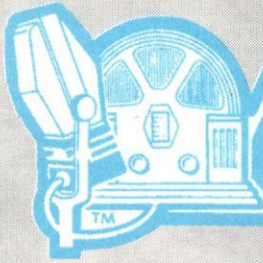


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RADIOGRAM

Vol. 35 • No. 4

April 2010

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RADIOGRAM

Volume 35 • Number 4 • April 2010



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The Mysterious Traveler



'Somebody Bawl for Beulah?'

A considerable number of radio listeners did "bawl for Beulah" each week back in the 1940s, first on *Fibber McGee and Molly* and then on *The Marlin Hurt and Beulah Show*. It was an age when radio innocently indulged in a type of ethnic humor guaranteed to send today's PC police into paroxysms of sputtering rage.

Beulah was presented to listeners as a young, garrulous and endearing African-American housemaid. In reality, Beulah was a talented Caucasian male from DuQuoin, IL named Marlin Hurt. Hurt's father managed a theatre in DuQuoin and as Hurt would explain later, "I practically grew up backstage." The youngster discovered early on that he had a skill for mimicry. Hurt was also a talented vocalist and by 1930 he was Dick of the Tom, Dick and Harry Trio which broadcast out of Chicago. In addition to his vocalist duties, Hurt found employment doing dialects for NBC.

Beulah was born out of Marlin Hurt's adept skill at dialects and his memories of Mary, who had worked in the Hurt household as a cook when Marlin was a boy. Marlin worked on perfecting the character, bringing her to the airwaves off-and-on during early appearances on *Showboat* and wherever else there was an opening. It was on the January 25, 1944, broadcast of *Fibber McGee and Molly* that Beulah was introduced to listeners as a continuing member of the cast. On March 14, 1944, Beulah started working as the McGee maid but only on Tuesdays. As Molly explained, "that's the day we need her the most."

Hurt would stand with his back to the microphone awaiting his cue. When one of the McGees would call Beulah's name, Hurt would swing round quickly and deliver his tag-line response: "somebody bawl for Beulah?" It quickly became one of those lines which lived in the popular culture of the day.

Radio occupied a dimension unique unto itself where deception was reality for many listeners. Marlin Hurt's Beulah proved the point nicely. Audiences heard a black woman much as Marlin Hurt wrote her in his own mind: 30-something, 110 pounds, fashionable hairstyle, skirts on the short side,

a hard-worker and always on the lookout for romance. Not knowing any different, at least in the beginning, that is what exactly what audiences envisioned each time Hurt swung round and mouthed into the mike, "somebody bawl for Beulah?"

The illusion was good enough to prompt many Black soldiers to write to the show requesting photos. At least one soldier reportedly proposed marriage. A spirited national debate took place for awhile over Beulah's true nature: male or female, black or white?

Marlin Hurt had a keen ear for dialects and a talent for translating what he heard into a believable voice. Hurt explained the

Beulah voice this way: "I've never been a female impersonator and Beulah, you may have noticed, doesn't have a falsetto voice; it's just my own pitched in a different register."

Beulah's popularity was sufficient to spin off a summer series in 1945. A regular series followed once Hurt proved that Beulah had staying power and was more than just a novelty voice on the radio. *The Marlin Hurt and*



Beulah show continued to capture the favor of listeners. Hurt was now doing three voices: his own, Beulah's and that of Beulah's boyfriend, Bill Jackson. Inevitably when juggling three voices at once, the wrong voice was bound to attach to the wrong character at some point. It happened to Hurt when he inadvertently read Beulah's line in his natural voice. In a quick-witted riposte, Hurt changed to Beulah and admonished: "Mr. Marlin, that's what I'm supposed to say." Then back in his natural voice, Marline explained, "It's hard to talk with a mouthful of Tums"—Beulah's sponsor.

Tragically, Marlin Hurt died unexpectedly of a heart attack at age 40. *The Marlin Hurt and Beulah Show* had been on the air less than a year. On March 24, 1946, CBS radio presented a half-hour memorial program paying tribute to Hurt, creator of the inimitable Beulah. The farewells were fond and heartfelt. A series of Black actresses would come along to assume the role on radio and television. Certainly they were more believable in the role than a white male. But the original style and spontaneity that Marlin Hurt breathed into Beulah was gone forever. A rather bland stereotype was all that remained. ♣

A Horrible Way of Looking at Radio

by Jim Cox

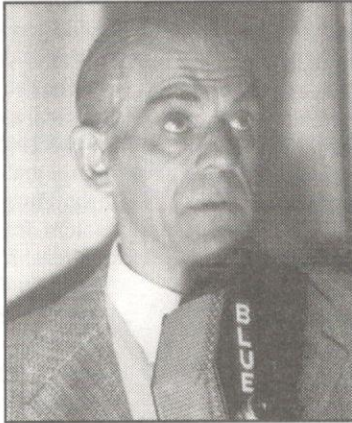
THE real stars of Ronald L. Smith's recently-released volume on radio are the kings and queens of classic film terror, not of film mystery or science-fiction, author Smith insists. In *Horror Stars on Radio: The Broadcast Histories of 29 Chilling Hollywood Voices*, he inspires us with revelations from the personalities of a plethora of familiar names that earned reputations by frightening and often petrifying on the big screen. His subjects then turned the blood in our veins cold as we listened to those venerated actors in ominous plots strictly penned as ear candy. In those mesmerizing treats we supplied the mental pictures as the menacing thespians of the silver screen thrilled us over the aural airwaves.

For those who got their kicks from such gore, radio provided plenty of chances for a regular fix. Through tales well calculated we were held in *Suspense* from which there was no *Escape* as we encountered *Creeps by Night* like *The Mysterious Traveler* and *The Whistler*. As we journeyed to the *Inner Sanctum*, invariably with our *Lights Out*, *The Witch's Tale* enveloped us. "Real terror," averred *Psycho* creator Robert Bloch, "consists of acquainting the audience with a character that will be cared about, and then putting that character in jeopardy. The suspense," he intimated, "comes from whether ... that character will escape or be done in." Radio's sinister series pursued that formula to perfection hundreds of times.

In Smith's 254-page softcover tome from McFarland, we are privileged to intersect with some of the best remembered names in the business: Louise Allbritton, John Caradine, Lon Chaney, Jr., Henry Hull, Boris Karloff, Elsa Lanchester, Charles Laughton, Peter Lorre, Bela Lugosi, Agnes Moorehead, Vincent Price, Claude Rains, Basil Rathbone, Gale Sondergaard, Elena Verdugo, Fay Wray and more than a dozen others. Scribe Smith endows us with fascinating details of the lives of those who kept us spellbound near our radios with their bloodcurdling portrayals.

Karloff, for instance, with professional employment as a ditch-digger and work in

tiny obscure theaters, faced middle age and failure before the promise of steady acting led him to fame and fortune. Cast as a vil-



lain in *The Criminal Code*, he was thrust into the part of the monster as Frankenstein afterward. Suddenly, ditch-digging was a thing of the past. His appearance later in "The Cat Wife" on *Lights Out* in 1936 put him in company, according to Smith, with those playing on one of the "Top Ten greatest radio shows of all time." There are numerous fascinating revelations in the book and as one reads them he will actually hear

the voices of idols speaking. Who among us hasn't heard Karloff, Lugosi, Moorehead and Price so often, for instance, that any of them couldn't be instantly recognized by their aural inflections?

One of the volume's best features is the inclusion of the actors' accomplishments in radio and audio (the latter covering recordings) in lengthy sections following each individual's biographical account. Here is a supposedly comprehensive listing of performance records. While such data may exist for movie stars in their own biographies, you won't encounter this much about all these people elsewhere in one spot. Smith has rendered a marvelous addition to the annals of radio trivia by documenting it for us.

At the same time, he shortchanges us by providing an index unworthy of voluminous research. A page-and-a-half is a total injustice to his work suggesting he sped through it. He not only did a disservice to casual readers wanting to know more but particularly to researchers whom he could have greatly assisted by expanding the chronicle to a dozen pages. It's a failure of more and more new books and one many of us in the vintage radio arena abhor.

Before he's finished with an otherwise marvelous text, Smith adds a brief final chapter labeled "Radio's Own Horror Stars" which the medium's addicts will find satisfying. Pithy introductions of some of the home-grown talent from the airwaves affirm some

ELECTION RESULTS

Current board members Bob Steinmetz, Glenda Kelly and Dave Struthers, who were the only declared candidates, were overwhelmingly re-elected to their positions, it was announced at the annual election meeting held March 13 at the Mid-Valley Library in North Hills in the San Fernando Valley. The three longtime members will share board responsibilities with four members yet to be determined from a pool of write-in candidates. In total 70 write-in candidates, including Sarah Palin, were received, and from that group four in descending order of vote tallies will serve according to their eligibility and willingness to serve.

Of the 906 ballots mailed 230 were returned, making the 2010 election a 25% turnout, down one percent from last year. The results were tabulated by election chair Neil Mitchell and election committee members Laura Mitchell and Lennie Nudel.

Election of this year's officers will take place after the seating of the full seven member board.

Glenda Kelly received the most votes with 217 followed by Bob Steinmetz with 212 and Dave Struthers with 209. The next highest—all write-in candidates—were as follows: Bobb Lynes 50, Dan Haefele 44, Rex Quinn 32, Barbara Watkins 29, Don Aston 23, Jim Harmon 20, Hoag Schmele 13, and Neil Mitchell 10.

Write-in candidates receiving single digits were as follows: Barry Opliger 9; Barbara Harmon, Jerry Williams and Larry Gassman 7; Frank Bresee, Jerry Haendiges and Patrick Lucanio 6; John Gassman 5; Ken Greenwald and Glen Mueller 4; Jim Hardin 3; Richard Glasband, Walden Hughes, Nilan Kincaid, Bruce Miller, Stuart Lubin, Barbara Williams and Sarah Palin 2.

Receiving one vote each were the following: Martin Grams, Jr., Mel Guzman, Don King, Greg Oppenheimer, Jim Worden, Chester Allen, Eddie Carroll, Ben Cooper, John Crosby, Ivan Curry, Herb Ellis, June Foray Donovan, Fred Foy, Art Gilmore, Casey Kasem, Michael Plett, William Robeson, Mickey Smith, William Spier, George Treadle, James Vaitimo, Janet Waldo, Susan Crawford, Nick Goodhue, Len Baque, Osgood Conklin, Lorenzo Jones, Fibber McGee, Molly McGee, Ma Perkins, Irma Peterson, Brit Reid, Meg Whitman, Don Winslow, Ben Dover, Stan Dupp, Roy of Hollywood, The Shadow, Just Plain Bill, and the seven dwarfs. Missing this year from the write-ins were George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Barak Obama but Sarah Palin garnered one more vote over last year.

Continued Page 14

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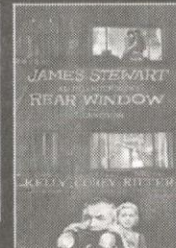
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When Melody Was King

by Fred Essex

WHEN WE TURN ON THE RADIO, whether in the car or at home, do we ever give a second thought of how the signal travels from a station to your receiver? We may have a passing idea of some wires running to an antenna tower but then what happens?

The word "broadcast" was first applied to radio in 1921. In laymen's terms it was meant to define the fact that an antenna cannot contain radio frequencies (known as RF) so it throws them off into the atmosphere; they bounce up from the ground at an angle until the RF hits an ionized blanket called the "E" layer some 65 +/- miles above the earth which reflects them down to our receiver at almost the speed of light. Indeed, something to think about.

A question: Why, then, at night are we able to hear stations from distant states when we cannot hear them during the day? Simple: The "E" layer exists only when there is daylight. At night it disappears but far, far higher is the "F" layer some 600 +/- miles above earth. Since radio waves travel upward at an angle, and they now have farther to go before striking the "F" layer, they therefore reflect to earth at a greater distance from their source. Confused? Just try to picture a huge triangle.

All this is to explain to the OTR readers why, as teenagers, we could listen to the radio at night after the 10 o'clock news and pick up the big band remotes from hotels far away. Growing up on Long Island and being a fan of Jimmy Dorsey's, among many others, I can recall with great pleasure hearing his band often from a hotel in New Orleans—roughly some 1400 miles away and probably one that no longer exists—with his singers Bob Eberle and Helen O'Connell. A timeout for trivia: Bob had a brother Ray who sang for Glenn Miller who changed the last letter in their name to "Eberly" probably in his mind to minimize confusion.

While radio brought us so much we tend to forget the big band remotes were one of the mainstays of the medium. Broadcasts were then heard coast-to-coast on the networks from such locations as the Avalon Ballroom on the island of Catalina, CA—"26 miles across the sea" as the song goes—to the Blackhawk restaurant in Chicago or Frank Daly's Meadowbrook ("on the Newark Pompton Turnpike only 45 minutes from Times Squares"). Those who remember the announcer's words are probably smiling.

With these remotes, radio probably did more for the music business than anything else. New orchestras were formed and heard as another entertainment facet was created. Names? Many are still familiar: Benny (necessary to add Goodman?), Tommy, Jimmy, Glenn, Guy, Sammy, Woody, Artie, Ozzie, Wayne, and Duke for starters. Then there were some less popular but good ones: Kenton, James, Savits, Berrigan, Grey, Pastor, Clinton, Barnet, et al. Radio can take a well deserved bow for bringing music into our homes daily although at

late hours.

It was reported that the Armed Forces Radio Network during WW II immediately recognized that music and variety from home could be a great morale booster. They then produced 15-minute musical variety programs on 16-inch discs which were sent to bases around the world.



Bob Eberly née Eberle

Today's generation mostly know the sound of plunking guitars. Some acoustic but many electric with amps to distortedly blow them away—if there is such a word. Yeah!

At least in the early days there was a melody one could sing, whistle or hum. True, during the transitional period some of the Beatles' songs were outstanding. Think of Paul McCartney's "Yesterday" with its great melody and chord changes along with others written by John and George. But many popular CDs today seem to be "Rap" and other forms, i.e., "Hip-Hop," and as many contend could be loosely defined as "no melody with rhymed spoken words assaulted by the guitars and drums."

In contrast, back in 1945 during the years radio had learned the power of music on the ratings, I was directing the Kostelanetz program on CBS with 65 musicians, sponsored by the Chrysler

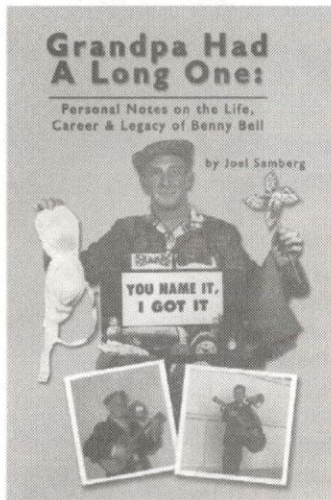
Corp. I recall one day receiving a phone call from a longtime and well-known song plugger who had been assigned to resurrect a tune that had had little previous popularity. He sent it over to the agency, I played it and thought enough of it to show André when we met at his home to discuss future shows. He sat at his piano, liked it, noted the composer's name and immediately called his friend Richard Rodgers to ask if there was anything special about this number which he had written. There wasn't but Kosti gave it to an arranger and it was subsequently scheduled. So a new life was given to "You Are Too Beautiful" ("far one man alone and I am a fool for beauty. ...") They don't write 'em like that anymore as the cliché goes. Besides, it was hard to get the melody out of your mind.

In those years music was at last a major genre on radio. Toscanini lead the NBC Symphony Orchestra which had been created just for him and originated from Studio 8H in 30 Rock. Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians were heard daily as was Glenn Miller. The hit parade was a weekly staple with Frank Sinatra and Dorothy Collins and later with Lawrence Tibbett—remember, "Don't Fence Me In"? Country music was in there with "Grand Ole Opry" among others.

While music is to be heard and radio was an ideal medium for it, television requires action. In an orchestra there is little physical movement other than watching a string section bow their instruments so television began to sound the ominous end. Other than the occasional PBS *Great Performances* musical programs, which range from *The*

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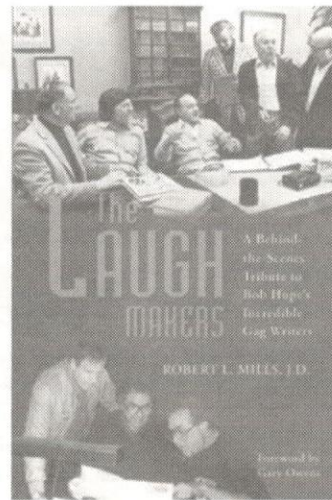
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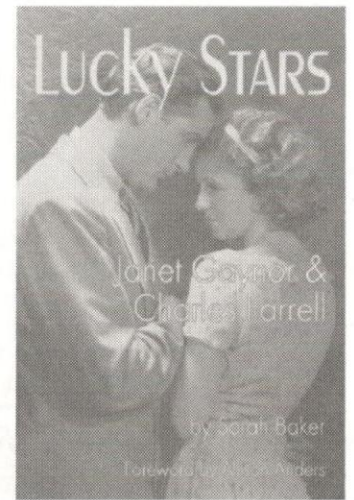
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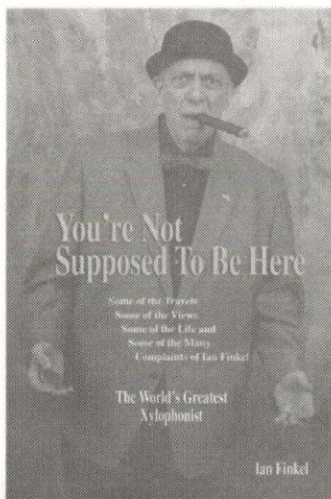
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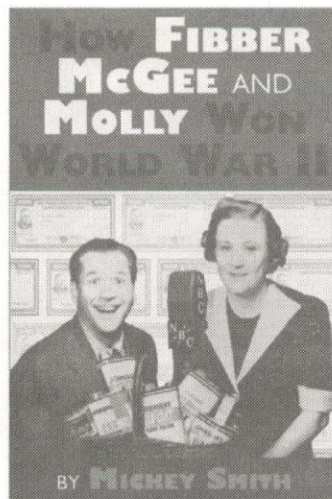
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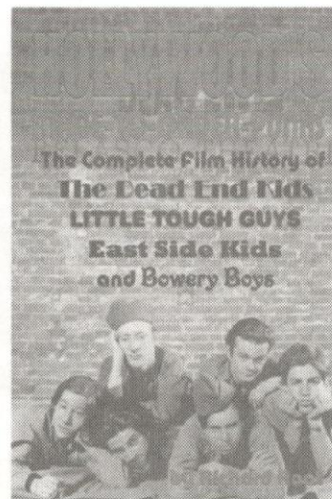
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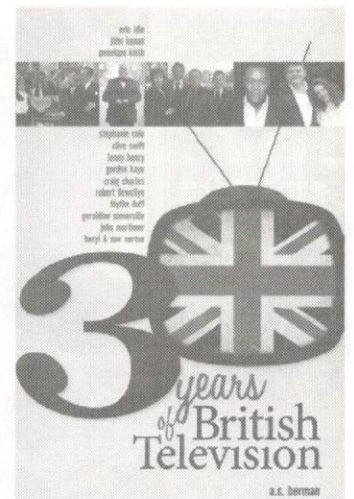
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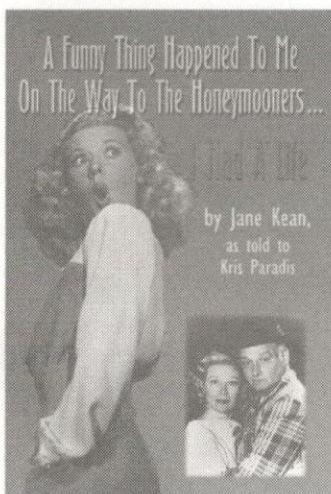
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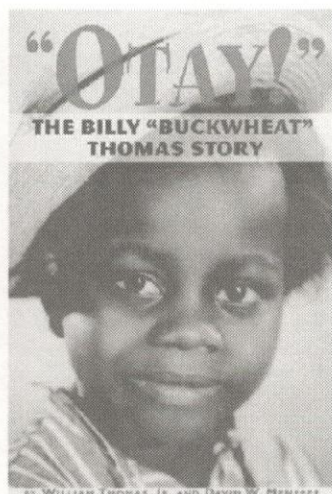
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Chicago in 1928 was a vibrant city. Since the turn of the century more than one million newcomers had flocked to the industrial metropolis on the banks of Lake Michigan. As the 1930s neared, the city was approaching 3.3 million men, women, and children, a good number of whom had arrived from foreign countries. Of those immigrant groups none could match the numbers of Germans who began arriving in the Midwest in huge numbers in the 19th century. By the 1920s nearly a quarter of Chicago's population claimed German heritage despite the negative pall cast upon that country by World War I.

Za Leedle Cherman Band

The Radio Work of Henry Moeller and Hal Gilles

by Doug Hopkinson and Ryan Ellett

Recognizing a sizable immigrant population as a potentially lucrative consumer bloc, the young radio station WGN created a daily (except Sundays) 15-minute music and patter program to tap into the city's German population. With no fanfare beyond a listing for the evening of March 5th, 1928 in the *Chicago Tribune*—owner of WGN—a band simply billed as *Louie und Dot Band* (*Louie and That Band*) appeared on the air from 10:15 to 10:30 p.m. to play old-time German music. The next day's listing was a bit more descriptive, *Louie Hasenpfeffer und dot Leedle Cherman Band*.

The program was quick to seize on current events to engage listeners. The third broadcast which aired March 7 at 10:30 p.m. tapped into the nationwide election excitement as the two political parties proceeded to choose their presidential candidates. A small blurb in that day's radio listing proclaimed "Yah! It's Louie Hasenpfeffer tuning up 'Dot Leedle Cherman Band' for the election frolics of 1928! Louie is a big politician and he may be a musician . . . that remains to be heard! Tonight, 10:30!"

The little German band entertained Chicago that first week in March, Monday through Saturday, before taking Sunday off. Though the 15-minute time slot would change slightly on the broadcasting schedule they became a musical staple for the next three years.

During their second week on the air, Louie's band was briefly christened *Dder Cherman Hass Hounds Affiliations*, apparently in reference to a running gag that would meander through the series for much of its run. For some time the quarter-hour would alternately be titled *Louie und Dot Band*, *Louie und Dot Leedle Cherman Band*

and *Louie und Der Cherman Chass Hounds Affiliations*. One final name alteration was in store for the new group. On March 19, 1928 the *Tribune* dubbed them *Louie Hasenpfeffer and His Hungry Five*. Two days later they were simply referred to as *Louie's Hungry Five*. Under this moniker the little German band would entertain Chicagoans for the next two decades.

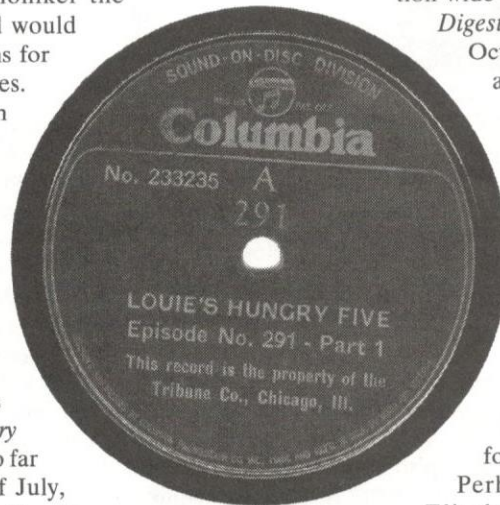
This local German music and patter show would likely have remained forgotten, however, if it weren't for WGN's efforts to put *Louie's Hungry Five* into syndication around the country. Details regarding the *Hungry Five* on record are so far very sketchy. As of July, 1928 just a few months after hitting the airwaves, *Hungry Five* records were being recorded, if not yet distributed. At least two have been identified which appear to have been recorded in Chicago on July 19, 1928. They are *The Bank Practice* and *Vot's De Idea?* Records indicate the Victor recordings were rejected, perhaps meaning they were never issued. A few months later at least one other adventure was recorded by Columbia in two parts, *Down by the Pickle Works*. At this time it looks as if these records were not for syndication but for the mass market because the first reference to syndication does not appear for another two years. When these records were actually released is unknown. However, a March 3, 1929, *Chicago Tribune* ad

states "You can hear their [Louie and Weasel] arguments now on Columbia Records." The work of these authors has yet to turn up copies of

these oldest *Hungry Five* recordings. Two sources indicate that WGN began syndicating the *Hungry Five* in October, 1930. An article in the October 17, 1930, *San Antonio Light* relates "*Louie's Hungry Five* [was] released this week by WGN for nation-wide distribution." *Radio Digest* confirms that "last October [1930] Moeller and Gilles [Herr Louie and the Weasel, respectively] began making electrical transcriptions of their Radio act." It appears that after 2½ years of successful broadcasting in Chicago, the company thought the German band had the potential for nationwide appeal. Perhaps, as surmised by Elizabeth McLeod, WGN had learned their lesson of having refused Gosden and Correll's desire to syndicate *Sam 'n' Henry*.

Little by little, information about this early radio show and its two creators is emerging. Recordings long reported as existing but never seen in circulation are coming to light. Recently, 92 transcription discs were obtained from two private sources and are currently in the process of being digitally preserved. Many of these discs had accompanying announcer's cue sheets held within their sleeves. Sadly, no scripts have so far been discovered. Thus, in the near future radio hobbyists may get a taste of this program not only through the snippets and story plugs offered by contemporary publications but also by hearing the shows as they were actually broadcast some 80 years ago.

These transcriptions were recorded in Chicago beginning sometime, presumably, in 1930. The earliest documented recording date of the syndicated transcription discs is for episode 85, recorded December 31, 1930, on the Brunswick label. According to Ross Laird, the author of a multi-volume review on Brunswick, the label's ledgers for 1930 are missing and had to be reconstructed using



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Herr Louie Endorses Tribune Want Ads

**BARGAINS FROM
THE TRIBUNE
WANT ADS**

LOST ONE LADY--WOMAN, KATY
Schneider, five feet high, blauer hat
mit weiss daizles mit it, und a yellow
dress mit red polkaspoets on it. If seen
wanderine loose, lookine hungry, call
Herr Louie Hasenpfeffer, Halsted
12345.

The Chicago Tribune, "the world's greatest newspaper" thus WGN radio, uses Herr Louis in cross promotion for want ads.

other records. These, for the most part, did not include "private recordings," which the Louie records were for the National Radio Advertising Co. The last episode which is listed in Ross Laird's multi-volume review of Brunswick recordings is number 204, recorded April 30, 1931. Around this time Brunswick was purchased by the American Record Company. Unfortunately, the recently acquired Brunswick recordings are numbered between 244 and 347 (this run is not complete) so studio dates are not available. Tim Brooks' multi-volume Columbia Master Book Discography does not include any recordings that resemble *Louie and the Hungry Five*. The oldest discs acquired are on the Electra label produced by Marsh Laboratories for the *Chicago Tribune*. These episodes, numbers 1 through 6, are the earliest examples of *Louie's Hungry Five* being syndicated. One could surmise from the evidence that the Electra discs were recorded no earlier than October 1930. Further discoveries regarding these transcriptions await hobbyists.

Louie and His Hungry Five was apparently never picked up by a national chain; press accounts so far are restricted to Chicago area newspapers. Despite the lack of a national chain, the show was still heard by millions of listeners across the country and in Canada from many stations utilizing the syndicated transcriptions. San Antonio was one of the

first cities to receive the program via electrical transcription and was sponsored locally by Richter's Bakery. A complete list of stations airing these transcriptions is unavailable, but some of those stations included WBKY, KDKA, WHK, WJR, KNX, WIL, WBZ, KSTP, KSTA, and KMBC. A May 1931 *Radio Digest* article claims approximately 40 radio stations purchased the series.

A promotional book of *Louie's Hungry Five* by Moeller and Gilles from 1931 lists 25 other radio stations apart from the ones listed above that represent 17 different states and Canada. Geographically, *Louie's Hungry Five* was heard coast-to-coast and border-to-border. They were even heard in Moosejaw in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan on CJRM.

The two main protagonists of the sketch were the namesake Herr Louie Hasenpfeffer, played by Henry (Hank) Moeller, and the Weasel, played by Harold (Hal) J. Gilles. The other three of the Hungry Five were "placid" Emil, Yohannis, and Fritz—actors all unknown.

The earliest known storyline is recounted in an April 22, 1928, blurb: "Have you heard the Weasel's new flute? The Weasel is the poor, meek, downtrodden German boy in *Louie's Hungry Five*, the new WGN feature heard each night at 10:15 o'clock. Louie, disgusted with the way the Weasel has been playing the big tuba, has started to give the Weasel lessons on the flute, and the boy has been making great progress. Already he can play 'Darling I am Growing Old,' with only two mistakes per measure, and Louie has great hopes that the Weasel will be one of the world's really great flutists. The Weasel is practicing valiantly, and the whistle of his flute—usually offkey—is one of the most amusing bits in this new radio feature." Other storylines included the Weasel going missing and the boys putting up wallpaper.

By early 1929 the boys were achieving a modicum of success. A radio commentator for the *Tribune* noted the *Hungry Five* had an imitator. In his words it seemed "... that the newly created Little German Band, WLS, 7:30 program, is a creation inspired by *Louie's Hungry Five*."

Moeller and Gilles realized they could

increase their income by taking their schtick in person to the public. During the first half of that year they were performing around the WGN listening area, including towns such as Valparaiso, IN, and Sheboygan, WI. In July they performed what was billed as their "first Chicago engagement" in an "uproarious radio stage sketch" at the Paradise Theatre. Two months later they were playing the city's Oriental Theatre. Unbeknownst to the band members at the time these live theatre engagements would provide a steady gig long after their radio days were over. The group further displayed their star power by playing before 5000 people at a Milwaukee aviation demonstration.

A few more plot lines emerge from the latter half of 1929, including the naming of Louie and Weasel's infant understudy, Horatius Blitzen Klutzenpfeffer, going to the World Series (featuring the Philadelphia Athletics and hometown Chicago Cubs), and the near-kidnapping of the Weasel by "a big city slicker" from New York. Gliding into 1930—and a deteriorating economy—Louie and Weasel bought a troublesome horse and the Weasel survives a lawsuit from former sweetheart Anna Katofelfresser, who "sued the Weasel for 'illumination of infections.'" This particular subject was not unique to *Louie's Hungry Five*. *Amos 'n' Andy* visited it not long after and the *Cecil and Sally* radio show also had a breach of promise story thread at least twice during its syndicated run. We speculate that it was no coincidence and that the impetus for this storyline stems mainly from the 1929 sensationalized story of Gene Tunney, then a retired world heavyweight boxing champion, fighting a breach of promise lawsuit brought by a Mrs. Katherine King Fogarty in the amount of \$500,000. Tunney was also facing a lawsuit brought on by John J. Fogarty (ex-husband of Katherine) for alienation of affection also in the amount of \$500,000. NOTE: It would be remiss if we did not to point out that breach of promise to marry or "heart balm" suits had been around since the reign of Queen Elizabeth and long before her. In the 1920's there were several very publicized breach of promise lawsuits brought to trial that involved extraordinary amounts of money. The combination of economic climate, newspaper and radio coverage, famous personalities and the monies involved resulted in a captivated public following of these trials which were occurring more and more frequently and continued well into the 1930's.

Not satisfied with their 1929 World Series effort, Louie and Weasel made occasional stops at the ball field in 1930 to assist sports reporters Quin Ryan and Bob Elson with Cubs games. It should be noted that Quin Ryan was WGN station manager as well as a big admirer

and supporter of Moeller and Gilles.

Aside from the Tribune Company's syndication efforts, there was life yet left in the live daily series. Modern radio fans get a clearer picture of the show during its final year, 1931, than at any other time due to more frequent comments printed in the *Tribune*. Storylines during the series' final year include Herr Louie's niece who goes missing. A February 16, 1931, account is insightful: Herr Louie is willing to tell the world any time of the effectiveness of *Tribune* Want Ads, since they helped him find his missing niece. Herr Louie's niece, Katy Schnauser, and her doggy companion, Schneider Schnauser, were on their way to Chicago to pay Herr Louie a visit. She failed to show up on the day scheduled for her arrival so Herr Louie, at the suggestion of the Weasel, put an ad in the *Tribune* Want Ad Section. A few days later Katy phoned from Pittsburgh, where she had missed the train connections, to say she had seen Herr Louie's ad, and would he please send her some money for railroad fare.

Things were looking up for German singers mid-1931 when they finally got a local sponsor—three and a half years after going on the air. I.T.S. Rubber Heels Company signed them for a 10-minute evening slot, 7:05 - 7:15, beginning June 15. This sponsorship lasted until the end of October after which Louie's little German band left the air.

Some of the final story threads included Herr Louie's search for a lawyer, his encouraging Katy to go to South America "on cocoon business," a new venture that might net the Hungry Five a million dollars, and, finally, in late October a trip to New York City. As was common, the series demise did not receive any attention in the press, leaving radio historians to wonder how the show was concluded. After more than three and a half years on the air Louie and his German band quietly slipped away from WGN's airwaves.

Herr Louie and his merry followers lived on at least another decade though not on the air. By January 1933 the *Hungry Five* was again entertaining Chicagoans at local theaters. Tragedy struck in the middle of the year when former *Hungry Five* musician David P. Cody's body was found floating in a Chicago lake. The body had been floating in the lake for two or three days the police determined and the cause of

death was not publicized. He was only 40-years-old. Whether he was an active member of the band at the time is not clear.

The band played on and as early as August 1933 they were providing in-house entertainment at the Old Heidelberg at the World's Fair. This attraction was so popular it was turned into an ongoing Chicago eatery after the Fair's closure. Two other players of the *Hungry Five* were identified during this engagement. They were George Blandon and Hans Kelter, both of whom had served in the Austrian and German military respectively. Another band member was identified in December 1934 due to public divorce proceedings. Joseph Lear was named as the trombone player for the Five and earned a modest \$63 for his efforts. Whether any of these men were original *Hungry Five* musicians is not known.

The *Hungry Five* did again grace radio but not until 1934 and this time on WCFL, not WGN. WCFL was owned by the Chicago Federation of Labor. This second incarnation ran from November 1934 until August 1935. Since they held a half-hour timeslot it is likely the broadcasts were original and not replays of the syndicated show, which consisted of 15-minute segments. Nothing else is known about this run.

The band's subsequent engagement at the Heidelberg Inn would last, interrupted at times, until 1946. During this time the *Hungry Five* tested their athletic skills by representing their host Old Heidelberg Inn

in a Chicago softball league. Station WIND aired a program simply called *Herr Louie* at the end of 1940. It seems this is the same Herr Louie that had been entertaining Chicago since 1928 but details of the broadcasts are yet to be uncovered. While the *Hungry Five* became entrenched at the Heidelberg, Hal Gilles (the Weasel) struck out on his own, establishing a one-man show at Math Iglor's Casino which would last at least through the war years. His reputation was so dependent upon his former role as the Weasel with the *Hungry Five* that his engagements continued to identify him as such despite his separation from the band. In 1947 he returned to the Old Heidelberg, site of the *Hungry Five's* long-term engagement. Whether he rejoined the German act is unclear.

While the Depression and World War II were not able to sideline Herr Louie, a heart attack on July 27, 1946, was. At the age of 52, Henry Moeller, Herr Louie's alter ego, passed away at his home in the Graemere Hotel. He was survived by his 39-year-old widow Mary Moeller. At least one source indicates the *Hungry Five* continued on yet a few years more, replacing Moeller with Harry Troppe who took on the role of Herr Louie. By mid-century it appears the "leedle Cherman Band" had finally disbanded after two decades of entertaining Chicago.

As mentioned above, Henry Moeller (Herr Louie) and Hal Gilles (the Weasel) were the craftsmen behind

PARADISE BALABAN & KATZ **TIVOLI**

CRAWFORD near WASHINGTON
55c Price—1:30 to 6:30 P. M.
First Chicago Engagement of these Sensational Radio Stars

LOUIE'S HUNGRY FIVE
FROM W. G. N.
IN PERSON

with HERR LOUIE and THE WEASEL
in an uproarious radio stage sketch

MARK FISHER & BAND
in "LACES and GRACES" scenic-wonder

COTTAGE GROVE near 63rd St
55c Price 1:15 to 6:30
You'll Roar With Laughter
This Famous Film Funster

SAMMY COHEN
IN PERSON

Funnier than he was in
"What Price Glory"

in "SAY IT WITH FLOWERS"

FRANKIE MASTERS

Gorgeous bouquet of melodies, surprises, beautiful girls with **STONE-VERNON** FOURSOME Sensational Dancers

Extra! Extra!
Talking Riot
CLARK & McCULLOUGH
'Bath Between'

ON PARADISE & TIVOLI LIVING SCREENS

ALL TALKING

Louie's Hungry Five featuring Herr Louie and the Weasel making a personal appearance in the 1930s at the height of popularity.



EIN, ZWEI, DREI, SPIEL! Louie's *Hungry Five*, heard each night on W-G-N, The Tribune's radio station, are caught red-handed by the camera. In the foreground, directing, Herr Louie, and at the right, the Weasel, who supply the feature with its comic dialogue.

the successful *Hungry Five* group. Their background is not well documented but some information is known. Moeller originally hailed from Davenport, IA and Gilles from Evansville, IN. Moeller and Gilles worked together going back to the early twenties, years before they entered radio. Interestingly, the pair also worked with Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll around the same time for the Joe Bren Producing Company. Their paths would later intersect yet again at WGN.

During the 20s Moeller and Gilles toured the Midwest producing Bren minstrel shows. Sometime in late 1927 or early 1928 the two found work at Chicago radio station WGN. When the station attempted to keep the famous *Sam 'n' Henry* program on the air after Gosden and Correll bolted for WMAQ, Moeller and Gilles were assigned the task of taking over the parts. In early January (10th), 1928, *Sam 'n' Henry* were once again on the air but the public clearly favored Gosden and Correll and the series permanently went silent a short time later.

Moeller and Gilles quickly transitioned from the black-dialect Sam and Henry characters to the German-dialect characters of Louie and Weasel. At the same time they kept busy with other WGN efforts. Gilles seemed to be the busier of the two, appearing simultaneously in the *Hungry Five* and a nightly musical variety show aired from 10:30 to midnight. His roles on this show variously

describe him as "jazzy end man," "warbling end man," and providing "chuckles and hot-tish songs." The theme of this hour-and-a-half spot fluctuated from vaudeville to minstrel-type themes, but it clearly allowed Gilles to show off the showmanship skills honed years before on the road.

Moeller was not left out of this nighttime extravaganza though he appears in the daily schedule descriptions less often. Nevertheless, he found billing as the Merry Monologue Man and as head of a trained animal act. Other WGN performers who frequently appeared on this program were the Pullman Porters, a blackface singing group, tenor Jean Napier, Harold Wright, and the Meeker Orchestra.

Gilles was also part of a comedy duo, Hal and Del, who appeared on various spots on WGN's schedule. Sometimes the slot was their own and other times it was as part of another feature such as the variety hour mentioned above. The other half of the duo, Del, was Delos Owen who was also responsible for creating WGN's radio programs. In addition to patter, Del provided piano music for some of the shows. The Tribune noted that

"Louie and the Weasel were introduced" by Del Owen. Whether this refers to a part in the creation of the character sketch is unclear. Also unclear is whether Owen provided music for the band and would have been one of the original *Hungry Five*.

Some of Hal and Del's routines have been preserved through brief promotional quips in the *Tribune*. Primarily it seems they "frolic[ked] a bit" and filled the time with "songs and chatter." One time "attorneys Hal and Del plead their cases before Judge Cobb, and there's that hot band of Harold Wright's in the jury box! Come to court at 10:50! Hear 'em send Hank Moeller up for life!" Here Moeller pops up again. Another time they penned a sketch called "The Dream of a Rarebit Fiend. Eating rarebit has been known to cause weird dreams." In 1928 and 1929 it was not uncommon for Gilles and Moeller to be a part of three programs that ran nearly back-to-back for most of the evening.

In 1930 and 1931, as the new decade got under way, WGN proved there was still life in blackface minstrel programming and created a weekly minstrel show that would "tour" the

In 1930 and 1931, as the new decade got under way, WGN proved there was still life in blackface minstrel programming and created a weekly minstrel show that would "tour" the region and broadcast from a different town each week.

region and broadcast from a different town each week. This was a natural setting for Gilles who had specialized in “darky ditties” on previously mentioned WGN features. In reality, readers submitted letters about their town and included information about prominent figures and local jokes. Around this information the writers (which included Moeller) would craft a half-hour broadcast. Moeller also served as the interlocutor for the *WGN Minstrels*. This program was actually a revival of an

When the station attempted to keep the famous *Sam 'n' Henry* program on the air after Gosden and Correll bolted for WMAQ, Moeller and Gilles were assigned the task of taking over the parts.

earlier minstrel show aired by WGN a few years before with an entirely different cast. Del Owen, previously mentioned, was the constant between the two incarnations serving as producer for both editions. He reused much of the old music for the new version but did revise both the opening song (“Hello, Everybody”) and the closing tune (“Won’t You Help Us Play Our Tamborines”).

Of interest to casual old-time radio fans is the appearance of a singing trio called Tom, Dick, and Harry. Some of their first appearances were on the late night minstrel shows which also featured Gilles. One member of the trio, a young Marlin Hurt, would go on to a successful radio career before his premature death in 1946.

In addition to Gilles, Moeller, and Hurt, WGN staffers who made up this “burnt-cork troupe” were Jack Spencer and Bud and Gordon Van Dover. During 1931 the group adopted the name *The Miniature Minstrels* which was generally used with all their billings. By January 1932 (by which time *Louie’s Hungry Five* had left the air) the cast of *The Minstrel Show* consisted of nine of WGN’s top performers. The program was produced by Del Owen, who also played Joe Cinders, Axel Christensen, a pianist who played Charcoal, Jack Spencer as Pork Chops, Gordon Van Dover as Sam Sambo, Fred Van Dover as Tom Tombo, Hal Gilles as Muddy White, Marlin Hurt as Ebony Brown, Hank Moeller as the interlocutor, and Carl Hoefle as the accompanist.

By early 1932, Hal Gilles found himself in at least two regularly scheduled non-musical features. The first, *Easy Aces*, would go on to become one of the most fondly remembered old-time radio programs of all time. Ace Goodman had brought his show to Chicago in mid-1931 after a successful one-to-two-year stint on KMBC-Kansas City. It would eventually go on to network prominence. For a short time, early in its Chicago days, Hal Gilles played the part of Jack. *Easy Aces* also fea-

tured the aforementioned Jack Spencer. Until a more extensive study of Goodman Ace and his aural feature is undertaken, the role of Gilles and Spencer in *Easy Aces* will likely remain obscure.

At the same time Gilles was also featured on an original WGN program titled *Over at the Hoopers*. It was a short-lived show, running just a few months (February through May confirmed) in early 1932. No recordings or documents of this 15-minute

drama are known to exist so once again historians are forced to rely on sparse newspaper accounts to reconstruct the series’ content. Our current knowledge is restricted to the following *Tribune* description:

Take all the ingredients of mystery and mix them together and serve each day at 5:00 and you will have that interesting WGN sketch *Over at the Hoopers*. Already ghosts, stolen pictures, a villainous doctor and his lonely sanitarium, a mysterious woman, an abandoned babe, and a counterfeiting gang have woven their way into the plot and into the little delicatessen store of Will Hooper and Ma Hooper, his wife. And now Will Hooper goes into politics with the express purpose of bettering the conditions of the little suburb in which the Hoopers live, and at the same time three men begin to pay court to Dorothy, the young and pretty niece of the Hooper family.


Over at the Hoopers featured Hal Gilles as Dr. Ellington, Hank Moeller as Fritz, Jack Boyle as Will Hooper, Bessie Flynn as Ma Hooper, Jean O’Connor as Bob Gordon, and Katherine Roche as Mrs. Van Slyne. The show drew a large enough audience that WGN switched its original late afternoon broadcast time to 1:15 p.m. to accommodate workers who wanted to tune in over their lunch hour.

Despite these non-musical efforts, the *Miniature Minstrels* were the most durable vehicle for Moeller and Gilles once the *Hungry Five* left WGN. The show continued at least until early 1933, making weekly “trips” to various locales in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, and Indiana. One *Tribune* wag commented that the Minstrels were popular enough to perform before a capacity crowd (albeit only 50) at the studio for their weekly broadcast. This Minstrel Show is the last non-*Hungry Five* radio work discovered for both Moeller and Gilles.

While Moeller’s show-business ended with his death in 1946, Gilles had at least

one more “act” after his time as the Weasel wound down. In the late 1940s he became a partner in Hargill Records (with Herbi Hardt, hence the Har-Gill name), a novelty-record company. The two produced risqué record *Sixteen Old Ladies Stuck in a Lavatory* in 1949 by Hardt and his Jovial Jesters at the Universal Broadcasting Studios in Chicago. One source states Gilles started his own label the next year. By 1959 he was comfortably retired in the Chicago suburb of Evanston.

Hank Moeller and Hal Gilles never achieved the national acclaim or lasting legacy of their original predecessors Gosden and Correll. Neither they nor their characters ever went beyond their own media. No movies, no television. Nevertheless, they did well enough to endure and make a career in the entertainment industry. Their modest success and fame was entirely regional. From grueling days with Joe Bren to successful years with WGN to a long swan song with engagements at Chicago-area establishments, the boys’ acting prowess—primarily



MEETING SCHEDULE
2010

THE 2010 SPERDVAC
MONTHLY MEETING
SCHEDULE

ALL DATES ARE CONFIRMED

May 8
South Pasadena Community Room

•

June 12
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•

September 11
Mid-Valley Library • North Hills

•

October 9
South Pasadena Community Room

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November 13
To Be Announced

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Louie's Hungry Five

with blackface and German acts—kept them busy during a time in which dialect performance were losing favor with the public.

Typical of most radio performers from the era the men behind the *Hungry Five* had all but been erased from the collective memory until Elizabeth McLeod dusted off their names in her research on *Amos 'n' Andy*. Unlike most of their contemporaries, however, at least some of their work was preserved on records, and a portion of those records are now resurfacing. The leedle Cherman band shows its age and will not likely gain an extensive following among hobbyists, but this work, hopefully, will shed further light on these aural pioneers from a window that once stood open some 80-years-ago and bring them some long over-due recognition and respect. ♣

When Melody was King

Three Tenors to Austin City Limits, there is little to be heard.

To paraphrase an old idiom, "A piece of paper never forgets," so it is true with CDs and old LPs of music which can be replayed and never forgotten. Spinning those disks we can recapture the sounds heard during the stellar radio years which now are often enhanced by greater reproductive techniques from remastered originals. But in recent years the recordings seem to be mostly vocals of good artists usually backed by guitars or synthesizers rather than full orchestras or popular bands. The exception is when they're used as backgrounds as in a CD by Rosemary Clooney with the Count Basie orchestra providing great swinging sounds to produce a memorable album.

So to those able to do so close your eyes and once again recall in your mind the great music on radio whether the far-away band remotes heard late at night or the beautiful resonant sounds emanating from the studios of a major network. Also the voices which were either a regular part of an ongoing program or the show itself. Think of Fran Allison singing on *Don McNeill's Breakfast Club* or Dennis Day on *The Jack Benny Program* or Bing Crosby, Perry Como, the Mills Brothers and, or course, Frank Sinatra.

During those years we were not aware how important music was to our radio entertainment; we merely accepted it as a norm. However, it's not too late to savor certain memorable moments via SPERDVAC and acknowledge that old time radio did indeed have something TV could never duplicate. ♣

"PURSUIT OF PEACE"

by NORMAN CORWIN

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A Horrible Way

of our favorites. Among them are William Conrad (*Gunsmoke's* Marshall Matt Dillon), Raymond Edward Johnson (*Inner Sanctum's* host "Raymond"), Joseph Kearns (*The Whistler* until joining *Suspense* as announcer and support player), Arch Oboler (*Lights Out's* most famous wordsmith), William N. Robson (producer-director of chillers *Escape* and *Suspense*), and more.

Smith disparages the "cheaper, easier form of entertainment for the sponsor's dollar" that suffices today for the better-made TV sitcoms and dramas that succeeded radio. Quiz shows and "increasingly outrageous" reality shows, he laments, don't amuse American audiences as they once were accustomed to in the "golden age of radio" (between 1935 and 1952, he indicates) and TV's early replacements.

His book is a delightful walk down memory lane, well worth being on the serious OTR fan's bookshelf. *Horror Stars on Radio* is on the web at www.mcfarlandpub.com and also may be ordered at 800-253-2187. It's priced at \$45. ♣



"SING OUT, SWEET LAND"

BURL IVES • ARTHUR GODFREY • PHEBE OSCARWOOD
BETTY JANE WATSON • J. SCOTT SMART • WILL GEER

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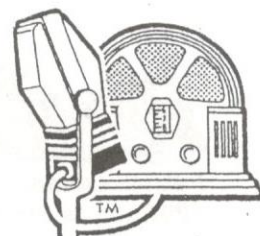
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