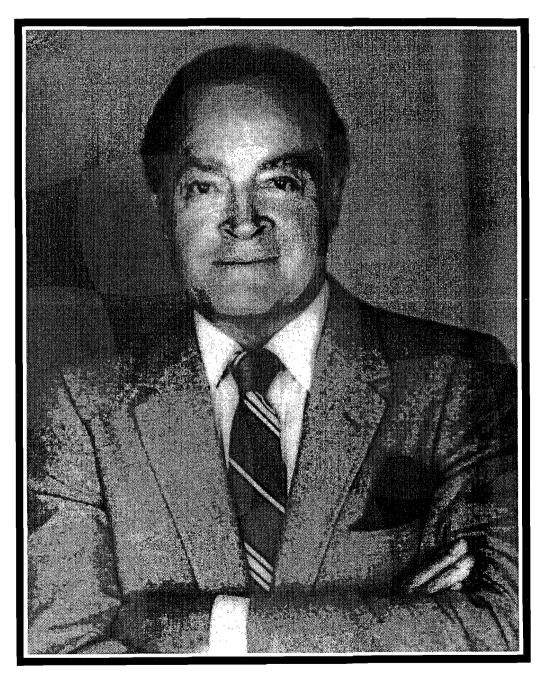
The Old Time Radio Club



Number 312

September 2003



BOB HOPE (1903 - 2003) Thanks for the Memories

Membership information

New member processing, \$5 plus club membership of \$17.50 per year from January 1 to December 31. Members receive a tape library listing, reference library listing and a monthly newsletter. Memberships are as follows: If you join January-March, \$17.50; April-June, \$14; July-September, \$10; October-December, \$7. All renewals should be sent in as soon as possible to avoid missing issues. Please be sure to notify us if you have a change of address. The Old Time Radio Club meets the first Monday of every month at 7:39 PM during the months of September to June at 393 George Urban Blvd., Cheektowaga, NY 14225. The club meets informally during the months of July and August at the same address. Anyone interested in the Golden Age of Radio is welcome. The Old Time Radio Club is affiliated with The Old Time Radio Network.

Club Mailing Address

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INNER SANCTUM MYSTERIES

by Martin Grams, Jr.

Book Reviewed by Jerry Collins

Over the past few years Martin Grams, Jr. has become one of the most popular and prolific writers in the area of "Old Time Radio." He has already written books on Cavalcade of America, CBS Radio Mystery Theater, Have Gun Will Travel, Ellery Queen, and I Love a Mystery.

Grams goes no further than page one to make two critical statements that are essential when reading the book. *Inner Sanctum* was one of the most popular dramatic radio shows ever produced. Secondly and possibly more important is its "lack of preservation." Only 1/5 of the shows are in circulation. Very few of the scripts are available and even fewer interviews have been preserved. The Library of Congress has even misplaced their *Inner Sanctum* collection.

Later in the book he relates the story of his attempt to do research on the book at a Southern (unnamed university) library. The librarian was rude and totally uncooperative. When Martin Grams repeated his requests, they threatened to throw him out of the library. They even sent him a nasty e-mail.

Certainly not a positive beginning to a book on the Inner Sanctum radio show. Still Martin Grams takes what is available on the show and does an excellent job in discussing all aspects of the show; sponsors of the show, announcers, sound effects and music on the radio show, Australian, South American and South African versions of the show, a list of performers on the show, Inner Sanctum movies, the Inner Sanctum television show, Inner Sanctum mystery novels written by at least 139 different writers. Grams concludes the book with an Episode guide of the Inner Sanctum show from episode 1 (January 7, 1941) through episode 535 (October 5, 1952.)

The author gives an excellent history of the radio show and a very complete biography of one of radio's greatest stars, Raymond Edward Johnson. What would a book dealing with *Inner Sanctum* be without a large section on creator/producer/director Himan Brown. In fact the history and the two biographies are the best parts of the book.

If you are a fan of *Inner Sanctum*, and there are a lot of you out there, this is the book to read.

FRANK and ANNE HUMMERT'S RADIO FACTORY

By JIM COX

Reviewed by JERRY COLLINS

Once again Jim Cox has tackled another important topic in the history of radio. Cox has written another great book on those golden days of "Old Time Radio."

In the title Jim Cox uses the phrase "Radio Factory." Later in the book he uses the phrase "Production Dynasty." According to Cox, "Frank and Anne Hummert are the most prolific creative in eight decades of broadcast history." The couple originated over 120 audio network series. Only half of those shows were aimed exclusively at housewives. The pair's collective output has never been duplicated or even approached. By 1940 the Hummerts controlled 4-1/2 hours of national radio broadcasting and in the process contributed more than half of the daytime radio advertising. At one point they were filling close to 30 hours of weekly broadcasting. By the late 1930s they were airing 36 separate programs, representing \$12 million dollars in annual advertising and 6.5 million broadcasts words per year.

When the average doctor was making less than \$5,000 annually and lawyers averaged \$2,500, the Hummerts were being paid \$300,000. They also lived in a beautiful mansion in Greenwich, Connecticut.

If you were one of the thousands of people that worked for the Hummerts you risked losing your job if you talked to a journalist, arrived late for a show or rehearsal, clowned around on the job, were involved in a scandal or even addressed them in public. You would also work for less than half the pay of those working for

The Illustrated Press

other producers. Hopefully you would not be intimidated by the Hummert's surprise visits. Then there were no perks and you knew that you would never be invited to the mansion and there would never be a Hummert Christmas party.



All this set aside we can never forget all those wonderful soap operas produced by the Hummerts; Ma Perkins, Our Gal Sunday, Lorenzo Jones, Just Plain Bill, The Romance of Helen Trent, Young Widder Brown, Just Plain Bill and many others. Then there were the detective stories; Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons, Hearthstone of the Death Squad, Mr. Chameleon, Mark Sabre and Mystery Theater. The children's shows were just as famous as the adult shows; Jack Armstrong, The All-American Boy, Little Orphan Annie and Terry and the Pirates. The least known of the Hummert shows were the musical programs; American Album of Familiar Music, American Melody Hour and Manhattan Merry-Go-Round.

If I still haven't attracted your attention, you might be interested in reading about Karl Swenson, Arthur Hughes, Ned Wever, Vivian Smolen, Alfred Shirley,

Virginia Payne, Bennett Kilpack, Ford Bond, Andre Baruch, Larry Elliot, Ken Roberts, Pierre Andre and George Ansbro.

Then there was Robert Hardy Andrews whose weekly production as a writer usually exceeded 100,000 words a week. He worked twelve hours a day, from noon to midnight. During that time he consumed 40 cups of coffee and smoked 100 cigarettes a day. The final chapter of the book compares the works of Frank and Anne Hummert to those of the other two parts of the "Troika" Elaine Sterne Carrington and Irna Phillips. I will let you read that final chapter.

When you combine a good writer with a fascinating topic, the result is a great book. Jim Cox has done it again. Frank and Anne Hummert's Radio Factory is another great book on "Old Time Radio." It is well worth reading and certainly well worth adding to your library.

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Letters . . .



Dear Ken:

In the June I.P., question 3 asks who was the first Chester Riley. The answer you gave was Jackie Gleason. It was William Bendix. Jackie Gleason was the first TV Chester Riley as Bendix was unable to play the role on TV due to contractural problems. However, he was finally able to do it in the 50s. Incidentally, the Riley character was based on The Flotsam Family and was to star Groucho Marx. The sponsor did not like Groucho for the role and the producer chose Bendix. Also, an early Life of Riley was broadcast in 1941 starring Lionel Stander as J. Riley Farnsworth. This show was very different from the Life of Riley with Bendix which ran from 1944-1951 on radio and on TV from 1953-1958. The Gleason version aired during the 1949-50 season. Jackie did sub for Bendix on the radio show at least once. ... Dick Olday

Illustrated Press 4

Dear Sir,

Do you have any information on the classical music program called "Magic Key" which was broadcast during the 1930s? How was it networked, for how many years, what was broadcast? Thank you.

Carol Coverly, Reference Librarian

Hi Carol . . .

"The Magic Key was a variety style program featuring symphony musicians, opera stars and the NBC Symphony Orchestra along with various radio acts of the day such as Lum and Abner, Colonel Stoopnagle and Bud, Amos 'n' Andy and Rudy Vallee etc. It also offered scenes from upcoming movies, reports from distant locations covering events such as the Mardi Gras, concerts by Eugene Ormandy and the Minneapolis Symphony. It was an hour long program on Sundays at 2 PM that ran from Sept. 29, 1935 through June 26, 1939. There are 17 shows in circulation including most of 9/29/35 and 3/29/36. It was sponsored by RCA.

Dear Mr. Krug:

My publisher recently forwarded your very complimentary review of my book on the delightful character actor, Hans Conried. Thank you for taking the time to read the book, and I'm very pleased that you found it worthwhile.

Since Hans was such a prolific actor, and there are still so many shows he worked on waiting to be discovered, I established a web site: www.hansconriedbook.com. Here I have posted new additions to the Radio Log (there are over 75 new entries up there now), Television and Voice Work Logs, and the Filmography. I also have interviews with voice actor Corey Burton (he also worked on radio with Hans), and Beverly Garland. For those who haven't had a chance to see the book yet, I posted a sample chapter and the Table of Contents.

I would appreciate it if you could take a look, and, if you feel your members would benefit from the information, please put a little note about the web site in your next newsletter.

Thank you again for the kind review, and best wishes to you always.

Sincerely, Suzanne Gargiulo

"The One, The Only"

by TOM CHERRE

"And now here he is, the one, the only, Groucho Marx". Boy how many times have we heard that intro? I'm sure its been



many. Groucho Marx was truly a one and only. Along with his brothers, Groucho had a spectacular movie career for many years. Their zany antics tickled our funny bones from the early 30s right up to around the beginning of World War 2. All of a sudden their popularity took a nose dive, and the magic was gone. Groucho took a try at radio. After four lackluster attempts producer John Guedel approached Groucho with a new idea for a spot as host for a new quiz show. Groucho was probably the best ab-lib man in the business. Did I say probably? He was quicker with his mouth than the Lone Ranger was, with his six guns.

The new show was to be called "You Bet Your Life". Guedel told Marx "I just want you to be yourself". Telling Groucho Marx to read a script, he said was like buying a Cadillac to haul coal. He wanted Marx to just be himself and give the show reality. Come to think about it, reality shows are what it's all about nowadays. So on October 27th, 1947 ABC broadcast the first of over 500 programs of You Bet Your Life. The first sponsor of the show, Elgin-American, maker of compacts and cigarette cases provided all of \$5000 for a weekly budget. This included prize money and salaries for the entire crew. Announcer, George Fenneman's salary was \$55.00 per week. Huge sums of money give-a-ways was not the main theme of the show. The format was simple. Fenneman would give the usual intro of a couple and say come in and meet Groucho Marx. For the next 5 or 6 minutes Groucho would ask them all sorts of questions getting the most laughs and chuckles you could possibly imagine. They would also have questions



to answer for money, with a chance for a jackpot question. Fenneman was the perfect straight man for Marx's weekly insults that he incurred upon him each week. George took it all in stride, and was loved by all for absorbing Marx's regular bashing week

after week. There was also a duck who would come down with a \$100 bill for anyone saying the secret word, something you see every day.

One of the writers thought if the contestants lost all their money the show would look bad, so Groucho had a

consolation prize with a rather simple question. The usual "Who's buried in Grant's tomb?" The real trivial genius might say Grant and also his wife. However, Grant would suffice. He had a long list of sure to answer ones like, what color is an orange, or



how long is a ten foot pole. Anyway Groucho had a huge hit going for him. Later on, DeSoto/Plymouth dealers took over the show and he himself sold many a DeSoto, by saying "Tell em Groucho sent you".

There was no exact formula for the show. It was gags, one-liners, and other humorous elements. When he had a tree surgeon on he asked, "Have you ever fallen out of a patient". With a pretty girl, "You have a pretty good head on your shoulders, and I wish it were on mine". With the cartoonist "If you want to see a comic strip, you should see me in a shower". These are only some of the stuff you would hear on the show.

Occasionally Groucho would have a little trouble with the censors. Nowadays almost anything goes, but back in the 40s and 50s that wasn't the case. Many of the things said on the show never made it on the air.

During the show's heyday Groucho was earning over \$800,000 a year. This show made him more than all his movies. Groucho's style was probably the premise for the future late night shows, still unheard of. There will never be another entertainer like Groucho Marx. I think he was ahead of his time. He inspired many newer comics, like Seinfeld and others. He was a one in million . . . "You can bet your life".



by DAN MARAFINO

Of all the programs from radio's past, I had a few favorites. Now I'm not one for having "favorites" per se. I generally like it or I dislike it. A few stand out from the rest and one in particular was Suspense, the real theatre of thrills. Even though the stories were repeated several times and with different actors, they still held that mystery to them, like would this be different from or better than the first broadcast? Different from, no, the original story line stayed the same, but it depended on the listeners personal taste as far as the actors were concerned. As far as I'm concerned, there were no bad shows in terms of story line or acting. The program set a high standard and stayed with it through it's entire run.

One of the more unusual things that the producers liked to do was cast stars to do a program completely out of their element. Comedians, like Jack Benny, Milton Berle, Red Skelton, Eddie Cantor and many more were put in a serious role. Maybe a murderer or a bank robber, a thief or using the company's money to bet on a horse. They loved it. This gave them a chance to display their talents to the full and they did a darned good job of it. Benny did three shows in a semi-serious role, Danny Kaye did two, etc. There were more but I'm not going to list them all here. They epitomized the word professional.

On the other hand not too many, if any, tried to go from being a serious actor to being funny. It really doesn't work, and most if not all can't do it. Let's face it, Richard Widmark isn't funny.

From the "Lodger", the audition show of 7/22/40, to "Devilstone" 9/3/60, the over 900 programs were, in my opinion, the best drama shows ever to be broadcast on radio.

I will soften my stance briefly by stating that yes, I do have a few programs that I can listen to more than twice. "Mission Completed" with James Stewart (whom I've always admired) is one, "To Find Help", both versions with Sinatra/Moorehead and Kelly/Barrymore are

radio classics. "Backseat Driver" with Fibber McGee and Molly, "Rave Notice" with Milton Berle and of Course "Sorry Wrong Number" with Agnes Moorehead. These are only a few of what I have listened to, I still have over eight hundred (800) more to listen to.

Suspense is the kind of a program you never get tired of listening to because each show is distinctive even though it may be a repeat. It was a sad day in 1962 when Suspense went off the air. For those of us who have the OTR shows on record, tape or MP3, it will never die and we'll always be there to welcome the man in black.

I LOVE A MYSTERY "THE STAIRWAY TO THE SUN"

by Martin Grams, Jr.

The "Stairway to the Sun," is considered by many ILove A Mystery fans as one of the best adventures of the entire series. With the exception of "Temple of the Vampires," most the adventures Morse presented on Mystery were straight-forward situations set along the California Coast, tropical islands and desert locales. With this adventure, Morse gave the detectives a larger task: to explore an unexplored country, rumored to be myth, and save the lives of the expedition. Doc Long and Jack Packard are hired to pilot and service an expedition into the South American jungle, headed by Dr. Karl Haugemann, scientist, and his two daughters, Frieda and Gretchen. The initial object of the adventure was a safe landing atop the great, four-hundred-squaremile, pre-historic plateau rising straight up out of the Venezuela jungle a mile high. After making a successful landing with the first load of food and equipment, Jack learns that Dr. Haugemann is not capable of leading such an expedition. With the plane undamaged, the crew could fly out of the jungles if it weren't for the fact that there is no room for a successful take off.

Forced to trek back to civilization by hacking their way through the savage tangle of jungle and floating down the river, the expedition encounters numerous obstacles including a mile-high waterfall, deep caverns and underground chambers.

GRETCHEN: It's too bad we can't see more too, because this must be a really tremendous cavern, FRIEDA: That is obvious by the manner in which our footsteps and voices echo...DOC: Yeah, listen to this fer instance... (back off)...Yoooweeeeee...Ride 'em cowboy...JACK: Heeey, Doc, cut that out...

Most important is the discovery of a stairway cut out of the living rock that climbs higher and higher until it vanishes in the haze and clouds above. Doc takes one look and dubbed it "Stairway to the Sun." It served undoubtedly as one way to reach the great plateau above. The continual drag upward (while not beyond the endurance of the two girls) creates a pull on muscles and delicate organs, which leaves them in an agony of stitches and cramps after every twenty or thirty steps. After the long climb upwards, which takes two days and one night (a total of four episodes), the party reaches the top to discover evidence of natives whose intelligence is limited to Pagan taboos and poison darts and blow guns. A virtual city of cliff dwellers.

Prehistoric monkey men invade the cliff dwellers and jungle natives in search of the men and two girls. Jack arranges for the short-wave set in working order and contacts the Venezuela Government station and the Caracas police. Shortly after, a mass of ape men start to invade and Jack shoots over their heads with a machine gun. This only makes them angry and more ready for a fight. Dr. Haugemann insists on staying behind to explore the lost civilization, shooting his daughter Gretchen when she won't agree to stay behind too. The rescue plane arrives. The expedition members are picked up and dropped off at the Caracas municipal airport. Gretchen's wounds are given a thorough examination and she is given the promise of quick recovery.

"The Stairway to the Sun" was the second-longest serial in the *I Love A Mystery* series, consisting of a whole thirty chapters, twice the normal length of the serials Morse usually wrote for the program. The idea for the "Stairway to the Sun" originated in Morse's second NBC Mystery Serial from 1930, The Dragon in the Sun (which also makes a brief appearance in episode fortyfour of the Adventures By Morse serial, "Land of the Living Dead").

No doubt originating from one of Morse's encyclopedias, "The Stairway to the Sun" was based on real Mayan history. The Egyptian kings maintained the cult of the sun over the centuries. Building pyramids (symbols of the stairway to the sun or angled rays of the sun) and later solar temples in honor of the sun gods, the Egyptians believed these stairways also led to the afterlife. When a king or Pharaoh died, his actions were judged in the Afterworld by Osiris, a form of sun god and ruler of the underworld. If they were considered just during their lifetime, the king would be transformed into a form of the sun god. In Palenque, Mexico, at one of the most beautiful of the Classical Mayan sites, are large stone steps described as the "Stairway to the Sun." The civilization became prominent in perhaps 700 A.D. and flourished for a few hundred years. This

large area of ruins lies in the Chiapas state of Mexico, near the Guatemala border.

"I had on my shelf a great British Great Encyclopedia," recalled Morse, "and I used it in every I Love A Mystery story that took place out of the country. I used that Encyclopedia to find out what kind of forest they had, what kind of people they had, and it was all written reasonably and responsible. For example, "The Twenty Traitors of Timbuktu' was laid in Africa way back there when Africa was a different place than it is now. I couldn't possibly do that show today unless I said it happened back in the 1930s. I even found out how big the little towns were, whether they had a railway through there, and what kind of trains they had. In great detail and it was in the Great Encyclopedia, letting the dialog take up the action."

With "The Stairway to the Sun" being as descriptive as it was, there can be no doubt that Morse used entries from the Encyclopedia for the foundation of this serial. As described by the announcer:

"As they watch Jack and Haugemann approach the falls, they see the flash of lightning and hear the crash and roll of thunder caused by the friction of the great body of falling water! The falls is completely surrounded by ring after ring of rainbows until it looks like a highly decorated may-pole reaching up into the clouds, and every few minutes the electrified air in the vicinity of the water explodes with the flash and crack of canon fire."

During another time the announcer also got descriptive, before the approach of flying reptiles:

"They look down on giant rocky prominence and cliffs of unbelievable proportions and of every color and hue; all the colors of the painted desert are splashed over the age-old peaks and declivities. The greens of emerald; the lustrous sheen and shine of exposed ledges of gold; the orange and browns of sandstone and the purples of amethyst . . . A whole glittering peak of amethyst banked by ledge shining with unlimited out-crossings of gold, so that it shone in the tropical brilliance like a captive sun. And then into the blistering sky swarmed a flock of creatures with wings; creatures as ancient as creation itself; great monsters with teeth, bat-like wings and with snouts and jaws like alligators . . . Doc called them Flying Crocodiles at first and then he called them a lot of other things as they turned toward the airplane intent on destruction . . . "

DOC: (excited) They're a comin' Jack . . . four, six, seven—nine of 'em—and they ain't foolin' . . . JACK: Well get up here in front along side of me. Gretchen, you'd better go back in the cabin with your father . . . You got both of those automatic rifles? DOC: I got 'em,

Jack... 'Scues me Baby . . . GRETCHEN: I'm pretty good with a rifle... If I can be any help . . . JACK: You can use an automatic rifle? GRETCHEN: Yes, I've never shot from an airplane. DOC: Well, we've never shot crocodiles from an airplane either, sister . . . Here, take this rifle and git over there on the other side of Jack . . .

It might also be noted that Venezuela was the same vast setting for this serial, as was the true inspiration of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's The Lost World (1912), and actually contains the world's highest waterfall, flooded plains, and Andean peaks. Known as Angel Falls, the highest waterfall in the world plunges down from the western flank of a gorge in the middle of the Auyantepui. With a total height of 979 meters, and free fall of 807 meters, the water that leaves the summit takes fourteen seconds to reach the bottom, although in the dry season much of that water is blown away in a fine mist. (There is a scene where Jack, Doc and their companions encounter such a waterfall. Doyle's novel was an inspiration to Morse in more than one way...)

This also marked the first serial in which Morse began incorporating Christianity among the pages of scripts. Many references, descriptions and dialogue began to filter through the *I Love A Mystery* serials, hoping to remind the audience that horror was only fiction, and not something to take seriously—especially in cult fashion. The Stairway was described as a veritable "Jacob's Ladder to Heaven." Later in the serial, the Island in the Sky was described as a "Garden of Eden" when the descriptions of the flora and fauna still left in half-finished stages were represented.*

The initial working title was "The Island in the Sky," but Morse changed the title to "Stairway to the Sun" before he completed the serial. Also of interest is the character of Dr. Karl Haugemann, described as a German scientist. At the time this serial was being broadcast, the United States was still at war with Japan and their allies—including Germany. So why have a German scientist leading an expedition? (If nitpickers really wanted, they could ask themselves how the opening gong in each broadcast setting the time of events, came into the picture. Are there any hidden natives with a gong at every corner?) Due to the popularity of the favorable fan mail, Morse would write a sequel to this thriller five serials later entitled "The Hermit of San Felipe Atabapo."

* During the spring of 1930, NBC was broadcasting a series of Biblical dramas scripted by Carlton E. Morse, entitled *Bible Stories*. George Rand was the producer and director. Paul Carson supplied the music. The hour-long dramas were broadcast on Sunday mornings from 11 a.m. to 12 noon on the West Coast.

The Illustrated Press

Storrs Haynes of Compton (the Agency representing the sponsor) wrote to Morse on July 23, 1943, days after "Stairway to the Sun" ended: "What the hell happened to 'Stairway to the Sun?' " Haynes expressed his opinion that the story started nicely, then frazzled. He wondered if Morse was having trouble with CBS. The loose ends of the story worried him, and he wondered if Morse shouldn't work these stories out more completely before starting to write them. "They have to add up as a whole . . . this would also protect you from Columbia."

On August 16, 1943, Morse wrote to Haynes: "CBS did not give me trouble. . ." and continued to explain his thinking on "Stairway" basically defending the story. Morse said he hadn't received any negative feedback. (He also mentioned that he recently received a letter from John Gordon about a Street and Smith I Love A Mystery comic book. Morse was very opposed to this, "it's cheap and childish, and it would harm the program.")

On September 13, 1943, Haynes wrote to Morse. "OK, you win, it seems listeners don't agree with me on 'Stairway.' "There is no doubt about "Stairway to the Sun," the serial is still regarded as one of the best serials ever broadcast. At present, the January-February 1952 broadcast of this adventure exists in recorded form—but only partially. Hopefully one of these days "lost" recordings will surface allowing us one more glimpse into the prehistoric world of radio drama.

Martin Grams, Jr. is the author of numerous books about old-time radio including Inner Sanctum Mysteries: Behind the Creaking Door, The Have Gun-Will Travel Companion and Information, Please. This article features numerous excerpts from his latest book, The I Love A Mystery Companion—reprinted with permission.

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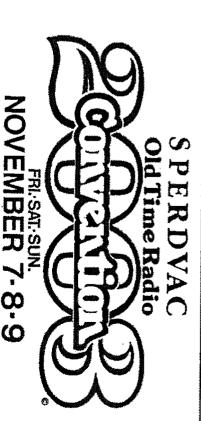
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