



Perspectives of a Current-Day Radio Actor - An Interview with Larry Albert

Interview Conducted Wednesday, June 27, 2001 in Seattle, WA

By Larry Albert and Stewart Wright © 2002

In the February 2002 issue of *Return With Us Now...* was an article, "Sherlock Holmes In Seattle," which dealt with the current radio series *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Prior to the Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound *Showcase IX*, I had the opportunity to talk to actor Larry Albert, who plays Dr. Watson in the series, about his radio acting activities. What follows is a portion of that discussion.

Larry, could you tell us a little about your acting background?

I have been a working actor for 27 years, much of it on the stage. When I say working, as with most actors who aren't big stars, you have to do other things. I was driving airport limos from midnight till 10:00 A.M. and then doing auditions for plays.

How did you get into radio acting?

I did my first dramatic radio show in 1980. We did two series - *The Adventures of Rodney Killcup* and *The Further Adventures of Rodney Killcup*. He was a Seattle private investigator who worked out of Pioneer Square, but he was a modern detective. We did seven episodes for the first series and five episodes for the second series. The series were 15-minute serials. The first time I played a best friend and in the second series I played the bad guy

and got shot to death. It was the first time I died on the air.

Then I did some work for KRAB, which was a public-access station. The next thing I did was for NPR in 1991.

How long have you been performing on *Imagination Theater* and its predecessor, *KIRO Mystery Playhouse*?

I did my first recording session with Jim French in December 1994. This was for the episode "Night Crew" which first aired on the *KIRO Mystery Playhouse*. I sent Jim an audition tape six months earlier. I got a call from Jim at three o'clock in the afternoon. This was back in my limo driving days and normally I would sleep through the phone. Luckily, I didn't this time.

Jim asked, "Larry, can you play an 18-year-old supermarket stock boy?" The guy who was supposed to do the role had dropped out and Jim happened to have my tape on his desk. It was just one of those serendipitous things. Earlier this month, June 2001, I recorded my 107th show for him.

On *Imagination Theater* you often have multiple roles. How do you manage to keep the different characters straight?

Experience, I have 27 years on the stage. I rarely use my own voice. I've always been playing characters; I've never crossed over when I'm doing multiple characters. In one *Sherlock Holmes* production, "The Bishop's Ring," Jim had me talking to myself. I have probably done 150 characters for Jim. Obviously, not all of them with a different voice.

(Continued on page 3)

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LIBRARIES

Reference Material:	Bill McCracken	7101 W. Yale Ave #502	Denver, CO 80227	(303) 986-9863
Logs & Scripts:	Fred Hinz	c/o RHAC PO Box 1908	Englewood, CO 80150	
Open Reel Tape:	Maletha King	900 W. Quincy Ave.	Englewood, CO 80110	
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#1 (1-499)	Ron Gallagher	888 S. Dexter #607	Denver, CO 80246	(303) 692-0531
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2002 Conventions

16th Annual OTR & Nostalgia Convention Apr 19-20, 2002 Radisson Hotel, Cincinnati
 For information: Bob Burchett, 10280 Gunpowder Rd, Florence, KY 41042, (606) 282-0333

30th Anniversary Party Golden Radio Buffs of Maryland May 4th, Parkville Legion Hall, Baltimore MD
 For information: Gene Leitner, 301 Jeanwood Ct. Baltimore MD 21222, or email club at grbmd@aol.com, or visit club website at <http://members.aol.com.grbmd>

National Audio Theater Festival, May 26 - June 1, Southwest Missouri State University, West Plains MO
 For information: Sue Zizza, 115 Kideman St. Hempstead, NY 11550 (516) 483-8321, or email at suemedial@aol.com

10 Annual REPS Radio Showcase June 28-30 in Seattle WA. Re-creations, Guests, OTR exhibits.
 For information: Mike Sprague 9936 NE 197st St., Bothell WA or email at mrrmikes@aol.com, or REPS at www.responline.org

The 26th Friends of Old-Time Radio Convention Oct 24-27, 2002 Holiday Inn-North, Newark NJ
 For information: Jay Hickerson, Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514 (203) 248-2887, or email at jayhick@aol.com

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RETURN WITH US NOW...

When I get the script, I read it once silently. I have to know who the character is ahead of time and prepare for how I want him sound. Then I go in the bathroom and read it out loud because the acoustics in there let me hear the voice that I want use.

I will not highlight the script until we are ready to record it. If there is a large gap of time between receipt of the script and the recording session, I read it again. Then I highlight just the name of my character. If I am doing two or three characters, I use different colors for each character.

Doing stage work, you get used to the immediacy of acting. A lot of the old-time radio actors started out as stage actors, so doing "live work" was no big deal. When you perform in front of an audience, the goal is to get through the performance seamlessly the first time. It doesn't always happen. There are shows in which you can't tell we didn't say the right thing. Because we had stage actors, we covered it.

One device I've found by being a voice actor on radio and for commercials is "physicality." Most people think that radio actors just stand and read into the "mike." If you watch radio actors perform, you notice they put themselves into the character. When I'm playing a character, I add a physical aspect to him. You can't just do the character with your voice.

It is a blessing of having been a collector of radio shows since 1971. I listen to old-time radio every day in my car.

Because of this background I had an idea of what to do for "Night Crew," the first show I did for Jim. We did in one take. I knew that Jim said we could stop, but it didn't sink in. I treated it like a play. I thought you did them all like that.

Probably the most confusing show I did was the *Harry Nile* episode "The Value of Details." I played three roles: a mentally challenged young man, an old man, and a fire inspector with a high voice.

Actor Harry Bartell has been a sort of mentor for me. He's been guiding me in technique, every once in a while he will hear something that I did. He will call me and say, "You didn't wait long enough for the pause." Or "Don't be afraid of dead air." Translating stage technique to radio. Harry's been very helpful to me, I really appreciate it.

On the series *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* you play Dr. Watson. Are there any particular challenges to playing a continuing character?

Yes, I'm just not playing a continuing character, but a character who has been as badly abused and dismissed in the media over the centuries as Watson. It is a challenge to give him life. It is a challenge to say, "I am NOT going to play to your preconceived notions. Doyle wrote this character and Dr. Watson is NOT a buffoon." When I play Watson, I AM Watson!

Who is John H. Watson? First, of all he is a surgeon, so he is educated. A decorated combat veteran; he is courageous. In a dangerous situation, he's a man you watching your back. From his own words, he's obviously a lady's man. He is courteous; he tends to treat people on an equal level, especially women. Watson is man who is warm, considerate, and very much a traditionalist; he's a very conservative man and a patriot.

What kind of a man would Sherlock Holmes tolerate as a companion and an associate? He would never tolerate a fool! Why did they insist on playing Watson like an old idiot? He is a young man in the prime of his life. If you read the Holmes Canon, you know that Watson acquires Holmes' abilities of observation. In the "The Solitary Cyclist," it is Watson who explains how Holmes knew she was a cyclist.

I heard a complaint from one listener who did not like my Watson, because I sounded too young. I told him that Watson and Holmes did most of their cases in their late twenties into their forties.

How do you play Watson? You play him honestly.

I think when you are playing someone like Watson, you are taking a chance if you're not giving the audience Nigel Bruce because that's what most people know. Edward Hardwicke (Watson in the Granada videos) made my job easier. I am always trying to bring that sense Hardwicke and Michael Williams (in the BBC radio dramas) brought to Watson. That's why Watson's narration has become intimate to the listener. That was a conscious decision on my part and Jim liked it.

Watson is probably the hardest role I have ever done because I want so much to do it right! I sweat every time we go to do a new episode. I go over the script and over the word pronunciations. I don't sleep well the night before a recording session.

In addition to acting, you also work for Jim French Productions. Could you tell us about some of your other activities?

I wear two hats. I am the operations manager or associate producer for Jim French Productions. Also, I am a working actor. I have the luxury of having my vocation and my avocation come together; my hobby and what I do for a living. If I'm not acting in a show that is being recorded at the Kirkland Performance Center, I'm not involved in it. If I'm not in a show that we do at Jim's studio, I do the sound effects. I'm also writing more.

Interviewer's Note: Larry and Jim French have co-written 3 episodes of *The Adventures of Harry Nile* and the new production of a *Crisis* episode: *Clockwork*.

Can you tell us about some of the changes that have recently occurred in *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*?

John Gilbert played Holmes in series through episode 18, "The Adventure of the Missing Link." John is a very intense man, a very passionate man. He has been an actor for 40 years. He looks like Sherlock Holmes, and he's thin, with a receding hairline. He has played Holmes on the stage. We work off of one mike when we are in the studio. I just love working with him.

John Patrick Lowrie, who has taken over the role of Holmes, has just recorded his second Holmes episode. The first one will air in July 2001. We recorded the most recent episode in mid June 2001 at the Kirkland Performance Center, "The School for Scoundrels," which airs on July 15th. Technically it will be John Patrick's first show on the air, but it's actually the second one recorded. The week before, Jim produced "The Adventure of the Dover Maiden."

John Patrick's Holmes is a different approach all together. Much more Rathbonian is a sense with a sense of Ian Richardson: upper crust, educated. We brought in some new voices for that episode including a real find in a woman named Caitlin Finne who does a lovely, young English voice. Also an actor, William Haymer, who sounds very BBC.

We hope the show has a new sound to it. There is a younger, more energetic sound to it. John Patrick is a younger man. There is a new announcer. In addition to the new voices, you will hear some of the older ones. I am really excited about the cast.

Interviewer's Notes:

Larry and I talked quite a bit more. This, as Dr. Watson might say, "I may tell you about at another time." Larry will be acting in and directing a re-creation at the Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound *Showcase* in Seattle, June 28-30, 2002. For more information about the upcoming *Showcase*. Visit the REPS Web site at:

<<http://www.homestead.com/repsonline/index.html>>
or Contact;

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*From the Desk of
the Editor
by Carol Tiffany*



April showers bring us diverse reading in Return With Us Now. From Stewart Wright's interesting interview to Paul Barringer's "What OTR Means To Me" entry, this issue should have something for almost everybody. The OTR Bookshelf returns next month. Until then, happy reading and listening, everyone, and GOOD LUCK on the Crossword!

New in the Tape Library

by Maletha & Dick King

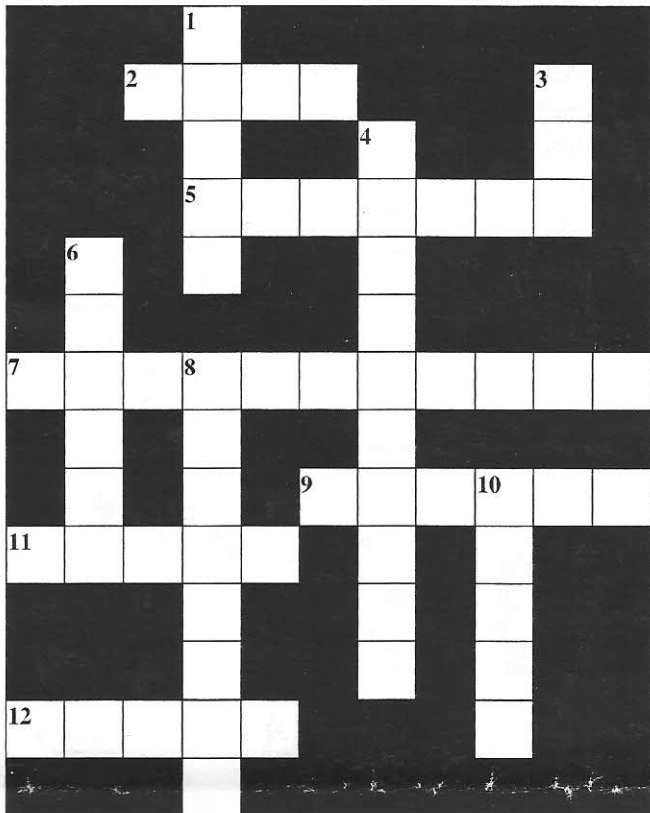


This month we will continue with the stories of Wild Bill Hickok, as portrayed with a steady and sobering touch by the very talented Guy Madison, along with his sidekick and deputy Andy Devine.

Don't forget that next month we will be rolling out the RHAC CD library. We'll also have a story about the all the hard work that has gone into making this library come into being. As they say, "don't touch that dial".

RICHARD DIAMOND PRIVATE DETECTIVE

Cross Word Puzzle, by Jim Johnston © 2002
Match wits with Diamond and solve this "puzzling" case



ACROSS

2. Diamond always visited the Fifth Precinct to get information and for sarcastic banter with a man he respected but nicknamed "Fatty" -- Lt. _____ Levinson, played by Ed Begley and Arthur Q. Bryant.
5. The Diamond program was created by Blake _____, the brain later behind movies like "The Pink Panther".
7. Actor Wilms Herbert played two roles, the dim-witted _____ at the Fifth Precinct, and _____, his wealthy girlfriend Helen's servant, who usually arrived with the champagne just in time to be embarrassed by amorous activities.
9. _____ was the first sponsor of Richard Diamond, beginning on April 5, 1950. The company also sponsored Phil Harris and Alice Faye.
11. Diamond refused to live off the money of his girlfriend Helen, who was played most by Virginia _____, and also by Francis Robinson.
12. At the end of each episode, Diamond would be found at Helen's penthouse, singing popular songs and playing the _____.

DOWN

1. Another Diamond sponsor asked listeners to "Take the _____ 30-day test and you'll see."
3. As originally described by creator Edwards, Diamond was former agent of the _____.

4. Girlfriend Helen's penthouse was located on _____, but in several confusing episode endings, Diamond's singing was interrupted by a next door neighbor yelling insults as though living in a tenement.
6. In one episode, Diamond told Helen that her _____ had loaned him money, but retained his private detective's badge as security.
7. If there was one activity Diamond loved, it was needling Lt. Levinson's _____, who would yell in an injured tone "Lieutenant, he's picking on me again!"
10. The Diamond show always opened with a classy clarinet solo, with a high note matching that of a ringing telephone with a call to him from Helen _____. Diamond often would answer in lyrics like "Diamond Detective Agency - a cheerful smile, a clever rhyme, we'll keep you from doing time!"

(Answers on page 6)

As with previous puzzles, the sources are Dunning's Tune In Yesterday and The Encyclopedia of Old Time Radio, plus Buxton/Owen's The Big Broadcast.

"Why Old Time Radio is Important to Me"

We continue with the Honorable Mention entry from the KFKA RADIO MEMORIES Essay Contest winners. These articles are reprinted here with the permission of Dick Williamson of Radio Memories.

Honorable Mention by Paul Barringer of Denver, CO

To convey why Old Time Radio is important to me in 300 words is difficult, but I guess a quick summation would be: It brings back memories of the late 1930's and the war years of the 1940's, and memories of our family enjoying nights of laughter, drama, and suspense as we took turns holding the radio knob on the station so the station wouldn't drift off the frequency.

It brings back memories of lessons and values learned as taught by The Lone Ranger such as honesty, fairness, caring, respect, loyalty, tolerance, and moral courage.

It brings back memories of the illusion and imagination it created in my mind and the excitement and chills I experienced as I heard the sinister laughter of The Shadow or the eerie chimes on Suspense, or how I laughed at Red Skelton and Bob Hope, and how excited I was when I received my first Captain Midnight decoder badge in the mail. It reminds me of the memories of fear and horror as we listened to the news broadcasts of the
(Continued on next page)

war in Europe and the Far East.

You might say I got some of my schooling from radio, as I was bedridden for about a year with rheumatic fever. I did a lot of reading and listening to radio, and when I heard a word I didn't know or understand, I looked it up in the dictionary.

Another reason Old Time Radio is important to me is because I grew up without a father. My father abandoned us while my brother and sister and I were very young. My role models were my heroes on radio; this is where I learned my values in life and have passed the values on to my children. This may sound odd but it is true.

Sound Effects Saved Life of Radio Actor

Reprinted with the permission of editor Jack French from the February 2002 issue of RADIO RECALL, Journal of the Metropolitan Washington Old Time Radio Club

One of the more fascinating stories from the Golden Age of Radio is recounted by Joe Julian, a radio actor and writer. He was on many drama shows and soap operas, but is probably most famous for being in the title roll of "Mr. District Attorney".

In his 1975 book, "This Was Radio", Julian tells how a radio sound effects man was directly responsible for saving the life of a radio actor, who did not even know that he was ill. Here's what happened.

Radio Readers' Digest was a prime-time evening show on NBC, airing from 1942 to 1948. Every week it presented a realistic dramatization of a true-life story that had previously appeared in the pages of Readers Digest magazine.

One week when Julian was in the cast of that program, the story line included a scene from a hospital operating room. In order to highlight the beating of the patient's heart, which was central to the action of the plot, the director and the sound effects man agreed that a real stethoscope would be pressed on the chest of the radio actor who was portraying the patient. The listening ends of the stethoscope were then placed next to the microphone.

During rehearsal, the engineer was able to integrate the sound of the heart's "thump-thump" into the dialogue and the director was very pleased

with the overall effect. That evening the show was done live and the same fine results ensued.

However, before the show "signed off", the telephone lines at the NBC studios in New York started ringing. Most of the calls, a total of twenty-one, were from different doctors throughout the country. All of them had heard the broadcast and all had detected the same cardiac malfunction. They urged that whoever had had the stethoscope on his chest should immediately be taken to the nearest hospital.

The actor, of course, took their advice. At the hospital, an electrocardiogram confirmed his heart condition, something that he had never suspected before. Appropriate medical action was taken and the radio actor lived on for many more productive years.... thanks to radio's sound effects.



Answers to the Richard Diamond crossword puzzle

