

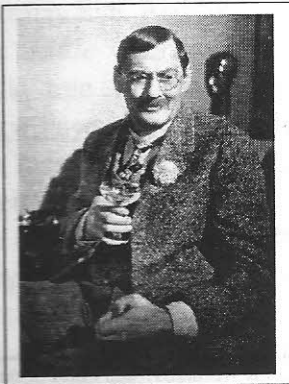


Christmas on Old-Time Radio

by Carol Tiffany

Christmas is always a magical time of year for children. Today, Christmas decorations appear in the stores almost before Halloween is over, and special Christmas activities begin well before Thanksgiving. In the OTR era, the day after Thanksgiving was the "official" beginning of the Christmas Season, and the anticipation began with the first episode of the yearly airing of *The Cinnamon Bear*.

No matter how many times we heard it, the chronicle of the adventures of Judy and Jimmy Barton as they searched through Maybeland for the lost Silver Star never failed to delight and excite us. What child could resist a story that included a root beer ocean, living inkblots, pirates, cowboys and Indians, witches with magic that worked, and culminated in a trip to Santa's fabulous workshop at the North Pole? We were glued to the radio for every episode, and every episode built towards the climax on Christmas Eve.



Lionel Barrymore

A special Christmas Eve treat was the annual presentation of *A Christmas Carol* with Lionel Barrymore as Scrooge and narration by Orson Welles. This was not the only "Christmas Carol" heard on OTR. Many of the various drama series presented versions of varying quality, but the Campbell Playhouse version was always the favorite in our house. Some series presented their own versions of the Dickens classic. The most imaginative included *Scrooge* on Blondie!, *A Christmas Carol* on Duffy's Tavern, *A Western Christmas Carol* on Six Shooter and the utterly wonderful *A Gumshoe's Christmas Carol* on Richard Diamond, Private Detective.



Jim and Marion Jordan

All through late November and December radio listeners could share Christmas preparations and celebrations with their favorite characters. From *Christmas Shopping* with Abbott & Costello, through innumerable minor Christmas disasters with Fibber McGee and Mollie, to *A Congo Christmas* with Tarzan, series radio celebrated the season in grand fashion.

(Continued on Page 3)

RADIO HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORADO

PO BOX 1908, Englewood CO 80150 (303) 761-4139

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KFKA 1310 AM	"Radio Memories" (Greeley)	Sunday, 6:00 - 12:00 PM
KNUS	"Radio Revisited"	Weekdays, 10:00 - 11:00 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

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Convention Schedules

18th Annual OTR and Nostalgia Convention, April 16 - 17, 2004; Contact Bob Burchett, 10280 Gunpowder Rd., Florence KY 41042 (859) 282-0333 haradio@hotmail.com

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RETURN WITH US NOW...

The various series approached their Christmas shows according to the established theme of each individual show. Ozzie and Harriet tried unsuccessfully to have *A Sensible Christmas* when they decided to pool their money to buy one large gift for the household, only to give in and buy gifts for each other anyway. Dragnet presented its' classic *A Gun for Christmas* in Dragnet's usual matter-of-fact style. This episode created quite an impact as it told the tragic story of a boy who found his Christmas rifle early and, playing with it, accidentally shot and killed his friend. Year after year Jack Benny went Christmas shopping for gifts such as a flower for girlfriend Gladys or shoelaces for Don Wilson. Other familiar Christmas shoppers included Henry Aldrich, Archie Andrews, Fibber and Mollie McGee, Throckmorton Gildersleeve, Mel Blanc, and Vic and Sade. Our Miss Brooks bought a magical Christmas tree which filled her lonely Christmas Eve with friends and a (finally) romantically inclined Phillip Boynton.



Phil Harris and Alice Faye

Some comedy series tried more serious stories for their Christmas offerings. Amos and Andy had the very memorable (and often repeated) *Christmas Show* in which Amos explained the meaning of the Lord's prayer to daughter Arbidella as they heard carols on Christmas Eve. Red Skeleton presented the story of *The Little Christmas Tree* about an undersized little tree whom no one wanted. Phil Harris and Alice Faye presented a funnier show, but still one with a message, wherein Jack Benny played Santa for their daughters, who recognized the deception. The situation was saved by their innocent faith (surprisingly shared by Frankie Remley) which allowed them to "see" the real Santa.

In keeping with their series formats, the mystery and adventure shows presented special Christmas

shows whose titles alone give a good idea of the content. Some examples include: *The Case of the Slaughtered Santas* on Nero Wolfe, *The Plot to Murder Santa* on Rocky Fortune, *The Missing Mouse Matter* on Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar, *Return of St. Nick* on This is Your FBI, and *Stockings Were Hung* on The Shadow. More elusive were shows like *Back for Christmas* starring Peter Lorre on Suspense. This was actually a "perfect murder" story wherein the murderer is undone by his victim's thoughtful plan for a Christmas surprise. Even the westerns got into the season with shows like *The Wise Men* from The Lone Ranger, *Twelfth Night* and *Beaker's Barn* from Gunsmoke, and *The Saga of Morbid Jones* from The Cisco Kid. Many of these were retellings of the story of the Nativity in the context of each series.

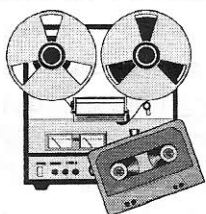
The drama and anthology shows honored the season in diverse ways. Lux Radio Theater aired traditional Christmas offerings such as *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Miracle on 34th Street*. Mr. Firstnighter presented its' *Little Town of Bethlehem* annually for over 12 years. CBS Radio Workshop created *All is Bright* and Hallmark modernized the Christmas story in *And The Desert Shall Rejoice*. The Damon Runyon Theater did the same in *Three Wise Guys* and also created the classic *Dancing Dan's Christmas*. Cavalcade of America presented *A Child is Born* in 1944, aired the memorable *The Names on the Land* in 1945, and gave us all the gift of the true story *The Day They Gave Babies Away* in 1951.

The common thread in most of these OTR Christmas presentations is the recognition of the special spirit abroad in the land at this time of the year and the concept that very unusual things can happen during the Christmas season. Several shows can be said to typify this concept. First, Family Theater's *Lullaby to Christmas* which tells the story of a mute servant boy in a humble inn whose only friends are the "tongueless ones", the flowers, trees and rocks of the fields. One night a child is born at the inn and the boy at last finds his voice to sing a welcome to the child for himself and all the tongueless ones. Another Family Theater presentation, *Blessed Are They (aka Father Christmas)* tells the story of a young blind girl in postwar London whose parents are concerned because she seems to be losing her faith. The girl is visited on Christmas Eve by a mysterious young man who lets her "see" the family Christmas tree. He

helps to restore her faith and hope for the future.

Another mysterious young man appears in Grand Central Station's perennial Christmas show, *Miracle for Christmas*. In this story it is an ambulance driver who has become jaded and burnt out to the point that he is ready to quit. A new intern (who has supposedly been killed in a train crash) shows up at the hospital to take the Christmas Eve shift riding the ambulance and to help restore the driver's compassion. It is left to the listener to speculate as to the identity of this mysterious stranger.

Finally, my personal favorite is *The Plot to Overthrow Christmas* from This is My Best. This show, written by Norman Corwin and starring Orson Welles is a long poem essentially addressing the theme Good vs. Evil. It is both humorous and meaningful and, most importantly, personifies the Christmas Spirit. All of the shows mentioned in this article demonstrate the unique quality of OTR, the ability to stimulate the imagination of the listener-to take him out of himself, and, for the duration of the show, allow him to live in another time and/or place. In these shows, the time is always Christmas and the place is everywhere.



New in the Tape Library

by Dick and Maletha King

This month we are offering one more of the "Old Fashion Revival Hour" shows and then we move on to a show that needs no further description. We are entering four reels, 32 shows, of the "Lone Ranger". This show has appealed to all generations for years and we are happy to offer them to our members.

We are also adding three reels of the Alan Young Show. This situation comedy show was offered in the 1940's and can be enjoyed by the entire family.

We are all busy during these holiday times, but if you have someone you want to give a gift to, that will live on for many years, we suggest that you give them a membership in RHAC. We feel sure that your gift will bring them many hours of pleasure every month for years to come.

Merry Christmas and a good year to all!

RETURN WITH US NOW...

More Christmas Gifts for OTR Characters

Have you ever wondered what your favorite OTR character would want to receive for Christmas? Here are some ideas for Christmas presents to delight the hearts of some of our OTR friends:

Jane Stacey	A new roommate!
Peg Riley	An uncomplicated Holiday Season
Dagwood Bumstead	Book of 1001 sandwich ingredients
Ma Perkins	An invitation from her family to eat Christmas Dinner in a restaurant
Betty Cooper	A date with Archie
Rocky Fortune	A new café Tambourine located in a better part of town
Osgood Conklin	A request for transfer to Clay City High School - away from Walter Denton
Lum & Abner	Some steady customers
Nero Wolfe	An unclassified orchid
Jack Benny	A selection of mail order catalogs to order presents from home
Leila Ransom	An engagement ring!
Joe Friday	Book of 10,000 facts
The Great Gildersleeve	A new girlfriend
Kingfish Stevens	A successful business venture
Jughead Jones	A NEW outfit
Johnny Dollar	One case to work on without having to keep an expense account
Lt. Walt Levinson	A year's supply of antacids

Johnny Celebrates 25 Years Calling For Philip Morris

by Danny Goodwin

"Call For Philip MMMooorrrr-rrrraaaiiiissss!"

In 1959, **NBC Radio** aired a special half hour program to celebrate the 25th anniversary of an advertising giant. This "**giant**" was all of 4' tall and was attired in a bellhop uniform complete with red coat and brass buttons. He became famous for saying only one line with a robust voice. The radio listeners knew him as "**Johnny Philip Morris**" (Johnny Roventini in real life). Hosted by Ben Grauer, the program was a tribute to Johnny's achievements in radio. With Johnny on hand as the guest of honor, he and Grauer looked back over the 25 years since the first call for *Philip Morris* was heard over the airwaves.

That first "**Call For Philip Morris**" took place in 1934 on a broadcast of the *FERDE GROFÉ SHOW* on NBC's **Red Network**. To the music of *On The Trail Movement* from Ferde Grofé's *Grand Canyon Suite*, Johnny yelled out his first "**Call For Philip Morris**" to a nationwide audience. In a nutshell, the music and Johnny's call blended well together. It would work well on over 50 other radio programs during the remaining years of radio's golden age (in numbers, *Philip Morris* sponsored more old time radio programs than any other product). Grauer asked Johnny how many times he called for *Philip Morris* during his 25 years in radio. Johnny replied that when the program was presented live and he was in attendance, he estimated around 500,000 times. When transcriptions of his call were used, that number would elevate into the millions.

During the broadcast, Johnny talked about some unusual things that happened to him. For example, he tripped over some wires in the radio studio during a broadcast of the *YOUTH OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM*--- just when it was time for him to call for *Philip Morris*. With no time to spare, Johnny had no choice but to give the call flat on his back. Luckily, he had a powerful voice. Johnny would also mention that he encountered some radio stars doing funny things in an attempt to have him break out laughing while he did his line.

Grauer brought up another incident that *supposedly* took place on a *Philip Morris* radio program. He said that a stagehand accidentally

dropped a tray of glasses. With the impromptu sound effect taking place for all to hear, a radio comedian ad-libbed the line, "**Folks, that was Johnny stepping out of thousands of store windows.**" Johnny admitted the incident took place, but it didn't happen on any radio program. He mentioned that a waiter at the Coconut Grove Hotel dropped a tray of glasses. Groucho Marx, who was making an appearance at the hotel, said the line--- and it would be used as a continuing gag on the unpredictable *MILTON BERLE SHOW*.

Before he began calling for *Philip Morris*, Johnny Roventini was a real bellhop at the New Yorker Hotel. Since he was only 4' tall, Johnny was known at the hotel as the "**The Smallest Bellboy In The World.**" In 1933, an executive for *Philip Morris & Co., Ltd.* and the president of the company's advertising agency desperately needed an idea to sell *Philip Morris Cigarettes*, which was struggling in sales. Fortunately, they were staying at the New Yorker. Since Johnny was considered a tourist attraction at the hotel, the two executives started to come up with an idea. They asked Johnny to page a man named Philip Morris. Johnny, unaware that *Philip Morris* was really the name of a cigarette, went through the hotel lobby paging Philip Morris. While he was doing this, the two executives knew they found their advertising promotion. After a few minutes, Johnny returned to the two men and said there was no response to his page. Knowing there wouldn't be anyone named Philip Morris, they asked Johnny if he was interested in doing what he just did on the radio. It was here one of advertising's greatest promotions was born. Johnny, in his bellhop uniform, would become the living trademark for *Philip Morris Cigarettes*. Since he was now selling *Philip Morris*, Johnny was given the new name of "**Johnny Philip Morris.**"

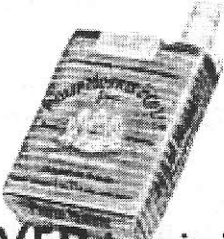
While Johnny's main task was to sell *Philip Morris Cigarettes*, he would actually become more popular than the product he was selling. Johnny had such a warm personality and beaming smile, he was not only popular with *Philip Morris* smokers, but also smokers of other brands, non-smokers, and especially children. When Johnny was to appear at a live event, it was guaranteed a lot of people would come to see him. They would either want his autograph or have their picture taken with him.

Although the 25th anniversary program was a tribute to Johnny, he graciously gave his own personal tribute to all the stars he sponsored on the

radio--- and especially to all the people who enjoyed his contributions in radio advertising.

Author's note: This article is dedicated to the memory of Christine Nelson, an old time radio fan and librarian at the Lincoln Memorial Library in Lincoln, Maine.

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PROVED less irritating
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HIRE'S the proof... from clinical tests with men and women smokers. The findings by distinguished doctors... reported in an authoritative medical journal... show that:

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**EXTRA
BUY MORE BONDS**

1940's Philip Morris advertisement (not to be misconstrued as a RHAC endorsement)

**From the Desk of
the Editor
by Carol Tiffany**

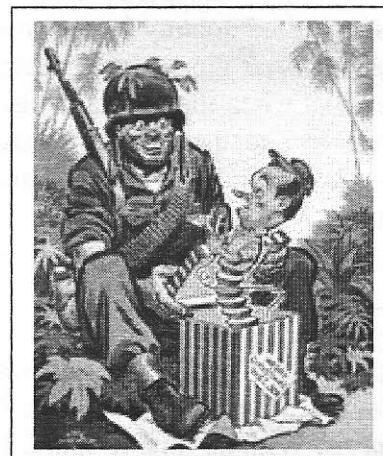


Hello again, everyone, and a very Merry Christmas to all of you.

Here we are again at the merriest and busiest time of the year. I hope your Holiday plans are all settled, the shopping done and presents wrapped. However, if you are more like your editor, you are frantically trying to finish a lot of last-minute chores. I find it helps a lot to play my OTR Christmas tapes while I work.

This is our last issue of 2003 and I would like to thank Larry Weide and Dick and Maleta King for all of their hard work in helping to keep our newsletter going. I am also very grateful to all of our contributors. Without your articles, puzzles, and ideas RWUN would cease to exist.

A final thought for 2003. We are continuing to lose great and talented people from OTR's "golden era" at an increasing rate. This year we lost one of the greatest, Bob Hope. Christmas always reminds me of Mr. Hope and the wonderful work he did for our soldiers during the holidays. The cartoon below from Stars and Stripes says it all.



"Merry Christmas to G.I. Joe"