

To Scott  
Best wishes always  
over my  
suff

# SPERDVAC



Vol. XVI, No. 6

The Society to Preserve and Encourage Radio Drama, Variety and Comedy

JUNE 1990

## SPERDVAC Remembers Elliott Lewis *Radio Actor - Writer - Producer - Director dies at 72*



Elliott Lewis, left, following a 1938 broadcast of *Silver Theatre* with Madeleine Carroll, Paula Winslowe and Joseph Kearns.

(Courtesy Paula Winslowe)

By Dan Haefele

Elliott Lewis, one of the most active contributors to radio's "Golden Era," died May 20. Mr. Lewis, who had been hospitalized for a short time prior to his passing, was 72.

Radio listeners knew Elliott Lewis best as the voice of Frankie Remley on the **Phil Harris-Alice Fay Show**. But comedy acting was just one of the many talents he honed for American listeners.

"I never thought of myself as an actor," Lewis once told SPERDVAC. "It surprises me when I hear myself performing because it always sounds like somebody else."

The native of Mt. Vernon, New York was a student at Los Angeles Community College when he enrolled in a radio acting class. "There was a guest speaker at the class one day and he invited everyone in the radio class to come down to KHJ and audition for a commercial job," he said. He missed the audition, but phoned the man and was invited to audition separately. The director was True Boardman, and he hired Lewis to play a small part on a dramatic show airing on Mutual.

"I had three lines," Lewis recalled. "In the earthquake sequence I had to shake a rack as hard as I could and yell 'Earthquake! Earthquake!'"

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## Board Makes Decisions On Squealing Tapes

By Barbara J. Watkins

At the annual planning meeting of the Board of Directors, held on April 14, 1990, the libraries were a major topic of consideration; specifically, what to do about the quality of the open reel tapes in the Archives and Hollywood Museum libraries.

Two decisions were reached: one, to phase out the Hollywood Museum open reel library by December 31, 1990, and two, to keep the Archives open reels 1 to 1,000 temporarily closed. Both libraries suffer from problems with tape squeal and much-used tapes that need to be replaced, due to years of traveling around the country through the mails, and being played on various tape recorders with dirty and magnetized heads. Both libraries require upgrading to keep the quality of the tapes at a satisfactory level.

The Board set as a goal for this year to assure that all master reels in the Archives library be of the best quality possible. Most of our Archives master reels numbered 1-1000 are on tape that has or will develop a squeal. Fortunately, much of the original source material is available to be redubbed from transcriptions discs. This will be a big project, but must be done. Multiple cassette copies will be made at the same time, to replace the copies that have been in use for years. Many of our members use cassettes rather than open reels, and the proportion of cassette borrowers to open reel borrowers make the upgrading of the cassettes a priority.

There was much discussion regarding what to do about the open reels in the Archives library. It was agreed that the library could not reopen in its present condition, with the problem of tape squeal and muffled sound quality on some tapes. We decided that the reels would be inspected and as soon as a sufficient number are identified that are in good condition, and a volunteer can be found for the librarian position, the library will reopen.

As to whether all of the tapes that need to be rerecorded (probably most of them) will be, will depend on the results of a poll being taken of new members and renewals on their respective application forms. If only a tiny fraction of members plan to borrow open reel tapes from the Archives' lower numbered reels, it may not be the best use of the Society's resources to record them.

*The permanent closure of the lower portion of the Archives open reel library will not take place until next year, if it happens at all. And it will not happen without an opportunity for members to voice their opinions on that subject.*

The Hollywood Museum open reel library is another matter. The original source of the programs is not available for rerecording. Both the masters and the loan copies are suffering from the tape squeal problem. It is no longer

possible to offer first generation copies for loan, since the discs are not available.

New material has not been added to the Hollywood Museum Library for quite a few years. Most members have already checked out all of the reels that they want from this library. The Hollywood Museum open reel library currently is serving only from ten to fifteen members at any one time, approximately 1% of the membership. The Board decided that the resources for dubbing that are available to us would be better spent in providing new material in the libraries and multiple copies of the more popular programs in both Archives and General Libraries.

Members will have until December 31st to borrow any reels they want from the Hollywood Museum Open Reel library. Multiple orders may be arranged for those members who are in good standing with the library (those who return tapes promptly). After that date, the programs will continue to be available on cassette.

It is most important to remember that these changes DO NOT EFFECT new material being added to the Archives Library, which will continue to be available on both open reel and cassette.

The entire General Library will also continue to be available on both open reel and cassette.

Members with questions about these decisions are invited to let us know. We welcome your input.

# SPERDVAC

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*We are so grateful to the many Friends of SPERDVAC who have contributed \$50 or more to help defray costs of the society. The above members have donated funds during the past year.*

# Radio in Review

By Chris Lembesis



The following publications are available from the Museum of Broadcasting. Their address appears on page 5.

**THE MUSEUM OF BROADCASTING'S CLASSICAL MUSIC COLLECTION.** By Thomas DeLong and Brian Rose. 1987. Softbound. \$2.00.

Here is an overall look at the Museum of Broadcasting's own collection of classical music shows from radio and TV. SPERDVAC member Tom DeLong contributed to this work with an article called "Reaching Out: The Classical Touch of Radio." The article lightly touches upon the art of broadcasting classical music. Program and personalities with unique highlights, such as Leopold Stowkowski's concern of tonal sound quality, mike placement, and reception add to a fascinating article. Programs touched upon are *The Telephone Hour*, *The NBC Symphony*, and *The Voice of Firestone*. Good reading!

**THE METROPOLITAN OPERA: THE RADIO AND TELEVISION LEGACY.** With articles by David Hamilton, and others. 1986. Softbound. \$10.00.

In 1986, the Museum presented an exhibition of the history of THE METROPOLITAN OPERA, and the years it was presented on radio and TV. In the field of classical music, this program holds a record for longevity that may never be equaled in modern show business.

Since 1931, *The Metropolitan Opera* has continuously been heard or seen; and has left its mark on American culture. This is a fine publication that brings out the Met's great history. It was a story of struggle and success, when its early years saw an array of sponsors come and go, and for a time it was a sustaining feature.

Then in 1940, Texaco assumed sponsorship. For 50 years, Texaco spent over 75 million in institutional advertising of this program. Remember Milton Cross? His association with this program is highlighted. The stars, productions, anecdotes and more are covered.

The radio years are beautifully written by David Hamilton in his piece "The Sound of the Met." But the real surprise is a first for our hobby: a complete log of every *Metropolitan Opera* broadcast, from *Hänsel und Gretel* on December 25, 1931, to its production of *Faust* on March 8, 1986. Principal cast and conductor are included.

The Met seasons were usually short and ran from November to April. Overall this publication is a fine introduction to the world of grand opera, as we heard it during the Golden Years of Radio. Classical music deserves its rightful place in the history of radio, and this publication should be a welcome addition to your OTR library.

**BOB HOPE: A HALF CENTURY IN RADIO AND TELEVISION.** With articles by Frank Buxton, Peter Kaplan, Larry Gelbart, Dick Cavett, Bob Hope, and a tribute by President Ronald Reagan. 1986. Softbound. \$7.00.

Truly an icon of American show business, Bob Hope was the subject of an exhibition of his radio and TV career at the Museum in 1986. Of all that has been written about



Send your wants in OTR-related material to McGee's Closet, % Barbara J. Watkins, PO Box 561, South Pasadena, CA 91031

**WANTED:** The following Maureen O'Sullivan radio broadcasts: LUX "Captain Applejack" 10-19-36; LUX "How Green Was My Valley" 3-31-47; LESSONS IN HOLLYWOOD, Mutual 10-14-36; plus her appearances on KRAFT MUSIC HALL, GOOD NEWS OF 1938, NBC UNIVERSITY THEATER, FAMILY THEATER, etc. Also looking for Janet Gaynor's 9-18-41 appearance on KRAFT MUSIC HALL. Contact: Connie Billips, 5111 Palmetto Lane, Fayetteville, NC 28304.

**WANTED:** Would like to purchase photos or photocopies of the network broadcasting studios in New York, Chicago and Hollywood from the 1930's, 40's and 50's. These would be over-all views, showing the architectural features, the acoustical treatments, the studios' set-ups, etc. I also want any information where I would be able to locate the above. Contact: Robert A. Koch, P.O. Box 83, Grand Island, NY 14072.

**WANTED:** Harold Peary interviews, recordings and biographical information wanted. Contact: Kayleen Sybrandt, 3333 Morningside Road, Wilmington, DE 19810, (302)478-9529.

**WANTED:** Cassette recordings of CBS's INVITATION TO LEARNING, 1941-1942. Contact: Tom Stanley, Box 434, Wilder, VT 05088.

**WANTED:** Photos, programs, and other memorabilia from THE BIG SHOW, NBC 1950-52. Also looking for good quality recordings of shows not in our collections. Interested in corresponding with any individuals who worked on THE BIG SHOW or other collectors of BIG SHOW programs. Contact: Gilbert M. Smith, 248 South 36th Street, San Diego, CA 92113, or George V. Norcia, 3860 Rose Street, Seal Beach, CA 90740

## DICK TUFELD GUESTS JUNE 9TH

Radio and television announcer Dick Tufeld will be SPERDVAC's guest at our June 9 meeting.

Mr. Tufeld was an NBC network announcer in Hollywood during 1948 and 1949, then moved to ABC where he served an network announcer until 1954. His announcing assignments included *Space Patrol*, *Mr. President*, *Amazing Mr. Malone*, and *Original Amateur Hour*.

In television he has worked on such programs as *Zoro*, *Peyton Place*, and *Lost in Space*, where he was both the announcer and the voice of the robot. In California, he has been the voice on the Great Western Bank commercials featuring Dennis Weaver.

Our meeting, which is open free to the public, begins at 12 noon. We will meet at the United Methodist Church, 15435 Rayen, Sepulveda.

Cont. on page 5...

# FM and Facsimile Radio Transmissions

By Hugh Anderson.

On June 5, 1936, Congress repealed the Davis Amendment in the Communications Act which required the allocation of stations equally among five radio zones under a "quota system" of distribution. With the amendment repealed, the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) was then empowered to license stations according to technical feasibility rather than population.

In the beginning there was just AM radio. In 1936, the prospect of TV, FM and facsimile transmission had to be faced and broadcast bands allocated. The FCC now had the ability to authorize bands and new stations for various uses and technical development. FM radio then had its opportunity to grow but it had stiff competition from TV and the fax machines of the 30's!

Dr. Edward H. Armstrong was the developer of the frequency modulation limiter. He first applied for his initial four patents in 1930, receiving them after Christmas, 1933. He demonstrated his system in early 1934 to NBC's David Sarnoff who invited Armstrong to install equipment in some of the RCA space in the Empire State Building and to work with RCA engineers in broadcasting experimental FM. Although these experimental broadcasts confirmed an engineering breakthrough, it would be years before FM would operate on its own and then only after a bitter fight between Armstrong and Sarnoff over patent rights.

In 1934, RCA, experimenting with television, tested facsimile transmissions in the ultra high frequencies. In fact, RCA pursued TV so strongly that in April of 1935 Dr. Armstrong was asked to remove his equipment from the RCA premises. RCA had become committed TV, facsimile and AM. Sarnoff anticipated a struggle for broadcast band space between TV and FM radio and would begin to form his battle lines.

At the St. Moritz Hotel in New York City, before members of the Radio Commission, radio engineers and members of the press, on April 9, 1934, Mr. John V.L. Hogan demonstrated his "radio pen reproducer", part of a high speed facsimile radio system, transmitted over experimental station W2XAR, ordered by WTMJ, Milwaukee.

In November of the same year, Armstrong staged a public demonstration of his FM system before a meeting of the Institute of Radio Engineers. A 17 mile transmission was made from Yonkers, N.Y. to NYC which was described by Lawrence Lessing, Armstrong's biographer, as "a life-like clarity never heard on even the best clear channel stations in the regular broadcast band. . ." In the fall of 1935, Armstrong won space for 13 of his 200 khz channels from the FCC but only five were suitable for transmission at the time and the 13 were in three widely separated places on the spectrum.

With a radio audience of 21,456,000 people in 1935,

a search began to capitalize on the established patronage. Facsimile transmission of fixed images to treated paper on facsimile receivers in the home and elsewhere was the bet by many to be the next big breakthrough in broadcasting. *Broadcasting Magazine* reports: "The Radio Manufacturers Association in January formed a special committee to coordinate facsimile research and to consider its service possibilities as well as its 'romantic appeal'." William G. H. Finch, assistant chief engineer of the FCC, revived patents for a facsimile receiver weighing only 14 pounds and capable of reproducing half-tones as well as black and white images.

"In a January 1, 1935 editorial, *Broadcasting*, with more certitude than prescience, hailed facsimile as 'a medium of practical picture broadcasting - a phase of the visual art that is destined to develop far ahead of the overballyhooed television . . . To the advertiser, facsimile will provide a means whereby he can show his merchandise visually to all within the living room. There will be sound accompaniment too, so he can describe his wares while his audience views them! *Broadcasting* also warned that the 'broadcasters of today, naturally, should be the facsimile broadcasters of 1937 and 1938. . . but there will be plenty of others who will try to elbow into this field, jealous of the progress of sound radio and the opportunities many of them muffed a decade ago.'

"There were several problems to be worked out in facsimile transmission, but its proponents were undeterred. Facsimile had been used to transmit weather maps to ships at sea. RCA, while investing heavily in television, hedged its bets by announcing in its annual report that it would plan a high-speed, ultra-short-wave facsimile circuit between New York and Philadelphia by the end of the year.

"Broadcasters speculated about the day when entire newspapers could be delivered to readers by 'radio-photography.' In fact, in October RCA executives discussed that possibility with the managers of New York newspapers such as the Herald-Tribune, World-Telegram and American. With the entry of the Scripps-Howard newspaper organization into the broadcast field in September, observers felt that the facsimile reproduction of newspapers was imminent. On December 3 the FCC authorized two experimental facsimile stations: WOR Newark, N.J. and the Yankee Network, Boston. At the same time, RCA's Sarnoff blessed the technology with the assertion that 'facsimile broadcasting into people's homes will be the next important development in radio. . . In a relatively short time, facsimile transmission will be in practical use.' "

Tune in same time, same station next month for the further exciting adventures of FM Radio!

the Hope mystique and his style of humor, this publication probably is one of the best. SPERDVAC honorary member Frank Buxton discusses Hope's radio work in "This Is Bob 'Camp Roberts' Hope. . ." It includes the story of how Hope entered that medium and how his show became the success it was. Script samples and photos are included, along with the story of how the writers prepared for each upcoming show.

Writer Larry Gilbert, who joined Hope in 1952, talks about working with him back then for radio and TV, in his article "The Bullfighter's Apprentice: An Oral Recollection." Dick Cavett writes about how Hope's career influenced him in "Hero Worship." Bob himself contributes a piece called "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Theatre."

Highlights from the Bob Hope Exhibition from radio and TV makeup the conclusion of this publication. The photos through showcase his media work. An excellent work worth adding to your OTR library.

**ORSON WELLS ON THE AIR: THE RADIO YEARS.** With contributions by Andrew Saris, John Houseman, Barbara Leaming, Dorothy Thompson, Howard Koch, and Steve Allen. Tributes by Joseph Cotton, Helen Hayes, Norman Corwin, and Henry Jaglom. 1988. Softbound \$7.00.

The radio legacy of Orson Wells was the subject of a Museum exhibition in 1988. This publication superbly brings out the talents of that Orson Welles. In an article titled "Orson Welles on Radio: The Shadow And The Substance," author Andrew Sarris summarizes Welles work by bringing out the qualities that Welles brought to radio, such as the use of guest stars in his **Campbell Playhouse** series, techniques of the theater adapted for radio, and views on what his work has left us today.

"An Interview With John Houseman" reviews his contributions to **The Mercury Theater** and **Campbell Playhouse** series, and discusses what it was like working with Welles, and being a part of the Golden Age of Radio. Welles' biographer, Barbara Leaming, adds her thoughts with an article titled "Citizen of America." Dorothy Thompson's article from the New York *Herald Tribune* "Mr. Welles and Mass Delusion," reviewing the radio play "The War of the Worlds," is reprinted in its entirety. "Orson Welles, Some Reminiscences", is Howard Koch's look at writing for Welles, before he became a screen writer and moved to greater success. In a final piece, Steve Allen writes about how his family reacted to "The War of the Worlds" when they heard it. Four tributes from friends and associates of Welles bring this publication to a conclusion.

A valuable Appendix is a look at the radio work of Orson Welles including logs of **The Shadow**, **The Mercury Theater**, and **The Campbell Playhouse**. Air dates, guest cast, and photos from the broadcast make this excellent reference section. SPERDVAC is acknowledged in the credits for its contribution to this publication. Highly recommended!

**THE TELEPHONE HOUR: A RETROSPEC-**

**TIVE.** With contributions by Robert Sherman, Thomas DeLong, Henry Jaffee, Howard Kissel. 1990. Softbound. \$7.

Presently on display at the Museum, through October, is a salute to a tradition of over 1,000 performances on radio and TV of **The Telephone Hour**, covering the years 1940 to 1968. This publication, just released in conjunction for this retrospective, is a marvelous look at a series that meant the best in light classical music. An overview of the series, "Radio and Television", is presented by Robert Sherman. An interesting note brought out is that the series never used the word BELL until it entered TV in 1959. Other highlights of this article include details of how each program was prepared, and the notable guest artists, from Jascha Heifetz to Fritz Kreisler. An even more detailed look at its radio run is presented by Thomas DeLong in "The Telephone Hour Reign on Radio."

Highlights of the Museum's collection of **Telephone Hour** radio and TV programs are described in the latter part of this publication, which lists the producers, conductors, and changes in the broadcast schedule.

An overall assessment of these publications would be one of gratification, for these works are excellent studies, both social and technical, of programs and personalities that made radio what it was. The quality of paper, choice of color and type, and the overall care that went into its production are evident. With few exceptions in some of the program logs, the research is accurate and the photographs are superb. Affordably priced, they will be referred to by fans and collectors alike for their wealth of information.

Thanks to Dana Rogers, Publicity Director of The Museum of Broadcasting for these excellent publications. If you are in New York City, visit the Museum and its excellent displays and seminars, held continuously. Their phone number is (212)752-4690. These publications are all available at the Museum along with other items. To purchase them by mail, include \$2 for shipping and handling. Send your order to: The Museum of Broadcasting, 1 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022, Attn: Mail Order Department.

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The response to the new **GUNSMOKE** book has made it an immediate favorite of the hobby. At the recent OTR Convention in Cincinnati, all copies sold out, and we did too! If you do not have your copy, please refer to the review in the last issue of the *Radiogram*.

Copies of member Ken Greenwald's new book **THE LOST ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES**, are available at our meetings. To order by mail, please include an additional \$2 for shipping and handling. The cost of this book is \$8, and well worth its price.

In 1979, Santa Susana Press published a Limited Edition portfolio titled **ABOUT NORMAN CORWIN**, by Ray Bradbury. It was issued to honor the achievements of Norman Corwin. It is an unusual work in appearance because it is not bound as most books are, but issued in a custom folding box. Each set is inscribed by the author, Ray Bradbury, the photographer, Amanda Blanco, the

*Cont. on page 8 . .*

# BOB BRUCE: RADIO'S 'THIRD BANANA'

By Dan Haefele

Bob Bruce made a living in radio's Golden Age performing in support roles on many of the medium's popular network shows. His career began during his college days at the University of Minnesota, continued in Chicago and New York, and concluded in Hollywood.

As a university student working toward a degree in theatre arts in 1932, Bruce was part of a small group of young performers working on a weekly show that recreated news events. "Four or Five of us played many, many parts, much as they did on **March of Time**," he told SPERDVAC's audience at last month's meeting. "It was that beginning which gave me a start as a character actor."

One of his peers there and later in Chicago was Arthur Peterson, who would also become a well known radio performer. After his graduation, Bruce went to Chicago where he did radio and stage work for a short time before moving to New York City.

## Disappointing Experience

Noting that he arrived in New York with just \$35, the actor recalled an important experience there. "The first day I was there," he said, "A friend of mine who had also been at the university said, 'There's going to be an audition for a road show that has about 15 small parts in it. Why don't we go down to the theatre tomorrow and audition?' I thought, 'I've been in town an hour and I've got an audition.'

"Five thousand other actors were there," he continued. We moved slowly up those stairs for a couple of hours, and finally . . . the line started going fast. We went to the top and there was nobody there. They had cast the show and run for their lives."

The disappointing experience during this attempt to obtain work as a stage performer had a long-lasting influence on him.

## New York Radio

"I started doing some radio because of an inability to get to see anybody in the theatre," he explained. His experience in local programs in the Twin Cities area was another boost.

"I did **Gangbusters** and even **March of Time**," he added. "Then I got a job on WMCA, which had a staff of six actors doing nine shows a week for \$50 a week,"

The WMCA staff included Arnold Moss, Frank Lovejoy and Wendell Holmes.

During that same time Bruce was offered the part of the coachman in a stage production of "Victoria Regina" with Vincent Price and Katharine Cornell. He turned the offer down when he realized the part paid \$15 weekly at a time when he was earning \$50 per week at WMCA.

## Moves to Hollywood

In 1938 Bob Bruce moved to Hollywood. "Because of my experience in New York, I was able to get to some of the local producers and they gave me jobs. I ended up on the staff of KFWB. There were four of us doing four or five shows a week," he recalled. "There was Alan Ladd, Arthur Q. Bryan, Jack Lescoulie and myself. Out of that came my 15 years I narrated the Porky Pig and Looney Tune car-

toons," he said of his work at the station then owned by Warner Brothers.

When the newly formed American Federation of Radio Artists forced stations to increase pay rates for local broadcasts to \$8, KFWB cancelled many of its shows, forcing the four to seek acting jobs elsewhere.

## Odd Twist of Fate

"Arthur Q. Bryan and I started doing freelance work on the network," he recounted. "But Alan . . . was having a tough time getting jobs."

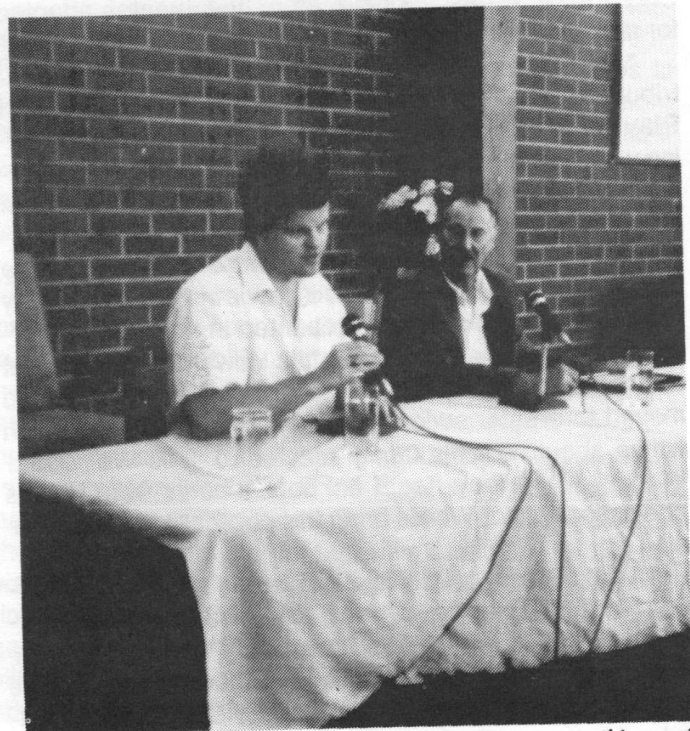
About this time Alan Ladd and his first wife broke up and Ladd moved in with Bruce. "One day", he continued, "he came home and said he had heard that Sue Carol, the former silent star, was looking for clients. She was starting an agency. I had a job that week. . . so I said, 'You go to see her.' He not only got a job in a picture but he married her and she was his manager."

## Radio Bloopers

Discussing his career with the SPERDVAC audience, Bruce recalled several fluffs of the airwaves. Once at KFWB he was doing a commercial for Town Talk Bread. Their catch slogan, "Insist on the best in bread," came out "Insist on the breast in bed."

In Studio C at CBS in Hollywood, Bruce and fellow actors were doing a live dramatic broadcast when they were unnerved by the sight of hoards of termites. The insects began invading the stage floor, crawling over performers shoes, and jumping to their deaths on the very hot footlights. Audience members didn't understand the actors'

*Cont. on page 8 . . .*



Larry Gassman interviewed actor Bob Bruce at last month's meeting. The new SPERDVAC honorary member was given the Diamond Circle Award by Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters last month.

## ELLIOTT LEWIS cont. . .

Mr. Lewis dropped out of college to pursue a radio acting career.

### Busy Radio Actor

There were times when he was involved in as many as twenty radio shows in a single week. He became one of Hollywood radio's busiest dramatic performers.

William Spier, director of **Suspense**, hired him as an actor on the highly rated CBS drama. He also helped with some of the script editing.

"The first person I think of when I think of learning anything (in radio) is Jack Benny," Lewis reflected. "When I was in school I had parts on the Benny show. He was the most supportive, best teacher, best audience. (He had) the least amount of ego of any man I knew in my life. If you got a laugh on the Benny show where he didn't expect it, he sent you an extra check. . . . When I was 19 he did me the great honor of letting me time the joke."

### Influential Advice

He also credits Jack Benny with some of the most influential advice he ever received. "Never do the same thing every week. Even if it's lousy, it's better than doing the same thing every week. Continue to take chances. Make yourself take chances," the comedian told him.

Dezi Arnaz, too, gave important advice: "Never do a lousy show."

Lewis' performances were anything but lousy and he was cast on many of the top network comedy and dramatic programs of the era. He once recalled that Sunday afternoons were particularly busy times for him.

"From 4 to 4:30 I did the Benny show," he said, "and from 4:30 to 5 I did **Passing Parade** with John Nesbitt at CBS. . . . So I parked my car in front of NBC and did the Benny show and while Don (Wilson) was doing the closing commercial, I strolled out of the building and got in my car. . . . pulled into the parking lot behind KNX, took one script out of my pocket and put another one in and walked into the studio as they were completing the opening commercial on **Passing Parade**. It never occurred to me that the car wouldn't start or that there could be an accident.

### Frankie Remley Role

When the **Fitch Bandwagon** comedy first went on the air in 1946 with Phil Harris and Alice Fay, they decided to add the comic character Frankie Remley as a regular on the program. Remley's character had been a running gag on the **Jack Benny Show** for years, but had never appeared on the air. The real Frankie Remley, a left-handed guitar player in the Harris Orchestra, tried to portray his radio namesake, but did not possess the needed acting abilities.

"He was a dear, wonderful man," Lewis often said. "But he was a musician, not an actor."

Harris stopped Lewis at NBC one day and asked, "Would you do me a favor? Remley doesn't sound right. Would you read Remley?" Elliott Lewis as Remley was an immediate hit with the listening audience and NBC's Pat Weaver suggested he be added as a regular.

"Phil would give me all the laughs, let me time it any way I wanted," Lewis recalled modestly.

### Laughs Too Big

"The laughs were bigger than the material. . . . I said to Jack (Benny), 'I don't know what they're laughing at. I know the joke is funny and I know we're doing the joke right, but why is the building shaking? The laugh is so enormous!'"

Benny's evaluation was concise: "What you two guys say, under the conditions that exist in the story, is what everyone in that audience would like to say if they had the nerve."

In 1939, during a rehearsal for **Silver Theatre**, he was asked to go into a nearby studio to audition for a group of people involved in a new show. Actress Rosalind Russell, with whom he had been rehearsing, suggested they perform a scene from the radio play they had been rehearsing. Lewis was then hired to star on **Knickerbocker Playhouse**, planned as a 13 week summer series originating from Chicago. It was there he also met actress Mary Jane Croft, who would become his wife 19 years later.

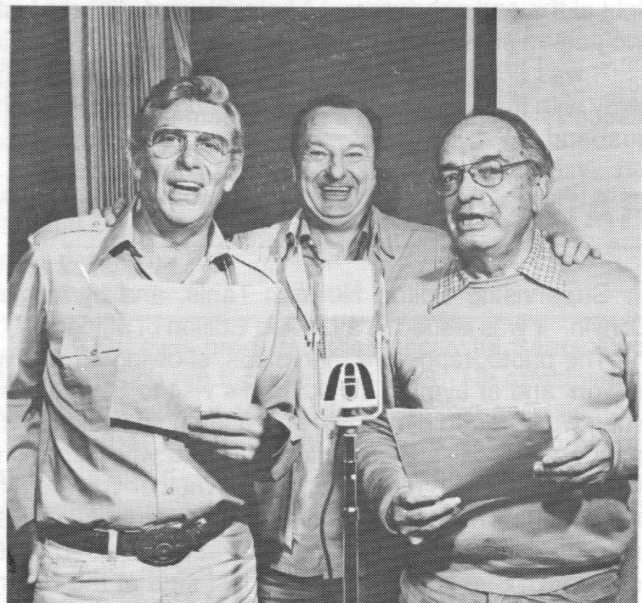
### Edited Shows for AFRS

During World War II he and long-time friend Howard Duff, not yet famous as radio's **Same Spade**, were in charge of editing American network shows so they would be suitable for rebroadcast over the Armed Forces Radio Service.

"We had three civilian crews working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to reassemble these shows by the techniques that we developed," he told John Dunning in a 1975 interview. "This was before tape. We were doing this editing off of acetate (records)."

Duff and Lewis obtained the recording from Radio Recorders in Hollywood and personally transported the glass based discs to the AFRS studios. "Howard and I would pick them up in an Army vehicle which was given to us occasionally," he said. "The rest of the time we were to use our own car, our own gasoline.

"We would make worksheets on a typewriter as the  
*Cont. on page 9. . .*



Andy Griffith, Fletcher Markle (director) and Elliott Lewis (executive producer) worked together on **Mutual Radio Theatre** in 1980.

## Bob Bruce Cont. . . .

odd behavior when they saw them walking strangely on the stage and shaking their feet frequently.

Cecil Underwood, later producer of **Fibber McGee and Molly**, once told Bruce of his most famous radio blooper. Working as an NBC announcer in San Francisco, Underwood was responsible for pushing the correct buttons to direct his closing announcements to the proper NBC stations. At the conclusion of the comedy **Stuff and Nonsense** the young announcer ran into the announcing booth where there were controls for NBC's Red and Blue networks. "He pushed the Blue network instead of the Red network and cut off the Pope" with the announcement "You've been listening to Stuff and Nonsense. . ."

On another occasion Bruce was a participant in a prank on Tony LaFrano on the **Red Ryder** program. Cast members set the Studio clocks ahead 15 minutes and rushed him in just as they began the children's show. He became devastated as lines were flubbed, the script stand was knocked over and few profanities were shouted in the broadcast studio.

### Third Banana

Bruce describes his radio work as playing a third banana most of the time. "The third banana people were very well trained, talented people," he observed. "We had very little name identifications because when someone said Bob Bruce was on the show, listeners didn't know what part I played." He noted the audience at home rarely knew when a performer played multiple roles on a broadcast.

Recently our guest, who has been made an honorary SPERDVAC member, has completed the manuscript for a book he tentatively has titled *Life as a Third Banana*. Publication of the book about his radio career has not yet been arranged.

But there was an occasion when Bob Bruce was a second banana on radio. "They built a show for Zasu Pitts right at the end of her career," he explained. "It was just a two person show and I played her husband.

"I was 35 years old," he mused. "In radio I could get away with that. I looked like her son and sounded like her husband."

## RADIO IN REVIEW cont. . .

Supervising Editor, Norman Tanis, and by Norman Corwin. It was issued in a Limited Edition of 60 copies.

The photographs are marvelous, showing Mr. Corwin at work and at events, including his visit to SPERDVAC, when we honored him in 1979. Each photo is signed and numbered by Miss Blanco, and it is she who informs us that only three sets remain for sale. Whether you are a fan of Norman Corwin or the writing of Ray Bradbury, this is a highly recommended work that is already a valued collector's item. She is offering these last sets at the original published price of \$260, and can be reached at 1626 Ar-

macost Ave. #7, Los Angeles, CA 90025.

New month, a look at music and the artists who brought their craft to radio. Until next time, as always, Good Luck and good Reading!

## SPERDVAC DIRECTORY

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## ELLIOTT LEWIS DIES . . .

show was on the air," he continued. "When we delivered the acetates. . . the crew knew exactly what they were going to do. By the following morning that show was ready to be broadcast by shortwave."

The crew cut commercial references and added fill music to make up for the lost broadcast time. "As I look back at it now, I don't know how in Heaven's name we did it," he added, "because while we were typing we were listening to a show and watching a clock." He was awarded the Legion of Merit for his audio efforts.

### Post War Credits

His post war radio work included **Casebook of Gregory Hood**, **Hawk Larabee** and **Voyage of the Scarlet Queen**.

Many of those involved in the **Scarlet Queen** series were part of the group that was in the Army together at Armed Forces Radio. Lewis credited much of the show's success to the emphasis on sound effects. Much of the studio space was devoted to the various devices needed to create believable sound patterns. The program used three sound effects men.

Another reason **Scarlett Queen** was such a good program, in Lewis' view, is because of the talent of the writer, Gil Doud. Formerly a sound effects man himself, Doud wrote for many popular dramas, including **Sam Spade** and **Suspense**.

### Radio Writing Career

"I think of myself as a writer," he told SPERDVAC in 1979. He did much of his writing for **Suspense** and also became the producer-director of the drama.

"A producer is a person in charge of what's wrong," he half-joked, noting the producer is held accountable for mistakes while writers, performers and directors receive credit for a program's successes.

As the television era began crowding radio out of the American lifestyle Elliott Lewis stayed in the medium and continued to make it a valuable form of entertainment. In the early fifties he was still heavily involved in five major radio successes each week.

In addition to his part as Remley, he was at the same time the producer-director of **Suspense**, on which he occasionally acted and contributed scripts; he was the producer-director-story editor of **On Stage**, which he co-starred with wife Cathy Lewis and wrote the shows' opening and closings; he was also producer-director of **Broadway Is My Beat** and **Crime Classics**, the weekly drama written by Morton Fine and David Friedkin. Lewis also furnished the openings and closings for that program and served as story editor.

"At one point CBS had three of those shows on back to back on Wednesday nights," Lewis recalled.

### Post Radio Era

After radio's demise Lewis concentrated his talents on television production and script writing. He also authored many novels.

In 1973 he was hired to be producer-director of **Zero Hour**, a syndicated series of nightly dramas in stereo. After the show was sold to Mutual Radio Lewis was dropped from the staff and the program lasted only a short time.

## VOX POP

### Memories of Elliott Lewis

Editor:

A man named Elliott Lewis died the other day.

In this era of power lunches, million dollar script sales, mega-mergers and buy-outs, I'm certain that his passing caused nary a ripple. But when many of today's moguls were but a gleam in their parents' eye, Elliott Lewis was a successful actor, writer, director and producer. For over 50 years he touched the lives of the people that worked alongside him, that derived pleasure from his countless productions. Yet, the announcement of his demise was buried in the back pages of the trade papers. Just another grizzled show business veteran, on no one's A list, with scattered credits on broadcasts long forgotten.

But to many of us, there was much more to this wonderful, multi-talented gentle man.

Sometimes, in our haste to get "the green light", or to "make it on the schedule", we neglect the human element of our business. But Elliott Lewis was interested in people. And not just those individuals who could help advance his career. Script supervisors, sound effects men, secretaries, aspiring writers and more, to all of them he lent an ear, or a hand when necessary. His generosity knew no bounds.

It was as a collector of old time radio that I wrote him in 1970 wondering about **SUSPENSE**, Phil Harris and Alice Fay and other jewels of a bygone era. He might have, as did several of his contemporaries, placed my inquiry in the circular file and been done with it. But this was not Elliott's way. Not only did he reply, but his thoughtful remarks were well-calculated to keep me enlightened, informed and entertained.

We exchanged many letters in the years that followed. And finally, in 1978, we met. Elliott and Fletcher Markle were ensconced in an office on Larchmont producing the **SEARS RADIO THEATRE**. I'm sure that he had scripts to edit, shows to tape and deadlines to meet. Yet, he carved a chunk of time out of his busy schedule to treat me to lunch and to endure more questions relating to the old days, days about which he had forgotten more than most of us will ever know.

Elliott worked until he was 70 years of age, the last years on the writing staff of a network series. There, he imparted his substantial wisdom and experience to a new generation of writers and producers. He educated them about the business, taught them the value of craft. And by example, he showed them how to maintain honesty, integrity and commitment in a business that does not always value such qualities.

A man named Elliott Lewis died the other day. He was an inspiration to me and many others. We'll miss him terribly.

*John Scheinfeld*  
Los Angeles

In 1979 Lewis produced the successful **Sears Radio Theatre**, which ran for a year on CBS. He remained with the program when it changed sponsorship and title, to become **Mutual Radio Theatre**. Both series presented weeknight entertainment in an hour-long format. SPERDVAC members made up most of the studio audience for two of the show's comedies starring Henry Morgan.

His most recent television work was as story editor of **Remington Steel**. Three years ago he and wife Mary Jane Croft moved to Oregon where, in semi-retirement, he worked on several writing projects.

# SPERDVAC



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**JULY ISSUE**

June 15, 1990

## MEMOS FOR MEMBERS

Welcome aboard to Oran Marksbury! Oran will serve as General Cassette Librarian for tapes numbered 1001 and beyond. He will begin taking orders on June 8. Address orders to: 2273 Colgate Dr., Costa Mesa, CA 92626.

Thank you once again to Duane and Jean Harding for their many hours of volunteer service to SPERDVAC in their capacity as membership chair. We are delighted to report they are assisting us with tape dubbing. And our gratitude to board member Carrolyn Rawski, our new commissioner of membership renewals and address changes.

Our thanks to the *Westchester News* for their nice article on SPERDVAC carried last month. We are still receiving calls and letters from readers interested in our organization.

SPERDVAC member RANDY SKRETVEDT will guest on the Ray Briem Show at KABC, Los Angeles at midnight Friday, July 13 (or, to be technically accurate, early Saturday, July 14) to discuss the career of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy. Randy is author of *Laurel and Hardy: The Magic Behind the Movies*. He is also host of "Forward into the Past," a program featuring old radio, big bands, novelties and show tunes on KSPC, Claremont, CA. The program airs Sundays, 2-5 pm.

An Independence Day old time radio mini-marathon will air July 4 on KPCC-FM, Pasadena. The special airs 6 pm-midnight on FM 89.3.

John and Larry Gassman are still in need of a volunteer to do reading of SPERDVAC related correspondence. This involves just a few hours per week. Members in the Whittier area may contact them at the SPERDVAC phone line, (213)947-9800.

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