

N.O.T.R.E. NEWS

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+Cyrano de Bergerac's leader is mortally wounded by invading evil forces. Fritz Ritterspach shown on stage as a misplaced pyrotechnic device explodes up his tunic.

WORDS AT WAR: WORLD WAR II ERA RADIO DRAMA & THE POSTWAR BROADCASTING INDUSTRY BLACKLIST, A NEW BOOK BY **Howard Blue**

This new book by educator Howard Blue is expected to be published by Scarecrow Press in October '02. It is based on interviews with Norman Corwin, Arthur Miller, Art Carney, Pete Seeger, Arthur Laurents, and dozens of others associated with radio's Golden Age.

Words at War tells how 17 radio dramatists and their actors fought a war of words against America's fascist enemies abroad and injustice at home. Beginning in the late 1930s, the commercial networks, private agencies and the government cooperated with radio dramatists to produce radio plays to alert Americans to the Nazi threat. They also used radio to stimulate morale. They showed how Americans could support the fight against fascism even if it meant just having a "victory garden".

Simultaneously as they worked directly on the war effort, many radio writers and actors advanced a progressive agenda to fight the enemy within: racism, poverty and other social ills. Many of them shared a common view concerning the reforms that America needed to experience to achieve true democracy and social justice. But Americans, particularly those on the far right, were not prepared to accept their agenda. Thus, even before Pearl Harbor some of the writers and

actors were red baited. Moreover, when the war ended, many of them paid for their idealism by suffering blacklisting. The red baiters often singled out writers, actors and plays that targeted racism, for example, as evidence of communist inclinations. Among the most well known victims of this phenomenon were Norman Corwin, Arcibald MacLeish, Burgess Meredith, Fredric March, Langston Hughes, and Orson Welles.

Here are some "soundbites" from the book:

- The FBI first started its file on Orson Welles because he produced a radio play advocating freedom of assembly.
- Actor Ward Bond who took an active role in helping to blacklist his colleagues on the political left once told a radio director, "We know Norman Corwin was not a communist, never was a communist. But, he'll do until one comes along."
- Melvyn Douglas' sensitivity to the Nazi threat was raised on an ocean voyage where businessmen praised Hitler for bringing order to Germany.
- Will Geer was once kidnapped and beaten in California by pro-Nazi toughs who objected to his playing an anti-Nazi who tore Hitler's picture off the wall.

+ + +

Time for a Change - The Gassman brothers separate their lives after 47 years as roommates.

[published 14 July, 2002 in the Orange County Register] by Andre Mouchard - @ocregister.com [excerpted]

John and Larry Gassman have been together, usually happily, for 47 years. They're identical twins. Matching DNA is powerful stuff and in the Gassman twins, it has turbo-charged all the mundane bonds of family and history and culture, transforming it all into something bigger, something more intricate than mere brotherhood. They are passionate about the same diversions, radio, barbershop quartets; echoes from a slower world.

But these similarities are easy to spot and relatively easy to explain. Others aren't. Why, for example, do they spread their hands on a table in the same way? Why do they gravitate toward the same place in an empty room? Why can they go through the same buffet line, at different times, and wind up with the same meal, down to the beverage and number of napkins? "Everything there is about being a twin, whatever it is, we've always felt it," Larry says, laughing at a phenomenon he still finds mysterious. . .

. . . The Gassman twins' connection is such that, until recently, the middle-aged men shared a room in a tract house in Whittier. Their beds were less than 3 feet apart, a setup they had used since they were toddlers. Then, last month things changed. Larry got married. The bride is Melinda Johnson whom Larry met 6 years ago. Now, the life Larry shares is Melinda's.

Most blind kids, growing up without blind siblings, get at least a dose of isolation. It's painful but natural. Some blind adults even say it's essential to becoming independent. Their blindness resulted from the oxygen enriched incubator they were placed in because they were premature. Overcoming blindness was a fact of life for the Gassman twins, not something to fear or lament. It didn't stop them from much.

They attended public schools, rode bikes, played football. Pushed by parents so we wouldn't miss out on anything we didn't have to miss. Later majoring in communications at Cal Poly Pomona, graduating in 4 years. Then seeking employment they discovered that, to this day, employers are reluctant to hire blind

people. In California, unemployment among the blind runs at roughly 70%.

The brothers turned their love of radio into something like a career. Starting in 1980 they worked (without pay) on their show "Same Time, Same Station," a weekly show in public radio. The twins became celebrities, getting national press as "the blind guys" who hosted the Rose Parade for KPCC, the public radio station in Pasadena.

Enter Melinda, who blind from age 22 was better at being blind than the brothers. She translated the "curse of blindness" into an activist's attitude. She didn't sing or host a radio show but she could shop by herself, negotiate public transport in Orange county, wash clothes and cook [something lost to the twins]. She had a job at the Braille Institute where she and Larry met. Here independence was a challenge to Larry to get a job before anything could happen with us.

Time passed and she gradually replaced John as the daily companion for Larry and on June 23, 2002 they were married at a wedding hall in Garden Grove. Later they were off to Maui to a condominium in paradise.

John is enjoying the change. He doesn't have his 24/7 friend to hang out with but potentially the new life is better than fine. While Larry works with Marriott John teaches braille. Last year, the Gassmans were subjects in a documentary. As part of the project, they spent a week in Saigon, exploring the city with their ears, fingers, and hearts. In other cultures, blind people are only now starting to be accepted as part of the world. "America is ahead in that regard." John and Larry talk almost every day, picking up conversations in midflow without need for small talk .



JOHN GASSMAN, right, toasts his twin brother during Larry's recent wedding to Melinda Johnson.
Source: Ana Venegas / The Register

Frances Langford recalls touring with Bob Hope

Jensen Beach, Florida: It was Hollywood's golden age and Frances Langford's career was skyrocketing with every sweet note she sang. The charming Florida gal was a featured guest on Bob Hope's radio show and had appeared in nine films.

Then, World War II broke out and Langford, a recording artist, radio and movie star, put her success on hold to join Hope on his overseas USO tours.

With Americans doing their part to support the war effort, Langford wanted to help. She couldn't work in the airplane factory. But she could sing.

"You forget about show business," says Langford, now 87. "We were there just to do our job, to help make them laugh and be happy if they could."

Last year, the United Service Organizations kicked into gear to bring American patriotism to a new generation of forces in Afghanistan. But this time, Langford, who was known as "Sweetheart of the Fighting Fronts," wasn't packing her bags.

Out of the limelight for decades, Langford lives quietly on her 57-acre spread overlooking the Indian River in this southeast Florida town 40 miles north of West Palm Beach.

Her memory may have robbed her of the ability to remember names, but she can still recall in vivid detail the visits to troops in England, North Africa, the South Pacific and later to Korea and Vietnam.

She finds it hard to talk about the wounded soldiers she visited in military hospitals, but recounts air raid stories with a laugh, even the time flak narrowly missed her face as she cowered in a stable.

Or the evening when she, Hope and guitarist Tony Romano were on the road to Tunis, Tunisia.

They had left a camp as night approached and suddenly were fired upon.

"We all jumped and ran into this culvert," Langford says. "You could hear them coming. They sprayed the ditches, and you could smell the bullets. It was frightening because you don't realize how you feel. You're just sort of frozen."

She also recalls the time Hope amused her, Romano and Hope's sidekick Jerry Colonna as they survived a night of bombing in the basement of their Algiers hotel with others nearby.

"Bob would start telling little jokes, only to us," she says. "It was so funny that we wanted to laugh so bad, and they were so scared. The troops loved Hope's humor." Frances says. "He's just naturally fun and just a great man. He's done so much for our military." Langford brought troops "a vision of home, and hope that it would be over sometime soon," says former manager Charles Wick.

"She had a very charming and glamorous personality, which along with her deep sexy voice certainly combined to give her the kind of image that the GIs used to really cheer," he says, "in addition to being moved by her lovely voice."

Frances is also known for playing the insufferable wife opposite Don Ameche in "The Bickersons."

Getting started -

Born in Lakeland, FL in 1914; she was discovered by bandleader Rudy Vallee. He invited her backstage to sing after a Miami performance. "I sang 16 bars and he said, 'That's enough,' she says. I thought, oh, that's the end of my career."

Instead, he asked her to sing on his radio program and invited her to New York. There she sang at Cole Porter's birthday party.



Photos by The Associated Press

She moved to California and sang on Louella Parson's radio show "Hollywood Hotel." She appeared in 30 movies including "Broadway Melody," "Yankee Doodle Dandee" and "The Hit Parade."

In 1941, she was singing on Hope's show when he held his first military program at March Field near Pasadena. The response was so positive Hope asked her if she wanted to bring the show to a training base very week. She quickly agreed.

"I really wanted to do something worthwhile for my country," she says.

Her trademark song, "I'm in the Mood for Love," which was written for her for the 1935 movie, "Every Night at Eight," was a huge hit with the servicemen.

"Everywhere I went, it was the same thing. I got up and sang about eight bars and way in the back some GI would stand up. He'd say, "You've come to the right place sister." They responded to everything, they were such a wonderful audience."

Patty Thomas, a dancer on the South Pacific tours, says the energy of a military audience can't be matched, and their experience island hopping won't ever be repeated.

The later years -

A boater and angler, Langford spends much of her time aboard her 110-foot yacht with husband Harold Stuart, assistant secretary of the Air Force under President Harry S. Truman.

The *Chanticleer* is docked next to a restaurant she built in the '60s with late husband Ralph Evinrude, heir to Evinrude outboard motor production company. She entertained famous friends and locals at the Polynesian-themed Outrigger Resort until Evinrude died in 1986 and she sold the place. Her boat is adorned with autographed pictures of Hope, former President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Winston Churchill and Richard Nixon.

Much of the glamour has left the grey-haired woman with failing eyesight. What remains is the humility that allowed her to sweep her hair up in a bandanna and overcome dust, dirt and danger to boost wartime morale.

Thanks for the Memories Frances!



Frances Langford poses in front of a poster of her from 1936 at the Dolphin Bar and Shrimp Post restaurant on Jan. 11 in Jensen Beach.

Derek Tague/Gary Yoggy Book in Preparation -

A book about Christmas Shows on radio is expected to be delivered to McFarland in early '03. Derek and Gary are having a problem with the "Philistines at McFarland as to the title. McFarland does not think people are going to make the "in the air" connection with radio in *Christmas in the Air*. They prefer something antiseptic like "Christmas-Themed Radio & TV Episodes." Derek & Gary are willing to compromise with "in the Air-Waves." We'll have to wait and see what the new book will be known as.

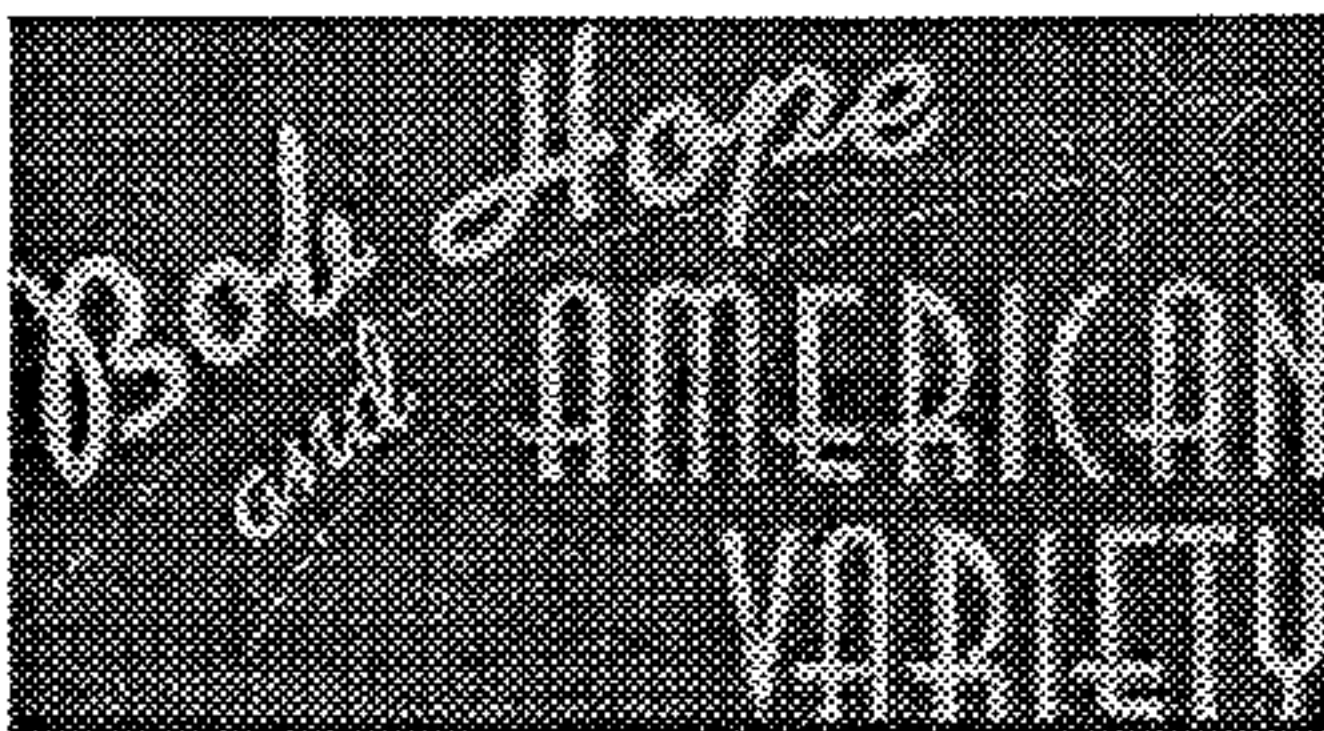
Thanks for the Memory

If vaudeville had an American creator, it was Tony Pastor. Pastor brought variety-act entertainment out of men's saloons and "refined" it into family entertainment when, in 1881, he opened his 14th Street Theater in New York City. Vaudeville's audiences, as well as many of its stars, were drawn primarily from the newly immigrated working classes.



The growth of vaudeville coincided with, and also reflected, the rise of urbanization and industrialization in America. As vaudeville grew more popular, centralized business interests took control of the acts. Just as goods in the late 19th century could be manufactured in a central location and shipped throughout the country, vaudeville routines and tours were established in New York and other large cities, and tours were made possible by the new ease of long-distance transportation afforded by the railroad. A successful act would be booked on a tour lasting for months and would change little as it was performed throughout the United States. In this way, vaudeville became a means of creating and sharing national culture.

Bob Hope was among the 20,000 vaudeville performers working in the 1920s. Many of these performers were, like Hope, recent immigrants who saw a vaudeville career as one of the few ways to succeed as a "foreigner" in America. Throughout his extraordinary professional career of nearly 70 years, Bob Hope practiced the arts he learned in vaudeville and perpetuated variety entertainment traditions in stage musical comedy, motion pictures, radio, television and the live appearances he made around the world in support of the U.S. armed forces. Today, the variety stage show is mostly a memory, but its influence is pervasive, thanks to the long and rich careers of vaudeville veterans such as Bob Hope.



Vaudeville was Bob Hope's training ground, and it made him one of the most popular entertainers of the 20th century. There, he honed his abilities as an actor, comic monologist, dancer, singer, sketch comedian and master of ceremonies. In the 1920s, Mr. Hope toured the United States as a vaudevillian, performing in hundreds of theaters, small and large. His talents and ambitions made him one of the great stars of the variety stage.

From the early 1880s to the end of the 1920s, vaudeville was the most popular form of live entertainment in America. A vaudeville show was a succession of seven to 10 live stage acts, which included comedians and musicians, together with novelty acts such as dancers, acrobats, trained animals and magicians. Its form and content were shaped by a wide range of 19th century diversions, including minstrel shows, the circus, medicine shows, traveling repertory companies, curio museums, wild West shows, chautauquas and the British music hall. The term "vaudeville" is believed to have been derived from the name of satirical songs sung in the valley (*vaud*) of Vire in France. It was applied to variety shows in the 19th century by entrepreneur B.F. Keith, in an attempt to give his shows cachet.

Nearly all of Bob Hope's 50-year broadcasting career was in programs carried by the radio and television networks of the National Broadcasting Co. (NBC). When NBC was established in 1926, it was the first commercial broadcasting network in the world. In its early years, NBC operated two networks, the Red and the Blue. The Blue Network was sold in 1943 and became the American Broadcasting Co. (ABC).



The NBC Collection at the Library of Congress comprises radio recordings, television kinescope motion pictures, scripts, press releases and business papers and is the largest and most comprehensive broadcasting company archives in the United States. The collection documents the rise and development of both radio and television entertainment.

Bob Hope conquered the radio medium at nearly the same time as he found success in motion pictures. Hope was featured regularly in several radio series throughout the 1930s. His success in "The Big Broadcast of 1938" brought him to "The Pepsodent Show" radio series, which aired for more than 10 years as a top-rated program. The show enjoyed enormous success for many reasons. Hope, by 1938 a veteran entertainer, had established a very popular persona: brash, yet not too serious about himself, a comic wiseacre who endeared himself to his audience by taking them into his confidence. The format of "The Pepsodent Show" was straightforward: a monologue by Hope, exchanges and skits with his regular cast and guest stars and a concluding skit. The manic comic character of his "Pepsodent" sidekick, Jerry Colona, was also a popular attraction on the show, but it was Bob Hope's opening monologue that rooted each

Radio



Desi Arnaz, Vera Vague, Jerry Colona, Bob Hope and Wendell Niles rehearse for a 1946 radio program.

The May 6, 1941, installment of Bob Hope's popular "Pepsodent" radio series aired from March Army Air Force Field in Riverside, Calif. This was the first remote broadcast of Hope's coast-to-coast radio program and became the first of hundreds of radio and television broadcasts he performed for U.S. soldiers. Hope, broadcasting in front of a live audience of soldiers and gearing the subject matter of the monologue to the troops, fashioned a very successful variant on the radio comedy variety format. World War II-era stateside radio audiences, as well as the troops, appreciated his soldier-directed monologues, which provided home audiences for a special affinity with the soldiers' lives and their contributions to the country.

Bob Hope and AMERICAN VARIETY

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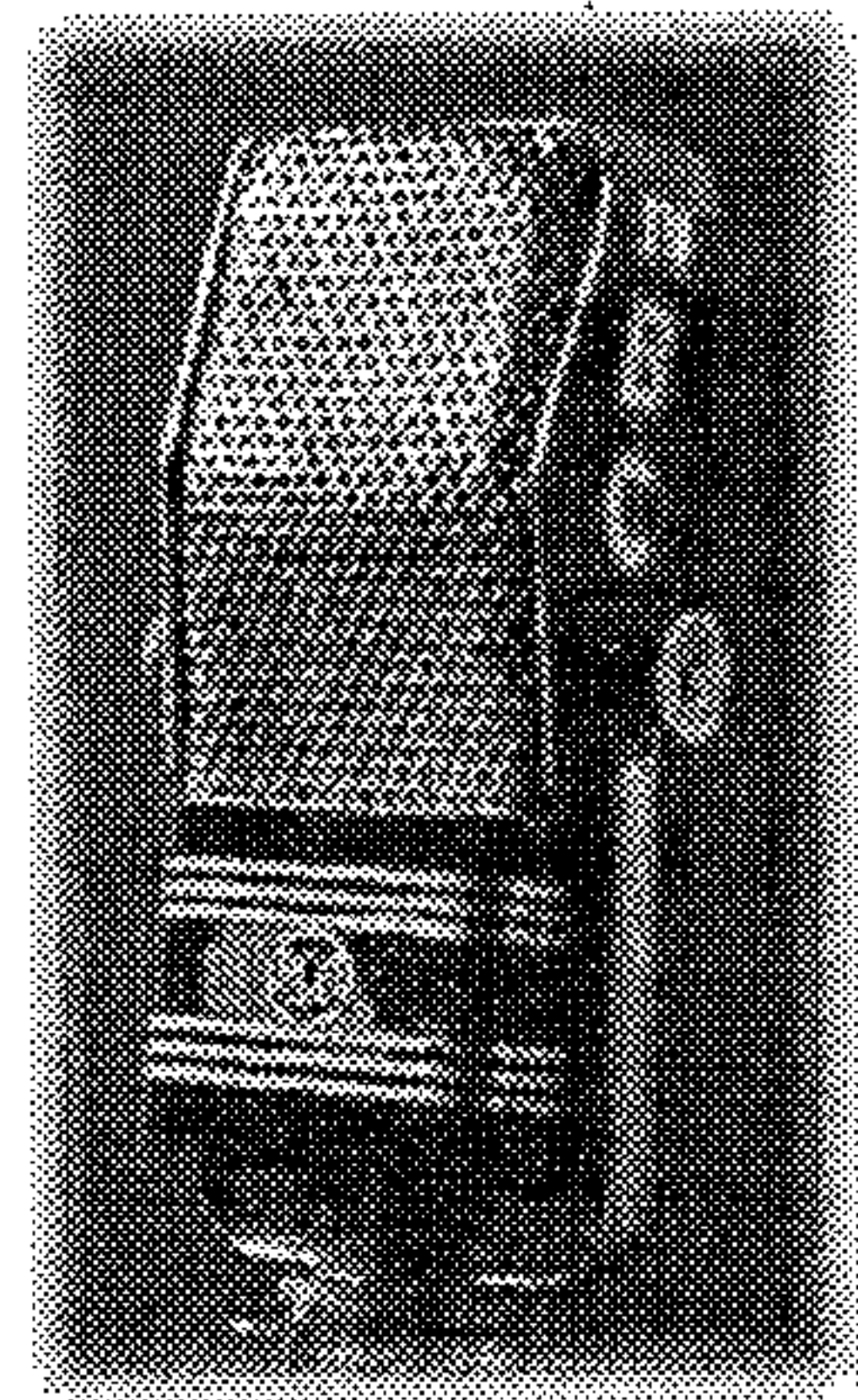
★ Radio ★

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Radio • Fred Allen, who wasn't able to transfer his success to TV, nevertheless influenced the comic styles of many. Proof of his staying power: a sold-out Paley tribute.

"California is a fine place to live—if you happen to be an orange."

—Fred Allen

By SUSAN KING
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The first three evenings to sell out at the Museum of Television & Radio's 19th Annual William S. Paley Festival were no surprise—"Alias," "Six Feet Under" and "Queer as Folk." All three are hip, cutting-edge series that appeal to the 18-to-49 demographic that networks cater to and advertisers covet.

That certainly can't be said of Fred Allen, the fourth sellout in the two-week festival.

Allen is best known for the radio work he did before 1950, most notably the popular sketch comedy show "The Fred Allen Show," which ran on the NBC radio network from 1942-49. He never made a comfortable transition to television and died 46 years ago at the age of 61.

Still, Allen influenced such radio and television comics as Garrison Keillor, Johnny Carson, Jay Leno and David Letterman.

"We are saluting Fred Allen because of his influence on American comedy both on radio and television and in general," says Ron Simon, who is curating the event. A similar Allen retrospective in November at the New York City branch of the museum was equally popular.

"We got a wide range of people who in some way Fred Allen influenced, from historian Arthur Schlesinger to Kurt Vonnegut to comedian Alan King," Simon says.

The Paley festival has an eclectic panel for the Wednesday night event at the Directors Guild of America Theater. Among those participating are Dick Cavett, radio writer-producer-director Norman Corwin, writer Larry Gelbart, writer-cartoonist Stuart Hample, writer Hal Kanter, producer-writer Normal Lear, comedian-di-

rector Dick Martin and novelist Herman Wouk of "The Winds of War" fame, who wrote for Allen in the late '30s.

"The one thing that Fred Allen did was give a topicality to American humor," says Simon. "Allen was known for reading many, many papers a day. He really wanted to comment on current events. Most of the other comedians on radio were relying on old vaudeville sketches or sketches that worked well on the live stage."

And there was Allen's style. "Allen didn't really play a character," says Simon. "He was Fred Allen, the great wit commenting upon current events of the time. He didn't develop an alter ego like Jack Benny did or Bob Hope did or obviously Edgar Bergen. So it was just Allen almost versus the world."

Born John Florence Sullivan on May 31, 1894, in Cambridge, Mass., Allen spent most of his childhood living with an aunt. His mother died when he was 3, and his father was a hard-drinking bookbinder.

"Fred was at heart a humorist and a writer, but didn't know it," says Hample. "He didn't go to college. He went to something called Commerce High School in Boston for children of blue-collar workers. He was left to his own devices."

Hample tells the story of Allen's

caustic quick wit even in school, as he once told a teacher during math class: "Let X equal my father's signature."

Allen taught himself how to juggle and by 18 was appearing as a juggler and comedian in vaudeville. He played the Palace Theatre in New York City 1919 and then appeared in numerous Broadway shows, including "The Passing Show of 1922," where he met his future wife, Portland Hoffa, who would be his version of Gracie Allen.

Allen started in radio in 1932 on "The Linit Bath Club Revue." By the time he was doing "The Fred Allen Show" in the '40s, he'd developed a weekly sketch dubbed "Allen's Alley," in which Allen would knock on the doors of various comedic characters including Mrs. Nussbaum, a Jewish housewife, and the Southern Sen. Claghorn.

Allen also got a lot of mileage out of his "feud" with Jack Benny, which began in the late 1930s over Benny's ability to play the violin.

Larry Gelbart ("MASH," "Tootsie"), a longtime fan of Allen's, came across his path twice when he was a young writer. "I met him in 1946 in New York," he recalls. "I was one of the writers on 'Duffy's Tavern,' and the show traveled to New York to do a couple of weeks there. Fred Allen was a guest on one of the shows. I wrote some material for him as one did for a guest artist." Two years later, Gelbart encountered him at the William Morris office in Beverly Hills.

"To a young writer, it was like a rodeo clown meeting John Wayne," says Gelbart. "He was a wit. Those were the days when you didn't have to be sunny to be liked. You could be iconoclastic. You could be ironic. You could be sarcastic. He was all of the above and more."

But Allen's humor also

got him in trouble with the censors.

"I remember when I met him in New York, we were in a room reading the script that we were going to do and the NBC censors came into the room," says Gelbart. "He physically changed. He was very disturbed by their presence because he had running fights with them."

"He had high blood pressure," says Hample, author of the new book "all the sincerity in hollywood: Selections from the Writings of Radio's Legendary Comedian Fred Allen." "He was a terribly hard worker. He wrote all the time, and while he did have writers in his career, he rewrote everything. He was a perfectionist. Everything had to bear his stamp."

By 1947, Allen was No. 1 on the radio and made the cover of Time magazine. But in 1949, he found his audience turning the dial to the game show "Stop the Music."

He didn't give up without a fight, even parodying the game show on his series. But the "Music" juggernaut was unstoppable. "He wore himself out," says Hample. "His sponsors, Ford, pulled out and he pulled out of the whole thing."

Allen, who resembled a saggy, baggy bloodhound, once admitted, "he had a face for radio." And he didn't take much stock in television: "Television is a device that permits people who haven't anything to do to watch people who can't do anything."

He tried a TV quiz show. "It wasn't very good," says Hample. "That was beneath him," adds Gelbart. "Fred Allen doing a game show would be like Winston Churchill judging a beauty contest."

Allen ended up as a panelist on CBS' "What's My Line" for the last two years of his life.

The museum's celebration of Allen will feature excerpts from his radio routines as well as clips from such TV appearances as an early "Colgate Comedy Hour" with Jackie Gleason. "We also have an 'Omnibus' [CBS' cultural series] where he is reading an excerpt from his book, 'Treadmill to Oblivion,'" says Simon. "The point of the seminar is that we are going to slow that treadmill down for Fred Allen."



Comedian Fred Allen, who died in 1956, once admitted he "had a face for radio."

A Salute to Fred Allen" takes place Wednesday at 7 p.m. at the Directors Guild of America Theater, 7920 Sunset Blvd. The event is sold out.

NBC



Talking on air: the Lux Radio Theatre, with a variety of actors' voices and live sound effects, has been re-created. Picture: DARRYL GREGORY

Serial thrillers

Before soaps there were radio dramas — and they're coming back, writes ROZZI BAZZANI

RADIO drama in the 1940s and '50s fired the imagination of audiences with stories and sound.

Then, families would gather around the wireless and sit captivated every evening by their favourite serials.

Complete with voices, door slams, footsteps on gravel, telephones, pauses and heavy breathing, many plays and serials were performed live to air, in front of an audience. The commercials were included, and it was gripping listening.

Actors often played several roles in the one play, using a range of voices and accents as well as creating the sound effects.

This was theatre of the imagination and, according to Melbourne theatre director Don McKay, it's a great medium for telling a story.

This is why he decided to re-create and celebrate the radio-theatre genre for the Arts Centre's Morning Melodies last year "as a bit of fun".

"I began my radio career in the Lux Radio Theatre," he says, "so it was full circle for me.

"The season went terribly well, so this year we are doing regular theatre evening slots as well."

The new season consists of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *The Agatha Christie Radio Mysteries*, which were originally written for the BBC.

McKay says he stumbled across the Christie mysteries and immediately thought they would be perfect for the Lux Radio Theatre.

"No wonder her thrillers have millions of readers," he says, "because in these plays you never knew whodunnit until the very end. The plot is everything.

"I take my hat off to Agatha — she was very skilled at writing for all mediums."

A feature of Lux Radio Theatre is a strong cast of five versatile actors ranging in age from 20 to 60.

"We wanted a mix of young actors as well as those experienced in radio so the look and sound are authentic," McKay says.

Actor Beverly Dunn is the voice of experience in the Lux ensemble, having begun her career 50 years ago in radio drama.

She starred in the recent stage production in Australia and Great Britain of Wilde's *Earnest*, opposite British actor Patricia Routledge.

DUNN is playing both principal roles this time and is thrilled to be re-creating the radio days.

"The women had to wear non-rattling materials such as velvet. No taffeta, which was all the rage, because you sounded like a bush-fire," she says.

"Charm bracelets were definitely out. They sound like sleigh bells."

Dunn's favourite sound effect was the sound of horses' hooves created by banging coconut halves together.

She remembers how radio performances were huge in the '50s.

"It's so exciting to discover audiences are being thrilled all over again by this theatre experience."

McKay believes new audiences as well as those familiar with the genre are enjoying the Lux Radio Theatre performances because the style invites audiences to use their imagination.

"The actors, regardless of character, are not in costume," he says. "They are in evening dress.

"The sound effects add another dimension — unexpected and amusing without being distracting.

"It's all about the plot."

Lux Radio Theatre, Morning Melodies, Melbourne Concert Hall, next Monday. *The Importance of Being Earnest*, 11.30am; *The Agatha Christie Radio Mysteries*, 1.30pm. Two-show ticket, \$19.50; single show, \$12.50. Bookings: 13 61 66. The show will then tour Victoria.

Agatha Christie Radio Mysteries presented tomorrow

Stawell Arts Council will be presenting a performance of Agatha Christie Radio Mysteries at the Stawell Entertainment tomorrow.

The Agatha Christie Radio Mysteries, which are recently rediscovered radio plays written by the writer whose appeal crosses all age barriers, will be presented at 7.30pm.

During the 1940s and 50s, the highlight of the entertainment week was The Lux Radio Theatre, a national radio program that brought Australian audiences the cream of the world's new plays, movies and novels.

This period has now been recreated in a stage show featuring radio plays by Agatha Christie - The Agatha Christie Mysteries.

These newly staged plays wonderfully evoke the time period of radio theatre to life, the distinguished actors in evening dress, the live sound effects, the vintage soap commercials.

This highly entertaining evening with the queen of whodunits uses all the devices of live radio drama, the distant whine of a train whistle, the hurried footsteps of an unidentified

person on a gravel path at night, a mysterious voice at the other end of the phone.

The Agatha Christie Mysteries features radio and theatre evergreen, Beverley Dunn who recently featured in the MTC production of Life After George, after playing in The Importance of Being Earnest in London with Patricia Routledge.

Lux Radio Theatre is ideal for touring. The performance style and the use of live and recorded sound makes the show flexible to play successfully everywhere from the large concert halls to smaller town halls or community centres.

The three short plays to be presented in Stawell tomorrow night offer Lux Radio Theatre the opportunity to perform fine examples of the radio drama genre within the company's unique live theatre style.

Bookings for tomorrow night's performance can be made at the Stawell Library on 5358 1274. Ticket prices are \$20 adults, students, children and pensioners \$12. For group bookings of eight or more, tickets will be discounted by \$2.



The

AGATHA CHRISTIE

RADIO MYSTERIES

THE CLASSIC RADIO PLAYS COME TO NEW LIFE ON STAGE

Directed by DON MACKAY

Radio still active

RADIO drama in the 1940s was terribly thrilling. The sonorous voices, the mysterious pauses, sound effects such as footsteps on gravel or the ring of an old bakelite telephone conspired to keep listeners spellbound around the wireless.

Lux Radio Theatre is dedicated to preserving this curious art, and on May 13 they'll present *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *The Agatha Christie Radio Mysteries* in full evening dress and with vintage commercials. Melbourne Concert Hall at 11.30am and 1.30pm respectively. Tickets: both shows \$19.50, one show \$12.50. Bookings: 13 61 66.

THE WEEKLY ADVERTISER June 6, 2002

Trip down memory lane

Wesley Performing Arts Centre

It was a great night at the Wesley Performing Arts Centre last Friday. The Agatha Christie Mystery Plays drew a large and enthusiastic crowd.

For some it was a trip down memory lane because the Sunday night radio program Lux Radio Theatre was practically an institution in family life in the 1940s.

For others, the novelty of watching this highly skilled team of actors create a story simply through dialogue and sound effects was both impressive and very entertaining.

The cast starred Beverley Dunn - known for her television appearances in Flying Doctors, Prisoner and Bellbird, James Wright, Jenny Seedsman, Rosalind Macky and Simon Russell. They did a brilliant job, bringing the plays to life most effectively for a modern audience so accustomed to actually seeing the action and the place.

The three plays "with Dame Agatha's unique mastery of entertaining plots" - to quote director Don Mackay - kept us guessing to the end. Each actor read several parts and took a turn at making the sound effects and a large part of the fun was seeing this done.

It was a very successful evening for Wesley, with almost a full house and clearly an equally successful one for the amused and responsive audience.

Let's hope we can get Lux Radio Theatre back again next year.

Get the picture on radio

By **SUE HOWARD**

THIS week sees the 100th anniversary of Guglielmo Marconi's very first radio broadcast. It seems surprising to me that something which has become so crucial in our lives is actually only a century old. And yet, a birthday like this gives us a chance to reflect on the way technology has grown and changed in the past 100 years and the extraordinary difference that inventions such as radio have made to our lives.

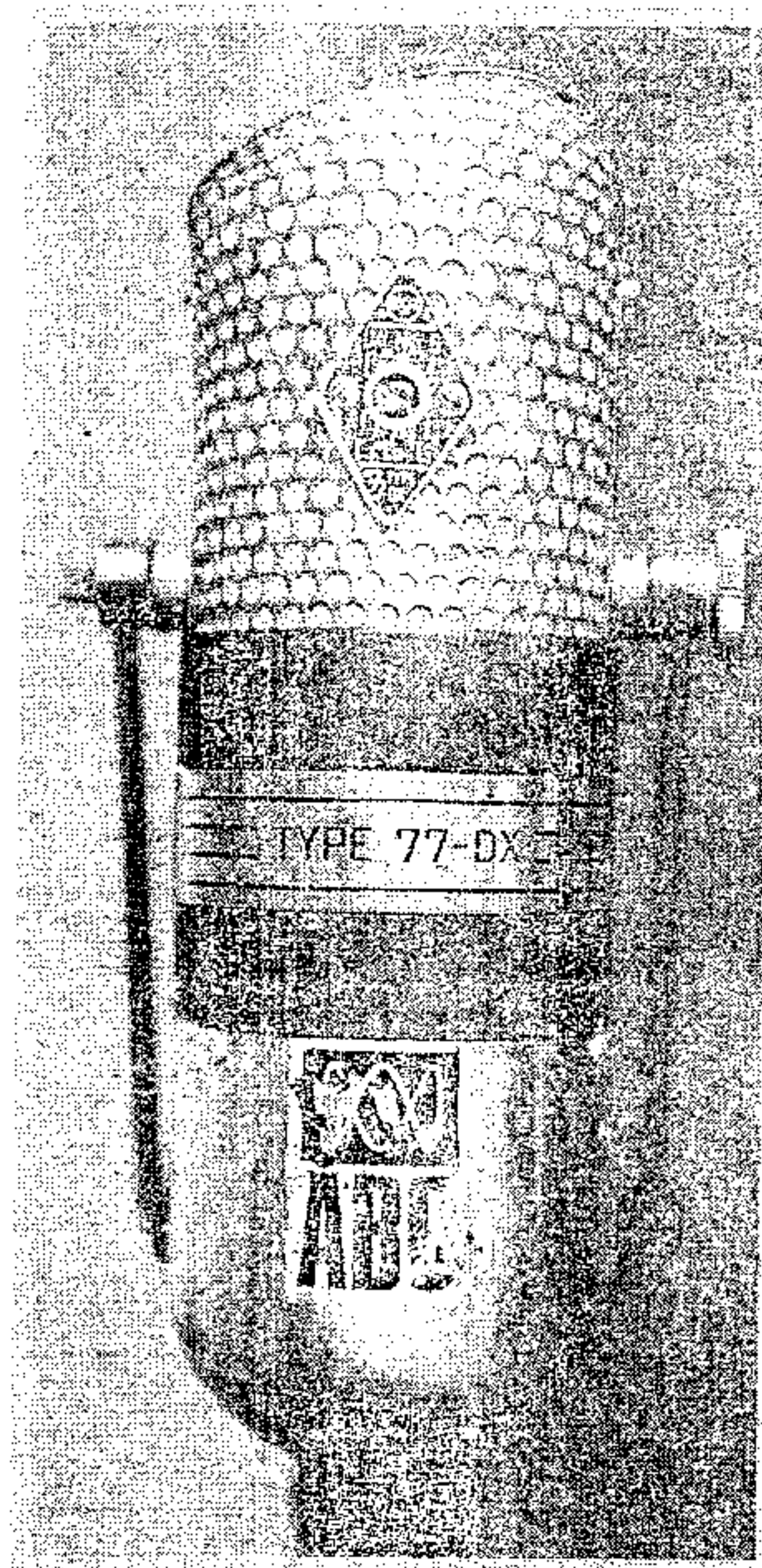
Radio probably played a larger role in my early life than in the lives of most of my contemporaries. By the time I was two years old, television had reached our shores and most kids of my age were raised with one in the corner of the living room. Not at my house. We had the wireless.

I can't remember the exact moment that I knew I was going to be a radio announcer, but blame Peter Evans. There I was, an impressionable teenager, taking in an early morning diet of eggs and Evans through most of my secondary school days. It was inevitable that I'd be improperly influenced. My parents really should have been more vigilant. Remember that voice drifting through the early morning fog sharing its grumblings and phobias? We always knew when he wasn't happy and he got away with this style in a time when the ABC approached the notion of such "entertainment" with fear and trembling.

Evans brought cynicism and flippancy to early morning radio, which is precisely when normal people are most likely to be feeling cynical and flippant. I can only imagine how the ABC bureaucracy felt as the cult of personality descended on those old studios in Lonsdale Street. To say that public service broadcasters are innately conservative is to state the obvious, and even when I arrived at those same studios in the mid '80s the grey cardigan was the most common attire for the older gentlemen who presided over the consoles!

Subconsciously, I heard Evans' love of the microphone, his superb sense of timing, his ambivalence about his role and his resoundingly hometown chat and at some point, thought: "Yes! This is for me!"

Melbourne's radio culture is, I believe, a bit different from other cities. For a start, we don't embrace the "shock jock"



syndrome in the way some other cities have. In this town, we're lucky in that we simply don't have to listen to real redneck radio. We don't need a highly paid voice to tell us what to think.

As the ABC's director of radio, I spend a lot of time thinking about what makes the audience in one city different from the audience in another. Melbourne has a radio culture very much its own. For example, broadcasters who work well in Melbourne tend not to work particularly well in Sydney. Alternative music

“Remember that voice drifting through the early morning fog sharing its grumblings and phobias?”

stations, such as Triple R and PBS, thrive in this town, where they might struggle in others. In Melbourne we want the mainstream, but we also want the chance to listen to other things. We want the choice of opinion and sound and we engage with what we hear. We have a strong live-music culture in this town thanks, in part, to the likes of Triple R, PBS and the ABC's Triple J.

And Melbourne likes what my colleague Jon Faine calls "the contest of ideas". Jon believes that Melburnians like to hear other points of view and he says that talk radio is about "leaving room for people to make up their own minds". I think it's also that people in Melbourne appreciate that radio delivers politicians and opinion makers live, unexpurgated and unedited. What you hear from an interviewee on talk radio is what you get — no edits, no tricks, just the words allowed to speak for themselves.

The other difference is that the Melbourne audience engages with us publicly, not just through talkback. Being a broadcaster is a public role. Being a broadcaster on the ABC in Melbourne is a very public role and it comes with some interesting extras — like a sense of public ownership. ABC broadcasters get accosted (usually in the nicest possible way) at the market or in the street and engaged in hot debate about subjects that have captured our audiences' attention.

This, I can tell you, is a bit of a strain for the partners and friends who might get caught up in the discussion. But there is a strong feeling among the ABC's listeners that ABC broadcasters are public property and a robust conversation about something that a listener heard or wants to hear on our programs is par for the course.

Melburnians want conversation and active debate from their talk radio. Stations like ABC Melbourne provide a community voice, a way of eavesdropping on what Melbourne thinks about itself and the rest of the world and leave you the space to make up your own mind. We don't expect you to always agree with what you hear, but we like your willingness to participate in ideas, debate and conversation.

Thank goodness for Mr Marconi. One hundred years on, I still maintain that the pictures are better on radio than television. All it takes is the airwaves and a little imagination to conjure the most colourful world from the words of the wireless.

RADIO

THE GOLDEN YEARS

The publicity surrounding the 50th anniversary of *The Archers* brought back so many happy memories for John Deards of his early years spent listening to the wireless. No research has been done for what follows, he claims - just a great deal of dedicated remembering!

The publicity surrounding the 50th anniversary of *The Archers* brought back so many happy memories of my early years spent listening to the wireless. No research has been done for what follows - just a great deal of dedicated remembering! Any errors are obviously mine and probably the result of diminishing brain cells.

One of my earliest memories is the sound permeating from the radio in our family home in the late 1940s.

Home at that time was actually the ground floor flat of a rather grand house in Highgate, north London, one of many requisitioned by the government after the war to re-house demobbed servicemen and their families.

So when my father returned from India and into civilian life in 1946, we moved in. I was just three.



Picture: Yesterday's Britain (Reader's Digest).

The radio was the centre of family entertainment fifty years ago.

A large, brown bakelite-cased Ferguson wireless sat in our lounge, which in better days had been the downstairs drawing room and, indeed, still had a huge marble fireplace with buttons on the wall either side to summon the servants!

Of course, this was a time when the word 'radio' meant the BBC, with a choice of the *Home Service*, the *Light Programme* and, for classical music lovers only, the *Third Programme*. It was, however, sometimes possible to pick up Radio Luxembourg, which was very exciting because they actually broadcast advertisements! Most of the programmes were sponsored by Horlicks, Ovaltine, and other British household names, and beamed by a strong transmitter to dedicated knob-twirlers in the UK. Perhaps most memorable were the adverts by Horace Bachelor who had perfected a system by which you were guaranteed to win on the football pools! He was located in Keynsham, Bristol, and insisted on repeatedly spelling out the name of the town to ensure you knew exactly where he was! K-E-Y-N-S-H-A-M. Keynsham, Bristol. On the BBC not even the mention of trade names was allowed.

In those halcyon days even turning on the wireless was an event. Plugged into the mains via a two-pin plug (brown bakelite again!), a turn of the large on/off knob produced a glowing orange light behind the large display of station names from all over Europe, Paris, Berlin, Hilversum. This was followed by a low hum as the mysterious valves within gradually warmed up. Finally the muffled sound emerged from the gold, meshed material covering the mouth of the speaker.

So, reaching out with veined and blotched hand for the rose-tinted spectacles, let me try to recall some of the sounds that filled the air in those far-off days.

Drama

My earliest radio addiction was *Dick Barton - Special Agent!* Dick, with his sidekicks Jock and Snowy, was unmissable every evening at 6.45. The scrapes they got into, and out of, in each 15-minute episode were extraordinary. To a young boy it was all tremendously exciting but adults tuned in too - by the million. Unfortunately its undoubted popularity did not save it from the



Remember Ray's a Laugh with Ted Ray and Alexander Gauge?

chop, and it was soon replaced by that boring 'everyday story of country folk'!

Other compulsive listening was provided by *Children's Hour*, presented at 5pm each day by Uncle Mac (Derek McCulloch) and the other aunties and uncles. When I was very young I always enjoyed the stories read so vividly by David Davies, whose voice brought to life the adventures of Peter Rabbit and his friends plus many others.

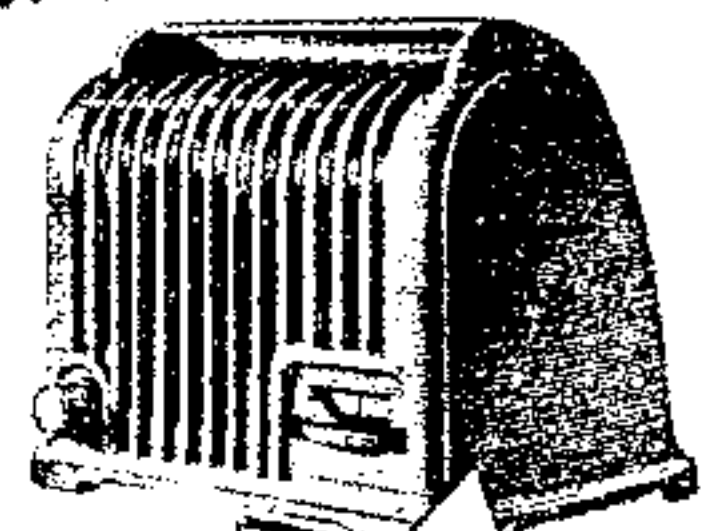
As I grew older other *Children's Hour* drama series became firm favourites. Among them *Norman and Henry Bones*, *Boy Detectives*, ripping yarns of adventure and detection. Then there was *Jennings and Derbyshire*, always in trouble at their public school; *Larry the Lamb in Toytown*, with his friend Dennis the Dachshund, who spoke the most dyslexic English possible in a painfully fractured German accent (it was only later that I discovered that the voice of Larry the Lamb was none other than Derek McCulloch) and finally, of course, *Billy Bunter*, the fat boy of the remove at Greyfriars School, whose yells of "Yaroo", "Cripes", etc were copied by boys in the school playground of my rather less exciting state school.

Then the 1950s arrived and my family moved to a cosier, modern flat and we soon acquired

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A Sobell 4-Valve
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**SOBELL
5-POINT
GUARANTEE**

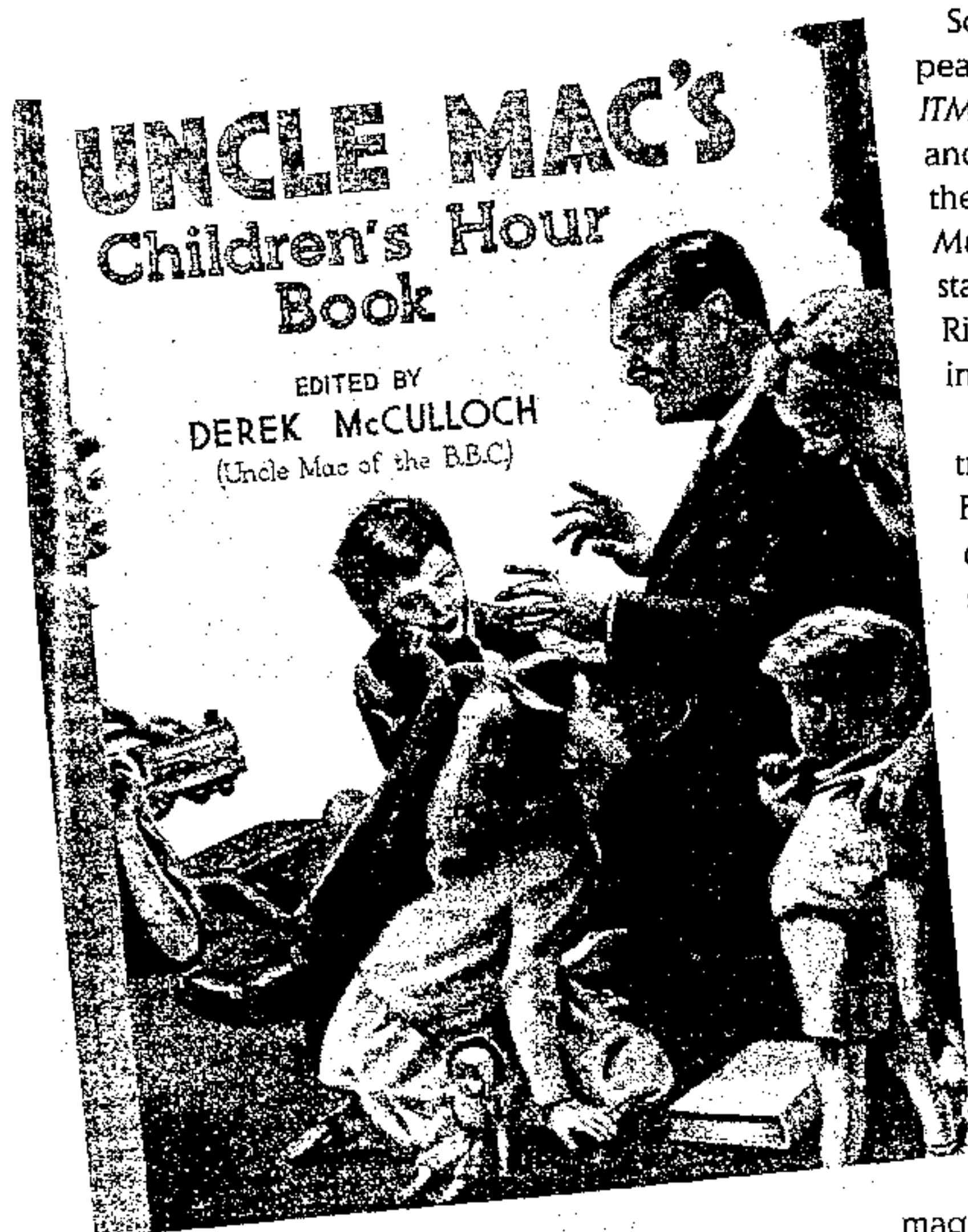
This Sobell needed no aerial and claimed to have a performance equal to a five-valve superhet.

one of the very first transistor radios, this time made by Philips, the Dutch manufacturer. Not only was it smaller, and thus more portable, but also the reception and sound quality were much improved.

Soon my tastes widened and I moved on to other series such as *Riders of the Range* and *Journey into Space*. These were both written by Charles Chilton and produced by Guy Kingsley-Poynter, and were, I think, designed to cash in on the popularity of cowboy and space serials at Saturday morning pictures. If my memory serves me correctly, two of the stars of *Journey into Space* were Alfie Bass and David Jacobs.

One programme's signature tune still makes the hairs stand up on the back of my neck whenever I hear it today. From the first strains of *Coronation Scot* you knew that adventure with a capital A was to follow. Paul Temple and his wife Steve were always in the thick of it. Unmasking criminals, solving mysteries and murders. So what if they spoke in cut glass, upper class accents, this was thrilling stuff and always left you wanting more.

Then there was my all-time favourite radio drama. To me there will only ever be one actor who captured the very essence of Sherlock Holmes - the wonderful Carleton Hobbs. With Dr. Watson played by the superb Norman Shelley and Holmes' housekeeper, Mrs Hudson, by Mary Wimbush, this was radio drama at its very best. The stories were brought so vividly to life one could almost smell the grimy, fog-bound back streets of Victorian London, and visualise the passing Hansom cabs and horse-drawn buses.



A favourite at 5 o'clock, Uncle Mac's popularity expanded into hard-back books.

BEST OF BRITISH - March 2002

Picture: BBC



The cast of *Dick Barton, Special Agent* - Noel Johnson, Alex McCrindle and John Mann.

Finally, apart from *The Archers* there was another very popular daily soap opera (sorry, serial drama), and that was my mother's favourite *Mrs Dale's Diary*. The sweeping sound of the harp signature tune took the listener into the daily goings on at the surgery, and among the patients, of Dr Jim Dale as recorded by his wife in her diary. Thrilling stuff, well, compared to the humdrum lives of its many listeners anyway.

Comedy

Some wartime comedy shows continued into peacetime radio. I vaguely remember hearing *ITMA!* (It's That Man Again!) starring the one and only Tommy Handley and Sam Costa, but they could have been repeats. Then there was *Much Binding in the Marsh*, set in an RAF station somewhere in England, and starring Richard Murdoch and Kenneth Home as two incompetent service personnel.

The early Fifties then brought us one of the truly revolutionary programmes of radio. From 1952 to 1960 it changed not only radio comedy but also the very nature of the British sense of humour. It was, of course, *The Goon Show*. Peter Sellers, Harry Secombe, Spike Milligan and Michael Bentine created a surreal world of crazy humour, where anything could happen and usually did. Even the programme's announcer, Wallace Greenslade, was dragged into the action.

Many have since tried to copy them...and failed miserably. Neddy Seagoon, Count Moriarty, Major Bludnok, the infamous Grip Pipe Thynne, Bluebottle and Eccles were unique and their world only made possible by the genius of the Goons, combined with the magic of radio and the listeners' imagination.

Radio comedy was soon booming, with a continuous stream of top quality shows. Among these was *Educating Archie*. Archie Andrews

was a ventriloquist's dummy dressed as a schoolboy who, with his 'friend' Peter Brough, employed some rather famous school teachers who tried, but usually failed, to educate him, including Tony Hancock and Max Bygraves. He also had a girlfriend, played by young Petula Clark. Ventriloquism on the radio - it could only happen at the BBC! - but it worked.

The *Navy Lark* was a hilarious show set on the Royal Navy frigate *HMS Troutbridge*. It starred Stephen Murray as the ship's No. 1, Leslie Phillips as an incompetent sub-lieutenant, Jon Pertwee as the mischievous Chief Petty Officer, and Ronnie Barker as Able Seaman Johnson and Evans the Welsh starboard lookout, among others! Heather Chasen, as a rather cheeky Wren, was the only female on board. Catch phrases from this show soon cropped up in normal conversation - "Left hand down a bit", "Steady as you go, Chief", "Everybody down!" It was one of the longest running comedy shows too, beginning in 1959 and not ending until the late 1970s.

Without doubt *Round the Horne* and *Beyond Our Ken* were and still are classics of radio comedy. The shows were held together by the brilliant laconic humour of Kenneth Home, a rock among the truly risqué scripts whose *double-entendres* followed one after the other. They got away with murder mainly, I think, because the scripts were not really understood by the old boys at the BBC who commissioned the shows! How else could such a show be broadcast at lunchtime on Sunday! The real characters in the show were played brilliantly by Betty Marsden, Hugh Paddick, Bill Pertwee and the inimitable Kenneth Williams. There were the ageing film stars, Charles and Fiona (BM & HP); Julian and Sandy (HP & KW), the camp couple, whose catch phrases were loved by regular listeners. "Isn't 'e bold!", "Nice to varda your jolly old eek, Mr 'Orne!" They were the first obviously



Picture: BBC

Ellis Powell as Mrs Dale in Mrs Dale's Diary.

gay comedy duo on radio and absolutely hilarious. Then there was Ramblin' Syd Rumpo, the folk singer, with Williams at his warbling best and singing lyrics which sometimes left very little to the imagination.

Two Northern comedy shows were also very popular at this time. The first was *The Al Read Show* which was observational comedy and very funny, and laid the groundwork for many later comics such as Jasper Carrot, Billy Connolly and most recently Eddie Izzard. Al Read took everyday situations and conversations and turned them on their head. He was absolutely hilarious.

The Jimmy Clitheroe Show was based around the daft Lancashire family of the vertically-challenged Clitheroe who, although in real life was much older, played a schoolboy who was always in trouble.

Situation comedy at this time was also of very high quality. One of the earliest was *Life with the Lyons*, which followed the day-to-day traumas of Ben Lyon, the American comedian, and his family. There was Ben, his wife Bebe Daniels, son Richard and daughter Barbara, plus their Scottish housekeeper played by Molly Weir. The programmes followed life in London with an American family at odds with life in general and England in particular. It was very popular and, as with many such radio shows, transferred to television but was never quite the same once you could actually see the performers!

In contrast you could not get much more English than *Take It From Here* in which the Glum family lurched from one disaster to the next. Jimmy Edwards played Mr Glum, the domineering father of simpleton Ron, who was romantically entwined with his beloved Ethel, or as he called her 'Eth'. The Australian comic Dick Bentley and the always-brilliant June Whitfield were inspired casting as Ron and Eth, and their weekly battles with Mr Glum, who in turn had problems with the ever-illusory Mrs Glum, were unmissable.

Another comedy about a family was *Ray's a Laugh*, starring Ted Ray as himself and Kitty Bluett as his long-suffering wife. It was gentle,

witty and well written and ran for many years to large audiences.

Then, of course, there was Tony, Sid, Bill and Hattie in *Hancock's Half Hour*. These residents of 14 Railway Cuttings, East Cheam, said it all really. The lugubrious Tony Hancock with ideas above his station; Sidney James, the wide boy, ducking and diving, on the edge of criminality; and Bill Kerr, not very bright but keen. And all of them looked after by the larger-than-life housekeeper, Hattie Jacques. The stories were brilliant, and sometimes dark, tales of the human condition, and very funny too.

Combining comedy with music, and way ahead of its time, was *The Jack Jackson Show*. Jackson, a former bandleader, lived in semi-retirement on an island somewhere in the South Seas where he had built a small recording studio. He hit on the idea of creating a programme where he presented records as a disc jockey but interspersed them with clips from comedy shows and radio broadcasts from the UK and America. The editing was superb and usually created some vague storyline! Tapes of the show were sent to the BBC and broadcast every week. They were an instant success and ran for many years inspiring others to follow his lead, most notably Kenny Everett and Adrian Juste.

Music

Much of the popular music on the radio in the late 1940s and early 1950s was a continuation of wartime tastes. Big bands, dance bands, with male singers, known then as 'crooners', and female singers and groups. Most of these were American, such as the Glenn Miller Band (continuing despite his death), the Buddy Rich Big Band and great singers such as Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Vic Damone, Peggy Lee, Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald. The top female group was undoubtedly The Andrews Sisters.

But there was British talent too. The Ted Heath Band (later Orchestra) was very popular and other bands led by Jack Hylton, Billy Cotton and Victor Sylvester continued their wartime success into the new peace. Henry Hall had his *Guest Night* with his very own introduction: "This is Henry Hall speaking", and the closing signature tune *Here's to the Next Time*.

As time passed Billy Cotton in particular became a regular part of Sunday listening with the *Billy Cotton Band Show* and its opening yell of 'Wakey, Wakey!'

As for singers, names like David Whitfield, Dickie Valentine, Frankie Vaughan, Edmund Hockridge, Anne Shelton, Joan Regan, Alma Cogan, Marion Ryan are just a few that come to mind, and do you remember Lita Roza and Eve Boswell? We had our female trio too, and they are still going today - The Beverley Sisters. In addition, mixed singing groups were very popular and even had their own shows on radio - The Stargazers (*The Stargazers are on the Air*) and The Squadronnaires

to name but two. One group that began a weekly show in the sixties and still continues today is The Cliff Adams Singers. *Sing Something Simple* still provides unique arrangements of today's hits and those of the past with Cliff Adams leading from the accordion.

For light classical fans there was, and still is, *Friday Night is Music Night* with an eclectic mix of opera, ballads and tuneful popular classics, played by one of the BBC symphony orchestras. *Semprini Serenade* was on the same lines but conducted from the piano by Semprini himself, his lilting Polish accent adding romance to the introductions - the ladies loved him!

Others included Geraldo and his Orchestra and, of course, Mantovani with his distinctive swooping strings, in musical arrangements that created a unique and instantly recognisable sound.

Then at the end of the fifties it all began to change. Rock 'n' roll arrived from America. The first real rock 'n' roller was a young country singer named Carl Perkins, whose upbeat tunes soon hit a chord with young Americans, particularly one teenager, Elvis Aaron Presley. Then Bill Haley's movie *Rock around the Clock* created riots in cinemas across the country, and things were never quite the same again!

Our own Elvis, Cliff Richard, was soon top of the charts and before long we were awash with pubescent singers belting out hit after hit - Marty Wilde, Billy Fury and Tommy Steele among them.

To be honest the BBC didn't really know how to handle this new music and carried on as before, seemingly ignoring its massive popularity. Then the early Sixties brought The Beatles and the real revolution in popular music just exploded.

The youth of the day thought the BBC was not playing enough of their music and soon the coast of Britain was awash with illegal pirate stations playing non-stop pop in between adverts. People power won in the end with the setting up of a pop station by the BBC in 1967. Radio One had arrived. The Home Service became Radio 4, the *Light Programme* turned into Radio 2 and the *Third Programme*, Radio 3. Truly, the end of an era.

One cannot leave music without mentioning two of the most popular programmes ever



Picture: Yesterday's Britain (Reader's Digest)

The Goons attracted a cult following in the 1950s - left to right: Harry Secombe, Michael Bentine, Spike Milligan and Peter Sellers.



Ted Heath, a popular British bandleader.

broadcast on the wireless, *Housewives' Choice* and *Two-Way Family Favourites*. Both were record request shows but each totally different. The first was aimed at the British housewife, to play tunes she had requested to take her mind off the daily round of dusting, vacuuming, cleaning and cooking. In those days, it was one of the most popular programmes on BBC radio. For me the most memorable presenter of the show was 'Mrs Elrick's wee son, George'.

Family Favourites was the show which kept service families in the UK in touch with service personnel posted overseas, mainly those stationed in Germany, by playing record requests and reading out messages. Whenever people remember the programme only two presenters usually come to mind - Jean Metcalfe and Cliff Michelmore - Jean in London and Cliff invariably in Cologne. They met through the programme and eventually became one of Britain's favourite married couples.

Variety

Unlike in the theatre, variety on the wireless had to be verbal, no dancers or tumblers. So it was mainly comedians, singers and musicians plus the occasional impressionist or speciality act.

Three variety shows spring to mind, all very similar in their format: *Variety Band Box*, *Midday Music Hall* and *Workers' Playtime*. The latter was one I remember well as it was always on when I arrived home from school for my lunch - I hated school dinners! The programme was broadcast each day from a factory canteen somewhere in the UK, and was very popular not only with the workers but with the management of the factories too, as it meant the name of their firm was mentioned to millions of listeners on the 'no adverts' BBC!

Comedians who appeared regularly included Ted Ray, Tommy Trinder, Cardew Robinson, Jimmy Edwards, Bill Maynard, Arthur Askey, Frankie Howerd, Terry Scott and Jack Train. A regular comic duo was Gert and Daisy, two irascible housewives played by sisters Elsie and Doris Walters (their brother Jack Warner found fame on television as Dixon of Dock Green).

Singers and musicians obviously included all those already mentioned plus groups like The Bachelors, The King Brothers, The Beverley Sisters and trad jazz bands such as Acker Bilk and Kenny Ball. In addition, other solo acts included Ronald Chesney (harmonica), Kenny Baker (trumpet) and Stephane Grappelli (violin).

As for the novelty acts there was the ever-reliable Percy Edwards and his strolls through the English countryside imitating all the birds' songs and wild animal noises as he went! Then Ronnie Ronald also whistled a merry tune as well as singing.

Frank Ifield part sang, part yodelled his latest ditty, and pretty unique at the time was Peter Kavanagh the impressionist. He was billed as 'The Voice of Them All' and very good he was too.

Panel Games and Quizzes

What is amazing about the radio panel shows is how they have lasted. Most of them have survived unscathed from the middle of the 20th century and into the 21st century.

First, however, two shows that are no longer with us. *Does The Team Think?* was really a vehicle for a panel of quick thinking, wise-cracking comics to show off their comedic wit. The questions really didn't matter, they were just feed lines for masters of comic patter, including Ted Ray, Jimmy Edwards, Tommy Trinder, with Macdonald Hobley trying to keep order as chairman!

Twenty Questions was totally different but equally entertaining. Again a panel, but this time typically including Joy Adamson, Anona Wynn, Jack Train and Gilbert Harding. As the name implies they had just twenty questions in which to guess what an object was and were only told whether it was animal, vegetable or mineral. The name of the object was relayed to the studio audience and, by the mystery voice, to us listeners at home.

Other shows such as *Just a Minute*, *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue*, *Round Britain Quiz* and *Brain of Britain* are still going and are still very popular.

Renaissance

My memory has, I think, served me rather well, but I am sure there are many other wireless programmes that I have missed, and some that will suddenly spring to mind one day, triggered by a piece of music or the sound of a familiar voice.

I'm pleased to say I still enjoy listening to the radio and it is still mainly the BBC that provides my listening pleasure. But as we journey into the 21st century there has never been more radio choice, with hundreds of local BBC and commercial stations, plus a few new national stations, such as Classic FM, which are fast becoming national institutions.

We are, indeed, witnessing a radio renaissance.

■ **What's your favourite recollection of radio back in the 1950s? Was there a show or entertainer that John Deards has overlooked? Let's hear your memories!**



'RADIO RANGERS' RODE THE AIRWAVES

Every weekday afternoon in the '30s, young Bobby Benson (and millions of would-be cowpokes) hit the trail.

*By H. John Susmith
Shutesbury, Massachusetts*



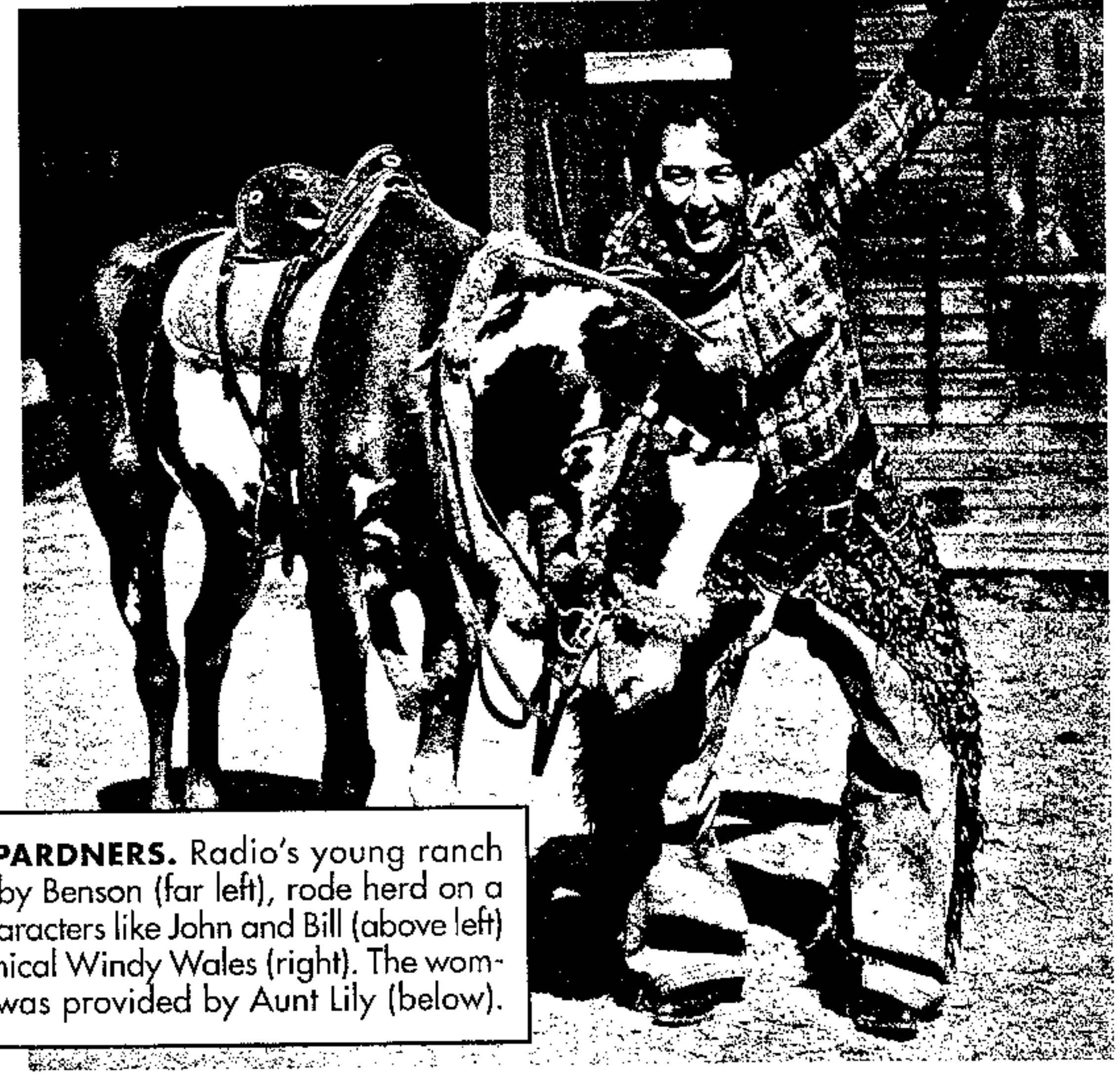
IN the early '30s in Palisade (now Fort Lee), New Jersey, I'd come in from playing on weekday afternoons at 4:25, plop in front of our Majestic radio and tune in *Bobby Benson's Adventures*.

This 15-minute show, sometimes called *Bobby Benson and the H-Bar-O Rangers*, was a predecessor to the better-known *Bobby Benson and the B-Bar-B Riders*, which began in 1949 on the Mutual Network.

The Bobby Benson I grew up lis-

tening to was sponsored by Hecker's H-O cereals. My friend Ken Hights and I still recall characters like Tex Mason, Windy Wales, Aunt Lily, Polly Armstead, John and Bill, Jock and an Indian named Harka.

I think the ranch mentioned in the show was somewhere in West Texas, because there was occasional mention of cold and snow. The ranch hands lived in a bunkhouse where many of the episodes took place. Windy Wales, a



HOWDY, PARDNERS. Radio's young ranch owner, Bobby Benson (far left), rode herd on a bunch of characters like John and Bill (above left) and the comical Windy Wales (right). The woman's touch was provided by Aunt Lily (below).



RADIO RANGER. Author's pal Ken Haight, now of Old Tappan, New Jersey, sported his Bobby Benson chaps (above) as he took aim on some cattle-rustling desperadoes with his six-shooter.

buffoon with a high-sounding voice, was often the victim of tricks by the other ranch hands. He also had a knack for getting himself into ridiculous or impossible situations.

Tex was the foreman of the ranch.

He usually took charge of things, and he and Bobby solved most problems together. Tex had a masculine voice, and Bobby sounded like a young teenager.

Ken and I, like many other kids in the '30s, were greatly influenced by the cowboys we heard on the radio or saw in the movies. Ken recalls saving boxtops from H-O Oats so he could send away for genuine leather chaps, a lariat and a neckerchief.

When they arrived in the mail, Ken

HELLO, HARKA. The cowboys at the H-Bar-O Ranch had an Indian as a fellow ranch hand. Harka (above) was among those Bobby could call on when trouble hit.

was pleased to see the chaps were made of high-quality leather with genuine lamb's wool fronts.

With the lariat rope (dyed bright yellow) and his red bandanna neckerchief, he was ready to take his place among the legions of Bobby Benson's Rangers.

A wireless man pulls the plug

LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles' oldest independent recording studio — where engineers recorded the West's first wireless broadcasts — is closing after 69 years.

Henry Mancini recorded the first version of *Moon River* there and Paul Francis Webster and Sammy Fain did *Love Is a Many Splendored Thing*.

Now they're turning off the lights at the Electro-Vox on Melrose Avenue. They'll switch off the last tube-powered amplifier and unplug the last 50-year-old audiotape console tomorrow.

Studio owner Alan Gottschalk is retiring. Mr Gottschalk, 69, grew up in the studio, watching quietly as stars such as Jack Benny hurried in to listen to transcriptions of radio shows that an hour earlier had broadcast from Hollywood to the East Coast.

Because of time zones, performers repeated the shows hours later for the West Coast audience.

"I was always surprised that they weren't laughing at the jokes when they were here listening," Mr Gottschalk said. "But they weren't there to be entertained. They were there to listen for any changes they needed to make in the script."

Mr Gottschalk's father, Bert, was a Warner-Vitagraph movie sound man who recorded early talkies — soundtracks on discs that were synchronised with film reels.

In 1931, he started a recording service for another emerging field — radio.

It was the elder Gottschalk who coined the term "aircheck" to describe his recordings. Soon, entertainers such as Fred Allen, Al Jolson and Burns and Allen were putting in orders to have what are now known as "airchecks" made for their personal use.

He was quickly commissioned to make recordings of programs on local radio stations which routinely aired such events as lectures and the early Academy Awards ceremonies.

In 1950, father and son introduced audiotape in their studio and expanded into radio commercial production.

AP

THE AGE
THURSDAY JUNE 29, 2000

The Weekend

CABBAGES AND KINGS

Gordon House recalls his early days in radio drama, when vegetables were the stars of the show and inanimate objects some of his closest friends

■ One of the great disasters of my BBC career was when I mislaid my cabbage. I should explain that long before I reached the dizzy heights of directing and producing plays, I was a humble — and many people would argue rather more valuable — cog in the radio drama machine: the person who performed the 'live' sound effects in a radio play. In America this particular job is dignified with a proper title — you're the 'Foley artist' — named after the man who invented the process of matching sound effects to previously shot film. In the BBC however, you're the mere 'Spot SM', endlessly opening doors and lighting cigarettes and pouring drinks for the great and the good in the thespian world, who — encumbered with 90-page scripts (for there is no time, nor money, for an actor to learn a radio drama script) — are incapable of doing the job for themselves. I was so nervous on my very first radio play that, having started to pour a very large gin-and-tonic for a character being played by Carleton Hobbs (the Laurence Olivier of radio drama), I was quite unable to stop pouring — with the inevitable result that before long Mr Hobbs's script had assumed the consistency of a wet sponge. He was, all things considered, quite forgiving in his choice of expletive.

But such embarrassment pales into insignificance compared to the day I lost my cabbage. We were recording a radio version of *A Man for All Seasons* by Robert Bolt — a play which culminates — or at least did in our radio version — with the execution of the principle character, Sir Thomas More. Now every Spot SM knows that the believability of a sound effect is often conveyed far more effectively by an imaginative substitute than by the 'real' sound. You want to hear a man walking on snow? Simple. Squeeze and twist a roll of cotton wool to the rhythm of the man's steps. You want an army to march over a bridge, and you've only got the budget for four actors? No problem. Half fill a biscuit tin with pebbles and shake them vigorously from side to side.

Hear that fire crackling gently in the grate? That's no fire, that's a Spot SM gently fondling a sheet of cellophane.

Which brings us to the cabbage — every Spot SM's favourite prop when the script calls for an execution or guillotining. Actors are notoriously reluctant to lose their heads — especially at the rates we pay in radio. An audience, however,

can be entirely convinced that the most gruesome dismemberment has taken place by the simple expedient of slicing deftly through a cabbage with a freshly-sharpened knife. I had chosen my Sir Thomas More

cabbage with great care, auditioning various-sized vegetables the night before in my flat, and recording the results on a small portable tape recorder. (This had the unfortunate side-effect of losing me my then girlfriend, who became con-

vinced she was dating a serial-killer). Having flirted briefly with a cauliflower, I selected a rather magnificent Savoy cabbage to do the job, and left it, untended, in the Spot Effects cupboard. Alas and alack, some hungry passer-by, unaware of the cabbage's importance in our nation's history, nicked the inoffensive vegetable and (presumably) cooked it. I, meantime, blissfully

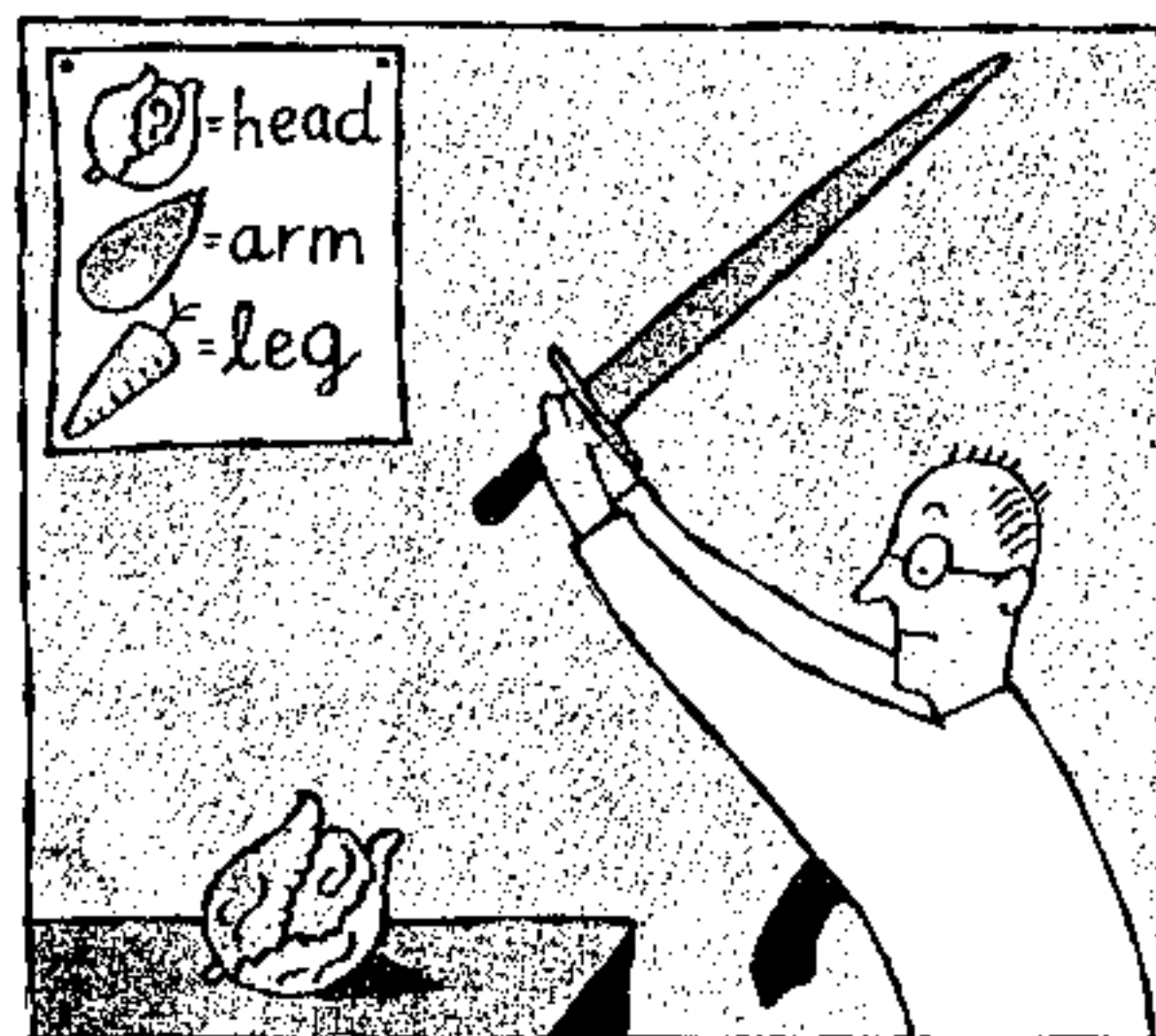
unaware, was in the studio, opening doors and pouring flagons of ale, while I awaited my big moment in the concluding scene.

Imagine my horror when I found the cupboard bare. We were already over-running, and the director — a man of notoriously fickle moods — was patrolling the studio restlessly, anxious to execute More as quickly as possible and retire with his cast to the bar. He looked at me askance as I re-entered the studio, devoid of vegetable. There was an ominous Pinter-esque pause.

"I suppose," I said, my voice trembling a little, "there's no chance of a last minute reprieve for Sir Thomas, is there?"

Gordon House is Executive Producer of World Service Drama

'Having flirted briefly with a cauliflower, I selected a rather magnificent Savoy cabbage'

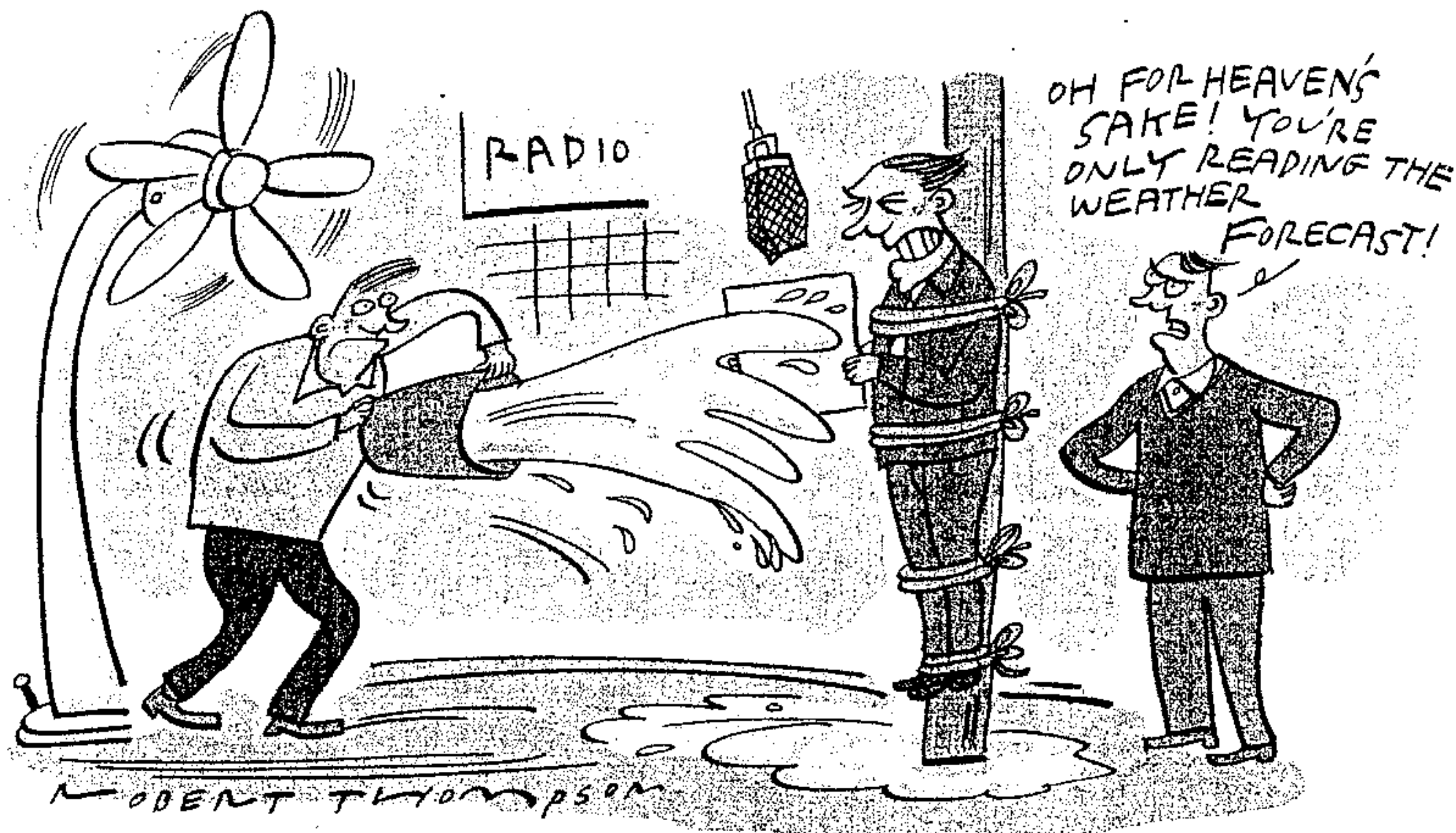


SALLY KINDBERG

Method Acting on Radio

METHOD ACTING MAY HAVE PRODUCED SOME GREAT SCREEN PERFORMANCES, BUT IN RADIO IT DOESN'T WORK QUITE SO WELL, WRITES GORDON HOUSE, HEAD OF BBC DRAMA, RADIO

WORLD SHOWCASE | MERIDIAN - MASTERPIECE



It won't surprise you to know that radio producers don't have much regard for 'Method' actors. When you consider that an hour's radio play takes a mere two days to record, there simply isn't time to allow an actor to indulge in the more extreme forms of Stanilavskian self-indulgence.

Take the famous scene in *Some Like It Hot* where Marilyn Monroe, at the height of her love affair with the Method, drove poor Tony Curtis to distraction (and to an abiding hatred of chicken) by insisting on over 50 repeats in one short scene. One in which Curtis had to nonchalantly consume part of a chicken wing.

On radio, we could have recorded 15 sequences in the time Marilyn took to fully explore her character's motivation, draw deep into her psyche and unlock the necessary critical, emotional response towards the dead meat in front of her. (I refer, of course, to the chicken wing). Added to which, there is the simple fact that radio budgets simply wouldn't accommodate the cost of that much chicken.

There is, moreover, something deeply alienating (in the best Brechtian sense) about the whole process of radio acting. While directors and actors do everything possible to shy away from the artificial 'reading' of lines, and while every other 'note' we give is a plea to 'make a speech more truthful', there is a limit to how much self-exploration a radio actor can do. Picture it: an actor - script in one hand, glass of water in the

other - knows that in four speeches' time, when he flounces out of the room in a huff, he will walk backwards towards the door (in order to remain facing the microphone) and that this door, simply a standing prop, will be opened by a mysterious third person who has no business being in the scene at all and promptly slammed shut - in the character of the actor - by this same mysterious person (the foley artist or 'spot' studio manager).

'I arrived unexpectedly early in the studio to find my leading actor in a state of partial undress'

That is not to say that that I don't, from time to time, run across an actor whose bible is Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* - and who demands, often at the expense of all his colleagues, detailed motivational suggestions in order, as he'll put it to me, "To get my creative juices flowing." Long experience tells me that the smaller the part, the more juice is liable to flow.

I once directed a very starchy British actress in a particularly unremitting Greek tragedy. She was endeavouring to finish a long, histrionic and somewhat bloodthirsty speech to a fellow actor whose part was limited to a solitary line of

consolation at the end. He attempted to interrupt her, however, at every conceivable opportunity, and when, in exasperation, she asked him why he was doing this, he replied, "Because I feel from my innermost being that this is exactly what my character would do in real life."

"That's fascinating," retorted the starchy actress. "Because I was just feeling, from my innermost being, that my character would punch you on the nose."

Method acting can, however, have its place in the radio studio. I once directed a production of *Don Juan* where I, and my leading actor, had decided that the Don's incessant womanising was a form of incipient lunacy. On the second day of recording, I arrived unexpectedly early in the studio to find my leading actor in a state of partial undress, engaged in extra-curricular rehearsal with a particularly attractive colleague. "Ah. Sorry Gordon!" He said, "Just immersing myself in the... er... role, as it were." So saying, he dropped down on all fours and galloped out of the studio, neighing and whinnying as he went.

There was, you might say, Method in his madness...

For times, see **Method Acting**, page 31.

We have five copies of Constantin Stanislavski's *My Life In Art* to win. See page 54

ILLUSTRATION: ROBERT THOMPSON



The world according to Lux

NEW YORK

How radio drama cheered up, and changed, America

WHEN faced with hardship, everyone craves escape. During the Depression, Americans turned to their radios. Despite tumbling wages and rising unemployment, most found the money to buy a radio. By 1937, four out of five households owned at least one.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, a typical radio station devoted over half its broadcasting time to music and the rest to education, literature, religion and "novelties". This changed with the arrival of variety programmes such as "The Maxwell House Show Boat" and "The Kraft Music Hall". Comedy shows, too, quickly gained popularity. "The Eddie Cantor Show", Rudy Vallee's "Fleischman Hour" and "The Jack Pearl Show" were early favourites.

Yet it was dramatic radio, as it became known, that proved most popular of all. Nobody really knows who invented it in America. Most radio buffs trace its origins back to WGY, a station broadcasting from Schenectady, New York. In August 1922 WGY's dramatisation of "The Wolf", a play by Eugene Walter, was broadcast to rapturous acclaim. This success led to the commissioning of "The WGY Players", a show presenting radio adaptations of popular stage plays. It was the first regularly-scheduled series of its kind.

Radio's growing popularity scared Hollywood. By the early 1930s, almost all the major studios had forbidden their stars to appear on air. But they changed their tune when they realised that radio could spread a star's fame and boost box-office receipts. "45 Minutes in Hollywood" was the outcome of this new spirit of co-operation. The show featured scenes from upcoming movies performed by unknown actors, followed by interviews with their real stars. This concept was taken a step further in "Hollywood Hotel", a variety show launched in 1934 and hosted by Louella Parsons (above, second left), a caustic and highly influential gossip-columnist. Not content with interviewing stars, Parsons made them act out scenes from films in which they were appearing. The stars did so without payment, partly for the publicity it brought them and their studios and partly because they were terrified of Parsons.

Enter soap

The next big development in dramatic radio came in 1934, with the arrival of "The Lux Radio Theatre". Lux was a creation of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency (JWT), which saw the show as a way of promoting Lux toilet soap—a pro-

duct favoured, it was claimed, by "nine out of ten screen stars". The Lux concept was simple: to broadcast one-hour adaptations of popular dramas interspersed with advertisements for Lux toilet soap. This it did very well.

Lux was based in New York and began by adapting popular Broadway plays. Only one of these adaptations, "Dulcy" from 1935, survives. The loss of the other 81 early shows, though regrettable, does not amount to a cultural disaster. Few of them made any effort to explore radio's dramatic potential. Innovations such as special effects and musical links between scenes were kept to a minimum, in favour of making listeners feel that they were listening to a show that was actually taking place in a theatre.

Although Lux got off to a promising start, ratings dropped over the second season. The show's producers solved the problem by decamping to Hollywood in 1936 and concentrating on adapting film scripts rather than Broadway plays. For many listeners, therefore, radio gave them their first taste of Hollywood. JWT executives also had the inspired idea of hiring Cecil B. DeMille as Lux's new host, duping listeners into believing he was also the show's producer. DeMille came with a formidable reputation as a purveyor of big-screen extravaganzas, and this rubbed off favourably on Lux, as did tales of his dedication to "producing" the show. Jeff Corey, an actor, remembers recording a programme in 1940:

There were some terrible rainstorms and [DeMille] was at his ranch, and he got on a horse and he went through the muck and the floods and all that, and then got transportation and came to the theatre for the

► performance in his mud-splattered puttees and riding crop in hand.

On another occasion DeMille, who claimed he was recovering from surgery, arrived at the show by ambulance and read his lines from a stretcher, surrounded by a gaggle of Hollywood photographers.

Listeners couldn't get enough of the new Lux. Hours before airtime, a vast queue would form outside the studio at the Music Box Theatre in Hollywood. Seating inside was limited; sometimes up to 1,000 people were turned away. They did not always go quietly. A CBS press release from 1936 records that during the broadcast of "Madame Sans-Gene", starring Jean Harlow and Robert Taylor,

the overflow crowd would not disperse and finally crashed through the cordon of police right into the theatre while the show was going out over the air. The noise was thunderous but listeners were unaware that anything unusual had happened, for at the very moment the riot had started, the script called for a mob scene.

The very size of Lux's audience was a source of some anxiety for the actors. Many fretted over their delivery and timing—understandably enough, as they worked in the knowledge that around 30m people were hanging on their every syllable. Ruby Keeler confessed to terrors before her first Lux appearance in "Burlesque". A panic-stricken Lupe Velez fled for the "little girl's room" mid-broadcast, only to be intercepted by one of the show's directors and returned to her microphone. Joan Crawford was fine during rehearsals for "Chained", but in the hours before the show went live her hands began shaking so violently that she could not hold the script.

Lux's Hollywood run—an impressive 844 shows over nearly 20 years—kicked off with "The Legionnaire and the Lady", starring Marlene Dietrich and Clark Gable, one of a number of adaptations in which stars from rival film studios were brought together on the radio. JWR's advertising was fairly unobtrusive by today's standards. Later on the programmes would be peppered with brief commercial announcements, but JWR's favourite approach was always the dramatised sketch. A 1935 version of "Adam and Eva" incorporated the following exchange:

JANE: Poor Amy! Everybody noticed she wasn't having a good time! It's a shame. After all, Amy is quite pretty...

SUE: And the men like her, really. Why, my brother says he'd go for Amy in a big way if it weren't for her complexion—

JANE: No, really, did he? Gee—let's help Amy! Let's send her some Lux Toilet Soap—

SUE: And I'll put in a note about how it guards against "cosmetic skin". That's all the hint she needs...

DeMille (and later presenters) regularly puffed other Lux products, too. A good example is the introduction to a 1939 version of "Pygmalion". "From the standpoint of the woman, 'Pygmalion' is pure Cinderella", the host intoned:

Of course, the pumpkin coach and glass slippers are a little out of date. Present-day Cinderellas who want to catch the eye of some handsome prince are more likely to depend on that fresh-out-of-the-band-box look and are sure there's a good supply of Lux Flakes on hand. In fact, I suppose a modern Cinderella considers Lux Flakes standard equipment.

Silky as it may have sounded to listeners, Lux flirted with broadcasting disaster more than once. A 1948 dramatisation of "I Walk Alone" almost failed to make the air when the star of the show, Burt Lancaster, did not turn up. Just eight minutes before the scheduled broadcast, the director boldly decided that an unknown ra-

dio actor called Ira Grosell (later to find fame as the actor Jeff Chandler) would have to take Lancaster's place. The deception worked perfectly. Lancaster arrived at the studio 12 minutes into the broadcast and took over at an opportune point. Even the show's sponsors did not realise what had happened until they were told.

A different problem confronted the producers and cast of "The Doctor Takes a Wife", a comedy which was aired the day after Pearl Harbour. The broadcast was interrupted in the second act by a CBS news bulletin reporting that unidentified aircraft were heading for San Francisco. A promise of further news bulletins threw the programme into complete disarray. Lux's writing team frantically hammered out an abridged ending to the drama, guessing how much they would have to cut out to make room for all the interruptions.

Most of the time, though, things went smoothly. Getting hold of the original material was easy enough. Rights for some screenplays were leased to Lux for a small fee, others were offered free in return for publicity. Adapting from film to radio turned out to be the hardest part. A scene from a 1951 Warner Brothers picture, "Goodbye, Mr Fancy", in which a woman rejects a man's embrace, illustrates a typical difficulty. How to convey this wordless action on radio? A new line was written into the script: "Sorry I smeared your lipstick", says the male character. As a historian of the Lux shows notes, this line "not only tips the listener off to what has transpired, but is in keeping with the character of the wisecracking newspaperman who said it and is a good piece of dialogue as well."

Lux's huge popularity inspired any number of similar shows, among them "The Silver Theatre", "The Gulf Screen Guild Theatre" and "The Campbell Playhouse". The latter was really Orson Welles's "Mercury Theatre" with a new sponsor. It specialised in adapting classic novels and plays, most famously "War of the Worlds", which created widespread panic when it was broadcast in 1938. Its success gave rise to a 1953 Paramount film—which was in turn adapted for Lux two years later.

Lux's final programme, "Edward, My Son", aired on June 7th 1955. Cultural historians say that it was the growing popularity of television, rather than competition from other radio shows, that saw Lux off the air. No doubt television had a lot to do with it. But another explanation may be that people had less to worry about in the 1950s than they did in the grim 1930s and 1940s. They no longer needed to escape by imagining that, in their own sitting rooms, they were playing host to Hollywood. ■

How to hear them

You don't need a radio to listen to the Lux shows today. Around 50 can be heard free over the Internet (visit <http://www.oldtimeradio.com/lux>). Specialist distributors such as Fair Pickings and Radio Showcase also offer many of the 656 surviving programmes on compact disc or audiocassette. The old-time radio website (<http://www.old-time.com/toc.html>) posts an extensive list of companies offering such a service, along with much other useful information on radio in its golden age. Purists who insist on listening to Lux on the radio (and who live in America) can tune in to WRVO, KNX or KPCC, all of which feature old-time drama. For extra authenticity, try wearing spats while doing so.



The YESTERDAY USA RADIO NETWORKS

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Unlike traditional Radio Stations that broadcast directly to members of the general public, Yesterday USA **only** transmits its powerful signals directly to broadcast satellites and/or to organizations that stream audio on the internet! Therefore, our actions **DO NOT** constitute a "Public Performance" of any kind! YUSA is **NOT** licensed by The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and as a result, is **NOT** subject to any FCC rules and/or regulations! Persons and/or organizations who choose to tune to the output of the Satellites that broadcast our signals, and persons and/or organizations who choose to visit Web-Sites that voluntarily stream our audio; do so at their own personal risks! We do, however, pledge to (at all times) offer only clean, wholesome, family type material; by presenting public domain old time radio shows from the 1920s - 1950s, 24 hours a day - 7 days a week. It is possible to listen to YUSA via the Internet, C-band Satellite Dishes, most Cable TV Systems, in many Hospitals & Nursing Homes, on cellular and dial-up telephones and on various privately operated Low-Power AM & FM Radio Stations. Our service is free of charge to any and all persons and/or organizations who care to listen and/or to all persons and/or organizations who may care to distribute or re-broadcast our signals in any form or manor! (Select "[How To Listen](#)" from the menu on the left, for more information.)

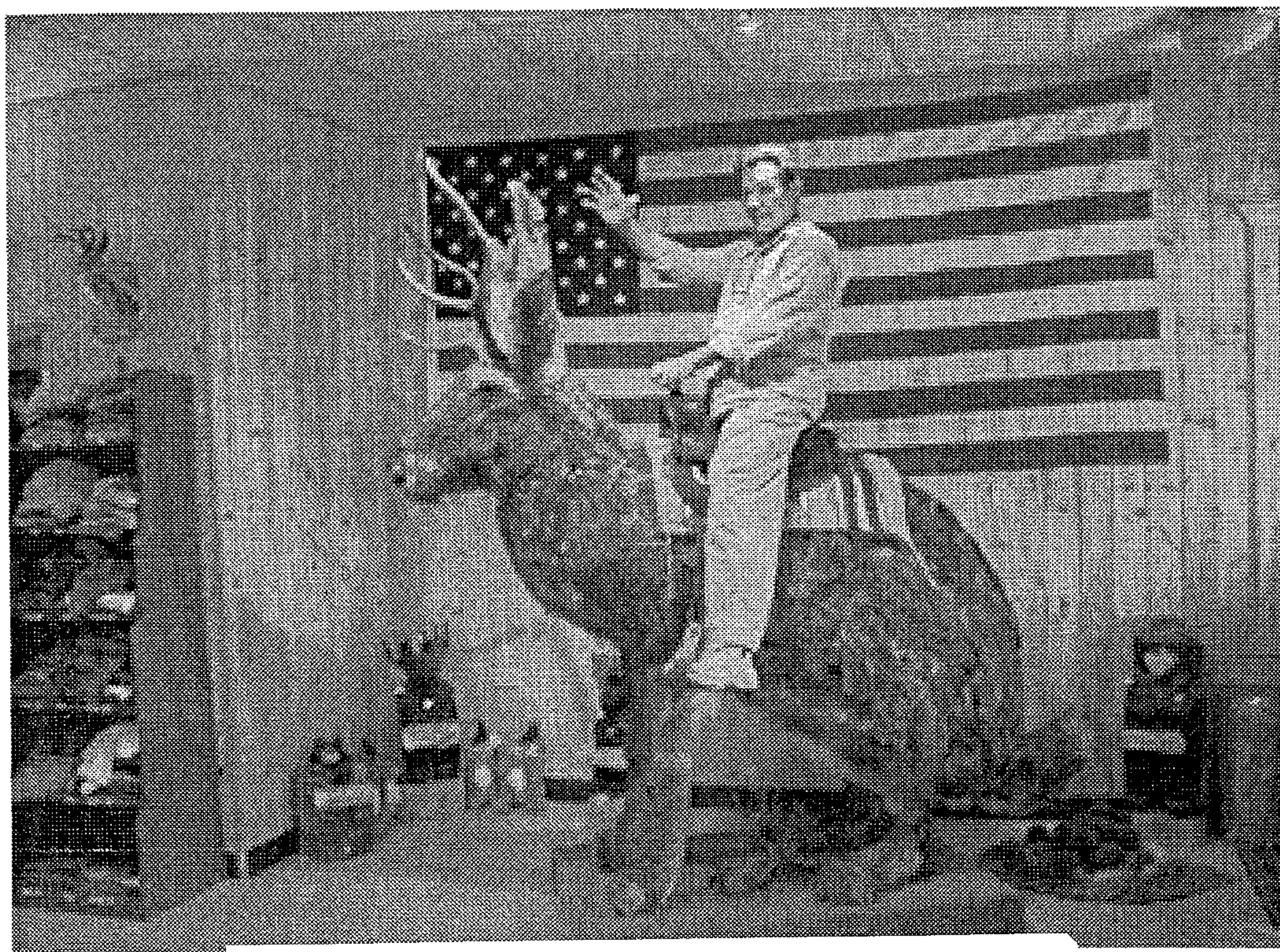
Yesterday USA was founded in 1983 by Bill Bragg (shown right). It is the worldwide voice of the *National Museum Of Communications, Inc.*, a non-profit 501 (c) 3 Texas Corporation, which Bill also founded in 1979. Yesterday USA's purpose is to preserve and present the history of radio and to tell the world about the Museum.



The station operates on a non-profit basis and is **funded entirely by contributions** from its listeners and anonymous donors. YUSA is operated by an all-volunteer staff. **No one** at YUSA receives a salary of any kind! (Select "[Supporting YUSA](#)" from the menu on the left for more information.)

YUSA is on the air 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and operates on "two-week cycles". During each two-week period a total of 87 hours of LIVE and/or recorded programming is prepared and presented. The format is public domain OLD TIME RADIO SHOWS all day long everyday, with a LIVE Broadcast each night at 10:30 PM Eastern Time. 24 of the 87 hours are created by a staff of over 25 dedicated volunteers (such as Ronnie Milsap, Frank Bresee and others). The volunteer DJ's record their presentations (containing the Old Time Radio shows) in their home studios, and then send their recorded tapes to the YUSA Studios. These tapes are then assembled onto 16 ninety minute Master Program Tapes, which are aired via a computer controlled automation system invented by Bill Bragg. The Rotation Schedule (available only to Supporting Members) is such that the listener can tune in during the same ninety minute period each day; and always hear something new and different! The 63 remaining hours (**87 hours minus 24 hours contained on the 16 Program Tapes**) consists of the nightly LIVE Broadcasts, Special Programs and the 10 hour Radio Entertainment Network (REN) presentation on Sundays.

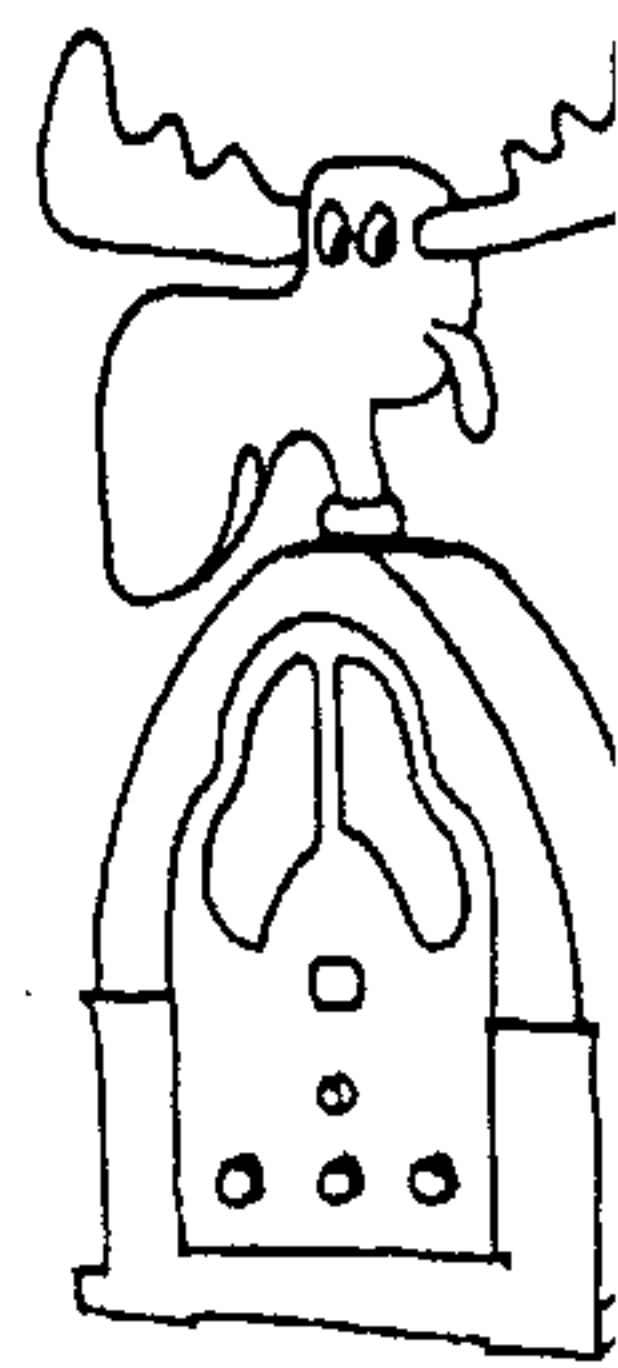
Video librarian Jerry Williams astride Big Bobb at SPERDVAC headquarters



National Old-Time Radio Enthusiasts - N.O.T.R.E.

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