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Contents

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Florence Case: Pioneer Performer is Remembered

David S. Siegel

How does one begin to explain the pleasure and challenge that comes with being given the opportunity to meet someone whose very first appearance before a radio microphone took place in 1926, the very year that NBC was created? It came about purely by happenstance.

I had just completed a talk about radio to a group of senior citizens when I was approached by a member of the audience who told me that her elderly mother had been a radio performer in her youth. The bits and pieces of information that followed convinced me that a meeting with her mother would be a rewarding experience. It took only a couple phone calls to a second daughter, who visited her mother each week, to arrange a meeting and an interview.

Shortly before noon, Saturday, July 11, 2009, Florence Klein, her daughter Anne Panoff, and an aide arrived at my house. Florence, seated in a wheelchair, frail but feisty at age ninety-two, was in an up-beat mood. It was quite obvious that she was pleased to know that someone was anxious to learn about her show biz career. After photocopying the press clippings that were in her scrapbook, we spent close to a half an hour engaged in an interview which was dutifully recorded.

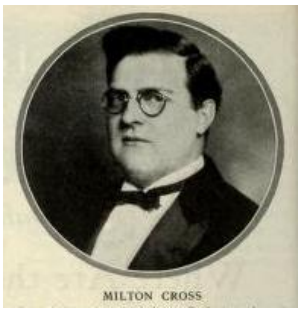
What follows is a narrative based on the information provided to me by Florence, supplements, to a large extent by the press clippings and other materials found in her scrapbook; and corroborated as much as possible by her daughters.

Florence Stimmel was both on November 17, 1916, in New York City. Song came to her quite naturally. When only four or five years old she and her older brother Arnold, neither of them very bashful, would sing for the guests at a summer resort in White Lake, New York, where the family vacationed.

At age ten Florence enrolled as a voice student at a prestigious music studio operated by Orry Parado. John Pennino, in

his 2006 definitive biography of soprano Rise Stevens, makes reference to the future Metropolitan Opera diva, (three years older than Florence), who studied at the same school.

Radio was in its infancy at the time. The National Broadcasting Company controlled two stations in New York City. WEAF, the flagship station of NBC's red network, aired the more profitable commercial programs. WJZ, which was founded in 1921, became the flagship station of NBC's blue network in 1927. With top professional talent reluctant to appear on the relatively new medium of radio and potential sponsors equally reluctant to put money into it, it was not uncommon for stations to make use of amateurs (nonprofessional) entertainment. Thus it was that in 1924 WJZ, influenced by a local newspaper campaign that cried out for on-air opportunities for talented young children, created a radio program hosted by Milton Cross called *The Children's Hour*. In 1927 the program was renamed *Coast to Coast on a Bus*.

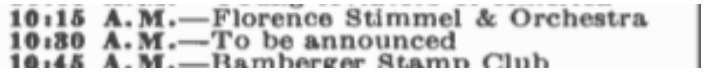

MILTON CROSS

Orry Parado was an astute business person who recognized the publicity value of having his students perform on the radio. A number of Parado's prize students including Renee (Rise) Stevens and Florence Stimmel appeared in the *Children's Hour* as early as 1926. Family and friends attending a song recital on Monday evening. June 27, 1927, at the Grand Ballroom of the hotel Waldorf-Astoria, were presented with a printed program that read in part: "Presenting Pupils of Orry Parado, featuring the children under his direction at WJZ."

During the next three years young Florence would make regular appearances on the *Infants Home of Brooklyn* program, heard on the short-lived station WPCH. She was also heard a number of times on station WABC's *Boys' Club* program. In 1930, Florence, now 14 years old, appeared on the *Tin pan Alley* program aired on radio station WOR.

The turning point in the career of any performer who has struggled for recognition without financial reward comes, as it did for Florence, when a paycheck finally signaled better days ahead. Those better days began in 1931. After several appearances on WOR's *Market and Halsey Street Playhouse* program, Florence was assigned to a 15-minute sustaining program of her own with six musicians for backup. Enthusiastic listener response led to the station adding two additional sustaining spots to her schedule on Monday and Wednesday evenings. In a move indicative of the station's confidence in their young soprano, 12 to 14 musicians, directed by Sherman Keene, were assigned to provide her musical accompaniment.

At this point in her career, 15-year-old Florence was aware of the challenges that she would face in the competitive world that she had embarked upon. A decision was made. On Saturday morning, November 21, 1931, New York City newspapers list the WOR 10:15 a.m. program as: *Florence Stimmel Sings*. On Saturday morning, November 28, 1931, the same newspapers for the same station and scheduled time the program was listed as: *Florence Case Sings*.


10:15 A.M.—Florence Stimmel & Orchestra
10:30 A.M.—To be announced
10:45 A.M.—Bamberger Stamp Club

Goodbye struggling amateur. Hello professional who is featured in her very own program and who had adapted a stage name befitting her new status. She began to be heard on a number of commercial programs including several appearances as a guest artist with Abe Lyman's Orchestra on a program known as *Rambling Through the Nightclubs* on radio station WABC.

WOR signed Florence on again, this time she would be sponsored by Littmans', a local women's dress shop. Reminiscent of another *Children's Hour* alumni, the teenage singing sensation Mary Small, who as Little Miss Bab-O, sold her sponsors' products, Florence became known as "The Alice Blue Gown Girl." The program which aired on Sundays could be heard at 12 noon, followed by a repeat performance 7 p.m.

A column appearing in the *New York World-Telegram* on May 18, 1932, written by Jack Foster, referred to Florence Case as: "One of the outstanding features of the day." Another newspaper critic wrote: "Miss Case has acquired the art of presenting popular songs of the

day a little bit differently than the stereotyped manner of other mike songbirds."

An article appeared in the July 1932 issue of *Music World Almanak* entitled "Native New Yorker Achieves Fame as a Radio Singer." After devoting four paragraphs to her earlier efforts the article continued: "Miss Case's success may be attributed not only to the fact that she has an unusually well-cultivated soprano voice, but also that she pays good attention to detail in the rendition of her popular songs." A newspaper critic is also quoted as saying: "Miss Case has a voice which injects a pleasing newness and vitality into tired popular songs."

The critical acclaim reflected in the accolades seen above are indicative of the kudos earned by Florence in the form of fan letters received from scores of radio listeners. It should be noted that by 1932, the 16-year-old soprano was savvy enough to recognize that her voice was more attuned to singing the blues than some of the operatic arias that she had mastered under Parado. Her voice, her youth, and the name recognition gained as a result of being a featured radio entertainer would lead to several offers to perform on the vaudeville circuit as well as many invitations to participate in various charitable benefits.

Florence joined Vincent Lopez and his Orchestra along with a number of other radio performers in a program in support of the World War I veterans at Chelsea Hospital at Castle Point, New York City. She found herself in the company of several nationally known personalities including Leon Errol, Ernie Hare and Billy Jones, Bill Robinson, Red Grange and Rudy Valle when she entertained at the *New York Daily Mirror*'s Elephant Fund benefit at the Ziegfeld Theater. Other early appearances for good causes as well as for publicity include being on hand at Reuben's Benefits for Crippled Children, and for benefit programs for the Daughters of Jacob and the Newark Athletic Club.

The Branford Theater in Newark, New Jersey with a seating capacity of 2,800 offered Florence and Bennie Fairbanks and his band a week-long engagement (May 20 to 28, 1932) to entertain its patrons between the showing of first-run films. In those early days of radio fans, who could afford the price of a ticket, took advantage of an opportunity to see as well as hear a popular radio entertainer. This, no doubt, accounted for an impressive turnout of fans, a successful engagement and a number of similar engagements at other large film palaces in the metropolitan New York area. Among these were the Audubon, located in Washington Heights and the Crotona Theater located in the Bronx. Both theaters had seating capacities of over 2,000, were built by William Fox in 1912, and have long since been demolished.

"Florence Case in Demand" was the bold headline that appears in the August 12, 1932, edition of the *New York Daily Mirror* (a Hearst publication in which Walter Winchell's column appeared regularly), a local radio personality as Dr. Cohen wrote: "Last Monday Florence Case, the Alice Blue Gown girl of radio assisted me in my radio program as guest star. Within five days more than three hundred letters were received from our audience asking that Florence again sing for them."

Cohen continued: "Miss Case is the sweetest little girl with the sweetest voice on the air. Her manner and charm, as well as her ease of delivery, has won her many friends and admirers. Her singing of popular songs in the new manner apparently meets the demand of radio audiences everywhere, for many of the letters have come from the remotest points where radio programs must satisfy to remain on the air. I have bound all of these letters together and sent them to her with a request that she appear as my guest this coming Monday, August 15."

By 1933, three years shy of her 20th birthday, several newspaper critics credited Florence with beating the odds as one of the few child entertainers whose career blossomed as she matured. When I asked her how, for example, she managed to become one of Don Bestor's vocalists, her simple reply was, "I auditioned for it."


Don Bestor

Don Bestor, a bandleader, whose fame has faded over the years, was at the top of his form in 1933. In what can only be interpreted as confidence in his newly-signed vocalist, the *New York Daily News* reported: "Don Bestor for the first time since he lost Ramona, will feature a female vocalist when Florence Case warbles for

him next week."

Metronome, a popular magazine devoted to the arts, featured a photograph of Florence, headed: *Busy Girl* and to prove the accuracy of its claim the following appeared below the photo: "Florence Case, soprano, is heard over WEAF, WGLO local stations Tuesday and Saturday and WGY Schenectady. Also appearing in *Show Boat* at Lake George, New York, and is featured with Don Bestor's Orchestra. Miss Case just made three recordings for Victor."

Unemployment during the height of the Great Depression had a profound effect on musicians. Attendance was down at most locations that traditionally offered live music. An exception to that pattern occurred in May of 1933 when several New York City newspapers reported on the teaming of Don Bester and his band with comedian Benny Rubin, who were keeping the seats filled at the Lowes State Theater.

Benny Rubin

Don's band could also be heard on the radio. The band appeared on Jack Lait's *Home Magazine Gaieties* program which aired on station WINS. They were also featured on a series of late-night remote broadcasts that NBC aired by means of a direct line to the Biltmore, an upscale New York hotel.

Don Bestor and his (as the ad reads) Orchestra were entertaining nightly in the "Le Casino Bleu" room of the Biltmore. One member of the audience who was particularly impressed by the voice and appearance of blues singer Florence Case was S.L. Rothefel, known in his day by the nickname of "Roxy." Although few today have ever heard of him, he was known as one of the most successful showmen in motion-picture history. He worked his way up from nickelodeon operator to manager of movie houses, radio broadcaster, and who at one time or another managed New York's Strand Theatre, the Rialto, the Rivoli, the Capitol, the Roxy (his own) and the Radio City Musical Hall. (Note: today Rockettes were once known as the Roxyettes.)

Rothefel was so impressed by Florence that he persuaded Bestor to release her for a week in order that she might be featured as part of the stage show at the Radio City Music Hall. The program of the week beginning Thursday, November 2, 1933, at the Music Hall identifies Erno Rappee as conductor of the orchestra and as vocalists, Florence Case and Jan Peerce.

I was curious as to why, just when things were looking promising for a bright future with the Don Bestor band, Florence Case would leave that organization to sign on with a lesser known bandleader. What I learned was that sometime between November 1933 and May 1934. Don Bestor signed a lengthy contract to appear in New York's Pennsylvania Hotel. Some three weeks into the assignment Florence lost her job. It seems the hotel management came to the conclusion that she looked "too Jewish."

A further brief word about Don Bestor, who is perhaps best known to radio fans as the bandleader who provided the music for the Jack Benny program from April 6, 1934 to July 14, 1935. He is also credited with having written the jingle used in the Jell-O commercials. While he would continue to lead a band until sometime in 1947, he never regained the degree of popularity that he enjoyed in the early 1930s.

Florence, quite naturally pained by the abrupt and unfair manner that led to her dismissal, was determined to resume her singing career as soon as possible. The otherwise optimistic young singer was faced with the realization that with unemployment at its height in the midst of the Depression, getting back to work as a band vocalist would require extraordinary good fortune. Luck alone could not have brought the alliance about. Several factors played a role in bringing Emil Velazco and Florene Case together. In

addition to possessing a sultry voice and a pleasing delivery of lyrics, her stage, nightclub and years of vocalizing on several different New York radio stations brought to the alliance of the element that Velazco sorely lacked: name recognition.

A name few current music historian would recognize and one rarely if ever cited in reference books is that of Emil Velazco. He was born in Mexico City on October 20, 1898, and during his early years taught himself to play the piano. He then learned to play the organ and earned a degree in music at The Chicago Music College at the age of 18. For a short time thereafter he became the youngest instructor at the college. Velazco played the organ in movie theaters in the United States and Europe when movies were silent. When Warner introduced sound to film, Emil and others in similar circumstances either found other employment or went broke.

Steady employment or the closest thing to it, might be achieved if one or more of New York's several radio stations could be induced to employ him as a staff member. His efforts to achieve that goal were frustrated more often than not by the legendary queen of radio organists, Rosa Rio, whose skill and charm won a large percent of the most desirable assignments.

By 1934, the year that Florence found herself at liberty, the only steady employment that Velazco could count on was a 15-minute sustaining spot each Sunday on WOR. Emil convinced himself that with the proper presentation he too could join the ranks of other broadcast organists, whose talents were no greater than his and earn a comfortable living as a band leader. Charles E. Green would serve as the personnel (or booking) manager for the new band.

"THE OUTSTANDING NOVELTY OF RADIO AND THE DANCE WORLD" appeared in large print below a photo of Velazco on the advertisement that appeared in trade magazines introducing the new band. Copy went on to read: "The world's only dance orchestra using a full-tuned $15,000,000 portable pipe organ. The only a new idea in dance music in ten years."

And thus it was that Florence would again see her name and photo appear in the various theatrical columns as the vocalist to be featured with the newest band sensation. A number of these almost identically worded clippings are in her scrap book. They serve to reveal the next stage of Florene's career. These PR-inspired messages are evidence to the degree to which the once aspiring amateur had embraced the tools of the trade to maintain her visibility and image in the minds of radio fans.

FLASH: "Florence Case, chosen from a group of several vocalists early in May (1934) when Emil Velazco opened with the unique orchestra in the Grill Room of the Hotel Taft, has proved strong drawing card with both in-person and Columbia listeners. She sings alone and in boy-and-girl numbers with Jack Goodman in Velazco's regular CBS sustaining programs."

With an August 13, 1934 news clipping identifying May 1934 as the beginning of the Case-Velazco collaboration and another clipping, this one featuring a gossip column penned by Ed Sullivan, on page 12 of the January 8, 1935 edition of the *Washington Post* which read: "Florence Case, orioile with Jacques Renard's crew and Dick Landers are romancing" clearly the Velazco-Case combination lasted no more than seven months, demonstrating once more the wisdom of Robert Burns observation regarding the best laid plans of mice and men.

When I read the Ed Sullivan piece aloud to Florence, some 73 years later, she laughed and called it the kind of PR nonsense designed to keep one's name before the public. Fully aware that Velazco is but one of several musicians whose lives intertwined with that of the talented Case is it folly to ask why more effort was not expended to explore the achievements and failures of so many others who, like the character portrayed by Brando, "could have been contenders?"

This piece was submitted by Martin Grams in the belief that Siegel never got around to having it published. One of the foremost collectors in the history of the old-time radio hobby, David Siegel passed way in 2016. He was a respected researcher in his own right and authored or co-authored several books including *Radio and the Jews: The Untold Story of How Radio Influenced the Image of Jews, Radio Rides the Range*, *Flashgun Casey, Crime Photographer: From the Pulps to Radio and Beyond*, and *The Witch's Tale: Stories of Gothic Horror from the Golden Age of Radio*.

Purchasing Groups

The Old Time Radio Researchers Purchasing Group:
Contact Jim Wood at OTRPG@Bookfixer.com
Dues: 5$ per month.

Ted Davenport Purchasing Group:
Contact Ted at tedotr@sbcglobal.net
Dues: 25$ per month for 5 hours of both circulating and uncirculating material.

Doug Hopkinson Purchasing Group:
Contact Doug at audiotorium117@gmail.com
Dues: 25$ per month for 5 hours of drama/comedy programming; 10$ per month for 2.5 hours of musical/variety programming; $30 for all 7.5 hours.

Visit Our Blog

Another little-known resource for Old Time Radio Researchers is our blog, found here. It was dormant after the death of Jim Beshires but in recent months have reactivated it. Please subscribe to be automatically notified of new posts.

A Reminder

The Old Time Radio Researchers online library remains one of the most valuable sources of downloadable OTR programs available freely to the wider public. Many newer members appear unfamiliar with this resource. Visit here!

Support the Old Radio Times

Since its debut in December 2005, the *Old Radio Times* has been offered free to the old-time radio community. It is the only free group publication in the hobby and it will remain so. However, as a way to help readers show their appreciation for the zine, we've created a Patreon page where you can pledge a regular donation to the upkeep of the zine and the work of the Old Time Radio Researchers in general.

Visit the Times' Patreon page to become a subscriber, paying $1 (or $2) to our dusty coffers each time a new issue is published. We are currently on a bi-monthly schedule so the total annual cost could be as little as $6.

Wistful Vistas
From the Editor's Desk
Ryan Ellett

The *Old Radio Times* is starting 2020 in a strong position and we have made the decision to attempt a bi-monthly publication schedule this year. Originally the *Times* was published monthly and then when Bob Burchett assumed the editorship he moved it to a bi-monthly schedule.

However, the sudden deaths in 2018 of both Bob and Jim Beshires (who acquired many of the articles that appeared in these pages) left us with a near-empty cabinet of material. By the end of 2018 a quarterly production cycle seemed sustainable.

Now with a renewed interest in the *Times* and a slowly rebounding circulation (due to a technical glitch that resulted in the loss of our subscriber list) we feel confident we can return to a bi-monthly format. This allows us to also be a little more timely in reporting on hobby news and events.

If you did a doubletake at seeing David Siegel's name in the author line of this issue's feature article, I don't blame you. Despite his death more than three years ago, Siegel's legacy still looms large over the old-time radio hobby so we were thrilled to receive this (believed-to-be) unpublished article via Martin Grams.

You'll find the biography of Clyde Beatty (from our recently released Maintained Set of *The Clyde Beatty Show*) penned by Dr. Bruce Frey. This is his first foray into OTR writing but makes his living as a prolifically published professor of statistics at the University of Kansas.

We are always looking for new content. Book reviews, reminisces, and historical articles are eagerly accepted. No professional writing experience necessary!

Edited by Ryan Ellett
OldRadioTimes@yahoo.com
Title font by Joe Adams

2020 Maintained Releases
(Year Month)

Counterspy 2001
The Clyde Beatty Show 2001
Rocky Fortune 2001

Remembering Stewart Wright

John C. Abbott

Like so many others in the OTR community, I was shocked to learn that my friend, Stewart Wright had died. Many of us know of his dedication to OTR research, and many of us have benefited from his generosity in sharing information. But there was much more to Stewart.

He was proud of his service in the U.S. Army, where he was an NCO in an artillery battalion. Our conversation invariably included stories of what could happen when projectiles were fired from a high-power artillery piece by those who really did not understand their job.

Stewart was proud of his work as a cartographer and geographic researcher. He would recount how he was scheduled to go to an observation station at Mt. Saint Helens on a Saturday only to be told by his supervisor that he was not to travel on the weekend but to leave on Monday - the Monday after the volcano erupted.

Stewart was also a dogged researcher who could literally find that nugget of OTR information that he needed. He was protective of his copyrights, but would freely provide assistance to others, including myself. I know that when he found previously unknown Johnny Dollar programs, he took the time to document them for me, even though it took time away from his scheduled research.

I will miss the 1-2 hour phone calls, the thank you for your service call on Veterans Day, and all the information he shared with me. But even knowing that he is gone, I find it difficult to remove his contact information from my phone - maybe, just maybe. . .

I am sure that Stewart is regaling the actors and writers of his favorite programs where ever he may be.

This memorial provided by John C. Abbott originally appeared in the volume 2020 issue 3 posting of the Old-Time Radio Digest published on January 20, 2020. It is reprinted here by permission of the author.

Additional Thoughts

Ryan Ellett

This picture of Stewart Wright was taken in the late 2000s at the Old-Time Radio & Nostalgia Convention in Cincinnati, OH. He did not make it to many of these shows, at least since I started attending around 2006, but I was felt privileged to meet him the one time in person.

I did not know Stewart well personally; all of my interactions and communications with him related directly to old-time radio. As others have stated on different platforms, he was a top-notch researcher and considered one of the best in the field.

Most of his research appeared either on websites or in OTR hobby publications; very little has made it into published books. I hope someday his work might be collected into a format and/or resource that will be more accessible to future generations of radio historians.

Clyde Beatty:
Wild Animal Trainer Supreme

Bruce Frey, Ph.D.

Picture a lion tamer you may have seen in the movies or on old TV shows or in a comic strip, and you are picturing Clyde Beatty. (*Beatty* rhymes with *matey*). It was Beatty who, in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, would enter a cage in a circus's center ring alone with some dangerous wild animal- lion, tiger, bear- armed with only a chair and a whip and maybe a pistol that fired blanks. For three decades, Beatty was so popular across media, in live shows, movies, radio, and early television, that he is single-handedly responsible for defining what a circus wild animal act is supposed to look like.

Clyde Beatty (1903-1965) ran away and joined the circus as a teenager (at age 15, 17, or 18, depending on the source). He got an early job as an assistant to the show's wild animal trainer. Later, he trained with Peter Taylor, who had the leading big cat act of the day. In 1930, for the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, he began the act for which he would be known. He faced a dozen or so large wild cats at a time, with an occasional polar bear thrown in for good measure. Eventually, Beatty was the lead act in his own traveling show, The Clyde Beatty Circus.

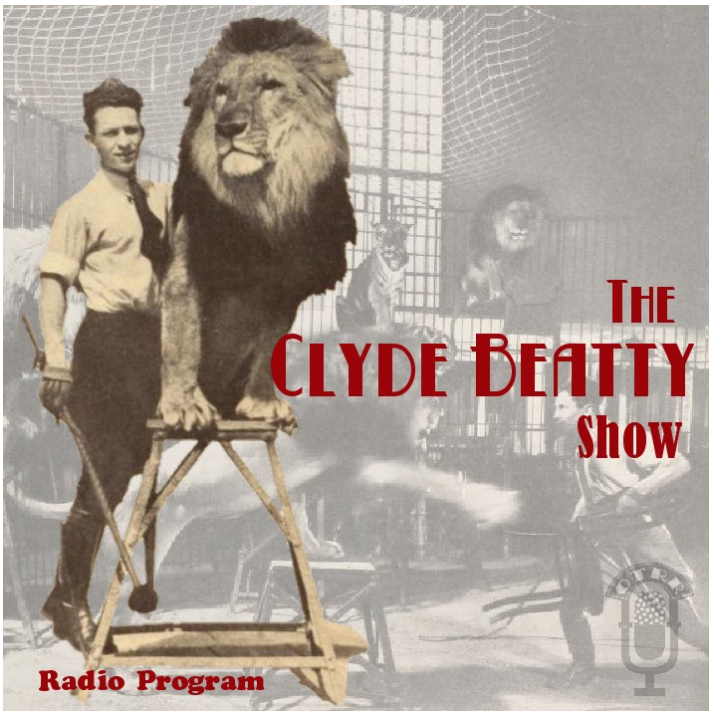
After a first marriage ended in divorce, Beatty married Harriett Evans, a fellow circus performer, in 1933. She switched from the trapeze to working with her own big cat act and found independent success. Clyde had a 2-year-old daughter, Albina, from his first marriage, and she, too, was trained in lion taming from an early age. Harriett died from heart disease in 1950. Clyde remarried (Jane Abel) and remained married until his death.

Clyde Beatty was a master of all entertainment media from the 1930's through 50's. He appeared in several movies, mostly quasi-documentaries as himself or in fictional films as "the lion tamer". He published a popular book about his exploits in 1933, *The Big Cage*, with Edward Anthony, which became a motion picture that year. Other books followed. He appeared in an Abbott and Costello film in 1949 and then a couple of jungle movies in 1953 and 1954. The 1949 movie role may have renewed interest in Beatty, as *The Clyde Beatty Radio Show* began in 1950 and ran until 1952. The roles of Beatty and his wife Harriett were played by actors (in fact, Harriett had died before the show began), but a few episodes were based on real events in Beatty's life. For the most part, though, the show was a heavily fictionalized account of the life of a wild animal trainer, similar to other radio shows supposedly about real people such as *Blackstone, The Magic Detective* and *The Adventures of Babe Ruth*.

Beatty continued to perform on television and in circuses through the mid-60s. Even after being diagnosed with cancer in 1964, he did his act for another year. Finally, his health forced his reluctant retirement. Beatty died at his home in California in 1965.

The Clyde Beatty Show Maintained Set released January 2020

2020 is off to a great start with the release of our first all-new Maintained Set in quite some time. It contains all 52 episodes known to be in circulation, advertisements, Dr. Frey's biography, and the show's first log provided by James Decker.



Arthur Anderson

Martin Grams

Arthur Anderson was a child actor who made a career out of acting the role of dragons, dwarfs, and knights in shining armor during the height of the Great Depression. The long-running radio program *Let's Pretend* offered a weekly fairytale for juvenile listeners. The highlight of the program was that the roles were played on the air by children – which was appreciated by the children who tuned in every Saturday morning to listen.

Anderson was among the cast of the Metropolitan Opera in the mid-1930s, worked with Orson Welles on many of the *Mercury Theater of the Air* broadcasts, and also worked with Welles on Broadway. Anderson was a regular at the Friends of Old-Time Radio Convention (NJ) throughout the 1990s and wrote a book thoroughly documenting the history of radio's Let's Pretend. The children's radio program was the platform that launched a number of actors into a life-long performing career, including Anne Francis, Dick van Patten, Donald Buka, Jackie Kelk, and Skip Homeier.

On television Anderson made guest appearances on Route 66, Dark Shadows, The Defenders, and Law and Order. Beginning in 1963 he voiced the cartoon character of Lucky the Leprechaun in those Lucky Charms television commercials you grew up with as a kid.

Arthur passed away in 2016 and all of his paperwork was mailed to me. I took the time to scan everything into digital format and assembled a PDF file. In short, this is a digital scrapbook of the career of Arthur Anderson including photographs, newspaper clippings, convention program guides, and other materials.

Arthur Anderson Digital Scrapbook

Why "The House In Cypress Canyon" Haunts Listeners… Especially Me (Pt. 2)

Denise Noe

Merry Christmas, Scary Christmas

Part of the power of "Cypress" comes from its link with Christmas. As the website *Escape and Suspense!* comments, "It has to be one of the most chilling Christmas tales ever told."

In modern America, horror stories tend to be connected with Halloween, that time of goblins, ghouls, and ghosts. Indeed, Halloween tames fear by having children dress up as legendary creatures of dread. In *Smithsonian.com*, Colin Dickey observes, "For the last hundred years, Americans have kept ghosts in their place, letting them out only in October, in the run-up to our only real haunted holiday, Halloween."

By contrast to Halloween, Christmas is a holiday of Santa Claus, his lovingly industrious elves and flying reindeer. Christmas is the wholesome holiday of family gatherings, of the Christmas tree decorated by sparkly tinsel and ceramic angels, of the exchanging of colorfully wrapped gifts.

Despite the love and generosity and good cheer that are intrinsic to Christmas, there is precedent for linking scary stories with Christmas as is so brilliantly done in "Cypress."

Many commentators believe an association between late winter and scary tales predates Christmas itself. After all, historians believe the early Church chose December 25 to celebrate Jesus Christ's birth not because the New Testament suggests that as his birthday but because it coincided with the pagan Winter Solstice and Yule. It is believed that Yule gatherings of family and friends often included people telling ghost stories. Writing for *All Hallows Geek*, "Mike" observes, "Winter nights are longer, darker, and lend themselves to spooky tales. . . . Many pagan beliefs suggested that during the Winter Solstice the dead could more easily cross into the living worlds, while others used tales of ethereal beings, gods, and monsters to explain the darkening of the days." Kat Eschner observes, "When the night grows long and the year is growing to a close, it's only natural that people feel an instinct to gather together. At the edge of the year, it also makes sense to think about people and places that are no longer with us. Thus, the Christmas ghost story." Eschner quotes University of Pennsylvania Religious Studies Professor Justin Daniels stating that the Winter Solstice and Yule celebrations existed in part because "the darkest day of the year was seen by many as a time when the dead would have particularly good access to the living."

Long after most Europeans embraced Christianity, both Christians and non-Christians continued to associated the end of the year with shivery stories. *The Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta* by Christopher Marlowe was published in 1589 and has the title character proclaiming, "Now I remember those old women's words, Who in my wealth would tell me winter's tales, And speak of spirits and ghosts by night." In Shakespeare's 1623 *The Winter's Tale,* Mamillius declares, "A sad tale's best for winter. I have one. Of sprites and goblins."

Eschner notes that drinking "rum punch" may also have played a role in the Christmas chiller tradition.

Of course, the most famous spooky Christmas tale is the 1843 Charles Dickens classic, *A Christmas Carol*. The story of how Christmas-hating miser Ebenezer Scrooge was rehabilitated into a generous, Christmas-loving man through his night-time encounters with the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future has become a cherished part of the Christmas celebration. Colin Dickey asserts, "Dickens' genius was to wed the gothic with the sentimental, using stories of ghosts and goblins to reaffirm basic bourgeois values."

A Christmas Carol also revitalized the link between ghost stories and Christmas. In Jerome K. Jerome's 1891 collection, *Told After Supper*, he observed, "Whenever five or six English-speaking people meet round a fire on Christmas Eve, they start telling each other ghost stories."

However, as Colin Dickey writes, in 19th Century American, the ghost story telling custom, to a great extent, passed from the Christmas to Halloween because waves of immigrants from Scotland and Ireland brought with them a love for Halloween. Just as Christmas borrowed from the ancient pagan traditions of the Winter Solstice and Yule, Halloween possessed much of the ancient pagan holiday called Samhain that celebrated the time during which harvest season gave way to the beginning of winter. Dickey

states, "Samhain was in time merged with the Catholic festival of All Souls' Day, which could also be tinged towards obsessions with the dead, into Halloween -- a time when the dead were revered, the boundaries between this life and the afterlife were thinnest, and when ghosts and goblins ruled the night." He remarks that the Halloween currently in the United States is "an odd hybrid of Celtic and Catholic traditions." As the 19th Century gave way to the 20th, Halloween pretty much filled ghost story telling time in America.

Nonetheless, the telling of scary tales around Christmastime never actually died out as it is alluded to in the modern Christmas song, "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year" written by Edward Pola and George Wyle in 1963 and made famous that year by Andy Williams. That song relates, "There'll be parties for hosting/ Marshmallows for toasting/ And caroling out in the snow/ There'll be scary ghost stories/ And tales of the glories/ Of Christmases long, long ago."

The Christmastime setting of "Cypress" is significant. Ellen looks forward to a change in fortune and hopes the house will be Fate's Christmas gift. Eschner observes that Dickens taught us that "the ghosts of Christmas are really the past, present, and future, swirling around us in the dead of the year." In "Cypress," past, present, and future are brought together in clever manner.

Haunted House, Ordinary House

"Cypress" breaks with horror tradition in the nature of the "haunted house." As Brad Stevens notes, the usual haunted houses are "imposing, ancient, and usually crumbling edifices wherein the sins of the past make themselves felt." By contrast, "Cypress" emphasizes how "new," "ordinary," and "little" this house is. Stevens continues that while Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist* is about the haunting of a newly built residence, it "ultimately traces" the haunting to an ancient Native American cemetery; no similar explanation is made in "Cypress."

Indeed, in "Cypress" the proverbial "skeleton in the closet" cannot exist as this recently finished home cannot have been the setting for a past murder with the victim returning to haunt the living murderer and/or the descendants of the murderer. There are not a multitude of rooms in which something can be hidden or someone can be hiding. It is not possible to get lost in this simply constructed and small building.

Then again, perhaps the house is not so ordinary after all. The story repeatedly mentions time as when a tired James asks, "You know what time it is?" The time *period* of the story is 1946 – the year after the end of World War II, one of the bloodiest conflicts in human history. The world had just learned of the genocidal horrors of the Holocaust. Harry Heuser observes, "No doubt, some who might have wished to live here are no longer alive" while others who would have wanted to live there "have no need for it at present" since they were wounded in the war. Heuser elaborates, "Blood has been shed so that future generations may dwell here. Can any home built under such circumstances truly be ordinary?"

The question that hovers over the story, the question to which Jim and Ellen, along with the audience, return, is: What is in that closet?

A clue would seem to be given by the different way the closet appears to Jim and Ellen compared to the police officers. That the closet holds something specific to Jim and Ellen – something that "belongs" to them -- is, paradoxically, suggested by the way it is initially unyielding to them. Ellen cannot open it because it is locked. Jim systematically goes through each house key but fails to find the key that will open it. They both see blood seeping from underneath it. Ellen touches it and feels contaminated by it.

Yet when the police officers arrive, the closet easily opens without the help of a key. No trace of blood is visible. For the cops, the closet holds no secrets. They leave, having found nothing mysterious or evil in that closet.

But that closet is the setting for Ellen's transformation from "ordinary" woman, apparently a loving and caring wife, to vicious monster.

What is in that closet?

As other writers have noted – and as I realized after a second listening - "Cypress" is concerned with gender roles. Harry Heuser sees it as one of many radio thrillers to "comment on the threat posed to men by independent females in the workplace, by shoulder-padded career women who, rather than being kept contentedly within white picket fences, appear ruthless

enough to impale their male counterparts upon them." Brad Stevens believes the Second World War's "impact on masculinity" is the "central concern" of "Cypress." The den was described as a "nice room, particularly for a man." The real estate agent never mentions a room that is "nice . . . particularly for a woman." However, that does not seem like an oversight since the home as a whole was generally assumed in the era to be women's province.

Indeed, it could be from that assumption of home as "women's place" that "Cypress" derives its horror. During WWII, much of American manhood was away, fighting against the Axis Powers. With so many American men risking and often sacrificing life and limb on foreign shores, it fell to American women to take many jobs that had previously been primarily performed by men. When the men came home, Rosie The Riveter was expected to become Susie Homemaker. Much female energy was pushed into a kind of closet – a closet that had to be unusually solid and rigorously locked. To view that closet, located right off the "man's den," as containing those frustrated, trapped female energies would explain why it is locked to Jim and Ellen and easily opened by the visiting police officers.

The closet could symbolize not only female frustration but the way such repressed frustration can turn dangerous, even deadly. Stevens writes, "The terrors of the autonomous female and the threat of castration she has to offer remain disturbingly near the surface: when James reaches out to touch his phallically 'rigid' wife" she bites him in a way suggesting emasculation.

Stevens views the mysteriously appearing and disappearing blood as "menstrual blood." This interpretation makes sense as it is consistent with the idea of the closet as the specifically female room. However, it is also possible to see that blood as representing the destructive turn inevitably taken when women's energies and capacities are repressed or "closeted." That vicious bite Ellen gives Jim could symbolize the harm done to a husband by a wife who feels pressed in by a sense of powerlessness and viciously nags her husband as a result.

The temporary transformation of Ellen into wounding monster is soon followed by what seems to be a permanent transformation into homicidal monster. Unable to restrain her destructive tendencies, Jim feels he has no choice but to murder the woman he loves and then turn the gun on himself.

Perhaps one reason this story spoke to me so strongly was that I am especially aware of how repressed female energy can turn destructive. I suffer from multiple psychiatric disorders that are, in part, the result of being raised by a mother who felt hopeless and helpless. Unable to channel her energies constructively, unable to exercise power over her own life, she took to what she herself described as "constant complaining" – supplemented by nasty nagging. She had herself been raised by a mother who suffered a similar sense of hopelessness and helplessness – and dealt with it by continuous griping and nagging. Indeed, perception of "women's place" as "bitchin' in the kitchen" probably goes back a long way in my maternal lineage as well as that of many other people.

Of course, the post-war repression of women's energies was followed by the feminist movement – which was both good and bad. The positive feminism sought to expand women's opportunities. The negative feminism sought to undercut basic human relationships like marriage and family. Indeed, the worst expressions of feminism can be symbolically linked to Ellen's biting/castration of her husband and her killing of another man.

Werewolf – Where Wolf?

When researching "Cypress" interpretations, I was struck by how often commentators believe it is a story about a werewolf. They come to this conclusion in the absence of a shred of evidence. No wolf is even mentioned. Rather, the alarming cries in the night are repeatedly compared to those made by cats – a species frequently associated in the popular mind with women. Ellen is never bitten by a wolf that could be a werewolf nor does she come under a curse – the usual ways in folklore that werewolves are created.

It seems that the werewolf link is made out of a desire to slot "Cypress" into an archetype. But this avoids the very specialness of the story that makes it so thrilling and so haunting.

"Relatively Happy"

Jim Woods takes pains not only to assure his reader of the ordinariness of he and his wife but of their being a "relatively happy family." Indeed, we do not hear evidence of incessant bickering. The couple appear comfortable with each other. Jim and Ellen seem to get along "relatively" well. They love and respect each other.

Is something missing? They have been married for seven years. Perhaps that is key to what Jim calls "the dreadful thing that has invaded our lives." Of course, the Marilyn Monroe classic *The Seven Year Itch* would not be filmed until 1955 – nine years in the future. However, the phrase "seven year itch" long predates the movie. According to *The Phrase Finder*, "The original seven-year itch wasn't a condition that supposedly began after seven years, but one that supposedly *lasted* for seven years. Seven-year itch had been known in the USA since the early 19th century as the name of a particularly irritating and contagious skin complaint." By 1884, it was being used metaphorically for things that were considered annoying.

There is a major thing about the Woods marriage that is different from the average American family of the era. They are childless. No explanation of this is given. Of course, many marriages throughout history have been childless. This was often an involuntary state due to infertility of one or both partners. In some cases, the couple did not want children and their form of contraception worked or they did not have the sort of sex that causes pregnancy. A childless marriage should not automatically be regarded as a "barren" marriage since many such marriages are very happy. Indeed, at least *some* childless marriages may be especially happy since the spouses have more time and energy to devote to each other.

It is at least possible that the childless status of the Woods marriage reflects lack of the activity that leads to pregnancy. Ellen has her husband's fondness, his affection, and his respect. However, after seven years of togetherness, she may have lost his passion. Could the anguished cries of the cat symbolize the frustration of a woman who has her man's love but no longer arouses his lust? Stevens sees Ellen as symbolically castrating Jim through her bite. Perhaps it symbolizes the idea that time and boredom have already castrated him, leading her to lash out at the man who has sexually failed her.

Having gone through so many varied possible explanations for the horror of "The House in Cypress Canyon," there are undoubtedly readers who would remind me of my original hypothesis that other writers saw too much in it. Am I erring even worse by postulating such varied interpretations?

I think not. I have concluded that was makes "The House In Cypress Canyon" unique among haunting stories is that is invites – and rewards – multiple interpretations. It is a one-of-a-kind masterpiece.

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Blog Profile

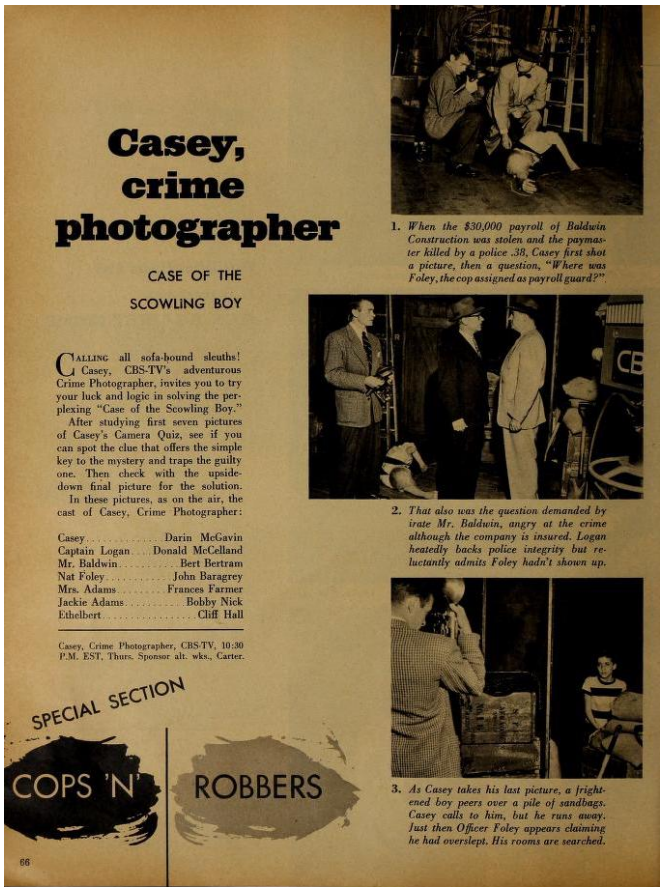
Blue Note Bulletin

Deconstructing one of radio's most beloved series, "Casey, Crime Photographer," episode-by episode-basis. The series ran on CBS 1943 to 1950, then briefly in 1954 to 1955. This blog is named after the "Blue Note Cafe" where Casey, Ann Williams, and Ethelbert the bartender can always be found pondering the latest mystery and the meaning of life. View posts chronologically from the "1943-07-07 Case of the Switched Plates" and then forward so commentary rolls out in the most logical way.

Prolific researcher and master tracker of lost old-time radio shows Joe Webb has established a new blog that chronicles his work of examining every episode of *Casey, Crime Photographer*. He's on pace to post a new episode review every couple days with the goal of then collecting everything into a book that will be available in the summer.

Yesterday USA Internet Radio Kickstarter

In the last issue we highlighted the Kickstarter being run by the Yesterday USA internet radio station to allow them to update their equipment. We're pleased to report they reached their goal, raising $4,763 total.



Casey, crime photographer

CASE OF THE SCOWLING BOY

CALLING all sofa-hound sleuths! Casey, CBS-TV's adventurous Crime Photographer, invites you to try your luck and logic in solving the perplexing "Case of the Scowling Boy."

After studying first seven pictures of Casey's Camera Quiz, see if you can spot the clue that offers the simple key to the mystery and traps the guilty one. Then check with the upside-down final picture for the solution.

In these pictures, as on the air, the cast of Casey, Crime Photographer:

Casey ..... Darin McGavin
Captain Logan ..... Donald McClelland
Mr. Baldwin ..... Bert Bertram
Nat Foley ..... John Baragrey
Mrs. Adams ..... Frances Farmer
Jackie Adams ..... Bobby Nick
Ethelbert ..... Cliff Hall

Casey, Crime Photographer, CBS-TV, 10:30 P.M. EST, Thurs. Sponsor alt. wks., Carter.

SPECIAL SECTION

COPS 'N' ROBBERS

66

1. *When the $30,000 payroll of Baldwin Construction was stolen and the paymaster killed by a police .38, Casey first shot a picture, then a question, "Where was Foley, the cop assigned as payroll guard?"*

2. *That also was the question demanded by irate Mr. Baldwin, angry at the crime although the company is insured. Logan heatedly backs police integrity but reluctantly admits Foley hadn't shown up.*

3. *As Casey takes his last picture, a frightened boy peers over a pile of sandbags. Casey calls to him, but he runs away. Just then Officer Foley appears claiming he had overslept. His rooms are searched.*

4. *Logan jails Foley after finding packed suitcases hidden in his apartment. At headquarters, Casey hears Foley's brother, Nat, protesting that the arrest is a frame-up, even though lab tests have proved that Foley's gun fired the murder bullet.*

5. *Casey agrees with Nat on Foley's innocence and uses picture to locate the scared boy, Jackie Adams. Elated when Jackie finally admits seeing the shooting, Casey then is stunned as the boy sobs that his idol, Officer Foley, had done it.*

6. *Casey shows the boy's photograph to bartender Ethelbert who sadly agrees the case is now airtight against their friend Foley. "Everything's sour," he mourns, "even the scowl on the poor kid." Casey gets an idea, returns to the Adams' home.*

7. *Unnoticed he places Foley's picture over a similar shot of the boy's dad, a dead police hero. Casey asks Jackie who the cop is in the photo. Jackie's startling reply is, "That's my father." STOP. What is the clue, who is the murderer?*

The boy's scowl made Casey suspect mistaken-mass, a secret kept to avoid "sassy" classes. The photo test confirmed. Nat in a police suit could have resembled brother. Nat could have drugged him, taken gun. Nat comes after boy, is trapped.

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Guest Performing for you::
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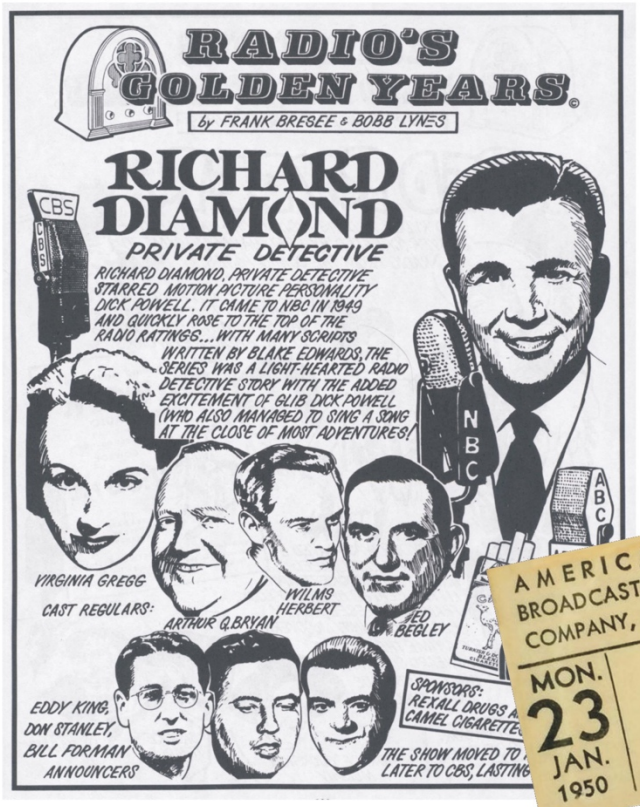
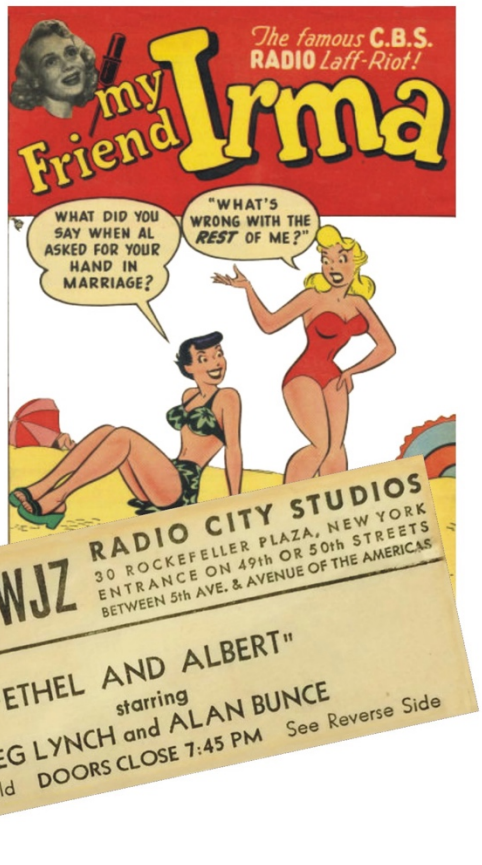
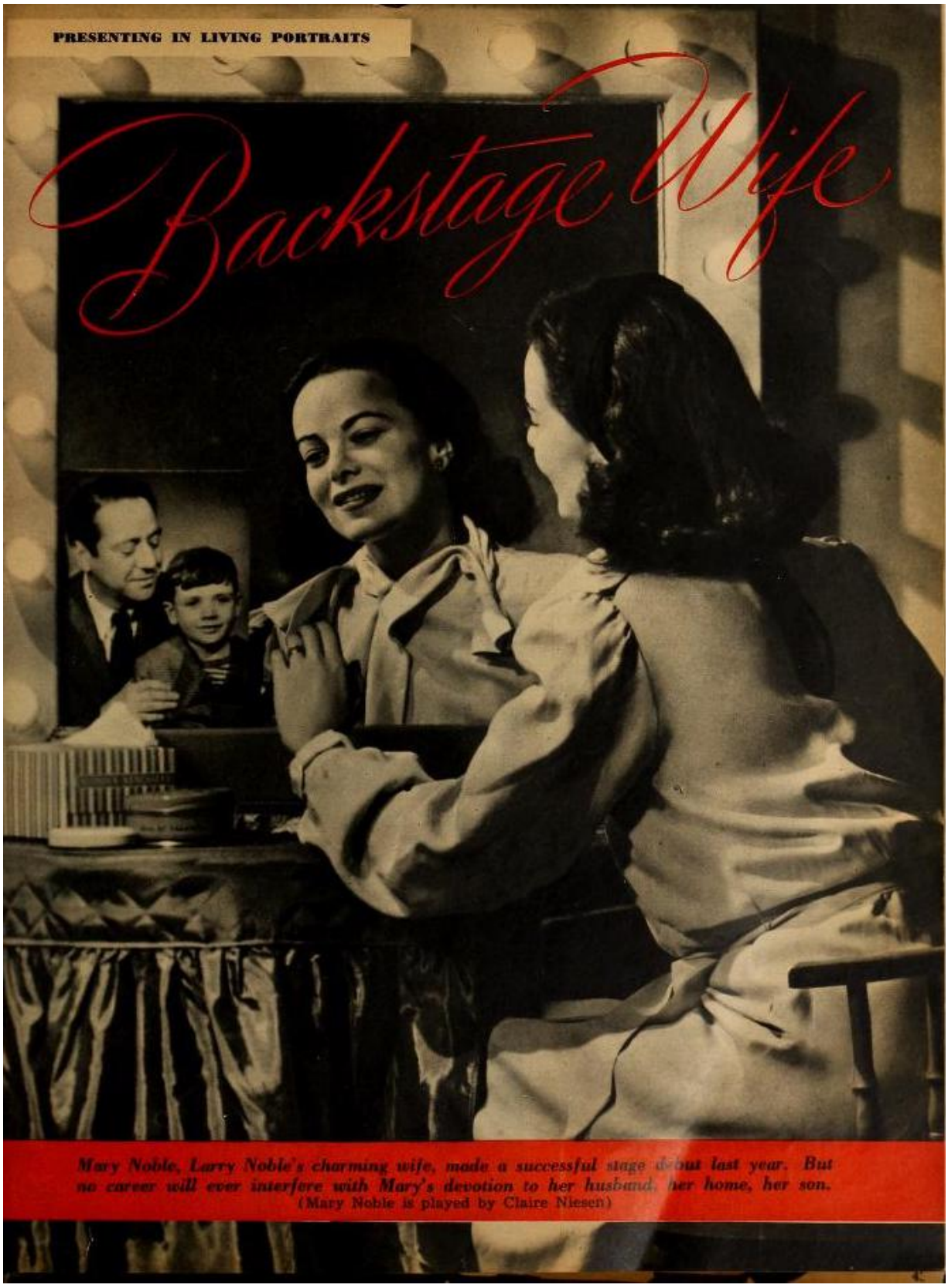
Stuffy Singer:::Jeannie Russell:::Alison Arngrim
Nancy Foy:::Bryan Hendrickson:::Phil Proctor
Melinda Peterson:::James Rogan:::Bobb Lynes
Jeff Ferguson:::Barbara Watkins
Directed by Gregg Oppenheimer



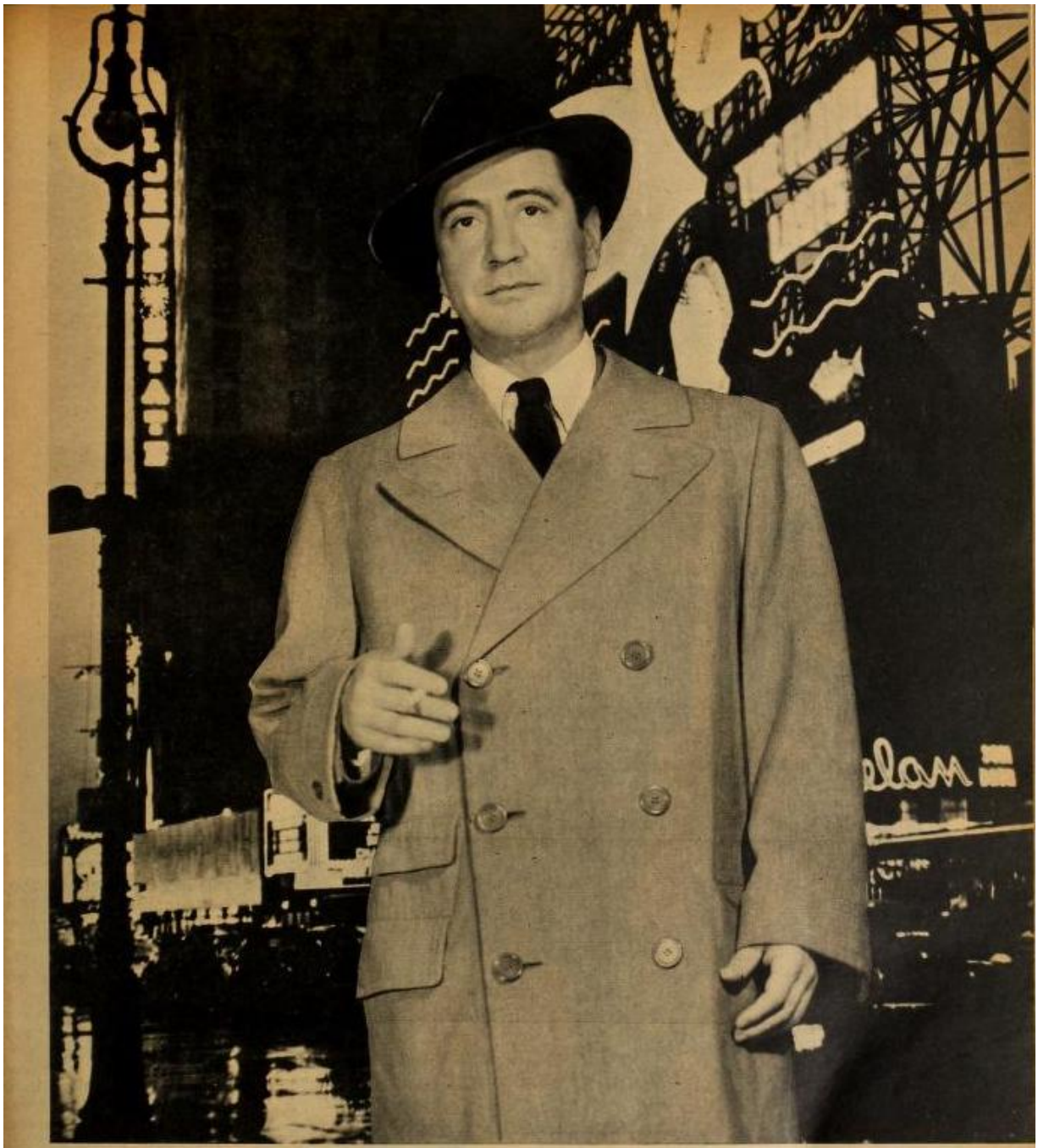


Mary Noble, Backstage Wife from the February 1946.



MAUD MARLOWE, well-known as a character actress, has criticized and advised her way through many years of close friendship with the Nobles. Devoted to five-year-old LARRY, JR., protective toward his parents as a lioness guarding cubs, Maud is always ready to share either their trouble or their fun.
(played by Ethel Wilson)

TOM BRYSON, who for a long time has been Larry's theatrical manager, last year branched out into playwriting, and wrote the play "Blackout" in which Mary Noble scored her first acting success. Tom is a worldly, sometimes tough-sounding person, but the Nobles have known him long enough to understand him.
(played by Chuck Webster)



LARRY NOBLE is famous as one of Broadway's most popular, compelling actors. His career, for a long time a series of satisfying successes, was interrupted for a while by the war. After spending some time in the Coast Guard, Larry has returned to his familiar theatrical haunts to look for a suitable new play. Because he is having a little difficulty in finding just the kind of part he wants, Larry, a high-strung, sensitive man, is becoming a trifle uncertain of himself. Mary has tried anxiously to help her husband in working out his delicate, unusual adjustment problem.

(Larry Noble is played by James Meighan)

Backstage Wife, Monday through Friday, 4:00 P.M. EST, NBC

Conceived and produced by Frank and Anne Hummert

33

Many years ago, wealthy, attractive VIRGINIA LANSING was in a play with Larry Noble. Now a widow, her interest in Larry is not confined to his career; she is waging a subtle campaign to weaken his confidence in himself so that, by consoling him, she can come to mean more in his life than Mary does. She finds her plans hampered by her young, charming sister, IRENE, who lives with her in the Park Avenue apartment she maintains, because Irene has become increasingly friendly with both Mary and Larry Noble. (Virginia is Helen Claire; Irene is Andree Wallace)

CLIFF CALDWELL, handsome young actor rehearsing in Mary's new play, does not realize that his romance with Irene may be ruined by Virginia Lansing's interference. Virginia, who took Irene's first love away from the inexperienced young girl and married him, will not hesitate to upset her sister's life again. (played by Phil Truex)

ADA, Virginia's maid, is more of a confidante than a servant, so well schooled in the details of Virginia's somewhat peculiar life that it is possible for her to defy her mistress without danger. This has worked to Irene's advantage; Ada, fond of the girl, often defends her against her vindictive sister. (played by Kay Renwick)

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This Life of Mine 1943-01-11 Bob Gets A Telegram.mp3
This Life of Mine 1943-07-29 Eden Talks With Mrs Rankin.flac
This Life of Mine 1943-07-29 Eden Talks With Mrs Rankin.mp3
Vic and Sade 1939-04-03 Speaking Acquaintances.flac
Vic and Sade 1939-04-03 Speaking Acquaintances.mp3
We Love And Learn 1950-08-11 Jim Argues About His Finances.flac
We Love And Learn 1950-08-11 Jim Argues About His Finances.mp3
We Love and Learn 1949-06-24 Jim Accuses His Mother Of Foul Play.flac
We Love and Learn 1949-06-24 Jim Accuses His Mother Of Foul Play.mp3
When A Girl Marries 1948-11-02 Ann Keeps Changing Her Mind.flac
When A Girl Marries 1948-11-02 Ann Keeps Changing Her Mind.mp3
When A Girl Marries 1948-11-03 Ann Is Afraid During The Storm.flac
When A Girl Marries 1948-11-03 Ann Is Afraid During The Storm.mp3
When A Girl Marries 1948-11-04 Joan Feels That Harry's In Danger.flac
When A Girl Marries 1948-11-04 Joan Feels That Harry's In Danger.mp3
Young Widder Brown 1955-12-22 Ellen Visits Anthony and Victoria.flac
Young Widder Brown 1955-12-22 Ellen Visits Anthony and Victoria.mp3

Episodes Donated by David Gibbs:

Danny Kaye 45-01-13 (02) The Life of Danny Kaye.mp3
Danny Kaye 45-01-20 (03) The Blues.mp3
Danny Kaye 45-01-27 (04) Trip to Washington.mp3
Danny Kaye 45-02-03 (05) Brings Baby From Washington aka King of Brooklyn.mp3
Danny Kaye 45-02-10 (06) Sends Valentine to Jack Benny.mp3
Danny Kaye 45-02-17 (07) Dog Gets Danny Evicted.mp3
Danny Kaye 45-03-03 (09) The Danny Kaye Playhouse.mp3
Danny Kaye 45-03-10 (10) Romeo and Juliet .mp3
Danny Kaye 45-05-11 (19) Concerto for War Bonds.mp3