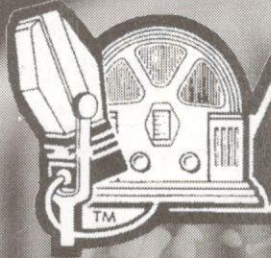


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# RADIOGRAM

Vol. 34 • No. 7

June 2009

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*plus...*

*What a Fab Confab at Convention 2009!*





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**The Editor Has His Say**

# Sorry I missed it, but I have a darn good excuse this time

**M**ay is the busiest time of the year for me since spring projects are due at the college and I spend a lot of time with students. But this year was going to be different. I had actually made arrangements to make it to the convention, but a glitch in travel arrangements left me literally holding the bag. But it didn't matter because I would've had to cancel the trip anyway. Mother Nature operates on her time and not mine. My daughter's delivery date was May 18 but my granddaughter decided to come early. So on April 29, 2009, Kate Evelyn Mayfield arrived at 7:24 a.m. Things went downhill from there. Kate was not cooperating well with the new world, and Kate's mother was going from one post-delivery crisis to the next. Things were scary for about five days while I paced in the hospital—a frightened and anxious father and grandfather. But I am happy to say that all turned out well, and that both mother and her daughter—that's my beautiful granddaughter—are doing well. Who knows? Maybe next year.

It's time for questions again. Remember, I receive questions—often in e-mails but sometimes in snail mail—seeking answers to everything from my age to who starred as Ozzie Nelson in *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. Who are the interlocutors? Everybody. Many introduce themselves by saying "I'm not a member of SPERDVAC but will you answer my question about *Life with Luigi*." I usually send such questions to the experts because even though I'm the editor and a true OTR fan I'm far from being an expert. So here we go with this round of questions.

*We missed you at the convention. What's your excuse this time?* I already answered that question, but I want to publicly express my appreciation for the kind comments about being missed. Few of these are ever snotty—I remember just one in all the time that I've missed—so disregard my snotty example above. I just want to say thanks to all who have sent their warm regards. I really think you did miss me.

*What's your position on all the infighting? How about an editorial?* No comment and no editorial other than what the Good Book says, "If a house be divided against itself, that

house cannot stand."

*Radiogram has deteriorated in the past year. What's going on?* I don't know. You tell me—and sign your name next time.

*Were you ever in radio?* Nope. I had great aspirations but no talent.

*Were you ever a newspaperman?* Yep. One year with a now defunct daily. I had great aspirations but no talent.

*Are you the columnist known as the "Mysterious Traveler" who writes those interesting bits about OTR?* Nope. Truly, it ain't me. I had aspirations of doing such a column but no talent. The author is, well, mysterious; he throws his

manuscripts off the local number nine each month.

*I notice that a few other OTR clubs are expanding to include early television. How about an article about *Our Miss Brooks* on radio and TV as well as that great movie version of the show?* Actually there are two parts to this question. First, I often get requests for articles about a show or a radio star. I try to please but I can publish only what I get from writers. Second, this TV request is getting more frequent, and not only in formal requests but in casual conversation with OTR friends. I attribute this question to the plethora of old TV shows now available on DVD such as *Gunsmoke*. But SPERDVAC is dedicated to radio; remember, it preserves and encourages radio, not television or radio/TV (I propose a new club: SPERTAO, the Society to Preserve and Encourage Radio and Television AntiQuity). Management has made it clear that SPERDVAC's primary interest is radio, and so articles about *Our Miss Brooks* on television would not be appropriate for *Radiogram*, but an article about the program's transition from radio to television *might* be appropriate. I emphasize *might* because such articles would be judged on individual merits. An article that says *Our Miss Brooks* started in radio in 1948 and crossed over to TV in 1952 and spends 2500 words on how great the TV series was would not make it. But a comprehensive analysis of how the television series depended on the radio series for its effectiveness might make it depending on the editor's "educated whim."

So long until tomorrow.☿





## Summer Reading

# New books chronicle 'Your Hit Parade' and garrulous radio

Two recently published books are required reading this summer and deserve places on any OTR and early television bookshelf.

Andrew Lee Fielding's *The Lucky Strike Papers: Journeys through My Mother's Television Past* is more than a biography of a musical talent once described by *Downbeat* magazine as "one of the coming female singers in the country," but a fascinating look at the early years of live television when television was, indeed, radio with pictures.

Fielding's mother was Sue Bennett, who

was a featured singer on various network television shows between 1949 and 1952 including *Kay Kyser's College of Musical Knowledge*, *The Freddy Martin Show* and *Your Hit Parade*, for which she was described by *Downbeat* as having "the controlled musicianship of a [Jo] Stafford, and the jazz ideas of a [Sarah] Vaughan."

Fielding, however, does more than just chronicle the life of his mother but weaves that life in and through a history of early television. As he states, "I've been drawn

to this subject—my mother's relationship to television's early years—since childhood."

To this end, Fielding has had conversations with such early television personalities as Dorothy Collins, Snooky Lanson, Raymond Scott, Merv Griffin, Arthur Penn and Kay Kyser.

Those truly interested in the transition, as it were, from radio to television in the late 1940s and early 1950s will find the work most interesting. A comprehensive review of the book will be published in *Radiogram* soon.

The book is available from the publisher, BearManor Media, at the company's website at [www.bearmanormedia.com](http://www.bearmanormedia.com), and also the author's website at [www.luckystrikepapers.com](http://www.luckystrikepapers.com). Or write to BearManor Media at P.O. Box 71426 in Albany, GA 31708 or BearManor Media at 229-436-4265. The book is also available on Amazon.

For those interested in completing their encyclopedic knowledge of radio, author Francine Silverman has, as the blurb says, "done it again." Her *Talk Radio Wants You: An Intimate Guide to 700 Shows and How to Get Invited* bridges the gap between show hosts and prospective guests, providing a reference guide to roughly 700 talk radio shows by category heard in the United States and around the world.

For the radio enthusiast the book offers comprehensive descriptions of talk shows both over the air and over the Internet. Each program is given a theme, guest profile, and "guest from hell," as well as information about contacting the program, how to get invited back, and a brief bio of the program's host or hosts.

Scanning the book is a lot like scanning the annual *Writer's Market*. As Dot Blum, host of Bright Spot on <http://www.radiosandysprings.com>, writes: "This resource book is an asset for people in public relations, marketing, promotions, special events and non-profit professionals and volunteers as it will direct them to the right venues and they can contract the appropriate media outlets."

The 329-page, \$75 trade paperback is available from the publisher at [www.mcfarlandpub.com](http://www.mcfarlandpub.com) or at Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640 and at Amazon.

## ← PUBLIC COMMENT →

The following is the proposed changes to SPERDVAC's bylaws and are presented here for public review. If you have any comments regarding the proposed changes send your comments to [spervac@aol.com](mailto:spervac@aol.com) or mail your comments to P.O. Box 669, Manhattan Beach, CA 90266-0669 or leave voice comments at 877-251-5771.

### ARTICLE II

#### Membership

Currently, Section 6 reads as follows:

"Section 6. Monthly Meetings

There shall be regular monthly meetings of the members of the corporation for any purpose or purposes. The regular monthly meetings shall be held on the second Saturday of each month at 12:00 noon at the principal office of this corporation or at any other place designated by a resolution of the Board of Directors. AMENDMENT 8/14/93"

If the change is adopted, Section 6 will read as follows:

"Section 6. Meetings

There may be meetings of the members of the corporation and open to the public for any purpose or purposes. Meetings may be held on the second Saturday of the month at a location designated by a resolution of the Board of Directors. AMENDMENT 8/14/93"

### ARTICLE IV

#### Officers

Currently, Section 7, (a) reads as follows:

"Section 7. Responsibilities of Officers

(a) President. The president shall be subject to the control of the Board of Directors, generally supervise, direct, and control the business and the officers of the corporation. He shall preside at all meetings of the members and at all meetings of the Board of Directors. He shall have such other powers and duties as may be prescribed by the Board of Directors or the bylaws."

If the change is adopted, Section 7 (a) will read as follows:

"Section 7. Responsibilities of Officers

(a) President. The president shall be subject to the control of the Board of Directors, generally supervise, direct, and control the business and the officers of the corporation. He, or his designee, shall preside at all meetings of the members. He shall preside at all meetings of the Board of Directors. He shall have such other powers and duties as may be prescribed by the Board of Directors or the bylaws."



## Joan Alexander, Radio's Lois Lane, Dies in Manhattan

Radio's Lois Lane died May 21 in Manhattan of intestinal blockage. Joan Stanton, known professionally as Joan Alexander, was 94.

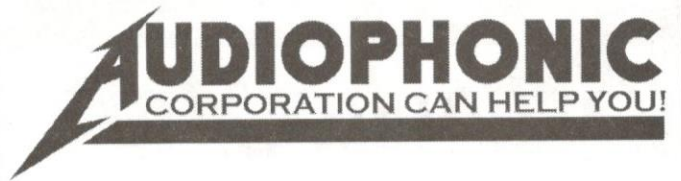
Ms. Alexander was a model and stage actress before turning to radio where she appeared in numerous programs including a longtime stint as Della Street in *Perry Mason*. In 1940, *The Adventures of Superman* began on WOR in New York and concluded in 1951 on ABC. She co-starred opposite Clayton "Bud" Collyer as Superman, and she and Collyer reprised their roles for the Filmmation cartoon series *The New Adventures of Superman* in the mid-1960s.



Ms. Alexander was born Louise Abrass in St. Paul, MN on April 16, 1915. When she was young her father died and her mother remarried and her stepfather moved the family to Brooklyn where she was raised. According to her daughter, writer Jane Stanton Hitchcock, Ms. Alexander took the name Joan because she loved the actress Joan Crawford but "Alexander" remained a mystery.

Ms. Alexander was married thrice, first to actor John Sylvester White, known in the 1970s as the principal in the TV series *Welcome Back Kotter*, and then to Robert Crowley, a surgeon, and father of Mrs. Hitchcock. Her third husband was businessman Arthur Stanton, whom she married in 1954. He died in 1987.

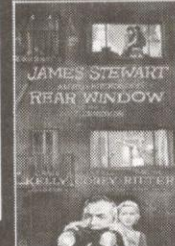
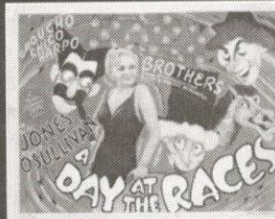
In addition to her daughter survivors include a son, Tim, and a grandson, Liam.



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REPS SHOWCASE 2009 • JUNE 26 & 27 • BELLEVUE, WA

# 'Groucho Marx' and 'Jack Benny' Set for Showcase 2009 in Bellevue

A Two-Day Event to Experience and Celebrate Classic Moments from the Golden Days of Radio Featuring *Gunsmoke, Suspense, Lux Radio Theatre, The Shadow, The Red Skelton Show, I Love a Mystery.*

Groucho Marx and Jack Benny promise to make appearances at Showcase 2009 at the Coast hotel in Bellevue, WA, June 26 and 27, at the gala OTR convention sponsored by the Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound (REPS).



In a celebration of the best of old-time radio, sketches are planned featuring *Baby Snooks, Lum 'n' Abner*, the comedy antics of Red Skelton, a trip to Allen's Alley with Larry Albert as Fred Allen in an impersonation that would amaze even Portland Hoffa. Also, REPS brings a thrilling adventure of *The Shadow* who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men as well as a visit with *Fibber McGee and Molly* and *The Great Gildersleeve*. An episode of *Gunsmoke* with its grueling sound effects challenges will also be featured. The Jack Benny beavers will appear as played by talented Seattle area child actors who are also featured in the expansive and daring production of *The Wizard of Oz* as originally heard on *Lux Radio Theater*.

Special guests appearing at the convention are:

- Eddie Carroll, whose diverse career spans four decades in the theater, television series, countless TV shows, and, since 1973, the voice of Jiminy Cricket, will bring his uncanny portrayal of Jack Benny to Showcase for the first time since 2007. As Eddie says, "Nothing has given me as much pleasure. I feel privileged to carry on Benny's legacy with respect and dignity and to keep his image alive."

- Frank Ferrante is an award-winning actor/director/playwright who has been a hit with audiences of all ages with his acclaimed portrayal of legendary comedian Groucho Marx in the touring production of *An Evening with Groucho*. Mr. Ferrante will be in Seattle the same weekend as Showcase to appear in the smash hit dinner show *Teatro Zinzanni*. He has graciously offered to take a few moments to make a special Saturday morning appearance at Showcase. Frank will be working along side his longtime friend Eddie

Carroll to present a radio salute to Groucho and Benny.

- Shirley Mitchell, who in 1943 appeared as Alice Darling (a ditzzy munitions-plant worker) who rented a room from Fibber McGee and Molly. Previously when the *Great Gildersleeve* spun off from *Fibber McGee and Molly* in 1941 Shirley Mitchell was an early cast member. She is most remembered as Leila, the southern belle and love interest of Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve. Shirley was a semi-regular in *I Love Lucy* playing Lucy's friend Marion Strong. She is one of two recurring cast members still living (the other being Doris Singleton who played Caroline Appleby). Shirley was a favorite at last year's show reprising her well-remembered characters. She is back by popular demand as Leila Ransom in a re-creation of *The Great Gildersleeve* with Jim French as Gildersleeve.

- Gloria McMillan. Fans of *I Love Lucy* should also remember the TV series *Our Miss Brooks*. Gloria McMillan played Harriett Conklin, the daughter of Osgood Conklin, the school principal of Madison High. Gloria appeared as the same character in all nine seasons of the radio version. She also appeared in *Mayor of the Town, A Date with Judy* and *Lux Radio Theater*. Gloria loves radio, and she currently runs an acting school for children.

- Rosemary Rice is a grammy winning artist who specialized in children's recordings. Rosemary was a New York radio actress who appeared in *Theater Guild, Cavalcade of America, Suspense* and starred as Betty in the beloved Saturday morning children's program *The Adventures of Archie Andrews* based on the comic book characters of the same name.

- Bob Hastings, who played Archie Andrews for the majority of the series run, will be on hand to perform in re-creations of *The Bickersons*, a married couple who spend nearly all their time in relentless verbal war. The program was certainly well ahead of its time and is a favorite among fans of old-time radio. Bob will also be playing the Wizard in REPS' version of *The Lux Radio Theater's* "The Wizard of Oz" from 1950. Hastings was the voice actor behind Superboy in the Fil-

mation cartoon *The Adventures of Superman*, and fans of the 1950s TV comedy *McHale's Navy* with Ernest Borgnine and Joe Flynn will remember Bob as Lt. Elroy Carpenter, Captain Binghamton's stooge. Bob's radio appearances also include *X Minus One*, a popular science fiction program of the 1950s.



- Beverly Washburn, TV's first child star who racked up more than 500 television appearances in a career that included stints on such classic shows as *The Jack Benny Program, Dragnet, Adventures of Superman, Leave it to Beaver, Wagon Train, 77 Sunset Strip, Father Knows Best, Star Trek, and General Hospital* (as a series regular), will reprise her role as one of Jack Benny's Beverly Hills Beavers. She later toured with Jack. Her movie credits include featured roles in *Old Yeller, The Greatest Show on Earth, and Hans Christian Anderson*.

- Tommy Cook auditioned for and won the role of Little Beaver in the 12-chapter *Red Ryder* cliffhanger at Republic Pictures. He also played the role on radio. Tommy's other roles in radio include Alexander on *Blondie, Junior* on *The Life Of Riley* and *Smilin' Ed's Buster Brown Show*.

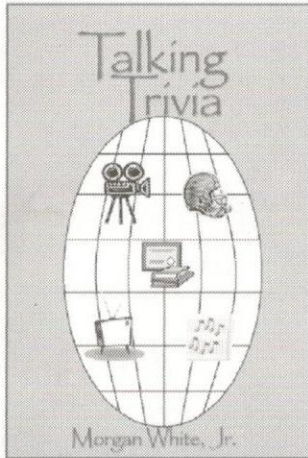
Also appearing are Stuffy Singer (*Lux Radio Theater, Beulah*), Dick Beals (*The Green Hornet, Challenge of the Yukon*), Dave Parker (*The Lone Ranger*), Bob Hudson (*Little Orphan Annie*), Jim and Pat French and Larry Albert (*Imagination Theater*), Paul Herlinger (*Adventures in Odyssey*). These are just some of the special guests appearing at this year's Showcase. Guests will share stories of their days in radio and radio behind the scenes. They will also bring performances of the best radio shows from yesteryear.

For more information go to [www.repsonline.org](http://www.repsonline.org) or call (206) 542-6231.

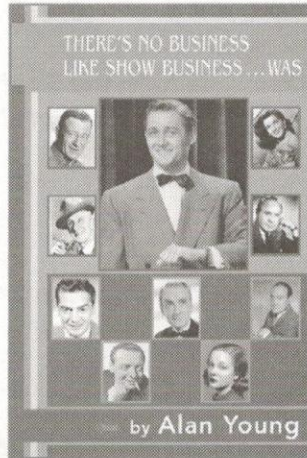
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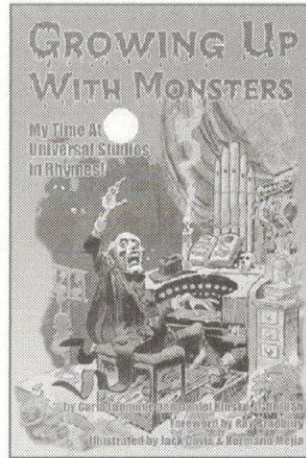
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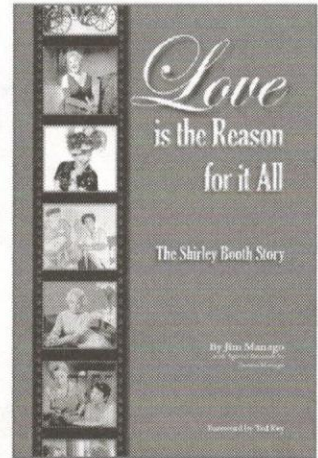
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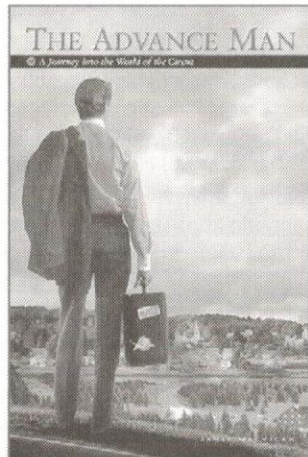
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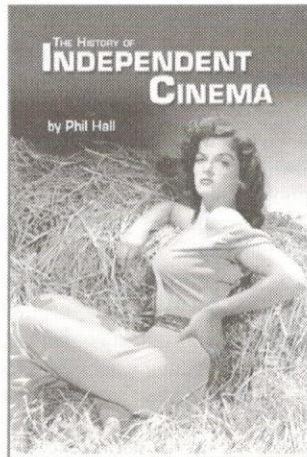
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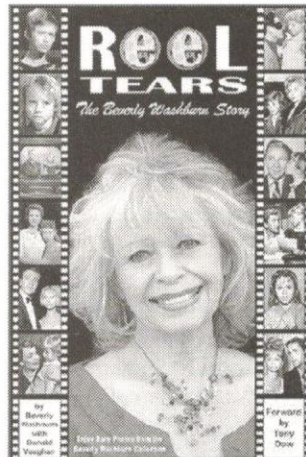
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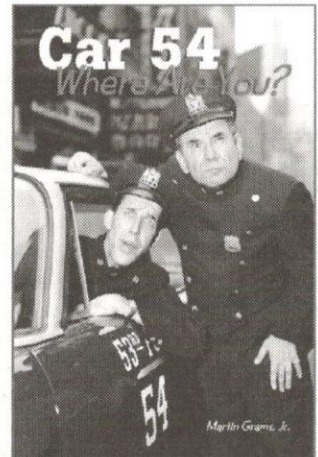
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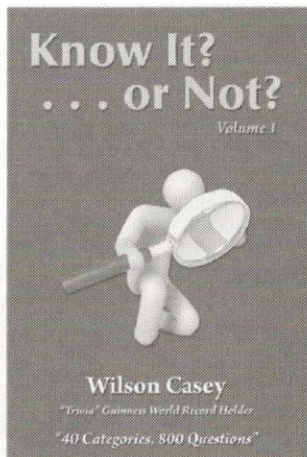
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P.S. Don't be sorry.

# CONVENTION 2009 • 35 YEARS



by **Bobb Lynes**  
CONVENTION CHAIR

If you missed the 2009 SPERDVAC Convention during May Day weekend, you really missed one of the best get-togethers we've ever had! SPERDVAC celebrated its 35th anniversary this year at the beautiful Beverly Garland Holiday Inn in North Hollywood. I have one regret: we might have had Beverly Garland participate in our convention this year had she not passed away. I was honored to serve as convention chairman. Even with the so-called "economic downturn," we enjoyed a respectable attendance, and I believe most everybody had a great time! To be very candid, it proved to be a somewhat "bumpy road" getting to that weekend, but with the dedication of the small band of volunteers on the convention committee we made it.

From my perspective here's what took place: The convention started off in the Beverly Garland Theater on time (12 noon, Friday) with the authors' panel hosted by Bob Mills with Martin Grams and Jim Harmon, all three of whom had newly released books for sale at the SPERDVAC table. Sorry, no dealers room this year. Then Martin Grams, in his first visit to SPERDVAC, treated us to his *Green Hornet* presentation. Next, just as they did last year, Stuffy Singer and Gloria McMillan brought us *The Bickersons*.

Eleanor Vallee remembered her legendary husband, Rudy Vallee, SPERDVAC's 10th honorary member, with a nice, heart-felt slide and music show.

At 5:15 on Friday the action

moved over to the ballroom where Tim Knofler (of "Capt. Hudson") directed a re-creation of *I Love A Mystery* starring Bob Hastings as Jack Packard. With 96-year young organ maestro Bob Mitchell providing live musical accompaniment, it was a history-making event. I'm sorry that Robert Easton was unable to be there—he got a job!—but we do understand.

Gary Owens, scheduled to be the Friday night emcee, also got a job out of town and couldn't be with us so I stood in for him as best as possible. We had a great response to the raffle as I stumbled my way through it, and John Harlan auctioned off signed scripts of the evening's re-creations of *The Great Gildersleeve* and *Burns & Allen*, both directed by Gregg Oppenheimer. Thankx to those who bought raffle tickets and bid in the auction. They helped us raise some much needed funds.

In *The Great Gildersleeve* re-creation Chuck McCann proved he now "owns" the role of Gildy, as did Shirley Mitchell in the part of Leila, which she created over 60 years ago!! Eddie Carroll doubled as both Peavey and Judge Hooker, June Foray played Birdie and Richard Beals was Leroy. Gloria McMillan & Ron Cocking (seemingly to be everywhere!), Stuffy Singer and Janet Waldo added to the fun, and tireless Bob Mitchell did live music again.

Topping off the night was *Maxwell House Coffee Time with George Burns & Gracie Allen*. Gregg Berger stood in for ailing Fred Travena as George and Janet Waldo nailed the part of Gracie—a wonderful surprise! Visiting the



The "hoofbeats" of Bobby Benson's steeds in action during Jim Harmon's new adventure of *Bobby Benson and the B-Bar-B Riders*.



# YRS OF OTR AND SPERDVAC



Burnses, once again, was Eddie Carroll as Jack. Chuck McCann did Bill Goodwin and John Harlan sold that coffee.

Saturday morning, in the theatre, Frank Bresee hosted the *Lux Radio Theatre* panel with Gloria McMillan, Richard Beals, Stuffy Singer, Barbara Fuller, Gladys Holland and Bob Birchard (DeMille book author). Gregg Oppenheimer followed with his radio "Bloopers & Out-takes." Next up, Bob Mills (he's everywhere, he's everywhere) hosted the *I Love A Mystery* panel with Tim Knofler, Martin Grams, Bob Hastings and Rick Ferguson. Bob Mills stayed around to host the talk radio panel with Ray Briem and former KABC colleague Ira Fistell. Joining them from the audience, was current KABC morning host, Doug McIntire. Not exactly OTR, but pretty interesting and informative.

Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters President Chuck (*The Music of Your Life*) Southcott moderated the singers Panel with Ray Briem. On the panel were Peter Marshall (of Noonan & Marshall), Al Martino and Marilyn King. I'm so sorry that Gogi Grant couldn't make it this year. Too bad. The singers panel was a wonderful ending to the afternoon's activities.

Back in the Ballroom, at 4:30, Jim Harmon's new adventure of *Bobby Benson and the B-Bar-B Riders* was presented starring an original Bobby, Ivan Cury. Tommy Cook was Tex, Richard Beals played

Windy, and Jim Harmon doubled as Harka and Irish. Along for the ride were Jan Merlin, Ron Cocking, Gloria McMillan and Barbara Watkins. Barbara Harmon directed and I had fun announcing.

Next, Barbara Watkins directed and played Peg to my Chester A. Riley in *The Life of Riley* re-creation. We were honored to have the original Junior join us, Tommy Cook. Also in the cast were Jan Merlin, Sy Prescott, Gladys Holland and Stuart ("Digger") Lubin with Walter Jesella announcing.

Leonard Maltin emceed Saturday evening's festivities, auctioning off three signed scripts and offering some very kind words about SPERDVAC and OTR in general. Thanx, Leonard!! Once again we had a very successful raffle with great prizes and the winners' tickets drawn

by your obedient servant. Roy of Hollywood won two groups of prizes!!!

The first of three (!) re-creations after dinner had Herb Ellis directing *Dragnet* and acting in his original role (before Ben Alexander) of Frank Smith. Celebrating *Dragnet's* 60th year the cast included Kenneth Mars as "Joe Friday" and Ivan Cury, Barbara Fuller, Gladys Holland, Gene Reynolds and Gloria McMillan with John Harlan announcing.

Then, Frank Bresee directed a 75th anniversary salute to *Lux Radio Theatre* with its version of "Casablanca" starring Darryl Hickman as Rick and (almost at the last minute,



SPERDVAC's registration chair Barbara Williams (second from left) and honorary member Herb Ellis (second from right) with friends at SPERDVAC's 35th anniversary convention celebration.



Moderator Bobb Lynes speaks with Bob Mills as Martin Grams, Jr. and Jim Harmon consult with each other during Friday's noon hour author's panel.

for Karen Sharpe Kramer) Terry Moore aka Jan Ford as Ilsa. Stuart Lubin was Cecil B. DeMille. In the cast were Stuffie Singer, Sy Prescott, Tommy Cook, Ron Gans and Doris Singleton with Eddy King abandoning NBC to announce a CBS show!

*Baby Snooks* was the final re-creation of the convention with Harold Gould as a magnificent Daddy and Marilyn King (subbing for Mallory Lewis) hit one out of the park with her dead-on portrayal of Snooks. She also sang a song as Marilyn King!

Directed by Gregg Oppenheimer, the cast included Tommy Cook, Gloria McMillan and Ron Cocking with John Harlan announcing.

All too soon came the final moments of convention 2009. Sunday Morning we had breakfast and I hosted a panel on Radio to Cartoons with four of the most recognizable

voices in the world: Richard Beals, June Foray, Janet Waldo and (he made it!) Gary Owens. It was a great conclusion to a fun-filled weekend.

All of this would not have been possible without the work of the volunteers who served on the committee this year. Their names are listed in the printed program, but I want to personally thank them here. Founding member Jerry Williams and Barbara Williams got us off the ground, handling mail-in registrations and initial dealings with the hotel. Jerry also did Sound FX and created those nice centerpieces. Barbara Williams and founding member Glenn (Durango) Mueller video taped the activities. At the registration table were Barbara Harmon and Patti Mueller. Former SPERDVAC president Don McCroskey did the engineering all those long hours in the theatre Friday and Saturday and in the ballroom on Sunday. Andrew Ooms helped Don with the audience mic. Thanx, Don! Penny Swanberg and Joy Jackson helped with Sound FX. Gregg and Debbie Oppenheimer handled the printed program and organized and donated most of the prizes in the raffles. As in all past conventions, I was glad to do the signs and awards, and I hope this bashful Okie is making progress as an emcee. I also want to give a very big thank you to all the directors and performers who participated. I know it's a chancy job, it makes a man watchful and a little lonely. (I couldn't resist it).

The hotel staff was very helpful, too.

In February, when Jerry stepped down as convention chairman,

it fell to me to be chair, and since as Barbara Watkins and I and were down with the flu for three weeks we couldn't do much. Gregg Oppenheimer (with Debbie) picked up the ball and ran with it, conferring daily and dealing with the hotel. I'll never forget his generous help. Barbara Watkins was a great and untiring coordinator of information for all of us; she was on that computer or phone day and night for too many hours! Gregg and Barbara, you were my right and left arm throughout this whole process. I simply could not have done it without you!!

I'll take some of the bows, but the praise goes to those listed above. It was my pleasure to work with you and to serve *spervac* as best I can.

As I step down as convention chair, please allow me to dedicate this one to all our Honorary Members, especially those we lost this past year. It's all for you,

Thanx to the SPERDVAC Board of Directors (2008-2009) for okaying the convention and thanx to all of you who attended and supported Convention 2009.

Next year? Who knows?  
Old-time radio still lives!🎤



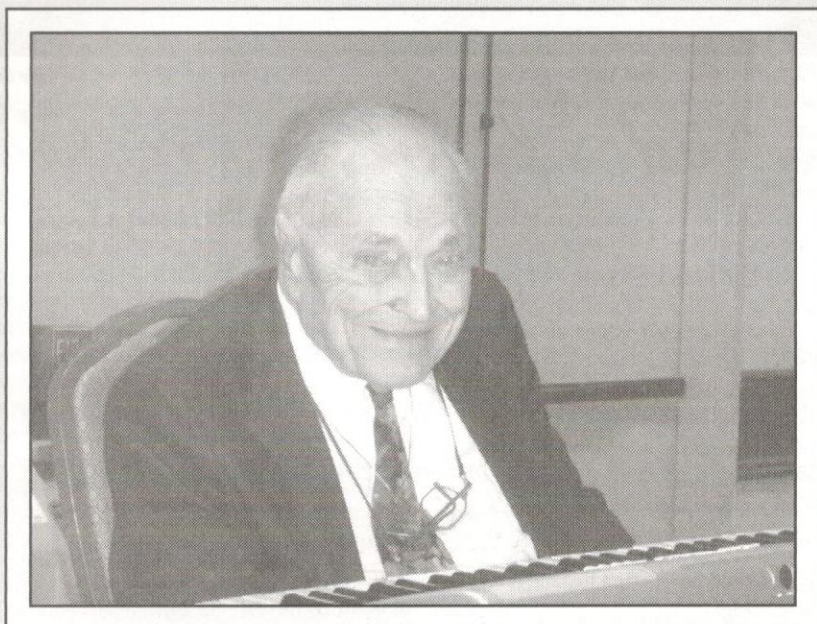
Film critic and writer Leonard Maltin emcees Saturday night's banquet and re-creations.



Director Greg Oppenheimer with Eddie Carroll and Chuch McCann along with the cast of a Saturday night re-creation.

# Convention Snapshots

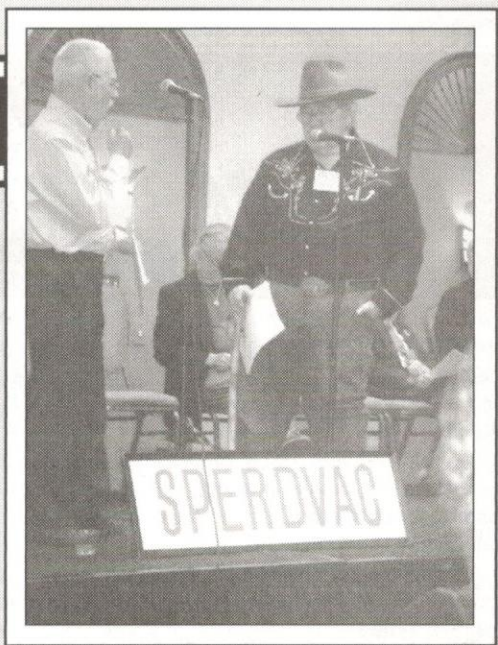
Convention photos are courtesy of Joy Jackson, Melanie Aultman and Jerry Williams



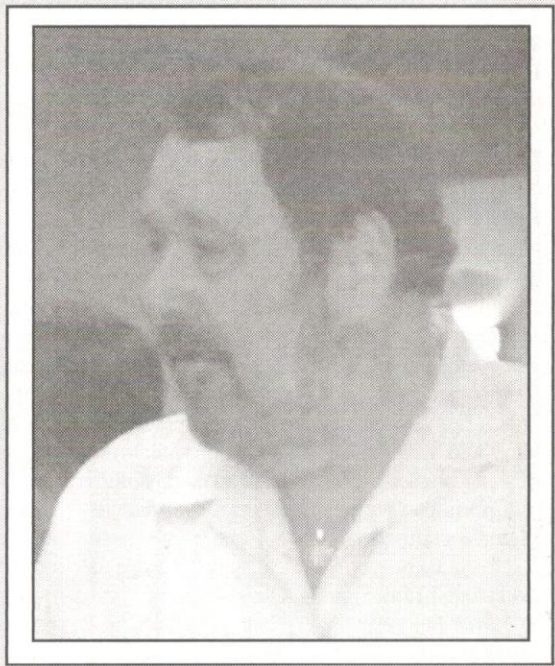
96-year-young organ maestro Bob Mitchell at the keyboard.



Fellow writer Bob Mills examines a certificate that says that writer and friend of Radiogram Martin Grams, Jr. is also a "friend of Sperdvac."



Ivan Cury and Jim Harmon present Harmon's new adventure of Bobby Benson.



Frank Bank—Clarence "Lumpy" Rutherford in "Leave it to Beaver"—makes an appearance.



Barbara Fuller and Dick Beats



Marilyn King as Baby Snooks



# Memories Are Made of This... People

by Fred Essex

Memories are always with us. Most are rewarding and pleasant and thanks to nature we're inclined to minimize the hurtful ones that seem to fade into the background of time. While we look to the future and the coincidences that make life interesting, it can be satisfying now and then to take a moment or two and look to the past.

**I**N THE CASE of old-time radio my memories go back some 60 years to the programs that competed for the Hooper Ratings in the 1940s. But equally vivid are the thoughts of the people with whom I worked. People to whom the general public were "names" conjuring up the impressions publicists had successfully created in their collective minds but, to me, were individuals going to work, making a handsome living just using their unique talents. For a short cracker-barrel session sit back and share with me some recollections of three interesting individuals in the business and perhaps you will see them beyond their highly acclaimed talents as I did.

For a starter, consider someone known to everyone, Frank Sinatra. Our Ad Agency had *The Jack Benny Show* for Lucky Strike Cigarettes and another agency had *The Hit Parade* also sponsored by Lucky Strike. When the Benny show, which originated in Hollywood, had Frank sing as a guest I was assigned to direct the New York cut-in with Frank and a full orchestra. The show was mixed in Chicago to minimize any difference in quality of sound when the two coasts were blended. Although on one show we had equipment problems requiring several repeats of the end on the song he would sing, when I asked him from the Control Room for one more time there was never any sign of temperament, a true professional. But that's not the end of this story.

Those years were the era of the adulation of young adults for Frank and my secretary, Evelyn, though qualified in her profession, was swept up in the Sinatra phenomenon. She admitted she had his pictures on her bedroom

ceiling so he would be the first thing she would see when waking!

Since the Benny show had a live audience, we couldn't have an audience in New York for if both applauded after his song it would sound like bacon frying. Our cut-in originated from Studio 6B in Radio City without an audience. However, I asked Evelyn if she would like to be his only live audience during one broadcast. "Oooh," she began, but I interrupted to suggest she bring a picture and I'd ask him to autograph it for her.

Sunday came and there she was seated in the front row of the empty theater section. It was obvious she had bought a gown (over an ordinary dress) for the occasion and had a large brown envelope on her lap. Frank was on stage with the orchestra as Axel Stordahl, his conductor in that decade, was checking a phrasing in the score. Her envelope had at least a dozen 8x10 glossies in it. She couldn't decide but I saw one with both Frank and Axel, took it and walked to Frank and told him the story. He turned to Axel and said, "here's one I didn't see" and both signed it to "Evelyn." At that point, although millions were waiting to hear him sing in a few minutes, he called Evelyn over and with his great smile thanked her for coming and handed her the picture. A regular guy.

One other. My friend's husband in Palm Springs was the all-around man on Frank's compound there. Unfortunately, my friend's mother was stricken with a severe heart attack requiring open-heart surgery at the Eisenhower Hospital. It had to be done regardless of the cost although she didn't have insurance. When it came to the day of discharge and

with trepidation they asked for the bill, the woman in the Billing Office smiled and said there was no charge; "Mr. Sinatra took care of all expenses." Nice memory, yes?

There are times when we all forget important things. André Kostelanetz and Lily Pons were married in the late 1930s on her palatial estate in Silvermine, CT, an area that juts into three communities. Only a few guests were invited to this momentous occasion including some top divas of the Metropolitan Opera who were Lily's contemporaries. The ceremony was conducted away from the main house in Lily's Tea House, probably a structure we would call a Guest House these days. But as can happen a small factor had been overlooked. As the story goes, sometime later it was discovered the part of her large estate with the Tea House was not in the area of the municipality which had issued the wedding license. Yes, we were told they were quietly remarried later without any press coverage.

As Lily received many honors, it was so for Kosty. The one that meant the most to him was the China-Burma-India ribbon awarded to him for flying the Hump to entertain the troops during WWII. He wore it proudly even if it seemed conspicuously out of place when he mounted the podium for each CBS broadcast in tails and white tie with the yellow service ribbon pinned to his left lapel. To all, the consummate musician. But to the man himself, an honored patriot.

Chances are only a few will know or remember the name of an actress heard on many radio programs, such as *Against the Storm*

Continued Page 14



## The Readers Have Their Say

### Convention Earns Thanks

I'd like to thank Bobb Lynes and all of the volunteers who made the 2009 SPERDVAC convention a wonderfully entertaining weekend. The venue at the Beverly Garland Holiday Inn was perfect and the many talents on display made for a great experience. These conventions are, in my opinion, the single most important thing that SPERDVAC does. It is the "E" in SPERDVAC: Encouraging Radio Drama, Variety And Comedy. Certainly preservation (the "P" in SPERDVAC) has been important, but "encouraging" is vital to the continued interest and appreciation of the art form we know and love as OTR. The interaction between OTR enthusiasts and those incredible veterans of radio help strengthen the bond we share and provide a much-needed avenue to introduce this hobby (and passion) to the next generation of fans. Thank you Bobb, Barbara Watkins, Jerry and Barbara Williams, Patti Mueller, Jim and Barbara Harmon, Penny Swanberg, Chris Knudson, Don McCrosky, Mark Lyen, Gregg and Debbie Oppenheimer, Frank Bresee and all of the many others who stepped up and provided such a high quality experience. Finally, thank you to the SPERDVAC Board of Directors for backing these conventions and keeping OTR alive.

Mike Kacey  
Culver City, CA

### Look Who's Talking

Thanks for an entertaining issue of *Radiogram*. I always enjoy Fred Essex's columns, but I'm afraid he perpetuates a Hollywood myth that film historians have been trying to "expunge from the record" for decades: namely, the old saw that silent-film leading man John Gilbert had a "thin, high-pitched voice." It simply isn't true. If you watch the great film *Queen Christina* (1933) with Greta Garbo you can hear for yourself that he had a perfectly fine speaking voice. The problem was that in his first talkie he was required to deliver ridiculous love-making speeches that caused audiences to laugh. There is another story—difficult to confirm—that MGM chief Louis B. Mayer, whom Gilbert had cold-cocked, sought revenge by sabotaging the recording of his voice. While that may be a stretch, it certainly is true that Mayer stopped offering Gilbert first-rate scripts in the early-talkie days, allowing him to work out his lucrative contract making substandard films.

Leonard Maltin  
e-mail

### Berliner Balks at Balk

In a May Letter you headlined "Signing off on Sarnoff" an Alfred Balk takes issue with remarks I made in the Nov-Dec 2008 *Radiogram* about the formation of RCA and David Sarnoff's connection with it. His tome *The Rise of Radio* relies upon a surfeit of attributions and documentation to support its claim to accuracy, yet even a cursory examination exposes the book's soft underbelly. Some gems of errors and omissions cry out for exposure:

1. He spells Tesla's first name as Nicola when it's correctly Nikola, telling us he was Austro-Hungarian (can you be both?), about which I'm sure his fellow Serbs would no doubt be resentful. And Tesla, father of the greatest boon to mankind since the wheel, alternating current, merits only this passing, error-laden mention. Maybe Mr. Balk doesn't regard AC current as having anything to do with radio.

2. Nowhere do we find the name Emile Berliner whose inventions, the microphone (the first device to combine AC and DC current in a single circuit), the disc record player (gramophone) and method of mass-producing unlimited perfect copies of a single master record, not only created today's recording industry but, combined with DeForest's "audion," made voice and music broadcasting possible; and resulted in NBC's going to 10 seconds of radio silence over the entire network to commemorate Emile Berliner's death on 3 Aug. 1929. This apparently wasn't enough to qualify my grandfather for inclusion.

3. In his multi-page discussion of the travails of Maj. Edwin Armstrong, Balk omits the sordid truth that David Sarnoff drove Armstrong to suicide (a leap to his death from a Waldorf-Astoria guest room he'd checked into for that end).


4. While mentioning Benny Goodman's appearances on the 1933-34 *Camel Caravan* launched the "swing era," which actually began in 1930, his extensive reference to *Your Hit Parade* omits the salient fact that it was the show that launched the solo career (after his emancipation from Tommy Dorsey) of "the boy whose voice is thrilling millions", Frank Sinatra, whose appearances introduced the ever-popular in-studio effect of swooning, screaming bobbysoxers that radio and now TV listeners are forced to endure.

5. I suppose the most poignant of Balk's oversights was where he says that Marconi's receiver atop Wanamaker's was closed, as usual, for the night, implying that Sarnoff hadn't been there to hear Titanic's distress sig-

nals. Despite his extensive research Balk fails to glean that it was Sarnoff's "eager beaver" fanaticism that compelled him to frequently visit the receiving station after hours. With all other receiving stations officially shut down for the night, Davey'd become the only man on land to hear Titanic's frantic "sparks." At 9 a.m. April 15, 1912 David Sarnoff secretly broke the news to White Star Line's U.S. executives, who rushed to sell their shares before broadcasting the tragic news that doomed their company, driving it into the arms of the rival it'd sworn to defeat, Cunard Line, as I said last November.

Oliver Berliner  
Bozman, MD

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## Memories

which ran for 13 years. Her name: Lenore Kingston (Jensen). In TV she was seen on many shows from *Wagon Train* to *Leave it to Beaver*, along with *Father Knows Best*, *Ben Casey*, *Ironsides*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. She was a busy competent professional known well to casting directors. Perhaps you would remember her face but hardly her name. But what made her so special as a person?

Of all things: Her hobby of amateur radio. A good many knew of it, thousands of licensed men and women talking to each other around the world on their own transmitters. Maybe there is a ham tower in your neighborhood and you wonder what they can talk about with strangers even if they were in the next town or a remote village overseas. Actually there are several ham activities involving the public, from emergency services to connecting some service man or woman to their state-side home to allow them to talk with their loved ones via some amateur radio operator using his own equipment.

The procedure? The ham operator would hear some foreign station calling for a "phone patch" to a city or town. This meant a ham could acknowledge the other ham over the air and connect his receiver to the telephone. The phone operator who knew all about "phone patches" would take the number, call a person and explain it was an incoming collect call from whomever. However, they would only be charged for the call between their home and the ham's location. The phone companies were most helpful for they understood how much it meant to the distant caller to reach his family from foreign shores. In fact, the military services recognize the importance of phone patches for morale purposes and have even established areas with ham gear.

This was Lenore's interest and she used her amateur station to bring people together. If they couldn't reach the person they wanted to call, Lenore would take messages, "handle traffic" it was called, and pass them on. This

professional actress with full days as a performer devoted her off time to her hobby. How often was she the intermediary between a serviceman and his home? In the late 1970s the military presented her with a Certificate of Commendation for during the Vietnam War it was reported she patched or handled traffic for over 68,000 service personnel! Yes, 68,000 during the War reached their homes via Lenore's hobby.

All three are gone now but I have my memories of them for what they were as individuals, not just for their performances to entertain thousands or millions. In a sense it is ironic: The people, listeners and/or viewers, who thought they knew them well hardly knew them at all.♣



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### FOR THE RECORD

For those who got confused, like the editor did, "Sure, But What Does He Look Like?" in last month's issue continued on page 6—the next page!—and not page 8 as noted. The editor needs new glasses.

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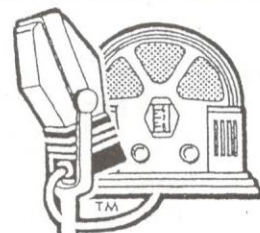
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