

The Old Time Radio Club

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The McGees of Wistful Vista

by Robert M. Yoder
(Continued from last issue)

In radio they keep anxious books on laughter and would measure the faintest grin if anyone knew how. The yak, or belly laugh, has always been the touchdown. Quinn and the Jordans think listeners prefer "a chuckle show." The chore they face equably each week is, of course, far more intricate than the show will sound—they will devise a story putting five to eight characters on stage and requiring sixty to 100 pretty funny ideas. "A continuous ripple of amusement" is what they are after. At times they have clocked ninety laughs in the half hour, which seemed to indicate they were keeping listeners in pretty steady good humor.

To get the "ripple of amusement," Quinn relies on lightly struck but telling notes, which are a speciality of the house. Repairing Doc Gamble's car—and switching car batteries in Fibber's favor—McGee was using tools borrowed from the cautious weatherman who appeared in the 1947 line-up, Foggy Williams. Foggy wanted them back because they were tools with a sentimental value—his "birthday hammer," his "anniversary pliers." That rang true to many a handy man around the house. Quinn also has a sure eye for the plausible but ridiculous postures people get into. Thus Fibber, trying to be a busy executive, was caught making paper airplanes because Molly had said he couldn't do it after Fibber said he didn't have time for that sort of nonsense.

The McGees have not always lived at 79 Wistful Vista, although that imaginary address of a hypothetical couple probably is better known than the address of the White House—1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. At first they were tourists, because the principal product advertised was car wax. When traveling wore thin, Quinn housed them with beautiful ease. They stopped in Wistful Vista, where a house was being raffled off. They won and have been there ever since. A second address ought to be equally famous. That is 14th and Oak. Whether Fibber is getting a haircut, negotiating a bank loan or pricing a neat power-driven crumb scraper at the Bon

Ton Department Store, it is always at 14th and Oak. Wistful Vista would have to have the country's most vertical business district to house all the enterprises spotted at this corner. But nobody seems to notice and Quinn and Producer Frank Pittman have filed it sadly under "confidential humor."

It would take skyscrapers, and you wouldn't find skyscrapers in Wistful Vista, which is pretty clearly a small town, although with remarkably flexible borders. Listeners are never told just how big it is, and those who write in to ask are given the soft answer that turns away real information. The mayor drops in on the McGees, which isn't a regular thing in New York or Chicago, and McGee gossips with the telephone operator—"How's every little thing, Myrt?" That is small town color, but anything that might give the town a more specific size is shunned as assiduously as a real city might boast of it. That, way, no listener's own picture of the town can be wrong. But there's no doubt what flag they hang out, if they can find it, on the fourth of what month. Thanks to some excellent observation, this is as American as the ice-cream soda you don't want, but eat because you're supposed to want to.

In Fibber's overstuffed closet, for example, there must be a mah-jongg set, Molly's old Empress Eugenie hat and maybe Fibber's old capping machine from the home-brew days. There would also be a three-legged bridge table, some gilded pussy willows, a couple of Rosa Bonheur horse pictures, the Christmas-tree ornaments that have been missing since 1940, Fibber's old plus-four golf knickers and the Spanish shawl they used to keep on the piano. And any day now, they intend to straighten that closet out.

Fibber and Molly keep getting praise from church groups for the purity of their entertainment. They journeyed back to the Middle West in April of last year to receive honorary LL.D.'s at the hands of the Reverend Walter Pax, of St. Joseph's College, in Collegeville, Indiana, for their "truly Christian philosophy" and the general "acceptability" of their comedy. They arrived with a roar of police motorcycles, and the college band played Pretty Redwing. There is never a blue line in their script, although the most noticeable thing about this purity is that it isn't noticeable; the two manage to keep their show clean without sounding like prigs, which they aren't, on stage or off. It pleases churchmen that they present such a picture of devoted home life. Fibber never so much as mentions another female, although there isn't much reason why he should: Molly is about the most amiable wife this side of never-neverland. If Fibber hopes to mystify, she's mystified; if he hopes to impress, she's impressed, suppressing a giggle. He could launch a wild venture to grow self-peeling

bananas or take the vacuum cleaner apart to invent a magnetic leaf rake and he'd never hear a word of criticism from this noble woman "You're a good kid," he tells her generously, and she certainly is. If Molly's velvet disposition could set a style, Quinn would be the American husband's best friend.

It's excellent propaganda, anyway, at which Quinn is a master. During the war it struck him that housewives must be pretty sick of hearing some movie queen with seven servants urge the public to save bacon drippings, while a radio star with four cars urged motorists to walk. Wartime sacrifices were petty, but they were also annoying. You were supposed to feel as exalted about saving your tires as Betsy Ross stitching up the first flag, and that wouldn't work. Quinn invented the most refreshing propaganda on the air. Fibber didn't preach. He grouched. He was the man holding his car to thirty-five, only to have the trunk stove in by fast drivers. He was the man who hated to be the only chump not eating black-market meat. Fibber always saw the light, of course, but his candid griping doubtless expressed what thousands hesitated to say. Quinn built whole shows around these themes and bested his own scores with them. He kept on even after the night he got home from a show on gasoline rationing to find his own application for extra gas—so he could work free for the Office of War Information—had been rejected. In one of these shows Quinn kidded the big rush to stock up, simply because something or other was about to be rationed. An inside tin ran through *Wistful Vista*. Crafty souls hurried out to beat the dead line without giving it a second thought. The tip was "They're freezing trusses at midnight."

Every now and then this comedy show essays an outright piece of public service. The lock-your-car campaign was a successful venture of this sort. William N. Connolly, Johnson's advertising manager in Racine, fell to talking with a reform school superintendent about young car thieves. The superintendent was getting more and more boys for this offense, and a shocking percentage of the car thieves was under eighteen. One thing the superintendent said impressed Connolly, most of the cars were easy to steal because the owners left the keys in them. Perhaps, said Connolly, pending more profound decisions on juvenile delinquency, it might be intelligent to remove the keys. This amoral and unsentimental approach delighted Quinn, who based a show on the idea. The idea of using a nickel's worth of simple mechanics to combat a grave problem won wide applause.

The McGees now bask in almost unqualified approval, but there is an occasional beef, just to keep things interesting. Doe Gamble remarked that as an Army surgeon he learned to stand "with my chest out, my stomach in and my mind closed." Those few officers who would be stuffy enough to complain all happened to be listening

in, and protested. Other serious souls get disturbed over the possibility that Fibber may be setting an example of happy indolence because he doesn't have a job. He doesn't, of course; he is neither clerk, factory hand, salesman, millwright nor parttime petunia potter. This is because to give him a specific vocation would restrict the action. Inquirers are told that the imaginary Fibber is a natural-born helper-outer who will step in whenever needed; This seems to satisfy them. The real Fibber, of course, works with great regularity and much profit. When not panning that radio gold or raising feeders on his ranch, he has other ventures, including one he might describe in one of his alliterative anecdotes: he is the busy big shot of a bustling bottling business.

No one with a share in this radio ten-strike, for which the sponsor probably lays out \$14,000 a week, seizes the opportunity to live high, wide and handsome. The Jordans, who have known hard times, might dwell in one of those dazzling white palaces to which tourists in Beverly Hills lift sunburned eyes. They don't; they live in an old five-room ranch house which they have expanded, with a certain caution, to seven. While the work was being done—Jordan seems to have been a little overconfident, like Fibber, about this—they lived partly in the old house, partly in a trailer parked beside it. Last summer they never did get around to deciding which of several plushy vacations to take, and ended up staying mostly at home. Jordan could at least buy a gold-plated washing machine in honor of the days when nobody would buy washing machines from him, but he doesn't. As for Quinn, he has a plane, a collection of water colors and a stable, which is a little more like what is expected. But it is a stable of one horse, which seems to reflect the Grand Rapids conservatism.

When, in 1943, the show hit the highest Crossley ever touched by a commercial program, it crowned many years of hard work. The Jordans had been in show business thirty years—from Jim's first job as a singer—when their show won last year's top comedy rating. Probably only salmon, which will battle waterfalls and flop laboriously up long fish ladders in their strange journey to spawning grounds, understand the obsession that drives show people. Ambition must induce a partial anesthesia, for entertainers on the way up have to put up with food, hotels and trains that could kill a Chinese irregular. Success ought to be correspondingly pleasant, after that. But the Jordans don't let it throw them. They seem to keep a famous old vaudeville line in mind, like a sampler on the wall. Not a line audiences heard, but one famous in the dressing rooms backstage. It is a great antidote for vanity—"Don't send out your laundry."

From *THE SATURDAY EVENING POST*
April 16, 1949

The Blonde I Prefer

by CY HOWARD

Cy's friend Irma has been a problem from the day she was born—but you can't help loving that girl

I wish I could say that there is—or was in my past—one real Irma. That she was an incredibly beautiful girl who broke my heart when I was a youth, and that the radio program is a sort of monument to the great love of my life.

Being the creator-producer of *My Friend Irma*, it would be very nice to be able to say that in answer to the hundreds of people who write to me, saying, "You must be a wonderfully happy married man with a lovely wife and six beautiful children." But the truth is that there was no one real Irma and the further truth is that I'm a thirty-two-year-old divorced bachelor, I'm disgusted with women, so I put two of them into a radio program and let them both suffer.

A less interesting, less romantic truth is that there was—and still is—a real Mrs. O'Reilly, however, and a real Mrs. O'Reilly's boarding house. (There had to be—how could a man in his right mind make up a thing like that?) But more of that later . . .

As for Irma, I made her the beautiful-but-dumb blonde type who really is smarter than the girls who make fun of her. Next I created Jane, the girl who lives with Irma and loves her, but frequently is even more stupid. To make it worse, I gave Jane a masculine mind. In fact, Jane is me—she uses my brains. So I have two girls—Irma and Jane. And I'd rather write about them than marry them, thank you.

If you want to know how *My Friend Irma* came to be, you have to go back with me a few years, because a lot of the Irma people I met along the way, and a lot of the situations in which Irma and her friends find themselves I found myself in, too. You have to go back with me, as a matter of fact, to the real Mrs. O'Reilly's boarding house in New York City. Dear old Mrs. O'Reilly, the aristocrat of 73rd Street. She had a face like a ploughed field and a heart bigger than all outdoors. There, were lace curtains on the first floor of her old brownstone front and from that floor up it didn't bear investigation. I was the inmate of the third floor front. Mrs. O'Reilly had the nerve to call it a "suite" because I had a screen which turned the one room into two. But there was a gold chandelier on one side of the

screen which created an air of ancient elegance. On the other side was a fireplace which worked when you had four bits for wood. If you didn't, it was a cold, hard winter. So it was a cold, hard winter.

Mrs. O'Reilly knew before I did when I'd be going out. Only dropping dead, which she never did, would have prevented her from appearing in the ghostly lower hall out of nowhere and murmuring in sepulchral tones: "Mr. Howard, could I trouble you for the rent?" My inevitable, only possible reply was, "Don't worry about it for a moment, Mrs. O'Reilly. I'm seeing George Kaufman about a new play in the morning."

This was breaking Mrs. O'Reilly's heart. Broadway was trying to break mine. So I thumbed my nose at the Great Bleak Way and went to Texas. The Houston Chronicle suffered to let me sell advertising. On the side I was a disc jockey. Then the Air Corps stepped in. I discovered I couldn't kill myself. When that was all over I was back home in Milwaukee and broke.

Funny thing about being stone cold busted. If you have a little money you relax and wait for the breaks. But if you don't have the price of tomorrow's breakfast you really start to move. I got on the interurban train for Chicago with no idea about what I'd do. By the time the Howard Street station was called I was half asleep.

HOWARD STREET? Why that was me! I jumped up and rushed off the train. There I stood with my entire assets—an eager look and a knife edge press in my pants. A few minutes later I walked into an advertising agency and asked to see the business manager. I came out, dazed with the realization that I'd talked myself into \$75 a week selling radio time. There was some side money, too, writing jokes for Danny Thomas. Stu Dawson sent some of my stuff over to another advertising agency and then Jack Benny took me on as a staff writer, which brought me to Hollywood. Ah, Hollywood, lovely spa by the Blue Pacific. How peaceful and quiet. All I could hear was falling pedestrians and dropped options. This was the place for Cy Howard to stay and one day—he hoped—pack away more money than Lassie or Darryl Zanuck.

There is always a fateful day. It came to me when I was cutting through the Beverly Hills hotel lobby on my way to a swimming pool located near a beautiful blonde. I was detoured by a man named Maxwell Anderson who said to me, "Are you an actor?" and then took me at my word when I said yes. A few hours after that I found myself saying to Jack Benny, "I gotta do a Broadway show." "That's fine, Cy," Benny agreed. "Everybody has to. I'd like to read the script one of these years if you ever get around to writing it."

"I don't mean that. I'm going to act in a show." A sympathetic look shaded the great comedian's eyes. He put a fatherly hand on my shoulder. "It happens to the best of us, my boy. Maybe if you take a little trip to Palm Springs for a rest, you won't have to see a psychiatrist. Take all the time you want. I'll keep you on the payroll, but get the acting germ out of your corpuscles." I finally convinced him that what I had was a job, not just a yen. I told him that the play was Maxwell Anderson's "Storm Operation."

Mr. Benny leaned like the Tower of Pisa. He looked at me as though he detected a resemblance to Cary Grant. Then he exclaimed, "Get out of here, you ham. Good luck and Heaven bless you."

Would you believe it? When I came up out of the subway, back in New York, Broadway was still there, shoving people around. Mrs. O'Reilly was doing the same thing with her tenants. I went up to 73rd Street just to make sure. As I walked by I was pursued by a flood of memories and the faint aroma of garlic. I said to myself, "Some day you will write a play to immortalize Mrs. O'Reilly and her happy patrons."

One play, one radio show and one year later, "some day" came—or began to get under way at least. Once again I'd fallen in with a godfather who was no relative to me. This was Bill Paley, who took me on to create new shows for CBS. I stood up before Bill like a man who knew what he was doing and delivered an ultimatum to both of us, to wit: "The comedy of life is in Mrs. O'Reilly's boarding house and a delicatessen on 6th Avenue. You can't go among the people in thirteen weeks. I'll need a year because I like to go to the bank regular."

For two weeks nothing happened. Then one evening when I'd made a comedian of myself at a party my wife said to me, "You are Phil Silvers without an act."

That made me sore. I didn't talk to her for two days, which gave me time to think up a radio show called *My Friend Irma*, incorporating all those people I'd met in Mrs. O'Reilly's boarding house, Mrs. O'Reilly herself, and a lot of characters I'd encountered.

How did I really find Irma herself? I could make up a good story about it, but why not tell the truth? In my time, I've gone around with a lot of girls. I made a list of them, but decided I couldn't use 'em. They all had a bad connotation. They were too lovely, too silly, too homely, too selfish, too something. I went through a lot of names Sally, Ruth, Helen, Nelma, Barbara—a list nine yards long before I came to Irma. Now there was a name! Irma could be anything you wanted her to be. I

wanted her to be in Minnesota, so she had to have a last name to go with the state. I remembered looking in a Minneapolis telephone book once, and all I could find were Petersons, Olsons, Johnsons and more Petersons. So there she was, in name only—one Irma Peterson.

Now, about the other girl I wanted to use—the clipped and brittle, capable and American one, the feminine counterpart of Tom Jones. Jane's a good, dependable name. So's Stacey. So there she was—Jane Stacey.

Then off to the West Coast I went, armed with a script and a briefcase full of ideas—but there was no band waiting to meet me. When I arrived in Hollywood to set up shop with Irma I had to find her. I considered hundreds of people who didn't know what they were applying for. I needed an Irma who wasn't as stupid as she sounded, but who'd be out of her class when thrown in with Jane. Jane who'd always know what she was doing and enjoy having a friend like Irma who'd polish up her ego. The whole cast had to be people who, standing by themselves, could be called quite normal, but when thrown together at Mrs. O'Reilly's boarding house would become a comedy concert.

See what I mean? There's Al. Irma knows he's not so much, but she loves him. And she's right. Al's a good fellow, but he's influenced by Joe who's a big crook. And Professor Kropotkin who never gets anywhere—but in different circumstances he might.

It took a year and a half to put all this together. One night I went to see *Ken Murray's Blackouts*. I had an idea about Marie Wilson, the leading lady, and I confirmed it by going backstage to meet her. She had all the sweetness and charm my Irma needed. Also she seemed like the Ph.D. of Dumb Dolls.

I explained Irma to her. "Oh," Marie exclaimed. "I couldn't do a character like that. I tried radio once. I can't read lines. Somebody'd have to double for my dialogue."

There was a long parade of would-be Jane Staceys. I heard about Cathy Lewis and called her up. She said, "I'm very busy. I'll give you exactly five minutes of my time. And in the end you'll take someone else."

That did it. Cathy's aggressiveness and basic sincerity hit the character right on the nose. She is one of the greatest talents I've ever known. When we learned at this season's beginning that Cathy couldn't go on, even after having worked the dress rehearsal, I was horrified. She just didn't have the stamina following her illness of the summer before. There were hours of nightmarish auditions trying to perform a miracle. We could-

n't come up with another Cathy, but Joan Banks seemed closest to her definition of the role. With less than an hour's rehearsal, Joan went on and has delivered an outstanding job ever since, although by the time you read this Cathy, may again be Jane.

Professor Kropotkin? That was another tough one. I was nutty about the character and wanted to play him myself, which was why I was so hardboiled about finding the right man. One day I was rushing through the lobby at CBS when I spotted a great actor by the name of Hans Conried. He was wearing a long, flowing tie and looked so preoccupied that I swear he walked through the front door without opening it.

"Hey," I exclaimed. "Do you drink tea out of a glass with the sugar in your mouth?" He looked at me as though he'd be infinitely happy if I crawled back into the woodwork. Then he spoke in rumbling, resonant tones. "It is none of your business, Mr. Horowitz," he said, deliberately lousing up my name. "But as a matter of fact, yes, I do drink tea out of a glass with sugar in my mouth." That made two of us, and I knew we would enjoy insulting each other.

Then came John Brown for Al. I seriously suspect that John, one of radio's original iron horses, makes more money than I do, he plays so many characters in various shows. Another of the war horses is Alan Reid, who plays Mr. Clyde. You know, Marie isn't just in "good company." She's with the greatest, including Donald Woods as Richard Rhineland. As for Gloria Gordon, what can a mere producer say about her work? That reminds me that at one time someone suggested that to save time we take away her credit on the show. "Take away her credit?" I howled. "Look, aside from the fact that she is sensational, she owns six houses and she's always late for rehearsal because she has to collect the rent. Why, I suspect that she owns most of Sunset Boulevard. Take away her credit and maybe CBS has to start looking for a new building!"

Speaking of credit, I hate to pick up my fee for directing these people. In case you don't know it, a good director is simply a fellow who has the sense to put a gang of performers like this together. That's why I have such a calm disposition. People go away from rehearsals for *My Friend Irma* thinking I'm berserk. One reporter got so mad he wanted to punch me in the nose. I'd been rehearsing one scene over and over. My temperament overshot the safety mark when Marie Wilson giggled. "Shut up!" I roared. "You're a miserable actress. You've got no talent. You do everything wrong, and on top of that you are insolent!" There was a slight pause. Marie looked up at the booth. "Thank you, Mr. Howard," she said silkily. "I accept your apology."

I was told later that the reporter went out of there declaring he'd wait for me in the alley. He should have waited until after the rehearsal when Marie came up to me and inquired anxiously, "Cy—are you feeling all right? Sure you're not sick? You only yelled at me for ten minutes today."

It's hard to explain why I do those things. I have an habitual attitude when I walk in on a rehearsal. The whole cast is sitting around a table reading their lines. Before I can hear what they say I yell, "Stop! Do it over—it's all wrong!" It's self-defense because if I treated my staff with the respect to which they are entitled, they'd think I was crazy, crawling in on my hands and knees all the time. Consequently it is entirely possible that I'll be murdered some day during rehearsal.

There's the matter of music. That genius of melody, Lud Gluskin, turned to me on one occasion and asked, "Cy, are you hearing enough of the viola?" Violas I don't know from. "I wouldn't recognize one with the label on it," I admitted furiously. We went on from there. A few moments later something sounded wrong. "Look here, Gluskin," I bellowed. "How many times do I have to tell you I don't want so much of that pringail. I realize you have a beetle browed opinion of my musical knowledge, but if you can't swing in with more klismeyer, go on out and lose yourself. I'd rather work with a hurdy gurdy."

Mr. Gluskin bowed from the waist. Mentally he assigned me to the lower reaches that all musicians reserve for those who can't tell an obligato from a reprise, whatever that is. People assume that I am a creative nut. Privately, I insist that I studiously avoid being hemmed in by routine and disciplined emotion. One day I walked into the show without screaming about something. The whole mood dropped down a foot.

Confidentially, I must admit that a portion of my work is done by my airedale dog, Mr. Clyde. What portion I'll never admit. Do you think I'd want NBC to hire him away from me? In addition to loaning his name to a character in the program (Mr. Clyde is Irma's boss), my Mr. Clyde has won more blue ribbons as a dog than I ever will critical acclaim as a producer.

Not too long ago there was an Irma in my life. A lovely girl. We'd gone together for quite awhile and liked each other so much we didn't have the nerve to come right out and admit that we'd begun to bore each other. The romance was exhausted but it kept breathing on the backs of our necks. Clyde fixed that. When she stopped by rehearsal, he jumped up and put his dirty paws all over her new white dress.

This Irma had been waiting for just such an opening and so had I. "You horrible dog, you!" she exclaimed.

"Look here, woman," I yelled. "You can't talk about my dog like that! Get out of my life!" "With pleasure," she snapped, on her way to the door. You can believe it or not, but driving home Clyde winked at me. That's really why I used his name for the character of Irma's boss in the show. He likes to be in on the act.

There are other things you should know about *My Friend Irma*. How I suffer, for instance. Take the way I tangle with Hans Conreid. Usually I get away with reading all the character lines the way they should be read, but my ambition is to play Professor Kropotkin on the air. This is the terrible cross that Hans has to bear. When I get to needling him, he suffers. Recently he slammed down his script. "If you can play this part better than I can," he demanded, "why don't you do it?"

"What," I returned in injured voice, "and ruin your reputation in thirty seconds?" I should try to follow Hans Cronreid? I should fall over a corpse. That's a great man!

They say that actors are like children. That's silly. You tell a child where you're going to be a couple of times and he'll find you like a bird dog. That's why I start rehearsals a half hour early. Marie always goes to the wrong studio. Unless I'm careful, she'll wind up one of these days playing stooge to the Thin Man.

She drives me mad. During the last political campaign we were preempted by a political speech. "We get a vacation," I told Marie. "Senator Taft's coming on." "Senator Taft?" she asked. "Why, Mr. Howard. I thought you told me we'd never have a guest star!"

Sometimes all of these wonderful people detest me. Hans hates me with an incurable rage—for giving him the job. John Brown will someday put poison in the rehearsal coffee because I'm always taking him away from his poker game with the musicians. No wonder he makes so much money. I hope he gets the wrong cup! And Gloria Gordon. I turned down eight Mrs. O'Reillys before I picked her. Yet I am a worm under her feet. If she didn't have to work so hard she'd have been out buying five more apartment houses and be hiring me to collect the rent.

Do you think that's bad? All right. *My Friend Irma* is now consistently among the first five shows, by Hooperating That's nice company up there with Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Fibber McGee and Molly and Lux Radio Theater—and not a big star in the cast. Then Irma leads me to Luigi, and Irma herself goes into

movies. I said I hate women. Look what she's done to me.

But you must grant me one thing I have a tremendous pride in Irma. She was created and written by me. After that, and to their everlasting credit, is the work of Parke Levy, who with his writing staff of Stanley Adams and Richard McLean, took over the script after the fifth show. This, with the inspired work of a fine production staff, has produced a show of which radio can be proud. Still, all this would be nothing if you, the listening audience, hadn't signified your love for *My Friend Irma* and voted her and her friends the best comedy story.

May you never lose each other! (April 1949)

LATEST ADDITIONS TO THE CASSETTE LIBRARY

- 2841 Let George Do It "The Symbol" 2/18/52
Let George Do It "Star Bright Pier" 2/25/52
- 2842 The Great Gildersleeve "To Marry Eve
Goodwin" 6/25/44
The Great Gildersleeve "Gildy Goes to the
Hospital" 1/9/44
- 2843 Boston Blackie "Amadon Pearls"
Boston Blackie "Tiny Philips"
- 2844 The Shadow "Murder is a Deadly Mistake"
4/18/48
The Shadow "The Man Who Was Death"
2/29/48
- 2845 You Bet Your Life - secret word "Table" 2/22/50
You Bet Your Life - secret word "Door" 3/1/50
- 2846 You Bet Your Life - secret word "Dust" 12/7/49
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11/30/49
- 2847 Box 13 "Damsel In Distress" 11/14/48
Box 13 "Diamond In The Sky" 11/21/48
- 2848 Mr. & Mrs. North "Murder by the Book" 3/2/43
Mr. & Mrs. North "The Letter" 10/6/43
- 2849 Lights Out "Execution" 4/27/43
Lights Out "Heavenly Jeep"
- 2850 Suspense "Parole to Panic" 2/12/54
Suspense "Confession" 12/31/47
- 2851 The Whistler "Girl in Black"
The Whistler "Fading Star"
- 2852 The Whistler "Feature Story"
The Whistler "Escape to Doom"
- 2853 The Whistler "Lady on a Yacht"
The Whistler "Hudson Bay Incident"
- 2854 Quiet Please "Summer Goodbye" 1/23/49
Quiet Please "Is This Murder?" 1/16/49

- 2855 Burns & Allen "Cattle Speculation" 2/19/48
 Burns & Allen "George's Girlfriend" 2/26/48
 2856 Ma Perkins #4177-4180 8/16,17,18,19/49
 2857 Ma Perkins #4181-4187 8/22,23,30,31/49
 2858 Ma Perkins #4189-4192 9/1,2,5,6/49
 2859 Ma Perkins #4197-4200 9/13,14,15,16/49
 2860 Ma Perkins #4201-4204 9/19,20,21,22/49
 2861 Ma Perkins #4205-4208 9/23,26,27,28/49
 2862 Ma Perkins #4209-4212 9/29,30/49 - 10/3,4/49
 2863 Ma Perkins #4213-4216 10/5,6,7,10/49
 2864 Ma Perkins #4217-4220 10/11,12,13,14/49
 2865 Ma Perkins #4221-4224 10/17,18,19,20/49
 2866 Let's Pretend "Jorinda & Joringel" 5/4/46
 Let's Pretend "The Yellow Dwarf" 7/27/46
 2867 Let's Pretend "Bluebeard" 6/21/47
 Let's Pretend "Thumbelina"
 2868 Let's Pretend "Brave Little Tailor" 7/12/47
 Let's Pretend "Chinese Nightengale" 7/26/47
 2869 Let's Pretend "Goose Girl" 8/3/46
 Let's Pretend "Faithful John" 8/10/46
 2870 Let's Pretend "Youth Who Learned to Shiver
 & Shake" 8/16/47
 Let's Pretend "Aladdin and His Wonderful
 Lamp" 8/30/47
 2871 Let's Pretend "Why the Sea is Salty" 8/22/42
 Let's Pretend "The Little Mermaid" 8/29/42

Mable Flapsaddle— Alias Sara Berner

The telephone skits on CBS's Jack Benny Program, in which two saucy-voiced "hello girls" keep cutting in on conversations, are some of the choicest bits on the Waukegan Wit's show.

The operators are played by Sara Berner and Bea Benadaret, two of radio's top character actresses.

Sara Berner's theatrical career began as a baby sitter for her brother in Tulsa, Okla. Brother liked westerns, she loved the drama. So, having deposited her young relative in the local "Ride 'Em, Cowboy" movie house, she was off to the Orpheum Theatre where she sat enthralled through a silent picture and several vaudeville acts.

She was fascinated by the leading ladies, the comedienues and even the dowagers. She studied their facial expressions, mannerisms and their various methods of acting. When the bill was over, she'd repair to the ladies' lounge where she entertained the attendant (and scared the other customers) with an amateur version of what she'd just seen and heard.

Thus was evolved Sara the Mimic, who delighted radio audiences with her roles of Jack Benny's airwave girlfriend, Gladys Zybisco, as well as Mable Flapsaddle, the Brooklyn-voiced telephone operator.

One of four children, Sara was born in Albany, N. Y. Her father, an auctioneer, moved his family to Tulsa, where Sara attended both grade school and high school. Naturally, she took part in the school plays but her first real dramatic effort took place just following graduation, when she was given the role of Mrs. Cohen in the initial amateur presentation of "Abie's Irish Rose." She remembers proudly that the players grossed \$1,000 from a three-night stand.

Soon after, Father Herdan moved his family east again, this time to Philadelphia. Sara went to work as a salesgirl in Wanamaker's department store, where life was bearable only when she had time to mimic the customers.

One day she picked the wrong moment—and customer—to mimic. An elderly Main Line dowager whom Sara thought had left was one of the interested viewers of a shredding impersonation of herself. That night, as Sara walked by the statue of John Wanamaker for the last time, she promised herself that someday she would return, not as a salesgirl but as one of the customers.

She had not lost her theatrical ambitions. She spent all her spare time at Columbia's station WCAU. Counting the experience more valuable than the few dollars to a budding amateur, Sara played running parts, impromptu roles, last minute substitutes, anything and everything.

"In those early radio days," says Sara, "we thought nothing of doing umpteen shows a day, switching from one dialect to another at a moment's notice. It was wonderful experience and I finally wound up with my own fifteen minute show, written by Arthur Q. Bryan. At that time Jan Savitt was staff conductor for WCAU."

Later, Sara headed for New York to be closer to the growing hub of radio. Getting a salesgirl job in a millinery shop on Broadway, she continued her rounds in an attempt to break into radio as a professional. Never one to miss an opportunity, she entered her name for the Major Bowes amateur show. Her appearance flooded the Major with phone calls, and so tremendous was her debut that the following morning she joined the Bowes Number One theatre troupe. Several years of cross-country touring gave Sara the polish and assurance she needed. Then she went back to radio, where she's been ever since.

Five feet, three inches tall, weighing a scant 115 pounds, Sara has reddish-brown hair and brown eyes asparkle with energy. During the war, she established a record of more than 1100 camp shows, innumerable canteen appearances, an entertainment stint on the aircraft carrier Saratoga for the Navy and junkets to entertain the Armed Forces at desert camps where it was 140 degrees in the shade.

Besides her roles on the Jack Benny program, Sara also has been heard on the *Amos 'n' Andy Show*. Her voice has been heard in five Academy Award-winning cartoons, including "Red Hot Riding Hood," "Mother Goose Goes Hollywood" and others. She also has done the cartoon voices of "Little Jasper."

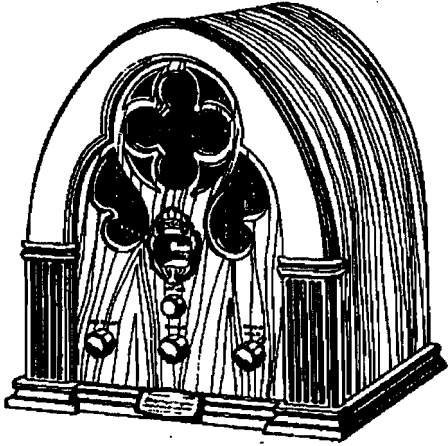
Her squeaky-voiced role of the animated mouse with Gene Kelly in "Anchors Aweigh" helped add "Look at me, I'm dancing!" to American jargon.

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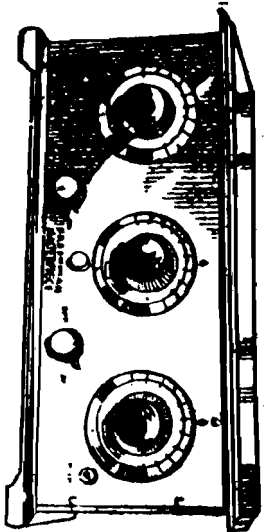


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