



Radio Personalities: Lawrence (Larry) Dobkin

By Stewart Wright © 2006

This is the latest installment in a series of biographical sketches on actors who had extensive careers on the radio. In each article I will list some notable performances of the actor. If that performance is followed by a number in square brackets [], that is the RHAC Tape or CD Library Number for that specific performance.

The picture of the actor in each article is through the courtesy of Bobb Lynes and originally appeared in the book "Radio's Golden Years: A Visual Guide to the Shows and the Stars" by Frank Bresee and Bobb Lynes.

Lawrence (Larry) Dobkin

Born: September 16, 1919,
New York, NY
Died: October 28, 2002,
Los Angeles, CA

Radio, Regional and National:

Larry Dobkin broke into Radio in the 1930's; playing an evil little boy on the WOR series *The Ebony Elephant*. Before World War II, he appeared on regional series on the Yankee Network and New York-based series such as *Superman*. During World War II, Larry was in an Army Air Force propaganda unit and worked on several

service-related radio series either as an actor on series such as *Voice Of The Army* or as an announcer on *Your Army Air Force*. While awaiting discharge from the Military, he acted on several civilian radio series that originated from New York including *The Carrington Playhouse*.

He had starring or featured roles on several series including one on which he starred on both the East and West Coast-based runs: *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*. Playing Ellery Queen on both Coasts helped him gain access to acting jobs on Hollywood-based radio series. He also had featured

roles on *The Adventures of Nero Wolfe* as Archie Goodwin, *The Adventures of Philip Marlowe* as Lt. Matthews, *The Saint* as Louie the cab driver, and *The Man From Homicide* as Sgt. Dave. Also, Dobkin played Police Lt. Tommy Ross on the short-lived Norman Macdonnell series, *The Judge*.

Larry Dobkin was a frequent guest on many series. He appeared on the CBS series *Escape* 33 times. Among his many fine performances on that series were both productions of "Wild Jack Rhett;" including the February 15, 1953 effort, [Tape 834, CD 870], in which he portrayed the cooked saloon keeper, Bohellen. In the August 23, 1953 *Escape* episode, "The

Man From Tomorrow," [Tape 172, CD 882], Dobkin



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18th Annual Radio/TV Classics Live will be held May 4 & 5, at The Buckley Performing Arts Center, Brockton, MA; Contact Buckley Center Box Office, 1 Massasoit Blvd., Brockton, MA 02302 (508) 427-1234, Web Site: www.radioclassicslive.org

2nd Annual Mid-Atlantic Nostalgia Convention, Sep 13 – 15, at Clarion Hotel, Aberdeen, MD; for information call Michelle or Martin Grams, Jr. at (717) 456-6208, Web site is www.midatlanticnostalgiaconvention.com

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played Dix Kennan, a former fighter pilot who is trained to develop his five senses to levels beyond those of ordinary men. Larry was also a frequent guest on another CBS series, *Suspense*. Among his nearly 40 *Suspense* performances was the July 15, 1948 production "Summer Night" as Charles [Tape 930.] A few of the other series on which he appeared were *The Alan Young Show*, *Broadway Is My Beat*, *The CBS Radio Workshop*, *Crime Classics*, *Doctor Christian*, *Eternal Light*, *Family Theater*, *Frontier Gentleman*, *Let George Do It*, *The Lux Radio Theatre*, *Mr. First Nighter*, *The NBC University Theatre*, *Nightbeat*, *Rocky Jordan*, *Rogers Of The Gazette*, *Screen Director's Playhouse*, *Six Shooter*, *Stars Over Hollywood*, *Tales Of The Texas Rangers*, *The Whistler*, and *You Were There*.

Dobkin appeared in no fewer than 74 episodes of *Yours Truly*, *Johnny Dollar*; with at least 47 of those performances as Pat McCracken of the Universal Adjustment Bureau who assigned Johnny many of his cases. In several episodes Dobkin played more than one role. A prime example is the multiple-part *Yours Truly*, *Johnny Dollar* case, "The Todd Matter," January 9-13, 1956, in which Larry played *five roles*: Orrin Vance - an informant, Don Freed - an insurance company representative, Dr. Kane - a doctor at a hospital, Bill Powers - the former husband of a murder victim, and William Charles - a criminal [Tape 391, CD 425.]

Larry Dobkin was one of the mainstays of Norman Macdonnell's radio "stock company" of accomplished actors. He made over 380 appearances on 13 Macdonnell series, including 213 on *Gunsmoke* and was a frequent guest on *Escape*, *Romance*, and *The Adventures of Philip Marlowe*. Among his many fine performances on *Gunsmoke* were "Xmas Story (December 20, 1952) as Angus Cowley [Tapes 307 & 5004], "Meshougah" (February 21, 1953.) as Brill - the insane outlaw leader, [Tapes 176 & 5005], and "Cavalcade" (January 31, 1953 and November 08, 1959) as Deputy Sheriff Ed Hunter [Tapes 5005 & 5035]. Other notable Dobkin performances on Macdonnell's series included the *Fort Laramie* episode "Indian Scout" of October 21, 1956 as Charlie Little Bear [Tape 29, CD 40] and the *Have Gun, Will Travel* episodes "The Outlaw" a.k.a. "Manfred Holt" of December 14, 1958 as Manfred Holt [Tapes 503 & 5042, CD 952] and "Winchester Quarantine" of February 22, 1959 as Joe Whitehorse [Tapes 52 & 5043, CD 955.]

Television:

Larry easily made the transition from radio to television and appeared on well over 100 series. Some of his early television acting credits included several small screen series that got their start on radio: *Gunsmoke*, *Family Theater*, *Dangerous Assignment*, *The Adventures of Superman*, *Richard Diamond - Private Detective*, and *You Are There*. During a period of nearly 50 years he appeared on many hit series including *I Love Lucy*, *Playhouse 90*, *Perry Mason*, *Have Gun Will Travel*, *Wagon Train*, *Rawhide*, *General Electric Theater*, *Mission: Impossible*, *MacGyver*, *Night Court*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *L.A. Law*, *NYPD Blue*, *The Practice*, and *Judging Amy*. On the TV mini-series *War and Remembrance* Larry portrayed General George Patton and his friend, John Dehner, played Admiral Ernest J. King. On *The Untouchables*, he portrayed gangster Dutch Schultz five times. For five seasons he was the narrator on *Naked City*. Dobkin received an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role in a Drama as Dr. Gettlinger in the 1967 *CBS Playhouse* production of "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night."

In addition to acting, Larry Dobkin also worked behind the camera as a director and producer on more than 50 television series. While he never acted on either the radio or television versions of *Dragnet*, Larry directed on or was involved in the production of several Jack Webb TV series: *Adam-12*, *Emergency!*, *O'Hara U.S. Treasury*, *Pete Kelly's Blues*, *Project U.F.O.*, and *77 Sunset Strip*. Some of his other directorial credits include *The Andy Griffith Show*, *Barnaby Jones*, *The Big Valley*, *Cannon*, *Charlie's Angels*, *Dallas*, *The Donna Reed Show*, *Dr. Kildare*, *Fantasy Island*, *The F.B.I.*, *The Fugitive*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *The Munsters*, *The Rifleman*, *The Rockford Files*, *Sam Benedict*, *The Six Million Dollar Man*, *Star Trek*, *Twelve O'Clock High*, *The Waltons*, and *The Wild, Wild West*. On some of the series he directed, he got to direct old friends from the Golden Age of Radio like Parley Baer, Virginia Gregg, Bill Conrad, and Edmund O'Brien.

Motion Pictures:

Dobkin also had an extensive career in motion pictures, appearing in more than 65 feature films, including *Angels in the Outfield*, *The Cabinet of Caligari*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Defiant Ones*, *D.O.A.*, *Deadline - U.S.A.*, *The Gene Krupa*

Story, Geronimo, In Search of Historic Jesus, Julius Caesar, Jump Into Hell, The Lost Missile, The Midnight Man, North by Northwest, Patton, Red Skies of Montana, Sweet Smell of Success, The Ten Commandments, Them!, and *Twelve O'Clock High*. He directed the 1973 motion picture *Sixteen* which featured Parley Baer and Mercedes McCambridge. He also wrote the screenplay for the 1976 film *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams* and later was the writer when it became a television series.

Reminiscence About Radio:

Larry Dobkin enjoyed performing on Radio as he mentioned at a 1986 meeting of The Society to Preserve and Encourage Radio Drama, Variety & Comedy SPERDVAC), "On Radio you could have all the thrill, all the challenge of a full performance with four rehearsals and the broadcast. You didn't spend hours driving to and from location and getting in and out of wardrobe as you do in television and motion pictures."

Reader's Digest Quiz

"Radio Quiz of the Month" was the title of a wartime feature that appeared in the **Reader's Digest**. It consisted of a series of questions selected from the numerous radio quiz programs of the time, such as **Dr. I.Q.** on the NBC network and **Are You a Genius?** on CBS. Here is a selection from the thousands of questions that were asked and answered over the air.

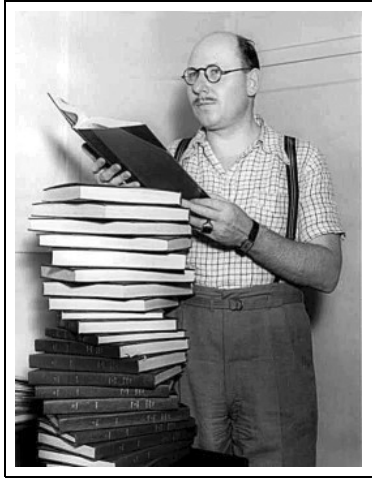
1. How does one know which is the left bank and which is the right bank of a river? (Are You a Genius? CBS)
2. What popular dances had in them titles the name of (1) a pastry, (2) a fruit, and (3) a city? (Battle of the Sexes, NBC)
3. Is a person who is excessively thirsty suffering from kleptomania, polydipsia, or myopia? (Bob Hawk Show, CBS)
4. True or false? Noah's Ark was known as the Ark of the Covenant. (True or False, NBC)
5. In a deck of ordinary playing cards, two of the Jacks are one-eyed; the other Jacks have two eyes. What is the total number of eyes on the four Jack cards? (Dr. I.Q., NBC)
6. Is it true that there is a place in England where the Queen can never go? (The Answer Man, ABC)
7. If you are convicted of the crime of embracery, what have you done? (Are You a Genius? CBS)
8. Of what well known proverb is this a paraphrase? "A nomadic portion of the metamorphosed igneous or sedimentary deposits of the Proterzoic era accumulates no bryophytic plant life." (Are You a Genius? CBS)
9. Why would a detective doubt this story? A lady dreaming that she was drowning became so frightened that she died of a heart attack in her sleep. (Double or Nothing, MBS)
10. Most of us use it in our homes. If we purchased 100 pounds of it, it would contain approximately 87 pounds of water, 4 pounds of fat, 4 pounds of casein, ash and albumin; and 5 pounds of sugar. What is it? (Dr. I.Q., NBC)
11. Five automobiles were lined up bumper-to-bumper. How many bumpers were actually touching each other? (Dr. I.Q., NBC)
12. Why does it take longer to hoist a flag to half mast than it takes to hoist it to full-mast? (Bob Hawk, CBS)
13. If an elderly man is the scion of a prominent family, is he the founder of the family, a descendant of the family, or the black sheep of the family? (Dr. I.Q., NBC)
14. Niagara Falls is situated between which two of the Great Lakes? (Double or Nothing, MBS)
15. If you were a musician and were practicing your flams, your flam paradiddles, your double paradiddles, ruffs and double drags, what kind of musical instrument would you be playing? (Dr. I.Q., NBC)

Answers on Page 7

"Fanny, Fanny, Fanny...."

Revisiting *One Man's Family*

By Elizabeth McLeod



For most OTR enthusiasts, the name of Carlton E. Morse brings to mind images of rip-roaring adventure -- replete with both Blood and Thunder. "*I Love a Mystery*," "*I Love Adventure*," and "*Adventures By Morse*" are among the most avidly collected series among contemporary listeners.

These were great shows, no question. But I'll go out on a limb here and argue that they pale alongside Carlton Morse's most impressive, longest-lived accomplishment -- the continuing story of a white bread, upper-middle-class San Francisco Bay Area family: the story of the Barbours, better known as *One Man's Family*.

Too many modern listeners hear an episode or two of *One Man's Family* and write it off as a glorified soap opera. But no serial ever developed its characters with greater depth -- no serial ever approached its subject matter in a more adult manner -- than Morse's twenty-seven-year epic.

Unfortunately, the bulk of *OMF* remains unavailable -- the primary representation of the show for modern audiences is a run of shows extending from 1949 into 1951, another short run from 1958, and scattered shows from the mid-forties. Of these, the 1949-51 programs are probably the most accessible. These programs bridge the gap between the series' transition from a half-hour once-a-week presentation to a fifteen-minute nightly strip, and while they aren't quite from the series' prime era, they do serve as a valid introduction to the themes that made this show

so rewarding for its audience for so long.

Family life is, of course, the backbone of the show - but it's not an idealized picture by any means, and this is one of the elements that makes *One Man's Family* such a remarkable work. In an era in which radio families were often idealized beyond all reason, the Barbours are clearly an imperfect lot, and this is very evident in the storylines which fill the 1949-51 episodes. These are real people and they deal realistically with real-world problems. This is no "will she find happiness as the wife of a wealthy and titled Englishman?" soap opera. In many ways, the drama of *One Man's Family* was cutting-edge for its time -- and it remains surprisingly contemporary today.

Much of the 1950 run revolves around Teddy Barbour, adopted daughter of Paul, the oldest Barbour son. Teddy was taken in by Paul as a young girl, and as she grew up she developed an obsessive romantic fixation on her adoptive father -- an attachment which led her to constantly sabotage Paul's love life, and which grew ever more intense, and ever more unhealthy as she matured into adulthood. The 1950 episodes detail Teddy's doomed attempt to break free of her feelings toward Paul by marrying a fumbling Army dentist named Elwood Giddings -- a decent sort, but in the end no match for her obsession with Paul. That Morse was able to treat such a psychologically-complex, highly-charged, relentlessly adult storyline as delicately as he did -- and yet as powerfully as he did is true testimony to his skill as a dramatist. His gifts clearly extended beyond blood-and-thunder.

Vivid characters abound in the available episodes of *One Man's Family*. Barton Yarborough's work as the clinically-depressed middle son Clifford is especially memorable -- a character far different from his rootin' tootin' interpretation of Doc Long, or his straightforward work as Joe Friday's partner Ben Romero. Cliff Barbour is one of life's victims -- ground down to a nub by constant disappointments and tragedies, and Yarborough makes him fully human: by turns you want to take his hand and tell him everything's all right, or you want to smack him one and tell him to get his life in gear. Michael Raffetto's raspy-voiced work as Paul conveys just the right tone of world-weariness, contrasting with Jeanne Bates' tightly-wound, intense interpretation of Teddy. And Tyler McVey's work as the sad-sack Elwood Giddings is outstanding -- infusing considerable depth into a characterization which could easily have descended into caricature.



L - R, Kathleen Wilson (Claudia); Barton Yarbrough (Clifford); Bill Andrews (announcer); sound effects man Ed Ludes and his water effects machine; Bernice Berwin (Hazel); Mike Raffetto (Paul Barbour); Minetta Ellen (Mother Barbour); Page Gilman (Jack); J. Anthony Smythe (Father Barbour)

The signature voice of *One Man's Family* is of course J. Anthony Smythe as Henry Barbour, the family patriarch. By 1950 he's retired from his stock brokerage, but is still very active meddling in the affairs of his children and grandchildren, only barely restrained by his gentle wife Fanny. Henry is a loving father and grandfather, to be sure -- but he's by no means lovable. He's pigheaded, arrogant, snobbish, and profoundly old-fashioned in his attitudes. He gives advice whether it's wanted or not, and can't wait to say "I Told You So" when some member of the family runs into difficulties after rejecting that advice. He's as distinctive, as memorable a character as radio ever produced -- and Smythe brings him to life as no other actor could.

If I have a major criticism of the series, it's that I don't feel that Morse wrote female characters anywhere near well as he wrote the male roles. His women tend to be one-dimensional -- and this is true in all of his series, not just *OMF*. Fanny Barbour seems to exist, at least in the surviving shows, as a mere long-suffering foil for Henry's mumblings, and the Barbour daughters seem to get far less airtime, far less development in the surviving episodes than their brothers. To be fair, however, the sisters of the family -- Hazel and Claudia -- did figure far more prominently in the storylines in the 1930s and early 1940s, and without access to long runs of recordings from this era it's difficult to properly evaluate their roles.

It helps to know a bit of back story before delving into this series -- for which the listener is referred to the excellent storyline summary presented by John Dunning in his Encyclopedia of **RETURN WITH US NOW...**

Old Time Radio. But *One Man's Family's* not a show that you can jump right into with a casual listen. Like real people -- you have to get to know the Barbours first. Some you'll like -- some will really rub you the wrong way. But if you spend enough time with them, you'll forget they're fictional characters -- and you'll see why I consider this series to be Carlton Morse's finest work.

 Elizabeth McLeod is a journalist, researcher, and freelance writer specializing in radio of the 1930s. She is a regular contributor to "Nostalgia Digest" magazine and the Internet Old Radio Mailing List, maintains a website, *Broadcasting History Resources*, and is presently researching a book on Depression-era broadcasting. Elizabeth is always looking for 1930s radio recordings in all formats -- uncoated aluminum or lacquer-coated discs, vinyl or shellac pressings, or low-generation tape copies. You can contact her at lizmcl@midcoast.com



New in the Tape and CD Libraries

by Maletha King

This month we go to the tape cassette and reel libraries with "The Shadow of Fu Manchu" and "America United", a political debate of 1945 - very much the same issues we have today.

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Answers to "Reader's Digest Quiz"

1. Facing downstream, the left bank is to your left, right bank to your right.
2. (1) Cakewalk, (2) Big Apple, (3) Charleston.
3. Polydipsia
4. False. The Ark of the Covenant was the sacred chest in the sanctuary of the temple into which Moses placed the tablets of stone containing the Ten Commandants.
5. Twelve. Each Jack has two faces.
6. Yes. The House of Commons.
7. Embracery is the crime of trying to influence a jury or a judge corruptly.
8. "A rolling stone gathers no moss,"
9. Because she would have been unable to tell of the dream if she had died of a heart attack in her sleep.
10. Milk.
11. Eight.
12. The flag should first be hoisted to the peak for an instant and then lowered to half-mast.
13. Descendants of the family.
14. Between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie.
15. Drum.

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