

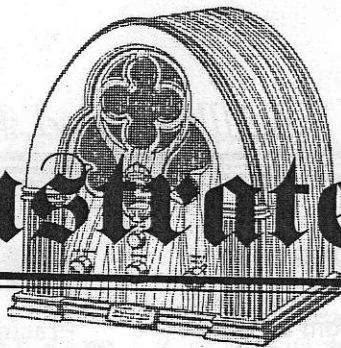
The Old Time Radio Club

Established 1975

The Illustrated Press

Number 366

January 2009



***“Should auld
acquaintance
be forgot”***

Happy New Year

The Illustrated Press

Membership Information

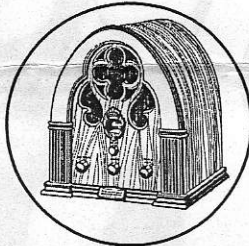
Club Membership: \$18.00 per year from January 1 to December 31. Members receive a tape library listing, reference library listing and the monthly newsletter. Memberships are as follows: If you join January-March, \$18.00; April-June, \$14; July-September, \$10; October-December, \$7. All renewals should be sent in as soon as possible to avoid missing newsletter issues. Please be sure to notify us if you have a change of address. The **Old Time Radio Club** meets on the first Monday of the month at 7:30 PM during the months of September through June at St. Aloysius School Hall, Cleveland Drive and Century Road, Cheektowaga, NY. There is **no** meeting during the month of July, and an informal meeting is held in the month of August.

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

Old Time Radio Club
56 Christen Ct.
Lancaster, NY 14086

E-Mail Address
otrclub@localnet.com



All Submissions are subject to approval prior to actual publication.

Deadline for *The Illustrated Press* is the 1st of each month prior to publication.

The *Illustrated Press* is the newsletter of the **Old Time Radio Club**, headquartered in Western New York State, It is published monthly except for the months of July and August. Contents except where noted are copyright © 2008 by the OTRC.

Send all articles, letters, exchange newsletters, etc. to: *The Illustrated Press*

c/o Ken Krug, Editor (716) 684-5290
73 Banner Avenue
Lancaster, NY 14086-1930

E-Mail address: AnteakEar@aol.com

Web Page Address:
members.localnet.com/~robmcd

Club Officers

President

Jerry Collins (716) 683-6199
56 Christen Ct.
Lancaster, NY 14086
collinsjf@yahoo.com

Vice President & Canadian Branch

Richard Simpson (905) 892-4688
960 16 Road R.R. 3
Fenwick, Ontario
Canada, L0S 1C0

Treasurer

Dominic Parisi (716) 884-2004
38 Ardmore Pl.
Buffalo, NY 14213

Membership Renewals, Change of Address

Peter Bellanca (716) 773-2485
1620 Ferry Road
Grand Island, NY 14072
pmb1620@worldnet.att.net

Membership Inquires and OTR Network Related Items

Richard Olday (716) 684-1604
171 Parwood Trail
Depew, NY 14043-1071
raolday@yahoo.com

Technical Manager / CD and MP3 Librarian

Bob McDivitt (716) 681-8073
109 Poinciana Pkwy.
Cheektowaga, NY 14225
robmcd@verizon.net

Cassette and Reference Librarian

Frank Bork (716) 601-7234
10 Dover Ct.
Lancaster, NY 14086
frankbork209@yahoo.com

Library Rates:

Audio cassettes and CDs are \$1.95 each and are recorded on a **club supplied cassette or CD** which is **retained** by the member. Rates include postage and handling and are payable in U.S. funds.

The CBS Radio Mystery Theater (Part 2)

By TOM CHERRE

After listening to the first 35 episodes of *The CBS Radio Mystery Theater* I had to say a few more words about this wonderful series. First of all I'm a walker. I limit myself to about an hour each night, (weather permitting). This works out great for me. Of the first 30 or so shows most were a feed from WOR-AM in New York or WDAF-AM in Kansas City, Kansas. Most of these shows had some national news broadcasts, which I really enjoyed. It's like a history lesson. Imagine if we had some daily newscasts from all the shows of the '30s and '40s. In 1974 news of Watergate was ever present and even then they were talking about the high price of oil. I also enjoy hearing the many Budweiser commercials. They had great jingles and Ed McMahon never sounded better. They also had Kelloggs, Tru-Valu Hardware and Buick among the big time advertisers. Once in awhile they had some local sponsors like Shop Rite and Suburban Savings both New York City natives.

With newscasts and commercials the show went a full hour. With no news or ads you're looking at 45 minutes. I like the hour better. So far out of the 30 plus shows I've only run across two duds. One was a lousy storyline and the other was poor acting. I've heard Mason Adams in a couple and Tony Roberts in a few. For the most part these shows were all good. I would put them above *Suspense* and *The Whistler* anytime. In the first couple of weeks Hi Brown, producer of the show came on and asks for response to this so-called new type of show. They even gave away prizes. With over 1300 more shows to listen to I guess I'm in for a lot of walking.

What I really like about this show more than *The Whistler* and *Suspense* was the casting and the acting. An example is on some of the two shows I mentioned they might have a actor sounding like Lawrence Olivier playing the part of a street thug mugging some poor stiff. On the other hand someone playing a sophisticated banker or executive might sound like Jimmy Cagney. I might be exaggerating a bit, but you get my point. The story lines for the most part were believable. Some author once said if you really want to get the full impact of a story you should put yourself into the story itself. I've found myself doing that with all the *CBS Radio Mystery Shows* and I am liking them more and more. Writer Sam Dann wrote many of the shows and he had

few losers. Even with a poor script with some good acting the episode will be enjoyable. Right now I'm planning to listen to episode number 35. When E.G. Marshall leads us on with his stories of the macabre, I have to say that word is stretching it a bit much. It's fine drama with a touch of murder, robbery and deceit. Whatever it is, tonight I plan to enjoy my walk and *The CBS Radio Mystery Theater*. I also won't forget to carry a few extra batteries with me just in case. Who needs television when you have programs like this. I also love the music and the creaking door. Try an episode on a long cold night and see what I mean. Enjoy!



Librarian's Notes

By FRANK BORK

Well here we are 2009 and another year has gone by. This past year I have enjoyed many, many hours of listening to our Old Time Radio Programs. I hope all the club members can say the same. It was also an enjoyable year attending the Club meetings and hashing over tales of our personal radio favorites. Being with old friends once more, passing on information and news of our wonderful hobby. As my Italian friends would say "La Dolce Vita"—"The Sweet Life." Coffee and a donut, and gab, who could ask for more?

Our Club Library is gaining at a slow pace, but gaining never the less. Thanks to a lot of generous, thoughtful Club Members. A great way to start the New Year would be to make a Resolution to aid the Club Library by replacing some of our missing Cassettes. PLEASE—Thank You. Listed below are 10 more of our missing cassettes:

- #1153 -Johnny Dollar - The Twin Trouble Matter
- The Cask of Death Matter
- #1160 -Challenge of the Yukon - Trail to Trouble
- The Diamond Solitaire
- #1173 -Suspense - Blue Eyes
Big Town - Every Eight Hours
- #1178 -Midshipman Hornblower
- #1191 -Sky King - Message in Code
- Mask of Diablo
- #1223 -Bastille - The Storming of the Bastille
- #1236 -Just Plain Bill, The Goldberg's, Jack Armstrong,
Back Stage Wife, Ma Perkins! - All 15 minutes

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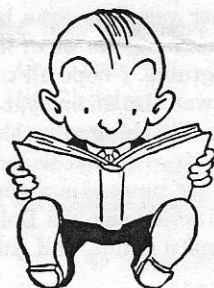
- #1244 -Lux Radio Theater - Only Yesterday
F.B.I. Help Wanted - This is a 90 minute cassette
- #1245 -Ellery Queen - Case of the Three Frogs
Comedy Caravan - Jimmy Durante, Garry Moore
- #1246 -Buck Rogers - The 25th Century

Our admirable Illustrated Press, Editor, Steve Wilson AKA Ken Krug, copied and donated the following four cassettes:

- #889 -Voyage of the Scarlet Queen - The Death of David Malone 2/2/47 - The Shanghai Secret 3/7/47 - The Report of the Whit Jade Buddha 7/10/47 This is a 90 minute cassette
- #910 -The Falcon - Case of the Dirty Dollars
Case of the Vanishing Visa
- #942 -Mr. Keen - The Absent Minded Professor 3/15/45
The Glamorous Widow 5/23/46
- #973 -The Hermit's Cave - #14 Author of Murder
#18 House with a Past

Thanks Steve, oops, I mean Ken.

*Till next time Happy Radio Listening,
your Club Librarian, Frank*



BOOK REVIEW

**This Day in
Network Radio**
by JIM COX

Reviewed by Jerry Collins

Jim Cox has done it again, another great book on old time radio, this makes number eight. This time Cox deviates quite significantly from his style in his previous books, This Day in Network Radio chronicles all the important radio events; births, deaths, debuts, cancellations and miscellaneous, which he refers to as, sound bites. He does this quite creatively. He travels through an imaginary year from January 1st through December 31st and categorizes all of these important events on a chronological basis. For a person who has done a great deal of research on the Internet, I can imagine that Cox must have spent a sizeable amount of time at the computer.

I am in the process of writing a nostalgia book based on important events, many radio related, between 1938 and 1952. Jim Cox's book allowed me to add a few more events to an already sizeable compilation of important

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events during radio's Golden Age.

This is now being followed by an article comparing a list of deceased radio stars to a much smaller list of living stars. Once again Jim's book proved to be invaluable as it saved me from making a few hundred additional hits on the Internet.

Although you would not use the book for recreational reading it will certainly serve as a worthwhile research tool. Once more it is time to dust the old shelf off to make room for another one of Jim Cox's books.

THIS DAY IN NETWORK RADIO: A Daily Calendar of Births, Deaths, Debuts, Cancellations and Other Events in Broadcasting History
259 Pages, Bibliography, Index
Soft Cover — Price \$49.95

Published by McFarland & Co., Inc. Publishers
Box 611

Jefferson, NC 28640

Orders 800-253-2187 — www.mcfarlandpub.com

THE RAILROAD HOUR: A BRIEF PERSPECTIVE ON THE MUSICAL RADIO PROGRAM

by Martin Grams Jr. and Gerald Wilson

"Entertainment for all. For every member of the family—the humming, strumming, dancing tunes of the recent musical shows. For Mother and Dad—happy reminders of the shows they saw 'only yesterday.' And also, occasionally, one of the great and everlasting triumphs that go 'way back before then." This was how the Association of American Railroads described their product known as *The Railroad Hour*, in their annual publicity pamphlets. For 45 minutes every Monday night, over the American Broadcasting Company's national network, the American Railroads presented for listener enjoyment, one after another of the world's great musical comedies and operettas . . . the top-rated successes whose names had been spelled-out in the blazing lights on both sides of Broadway. Complete with music and words, the program offered famed headliners of the stage, screen and radio taking the leading roles.

Highly favored by Joseph McConnell, President of the National Broadcasting Company and William T. Faricy, President of the Association of American Railroads, The Railroad Hour competed against such radio programs as CBS' high-rated *Suspense* and *The Falcon* in the same weekly time slot. The program lasted a total of 299 broadcasts over a span of six broadcast seasons—an

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accomplishment some would consider impossible by today's broadcasting standards should the program be dramatized on television.

Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee were masters of the art of adapting stage musicals to the format of radio programs. Their skill as adapters and their ability to create original works had established the two in the field of radio and television writing. They received very little awards (if any) for their work on *The Railroad Hour* which they were heavily involved. Although the program received recognition a number of times, the creative men behind the development of the scripts received very little recognition.

Jerome Lawrence was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on July 14, 1915. Son of a printer, Samuel Lawrence, and mother Sarah Rogan Lawrence (a poet), Lawrence was exposed to the education of reading and writing, and took drama courses in high school. As a teenager, Lawrence's parents arranged to have him study writing with playwright and director Eugene C. Davis.

After graduating from Glenville High School in Cleveland in 1933, he attended The Ohio State University where he studied with playwrights Harlan Hatcher, Herman Miller, and Robert Newdick. Lawrence graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Ohio State in 1937. In the brief year after graduating, Lawrence worked as a journalist, reporter and telegraph operator for the *Wilmington (Ohio) News-Journal* and *New Lexington (Ohio) Daily News* before heading to California. There, he entered graduate school at UCLA while working at Beverly Hills radio station KMPC as a continuity editor. There, he wrote and directed the radio series *Opened by Mistake*.

Robert E. Lee was born October 15, 1918 in Elyria, Ohio, just 25 miles from Cleveland where Jerome Lawrence was born. He was the only child of Claire Melvin Lee, a toolmaker for Garford Manufacturing (a manufacturer of automobile and bicycle parts) and Elvira Taft Lee (a school teacher). In 1934 he went to study at Northwestern University in Chicago. In 1935, he transferred to Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio, where he majored in astronomy and worked as a technician at Perkins Observatory. "I gave up my studies with the world's third largest telescope to write for more terrestrial stars," Lee said in a 1951 interview with the *Columbus Dispatch*.

In 1937, Lee left behind higher education and his position at the observatory for a director's position at radio station WHK-WCLE in Cleveland; there, he also attended Western Reserve University for one year. He was a part-time announcer for WHKC, WOSU and WCOL

radio. At SGAR, he wrote scripts for the radio series *Empire Builders*. At WGAR in Cleveland, he wrote for radio's *Flashbacks*. But in 1938, Lee again left school for work, this time for a job at the Young and Rubicam advertising agency in New York City. At Young and Rubicam, he wrote and produced some of radio's top shows including *March of Time*, *Kate Smith Hour*, *Screen Guild Theater* (possibly 1946), *We the People*, *Aldrich Family* and a number of soap operas and quiz shows.

In 1939, while relaxing in a Madison Avenue bar, Robert E. Lee met Jerome Lawrence, who was on assignment in New York. Knowing of each other's work, (Lawrence was a writer for *A Date with Judy* and Lee wrote for *Meet Corliss Archer* where he met and later married the star of the program, Janet Waldo), the pair quickly decided to quit their respective jobs and form a freelance writing partnership. Their first play, *Laugh, God!* was published in 1939 but they didn't form an official partnership until January 23, 1942, at the beginning of their tours of duty in the U.S. Army.

Having enlisted in the Army following America's entry into World War II, the mighty duo worked as part of a group that established the Armed Forces Radio Series (AFRS), where they produced patriotic Army and Navy programs for D-Day, VE-Day and VJ-Day. They wrote numerous scripts for *Yarns for Yanks*, *Command Performance* and *Mail Call*, among others.

At the height of the World War II in 1945, there were about three hundred radio stations under the AFRS. Lawrence also served as an AFRS correspondent in North Africa and Italy, was promoted to staff sergeant, and earned a battle star from the secretary of war.

By the time they both completed their term of service in 1945, they continued to write and produce radio programs for CBS, including *The Columbia Workshop*. Then came *The Railroad Hour*.

The career of Gordon MacRae, the young baritone star of *The Railroad Hour*, is a saga of America, the story of a youth who knew what he wanted and was able to get it because his abilities had the encouragement and guidance of understanding parents and the climate of freedom in which to grow.

MacRae was born in East Orange, New Jersey. In his childhood he moved with his parents to Buffalo, and later to Syracuse, New York. There the youngster became locally famous for his acting, singing and mimicking talents. He participated wholeheartedly in school dramatics, operettas and musical comedies. The debating society and athletics also claimed his attention, and

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he won his letter in several sports. The field that riveted MacRae's interest was acting and singing. While attending Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts, he played leading roles in several productions and helped organize a group of fellow students for personal appearances throughout New England. In his school days MacRae toured England, France, Germany, Switzerland and Holland. Time and again that experience proved of value to him in interpreting the assorted European characters he portrayed in operettas and musical comedies such as those dramatized on *The Railroad Hour*.

At nineteen, Gordon won a magazine talent contest. The prize was a two weeks' engagement in a show at the New York World's Fair. He then joined the Millpond Players at Roslyn, Long Island. After a brief stay, he got a job as a page boy at the NBC Studios in New York. There, Horace Heidt, the noted orchestra leader, offered him a tryout. Gordon accepted, and toured the country with Heidt's Orchestra. While in Cleveland, Ohio, he married Sheila Stephens, whom he had met when she was a star of the Millpond Players.

In 1942, Gordon made his stage debut in the Broadway hit *Junior Miss*. When the show closed, he joined the aviation cadets, advancing from private to first lieutenant in the air branch. Returning to civilian life in 1945, Gordon landed a role as the romantic juvenile in *Three to Make Ready*. By this time he was much in demand as a singer. In 1947 he was put under contract by Warner Brothers and Capitol Records.

Then in 1948 came the greatest opportunity of all when Gordon was selected for the top role in the show that millions of Americans heard every Monday evening—*The Railroad Hour*. Intensely serious about his work, Gordon was casual, relaxed and informal behind the microphone. He trusted people implicitly, and people liked him instinctively.

The Association of American Railroads utilized the advertising agency Benton and Bowles to produce the commercials, and it was one of their executive's daughters hearing MacRae on NBC's *Teentimers Club program* that led to him getting the job as lead vocalist and star of *The Railroad Hour*. *

* *Teentimers Club* was broadcast August 25, 1945 to August 16, 1947 on NBC and March 13, 1948 to December 25, 1948 on Mutual. The series was known as *Teentimers Canteen* until the broadcast of November 24, 1945 when it changed to *Teentimers Club*.

Gordon MacRae was "a pleasure to work with" in the view of *The Railroad Hour* musical director Carmen Dragon, according to MacRae biographer Bruce Leiby.

"He (MacRae) could read vocal parts right off the bat," Dragon said, explaining how the show could produce a new musical every week.

The conductor, with watch in hand, counted out the seconds as he prepared to sing out "All Aboard" and give the signal to start the train. In the broadcasting studio the director awaited the exact second to signal that the program was on the air.

Railroading and radio had one thing in common—they operated on exact time schedules. Without uniformity of time over wide areas, chaos and confusion would be the result. Radio was a comparatively recent development, but railroads carried on through half a century when there were hundreds of local times in the United States and when there were nearly one hundred different time standards by which railway trains were operated.

At high noon on November 18, 1883, after months of preparation, railroads throughout the United States abolished local times and adopted a new system known as Standard Time. Under this system, the country was divided into four time zones—Eastern, Central, Mountain and Pacific—with an hour's difference between each. The United States Government, as well as cities and towns throughout America, cooperated in putting the new system into effect, and within a few years Standard Time, patterned after the American railroad plan, had spread throughout the world.

During the 30-minute period *The Railroad Hour* was on the air, more than 600 passenger and freight trains departed from their starting terminals and more than 600 arrived at their destinations. In each half-hour period, day or night, the railroads received for shipment around 2,100 carloads of freight and delivered the same number of carloads of freight to destinations. They performed the equivalent of transporting 30 million tons of freight one mile and 2 million passengers one mile. They received for handling between 8,000 and 9,000 express shipments and 664,000 pounds of United States mail. For each 30-minute period of the day and night (equal to the time the *Railroad Hour* was on the air), the railroads paid out \$50,000 for federal, state and local taxes; more than \$100,000 for fuel, materials and supplies; and more than \$250,000 in wages.

Among the millions who listened to Gordon MacRae and his supporting cast on *The Railroad Hour* each Monday evening was the daughter of Victor Herbert, the world-famous composer whose operettas had been among the most widely-acclaimed productions on *The Railroad Hour*. The composer's daughter, Mrs. Robert Bartlett, who resided in New York City, had written the Association of American Railroads commending Gordon

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MacRae and other stars for their excellent work and expressing her great interest in the programs.

The Railroad Hour was broadcast from the studios of the National Broadcasting Company in Hollywood, California. The program was heard regularly over 170 stations of the NBC network. According to an annual report issued by the Association of American Railroads that it was estimated that the program was heard by more than four million family groups.

"Musical shows with a dramatic continuity are enjoyed by persons of all ages, especially when the leading roles are portrayed by outstanding artists. All members of the family, as well as school, church and club groups, find *The Railroad Hour* wholesome, dignified and inspiring entertainment," quoted Van Hartesveldt.

So why is the program called the Railroad "Hour" when it was on the air only thirty minutes? In radio, the term "hour" was indicative of the time of the beginning of the broadcast, rather than the number of minutes the program was on the air. Also odd was the fact that the program ran a mere 45 minutes instead of 30 or 60 during the opening months.

During its half-hour on the air, *The Railroad Hour* gave its listeners 25 minutes of entertainment. About two-and-a-half minutes were given to the railroad message. The remaining time was required for opening and closing announcements and station identifications.

The Railroad Hour did not broadcast any operas, contrary to popular belief, and reference guides. The producers of the series presented operettas and musicals, leaving the operas for other programs, namely *The Metropolitan Opera* broadcasts. So what is the difference between opera and operetta?

An opera is an art form consisting of a dramatic stage performance set to music, and which the dialogue is sung, rather than spoken. An operetta was a musical performance where the conversations are "talked" and the expressive moments are set in song.

One question came up during a standard question and answer session with the Association of American Railroads: "Are recordings of *The Railroad Hour* broadcasts available?" The formal answer from the Association was that copyright restrictions did not permit the producer of *The Railroad Hour* to make any recordings of the musical program. However, recordings of many of the song hits heard were available at music stores. This of course, was the formal public statement. In reality, every broadcast of *The Railroad Hour* was recorded and transcribed. Numerous copies were made

for both legal and historical purposes. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, who wrote the majority of the scripts, actually kept a copy of almost every broadcast for their personal collection. These discs were later donated to the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts located at Lincoln Center in New York City. The Library of Congress presently stores a copy of all the discs in their archives. Dealers and collectors specializing in recordings from the "Golden Age of Radio" have come across similar depositories over the years and thankfully, more than half of the broadcasts are presently available from dealers nationwide. Marvin Miller, the announcer for *The Railroad Hour*, saved a few of the scripts, which were later donated to the Thousand Oaks Library in California.

A limited number of free admission tickets for the public were available for each *Railroad Hour* broadcast. Tickets could be obtained by writing to the Association of American Railroads, Transportation Building, located in Washington, D.C., or by writing to the National Broadcasting Company in Hollywood, California. The Applicant was required to give the date for which the tickets were desired and the number of persons in the party. Because of the demand for tickets (especially since they were free), it was publicly advised to request them several weeks in advance of the broadcast.

From the 1948 annual report of the Association of American Railroads:

"Beginning on October 4, 1948, the AAR produced and presented a weekly coast-to-coast radio program entitled "The Railroad Hour." Broadcast on Monday evenings, the program has presented condensed versions of outstanding musical comedies and light operas with Gordon MacRae as singing host and master of ceremonies and featuring top-name guest stars."

AAR President William T. Faricy delivered a message on the show's premiere episode, expressing his pride and joy for the presentations that are planned, and the hope that the radio listeners would tune in each week for future presentations. The premiere broadcast featured Jane Powell and Dinah Shore in the cast. In *Good News*, the plot about a football hero who has to pass an important exam so he can play in the big game, and please the girl he loves, inspired a slew of imitations on stage and screen. But none could match the infectious score composed by Ray Henderson with lyrics by Buddy Desylva and Lew Brown. Their dance-happy songs included "The Best Things in Life are Free" and "The Varsity Drag," a Charleston-style dance number that became an international craze. The libretto was a fairly loose affair, allowing members of the cast to offer audience pleasing vaudeville-style specialties. The author of the radio

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adaptation was none other than Ed Gardner, creator and star of the situation comedy, *Duffy's Tavern*. This would be his first and only contribution for *The Railroad Hour*.

The broadcast of April 25, 1949 marked the 30th broadcast of the series, and the final episode to be broadcast in a 45-minute time slot. Beginning with the broadcast of May 2, 1949, the program's format shrunk to a 30-minute time slot, where it would remain for the rest of the series. A few misconceptions have been made over the years regarding the length of these broadcasts. One reference cited *The Railroad Hour* as a full hour, and that the 45-minute recordings are "edited" from the hour-long format. This is simply not true. Another reference cited *The Railroad Hour* of being a 45-minute program during the entire run, and that all the 30-minute recordings are "edited." This is also untrue.

Throughout the summer of 1949, *The Railroad Hour* featured a salute to various composers and their best works, with a behind-the-scenes story of how they created the popular musicals they are often associated with. The series was actually subtitled *The Railroad Summer Show*. John Rarick replaced Carmen Dragon as the musical conductor for this summer series, and would be replaced by Dragon afterwards. (Dragon would then remain with the series till the very end.)

The October 5, 1949 issue of *Variety* reviewed the second season opener:

"*The Railroad Hour* is back on the air with its winter season of operettas and musical comedies, to add a lush, melodious half-hour of better-grade American music to Monday evening's listening. With first-rate artists, good supporting choral and instrumental ensemble, and top direction and production, ainer has flavor and appeal.

"Monday's preem was the perennial favorite, 'Show Boat.' Done in dialog as well as song, the Hammerstein-Kern musical retained all of its nostalgic charm and rich melody. Gordon MacRae, who was sort of emcee as well as male singing lead, acquitted himself quite creditably, with the Met's Dorothy Kirsten and Lucille Norman giving admirable support. Chorus under direction of Norman Luboff, and orch under Carmen Dragon, added to the smooth proceedings."

For the holiday season, *The Railroad Hour* offered a special presentation every year for the radio audience. The broadcast of December 26, 1949 was no exception. Through special arrangement with Walt Disney Studios, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was dramatized, including the music from the 1937 animated movie of the same name. *

* The animated movie premiered Christmas of 1937, so

The Railroad Hour presentation was about 13 years after the premiere! Its single nomination was for Best Music Score.

During the 1950 holiday broadcast, William T. Faricy, president of the Association of American Railroads made a quick guest appearance to broadcast a special message personally:

"Christmas is the season when men and women turn from strife and struggle toward the blessings of peace and the fellowship which some day will bring all men together as friends. This is the goal which men have sought for almost two thousand years—which, no doubt, they will continue to seek for years yet to come. No man, no institution, no people alone can achieve this long sought goal—but every man, every institution, every people can contribute to the fulfillment of the promise of the first Christmas—Peace on Earth, Good Will To Men."

"The heart of that seeking for peace and good will is in the family—an institution which symbolizes the family of mankind. So Christmas, the festival of peace, is the great family festival, celebrated in the homes where families gather."

"To all such gatherings who might be listening tonight, the family of the Railroad Hour - a family made up not only of those who produce our weekly broadcasts, but also the railroad companies which sponsor them, the million people who as small as stockholders own the railroads and the million and a quarter men and women who work for them—*The Railroad Hour* family says to you and your family, 'Thank you for joining our Christmas party tonight—and in your own holiday season, and in the new year to come, may you find joy, prosperity and, above all, peace!'"

This was the first of what would become an annual tradition of musical offerings for the holiday season, with festive and religious music, interlaced with comical tones of festive celebration, and a personal message given personally by Faricy. So many listeners wrote in to express their appreciation of the *Railroad Hour's* "Christmas Party" that the producers repeated this tradition every year after.

Beginning with the broadcast of July 2, 1951, *The Railroad Hour* premiered a summer season of original musicals created by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, adapted from a variety of sources ranging from poems to biographies. With their knowledge of literature (especially having scripted all of the *Favorite Story* radio dramas), Lawrence and Lee worked alongside Carmen Dragon to present original musical presentations (though the music was not so much original as Irish folk songs and American Ballads made up a large percentage of the vocal music). (Part 2 continued next month)

SLIPS that PASS THROUGH the MIKE

The Best Performers Make "Boners" But Listeners Love It!

(Article originally published July, 1945)

Ever feel like pushing yourself under the rug when your tongue tripped, slipped or balked and turned up with a neat little phrase you never should have uttered? Or hopelessly muffed an important introduction, or stutted on the snappy comeback that should have panicked your dinner guests? Then you can readily sympathize with the poor announcer or actor who suddenly finds himself pulling what he is sure must be radio's prize "boner." Though they can be laughed at later, these inexplicable twists of the tongue have given the boys and girls in the studio some mighty bad moments.

Such slips in no way reflect on a performer's ability, for practically everyone on the air—veteran and novice, star and bit-player—makes his share of "fluffs." The phenomenon can't be explained any more logically than tripping on a sidewalk or spilling a glass of water on your vest. Boners just happen, and no amount of rehearsal and preparation can guarantee they won't.

Sometimes, the result of a jumbled phrase causes the listener to howl with far greater glee than could be induced by professional gag-writers after a week of burning the midnight oil. While most of the quips are innocently humorous, some of them have sent the perpetrators off into a corner, blushing furiously, while censors gnawed their blue pencils in futile indignation. Like the time that—perhaps we'd better not go into *that* one!

High on the list of funniest twisted-tongue lines is one which occurred during the broadcast of an NBC soap opera. The harrassed heroine was aboard a ship riding a dense fog. In a voice taut with emotion, she proclaimed to her coast-to-coast audience that the fog was "thick as sea poop."

Another momentarily unhappy performer was the young man playing the part of an aide-de-camp to a German general, on Mutual's *Nick Carter*. Said the general: "We are surrounded on all sides by the enemy—they come from the left, from the right—from the east, west, north and south—and we are without food and water!" The aide was supposed to exclaim: "Is it that bad?" Instead,

the luckless actor found himself burbling: "Is that bad?"

Then, of course, there was the dramatic actress, appearing on a CBS serial, whose simple line, "We'll give the bell a pull," came out unexpectedly as: "We'll give the bull a pill!" And young Bill Lipton, who has appeared in hundreds of roles since his air debut at the age of 11, once admonished a fellow actor in a soap opera to "Keep a stuff ipper lup, old boy."

It isn't always the players who supply unintentional humor in the dramatic shows. The boys in the sound effects department can claim their share of the scallions for boners and poor timing. Many an overworked producer and director has spent sleepless nights planning all sorts of medieval tortures to inflict on the hapless sound effects man who ruined a dramatic scene.

On one occasion, the breathless lovers in a popular soap opera were supposed to whisper their words of endearment against a soft, light background of summer breeze. The director signalled for his "light breeze" but the sound man—evidently in a slight state of confusion—obliged with a gale of hurricane proportions. The young lovers were actually drowned out by the sound of nature run wild.

Then there was the time the plot called for the sound of surf beating against the rocks. What the listeners heard, instead, was a recording of a crowd cheering the players at a football game. The ocean waves are said to whisper many things. This was probably the first time in history that they roared out: "Hold that line!"

While most of the blunders give listeners a chuckle, maybe even a hearty guffaw, some produce reactions of a far different nature. Picture, for example, what the charming ladies of the Mary Margaret McBride circle must have thought, on the day their idol blandly proclaimed: "A lot of things you are supposed to eat, you just don't like . . . especially children."

Nervous contestants on the quiz shows and amateur programs are responsible for a goodly share of radio's fluffs. A Mrs. O'Leary, appearing on Phil Baker's *Take It or Leave It*, proudly acknowledged her introduction by stating "I'm a first cousin to the cow that started the Chicago Fire." An amateur musician, describing the wonders of his home-made contraption to Major Bowes, gave the CBS audience a macabre thought when he said: "The spoons belong to me; the bones are my father's!" Presumably, the "bones" in question were those ivory or wooden clappers once wielded so enthusiastically by the end-man in a minstrel show—but how were enthralled dialers to guess that listening in? Another night, the Major was chatting with one of his amateurs who was an

The Illustrated Press

interior decorator. Asked about his work, the contestant nervously admitted that he had just finished "over-doing an apartment." On yet another occasion, a Russian girl told the Major that her father was a painter. "House painter?" he asked. "Just fine," answered the little Russian girl.

But even the seasoned performers cannot avoid the pitfall of garbled phrases. Erudite veteran Milton Cross, for instance, once intrigued music lovers all over the nation by describing the operetta, "The Prince of Pilsen," as "The Pill of Princeton."

When this global war ends, some sort of medal should be struck off and presented to the news reporters who have spent the past five years rolling their tonsils around the names of Polish, Russian and Japanese towns—and generals. While the boys in the news-room don't always agree on pronunciation, they have done a creditable job in giving the listener a nodding acquaintance with some of the more indiscriminately-voweled names around the world. And, if they do stumble over a few, who does know the difference?

But other accidents can happen on the news circuits, which no dialer could fail to notice with either surprise or amusement. John Vandercook was once innocently involved in a mix-up over locale, during his nightly world news roundup. In making a switch, he announced: "We take you now to John McVane in London." After a short pause came the blithe greeting "This is John McVane, speaking from Paris." Occasionally, the overseas reporter gets a personal shock himself—or herself—as on the day Bob Denton was announcing a Helen Hiatt broadcast from Spain. "Miss Hiatt," said he, "is NBC's only woman correspondent in pain." Incidentally, though Bob won't admit it, he may have been playing amateur critic on another occasion, when he proudly presented a "pewgram of music."

Even the weather proves a stumbling block once in a while. NBC's George Putnam (now in service) capped one of his news programs with the daily weather report. Most of the items, this particular day, had been of Chinese and Japanese origin, so maybe the audience felt that George was just keeping in character when he predicted: "Tomorrow, moderate temperatures, *increasing* cloudiness." Reporting the war on the other side of the globe, Frank Singiser described a certain well-remembered German drive and gave his Mutual followers an added treat by calling it the story of the "Bulgian Belch." And listeners to the same network found themselves being introduced one night to Paul Schubert, "the newt-ed nose analyst." Out on the West Coast—where almost anything can happen and usually does—a Hollywood news voice once breathlessly informed his cinema city

listeners that "Johnny Weissmuller's wife, Beryl Scott, presented him with an eight-pound baby boy today . . . and now for other sporting events . . ."

Gabriel Heatter's several million listeners heard him wind up a broadcast one evening with the portentous sentence: "Listen to *The Voice of the Dead*"—followed immediately with the introduction: "And now, ladies and gentlemen, announcer Len Sterling!"

Life can be terrible when an announcer fluffs at a particularly serious moment. If you don't think so, just ask Harry Von Zell how he felt when he introduced the then-President of the United States as "Hoobert Heever"! Even the famed Von Zell aplomb was shaken that time. But, if the Crown Prince of Norway had been within earshot, he too might have been startled out of his dignity the day Mutual's Arthur Whiteside announced into the microphone: "Here comes the brown quint of Norway."

Lip-tripping and twisted meanings are the bane of the commercial announcer, who could often cheerfully strangle the boys in the agencies who seem content to let the participles, prepositions and verbs fall where they may. Take, for instance, the plug that read: "Have you tried Wheaties for a bedtime snack? They're light and easy to sleep on." Or the snappy come-on for a favorite brand of bread: "it gives you a rich, nutlike flavor." Or the nifty Tom Slater uttered on a Raymond Gram Swing program: "More and more men are turning to White Owls."

Probably the most sympathy can be directed at the nervous, jittery speaker who is facing a mike for the very first—and probably the last—time. Representative of that group is the president of a manufacturing concern chosen to address his fellow executives at a convention dinner, which was also broadcast over a nationwide network. His greeting listed all the distinguished guests on the rostrum and wound up with "and also the people of the audio radiance." After a moment of hushed silence, the speaker stumbled on. "It is indeed a pleasure to address such a gathering of ragged individualists." From that point on, it didn't matter very much what he said. His fame was immortal!

It isn't always the man at the mike who makes the boners. H. V. Kaltenborn will probably never forget the time he was presented to a dignified lecture audience with what was undoubtedly intended to be a staid and proper introduction "We now present H. V. Kaltenborn, who has been on the *lecher* platform for twenty-five years."

The atmosphere was also momentarily electric, over the airwaves, when George Putnam gravely introduced the star of an original drama with the breathtaking words:

"Miss Helen Hayes presents a litter for Hitler!" What he should have said was "letter."

Andre Baruch once confused his CBS listeners no end by referring to the Marine Roof of Brooklyn's Hotel Bossert as the "Maroon Reef." The same Andre (now Major Baruch of the Army) introduced a musical selection on Mutual's *Your Army Service Program* with: "And now the orchestra, with Warrant Officer Edward Sadowsky seducting . . ."

"While such slips of the lip are the nightmare of a radio speaker's existence, they do lend spice to radio listening. Occasionally, a *faux pas* is the fillip which turns an otherwise dull session into a veritable funfest.

But it doesn't make life any pleasanter for the hapless "fluffer"—who, more often than not, wishes he could just follow the lead of the little boy who appeared on the Major Bowes hour. This 6-year-old sang about three bars of his song, then forgot the words. Not the least bit flustered, he turned to the Major, raised his hand in signal—and asked if he could leave the room!

January
1944

LISA SERGIO STRIKES BACK

Once Mussolini's official short wave broadcaster, this Italian girl now fights fascism as a news commentator



Lisa Sergio can put her heart into the anti-axis news broadcasts she does every weekday at 7:00 PM over New York's WQXR. She really knows about fascism—from the inside. Her background is truly Italian, for her father was the Baron Agostino Sergio and she herself was born and educated in Florence, Italy. Her mother, however was an American—the former Margaret Fitzgerald of Baltimore.

Her fluency in English gave her a start in radio. With the help of Count Guglielmo Marconi, she obtained the

position of English translator of Mussolini's speeches in 1933. In the next few years she made history as Europe's first woman commentator and was widely recognized in fascist circles. Nevertheless, her contacts with American and British newspapermen made her uneasy, and she gradually lost confidence in Mussolini's regime. By 1937 she had been dismissed from the government-controlled radio, and with Count Marconi's help, escaped from Italy on the day an order was issued for her arrest. Upon her arrival in this country she devoted herself to fighting against the principles she once spoke for. It was she who coined the term "Axis"—a word she hopes won't be needed long. (originally published January 1944)

Fast forward to September 29, 2008

LISA SERGIO, Radio Commentator in Italy and New York Dies at 84. (*New York Times*)

A pioneer radio news broadcaster in Mussolini's Italy who became a dedicated anti-Fascist and a news commentator for WQXR and other American radio stations died of a heart attack Thursday, September 25, 2008 at her home in Washington.

Miss Sergio, a slender, fiery contralto once known as "the Golden Voice of Rome" also translated the dictator's blustering speeches into English and French almost simultaneously on the air until her modifications of propaganda commentaries prompted her dismissal from Rome radio.

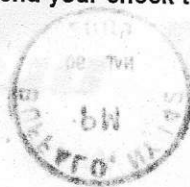
Faced with arrest and internment in 1937, she was smuggled aboard a trans-Atlantic liner by a family friend, Guglielmo Marconi, the radio developer. She settled in New York City, where she soon became a guest observer for NBC radio and the host for broadcasts including Metropolitan Opera performances and Berkshire music festivals.

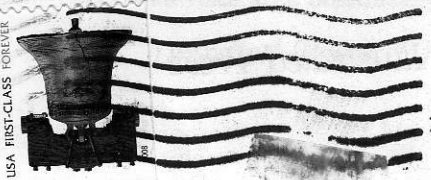


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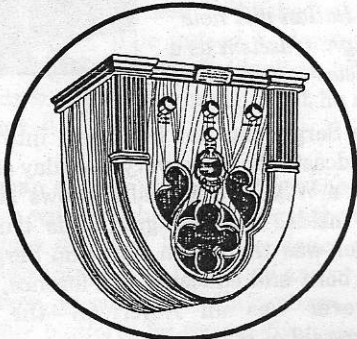




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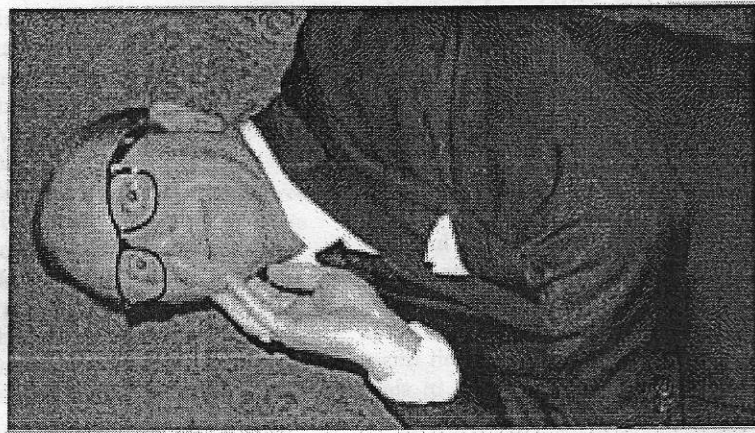
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