

Old Time Radio **DIGEST**

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Jack
Benny

Warren



Old Time Radio DIGEST

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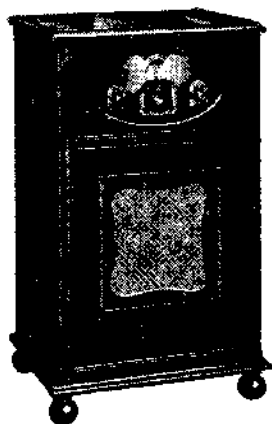
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The **DOUBLE LIFE** of



**The man
who wanted
to be
Heifetz**

A long time ago, when the Jack Benny of today was still little Benjamin Kubelsky, he was minding his father's haberdashery shop in Waukegan one evening when a stranger walked in and handed Benjamin some money. Kubelsky *pere*, seeing the cash in the register later, asked his offspring what he had sold. "Nothing," said his son. "He just gave me some money on his account."

"But what was his name?" insisted Mr. Kubelsky.

"I don't know," said Benjamin. "Gee whiz, Pop, do you have to have his name, too?"

Not long afterwards a customer came in and purchased some ties, handkerchiefs and shirts and departed without leaving any cash. "But it's all right," Benjamin told his father later, "he told me to charge it to his account. And this time I got his name."

"Name!" the old man screamed. "That fellow has no account in my store!"

Jack Benny, at 53, according to his intimates, is only a little less naive than the youthful Benjamin Kubelsky who could be flim-flammed so easily by a smooth-talking sharper. "Benny," said Ed Beloin, one of his former writers, "is probably the most unsophisticated man I know."

Yet Jack's radio self-portrait of a sport-jacketed, Beverly Hills Simon Legree, who makes Dennis Day mow his lawn as well as sing for his \$17.50 a week, is taken as

Mr. J. Benny

pure gospel by the 25,000,000 people who listen regularly to his Sunday night half-hour over NBC. Benny's mail still bristles with indignant letters demanding that he pay Rochester a living wage. (Rochester gets over \$1000 a week.) Even Mr. Whiskers once fell for the Benny myth, when the WPB, a Government war-time agency, sent Jack a business-like letter requesting that he turn in his legendary Maxwell to the scrap drive.

Strangers still turn their heads when Jack lunches or dines in Romanoff's or the Brown Derby, curious to see if he will leave either a nickel or a dime tip. Benny always overtips lavishly, both because that is his nature and because he is almost pathologically sensitive about his penny-squeezing "reputation."

The truth is, no one knows the real Jack Benny—no one, that is, outside of Jack himself, and he is only a shade more voluble than the



One of the secrets of their success is that Jack and his wife Mary have a lot of fun when they work together on the program.

late Calvin Coolidge. Millions of words have already been printed about this man who is the highest-paid comedian in radio. His scrap book, if he kept one, would in sheer stacked-up wordage make the Sears, Roebuck catalog seem like something marked "Reading Time: 10 Seconds," yet Benny still remains one of the most elusive, paradoxical figures in show business.

Benny is a fabulous personality, not so much because of his stratospheric Hooper rating, or his individual brand of humor or because he virtually revolutionized the pattern of radio comedy. Jack is radio's most intriguing figure because he has for more than 15 years succeeded brilliantly at the business of manufacturing laughter when he himself is anything but a funny man.

To an observer watching Benny prepare his Sunday program, he looks for all the world like a harried, cautious Seventh Avenue garment manufacturer worrying about his next Spring's line.

There is nothing uncomplimentary in this. The creation of a Benny broadcast is an arduous, painful, seven-day-a-week task, worth every penny of the reported \$22,500 weekly check Jack gets from the American Tobacco Company. Benny's product comes from the sweat, toil and savvy of The Boss himself, from a quartet of the highest-priced writers in radio and a superlative surrounding cast whose talents all mesh like the jewelled gears of a Naval Observatory chronometer. Jack's competitors — Fred Allen, Danny Kaye, George Burns and others — frankly admit that when it comes to judging comedy material, Ben-

ny tops them all.

People, meeting Jack for the first time, stand around hopefully waiting for him to let loose with a barrage of boffolas. They go away disappointed. Jack gives strangers a limp handshake, a shy, almost distant "Hello" and seems eager to evaporate the next moment. On the other hand, Jack can be the greatest audience in the world during rehearsals, howling with laughter, pounding the floor in glee over a line, while his cast sits there dead-pan.

And yet Benny, as George Burns says, "is the greatest editor of material in the business. He's got the knack of cutting out all the weak slush and keeping in only the strong punchy lines." Because he has made the creation of comedy such a serious business, Jack knows better than any other man in the world what will be funny on his program. "I can't always tell when a line is good," he admits, "but, brother, I can tell when it's lousy."

Despite all this, despite his stature as "Mr. Radio," his consistent standing among the top five on the air, his huge earnings, his talent as a star-maker, the kudos paid him by the public and the trade, Jack Benny is still the "unhappy fiddler." (Why must comedians always want to play "Hamlet"?) Oddly enough, Benny really believes that if he had listened to his father, and practiced more on the fiddle when he was a boy in Waukegan, he would be a fine violinist today. He honestly envies the great virtuosos like Heifetz, Isaac Stern and Szigeti. He still remembers that Heifetz once told him he had a rich tone



Above, the Sportsmen, give out with "L-S-L-S-M-F-T," and below, Jack catches up on news with Phil Harris and Rochester.



and that he should have continued with his music. The pre-comedy Benny was actually a soulful fellow with a violin. Unfortunately, it didn't get him any place.

Even Jack realizes this in his less pre-occupied moments. As his wife, Mary Livingstone once told him, "If you had kept up with your fiddle-playing, you would have lost all the humor of being a lousy violinist on your program." (Jack is actually quite proficient.) But he can never seem to forget that he was once a fiddle player. Being no noodle, despite the role he plays on the air, Jack has managed to sublimate his musical yearnings. He has turned his frustration into one of the most riotously funny routines among all the running gags on his program—the "Professor Le Blanc" situation in which Mel Blanc, as the "Professor," gives Jack violin lessons and forever ends up with his buck-fifty unpaid.

Occasionally, however, Jack will rebel against the fate that has made him the comedian with the longest run in radio among the top funny men. He sets out to prove that he has other talents, only to wind up behind the personal eight-ball. Not long ago there was a party at Jack's \$250,000 Beverly Hills home, where expert pantaloons like Danny Kaye, George Burns and Georgie Jessel were panic-ing the guests, bouncing ad libs around like so many basket balls. After a couple of hours Jack turned restless. "Everybody gets laughs around here but me," he complained. "And in my own house."

Benny went upstairs, then came down again a short time later, made up like the corniest of gypsy

fiddlers. He strolled among the guests, playing as schmaltzy an assortment of *tzardas* ever heard outside of the ineffable Rubinoff. Then he passed around a battered hat.

No one bothered to laugh.

Another time, at a Hollywood benefit for Greek War Relief, Benny, instead of his expected comedy turn, performed an elaborate concerto arrangement of "Love in Bloom." The surprised audience burst into applause, but Jack merely bowed to the conductor, bowed to the audience, then sauntered off the stage, his treasured violin under his arm.

The contradictions in the Benny personality show up in many ways. Take, for instance, his reputed inability to get off a fastie unless his scripting crew is running interference for him. True, Benny is no rapier wit like Fred Allen or Henry Morgan. "Benny," said Harry Conn, his first writer, "couldn't even ad lib a belch at a Hungarian banquet." Yet Jack, when hurt or cornered, can dish it out as well as take it. Radio circles still chuckle over Jack's famed bout with Fred Allen, who had Benny hanging on the ropes with his ad libs. Jack stood it as long as he could, then said, plaintively, "You wouldn't dare do this to me if I had my writers with me."

On another occasion when Benny, Bob Hope, Fred Allen, Jimmy Durante and Jerry Colona were starring on a Christmas "Command Performance" for the Army, the photographer lined up the comedians for a series of pictures. Someone had to say something and Hope started it with a crack about

his profile. There was a pause and Durante yelled, "Hey, you ushers, stand erect and give this jernt a little class." Neither Benny nor Allen could think of anything to say. Allen started mugging and Jack jammed his hat on crosswise. "Well, at least I'll *look* funny," he quipped. Then Benny pulled a parking ticket out of his pocket. "I don't mind doing this show for free," he announced, "but who in heck is going to pay for this parking ticket?"

The delighted screams of the audience could have been heard all the way to Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga.

His studio audience, watching Jack do a warm-up before a broadcast, see Benny come out with all his own hair, see him tanned, genial and sassy-looking. He looks

like a man with a million bucks in his pocket and a phone call from Lana Turner. "Welcome to the Lucky Strike Program," he says, then flips the ashes off his cigar. But that incredible Benny poise is ersatz. Jack's "deliberately cultivated suavity," said a friend, "conceals an almost irrational terror of an audience. Nobody watching him realizes that he is trembling inside and that every line he speaks and every piece of business he does requires an effort of will power."

Even in the days when he was an unknown vaudevillian, happy to pick up a fast twenty-five dollars with a dog act, Benny had that magnificent poise. Once, Jack tried out a turn at the Academy of Music Theatre in New York—a vaudeville house not particularly



Could Dennis Day, Rochester, Phil Harris, Mary Livingstone, J. Benny, Don Wilson, and Mel Blanc be tuning in for Fred Allen?

noted for its polite treatment of entertainers who weren't too well known. Everything went—from boos to over-ripe tomatoes. As Jack came out on the stage with his violin under his arm and his routine "Hello, folks," opening, the Bronx cheers began. When Jack got to the center of the stage the raspberries were deafening. But instead of going into his act, Benny kept on walking obliviously toward the other wing. Just as he reached the wing he turned and faced the customers. There was an ominous silence. "Goodbye, folks," he said. Then he strolled off the stage and out of the theatre.

To his cast—Dennis Day, Mary Livingstone, Rochester, Phil Harris, Don Wilson and the others—Benny is simply The Boss. He is no whip-cracker, but he demands and insists on perfection. Benny is his own producer. He rarely glances at the control booth for cues. He can get together with the sound man and patiently go over a sound effect—the clank of the chains in his "vault," for example—as many as 40 times, until his meticulous ear is happy. Jack himself labors over the hilarious rhymed commercials that his Sportsmen Quartet sings—incidentally, one of the freshest new routines to appear during the last twelve months. All of the painstaking Sunday-to-Sunday writing sessions are master-minded by Benny, though he may not contribute an original line of his own.

The Benny show has almost as many recurring situations and running gags on tap as the objects that fill Fibber McGee's closet. There's the broken-down Maxwell, the violin lessons, the Benny vault

with its caretaker who never sees the light of day, the brash telephone operators, Mr. Kitzel and his "peekle-in-the-meedle," the synthetic feud with Fred Allen, the Quartet and a packet of others. On the whole they pay off with laughs. But even so shrewd a judge of material as Benny will occasionally rely too much on strictly local references—things like his "Eastern - Columbia," he goes to sleep, has been described as "the worst mish-mash since the cyclone hit Lecompton, Kansas." Old scripts, recordings of broadcasts, books, magazines, newspapers and fan letters are piled high on every table and chair. In this cluttered room Benny the perfectionist finds a certain surcease from the strain. Here he wallows in mystery stories and listens to who-dun-its on the air—rarely to other comedians. "I know they're suffering, just the way I suffer," he once said. "If a gag of theirs doesn't get a laugh, I cringe."

Jack has been known to add \$1000 out of his own pocket to boost a guest fee for violinist Isaac Stern. His four writers who "Broadway and Ninth" routines which at best ring hollowly on the ears of listeners away from Los Angeles.

It's been said of Jack that he lives on a diet of black coffee and fingernails. It's true that he just can't wait to start to work and begin worrying every day. Benny arises at six in the morning, goes out for a couple of rounds of golf, then is ready for work. He is always the first on hand for conferences and rehearsals. Ten minutes before the end of a luncheon

break, Benny is back in the studio, hunched up in a corner studying his script. He fumbles nervously with his hair, clamps his teeth on an unlighted pipe, keeps fingering his tie. He is so concerned about the carefully-contrived spontaneity of his show that he keeps the side men in the Phil Harris band away from the final Sunday rehearsals. Jack wants the lines to be as fresh to them as to the audience.

All this is part of the perfection Benny strives for and usually achieves. Yet Jack's own bedroom at home, where he relaxes before have been with him five years—Sam Perrin, Milt Josefsberg, George Balzer and John Tackaberry—together earn around \$5,000 a week. Jack keeps Artie Auerbach, the "Mr. Kitzel" of his show, on salary all year round, though he may use him but three

or four times a season. Recently, when Sara Berner and Bea Benadaret—"Gladys" and "Mabel," the telephone operators—were written out of two programs at the last moment, because the shows were overboard on time, both girls received their full fees just the same. One year Jack spent more than \$100,000 on line charges to put on his broadcasts from remote camps and hospitals. This was Jack's own money, spent without publicity. And when the troupe travels, Rochester stops in the same hotel with Jack and the rest of the cast, or Jack moves the troupe to a hotel where Rochester is welcome.

Yet Jack, abnormally sensitive as he is to the feelings of others, can sometimes reveal a curious naivete. Preoccupied with the problems of his own program,



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Benny displays an odd surprise when he is confronted with the fact that there are also other programs on the air. Not long ago he used a couple of 12-year-old radio actors in the roles of "Steve" and "Joey," two neighborhood youngsters who, on the air, play football with Jack, fall for his tall stories and believe he is the superhero he claims to be. After a preliminary script reading, Jack told the boys they could leave, but to be back that afternoon at 2 for another rehearsal. After the boys had scurried out, John Tackaberry, one of Benny's writers, said, "Jack, I don't think that one kid will make it back on time today. He's got a 'conflict'."

"What do you mean?" asked Benny.

"Well," said Tackaberry, "that boy has a show of his own, you know."

"A show of his *own*?" repeated Jack. "Ohh."

Going into his record consecutive 16th year on NBC, Benny is still shrewdly playing to the listener in his living room at home, still using the narrative show with a framework of situations which he developed. Actually, Benny is the great revolutionist of radio. He was, as Fred Allen said, "the first comedian on the air to realize that you can get big laughs by ridiculing yourself, instead of your stooges."

Just where the once-skinny Waukegan kid who was born Benjamin Kubelsky got his superb sense of timing, is unimportant. But not even the most lukewarm can deny that Benny has it. Jack seems able to get more laughs out of a pause, or a simple word like

"Well," than other comedians out of a dozen pratfalls. Jack reads a line so that the very inflection makes it funny. He is "a masterly comedian who could wring a laugh out of an executor's report."

Benny is still the only radio artist who has a lifetime option on NBC's choice 7 o'clock spot on Sunday night. Niles Trammel, president of the network, gave Jack that option back in 1941, no matter who sponsored him in the future. And for the next three years, at least, Jack will be toting home around one thousand dollars a minute, just for being the very opposite of himself on the air.

Reprinted from *Radio Best*, March 1948.

JACK BENNY BACK ON THE AIR



with

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Presented by

LUCKY STRIKE

L.S./M.F.T.

Sunday Night Oct. 1

NBC NETWORK

7 P.M. WGY

Off The Wall

by Jim Snyder

Jack Benny's role as a miser and a cheapskate was an important feature of his weekly radio show; however, we have been repeatedly told how in real life he was extremely generous. There was one event in his "real life," though that lived right up to the radio characterization. This was when he and George Burns were indicted and tried for smuggling.

Jack, Mary Livingston, George Burns, and Gracie Allen spent the summer of 1939 in Europe on their vacation. While there they met a charming con man by the name of

Albert N. Chaperau. Mr. Chaperau offered to buy some jewels for the two men, which he said he could get at a bargain. He further explained that he had diplomatic immunity so that he could save them quite a bit more by personally taking them into the United States. Because of his immunity the United States customs agents could not levy the import duty. Both men took him up on his offer. Jack remembered purchasing about two thousand dollars worth of jewels for Mary, but was unsure of the amount of George's purchase. According to Jack, he and George considered the amount of money to be trifling and wanted to take the jewels through customs themselves. He said that



Chaperau finally convinced them by saying, "Everyone does it. You would probably be soaked a much higher duty on them because you're celebrities. And I insist. It will be my pleasure." Jack didn't think that Chaperau would gain anything at all from this. It was just that he wanted to do a favor for Burns and Benny. This was not an unusual occurrence. The stars were used to having strangers go out of their way, both personally and financially, to do favors for the big names. Dealers often gave stars discounts, for example. An auto dealer might consider it great advertising to have Jack Benny driving around in one of his cars, that was good for his business and especially good for a "name dropper."

Anyway, Jack and George were used to this kind of treatment and thought nothing further about it. They accepted Mr. Chaperau's offer, and then they were caught.

Jack was bitter about the way he was treated throughout the legal process. John Cahill, the United States Attorney who prosecuted Jack and George, was perhaps a little overzealous because of the celebrities involved in the case. At least Jack thought so. Jack said that "Cahill didn't prosecute us, I thought he persecuted us."

Both Jack and George apparently really considered themselves to be at least "morally" innocent, but because they were super stars they gained widespread negative publicity and their lawyers advised them to plead guilty and to get the whole thing over with.

Jack was equally bitter about the judge, Vincent L. Leibell, who perhaps was anxious to prove that justice would be firm in his courtroom, even

if celebrities were involved. Jack is quoted as saying, "He treated us like criminals with long records. We admitted that we had made a mistake but he screamed and yelled at us. Once when I was sort of slumped in my chair, he yelled at me to sit up straight, or stand up. I don't remember which, but I stood up, at attention, while some of the charges were read."

The two men received reprimands fines of \$10,000 each, suspended sentences, and had to pay an extra duty on the jewels.

The press had quite a field day with the whole episode, before, during, and after the trial. This apparently caused quite an increase in the amount of hate mail that Jack received. He said "I got letters saying, 'Dear Jew, Hitler is right,' and others not quite so polite. And much to my sorrow, I got scolding letters from fellow Jews telling me what a thoughtless louse I was trying to chisel a few bucks in those times."

Jack's radio program went on as usual during the trial, and many wondered if he would use his show to seriously proclaim his innocence, to treat the situation with humor, or to simply ignore the whole thing. Apparently there was just one minor reference to it. In one show he was supposedly walking with Rochester through the desert near Palm Springs. Suddenly there was the sound of a rattlesnake and Rochester yelled out, "Boss, Boss, look out! Right in front of you there's a rattlesnake!" Again the sound of the rattle and then Jack said "Please, Mr. Snake, leave me alone. Don't I have enough trouble?" The audience took this as a reference to the smuggling episode and loudly showed their support for Jack.

Is this the future of OTR?

by George Wagner

By far the most important thing we will do is to broadcast new "live" radio comedies and dramas. Getting qualified actors for these programs will *not* be difficult. We approach the amateur theatrical group(s) in our area (most of the long-established ones are quite good) and make them the following offer: we will advertise the holy hell out of your next stage production, if you will supply us with a live radio cast on a nightly or weekly basis. We can also approach the drama schools in our area or the drama departments of the local colleges and universities, and see if their students would like the broadcast exposure. My guess is that they will leap right over themselves at the chance, the faculty as well as the students. Other talent may come from broadcast schools or, indeed, from the OTR community itself.

Church and other choirs, by the way, will be an excellent source of radio actors and actresses. Good singing and good acting are not by any means unrelated, and many experienced choristers have had some acting experience. A case in point is OTR's own Dave Warren, the commercial artist who does all those marvellous covers for OLD TIME RADIO DIGEST. Dave is a member of the King's Men, one of the best male choruses in the United States. He is also regularly featured in the broadcast recreations at the national OTR convention. I'll also point out that many of the greatest radio announcers of early radio — Graham McNamee and Milton Cross come first to mind — came into

radio as *singers*, not announcers.

In addition to the above, any number of civic groups will be only too happy to put skits together for the radio. In doing such things, we will not merely be "bringing back" old radio. We will be, once again, re-inventing radio from the start.

We can also broadcast *new* radio horror dramas. I am a dedicated fan of the radio horror tale, and this has always been one of my main collecting interests in OTR. However, radio horror from the Golden Years of OTR is, admittedly, pretty mild stuff by mid-1980s standards. We can write new creepy-crawlers today that will melt Steven King's bones. In fact, I believe that it will almost certainly be possible to obtain permission from Stephen King to dramatize his earlier stories, and that such permission can also be gained from such other contemporary masters of the macabre as Peter Straub and Malcolm McDowell. When we do a vampire story, there are going to be vampires crawling up the backs of our listeners' chairs!

I believe that the greatest master of the twentieth century horror story was Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937). Yet of Lovecraft's dozens of absolutely first-rank thrillers, only three have ever been done on the radio. The first was "The Dunwich Horror" broadcast on SUSPENSE for November 2, 1945 — a remarkably poor adaptation, with a ridiculous framing device that cheapened what is perhaps the single best short story that I have ever read. (The production was saved only by the casting of

Ronald Colman as the hero.) The only other two Lovecraft stories dramatized on radio were "The Outsider" and "The Rats in the Walls," both aired on THE BLACK MASS program in very late radio. While these adaptations were remarkably close to both the content and the spirit of the Lovecraft stories, they suffered because of the extremely limited casts. ("The Outsider" is little more than the narrator reading the story into a microphone.) We can dramatize such other Lovecraft stories as "The Dreams in the Witch-House," "The Color Out of Space," "The Thing on the Doorstep," "Cool Air," "Pickman's Model," "The Horror at Red Hook," "Dagon," "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward," and "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," among many others. None of these stories have ever been done on the radio, although "Cool Air" and "Pickman's Model" were treated in rather bastardized form on the NIGHT GALLERY television series. (Three or four Lovecraft stories have also been the genesis of really dreadful motion pictures, of which the less said the better. One of them unstarred Vincent Price, a second ended the career of Ed Begley, while the this hastened the death of Boris Karloff. We can do much better.)

Edgar Allan Poe was not ignored as much by radio, but radio nevertheless seemed to do the same few Poe stories over and over and over again. One could fill whole volumes with the world-class Poe stories that have never been dramatized in any media. It is up to us to take care of the oversight.

I also believe that it may be possible to obtain vintage but unproduced radio scripts from such well-known

radio writers as Robert Bloch and Alfred Bester. Bloch wrote a great deal of very fine radio scripts in the 1940s although his main fame comes from his later career as a screen writer (he wrote both the novel and the script for PSYCHO). Bester, one of the greatest science-fiction novelists of the century, wrote marvellous scripts for many first-class radio shows, including THE SHADOW and NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE; his wife was the late Rollie Bester, a noted radio actress. Perhaps we could also obtain scripts from other still-living radio writers.

During the week or so before Halloween, we might take a nightly



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15-minute or even 30-minute tour through one of the local charity "haunted houses," a different one each night. While these "haunted houses" are *primarily* visual attractions, our tours could be extraordinarily effective if coupled with intelligent production and well-written commentary. I'll bet money that within a week after broadcast our "haunted house" episodes will be in general OTR trade.

In addition to broadcasting old radio

shows and new, "live" dramas and comedies, we can *also* broadcast *new* versions of old scripts. While it would be unfair to re-enact, say, a Fred Allen or Eddie Cantor script (unfair to both our amateur actors and to the script itself), we can have great fun with an old WITCH'S TALE script or one from the HERMIT'S CAVE. We can also use old soap opera scripts (perhaps brought up to date), if we can find an extensive run. Indeed, dozens of old

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- 12:30 a.m. Old radio programs, with commentary; tryouts of live dramatic skits.
- 6:00 a.m. News summaries.
- 6:30 a.m. Wake-up deejay playing cuts from old radio programs, comedy records, etc. Probably some recorded music as well. One short segment here *might* be a 15-minute "coffee corner" program from a local coffee shop or restaurant, recorded one morning and broadcast the next.
- 8:00 a.m. Old radio programs, with commentary.
- 9:00 a.m. Live woman's program; interviews; news.
- 10:00 a.m. Four soap operas; half old and half new live productions.
- 11:00 a.m. Old radio programs, with commentary.
- 11:30 a.m. News summaries and commentaries; interviews; live remote if anything interesting is going on around town.
- 12:30 p.m. Musical interlude; may be pre-empted by previous program.
- 1:00 p.m. Old radio shows, with commentary.
- 2:00 p.m. Four more soap operas, again a mixture of old and new.
- 3:00 p.m. Live local programming, either a discussion program or (preferably) a locally-produced drama or comedy.
- 4:00 p.m. Children's adventure shows, a mixture (again) of OTR and new live material.
- 5:30 p.m. Sports news, with greater emphasis on high school athletics than given by the other commercial stations. (Mrs. Wagner didn't raise stupid children; we're going to introduce quality radio to the *young*.)
- 6:00 p.m. Local and world news; station editorial.
- 6:30 p.m. Locally-produced quiz show, game show, or panel discussion.
- 7:00 p.m. Old radio shows, with commentary.
- 8:00 p.m. Two or three locally-produced live dramas or comedies.
- 9:30 p.m. Old radio shows, with commentary.
- 10:00 p.m. Telephone-talk program; while this can and will cover other topics, the moderator can center the program on OTR.
- 11:00 p.m. Old radio shows, but whenever possible this period can be used for a live music remote.

radio scripts could be "brought right up to date" by changing just a few lines here and there.

One of the things we most especially want to do is to have live audiences for our live dramatic broadcasts. Even our nightly program of midnight-to-dawn old radio shows should make room for a "night people" audience, especially if the OTR programs are interspersed with discussions, interviews, etc. We can also use this nightly period for people who want to try out live dramatic and comedy skits. I believe that within a short time — with proper advertising — this program could be the most popular in its time period.

Another reason for promoting *new* radio comedies and dramas is that they will be totally free of the taints of racism and sexism that *do* mar some vintage radio broadcasts. I realize that I have argued the *other* side of this question with Dave Reznick, mostly on the issue of my beloved AMOS 'N' ANDY, but our disagreement has been mainly a matter of degree. There *were* gratuitous racial insults on OTR. And sexism was an even worse problem on OTR. I have a GILDERSLEEVE show, recently rebroadcast, which states that women have only two legitimate places in this world: in bed or in the kitchen. That is probably the *only* objectionable thing I've ever heard on a GILDERSLEEVE broadcast, but it is *remarkably* out-of-tune with the mid-1980s. And I have a radio "comedy" (ha! ha!) from a few years later which states that it is hilariously clean fun to contemplate a man using his wife as a punching bag. In the main, OTR was almost totally free of such nonsense, but *new* material will

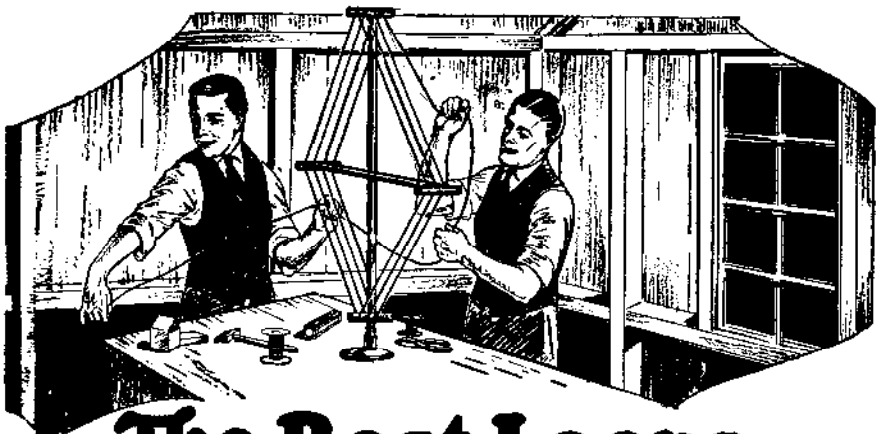
counteract *any* tainted material in the old.

While we will be *primarily* a vehicle for radio drama and comedy, both old and new, we do not intend to *ever* turn into any sort of dusty radio museum. We can carry news and actualities that the "regular" radio stations wouldn't touch. We can carry the public meetings of our local OTR Club...interviews with veteran radio actors and actresses...dramatizations of local or national current news stories (a sort of modern MARCH OF TIME).

An interesting program might be presented in conjunction with the local public libraries. Since many public libraries now carry OTR records and tapes as well as books, this might be a far better idea now that it ever was in the 1930s and 1940s. In addition, I've known a number of librarians who are also accomplished amateur (I should probably say semi-professional) actors and actresses — so let's *not* miss the boat here.

Our station can also do the best and the most extensive motion picture reviews in all radio. As a general rule, motion picture producers don't greatly care how much of the dramatic soundtrack we use in promoting their pictures; it is the *visual* images of which they are most jealous.

Our local soap operas, especially, should be locally-oriented. That is to say, the soaps on a Peoria station should feature Peoria streets, Peoria problems, Peoria sounds. Day-to-day local Peoria news must enter our after-school juvenile adventure programs as well; it is probably even more important here than with the soaps. In this manner, we *can* and we



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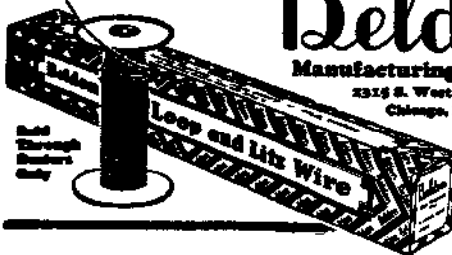
When you build a loop, make one that will give maximum signal strength and still keep snug and tight, after long usage. For special work, use Belden Litz Wire. Our new booklet, "Helpful Hints for Radio Fans," has a lot of good ideas that will help you. Send for it. It's free. Use the handy coupon.

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Name _____

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will gain a young audience again. And the young listener who tunes in for SPIKE FLYNN OF PEORIA (or whatever) will stay turned in for our re-runs of JACK ARMSTRONG — a lot more besides.

One of the things we most have to do is to get local people "on the radio." People will get in the habit of tuning in to hear their kids, their relatives, their friends — and stay with us. If that sounds like the early days of radio, you've got it. That's what re-inventing radio is all about.

One question I am certain to be asked is "who do you expect to write all this new radio material? There's nobody left alive who knows how to write this stuff!" For heaven's sake, who do you think wrote the *first* radio material? I assure you that OTR scripts were not written by the Hand of God — even though it may seem that way to we current OTR collectors. Radio comedies and dramas were written by people who had previously written *other* things! Personally, I have never (yet) written a radio script. However, I did for several years support myself as a writer of magazine articles and fiction. When the time comes, I believe that I will be able to turn out my share of radio scripts for any station that wants them.

A great deal of the knowledge as to the writing, directing and acting of radio dramas and comedies is commonly available to us through textbooks which have survived from the Golden Age. I own several dozen manuals of this type, and know other collectors who own as many or more. These books are easily available through used book stores, library sales, charity book bazaars and the like. The most expensive of mine cost me four or five dollars, while many

were priced less than a buck, on the grounds of "who will ever want *these* again?" (We are going to *answer* that question!)

We can almost certainly obtain tapes made by the broadcasting departments of major colleges and universities. Perhaps Brad Gromeński and Tom DeLong can give us some advice here. We might have a half-hour or so a day just devoted to short story readings. I suspect that a number of veteran OTR actors and actresses across the country will be willing to help us out here by putting stuff onto tape.

Still another source of radio broadcasts might be the broadcast recreations produced each year at the national OTR convention. In fact, it should be possible to return from the national convention with entire *reels* of potential broadcast material, including extensive interviews. In addition, the increasing number of OTR conventions (Cincinnati is planning to hold its own in 1987!) will give us an even greater pool of material of this sort. The station can advertise the convention, while the publicity attendant upon the convention will greatly increase the listenership of the station. It may even be possible to carry portions of the convention "live" on the air!

We can carry productions by the local high school dramatics club. This could be financially rewarding: if we run a production by the kids at Peoria High School, it won't be difficult to get the good people down at the Peoria Pharmacy to spring for a commercial or three.

There is an additional benefit to running high school programs. We can then "trade-off" with the schools in order to use the high school

auditoriums as additional studios. The school auditoriums will accommodate both larger dramatic productions and a large live audience. (The old WLW Stock Company utilized high school auditoriums quite effectively back in the 1940s; several of these productions are in OTR circulation.)

Our station should also carry live music remotes. In spite of what certain stay-at-homes may think, live music is still *VERY* much a part of the contemporary cafe, restaurant and night club scene. Within a six or eight block radius of my home, one can hear the following types of live music on an almost nightly basis: country and western, rock 'n' roll, blues, hot jazz, cool jazz, swing.

I am no fan of that roll, that rock as Bob and Ray call it); as stated earlier, my own musical tastes run to jazz and swing from the 1930s and 1940s. However, I would be by no means opposed to running remotes of live rock concerts from around town, on the bedrock simple basis that *any* live remote is preferable to wall-to-wall recorded jukebox. It will also help bring the kids in.

I can already hear the objection that we can't do music remotes anymore because "nobody knows how to mike those things these days." Good Lord, who do you suppose instructed the original engineers how to do it? You stick microphones in front of the musicians, and listen to the result; the second broadcast will be better than the first. In addition, miking charts exist from the 1930s and 1940s, and I will only be too happy to Xerox them for anybody interested. (I also have miking charts from dramatic shows from this same period.)

Our Sunday programming will probably be taken up with a good deal of

religious programming; some few things *never* change. We can offer the religious programmers a *much* better financial deal than they can get from the other commercial stations — perhaps even better than they can get from the religious stations. We might even offer them *free* time if they agree to produce a religious *drama* (or a religious *comedy*? — now *there's* an idea) rather than the standard sermon. Moody Bible Institute in Chicago produces some truly excellent dramatic programs which I believe they'd only be too happy to let us use. In the late 1970s they produced a multi-part life of Johannes Bach which was equally as good as anything ever produced by the BBC.

Please understand that our first broadcasting studio need be nothing fancy. It can be a storefront, a trailer (several commercial stations use exact-

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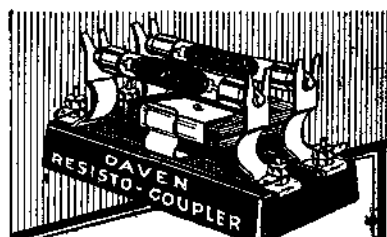
"That
Brewster
Boy"

Premiere!

9:30
TONIGHT WEAF

ly this), or the room over Floyd's barber shop (on the Jolly Boys' Club's off-nights, of course). We could probably start, legally, in somebody's basement. ("But nobody's ever broadcast live radio dramas from somebody's basement before!" Now you are getting the idea!) There remain many other possibilities: an empty service station; an abandoned aircraft hanger (these have been converted into movie sound stages by semi-professional motion picture groups); a barn; a room in a cheap hotel; a backyard shed; an attic; an apartment; a private home. The list of possibilities is pretty much endless.

To be continued



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Radio Humor

● Milton Berle: Do you know about "A Tree That Grows in Brooklyn?"

Zazu Pitts: Of course.

Milton Berle: My parents live in it. It's their branch office.

—*Let Yourself Go (Blue)*

● Gracie: But Rita and I can't stay alone in that big house all night. We need a man, we need you.

George: You do, huh?

Gracie: Yes—who's going to cook our breakfast?

—*Burns and Allen (CBS)*

● Hanley Stafford: Now, I'll tell you a story. What kind of stories does your Daddy tell?

Fanny Brice: I don't know.

Hanley Stafford: You don't know?

Fanny Brice: No. He always sends me out of the room.

—*Maxwell House Time (NBC)*

● Leo Durocher: Finnegan, what about the World Series?

Finnegan: That's very hard to get in to.

Archie: You're right, Finnegan. Mr. Durocher has discovered that, too.

—*Duffy's Tavern (Blue)*

● Cass Daley: Hey, Pop, when am I gonna get married?

Bing Crosby: Always talking about your post-war plans!

—*Kraft Music Hall (NBC)*

Private Eyes for Public Ears

by Jim Maclise

Nick Carter's adventures first appeared in the *New York Weekly* in 1936 but were updated into the twentieth century in a 1939 film titled *Nick Carter, Master Detective* starring Walter Pidgeon. The same title was used for the Mutual series which began weekly broadcasts in 1943, starring ex-opera singer Lon Clark as Carter. The radio version was a hit and miss affair, sometimes awful, sometimes bizarre, often effective melodrama. But it was an obvious success, running ten years on Sundays, either sponsored or network sustained, with barely a change in cast. Nick's assistants were his secretary, Patsy Bowen, and the young newspaper reporter who did much of his leg work, Scubby Wilson. The standard incompetent policemen, Lieutenant Riley and Sergeant Mathison, were right off the sockroom shelf, always astounded by Nick's amazing deductions, but never willing to credit him with solving a case.

Each episode was double-titled, such as "Death After Dark, or Nick Carter and the Mystery of the Vampire Killings" or "The Drums of Death, or Nick Carter and the Mystery of the White Witch Doctor." Each program opened with a man pounding vigorously on a door until Patsy cried out: "What's the matter, what is it?" Then a harsh voice announced, "Another case for Nick Carter, Master Detective!" In a 1979 *Collector's Corner* I suggested that this sort of hyper-melodrama tasted like canned corn and I was unkind to Nick and

his cohorts. But a longer acquaintance with Carter has changed my opinion, and I've since become something of a fan. In fact, the very shows I then considered most absurd, such as the two titles above, are those which I now value. "The Drums of Death," for example, concerns a wealthy elderly woman whose hypochondria leads her to consult a most unusual physician, a W.D. (doctor of witchery?). The story defies logic and is patently ridiculous, yet it fascinates despite Nick's brave attempt (unsuccessful) to explain away its bizarre villain. And the first two-thirds of the vampire case are equally effective.

As any listener knows, the Nick Carter shows have as many liabilities as assets, and their quality fluctuates like the stock market in election year. Because humor and wit are lacking, the dialogue is often flat, and many a mediocre script slides by mainly on the mellifluous sound of Lon Clark's baritone. But Clark's hypnotic radio voice gets away with a lot. When Patsy, having risked her life as a stake-out for vampires, claims that it was nothing, Nick solemnly corrects her: "The women and children who want to use the park wouldn't call it nothing, Patsy." Nick delivers these trite moral tags frequently, but the listener learns to tolerate them. Why? What's the pay-off in a show with such stock characters as Patsy the adoring secretary, Scubby the eagle scout and boy Friday, dumb cops, and many a plot which unravels well before its preposterous solution?

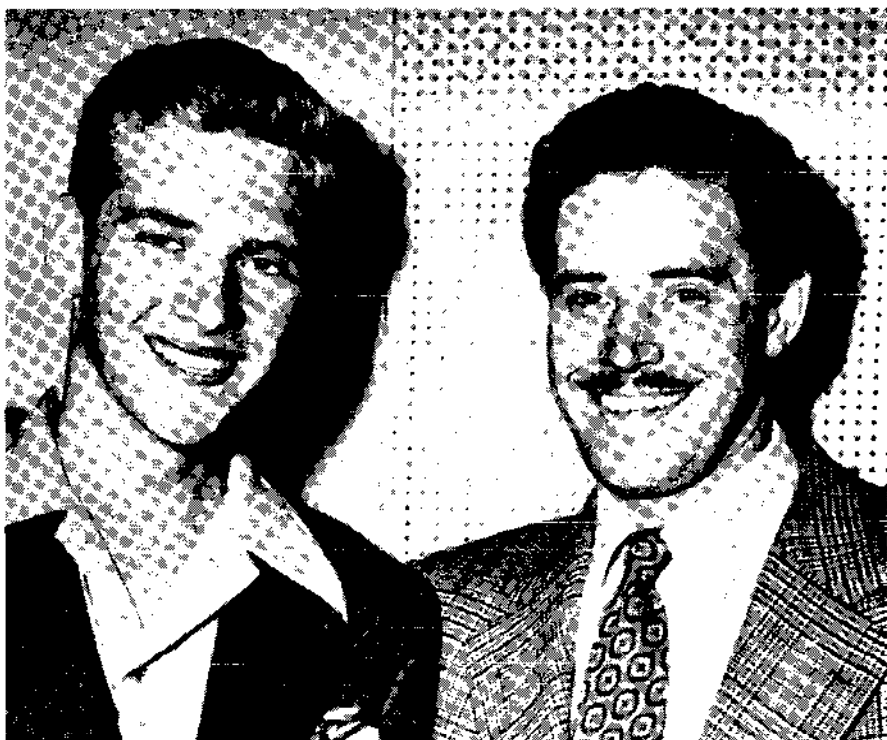
Perhaps it should first be noted that

what appeals most in radio detective shows is probably a continuing cast of characters with whom we become familiar from episode to episode. Often they come in pairs, less frequently in trios. Sam Spade and Effie, Holmes and Watson, Nick and Patsy, Jack, Doc, and Reggie will be back next time to solve another mystery despite the rigors of this week's adventure, and we come to depend on that. Sherlock and Sam and Nick may be predictable, but that makes them as safe as houses. Whatever mess we're in at the moment, we know from experience that they'll get us home free.

While solutions in *Nick Carter* are often unsatisfying, the program usually has intriguing opening situations:

After an evening tennis match, a girl's bloodless body is found in the park. A professor's newly invented healing ray is stolen by gangsters. While in Chicago Scubby finds it's not his face in the mirror, but he's stuck with it and a murder. One of Patsy's girl friends returns home from a party drunk and stumbles over a dead man whose head is in her fish pond. An opera diva is discovered murdered in her private train car when the train is stalled by a snowstorm as it climbs up Mad Mountain with Nick and Patsy aboard. A girl's college calls Nick to investigate the apparent suicide of a student whose hobby was photography.

Like the A-1 Detective Agency of *I Love a Mystery*, Nick Carter occasionally handles cases involving seem-



BOY DETECTIVE CHICK (PLAYED BY BILL LIPTON) AND FOSTER-FATHER NICK (LON CLARK)

ngly supernatural elements. These shows — one thinks of the aforementioned "Drums of Death," "Death in the Dark," or "Murder by Magic" — are among the best in the series, despite unsatisfactory solutions. (Yet, after all, if the trip was exciting and only took thirty minutes, why complain when the destination proves disappointing?) Furthermore, the program is also a respectable entry in the whodunit category, sometimes displaying Carter's "master detective" ability.

"Death by Ricochet," "Murder in a Decanter," "Death in the Pool," and "Murder Goes to College" are examples of the straight whodunit genre. More rarely the program produces a meandering plot which seems to have originated from those Victorian adventures in the 1886 *New York Weekly Street and Smith* stories.

"The Body on the Slab" from 1943 is a classic example of what I have in mind. Enough plot for a two hour movie races by in thirty minutes and begs you to follow it.

There is no shortage of *Nick Carter* programs, and reel collectors will purchase them eight at a time. Cassette collectors have to be somewhat discriminating and might try those already mentioned, plus "The Corpse in the Cab," "The Flying Duck Murders," and "Monkey Sees Murder" (though Lon Clark has a cold here). To be avoided are "Wobs of Death" (trite wartime propaganda), "Records of Death" (too many records, not enough death), and "An Angle on Murder" (this time the solution insults even listeners awaiting brain transplants). Also be advised that "The Red Goose Murder" lacks Carter completely, so Patsy solves the case.

Nick Carter, Master Detective was written, produced and directed by

Jock MacGregor and originally starred Helen Choate as Patsy, with John Kane as Stubby. Lin-X Home Brighteners sponsored the 1944-46 shows which seem to make up the majority of those available to the collector which are not AFRS transcriptions. The anonymous organist, responsible for creating much of that ambience of cozy peril which I so require, must have moonlighted from *Inner Sanctum*.

Coming next: Charlie Chan



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Radio Book Collecting

by Edward Carr

As always, before I begin a column on books and right after a convention, I like to reminisce a little. The 10th annual convention for the Friends of Old Time Radio was held in Newark, New Jersey on October 11 and 12. Two days of nothing but radio related memories. Once again many well known actors and actresses graced the convention giving generously of their time. And once again they deserve our heart felt thanks. If you haven't yet been to a convention, do try to come, as your in for a very pleasant surprise. No words in any column can describe actually being there. I go to the convention to meet voices only heard on a telephone for a year, and to tell the truth they don't look anything like what their voices sound like. I had a number of persons come to my home, and to match the voice and person, forget it. Don't take me wrong, I wouldn't replace those guys or gals for friends with anything, anyone, anytime. It's a hobby that when you form friendships they become very solid.

But what else goes on besides workshops and meeting people? Well, deals are made, trades are made, promises are made and over the course of a year, broken. How sad for this.

At this years convention if my sources are correct a lot of Lone Ranger material, including discs and tapes were sold along with Sergeant Preston and Green Hornet discs. I know for a fact that Lone Ranger discs were there because I approached the

people selling them, but they told me Fred Foy had the last say so. My only hope is that when they become available the discs are done right and not a rush job. It takes more than a disc player and equalizer to do the job right. I won't attempt to do discs even though I have an up to date player that can record not only 33 1/3 but 16, 78's, 45. My machine was customized for this by one of the better disc recorders in Chicago.

Also coming out in the near future, many new finds which at this time I feel I can't say anymore or it would be sort of a breach of promise. Are new finds important to you or to me? I'd like to give a brief run down as to that issue. Most finds are important only to those people who collect specifics such as all comedy, mystery, etc. If new Sam Spade's came out I would be interested, but new My Friend Irma, forget it. There are thousands of shows out there that I haven't heard. To worry about new ones, and if the sound quality isn't there why rush to listen to it; but I am not going to dwell on it here as it would take pages of arguments pro and con to state it all. But perhaps sometime we could get into it. I think it would be very interesting.

What I have mentioned here of course is only a small part of what goes on. How can you possibly put two days of enjoyment into a small magazine? It cannot be done.

I did come across a few books for my collection and if you remember in a previous issue I mentioned the 2 volume (part of a broken encyclopedia set) America: An Illustrated Diary of It's Most Exciting Years. Well, they sold out within a few hours. Many compliments were made about it. If you by chance didn't pick up a set you did

man. I enjoy this type of book because it takes you back to those early years right when radio was an infant and brings you along right up and into the TV years. The book has little change in it over others written by persons experiencing radio for the first time. Some of the information is repetitive of others, however he did refute KDKA as being the first Radio station. Still in all it's a person's actual being there that makes worthwhile. I do enjoy reading actual experiences. Overall I would have recommended it as one book on a must list.

Well no sense in taking up all the space so for now — Keep your bookmarkers dry!

The following is a continuation of books to be on the look out for.

miss out on a nice bargain as well as an intro into the stars of Radio. By good fortune I picked up the huge hardbound copy of The Life and Hard-times of Little Orphan Annie, the comic strip by Harold Gray. Again this was mentioned in Old Radio Digest a number of issues ago.

One book I found and I can recommend it to everyone, especially those of you starting a collection was; I Looked and I Listened by Ben Gross, Dean of American Radio and TV Editors. This is the revised and illustrated edition, circa 1970. To capulize it, it's an informal recollection of Radio and TV. As with most books it has a beginning. His is titled "How I Became an Expert." He goes on to tell of his bid to become a newspaper

TITLE

AUTHOR

PUBLISHER

104. The Story of Radio	Orrin Dunlap	Dial Press Inc. 1935
105. 26 By Corwin	Norman Corwin	Henry Holt & Co 1941
106. Laughter in the Air	Gaver & Stanley	Greenberg & Co 1945
107. The Quiz Kids	Eliza Hickock	Houghton Mifflin Co 1947
108. Untitled & Other	Norman Corwin	Henry Holt & Co 1947
109. Don't Touch Dial	Fred MacDonald	Nelson Hall Pub. 1979
110. Radio Comedy	Frank Wertheim	Oxford Univ. Press 1979
111. Reflections In Eye	Robert Metz	Playboy Press 1975
112. My Eyes My Heart	Ted Husing	Bernard Geis Pub. 1959
113. The Taste Of Ashes	Bill Stern	Henry Holt & Co. 1959
114. Documents B'CASTing	Frank Kahn	Appleton Century 1973
115. News By Radio	Mitchell Charnley	The Macmillan Co 1948
116. Radio TV & Society	Charles Siepmann	Oxford Univ. Press 1950
117. Everybody Loves	Arthur Marx	Hawthorne Books Pub 1974
118. Radio & Print Page	Paul Lazarsfeld	Duell, Sloan & Pearce 1940
119. Advert. Side Radio	Ned Midgley	Prentice-Hall Inc. 1948
120. Don't Let Scare You	Roger Burlingame	Lippincott Publishers 1961
121. Music In Radio	Gilbert Chase	McGrall-Hill Book Co 1946
122. 30 Year History	Harrison Summers	Arno Press Inc. 1972
123. Radio Directing	Earle McGill	McGraw-Hill Book Co 1940
124. New Radio Plays	Arch Oboler	Random House Pub. 1941
125. The Golden Web	Erik Barnouw	Oxford Univ. Press 1968
126. None Your Business	Carroll Carroll	Cowles Publication 1970
127. Tune In Tomorrow	Mary Jane Higby	Ace Paperback Books 1970
128. Great Radio Heroes	James Harmon	Ace Paperback Books 1968

Classified Ads

SCIENCE FICTION RADIO SHOWS
on reg. cassettes. Send for catalog, 25¢
John Ford, 411 Truitt St., Salisbury, MD
21801.

Raymond Stanich, 173 Columbia
Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201 / reel /
4,000+ / 15 / Elect. enginner / 56 /
Music, personalities, drama, comedy /
Railroad Hour, Chicago Theater of the
Air, Fred Allen, Richard Diamond, Baby
Snooks, Bickersons, Ray Bradbury. / Co-
authored book: "SOUND OF
DETECTION-ELLERY QUEEN ON
RADIO." Do research on old time radio.
Issue logs.

WANTED: Amos & Andy radio
program items, puzzles & stand-ups.
Bob Morgan, 4005 Pitman Rd., College
Park, GA 30349.

Tom Monroe, 1426 Roycroft Av.,
Lakewood, Ohio 44107. / (216) 226-8189
Cassette and reel / always growing / 4 /
traffic / 41 / Mystery, adventure, sci-fi,
westerns, drama, some comedy /

James L. Snyder, 517 North Hamilton
Street, Saginaw, MI 48602 /
(517) 752-4625 / reel / 16,000 shows/
All, except music/sports.

Want these Lux shows: Red River,
Alice in Wonderland, Paradine Case.
Kent Coscarelly, 2173 Willester Ave.,
San Jose, Calif. 95124

Radio books, parts wanted prior 1950
from radio repair shops. Send price list.
Richards, Box 1542-D, Brooklyn, N.Y.
11201.

HAVE MOST BIG BANDS in chron-
ological order in exchange for Boswell
Sisters, Annette Hanshaw, Ruth Etting,
Lee Whiley from 78 records or broad-
casts. Have most of their LP's. Walter M.
Keepers, Jr., 6341 Glenloch Street,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19135. 1-77.

RADIO PREMIUMS at your price in ech
of our mail bid auction catalogues. Each
list includes decoders, manuals, rings,
and other rare premiums. For sample
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AMERICANA & COLLECTIBLES, Post
Office Box 1444, York, Pennsylvania
17405. We also buy premiums and
comic character items, especially pin-
back buttons and 1930's Disney
material.

Steve Dolter, 577 West Locust,
Dubuque, Iowa 52001. / (319) 556-1188 /
reel/200 reels/3/Truck driver/28/
Comedy, mystery, drama/Fred Allen,
Jack Benny, Suspense, I Love a Mystery/
Interested in books about OTR or OTR
performers.

WANTED: Classical music broadcasts,
ET's, Acetates, tapes, all speeds, sizes,
formats, for cash, Joe Salerno, 9407
Westheimer #311A, Houston, Texas
77063

William R. Lane, 236'W. 6th, Brigham
City, Utah 84302. / 1-801-723-3319 / reel/
2600 hours / 5 / Hill Air Firce Base / 60 /
all types / Lum & Abner, Jack Benny, Lux
Radio Theater. Will buy or trade.

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Zorro, etc. Free list, send S.A.S.E:
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