

RETURN WITH US NOW...

The Radio Historical
Association of Colorado, Inc.



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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.

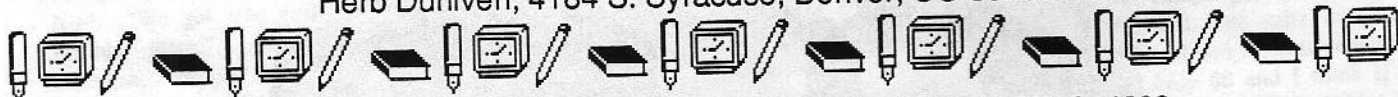


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NO BOARD MEETING IN JANUARY! NEXT BOARD MEETING FEBRUARY 4, 1993.
ALL MEMBERS ARE WELCOME AND INVITED TO ATTEND AND PARTICIPATE AT THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING. The February 4th meeting is at the home of HERB DUNIVEN at 7:30 P.M.



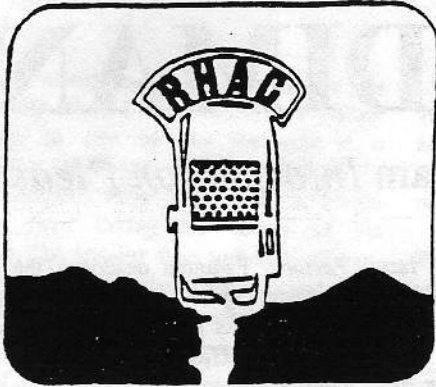
CLUB MEETINGS:

FAR OUT and FUNKY! If that's the way you like it, then do come. Expect the unexpected if you dare to. The meeting may reach a **CRITICAL MASS!** And the **CRITICAL MASS** will surely come to the meeting! But, it is NOT for the fainthearted. If sharp, biting humor rubs you the wrong way, then you may not feel comfortable here. Positively no one is safe from **CRITICAL MASS!** So, you must be mindful of your safety. If your stomach is weak and cannot tolerate convulsive laughter, perhaps you'd be safer elsewhere. If you regularly listen to "Dave Otto's Morning Show" on Denver's KRRY-FM you may have been exposed to some snippets of **CRITICAL MASS** leading edge humor. Otherwise, come to the regular January 1993 R.H.A.C. Meeting on January 21, 1993 and Keith Hughes and Jesse Smith will regale you with their personal brand of humor which they market through their Critical Mass Media Productions, Inc.

COME TO THE MEETING AND EXPERIENCE CRITICAL MASS!

FROM THE KING'S ROOST

By Dick and Maletta King



Radio Historical Association of Colorado

John Adams asked us to remind you that RHAC has available a private collection of sports broadcasts. A few dated 1947, 1957, 1958, 1959; many in 60s, others from 70s & 80s; none of the listings gives sportscasters names. ALL sports broadcasts are only available on 7" reels. An order form for these reels may be found at the rear of this newsletter.

During January RHAC will move the 500 series of cassettes into Library #1 (Dan Decker). This change will allow more "growing room" for new entries of the 1000 series into Library #2 (Dave Logan). A new order form for Library #1 (Dan Decker) will appear in the February newsletter.

Many of our members reported that they enjoyed "The 1940's Radio Hour" presented at the Arvada Center Theater Group during December. We do hope that more groups will be interested in similar shows. "1940's Radio Hour" was sold-out for its entire run.

We attended the SPERDVAC convention in Los Angeles in late November. The hotel was deluxe; meals were on time and very satisfactory. The quality of the re-creations and panels was tops and kept the audience spellbound. Another top job by SPERDVAC! We would like to credit the participants for their excellent work. All of Denver RHAC members who attended enjoyed the shows and plan to attend again.

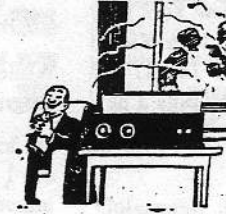
Interest in Old Time Radio seems to be continually spreading throughout the country. We can only hope that more young people continue to show an interest in Old Time Radio. We feel that much of the quality of today's TV is largely responsible for the renewed interest in Old Time Radio.

RHAC member John Stevenson has devised a method to improve the sound quality of your tapes. John invites you to phone him at (303) 573-7558 to discuss your tape needs with him. John has more time to work on tapes than most of us have and he's hoping to be able to offer his service to RHAC members for a nominal fee.

While I am writing, we are listening to "Our Miss Brooks" and we find it difficult to concentrate on this writing: So, I'd better close wishing you all a good and pleasant 1993!

1927 CARTOONISTS look at Radio

from the pages of RADIO NEWS



CLIFTON FADIMAN

Moderator of Radio's Classic Quiz Program *Information Please*

Interview by Ronnie Cramer

RHAC Member Since 1982

Despite the fact that he spent the better part of the 1940s and 50s working in radio and television (including ten years as the host of the seminal quiz program *Information Please*), Clifton Fadiman's "real" occupation has always been in the field of literature. Author of countless books and essays, editor-in-chief at Simon and Schuster, book critic for *The New Yorker*, contributing editor of *Saturday Review* and member of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* board of editors for the last fifty years, Fadiman characterizes his broadcasting career as "a happy accident."

His first appearances before the microphone were on a pre-*Information Please* series of book reviews in the 1930s. "I don't know what the [series] was called," he says, "it wasn't very successful. I had a large audience consisting entirely of my family."

Fadiman's involvement with *Information Please* began when he was approached by a young producer named Dan Golenpaul. "[He] had this idea for a show in which the panel would consist of experts, highly knowledgeable people, and by accident he happened to be present in the audience once (at the New School for Social Research) when I was debating with some other literary chap. It was a pretty dull debate on the modern novel or something of that sort."

Golenpaul saw in Fadiman qualities that he thought would be right for his new program,

"We had no idea of how to conduct a program, so we just settled for being ourselves"

and asked him to sign on as moderator. "So he got together a small group of experts. They finally changed in personnel until we arrived at our classic trio of (*New York Post* columnist) Franklin P. Adams, John Kieran (sports writer for the *New York Times*) and (composer/pianist) Oscar Levant, plus a new

guest every week. Oscar as a matter of fact was only on twice a month, so every two weeks we had two new guests."

(NOTE: While Buxton and Owens' *The Big Broadcast* lists him as a panelist before becoming the host, Fadiman explains that he was the moderator during the shows' entire run. With regard to being a panelist; he insists, "I don't think I would have been much good!")

Fadiman illustrates the show's appeal: "Instead of the audience answering questions as they do in our quiz shows today, we had a panel of four experts answering questions sent in by our audience. That was a novelty at the time. While it was called

Information Please and was informative, I think our main interest was in trying to create a conversation among five people, using the questions and answers as a kind of armature or skeleton or platform. What I think attracted people to the show was the unusual phenomenon of light but civilized conversation, rather than only the informational quality of the program. We

were all new to show business - we had no idea of how to conduct a program - so we just settled for being ourselves, such as we were."

While he enjoys contemporary quiz programs like *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of*

Fortune, Fadiman describes the difference between those shows and *Information Please*: "[Our program] was different in that it was not efficient. Modern quiz shows are very efficient - they're mechanically perfect. There are so many questions that have to be asked in so many seconds, and the MC's responses are almost machine-like in their inevitability. Ours was - as we always used

to say very proudly - 'spontaneous and unrehearsed'.

Not that the present ones are not honest, they are, but they are machined, they are efficient as all television shows have to be these days. Ours, existing in the early stages of radio, had a kind of off-hand, casual quality that I think tends to be lost nowadays, although we've



gained in other ways."

Like contemporary television shows, the New York-based *Information Please* had a crowd "warmup" before going on the air. "We had a live audience, and a few minutes before it began I used to address the audience and give them a few simple rules about how they should act. I remember once saying to them 'when I ask the questions, I don't want you to mutter or utter the answer in any way so that our four experts will overhear you'. And then I turned to our four experts and I said very severely to them 'and as for you gentlemen; no eavesdropping please!' At which point Franklin P. Adams said, 'No eavesdropping? How about Adams-dropping?' That was pretty smart, and it was wasted [because it came] during the rehearsal period rather than the program itself. But that sort of thing went on all the time - it was a game."

Fadiman describes John Kieran as "a remarkably learned man" and tells the story of how, as one of the speakers at a graduation ceremony, Kieran followed "a rather pompous chap" who used the phrase *tempest fugit* during the course of his remarks. The speaker then turned to Kieran, who was sitting on the platform, and said, "Mr. Kieran, for your benefit; that's Latin

world about the royal families of Europe. When we asked him how he happened to know so much about them," he said, "Well, they're the ones who support us poor pianists, we have to know about them."

The show's staff (mainly Golenpaul and his wife) made an effort to learn something about the hobbies or interests of each guest,

to Welles' lack of diffidence? "Genius is not always modest, why should it be? There's nothing to be modest about."

During the 1940s, RKO-Pathe shot over four dozen *Information Please* film shorts at a New York sound stage similar in appearance to the set used for the broadcasts. "In those cases we did try to get show biz personalities," says Fadiman, "because those were the people that our audience knew from the movies and we were showing them on screen - so we wanted to get their faces on. We had a lot of pretty girls of course; Joan Fontaine, Olivia DeHaviland, almost all the attractive actors and actresses that we could corral."

"(Orson Welles) was one of the few real geniuses we had on the show. Genius is not always modest, why should it be?"

meaning 'time flies.'" After concluding his remarks, John Keiran was called upon to speak, and delivered his address *entirely in Latin*, which, Fadiman notes, "was a nice comedown."

The third member of the regular panel was the legendary, caustic wit Oscar Levant (his 1944 autobiography was called *A Smattering of Ignorance*). Says Fadiman of the renowned musician: "He was on twice a month instead of four times a month. I wish he'd been on every week, but Mr. Golenpaul wanted to get more celebrities on. Oscar and Dan were both interesting and rather prickly personalities, and it might well have been that there was some little misunderstanding between them."

With an audience of over ten million listeners each week, *Information Please* had no difficulty in getting the top celebrities of the day, even though they were not paid to appear. "They enjoyed it, [and] it gave them excellent publicity. We had Wendell Wilkie on during the time that he was running for the presidency (against FDR), and he was brilliant - I think he made many friends." Other guest panelists included Eleanor Roosevelt, Gracie Allen, Christopher Morley, Rex Stout, Alfred Hitchcock, Groucho Marx, Fred Allen and Boris Karloff.

"Boris was on very often. He was a good character to play with because he was a charming, soft-spoken, lovely, delightful man - absolutely in contrast with the characters he played on the screen - and the audience enjoyed seeing this other quality of him come out in these questions and answers. He was a thorough English gentleman."

"One of our [other] favorite guests was the great pianist Arthur Rubenstein, who turned out to know more than anybody else in the

and to then find some suitable questions from the hundreds that were sent in each week by listeners. Fadiman points out that although "they never knew what the questions were going to be - we felt it was only fair to give them a chance to shine in their own domain. They were often edited, and we made no secret of that fact, though the basic question was used. But it was sometimes rephrased in such a way as to make it more suitable or more pointed or whatever, but they were genuine questions sent in by the audience. The ones that won got an *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Nowadays they get a hundred thousand dollars for answering questions. But the audience got the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* if the question was muffed."

Occasionally celebrities had trouble with the questions, and it was Fadiman's job to then put them in the best possible comic light. "When they flopped on a question," he explains, "I wasn't trying to dig into them to

As one of the stars of a top-rated show, Fadiman was naturally called upon to make guest appearances on other popular radio programs. "I was on [*Duffy's Tavern*] a couple of times - I was terrible but it was fun all the same. That was a great show."

"During the war I was [also] one of a group called the Writers' War Board, which was simply a propaganda arm [of the U.S. Government]. We tried to mobilize the writing talents of all the writers we knew to help in anything that the government wanted us to help with - from recruiting up and down. I think [the radio show] *Keep Em Rolling* was one of the things we invented to help in the war effort. Anything that had to do with words we did our best to use to help the war effort and stiffen morale."

"During one summer [*Information Please*] went abroad to try and entertain the troops in

"We weren't right for television, our medium was talk and not pictures."

show how ignorant they were, but to show they were human like the rest of us. Some of them were a little nervous, but within two or three minutes it was my job to set them at their ease. They felt at ease on the show because they were playing a game, and frequently even though they didn't know the answer to a question, they would somehow score off the guy who did know the question."

One guest panelist who had no trouble answering every question that came his way was actor/director Orson Welles, who Fadiman remembers as having "an aggressive quality to him. He was one of the few real geniuses we had on the show - I use the word genius very carefully." His reaction

Germany - just at the very end of the war - and then came back for another year or two. Then we began to tail off, as all shows tail off. We had about a ten year run (1938-48) and I think we felt that was about it."

Like many radio programs, *Information Please* had a video incarnation when television gained a permanent foothold in the early 1950s. Fadiman recalls the TV version as mostly a local (New York and environs) effort. "I think we were on only about nine months. We weren't very good - in fact I think we were pretty bad. We weren't right for television, our medium was talk and not pictures."

"Golenpaul, doing his best to learn about

television, worked up questions involving pretty girls with signs on them and other visual devices which somehow interfered with the natural flow of talk - and I think the audience enjoyed making up a picture of us in their minds rather than seeing us displayed as we were. None of us was very pretty, and I think we sounded more attractive than we looked."

Although the television version of *Information Please* turned out to be a disappointment, Fadiman continued working in TV with a great deal of success, hosting a variety of programs that included - *Quiz Kids*, *What's In a Word* and *The Name's the Same*.

On *This Is Show Business*, he served as Master of Ceremonies while panelists like Abe Burrows, Sam Levinson and Walter Slezak chatted with a guest star who would then perform. It was on this program that panelist George S. Kaufman became embroiled in a controversy of sorts when he suggested during a Christmas broadcast that he had heard quite enough of the song *Silent Night*. "We got into a little trouble there," observes Fadiman, "people are very sensitive about that sort of thing."

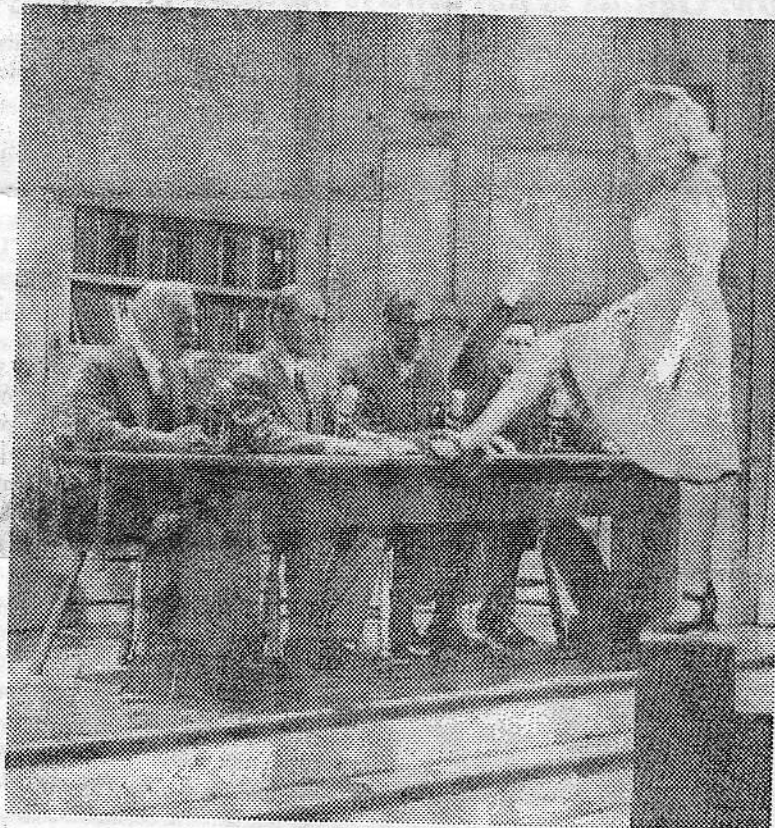
Even though he was already hosting several shows and "far too busy," Fadiman managed to make guest appearances on television programs like *What's My Line* and *The Jerry Lewis Show*, explaining that "once you attain a little notability on the medium, you're just railroaded through all these shows almost mechanically. You appear as a guest on the eight or nine important shows. Sometimes you do well, sometimes you don't."

"I did too many. There's a story about the great Finnish composer Sibelius meeting the composer Dvorak. They talked about their mutual interest - composing - then Dvorak suddenly looked up very sadly at Sibelius and said 'I've composed too much haven't I?' (Because Sibelius was not prolific and Dvorak was and did a certain amount of mediocre work.) Well, in the same way, I

"I think I did too many radio and television shows."

think I did too many radio and television shows."

Some of Fadiman's final TV appearances came on NBC's *Tonight Show Starring*



(L-R): John Kieran, Franklin P. Adams, guest panelist Boris Karloff and Oscar Levant 'examine' a young starlet in one of the many ten-minute film shorts based on *Information Please*. Moderator Clifton Fadiman (offscreen here) describes Karloff as being "absolutely in contrast with the characters he played on the screen - a thorough English gentleman."

Johnny Carson. "I appeared as a wine expert. I'm a wine buff - co-author of a couple of books about wine so we put on a wine exhibition in which I tasted wines blindly - got them all wrong of course." A long-time Carson fan, Fadiman also manages kind words about his successor, comedian Jay Leno, though he assesses their approaches in this way: "It's an entirely different show, an entirely different attitude. Jay Leno is pure show biz, Johnny Carson was pure human being."

After his final guest shot on *The Tonight*

Show, Fadiman started tapering off his TV appearances, reasoning, "You either decide to stay in show biz and make that your life work or you begin to be ignored as you should be - new faces come up. My main interest is not show business but writing."

"When I was a very young man I made a resolution never to stay in any job more than ten years and with the exception of the Book of the Month Club (where he's on the editorial committee) and the *Britannica* that's [been] true. I was on *Information Please* for ten years, I was a lecturer for about ten years, I was the book editor of the *New Yorker* and I resigned in my tenth year. I felt that if you couldn't lick the job in ten years you ought to get out. I should add that I frequently left jobs not on my own volition long before the ten years were up."

A Florida resident for the last three years, the NYC-born Fadiman recently vacationed in Paris with his wife ("standard tourist stuff.") He still works ten or twelve hours a day, seven days a week, asking rhetorically: "What would I do if I didn't? I have no hobbies except not taking exercise. I find that suits my character and temperament very well. I'm only 88 and I think if I took exercise I'd probably die the next day."

Assignments "seem to come along pretty constantly." Current projects include a revised, enhanced edition of his 1960 literature guide *The Lifetime Reading Plan* and continuing work as a member of many literary boards.

"I'm working on a few [other books] now. I don't know that I'll live long enough to finish them, but I'm going to do my best."

His thoughts regarding collector's tapes of the classic *Information Please* radio programs? "I have a few too . . . once in a while I play them and chuckle occasionally. If I were you I'd take good care of them - I think your grandchildren will find they can sell them for large sums of money." ■