

# NOSTALGIA DIGEST

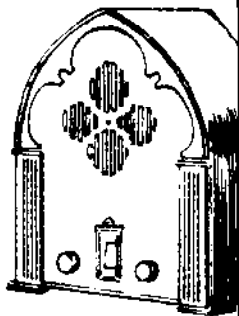
AND  
RADIO  
GUIDE



RED SKELTON

# A Day of Radio from the 1930s

On September 21, 1939 radio station WJSV in Washington, D. C. recorded their entire broadcast day, from sign-on to sign-off. This set is a one-of-a-kind item. You will hear everything as it sounded the day it was recorded — the pops and crackles of the transcription discs, the station breaks and technical difficulties — along with all the music, comedy, drama, news and commercials that aired on September 21, 1939. This set includes a program guide with a description of each show and information about your favorite stars.



## A DAY FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO CONTENTS:

6:30 am Sunrise with Arthur Godfrey	2:40 pm French Premiere Daladier
8:30 am Certified Magic Carpet	3:00 pm Address Commentary
8:45 am Bachelor's Children	3:15 pm The Career of Alice Blair
9:00 am Pretty Kitty Kelly	3:30 pm News
9:15 am Story of Myrt and Marge	3:42 pm Rhythm and Romance
9:30 am Hilltop House	3:45 pm Scattergood Baines
9:45 am Stepmother	4:00 pm Baseball: Cleveland Indians at Washington Senators
10:00 am Mary Lee Taylor	5:15 pm The World Dances
10:15 am Brenda Curtis	5:30 pm News
10:30 am Big Sister	5:45 pm Sports News
10:45 am Aunt Jenny's True Life Stories	6:00 pm Amos 'n' Andy
11:00 am Jean Abbey	6:15 pm The Parker Family
11:15 am When a Girl Marries	6:30 pm Joe E. Brown
11:30 am Romance of Helen Trent	7:00 pm Ask-It Basket
11:45 am Our Gal Sunday	7:30 pm Strange as It Seems
NOON The Goldbergs	8:00 pm Major Bowes Original Amateur Hour
12:15 pm Life Can Be Beautiful	9:30 pm Columbia Workshop
12:30 pm Road of Life	10:00 pm Americans at Work
12:45 pm This Day is Ours	10:15 pm News
1:00 pm Sunshine Report	10:30 pm Music
1:15 pm Life and Love of Dr. Susan	11:00 pm Albert Warner
1:30 pm Your Family and Mine	11:30 pm Jerry Livingston's Orchestra
1:45 pm News	12:00 am Teddy Powell Band
1:50 pm Albert Warner	12:30 am Louis Prima Band
2:00 pm President Roosevelt's Address to Congress	1:00 am Bob Chester Orchestra

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# CHUCK SCHADEN'S NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

BOOK TWENTY-FOUR

CHAPTER TWO

FEBRUARY/MARCH 1998

## Hello, Out There in Radioland!

BY CHUCK SCHADEN

Last year was not a very good year for show business. We lost many of our favorite entertainers and personalities during the twelve months of 1997. They're gone, but not forgotten:

**HY AVERBACK**, 76, announcer for Bob Hope, Jack Paar and Jack Carson on radio; produced and directed such TV shows as *M\*A\*S\*H*, *F-Troop*, *Dick Powell Show*, *Flying Nun*. October 14.

**LEW AYERS**, 88, movie actor best known for his starring role in *All Quiet on the Western Front* and in the title role of the popular *Dr. Kildare* series on the silver screen and on radio. December 30, 1996.

**RUDOLF BING**, 95, general manager of New York's Metropolitan Opera from 1950-1972. September 2.



GEORGE FENNEMAN  
with Groucho Marx

### NECROLOGY OF 1997

#### We Remember Them Well

**HARRY BLACKSTONE**, 62, magician who performed around the world, carrying on the legacy of his famous father with astonishing magic tricks and illusions. May 14.

**JOSH BRADY**, 78, popular radio host on WBBM, Chicago during the 1950s, heard later on WMAQ and WIVS. An Arthur Godfrey sound-alike, he referred to himself as Josh "B'gosh" Brady. April 30.

**SIDNEY BREESE**, 89, Chicago radio actor, appeared in scores of soap operas and other dramas from the '30s thru the '50s; acted in and directed theatrical productions at Ivanho, Drury Lane and other theatres in the Chicago area. March 8.

**THELMA CARPENTER**, 77, popular singer appearing on radio on the *Eddie Cantor Show*. May 17.

**ADRIANA CASELOTTI**, 80, the voice of Snow White in Walt Disney's first feature-length cartoon. January 19.

**AL 'JAZZBO' COLLINS**, 78, jazz disc jockey and TV host of "Soundies" on American Movie Classics. September 30. (Hear Al 'Jazzbo' Collins in *X Minus One* on *TWTD* March 7.)

**PAT COLLINS**, 62, entertainer billed as the "hip hypnotist" who appeared on TV in the 1950s and '60s. May 31.

**JOE CONTI**, 72, stand-up comedian and tap dancer, a Chicago favorite who performed for many years at Mangam's Chateau in suburban Lyons. April 30.

**JACQUES-YVES COUSTEAU**, 87, French-born oceanographer and underwater explorer who entranced millions with his books, motion pictures and television documentaries. June 23.

## NECROLOGY OF 1997

**GAIL DAVIS**, 71, actress who starred as *Annie Oakley* in the 1955-58 TV series. *March 15.*

**JOHN DENVER**, 53, singer-song writer-actor, wrote "Leaving on a Jet Plane," sang "Rocky Mountain High" and "Take Me Home, Country Road." Co-starred with George Burns in the film *Oh God*, 1977. *October 12.*

**ALLAN DE WITT**, 80, vocalist who was replaced by Frank Sinatra in the Tommy Dorsey orchestra, later sang with Jan Savitt and his Top Hatters, then formed his own band. *April 24.*

**NANCY DICKERSON**, 70, award-winning journalist who in 1960 became the first female correspondent for CBS-TV news. Also worked for NBC, Fox and PBS. *October 18.*

**IVAN DITMARS**, 90, versatile musician on many radio shows in 1930s and '40s. Directed and wrote musical scores; played organ, harp and piano on such programs as *Escape* and *Stars Over Hollywood*. *September 10.*

**DAVID DOYLE**, 67, movie and TV character actor best known as the assistant to the boss on the TV series *Charlie's Angels*. *February 26.*

**JOEY FAYE**, 87, veteran vaudeville comedian and second banana comic, appeared on Broadway, in movies and on TV. *April 26.*

**GEORGE FENNEMAN**, 77, long-time sidekick to Groucho Marx on *You Bet Your Life*; announced *Dragnet* on radio and TV. *May 29.*

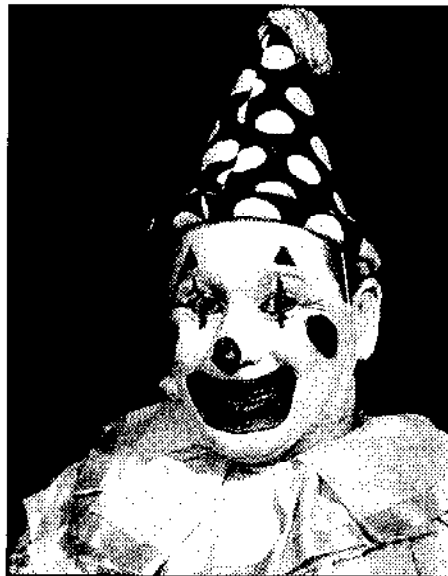
**HAL GOODMAN**, 82, award-winning comedy writer for radio and television for Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Jack Paar, Johnny Carson, Flip Wilson. *September 3.*

**GEORGES GUETARY**, 82, Egyptian-born crooner, extremely popular in France, best known to American audiences for his song and dance routines "Stairway to Paradise" and "S'Wonderful" in the 1951 film *An American in Paris*. *September 13.*

**RAY HEATHERTON**, 88, big band era singer with Paul Whiteman, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey; had his own band in the 1930s. Father of singer-dancer Joey Heatherton. *August 15.*

**BOBBY HELMS**, 61, rock n roll singer, first to record "Jingle Bell Rock" in 1957. *June 19.*

**ART HERN**, 90, long-time radio and TV actor whose start in the business was in Chicago; played Ichabod Mudd in *Captain Midnight* se-



**ART HERN**  
as Natco the Clown

ries; appeared on *Ma Perkins*, *Today's Children*, *Jack Armstrong*; was Natco the Clown and the *Pied Piper* on Chicago TV. *August 4.*

**WED HOWARD**, 75, Chicago radio and TV personality, hosted *Melody Magazine* for nine years on WMAQ radio. Was TV network announcer for Ed Sullivan, Dinah Shore and *What's My Line?* *December 18, 1996.*

**RICHARD JAECKEL**, 70, Hollywood character actor, with roles in *Guadacanal Diary*, *Sands of Iwo Jima*, *Dirty Dozen*, *Come Back, Little Sheba*. On TV as Lt. Martin Quirk in *Spencer: For Hire* and as Lt. Ben Edwards on *Baywatch*. *June 14.*

**DENNIS JAMES**, 79, television game show host and commercial spokesman; hosted United Cerebral Palsy telethon for 47 years. *June 3.*

**BILL JOHNSTONE**, 89, versatile radio actor with many roles during the radio days; best known for his starring role as *The Shadow*. *Early 1997, exact date unknown.*

**BRIAN KEITH**, 75, TV actor, played Uncle Bill on *A Family Affair* (1966-71); also on *Hardcastle and McCormick* (1983-86); and in many feature films. *June 24.*

**LUISE KING**, 83, one of the singing King Sisters during the era of big bands and early TV. Married bandleader Alvino Rey. *August 4.*

**CHARLES KURALT**, 62, CBS newsman whose *On The Road* reports celebrated off-beat America for 13 years; hosted CBS-TV's *Sunday Morning* for 15 more years. *July 4.*

**BURTON LANE**, 84, Broadway and Hollywood composer best known for the musicals *Finian's Rainbow* and *On A Clear Day You Can See Forever*. *January 5.*

**ROSINA LAWRENCE**, 84, film actress in *Our Gang* and Laurel and Hardy comedies. *June 23.*

**SHELDON LEONARD**, 89, Jack Benny's famous "tout" character who also played many tough guy roles on radio, television and movies as well as being a prolific director-producer of such TV hits as *I Spy*, *Andy Griffith*, *Danny Thomas*, *Dick Van Dyke*. He played Nick, the bartender who threw George Bailey out into the snow in the classic film, *It's A Wonderful Life*. *January 10.*

**AUDRA LINDLEY**, 79, TV actress best known as Mrs. Roper in *Three's Company* and as Phoebe's grandmother on *Friends*. *October 16.*

**GERALD MARKS**, 96, Tin Pan Alley composer of such hits as "All Of Me" and "Is It True What They Say About Dixie?" *January 27.*

**BURGESS MEREDITH**, 89, respected actor in movies and television; starred as Ernie Pyle in *The Story of GI Joe* (1945), *Of Mice and Men* (1939) and in the *Rocky* series; was the Penguin on TV's *Batman*. *September 9.*

**ROBERT MITCHUM**, 79, motion picture



**SHELDON LEONARD**



**BURGESS MEREDITH**

actor, one of Hollywood's most enduring stars and colorful characters, performing in more than 125 features from 1943-76. *July 1.*

**ALVY MOORE**, 75, Veteran TV actor on many shows; was County Agent Hank Kimball on *Green Acres* (1965-71). *May 4.*

**EDWARD MULHARE**, 74, Irish stage actor who starred in U.S. television series *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* and *Night Rider*; played the lead role of Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady* on Broadway. *May 24.*

**TINY MURPHY**, 67, steel guitar-playing star of the *National Barn Dance*. *November 13, 1996.*

**COL. TOM PARKER**, 87, former carnival barker who managed and guided the career of Elvis Presley. *January 21.*

**PAT PAULSON**, 69, dead pan, droopy-faced comedian, most popular for his appearances on the Smothers Brothers' TV series, who satirically ran for the White House every four years. *April 24.*

**LAWRENCE PAYTON**, 59, one of the original Four Tops, Motown singing group which sold more than 50 million records in the '60s and '70s. *June 20.*

## NECROLOGY OF 1997

**RAY PEARL**, 83, nationally known bandleader from the '30s-'50s who played in many Chicago venues. Orchestra known as Ray Pearl and his Musical Gems. *February 25.*

**DON PORTER**, 84, stage, screen and television actor, remembered for his TV portrayal as Ann Sothern's boss on *Private Secretary* and the father of Sally Fields on the *Gidget* series. *February 11.*

**ARTHUR PRYSOCK**, 68, internationally known, twice Grammy nominated, jazz, rhythm and blues and country singer. *June 21.*

**MARJORIE REYNOLDS**, 80, actress, played the wife of William Bendix in TV's *Life of Riley*; she was also the love interest of rivals Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire in 1942 film *Holiday Inn*, singing "White Christmas" with Bing. *February 1.*

**ALEXANDER SALKIND**, 75, successful independent film producer, made the *Superman* movies starring Christopher Reeves. *March 8.*

**ROBERT SARNOFF**, 78, former president of NBC, helped usher in the era of color TV in 1956 when he dedicated WMAQ-TV, Chicago,



**ARTHUR TRACEY**  
"The Street Singer"

as the nation's first all-color television station.

*February 22.*

**GEORGE SCHAEFER**, 76, award-winning producer and director of Broadway and television. During a 17 year period beginning in 1953, he directed more than 50 productions of the *Hallmark Hall of Fame* on TV. *September 10.*

**REID SHELTON**, 72, TV and Broadway actor who originated the role of Daddy Warbucks in *Annie* in 1976. *June 8.*

**RED SKELTON**, 84, beloved "clown" of radio, television and movies who created such memorable characters as Junior the Mean Widdle Kid, Willy Lump-Lump, Clem Kadiddlechopper, Deadeye, Freddy the Free-loader, and Gertrude & Heathcliff, the cross-eyed sea gulls. *September 17. (Read the cover story about Red Skelton on Page 6 and tune in TWTG March 14 for a Skelton tribute.)*

**GEORG SOLTI**, 84, world-renowned conductor who led the Chicago Symphony Orchestra to fame from 1969-91. *September 5.*

**JAMES STEWART**, 89, one of America's greatest movie stars, a giant of the silver screen, appearing in more than 75 films during a 57 year career. *July 2.*

**LINDA STIRLING**, 75, star of '40s and '50s adventure film serials such as *The Tiger Woman* and *Zorro's Black Whip*. *July 20.*

**ARTHUR TRACY**, 98, radio's celebrated "Street Singer" who sang love songs, ballads and popular tunes during the 1930s. Theme song was "Marta, Rambling Rose of the Wild-wood." *October 5.*

**JESSE WHITE**, 79, dour-faced character actor from radio, TV and movies, seen by millions of televiewers as the original lonely Maytag repairman (1967-89). *January 8.*

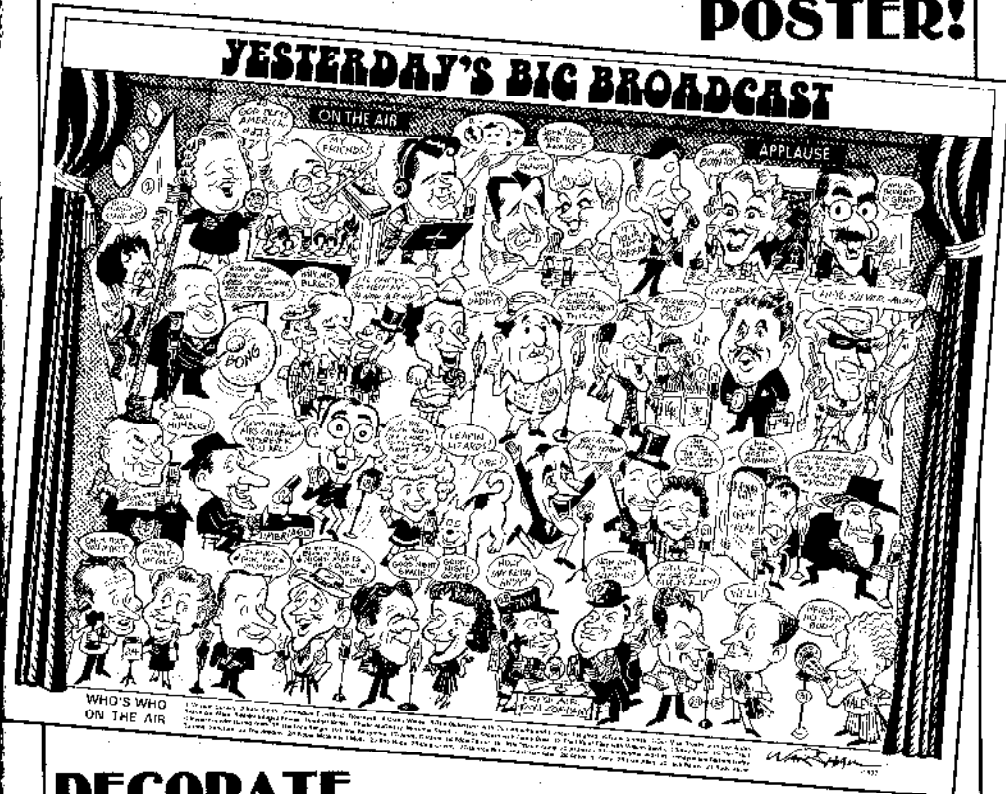
**FRED ZINNEMAN**, 89, Oscar-winning motion picture director who gave us *From Here to Eternity*, *High Noon*, *Oklahoma*, *A Man for All Seasons*. *March 14.*

**BILL ZUCKERT**, 76, veteran character actor on radio, TV, Broadway, movies. On radio he appeared on *Mysterious Traveler*, *Joyce Jordan*, *Official Detective*. *January 23.*

**GONE... BUT NOT FORGOTTEN**

*We Remember Them Well*

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# A Skelton Scrapbook

BY CLAIR SCHULZ

It doesn't take much imagination to picture an adult scolding a boy with the words "You're acting like some kind of clown" and the child replying with a quivering lip, "I can't help it." If that youngster happened to be Red Skelton, both parties were right on the money for he certainly was some kind of clown and he could not have been anything less than what he was: a born laugh-maker.

Richard Bernard Skelton wasn't actually born under the big top in Vincennes, Indiana on July 18, 1913, but he came mighty close for his father was a clown with the Hagenbeck and Wallace Circus. As the only redhead in the family, it didn't take long for Richard to acquire the nickname that would one day be seen on marquees around the world.

Because his father died two months before Red was born the four Skelton brothers had to go to work as soon as they could to support the family. At the age of seven while selling papers as a newsboy Red found that by sassing people on the street they would make a purchase just to get rid of him. Seeds planted then in his brain would sprout later in the form of Junior, the "Mean Widdle Kid."

Perhaps Skelton's first big laugh came the day in 1923 when he accidentally fell off a stage while trying out for a medicine show. For a couple of summers he trav-

*Clair Schulz is a free-lance writer from Stevens Point, Wisconsin, and a regular contributor to our magazine.*

eled with the Doc Lewis Show and later with a stock company of actors before spending some months walking in his father's big-shoed footsteps as a clown for the same Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. For a short time he considered becoming a lion tamer — until the day he saw Clyde Beatty being clawed in a cage.

By 1928 Red had joined the burlesque circuit doing live versions of comic strips such as Mutt and Jeff as well as acting in parodies of popular Broadway plays. Two years later while at the Gaiety Theatre in Kansas City he met an usherette named Edna Stillwell who became his bride in 1931. Meeting Edna could be considered the turning point in Skelton's career because she not only encouraged him to get ahead in show business and arranged for tutoring so he could earn his high school diploma via a correspondence course but she also had a flair for knowing what tickled funny bones and for writing witty dialogue.

The Skeltons performed for a few years as a vaudeville team without much success until they clicked with Canadian audiences for half of 1936 at a Montreal theatre. The highlight of the act became Red's extended pantomime of a man dunking doughnuts. Eating four doughnuts a show three times a day brought down the house, but it also brought Red's weight up thirty-five pounds.

Skelton found a more amusing alternative which was kinder to his waistline in the form of the "Guzzler's Gin" routine.



This bit, which he performed countless times over the years, involved a liquor salesman freely sampling of his own product until he became so inebriated he could hardly stand up. Red, who had always been a keen observer of human behavior, credited his ability to mimic drunkards to watching the unbalanced steps children take when they are learning to walk.

His new act at the Paramount Theatre in New York proved to be such a hit that it led to a guest shot on Rudy Vallee's radio

program in 1937 and a small role the following year in a Ginger Rogers film, *Having A Wonderful Time*.

In 1939 Skelton became a regular on *Avalon Time*, a radio show that mixed songs by Red Foley and band numbers with tidbits of comedy. The playful character that delighted millions later was already very much in evidence as he broke up cast members with ad-libs like "I think I'll look on the next page to see if there are more laughs" and "We get more fun out of this than the audience."

However, the program was laden with wheezes that were old even then (c.g. Man: You want to see Big Chief Running Bear? Woman: Certainly not. Tell him to put some clothes on) and Skelton did not have much opportunity to stretch out in his other strength besides pantomime, sketch comedy.

Red earned small parts in two Dr. Kildare pictures as an orderly, then hit the jackpot in *Whistling in the Dark* as Wally Benton, a radio detective known as The Fox who has to solve a real case. Suddenly, after just one starring role, Skelton was called "the comedy find of 1941" and "the comic who will give all other comics a first-class run for their money."

Just as Universal had been cashing in on the demand for Abbott and Costello movies so Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer quickly turned out two more Wally Benton films, *Whistling in Dixie* and *Whistling in Brooklyn*. Unfortunately for Skelton, MGM's strong suit was musicals, not madcap silliness, so throughout the duration of his contract with the studio, he bounded back and forth between ninety-minute frolics in which he dominated the action and syrupy songfests like *Ship Ahoy* that restricted him to providing comedy relief. *DuBarry Was A Lady* (1943) is a period comedy that might today be regarded in the same favorable light as Bob Hope's *Monsieur*

## A SKELTON SCRAPBOOK

*Beaucaire* if it had been strictly a farce spotlighting his talent instead of an intermittently amusing revue equally memorable for Gene Kelly's graceful moves and Cole Porter's music. Likewise the plot of the picture that bears one of his trademarked expressions as the title, *I Dood It*, took frequent detours while Jimmy Dorsey's Orchestra, Lena Horne, and Eleanor Powell played, sang, or danced.

At times Skelton must have considered himself waterboy for Esther Williams. Playing her husband in her first major role as the *Bathing Beauty*, he helped her get her feet wet, but he also helped himself to a juicy bit impersonating a ballerina. In *Neptune's Daughter* Red and Betty Garrett played second fiddle to the romance between Esther and Ricardo Montalban, although they did have a chance to sing their version of the Oscar-winning "Baby, It's Cold Outside." After sticking his head in for a cameo in *The Dutchess of Idaho*, he managed to inject some chuckles into *Texas Carnival* to balance the Williams-Howard Keel songs by pretending to be a swaggering oil tycoon.

When left on his own and given a solid plot, Skelton demonstrated that he could make a picture without the singing and dancing and still leave audiences saying, "That's entertainment." Red, like Buster Keaton, was adept at playing, with or without words, ordinary men like clerks and ushers who stumble up or down life's ladder in hilarious ways as he did

in *The Show-Off* and *Merton of the Movies*.

But Skelton had to go to Columbia on loan-out from MGM to get one of his best roles, that of *The Fuller Brush Man*, an inept salesman trying with Janet Blair's assistance to extricate himself from a sticky web of circumstances that implicates him in a murder. Two years later in 1950 MGM fed off the success of that film by putting Red in the similarly-titled *The Yellow Cab Man* and repeating the man-on-the-run story line.

By this time Keaton, recognizing that Skelton's talents were akin to his, had asked Louis B. Mayer for a chance to work with Red to produce comedies in his distinctive



"Guzzlers Gin Is A Smoooooth Drink"

style and had been turned down. However, Keaton's influence appeared on screen in the scene of *A Southern Yankee* in which, following Buster's suggestion, Red wore the "half and half" uniform of blue and gray which allowed him to walk across the battlefield unscathed and in *Watch the Birdie*, a remake of Keaton's *The Cameraman*, that featured Skelton in three different roles.

Although Skelton the movie actor may have vacillated between hits and miss, comedy and musical, and starring and supporting parts, Skelton the radio comedian was a success from the time his own program debuted in 1941. The show shot into the top ten almost immediately and stayed there for a decade, sometimes even challenging *The Bob Hope Show* and *Fibber McGee and Molly* for the number one spot.

During the war years Ozzie Nelson and his orchestra provided the music while wife Harriet sang and played foil to Red's ready-made cast of Junior, bumpkin Clem Kadiddlehopper, gravelly-voiced Deadeye, punchy Willie Lump-Lump, and impetuous Boliver Shagnasty (spelled, as Boliver always insisted, with "one shag and two nasties") in sketches introduced as pages taken from the "Skelton Scrapbook of Satire." The show went off the air soon as Skelton received his draft notice in early 1944. (Red claimed to be the only film celebrity to go in a private and come out a private. At least he wasn't demoted.)

By the time Skelton returned to radio late in 1945 Ozzie and Harriet had their own



Red Skelton at Work with his Radio Sound Effects Team

show, but he was ably supported by a new cast of Verna Felton and Lurene Tuttle who did all they could as Junior's grandma and mother to raise the brat who was quite aptly described by one of his victims as "a hot-foot with legs." Lurene and GeGe Pearson acted as girlfriends to Kadiddlehopper, the inane rustic who took pride in his stupidity and openly resented it when Mortimer Snerd threatened his claim to being America's foremost moron.

Despite the fact that Red and Edna had divorced in 1943 their relationship remained amicable as she assumed the roles of his business manager and chief gagwriter. From time to time Skelton would acknowledge her contribution as he did on the October 27, 1947 show when he said after delivering a mild joke, "I wrote it myself. It gives you an idea of what kind of material you'd hear if Edna didn't have anything to do with this."

Red's asides often provoked bigger laughs than the gags. When he saw a plum coming up he would say, "Prepare yourself folks. Here it comes." In the middle of an involved story he would interrupt

## A SKELTON SCRAPBOOK

himself and say, "Don't go. It's gotta get better."

Skelton could handle muffs brilliantly like the night Verna said "poodle" instead of "puddle" when he quickly added, "That's okay. It's been raining cats and dogs" or one of his own by explaining that "I fell in my mother's washtub and got a little bluing in my gray matter."

But if *The Red Skelton Show* had attempted to get by on bloopers and improvised lines it would have been levelled by a low-swinging Hooper and buried. The writers gave the Skelton crew a steady stream of decent jokes that were funny to the eyes and the ears such as the image formed when Clem said he used a mackerel on the roof of the barn as a weather vane because "that way you can tell which way the wind's blowing without looking up."

Most comedy programs that were not sitcoms regularly featured guest stars, but Red didn't need a big name to generate laughs or to raise ratings because he had his own stock company locked up in his larynx. At one time a laugh-meter registered his program drawing guffaws every eleven seconds, a record no show ever topped.

Of all the radio comedians who took the giant step over to television, none of them made a smoother transition than Red Skelton did. Whether the script called for jesting in a monologue, acting out a scene in pantomime, or cavorting in a sketch, Skelton was the right man for the job for twenty years from September 1951 to August 1971.

On TV Red showcased his repertoire of zany characters and over the years modified them a bit. The gallery still included Deadeye, although some of the larceny running through his veins had been trans-

fused into San Fernando Red, a con man who probably could have outfleeced Sgt. Bilko, and canvas-backed boxer Cauliflower McPugg, who borrowed some of Willie's grogginess. Junior, Clem, and Bolivar also came along for the ride. Hobo Freddy the Freeloader gave Red a chance to speak volumes without words. Skelton's version of O. Henry's "The Cop and the Anthem," detailing Freddy's efforts to get arrested so he could spend the holidays in a warm jail cell, became a Christmas tradition cherished by those who watched it every year.

Just as "I dood it" was a catch phrase in the early 1940s so another generation of children found pleasure in emulating Deadeye's "Whoa. Oh, c'mon horse. I said 'Whoa,'" McPugg's "There goes another flock of them," and the little jump and kick Red would do to the accompaniment of tinkling bells.

Few if any programs on television conveyed a greater sense of unbridled joy than *The Red Skelton Show* did. Skelton took delight in breaking up guest stars after they had delivered a punch line with "You're proud of that one, aren't you?" Celebrities from Vincent Price to Carol Channing to Mickey Rooney gleefully accepted a chance to romp with the small screen's finest clown. No doubt many TV viewers today who wonder where the fun has gone would eagerly welcome an opportunity to see once again that redhead with the impish grin cutting capers in their living rooms.

Since Red Skelton was called off this stage on September 17, 1997 at the age of 84, his legion of fans have echoed the words he often spoke with a twinkle in his eye after someone fluffed a line on one of his shows: "We're going to miss you around here." ■

(NOTE: Tune in to a four-hour salute to Red Skelton March 14 on TWTN.)

# The Quiz Kids

## Radio's Incomparable, Indomitable, Juvenile Geniuses

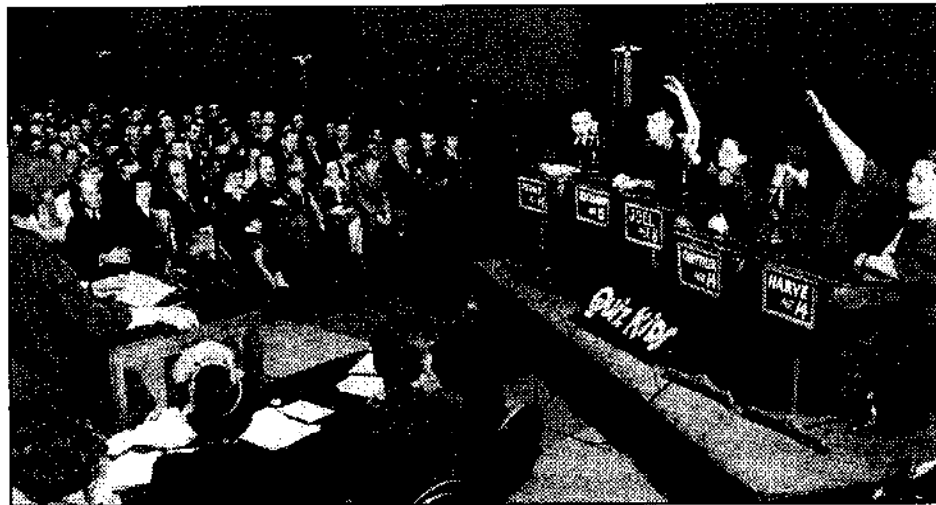
By Wayne W. Daniel

Before the days of ready-made entertainment supplied by radio, television, and movies, people drew on their own ingenuity and devices to amuse themselves. Popular among these homemade diversions were such old-time parlor pastimes as spelling bees and guessing games like "Twenty Questions." These were simple amusements that provided moderate stimulation of the intellect. As modern technology continued to worm its way into more facets of our existence the games we played ourselves became games that we watched and heard other people play. Thus the modest mind-expanding parlor games of our grandparents became highly popular

and sophisticated radio quiz shows of the 1930's and 40's.

From the time *Professor Quiz*, the first nationally broadcast quiz show, went on the air in 1936 until television replaced radio as the major home entertainment medium in the early 1950's, listeners could tune in to dozens of quiz programs of almost every conceivable kind.

Quiz shows appealed to different people for different reasons. They helped satisfy what appeared to be a tremendous public appetite for facts. As radio had expanded the horizons of most Americans it had also aroused their curiosity about the persons, places, and things they were hearing about.



## THE QUIZ KIDS

Some were titillated by the moments of tension and suspense created by programs like *Take It or Leave It* in which contestants could quit after winning early rounds of the game or keep going at the risk of losing their winnings or earning more money for harder questions. Interesting and unpredictable contestants added to the entertainment value of the quiz shows.

At the peak of the question-and-answer programs' popularity *Quiz Kids*, one of the most innovative and successful specimens of the genre, appeared on the scene. This show, the brainchild of Chicago publicist Lou Cowan, was a juvenile version of *Information Please* in which the experts were bright, personable youngsters between the ages of 5 and 16. *Quiz Kids* made its debut on June 28, 1940, from the Chicago studios of the NBC network and was sponsored by Alka-Seltzer. That first Friday evening's program, which had been scheduled as a summer replacement for pianist Alec Templeton, featured Gerard Darrow, seven; Joan Bishop, thirteen; Van Dyke Tiers, thirteen; Mary Ann Anderson, fourteen; and Charles Schwartz, thirteen. The program's format was patterned after that of a classroom with an adult quizmaster, or "teacher," posing questions to a panel of five "pupils." All participants wore academic robes and mortarboards and sat at typical classroom desks equipped with microphones.

After rejecting 16 applicants for the job — among them prominent radio announcers, college professors, a noted lecturer, and

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an author — those in charge picked Joe Kelly, a former vaudeville singer with a third-grade education, to be the quizmaster. In her book, "The Quiz Kids," Eliza Hickok, who worked behind the scenes at the show, identifies the qualities that set Kelly apart from the other contenders for the position. "Joe Kelly knew children," she wrote. "He loved them thoroughly and sincerely." For eight years he had hosted a popular early morning children's show on a Chicago radio station. Adult audiences were familiar with him as the genial emcee of the Saturday night *National Barn Dance* heard coast-to-coast on the NBC network. Also, according to Hickok, Kelly "laughed so easily and so well" and "liked everybody and everything." These were the traits that set at ease the juvenile intellectuals who had sat cold and uninspired before the college professors. Joe Kelly, says Hickok, made the kids "relaxed, happy, and eager." By 1947 approximately ten million listeners were tuning in each week to find out if Kelly could come up with a question that his panel of mind-blowing minors might miss.

The first question on that first *Quiz Kids* program was, "I want you to tell me what I would be carrying home if I brought an antimacassar, a dinghy, a sarong, and an apteryx." (Answer: a cover to protect the back or arms of furniture, a rowboat or sailboat, a loose skirt worn by men and women of the Malay archipelago and the Pacific islands, and a flightless New Zealand bird.) Pooling their individual knowledge the Quiz Kids answered this question with ease, as they did thousands of others put to them during the decade and a half they were on the air. A sampling of the questions to which the youngsters correctly responded reveals their wide-ranging interests and areas of expertise: "Would you be pleased or displeased if varicella came to visit you?" "What city in America



**JOE KELLY** was a Chicago radio announcer when he was chosen to emcee the Quiz Kids program. His experience working with youngsters included several years as host of a children's program on Chicago's WLS. His warm and genial personality made him a hit with the young contestants on the show as well as with the listening audience.

is on approximately the same latitude as Rome, Italy?" "What adventures might have been yours if you had sailed on (a) the Half Moon, (b) the Clermont, (c) the Monitor?" (Answers: Displeased, varicella is the scientific name for chicken pox; Chicago; a. exploring the Hudson River with Henry Hudson, b. traveling on the first steamboat, c. participating in a Civil War naval battle.)

Many of the questions used on the program were sent in by listeners — more than 15,000 a year during the show's heyday. Eliza Hickok supervised the staff that read the mail and selected the questions for use on the air. In her book she states that listener-submitted questions usually required

considerable editing and "toughening up" before they were considered suitable for use on the air. She had a fairly simple criterion for screening questions. "If I can answer a question," she wrote, "I naturally suppose that it is too easy and tend to discard it." Listeners whose questions were selected for use on the program received a portable Zenith radio. Any listener who submitted a question, whether accepted or not, received a postcard picture of the Quiz Kids.

For each appearance on the program, the Quiz Kids received a hundred-dollar U. S. savings bond from the sponsor. The three participants who gave the most correct answers on a given show were invited to return the following week to match wits with two new contenders. A loser who demonstrated outstanding ability was often asked to make appearances on later programs. "Thus our best children are on and off the program for years," Hickok writes.

Anytime a Quiz Kid was able to outsmart cruder adults or experts on any subject, some reporter or magazine writer quickly rushed an account of the incident into print.

Seven-year-old Ruthie Duskin, who joined the show in 1941 as the program's at-the-time youngest member, was an expert on Shakespeare, opera, and the Bible. Once in the presence of five University of Chicago professors who could name only four of Jacob's twelve sons, she glibly recited off the names of the other eight.

On another program the Kids were asked to divide the number of Ali Baba's Thieves by the number of Quints (Canada's then famous Dionne quintuplets were about six years old at the time), add the Horsemen of the Apocalypse and subtract the number of days it took to make the world. When fourteen-year-old Cynthia Cline's answer of five was declared correct by Joe Kelly he was immediately challenged by thirteen-year-old Virginia Booze. "The



## THE QUIZ KIDS

answer is six," she said, and went on to divide the forty thieves by the five Quints getting eight, added the four horsemen to get twelve, and subtracted six days instead of seven for the making of the world. "For on the seventh day He rested," she explained. It was not uncommon for the Kids to come up with a better answer to a question than the one on Joe Kelly's cue sheet.

Because of their incredible enlightenment on certain subjects, their intellectual agility, and their naturally charming on-air personalities, many of the Quiz Kids soon became celebrities, garnering extensive exposure in newspapers and nationally circulated magazines.

Gerard Darrow, at the age of seven, was the youngest member of the original panel and one who received considerable press coverage during his tenure as a Quiz Kid. The featured subject of a 1941 American Magazine story, he was called abnormally bright and referred to as "the littlest big shot of the air waves." His special area of expertise was birds. Gerard's mother died when he was four months old, and he was reared by his grandmother and an aunt who devoted many hours of their time reading to him. One of his favorite books contained pictures and descriptions of birds. By the time he was three years old Gerard could name and describe in great detail some 100 birds. A year later he could identify 365, and by the time he became a Quiz Kid, he could speak with authority about 1,000 of his feathered friends. From birds, his interest in wildlife expanded to encompass insects, flowers, and animals of all kinds. But Gerard's store of information was not confined to subjects from the realm of mother nature. "His knowledge of Greek mythology astounds even the professors who write books about it," said American Magazine. Knowledge alone, however, did

not make for a popular Quiz Kid. The way they communicated their knowledge to the listening audience counted for a lot. In the case of Gerard Darrow, his "piping radio voice palpates with personality," observed one writer. When his score was such that he had to be taken off the air, an effective letter-writing campaign resulted in his being asked back within a month.

Joel Kupperman, a favorite among listeners was a math whiz. When, at the age of five, he wrote to the show's producers expressing a desire to be a Quiz Kid, he stated that he could multiply, in his head, 99 or 98 times any number up to 100. The son of an engineer father and school teacher mother, Joel learned about numbers by playing with an abacus attached to his play pen. When he was four years old he would put himself to sleep, not by counting sheep, but by reciting a little chant that went, "2 plus 2 equals 4, 4 plus 4 equals 8," and so on. He usually fell asleep at about "768 plus 768 equals 1,536." Awake, he could go on indefinitely. When shopping with his mother, Joel paid close attention at the cash register and corrected any attendant who might make a mistake in addition or making change. His other interests included picture post cards, mythology, and history.

Joel, who was not quite six years old when he became a Quiz Kid, thought of the show as an exciting game. Innocent and totally lacking in guile he often became so enthusiastic over what was going on that he was constantly jumping up and down and getting out of range of the microphone. When the audience applauded, so did Joel, even when the applause was for him. One writer observed that "unconsciously he is the most entertaining son-of-a-gun, little or big, on the radio." Another called him a "human coil spring."

Week after week, Ruthie, Gerard, Joel, and their numerous fellow contestants both



THE POPULARITY of the Quiz Kids inspired consumer products such as this 1941 game aimed at young fans of the radio program. It was one of several editions that were marketed. Each game contained a set of cards that were numbered and printed front and back with questions similar to those heard on the radio program. A separate answer sheet was provided. The game could be played by any number of persons. One of the players, chosen as quizmaster, read the questions one at a time. The other players raised their hands if they thought they knew the answer. The quizmaster checked the answers given by the players against the answer sheet and kept score. This game contains 72 questions.

amazed and amused radio audiences. *Quiz Kids* fans still recall the show's other remarkable youngsters such as musical prodigy Joan Bishop; Richard Williams, like Joel Kupperman, a mathematical wonder; Naomi Cooks whose specialty was literature; and Jack Lucal, expert on history, geography, and politics.

The *Quiz Kids* answered their last questions on radio in 1953, approximately 13 years after the show's debut. Beginning in 1949 the *Quiz Kids* could be seen as well as heard on that new home entertainment wonder, television. The TV version was highly popular and garnered numerous awards before going off the air in 1954. A 1956 reprise of the television program failed to generate the audience enthusiasm enjoyed by its predecessors and was dropped after nine months. During their tenure the *Quiz Kids* shows featured several hundred gifted, adorable, and memorable children. Today when old-timers reminisce about the golden days of radio, a question that frequently comes up is, "Whatever happened to the Quiz Kids?"

That question has been answered in considerable detail by former Quiz Kid Ruthie Duskin, the little girl who could name all

of Jacob's twelve sons. Now Mrs. Ruth Duskin Feldman, a Chicago-area textbook author and magazine writer, she contacted dozens of her fellow masterminds to find out what they had been up to since their glory days as media stars. Her findings were published in 1982 in an engaging and informative book titled "Whatever Happened to the Quiz Kids? Perils and Profits of Growing Up Gifted."

Basically, she found that the Quiz Kids grew up to make their mark in careers as varied as the questions they had answered on the air. Like the ordinary youngsters who had listened to them on radio and watched them on television, they became lawyers, doctors, teachers, college professors, writers, actors, musicians, homemakers, and business executives, to mention but a few of the diverse career paths they chose to follow.

Joe Kelly, the gentle man who endeared himself to the Quiz Kids as well as those who listened to them, died on May 26, 1959, five days short of his fifty-eighth birthday. ■

(NOTE: Hear a Quiz Kids program and several Jack Benny shows with Quiz Kids as guests during February on TWTD.)

# Hollywood: Radio-Style

BY RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

Radio played an important role in the success of a major studio during "Hollywood's Golden era" back in the thirties and forties.

The studio was RKO. Those initials stand for Radio-Keith-Orpheum. The company turned out those great Astaire-Rogers musicals, *King Kong*, *Gunga Din*, *Citizen Kane*, a series of Alfred Hitchcock thrillers, and other classics when Tinseltown was the center of the entertainment world.

Radio was an important part of the studio's operation as well. Prior to the arrival of the RKO logo, the studio, established in 1919, was known as FBO. That stood for Film Booking Offices of America, Inc.

FBO turned out mostly what we call "B" movies, minor productions made on a low budget, that were seldom blockbusters. Toward the end of the silent era, radio, which was in its infancy as a national entity, became interested in the film world and, in particular, FBO, which was available for the right price.

Some big spenders, among them Joseph Kennedy, came up with the necessary cash, and FBO, back in 1929, almost seven decades ago, became RKO. "R" was for radio. As for Keith and Orpheum, they were a part of the old FBO setup. Mostly, they were theatres and booking offices around the country.

Thus did radio arrive on the scene. David Sarnoff, president of the Radio Corporation of America—RCA—became the power behind the throne at RKO for several years. Mainly, Sarnoff manufactured

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the sound paraphernalia needed to make films in those days.

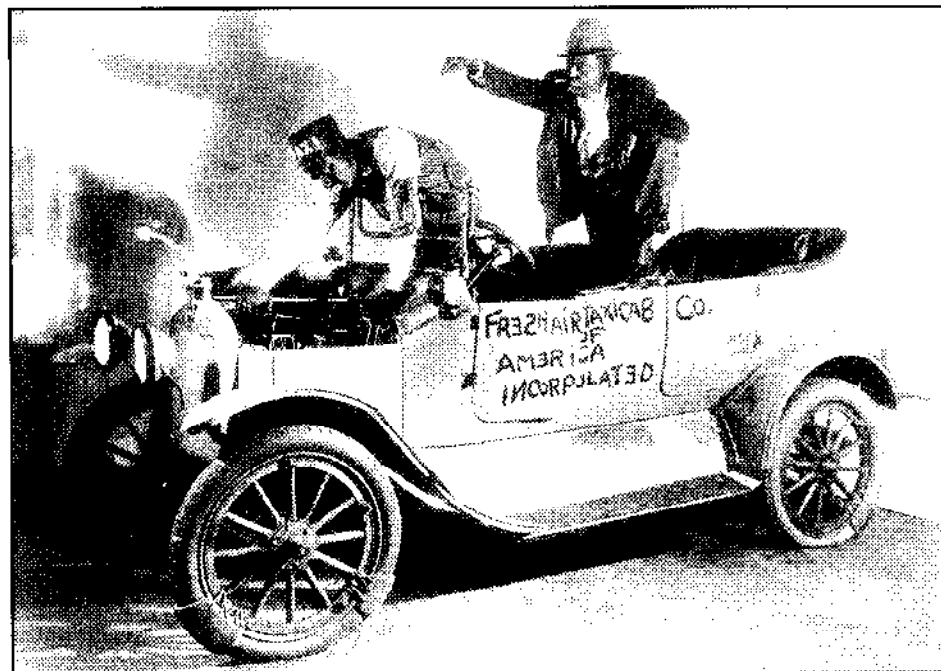
And Sarnoff, because he was a radio pioneer, thought his medium could make an important contribution to the success of the old studio with a new set of initials. He believed that the talent on radio, certainly at the voice level, was as good as, if not better, than the talent employed in those old silent flicks, at least, for the "talkies."

Big names on radio, strong enough to attract long lines to the box office, were rare in the thirties. Then along came *Amos 'n' Andy*, which quickly became the nation's favorite radio show. Two white actors were the stars, and they played the two black owners of a taxi company. Amos was played by Freeman Gosden, and Charles Correll was Andy in the hit comedy show.

Gosden and Correll were quickly signed by RKO. They put on black makeup and went on to star in *Check and Double Check*, which broke box office records in 1930. It was RKO's most successful film that year and, in the normal course of events, there should have been a series of *Amos 'n' Andy* movies.

Not so. RKO, it turned out, did some checking after the film came out. The pollsters discovered the public enjoyed the pair more on radio, and had only showed up at the theatre to get a peek at the two white performers in black makeup. They were called "freaks of the screen, good for one film only." The "freaks" may have been a little bit hard, but the latter part was true. Gosden and Correll made only one film during their long radio career.

Over the years, RKO signed on an impressive array of radio stars. They included



**CHECK AND DOUBLE CHECK (1930) Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll as Amos 'n' Andy**

Kay Kyser of radio's *Kollege of Musical Knowledge*; Marian and Jim Jordan, also known as *Fibber McGee and Molly*; Hal Peary of *Great Gildersleeve* fame; Dennis Day of his own show and Jack Benny's; Ralph *Truth or Consequences* Edwards; Joan Davis; and others who achieved "big name" status while on radio.

Eddie Cantor and Burns and Allen also were on the RKO payroll for a while. But they were stars prior to the airwaves. Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Jimmy Durante were all stars before their long runs on the airwaves. Still, being on the radio helped them, especially Benny. Benny and Hope were with Paramount, and Durante had his great film success at MGM.

At RKO, Kay Kyser made a series of musicals that were great at the box office. Gildersleeve and Fibber and Molly also enjoyed some success, but never came close to the success of their radio shows. Joan Davis, who had appeared in films

prior to RKO, had box office potential, but died at an early age. Edwards and Day never really made it in the film world.

Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy were also big names at RKO, but there were limits to what they could do. The problem was Charlie. There wasn't really too much that could be done with Bergen's dummy. Perhaps if Bergen was a puppeteer he could have worked out an act. Bergen and McCarthy tried films a number of times, but never matched the magic they had on radio.

RKO kept up its friendship with the radio stars into the fifties, when Howard Hughes took over the studio, and made a mess of it. RKO lost its urge to survive, or so it seemed, once the multi-millionaire took charge, or so it was claimed.

The radio star who made the greatest impact at RKO was, without a doubt, the legendary Orson Welles. The actor's radio show, *Mercury Theatre on the Air*, was

## HOLLYWOOD: RADIO-STYLE

a national sensation, mostly due to its celebrated Halloween performance of "War of the Worlds," the radio program that terrified the nation.

When Welles inked his contract with RKO, he brought some outstanding performers to Hollywood, among them Joseph Cotten, Agnes Moorehead, George Coulouris, Everett Sloane, Ruth Warrick, Ray Collins, Harry Shannon, Fortunio Bonanova and Paul Stewart.

Cotten and Moorehead achieved great fame in the film world. The others became fixtures on the Hollywood scene. Ray Collins, who was rated by Welles as the greatest radio actor ever, appeared on the old *Perry Mason* TV series for years as Lieutenant Tragg.

Welles' *Citizen Kane*, an RKO picture, is rated by many critics as the best film ever made. His *Magnificent Ambersons* was also marvelous, and *Journey Into Fear*, his final RKO flick, was a neat little thriller. But Welles and the powers at the studio did not hit it off, primarily because they felt

he spent too much money making his own films.

The actor and the studio headed off in different directions. Ironically, both struggled for years. The actor lasted longer.

In addition to luring favorites of the airwaves into the film world, RKO did attempt to use radio to manufacture a couple of movie stars.

In 1939, the studio became involved with a radio show called *Gateway to Hollywood*, hosted by veteran producer Jesse Lasky. Each week two potential stars were introduced in half-hour dramas. The performances of these talented young men and women were evaluated by a panel of judges.

At the end of the season the two who gave the best performances and were considered physically attractive in the eyes of the judges (since listeners could not see them) were awarded contracts by RKO. They were also given key roles in "a major motion picture."

The winners were John Archer and Alice Eden. They appeared in a film called *Career* starring character actor Edward Ellis.



GILDERSLEEVE'S GHOST (1944) Harold Perry as Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve, with friend



LOOK WHO'S LAUGHING (1941) Jim Jordan (Fibber McGee), Charlie McCarthy, Lucille Ball, Edgar Bergen and Marian Jordan (Molly McGee)

*Career*, the story of a kindly druggist, was a good film, but did not do as well at the box office as expected. Archer and Eden, as a result, never had a chance to hit it big.

If *Gateway to Hollywood* had worked, RKO planned to use the show as a training ground for other future stars. As it turned out, it lasted only one season.

Alice Eden disappeared from the silver screen. Her Hollywood career ended in a hurry. Archer played second leads and character parts for several years. He went to New York where he got radio jobs, most notably as *The Shadow*, and appeared on Broadway.

Last, but not least, there was that "radio movie" made by RKO. It was a murder mystery called *The Phantom of Crestwood* and was released in 1932.

At the time, studio executives spent endless hours trying to come up with projects that would combine both radio and films. And they come up with an idea that can

only be called unique. For six weeks, NBC presented a serial called *The Phantom*. However, there was no ending to this radio mystery. Listeners were invited to send in their own endings to the whodunit. It was up to the radio audience to unmask *The Phantom*.

The endings poured in to NBC. Thousands of them and, eventually, four contestants won prizes for their solutions. One of these solutions, it was revealed, would be used as the climax for the new RKO thriller, *The Phantom of Crestwood*, which was a film based on the radio serial.

The film was released and the profits were splendid. It netted more than \$100,000, a tidy sum in those depression days. Pennies counted back then.

Alas, RKO never revealed which one of the four prize winning solutions was used. It remains a mystery to this very day.

RKO is gone now, and so are most of those great radio stars of yesteryear. ■

# THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.

## FEBRUARY 1998



### February is Jack Benny Month!

This month we offer eight Benny broadcasts related to the song he wrote; a few shows with Jack and the Quiz Kids; and some vintage programs highlighting some of the prominent singers he featured over the years. See the article about Jack's Tenors on page 26 and the one on the Quiz Kids on page 11.

#### SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7th

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (10-14-51) Jack has written a song, "When You Say 'I Beg your Pardon,' Then I'll Come Back to You" and he has a meeting with a music publisher. Featured are Mary Livingstone, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Phil Harris, Dennis Day, Don Wilson, Sportsmen, Sheldon Leonard, Joe Kearns. *This is the first of eight related programs dealing with Jack's Song.* Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (27:15)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (3-31-33) An early show with Jack, Mary Livingstone, tenor James Melton, Frank Black and the orchestra, announcer Howard Clancy. The cast does a parody of the Mae West film, "She Done Him Wrong." Chevrolet, NBC. (28:02)

**QUIZ KIDS** (7-21-46) From Chicago, Chief Quizzer Joe Kelly introduces Quiz Kids Patrick Conlon, Ruthie Duskin, Naomi Cooks, and Joel Kupperman. Harve Fishman is in Hollywood interviewing former Quiz Kid Vanessa Brown (Smylla Brind). Alka Seltzer, One-A-Day vitamins, ABC. (28:02)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (4-6-41) In preparation for an appearance on a Quiz Kids pro-

gram, Jack invites Richard Williams, Claude Brenner, Joan Bishop and Gerard Darrow, the Quiz Kids, to battle his cast, known as the "Jell-O Kids," with Jack acting as quizmaster. Jell-O, NBC. (29:33)

**BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW** (1-8-48) George and Gracie with guest Jack Benny. Gracie decides that George and Jack should team up to become the Gypsy Troubadours. Maxwell House Coffee, NBC. (29:52)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (10-21-51) Jack and the gang, plus Bea Benadaret and Sara Berner as Gertrude and Mable, the switchboard operators; Herb Vigran as the sound man; Elvia Allman, Frank Nelson, Lenny Kent. *Second program in our Jack's Song sequence.* Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (27:35)

#### SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14th

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (10-28-51) Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Colman join Jack and the gang. The Sportsmen want to do a commercial based on Jack's song, but Jack can't find his copy of the sheet music. *Jack's Song #3.* Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (26:55)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (4-13-41) Jack studies for his appearance on the Quiz Kids program while three of the Kids — Claude Brenner, Gerard Darrow and Richard Williams — are staying at Jack's house. Jell-O, NBC. (29:30)

**PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW** (1-9-49) Phil and Alice star with Elliott Lewis as Frankie Remley, Walter Tetley as Julius, Robert North as Alice's brother Willy. Phil accidentally drops Willie's engagement ring down the drain. Rexall, NBC. (29:01)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (5-18-34) Jack stars with Mary Livingstone, tenor Frank Parker and Don Bestor and the orchestra. Late for his broadcast, Jack takes a taxi ride to the studio. Later, singer Frank Parker invites Jack and



**JACK BENNY AND THE QUIZ KIDS**  
Joel Kupperman, Harve Fishman, Ruthie Duskin and Richard Weixler

Mary to his home to meet his family. General Tire, NBC. (18:46)

**SUSPENSE** (6-2-52) "A Good and Faithful Servant" starring Jack Benny as "a man who worked thirty years to prepare a most unusual retirement plan." AutoLite, CBS. (28:35)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (11-25-51) Polly the Parrot has learned how to play Jack's song on the piano. When Jack and Mary go to Grauman's Chinese Theatre to see Dennis Day's new film, "Golden Girl," they meet Dennis' mother (Verna Felton) in the theatre. *Jack's Song #4.* AFRS rebroadcast. (24:30)

#### SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21st

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (12-9-51) Jack and the gang are in Palm Springs, California where their guest is actor Charles Farrell. The cast presents "The Palm Springs Murder Mystery." *Jack's Song #5.* AFRS rebroadcast. (25:13)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (4-24-38) Jack stars with Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Don Wilson, singer Kenny Baker, Andy Devine and Sam Hearn (Schlepperman). The cast offers a musical version of Walt Disney's "Snow White" called "Snow White and the Seven Gangsters." Jell-O, NBC. (28:17)

**A DAY IN THE LIFE OF DENNIS DAY** (1948) Dennis Day in his own show with Bea Benadaret, Barbara Eiler, John Brown, Dink

Trout. Dennis tries to sell his idea for a radio show to local businessmen, who get the wrong idea. NBC. (25:23)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (4-20-41) Three Quiz Kids are still staying at Jack's home, but he thinks he made a fool of himself when he appeared on their program. Jell-O, NBC. (4-20-41)

**PHILCO RADIO TIME** (3-26-47) Bing Crosby welcomes guests Jack Benny and Mary Livingstone. Jack proposes that he, Bing and Mary team up for an act together. Philco, ABC. (29:32)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (1-20-52) Jack has invited his old friend George Burns to come on his show to sing Jack's song. Regulars include Mary, Phil, Dennis, Don, Rochester. *Jack's Song #6.* AFRS rebroadcast. (24:50)

#### SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 28th

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (2-17-52) After a New York publisher declines to publish Jack's song, he dreams the New York Symphony Orchestra plays it at Carnegie Hall. *Jack's song #7.* AFRS rebroadcast. (24:47)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (5-12-46) Broadcast from the Civic Opera House in Chicago with 3,724 people in the audience, Jack's guests are Quiz Kids Harve Bennett Fishman, Joel Kupperman, Ruthie Duskin, and Richard Weixler. Jack invites the kids over for a quiz session with his regular gang, Mary, Phil, Rochester, Dennis, and Don. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (26:42)

**CAMPBELL PLAYHOUSE** (3-24-40) "June Moon" starring Jack Benny in a radio version of the Broadway comedy by Ring Lardner and George S. Kaufman. Jack stars as a song writer from Schenectady who goes to the big city of New York to write a romantic hit. Orson Welles is host and producer of this series and the cast for this broadcast features Benny Rubin, Bea Benadaret, Lee Patrick, Virginia Gordon. Campbell Soup, CBS. (28:00; 30:30)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (4-8-45) Broadcast from Turney General Hospital in Palm Springs. Jack dreams that guest, actor William Powell is his butler. AFRS rebroadcast. (27:15)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (3-2-52) From Palm Springs, guests Frank Sinatra, George Burns, Groucho Marx and Danny Kaye form a quartet to sing Jack's song, "When You Say 'I Beg Your Pardon' Then I'll Come Back to You." *This is the eighth and last program in our sequence of Jack's Song broadcasts.* Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (27:51)

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# THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.

MARCH 1998

**PLEASE NOTE:** The numerals following each program listing for *Those Were The Days* represents the length of time for each particular show: (28:50) means the program will run 28 minutes and 50 seconds. This may be of help to those who tape the programs for their own collection.

## SATURDAY, MARCH 7th

**SUSPENSE** (6-16-57) "Trial By Jury" starring Nancy Kelly with Parley Baer, Jerry Hausner, Lawrence Dobkin, Byron Kane, Shirley Mitchell and Kenny Delmar. A gambler, freed of a murder charge, blackmails his attorney. Sustaining, CBS. (25:46)

**FRED ALLEN SHOW** (10-18-42) Actor Orson Welles and singer Benay Venuta join Fred and Portalnd Hoffa, Minerva Pious, John Brown, Alan Reed, Al Goodman and the orchestra. Announcer is Arthur Godfrey. Orson and Fred appear in a Welles' production of "Les Miserables." AFRS rebroadcast. (29:00)

**MR. AND MRS. NORTH** (9-19-54) "Operation Murder" stars Richard Denning and Barbara Britton as Pam and Jerry North. A doctor is asked to guarantee that his patient will die. Sustaining, CBS. (29:09)

**X MINUS ONE** (2-27-57) "Real Gone" starring Al "Jazzbo" Collins as himself, a radio disc



FRED ALLEN

jockey whose friend has developed a new art form. This drama is based on an idea by Collins. Sustaining, NBC. (22:16)

**FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY** (4-23-46) Jim and Marian Jordan star as the McGees of Wistful Vista, featuring Gale Gordon as Mayor LaTrivia, Bill Thompson as Wallace Wimple, Arthur O. Brian as Doc Gamble, Bea Benadaret as Mrs. Carstairs, with Harlow Wilcox, King's Men, Billy Mills and the orchestra. McGee picks up a book on how to live to be 150 so he starts on a health food kick. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (29:25)

**SIX SHOOTER** (9-20-63) "Jenny Carver" starring James Stewart as Britt Ponsett in the first program in the series. Heading towards the town of Land Creek, Britt finds a wounded man and brings him to a cabin where a single woman lives by herself. Colman Home Heaters, NBC. (29:00) *Rescheduled from an earlier date.*

## SATURDAY, MARCH 14th REMEMBERING RED SKELTON

**SCREEN GUILD PLAYERS** (1-20-49) "Fuller Brush Man" starring Red Skelton and Janet Blair repeating their original screen roles from the 1948 film. Red is involved in murder while trying to succeed as a door-to-door salesman. Cast includes Frank Nelson, Willard Waterman, Earle Ross, Paula Winslowe. Vern Smith announces. Camel Cigarettes, NBC. (27:55)

**1994 RADIO HALL OF FAME** (11-6-94) *Excerpt* as Charles Osgood introduces impressionist Rich Little who inducts Red Skelton into the Radio Hall of Fame in a coast-to-coast broadcast from the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago. RHOF Network. (8:38)

**RED SKELTON SHOW** (2-11-51) The Skelton Scrapbook of Satire presents "The Big Scare" starring Red Skelton as Willy Lump-Lump, Clem Kadiddlehopper, San Fernando Red, and Junior, the Mean Widdle Kid. At a town meeting, the citizens vote for Willy Lump-Lump to

leave town! Cast includes Lurene Tuttle, Pat McGeehan, Dick Ryan, Rod O'Connor, David Rose and the orchestra. Tide, CBS. (30:00)

**RED SKELTON AFTERSHOW** (2-19-50) After the completion of his regular network broadcast, Red Skelton presented this "aftershow" for the studio audience, which really enjoys this special treat. Red sings "Mule Train" with the Four Knights, then does his famous "Guzzler's Gin" routine. *This is not a broadcast; the studio technicians kept the recorders running during this aftershow.* (23:55)

**SUSPENSE** (11-3-49) "The Search for Isabel" starring Red Skelton with Cathy Lewis. After a new telephone is installed, a bank clerk becomes very curious when he begins to get mysterious calls asking for Isabel LaRue. AutoLite, CBS. (29:30)

**HONOR AMERICA DAY** (7-4-70) *Excerpt* from a giant rally in Washington, D.C. with Red Skelton offering his special version of The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America. (7:00)

**SCREEN GUILD PLAYERS** (4-12-42) "Tight Shoes" starring Red Skelton, Lucille Ball and George Tobias in a radio version of the 1941 film based on a Damon Runyon story. Red is a big-shot gambler who has big feet. Roger Pryor is host. Oscar Bradley and the orchestra. Gulf Oil Co., CBS. (29:50)

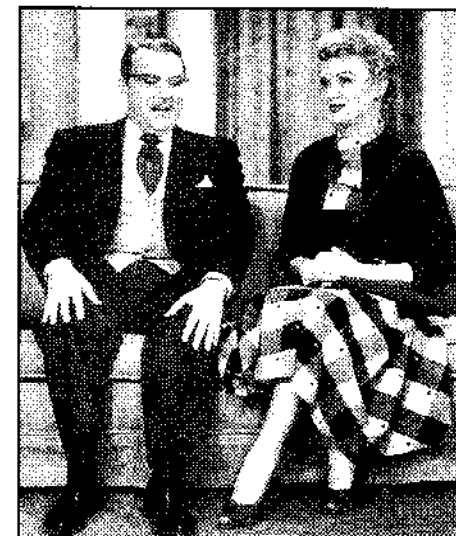
*Read the cover story about Red Skelton on Page 6.*

## SATURDAY, MARCH 21st

**ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE** (1940s) "The Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail Capet" starring Howard Duff as Dashiell Hammett's detective with Lurene Tuttle as his faithful secretary Effie



HOWARD DUFF



GALE GORDON and EVE ARDEN

Perrine. Spade vies with another private eye for a job at a charity affair. Wildroot Cream Oil, CBS. (28:08)

**OUR MISS BROOKS** (9-10-50) Eve Arden is the Madison High School English teacher, with Dick Crenna as Walter Denton, Gale Gordon as Mr. Conklin, and Jeff Chandler as Mr. Boynton. Rumors are flying as the fall semester begins. Colgate, Lustre Creme, CBS. (29:53)

**HOLLYWOOD STAR PLAYHOUSE** (8-9-51) "A Wonderful Disposition" starring Deborah Kerr in a drama about a divorcee who meets a man at the airport who needs help with his luggage. Sustaining, ABC. (29:01)

**ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET** (10-17-48) The Nelsons as themselves, with Tommy Bernard as David, Henry Blair as Ricky, John Brown as Thorny, and Janet Waldo as Emmy Lou. Ozzie gets tangled in a web of promises. International Silver, NBC. (29:09)

**BOB ELSON ON THE 20th CENTURY** (1946) At Union Station in Chicago, home of the 20th Century Limited, "one of the world's great trains," Bob Elson interviews comedian Hugh Herbert, impressionist Dean Murphy, and Ice Capades skater Trixie Hershe. Krank's Shave Kream, Syndicated. (12:57)

**SUSPENSE** (4-3-47) "The Swift Rise of Eddie Albright" starring Phil Silvers with Cathy Lewis. A lowly elevator operator with big plans suddenly finds himself mixed up with some unsavory characters in his building. Truman Bradley announces. Roma Wines, CBS. (31:00)

# THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.

**MARCH 1998**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 28th**  
**ORSON WELLES ON THE AIR**

**MERCURY THEATRE ON THE AIR** (7-18-38) "Treasure Island" starring Orson Welles as Long John Silver and as Jim Hawkins who tells the classic Robert Louis Stevenson pirate adventure of the journey to an isle of hidden bounty. Cast includes Arthur Anderson, age 14, who appears as Jim Hawkins as a boy; George Colourus, Ray Collins, Alfred Shirley, Agnes Moorehead. Dan Seymour announces. Sustaining, CBS. (28:37; 33:57)

**BLACK MUSEUM** (1952) "Service Card" starring Orson Welles with a tale from London's "warehouse of homicide... where everyday objects... are touched by murder. An automobile service card proves instrumental in solving a brutal murder. Sustaining, MBS. (25:03)

**CHARLIE MC CARTHY SHOW** (1945) Edger Bergen stars with Charlie, Effie Klinker, Orson Welles, Joan Merrill, announcer Jim Ameche, Ray Noble and the orchestra, and guest John Robert Powers, head of the famous modeling agency. Welles, apparently a regular on the show, appears as an Irish judge; later looks fifty years into the future with Bergen. AFRS rebroadcast. (30:45)

**THIRD MAN** (1950) "Earl on Troubled Waters" starring Orson Welles as adventurer Harry Lime who is offered a share of \$30,000 if he can smuggle it out of the country. Zither music by Anton Karas. Syndicated. (24:55)

**SUSPENSE** (9-2-42) "The Hitchhiker" starring Orson Welles in the classic Lucille Fletcher story about a man who makes a terrifying cross-country trip. Sustaining, CBS. (28:37)

*Read the article about Welles on Page 36.*

**Coming in May**

**Month-Long 95th Birthday Salute to Bob Hope** 

*...and for more good listening...*

**ART HELLYER SHOW**-- Music of the big bands and the big singers with lots of knowledgeable commentary and fun from one of radio's legendary personalities, now in his 51th year on the air! *WJOL, 1340 AM, Saturday, 9 am-1 pm; Sunday, 2-6 pm.*

**DICK LAWRENCE REVUE**-- A treasure trove of rare and vintage recordings with spoken memories from the never to be forgotten past. *WNIB, 97.1 FM, Saturday, 8-9 pm.*

**JAZZ FORUM**-- Chicago's foremost jazz authority, Dick Buckley, presents an entertaining and enlightening program of great music by noted jazz musicians. *WBEZ, 91.5 FM, Monday thru Thursday, 8:30-9:30 pm; Sunday 1-4 pm.*

**REMEMBER WHEN**-- Host Don Corey's "nostalgia fest" with the emphasis on old time radio musical and variety shows, plus show tunes and interviews. *WAIT, 850 AM, Sunday, 1-4 pm.*

**WHEN RADIO WAS**-- Carl Amari hosts a weekend edition of the popular series featuring old time radio broadcasts and interviews. *WMAQ, 670 AM, Saturday and Sunday, 10pm-midnight.*

**IMAGINATION THEATRE**-- This series is heard occasionally on *Those Were The Days* in Chicago, but is broadcast weekly in many other cities across the country. For the station in your area, call Tim McDonald at TransMedia Productions at 1-800-229-7234. For a list of stations carrying the program and an **episode guide**, the Internet address is: [tmedia@aimnet.com](mailto:tmedia@aimnet.com)

**THE SATURDAY SWING SHIFT**-- Bruce Oscar is the host for this two-hour program featuring swing music on record as performed by the big bands, popular singers and small groups. *WDCB, 90.9 FM, Saturday, 10 am-Noon.*

## "When Radio Was" -- WMAQ-AM 670

Monday thru Friday Midnight to 1 a.m. Host Stan Freberg

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<i>February, 1998 Schedule</i>				
<b>2</b> Frontier Gentleman Burns & Allen Pt 1	<b>3</b> Burns & Allen Pt 2 Lights Out	<b>4</b> Green Hornet Fibber McGee Pt 1	<b>5</b> Fibber McGee Pt 2 Box Thirteen	<b>6</b> Suspense Superman
<b>9</b> The Shadow Jack Benny Pt 1	<b>10</b> Jack Benny Pt 2 Dragnet	<b>11</b> Have Gun, Will Travel Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	<b>12</b> Charlie McCarthy Pt 2 Crime Classics	<b>13</b> The Shadow Superman
<b>16</b> Six Shooter Great Gildersleeve Pt 1	<b>17</b> Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 Escape	<b>18</b> Gangbusters Father Knows Best Pt 1	<b>19</b> Father Knows Best Pt 2 Black Museum	<b>20</b> Suspense Superman
<b>23</b> The Whistler Favorite Husband Pt 1	<b>24</b> Favorite Husband Pt 2 Lone Ranger	<b>25</b> Boston Blackie Life of Riley Pt 1	<b>26</b> Life of Riley Pt 2 Mysterious Traveler	<b>27</b> The Shadow Superman

**OUT OF TOWN LISTENERS PLEASE NOTE:**

"When Radio Was" is a syndicated series heard throughout the country. If you're unable to tune in WMAQ, call (847) 524-0200, Ext. 234 and ask which station in or near your town carries the program.

<i>March, 1998 Schedule</i>				
<b>2</b> Gunsmoke Burns & Allen Pt 1	<b>3</b> Burns & Allen Pt 2 Sgt. Preston	<b>4</b> Green Hornet Fibber McGee Pt 1	<b>5</b> Fibber McGee Pt 2 Dragnet	<b>6</b> Suspense Superman
<b>9</b> The Shadow Jack Benny Pt 1	<b>10</b> Jack Benny Pt 2 Box Thirteen	<b>11</b> Have Gun, Will Travel Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	<b>12</b> Charlie McCarthy Pt 2 Arch Oboler's Plays	<b>13</b> The Shadow Superman
<b>16</b> Broadway is My Beat Great Gildersleeve Pt 1	<b>17</b> Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 Escape	<b>18</b> Gangbusters Abbott & Costello Pt 1	<b>19</b> Abbott & Costello Pt 2 Tales of Texas Rangers	<b>20</b> Suspense Superman
<b>23</b> Screen Directors Favorite Husband Pt 1	<b>24</b> Favorite Husband Pt 2 Lone Ranger	<b>25</b> Boston Blackie Life of Riley Pt 1	<b>26</b> Life of Riley Pt 2 This is Your FBI	<b>27</b> The Shadow Superman
<b>30</b> The Whistler Our Miss Brooks Pt 1	<b>31</b> Our Miss Brooks Pt 2 Richard Diamond			

# Lend Me a Tenor

## (I'm Too Cheap To Pay for One)

BY BILL OATES

For most of his duration on radio, Jack Benny surrounded himself with a cast that was as memorable as the program's name-sake. Once firmly established and called out at the beginning of the show by venerable announcer Don Wilson, "The Jack Benny Program with Jack Benny, Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Phil Harris, Rochester, and yours truly, Don Wilson" guaranteed the listeners laughs sparked by the best ensemble in the medium.

The last regular component of the cast, tenor Dennis Day, followed a fairly small number of singers who began with Benny in the earliest years and became a fixture of the show through its run on radio and television.

Tenors and radio grew up together. As a matter of fact, the higher pitched male singers (as well as other soloists, instrumentalists, orchestras, and operas like the Chicago Civic group) established slots on the broadcasting schedule from the earliest days.

Programs like the B.F. Goodrich sponsored *Silver Masked Tenor*, which featured the always publicly disguised Joseph M. White, premiered on New York's WJAF in 1923 and moved to NBC in 1929. He stayed there until a debilitating automobile accident forced him off the air in 1940. Another famed tenor, Lanny Ross, had his

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*Bill Oates, of Kouts, Indiana, a high school English teacher and author with a love of old time radio, is a regular contributor to these pages.*

---

own program on NBC in 1931, a year before he became the featured singer on the successful early variety program the *Maxwell House Showboat*.

James Melton, another popular tenor of the day, eventually landed the first long term role as resident singer on the infant Benny program.

Because singers on radio were already a staple by the early 1930's and because these early shows emanated from New York City, where there was an abundant supply of talent, a featured singer was often included in the casts of variety programs and the increasingly popular comedies.

For Jack Benny, when his show debuted on May 2, 1932, the George Olsen Orchestra and sponsor Canada Dry ginger ale were in place, and by the time this first sponsor was finished with Benny in January 1933, Ted Weems and his orchestra rounded out the musical chores. However, there was still no permanent soloist. Ethel Shutta, wife of George Olsen did the singing in the early days of the show, and two female singers, Andrea Marsh and Mary Livingstone (Benny's wife and first regular on the show) sang to Weems' accompaniment. When the program was resurrected on March 31, 1933 as the Chevrolet Program, tenor James Melton became the first Benny tenor in residence.

Melton was an established star by the time he joined the Benny cast. He became a singer when he need to defray his expenses at the University of Florida, but instead of staying there to complete his law

degree, he transferred to the University of Georgia to study music. The next logical step in his career was to move to the American entertainment capital New York City, where he was introduced to listening audiences on theater entrepreneur S. L. Rothafel's *Roxy and His Gang* radio program in the late 1920's. As his prominence in the music world rose, he was asked to

sing on a 1932 recording of the musical *Show Boat*. During one of his numerous singing stints, Melton joined The Revelers, a quartet who sang with the Dr. Frank Black Orchestra. When Black joined the Chevy cast, so did Melton.

Even though the type of daffy character with the angelic singing voice did not fully mature on the Benny

program for a few years, James Melton did assume roles in the weekly sketches, as did the announcers and band leaders of the day. In these early shows, Jack Benny *the monologist* was more prevalent than was Jack Benny *the character*. These Great Depression offerings usually included a commentary on the news, several complete musical numbers (usually two from the band and one or two from a singer), and a skit often inspired by a current motion picture or a parody on a time worn play like *East Lynne*. By the end of the first complete year of the Benny program, Frank Parker replaced Melton as resident tenor.

James Melton's prestige in the musical world rose after he left Jack Benny, but the

direction of his singing continually moved from the popular tunes common on variety and comedy show to more classical pieces. In 1935, he sang with Jane Froman on their short-lived program *The Intimate Revue*; however, the show was more noteworthy for providing a young Bob Hope with his first exposure as a regular on a network radio show. Melton eventually

moved on to the Metropolitan Opera where he was featured from 1942-1947 and made numerous guest appearances on programs like the *Bell Telephone Hour*, the *Chicago Theater of the Air*, and the *Ziegfeld Follies of the Air*. For two seasons starting in 1944, Melton starred on the *Texaco Star Theater*, and in 1945 he rejoined Dr. Black on the

*Harvest of Stars*. Prior to his death at age 57 in 1961, James Melton continued entertaining audiences with his singing in venues such as films, stage musicals, and night clubs.

Like James Melton, Frank Parker was a renowned singer when he joined the *Jack Benny* cast on December 10, 1933. Born in 1903, Parker sang with Jessica Dragonette in the *Cities Service Concerts* starting in 1929. When he assumed his place on the Benny show, Frank Parker became the first singer to have an on air personality, one who would act as a cast member rather than just occupy a break from the comedy. As part of the Benny troupe, he merited his own special show



JAMES MELTON

## LEND ME A TENOR

when on May 18, 1934, "The Visit to Frank Parker's Family" episode bowed. The plot of the show revolves around Benny making an obligatory visit to see Parker's family after similar visits to other cast members' houses. Although Parker does not reflect the moronic tenor characters that were to come, in this program, he was portrayed as a member of an impoverished family who never stopped singing.

In 1934, several elements changed the *Jack Benny Show*: announcer Don Wilson became the longest running member of the Benny family outside of Jack and Mary, General Tire owned sponsorship, Don Bestor became the

orchestra leader, and the audience that seemed only barely extant in the earlier programs was now a very vocal participant. As a practice that continued in several Jack Benny films, Parker and temporary orchestra leader Jimmy Grier were brought over from the radio show to assume roles in United Artists' motion picture *Transatlantic Merry-Go-Round*, starring Benny, Nancy Carroll, and Gene Raymond.

Unfortunately, the following year Parker and Benny had a disagreement. Sources close to the show reported that the singer quit of his own accord, and others claimed that he was fired. Some media watchers felt that the show's ratings might suffer without the popular Parker. Whatever the

reason, auditions were quickly held to find a replacement and an interim tenor, Michael Bartlett, provided the songs for four weeks. Very few copies of the program from this time period survive; and so, it is difficult to understand how he fit into the shows. In the biography of Jack Benny written by Mary and her brother Hilliard Marks, they stated that the "writers could not mold Bartlett's personality to the Benny concept."

Frank Parker continued to make appearances on the radio, such as the time he sang "Mandy" on a special minstrel show edition of *Amos 'n' Andy* in late 1936, and by 1943 he had his own program. His popularity continued to the extent that he became one of the "Little

Godfreys" on Arthur Godfrey's post war program. So popular was Parker during this stay that he sang "Liza" on a series of 45 records entitled "Arthur Godfrey and His Friends" and a 1954 *Cosmopolitan* magazine featured his life story in connection to the Godfrey program.

Like the sponsors before, General Tire dropped the *Jack Benny Show*. General Foods, hoping to dethrone Royal as the number one maker of gelatin desserts, decided to take a chance on the comedian. With Mary, Don, Don, and Frank, Jack readied himself for his meteoric rise to the top of radio stardom. However, after Parker left during the early days of the Jell-O series, one necessary and carefully acquired

substitute to the struggling program was needed. Long time writer for the show and Jack Benny's friend Milt Josefsberg surmised that the program needed a daffy character, and from Kenny Baker's first lines on the show on November 3, 1935, "I'm a tenor singer. I'm sorry," he established the lovable but stupid tenor who would be a part of the cast for its duration on radio and television.

After the first dim-witted singer was added to the cast, several more final alterations developed the program into one of the best loved and longest lasting comedies in broadcasting history. The first change was that once the goofy Baker part was established, Mary's dizzy girlfriend demeanor changed to a wise

cracking, boss bashing companion. The next two modifications were the cast additions of band leader Phil Harris in October, 1936 and valet Eddic "Rochester" Anderson in March of 1937.

For the next four years, Kenny Baker's star would rise in the role of moron with a beautiful voice as the Jell-O program vied for the top spot in radio with Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy's Chase and Sanborn show. To a greater extent than his predecessors, Kenny Baker also assumed roles in prestigious motion pictures, not the least of which were the Marx Brothers' *At the Circus*, *The Mikado*, and *The Harvey Girls*. However, just as his fame was increasing, so were the offers to star in his

own radio show. In the long run, greener pastures for Kenny Baker seemed to be with the Jack Benny show, instead he chose to test the waters himself with only a modicum of success. The only program close to the listenership and prestige of the Benny show on which Kenny Baker performed was that of friendly Benny rival Fred Allen, where the tenor sang for a brief stint in the

early 1940's when the singer was between his own shows.

After leaving Jack Benny at the end of the 1938-39 season and before his death in 1985, Kenny Baker toured in theaters during World War II with Dorothy Lamour, made a few more motion pictures, and eventually embraced Christian Science, for whom he made

several religious recordings. He even returned to radio with his own show on the Mutual network. For Jack Benny, even though he had established himself as a winner on radio, some critics felt that he might lose his lofty position without Kenny Baker. The same scenario of four years earlier repeated just prior to the 1939-40 season when carefully scrutinized auditions were held to ensure a quality singer in what would become the last of the classic Jack Benny cast members.

Born Owen Patrick "Eugene" McNulty into an Irish family in the Bronx in 1917, Dennis Day, like the original Benny tenor James Melton, planned to become a lawyer. The young Manhattan College stu-



FRANK PARKER



KENNY BAKER



## LEND ME A TENOR

dent sent an audition disk to Mary when he heard that the Benny program was in need of a singer. He was like the hundreds of hopefuls who heard of the program's need, some of whom had made modest gains in the entertainment world, and others, like Dennis Day had very little professional experience. His total exposure to radio was a few singing stints at the local New York CBS affiliate.

Once the numbers were limited to a few interview candidates, Dennis was brought before Jack and Mary to chat. Jack had been in Chicago interviewing tenors, and Mary was in New York doing the same. When they got together, the intention was to gauge the person whose singing ability had already been verified as to how well his verbal skills registered with cast members. In two words, the choice was made. Mary opened with a simple question, "Now, Dennis?" When he replied, "Yes, please," she broke up and expressed her choice immediately.

Although Mary's influential vote was cast, it took several weeks for the contract signing, primarily because Jack cut a transcription disk of Dennis for his writers to hear, mailed it to California, and waited for their response. Soon after, Dennis went to the station to board the train West. Before he left, his mother spotted the famous vaudeville team of Tim and Irene and asked them to look after her boy out in California. Ironically, during 1936, the duo were Jack Benny's summer replacement.

Once in California, Dennis was not completely welcomed as a full cast member. First he had to sing for Western NBC executives and was rewarded with only a two week contract. Still stinging from departed tenors and cautious with this new choice, the second contract was more lengthy but not exactly an overwhelming affirmation

when eleven weeks were penciled in. During the rest of the season, Dennis Day received a series of thirteen week contracts.

Mary Livingstone's intuition was uncanny, because Dennis' hitherto lack of character training for the radio quickly evolved as he became one of the funniest deliverers of lines with the timeliness of a pro. To bolster his confidence and pair him with a surefire veteran performer, the Benny writers immediately coupled Dennis with Verna Felton, who played his radio mother off and on for the next twelve seasons, as well as on his own show. The insightful Benny introduced Dennis not so much as by what he said the first time on that October 8, 1939 program, rather how Benny told the cast about the new tenor and through the usual belittling given to Benny by Felton. (In earlier shows she played Don Wilson's mother and Phil Harris' mother.) Contrary to Dennis' sweet, shy real mother, Verna Felton played against Benny better than he ever played "Love in Bloom" or "The Bee," and often silencing him with "Listen, Buster..."

As the show progressed and inched toward World War II, the segments with daffy Dennis Day sharing his illogic with his boss contrasted to his lilting Irish voice became an audience favorite to the point that he was named one of the five best singers in radio after his first season. During his second season on the show, when Dennis Day's contract was long term and as his confidence as a comedian grew, the appearances of Mother Day diminished; however, she was so etched in the loyal listeners' minds as Benny's worst nightmare that the mere mention of her name sent chills up the underpaying boss's spine.

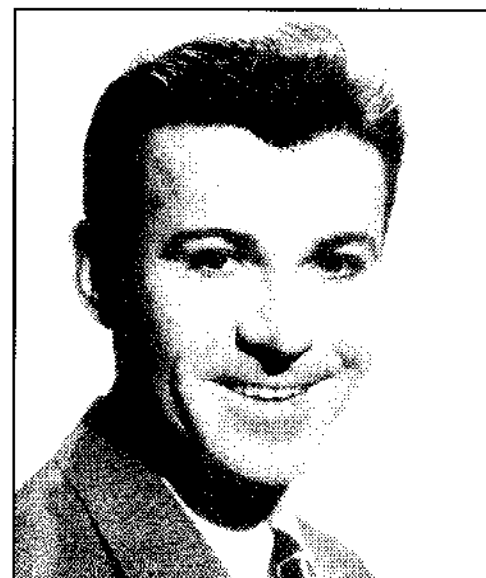
As Dennis Day rode the crest of the show's popularity, his fortunes entertaining in other venues likewise profited. Unlike his predecessors, the former Mr. McNulty had not starred in a movie, cut a

hit record, nor found his face on sheet music. He had no formal acting training and only a few signing lessons; yet, as a result of being on the Benny show, he made eight motion pictures starting with *Buck Benny Rides Again* in 1940 and was featured on records and sheet music for his renditions of wonderful songs like "Danny Boy," "Johnny Doughboy Found a Rose In Ireland," "McNamara's Band," and "Clancy Lowered the Boom." Likewise, when television first became a popular American appliance, Dennis found himself on his own show and guested on many others.

The success of Dennis Day as a tenor and character actor on the Jack Benny show was a result of natural nurturing from a radio family that included supportive cast members and savvy writers. The talent was natural, especially his ability to impersonate well known characters. Milt Josefsberg recalled that during a 1944 show, the cast performed a parody of the *Bob Hope Show*. Dennis played mustached Jerry Colonna and did it so well that numerous critics accused Benny of slipping the real Colonna onto the show.

Dennis was always grateful for the chance that he was given by Jack and Mary. What they did was not only to provide an opportunity for a new voice for the program, but it also meant taking a chance on a untried performer in a medium that was becoming increasingly competitive. Dur-

ing one rare serious moment on the April 23, 1944 program, Dennis was able to thank them publicly. He was going into the navy, and it was a departure that Jack and Mary felt very personally. Perhaps it was because Dennis was joining the same branch of the service that Jack did, and the veteran of World War I knew what combat was like from that perspective. The war



DENNIS DAY

was entering a crucial period, and it was not won by the Allies quite yet. Or maybe it was because Dennis was the son they never had. If nothing else, his beautiful songs and Gracie Allen-like illogic would be missed by those who sincerely wished him well that night, from Jack to Rochester.

The temporary replacement

tenor was Larry Stevens, who assumed but did not master the role for the next two seasons. In all fairness, Larry Stevens' fortunes were limited to Dennis' absence, and while the regular singer was gone, Stevens found his way to the covers of sheet music such as "Dance with a Dolly" and listed as "Larry Stevens - Jack Benny Program."

When Dennis was heartily welcomed back from the navy in 1946, only a few changes had been made on the successful program. Sponsorship changed for the last time from General Foods (Jell-O and Grape Nuts) to Lucky Strike cigarettes.

Most of the cast remained the same, but two recurring bits were added: with a

## LEND ME A TENOR

Schleppermanesque Yiddish accent (Schlepperman was portrayed in the early years of the show by Sam Hearn), Artie Auerbach as Mr. Kitzel ran into Benny on a variety of occasions, as did two nose-y NBC switchboard operators, Gertrude and Mabel, who were introduced in 1945 and became regular fixtures. In short, Dennis was rejoining a cast that was defining the pinnacle of radio comedy for the medium's final years.

As has been already mentioned, Dennis Day had his own radio program, *A Day in the Life of Dennis Day*, which premiered October 3, 1946. Although it did not garnish the critical praise of the Benny show, Day's little situation comedy was quite amusing.

In the program, he usually played a soda jerk, who was slightly less moronic than the character he played on the Benny show. Even on his own program Dennis played a singer who was forced to find additional income because of being underpaid by Jack Benny. His main goal in life was to woo his girlfriend Mildred and to convince her parents of his worth. The show was successful enough to last until 1951.

The following year, he took his impoverished singer act and Verna Felton as his mother to television on *The RCA Victor Show*. Although the program experienced several modifications, it remained on the air until 1954, when it bowed as *The Dennis Day Show*.

In a display of generosity, whether it was Phil Harris, Mel Blanc, or Dennis Day, Jack Benny not only permitted his radio family the flexibility to pursue their own shows while continuing their parts on his program, but he also made guest appearances on those shows to endorse them and help the ratings. For this support, Dennis Day was eternally grateful to Benny and re-

mained his friend until his boss's death in 1974. He continued recording and guest starring on television after the Benny show ended its run. Several times he sang or narrated Disney recordings of "The Story of Johnny Appleseed" and "Further Tales of Snow White and the Dwarfs." In 1980 he added his voice to the television cartoon "Frosty's Winterland."

Dennis Day remained active as a performer until his own death on June 22, 1988.

Most successful comedies on radio and television rely on the strength of the ensemble. A featured star is an asset, of course, but if the star knows how to mold a cast into well rounded supporting members, he could keep an audience week after week and year after year. Hence, the *Jack Benny Show*, with its variety of sponsors, grew in quality as the medium matured.

Season after season, Jack and Mary Benny and their writers exercised shrewd judgment to find and retain one of the best announcers, a great character band leader, the first African-American on radio to be able to spar verbally and humorously with his "boss," numerous supporting actors, and after trial and error, as well as learning lessons from losing creative voices/personalities, tenors who could send listeners off to the music of a Celtic dreamland one minute and the next into scrambled logic that was so crazy that it almost made sense.

In the end, *The Jack Benny Program* refined itself and defined radio comedy at its best to the point where it still works decades after the shows originally aired. ■

(NOTE: Tune in to TWTD during February --Jack Benny Month-- to hear tenors James Melton (in 1933), Frank Parker (in 1934) Kenny Baker (in 1938), and Dennis Day (in 1941, 46, 51, 52, and on *A Day in the Life of Dennis Day* in 1948.)

## Ken Alexander Remembers . . .

### *The Old Neighborhood*



*How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood  
When fond recollection presents them to view:  
The orchard, the meadow, the deep tangled wildwood,  
And ev'ry loved spot that my infancy knew.*

*--From the ancient song "The Old Oaken Bucket"*

I suppose that all of us, from time to time, fondly reflect on the place where we spent our childhood. Whether we grew up on a farm, in a small town, or in a big city, we enjoy traveling back there in our thoughts.

The Old Neighborhood -- that's where our roots are. Rich or poor, distinguished or common, we never forget where we came from.

With your kind permission, I'd like to indulge myself by taking an imaginary stroll through the neighborhood where I grew up. I'd be happy to have your company.

My old neighborhood is on Chicago's West Side -- the section around Madison and Pulaski known as West Garfield Park.

The north-south street at 4000 west used to be called Crawford Avenue, but after its name was changed to Pulaski Road, we continued for years to call it Crawford.

The bank on the northwest corner remained the Madison-Crawford Bank, and the clock on the ornate pole on the sidewalk in front continued to bear that name on its four faces.

The Crawford Theatre was never renamed the Pulaski.

And when the streetcars approached 4000 west, the conductors would call out "Crawford!... Pulaski!"

Old habits die hard.

My family lived just a block west of Crawford -- er, Pulaski -- on Karlov Avenue; our apartment was in a three-story red brick building on the northeast corner of Karlov (4100 west) and West End (200 north).

It wasn't a ritzy neighborhood, but it was a nice place to live. The going rate for a four-room apartment was \$37.50 a month.

A few blocks to the east was Garfield Park, with its conservatory -- largest in the world -- and its lagoon, where you could take a rowboat ride. As I recall, there was no rental charge for the boat; you just had to pay a small deposit in case you should break one of the oars.

East of Pulaski, the north-south streets appeared to have been named on a random basis. Between Pulaski and Cicero, all the street names began with "K" -- Keystone,

## THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD

Karlov, Keeler, Kildare, Kolin, Kostner, Kenneth, Kilbourn, Kolmar, Kenton, Kilpatrick.

West of Cicero, the "L" streets began. But that was another neighborhood.

Madison and Pulaski was an excellent shopping area. Along Madison, in the couple of blocks west of Pulaski, were all kinds of stores and shops.

There was a Madigan's, probably the original Madigan's. Baer Bros. & Prodie was a popular men's clothing store. The Three Sisters shop sold women's apparel. There was a Robert Hall clothing store at Washington and Pulaski.

L. Fish Furniture Company had a store on Madison, with a large electrical sign in the shape of a fish hanging over the sidewalk. Straus & Schram had another furniture store on the street.

A bakery called Schlosser's opened on Madison while we lived in the area. It was a beautiful store, with a pale blue, oval, indirectly lighted ceiling.

Then there was a dime store Neisner's, a five-and-ten on the order of Woolworth's or Kresge's. At one of the counters a young woman sold records, 78-r.p.m. discs. You could hear Sammy Kaye's record of "Daddy" or the Andrews Sisters' current hit as you passed her counter.

The first supermarket I ever saw was an A&P on the northwest corner of Madison and Keeler.

The area of Madison and Pulaski was a mecca for folks seeking entertainment. There were two large and famous movie theatres: the Marbro, in the 4100 block of Madison and the Paradise, on Pulaski at West End. These were Balaban and Katz Theatres, and they were elegant movie palaces.

There were smaller, independent movie

houses, too: the Crawford and the Alex. Then there was the Senate, near Kedzie, and the Byrd, farther west at Cicero.

Add to the theatres the Paradise Ballroom in the Hotel Guyon, at Washington and Pulaski. Although this ballroom didn't book the nation's top bands, there was always good, live dance music on weekends.

Imagine the crowds of people that the movie theatres and the ballroom would draw to the neighborhood. On a Saturday night date night cars would be parked almost bumper-to-bumper on all the side streets in the area.

In addition to the Hotel Guyon, there were two other hotels in the area: the Midwest Hotel, at Madison and Hamlin and the Graemere, a few blocks east at Homan.

Across the street from our building — on the west side of Karlov — was an empty lot, or, as we called it, the Prairie. This lot was overgrown with weeds and littered with bottles, cartons, tin cans and debris of all kinds.

A group of us boys averaging about 11 years old one day approached the woman who owned the lot — she lived in the house on the lot adjoining this one — and asked her if she would allow us to play in the lot provided that we would clean it up first.

The woman agreed, and one summer day a dozen of us boys stormed that prairie and, under the leadership of one of the older boys, cleaned it up. We hauled away scads of rubbish and we pulled up and cut down weeds.

Now the boys who played baseball and touch football no longer had to play in the alley.

A couple of times a bunch of us had a potato roast. Each of us would bring an Idaho potato from home, and some salt and a sheet of aluminum foil. Then we would wrap the spuds in the foil and roast them over a small bonfire on our prairie. Potatoes never tasted so good.

Since no homes were air conditioned back then, people who lived in houses would sit on their front porches on warm summer evenings. Apartment dwellers had no front porch, but we would sit on our back porches.

Neighbors got to know each other in this way. They would sit and exchange bits of gossip while their kids played in the backyard below.

**L. Fish Furniture Company had a store on Madison, with a large electrical sign in the shape of a fish hanging over the sidewalk.**

Folks could also keep abreast of neighborhood news by reading the community newspaper, the *Garfieldian*.

The George W. Tilton School, my grammar school, was a block west of the corner where we lived — at West End and Keeler. Some of the neighborhood kids attended St. Mel's at Washington and Kildare.

We would hear the bells at St. Mel's Church each hour during the day. First, the Westminster chimes, then the bell would strike the hour.

At 6 p.m., after the hour was struck, we would hear three sets of three bells, signifying the Trinity:

Bong.....Bong.....Bong.....  
Bong.....Bong.....Bong.....  
Bong.....Bong.....Bong.....

The Logler branch of the Chicago Public Library was on Pulaski just south of Madison.

A restaurant at Madison and Kedzie called Little Jack's was a popular place known for its cheesecake.

Not everybody owned an automobile in those days, but public transportation served the area well.

Going downtown was simplicity itself. You could take the Chicago Motor Coach bus on Washington or the Chicago Surface

Lines streetcar on Madison — it was a straight shot right to the heart of the Loop. Then there was the Lake Street "L," now the CTA's Green Line.

Pulaski was a streetcar line that would take you north or south.

Although I've been talking in the past tense, I realize that some of the buildings and institutions are still there. But many of them are gone.

Well, that's the end of our walking tour. It was nice of you to come along — especially since this may not be the neighborhood where you grew up.

Take a walking tour of *your* old neighborhood some time. It's fun. But if you've been away for a number of years, don't go back there in person — you may be terribly disappointed if you do.

You could be shocked to find that the house you lived in has been torn down. The little corner grocery is no longer there; now a supermarket occupies a third of the block. Your old barber shop is now a tanning parlor. A parking lot lies where the bakery stood. The old bookstore? A video arcade.

Gone are the noisy streetcars; even the tracks have been torn up, or covered with asphalt.

Your childhood playmates, like yourself, have grown up and moved away, and the prairie where you used to play is now a strip mall. Even your favorite tree is gone.

In short, you may hardly recognize the place.

So when you revisit your old neighborhood, do it in your imagination. In that way you won't be disappointed.

If you're a sentimental person, like me, you cherish your memories; you don't want them to be disturbed by the realities wrought by the passage of time. So when you return to your old neighborhood, travel there *in your mind*. You'll find that not a thing has changed; everything will be just the same as it was when you were twelve.

# OBEDIENTLY YOURS

## Orson Welles Rewrote the Rules of Radio

BY ERIK MARTIN

Before he changed the face of the stage and screen forever and became known as one of cinema's greatest directors and actors, cherub faced George Orson Welles blazed his biggest trail in the most unlikely of mediums: radio.

Welles' commanding and versatile voice was often his greatest attribute, nowhere more evident than on radio. He could manipulate his voice masterfully, building it to a thundering crescendo and then, implementing perfectly timed dramatic pauses, hushing to a serene whisper. Welles was also able to play many different parts simultaneously, and shift between young and old characters seamlessly. Indeed, the young star—possessing a mature voice rich and developed far beyond his age—had a penchant for transforming into completely believable aged characters. He also mastered many dialects and effortlessly assumed the vernacular of any character he portrayed.

Beginning in 1935, at the end of his teenage years, Welles earned bit parts on various radio programs and was largely uncredited as a radio performer. Eventually, Welles appeared regularly on such weekly series as the Mutual Network's *March of Time*, the *Cavalcade of America*, and *Information Please*, a show that demonstrated Welles' high IQ and mastery of trivia time and again.

In 1936, Welles struck a nerve as a player on the *March of Time* episode entitled

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*Erik J. Martin is a free-lance writer from Oak Lawn, Illinois.*

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*Panic*, an account of the 1929 stock market crash. It was this impassioned performance that impressed Mutual enough to give Welles more air time and creative control on other programs.

Nineteen thirty seven proved to be a ground breaking year for Welles in radio. At only 22, he pulled his first stint behind the mike as Lamont Cranston, the infamous *Shadow*, and the first legendary character in Welles' repertoire was born (though he would only play *The Shadow* for one full year). Next, he assembled a stellar band of actors to enact a top-notch version of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* for Mutual over seven weeks beginning in July—a project that allowed Welles to successfully wield the power of producer, director, writer and actor. He wore those same hats soon afterward as head of the Broadway and radio versions of the *Mercury Theatre*, a stalwart troupe comprised of *Les Miserables* players and other multifaceted actors, including Agnes Moorhead, Ray Collins, Martin Gable, Frank Readick, Joseph Cotton, and many others.

*Les Miserables* was a pioneering turning point for Welles and for radio itself. From the start, Welles said he aimed to air the essential character of the book itself, and to enact the work of Victor Hugo to the fullest extent. By using emotional musical bridges, echo effects, seamless dialogue montages and other unique effects, all in different combinations, Welles helped usher in the era of true radio theater. Thanks to his unleashing of the power of dialogue and brilliant counterplay of voices, the end result sounded very three-dimensional and utterly believable.



ORSON WELLES

Already having conquered Broadway with his highly praised Mercury Theatre troupe, Welles bagged his first full-time radio series at CBS in 1938 with the *Mercury Theatre on the Air*. A unique dramatic program featuring faithful adaptations of classic works of world literature and theater, the *Mercury Theatre on the Air* kicked off its inaugural season with a fine version of Bram Stoker's "Dracula" in July. "Treasure Island," "A Tale of Two Cities," and other fine adaptations followed, but it would be another horror story that would forever etch Welles in the ears of Americans and in the pages of history: his infamous "War of the Worlds" broadcast on October 30, 1938.

Based on H.G. Wells' science fiction masterpiece, and co-adapted by Mercury veteran actor John Houseman—Welles' close friend and creative accomplice—"The War of the Worlds" broadcast was Welles' chance of playing the biggest Halloween prank ever on an unsuspecting nation. He scripted a series of mock news bulletins depicting a hostile invasion by

Martians that kept interrupting what sounded like an authentic big band dance remote. The bulletins and eyewitness accounts by the Mercury players in tandem with the unique sound effects were so realistic sounding that roughly half the nation bought the ruse. Thousands barricaded themselves indoors or fled their homes, while others even attempted suicide.

Welles' sense of timing in airing "War of the Worlds" was impeccable. At the time, as political uncertainty and whispers of war swept across the rest of the globe, America tried to isolate itself from the impending conflict, though Americans were always eager to hear updates on world events. His drama played opposite the country's most popular radio program, the *Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy Show*, whose listeners would often switch to other frequencies to check for news during commercials.

After an intense public backlash and media frenzy surrounding the program, Welles made a sincere sounding public apology that was Oscar caliber. Clearly, however, the one-time child prodigy had to be ecstatic: the broadcast had put him on the front pages, and his career skyrocketed shortly afterward.

By the end of 1938, Welles' program picked up Campbell's soup as a sponsor, and *Mercury Theatre on the Air* became the *Campbell Playhouse*. One of its first broadcasts was Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," a radio play which would become a yuletide tradition over many years starring the inimitable Lionel Barrymore as Scrooge, with narration by Welles.

By this time, with his busy on-air schedule on different programs, Welles had to rely on a rather clever way of getting him from show to show in time for his performances: he hired an ambulance to take him between radio studios.

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Museum of Broadcast Communications

# museum pieces

Reported by Margaret Warren

Stop by the archives of the Museum of Broadcast Communications just for fun!

In seconds the very user-friendly computers will put you in touch with any number of your favorite programs and stars - past and present.

For instance, what could be more appropriate this time of year than programs with a Valentine or St. Patrick theme.

One Valentine delight you'll find is a classic "Peanuts" adventure - "Be My Valentine, Charlie Brown." Another whimsical delight is a vintage "Kukla, Fran and Ollie" episode.

A slightly more erudite tribute to the day comes when John Callaway looks at match-making with a panel of dating service operators on "Chicago Tonight." This program originally aired on St. Valentine's Day, 1986.

Fast-forward to March to St. Patrick's Day. Go back in time and remember when Eddie Fisher did "Coke Time," a gem of a little NBC television show in the 1950s. Here Morton Downey drops by and warbles one of his classic Irish songs.

There's Irish history when Pat O'Mally, chairman emeritus of Canteen Corporation, visited with Lee Phillip one afternoon. It's a wonderful conversation about the Irish in America and in Chicago, and the St. Paddy's Day parades and traditions.

Callaway's "Chicago Tonight" topped off St. Patrick's Day in 1987 when on March 18 Bruce DuMont concluded the program with a look at the St. Pat's festivities of the previous day. You'll see the greening of the Chicago River, the big parade complete with every available politician, and lots of regular folks all decked out in green.

There are thousands more television and



**WALTER JACOBSON** discussed television news and his own career one evening last fall. The tape is available for viewing in the Museum Archives.

radio programs in the Archives waiting to be watched, heard and enjoyed.

Stop in on your lunch hour, a break from shopping, to do some research on a special media-related project, or for any reason at all.

Choose a show, sit back, relax and enjoy.

And while you are there think about becoming a member of the Museum.

Museum of Broadcast Communications

Chicago Cultural Center

Michigan Avenue at Washington Street

Chicago, 60602

Phone (312) 629-6000



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PHOTO BY JEFF BROWN

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## ← JACK BENNY AND DENNIS DAY

Dennis was the most famous, but not the only singer employed by Jack. Read Bill Oates' article about Benny's Tenors, page 26.

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