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First -Hand:

Bing Crosby & the Recording Revolution

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Introduction

In November of 1951 I quit my job in television in Los Angeles due to the conflict with my high school classes. I could no longer spend time with the remote crews doing live broadcasts but had to live in the dull world of film control on weekends. With the remotes I put in microwave links, repaired TV cameras and installed sound and video equipment. In film control there were only western movies and commercials, and the only excitement came when the film broke.

When I left, one of the directors that worked the remotes gave me a slip of paper with an address, 9030 Sunset Blvd., and a name, Jack Mullin. The next day I went to the address and asked for Jack Mullin and found that he was expecting me. The director was a friend of Frank Healy who was the head of the Electronic Division of Bing Crosby Enterprises. He told Frank

about my work at the TV station. John T. (Jack) Mullin was the Chief Engineer, and had decided to hire home based on the recommendation of the director. They knew more about me than I did. The job was to do electronic bench work for Jack Mullin because he had broken his arm. It was to be for two weeks or until his broken arm healed, but the two weeks turned into six years.

The work involved building the first practical video recorder so that Bing Crosby Child record his TV shows on magnetic tape just as he was doing with his radio programs. I was the fourth member of the team that consisted of Jack Mullin and Wayne Johnson. The third member was Gene Brown who was the machinist. About a week before, they had demonstrated to the news media what has been described as the first TV picture to have been recorded on tape. All of the main Hollywood press was there, and

now the pressure was on to produce the recorder. However, before going into the development of the video recorder it is important to understand the events that led up to this project.

The Audio Years

Over the months after I started working for Jack Mullin, he became my mentor and took me under his wing. He had been the person that had put the Bing Crosby radio show on magnetic tape and with Bing developed the art of editing the tape. Jack not only described to me these events, but took me to see the recording studios and equipment. He also taught me how to record and edit magnetic tape, and that prepared me to be an alternate editor for the radio show. Jack was now full time on the video tape development, and others had taken over the recording and editing work. The years of recording the radio show laid the ground work for the video tape development.

Bing Crosby was one of the pioneers of the radio music show. Beginning in 1935 the *"Kraft Music Hall"* on the NBC Red Network was a standard. It was a quality live production that held a high position in the ratings over the years. However, the summer of 1945 was a turning point in this standard. Bing decided that doing a live show every week was too demanding, and it did not permit him to pursue his other interests and to be with his family. During one period the show had to be done live twice, once for the east coast and once for the west coast, which also added to the work load. It also was confining, since it all had to be done within a certain regime that took away Bing's casual side. The adlibs and jokes had to be done according to the script; there was no editing to remove mistakes.

The Bing Crosby show was aired on the elite Red Network of BC that would not permit recorded shows; they had to be live broadcasts.

So, the 1945 - 1946 *"Kraft Music Hall"* program began without Bing because of the dispute. The show went on, and BC and Kraft sued him for not appearing. He returned to finish the season beginning with the 7 February 1946 program, but that was the end of Bing on the BC Red network. This time Bing had set his mind to having a prerecorded production. However, his current Bing Crosby Productions organization headed by his brother Everett did not have the talent to establish a prerecorded show operation and the technical support it needed. In December of 1945 Bing hired Basil Grillo to help him with this task and improve the operation of Bing Crosby Productions.



In 1941 the US Government broke up the NBC empire and made it sell its Blue Network. NBC had its sophisticated programs on the Red Network and the other features like jazz on the Blue Network. In July 1943 NBC announced the sale of its Blue network, but it took several years for ABC to develop its own programs. They shared the NBC facilities at Sunset and Vine in Hollywood until at least 1948. After the breakup ABC needed programs with high ratings and the upcoming 1946 -1947 season was no exception.

They told Bing that if he joined ABC he could record his show but the quality had to be equal to the live broadcast. It was to be a 30 minute show known as the "*Philco Radio Time*" program.

A number of events happened during January 1946 before Bing accepted the ABC offer. Bing Crosby Enterprises was reorganized, and a division of it was dedicated to the production of the prerecorded radio show. It included a person, Francis (Frank) Healey, to supervise the technical parts of the production. Prior to this Bing did not have his own technical staff, since the NBC engineers provided that support. By the end of January 1946, Bing had settled with BC and was well on the way to having his own pre-recorded show on ABC.

The new 1946 - 1947 "*Philco Radio Time*" program began with Bing Crosby recording his show on transcription disks using the NBC recording facilities assigned to ABC and supervised by Frank Healey. However, all was not well with this new production. The recordings on the disks lacked the quality of the live show and the editing process was difficult. The show was done as a live production, but with additional recorded material that could be used if there was a problem. While it took two disks (15 minutes each) for the thirty minute show, the recordings were edited before the show was played at the appointed time on the ABC network.

The prerecorded show permitted changes to be made if Bing or his staff did not like something in the show. The sponsor also was known to require changes that could not be done with a live show. The editing process was difficult, since it required recording from one disk to another several times. At least two or three playback units were required to permit the different parts to be merged on to a new recording disk, and with each copy the sound quality dropped.

At time this process took over forty disks and many days to complete the edit. The result was the recorded show was less than desirable, and the radio audience noticed the difference. The ratings dropped, and ABC began to question if they should not return to the live broadcast.

The Recording Revolution

While the Crosby show was struggling with the disk recordings, a new technology had arrived. Jack Mullin had returned from his World War II service with parts for two German Magnetophon magnetic tape recorders that he had shipped back in mail sacks over a number of months. Instead of going back to the telephone company, he joined a friend, William Palmer, in a recording and movie business. William Palmer had a machine shop where the restored and modified the Magnetophon. Jack made new electronics using standard American



parts and replaced the DC bias with AC bias to improve the tape signal-to-noise and added pre-emphasis for the high frequencies. These rebuilt Magnetophon recorders were then used in their recording business.

In May 1946 Jack Mullin demonstrated the modified Magnetophon recorder at an IRE(IEEE) show in San Francisco with the help of William



Jack Mullin (l) and Murdo McKenzie (r) with the two Magnetophon recorders in 1947. (Jack Mullin)

Palmer. This demonstration caused a number of people to take notice of the quality that could be obtained from a magnetic tape recorder. There were other tape recorders at that time, but none of them had the outstanding quality of the rebuilt Magnetophon. During the following months William Palmer set up a number of demonstrations of the recorder for Jack to various movie, recording and broadcast people. The demonstrations showed that the recorder could reproduce sound as if it were live. Not only that, the magnetic tape could be edited by cutting it with a pair of scissors and splicing it with Scotch tape. These demonstrations were more of a novelty to the industry than a major step forward. After all there were only two recorders and only 50 rolls of tape that no longer was made. The movie companies had made other agreements for their sound tracks, and the recording companies were happy with their recording process. During the demonstrations in the summer of 1947 Frank Healey, who was involved with technical production of the Crosby show, heard a demonstration and encouraged Murdo McKenzie, the producer of the Bing Crosby show, to investigate them for the show. Murdo arranged for a demonstration in San Francisco where Jack and Bill Palmer had their business. This demonstration was after

the bad experience with the disk recordings, and Crosby now was faced with the prospect of finding a new way of recording the show or reverting to live broadcasts again. Murdo was so impressed with the tape process that he arranged for Bing to hear the demonstration, which took place about the first of August 1947 in Los Angeles. When Bing heard the sound quality and saw the editing, Jack Mullin was asked to do a test recording of the first Bing Crosby show of the 1947 - 1948 season. It was only a week away, and the Crosby people expressed concerns that Jack had only two recorders and a limited amount of tape. There needed to be way forward other than just the Magnetophon.

Jack had made an agreement with Colonel Ranger of Ranger Industries a year earlier to provide him with information so that Ranger could build a version of the Magnetophon and supply tape for it. Tests had shown that the Minnesota Mining (3M) tape would not work with the German recorder. By this time 3M had developed a black oxide plastic backed tape that evolved from their paper backed tape. It was the Scotch Magnetic Tape No. 100 designed for the Brush recorder, which was an early tape recorder. However, the Magnetophon needed a tape that could record a stronger magnetic field



and have a better signal-to-noise ratio. The research group at 3M realized this need and set out to develop a higher grade tape using a red oxide, not knowing what the target machine would be. During this period Ampex also had decided to build a broadcast quality tape recorder and asked Jack for assistance, but Jack could not help due to the agreement with Colonel Ranger. As the date for the Crosby session approached the tension grew.

Colonel Ranger did come to Los Angeles with his two recorders but no new tape. His tape recorders were set up along side the Magnetophon recorders in the recording department of NBC who was still supporting ABC. The show was held on the evening of 10 August 1947, and the moment of truth had come. The NBC engineers recorded the show on the standard disk lathes, and Jack Mullin and Colonel Ranger also recorded on their respective machines. Mixdo asked Ranger to play his recording first, and it was terrible with distortion and noise. Jack was next, and history was made. The first radio show to be recorded on magnetic tape was broadcast on 1 October 1947. Jack, who was still working for Palmer, was given an old studio and control room in the NBC (ABC) facilities where he could



set up his machines and do the recording and editing of the show. It also served as his office. The 1947 - 1948 season was the first time a radio program was aired from a magnetic tape recording even though the program was transferred to disk for broadcast. This transfer was due to the need to preserve the tape and insure that a tape break would not disrupt the broadcast. The quality of the show had improved even though disks were used, since the show was only transferred in final form and not edited on the disks. However, more important, the ratings of the show improved and the prerecorded show was preserved. The first step had been taken, but a bigger problem still needed to be addressed - new recorders and tap

Alexander M. Poniatoff, the head of Ampex, heard one of the early demonstrations of the Magnetophon. He was in need of a new postwar product and was so taken by the recorder he decided to build one. He put his chief engineer, Harold Lindsay, in charge of the project and asked Jack Mullin to help them. Unfortunately Jack had already made the agreement with Colonel Ranger by that time, but Ampex decided to go ahead with the project anyway. After the poor showing of his recorders to the Crosby





Jack Mullin in the old BC control room in early 1949 with the two portable Ampe-. 200 recorders and the first Ampex 300 recorder.

group, Colonel Ranger was persuaded by them and Jack Mullin to give up his agreement with Mullin. Jack was now free, and a call was placed to Ampex in October 1947. Minnesota Mining (3M) also was brought in as the tape supplier.

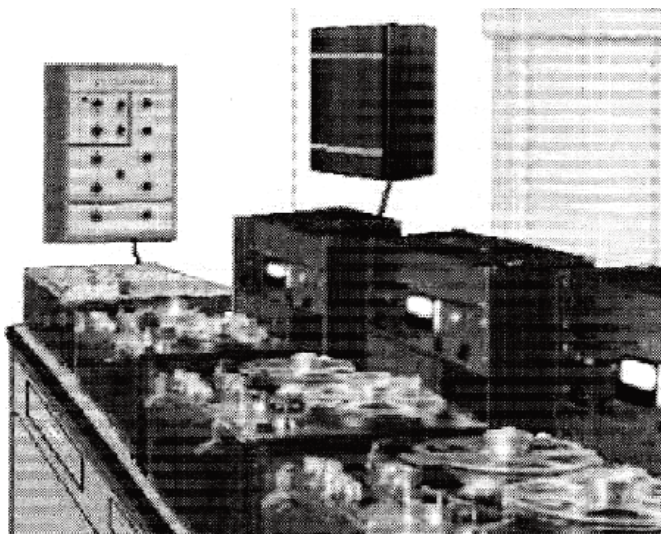
Ampex by the spring of 1948 had developed their first prototype, but lacked finances to bring it to market. The banks did not have any idea about venture capital at that time. Pressure once again began to build because the Bing Crosby show needed new recorders and tape for the 1948 -1949 season. Everyone was convinced that Ampex was the answer, and Bing sent them a check for \$50,000 in just an envelope without any cover letter. It was what Ampex needed to begin production of the Ampex 200. In late 1947 Jack Mullin visited Minnesota Mining (3M) to see if they could provide the required magnetic tape to work with the Magnetophon and the future Ampex recorder. By then they had started development of their new red oxide tape that would work with the Ampex recorder. Jack Mullin began to work with Robert Herr and William Wetzel of 3M conducting tests to help develop a

high quality magnetic tape for audio recording. His work focused on the dropout rating, frequency response and signal-to-noise for the different test tapes that 3M produced. The result was the Scotch Magnetic Tape No. 111 that later evolved into the No. IIIA. For these efforts by Bing and Jack, Bing Crosby Enterprises (BCE) was awarded in 1948 the distributorship west of the Mississippi River for the Ampex recorders and the 3M tape. The Electronic Division of BCE under Frank Healey was given responsibility to market and service these products. The division began to grow when Jack Mullin left Palmer to become its chief engineer in August 1948 to support the development work with Ampex and 3M and in Poniatoff and Bing in the 1948.

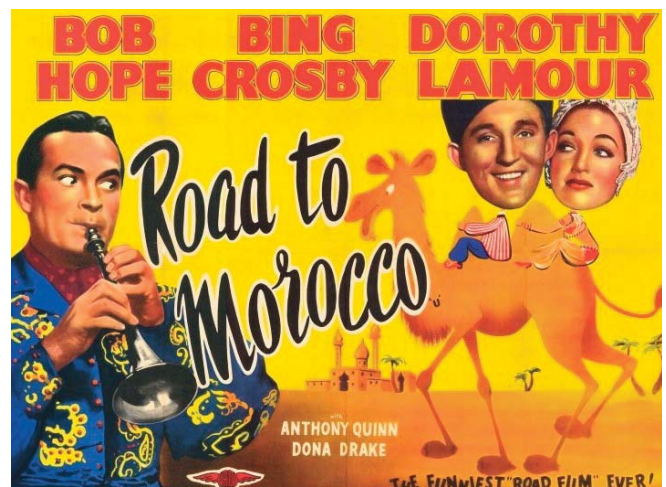
It was housed in a polished black wood console with a stainless steel top that caused it to be called the most beautiful recorder to be made. The Crosby show received the first two of them, serial numbers 1 and 2, in time for the 1948 - 1949 season. Later the only twHarold Lindsay led the team to produce the Ampex 200 for Alex portable Ampex 200 recorders built, serial numbers 13 and 14, were delivered. Each of them consisted of two wooden boxes with handles. It took at least two people to carry each case, but they were taken everywhere the Crosby show went during the later part of the 1948 -1949 season, even to Canada. Jack Mullin described how they had to push and pull the four boxes up a spiral staircase



to reach one of the upper dressing rooms where the recorders were set up. The audio mixing was done at the stage level using the RCA OP-6 and OP-7 equipment. The output was fed over a telephone line to the recording location. By the 1949 -1950 season the *Bing Crosby show* had moved to CBS, and BCE had to establish its own recording-editing facility. It was a small facility located in the CBS Columbia Square Complex at 6121 Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. It was on the second floor in the east wing of the complex. The recorders were located in the front of the building. There were two windows that were open most of the time, and people on Sunset Boulevard could hear the editing process. The three Ampex 300 recorders were on a waist-high shelf with a special tape speed control unit and acoustical equalizer at one end. In the hallway outside the room, there were shelves of indexed tapes of past recording sessions. By 1950 others like Robert McKinney were involved in the recording and editing of the show. In Hollywood the live show was done at the CBS studios and in a theater behind CBS. The microphone placement and mixing of the show was done by Norm Dewes. He was a true professional held in high es-



A likeness of the BCE recording-edit room in CBS showing the three Ampex 300s and associated equipment after the fall of 1949.



teem by Jack Mullin. It has been said that the balance of the shows recorded was outstanding. There were no multiple tracks, just one channel that was fed to the recorders.

Those of us in the recording room had no visible contact with what was happening. I used to sing along with Bing during the recording sessions, since I was the only one there at times. I may have sung more "duets" with him than most people, but it helped to learn his phrasing for editing.

During the first two seasons that used the magnetic tape recorders, the Crosby radio show was recorded in front of a live audience when Bing was available. There were recorded rehearsals, but the editing process was limited by having only two recorders. The first season that was recorded on the old Magnetophon tape had to be transferred to transcription disks because of concerns about the old tape breaking. With the new Ampex recorders and 3M tape, this transfer was no longer required, but the editing was still limited by having only two Ampex 200 recorders. With the recording of the show, Bing was more relaxed and the audience had more fun with the adlibs, since mistakes could be repaired. The quality was equal to a live show, and the broadcast version was mistake free. With the portable recorders the show also could be taken on the road, if Bing wanted to travel. By early 1949 Ampex had begun to produce the Ampex 300, which was smaller and lighter than the Ampex

200. The big plus was that the Bing Crosby show now had three recorders for the 1949 - 1950 season. These changes opened the door to new innovation, and the Crosby show did not lose time in coming up with new ways to record a radio show.

The Development of the Recording Art

The industry standard Minnesota Mining audio recording tape Type III A with the red oxide. With three recorders Bing, Murdo and Jack set out to see how the show could move away from the basic live audience format. No one had done this type of program before; so these three men were establishing a new art form. During the previous seasons the show was done live and recorded on tape. These shows could be recorded when Bing had the time, and more than one program was recorded during these sessions. However, only limited editing could be done, since there were only two tape recorders. There were others during this period editing tape, but they were using recorders that were intended for the general market. The high quality magnetic tape recordings of radio programs took tape editing to another level.

There were a number of issues that arose as a result of using tape. With the higher bandwidths of the new Ampex recorders it was possible to hear things that were hidden by the lower quality recorders. There were problems due to timing (or tape speed) and wow and flutter that had to be resolved. In addition, the tape also caused dropouts due to imper-

fections in the oxide that was coated on the plastic backing. To solve this problem Minnesota Mining (3M) was trying different coating techniques for their III audio recording tape, and Jack Mullin would test each new batch to determine the dropout rate. After a number of trials 3M produced the IIIA tape that became the industry standard.

Since Bing did not read music and sang by ear, one take of a song could be in a different key from the second take. This change in pitch posed a problem when using segments from different recording sessions to make one complete piece of music. Today matching the pitch is easy with digital technology, but in 1950 it was different. To do the matching one tape was slowed down and the other was speeded up until the pitch was the same. However, the change in tape speed led to timing problems; so after the splice was made the tape was then slowly returned to its normal speed. Unless one was listening very closely it was not detectable. With the advent of the Ampex 300, Jack Mullin worked with Ampex to develop a unit to correct the Ampex 300 recorder tape speed. The unit produced an 18 kHz control signal modulated by a 60 Hz reference. On playback it then used the 60 Hz signal to control the speed of the Ampex 300 capstan motor. Not only did it adjust the timing problem, but it was able to correct some of the low frequency wow effects. It was now possible to record a tape on one machine and play it back on a different ma-



chine without speed changes that caused changes in the pitch of the music. It also was used to change the tape speed to match the different pitches.

Another major problem was not being able to play from two machines and record on a third. The ability to fade from one program segment to another was limited. These edits had to be preplanned in the recording process, but at times long diagonal cuts were made that would allow one segment to fade and the other to get louder. This process was difficult and was not used unless it was the last resort. The Magnetophon recordings were made a 30 inches per second (ips), which made the long cuts impossible. The Ampex 200 operated at both 30 and 15 ips while the Ampex 300 normally operated at both 15 and 7.5 ips. At these lower speeds the long cuts were possible.

With the high speeds, the normal cuts were made with a pair of scissors and Scotch tape. In most cases it was possible to cut the tape as it was running since there was a lot of room for error. Jack Mullin had great ear-to-hand coordination and could make the cuts even at 15 ips. I used to do it as well, but not with the accuracy that the Jack had. When it came to cutting a note or syllable it required the tape to be stopped and moved back and forth until the correct spot could be located. The head gate was then opened and the tape cut at the playback head gap. Jack and I did not use any splicing blocks since we were able to cut the tape at the same angle; however, in most cases the ends of the taped were overlapped. This overlap caused problems when rewinding the tape since the splices would get caught going through the head gate. The tape in the early days was put together using Scotch tape that would stick to the other winding of tape on the reel. To prevent the sticking, talcum powder was used, and it is still present today in the early tapes being restored. About 1951 3M produced a splicing tape that eliminated the sticking problem. One of the great edits of Jack Mullin was made late at night on 2 No-

vember 1948 when it was found out the Truman had won the election instead of Dewey. When the show was recorded, Bing said that Dewey had won. With no "Truman" recorded by Bing, Jack had to manufacture the name using the existing tape and do it with the Ampex 200 recorders.

When the Crosby Show received its three Ampex 300 machines, the editing process changed as did the format of the radio show. The early radio programs were recordings of live shows with little editing, but the later shows were assembled from many different recordings. One of the new innovations of this period was the introduction of recorded audience reactions. Fake laughter always had been around. It was added by turning the volume up and then fading it down. The same laughter was used every time, and it became known as "canned laughter." After one live show where the guest and Bing caused much audience reaction that had to be cut, Jack Mullin

was going to throw out the rejected tape. Bing happened to be there at the time and told him to save it for future use. Thus the



The last Bing Crosby show with David Bowie aired on 30 November 1977 after Bing died.

Cosby and family



new "laugh track" was started. By the time I began to edit, the "laugh track" had grown to forty-two different segments. These ranged from great outbursts of laughter to the groans of the audience. The orchestra had their reactions as did the lady in the balcony.

The radio program by now was scripted down to each segment oftape. These segments came from many different sources that had to be matched. The acoustics of Bing's ranch house in Elko had to match with the characteristics of the studios in Hollywood and New York. The Marine Auditorium in San Francisco had to agree with a theater in Canada. To match the acoustics, Jack Mullin built a filter box where the audio characteristics could be altered and echo added if required. When a recording session was held, material was recorded for four to six shows. Portions of these sessions also included a live audience, and parts of it would be used in other shows.

Separate segments also were recorded to keep the shows current. These were made wherever Bing happened to be, and the same applied to the guests on the show. The acoustics of Bing's ranch in Elko and remote studios had to be accommodated in the editing process. Besides these different sources, a large library of recorded material was created that was crossed referenced by date, artist and subject.

This catalogue made it possible to reuse old recordings and cut back on the new recording sessions.

Each radio program was assembled from the different sources according to the script. During the editing process different short segments of tape were attached to a line that was above the recorders with the number of the segment, but the longer ones were kept on reels that were numbered. Once the music segments were edited and put into one continuous program, the voice segments were added and the program was cut to the proper time. This cutting of the program involved the editing of verses, refrains or portions of them so that the program was the correct length to be broadcast. The audience reactions were then added that involved listening to the program and deciding what type of reaction was required. Bad jokes got bad responses and good ones got good ones. However, the process somewhat involved the ear of the beholder and arguments occurred between the editors. Murdo made the final decision. He sat on a bar stool behind the editors with an old Paris taxi horn attached to its side. To get the editors attention he would squeeze its large bulb. We had the speakers turned up so loud, it was difficult to hear him. Besides the standard reactions to the banter between the

parties on the show, other reactions were injected where it appeared that something was happening with the orchestra or on the stage.

This editing might be described as the high point of recorded shows. Many of these editing techniques then were used by the radio networks and record companies. *The Bing Crosby radio show* during its last few seasons produced shows that never happened the way they were heard by the radio audience. This art form was created by the talents of Bing Crosby and Jack Mullin. It was made possible by the recorders produced by Ampex and the magnetic tape manufactured by Minnesota Mining (3M).

The Desire for Video Recording



The first Bing Crosby TV show aired on 3 January 1954 was on 35 mm movie film with edited played back audio

By 1953 Bing was facing a new problem, television. He was being asked to do television shows instead of radio, but there was no easy way to record a television program as he was doing with his radio show. In 1950 Bing asked Jack Mullin if he could record television on tape the way the radio show was recorded, and Jack told Bing that he did not see why it could not be done. Encouraged by Jack, Bing put money into the Electronic Division of Bing Crosby Enterprises so that Jack could build him a recorder and also encouraged Ampex to build a video recorder. Jack Mullin probably had taken on the greatest challenge of his life. He never said any-

thing to me about not being able to do it. I believe that he and Wayne Johnson thought that it could be done. It was to be a long hard struggle.

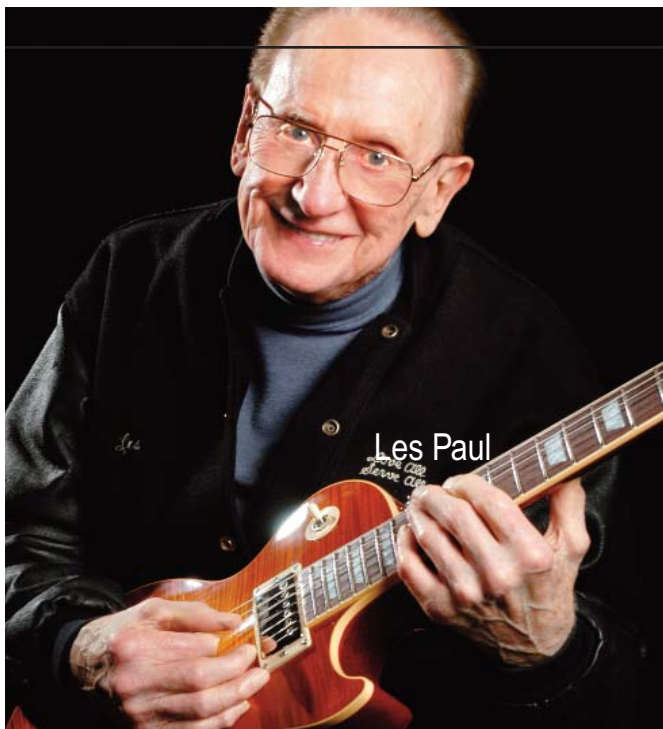
The Bing Crosby radio show on CBS continued until the end of the 1953 season, which was on 30 May 1954. In early 1954 Bing had made the difficult decision to end the production, which meant that many lifelong relationships were to change or be severed. The first television show that involved Bing was a telethon on 21 June 1952 that he co-hosted with Bob Hope to help finance the American Olympic team. However, the first big Bing Crosby television show was produced in 1953 and aired on 3 January 1954. It was a mixture of his radio show and 35 mm movie technologies. The audio for the television program was prerecorded and edited in the same manner as his radio show was. The audio was then played back and synced with the 35 mm movie cameras..

The 1954 show was the first real introduction of Bing Crosby to the television audiences. However, he had been doing walk-ons and other television appearances on shows hosted by other people. To keep his name in front of the radio audiences, Bing prerecorded short radio shows beginning in 1954 and going into 1962. These included shows with Buddy Cole and his group and Rosemary Clooney that were syndicated and distributed to stations that wanted them. Buddy Cole used a recording technique invented by Les Paul, who also was a good friend of Bing. The record over-process is where one person would play or sing different parts. Each part would be mixed with the earlier parts and recorded over the previous one. Bing gave Les Paul one of the

Ampex 400 recorders, and Les modified it with a second playback head. This modification permitted him and his wife Mary Ford to do their famous record-over recordings. Les Paul also worked with Jack Mullin at the Electronic Division to improve the process.

The show with Buddy Cole lasted until 1958 when Bing had a video reduring this period that many changes came to tape recording. A lot of them were from Jack Mullin and the Electronic Division of the Bing Crosby Enterprises (BCE) operating out of a small facility in the BCE Building at 9030 Sunset Boulevard. The road to the video recorder was much more involved and slower than Bing would have liked. He always was around to encourage the project, and when Ampex decided to build their version he was supportive of them. Bing wanted a video recorder.

To continued in next issue.



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It is the policy of The Old Radio Times not to accept paid advertising in any form. We feel that it would be detrimental to the goal of the Old Time Radio Researchers organization to distribute its products freely to all wishing them. Accepting paid advertising would compromise that goal, as dealers whose ideals are not in line with ours could buy ad space.

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Publishing houses who wish to advertise in this magazine will be considered if they supply the publisher and editor with a review copy of their new publication. Anyone is free to submit a review or a new publication about old time radio or nostalgia.

Dealers whose ads we carry or may carry have agreed to give those placing orders with them a discount if they mention that they saw their ad in 'The Old Radio Times'. This is in line with the group's goal of making otr available to the collecting community.

We will gladly carry free ads for any other old time radio group or any group devoted to nostalgia. Submit your ads to: bob_burchett@msn.com

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Going strong for 30 years, the **Metropolitan Washington Old Time Radio Club** brings people together who have an interest in Old Time Radio (OTR). This is done through monthly meetings consisting of presentations about OTR stars and programs, and recreations of classic OTR shows, plus occasional performances of member-penned scripts produced in the OTR style.

Radio Recall is our illustrated twelve page journal published every other month, edited by Jack French, OTR historian and author. Articles by Jim Cox,



RADIO RECALL

Metro Washington Old Time Radio Club



Martin Grams, Jr., Karl Schadow, Jim Widner and other OTR researchers. OTR book reviews, upcoming OTR events, and historical footnotes. Available in full-color PDF via email, B&W hardcopy via USPS, or distributed to members at meetings.



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music reviews, bits of nostalgia, and essays by Club members. Recently the GRTR has morphed into The GRTR Studio Edition which is a fanciful use of the format of old-time radio variety shows, and the popular NPR talk-show "Fresh Air." GRTR brings lively information about entertainment and nostalgia.

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The Day I Met Gracie

by Catherine Nixon Cooke

George Burns has been an entertrainer for 73 years. At seven he was member of the PeeWee Quartet on New York East Side. Today, 80 years old, he's the star of *The Sunshine Boys*, a new film also starring Walter Matthau. But according to man who put El Producto on the map his life didn't really begin until he was 27 years old. That's when he met Gracie Allen and discovered real show business magic,

"If you ask the right questions, I'm funny," he says in his famous ravel voice. But I don't get up in morning and say, "I will be funny today at five after 10:00." I see the funny side of things, and I think you can get more done with humor than with straight talk."

And George Burns has certainly gotten a lot done--besides entertaining in every show business medium, he is busy writing a book and planning the New York opening of *The Sunshine Boys* and is rehearsing for an appearance at Carnegie Hall scheduled for early spring.

But according to the beloved comedian, he wasn't always in such demand. But he wasn't always discouraged. "I was always secure because I knew I'd be bad," he explains. "I wasn't good ... I was bad, bad bad!"

You don't quite believe him--his eyes are twinkling--but he continues, "I was bad for years. Until I was 27. But I didn't know I was bad. I didn't give a damn about whether I was bad or good ... I was in show business. That was more important than being good or bad.

"Then I got lucky when I was 27. I met Gracie. And we worked together. And she was awfully good. She was great, and she took me along with her and I got better.



At 80 Year old, George Burns talks about the turning point life as he begins as he begins a film career

"It was the love of show business that kept me in it," he explains. "The love of being able to walk down Broadway with music under my arm and a makeup kit in my hand, and not working. I was in show business. I think everybody in the world should go into show business. If I'm doing well, I think everybody would do well!" When George Burns joined show business at age seven, it was not as a child of entertainers like so many of her early start "I came from very religious parents and they thought if you sang with your hat off it wasn't nice. They were so orthodox. They didn't unders and show business. I came from a very big family ... seven sisters and five brothers. And all of a sudden there I am singing. My family sang too, but they sang religious songs. And I sang 'Hard to sing

and my father didn't understand that, but he used to hum along." George Burns chuckles with the memory of his PeeWee Quartet, singing in saloons, yards, and at amateur nights in the neighborhood. "Money was so scarce in those days that if all of us made five dollars, that meant \$1.25 a kid, and that would take care of people for a long time.

"In those days you could buy Vienna rolls ... two for a penny. And if you had a family of 12, all you hadda do was buy six cents worth of rolls. Of course, it would take four or five of us kids to go down and bring them up--they were awfully heavy," he laughs. "And the funny thing is that my family never had bad stomachs. We could digest anything. My mother made great sauces. She'd put the right sauce on wood and we'd eat it. I ate a chair ... " he pauses, his timing perfect, waiting for a smile.

"My mother kept a pot on the stove and no matter what we brought home, we'd throw it in ... chalk from school, you know, we ate anything." Looking back on his early days, George Burns smiles softly. Times were hard then, but he loved every minute of it, even if it meant "eating chairs." "I don't think you can weigh anything by money," he explains. "Money is not important to me ... I don't think about it. "And I'm not just saying that now I have it. It was never important to me. 'Cause I told you about my family. The only reason that I'm comfortably fixed today is because I made so much money I had to save some, "But money never entered my mind.

I never would have stayed in show business until I was 27 if I'd thought about money, because I never made any before then."

Another thing that George Burns doesn't think about is age. "Age doesn't even enter my mind. I know how old I am and I don't try to be any younger than I am. But this is my age, and

this is the way I do things."

"There's not a darn thing that you can't do now that you couldn't do then--although maybe not quite as well. But you can do it. Just because you get to be 79 or 80 years old, you don't say, 'Look, I'm ready to make my exit.' If you're gonna exit, get applause for doing it, and then come out and do a few more minutes."

George Burns describes the book he's writing, which centers around the subject of age. "It's about now, about being my age, and being able to do it. The book is going to be about life



George Burns and Walter Matthau in "The Sunshine Boys," Burns' first film in 36 years

in general . . . about me sitting here having a Martini, about going to play bridge with George Jessel after lunch, about me going to London and doing two concerts. "Of course, there are some things I do better now than I did at 20," he chuckles, "and some things I don't do as good.

"I don't think sex ever stops. If you meet somebody you like, it works. If you meet somebody you had an affair with 50 years ago, it doesn't."

"I have, I would say, four or five affairs a day. Every day I have four or five different girls come to see me. No, that's not really true," he says, his eyes twinkling mischievously. "I only have two.

"Seriously," he says, "I think sex is here to stay. It's like eating. When you get old, you don't stop eating. Life goes on, you know. Maybe you're not as good as you used to be. I'm not as good as I used to be last week. But you just go along with life. It only stops when you stop."

But despite his outlook on age, George Burns knows very well that audiences want believable

jokes. "You cannot allow yourself to get younger," he explains. "If your jokes get too young for you, you won't get a job. 'Cause the audience knows."

George Burns smiles, and gives an example concerning his comedy 'partner and wife for 38 years, Gracie Allen.

"Gracie once said to me when she was 35, 'I don't think I can do this offbeat, silly character anymore.' I asked her why and she said, 'I'm 35.'

"I said, 'What difference does that make?"



You were born silly. You were silly when you were 18, you're silly now at 35, and you'll be just as silly when you're 70. The most important thing though is what you're silly about.' "I said, 'You gotta talk about things that 35-year-old women are silly about . . . then you're in character. If you talk about things that 18-year-old girls are silly about then you're out of character.'

"And she said, 'George . . . ' and she applauded me for five or six minutes, ' ... you're smart.' .

George and Gracie Allen Burns were a team that endeared itself to audiences around the world, and when George talks about Gracie and her death in 1964, his voice is soft and loving.

Lighting up his famous El Producto, George gives an example of knowing what material is "right" for an entertainer, a gift he's always had.

"We told the roast joke for years," he begins, "and it's something you're silly about when you're 35 ... or 50. You put a little roast and a big roast in the oven and when the little roast burns, the big one is done.

"The whistle joke is another story. Gracie carries a police whistle and says, 'If you kiss me, I'll blow this and a policeman will come.' And I kiss her and say, 'Why don't you blow it?' And she says, 'It's broken from last night.' That doesn't fit a 35-year-old woman. You gotta do jokes your age."

As he makes his point, he waves El Producto cigar, a prop that has come to be such a part of George Burns. "I started smoking at one 'Young?'"? I had an affair with my teacher, Mrs. Hollander, when I was nine years old. Not true!" he adds, his straight face- breaking into a smile. "I used to smoke 15 or 20 cigars a day," he admits, "until I got sick and was operated on. Now I just smoke about five. I smoke only domestic cigars ... El Producto. I wouldn't smoke Havana



cigars ... they're too strong. "I started smoking them because I thought cigars made me look like I was an actor. Eddie Robinson turned out to be a big star and I didn't."

Even at 80, with a new movie scheduled for release and a 73-year career promising to expand, George Burns won't admit he's a star ... but his eyes twinkle as he denies it. "I've been booed lots of times. But who cares? I got so used to being booed I thought I was doing well. It wasn't bad. I stood out there and I was booed, but I had music, I had on makeup ... I loved every minute of it. I never thought I'd make it anyway ... I just wanted to be in show business. I liked it better than making felt hats."

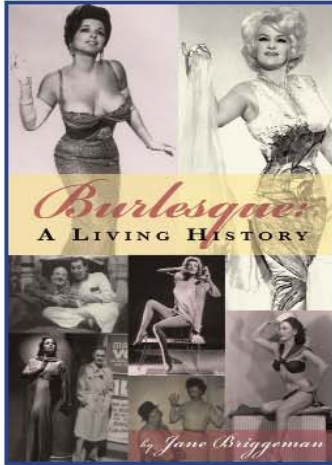


Geo at 7 years old with the PeeWee Quartet

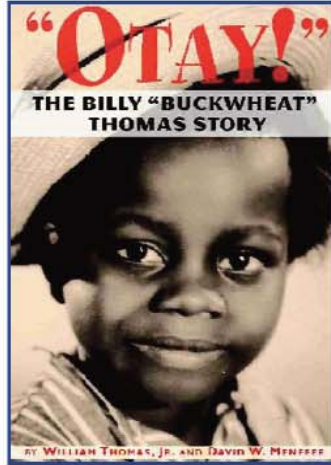
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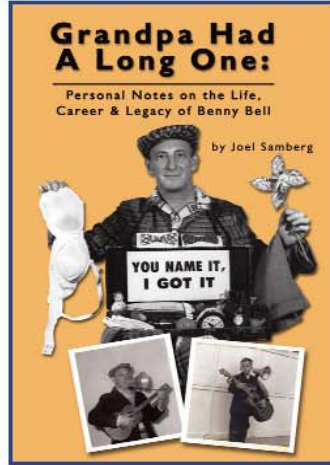
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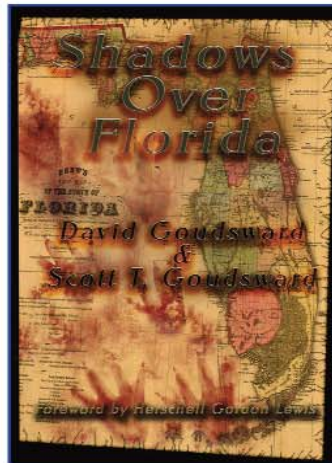
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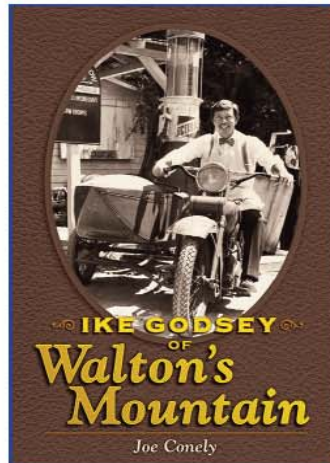
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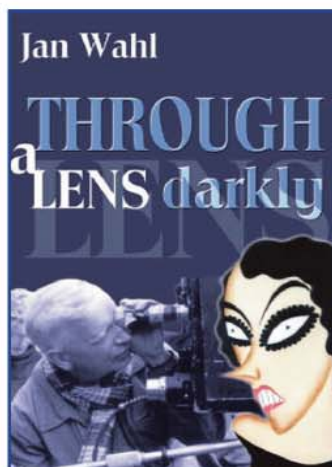
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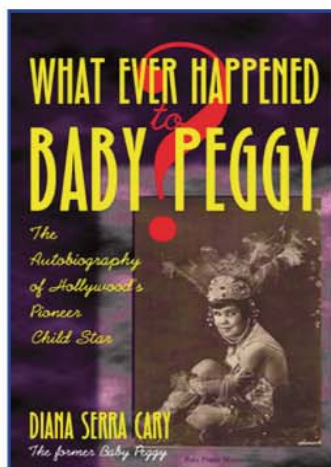
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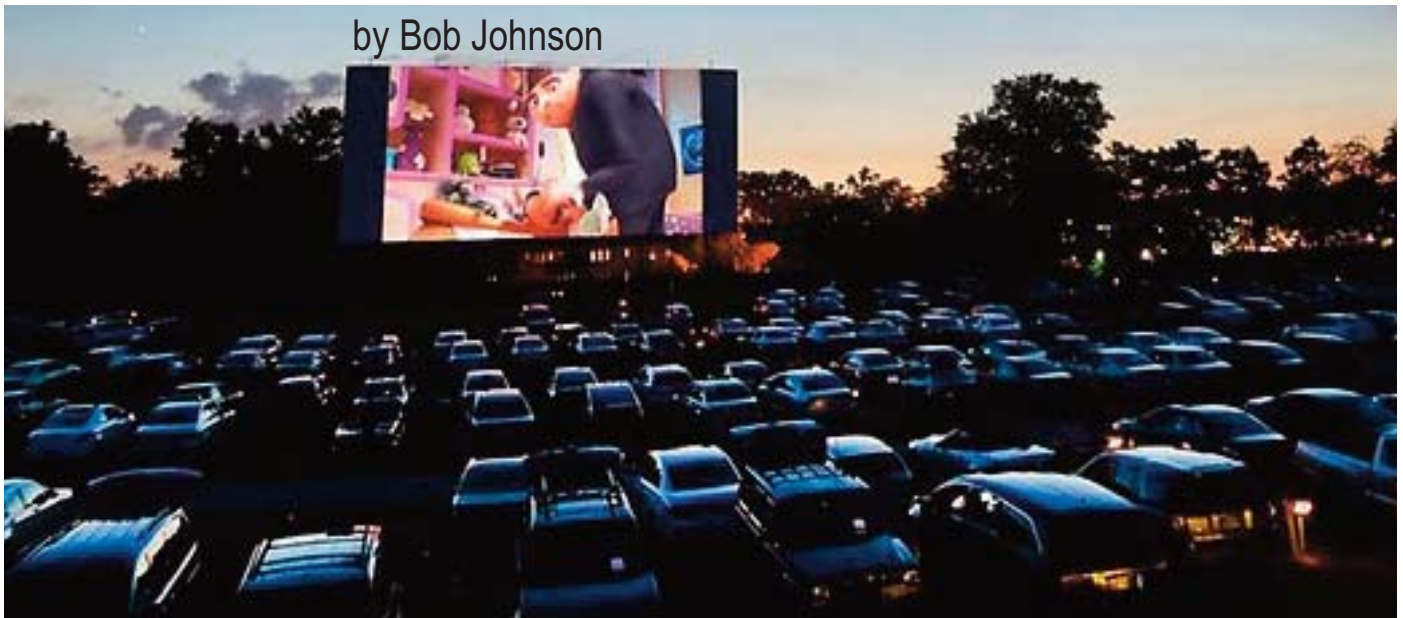
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Along With Cheap Prices, Drive-In Movie Era Gone

by Bob Johnson



It is 7:00 pm on a balmy July 7, 1953 Tuesday evening in Johnson City. The four members of the John Doe family have decided to attend a local drive-in movie, having these motion picture choices: Van Johnson and Paul Douglas in “When In Rome” at Family Drive-In, John Derrek and Donna Reed in ‘Saturday’s Hero” at Tri-City Drive-in, Anthony Dexter and Eleanor Parker in ‘Valentino’ at Twin-City Drive-In and Edmond O’Brien and Joanne Dru in ‘711 Ocean Drive” at King Springs Drive-In.

They choose the Family Drive-In with two nightly showings, 8:45 and 10:45, opting for the earlier one. The ticket booth attendant charges them \$1.25 (a quarter per person and a quarter per vehicle), giving little thought to anyone hiding in their trunk, an occurrence commonplace with the younger crowd. Upon entering the establishment, the Does search for the most favorable viewing location, directly in front of the big screen without being too close or too far from it.

They next remove the gray-colored speaker box from the outside post and hang it on the dri-

ver’s side window. Just prior to the start of the movie and while it is still light, the Doe children visit the playground and stop by the concession stand before returning to their vehicle. The family is now ready to enjoy, “When In Rome.” About halfway into the picture, an intermission “trailer” comes on the big screen, further enticing people to visit the snack bar: “It’s Intermission Time, Folks. Time For a Delicious Snack in Our Sparkling Refreshment Building.”

Drive-in movies had good and bad aspects





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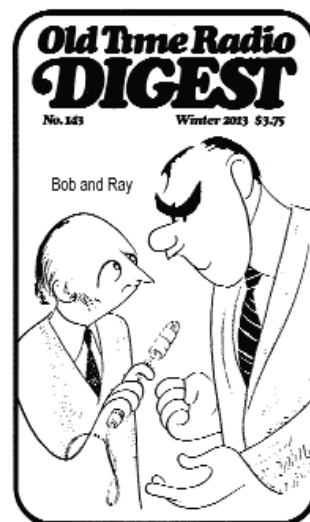
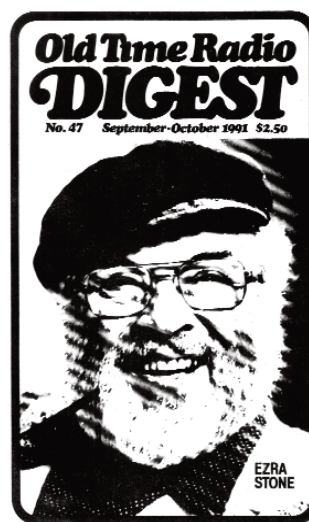
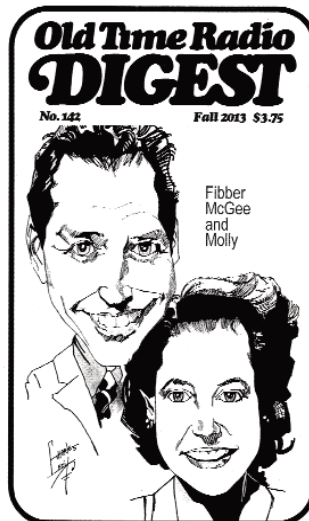
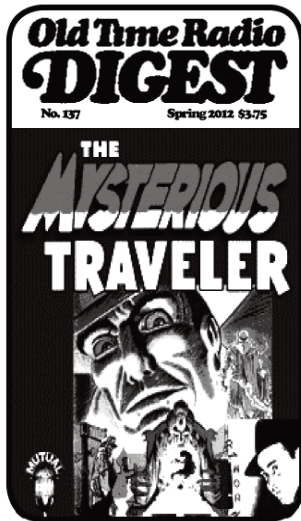
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Drive-in movies had good and bad aspects. On the positive side, patrons could enjoy a motion picture in the privacy of their automobile. That meant making it a family affair, talking and eating without disturbing others around them. Those who owned convertibles could let the top down and literally enjoy movies under the stars.

On the negative side, drive-ins featured mostly second-run movies that required total darkness, yielding a picture quality inferior to that found at indoor theatres. Also, customers had to contend with bugs in the summer and chilly air in the winter, prompting some theatres to issue small heaters for patron use. The speaker’s monophonic sound quality was poor with just one knob for level control.

People would sometimes intentionally or inadvertently drive off with the speaker still attached to their vehicles, leaving a snapped cord dangling behind. “Replace the Speaker on the Post When You Leave the Theatre.”





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OTRR ACQUIRES NEW EPISODES AND UPGRADED SOUND ENCODES FOR SEPTAND OCT

This is a list of newly acquired series/episodes. They may either be new to mp3 or better encodes. These were acquired by the Group during the months of July and Aug They were purchased by donations from members and friends of the Old Time Radio Researchers.If you have cassettes that you would like to donate, please e-mail beshiresjim@yahoo.com
For reel-to-reels, contact david0@centurytel.net
& for transcription disks tony_senior@yahoo.com

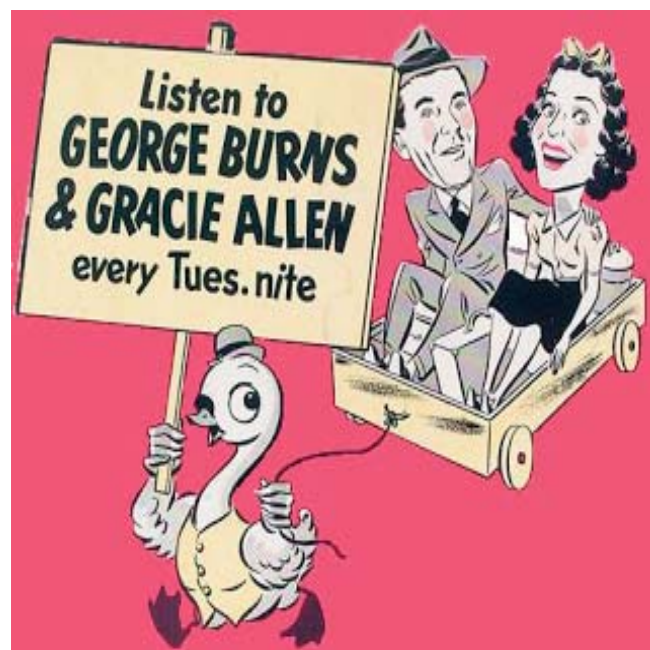
Burns & Allen

1942-12-22 Akim Tamiroff.mp3
1942-12-29 Gracie's Dating Service (with Rita Hayworth).mp3
1943-02-16 Beauty Mark (with Veronica Lake).mp3
1943-08-31 Frank Sinatra.mp3
1944-01-18 William Bendix.mp3
1944-02-15 Fred Astaire drives George crazy.mp3
1944-02-29 Dorothy Lamour.mp3
1944-03-07 Alan Ladd.mp3
1945-11-29 Back to college.mp3
1946-05-09 Harpo Marx.mp3
1947-01-09 Last year's Christmas bills.mp3
1947-01-16 Poker Game.mp3
1947-01-23 Country cousin.mp3
1947-01-30 Guest is Bea Lillie.mp3
1947-03-06 Gracie takes up crime solving.mp3
1947-03-27 St Bernard.mp3
1947-09-04 Back from a vacation in the woods.mp3
1947-09-11 The long dress.mp3
1947-10-09 Gracie gets a job.mp3
1947-11-20 Gracie has romantic notions.mp3

1947-11-27 French singer.mp3
1947-12-11 Lady killer.mp3
1948-03-18 George is losing his hair.mp3
1948-05-13 Gracie's problems with salesmen.mp3
1948-05-27 Spiritualism.mp3
1948-06-03 For Louella Parsons.mp3
1949-01-06 Gregory Peck.mp3
1949-02-10 Gracie sends Sam Spade to jail (with Howard Duff).mp3
1949-05-05 George the cowboy (with William Boyd).mp3
1949-05-19 Gracie adopts Mickey Rooney.mp3
1950-01-25 Ronald Reagan.mp3
1950-02-01 Al Jolson's vigorous lifestyle.mp3

COTY

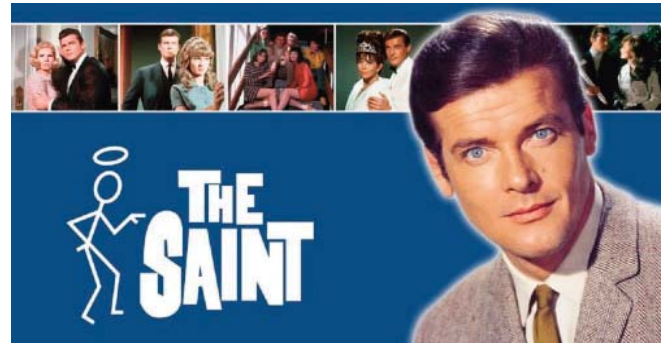
1952- 09-16 Death on Roaring River.mp3
1952-06-12 Stormy Night.mp3
1952-06-17 Domino.mp3
1952-06-19 The Race To Dawson.mp3
1952-06-24 King Takes Over.mp3
1952-06-26 The Partners.mp3
COTY 1952-07-06 The White Wolf.mp3



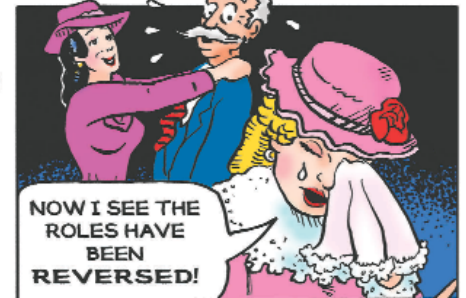
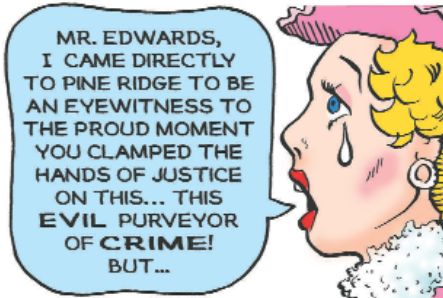
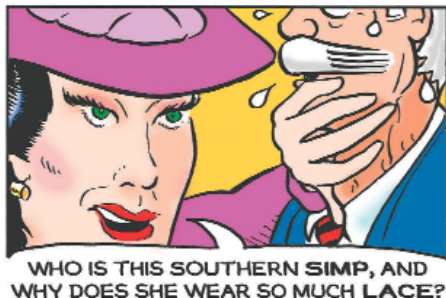
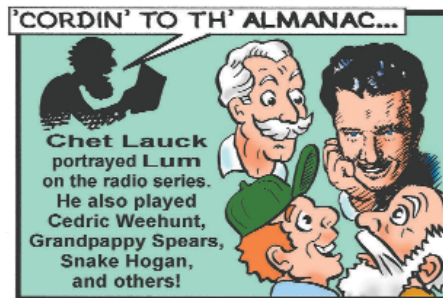
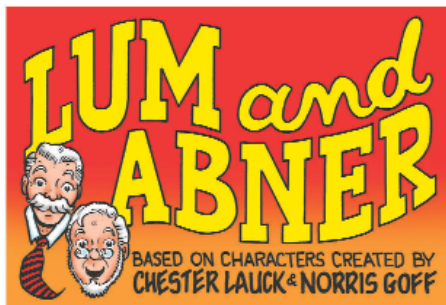
1943-08-02 Murder in the Crypt.mp3
 1947-02-02 Careless Employees.mp3
 1947-03-23 Crystal Prophecy.mp3
 1947-07-20 Wandering Macaroni.mp3
 1947-09-07 Bearded Queen.mp3
 1947-09-21 Two Faced Firemaster.mp3
 1947-11-23 Barefoot Banker.mp3
 1947-12-21 Policy Makers.mp3
 1948-01-11 Graveyard Gunman.mp3
 1948-02-01 Classical Clue.mp3
 1948-02-29 Boy Who Got Lost.mp3
 1948-03-07 Absent Clue.mp3
 1948-03-28 Martyred Rat.mp3
 1948-04-11 Henpecked Husband.mp3
 1948-05-09 Nameless Blonde.mp3
 1948-05-16 Salesman of Death.mp3
 1948-05-23 Tatoed Cobra.mp3

Saint

1947-10-29 Greed Causes Murder.mp3

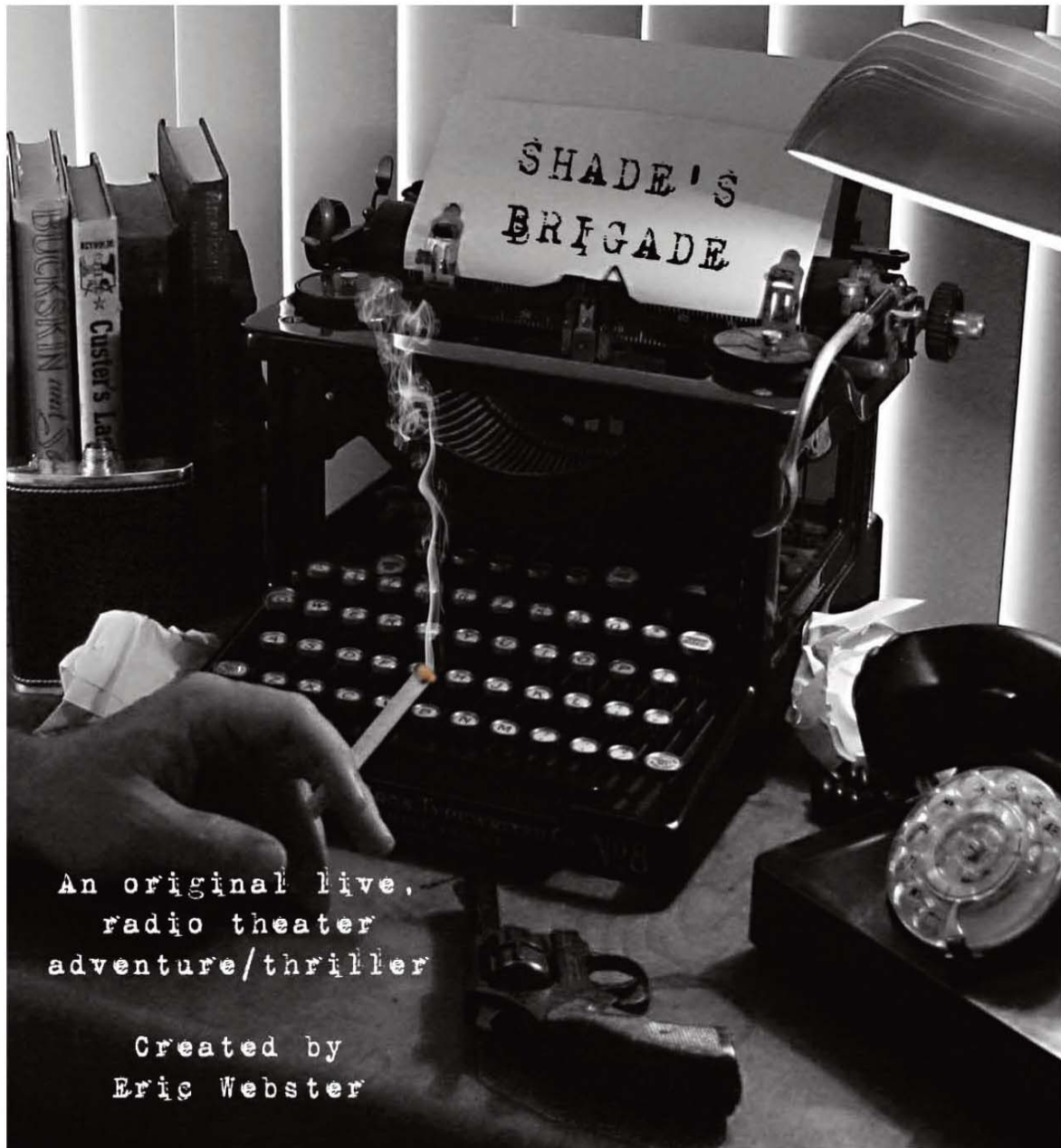


1947-12-17 Saint Goes Underground.mp3
 1948-05-26 Blond Who Lost Her Head (Fake Amnesia Killer).mp3
 1949-09-18 A Schizophrenic Psychiatrist.mp3
 1950-06-18 A Sonata For Slayers.mp3
 1950-07-02 A Real Gone Guy.mp3
 1951-01-14 Simon Takes a Curtain Call.mp3
 1951-01-21 Tuba or Not Tuba, That is the Question (The Tuba Pla)



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