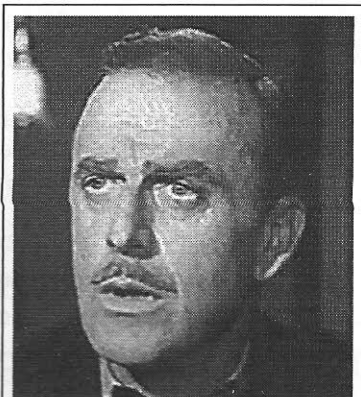




**Norman Macdonnell's
Gunsmoke "Stock Company"**

By Stewart Wright

During the Golden Age of Radio a few directors, such as Jack Webb on *Dragnet* and Jack Johnstone on *Yours Truly Johnny Dollar*, were known to favor the use of small cadres of guest actors on their series. On *Gunsmoke*, as on most of his other series, director Norman Macdonnell also relied on a relatively small group of performers for the majority of his guest cast members. These highly talented actors have become known as Norman Macdonnell's *Gunsmoke* "Stock Company" and have been alluded to in several books on Old-Time Radio and by actors from the Golden Age of Radio. But these general statements leave some unanswered questions. What were the advantages in using a small cadre of regular guest performers? Which actors were part of Norman Macdonnell's *Gunsmoke* "stock company?" And finally, how often did these actors appear on *Gunsmoke*?



John Dehner

John Dehner

The advantages of using a small cadre of regular guest performers is probably best explained by one of the charter members of the *Gunsmoke* "stock company," Harry Bartell. Harry appeared in the first and last episodes of the series ("Billy The Kid" 04/26/1952 and "Letter Of The Law" 06/18/1961) and at least 179 more. In addition to performing regularly on Norman Macdonnell-directed series such as *Gunsmoke*, Harry was also a regular guest performer on series directed by Jack Webb and Jack Johnstone. During the course of a 1998 interview, Harry talked with me in general about Norman Macdonnell "stock" company of actors and specifically about the use of that "stock" company on *Gunsmoke*. The sentiments expressed by Harry were echoed by two other frequent *Gunsmoke* guest stars: Larry Dobkin and Sam Edwards.

"One of the major benefits of using the same cadre of actors was that you had great trust in the other actors. You knew, if for some reason if you got off-track or you made a mistake, that they were going to cover for you. And you would cover for them. As a result, there was an ensemble feeling that was very different than if you had a different cast on the show everyday."

"Gunsmoke was unique. I don't know what kind of chemistry brought that show together, but it was an experience different from any other show I did. There was a sense of camaraderie, a great warmth, and respect. No matter how much kidding around there was at rehearsal, once that thing started, it became very, very professional. There was a sense of reliance of one actor on

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Convention Schedules

20th Annual OTR and Nostalgia Convention, April 21 - 22, 2006; Contact Bob Burchett, 10280 Gunpowder Rd., Florence, KY 41042 (888-477-9112) haradio@hotmail.com

31st Old-time Country and Bluegrass Contest and Festival, Aug 28 - Sep 3, 2006 at Harrison County Fairgrounds in Missouri Valley, Iowa. For information contact Bob Everhart at Box 492, Walnut, IA 51577 (712) 762-4363 bobevertart@yahoo.com

31st Friends of Old-time Radio Convention, Oct 19 - 22, 2006 at the Holiday Inn, Newark, NJ; For information contact Jay Hickerson, Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514 (203) 248-2887 JayHick@aol.com or check our web site: <http://www.fotr.net>

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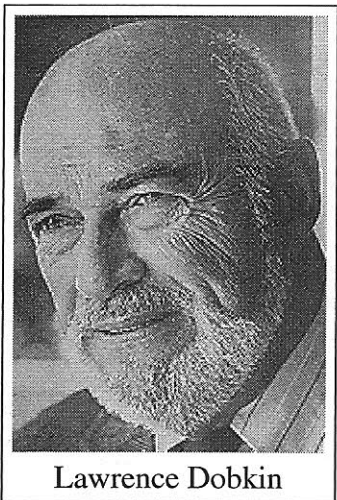
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another and through experience being able to anticipate timing, being able to anticipate any changes in line reading from the person with whom you were working. Part of it was the group that worked the show was comparatively limited. Norman Macdonnell got screamed at for having a 'stock company.' I was just very happy to be part of it."



Vic Perrin

Macdonnell directed several radio series - Escape, Green Lama, Yours Truly Johnny Dollar, The Adventures of Philip Marlowe, Suspense, Romance, Rogers of the Gazette, Fort Laramie, and Have Gun Will Travel. However, Macdonnell's longest continuous association was with the series over which he had the most creative control, Gunsmoke. The four lead actors on Gunsmoke: William Conrad, Parley Baer, Georgia Ellis, and Howard McNear had been frequent performers on Macdonnell's earlier series.



Lawrence Dobkin

Cast lists from Gunsmoke's 480 network episodes provide substantial insight into the composition of the Gunsmoke "Stock Company." A core group of guest actors amassed over 1600 performances during Gunsmoke's 480 episode CBS

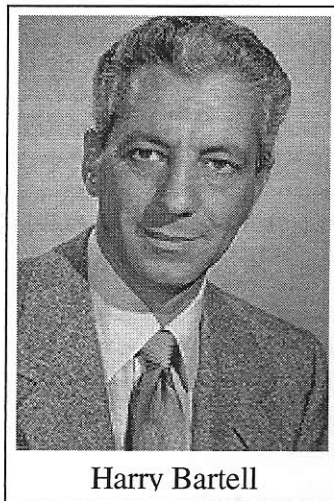
run; five of those actors accounted for a total of nearly 950 appearances on the series. The actors who made up his Gunsmoke "Stock Company" changed somewhat over the years; a few actors such as Tom Tully later became almost exclusively involved in television and motion picture work.

The following core group of 29 guest actors made 10 or more appearances on Gunsmoke and together they accounted for over 88 per cent of the total guest actor appearances on Gunsmoke. Most of these actors also made frequent appearances in other, previously-mentioned Norman Macdonnell-directed series. Their number of verified performances on Gunsmoke follow their names.

John Dehner	234	Helen Kleebe	21
Vic Perrin	221	Lou Krugman	21
Lawrence Dobkin	211	Vivi Janiss	20
Harry Bartell	181	Ben Wright	20
Sam Edwards	100	Jack Kruschen	18
Ralph Moody	88	Jeanette Nolan	18
James Nusser	74	Joe Du Val	15
Barney Phillips	64	Lynn Allen	14
Joseph Kearns	46	Lillian Buyeff	12
Virginia Christine	43	Tom Tully	12
Virginia Gregg	42	Frank Cady	11
Jeanne Bates	33	Joe Cranston	11
Paul Dubov	29	Michael Ann Barrett	10
Dick Beals	25	Don Diamond	10
Jack Moyles	22		

Additionally, the three primary Gunsmoke sound patterns artists, Ray Kemper, Bill James, and Tom Hanley, were also frequently called upon to do vocal sound effects or "Ad Lib" background dialog in crowd scenes.

We Old-Time Radio fans are lucky that so many episodes of Gunsmoke have survived so we can enjoy the fine work of this talented group of actors.



Harry Bartell

Old Time Radio Moments of the Century (Part 5)

(The following article by broadcast historian Elizabeth McLeod is reproduced here with her permission.)

Ms. McLeod has listed her "top 100" 20th Century Radio Moments. We will be presenting 10 of her selections in RWUN each month for ten months.

60. We Hold These Truths 12/15/41

An eloquent paean to the Bill Of Rights by Norman Corwin, featuring a cast of big-name stars and heard over all networks becomes one of the most-heard single broadcasts of the entire radio era, with an estimated audience in excess of sixty million. Coming just a week after the US entered the Second World War, the program sets the tone for Corwin's wartime output -- programs stressing a uniquely populist brand of patriotism.

59. Sorry Wrong Number 5/25/43



It's lost a lot of its impact from constant repetition -- is there anyone out there who doesn't know how it ends? But Agnes Moorehead's handwringing tour-de-force performance in Lucille Fletcher's tight little murder story is, in many ways, the essence of the radio suspense drama. Its notoriety helps land CBS's sustaining "Suspense" series a big-budget sponsor, and helps lay the foundation for a twenty-year run.

58. Light's Golden Jubilee 10/21/29

Radio joins the nation together in tribute to the fiftieth anniversary of the invention of the electric light bulb. Thomas Edison himself is the guest of honor in an elaborate ceremony broadcast from Dearborn, Michigan under the auspices of Henry Ford, and President Hoover heads a long list of dignitaries on hand for the festivities. Even Albert Einstein joins in by shortwave from Germany. Graham McNamee, at mikeside for NBC, and Ted Husing for CBS, give a stirring descriptions of the highlight of the evening -- the reenactment of the lighting of the first electric bulb. The entire event is one huge publicity gimmick, orchestrated for General Electric by PR mastermind Edward Bernays -- and points the way for a long succession of self-congratulatory Corporate Media Events to follow.

57. The Rise of Information Please Summer/Fall 1938

Bright people sitting at a table talking. No scripts at all -- just questions sent in by listeners, the sort of things we'd call "trivia" today. It doesn't sound like a particularly promising idea -- but "Information Please" proves to be the surprise radio hit of 1938. It's a highbrow show that even a lowbrow can love, with questions ranging from Shakespeare to baseball, and panelists able to cover all that ground with energy left over for sparkling repartee. The series spawns a number of forgotten imitators -- "So You Think You Know Music?" "Fun in Print" -- as well as a sort of precocious little niece known as "The Quiz Kids", but none of the imitations ever rise to the level of the original. And one could argue that in the unscripted, spontaneous "Information Please" format one finds the true ancestor of the modern talk show.

56. Mrs. Wicker and Miss Mack. 1930-31

Radio for children splits into two directions at the dawn of the 1930s -- the heavily commercialized and hyperactive adventure serials, and the quieter, more contemplative sort of entertainment best represented in the works of Irene Wicker and Nila Mack. Both come to prominence as the 1930s are getting underway: Wicker as NBC's "Singing Story Lady" and Mack as the director of CBS's "Adventures of Helen and Mary," a precursor to the better known "Let's Pretend." There are formatic differences between the two -- Wicker is essentially a solo performer, while Mack works behind the scenes of a fully-dramatized production -- but they share a similar outlook on the sort of entertainment they offer to youngsters. And together, they blaze a trail to be followed in later years by such thoughtful creators as Paul Tripp, Bob Keeshan, Shari Lewis, and Fred Rogers: a trail that leads to a world of gentle imagination.

55. And Now Get Ready To Smile Again... 1932

Husband-and-wife situation comedies first show up in the late twenties, with shows like "The Jenkins Family" and "Graybar's Mr. and Mrs." They're all pretty much the same sort of thing: harassed white-collar husband dealing with a more-or-less ditzzy wife. Even bright spots like the urbane "Easy Aces" are simply variations on this standard format. But in 1932, an NBC-Chicago staff writer named Paul Rhymer takes this cliché and turns it sideways. "Vic and Sade" isn't a sitcom, isn't a drama, isn't really a serial. It's easier to say what it isn't than to figure out what it is -- a fun-house-mirror held up to a quiet midwestern family that manages to be both profoundly ordinary and awesomely bizarre. And it echoes down thru the years in the works of such performers as Jean Shepherd and Bob Newhart.

54. Little Orphan Annie and the rise of Juvenile Adventure. 1931.

With a new decade comes a new approach to children's programming -- rollicking, rousing, blood-and-thunder serialized adventure: epitomized by a blank-eyed frizzy-haired funny-paper heroine. On radio, Annie loses the harsh ultra-right-wing political overtones of Harold Gray's comic strip -- and becomes the personification of an aggressive childhood: solving mysteries, exploring the world, and horrifying Concerned Parents for more than a decade. From the drooling hard-sell of the Ovaltine commercials to the endless send-away-premium offers, "Annie" sets the tone for an entire genre: Jack Armstrong,

Tom Mix, Captain Midnight, Hop Harrigan -- they're all her children.

53. The Lone Ranger Hits The Big Time: January 1934

The Mutual Network wasn't founded by the Lone Ranger, no matter what they claim at WXYZ. But when the Masked Rider Of The Plains rides onto stations in Cincinnati, Chicago and New York -- by arrangement of the Gordon Baking Company -- he strengthens the links that already exist between WOR and WGN, stations that are already on the way to becoming the nucleus of that new chain. And more important, The Ranger goes on to become radio's most enduring contribution to American popular culture -- and one of the best-known fictional characters of all time.

52. Dr. Brinkley almost wins the Kansas Governorship Fall 1932

Today, we see him as a quaint sort of quack -- a bearded face right off a patent medicine bottle, a twanging Kansas voice offering up spicy barnyard metaphors. To the AMA, he was a dangerous fraud -- parlaying a phony medical degree and an eccentric idea for revitalizing impotent men into a national reputation over his radio station KFKB. But to his heartland followers in the 1920s and early 1930s, John Romulus Brinkley is a champion -- fighting for their interests against them slickers from the Big City, and their support makes KFKB, for a time, the most popular station in the United States. Following investigations by the AMA and the Kansas City Star, Brinkley's fraudulent background is made public -- but that doesn't stop the Doctor. Eventually, from an ultra-high-power radio station just over the Mexican border, Brinkley blankets the entire nation with his graphic condemnations of Internationalism, the Medical Establishment, and prostate massage. On the strength of his down-home line of patter -- and his unstoppable signal -- he comes within 30,000 votes of winning Kansas' highest office. Brinkley's station is finally muzzled by Mexican authorities in 1941, and he dies bankrupt in 1943 -- but his tradition of medical/political charlatanism is alive and well today on dozens of shortwave and small-time AM stations.

51. Orson Welles becomes The Shadow 9/26/37



It isn't great art. It's never a ratings blockbuster. But this Sunday-afternoon superhero saga has captivated generations of listeners. And many of those listeners will tell you that the 22-year-old Welles was the greatest Lamont Cranston of them all. Others (including me) may find him a just bit too callow compared to the more mature

Bill Johnstone. But no one will dispute that Welles makes an impression in the role -- and even more important, the part helps pave the way for even more impressive roles to come.

Some Suggestions for Christmas Listening . . .

Campbell Playhouse "A Christmas Carol"

Amos 'N' Andy "The Lord's Prayer", "Andy Plays Santa"

Screen Directors' Playhouse "Miracle on 34th Street"

Family Theater "The Littlest Angel"

Bing Crosby "Annual Christmas Show"

Grand Central Station "The Ambulance"

Red Skelton "The Little Christmas Tree"

Damon Runyon Theater "Dancing Dan's Christmas"

Ozzie & Harriet "A Sensible Christmas"

Cavalcade of America "A Child is Born"

Family Theater "Lullaby to Christmas"

Fibber McGee and Molly "Figuring the Costs of Gifts", "Fixing Toys for Needy Kids"

Jack Benny Program (any Christmas program)

Let's Pretend "The Night Before Christmas"

Our Miss Brooks "Connie's Christmas" (Magic Tree)

Roy Rogers "Christmas Misunderstanding"

Suspense "Back for Christmas"

The Cinnamon Bear

Broadway is My Beat "Nick Norman, Santa Claus"

Cavalcade of America "The Day They Gave Babies Away", "The Names on the Land"

Duffy's Tavern "Miracle in Manhattan"

Family Theater "Blessed are They" (Father Christmas), "The Nativity"

Great Gildersleeve (Any Christmas Episode)

Gunsmoke "Beaker's Barn", "Feud"

Mysterious Traveler "Christmas Story"

Phil Harris/Alice Faye "Santa's Visit"

Richard Diamond, Private Detective "A Gumshoe's Christmas Carol"

Romance "Richer by One Christmas"

The Life of Riley "A Christmas Tale"

This is My Best "The Plot to Overthrow Christmas"

This is Your FBI "The Innocent Santa"

Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar "Dancing Mouse Matter", "The Nick Schoen Matter"

The Cinnamon Bear



Editor's Note: In the history of Old-Time Radio, there has never been a more beloved or successful children's' series than "The Cinnamon Bear". Produced in 1937 as a syndicated show, The Cinnamon Bear consisted of 26 15-minute chapters that were usually aired daily from Thanksgiving to Christmas. After its initial airing, The Cinnamon Bear has been on the radio somewhere in the country annually for over 60 years. The entire series is also available on CD or cassette from most OTR dealers.

This wonderful Christmas holiday fantasy adventure serial was created and written by Glanville Heisch for children of all ages. It all happens to twins Judy and Jimmy before Christmas. Something has taken the "Silver Star" for their Christmas tree. The very Irish teddy bear, Paddy O'Cinnamon by name, comes to their aid and tells them that the Crazy Quilt Dragon has taken the star to Maybeland. So the three venture off to find their "Silver Star." The fifteen-minute episodes were first broadcast from the end of November right up 'till Christmas, and can still be enjoyed that way by the entire family.

There are many fantasy characters in Maybeland, including a dragon, a giant, a witch, a whale, a queen, a rhyming rabbit, a magician, cowboys and Indians, and even pirates! Most of the characters are quite sophisticated, and are a listening joy for adults as well as children. Many well-known radio actors took the parts, including Howard McNear (Speed Gibson, *Gunsmoke*) and Gale Gordon (The Great Gildersleeve, *Our Miss Brooks*) Concerning the central characters, Judy was played beautifully by Barbara Jean Wong, and strangely, to this day, the boy who played Jimmy has not been identified, even by The Cinnamon Brigade, a group of loyal fans of this famous show.

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As has been mentioned over the years, the Cinnamon Bear is similar in many ways to The Wizard of Oz movie, and was released the same year. It certainly has the polish and dramatic appeal of the Wizard of Oz, and that's high praise indeed. Also, one is reminded in listening to the Cinnamon Bear of the great "Alice in Wonderland" and Pinocchio in the Disney animation versions. The Cinnamon Bear has a first-class score by Don Honrath, with song lyrics done by Heisch.

All things considered, Cinnamon Bear is definitely a radio Christmas classic, and a superb example of radio's special dramatic ability - to take the perfectly fantastic, and make it perfectly real in the imaginations of listeners of all ages.



New in the Tape and CD Libraries

by Maletha King

This month we are continuing with the "Calling All Cars" series. These will be from the 1930s and of course are the forerunner to another police action series, "Dragnet". We then go on to more of the 1930s episodes of "The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes". We know that you will all enjoy the expert way the great master detective works his way through the mysteries of those days.

For those members that have access to the Denver area; We regretfully advise that a very good supply of OTR equipment, the Second Sound Company, is closing their doors at the end of the year. Many of us had depended on these folks for supplies and repairs for many years.

From the officers of RHAC and the staff of RWUN, we all wish all of you the

***Merriest of Christmases, and the
Happiest and Healthiest of New
Years.***