



RETURN WITH US NOW...

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO



Volume 27, Number 10

October, 2002

Fake 'War' on Radio Spreads Panic over U.S.

Edited by Carol Tiffany

Editor's note: The above title was taken from a headline that appeared in the New York Daily News on Monday, Oct. 31, 1938. Much of this article is taken from the Oct. 1988 issue of "Return With Us Now" which featured full-text reprints of the Daily News and New York Times accounts of the Mercury Radio Theater broadcast and it's aftermath. The idea for this article came from frequent RWUN contributor Jack Richards, who wrote in his Scariest Show Contest entry:

"Millions of others have already cast their ballot on the single most scary OTR program ever. I, for one, wish to have my vote included with theirs.

Imagine, while listening to a quite evening of dance music, an interruption occurs stating that an invasion is underway! The unspeakable acts of 9/11 were mild compared with the terror in America's heart in learning that the attacks were from ALIENS

from another world. At that time people were unaccustomed to any other species except Homo Sapiens. It would be many years in the future before we would accept other beings ala Star Trek, Men in Black, and others.

Of course, I am referring to that wonderful Halloween broadcast by the Mercury Theatre of *The War of the Worlds*." - Jack M. Richards

The ability to confuse audiences producing totally unforeseen reactions may have first become obvious as a result of one of the most infamous mistakes in history. It happened the day before Halloween, on Oct. 30, 1938, when millions of Americans tuned in



to a popular radio program that featured plays directed by, and sometimes starring, Orson Welles. The performance that evening was Mr. Welles' adaptation of H.G. Wells' science fiction novel *The War of the Worlds*, about a Martian invasion of the earth. In adapting the book for a radio play, Welles made an important change. His play was written and

(Continued on Page 3)

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

PO BOX 1908, Englewood CO 80150 (303) 761-4139 - Dedicated to the preservation of old-time radio programs,
and to making those programs available to our members

Old-Time Radio is Alive and Well in Colorado!

KEZW 1430 AM	"When Radio Was", with Stan Frieberg	Weekdays, 7:00 - 8:00 PM
KFKA 1310 AM	"Radio Memories" (Greeley)	Sunday, 6:00 - 12:00 PM
KRMA TV Channel 6	Secondary Audio Program (SAP), "Tribute to OTR"	Sunday, 2:00 PM
KUVO 89.3 FM	"Destination Freedom"	9:00 PM

RHAC WEB SITE <http://www.rhac.org>

RHAC OTR WEB PAGE <http://www.old-time.com/rhac.html>

RETURN WITH US NOW... is the official publication of the Radio Historical Association of Colorado, Inc., a nonprofit organization. Cost of membership is \$25.00 for the 1st year with \$15.00 for renewal. Each member in good standing has full use of the club resources. For further information contact anyone listed below. Any mention of a product in **RETURN WITH US NOW...** does not constitute an endorsement by RHAC.

President:	Larry Weide	5270 E. Nassau Cir. Englewood, CO 80110	(303) 758-8382	lweide@attglobal.net
Vice-President:	Dick King	900 W. Quincy Ave. Englewood, CO 80110	(303) 761-4139	dickking@worldnet.att.net
Secretary:	<i>Open Position</i>			
Treasurer:	Maletha King	900 W. Quincy Ave. Englewood, CO 80110	(303) 761-4139	dickking@worldnet.att.net
Newsletter:	Carol Tiffany	1394 Golf Vista Court N. E., Palm Bay, FL 32905	(321) 723-7803	ctiffany@worldnet.att.net
RHAC Players:	<i>Open Position</i>			
Talking Nwslter:	Mike Fields	243 S. 1100 E. Greentown, IN 46936		
Membership:	Dick King	PO BOX 1908 Englewood, CO 80150	(303) 761-4139	dickking@worldnet.att.net
Tape Donations:	Bill McCracken	7101 W. Yale Ave. #503 Denver, CO 80227	(303) 986-9863	
	Herb Duniven	4184 S. Syracuse St. Denver, CO 80237		
Directors at Large:	David L. Michael, Herb Duniven and Dick King			

LIBRARIES

Reference Material:	Bill McCracken			
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	
Ccassette Tape:				
#1 (1-499)	Ron Gallagher	888 S. Dexter #607	Denver, CO 80246	(303) 692-0531
#2 (500-999)	David Gatch	PO Box 70	Glen Haven, CO 80532	(970) 577-0805
#3 (1000-2000)	Dave Logan	5557 S. Sherman Cir.	Littleton, CO 80121	(303) 730-1430
#4 (5001-up)	Mika Rhoden	3950 W. Dartmouth Ave.	Denver, CO 80236	(303) 937-9476
CD Library:	Ron Gallagher	888 S. Dexter #607	Denver, CO 80246	(303) 692-0531

2002 Conventions

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

SPERDVAC Convention: Nov 8 – 10 at Hacienda Hotel in El Segundo; details when available

17th Annual OTR and Nostalgia Convention April 11 – 12, 2003; Contact Bob Burchett, 10280 Gunpowder Rd., Florence, KY 41042 (859) 282-0333 haradio@hotmail.com

CREDIT: This publication may include the use, objects and/or images from one or more of the following: Lotus Wordpro97 and Corel Gallery. These software packages are protected by the copyright laws of the United States, Canada and elsewhere. Used under license.

RETURN WITH US NOW...

-2-

October, 2002

performed so that it would sound like a contemporary broadcast about an invasion from Mars, an approach that was presumably intended to heighten the dramatic effect.

In the *Mercury* version of the story, remote broadcasts of dance music were interrupted a number of times by "news bulletins" reporting that explosions had been detected on the planet Mars, then that a "huge flaming object" had dropped on a farm near Grovers Mill, New Jersey. As the play continued, further bulletins described the inexorable advance of the Martian machines. Many people tuned out at this point, believing the country was under attack by a vastly superior force, and made plans to dig in or flee.

The broadcast also contained a number of explanations that it was all a radio play, but if members of the audience missed a brief explanation at the beginning, the next one didn't arrive until 40 minutes into the program. Unfortunately, many people tuned in late that night and missed the initial disclaimer. These folks, and many others believed they were hearing actual news bulletins, and the result was panic. Reporter George Dixon described some of what happened in the **New York Daily News** on Sunday, Oct. 31.

"A radio dramatization of H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds, which thousands of people misunderstood as a news broadcast of a current catastrophe in New Jersey, created almost unbelievable scenes of terror in New York, New Jersey, the South and as far west as San Francisco between 8 and 9 o'clock last night,

The panic started when an announcer suddenly interrupted the program of a dance orchestra (which was part of the dramatization) to "flash" an imaginary bulletin that a mysterious "meteor" had struck New Jersey, lighting the heavens for miles around.

A few seconds later, the announcer 'flashed' the tidings that weird monsters were swarming out of the mass of metal, which was not a meteor but a

tube-like car from Mars, and were destroying hundreds of people with death-ray guns.

Thousands Flee Without waiting for further details, thousands of listeners rushed from their homes in New York and New Jersey, many with towels across their faces to protect themselves from the 'gas' which the invader was supposed to be spewing forth.

Simultaneously, thousands more in states that stretched west to California and south to the Gulf of Mexico rushed to their telephones to inquire of newspapers, the police, switchboard operators, and electric companies what they should do to protect themselves. Eleven hundred calls flooded the switchboard at the News, more than when the dirigible Hindenberg exploded."

The New York Times stated that *"The broadcast, which disrupted households, interrupted religious services, created traffic jams, and clogged communications systems, was made by Orson Welles, who, as the radio character 'The Shadow', used to give 'the creeps' to countless child listeners. This time at least a score of adults required medical treatment for shock and hysteria."*

The Times article went on to describe numerous incidents illustrating the disruptions mentioned above.

News of the panic (which was conveyed via genuine news reports) quickly generated a national scandal. There were calls, which never went anywhere, for government regulations of broadcasting to ensure that a similar incident would not happen again. Many of the victims expressed anger at having been taken in when they were informed that the 'news' they had heard was part of a radio play. In a **New York Times** interview, one resident of New York's Riverside Drive stated *"I came home at 9:15 P.M. just in time to receive a telephone call from my nephew who was frantic with fear. He told me the city was about to be bombed from the air and advised me to get out of the building at once. I turned on the radio and heard the*



broadcast which corroborated what my nephew had said. When I got to the street there were hundreds of people milling around in panic. Most of us ran toward Broadway and it was not until we stopped taxi drivers who had heard the entire broadcast on their radios that we knew what it was all about. It was the most asinine stunt I ever heard of."



CBS and Orson Welles came under fire almost immediately, and were quick to disclaim any deliberate intent to deceive the audience. As **The Times** reported on Oct. 31, "The Columbia Broadcasting System issued a statement saying that the adaptation of Mr. Wells' novel which was broadcast 'followed the original closely, but to make the imaginary details more interesting to American listeners the adapter, Orson Welles, substituted an American locale for the English scenes of the story.'

Pointing out that the fictional character of the broadcast had been announced four times and had been previously publicized, it continued:

'Nevertheless, the program apparently was produced with such vividness that some listeners who may have heard only fragments thought that the broadcast was fact, not fiction. Hundreds of telephone calls reaching CBS stations, city authorities, newspaper offices, and police headquarters in various cities testified to the mistaken belief.'

'Naturally, it was neither Columbia's nor the Mercury Theater's intention to mislead anyone, and when it became evident that a part of the audience had been disturbed by the performance five announcements were read over the network later in the evening to reassure those listeners.'

"Expressing profound regret that his dramatic efforts should cause such consternation, Mr. Welles said: 'I don't think we will choose anything like this again.' He had hesitated about presenting it, he

disclosed, because 'It was thought that perhaps people might be bored or annoyed at hearing a tale so improbable.'"

In her column in the **New York Tribune**, Dorothy Thompson noted that the broadcast revealed the way politicians could use the power of mass communications to create theatrical illusions, and to manipulate the public.

"All unwittingly, Mr. Orson Welles and the Mercury Theater of the Air have made one of the most fascinating and important demonstrations of all time," she wrote. "They have proved that a few effective voices, accompanied by sound effects, can convince masses of people of a totally unreasonable, completely fantastic proposition as to create a nation-wide panic.

"They have demonstrated more potently than any argument, demonstrated beyond a question of a doubt, the appalling dangers and enormous effectiveness of popular and theatrical demagoguery....

"Hitler managed to scare all of Europe to its knees a month ago, but he at least had an army and an air force to back up his shrieking words. "But Mr. Welles scared thousands into demoralization with nothing at all."

*From the Desk of
the Editor
by Carol Tiffany*



Welcome to the **Inner Sanctum** of Old Time Radio contest judging. While there was less interest in the Scariest Show Contest than in last year's Christmas Favorites contest, the entries were both thoughtful and interesting. Because we had fewer entries in this contest, we will be awarding fewer prizes this time around. The outcome was quite a surprise to your editor, as I think it will be to many of you. Look for the results elsewhere in this issue.

Meanwhile, break out your tapes and get ready for some truly frightening listening this Halloween. I, for one, will be enjoying many of my old favorites from **The Witch's Tale, Lights Out, Quiet Please, Suspense, and The Hall of Fantasy.**

I hope you and yours have a great month and a happy and scary Halloween!

The Trivial Matter of the Openings for OTR's Scariest Shows

By Carol Tiffany

Match the opening lines/sound effects with the show title. Fill in the name of the show in the blank space indicated or after the description.

- 1) "I am ___ and I know many things, for I walk by night."
- 2) "This is Orson Welles, speaking from London." ___
- 3) "And Now ___, (drums, footsteps) Welcome to the series of radio dramas dedicated to the supernatural, the unusual, and the unknown."
- 4) (cackling laughter) "Once again, the keeper of the book.." ___
- 5) "This is Bela Lugosi, welcoming you to ___".
- 6) "We bring you ___ written and produced by Alonzo Dean Cole. And now, let us join old Nancy, Witch of Salem, and Satan, her wise black cat."
- 7) "Adventures in time and space, told in *future* tense ..." ___
- 8) (tolling bell) "This is the man in black, here to introduce..." ___
- 9) "Tired of the everyday grind? Do you dream of a life of romantic adventure? Wanna get away from it all? We offer you _____!"
- 10) "Who knows what evil LURKS in the hearts of men? ___ knows."
- 11) "___ for (*episode name*). It...is...later...than...you...think."
- 12) (Train whistle, footsteps, train passing) "This is ___ inviting you to join me on another journey into the realm of the strange and the terrifying..."
- 13) (swelling organ music) "Lipton tea and Lipton soup present ___ (long squeak) Good evening, friends, this is your horror host at the squeaking door ..."

- A) THE SEALED BOOK
- B) THE WITCH'S TALE
- C) THE HALL OF FANTASY
- D) MYSTERY HOUSE
- E) DIMENSION X
- F) THE WHISTLER
- G) THE MYSTERIOUS TRAVELER
- H) INNER SANCTUM MYSTERIES
- I) THE SHADOW
- J) THE BLACK MUSEUM
- K) LIGHTS OUT
- L) ESCAPE
- M) SUSPENSE

SCARIEST SHOW CONTEST WINNERS

Here are the results of our readers' poll for the ten scariest OTR shows of all time. Since entrants were able to vote for both individual shows and series as a whole, there are two different lists to present. First, the individual shows:

- 1) Sorry, Wrong Number - *Suspense*
- 2) (tie) The War of the Worlds - *Mercury Radio Theater*
- 2) (tie) The Lodger - *Mystery in the Air*
- 4) Three Skeleton Key - *Escape*
- 5) The Thing on the Foible Board - *Quiet, Please*
- 6) He Who Follows Me - *The Hall of Fantasy*
- 7) Four Fingers and a Thumb - *The Witch's Tale*
- 8) (tie) Leiningen vs. the Ants - *Escape*
- 8) (tie) Sub-Basement - *Lights Out*
- 8) (tie) Quiet Sunday - *The Whistler*
- 8) (tie) The Pit and the Pendulum - *Suspense*

And, of course, the series:

- 1) Suspense
- 2) Escape
- 3) Quiet Please
- 4) Lights out
- 5) The Hall of Fantasy
- 6) The Witch's Tale
- 7) The Mysterious Traveler
- 8) The Shadow
- 9) The Whistler
- 10) Mercury Radio Theater

Our winners for this year are:

1st Place - (tie) Gene Dench and B.J. George
Runner-up - Dr. Charles Beckett

Congratulations to our winners and thanks to all who entered! Your prizes will be mailed shortly.

Answers to Opening Lines Quiz:

- 1) "I am **F** and I know many things, for I walk by night."
- 2) "This is Orson Welles, speaking from London." **J**
- 3) "And Now **C**, (drums, footsteps) Welcome to the series of radio dramas dedicated to the supernatural, the unusual, and the unknown."
- 4) (cackling laughter) "Once again, the keeper of the book.." **A**
- 5) "This is Bela Lugosi, welcoming you to **D**".
- 6) "We bring you **B** written and produced by Alonzo Dean Cole. And now, let us join old Nancy, Witch of Salem, and Satan, her wise black cat."
- 7) "Adventures in time and space, told in *future tense* ..." **E**
- 8) (tolling bell) "This is the man in black, here to introduce..." **M**
- 9) "Tired of the everyday grind? Do you dream of a life of romantic adventure? Wanna get away from it all? We offer you **L**!"
- 10) "Who knows what evil **LURKS** in the hearts of men? **I** knows."
- 11) "**K** for (*episode name*). It... is... later... than... you... think."
- 12) (Train whistle, footsteps, train passing) "This is **G** inviting you to join me on another journey into the realm of the strange and the terrifying..."
- 13) (swelling organ music) "Lipton tea and Lipton soup present **H** (long squeak) Good evening, friends, this is your horror host at the squeaking door..."



New in the RHAC Library

by Maletha & Dick King

Last month we mistakenly advised that CD #24 was in poor sound. We meant to advise that #204 had marginal sound.

This month's entries to the CD library continue with "Grand Marquee" and "Richard Diamond, Private Detective". These are the NBC run. There are seven shows in the Diamond series that are new to RHAC. We have only one "Frontier Gentleman" this month, but we'll continue the series next year with more CD entries. We will also have "Space Patrol", "CBS Radio Workshop" and the five part "Johnny Dollar" shows.

Our club has received three very generous donations from members. Vicki Johnson (nee Blake) gave us a Roberts reel-to-reel player complete with speakers. We will check it out before we offer it as a prize in the future.

David Michales has graciously given us his extensive collection of cassettes.

John Rayburn has moved to Tennessee and has contributed his collection of cassettes and many of his books. We will all miss John on the local airwaves, but feel sure that he will soon be broadcasting in his new area soon.

On the OTR Bookshelf...

"The 2nd, Revised Ultimate History of Network Radio Programming and Guide to ALL Circulating Shows", By Jay Hickerson,

Review by Stewart Wright Copyright 2002

Have you ever looked in your Old-Time Radio books for information on an unfamiliar series and found nothing? Ask friends and they don't have information on that series either? You might even begin to doubt that the series ever existed. You wonder, "Why doesn't somebody write a book with information on all radio series?"

While uncovering information on all Old-Time Radio series is probably impossible, there is a book that comes close. It provides basic information on more than 6000 Old- and New-Time Radio series and is an extremely useful reference book for any OTR fan and collector. The book is "The 2nd, Revised Ultimate History of Network Radio Programming and Guide to ALL Circulating Shows" by Jay Hickerson. This book is available only from the author.

In this 561-page reference book, Jay lists basic information on more than 6000 network, regional, local, and syndicated radio programs. This information includes series title or titles, series broadcast dates, sponsors, network, and air time for each series. As many radio series had multiple titles during their run, Jay has included cross references for those titles. Some series have a brief descriptions with one or two cast members listed. If the series theme song is known, it is listed. Jay probably has listed more series theme songs in his book than in any other source. In addition, Jay's book lists the number of episodes that are in circulation and available to collectors, usually listing the exact dates of the available episodes. There are also short sections on Broadcast Log Preparers, OTR Book Publishers, OTR Publications and Organizations, Sponsors and Products, Locations for Remote Broadcasts and an Index of Personalities.

Jay actively regularly seeks additional and new information on series from the OTR community. Over 150 people have contributed information on various series to the most recent edition of his book. Many of the contributors are acknowledged experts on specific areas of OTR. This results in more information becoming available on series and circulating episodes. The book is updated annually in the form of supplements and these supplements are available from Jay for a reasonable price.

If you are a collector of Old-Time Radio shows, this book is a MUST HAVE for your OTR library.

Cost: \$47.00, Plus \$4.00 postage and handling.

Available from: Jay Hickerson

Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514

(203) 248-2887, FAX (203) 281-1322, jayhick@aol.com