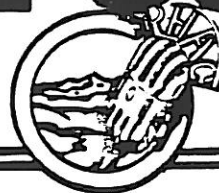


# RETURN WITH US NOW...

The Radio Historical  
Association of Colorado, Inc.



Volume 17 Number 10

May 1992



The "Columbia Workshop" was probably radio's finest dramatic program. Presented unsponsored by CBS, it broadcast plays, many of them highly experimental, written for radio by such writers as Archibald MacLeish, Norman Corwin, and Arch Oboler. This 1938 photo shows a rehearsal of "Air Raid" by Archibald MacLeish. From left to right are Orson Welles, Betty Garde, Ray Collins, William N. Robeson, Director, and Mr. MacLeish.

**RETURN WITH US NOW...** is the official publication of the Radio Historical Association of Colorado, Inc., a non-profit organization. Cost of membership is \$20.00 for the first year with \$15.00 for annual renewal. Each member has full use of the Club resources. For further information contact anyone listed below.



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**THERE WILL BE NO BOARD MEETING IN MAY! NO meeting in May!**

**ALL MEMBERS ARE WELCOME AND INVITED TO ATTEND AND PARTICIPATE AT THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING.** The June 4th meeting is at home of David Michael at 7:30 P.M.



**THE MAY 1992 MEETING WILL BE MAY 21ST AT THE CHURCH OF THE MASTER, LOCATED AT 17TH AVENUE AND FILBERT COURT.**

Yes, we had to cancel our April meeting due to circumstances beyond our control. But the nice part of it is that Merwin Smith was nice enough to go along with us and agree to give his presentation in May.

Merwin Smith, KLZ Radio & TV personality and veteran, has put together a special presentation of radio and TV goofs and assorted humorous outtakes carefully collected from many years of Denver broadcasting. Come, join us for a funny and entertaining program.

---

James Thurber once wrote, "A soap opera is a kind of sandwich, between thick slices of advertising, spread twelve minutes of dialog, and predicament, villainy, and female suffering in equal measure, throw in a dash of nobility, sprinkle with tears, season with organ music, cover with a rich announcer sauce, and serve five times a week."

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### THE CLOCK

For lovers of mystery dramas, "The Clock", Mondays at 8:30, written by Lawrence Klee, directed by Clark Andrews, and utilizing the talents of a different cast each week.

The whole bunch, including music maker and sound effects men, take the show ingredients, whirl them around their heads a few times and let fly with a show novel in excellence and, usually, in plot.

Adapting music to locale rather than trying to establish the eerie by its use adds immeasurably to the show.

RADIO LIFE, June 29, 1947

## COLUMBIA WORKSHOP

Encouraged by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the U.S. Office of Education, in 1935 the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) put its experimental "Columbia Workshop" on a regular basis. Irving Reis, its producer, declared: "We do not plan to abide by any preordained concept...We plan to do almost anything that lends itself to unique treatment and interesting experiments with sound effects and voices."

Getting a sustaining half hour on Saturday nights at 8 and all the writers and actors he needed, Reis originated the workshop to practice his own theory: radio writers must write for mass consumption, not for a specialized audience.

His simple characters and situations found depth and balance by swift, multiple scene changing: "Shift them as often as you like... The sky's the limit." His "St Louis Blues" illustrated the point. The play concerns an engineer and announcer wondering who is listening in on a jazz program. Six different locales are faded in and the effect of the music on each is demonstrated.

On the side, Reis's agile brain concocted a hundred variations on standard radio technique. He was the first to cover stage shows by use of the parabolic microphone, picking up voices as spotlights pick up faces. He presented a British mine play, "Comedy of Danger," where sound effects played a major dramatic role. He put on the air the sounds of Broadway at night. An excerpt from "Gulliver's Travels" -- "Voyage to Brobdingnag," the land of giants -- used a special microphone device for magnifying the voices of the giants and softening Gulliver's tones.

Artistically, the workshop program is a success. But though commercial broadcasters borrowed innumerable Reis tricks, none has chosen to sponsor so radical a departure from accepted standards.

News-Week, November 21, 1936

Last week CBS's best "prestige program," *Columbia Workshop*, celebrated its third birthday on the air by inaugurating Festival (Thursdays, 10 PM) of 13 broadcasts. Eight are the pick of the 140 radio plays the *Workshop* has done since its beginning. Five are new ones: among them plays by Dorothy Parker, Lord Dunsany, William Saroyan.

Original director of the *Workshop* was Irving Reis, a swarthy, jittery onetime control-room engineer who thought the production, not the play, was the thing and who sweated with oscillators, electrical filters, echo chambers to produce some of the most exciting sound effects ever put on the air -- Gulliver's voice, the witches in *Macbeth*, footsteps of gods, the sound of fog, a nuts-driving dissonance of bells, the feeling of going under ether. When director Reis left the *Workshop* -- which had graduated an even more celebrated member, Orson Welles -- it was run for a time by handsome, long-armed William N. Robson, CBS staff director, who used such sound effects as knifing a watermelon to sound like a stabbing. Later the *Workshop* became a laboratory for all of Columbia's crack directors. Reis, now a director for Paramount in Hollywood, will direct three of the plays in the Festival: Robson one. Most famed of the *Workshop's* plays, Archibald MacLeish's *The Fall of the City*, goes on the air September 28. Other good bets: an adaptation of Stephen Vincent Benet's *John Brown's Body*, and a bombing story, *They Fly Through the Air with the Greatest of Ease*, by Norman Corwin.

Time, July 17, 1939

The commonest criticism leveled at commercial radio is that it is interested in well-paying quantity first and well-worth-hearing quality second. The outstanding



prewar exception to the critical rule was The Columbia Workshop. Deeming it "just a little too frolicsome" for wartime consumption, the network dropped the program in 1941. Last week the Workshop came back on the air (CBS, Saturday 2:30 PM) to take up where it had left off.

Started in 1936, The Columbia Workshop was a wild departure from standard radio. It wasn't -- and still isn't -- up for sponsorship. Its main objective was to provide a sounding board for new dramatic techniques. Its motive was to rescue radio from the doldrums of straight music, straight dramatics, or straight variety. Excellence in entertainment automatically followed.

The Workshop did not search merely for new talent. And it did not offer its valuable time to any but the most talented of beginning script writers. Consequently, the Workshop's alumni list boasts some of the best writers ever to lend their imaginations to radio. Although the standard rate was but \$100 a script, William Saroyan, Dorothy Parker, Archbald McLeish, and Charles Jackson were among those represented. The criterion was that each script supply fertile material for directorial technique.

While Irving Reis and William N. Robson, now outstanding in radio's Who's Who, between them directed most of the Workshop's masterpieces, others with bright ideas were given their chance. The Workshop's top disciple is Norman Corwin, whose work, though successful, has yet to be standardized. To give the new series a proper send-off, Corwin directed the opening show, "Homecoming," the first script for American radio by a young Canadian, Norman Williams.

Newsweek, February 11, 1946

## SOAP OPERA

From nine every morning until six every evening, Monday through Friday, unrelieved tragedy nearly blankets the networks. During these hours and these days babies are torn from their mothers' arms; mortgages are foreclosed; lovely ladies are put upon; dewy-eyed maidens and stalwart get embroiled in trouble, and kindly old codgers, twinkling over their spectacles, are victimized by scheming loan sharks and other assorted rascals.

These sob-in-the-throat radio dramas are known to the trade as "soap operas" or "strip shows." The origin of the term "soap opera" is fairly obvious; it owes its inspiration to the popularity of this kind of entertainment among the leading manufacturers of soap. The source of "strip show" is more obscure. It may be a corruption of "script" show, or it may be derived from the comic strip to which it bears a strong resemblance. Wherever the term came from, it should not be confused with the strip show of burlesque. One can think offhand of no two forms of entertainment more distant poles apart.

Soap opera can be heard during almost any fifteen-minute period on any weekday. In form it is narrative-dramatics; its purpose, to win the interest of women listeners. How successfully this desired end has been accomplished is shown most clearly in the balance sheets of the major networks. Seven years ago the combined income of NBC and CBS from daytime radio sales was \$8,400,000. Today it is \$27,700,000. -- fully one-third of all the income received from the networks from the sale of time.

How dear to the heart of listeners the soap opera has become is revealed by the fifty million letters received by ONE broadcasting company alone in answer to premium offers made on clients' daytime serials over a six year period. Most of these letters required "proof of purchase," which is radio's euphemism for sending in a box top; a large percentage also required cash, generally a dime, occasionally a quarter, sometimes more.

In return the followers of "Willie and Winnie" or "Interned Nurse" or "Valient Widows"

received some household gadget or a compact or costume jewelry or -- in one deliriously tempting offer -- a package of tested, guaranteed, jumbo zinnia seeds.

A reasonably attractive premium offer made on any one of the twenty-four daytime leaders will draw from 250,000 to 600,000 letters, complete with box top and cash. When conditions are made easy the number of letters soars into the millions.

Oddly enough, although the popularity of soap operas has steadily increased, the number of daytime radio sponsors has been diminishing. In 1936, 31 sponsors bought 132 quarter hours per week; in 1938, only 23 sponsors bought 249 fifteen-minute periods. The explanation given is that the generous discounts which are offered to sponsors for gross billings make the yearly purchase of blocks of daylight time particularly attractive to the large advertiser who has a number of different products to sell. For instance, the cost to the advertiser for average soap opera on 33 stations of the Red Network would be approximately \$2,250 for each fifteen minute period. Should the advertiser's gross billings exceed a certain amount, however, there would be a rebate of 12-1/2 percent -- and a further rebate of 12-1/2 percent if the same time were used throughout the year. These costs include both station rentals and telephone-wire charges. The cost of actors, music, writing, and direction is additional.

Six manufacturers are now paying for more than two-thirds of all the soap operas. Soap and cleansing agents bear the brunt of the cost, with 108 fifteen-minute periods, breakfast foods come next, with 40; drugs support 23. The leading angel of soap operas is Proctor & Gamble, which in 1939 bought \$8,765,135 worth of radio time from the leading chains, NBC, CBS, and MBS. Incidentally, on the basis of the Crossley report, this company provides, among others, five of the most popular shows: "Guiding Light," "Ma Perkins," "Pepper Young's Family," "Mary Marlin," and "The O'Neills."

Accepting any of the estimates, one concludes that the day-time radio serial is the most popular form of entertainment ever devised.

HARPER'S MAGAZINE, circa 1940

### **Dream Bubbles in Soap**

From Monday through Friday between 200 and 300 dramatic serials are aimed by the nation's radio stations at 22,000,000 women. These fifteen-minute sketches, called "soap operas" by the trade because many are sponsored by cleanser manufacturers, account for \$30,000,000 of the big chains' annual income. Each program has an average audience of from 2,000,000 to 5,000,000.

Such staggering listener appeal has caused broadcasters to wonder what were the precise psychological factors behind the lure of these daytime dramas, and two years ago Columbia University's Office of Radio Research, subsidized by the Rockefeller Foundation, decided to find out. Last week, the first results of a survey by Dr. Herta Herzog, staff psychologist of the group, were revealed.

Sampling the reaction of New York women, Dr. Herzog found that of 65 programs mentioned the most popular were Road of Life, Woman in White, Life Can Be Beautiful, and The Goldbergs. The appetite for the daily serials is enormous. Each tuner-inner heard an average of 6.6 skits a day. It also appeared that the more complex a listener's problems became, the more programs she listened to -- the extremes ranging from one woman who needed only two a day to a Negro maid with a 22-a-day diet. The basic listener appeal of the programs, Dr. Herzog reported, was the same. The daily "getting into trouble and out again" appeal to the dialer's insecurity and provided them remedies. And the fact that these remedies are twofold is pleasing to sponsors -- their advertised products are used by two-thirds of the women questioned.

Newsweek, June 2, 1941

## Question of Soap

Have listeners become surfeited with the continuous problems of Helen Trent and Our Gal Sunday? Are there too many serials on the air? Does the public want other types of daytime radio entertainment?

The Blue Network wanted answers to these questions, last week made known the results of consulting a cross section of 5,000 U.S. housewives:

> The major networks devote 79% of their daytime commercial hours to soap operas. But listeners pay attention to them only 50% of the time.

> Plenty (47%) of housewives do not listen to serials at all. A lot (28%) of those who do -- plus 36% of all housewives -- think that the air is sudsed up with too many soap operas. Most (60%) of those who listen four or more hours a day agree.

> About half of the serial fans think most soaps are interesting, 24% think a few of them are, 2% swear none is.

> Daytime listeners who leave their sets tuned to one station (19%) are outnumbered by those who listen only to specific programs (51%). Some 13% tune in nothing but news broadcasts.

> Types of daytime programs listened to by housewives: 1) news (81%); 2) serials (53%); 3) popular music (49%); 4) serious music (32%).

The Blue Network seemed to have proved its point: that a good deal of soap opera time is wasted. The Blue, when it was NBC's second string network produced one of radio's first network soap operas (Little Orphan Annie) in 1931. After it was separated from NBC, the Blue got rid of its four sponsored soaps and looked around for something to replace them. Since then it has concentrated on music, variety, comic and children's daytime programs -- trying to build different kinds of shows to pull the soapy diehards away from its competitors. If the Blue's survey was correct, the network undoubtedly had a case for its soapless policy. If not, it had at least made history by publishing a survey which did not try to prove that it was the best network in existence.

Time, June 7, 1943

## Exit The Soap Opera

"And so," gushed the announcer as the music surged up and out, "after more than seven thousand broadcasts, 27 years, we say good-by to Ma Perkins."

It was, indeed, good-by to kindly Ma, philosophical widder-woman of Rushville Center, last week. Also by-by to five other CBS radio soaps -- from toddlers like the two-year-old "Whispering Streets" to such antiques as the twenty-year-old "Young Doctor Malone" -- all of which were entombed by the network to make way for a streamlined schedule of news and information shows.

For Ma, Young Dr. Jerry Malone, and the second Mrs. Burton (the first Mrs. Burton is the second Mrs. Burton's mother-in-law, and a terror), it meant a quick sweep-up of loose ends: Ma's grandson, Junior, decided to marry Ma's protegee, Anushka; Jerry agreed to return as head of the clinic; and the first Mrs. Burton broke off all relations with her friend Fenno. On other soaps, notably "The Right To Happiness" (the life story of Carolyn Nelson, "the typical American woman"), things were a bit more messy and had to be resolved in a rush. One character was paroled from prison, two estranged parents were reconciled, another participant watched his court case draw to a satisfactory close, and Carolyn's son, Skip, found love.

"Happiness depends upon our relationship with those we love," chortled Carolyn ecstatically, as her exit music billowed up and out.

"Sometimes I think loving and needing go hand in hand," said Hope Winslow, as her music swelled up and out on "Whispering Streets." "We hoped devoutly, that Mrs. Cranford will never know the stock was really worthless..."

Ma Perkins was a bit windier for her curtain speech. Looking at her loved ones gathered for a holiday feast ("Table laden with the fruit of this good green earth"), dear old Ma reminisced, then looked forward. "Oh, some day Fay will be sitting here where I'm sitting or Evey or Paulette or Janie or Anushka's child," she beamed. "I give thanks that I have been given this gift of life, this gift of time, to play my little part."

Amen, Ma. Music up and out.

Newsweek, December 5, 1960

## RHAC TAPE LIBRARY

<u>TAPE 986 THE LIFE OF RILEY (C)</u>		1200'
1L	11-10-50	Guess The Beans In The Bowl Contest
	11-17-50	The Riley's First Date
2L	11-24-50	Riley Locks Up Babs After Student Riot
	12-1-50	Riley's Troubles With New Foreman
1R	12-8-50	Lawn Mowing Company
	12-15-50	Riley The Coward
2R	12-22-50	The Riley's First Baby - Flashback
	1-5-51	Peg's Father Comes To Visit
<u>TAPE 987 THE LIFE OF RILEY (C)</u>		1200'
1L	1-12-51	Anniversary Tiff
	1-19-51	Scoutmaster Riley - Housekeeping System
2L	1-26-51	Tillie Boomer - Flashback
	2-2-51	Babs Blackballed At Sorority
1R	2-9-51	Dance Lessons With Louella
	2-16-51	Riley's Case Of Nerves - 2nd Honeymoon To Palm Springs
2R	2-23-51	Riley Has Tonsillitis
	3-2-51	Louella Stays With The Rileys
<u>TAPE 988 THE LIFE OF RILEY (C)</u>		1200'
1L	3-16-51	Time Clock
	3-23-51	Basketball Game - Bribe?
2L	3-30-51	Rent Collector
	4-6-51	Old Man Riley
1R	4-13-51	Civil Service Exam
	4-20-51	Riley And Louella
2R	4-27-51	Babs Wants Privacy - Moves Out
	6-24-49	Wally Brown Audition - Dialogue Only
<u>TAPE 989 FREEDOM USA/WARTIME SOAPS (C)</u>		1200'
1L		FREEDOM: Pgm #27: Cloud Seeding
		FREEDOM: Pgm #28: New Nazi Movement
2L		FREEDOM: Pgm #43: Indian Land For New Dam
		FREEDOM: Pgm #44: Flood Control Project
1R	-42	VICTORY COLUNTEERS: Young Widder Brown
	-42	VICTORY FRONT: Big Sister
		Romance Of Helen Trent
		Young Widder Brown
2R	-42	VICTORY FRONT: The Goldbergs
		Second Husband
		Give Us This Day
		We Love And Learn

## RHAC TAPE LIBRARY

<u>TAPE 990 THE CLOCK (C)</u>		1200'
1L	# 4: The Actor	
	# 5: The Story Of Mr. Littlefield	
2L	# 6: The One-Eyed Cat	
	# 7: Jungle Drums	
1R	# 8: Aunt Emmy	
	#11: The Dentist's Chair	
2R	#12: Ghost Story	
	#13: The Other Woman	
<u>TAPE 991 THE CLOCK (C)</u>		1200'
1L	#14: Bank Vault	
	#15: Hitchhiker	
2L	#16: Jail Break	
	#17: Time In Reverse	
1R	#19: Amazon Island	
	#20: Pretty Cousin Amy	
2R	#21: The Past Or The Present	
	#22: Death Valley	
<u>TAPE 992 THE CLOCK (C)</u>		1200'
1L	#23: Starcrossed Lovers	
	#24: Hollywood Heartbreak	
2L	#25: The Perfect Crime	
	#26: Guilty As Always	
1R	#27: Only Death Is Timeless	
	#28: Retribution	
2R	#47: Hazel	
	#48: Beauty And The Beast	
<u>TAPE 993 COLUMBIA WORKSHOP (C)</u>		1200'
1L	4-11-37 The Fall Of The City	
	4-19-42 Play Ball	
2L	8-11-46 Wilbur The Psycho-Neurotic Automobile	
	9-21-46 The Midnight Town Is Full Of Boys	
1R	11-23-39 A Circular Tour	
	11-30-39 The Wonderful Day	
2R	12-7-39 As You Like It	
	12-14-39 A Story In Dogtown Common	





# RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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Signature

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RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO, INC.  
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**MERWIN SMITH**  
WILL BE OUR  
GUEST SPEAKER THURSDAY,  
MAY 21ST, 7:30 PM AT THE  
CHURCH OF THE MASTER  
17TH AVE AND FILBERT COURT