

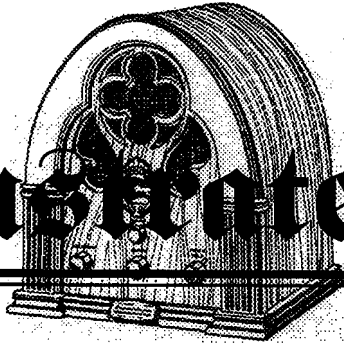
The Old Time Radio Club

Established 1975

# The Illustrated Press

Number 306

January 2003



*"I'd love to come up and see you  
Miss West, but I've got to pay my  
Old Time Radio Club dues first"*

# *The Illustrated Press*

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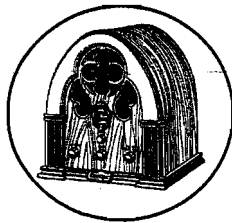
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### Club Mailing Address

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## Book Reviews

### A Review of Ellery Queen's Adventures in Radio

#### THE SOUND OF DETECTION

by Francis M. Nevins and Martin Grams, Jr.

By *Richard A. Olday*

I grew up watching Ellery Queen on TV and reading EQMM. I also have most of the old Ellery Queen movies and 14 of the radio shows (I sure would like to find more) as well as the Minute Mysteries. Because of this, it was my pleasure to review this book.

It was quite interesting for me to read about the two cousins from Brooklyn who created Ellery Queen as a lark one day over lunch in 1928. Frederic Dannay and Manfred Lee were born 9 months apart in 1905. Danny moved to "upstate" Elmira (if Elmira is upstate, then New York City must be lower New York) for twelve years resulting in far different upbringings for the two cousins. With the return to Brooklyn, a powerful friendship developed between the two cousins. Besides the typical teen-age interests, they both shared a passion for detective fiction.

After completing several novels and a few radio scripts during the 1930s, Ellery Queen began a long run on radio starting as a sixty-minute show on CBS on June 18, 1939. On May 5, 1948, Ellery Queen completed its eighth season and left the airways after 355 episodes.

The beginning of the book contains information on the cousins and how they collaborated on the Queen stories. A detailed log on the radio shows fills out the center section while brief biographies on the cast and production crew round out the book. The authors have done a great job of detailing the history of Ellery Queen. This book is a MUST for fans of Ellery Queen. The paperback is available from your local bookstore for \$24.95 or

may be ordered from OTR Publishing, P.O. Box 252, Churchville, Maryland 21028. Mail orders should also include \$3.95 for 2-day priority postage.

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### AW...RELAX, ARCHIE! RE-LAXX

by Hal (Harlan) Stone

A Book Review by *Jerry Collins*

Before you begin reading this book, realize it is not your ordinary autobiography. It is certainly not a scholarly work. I do not think that Hal Stone would have wanted it that way. Instead, it is a dialog between writer and reader, a 320-page conversation between entertainer and those to be entertained. It is a conversation that could have taken place in a bar, in your living room or in a theater with Stone talking to the audience.

Hal Stone does an excellent job of re-telling the story of his childhood modeling career. Stone has a good assortment of pictures that covered the career that he had begun at the age of three and lasted for the next five years.

In early 1940, eight-year old Hal Stone made his next step up the entertainment ladder. He received the part of Harlan in the play *Father Knows Best*, playing at the Blackstone Theater in Chicago. It was during this ten month run that he saw his name changed from Harold to Harlan and he was befriended by one of Hollywood's legends, Lillian Gish. He also had his appendix removed after a performance. Miss Gish visited Stone every day that he was in the hospital. She was also the first person to encourage his artistic career.

Stone then returned to New York City, where he resumed his modeling and began a child-acting career on Broadway. One of his more memorable roles was in *This Rock* which starred Bill and Zachary Scott. At age thirteen Stone toured the country all the way to California in the play *Tomorrow the World*.

I was at the age of nine that Hal Stone began his radio career. He played in such shows as *Let's Pretend*, *Dr. Christian*, *Big Town* and *Death Valley Days*. Hal Stone was just short of his fourteenth birthday when he won the role of "Jughead" in *Archie Andrews*. This is a good place to stop and reflect since we are at the midpoint of the book.

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I think Hal Stone spent too much time discussing the careers of the performers that worked in the different plays that he was in. A very brief listing without pictures would be more than adequate. Still, the first half of the book is excellent. It is replete with fascinating stories and anecdotes. If you are interested in the life of a very happy, content, non-troubled and very successful child actor, this is the book for you. Stone does a great job of relating his modeling, theater and early radio career. His memory in retaining so many of these happenings is quite amazing.

Aside for a brief period in the early 1950s, when he was in the military, Hal Stone played Jughead from 1945-1954. Stone does a very good job discussing the technical aspects of the show. He also includes a very complete collection of pictures, both of the complete cast and individual cast members. He also includes numerous staged promotional pictures as well as pictures of programs, advertisements, picture scripts, news articles, etc. When talking about the different "Old Time Radio" conventions he has attended, Hal Stone projects himself as a very hard-working, dedicated, professional and sincere person and entertainer.

Again in the second half of the book too much time is devoted to lengthy discussions of the careers of all the performers, writers, directors and announcer who had anything to do with the *Archie* show. Again, a simple listing without pictures would have been more than adequate. Instead, those extra pages could have been devoted to a collection of more of the stories and anecdotes related to the *Archie* show and its cast members.

I think Harlan's autobiography is a very good book. Still I did become quite tired of reading all those short biographies and missed the good stories and anecdotes that filled the first half of the book.

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## The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

By TOM CHERRE

Many years ago, over 30 to be more precise, I had the unfortunate experience of breaking my leg in a football game. It was actually a touch football game at a family picnic, but it still hurt just the same. I was in a cast and was immobile for quite a while. I became a more avid reader, and was looking for something more interesting enough to pass the time and ease the pain away. A good friend of mine suggested the works of Sir Arthur Conan



Basil Rathbone, Sherlock Holmes on radio, in movies, and on early live TV in a still from the film *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*. After reading "A Study In Scarlet" I knew I was hooked. My bad break turned out to be a good break and I breezed through his four novels and fifty-six short stories. It just so happened that at the same time PBS Channel 17 was running a marathon of the old Sherlock Holmes movies of the late 30s and 40s. After those were over I thought that was it. After some 33 or so odd years I recently became acquainted with the old time radio shows of Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

We all know there were countless detectives on radio. Some had mystic powers to cloud men's minds. Others were more suave and debonair, some with girlfriends or wives to help or hamper. Some were tough, and others were humble. You knew who they were. There was undoubtedly no other consulting detective with as much



Nigel Bruce and Basil Rathbone, Dr. Watson and Sherlock Holmes in several media, here in a still from their film *Dressed to Kill*.



Nigel Bruce was Dr. Watson and Basil Rathbone played the role of Sherlock Holmes on the NBC Blue Network in October 1939. During the show's 25 years, nine other sets of actors played Holmes and Watson.

wit and brains as Sherlock Holmes. With his trusty and dedicated associate, Dr. John Watson, the two scoured the moors and villages of old England to seek out every possible sort of villain known to mankind. I myself formed a warm bond with the Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce team. I loved hearing the bumbling raspy voice of Bruce's Watson. Conan's description of Holmes fit Rathbone to a T. His somber and serious nature was Sherlock all the way. Much like Brace Beemer was born to play the Lone Ranger, Rathbone was born to be Holmes.

The radio adaptations of *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* usually started out in the warm confines of Dr. Watson's study. You could hear the crackling of the burning logs in the fireplace, and I swear I could almost smell the burning embers. The chimes of Big Ben were heard in the background thus setting the tone for our exciting adventure.

The announcer would slip in the fact that this adventure was brought to us by Bromo Quinine cold tablets or perhaps Petrie Wine. He miraculously slipped out of his role of host and stepped into the scene of the drama saying: "What tale have you for us tonight Dr. Watson?" Hemming and hawing, fumbling through his memoirs, the scratchy voice of Watson would begin his tale of Sherlock Holmes in foggy London. We were mag-

ically catapulted to 221B Baker Street possibly in the late 1800s with Holmes smoking his pipe and Watson burying his nose in the *Times*. Just then Mrs. Hudson would usher in a client who had come to Holmes as a last resort for help. Many of his cases involved murder, kidnapping or thievery. His biggest adversary, (the Napoleon of Crime) which is what he called Dr. Moriarity figured in many of his cases. Holmes had a way with words as he also described Moriarity as the greatest schemer of all times, the organism of every deviltry, the controlling brain of the underworld and everything completely dedicated to evil. In other words, he was a real meany. Wherever the trail led, we were kept in suspense for nearly 30 minutes. As the case ended, we were brought back to the cozy quarters of Dr. Watson with a brief summation and a preview of next week's show. I would like to say for sheer entertainment the answer is elementary. It's Sherlock Holmes.

## PETER DONALD

### THE "CAN YOU TOP THIS" GAGMASTER IS A YOUNG VETERAN OF RADIO

(February 1944)

Twenty-five years old, lean of frame and sandy gold of hair, Peter Donald himself will tell you that the most frequent reaction he gets from *Can You Top This?* visitors is a frank: "Why I always imagined you as being fat and fifty!" He doesn't know why, unless it's the age of the jokes he has to tell—or the fact that he's been around radio studios for quite a while now.

Being "old" comes rather naturally to Peter. At 16 he started out playing elderly men on the air, took the part of Maude Adams' husband at 18 achieved the distinction of being both Joan Bennett's and Helen Hayes' radio fathers at the ripe age of 24. On *March of Time*, he's portrayed such varied personalities as Generals' Wavell and Montgomery, Lindbergh and the late Leslie Howard.

But his most unusual role so far was that of *Peter Donald*, grandfatherly cracker-barrel philosopher on a transcribed program called *Carnation Bouquet*. It was strictly a characterization, but for reasons now unknown even to himself, the young troupier elected to use his own name. As a result, he's occasionally asked if he's a grandson of that other Peter Donald. Actually, Peter has few family memories of the every day kind, born in Bristol, England, where his concert-pianist

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Comedy scripts are duck soup to Donald, who can play all ages and dialects.

mother and minstrel comedian father were currently performing, he spent his childhood growing up on round-the-world tours. He saw India, Africa, Spain, France, Italy, Australia—from behind the footlights. It wasn't until they settled down in New York that Peter went regularly to school. Even then, it was the Professional Children's School for budding young actors and actresses.

Show business has literally been his whole life. One of the most versatile actors in radio, he's been honored by such topnotch scripters as Norman Corwin and Ranald MacDougall, who have turned out plays especially for his talents. In one of these scripts, he enacted a character from the age of 17 to the age of 70. In another, lines were written in for every other member of the cast—but Peter had to ad-lib his own. In still another, he was the only actor and played all the parts, besides doing the narrating.

Nowadays, Peter uses these talents only in acting out his four jokes of the evening on *Can You Top This?* The winning contributions from listeners are handed to him, typed out in their barest form, just before the broadcast. The master dialectician glances at them, crosses them out, and proceeds to "cast" his own version from his own repertoire. Once upon a time, Peter

used to drag as many as four or five brand-new characters into his jokes. Now he has a "stable" of imaginary stooges, each with their own characteristics and inflections. There are *Gertrude* and *Sadie*, his two Brooklyn girls—*Sam* and *Willie*, his two morons—types, in fact, to cast for every need.

Comedy has become the Donald field, more or less in spite of himself, with his gagmaster duties on *Can You Top This?*—heard over WOR on Wednesday evenings, as well as over the NBC network on Saturdays. But Peter's biggest plum to date is a half-hour program called *Guess Who?*—also over WOR on Wednesday, at 9:30 P.M. Here Peter's the whole show himself, quizzing contestants about snatches played on half-forgotten or little-known records, awarding prizes to those who can identify the voices of various celebrities.

The gags on all these programs are full-tasseled corn, as befits both the subject-matter and Peter's own early music-hall background. But someday, his friends and fellow-workers predict, Peter Donald will be radio's latest big-time variety star, combining his wisecracking glibness and versatility in one program.



### Major Bowes

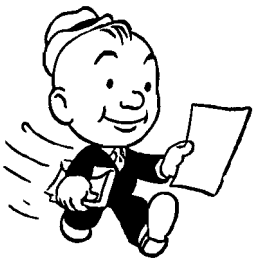
A radio star in the making was Maj. Edward Bowes when he came to Buffalo to broadcast his *Original Amateur Hour*. He had started the program a year earlier on a New York City station and had gone on the network just before he came to Buffalo to do the program.

His most famous prop was the gong which he rang to halt an act that wasn't going to make it. The same year he came to Buffalo, he had rung the gong on Frank Sinatra, a 20 year old singer in the "Hoboken Four."

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Maj. Bowes (he was an Army reservist) had made, lost and re-made a fortune in real estate in his native San Francisco. He built the once-famous Capitol Theater in New York in 1918.

His amateur hour was a popular hit in the great days of radio and survived into the television age until 1970 as *Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour*. A contemporary imitator was TV's *Gong Show*.



### **RADIO ODDITIES**

In radio parlance a "gaffoon" is a sound effects man who does two or three sound effects at the same time.

Sunday, March 13, 1938, the day after Hitler sent his troops into Austria, marked the first foreign news round-up ever broadcast by a network from overseas.

Kay Kyser disliked mustaches so much that he wouldn't allow anyone in his band to grow one.

As director of *Duffy's Tavern*, Ed Gardner couldn't find an actor who sounded as convincing as he did in the role of *Archie*, so he took over the part himself.

Frederic Danney and Manfred B. Lee, first cousins who were in the advertising field, entered a mystery story contest and won \$7,500 for their creation of *Ellery Queen*.

Hal Peary (*The Great Gildersleeve*) was formerly billed as the "Spanish Troubadour," and at the same time played eight different roles on one program series—including an Eskimo, a Portuguese fisherman, an Irishman and a gangster.

Jim and Marion Jordan once made a ten dollar bet with Jim's brother that they could get on the air as comedians. That's how they got their start in radio and rose to fame as *Fibber McGee and Molly*.

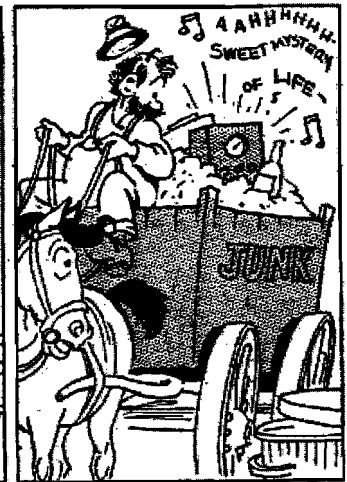
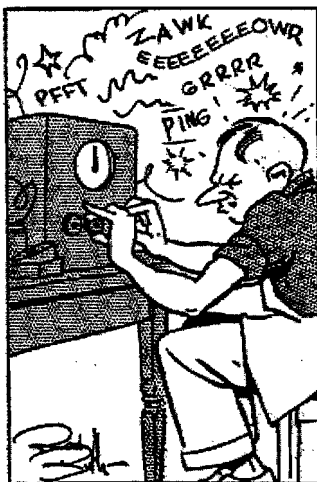
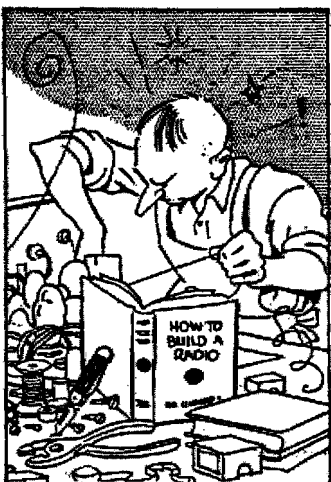
Hoagy Carmichael's front doorbell played the opening strains of "Stardust," while ringing the back doorbell "Georgia On My Mind" was played. Both Hoagy's famous hits.

And while on the subject, Rudy Vallee's front door chimes rang out the first notes of his theme song, "My Time Is Your Time."

Harold Huber, well known to mystery fans as *Hercule Poirot* came from a family of linguists and spoke five languages. Even Sanskrit was kid stuff to him.

Helen Hayes sang for the first time on radio, stage or screen when she played the lead in "The Unsinkable Mrs. Brown," on *Cavalcade of America*. Listeners found that she had a lovely voice.

Mike fright gripped Cass Daley when she made her first radio appearance on Bing Crosby's Show. She read her lines perfectly, sang a song, took two bows, walked off stage and collapsed. The next morning she could not remember having been on the program and had no recollection of the event which started her on the way to fame.



## Danny Thomas

*Former night club star makes dream sequences a hit on "Toasties Time"*

(May, 1945)

Danny Thomas is really a pretty good-natured guy. But if there's one thing that makes the hackles of his neck rise, it's being mistaken for Danny Kaye. And that has a way of happening quite frequently.

Take his very first *Toasties Time* broadcast, for example. A few minutes before going on the air, an announcer unthinkingly introduced him to the studio audience as—Mr. Danny Kaye. The applause was thunderous. Thomas waited in the wings feeling slightly sickish while a correction was made, then strolled out to the accompaniment of polite, stilted clapping. Nobody seemed to know who he was—and what's more nobody seemed to care. That's all changed now though—in fact, the studio audience felt he rated his own ovation just as soon as the slim, dark-complexioned comic launched into one of his hilarious routines. But in case there's still any confusion in the public mind, Danny Kaye is the former Broadway star of *Let's Face It* who now has his own radio show—and Danny Thomas is the former night club whiz, who now plays wistful *Jerry Dingle* on the Fanny Brice program. And when we say "Danny" from now on, we're referring to *Mr. Dingle's* impersonator—and no other.

As listeners to *Toasties Time* know, mailman *Jerry Dingle* is a new kind of radio character, a pathetic and appealing *Mr. Milquetoast* of the air. But instead of giving in to the frustrations and humdrum routine of ordinary life, *Jerry* escapes through all sorts of weird pipe-dreams, in which he takes glorious roles. According to his creator, the mailman is a combination of two comic figures developed during night club days "a meek sort of gent who begins talking to himself and all of a sudden works up a terrific super-man complex, and the wailing Syrian, a down-trodden soul who dreams that *he* is the big-shot and mentally cracks the whip at all his superiors."

Whatever his antecedents, the "small-time fella with big-time ideas" has certainly come to stay, is gaining new admirers with each performance. Critics have congratulated Thomas (who writes most of his own material) on the refreshing originality of his patter, the poise and finesse with which he puts it across. Not the least of *Jerry's* charms are the delightful song parodies with which each dream ends. As a sample, *Jerry* was once insulted by a doctor. His wounded feelings find him in solace in singing:

"Sulfahyathyaparapencinilimide" (lyrics by Jerry Seelen)

*I've discovered Sulfahyathyaparapencinilimide  
Doctors will adore it's miraculous, stupendous—it's a  
most amazing cure  
But there is no disease for it.*

Danny's brand of comedy isn't limited to this particular type of characterization, either. Visitors to Chicago's swank 5100 club (where the energetic gagster signed in for a week in 1940, stayed three years) remember him as a gifted story-teller with a natural sense of timing, handing out laughs right and left with seemingly effortless ease. Dialect jokes are a forte, too, and the versatile Mr. Thomas can turn on dozens of different dialects at will—including Russian, Greek, Italian, Negro, Jewish and Syrian.

The last of these isn't surprising, since the dark-eyed medium-sized funster is of Syrian descent, was born Ames Jacobs in Deerfield, Michigan. Among the talents he inherited is an ability to play the mizwiz, an exotic Eastern music maker which is said to be the pride of the Syrian hep-cats. It would certainly take either a hep-cap contortionist—or a Thomas—to handle it, for the mizwiz is a double bamboo instrument of reeds into which one must simultaneously inhale and exhale. Danny mastered the technique after many years of instruction from his father. And his father learned the art from a wandering Arab, who made him practice by sipping water kneeling at the bank of a desert oasis. Anyway, that's how the story goes.

Danny's infatuation with show business began years ago, when as a scrawny, round-eyed lad of eleven he took a job as candy butcher, running up and down the aisles of a Toledo, Ohio, theatre selling the folks something to chew. Then and there the boy decided he'd rather look at the audience from the footlight side of the stage, and spent all his spare moments concocting song and dance acts with his brothers and sisters. (There were ten children all together—which made for a lot of possibilities.) High school dramatic clubs gave the youngsters some training, and by graduation day the would-be actors were already clowning their way in and out of local stage doors.

Somehow, because Danny Thomas was not a nationally known radio personality when he hit Hollywood, everybody assumed he was an airwave novice, insisted on giving him advice about mike technique. Actually, the funster learned about broadcasting the hard way—by appearing as an amateur on a Detroit station while still in his teens. What's more, he had to hitch-hike sixty miles, twice a week, to get there. As Danny explains it, he was determined to become an experienced "hooper"—



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Danny Thomas looks like Cary Grant—with proboscis added one way or another. It was at La Martinique in New York that the ingenious comic's expressive hands, flexible face and super-showmanship won widest acclaim. (According to Thomas, hands and face had little to do with it, and he transferred his style to radio practically intact. "You can't depend too much on visual gags in a smoke-filled night club anyway.") But though big-time success was just breaking for him, the 33-year-old storyteller gave up commercial ventures at this point to go on a three-month USO tour.

The unit (which included Marlene Dietrich and several other performers) were sent to the Mediterranean theatre of war, gave a total of 150 shows in North Africa, Sicily, Sardinia—and right on up to the Anzio beach-head in Italy. Except for the large cities, where closed theatres were available, all performances were held in the open air on the back of a mobile truck. And Danny

is proud to say that they never disappointed anybody on account of the weather. If it poured, they just let it pour—and kept right on delivering gags to the battle-weary soldiers. Following along with the Army from Naples to Rome meant several bombings, too, but Thomas says he developed the GI outlook on that. "The GI's claim they're not worried about the bomb that has their name on it. If it's addressed to you, you'll get it . . . so why worry? It's the bomb that's addressed 'To Whom It May Concern' that chases you into a fox-hole."

The comedian returned from that trip last summer with no particular engagements in view. It was a guest shot on a New York show that won him the *Toasties Time* assignment. Fanny Brice tuned in on the program in Hollywood, decided he was just what she wanted for her new show—and presto, Danny had a job, sight unseen. The pair didn't even meet until rehearsals were in progress.

Now that Danny's taken to radio like a duck to water, and *Jerry Dingle* regularly visits millions of homes each Sunday night, the singing funnyman hopes that people will start to remember him. Then he'll never again have to explain patiently: "Nope, the last name is Thomas."

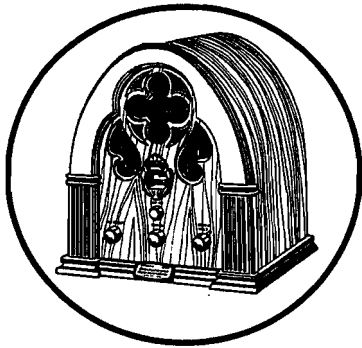


It's membership renewal time once again, and in order to remain a member we must receive your dues (\$17.50) by the end of February. If the mailing label has 1/03 printed after your name it means your membership is expiring and this will be the last issue mailed to you. Please send your check today while it's fresh in your mind.




**The Old Time Radio Club**

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