

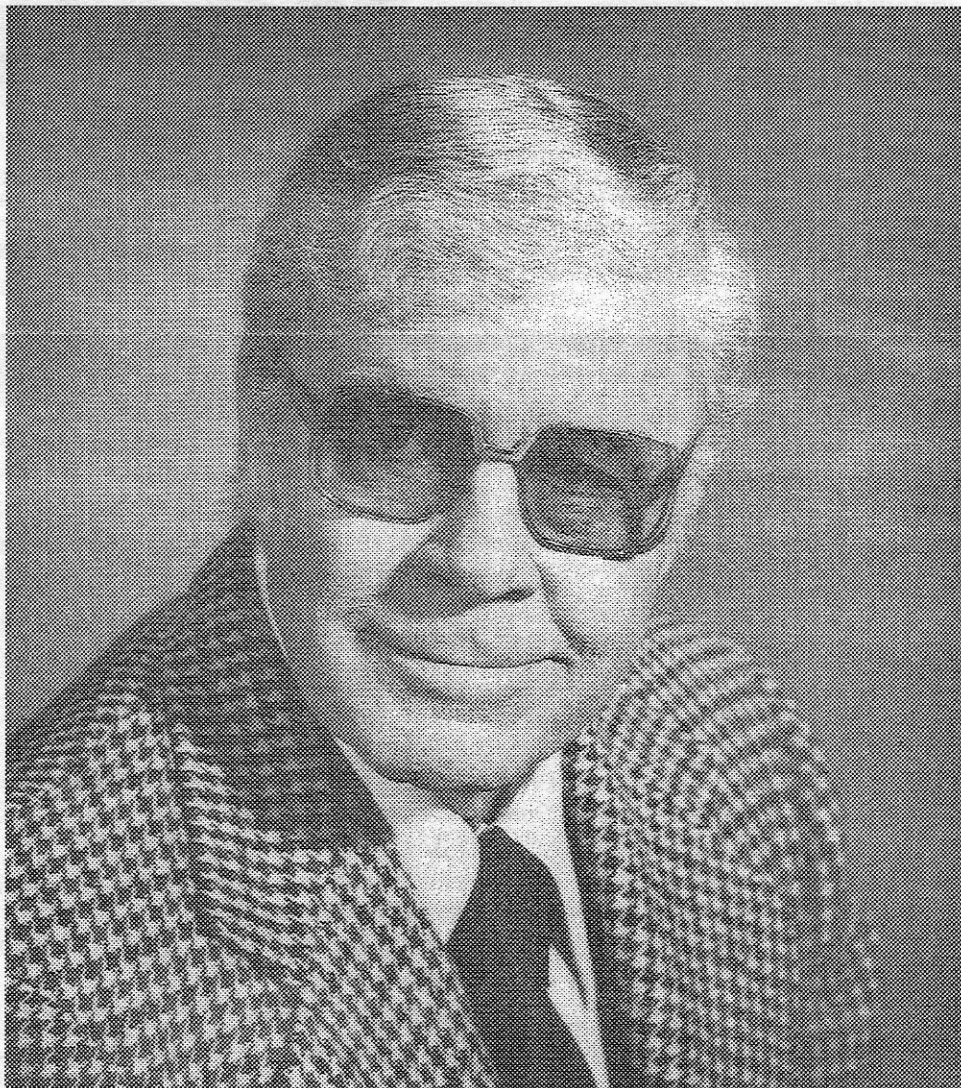


RETURN WITH US NOW...

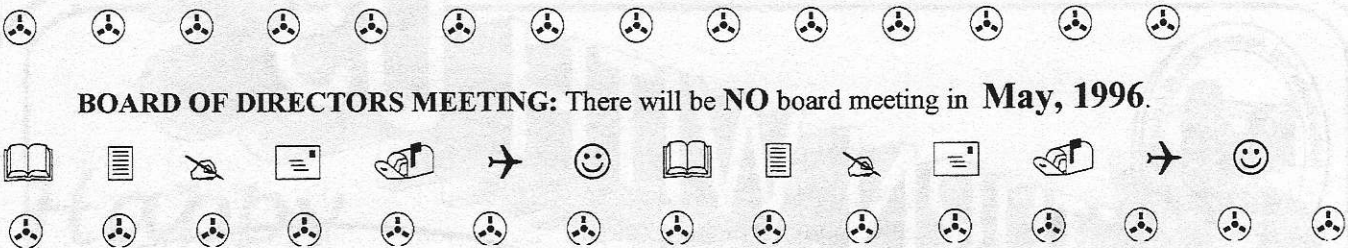
RADIO HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION OF
COLORADO

Volume 21, Number 10

May, 1996



John Archer - Long time actor of stage, screen and radio, his credits are many and varied. During his visit we has chosen to emphasize *The Shadow*, however, his more recent made-for-TV-film work includes *Columbo*.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING: There will be **NO** board meeting in **May, 1996.**

“Who knows...what evil...lurks...in the hearts of men? *The Shadow Knows!*”

One of radio's most famous programs will be re-created

Thursday, May 16th in the Windsor Gardens Auditorium

**9500 E Alameda Ave at Clinton St turn South at traffic light, go about two blocks to parking lot at auditorium
7:00-9:00 pm**

John Archer

(Who portrayed The Shadow on radio in 1943)

Stars in

“The Spider Boy”

With Denver's own

John Rayburn

(as the villain!!)

plus a hilarious comedy

“Ethel and Albert”



Presented by:

Radio Historical Association of Colorado

(Coffee and goodies will be available)



RETURN WITH US NOW... is the official publication of *The Radio Historical Association of Colorado, Inc.*,

a non-profit organization. Cost of membership is **\$25.00** for the first year with \$15.00 for renewal.

Each member has full use of the club resources. For further information contact anyone listed below.



Phone numbers are in the (303) area code except where indicated.

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 - #3 (1000 & up) Dave Logan, 5557 S Sherman Cir, Littleton CO 80121.....730-1430
 - #4 (5001 up) Mika Rhoden, 3950 W Dartmouth Ave, Denver CO 80236.....937-9476
- DIRECTOR AT LARGE: David L Michael, 1999 Broadway, Lowery Suite, Denver CO 80202.....296-1456
- CORRESPONDING SECRETARY: David L Michael (as above)

From the
King's



Roost

May will be a big month for our members in the Denver area. Our club will bring in **John Archer**, who played **the Shadow** for years and we will have a presentation at Windsor Gardens, an upscale retirement community on **Thursday, May 16th at 7:00 pm.** All RHAC members are urged to attend and enjoy the evening.

For those of you who don't know Windsor Gardens: it is one of Denver's first and most active retirement home complexes. Windsor Gardens main entrance is at 9500 East Alameda Avenue, where Alameda intersects with South Clinton Street (there is a traffic light at that intersection). Their residents will join us for this evening of fun and entertainment. Our own **John Rayburn** and his wife **Carol** will lead our supporting cast of members for a re-creation.

We are also making plans to join with another club for a Fall presentation of a Sherlock Holmes play. More about that as plans progress.

This has been a very busy month for the libraries. Our call for a librarian for cassette library #2 was quickly answered by **David Gatch**, 606 S Jersey St, Denver CO 80224. The library has been moved. Now, as boxes

of cassettes are returned from loans, we'll be sure to see that they are forwarded to David.

When it comes time to repack your tapes to mail back to RHAC and you want to seal the box, please, use filament tape for sealing. This filament tape is available at office supply houses and most hardware stores.

Terry Hamilton has been making shipments for library #1, and he reports that all is moving smoothly there. Terry advised that he'd be out of town for a few days. That is really no problem, since we all take some time off now and then. All we can do is remind our members that they must allow some time to permit our volunteers to get the orders in the mail. No orders are held anywhere near as long as they are in some other clubs.

One of the things that causes delays is the wrapping of new boxes. You see, in order to prolong the life of the boxes and save the expense of buying many new boxes, we carefully reinforce each box by hand. Then, when a shipment is being prepared, we carefully seal the box with filament tape in such a manner as to permit you to easily open the box by peeling off the filament tape.

So, at this time we would again like to remind users of the libraries that they should NOT cut the sealing tapes, but peel it off by using the tabs that we put on the ends. Each time you use a knife you damage a box which then either requires the librarian to have to repair or (horrors) discard the box.

Another cause for delay or confusion or both: if you don't list alternatives on your order form, the librarian has no choice but to hold when one particular reel is out on loan. We do not have extra copies; there is only one reel in the library for each catalog number. Special handling for those orders which cannot be completed causes great problems for the librarians. We have a lot of people using the libraries and it simply is not practical to try holding an order aside for want of a tape that is already out on loan.

We have many new members and we want to remind mostly them that: we offer a

"Talking Newsletter."

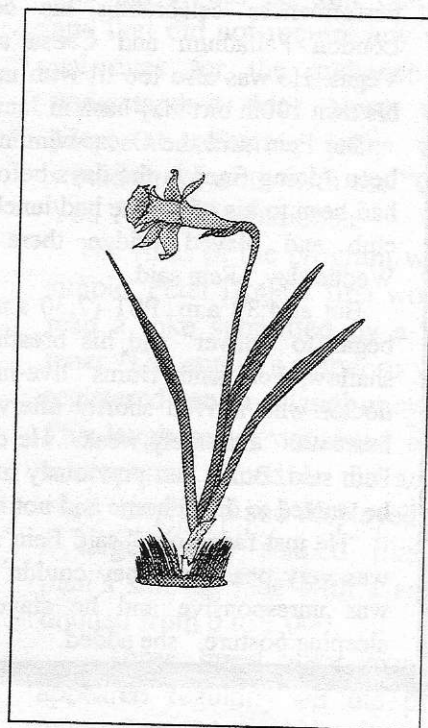
All the credit for this goes to

Mike Fields

1210 Cadillac

Kokomo IN 46902.

For those who ask for it, Mike also offers the catalog on cassette.



LOS ANGELES (Reuter) - George Burns, one of America's best loved and most enduring entertainers, died Saturday, March 9, 1996, less than two months after celebrating his 100th birthday.

His manager and long time friend, Irving Fein, said the wisecracking, cigar-chomping comedian died at his Beverly Hills home at 10 a.m. PST. "There was no pain, no suffering, thank God."

Burns who celebrated his 100th birthday January 20, was remembered from Hollywood to Washington. President Clinton, in a statement issued during a trip to California, said he and first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, were "deeply saddened to learn of the death of one of the great entertainers of all time."

"George Burns' sense of timing and captivating smile touched the hearts and funnybones of more than three generations. He enabled us to see humor in the toughest of times and to laugh together as a nation."

Fellow comedian Milton Berle said Burns would be "headlining up there in heaven." California Gov. Pete Wilson said, "George Burns proved that there is no limit to success or endurance as long as one is blessed with a passion for work, a refined sense of humor and a passion for a good cigar."

Burns had been in ill health since July 1994, when he slipped and fell in the shower at his home in Las Vegas.

Burns' frailty earlier caused him to cancel performances celebrating his centenary at the London Palladium and Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas. He was also too ill with influenza to attend his own 100th birthday bash in January.

But Fein said the Oscar-winning entertainer had been "doing fine" in the days before his death. "He had been to his office, he had lunched at his country club and played bridge there as recently as Wednesday," Fein said.

But at 4:30 a.m. PST (7:30 a.m. EST) his body began to "quiver" and his breathing became very shallow, Fein said. Burns' live-in nurse called his doctor who arrived shortly afterward and said his heart was "extremely weak." He died an hour later, Fein said. Burns had previously made it known that he wanted to die at home and not in the hospital.

"He just faded out," said Fein's wife Marion. "It was very peaceful. They couldn't get him up. He was unresponsive and he stayed in a kind of sleeping posture," she added.

Fein said Burns would be buried alongside his late wife, radio and TV star Gracie Allen, at a private funeral service at the Forest Lawn cemetery in Los Angeles on Tuesday.

Paying tribute to his friend of more than 30 years, Fein said: "He was one of the greats. He was a man who worked until he was 99, doing night clubs and TV commercials. He was one of a kind. He will be greatly missed."

Burns essentially had two careers, one that started with his wife and partner, Gracie Allen, on radio and television, and a second as a movie star, recording artist and author that began when he was 80.

"When you're hot, you're hot. I made more money in my 80s than at any time in my career," Burns once said.

For 19 years Burns and Allen appeared on radio and television, Allen playing a daffy, scatterbrained wife and Burns the bemused, tolerant husband and straight man.

"All I had to do was listen," Burns said. "I'd throw in a 'Your brother did what?' or 'You don't say' and Gracie would take it from there."

When Allen died in 1964 at the age of 58, Burns said he had to start working again. "My talent up to that point was in marrying Gracie," said Burns, who visited Allen's grave in Forest Lawn Cemetery regularly for the rest of his life.

But it was the death of his best friend, comedian Jack Benny, that saw the rebirth of Burns as a celebrity, bringing him to the attention of a whole new generation.

Benny was slated for the role of a retired comedian in the film version of Neil Simon's "The Sunshine Boys," which went instead to Burns, who had last appeared in a film in 1939.

Burns won a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his performance, and his career soared. He toured the United States and made a number of trips to Europe for concerts, in which he sang, danced a little and told stories.

"Audiences were afraid that if they didn't applaud I'd drop dead on stage," said the man with the first Social Security card, issued with the Roman Numeral I.

Reuters/Variety, March 9, 1996

'Can You Top This?'

Classic Comedy

By Read G. Burgan

Did you hear the one about the barber who had been losing heavily betting on horses? This drove him to drink.

While in this condition, a minister came in for a shave and although he smelled liquor on the barber's breath, he didn't say anything.

After several minutes, the minister's face was a mess of blood from all of the nicks he received at the barber's unsteady hand. Unable to contain himself any longer, the minister remonstrated, "Now do you see the effect of liquor?"

"Yes," replied the barber, "it makes the face very, very tender."

Or about the man who was arrested for stealing petticoats from a department store? When he was brought before the magistrate, the judge asked him, "How do you plead? Guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, your honor. But can't you let me off this time? After all, this was my first slip."

You may not be rolling in the aisles, but the first joke rated 900 on the "Can You Top This" laugh-meter and the second went over the 1,000 mark.

"Can You Top This" was one of those programs that was just tailor made for radio. Four people sat around telling jokes, each one trying to outdo the other.

Only on radio could such a format survive and thrive. And thrive it did, for 14 years. In 1943 an estimated 10 million people listened to the weekly program and Time magazine said, "There is nothing quite like it on the U.S. air."

"Can You Top This" was the brainchild of Senator Edward Hastings Ford. The "Senator" part, like most of his jokes, was a made-up title.

The program itself was simply an outgrowth of a regular meeting at

which Ford and the other participants would spend countless hours telling stories at New York's famous Lamb's Club. From the outset of the program in December 1940, Ford owned the rights to the program and was a regular participant.

The lynchpin for the program was the actor Peter Donald who would begin each round of jokes by telling a joke submitted by a listener.

Donald was born in Bristol, England, into a theatrical family. By the time he was nine years old, he had traveled around the world twice. At the age of ten he began acting in radio. Later he played Ajax Cassidy on the Fred Allen Show, and dramatized the voices of Winston Churchill, Field Marshall Montgomery, King George VI and the Duke of Windsor on "March of Time."

Donald was quite a sight. He had red hair, a manicured mustache and black horn-rimmed glasses. He began on the "Can You Top This" program when he was only 22 years old. He was a wonderful dialectician. When he recounted a listener's joke, it was in full dialect and dramatized to the hilt.

He gave you the feeling that you were sitting in a pub with friends who had hoisted just enough to become well oiled and were now telling their favorite jokes for all they were worth.

Each week from 3,500 to 12,000 letters were received from listeners submitting jokes that they hoped would be read over the air. If their joke was read and their rating on the laugh meter beat the jokes of the program's experts, they would receive cash prizes.

Only four or five listener jokes were used in any given week. Ford claimed that they never received any new jokes, only variations on old ones that professional comedians had used for years.

No one got rich on having their jokes read. In the beginning, the listener received \$5, plus an additional \$2 for each of the experts he bested, for a maximum of \$11. Several years later the minimum amount had increased to \$10, with a maximum of \$25 and some samples of the sponsor's products.

In later years, a listener also received a phonograph record of Peter Donald telling his story.

The task of reading through the 3500 plus letters each week fell to Betty North, who was a vaudeville veteran. In a small office not far from the Lamb's Club, she kept several filing cabinets full of jokes sent by listeners.

Certain subjects were taboo, including death, religion, race, deformities and stuttering. It makes you wonder where today's comedian's would be with those restrictions.

Some listeners sent risqué jokes, knowing they would never be used but thinking that the unassuming Mrs. North would nonetheless be amused by them.

An acceptable joke had to be one that could be told quickly and that did not require any visual cues for the audience to understand it. Mrs. North was adept at selecting jokes that would make a hit with the "Can You Top This" audience.

The rules of the program were simple. Peter Donald first would read a joke submitted by a listener. The studio's response was registered on a "laugh-meter." The laugh meter consisted of a microphone aimed at the audience, amplified and displayed on a large meter shaped like a man's smiling face with a scale divided from 0 to 1,000.

Three guest joke experts appeared regularly on the program: Sen. Ed Ford, Joe Laurie,

Jr. and Harry Hershfield. The three professional comedians boasted a combined collection of 15,000 jokes.

Joe Laurie, Jr. was known for his diminutive size. He liked to quip that his greatest thrill was when a midget looked up at him. He was a writer for Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor, had a regular column in *Variety* and was in demand as an after-dinner speaker.

Harry Hershfield had been a cartoonist whose character "Abe Kabibble" appeared in comic strips. His regular column appeared in the *New York Daily Mirror*. He was also a photographer, reporter, banquet toastmaster and screenwriter.

Senator Ed Ford cut his teeth in vaudeville and authoring a book titled, "After Dinner Speaking and Other Forms of Insanity."

The three studio joke experts were not given access to the listener's jokes prior to the program and they were not allowed

to bring any written notes to the broadcast. Further, their jokes had to be in the same category as that of the one submitted by the listener, which could range from barbers to jealousy to drunks ... you name it.

Each time a joke was told, the highest rating it received was read on the laugh meter. If the listener's joke, as told by Peter Donald, received a higher rating than the expert's, a small sum was added to the amount the listener received.

If the listener's joke was topped by all three experts, he was sent a joke book written by the three experts.

The strength of the program was the manner in which the four studio joke tellers told their jokes. Most of the jokes were ethnic jokes, the majority falling into one of several categories: Jewish, Irish, Scottish, Italian, Swedish and German.

Each of the three experts was uninhibited in using the most outlandish, stereotypical dialect

in acting out his story. Joe Laurie, Jr. sounded like an international Joe Pesci.

The half-hour show originated in 1940 as a local program on WOR (AM) New York. In 1942 NBC put it on its Saturday night schedule under sponsorship by the Colgate Palmolive company.

The program moved to Mutual network in 1948 then to ABC network in 1950. In the best tradition of "What goes around, comes around," the program returned to NBC in 1953.

After a final year on NBC, "Can You Top This," like most of the other network radio programs, found that it could no longer top TV.

Special thanks to Bill McCracken of the **Radio Historical Association of Colorado** for providing material from their well stocked reference library.

Read Burgan is a freelance writer and a former public radio station manager who can be reached at 906-296-0652; or through e-mail at rgb@up

Between the Bookends ... with Ted Malone

Between the Bookends began, like so many shows of early radio, when an act failed to show up, and eventually became the air's top series of sentiment and poetry readings. Alden Russell, a recent college graduate, had just gone to work with KMBC, the CBS affiliate in Kansas City, as a ukulele player, announcer and general man Friday. The time was the late 1920's. When a hillbilly act failed to arrive for a scheduled slot, Russell was thrown into the breach, told to read poetry and somehow fill the next ten minutes. Embarrassed at the assignment, he agreed with the condition that his name not be used. Announcer Hugh Studebaker, also working spontaneously, introduced him as "Ted Malone," and a

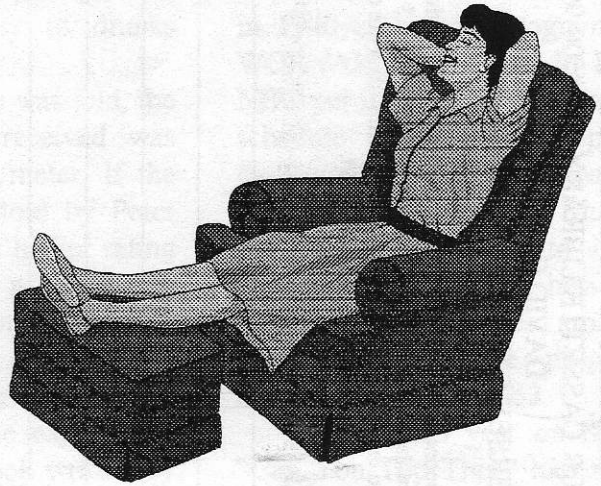
new personality was born. Russell read William Cullen Bryant's "Thanatopsis" with such feeling that letters began pouring in. Russell broadcast ever after as Ted Malone, filling the air with heartbreaking poems for more than twenty years. His show was picked up by CBS in 1935, and was still going strong at ABC in 1956. Like Tony Wons, Malone used contributions of listeners and drew upon a huge personal library of tidbits and poems. His show drew 15,000 letters a month, and varied between two-a-week and five-a-week 15-minute doses. Malone went to the Blue Network in 1938. He returned (it had then become ABC) in 1945, after a stint with the network as a war correspondent. Westinghouse carried his show from 1945 through 1949; various sponsors thereafter.

Tune in Yesterday by John Dunning, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1976

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Happy Mother's Day



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