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--Chuck Schaden

# JACK CARSON: MR. RELIABLE

BY CLAIR SCHULZ

There is a limboland between the mountaintop where the screen legends reside and the plain which is home to the character actors. Perpetually stuck in the middle are those performers who were frequently cast as second leads such as Preston Foster, Dan Duryea, Evelyn Keyes, Van Heflin, Claire Trevor, Marjorie Reynolds, Eddie Albert, and Diana Lynn.

Perched high on a ledge somewhere within sight of the peak sits Jack Carson all alone muttering to himself, "So near and yet so far."

No one could have predicted that John Elmer Carson born October 27, 1910 in a small town in Manitoba, Canada would have even reached those heights. His family moved to Milwaukee when he was still a child and he attended St. John's Military Academy in Delafield from 1923 to 1928.

At Carleton College Jack excelled in football and swimming and he dabbled in a few dramatic productions, but because he seemed more interested in pulling pranks than in pulling grades he was politely told after his sophomore year not to return for the fall 1930 semester.

He sold insurance for a year until an acquaintance named Dave Willock suggested that they get an act together and go on the stage. Just as the fabled team of McGee and Nitney that Fibber always bragged about, Willock and Carson hit the vaudeville circuit with an assortment of quaint

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*Clair Schulz, a Nostalgia Digest subscriber from Stevens Point, Wisconsin, is a regular contributor to our magazine.*

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JACK CARSON

PHOTO: LES1

sayings, snappy jokes, softshoe dances, and bouncy songs.

By 1935 vaudeville was dying and, as Jack freely admitted, "We helped kill it." When the act split up, Carson became master of ceremonies at a theatre in Kansas City, but he never forgot his friend even after he left the stage for Hollywood in 1936.

The standard joke of self-deprecating comedians, "I started at the bottom — and stayed there," is only half-true in Jack's case.

He did begin with just bit parts like filling Henry Fonda's car with gas in *You Only Live Once* and standing in Humphrey Bogart's shadow in *Stand-In*.

Producers at RKO liked what they saw

of him so they put him in seven of their best features in 1938 alone. In *Law of the Underworld* Carson was noticeable as a henchman of Chester Morris and he drew more attention as a droll criminal named Red Jenks who gets bumped off by *The Saint in New York*. His vaudeville training served him in good stead aiding Joe Penner in two slapstick farces, *Go Chase Yourself* and *Mr.*



**"STRAWBERRY BLONDE" (1941) Jack Carson and Rita Hayworth**

*Doodle Kicks Off*. He acted as the right hand man to Ginger Rogers in *Vivacious Lady*, *Having a Wonderful Time*, and *Care-free*, though he was usually left out at the end and soon became known as the bouncer left out cold by the right hand of the other man. Somebody had to be the brash suitor of the sweetheart who took it on the jaw from the hero at the fade-out and Jack obligingly kept sticking his chin out time after time.

Even though he occasionally found himself in notable films like *Destry Rides Again* and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and had moved up in the credits, more often than not Carson was stuck in B pictures supporting the likes of Jed Prouty, Stu Erwin, and Bob Burns. Of the ten movies in which he appeared in 1940 all are forgotten or forgettable except *Love Thy Neighbor* featuring Burns and Allen and *Lucky Partners*, which might be regarded as his breakthrough film because, through he loses Ginger once more, he grabbed third-billing behind her and Ronald Colman.

Perhaps it was the uneven nature of the

projects he did bouncing between RKO, Paramount, Universal, and Fox that convinced Carson to sign a contract with Warner Brothers. At least by regularly appearing with the major actors of that studio audiences would say, "That's the same guy who kissed Ann Sheridan and took a shot at Edward G. Robinson instead of "Who's that guy?"

Right away in *Strawberry Blonde* he made an impression as the genial villain who steals Rita Hayworth away from James Cagney who in turn romances Olivia De Havilland. But even when Jack's character wins he loses for it turns out that Rita is a shrew and Olivia a darling so Cagney gets the last laugh after all.

Playing a comedic heel became his customary role as he provided some of the sparks that came between Myrna Loy and William Powell in *Love Crazy* and between Cagney and Bette Davis in *The Bride Came C.O.D.* In the service comedy *Navy Blues* he was on the receiving end of soap, eggs, and a pail of water tossed by Jack Oakie. As Joe Ferguson, a gridiron hero and former beau of the wife of a university pro-

## JACK CARSON

fessor in *The Male Animal*, he threatened to disrupt the marriage of Henry Fonda and Olivia De Havilland. Carson's beefy frame and his expert delivery of fatuous remarks enabled him to give an impeccable performance in this adaptation of James Thurber's play and earned him best acting honors from the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures.

That Carson was a versatile actor who could still play it straight was proven when he assisted Robinson in *Larceny, Inc.* and befriended Errol Flynn in *Gentleman Jim*. But the most fortuitous pairing with any Warner player came when he squared off against Dennis Morgan for Ann Sheridan's hand in *Wings for the Eagle*.

The camaraderie between Morgan and Carson became apparent when the two sang and danced their way through "Tip-toe Through the Tulips" and "Am I Blue?" in *The Hard Way*. During the filming of the two ex-Milwaukeeans cemented a friendship that lasted long after the cameras stopped rolling. Once a week Carson, his wife (singer Kay St. Germain), Morgan,

Marie Wilson, and old pal Dave Willock put on a vaudeville show at an army camp near Los Angeles. Jack gave generously of his time to entertain the troops during the war and eagerly accepted parts in the patriotic movies *Thank Your Lucky Stars* and *Hollywood Canteen*.

Dennis, Jack, and Ann were retcamed in *Shine On Harvest Moon*, although it was Jack as a hammy magician named Georgetti and Marie Wilson as his dotty assistant who stole the film. Just Carson's wild-eyed expressions and the manipulation of his mustachioed lip was enough to send audiences into paroxysms of laughter.

His flexible features were spotlighted in his next film (the first one to give him top billing), *Make Your Own Bed*, in which he played an inept detective helping and hindering Jane Wyman and also in *The Doughgirls* when he never seemed quite certain as to whether he was married, single, on foot, or on horseback. When Carson was stumbling around in a fog of uncertainty his perplexed face seemed to be saying, "Will somebody tell me what's going on around here?"

In 1945 he took a break from light-weight fare when he assumed the part of Wally, a brassy, repulsive realtor who is of dubious aid to Joan Crawford in *Mildred Pierce*. As Carson demonstrated often later in his career, he could be an oily creep if the part called for it.

It was in the postwar pictures with Morgan that Jack reached the peak of his popularity. In *Once More Tomor-*



"MILDRED PIERCE" (1945) Jack Carson and Joan Crawford

PHOTOFEST



"A STAR IS BORN" (1954) James Mason and Jack Carson

PHOTOFEST

row he played a butcher who stood up to some bigwigs and got a girl at the end. The *Two Guys from Milwaukee* were Dennis as a prince and Jack as a cabbie, but Carson made most of the mirth and had one reviewer raving that he could "put more muscular energy into a comedy role and edge it with a finer degree of mental lassitude than any six screen comedians we can think of ... the boy's very, very funny."

*The Time, The Place, and the Girl* featuring the duo was in theatres shortly thereafter and *Two Guys From Texas* in 1948, but neither was as amusing as *Milwaukee* or *It's a Great Feeling* (1949) in which the pair, playing themselves, engage in some double crossing a la Hope and Crosby as they each try to win a movie part for and the affections of waitress Doris Day. (Jack and Doris played virtually the same roles in another 1949 effort, *My Dream is Yours*).

Because most of the episodes have been lost many people today are unaware that during the 1940s Carson had his own radio program. After doing some work on *The Signal Carnival* with veterans like Hal Peary and Jane Morgan, he was the headliner on a CBS program supported by

Arthur Treacher, Dale Evans and Willock. During the 1947-48 season he switched over to NBC to host *The Sealtest Village Store*.

*The Village Store* featured good-natured kidding between Carson, Eve Arden, Willock, and bald-pated band leader Frank De Vol usually followed by a skit parodying specific films or stock characters often seen in pictures like cowboys, pirates, and gangsters. The laughs frequently came from confusion over complicated names like Flooglefleagle and a steady stream of corny gags such as "Who are you, k-nave?" "Who wants to k-now?" Carson aptly described the program when he said, in response to one of Dave's inanities, "That's not funny, but it's silly." Silly or not, it is still a joy to hear Eve and Jack show off their talents at mimicry and toss dialects and foreign accents back and forth.

When television replaced radio as the public's medium of choice, Carson was there as well sharing hosting duties on *The Four-Star Revue* with Danny Thomas, Ed Wynn, and Jimmy Durante from 1950 to 1952. For the next decade he appeared on dramatic shows of merit such as *Ford The-*



JACK CARSON

atre, *U.S. Steel Hour*, *Playhouse 90*, *Studio One*, *Lux Video Theatre*, and *Screen Directors' Playhouse* as well as popular shows like *Bonanza*, *Thriller*, *Zane Grey Theatre*, *The World of Disney*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, and in a serio-comic episode of *The Twilight Zone* as a used car salesman who suddenly can't help telling "The Whole Truth."

Though his work on TV and radio kept him busy, he still found time to appear in films. *The Good Humor Man* (1950) is one of his more memorable roles as he dodged policemen and crooks for about eighty minutes while managing to take a pummeling with fists, flour, soot, water, and pies. The movie was derivative of and inferior to Red Skelton's *The Fuller Brush Man* and is perhaps most noteworthy for teaming Carson with Lola Albright who would become his third wife in 1952.

Jack again took it on the lam in *The Groom Wore Spurs*, but at least as a phony cowboy star the humor centered around what he did and not on the damage done to him, and old screenmate Ginger Rogers

added to the merriment by acting as his lawyer. He ambled about amusingly as another cowpoke, this one full of arrogance and bluster, who gave Rosemary Clooney all the headaches she could handle in *Red Garters*.

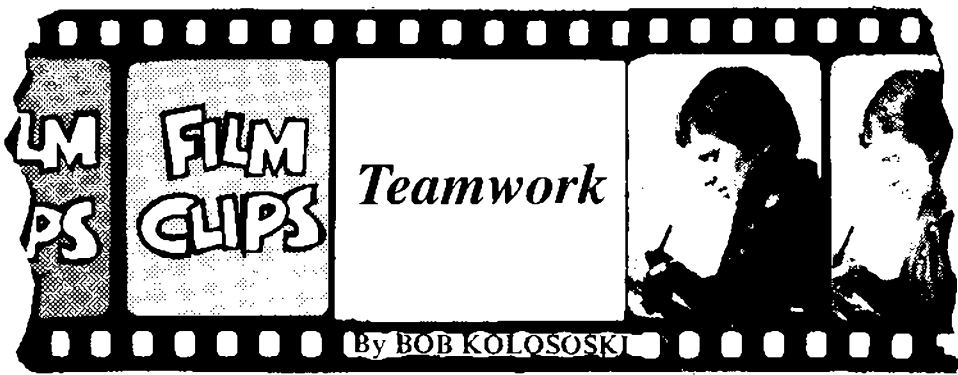
In the mid-fifties his parts in movies diminished and were almost exclusively dramatic. Carson was in top form as a cynical press agent in *A Star is Born*, and he demonstrated a forceful presence playing the loudmouthed neighbor in *The Bottom of the Bottle*, conniving sheriff in *The Tattered Dress*, obnoxious heir in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, loyal mechanic in *The Tarnished Angels*, and corrupt politician in *King of the Roaring '20s*. Even when he assumed a lighter role like the loutish captain sent into space at the end of *Rally Round the Flag, Boys!* his shady characters usually got their just desserts.

It seems that Jack Carson, however, never got what was coming to him. He died too soon, of cancer that struck him down at the age of 52 while he was rehearsing to appear in a production of *Critic's Choice*, a fitting title for a finale because Carson was the critic's choice, the director's choice, and the people's choice to be the dependable role-player who stirred the plot. He could fill the screen with those massive shoulders and that broad grin and be convincing whether he was acting obstreperous or treacherous.

Jack Carson could act circles around comedians and clown better than most actors. Awarding him the title of "Hollywood's all-around Mr. Reliable" may not seem like much of a consolation prize to Jack sitting up there on that aery perch unless some of those heavenly bodies shine brightly and some just glimmer but they are all stars. ■

(NOTE— Tune in to TWTD July 19 for a four-hour salute to Jack Carson.)





By BOB KOLOSOSKI

*Sunset Boulevard*, the Andrew Lloyd Webber stage musical, was initially a tremendously successful motion picture.

Film director Billy Wilder and his longtime writing partner Charles Brackett collaborated with D. M. Marshman, Jr. to create the fabulous story and super characters. Released in 1950, *Sunset Boulevard* was the smash hit of the year, winning Academy Awards for Best Screenplay and Score (by Franz Waxman).

It was the last film Brackett and Wilder would work on together. They parted after the film's release, ending the most successful movie writing team of the 1940s.

Charles Brackett, born in 1892, was the son of a New York state senator and a graduate of Harvard Law School. He had written for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and was at one time the drama critic for the *New Yorker*. He came to Hollywood in the early '30s to work at RKO and found the studio and the work tedious.

He went back to New York, but returned to Hollywood and the movies in 1934 to

become a staff writer at Paramount. He was cultured, reserved, and loved to sit at his desk behind a closed door and nurture ideas into stories.

Billy Wilder was born in Poland in 1906 and wound up in Vienna at an early age. He was a restless youth with little formal education and even less ambition. He settled in Berlin in the mid-twenties and held various jobs around town including one as a newspaper reporter. Eventually he secured a position with UFA Film studio as a screenwriter. His early works are reflections of his "streetwise" existence.

In 1933 he found that the life of a Jew in Berlin was worth very little, and after finishing a screenplay that criticized the Nazi

party, he felt compelled to flee for his life. He went from France to England to Mexico to Los Angeles to a tiny office in the writers' building at Paramount. There he practiced his

English and worked on a couple screenplays (for \$75 a week) and prayed he would be given the chance to work with his idol, Ernst Lubitsch.



PHOTOFEST  
CHARLES BRACKETT



PHOTOFEST  
BILLY WILDER

## TEAMWORK

On the afternoon of July 17, 1936 Wilder was summoned to the office of Manny Wolf, chief of the writers' department at the studio. Brackett was already there and the air was thick with cigar smoke. The studio was preparing a new film for their most celebrated director and Brackett had been selected to prepare the script.

Since the project was based on a French play and the director, Ernst Lubitch was famous for his cosmopolitan touch, Wilder was brought in to add European flavor to the brew.

Brackett and Wilder were now a team and they would share an office and a secretary. Wilder was overjoyed but Brackett was less than thrilled to be stuck with the newest refugee on the lot.

The play was *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* and the screenplay had flashes of great humor, but the casting of Gary Cooper as a millionaire playboy was bogus to audiences. It wasn't one of Lubitch's better films and quickly faded from the scene. The writing team of Brackett and Wilder were assigned another "continental" comedy and this time they were right on target.

They were given a story idea by Edwin Justus Mayer and Franz Schulz with the title *Midnight*. The idea was simply the premise of an American chorus girl stranded in Paris with nothing but an evening gown to her name. Brackett and Wilder expanded and molded that idea into a sterling, sophisticated, screwball farce that is still great fun to watch in the high-tension 1990s. The cast of Claudette Colbert, Don Ameche, John Barrymore and Mary Astor reveled in the material and gave top shelf performances.

Wilder and Brackett were rewarded for their sophisticated triumph with the assignment of the first Henry Aldrich comedy



"NINOTCHKA" (1939) PHOTOFEST  
Greta Garbo and Melvyn Douglas

starting Jackie Cooper in the title role.

While they stewed over their Aldrich project, Lubitch was over at MGM trying to get a Greta Garbo film off dead center. Three teams of MGM writers had struggled with the screenplay for *Ninotchka* with varied results. Lubitch wanted the best screenplay MGM's money could buy and he felt cheated by what had been done. Garbo was ready to bolt into retirement, but Lubitch convinced her that his Paramount team could save the day.

MGM paid dearly for Brackett and Wilder who were astonished at their good fortune to be working with Garbo and Lubitch on the same film. It became one of the era's wittiest romantic comedies and a classic gem to savor whenever possible.

Paramount producer Arthur Hornblow Jr. was anxious to get his crack writing team back to work on an original screenplay that dealt with the German invasion of Poland in 1939. The project was postponed when male lead William Holden was loaned out to Columbia to do a western. Director Mitchell Leisen was working on a project

with the Spanish Civil War as the backdrop. When Wilder and Brackett became available he asked Hornblow to assign them the screenplay.

The writers fashioned an action-comedy that sent hero Ray Milland from Spain to Poland to fight the Fascist terror gripping Europe. Claudette Colbert played a spunky American correspondent who follows the man she loves and the stories that make headlines. Paramount ran into trouble with the production code office because of some sexy dialogue created by the writers and with the European market because of the anti-Fascist tone of the film.

There was unrest in Europe and, on the Paramount lot, Billy Wilder was creating quite a huff with his home studio. During the filming of *Arise My Love* Wilder was at war with director Leisen. Wilder felt that Leisen was missing the point of the anti-Fascist theme and throwing the timing off in several key scenes.

Leisen felt that Wilder was a royal pain and should be locked in the writers' building during filming.

When Brackett and Wilder were assigned to adapt Kittie Fring's novel *Hold Back the Dawn* they made the main character a much darker and more complicated person than the novel portrayed. Mitchell Leisen was the director and again he and Wilder fought over content and timing. It was this film that convinced Wilder that he could direct his own screenplays. At Paramount, Preston Sturges had made the leap from screenwriter to director in 1940 with *The*

*Great McGinty*.

Wilder's plans to follow Sturges' lead were put on hold because Samuel Goldwyn was mad at Gary Cooper.

Cooper was under contract to Goldwyn and it was difficult for the legendary producer to find suitable stories for his biggest star. Cooper was enjoying a lot of time off on salary and Goldwyn was very upset. He loved the work of Wilder and Brackett and arranged for the writing duo to produce a story for Cooper.

In exchange for the writers, Goldwyn



PHOTOFEST  
"LOST WEEKEND" (1945) Ray Milland and Howard da Silva

loaned Cooper to Paramount who put the lanky star into *For Whom The Bell Tolls*. Wilder dusted off an old script he had written in Germany and he and Brackett doctored places, people and things to a finished product called *Ball of Fire*. Goldwyn's wife loved the story and it was filmed by Howard Hawks with Barbara Stanwyck as Gary Cooper's co-star

Two months later Wilder returned to Paramount armed with enough information on directing to make him dangerous.

He went to producer Hornblow with an idea about a twenty-something lady who

## TEAMWORK

disguises herself as a twelve-year-old to ride the train cross country for half-fare. Hornblow loved the lead but balked at Wilder directing unless he could get a name star to play the masquerading lady.

Wilder contacted Ginger Rogers because he had heard her say that she had done something similar when she was a traveling chorus girl. Rogers fell in love with Wilder's sense of humor and agreed to play the part. He asked Ray Milland to co-star and when Milland said okay, *The Major and the Minor* was put into production.

While Wilder was directing his first film, Brackett was searching for new material. He zeroed in on a World War I play called *Imperial Hotel* and updated it to reflect the current German/British conflict. A major character in the final script was Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, commander of the Afrika Corps. As Wilder was working with Brackett on the script, he saw only one man as Rommel — Eric von Stroheim, who had played many evil Germans during World War I and was known as "the man you love

to hate." They secured Stroheim, retitled their screenplay *Seven Graves to Cairo*, and went to Hornblow with a great war-time script, a great actor committed to the movie, and Wilder set to direct. Franchot Tone became the star of the film, but von Stroheim dominated every scene he was in and movie critics liked the film and loved the Hun.

Author James M. Cain had published his first novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, in 1934 and caused a sensation. He serialized a novella, *Double Indemnity*, in 1935 in *Liberty Magazine* and again the story of adulterous affairs and murder caused a sensation. All the major studios went after the film rights, but backed off when the Production Code office issued a statement that condemned the story.

By 1944, Paramount decided that the time was right for a story dripping with sex and murder and Wilder wanted to direct it. Brackett was working on the script for *The Lost Weekend* and Wilder convinced author Raymond Chandler to work with him on the script for *Double Indemnity*. Their working relationship deteriorated quickly,

but they managed to tough out a bad situation and produce a script stained with Wilder's sweat and Chandler's booze. It also had some of the best dialogue ever produced. The film extended Fred MacMurray's waning career, presented Barbara Stanwyck in a sleazy blonde wig that was to die for, and spotlighted Edward G. Robinson who became a character actor for the first time in a long



"DOUBLE INDEMNITY" (1944)

Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray

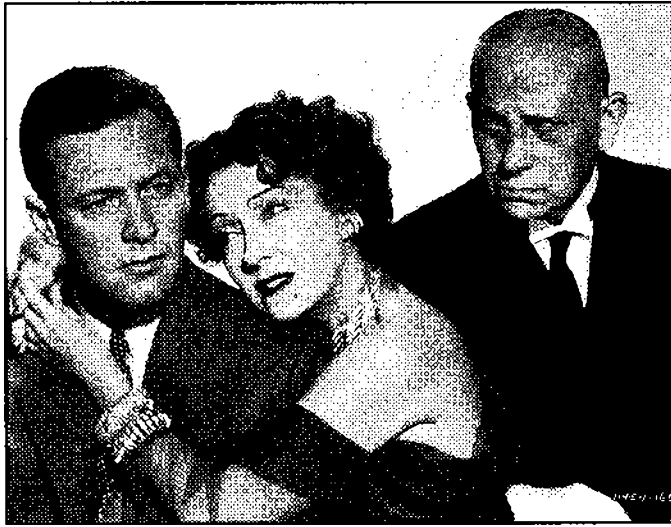
career. Wilder's film is pure *noir* and introduced the director to the dark side of filming.

He went back to Brackett to find *The Lost Weekend* as dark a story as ever told in a film. He loved the concept of portraying an alcoholic as a person with a sickness. They were entering new territory and the studio balked at the whole idea. Brackett argued that the public was tired of cute stories

about cute people in a sugarcoated world. The war had hardened the American moviegoer and they wanted to give the public a story with an edge to it. The studio bosses finally agreed to put the film into production and Wilder went to non-drinker Ray Milland to star as the alcoholic the story followed. Wilder promised Milland an Academy Award and Milland did win the Oscar for Best Actor of 1945.

After two dark pictures, Wilder and Brackett whipped up a bit of Bavarian fluff with *The Emperor's Waltz* starring the king of Paramount, Bing Crosby. Shot in glorious Technicolor, it was lovely to look at but hard to swallow. The writers knew they had to get back to something with a little bite to it and, along with writer Robert Harari, they altered an outline by author Irwin Shaw into a script for *A Foreign Affair*. The film starred Jean Arthur, Marlene Dietrich and John Lund and took place in the bombed-out city of Berlin. It presented American occupation troops as opportunists and black marketers.

Wilder went to Berlin in 1947 and shot hours of footage as background scenery.



"SUNSET BOULEVARD" (1950)

PHOTOFEST

William Holden, Gloria Swanson and Erich von Stroheim

It was not the kind of film a victorious American public wanted to see. Charles Brackett also felt that they had gone too far and tried to soften the edges he and Wilder had created. Wilder absolutely refused to give an inch and as the director, shot the film his way. It made only a modest profit, reinforcing Brackett's concerns on the contents of the film.

His concern spilled over to their next project.

Brackett saw *Sunset Boulevard* as a terrific satire on Hollywood and Wilder wanted to explore the shadow side of the business. Their egos collided and Wilder won, but at a price. After the success of *Sunset Boulevard* and all the awards had been put up on shelves, they decided there existed irreconcilable differences in their approach to moviemaking. They went their separate ways to make more movies and win more awards and applause from their audiences.

They were born in different worlds, but each man was dedicated to his craft and together they made movies that have, indeed, stood the test of time. ■

# Gershwin Rhapsody

BY BILL SHELDON

It seems to me that I always knew there was a George Gershwin.

Being a devoted addict of radio when I was growing up in the thirties, you could never be very far from a Gershwin melody. So when I heard Mickey and Judy sing "I love a Gershwin tune, how about you" from the silver screen, I knew the "you they were singing to was me, of course!

But I had another connection. You know those old Warner Bros. movies where Dick Powell would be a song plugger pounding the piano in a tiny room in Tin Pan Alley on Broadway trying to convince a star (Joan Blondell, maybe) to put his song in her next show? Well actually there was a place like that in New York City, and it was called the Brill Building. It was where all the music publishers had their offices.

But you may already know that. What you may not know is that Chicago had its own version of the Brill Building. It was the Woods Building which housed the old Woods Theatre, which was at the corner of Randolph and Dearborn — torn down not too many years ago.

Well, lucky me. My sister worked for one of those music publishers in the Woods Building in those pre-World War II days. She also used to date one of the song pluggers, as they used to call them in those days. It was the song plugger's job to contact all the local singers and band leaders to get them to play their songs.

My sister would bring home free copies

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*Bill Sheldon, a devotee of George Gershwin, is a music historian, cabaret performer, and owner of a financial publishing firm.*

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of the sheet music. It wasn't the stuff you see in the music stores, with the glossy covers featuring a picture of some singing star. It was just the plain sheet music. And sometimes it would have stamped on it the legend, "Number One Plug Song." Meaning the song pluggers would have to go all out for that particular number. Wow! Real inside stuff! And don't think that didn't make me a big shot with my high school classmates.

I can also remember one day, my sister coming home and saying, "Oh, by the way, George Gershwin was in the office today."

I was such a snob in those days, as only a teenager and a classical music student could be, and all I said was, "Oh?"

If it had been Arturo Toscanini or Leopold Stokowski who had dropped by, that would have been a different story.

I guess my snobbish feelings were a bit salvaged when I came across wonderful and clever lyrics by George's brother Ira. I do remember marveling at the wonderful melodies of Gershwin and the sophisticated lyrics that went along with them. After all, where else in a popular song of the day could you find a rhyme like

*You reading Heine, me somewhere in China...*

*My nights were sour, spent with Schopenhauer* —From "Isn't It A Pity"

George Gershwin was born on September 26, 1898.

Like no other composer of American popular music, before or since, Gershwin also made his mark in the classical music field with his Piano Concerto and symphonic works such as "American In Paris" and "Rhapsody in Blue." Already a suc-



GEORGE GERSHWIN

PHOTOFEEST

successful Broadway song writer in the 1930s, he went to France to meet the famous composer Maurice Ravel because he wanted to study with him. At their first meeting, Ravel asked Gershwin how much money he had made that year. When George told him, Ravel said, "Hmmm. You teach me!"

By all accounts, Gershwin was the typical picture of the Broadway and Hollywood success story of his day, a cigar smoking, brash young man who monopolized the piano at parties, playing his songs into the night.

In the Warner Bros. biopic, *Rhapsody in Blue*, there is a scene of Robert Alda as Gershwin doing just that, and saying to Oscar Levant, "Do you think my music will be around in a hundred years?" Oscar replied, "It will if you're here to play it!"

But there was another side to George Gershwin.

Ethel Merman used to tell the story about when she was introduced to Gershwin at an audition for the musical *Girl Crazy* in which she would go down in musical history for belting out "I Got Rhythm." She

was a complete unknown who had never been in a big time show. He showed her the music for the show and she looked it over, awed and tongue-tied in the presence of Gershwin, wondering how she could ever do justice to the songs. He mistook her silence for disapproval and said, "Miss Merman, if there's something you don't like in the music, I'll be happy to make some changes for you." This from Broadway's hottest composer of the day!

When the Gershwin brothers went to Hollywood, their batting average was not too good at first. They wrote a score for a movie with Janet Gaynor, a star who by that time was beginning to fade a bit, and the movie was not a success.

But when they connected with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, their real movie fame began, as they turned out one hit after another for the dancing duo.

But the music world didn't always know what to make of George Gershwin. When he presented *Porgy and Bess*, viewed today as the first real American folk opera, the classical critics turned up their collective noses. "Too many hit songs" (!) they said. The Broadway naysayers complained, "Hey, this is too high-toned for us." So *Porgy and Bess* closed after some one hundred performances. Maybe not too great a run for a Broadway show, but who ever heard of a new opera chalking up one hundred performances the first time out? And it took the staid Metropolitan Opera fifty years before they decided to produce this great American classic.

George Gershwin died at the tragically early age of 39 on July 11, 1937.

Oscar Levant was wrong. Gershwin's music is still around, sixty years after his death. The man is gone, but his music is immortal. ■

(NOTE— Bill Sheldon joins Chuck Schaden for a Tribute to George Gershwin on TWTD July 12.)

# The DeZurik Sisters and The Cackle Sisters

BY WAYNE W. DANIEL

During the 1930s, as this country struggled against the shackles of the Great Depression, rural youth left their farms in droves seeking employment and other opportunities in the nation's cities. In search of the good life and urban sophistication, many strove to divest themselves of all reminders of their agrarian heritage.

Among this host of migrating youth were Mary Jane and Carolyn DeZurik, two young women who had been born and reared on a farm in Minnesota. Unlike scores of their contemporaries, however, they did not turn their backs on their pastoral past. In fact, they took a part of their rustic raising with them and parlayed it into careers that would make their names and talents known to millions of radio listeners, record buyers, stage-show audiences, and movie goers across the country.

Mary Jane and Carolyn DeZurik were born on a farm six miles east of Royalton, Minnesota, in the center of the state and a mere hop, skip, and jump from the Mississippi River. Mary Jane was approximately two years older than Carolyn and, like their four sisters and one brother, were taught by their parents, Joe and Mary DeZurik, to perform all the chores necessary for sur-

vival in a rural environment. They milked cows, tended the family garden, cleaned the barn, shocked grain, stacked hay, canned fruits and vegetables, and helped keep house.

But all was not drudgery around the DeZurik home place. The family somehow found time for the music that they all loved and most were accomplished at performing. The father of the DeZurik children played fiddle for local barn dances, son Jerry played accordion and guitar and sang, and five of the six girls were also singers and guitar players. But it was Mary Jane and Carolyn who persisted in honing their talents to a professional edge to put the Dutch-derived name DeZurik before the public.

To most farm folks the sounds of their domesticated animals are heard as demands for food and other ministrations to physical needs. Most of the DeZurik's farmer neighbors listened to the sounds of wildlife for cues to locating game that could be converted into food for the family table. Mary Jane and Carolyn, however, were on a different wave length. In the bleat of the calf, the cackle of the hen, the howl of the wolf, and the warble of the bird they, like the storyteller in "The Song of Hiawatha," heard an inspiring natural music. These varied animal sounds provided them with ideas for yodels and trick vocalizations that they incorporated into their singing to produce a unique style that set them apart from other vocalists. Their novel harmonics attracted the attention of

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*Wayne W. Daniel of Chamblee, Georgia, is a retired college professor and a country music historian. He has written more than 130 articles on the subject and is the author of Pickin' on Peachtree, A History of Country Music in Atlanta, Georgia, published by the University of Illinois Press.*

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entertainment entrepreneurs searching for the elusive "something different" that could be developed into a successful show business career.

The DeZurik sisters received their first stage experiences by entering — and usually winning — amateur contests in central Minnesota. Their prize for winning one contest was two appearances on radio station KSTP in St. Paul. In 1936, after winning another contest, they were invited to appear at the Morrison County Fair in Little Falls, Minnesota. Carolyn remembers that "It just so happened that a group of WLS National Barn Dance entertain-

ers were also appearing at the fair with one of their shows." After watching and listening to the DeZurik sisters, George Ferguson of the WLS Artists' Bureau asked them to appear on the Saturday night National Barn Dance radio and stage show. They made their Barn Dance debut on October 17, 1936. A month later, on November 19, they signed the contract with WLS that made them full-time employees of the station.

Mary Jane and Carolyn were instant hits with WLS listeners and the audiences that

heard them when they made personal appearances with WLS road shows. The publicity people at WLS wrote about them frequently for *The Prairie Farmer*, the newspaper that owned WLS, and *Standby*, the

station's fan magazine. "They specialize in trick yodels including a Hawaiian yodel, the cackle trill, German, Swiss, and triple tongue yodel." readers were told in one article. "They are clever at imitating the sounds of musical instruments such as the Hawaiian guitar, trumpet, musical saw and mandolin. They have memorized more than two hundred and fifty songs." In another article, the writer gave readers a de-



THE DE ZURIK SISTERS (1938)  
Carolyn (top) and Mary Jane

scription of the sisters. "Caroline [This spelling of Carolyn's name was frequently used.] is five feet and one inch tall and has blue eyes and light brown hair. Mary Jane is just five feet tall and looks much like her sister, with the same color hair and eyes. Neither girl is married and both insist they have no intentions of wearing orange blossoms soon."

It would not be long, though, before they would have a change of mind. Ralph "Rusty" Gill, staff guitarist and vocalist with the Hoosier Sod Busters, had been

## DE ZURIK/CACKLE SISTERS

working for the station a couple of years when the DeZurik sisters joined the WLS roster of entertainers. "It was on one of [the WLS] road shows at a county fair where I first met Carolyn and Mary Jane DeZurik," he recalls. "I worked with and along side of them for months, before I realized that I was keeping my eyes on Carolyn. So were other guys, and Mary Jane was keeping her eyes on me, watching out for the younger sister. After two years of working side-by-side with the girls, I finally worked up enough courage to ask Carolyn to marry me. To my surprise, she answered with a big, 'yes'. We were married September 1, 1940." Less than a month later, on September 29, Mary

Jane married Augie Klein, a WLS staff accordionist.

Exposure provided by WLS and the National Barn Dance opened additional career doors for Mary Jane and Carolyn DeZurik. In 1938 they signed a contract to record for the Vocalion label. They recorded six songs "Arizona Yodeler," "Sweet Hawaiian Chimes," "Birmingham Jail," "I Left Her Standing There," "Go To Sleep My Darling Baby," and "Guitar Blues."

A month after their marriages the DeZurik sisters were off to Hollywood to star in the Republic Pictures movie "Barnyard Follies" which also featured June Storey, long-time leading lady in Gene Autry westerns; and Pappy Cheshire, a country music radio personality at KMOX in St. Louis. The songs Mary Jane and Carolyn sang in the movie were "Barnyard Holiday," "Poppin' the Corn," "Big Boy Blues," "Listen To the Mocking Bird," and "Lollipop Lane." Following its release, the DeZurik Sisters toured with the movie on a promotional jaunt that took them into new territory and introduced them to new audiences.

Perhaps the most significant break in the DeZurik Sisters' early career came in 1937 when they were hired by Purina Mills to appear regularly on the transcribed "Checkerboard Time" radio show that advertised Checkerboard chicken feed and other Purina products. Carolyn remembers how she and Mary Jane were selected for the job. "Two talent scouts from Purina Mills came to the WLS National Barn Dance on a Saturday night to hear us in person," she relates. "Afterwards they came backstage to talk to us. The following Monday we went to a recording studio and made a record for



**THE CACKLE SISTERS (1938)**  
Carolyn (left) and Mary Jane



#### MURPHY'S BARNYARD JAMBOREE CAST, 1940

Murphy's Barnyard Jamboree was a segment of the National Barn Dance sponsored by Murphy's Products. The DeZurik Sisters and their soon-to-be husbands were featured on this program. Mary Jane is seated at the extreme right on the front row. Carolyn is standing behind and just to the right of her. Rusty Gill is seated in the center with his guitar. Augie Klein's smiling face and part of his accordion are visible to the right of the lower right-hand corner of the Murphy's sign on the left side of the photograph.

them to take back to Purina Mills who listened and hired us. The reason the scouts came to the Barn Dance, they had heard us do 'My Little Rooster,' and they thought it would make a terrific trademark for their show." Because of contractual agreements between the DeZurik Sisters and WLS, the Purina folks renamed their new artists the Cackle Sisters.

Over the next several years, according to Rusty Gill, the transcriptions of the Checkerboard Time were heard on radio stations in all of the then forty-eight states. Other artists appearing on the shows included Fran Allison, the Maple City Four, the Cass County Kids, the Swanee River Boys, and Otto and the Novelodians. Among the programs' emcees were Chick

Martin, Jack Holden, and Jack Stillwell.

In anticipation of new arrivals in their households Carolyn and Mary Jane temporarily stopped performing in 1940, except for their appearances on transcriptions and commercials. Later in the year, Carolyn and Rusty became the parents of a son, Donald Alan, and Mary Jane and Augie Klein's daughter, Janice Marie, was born. In 1943 Rusty and Augie were drafted, and for the next three years military duty — much of it overseas — kept them away from their families. During Rusty's absence Carolyn edged past more than 40 other hopefuls to win an audition for the Sonja Henie Ice Review. During her stint with the Review, Carolyn sang and yodeled in several segments of the show

## DE ZURIK/CAKCLE SISTERS

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while the former Olympic skating champion displayed her talents on the rink. "The most exciting part of the show for me," Carolyn reminisces, "was the opening. The announcer came on with 'It's the Sonja Henie Show'. The spotlight opened on me yodeling and then fanned out to Sonja and the entire cast."

After two seasons with the Sonja Henie Review, Carolyn paid a visit to her old home at Royalton, Minnesota, and while there was invited to become a member of the Sunset Valley Barn Dance produced by Dave Stone on KSTP in St. Paul. The Sunset Valley Barn Dance, like the National Barn Dance, was a combination stage and radio program. The weekly show was broadcast from auditoriums, theaters, and fairs in St. Paul and various other Minnesota cities. In addition to the Barn Dance, Carolyn was heard on KSTP's daily noon-time show, Main Street Minnesota, and on an early morning program called Sunrise Roundup. Carolyn's fellow artists at KSTP included eleven-year-old Little Genevieve Hovde, Billy Folger, Kathy Kohls, Al and Hank, Pop Wiggins, Cactus Slim, Hank and Thelma, and Frank and Esther.

In 1944 Purina Mills again came calling on the DeZurik Sisters. This time the manufacturer of animal rations wanted Mary Jane and Carolyn to reprise their act as the Cackle Sisters for appearances on stage and radio transcriptions with a rising country music star named Eddy Arnold. Mary Jane was enticed out of retirement, and once again, the DeZurik/Cackle Sisters found themselves involved in a full schedule of entertaining that included regular appearances on the Grand Ole Opry, road tours with Eddy Arnold and other Opry stars, and Checkerboard Funfest transcriptions that were heard on radio stations around the country. During this time Mary

Jane and Carolyn continued to make their homes in Chicago, a decision that necessitated a weekly train commute between the Windy City and Nashville so they could fulfill their Opry obligations. Thus they became the first women to achieve stardom on both the National Barn Dance and the Grand Ole Opry.

Upon his discharge from the military in 1946, Carolyn's husband, Rusty Gill, returned to WLS and the National Barn Dance, reclaiming his place as a member of the Prairie Ramblers which, at the time, also included Chick Hurt, Jack Taylor, Alan Crockett, and Bernie Smith. The following year the DeZurik Sisters also returned to WLS, but now the act consisted of Carolyn and another sister, Lorraine. After she and her family were in a serious automobile accident in 1947, Mary Jane had decided to retire from show business.

In 1949 the Prairie Ramblers and the DeZurik Sisters left Chicago for jobs at WLW radio and WLW-TV in Cincinnati, Ohio. They appeared regularly on the Midwestern Hayride, a Saturday night barn dance type show carried by the National Broadcasting Company's television network. Their fellow performers at WLW included Ernie Lee, Judy Perkins, and Kenny Roberts.

After two years in Cincinnati the Prairie Ramblers moved to a new job at WHIO-TV in Dayton, Ohio. By now Lorraine had retired and Carolyn had become the female vocalist with the Prairie Ramblers, a position that had been vacant since Patsy Montana had left the group some ten years earlier.

In 1954 Carolyn DeZurik and the Prairie Ramblers returned to Chicago and took jobs at WBKB-TV (Channel 7), the city's television outlet for the ABC network. They were given featured billing on a daily show called Chicago Parade. During the next several years they were involved in a

wide variety of television and stage shows including the TV show *Crazy Acres* on which, according to the local press, they provided "lots of music and dancing and entertainment (country style, of course)."

In 1956, during a revival of interest in polka music, Carolyn and the Prairie Ramblers made the most drastic change of their careers. They dropped the country and western songs from their repertoire and replaced them with new material like "Swiss Kiss Polka" and "Grey Horse Polka." They swapped their cowboy hats and boots for Bavarian costumes, teamed up with Stan Wolowic, changed their

name to the Polka Chips with Carolyn DeZurik, and became one of the polka sensations of Chicago. For the next two years they entertained television audiences with their interpretations of the music which, in the words of one writer, "crystallized in Chicago in the 1950's [and] swept fans and bands across the land."

When the Polka Chips disbanded Rusty and Carolyn continued to entertain as a duet. They were welcomed back to ABC-TV and were soon starring in a new polka

show called *Polka-Go-Round* that was immensely popular on network television for the next two years. In addition to Carolyn and Rusty, the show featured the Polka-Rounders band directed by Lou Prohut.

From 1956 through 1963, Carolyn

supplemented her entertainment duties with a commercial commitment with Busch Bavarian Beer. She was the company's yodeling trademark on transcriptions made at Universal studios in Chicago and in St. Louis. Jamie and the Jays were her vocal background group.

When *Polka-Go-Round* went off the air Carolyn retired from



**CAROLYN DE ZURIK and the PRAIRIE RAMBLERS (1953)**  
Clockwise from top left: Jack Taylor, Carolyn DeZurik,  
Rusty Gill, Wally Moore, Chick Hurt

the entertainment business, bringing down the curtain on the varied and rewarding career of the DeZurik Sisters that had started in Royalton, Minnesota some 30 years before. Mary Jane died in 1981, and Lorraine had earlier married and moved to Washington state where she continues to live.

Today Rusty and Carolyn are enjoying their retirement in the Chicago area while keeping in contact by telephone and letter with many of their former fans and colleagues. ■

**Chuck Schaden's**  
**THOSE WERE THE DAYS**  
**WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.**

**JUNE 1997**

**PLEASE NOTE:** The numerals following each program listing for *Those Were The Days* represents the length of time for each particular show: (28:50) means the program will run 28 minutes and 50 seconds. This may be of help to those who tape the programs for their own collection.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 7th**  
**SPOTLIGHTING WALLY PHILLIPS**

*Today we devote our entire program to one of Chicago's most popular radio personalities on his Golden Anniversary.*

**WALLY PHILLIPS** began his broadcasting career fifty years ago, in 1947, when he got his first radio job at station WJEF in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He soon moved to Cincinnati, Ohio where, over the next eight years he he was on the air at WASI, WCOP and WLW.



**WALLY PHILLIPS**

In the fall of 1956 he joined WGN in Chicago, his radio home ever since. He began his Chicago career doing a variety of mid-day and evening programs. In 1965 he brought his quick wit and clever use of the telephone to WGN's morning drive time, quickly becoming the listeners' choice and making him a ratings leader for several decades.

In 1993 he was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame at the Museum of Broadcast Communications, adding an important honor to his already long list of accolades. Earlier this year he was welcomed into the National Association of Broadcasters Hall of Fame.

Wally Phillips will join us in person during our program today as we talk about his radio career and present clips from some of his memorable broadcasts.

You're invited to be a part of our studio audience at the Museum of Broadcast Communications in the Chicago Cultural Center. Reservations are not required.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 14th**  
**10th Anniversary**  
**MUSEUM OF**  
**BROADCAST**  
**COMMUNICATIONS**

*On June 13, 1987 Chicago's Museum of Broadcast Communications opened its doors. Today we celebrate a decade of accomplishments as we spotlight a few highlights in the life of the Museum's first ten years:*

**JUNE 12, 1987**— The first live remote broadcast from the Museum. From River City, 800 S. Wells Street in Chicago, Chuck Schaden and John Hultman interview celebrity guests at a gala celebration on the eve of the Museum's official opening. Heard in excerpts from that program are Paul Harvey, Alex Drier, Len O'Connor, Don McNeill, Frances Bergen, Karl Pearson, Lee Phillip, Dorsey Connors, Jim Conway, John Madigan, Bob Atcher, Jack Brickhouse, Stanley Paul and the orchestra. From WBBM Special. (18:30; 19:13)

**JUNE 13, 1987**— The first broadcast of *Those Were The Days* from the historic Pierre Andre Memorial Studio at the Museum. Bruce DuMont, founder and president of the MBC talks about the opening. Special guest is announcer Ed Herlihy who talks about his career and long association with Kraft Foods, who funded the Museum's Kraft Television Theatre. From WNIB. (4:30; 13:27; 15:30)

**APRIL 28, 1990**— Jim Jordan, Jr., in town for the dedication of the Museum's Fibber McGee and Molly exhibit (funded and built by McGee fans), talks about the exhibit and his parents, Jim and Marian Jordan. From the *TWTD* 20th Anniversary Show, WNIB. (14:36)

**APRIL 28, 1990**— In honor of the opening of the Museum's McGee exhibit, a group of talented old time radio fans offer a live presentation of an original script by Ken Alexander

based on and honoring the Fibber McGee and Molly program. From *TWTD*, WNIB. (42:35)  
**JUNE 13, 1992**— On the opening day of the Museum's move to spacious quarters in the Chicago Cultural Center on Michigan avenue at Washington street, another unique exhibit is unveiled for the first time. It's the Jack Benny's Vault Exhibit (funded and built by Jack Benny fans). On hand for the occasion are Jack's daughter Joan Benny and longtime Benny writer George Balzer who talk about Jack and his long-running radio show. From *TWTD*, WNIB. (10:40; 23:00)

**SATURDAY, JUNE 21st**  
**OLD, NEW, BORROWED, BLUE**

*--Something Old--*

**X MINUS ONE** (9-12-57) "The Old Die Rich" is a science fiction story about some elderly people who are found dead of malnutrition, but with substantial savings accounts. An actor, researching a role, wants to find out why. Cast includes Jim Boles, Jan Minor, Bill Zuckert, Wendell Holmes. Ivor Francis. Sustaining, NBC. (26:30)

*--Something New--*

**PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW** (3-19-50) Alice wants a new car, but can't decide which one to buy. Elliott Lewis co-stars as Frankie Remley, with Walter Tetley as Julius Abruzzio, Robert North as Willy. Hans Conried is a Hudson salesman. Rexall, NBC. (29:21)



**ALICE FAYE**

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (10-28-87)

Alice Faye talks about her long show business career and the Harris-Faye show in a conversation with Chuck Schaden, recorded at the Whitehall Hotel, Chicago. (31:25)

*--Something Borrowed--*

**SCREEN GUILD PLAYERS** (4-1-46) "On Borrowed Time" starring Lionel Barrymore, Agnes Moorehead, Vincent Price and Ted Donaldson in a radio version of the 1939 film, a fable of Death, who comes to claim his victims. Mr. Barrymore repeats his original screen role. Lady Esther Products, CBS. (28:57)

*--Something Blue--*

**PHILO VANCE** (1948) "The Blue Penny Murder Case" stars Jackson Beck as the detective created by S. S. Van Dine. A woman is murdered with no apparent motive. Cast features George Petrie as District Attorney Markham, and Joan Alexander as Vance's secretary, Ellen Deering. Syndicated. (23:25)

**SATURDAY, JUNE 28th**  
**OH CANADA!**

**July 1st is Canada Day, so today's program features performers who were born in Canada.**

**FORT LARAMIE** (4-15-56) Raymond Burr (born in New Westminster, British Columbia) stars as Captain Lee Quince of the U. S. Cavalry. A woman and her daughter, staying at the Fort due to a stagecoach breakdown, are causing problems for the soldiers. Cast includes Vic Perrin as Sgt. Goerss, and Jeanette Nolan, Sam Edwards, Shirley Mitchell, Harry Bartell, Jack Krushen. Sustaining, CBS. (28:09)

**PEOPLE ARE FUNNY** (9-19-52) Beginning the tenth season on the air for the sponsor, emcee Art Linkletter (born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan) puts the contestants thru their paces. One has to go out to borrow a family; another can't decide between two men who want to marry her. Raleigh Cigarettes, NBC. (29:17)

**THE SHADOW** (2-15-48) "Terror at Wolf's Head Knoll" stars Bret Morrison as Lamont Cranston and Grace Matthews (born in Toronto) as the lovely Margo Lane. When Margo sprains her ankle, she and Lamont seek shelter in a mysterious mansion. Blue Coal, MBS. (28:00)

**PHILCO RADIO TIME** (5-26-48) *Excerpt* featuring host Bing Crosby, singer-comedienne Bea Lillie (born in Toronto), and pianist Alec Templeton. Bea offers a travelogue of the USA. The trio sing British Music Hall tunes. Philco Radio, ABC. (21:03)

**SUSPENSE** (11-2-43) "Statement of Employee Henry Wilson" starring Gene Lockhart (born in London, Ontario) as a man who relates and relives the climactic moments in his life. Sustaining, CBS. (28:55)

**YOUR HIT PARADE** (11-10-45) Joan Edwards and Dick Todd (born in Montreal) sing the top tunes of the week, accompanied by the Hit Paraders and Mark Warnow and the orchestra. AFRS rebroadcast. (29:52)

**See the article about Canadian performers on page 29.**

**Chuck Schaden's**  
**THOSE WERE THE DAYS**  
 WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 P.M.

**JULY 1997**

**SATURDAY, JULY 5th**  
**CHRISTMAS IN JULY**

**JILL'S ALL-TIME JUKE BOX** (12-25-45) GI Jill presents a Christmas edition of her popular program, reviewing the hit tunes of holidays past. Featured are recordings by Glenn Miller, Bing Crosby, Wee Bonnie Baker, Freddy Martin, Kay Kyser, Benny Goodman. AFRS. (29:42)

**SUSPENSE** (12-21-50) "A Christmas For Carol" starring Dennis Day as a bank teller who needs money. Cast includes Joe Kearns. AutoLite, CBS. (30:35)

**CHRISTMAS SEAL SPECIAL** (1955) Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy star with Edgar's nine-year-old daughter Candice. Candy and Charlie recite "The Night Before Christmas." Christmas Seals. (14:30)

**HENRY MORGAN SHOW** (12-25-46) Morgan tells the story of kids who go to Washington to get a law passed making every day Christmas! Cast includes Arnold Stang, Bernie Green and the orchestra. Eversharp, ABC. (23:36)

**ADVENTURES OF NERO WOLFE** (12-22-50) "Case of the Slaughtered Santas" starring Sidney Greenstreet as the chairbound detective. Cast includes Larry Dobkin and Howard McNear. A man kills several Santas to cover a murder. Sustaining, NBC. (26:55)

**ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET** (12-19-48) The Nelsons agree on a "practical" Christmas gift for the house. It's a radio-phonograph which will be their gift to each other. International Silver Co., NBC. (28:30)

**SATURDAY, JULY 12th**  
**TRIBUTE TO GEORGE GERSHWIN**

**FAMILY HOUR** (6-24-45) "Musical Salute to George Gershwin" prior to the opening of the Warner Bros. film "Rhapsody in Blue." Cast features Eileen Farrell, Earl Wrightson, Jack Smith and Al Goodman and his orchestra and chorus. Included "a musical salute to 'Porgy and Bess.'" AFRS rebroadcast. (30:00)

**CAVALCADE OF AMERICA** (2-27-39) "George Gershwin" is a dramatization of the life story of the great American composer, from his early years to his Tin Pan Alley days, to the "Rhapsody in Blue" and "Porgy and Bess." and his death in 1937. DuPont, CBS. (30:00)

**MUSIC BY GERSHWIN** (2-19-34) George Gershwin, "America's leading modern composer brings an intimate revue of present day music" in this first program in the series. Gershwin tells the "inside story" of "The Man I Love" and plays "I Got Rhythm." Feenamint, NBC. (15:15)

**SINGING LADY** (1950s) Irene Wicker, the frabled singing storyteller, presents the "true story of the boyhood days" of composer George Gershwin (and his brother Ira). Music provided by Samuel Sanders at the piano. Sustaining, WNYC, New York. (24:25)

**ANDRE KOSTELANETZ** (10-11-45) "Portrait of George Gershwin" featuring Andre Kostelanetz and his orchestra with "Music Millions Love." A concert of music by George Gershwin with a commentary by Oscar Levant, plus Metropolitan Opera Company so-

prano Dorothy Kirsten. Chrysler Corporation, CBS. (29:46)

**OUR SPECIAL GUEST** will be music historian **Bill Sheldon** who will talk about Gershwin and his contribution to American music. *See the article about George Gershwin on page 12.*

**SATURDAY, JULY 19th**  
**REMEMBERING JACK CARSON**

**VILLAGE STORE** (10-30-47) **Jack Carson** stars with Eve Arden as Jack plans to do a sketch, "The Home Life of Al Jolson." Cast features Peter Leeds, Frank Nelson. Sealtest, NBC. (29:40)

**SCREEN GUILD THEATRE** (10-5-41) "Strawberry Blonde" starring James Cagney, **Jack Carson**, and Olivia DeHavilland in this radio version of the 1941 film. A dentist is infatuated by a gold digger in this turn-of-the-century comedy. Gulf Oil Co., CBS. (29:48)

**EDGAR BERGEN SHOW** (1956) An unusual format for Edgar as he plays records and interviews guests, including singer Jack Smith, two of America's top pilots, and actor/comedian **Jack Carson**. Carson and Bergen talk about Jack's movies and TV shows. Charlie McCarthy enters for some comic banter with Carson. Sustaining, CBS/AFRS. (29:00)

**KRAFT MUSIC HALL** (5-18-44) Bing Crosby welcomes guest **Jack Carson** in a program of music and comedy. Time Marches Back to 1927. Carson discusses his charm! (Kraft Foods, NBC. (29:00)

**BURNS AND ALLEN** (10-31-46) Gracie wants George to replace Clark Gable in "The Hucksters" film, and when George meets guest **Jack Carson**, there's a mix-up. Cast includes Bill Goodwin, Mel Blanc (as the Happy Postman). Maxwell House Coffee, NBC. (29:35)

**SUSPENSE** (11-7-46) "Easy Money" starring **Jack Carson** as a man who wants his freedom badly enough to kill somebody for it. Roma Wines, CBS. (30:09)

*See the article about Jack Carson on page 2.*

**SATURDAY, JULY 26th**  
**THIS DAY — THAT YEAR**

**BUSTER BROWN GANG** (7-26-47, *exactly 50 years ago today*) Smilin' Ed McConnell and the Gang, including Squeaky the Mouse, Midnight the Cat, Grannie the Talking Piano, Froggy the Gremlin. Smilin' Ed's story is about a great tournament in the days of Knights. Buster Brown Shoes, NBC. (29:05)



**SMILIN' ED MC CONNELL**

**GUNSMOKE** (7-26-54, *exactly 43 years ago today*) William Conrad stars as Marshall Matt Dillon, accused of murdering a man he previously ran out of Dodge City. Matt's old friend Wild Bill Hickok arrives in town. John Dehner appears as Hickok. Chesterfield, CBS. (27:40)

**ROAD OF LIFE** (7-26-48, *exactly 49 years ago today*) An isolated episode of the long-running (1937-1959) daytime drama created by Irna Phillips. Dr. Jim Brent decides to ask Maggie Lowell to marry him. Duz, NBC. (14:09)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (6-16-70) Harry Elders — star of the "Curtain Time" series — talks about the radio days and his career in a brief conversation with Chuck Schaden. (8:15)

**CURTAIN TIME** (7-26-47, *exactly 50 years ago today*) "Solid Sender" stars Harry Elders and Nanette Nergerant in a romantic comedy about a girl who tries to help an out of work musician get a job. Mars, Inc., NBC. (28:25)

**SUSPENSE** (7-26-55, *exactly 42 years ago today*) "Greatest Thief in the World" about "twin identities in crime, based upon absolute fact." Cast features Ben Wright, Joseph Kearns. Sustaining, CBS. (23:35)

**THIS IS NORA DRAKE** (7-26-48, *exactly 49 years ago today*) An isolated episode of the long-running (1947-1959) daytime drama. Created by Julian Funt. Nora Drake, a nurse on the staff of Page Memorial Hospital, falls in love with Dr. Ken Martinson, a married man. Toni Creme Shampoo, NBC. (13:58)

**DIMENSION X** (7-26-51, *exactly 46 years ago today*) "Courtesy" is the story of the second expedition to the Planet Atlantor as told by one of two survivors of the original compliment of 180 men. Sustaining, NBC. (29:58)

FOR AN  
**AUDIO**  
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**Preview of a Coming Attraction!**



**SATURDAY, AUGUST 2nd**  
**AUGUST DOG DAYS**  
or  
**RADIO GOES TO THE DOGS**



**GRAND MARQUEE** (7-9-46) "Half a Dog is Better than None" starring Jim Ameche and Beryl Vaughn in a comedy about a rich old woman who leaves an interesting clause in her Last Will and Testament. Premiere show in the series. Cast includes Hope Summers, Herb Butterfield, Charles Eggleston. Sustaining, NBC. (29:21)

**FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY** (11-30-43) The McGees search everywhere in Wistful Vista for Teeny's little dog Eddie. Jim and Marian Jordan star, with Harlow Wilcox, Arthur Q. Brian, Shirley Mitchell, Ransom Sherman, the King's Men, Billy Mills and the orchestra. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30:09)

**CHALLENGE OF THE YUKON** (12-27-47) "The Shepherd Dog" stars Paul Sutton as Sgt. Preston who, with the help of Yukon King, his

Wonder Dog, finds an old Shepherd dog caught in an animal trap. Fred Foy announces. Sustaining, ABC. (29:24)

**STORY OF DR. KILDARE** (3-9-51) "Hysteria or Hydrophobia" stars Lew Ayers as Dr. Kildare and Lionel Barrymore as Dr. Gillespie, with Virginia Gregg as Nurse Parker. A boy is brought into Blair General Hospital after being bitten by a dog. Syndicated. (25:05)

**PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW** (1-8-50) Phil agrees to babysit his sponsor's dog. Elliott Lewis is Frankie Remley, Gale Gordon is Mr. Scott, Walter Tetley is Julius; Stan Freberg as the dog. Rexall, NBC. (28:04)

**DRAGNET** (11-16-54) Jack Webb stars with Ben Alexander. An elderly man with a shotgun threatens his neighborhood after his dog has been poisoned. AFRS rebroadcast. (24:19)

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**ART HELLYER SHOW**-- Music of the big bands and the big singers with lots of knowledgeable commentary and fun from one of radio's legendary personalities, now in his 51th year on the air! *WJOL, 1340 AM, Saturday, 9 am-1 pm; Sunday, 2-6 pm.*

**DICK LAWRENCE REVUE**-- A treasure trove of rare and vintage recordings with spoken memories from the never to be forgotten past. *WNIB, 97.1 FM, Saturday, 8-9 pm.*

**JAZZ FORUM**-- Chicago's foremost jazz authority, Dick Buckley, presents an entertaining and enlightening program of great music by noted jazz musicians. *WBEZ, 91.5 FM, Monday thru Thursday, 8:30-9:30 pm; Sunday 1-4 pm.*

**REMEMBER WHEN**-- Host Don Corey calls this his "four-hour nostalgia fest" with the emphasis on old time radio musical and variety shows, plus show tunes and interviews. *WAIT, 850 AM, Sunday, noon-4 pm.*

**WHEN RADIO WAS**-- Carl Amari hosts a weekend edition of the popular series which features old time radio broadcasts and interviews. *WMAQ, 670 AM, Saturday and Sunday, 10pm-midnight.*

**IMAGINATION THEATRE**-- This series is heard occasionally on *Those Were The Days* in Chicago, but is broadcast weekly in many other cities across the country. For the station in your area, call Tim McDonald at TransMedia Productions at 1-800-229-7234. For a list of stations carrying the program and an **episode guide**, the Internet address is: [tmedia@aimnet.com](mailto:tmedia@aimnet.com)

# "When Radio Was" -- WMAQ-AM 670

**Monday thru Friday Midnight to 1 a.m. Host Stan Freberg**

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<b>June, 1997 Schedule</b>				
<b>2</b> Superman The Bickersons Pt 1	<b>3</b> Bickersons Pt 2 The Shadow	<b>4</b> Green Hornet Fibber McGee Pt 1	<b>5</b> Fibber McGee Pt 2 Lone Ranger	<b>6</b> The Whistler Bob and Ray
<b>9</b> Dragnet Burns & Allen Pt 1	<b>10</b> Burns & Allen Pt 2 Texas Rangers	<b>11</b> Escape Abbott & Costello Pt 1	<b>12</b> Abbott & Costello Pt 2 Philip Marlowe	<b>13</b> Suspense Tom Mix
<b>16</b> Gunsmoke Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	<b>17</b> Charlie McCarthy Pt 2 Man Called X	<b>18</b> Boston Blackie Dunninger Show Pt 1	<b>19</b> Dunninger Show Pt 2 Have Gun, Will Travel	<b>20</b> Box Thirteen Lum and Abner
<b>23</b> Gangbusters Jack Benny Pt 1	<b>24</b> Jack Benny Pt 2 Six Shooter	<b>25</b> Dimension X Great Gildersleeve Pt 1	<b>26</b> Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 Sgt. Preston	<b>27</b> Suspense Dial Dave Garroway
<b>30</b> FBI In Peace & War Life of Riley Pt 1	<p><b>OUT OF TOWN LISTENERS PLEASE NOTE:</b></p> <p><i>"When Radio Was" is a syndicated series heard throughout the country. If you're unable to tune in WMAQ, call (847) 524-0200, Ext. 223 and ask which station in or near your town carries the program.</i></p>			
<b>July, 1997 Schedule</b>				
	<b>1</b> Life of Riley Pt 2 Sam Spade	<b>2</b> The Shadow Fibber McGee Pt 1	<b>3</b> Fibber McGee Pt 2 Green Hornet	<b>4</b> Cavalcade of America Bob and Ray
<b>7</b> Superman Burns & Allen Pt 1	<b>8</b> Burns & Allen Pt 2 Mercury Theatre	<b>9</b> Nero Wolfe Abbott & Costello Pt 1	<b>10</b> Abbott & Costello Pt 2 Mystery in the Air	<b>11</b> Suspense Lum and Abner
<b>14</b> Dragnet Charlie McCarthy Pt 1	<b>15</b> Charlie McCarthy Pt 2 Texas Rangers	<b>16</b> Lone Ranger Jack Benny Pt 1	<b>17</b> Jack Benny Pt 2 Nick Carter	<b>18</b> Escape Bill Stern Sports News
<b>21</b> Box Thirteen Great Gildersleeve Pt 1	<b>22</b> Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 Six Shooter	<b>23</b> Sgt. Preston Life of Riley Pt 1	<b>24</b> Life of Riley Pt 2 Gangbusters	<b>25</b> Frontier Gentleman Police Headquarters
<b>28</b> Suspense Ozzie & Harriet Pt 1	<b>29</b> Ozzie & Harriet Pt 2 Gunsmoke	<b>30</b> The Whistler Blondie Pt 1	<b>31</b> Blondie Pt 2 Boston Blackie	

# Sherlock Holmes

By RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

Can you name the only classic radio series to hit the *Publishers Weekly* audio best seller list?

If you said *Jack Benny*, or *The Shadow*, or *Lux Radio Theatre*, you are wrong. Not even Orson Welles' celebrated *Mercury Theatre* — and that series included "The War of the Worlds," probably the most famous radio show ever — managed to make the *Publishers Weekly* list.

What vintage radio series has become a best seller in today's expanding audio market?

If you guessed the old *Sherlock Holmes* radio series, starring Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce, you are absolutely correct.

The first episodes of the series were released in 1988 by Simon and Schuster Audio under the banner of "The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes."

"Originally, only a few of the half-hour shows were supposed to be released," said Robin Jones, spokesperson for Simon and Schuster. "But the demand for the tapes was so great, we kept on releasing the Rathbone/Bruce shows, until we ran out of them."

In November, 1994, Simon and Schuster released the last of the tapes. In all 26 cassettes, with two programs on them, were sent to book stores in the United States and abroad. That's a total of 52 of the vintage shows.

"Sherlock Holmes ranks second to *Star Trek* as the most popular audio series we

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*Richard W. O'Donnell of Port Richey, Florida is a free-lance writer and long-time radio buff.*

---

ever released," said Thomas Spain, acquisitions director for the tape distributor. "We have been delighted with the success of Holmes, and wish we had more tapes to offer. Unfortunately, we have been unable to locate any more.

"Dan Ross, our former acquisitions director, was the one who acquired the Holmes series for us," said Spain. "He heard a couple of the shows on an old vinyl record, and decided they would be ideal for a series. Ross contacted a group of Los Angeles Sherlock Holmes buffs known as 221A Baker Street Associates, and they managed to find the fifty-two shows for us."

The *Sherlock Holmes* programs with Rathbone and Bruce were on the air from 1939 to 1946. In all, there were 213 episodes.

"In 1939, Rathbone and Bruce appeared in two Holmes movies," said long time Sherlock fan Stanton Young. "Both *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and its splendid sequel, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* were big hits, but there were no plans for the two actors to make any more movies in the series.

"However, they did do a *Sherlock Holmes* radio series, on NBC. I think it was, in 1939, and the show caught on. Thirty-nine weeks a year, they were on the air, and the show got high ratings, and was renewed.

"Evidently, somebody at Universal in 1942 learned about the popularity of the radio show, and, at that point, it was decided to produce a series of the *Sherlock Holmes* movies. Basil Rathbone and Nigel



NIGEL BRUCE and BASIL RATHBONE

Bruce were teamed again as Holmes and Watson. Without a doubt, it was the popular radio show that set the stage for the now legendary movie series, which is still shown regularly on TV."

The early radio shows featured the original stories penned by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Later on, new adventures by Edith Meiser, a prolific writer, were used.

In 1945, Denis Green and Anthony Boucher took over the writing chores, and they created *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, the fifty-two stories in the audio collection.

"The shows were produced on the West Coast," recalled Green, "and we lived on the East Coast. Our big problem was getting the scripts in the mail on time, so they would get there before the rehearsals started."

Stories in the audio collection include such half-hour gems as "The Notorious Canary Trainer," "The Demon Barber," "The Headless Monk," "The Babbling Butler" and "The Tell Tale Pigeon Feathers," to name a few.

Basil Rathbone is not heard on all of the tapes. On four of them, veteran actor Tom Conway teamed with Nigel Bruce, after his long time colleague retired from the

radio series.

A critic once wrote that the person who decided to team Rathbone and Bruce as Holmes and Dr. Watson should be considered a "genius."

It was Hollywood writer Gene Markey who suggested Rathbone for the role of the great detective. He was the producer of the two Holmes films made back in

1939. Both of the original films were turned out by Twentieth Century Fox, and it was the fabled Darryl F. Zanuck, head of the studio, who signed British character actor Bruce for the role of the good doctor. The rest is history.

Why was the Rathbone/Bruce team so successful? The two actors certainly rate most of the credit. Robert W. Pohle, Jr. and Douglas C. Hart, in their book, "Sherlock Holmes on the Screen" wrote: "We Holmesophiles know that the image will never die; Sherlock Holmes will always be at least partly Basil Rathbone.

As for Bruce, Pohle and Hart stated: "Bruce's interpretation of Dr. Watson has become 'definitive,' despite the fact his interpretation is quite a different character than Arthur Conan Doyle created. Nevertheless, Bruce made such an indelible impression as Watson that since 1939, almost all impressionists who have done Watson have really been doing Bruce."

A tidbit of interest. Sherlock Holmes is the most popular character in the history of English literature. He is known in every corner of the world; even in remote villages not on the map. His adventures have been translated into every major language.

## SHERLOCK HOLMES

Another item of interest. There have been more films made about Holmes than any other fictional character. At last count, there were more than 190 of them, and more are on the way.

Still another item. Sherlock Holmes has probably been played by more different actors on radio than any other character. Rathbone, Conway, John Stanley, and countless other performers have played the part on American radio. In England, the list of actors who played the role on the BBC is a long one.

And since Watson is an essential in any Holmes story, a lot of actors have played him too. He is probably in a dead heat with Holmes.

Basil Rathbone, a great actor, felt the role of the great detective was limiting his acting career. Prior to Holmes, he has a long list of exceptional performances. According to *The Film Encyclopedia*, he was "the American screen's finest villain, and most memorable Sherlock Holmes." Quite a combination.

After completing his final Holmes movie, *Dressed to Kill*, the actor, in 1946, quit both the film and radio series. This proved to be a colossal mistake.

This move caused hard feelings between Bruce and Rathbone, but, over the years, the wounds healed. At the time, NBC was contemplating a *Sherlock Holmes* television series. This was a future project, but lucrative contracts had been offered to both stars. Bruce was willing, but Rathbone

wanted no more of Sherlock Holmes.

Rathbone enjoyed some success on Broadway during the fifties, but his career went downhill after that. He died in 1967 at the age of 75.

Bruce, who was 58 when he died in 1953, finished his career playing character roles in films, and on the radio. He wanted to continue playing Watson on the radio, but without Rathbone, the series was doomed. He did play the part for a while when actor Tom Conway took over as Holmes, but the old magic was gone.

Ironically, Rathbone made two attempts to revive Sherlock Holmes in the early sixties. His first attempt, a stage play, sold tickets, and was an excellent production but it flopped because of a weak plot. Later, he tried to revive Holmes as a TV se-

ries, but without Nigel Bruce, the product was not as marketable as it might have been.

His career as Sherlock Holmes had ended.

Without a doubt, the two actors would have been astounded by the tremendous success their Holmes and Watson series have enjoyed.

The movie series, at one point, was rated by *TV Guide* as "the most popular ever presented on television."

And their old radio series has become a major success on audio cassettes. ■

(NOTE: Sherlock Holmes movies on video tape and the Simon and Schuster series on audio cassette are available at Metro Golden Memories in Chicago.)

### RATHBONE ON BRUCE:

*"He was the ideal Dr. Watson, not only of his time, but possibly of and for all times. There was an enduring quality to his performance that humanized the relationship between Holmes and Watson."*

### BRUCE ON RATHBONE:

*"At times, I am almost convinced, he is the great detective. Basil Rathbone is Sherlock Holmes as far as I am concerned. No actor will ever match him."*

# NORTH OF THE BORDER



## Radio Stars from Canada

BY RICHARD KUNZ

Here's a quick quiz—What do these people have in common: Court Benson, Henry Burr, Fr. Charles Coughlin?

You can't place them? Well, how about Arlene Harris, Grace Matthews and Will Osborne?

Still stumped? Try Bobby Breen, Raymond Burr and Jack Carson. Or Ruby Keeler, Alexander Knox or Beatrice Lillie.

Hmm. Are the performers listed above united by birthplace? You bet. All (and more, whom you'll meet in a bit) were born up north in Canada, and all rose to fame (some more, some less) as participants in that great art form called Old Time Radio in the U.S.

Admittedly, Court Benson, Henry Burr and a few of the others were not exactly household names over the long haul, but they all crossed the border to find work in U.S. radio. Performers from the land of the Maple Leaf still head southward to achieve fame and fortune (Rich Little, Anne Murray and William Shatner are but three of a substantial group; we'll add more names a little later).

It's not that broadcasting work didn't (and doesn't) exist in Canada; the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has long been hailed as one of the finest communications organizations in the world, perhaps second only to its British cousin, the British Broadcasting Corporation. But real

*Richard Kunz is editor of The New Electric Railway Journal and a free-lance writer with a special interest in old time radio.*



**RAYMOND BURR**  
*New Westminster, British Columbia*

fame (and big money) seemed more plentiful in the U.S., and many performers followed their dreams to the land of the Stars and Stripes.

Radio development north of the border was about on a par with that of the States, taking root in the Twenties, and Canada soon was blessed with a substantial number of AM radio stations. As in the U.S., local talent filled the airwaves, supplemented by network programming from major cities like Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver.

Network radio in the U.S. began with establishment of NBC in 1927, and by the

## **NORTH OF THE BORDER**

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mid-30's listening to the Atwater Kent or Philco had become a regular habit for most Americans. The appetite of radio listeners for more programming caused programmers and agents to search an ever-wider area for talent to fill available air time each week.

With its common language and similar culture, Canada was a logical place to seek out artists and performers for CBS, NBC Red and Blue and the fledgling Mutual. Some CBC (and BBC) programs made their way to U.S. kilocycles, directly or by adaptation; soon the talent itself followed, much as Hollywood imported actors, directors, writers and others, particularly as war began to threaten Europe.

It is impossible to determine precisely who was the first performer born and raised in Canada to speak into a U.S. microphone, but the continuing talent "raid" upon our northern neighbor probably began as early as the late 1920s, when the talkies and network radio burst upon the scene almost simultaneously, each with a voracious appetite for talent to attract and keep viewers and listeners.

The great variety programs were beginning to saturate the airwaves as the 30s got off to a wobbly financial start. Entertainment was just the relief needed from a daily dose of the Depression, and vaudeville powerhouses like Eddie Cantor gravitated to the audio medium.

Cantor began his first variety program on NBC in 1931, and in his ensuing two decades on the air showcased such Canadian-born talent as Bobby Breen (Toronto) and singer Deanna Durbin (Winnipeg). Ms. Durbin went on to a spectacular—if short—movie career with Universal ("Three Smart Girls", "100 Men and a Girl", etc.) that helped save the studio from bankruptcy.

Given the success of performers like Deanna Durbin, small wonder that there was a flood of talent crossing the world's longest unguarded border in search of a better life.

What follows are capsule comments on Maple Leaf expatriates who brightened U.S. Old Time Radio over the years.

**Court Benson** (Toronto) and his actress-wife **Grace Matthews** (Toronto) came to New York in 1946 to work in radio. Benson had worked on radio in Canada since 1930; in the U.S. he acted in many soap operas, and narrated "Gang Busters". Active later in television as well, Benson finished his radio work on "CBS Mystery Theatre". Ms. Matthews pursued a similar soap opera career, as well as a three-year stint as Margo Lane on "The Shadow", along with much straight dramatic work out of New York.

**Norman Brokenshire** (Murcheson, Ontario). His "How do you do, ladies and gentlemen, how DO you do", parlayed a cultured voice into many years' work as an announcer. He first interned at the old WJZ in Newark (flagship station of the Blue Network of NBC, now WABC New York) in 1924, later working on such programs as Eddie Cantor's, and Major Bowes' "Original Amateur Hour".

**Henry Burr** (St. Stephen, N.B.) was an old-time singer on records and later radio, as a performer on very early programs. In the mid-1930s, he joined the "National Barn Dance", and was a regular there for many years.

**Raymond Burr** (New Westminster, B.C.). The quintessential "Perry Mason" of later TV fame was a multi-talented actor with a considerable body of work in radio before he turned to movies and television. Burr was a featured player on the "CBS Radio Workshop", "Dr. Kildare", "Fort Laramie" (as Quince), "The Lineup" (radio version), and Jack Webb's "Pat Novak for Hire" (as Hellman).



**NORMAN BROKESHIRE**  
*Murcheson, Ontario*

**Jack Carson** (Carmen, Manitoba). This often-underrated actor-comedian was a featured player in many movies (particularly as the hero's best friend who never gets the girl). His presence around the dial was just as prevalent as on the screen; many a program was enlivened by his comedic turns, both slapstick and classic. He had his own radio program as well, and was a regular patron of the "Sealtest Village Store". He graduated to television in both drama and comedy parts; arguably his best movie role was as the hard-hearted press agent in the Judy Garland-James Mason version of "A Star Is Born".

**Dorothy Collins** (Windsor, Ontario). Remember the lady on TV's "Candid Camera" with the automobile that was missing an engine? That was Dorothy Collins, perhaps better known as a singer on the long-running "Your Hit Parade" on radio and television. Ms. Collins began on the series as the vocalist for its Lucky Strike cigarette commercials and advanced to become the show's female lead. She later married

the show's orchestra leader, Raymond Scott.

**Fr. Charles Coughlin** (Hamilton, Ontario). Father Coughlin was a controversial Catholic preacher based at the Shrine of the Little Flower in Royal Oak, Michigan, beginning in the 1920s. In 1926 he began a Sunday radio program on WJR in Detroit to explain Catholicism. Soon contributions were flowing in to his parish, and his "sermons" began ranging toward political topics—the evils of capitalism, Communism, labor unions, and a tirade against Jewish bankers.

He went network on CBS in 1932, but after forming his own political party four years later Fr. Coughlin incurred the wrath of William Paley (head of CBS) for his increasingly shrill broadcasts. When CBS insisted on censoring his scripts, the preacher formed his own network. The controversy over his inflammatory remarks continued, however, and the program came to an end during the war after the church itself applied pressure on Father Coughlin.

**Selma Diamond** (London, Ontario). A diminutive lady with a distinctive New York accent who often occupied Jack Paar's guest couch on his late-night TV show, Selma Diamond was one of the last great writing talents to come out of radio. Along with other scribes as George Foster, Frank Wilson and Goodman Ace, Ms. Diamond wrote the scripts for radio's last big variety show—the aptly named "Big Show" that premiered on NBC in 1950 and died quietly two years later. This program was but one of Selma Diamond's many accomplishments; she wrote considerable comedy bits, later becoming an actress herself on TV's "Too Close For Comfort" and "Night Court".

**Jean Dickenson** (Montreal). The so-called "Nightingale of the Airwaves" was a classically trained singer and protege of Lily Pons. She began her singing career

## NORTH OF THE BORDER

on Denver's KOA, later moving on to CBS in Hollywood for a stint on "Hollywood Hotel" with Dick Powell in 1936. One year later she joined NBC's "American Album of Familiar Music", remaining with that program as its principal singer until the show's demise in 1951.

**Percy Faith** (Toronto). When "Beautiful Music" was a popular format on radio (particularly FM in its early years), Percy Faith's orchestra and chorus rivaled Mantovani in amount of play time. Faith had been an arranger-conductor on a number of Canadian radio programs (one, "Music by Faith", a Mutual staple) when he received an offer to helm the orchestra on NBC's "Carnation Contented Hour" in 1940. Several subsequent assignments eventually led to his appointment as musical director for Columbia Records, where his orchestra turned out almost 50 albums of "easy listening" music.

**Arlene Harris** (Toronto). An early radio comedienne, known as the "human



**PERCY FAITH**  
Toronto, Ontario

chatterbox" on Al Pearce's program, beginning in 1935. She had been a monologist and impersonator billed as Arlene Francis when an auto accident necessitated a re-evaluation of her career priorities. She went into radio on the Warner Brothers Hollywood station, KFWB, in 1933 and her "bright and diverting" monologues attracted the attention of Al Pearce. Ms. Harris later played Mummy Higgins on Fanny Brice's "Baby Snooks" program.

**Walter Huston** (Toronto). A celebrated stage and film ("Treasure of the Sierra Madre") actor, Huston was the father of actor-director John Huston. His radio work was largely centered on dramatic roles, on programs of greater and lesser stature like "Everyman's Theatre" (an Arch Oboler venture), "Good News of 1938", "Lux Radio Theatre", "Streamlined Shakespeare", and "Theatre Guild on the Air".

**Ruby Keeler** (Halifax, Nova Scotia). Best known for her show-stopping role in Warner Brothers' "42nd Street" ("you're going out there as a youngster, but you've got to come back a star"), Ms. Keeler had a troubled marriage to Al Jolson, with whom she starred in a 1936 "Lux Radio Theater" version of "Burlesque". She went into retirement in 1941, returning to the spotlight after the cult revival of her Warner films, then essayed a successful Broadway revival of "No No Nanette".

**Frank Knight** (St. John's, Newfoundland). A stage actor in his early career, Knight came to radio in 1928, in dramatic roles and as an announcer. His voice, which many said bordered on the pompous, gained him many assignments as the "voice of Columbia". He is probably best remembered for his work with the Longines Watch Company's "Symphonette" and "Choraliers", and on a number of records chronicling Old Time Radio.

**Alexander Knox** (Strathroy, Ontario).



**ART LINKLETTER**  
*Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan*

Best known for the handsomely mounted but popularly less-than-successful movie "Wilson", in which he played the title role. Knox was one member of an impressive cast in United Nations Radio's "Document A/777", produced by Norman Corwin.

**Beatrice Lillie** (Toronto). She was an extremely funny woman, with a rubber face that accented her comedic talents. After getting her first radio exposure on Rudy Vallee's "Fleischmann Hour", Ms. Lillie began a weekly variety series in 1934, which continued for three years. Subsequent work on such programs as "The Big Show", with Lionel Barrymore in "A Christmas Carol", with Fred Allen, on "Information Please" and "Manhattan Merry-Go-Round", reinforced her star status in the English-speaking world.

**Art Linkletter** (Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan). Arguably the medium's first and foremost audience-participation exponent, Linkletter began his radio work at KGB in San Diego in 1933, while attending college. As a staff announcer at

various stations on the West Coast, he honed talents that sprang to the fore in 1942, when "People Are Funny" began its long run (ironically, originally with Art Baker as its host).

This weekly pastiche of stunts spawned the weekday "House Party", aimed at housewives and featuring a popular segment where kids said "the darnedest things". Both programs had numerous imitators, and both lasted into the television era, "House Party" eventually being hosted by Art's son Jack Linkletter.

**Gene Lockhart** (London, Ontario). A veteran vaudevillian and stage actor, with many strong character parts in over 100 films ("Going My Way, for one), Lockhart was a featured player in a two-season summer replacement series on CBS in 1944, "The Doctor Fights". Guest stars in this 1944-45 series played physicians from far-flung battlefields who contributed to the war effort. Lockhart's wife Kathleen and daughter June were also members of the acting fraternity, June being remembered for her work in the "Lassie" TV series.

**Guy Lombardo** (London, Ontario). As he once said on TV's "Laugh-In": "I'm



**GUY LOMBARDO**  
*London, Ontario*



## NORTH OF THE BORDER

Guy Lombardo, and when I go, I'm taking New Year's Eve with me." Perhaps more associated with that holiday than any single person (who can forget his interpretation of "Auld Lang Syne" in that classic rickety-tick style?), the helmsman of the aptly named Royal Canadians was a feature of the sub-class of Old Time Radio known as "big band".

In addition to duties as the band leader on "Burns and Allen" in that program's earliest incarnation, he had a number of his own programs on both radio and TV. Beginning in 1929, Lombardo and company racked up an impressive total of 48 New Year's Eves at the microphones (and later, cameras as well).

**Raymond Massey** (Toronto). Another actor with a commanding presence in virtually every role he undertook (can you picture anyone else playing Abraham Lincoln?), Massey essayed The Great Emancipator on radio as well. His other roles included Mark Twain and Walt Whitman, and on television he portrayed Dr. Gillespie

on the long-running "Dr. Kildare" series. The distinguished performer also fathered Anna Massey and her brother Daniel, both active on the stage and in films.

**Will Osborne** (Toronto). A contemporary of Rudy Vallee, band leader and singer Osborne never achieved the popularity of his Yankee rival. Originally a drummer, he broke into radio on New York's WMCA in 1925, and five years later he and his band were regular fixtures on CBS. He kept his swing-oriented conclave together into the 1940s, often appearing with Abbott and Costello.

**Wilfred Pelletier** (Montreal). An orchestra conductor on many early NBC programs, Pelletier was also a well-respected coach of established opera stars and promising newcomers. As maestro of an yearly radio series of auditions for the Metropolitan Opera (which he had joined as an assistant conductor in 1917), he assisted in advancing the careers of such future Met greats as Richard Tucker, Leonard Warren and Rise Stevens.

**Walter Pidgeon** (E. St. John, N.B.). This icon of Hollywood films (a long-time



WALTER PIDGEON  
East St. John, New Brunswick

MGM stalwart), did some radio work, participating in an unusual program that appeared on NBC in 1949 in the wake of the William Paley-inspired talent raids by CBS. "Hollywood Calling" was an elaborate giveaway program with Hollywood stars (in this case June Allyson and Walter Pidgeon) called listeners at their homes. Prizes were won just for answering the telephone, and the ante went up from there. It was a brazen attempt to lure listeners away from the new CBS acquisitions—and it failed miserably, despite its star names.

**Hank Snow** (Liverpool, Nova Scotia). One of the most popular country singers of all time, Snow eventually gravitated to Nashville's Ryman Auditorium and WSM's "Grand Ole Opry". The Opry had begun in 1925 and for years was a feature on Saturday night's NBC schedule. Today, still featuring the best in country music from its "new" home in Opryland USA, Grand Ole Opry fills Saturday nights on WSM; a portion also appears on cable's Nashville Network.

**Dick Todd** (Montreal). A singer on many programs in the 30s and 40s, including "Your Hit Parade", Todd was a graduate of McGill University, majoring in music. He did his first radio work in Montreal in 1933, crossing the border to join NBC in 1938, singing with Larry Clinton's orchestra, and was considered a rival of Bing Crosby. At one point he wrote, cast, produced and directed a half-hour musical program for NBC in California.

**Donald Woods** (Brandon, Manitoba). A clean-cut character actor in many Hollywood films, Woods did considerable radio work, including a regular role in "Those We Love", a drama series that might have been a rival to "One Man's Family" if not for constant time and network changes. Woods also appeared on "My Friend Irma", was a narrator for "True Confessions", and did hosting duties on "The Woolworth Hour". He too moved to TV, with roles on such programs as "Ironside" and "Bonanza".

One "runner-up" deserves mention in these pages. Although born in England, **Alan Young** moved to Canada early on, and became a fixture on CBC radio, beginning in Vancouver. He joined the exodus to U.S. work during the war, winning his own show in 1944. He achieved everlasting fame on TV opposite a horse—as Wilbur Post, foil to "Mister Ed."

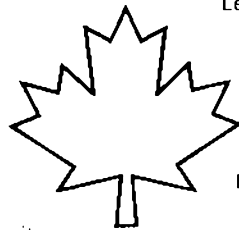
The folks you met above are the best-known emigres to U.S. Old Time Radio from Canada—along with a few not-so-well-remembered performers. Perhaps they were a small group alongside their domestic counterparts, but their talent was great and well-appreciated by listeners in the golden years of radio and beyond. Most are gone now, but their contributions will live on. ■

(NOTE—Tune in to TWTD June 28 for an all-Canada show featuring radio performers born North of the Border.)

## Continuing Canadian Contributions to U.S. Show Business:

As television became our principal source of entertainment, so did the flow of talent move into the medium; many crossed over into films as well. Here is a short list of some native Canadians working on big and little screens in the U.S. today:

Paul Anka, Ottawa  
Dan Akroyd, Ottawa  
Hume Cronyn, London, Ontario  
Yvonne DeCarlo, Vancouver  
Glenn Ford, Québec  
Michael J. Fox, Edmundton  
Bruce Greenwood, Vancouver  
Monty Hall, Winnipeg  
Phil Hartman, Ontario  
Arthur Hill, Melfort, Saskatchewan  
Peter Jennings, Montreal  
Margot Kidder, Yellowknife, NW Territory  
Rich Little, Ottawa  
Giselle Mackenzie, Winnipeg  
Robert MacNeil, Montreal



Howie Mandel, Montreal  
Anne Murray, Springhill, Nova Scotia  
Leslie Nielsen, Regina, Saskatchewan  
Christopher Plummer, Toronto  
Morley Safer, Toronto  
Mort Sahl, Montreal  
William Shatner, Montreal  
Martin Short, Hamilton  
David Steinberg, Winnipeg  
Donald Sutherland, Saint John, N.B.  
Alan Thicke, Kirkland Lake, Ontario  
Alex Trebek, Sudbury, Ontario  
Robert Urich, Toronto  
John Vernon, Regina, Saskatchewan  
Fay Wray, Alberta

# Radio's Most Missed Five-Minutes

BY ED KNAPP

“Good evening everybody. This is Lowell Thomas with the news.”

The hands on the clock pointed to 7 p.m. (EST), and the station on the radio dial was set to hear the interesting newscaster's weekday five-minute broadcast of current newsworthy events.

Like so many others, I rarely failed to tune in the rich baritone voice of Lowell Thomas as he dispatched the day's news highlights. Listening to Lowell, I was filled with the assurance each evening that the world was a wonderful place, whatever he unfolded in the reports. The oratory of this illustrious, respected broadcaster was convincingly delivered with pinpoint accuracy and on occasion a touch of levity. Without fail, wherever I was at seven in the evening, I had a radio dial set for his short but informative program: in the car, setting down to supper, working in the yard (via portable radio). I *always* made it a point to listen.

Lowell Thomas began a long and successful broadcasting career on network radio on September 29, 1930 when he pinch-hit for regular but overly tardy newscaster, Floyd Gibbons.

Besides being an accomplished radio news reporter across the years, Thomas wore many other hats. A prolific writer, he was the author of over 51 books, long-time narrator for Fox Movietone newsreels, lecturer, world adventurer, and traveler. As if that weren't enough to give him a full calendar of things to do, the colorful per-

---

*Edwin S. Knapp of Three Rivers, Michigan is a retired professional photographer who spends his free time writing and collecting.*

---

sonality was also an ambitious sportsman, a promoter-narrator of the unique movies-in-the-round creation *Cinerama*, and associated with presidents, world leaders, statesmen, and his legendary friend, Lawrence of Arabia.

He was a devoted husband and father, a humanitarian to those in need; stretching time, it would seem, to accomplish everything in his busy life-style, including his 47 years of radio broadcasting.

Lowell Thomas' five-minute airings at the top of the hour were a skillfully prepared mix of headline news and reports on the passing of notables on those occasions. He would frequently sign-off his program with a lighthearted news item to lighten the listeners' mood for what had gone on before. They became a unique trademark of his news show, pointing to his keen sense of humor.

On one broadcast evening when he was preparing to end his radio show, a light news item filled the final minutes with unplanned mayhem. Thomas was reporting a profile on an overweight person named “Dolly Dimple.” The news item and the cutesy name tickled him and seemed to go straight to his funny bone. Losing all control, the otherwise serious distinctive voice broke as he was beset by unsuppressed waves of laughter. Further words became indiscernible or mangled between “yaks.”

The infectious guffaws with “Dolly Dimple” spread to the program's announcer who became so bent-over with laughter he was unable to complete a rational sales pitch for the sponsor's prod-

uct. Between the pair's raucous laffs, dead air space, loss of breath, and uncontrollable words, the newscast ended in total disaster.

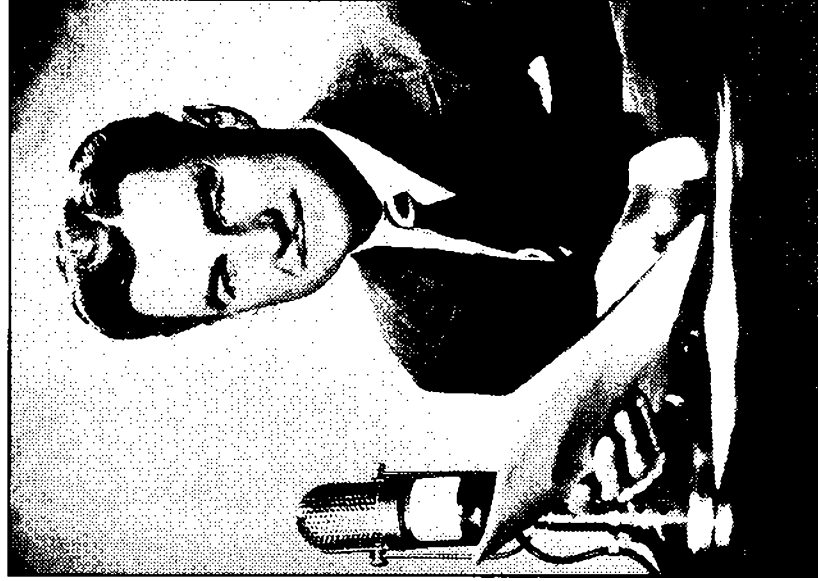
A graphic example of Lowell Thomas' more serious side and attesting to him being his "own man" came about in the late 1950s. Thomas had consented to appear as a speaker before a large group of sports personalities during an annual banquet. Unknown to the newscaster, acting in good faith, this was a planned ruse to get him before a television camera by Ralph Edwards, the popular host of the "live" program, *This Is Your Life*.

When Edwards approached the unsuspecting newscaster with a microphone and announced, "Lowell Thomas, this is your life" the smile on Thomas' face turned into a frown. The well-educated news reporter did not take kindly to the prearranged scheme. In his personal life, he was a very private person and guarded that privacy with a vengeance. He looked up at Edwards with a steely gaze and blurted out angrily, "To hell it's my life!" turned on his heel and stamped out the door and out of sight. Without Thomas,

the *This Is Your Life* television program that evening became an embarrassing "bust" for Ralph Edwards.

I had listened to Lowell Thomas news broadcasts so long that I began to feel like a close friend, so during the 1960s I wrote him a letter of appreciation for all the years he had been of service to us listeners. I hardly expected to receive an answer from one as busy as he seemed. To my utter amazement and surprise, within a month a

lengthy letter arrived, apologizing for taking so long to answer. Lowell wrote, explaining my letter had caught up with him while on his current travels. Taking particular notice of the fact that I was from Three Rivers, Michigan, he recollected over a decade or more, some individual



LOWELL THOMAS

from my town had sent him the most delicious lasting sausage, and he thought the old-timer's name was Chet? What a remarkable memory Lowell must have had since Chet Shafer was a local journalist and village character with a keen sense of memory of the town's citizens and past.

Lowell's personal letter went on to state in the typical Thomas style, "Great Scot, my mother told me long long ago that some of my forebears, her family, are buried at

## LOWELL THOMAS

Three Rivers..." Most amazing to have this recall on a small town of no more than 8,900 population, when he has been known to travel around the world. Anything that Lowell Thomas was connected with proved of foremost interest, whether it was as radio newscaster, author, or in a personal letter to a fan. Lowell, it would appear, was acquainted with "everybody" and "everywhere" and had presence of mind to remember the occasions.

The five-minutes I miss most out of every day are those past air time news programs I listened to with Lowell Thomas and the News. His nightly radio broadcasts ended with his final microphone appearance on Friday, May 14, 1976. After years of faithfully reporting the world's news happenings, he elected to settle down to happy, unhurried retirement. That final broadcast failed to end with the customary parting salutation well-known to his listeners, "So long until tomorrow!" After that sign-off there were no more tomorrows before the radio microphone for Lowell Thomas.

LOWELL THOMAS  
HAWK ESELEY MAIL  
PAVING, NEW YORK 10011  
February 3, 1969

Dear Ed Knapp:

Many thanks for your grand letter!

Wish I could stop by and thank you in person.

Some twenty-five or thirty years ago I had a friend who edited the newspaper in Three Rivers. He was a well known humorist, and at the moment his name has vanished from my mental filing department. He used to send me some special Three Rivers sausage. He and I belonged to a rather mad-cap organization known as the pipe organ pumpers.

Great Scot, Three Rivers also reminds me of something else. My mother told me long long ago that some of my forebears, her family, are buried at Three Rivers. The name was Throp. By now even their headstones may have disappeared. Some of them spelled it with one "b" and some with two. They were Dutch who had come over to this country with Peter Stuyvesant.

Again many thanks for your letter.

Cordially,  
*Lowell Thomas*

From that time, he lived in retirement, and on August 29, 1981, after an active and colorful life, he died at the age of 89.

He was indeed a friend to all his faithful listeners and we miss his familiar voice on radio.

So long, Lowell, until tomorrow. ■

### NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

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The Nostalgia Digest is published six times a year by  
THE HALL CLOSET, Box 421, Morton Grove, IL 60053  
Phone/Fax (847) 965-7763

Annual subscription rate is \$15 for six issues. A two-year subscription (12 issues) is \$25.

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#### ADDRESS CHANGES

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The Post Office **DOES NOT** forward the Digest which is sent by bulk mail.



## Our Readers Write

### WE GET LETTERS

**MT. PROSPECT, IL**— Thanks for the great Saturday programs, especially "Please Stand By...A History of Radio." —**FLORENCE FILMER**

**PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA**— The corporations on the radios pictured in the article by W. Gardner Kissack in the April-May issue --- Zenith, Crosley, Westinghouse, CBS --- had something else in common: they each owned radio stations. (RCA and GE were, of course, manufacturers and broadcasters, too.) Which makes me wonder if any of them ever customized their product for each city in which they broadcast so their station would be favored, either with a detent at that spot on the band, a motor to retune to that frequency each time the radio was turned on, or a bandpass filter to cause their station to sound louder. Or at least a visible mark on the dial. —**RONALD LINDOW**

**WILMETTE, IL**— I enjoy the *Digest* and particularly look forward to Ken Alexander's articles. The old coal furnace, the ragman's call, the glory days of the Loop. It was a harder life then and reflecting upon it gives you an appreciation of what we have now. In its own way it was a richer life, too, and Ken brings it all back in warm reflection. —**BOB LARSON**

**ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO**— My sincere thanks to Steve Darnall for the fine piece on Larry Adler (Feb-Mar, 1997); never thought I'd find such in *Nostalgia Digest*. As always, Ken Alexander did a great job on the movie palaces of the Loop which I first visited in '41. Ken, how about a recall of the burlesque theatres and clubs? —**JIM GOODRICH**

**CHICAGO**— I just had to write to tell you how much we enjoyed Jack Benny Month in February and the comedy dialogue between you and "Jack Benny". Not only is John Sebert a great Benny, he's a great asset to Metro Golden Memories. It's always a pleasure to walk in and be greeted by his wonderful smile and personality. That's one of the reasons it's the greatest show biz nostalgia store in the world! —**JOHNNY PITTS**

**ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, IL**— Thank you for the

beautiful tribute to my husband, Charles Roehl, in the April-May issue. That was very thoughtful of you, even though it made me weepy eyed. —**LUCILE ROEHL**

**CHICAGO**— Nothing against Dorothy Lamour, but I really missed your annual Easter show. No spirit this year? —**CLIFF WALZEL**

**LISLE, IL**— As a senior citizen who grew up loving radio entertainment, your contributions are truly appreciated. I've enjoyed *TWTD* since the *WLTD* days and am a long time *Digest* subscriber as is my sister. I have an extensive collection of audio tapes, many of which have been bought at Metro Golden Memories. —**JOHN LASTOFKA**

**WHEATON, IL**— Your radio program *Those Were The Days* is the best old time radio show in America, bar none. Keep up the good work! —**R. P. STEVENS**

**HOMEWOOD, IL**— I would like to tell you how very much I enjoy your programming. Ever since we moved to Chicago eight years ago, I have lived the lives of Jack Benny and George and Gracie. I am probably the biggest 16-year-old fan Jack Benny has! I also love Gunsmoke, Sherlock Holmes and X Minus One. I have met few people my age who share my passion, but those who do swear by these classics. —**KATE ANDERSON**

**KENOSHA, WISCONSIN**— I am writing to let you know how important a role your show has played and continues to play in my life. I have been listening to your show for over twenty years. I am now 34 years old. My father (b.1931) died much too soon at the age of 54 in 1986. I often think with sadness of the fact that he will never meet my wife or his grandchildren. He would have been very happy. But I am cheered by the legacy he left me by teaching me the value of the radio, movies, etc. of the '30s and '40s. As I'm sure you know, most people my age have no interest in these things and no idea of their value. Whenever I watch an Abbott and Costello movie or listen to a Jack Benny show with my kids I get a warm reminder of the man who made it possible and how much he would enjoy being with us. I want to thank you for the role that you played in my father's passing these things on to me and the role you continue to play in my passing them on to my wife and children. —**KEVIN MAHAN**



Museum of Broadcast Communications

## **museum pieces**

Reported by Margaret Warren

Ten years ago, on June 13, 1987, the ribbon was cut and the Museum of Broadcast Communications opened.

We're still going strong with activities all over the place!

One of the most popular activities the Museum offers is putting fans together and up-close with their favorite stars. We've had opportunities to chat with, be photographed

with and get autographs of many spectacular radio and television stars of then and now.

We've visited with Steve Allen, Milton Berle, Tom Snyder, Dennis Franz, Bob Conrad, Les Tremayne, Carol Marin, Charles Osgood, Betty White, Jack Brickhouse, Shirley Jones, John Drury, Jim Conway, Audrey Meadows, and Wally Phillips, to recall just a few.

Earlier this year Dick Van Patten dropped by and, chatting with WGN's Dean Richards, absolutely delighted everyone with his stories of his long career. It was one of our best star visits and if you missed out, stop by the Museum Archives and enjoy it on tape. Speaking of the Archives, thousands of vintage radio and television programs plus fresh news and current entertainment programming are at your disposal.

Museum president and founder Bruce DuMont will roll out the birthday cake on Friday, June 13, 1997 at a huge 10th Anniversary party in the Chicago Cultural Center. It will be a star-studded evening to remember. A host of stars, drawn from the many who have been honored over the past ten years, have been invited. Some of those expected to attend are Edie Adams, Steve Allen, Jane Meadows, Betty White, Larry King, and Mike Wallace. Tickets for this glittering black tie event are \$300. For information and reservations, phone (312) 629-6023.

NBC-Channel 5 will use the celebration as a backdrop for the production of a special program saluting television, to be telecast later this year on Channel 5 and nationally on one of NBC's cable networks.

Happy 10th Birthday to your Museum of Broadcast Communications.



**ACTOR DICK VAN PATTEN** toured the Museum and paused to explain "Fibber and Molly" to his young niece and nephew.

Museum of Broadcast Communications

Chicago Cultural Center

Michigan Avenue at Washington Street

Chicago, 60602

Phone (312) 629-6000



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are a big hit on tape. Read the Rathbone-Bruce success story by Richard W. O'Donnell on Page 26.

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