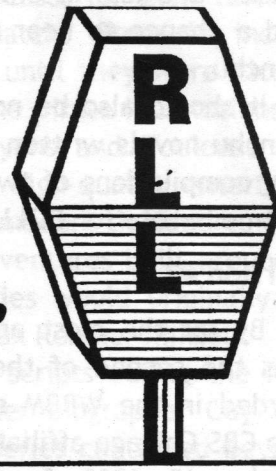


# RLL



## On the Air

### *The Shadow of* **FU MANCHU**

By: Martin Grams, Jr.

"The chimes of old Big Ben, London's historic clock, ring out. A sharp rap on a door is heard. The door creaks and warns of a stealthy entrance. A girl gasps and piercingly screams. A shot is fired. The Yellow Peril incarnate laughs terrifyingly and sends shivers through millions of listeners from coast to coast. Dr. Fu Manchu, Mastermind of Crime, is on the air!"

Sax Rohmer's Oriental mysteries never made it to the top of the popularity charts, but fans of Fu Manchu can never get enough of him. His exploits were many, but documentation about the radio series has been cursory at best. Fu Manchu was brought to radio in five separate incarnations.

#### Version #1

The first was "The Collier Hour," broadcast over the NBC Blue Network in 1927. Designed to boost magazine subscriptions, this hour-long program was divided into segments, each dramatizing a story or serial installment from the current issue of **COLLIER'S**. A host called "The Editor," portrayed through the years by John B. Kennedy, Phil Barrison, and Jack Arthur introduced the segments. Malcolm LaPrade created and produced the series; his brother Ernest LaPrade supplied the music

scores. Directed by Colonel Davis, this series was a mere amateur performance, with music and sound effects improvised during rehearsals. Three separate serials were dramatized, based on those that appeared in **COLLIER'S**:

"The Day the World Ended" (12 installments, May 1, 1929 to July 17, 1929)

"Daughter of Fu Manchu" (12 installments, March 9, 1930 to May 25, 1930)

"Yu'an Hee See Laughs" (12 installments, March 1, 1931 to May 17, 1931)

Arthur Hughes played Fu Manchu (and also doubled as host, "The Editor" for a majority of these broadcasts). For the first year, "The Collier Hour" was broadcast on Wednesday evening's preceding publication of the magazine. Beginning in 1928, the program was broadcast on Sunday evenings following publication. According to the files at NBC, Sax Rohmer appeared in person on March 1, 1931 (often mis-credited as May 1, 1931), for the premiere broadcast of "Yu'an Hee See Laughs." It's been suggested that "The Emperor of America" was another 12-chapter serial, broadcast circa 1927-28, but no information has been found to confirm it. "The Collier Hour" originated from New York radio stations and was heard only on the East

Coast. Luckless listeners on the West Coast never had a chance to hear the first radio serials of Fu Manchu.

It should also be noted that the first three Fu Manchu novels written by Sax Rohmer, were actually compilations of twenty-nine short stories that Rohmer wrote for COLLIER'S magazine.

## Version #2

By far the most ambitious Rohmer adaptation was the second of the four series, this time recorded in the WBBM studios, and broadcast over the CBS Chicago affiliate, WGN. On Thursday, September 15, 1932, Sax Rohmer and his wife Elizabeth sailed from Southampton bound for the Big Apple. On Wednesday, September 21, the White Star line Majestic arrived in the Port of New York. Mr. and Mrs. Rohmer stayed at the Ritz for a few days, and went sightseeing till Sunday the 25<sup>th</sup>, when Rohmer made one of his rare radio appearances for a fifteen-minute interview with CBS writer Steve Trumbull. The purpose of the interview was to publicize the radio series, which again was heard only on the East Coast. Within weeks, the program brought hundreds of positive letters to CBS, and a nationwide hookup was established so that certain stations on the West Coast could carry the program.

"I am deeply interested in radio and the dramatic technique," Rohmer commented, "which has been enormously developed on your (the American) side." Rohmer claimed crime was on the increase in England and attributed it largely to the influence of American crime and the fact that some American criminals had transferred their activity to London. He believed that Scotland Yard was capable enough when dealing with ordinary crimes, but frequently ineffective when faced with organized gangs.

On Monday, September 26, "Fu Manchu Mysteries" premiered on CBS radio, nationwide. (Unfortunately, no episodes are known to exist of the series.) Instead of a serial, the show presented a single 30-minute adventure. The opening episode, an adaptation of Rohmer's "The Zyatt Kiss," varied slightly from the rest of the series, the drama lasting only twenty minutes instead of the customary 25. Introductory remarks and commercial credits usually took up the remaining five minutes, but the premiere instead featured a talk by Sax Rohmer.

Unlike the other "Fu Manchu" series, this one went all out for the preparation and performances. The actors had to dress in full costume, and instead of the performance being acted out in a small sound studio, it was performed on stage before a live audience, recorded, and later broadcast via transcription. Sound effects were as authentic as possible. The solemn note of Big Ben and the background traffic noises of the Thames embankment were as true as could be, since they were actual recordings specially made and imported from England. G. Fred Ibbett, director of radio for the McCann-Erickson Company, and in charge of the production, would have nothing but exact sound effects. He knew his native London, having been an engineer for the BBC previous to his service with NBC and CBS. When Nate Caldwell, with an option on the radio rights to Rohmer's mystery in his pocket, convinced Mr. Ibbett that Fu Manchu was a natural, the radio director readily agreed. Ibbett convinced the Campana Company to sponsor the dramas, and began a diligent search for the right actors and actresses to make Rohmer's characters spring realistically to life.

Most of the characters were British, with a wide variety of types required, and the problem of finding them in Chicago was a hard one to solve. "From all corners of the world (if you can believe a 1932 CBS press release), even far off China itself, the cast was drawn." John C. Daly (as Dr. Fu Manchu) spoke French, Chinese, Arabian, and Hindustani. (Note: This was fairly common for many radio actors, as Virginia Gregg, during the forties and fifties, doubled as old English ladies and young Chinese women in many radio westerns.) Charles Warburton, one of the first to bring Shakespeare to radio (as Shylock), would play the role of Nayland Smith, the Devil Doctor's nemesis. A few years later, Warburton returned to the New York radio studios to star in 35 big dramatic programs, among them "Sherlock Holmes," "Eno Crime Club," and "K-7: Secret Service Spy Story."\*

\*(footnote) Oddly enough, although Warburton was signed to play roles in these shows, one Sherlock Holmes radio expert insists that Warburton did not act in any Holmes radio plays, but with so many radio incarnations of the Holmes character, and so little recordings existing in recorded form (compared to the thousands broadcast), it still remains a possibility that Warburton did play a few roles in Holmes films.



Bob White, who played Smith's "Watson," Dr. Petrie, was born in England and experienced on the stage. Betty, his wife, was an experienced radio actress specializing in juvenile parts, and took an unbilled role in a couple of the "Fu Manchu" episodes. When not excelling as Petrie, White headed his own successful radio-producing company.

Many hours were spent daily during the week preceding the Monday night broadcast, which took but 30 minutes air time. There was no music for the production. Ibbett explained that "The chance of irritating the listener, instead of creating a mood fitting the play, is too great. I prefer to omit music which might distract from the setting." The actors performed their roles in costume, so that fans could attend the stage performances and be thrilled by the spectacle of the Oriental settings. During the early productions, Ibbett drafted plans for the scenery and lighting effects, for the purpose of allowing the audience attending the "horror chambers" of the criminal mastermind.

Part way through the series, John C. Daly, (not, by the way, the John Charles Daly of television's "What's My Line?" fame) was replaced by Harold Huber, and Sunda Love was replaced by Charles Manson. In the thirties, Huber became a popular character player for Warner Brothers, as well as a radio actor. He is also known to Charlie Chan fans for playing police inspectors of various nationalities in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Chan film series. Huber also wrote radio scripts for "Suspense" in 1943 and 1944, sponsored by Campana Balm. Helen Earle and Urban Johnson supplied the sound effects.

"Fu Manchu Mysteries" ran for a total of 31 half-hour programs, heard Monday evenings at 8:45 p.m. It lasted until April 24, 1933.

### Version #3

During the thirties, the pirate commercial radio programs transmitted from the European continent had vast English audiences. By law, the British Broadcasting Corporation had a complete monopoly on radio transmission within Britain, and was charged by its license holders, and by the British Parliament, with the task of providing radio entertainment for all tastes. Commercial radio, banned in Britain and able to operate only from transmitters on the Continent, capitalized on this situation. With the financial backing of sponsors such as Ponds, Colgate-Palmolive, and other large firms, the pirate stations attracted quality writers and

performers to provide showcases for their talents, which the BBC could not match. From the inception of their transmissions until they were closed down in the late thirties, the pirate IBC stations in Luxembourg, Normandy, Lyons and Toulouse offered a continuous flow of high-quality entertainment. In 1936, Radio Luxembourg decided to feature a series of mystery adventures built around a single character. This series would originally be written and supervised by Sax Rohmer himself.

"Sax himself wrote the scripts during the first half of the series," Rohmer biographer Cay Van Ash recalled. "When the series continued beyond his original expectations, he found it too great an imposition on his time. He continued to write some of the scripts, but others were written either by Elizabeth or myself. I came in on only the last six months or so of the project. I had first met Sax in November 1935, and he had my education in hand for just over a year. Whether the draft scripts were written by Elizabeth or by me, they were carefully edited afterwards by Sax, for which reason I described the series in **MASTER OF VILLAINY** as the most faithful version broadcast. The adaptation was not a very difficult job. I don't recall that any particular selection of episodes was made. As I remember it, we just went straight through the books in their natural sequence. The dialogue did not require changing very much. On the other hand, we did our utmost to avoid narration and to translate action directly into dialogue or sound. This often required additional material, and I think we also used a great many more sound effects than there were in the American 'Shadow of Fu Manchu' radio series."

Frank Cochrane, who played the Luxembourg broadcast Fu Manchu, was a distinguished stage actor and eminently suited to play the part. He had lived for many years in China, studying the native habits and mental makeup. He had also played innumerable Chinese roles on the stage. (Cochrane had won acclaim for the part of The Cobbler in the long-running show, **CHU-CHIN-CHOW**.)

"Fu Manchu," Cochrane said in a 1937 interview, "has a definite personality and a definite purpose. He is a keen wit and possesses a quick Oriental brain. He is a demon for power and wants to mold the world to his way of direction and thinking. The adventures of Dr. Fu Manchu are full of unlikely happenings, which have been so well

treated that they convince the listener as being highly probable. Before settling down to listen, I suggest you turn out the lights in the room the moment you hear the gong, and take your mind into serious channels. This will help you enormously to catch the illusion."

All of the IBC recordings were produced in London. There were no live broadcasts. It's believed that Rohmer and the crew recorded the shows at a disused theater. The leading light in the operation was producer Eddie Pola, who also took part as an actor in some episodes. There was actually a plan to follow up the 52 "Fu Manchu" broadcasts with a series adapted from Rohmer's **THE QUEST OF THE SACRED SLIPPER** (1919), Cay Van Ash distinctly remembers having written the first two episodes. However, the BBC exerted legal pressure to close down the rival operation, so it came to nothing.

D.A. Clarke-Smith, a well-known stage actor who had appeared in Rohmer's stage plays **THE EYE OF SIVA** and **SECRET EGYPT**, played the role of Nayland Smith. "I'm getting hardened to it now, but the nerve strain is still almost unbelievable," commented Clarke-Smith, as the atmosphere in the studio grew more intense with each passing moment. "I have to talk so fast, six or seven prop men are grouped around another mike, to provide the dramatic effects. And, when I'm supposed to be swimming for my life in a swirling river, I have to try to forget that at the other mike a man is vigorously shaking a half-filled hot-water bottle."

The program's producer, swift-thinking Eddie Pola, rehearsed three radio installments in the space of two hours. "Funniest thing, rehearsing one dramatic scene," recalled Eddie, "was when we came to the line, 'Shoot the man at the window.' The effects man fired the gun, but it just didn't go off. Again we repeated, 'Shoot the man at the window.' Again the gun refused to function. We tried again. 'Shoot the man at the window!' But still the gun was silent. 'Oh, cut his throat,' I said. And at that moment, the gun went off and nearly blew me out of my skin!"

"There is only one female role in **DR. FU MANCHU**," Frank Cochrane said. "This is the part of the heroine. The girl who takes this character, Karameneh, is Rani Walker. She's brilliant! There is a good cast in these programs, all exceptionally good actors, and with Rani in the only female role who, as I have said, is excellent. It is a well-balanced cast."

The supporting cast who performed the incidental character parts included Arthur Young, Mervyn Johns (father of actress Glynis Johns), and Vernon Kelso. As was common in radio drama, the actors often took several parts in the same episode and program, and sometimes switched roles whenever necessary. For example, in Episode 43, Arthur Young portrayed Dr. Fu Manchu, Inspector Weymouth, and Sir Frank Narcombe, while Vernon Kelso took on three other parts.

With completion of the "Fu Manchu" series, Cochrane and Clarke-Smith were rated such a successful team that they were featured in another long-running series of radio plays, this time concerning Inspector Brooks of Scotland Yard. Clarke-Smith played the Inspector, while Cochrane played the — perhaps inevitable — Chinese villain, La Sante.

#### Version #4

In 1939, another, lengthier "Fu Manchu" program was produced, probably the most popular of them all. This was a series of 156, fifteen-minute episodes, under the overall title "The Shadow Of Fu Manchu." The series was recorded, transcribed, and released through Fields Brothers in Hollywood. After the recordings were completed, all 156 episodes were pressed and copied onto transcription discs, and distributed to radio stations across the country. This allowed the stations to play the episodes in any time slot they wanted. Some presented the series on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, while others broadcast on all five weekdays.

Ted Osborne played Dr. Fu Manchu, with Hanley Stafford as Nayland Smith, Gale Gordon as Dr. James Petrie, Paula Winslowe as Karameneh, and Edmund O'Brien as Inspector Rymer. It has not been confirmed whether O'Brien or Gerald Mohr was the announcer. (It was common for radio announcers to double in an acting role, which would give credence to the claim that it was O'Brien. But, until someone turns up a recorded interview with either actor providing that information, or can find the original scripts, cast credits included, neither name should be taken as the gospel.) Frank Nelson and Norman Fields played supporting roles.

40 episodes from "The Shadow Of Fu Manchu" have definitely been floating about in circulation among collectors for the last few decades, 39 of them were definitely the first serial in complete



form. The single out-of-sequence episode that has been in circulation was not (as many people have assumed), episode number forty. In fact, from observation, and narrowing down possibilities (and applying a little common sense), I suspect that the out-of-sequence episode many people label as episode #40 is either episode #136, 137, 138, 139, 140 or 141.

The adaptations were quite faithful to the original books, though in the middle of the series the episodes occur in somewhat jumbled order. From what is known so far:

Episodes #1 to #21, for example, is an adaptation from **THE INSIDIOUS DR. FU MANCHU** (1913)

Episodes #22 to #27 from **THE HAND OF FU MANCHU** (1917)

Episodes #28 to #39 from **THE RETURN OF DR. FU MANCHU** (1916)

Episodes #40 to #78 from **TRAIL OF FU MANCHU** (1934) and **PRESIDENT OF FU MANCHU** (1936)

Episodes #79 to #94 from **DAUGHTER OF FU MANCHU** (1931)

Episodes #99 to #117 from **MASK OF FU MANCHU** (1932)

Episodes #118 to #135 from **DRUMS OF FU MANCHU** (1939)

Episodes #142 to #156 from **BRIDE OF FU MANCHU** (1933)

Many sources wrongly list the 1939-40 "Fu Manchu" series as a 77 or 78-episode broadcast run. The reality is that 156 were actually recorded and aired. Four separate serials were recorded; each 39 episodes in length, each composed of more than one Sax Rohmer story. Each serial ran 39 consecutive installments. It's been rumored for the past decade that selected discs from the other three serials, episodes #40 to #156, are in existence, but not yet released in circulation, being held on to by a profiteering collector in Niles, Ohio. I personally tracked down and made contact with the collector, who verified over the phone that he had come across a huge stack of 16-inch transcription discs and, among them, were many of the episodes from the third and fourth serials of "The Shadow Of Fu Manchu." Neither serial is complete. Sixteen of the thirty-nine episodes are missing from the third serial, and fifteen of the thirty-nine episodes, from the fourth and last serial, making only half of the episodes of each serial available.

Version #5

The fourth and final "Fu Manchu" broadcast was a one-time presentation. "The Molle Mystery Theater" was an anthology series, aired over a decade under different titles. The program featured the best in mystery and detective stories, all adaptations of short stories, stage plays and novels by such stalwarts as Raymond Chandler, Jack London, W.W. Jacobs, Rufus King, and Craig Rice. On Tuesday, October 3, 1944, from 9 to 9:30 p.m., EST, the 1913 novel, **THE INSIDIOUS DR. FU MANCHU** was dramatized, originating from NBC studios in New York. The program was narrated by Roc Rogers and selected by Geoffrey Barnes (the on-the-air pseudonym of Bernard Lenrow, who had recently played Doc Savage, Man of Bronze, in a series that ended in June of 1943). Jack Miller supplied the music. A few publications and web-sites incorrectly list this episode with an August 1944 broadcast date. However, the October date is official; it originates from the original script held at the NBC Studios in New York, where the "Molle" scripts are housed.

Will Dr. Fu Manchu ever return to the radio airwaves? Well, Sherlock Holmes does to this day, so we can only hope . . .

**CLOSING NOTES:** This article originally appeared in the thirty-ninth issue of **SCARLET STREET**, © 2000. This article is reprinted with permission and courtesy of the editors of **SCARLET STREET**, and the author.

According to Gordon Payton (a.k.a. "The Sci-Fi Guy"), in 1945, Sax Rohmer wrote a series of eight radio plays for the BBC. Fu Manchu was a bit too politically incorrect for the BBC, in light of England's large Asian population, and they liked to avoid criticism from any quarter, so Sax created for them a character named Sumuru, who, in effect, was a female Fu Manchu. She is described as "a glamorous witch of totally untraceable nationality, heading an international crime organization which employed strange and bizarre devices." This aired from December 30, 1945 to February 17, 1946. No copies survive, but Rohmer later wrote a series of five books based on his BBC plays.

Since the article's initial printing, the discs described as held by a collector in Ohio, have been purchased and released on audio cassette and CD by Ted Davenport, who paid the collector his very large ransom. Thanks to Ted, these shows are currently available through **RADIO MEMORIES**. (Your support in purchasing these from **RADIO MEMORIES** will help reimburse Ted for his generosity.)

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** We echo the above statement. Mr. Davenport/**RADIO MEMORIES** has been very

helpful and generous to the club. We strongly recommend that you consider **RADIO MEMORIES** for all of the purchases you make.

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## *DOROTHY GISH*

*MASSILLION, OHIO ACTRESS MADE  
MORE THAN 75 MOVIES*

By: Rebecca Goodman

On June 4, 1968, actress Dorothy Gish - a Massillon, Ohio, native - died in Rapalolo, Italy. She was the daughter of James Lee Gish, a grocery-store clerk from Springfield, Ohio, and actress Mary Robinson McConnell of Urbana, Ohio. She was the granddaughter of Ohio Senator Samuel Robinson.

Dorothy and her older sister, Lillian, who was born in Springfield, became stage actresses at about 4 or 5 years old.

In the early 1900s, James Gish died, leaving his family destitute. Mary went to work managing a candy store in Springfield. When she had saved enough for fare to New York, she packed up the girls and joined a stock company there. Dorothy and Lillian accompanied her on stage. Famed director D.W. Griffith hired all three in 1912 and gave them small parts in their first silent film, **AN UNEASY ENEMY**.

Dorothy Gish appeared in more than 75 films, often with her sister, for more than 50 years. Her last film was **THE CARDINAL** in 1963. Lillian Gish more well-known than her sister performed for 90 years. She died in New York City in 1993.

Dorothy bought a house in Massillon in 1953, and she and Lillian used it until their deaths. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Lillian was on several radio programs including; Peg Lynch's "The Couple Next Door," "Information Please" and "Texaco Star Theater." We could not find any listings for Dorothy or her mother Mary. If you know of any please let us know.

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On July 4<sup>th</sup> remember why we celebrate Independence Day.

## UPCOMING CONVENTIONS

### NATIONAL AUDIO THEATER FESTIVAL

June 14-20, 2003 (516) 483-8321

Contact: Sue Zizza

115 Dikeman Street

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[Suemedia1@aol.com](mailto:Suemedia1@aol.com)

web site: [www.natf.org](http://www.natf.org)

### LUM AND ABNER CONVENTION

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Contact: Tim Hollis

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Dora, AL 35062

[CampHo11@aol.com](mailto:CampHo11@aol.com)

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June 26-29, 2003 (425) 488-9518

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Box 723

Bothell, WA 98041

[HRRMIKES@aol.com](mailto:HRRMIKES@aol.com)

### OLD-TIME COUNTRY MUSIC CONTEST & FESTIVAL

August 25-31, 2003 (712) 762-4363

Contact: Bob Everhart

Box 492

Walnut, IA 51577

[Bobeverhart@yahoo.com](mailto:Bobeverhart@yahoo.com)

### FRIENDS OF OLD-TIME RADIO CONVENTION

October 23-26, 2003 (203) 248-2887

Contact: Jay Hickerson

Box 4321

Hamden, CT 06514

[JayHick@aol.com](mailto:JayHick@aol.com)

Website: <http://www.lofcom.com/nostalgia/fotr/>

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April 16-17, 2004 (859) 282-2333

Contact: Bob Burchett

10280 Gunpowder Road

Florence, KY 41042

[haradio@hotmail.com](mailto:haradio@hotmail.com)

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## *TIDBIT FROM RLL*

**RADIO WAVES:** Because radio waves travel at 186,000 miles per second and sound waves saunter at 700 miles per hour, a broadcast voice can be heard sooner 13,000 miles away than it can be heard at the back of the room in which it originated.



# METROPOLITAN

## OPERA

### FANS LAMENT THE LOSS OF TEXACO STAR

By: Verena Dobnik

NEW YORK — For 63 years, opera fans have kept a regular Saturday afternoon date with their radios.

Texaco-sponsored Metropolitan Opera broadcasts filled homes and cars from Maine to California with their arias, celebrity-studded intermissions and whimsical trivia quizzes.

The fans' pleasure turned to operatic-pitch lament this past week when ChevronTexaco Corporation announced it would stop financing the broadcasts after next season. While the Met is confident it will find a new sponsor, fans wrung their hands and waxed nostalgic over a show that has changed their lives.

"Boy, I can remember riding around in the car in the '50s looking for a Texaco station to gas up at, because they sponsored the opera!" Avise Nissen of Mount Rainier, Md., wrote in an e-mail to OPERA NEWS magazine.

Nissen first heard opera on the Texaco program, when she was in her early teens in Arkansas.

"It's a democratic thing that Texaco did," Nissen said later in a telephone interview with The Associated Press. "Opera has this snobby, snotty mystique and people thought, 'Oh, opera -ugh!' But the Texaco thing ... created fans all over the country."

The Saturday afternoon broadcasts have been a staple on classical music stations since 1931, with Texaco beginning sole sponsorship nine years later. The broadcasts now reach about 10 million people in 42 countries, through 360 U.S. public and commercial stations as well as others around the world.

For David Scally, a retired doctor in Chevy Chase, Md., the broadcasts provided a music education. He was one of the hundreds of worried fans who wrote letters and e-mails to the Met this week.

"I still have fond memories of moving my aunt's old portable Philco to where I would not disturb the rest of the household and listening to my first

Met broadcast - Wagner's 'Lohengrin' on January 25, 1947," Scally wrote.

Sponsorship of the broadcasts, live from Lincoln Center, changed after Chevron acquired Texaco two years ago in a \$39 billion deal. The more cumbersome corporate name was inserted, but the show otherwise remained intact.

ChevronTexaco's withdrawal from the opera, the company said, was a marketing decision.

Thus ended the longest continuous sponsorship in the history of American radio — one that began with the Dec. 7, 1940 broadcast of Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro."

Met General Manager Joseph Volpe said he's "determined to have these broadcasts continue." He expects a new company or private donor to pledge the \$7 million a year needed so the Met performances can be aired live each Saturday, from December to the spring.

The intermission features are set in a small hall behind the Met's main theater where the Met chorus rehearses. Panel guests have included opera buffs such as U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, and opera stars such as Luciano Pavarotti and tenor Placido Domingo. Regulars include Broadway playwright Terrence McNally.

Fans send letters and e-mails to "Opera Quiz," getting prizes of recordings or books if their questions are answered in laughter-filled chatter among each week's changing panelists.

After hearing about the oil giant's decision to drop sponsorship, Pati Wolfgang of Felton, Pa., wrote a letter to ChevronTexaco, saying she felt "deeply saddened."

"There were many times that I sat and listened with tears in my eyes, feeling such gratitude to your company," Wolfgang wrote. "I remember dancing in my living room, with my oldest son as a baby, to the Flower Duet (from Leo Delibes' opera 'Lakme'). I'll never forget looking into his eyes and seeing that he got it, he heard the profound beauty ... You have changed people's lives."

## TIDBIT FROM RLL

**DRAGNET:** The famous dum-de-dum-dum, ostensibly from "Dragnet," was actually composed by Miklos Rozsa for the 1946 film noir classic, **THE KILLERS.**

# THE G-MEN

## TAKE TO THE AIRWAVES

By: Martin Grams, Jr.

On a warm night in Chicago in 1934, John Dillinger, known throughout the land as public enemy number one, came out of hiding to take in a movie at the Biograph Theater. There, he watched a film titled — perhaps appropriately — **MANHATTAN MELODRAMA**, a prison story in which Clark Gable plays a gangster who goes to the electric chair. "Die the way you live" Gable says as he is led to his doom. While Dillinger mixes with other patrons in the darkened theater, J. Edgar Hoover's federal lawmen nicknamed "G-Men" assembled outside, awaiting Dillinger's exit. The wait was brief. The show concluded, and John Dillinger left the theater; in a single moment, someone out of nowhere opened fire and public enemy number one was felled in a fusillade of police gunfire. As Dillinger lay dead in an alley from massive gunshot wounds, the world heard for the first time the tale that a mysterious "woman in red" had betrayed the unwary gangster.

This historical moment, defined on July 22, 1934, not only ended the career of a notorious American figure but also brought to national recognition America's own federal police, the G-Men, and the notion that Hoover's men would always get their man. But the full extent of the federal men's operations, the speed and mobility with which they moved, and their remarkable equipment were never so thoroughly illuminated as they were during the Weyerhaeuser kidnapping when men in the field were directed from Washington, an amazing 2,500 miles away, by telephone. If the case was too large for local police to handle, it was now clear that the Division of Investigation (later to be renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation) of the Department of Justice had its own sources.

As radio news bulletins and national headlines followed the desperate man-hunts that swept over the Eastern and Midwestern parts of the country, the rattle of machine guns and the fiery blasts from .38 caliber pistols subordinated the otherwise dogged diligence of the agents' pursuits. In reality, it was clear that the bureau had developed a definite technique for use in major crimes of kid-

napping, bank robbery and extortion, and methods varied only as circumstances required. Just as the staff of the Army and navy fought imaginary battles at the war colleges, so did the agents of the bureau rehearse every possible criminal situation, devising plans to cope with such situations as was necessary in what newspapers now called America's "war against crime."

In time, gangsters began to learn the methods of these specially-trained agents. Baby Face Nelson for example, traded shots with an agent named Carter Baum, killing Baum with bullets to the head. "I know you have on bulletproof vests, so I will give it to you high and low," Nelson reportedly shouted as he fired. It was Machine Gun Kelly who named the government agents "G-Men." The story goes that when Kelly was captured, he walked out of a room with his hands above his head. But as agents checked Kelly's room they learned that he had left two loaded pistols on a bed. "Why didn't you use them?" asked one of the agents, and Kelly reportedly replied that he "knew you G-Men would kill me."

But what is important here is that such defining moments gave Americans their own romantic police force. America's G-Men now rivaled in attraction England's Scotland Yard, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the French Surety as a formidable dramatic weapon, particularly as that weapon was employed by such a mass medium as radio.

In a press release dated July 14, 1935, it was clear that G-Men were now a viable property appropriate for dramatic exploits. The release stated that: "A new weekly dramatic serial, "G-Men", based on actual cases from the files of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, opens coast-to-coast Saturday night at 8 o'clock, EST. The continuity will be prepared by Phillips H. Lord, known on the air as *Seth Parker*. 'If there are some, who are still dazzled by the false glamour of the gangster,' said a representative of the sponsor, 'we hope these radio programs will show little glamour is left to the criminal, when he comes to the end of the road.' The purpose of the broadcasts, it is pointed out, is to 'hold up a clear mirror to the "G" man and his activities, and let the true reflection, as contained in the official records, speak for itself.' By extending accurate workings of the department it is hoped, through these broadcasts, to 'double the effectiveness of this arm of the government by



increasing public cooperation in the war on crime.”

And “G-Men” did just that. Not only were the most important and famous of all cases dramatized, but also after each drama a physical description of a wanted man was given over the air along with the crimes they had committed. If radio listeners happened to spot someone by that description, they were urged to phone the police. It was reported that nearly 200 criminals were captured over the years as a result of this public service.

Phillips H. Lord, who produced the series, knew he had something special soon after the premiere of “G-Men.” The series, however, lasted only a short 13 episodes before going off the air. Hoover wasn’t favorable toward the program, offering Lord only closed case files rather than active ones, and participation toward “G-Men” was thinning out. About three months later, however, “G-Men” returned to the air under a new title, “Gang Busters.” (Note the title of the program was two words, not one. This has been the subject of nitpickers anonymous but a Little Book, posters for the 1942 Matinee Serial and the 1955 movie exploited the program’s title as two words.) The revised series, in a new format and style, offered dramatizations of police files from across the country rather than focusing narrowly on FBI cases as “G-Men” did. The reason for the title change might also have been as the result of the bureau’s name change for their agents. From the Associated Press, June 29, 1935, it was noted that, “The Department of Justice has no more ‘G-Men.’ They are agents of the F.B.I. Henceforth the department will ignore the name made famous by ‘Machine Gun’ Kelly. Just as England has its C.I.D., the United States will have its F.B.I., which stands for Federal Bureau of Investigation.”

On a humorous note, it was noted that Attorney General Cummings inadvertently revealed earlier that month how prominent a place the National Recovery Administration has in his thoughts. Informing reporters of a radio speech on the proposed National Crime Institute which he would make at Stamford, Conn., Mr. Cummings said, “It will be broadcast over the NRA network.” When a shout of laughter followed, he sheepishly substituted “NBC.”

“G-Men” presented facts about the F.B.I., most of which listeners probably never knew until listening to the dramas. G-Men, it was explained,

had no pension rights, because they were not under civil service; hence when a G-Man is badly sounded, killed or retired because of age, his family must get along as best it could. The program also reported that widows of men killed in the line of duty found jobs with the bureau, and it was noted that there were four of them in 1934.

The premiere broadcast, naturally, dramatized the capture of John Dillinger, the most famous of all F.B.I. cases. The capture of “Baby Face” Nelson and “Machine Gun” Kelly were also dramatized, respectively. In the third broadcast of the series, the famed Osage Indian Murders was presented with a certain stark realism. Between 1921 and 1923, several members of the Osage Indian Reservation died under suspicious circumstances. William “King of Osage” Hale was suspected of being involved in the deaths and agents posing as medicine men, cattlemen and salesmen infiltrated the reservation and eventually solved the murders. Hale had committed the murders in an attempt to collect insurance money and gain control of valuable oil properties owned by the deceased persons, a true narrative that had the sound of fury of a wholly dramatized script for competing radio detective series.

But not all listeners were satisfied with the broadcasts. Police officials from around the country agreed that the presentation of crime dramas on radio was detrimental to the morals and proper training of children. A resolution was adopted by the officials to supply no factual information on crimes to the radio. Don F. Stiver, superintendent of the Indiana State Police, who headed a committee studying the effects of crime drama, said that much of the information furnished to radio programs was so distorted by writers that the police could not even recognize the story. Despite the concerns of the police officials, young children from all over the country tuned in to “Gang Busters” each week, and to the shock of lawmen it was reported that even child actress Shirley Temple was a dedicated listener of “Gang Busters.”

Despite, or because of, the criticism, the program inspired competing producers to emulate the sound of fury of “Gang Busters.” This obviously demonstrated not only the effectiveness and accuracy of F.B.I. agents in their war against crime, but also their growing popularity in the collective American mind. Series like “The F.B.I. In Peace And War” and the indistinguishable “This Is Your

F.B.I." followed. "Gang Busters" itself would spawn a matinee serial in 1942 produced by Universal Studios with Kent Taylor (television's Boston Blackie) and Robert Armstrong as police detectives seeking the leader of a gang of terrorists known as the League of Murdered Men. The serial is distinct for its visual interpretation of the radio series' erratic and cacophonous signature, described by Jim Harmon, in the first edition of **THE GREAT RADIO HEROES**, appropriately as, "Sirens howling in the night, the flaming chatter of submachine guns and, finally, the marching tread of convicts headed for their cells!"

"Gang Busters" became a short-lived television series in 1952 on NBC that alternated with Jack Webb's "Dragnet." Episodes from the series dealing with Oregon prison escapee John Omar Pinson and identified as Public Enemy Number Four were strung together to form a theatrical feature in 1955 starring Myron Healey, Don Harvey, Frank Gerstle and Sam Edwards. In 1958, a second film titled **GUN DON'T ARGUE** used footage from the television series to chronicle the F.B.I.'s pursuit of infamous gangsters.

The radio series was broadcast over CBS and NBC until its final two seasons on Mutual, ending its 20 year run in 1957. What follows is a broadcast log of the first year's productions. I admit it may be a little sketchy, but this has been a difficult program to document. Various scripts have been housed in special collections in University Libraries across the United States and I have been for years (and probably will continue for the next few years) to gather titles and air dates for episodes of "Gang Busters." None of the broadcasts listed below are known to exist. In fact, the earliest broadcast date assigned to any existing episode of "Gang Busters" is May 26, 1937.

Many of the plots are fairly familiar judging by the titles, which gives you an idea of what kind of stories were being presented on *G-Men* and the early months of *Gang Busters*. Consider this a work in progress.

**"G-MEN,"** for the first thirteen broadcasts. Broadcast Saturday evening from 9 to 9:30 p.m., EST., NBC, Sponsored by Chevrolet.

1. "The Case of John Dillinger" (7/20/35)
2. "The Case of Baby-Face Nelson" (7/27/35)
3. "The Osage Indian Murders" (8/3/35)
4. "The Durkin Case" (8/10/35)

5. "The Cannon Extortion Case" (8/17/35)
6. "The Bremer Kidnapping Case" (8/24/35)
7. "The Urschel Kidnapping Case" (8/31/35)
8. "The Case of Machine Gun Kelly" (9/7/35)
9. "The Case of the Tri-State Gang" (9/14/35)
10. "The Fleagle Fingerprint Case" (9/21/35)
11. "The Case of 'Pretty Boy' Floyd" (9/28/35)
12. "The Boettcher Kidnapping Case" (10/5/35)
13. "The Case of Dutch Schultz" (10/12/35)

**"GANG BUSTERS,"** beginning with the broadcast of January 15, 1936. Broadcast Wednesday evenings, 10 to 10:30 p.m., EST. (With notable exceptions listed below.)

14. "The Capture of the Millen Brothers" (1/15/36)
15. "The End of Fats McCarthy" (1/22/36)
16. With guest William N. Hallanan, Chief of Police of Sacramento, CA (1/29/36)
17. "The Reppin Murder Case" (2/5/36)
18. ----- title unknown ----- (2/12/36)
19. ----- title unknown ----- (2/19/36)
20. "The Case of the Los Angeles Sewer Bank Robbers" (2/26/36)
21. "The Career of Henry Fernekes" (3/4/36)
22. with guest Grace M. Poole, Dean of Women of Stoneleigh College (3/11/36)
23. "The Capture of the Phantom of the Flats" (3/18/36)
24. "The Capture of Leonard Scarnici" [part one of two] (3/25/36)
25. "The Capture of Leonard Scarnici" [part two of two] (4/1/36)
26. "The Capture of the Dago Perretti Gang" (4/8/36)
27. "The Capture of the Dillinger Gang" (4/15/36)
28. "The Capture of the D'Autremont Brothers" [part one of two] (4/22/36)
29. "The Capture of the D'Autremont Brothers" [part two of two] (4/29/36)
30. "The Capture of Willie-the-Actor Sutton" [part one of two] (5/6/36)
31. "The Capture of Willie-the-Actor Sutton" [part two of two] (5/13/36)
32. This episode aired 10:15 to 10:45 p.m., EST, due to a special 45-minute panel and lecture that began at 9:30 over CBS. (5/20/36)
33. "The Capture of Alex Bogdanoff" [part one of two] (5/27/36)
34. "The Capture of Alex Bogdanoff" [part two of two] (6/3/36)
35. "The Case of the Radio Maniac" (6/17/36)



"GANG BUSTERS" was broadcast from 9:30 to 10:00 p.m., EST beginning with episode 36.

36. "The Capture of Two-Gun Crowley" (6/24/36)

Notes of interest:

There was no broadcast on June 10, 1936.

Special thanks to Patrick Lucanio, editor of SPERDVAC's RADIOGRAM for adding material to the information listed above. My initial submission was primarily concerning the radio log, and I was unable to dig up much information about the program "G-Men" to permit a satisfactory closure. Patrick fleshed it out for me and expanded the dull spots. Patrick deserves a large credit.

If in the near future I get a chance to add more to this "Gang Busters" log, it will be revised.

Martin Grams, Jr. is the author and co-author of numerous books on network broadcasting including THE HISTORY OF THE CAVALCADE OF AMERICA, INNER SANCTUM MYSTERIES: BEHIND THE CREAKING DOOR, THE ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS COMPANION, THE HAVE GUN-WILL TRAVEL COMPANION and INVITATION TO LEARNING, among many others.

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The following members worked at our tables during the convention:

David Horner  
Bruce Rudesill  
Ted Shumaker

Bob Kistler  
Charles Sexton  
Randy Story

David Horner, as always, brought breakfast for Barbara and me on Saturday.

Ted Shumaker once again showed his devotion by driving from Wilmington, OH to the convention center on Thursday evening. He and George Huber carried all of the club material from the parking lot to our tables and set them up. Nice job guys.

I did not get the names of everyone that helped take everything back to the parking lot and load the cars up after the convention on Saturday, but your efforts were appreciated. More special thanks to Ted for going home with Barbara and unloading everything.

It was our best year ever for getting new members at the convention.

If you have not contributed to the expenses that we incurred at the convention, as Jim Ouzts and Charles Sexton did, it is not too late.

~~~~~

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Old newsletters and periodicals related to OTR.

"The Story Of Mary Marlin." A serial drama that ran from 1937 to 1952.

"When The West Was Young." A multi-part story on the west, starring Herb Ellis and broadcast over the AFRS network. Our guess is that it had thirteen parts

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Many thanks to Arlene Osborne for contributing the material in the "Tidbit" sections this issue.