

Volume 39, Number 4

# HYPHENATED AMERICANS ON OTR

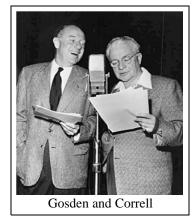
The Golden Age of Radio was in its last days at the beginning of the era of enlightenment on the issue of civil rights in America. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was not yet signed into law by the time that most network OTR drama, comedy and variety broadcasts had disappeared from the radio dial.

The treatment of minorities in the scripts, skits and dialogue of Old Time Radio generally reflected the times in which Americans lived.

Especially on the earlier shows, ethnic and racial stereotypes were common. "Hyphenated" Americans including African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Native-Americans, Asian-Americans and Italian-Americans were portrayed almost universally by Anglo actors as thick-accented, ignorant, often "bad guys" and inevitably subservient to the main character.

Radio in America is a medium whose stations are licensed by the government. The programs are heard in the privacy of listeners' homes. The audience is assembled from a wide spectrum of backgrounds. Consequently, expressions of blatant, vicious bigotry were avoided in OTR network shows. Many times these ethnic characters "got the best" of their white bosses or "superiors", but always in a respectful way that clearly indicated their lower status.

Many of these shows were top-rated, enjoying popular acclaim and commercial success at the time. The Radio Historical Association of Colorado does not condone these stereotypes depicted on OTR in any way. RWUN readers and OTR fans are asked to consider the broadcasts of the following described shows strictly in their historical context.



The most famous and successful show of this genre is, of course, *Amos 'n' Andy*. Two white men, Freeman Gosden as Amos Jones and Charles Correll as Andrew H. Brown were featured in this long running (34 years) tale of two black men from the South who moved to Chicago.

The program evolved from the beginning years in which the two performers (who played all of the roles) were seated at a table in an otherwise empty studio into a full-blown weekly half-hour with a full supporting cast of both black and white actors and an orchestra.

It became so popular than in 1931 movie theaters commonly stopped the feature film so audiences could hear the latest episode on loud speakers; a prominent judge at the time recessed deliberations in his courtroom so he could retire to his chambers to hear *Amos* 'n' *Andy*; daily newspapers carried accounts of the trials and tribulations of the two **Continued on Pg. 3** 

# July/August, 2014

# **RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO**

PO BOX 1908, Englewood CO 80150

Dedicated to the preservation of old-time radio programs, and to making those programs available to our members

Hear RHAC on the web, 4th Sunday of every month, at 8:30pm Mountain time at; "OTR From The Rockies" - http://www.yesterdayusa.com/saturdaylive.htm

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# **2014** Convention Schedules

No conventions have been submitted at this time

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characters, who OTR chronicler John Dunning described as "the commonest of common men, the poor Joe with no money, no job and no future."

Despite its wide popularity, even in its early days the show drew criticism from several quarters including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); a petition drive by a Pittsburgh newspaper resulted in nearly three quarters of a million people calling for the show to be removed from the air.

Conversely, *Amos 'n' Andy* drew popular support from many blacks in its large audience. Correll and Gosden characterized the show as "harmless fun" and professed to be quite fond of Negroes and pointed out that they often would play benefits for black children.

The controversy did not harm the popularity of the show on radio; its demise on the medium rather was chalked up to the same phenomenon that "did in" OTR overall: television. An *Amos 'n' Andy* TV series (ironically with black actors playing the lead roles) was forced off the air, the NAACP declaring that "the entire black race seemed crooked, stupid or cowardly."

Pick and Pat was a 1930s OTR network outing that also featured two white men playing African-Americans. Pick Malone and Pat Padgett were Irishmen who, before their radio gig, had performed a blackface act on the vaudeville stage, called Molasses and January.

The Johnson Family starred Jimmy Scribner, still another white man portraying, in this case, a small town group of southern blacks. Scribner was a true "one man band" voicing all the characters. He developed a "cast" of 22 including Mama and Papa, a daughter, her boyfriend, the town lawyer and the local preacher. The show ran from 1934 and ended in 1950 without any noticeable controversy, and was known to be especially popular in the South and among rural blacks.



The *Beulah Show* grew out of the character of a maid on *Fibber McGee and Molly*. At various times in its OTR history, Beulah was voiced by five

different performers: two white men and three African-American women. Marlin Hurt could produce a distinct falsetto voice with overtones from his youthful days in the South. On Fibber, he would "wow' the studio audience by standing with his back to them and on cue, whirl around and declare "Someone bawlin' for Beulah?"

Later on The Beulah Show, upon the sudden death of Hurt from a heart attack, Bob Corley played the role. In the late 1940s and early 50s, perhaps as part of the social changes regarding race, famed African-American actress Hattie McDaniel was hired for the role. When she became ill, well-known radio voices, sisters Lillian and Amanda Randolph, alternated in the part.



Lillian Randolph was a key performer in another show, a spin-off of Fibber McGee. It was a spectacularly successful comedy outing called *The Great Gildersleeve*. Randolph played Birdie Lee Coggins in the Gildersleeve household which was "nominally" headed by bachelor Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve. "Gildy" was constantly out-flanked by his nephew, Leroy and niece Marjorie, his various girl friends, male pals and by Birdie.

In the mold of respectful servant, as described by writer Dunning, Birdie had "an infectious laugh and a heart as big as the man's midsection." She also had a feisty side, Dunning noted, being fully capable of deflating Gildersleeve's ego. "She spoke her mind, but did so respectfully while making sure her voice was heard, and remained a sympathetic character to both races in mid-1940s America."



*The Jack Benny Program*, voted recently as the all-time favorite show in a survey of OTR fans also featured ethnic voices. Benny was actually a pioneer, hiring the first African-American to appear

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regularly on a nationwide radio program; a prominent African-American character actually played by a black man. This, of course, was Rochester Van Jones played by Eddie Anderson, who was hired by Benny in 1937 and remained on the show through the entire radio run and into the television years. Rochester was Benny's valet, driver, cook, companion and gentle critic when it came to discussions about Benny's penny-pinching tendencies, his vanity and supposed business sidelines. In reality, Benny paid everyone on his cast handsomely. His salary from the Benny show allowed Anderson to enjoy a life-style not readily available to blacks in show business during the earlier days of Hollywood.

Benny's show also utilized to comedic affect the great voice talents of Mel Blanc, especially in a skit involving a Mexican musical combo called "The Tijuana Troubadours." The sing-songy over reaching Mexican accent involved may be offensive today to many Hispanic-Americans, but the play on words remains a silly, but infectious comedy gem:

Benny is questioning Blanc, who is leading the group:

Benny: Are you really from Tijuana? Blanc: Si. Benny: Are you the spokesman? Blanc: Si. Benny: And the leader? Blanc: Si. Benny: What's your name? Blanc: Cy Benny: Cy? Blanc: Si. Benny: And your girl singer, is she your sister? Blanc: Si. Benny: And what is her name? Blanc: Sue Benny: Sue? Blanc: Si. Benny: (to girl): When you are not singing what do you like to do? Girl: Sew. Benny: Sew? Girl: Si.

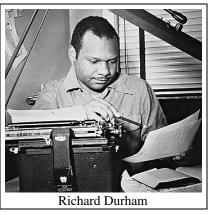
Blanc also used the Mexican accent on *The Judy Canova Show* as "Pedro" who politely opened his dialogue with the star by saying: "Pardon me for talking in your face, senorita" and signing off with "Hasta manana" to which Canova would reply: "Pasty bananas to you, too, Pedro."

# DESTINATION FREEDOM

In the late 1940s at the zenith of Old Time Radio, broadcasts continued to include stereotypical depictions of blacks and other minority groups. One broadcast series bucked that trend and sounded a firm and clear voice in the cause of African-American rights.

Although it was not aired on a national network, *Destination Freedom* originated in Chicago, a city with a large black population. The program was produced by a free-lance staff working at WMAQ, a major radio station with a strong signal reaching a large swath of the Midwest.

The series highlighted major achievements of African-Americans (Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, George Washington Carver; athletes such as Joe Lewis and Jackie Robinson; and entertainers including Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller and Nat "King" Cole.)



Thanks to the skills and passion of writer-producer Richard Durham *Destination Freedom's* dramatized presentations went far beyond a superficial treatment of those well known figures to chronicle the personal struggles of ordinary black men and women in a white man's world. Durham wrote from his personal perspective as a black man. The leading players in the cast all were African-Americans (Fred Pinkard, Oscar Brown, Jr., Janice Kingslow) with well-known white Chicago-based actors (Boris Alpin, Forrest Lewis, Studs Terkel, Harry Elders, etc.) in supporting roles.

The show took strong stands against the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist groups. Durham was quoted as saying he never felt pressured to soften the rhetoric, but ultimately did succumb to another temptation. He left the project to accept a much more lucrative writing job for a network show starring Don Ameche.

After a brief hiatus upon Durham's departure, *Destination Freedom* returned to the air for a short while, but lacked the fire and intensity of its initial offerings. Nonetheless, it secured its valuable and unique place in the history of civil rights and in the contributions of Old Time Radio to American culture.

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Other examples of hyphenated-Americans on OTR:



In its treatment of Native-Americans, the outstanding example is *The Lone Ranger* with a white actor mimicking the cadence of "the faithful Indian companion", Tonto. Tonto was certainly respectful of his kemo sabe and sometimes saved the Ranger's "bacon" in tight situations with the Cavendish gang and other miscreants in the old West.

*The Green Hornet* depended on his faithful Asian-American servant, Kato.

"Heyboy" was a Chinese bellhop in the San Francisco hotel where leading character Paladin hung out in *Have Gun, Will Travel*. While actor Ben Wright was a versatile member of CBS' famed radio acting group, his voice characterization was a poor, campy and unrealistic one that a real Asian-American would no doubt cringe upon hearing.



Several ethnic accents were heard on *Life With Luigi*, a comedy show about the life of a poor Italian-American immigrant portrayed on the air by J. Carrol Naish, an actor of Irish descent. In Luigi's night school class were fellow students from Germany and Scandinavia allowing the skilled radio actors to use their best vocal interpretations of folks from other lands.

Fortunately, today the hyphenated Americans referenced in this article have opportunities in show business largely denied their forbears. Regrettably, radio is no longer a medium that regularly features the type of great entertainment those performers offer.

# "A Word From Our Sponsor"

Admen, Advertising and the Golden Age of Radio

# A Book Review by Fred Hobbs, RWUN Editor

By Cynthia B. Meyers, associate professor of communication at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in New York City. Fordham University Press, Copyright 2014. 391 pages including footnotes, bibliography and index.



Fans, collectors and researchers of Old Time Radio programs are most concerned with the content--comedies, dramas, news, sports, music and/or variety--contained in them.

OTR devotees first and foremost enjoy listening to the vintage shows.

Some folks have favorite on-air personalities, genres or themes (westerns, juvenile, detective, soap operas, etc.) Other fans collect scripts, photos and promotional items (such as secret decoder rings and Orphan Annie Ovaltine shake-up mugs.)

However, very little attention is given to the business side of Old Time Radio, the advertising models that shaped its destiny and created the revenue to bring quality entertainment and information free to the American listening public.

In her extensively researched book *A Word From Our Sponsor*, author Meyers brings the role of advertising and specifically ad agencies into sharp focus as the raison d'etre for OTR to become such an important aspect of American pop culture in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s.

The importance of her book is illustrated in a quote from historian Michele Hilmes: "During the formative decades of broadcasting...the main innovation in programming took place in the offices of advertising agencies. Despite that fact, not a single book-length scholarly work has focused on the role of the advertising agency."

## **RETURN WITH US NOW...**

After nearly 100 years, that omission has been rectified.

A Word From Our Sponsor develops chronologically, detailing the emergence of early ad agencies whose founders dealt primarily with creating printed impressions in newspapers and magazines along with efforts to boost the credibility and viability of advertising.

From the beginning "despite the steady growth and increasing professionalism of advertising," writes Meyers, "admen were shadowed by images of earlier salesmen: the itinerant peddler, the drummer, the traveling salesman, the circus man, the medicine tent show promoter."

That notion prevailed into the early days of advertising on radio and beyond. Everyone supposedly hated the sales messages that bombarded the airwaves. And yet, during World War II and the postwar 1940s, many GIs and recent returning veterans proclaimed that they enjoyed hearing radio shows "from home" on Armed Forces Radio with one exception: They missed the commercials! (The advertisements were scrupulously edited out of the recorded discs distributed by the Armed Forces Radio Service to military bases and areas where Americans were serving.)

Meyers' book describes the early debates about the role of advertising on radio, even the question of whether it should be allowed and, if so, what form it should take. The print press, predictably, feared the competition for the advertising dollar. Even those in the business of radio initially were not concerned with advertising, but the manufacture and sale of radio equipment.

Early station WEAF in New York City confined advertising messages to mentioning the sponsor's name and product and to clients who would pay around \$50 to speak about their business for 15 minutes.

1920s network advertisers could use their name only in the program title, e.g., The Clicquot Club Eskimos, Kraft Music Hall, The Atwater Kent Hour.)

A Word From Our Sponsor describes in detail the ongoing relationship between the advertising agencies at OTR's beginnings and the emerging radio networks. Many OTR enthusiasts may not be fully aware that powerful advertising agencies controlled the creation, production, script development and advertising content of most network program offerings during the Golden Age of Radio.

Each of the "alphabet soup" of ad agencies developed its own "take" on methods of delivering **RETURN WITH US NOW...** 

advertising messages on radio. BBDO (Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn); JWT (J. Walter Thompson); Y&R (Young and Rubicam); and B-S-H (Blackett-Simple-Hummert) were four of the top agencies that hired writers, producers and sales people in their respective "radio departments."

The book points out the distinctive style of advertising used by the various agencies to match the program content. B-S-H's Frank and Anne Hummert produced many of the daytime soap opera serials such as Stella Dallas, Just Plain Bill and The Romance of Helen Trent using the "soaps" hard sell technique, as opposed to commercials on Y&R's popular prime time shows such as those fronted by comedians Jack Benny and Fred Allen that offered a soft sell approach with humorous overtones.)

As was the case with radio, advertising agencies were born in New York City. "Madison Avenue" where most of the agencies were located had become the originating point of the commercial messages for radio, whose networks (NBC-Red and Blue, CBS and Mutual) also headquartered in "the Big Apple." The broadcast studios and the entertainers who performed on OTR also worked on the east coast.

Writer Meyers chronicles the time at which the agencies and networks began to realize that Hollywood offered a much larger talent pool than New York; programs that could more easily feature highly popular movie stars as well as utilize new writers and producers for radio. Ad agencies opened offices in Los Angeles. Technology had advanced so that radio broadcasts need not originate just in New York or Chicago, but out west as well.

One fascinating section of A Word From Our Sponsor deals with the role of radio and advertising agencies and networks during World War II. A framework and special office was opened, in conjunction with the Federal government, to create and broadcast important messages about what citizens could do to support the war effort, e.g., buy war bonds, save fats, oil and scrap metal, use ride sharing car pools. Many of the messages were incorporated into the plots or skits of radio shows; others were inserted in product plugs or aired instead of a regular commercial.

The peak of the Golden Age of Radio in the 1940s is highlighted in a chapter that also describes its sudden decline as network listenership and attendant ad revenue plummeted with the rise of television viewing. Meyers outlines the significant shift in format at that time away from the single sponsor tradition of network radio (The Pepsodent July, August 2014

Show with Bob Hope", The Johnson Wax Program with Fibber McGee and Molly, The Lucky Strike Program starring Jack Benny.") Television adopted the spot announcement model prevalent today not only on the tube but also in local radio.

Advertising agencies now produce materials and place multiple broadcast commercials along the daily spectrum. Significantly, TV networks or production companies instead of the ad agencies control actual program content in the current model.

A Word From Our Sponsor contains reprints of vintage print ads, cartoons and photos depicting aspects of the historic role of radio advertising. Sprinkled throughout the book are quotes from many of the leading advertising and broadcast executives at the advent of the Golden Age of Radio and through the growth and ultimate end of that period of American life. The names of the players and descriptions of their involvement in the process also are prominently featured.

Advertising and programming pioneers and innovators such as Sylvester "Pat" Weaver, Bruce Barton, Frank Hummert, Raymond Rubicam and William Benton may not be well known to OTR's legion of fans. But the book's accounts provide a compelling compilation of information on their significant contributions to America's business while at the same time they brought enjoyable and informative radio programming into the lives of so many.

The future of broadcast advertising is an open question. Modern technical innovations are now available allowing television viewers to block out advertising messages. Radio listeners can tune in non-commercial programs delivered by satellite. And then, there is the Internet, which, by the way, is the medium by which you can listen today to "OTR from the Rockies," the monthly program produced by the Radio Historical Association of Colorado.

Author Cynthia Meyers concludes her work by acknowledging that it remains to be seen what will happen to advertising, but adds an optimistic "guess" that it will all turn out to be to the industry's advantage.

Perhaps at some point she will offer a sequel, an updated "word from our sponsor."

# KNOW THESE SPONSORS?

The book review of *A Word From Out Sponsor* featured in this edition of RWUN prompted this subject for a quiz to test the level of ad impressions on you, the listener. It will also tax your memory to determine if you can match the shows with their long time or (in most cases) exclusive sponsors.

- This is Your FBI
   Your Hit Parade
   Quiz Kids
   First Nighter
   The Fat Man
   Halls of Ivy
   Adventures of Sam Spade
- 9. Superman 10.Ma Perkins
- A. Wildroot Cream Oil



C. Schlitz Beer



E. Kellogg's Pep





B. Oxydol

D. Equitable Life Insurance



F. Lucky Strike

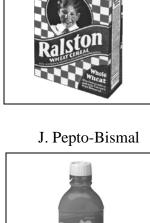


G. Alka-Seltzer



I. Campana Balm





H. Ralston-Purina

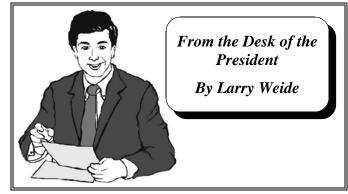
Have a great Fourth of July!



From the officers and staff of RHAC and ''Return With Us Now''

# SPONSOR QUIZ ANSWERS

I-D' 5-E' 3-G' **†**-I' 2-1' 9-C' *J*-H' 8-V' 6-E' 10-B



Hello everyone,

Personally, I find this month's article on "Hyphenated Americans" <u>very</u> thought provoking. Being in my mid seventies you can well imagine that I spent a great deal of my early years glued to our old Majestic "boat anchor" console radio, that sat in the living room, listening to the very shows that are discussed in this article. At the time my family gave no thought to the race related issues, only that these were very entertaining shows. Right or wrong our sensibilities, like many others, were filtered through the prevailing attitudes of the times.

Far too long in coming but rightly so, there's been an awakening in this country about how seemingly innocent depiction of other races in the media have been harmful. I suppose the question comes down to, should we obliterate it all from our consciousness, draw the line and go on or is it valuable to keep the history alive as a way to remind us of our past.

Of course I want to keep this conversation relative to OTR, which I believe tells a story of development, innovation and monumental change the likes of which will be hard to ever repeat again. Consequently, in my opinion, it would be sad indeed to toss it all out because of insensitivities that were clearly there. But at the same time I think we do need to hold OTR up as a reminder that we all deserve respect and equal treatment.

That's my opinion, let me know about yours,.

Larry

### **RHAC TAPE LIBRARY**

#### **TAPE 2027 MATINEE WITH BOB AND RAY** 1<sup>ST</sup>: Happy Birthday - Oh, Oh That Was Yesterday 11. 10-13-49 1<sup>ST</sup>: Station Is Very Happy To Please You All 10-14-49 2L 10-15-49 1<sup>ST</sup>: Don't Stop The Music - Bob Is Ill 1<sup>ST</sup>: Hollis Wants His Tuxedo Back 10-17-49 1<sup>ST</sup>: On Stage For Matinee With Bob & Ray 1R 10-18-49 1<sup>ST</sup>: Back To Last 25 Minutes This Morning - Bumpty Bus 01-05-51 1<sup>ST</sup>: Didn't Want To Talk Too Loud 2R 01-15-51 1<sup>ST</sup>: When The Moon Comes Over The Mountain - President's Budget 01-16-51

# TAPE 2028 MATINEE WITH BOB AND RAY

1L	02-06-51 04-04-51	<ul> <li>1<sup>ST</sup>: What An Imagination Ken Wilson Has - 180 Horsepower Engine</li> <li>1<sup>ST</sup>: Any Similarity To Entertainment Is Coincidental - Summer Camp Cottages</li> </ul>
2L	04-18-51 04-21-51	1 <sup>ST</sup> : Broadcast From Friendly Valley 1 <sup>ST</sup> : Pleasant Spring Day In Baltimore - Salute To Spring
1R	05-04-51 05-05-51	1 <sup>ST</sup> : Program Will Sound Shoddy - Bob Recuperating From Accident 1 <sup>ST</sup> : Bird Lovers Auxiliary Program
2R	06-28-51 06-30-51	1 <sup>ST</sup> : It's Raining In Friendly Valley - McGee Day 1 <sup>ST</sup> : Last Show For WHDH

### TAPE 2029 THE PLAYER / YELLOW CAB STORYTELLER / THE CITY 1200'

1L	1948	STUDIO X [THE PLAYER] #02: Frozen Justice
	1948	STUDIO X [THE PLAYER] #03: The Professor Goes For A Walk
	1948	THE PLAYER #23: The Professor Goes To A House Cleaning
	1948	THE PLAYER #24: Mirage
2L	1948	THE PLAYER #25: First Citizen Of The Bowery
	1948	THE PLAYER #26: Curse Of The Janka Diamond
	1948	THE PLAYER #27: Solo Flight
	1948	THE PLAYER #28: The Professor Goes To A Wrestling Match
1R	1948	THE PLAYER #42: It's All In The Deal
	1949	THE PLAYER #79: Reward For Sanchez
	1949	THE PLAYER #80: Fate Upsets A Plan
	1949	THE PLAYER #81: The Pinwheel Role
2R	1949	THE PLAYER #82: The Prophecy
	1940s	YELLOW CAB STORYTELLER: A Piece Of Wire
	1947	THE CITY: A Tapestry For Radio

509

1200'

1200'

# **RHAC TAPE LIBRARY**

# **TAPE 2030 DESTINATION FREEDOM**

1L	08-15-48 08-22-48	Truth Goes To Washington - Sojourner Truth Arctic Autograph - Matthew Henson
2L	11-07-48 03-06-49	Echoes Of Harlem - Duke Ellington Do Something, Be Somebody - Canada Lee
1R	03-13-49 03-20-49	Up From Slavery - Booker T. Washington Black Boy - Richard Wright
2R	03-27-49	Transfusion - Dr. Charles Drew

# R03-27-49Iransfusion - Dr. Charles Drew05-22-49Secretary Of Peace - Benjamin Banneker

## TAPE 2031 JACK BENNY PROGRAM

1L	02-13-38	Robert Taylor Plays The Cello
	03-27-38	GUESTS: Fred Allen, Kate Smith, Robert Ripley
2L	04-03-38	GUESTS: George Jessel, Andy Devine
	03-26-39	GUEST: Ed Sullivan; Great Hotel Murder Mystery
1R	02-01-42	GUEST: Humphrey Bogart; The Frightwig Murder Case Part 2
	02-08-42	Mad At Fred Allen For Moving To Sunday Nights
2R	02-15-42	Jack Wants To Go To Movie On His Birthday
	03-01-42	Jack Starts Campaign For An Oscar

# TAPE 2032 JACK BENNY PROGRAM

1L	03-08-42 03-15-42	GUEST: Joan Bennett Jack Talks About Lending Fred Allen \$10
2L	04-05-42 11-01-42	Don's Commercial - Menthol On His Chest Jack And Phil Go Target Shooting
1R	11-08-42 11-15-42	Twink Family - Part 1 Twink Family - Part 2

2R	11-22-42	Riding To Opening Of "George Washington Slept Here"
	12-06-42	Liberty Ship - Phil's Leaves For The Merchant Marines

# **TAPE 2033 JACK BENNY PROGRAM**

1L	04-11-43 01-02-44	Jack Returns After Illness - GUEST: Orson Welles Jack's Annual New Year's Eve Show
2L	02-13-44 10-29-44	GUEST: Larry Adler Allen's Alley - GUESTS: Fred Allen, Martha Tilton
1R	01-28-45 12-23-45	GUEST: Ann Sheridan The English Butler - GUESTS: The Colmans
2R	02-10-46 03-17-46	GUEST: Eddie Cantor Allen's Alley Spoof - Dennis Returns From The Navy

1200'

1200'

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3	6	9	12	
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City		State	_ Zip Code	

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