prepare a one-hour special for the day of victory. The resulting program was, without a doubt, Corwin's masterpiece: *On A Note of Triumph*. On Tuesday, May 8, 1945, at 7pm Pacific War Time, Corwin threw his finger to cue the start of the program. Martin Gabel served as the listener's guide on a journey through past and present, while peering into an uncertain future. Response to the show proved so overwhelming that CBS

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**Paul
Secord**

President



**WHAT'S
HAPPENED AT
REPS SO FAR IN
2010**

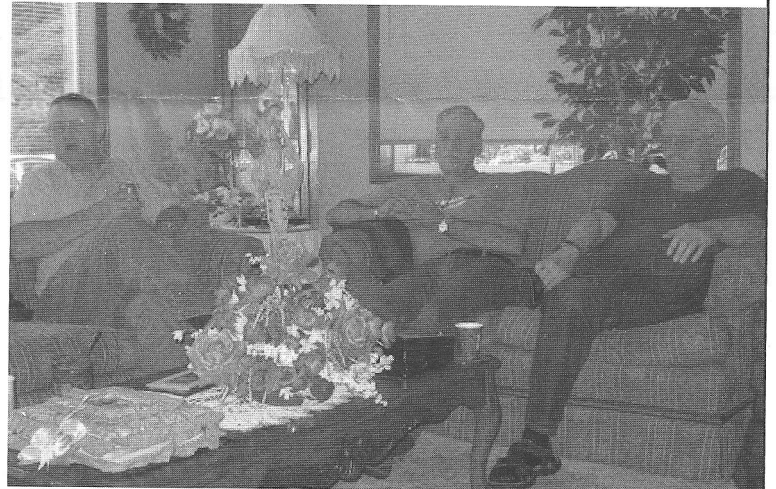
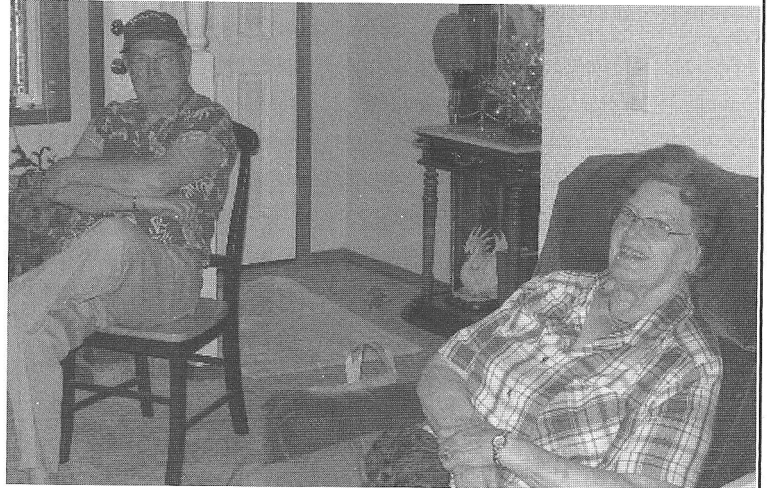
In February we interviewed Stuart Canin via telephone. As a 10 year old violinist he was introduced to radio at the beginning of the Fred Allen and Jack Benny feud. The same day Bob Shepard, who worked in radio for many years at NBC in New York, and now resides in the Kirkland area, was called to the mike to share many tidbits of his career. In May, for something completely different, members brought in excerpts of radio programs they consider the worst on radio. There were quite a few shows that qualified but luckily we had only a limited time available. Of course, there was the trivia quiz program conducted by Larry Albert at our March meeting. This is always a hoot and why do we do this only once a year? Fred Foy was with us via telephone from his home in Massachusetts in April and spent the time reminiscing about his career out of the past.

The REPS Radio Readers performed at our monthly meeting in June with the re-creation of "Mars is Heaven" a science fiction story written by Ray Bradbury. They had so much fun they snuck in a repeat performance in July at Fairwinds-Brighton Court retirement facility in Lynnwood, which is the residence of Bob and Shirley Hudson. REPS welcomed this opportunity to give back to the community.

June 25th, 26th and 27th were three days devoted to **Showcase XVIII** and what wonderful days they were. Our special guest was Norman Corwin who presented us with his grace and wisdom one hundred fold. Along with Mr. Corwin we were treated to many returning stars and some that were new to Showcase. The weekend wrapped up with a buffet brunch giving us more time with stars and more time for picture taking.

In August, our traditional picnic was held at the palatial estate of Vi and Darrell Anderson. For the first time we were greeted with a good supply of Seattle's liquid sunshine. But, undaunted, the picnic was moved inside where everyone enjoyed all the good food and the great company. Thanks Vi and Darrell.

What's coming next? You gotta be there...



Picnic August 7, 2010

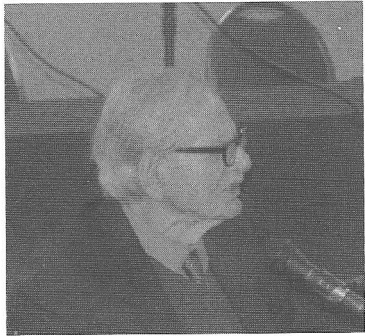
Election for Officers and Board Members 2011

Elections for President, Treasurer, and the three Board Members at Large will be coming up soon. Nominations for these positions may be made in writing to the Board and should have a written second up until nominations are held from the floor at the October 2, 2010 General Membership Meeting.

asked for a repeat performance five days later, on Sunday, May 13th. Carl Sandburg called it "one of the all-time great American poems" and *TIME Magazine* proclaimed it "U.S. radio at its best."

Corwin had very little time in preparing a similar program to celebrate V-J Day. Simply titled *14 August*, Corwin wrote this overnight for Orson Welles to perform. The script contained only one sound effect. Nevertheless, the program proved a worthy summation of the costs of war and the high price of freedom.

In 1946, Corwin was selected as the first recipient of the *Wendell Willkie One World Award*. Willkie, the Republican challenger to FDR in 1940, visited American allies across the globe in 1942. In his bestselling book, *One World*, Willkie posited that international cooperation was the



only way to solve future problems. After his death in 1944, friends established *The One World Award* with the purpose of retracing Willkie's famous trip in his honor.

Corwin traveled to 17 countries, covering 37,000

miles. He interviewed heads of state as well as people on the street, asking them what they thought of present postwar conditions. These recordings served as the basis of Corwin's final series for CBS, *One World Flight*.

William S. Paley, the head of CBS, asked Corwin to broaden the appeal of his shows. Corwin knew he was being asked to dumb down his approach. Not surprisingly, the next contract he was offered contained onerous provisions that Corwin could not accept. After ten years, Norman Corwin and CBS parted ways – this time for good.

In response to the growing influence of the House Un-Americans Activities Committee, Corwin agreed to write and direct *Hollywood Fights Back* in late 1947. He brought to the microphone Judy Garland, Humphrey Bogart, Peter Lorre, William Wyler and others, warning of the consequences caused by the committee's reckless

investigations. When the infamous booklet *Red Channels* was published, Norman Corwin was one of the 151 names listed. Work offers were sparse. Some projects dried up completely. The fact that Corwin had never been a Communist was immaterial.

Corwin persevered. As head of Special Projects at United Nations Radio, Corwin continued his dedication to the virtues of freedom, human rights and international cooperation. His first U.N. show, *Could Be*, ponders a future where governments attack the problems of famine and disease with the same zest and resources they apply to making war. One of its listeners wrote to Corwin, "I wish to congratulate you on one of the best radio dramatizations that has ever been my good fortune to hear, and I wish not only every American, but all foreigners, could hear it." The letter was signed by Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz.

By 1952, Corwin had left U.N. Radio and turned to writing books, essays, stage plays and screenplays. He was nominated for an Academy Award for his screenplay of the 1956 film *Lust for Life*. Corwin's play about the Lincoln Douglas debates, *The Rivalry*, ran on Broadway in 1959 and has had numerous revivals, including a 2010 production at Ford's Theater in Washington, DC. His television series, *Norman Corwin Presents*, aired in 1971-72. Corwin also began a distinguished teaching career. He returned to radio in the 1990s with the NPR series *More By Corwin*.

A published author since 1929's *So Say the Wise*, Corwin has written over a dozen books including *Megalove and Overkill*, *Holes in a Stained Glass Window* and *Trivializing America*. In 2009 Continuum Publishing released Corwin's latest book, *One World Flight: The Lost Journal of Radio's Greatest Writer*.

Celebrating his 100th birthday on May 3, 2010, Norman Corwin continues to write daily and remains an active champion for the ideals he has always cherished. A proud and sometimes critical American, Norman Corwin still believes in the words he wrote for *On A Note of Triumph* in 1945: "Brotherhood is not so wild a dream as those who profit by postponing it pretend."



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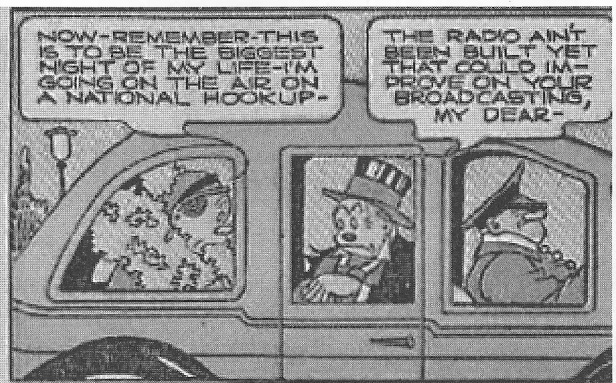
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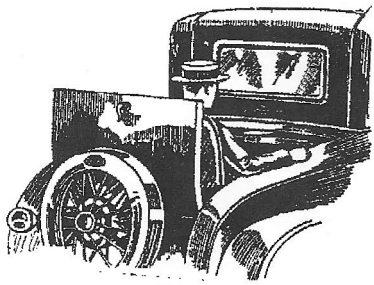
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There are 3330 CDs in the REPS CD Library with 6774 individual episodes of hundreds of individual series. With the exception of hour programs and shorter fifteen minute programs there are two episodes per standard eighty minute CD. For hour programs there is one per CD and for 15 minute programs there are usually five. About 15 to 30 'new' CDs are added to the library each month.

The catalog is kept up to date on the REPS web site, www.repsonline.org. When space is available in the Air Check we print four pages on the center sheet. It is arranged this way for easy removal and insertion in your folder.

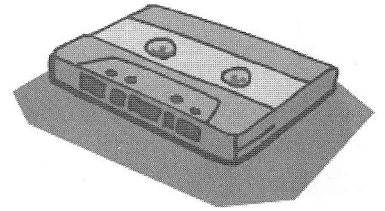
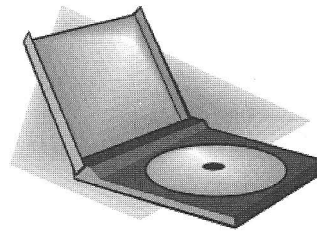
Since the CD catalog takes over 150 pages to print, arrangements can be made to get a printed up to date catalog of the complete contents for the cost of printing.

These episodes are the best available sound quality you will find anywhere. True, on the internet and from dealers you can find as many as a hundred or more episodes in MP3 format on an individual CD. Many of these MP3 episodes are of lesser quality, duplications, miss identified, or unknown content and quality. Some may be just fine. These MP3 CDs sell for from \$1.00 to \$10.00 each. Many of the programs that can be downloaded (there is a new word, *downloaded*, we didn't have when the programs were first broadcast) from the internet will be of the same unknown quality or identity.

Our CD library costs 60¢ per CD to rent known high quality as opposed to MP3 and internet downloads. The rental cost is \$6.00 for 10 CDs or \$12.00 for 20 CDs. The rental cost supports adding 'new' programs, adding shelves from time to time, the circulating CDs themselves, a backup copy, replacements for lost and damaged CDs, and mailing the CDs to you.

We will continue adding to the Gildersleeve series and are beginning to add Fibber McGee and Molly over the next year.

Page 10 of this issue contains two library check out forms to either clip out or photocopy for your use in checking out from the library. Please give it a try!



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, 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, and CDs 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 (example, *Escape*) that have never surfaced in quality sound. These poorer quality sounding episodes are included to fill out the series. The cassette library was acquired 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. There are Cassettes that have programs not available on CDs, and CDs with programs not available on Cassettes. Many are available on both.

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:

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Renton WA 98058.
425-226-7005, woods_inn@aol.com

Aircheck is created on a Mac G5 computer with *Adobe Indesign CS3* and *Adobe Photoshop CS3*. 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, contact Frank Rosin, 9811 NE 139th St, Kirkland WA 98034.

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September 2010

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Scheduled Events

- Sep 4, 2010 Regular and Board Meeting, *Mars is Heaven* by REPS Readers
- Sep 13, 2010 Imagination Theatre, Kirkland Performing Arts Theatre, *Sherlock Holmes, Harry Nile*, doors open 7:00pm
- Oct 2, 2010 Regular and Board Meeting, Nomination of 2011 Officers and Board
- Nov 6, 2010 Regular and Board Meeting
- Dec 4, 2010 Regular and Board Meeting, Toys for Tots, Ballots Counted

Darrell Anderson, Librarian

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Unless specified otherwise, Board Meetings are held in the Norse Home Board Room, Seattle, and start at 11:00 am. Regular Membership Meetings are held at the Norse Home, Seattle, and start at 2:00 pm. They are both on the first Saturday of each Month.