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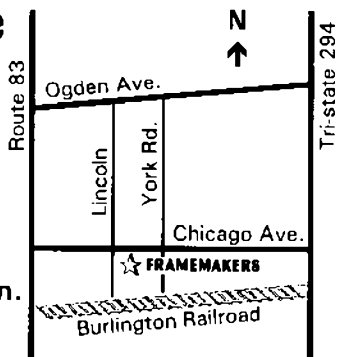
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CHUCK SCHADEN'S NOSTALGIA DIGEST



BOOK TWENTY-EIGHT

CHAPTER TWO

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2002

Friends Came to Call

BY GREG STEVENS

Most of *Fibber McGee and Molly's* story lines began or were moved along when their front doorbell rang and a friend was ushered in. Whether it was Mayor LaTrivia or Doc Gamble, the Old Timer, or even Teeny, we could all say "thank goodness" for the friends who called at 79 Wistful Vista. They may have confused, befuddled or frustrated Fibber but they always made the rest of us feel good.

In mid-June of 2001 I underwent open heart surgery for the second time in seven years. I knew I could expect seven or eight weeks of at-home recuperation before going back to work and I would appreciate any friends who might visit our small home in South Elgin, Illinois to help me pass the time.

And the friends came! At first I was still very tired and I know I was poor company because I would doze off as the friends spoke. Only bits of conversation reached my ear. I seem to remember catching snips and snatches such as "That's not how I heard it, Johnny" — "On you Huskies" — "Archie the Manager speaking" — and "It was a cold day in Los Angeles."

After the first week, and with returning strength, I was able to sit in my recliner

Greg Stevens of South Elgin, Illinois is a free-lance writer and a fan of old time radio since before it became old time.

when Chester A. Riley stopped in and related the story of how he and his wife Peg had first met as well as about the birth of their first child. Paladin tied his horse outside and shared his memories of a Colorado rancher who hired him to find a son who had been kidnapped by Indiana.

A visiting nurse made several visits to the house to check on my recovery and when some of my friends came by they offered their own suggestions regarding my health. *Orphan Annie* and *Captain Midnight* reminded me to get my vitamins by drinking Ovaltine. *Tom Mix* strongly suggested that I'd grow stronger if I ate instant Ralston. *Superman* was pretty sure that Kellogg's Pep would give me, well, pep.

We had some pretty hot weather in July. It was too hot and humid to get out and walk as my doctor recommended. In the cooler parts of the day I would shuffle out to the mailbox or take a longer walk down to the corner and back. Some friends joined me on those brief excursions.

Jack Webb and Raymond Burr came along and shared a story about Pat Novak picking up the wrong clothes from the cleaners. Roy Rogers, Dale Evans and Gabby Hayes covered some ground with me as they remembered the mystery of the Circle C Ranch.

By the beginning of August I had

NECROLOGY OF 2001

We Remember Them Well

Last year was not a very good year for show business. We lost many of our favorite entertainers and personalities during 1999.

They're gone, but not forgotten.

LARRY ADLER, 87, harmonica virtuoso who appeared often on radio (with Jack Benny, Rudy Vallee and others) and in concerts around the world. August 7.

SAMUEL Z. ARKOFF, 83, producer of 463 low-budget movies including *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957) and *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1965). September 16.

CHET ATKINS, 77, country-western guitar stylist and record producer who influenced a generation of musicians, helping craft what became known as the "Nashville Sound." June 30.

JEAN-PIERRE AUMONT, 90, French actor for seven decades appearing in many U.S. films including *Cross of Lorraine* (1943) and *The Devil at Four O'clock* (1961). January 30.

SANDY BARON, 64, actor and stand-up comedian who in recent years had a recurring role in the *Seinfeld* TV series as old-timer Jack Klompus. January 21.

JULIE BISHOP, 87, actress whose career began in the silent film era with *Children of Jazz* (1923) and ended in the early days of TV with appearances on the Bob Cummings show, *My Hero*. August 30.

LOU BOUDREAU, 84, Baseball Hall of Fame shortstop and long-time Chicago Cubs radio



Les Brown



Roy Brown

started Cardiac Rehab and on the three mornings each week that I drove to my workouts more friends came with me in the car. Earl Graser and Bruce Beemer both joined me with tales of the *Lone Ranger*. Bret Morrison and Orson Welles explained what evil lurks in the hearts of men as *The Shadow*.

One stormy day, as I approached the time I would return to work, a thirty-nine year old Jack Benny came over from Waukegan and lightened my afternoon by recalling a checker game he had played with Groucho Marx.

All those friends who gave me their time made the weeks of renewing my health lighter. I laughed with Bob Hope, Eddie Cantor, Lum and Abner, and Charlie and Mortimer. I hummed songs like they don't write anymore right along with Bing and Frank and the whole crew at *Your Hit Parade*. I thrilled to the ongoing course of World War II as reported on *World News Today* and *News of the World*. I shed more than a single tear as the networks recounted the events surrounding the death of FDR.

I said my house was small so where was there room for all these friends to visit? Well, it wasn't just a visit, you see. All these friends and so many more are still here. More and more friends, old and new, are always joining them. Right now they stay on shelves in our basement in the form of almost 900 cassette tapes containing close to 2,000 radio programs.

What a joy to have these friends near at hand and what a pleasure to hear them again and again. Like any good friends I love to introduce them to others for the first time.

Did I say they stayed in the basement? Maybe they stay there but that's not where they live.

They live in my heart and I'm so glad they came to call. ■



Frankie Carle



Perry Como



Rosemary DeCamp



Arlene Francis

color commentator on WGN, Chicago with Jack Quinlan and Vince Lloyd. August 10.

LES BROWN, 88, one of the big band era bandleaders. He began in 1936 and continued to perform though the end of the Twentieth Century. His "Band of Renown" appeared with Bob Hope on radio and TV for some 40 years. January 4.

ROY BROWN, 68, Chicago television performer who appeared on WGN-TV as Cooky the Clown on *Bozo's Circus*, as the voice of "Cuddly Duddly" on *Ray Rayner and Friends*. January 22.

FRANKIE CARLE, 97, pianist for 70 years who was considered the dean of the big band leaders, performing from 1944 to the early 1960s. March 7.

IMOGENE COCA, 92, expressive, rubber-faced comedienne who teamed with Sid Caesar on TV's *Your Show of Shows* from 1949-54. June 2.

PERRY COMO, 88, popular singer whose rich voice and relaxed manner entertained millions for more than half a century on radio, television and recordings. May 12.

JOHN COUGHLIN, 75, veteran Chicago television weatherman for nearly 20 years on WBBM-TV. His career began in radio in Evanston, Illinois on station WEAW while a student at Northwestern University. February 17.

DAGMAR (Virginia Ruth Egnor), 79, voluptuous actress who played the sexy dumb blonde on TV's *Broadway Open House* with Jerry Lester in the early 1950s. October 9.

JEAN DAVID, 86, versatile Chicago actress who appeared on radio in *First Nighter*, *Grand Hotel* and *Ma Perkins* in the 1930s and 40s, and on various television and stage

productions. April 2.

ROSEMARY DE CAMP, 90, character actress who played Nurse Judy Price on radio's *Dr. Christian*, a widowed housewife on TV's *Bob Cummings Show*, and the mother of James Cagney's George M. Cohan in the film, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942). February 20.

FRED DE CORDOVA, 90, producer of *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson* for 22 years and, for a time, directed the Jack Benny TV series. September 15.

TROY DONOHUE, 65, heart-throb movie actor of the 1950s and '60s who appeared in such teen romance films as *A Summer Place*, *Parrish*, *Rome Adventure*, and *Palm Springs Weekend*; in TV series *Surfside Six*. September 2.

DALE EVANS, 88, the "Queen of the West" who rode along side of her singing cowboy husband Roy Rogers in countless movie westerns and radio and TV shows. February 7.

ARLENE FRANCIS, 92, 1930s movie actress who became a household name in the 1950s and '60s as a panelist on TV quiz shows including the long-running *What's My Line?* May 31.

KATHLEEN FREEMAN, 82, brash and funny character actress on stage, screen and TV in hundreds of roles as recalcitrant maids, demented nuns, mouthy housekeepers, battle-ax mothers, irate landladies, and noisy neighbors. August 24.

HAL GOLDMAN, 81, TV comedy writer who worked for Jack Benny, George Burns, Carol Burnett, Flip Wilson, others. July 4.

JOSE GRECO, 82, famed Flamenco dancer and choreographer who brought Spanish dancing to U.S. audiences in the 1940s and '50s. December 31, 2000.

NECROLOGY OF 2001

We Remember Them Well

JANE GREER, 76, movie and TV actress in a number of film noir pictures in the 1940s and '50s, most notably in 1947's *Out of the Past* with Robert Mitchum and Kirk Douglas. August 27.

WILLIAM HANNA, 90, pioneering film animator who, with partner Joe Barbera, created such characters as *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons*, *Huckleberry Hound*, *Yogi Bear* and *Tom and Jerry*. March 22.

GEORGE HARRISON, 58, lead guitarist for the legendary rock music group The Beatles. November 29.

CHRISTOPHER HEWETT, 80, British-born stage and screen actor best remembered as TV's English butler *Mr. Belvedere* from 1985-90. August 3.

AL HIBBLER, 85, popular jazz singer who was bandleader Duke Ellington's vocalist in the 1940s and had his own record hits "Unchained Melody" and "After the Lights Go Down Low" in the 1950s. April 24.

JOHN LEE HOOKER, 83, renowned blues singer who electrified audiences and inspired generations of musicians over a 70-year period. June 21.

HERB HOWARD, 69, Chicago broadcaster and pioneer in live traffic reporting on WBBM Newsradio in the 1960s, '70s and '80s. June 27.

HUGH JAMES, 85, veteran radio announcer heard on such network shows a *Voice of Firestone*, *Lowell Thomas*, *Second Mrs. Burton*, *True Detective Mysteries*, *Wendy Warren and the News*, and *When a Girl Marries*. June 17.

RAYMOND EDWARD JOHNSON, 90, prolific radio actor during the 'golden age' best known as the host who opened the creaking door of the *Inner Sanctum* from 1941-45. August 15.

STANLEY KRAMER, 87, highly honored and respected motion picture producer and/or director of such films as *High Noon*, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, *Judgement at*



Kathleen Freeman



Raymond E. Johnson

Nuremberg, *Inherit the Wind*, and *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. February 19.

JACK LEMMON, 76, one of America's most beloved and accomplished actors in a career that spanned half a century and produced such classic films as *The Odd Couple*, *Some Like It Hot*, *Days of Wine and Roses*, *The Apartment*, and *Save the Tiger*. June 27.

BILL LIPTON, 74, radio actor for many years on such programs as *Let's Pretend*, *Coast-to-Coast on a Bus*, *Road of Life*, and *X Minus One*. October 29.

JAY LIVINGSTON, 86, Oscar-winning composer and lyricist whose 64-year career collaboration with Ray Evans resulted in such hits as "Silver Bells," "Que Sera, Sera," "Mona Lisa," and "Buttons and Bows." October 17.

WHITMAN MAYO, 70, actor who portrayed the grey-bearded sidekick of Redd Foxx on the TV sitcom *Sanford and Son* in the 1970s. May 22.

DOROTHY MC GUIRE, 85, leading lady in motion pictures from 1940s to 1960s, starring in such hits as *Gentleman's Agreement*, *Friendly Persuasion*, *Claudia*, *Spiral Staircase*. September 13.

GARDNER MC KAY, 69, actor who played Capt. Adam Troy on the 1960s TV series *Adventures in Paradise*. November 21.

LORENZO MUSIC, 64, TV writer and director who provided the off-screen voice of *Garfield* the cartoon cat and Carlton the unseen doorman on the *Rhoda* series. August 4.

CARROLL O'CONNOR, 76, Emmy-winning actor best known for his role as Archie Bunker in the TV series *All in the Family* for 13 seasons beginning in the 1970s. Later starred on TV's *In the Heat of the Night*. June 21.

TEDDY PHILLIPS, 83, Chicago-based band-



Jack Lemmon



Dorothy McGuire



Anthony Quinn



Ann Sothern

leader who performed at the Aragon, Trianon and Willowbrook ballrooms in the 1940s and '50s. March 10.

ANTHONY QUINN, 86, versatile actor in more than 100 films over a six-decade career. He won Academy Awards for *Viva Zapata* (1952) and *Lust for Life* (1956) and great fame for his title role in *Zorba the Greek* (1964). June 3.

JASON ROBARDS, 78, veteran stage, screen and television actor who earned movie Oscars for his roles in *All the President's Men* (1976) and *Julia* (1977). December 26, 2000.

ANN SOTHERN, 92, movie, radio and TV actress whose career spanned six decades. She starred on radio and film versions as *Maisie*, as Susie McNamara in *Private Secretary* on TV and in many MGM musicals and comedies. March 15.

KIM STANLEY, 76, stage and film actress best known for her Broadway roles in *Picnic*, *Bus Stop* and *The Traveling Lady*; on screen in *The Goddess* and *Seance on a Wet Afternoon*. August 2.

JOHNNY STEARNS, 85, writer and co-star of the early television (1947) situation comedy *Mary Kay and Johnny*. December 5.

ISAAC STERN, 81, master violinist, one of the most recorded classical musicians in history, who made his Carnegie Hall debut in 1943 and years later used his prestige and contacts to save Carnegie Hall from the wrecking ball. September 22.

JIM STEWART, 74, Chicago television veteran who hosted *Here's Geraldine* for eight years and *Passage to Adventure* for 12 years during the 1950s and '60s. March 28.

BEATRICE STRAIGHT, 86, stage and screen actress who won an Academy Award for her role as William Holden's wife in the

1976 film *Network*. April 7.

'LIL' RICHARD TOWALSKI, 58, musician and host of various polka broadcasts on a variety of Chicago area stations for nearly 50 years beginning with a program on WOPA, Oak Park, when he was just 12 years old. March 28.

RAY WALSTON, 86, award-winning stage, movie and TV actor who played the lovable extra-terrestrial on the TV series *My Favorite Martian*, and the devil in *Damn Yankees* on Broadway and on the screen. January 1.

AL WAXMAN, 65, veteran Canadian actor known in the U.S. for his role as the police chief on the *Cagney and Lacey* TV series, 1981-88. January 18.

TIM WEIGEL, 56, Chicago sportscaster who covered Windy City sports in print, on radio and television for almost 30 years. June 18.

BOB WEISKOPF, 86, comedy writer for Bob Hope, Eddie Cantor on radio, and for *I Love Lucy*, *Make Room for Daddy*, *Our Miss Brooks*, *All in the Family*, and *Maude* on TV. February 20.

JUSTIN WILSON, 87, Cajun chef with a "down-home humor" who was host of several cooking shows on public television. September 5.

TOBY WING, 85, the original "Goldwyn Girl" who appeared in 38 films during the 1930s and who reigned as America's favorite pin-up between Jean Harlow and Betty Grable. March 23.

EDWARD WINTER, 63, actor best known for his recurring role as Col. Flagg on the TV series *M*A*S*H*. March 8.

GONE...BUT NOT FORGOTTEN
We Remember Them Well



Newest Radio Hall of Famer: Eddie 'Rochester' Anderson

BY BILL OATES

Eddie Anderson was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame on November 3, 2001, joining his "boss" Jack Benny and the scores of other performers who entertained us so royally during the Golden Age of Radio.

Salesman: Is your boss an old man?
Rochester: No.
Salesman: Is he middle-aged?
Rochester: No.
Salesman: Is he elderly?
Rochester: Wrap it up!

He had to keep track of his boss's hair, make sure a pre-World War I automobile kept rolling, and lovingly suffer with the cheapest employer ever.

On New Year's Eve, he had to abandon his own evening's plans to share "Auld Lang Syne" with a pathetically lonely miser. And throughout their three decades of master and suffering servant relationship, no duo better understood each other and moreover created and amplified more endearing characters on radio and television than those of Rochester and Jack Benny.

Perhaps the greatest comedy ensemble to perform on the radio (and later on tele-

Bill Oates, of Kouts, Indiana, is a high school English teacher and author. This article originally appeared in our February/March 1992 issue.



Eddie "Rochester" Anderson

vision) was the cast that was called *The Jack Benny Program*. The namesake would be the first to admit that his success lay in the workings of so many talented actors who, at the hands of equally capable writers, provided listeners with an incredible number of laughs per half hour show.

One member, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, was not only an integral part of the group, but also became one of the earliest successful black actors to be accepted in a sea of white faces. From simple stage beginnings in Oakland, California to the number one show on the air, it was Rochester who rose to play opposite his "boss" in a way that audiences adored and anticipated

for years. He became the first universally accepted performer of his race to be endeared to the hearts of all Americans and especially on Sunday nights.

Performing was almost a given to young Eddie Anderson. His father was a minstrel show performer (yes, a black man in a minstrel show) and his mother was of a rare breed of black tight-wire artists.

Big Ed and Ella Mae Anderson ushered Eddie into the world on September 18, 1905. By age fourteen, he and brother Lloyd began singing in all-black revues in such prestigious spots as San Francisco's Presidio and in hotel lobbies. When the boys began touring up and down the Pacific Coast, father objected and the duo came home for awhile.

The job that was more acceptable to Big Ed provided young Eddie with a potential disaster that was turned into one of the most distinctive trademarks in radio. Hawking newspapers in Oakland's streets gave Eddie some spending money, but the theory was that the louder he yelled the more papers he sold. The future star yelled so loudly to out-sell his opposition that he permanently damaged his vocal chords. What seemed to be the death knell for a performer gave "Rochester" his distinctive raspy voice.

Later in his teen years, a second brother, Cornelius, was added to the group and the "Three Black Accs" began their career as a song and dance team. The parts for the trio grew as the 1920s progressed. In 1919 the team landed parts in the cast of "Strutting Along." After Eddie got one line in a stage comedy in 1924, he left the group to



do a solo turn. This was not the end of the team, even though their more famous brother accepted more prestigious jobs, for later they played two and a half years at the famed Cotton Club night spot in Harlem during its heyday.

Movie producers noticed the talented young black man in the early 1930s. First Anderson got a small part in the film *What Price Hollywood?* A greater claim to fame came when he had a more prominent part in the all-black Warner Brothers film *Green Pastures* in 1935. But even though he had a small role, Eddie Anderson eventually found himself in the most famous production in film history, *Gone With the Wind*.

Anderson had been on the *Jack Benny Program* for two years when David O. Selznick requested that "Rochester" (to radio audiences) be tested for the part of Port, the O'Hara's house servant. A note from Selznick to the resident counsel at RKO studios said, "I think that George (Cukor) is right to test Anderson..." He did not receive that part, but rather it went to Oscar Polk. Instead, Eddie moved to the Hamilton's household as Uncle Peter.

Anderson's movie roles, some guess the number to be near sixty, continued into the



Gone With The Wind (1939)
Eddie Anderson, Olivia de Havilland, Vivien Leigh

PHOTOFEST

1960s. But, just as it was Jack Benny's lot to be a movie star before he was successful on radio, Anderson's greater claim to fame emanated from the Philcos and Zeniths of America for nearly two decades.

When Jack Benny needed character parts on his show he often dipped into his cast of supporting players: a Benny Rubin, Bea Benaderet, or Mel Blanc. It was Rubin who was to assume the Negro dialect part of a train porter in a 1937 show. He had mastered so many voices but, according to Jack Benny in his autobiography compiled by daughter Joan, script writer Bill Morrow noticed Rubin vocalizing the part nicely, but deemed the actor was "too Jewish looking." Even after an offer to don blackface, Morrow suggested that Rubin would "look" the same to the critical studio audience, only darker. (It would not have made any difference to the *listening* audience.) It was decided that the show should hire a Negro actor.

Eddie Anderson had taken a number of bit parts on radio prior to what was to have been another one-shot stint. One story goes that a phone call came to a hotel in Los Angeles that housed many black actors in 1937. Anderson picked up the call for another actor and reported to the intended's audition.

Jack Benny had recently taken the Super Chief from New York to Los Angeles and the character of a real porter loomed as a potential gag candidate on the Easter show of that year. What resulted was the landing of a part and a lifetime job rewritten so that "Rochester" Van Jones would become Benny's definitely underpaid and often highly critical valet. The routine went—

Jack: Hey, porter, porter!

Rochester: Yas-suh.

Jack: What time do we get to Albuquerque?

Rochester: What?

Jack: Albuquerque.
 Rochester: I dunno. Do we stop there?
 Jack: Certainly we stop there.
 Rochester: My, my!
 Jack: Hm.
 Rochester: I better go up and tell the engineer that.
 Jack: Yes, do.
 Rochester: What's the name of that town again?
 Jack: Albuquerque.
 Rochester: (laughs) Albuquerque. What they gonna think up next?
 Jack: Albuquerque is a town.
 Rochester: You better check up on that.
 Jack: I know what I am talking about!
 Now, how long do we stop there?
 Rochester: How long do we stop where?
 Jack: In Albuquerque.
 Rochester: (laughs) There you go again.
 Sound: (Train whistle, twice)

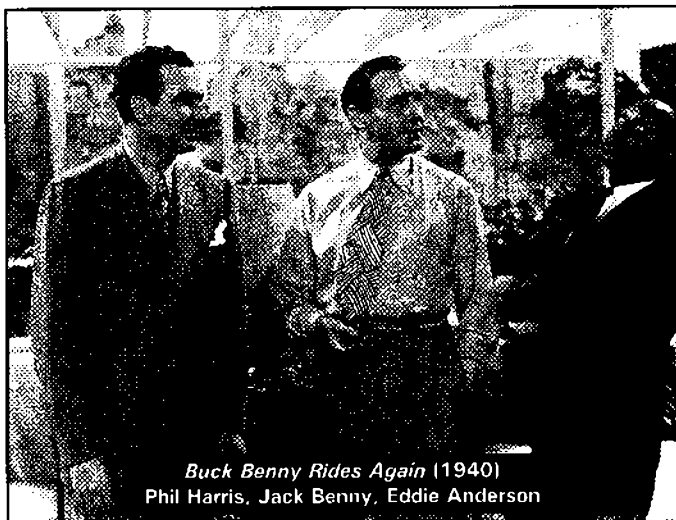
Five weeks later the character reappeared in the show when he stopped at Benny's house when the train came again to Los Angeles. Jack eventually hired the man away from the railroad and the character was adapted as a permanent member of the cast (the first Negro in a major radio production). And so the arrangement continued on radio, then television until the regular show left TV in 1964.

Anderson confessed that he had to raise the pitch of his voice for the character. His normal sound was lower, and if he put more pressure on his voice he got the correct vibration. Of course, sometimes that voice cracked

mid-word over the air sending the Boss into tears of laughter. The only competition Rochester had for voice jousting came when Andy Devine was required to play opposite the valct in the Buck Benny sketches.

The Benny show starred performers whose early careers relied on commonly accepted racial stereotypes, and the programs of the late 1930s reflected a closer tie to those now-dated jokes. As an awareness of the damaging comedy became more evident and after there was a radical writer turnover in the early 1940s, Jack Benny, an extremely sensitive leader, liberalized his treatment of the Rochester character. Late in Anderson's career, civil rights activists sought his name for their cause, but because he appreciated the fortunes that had befallen him he distanced himself from their requests.

Jack Benny went to bat for his fellow performer more than once. Rochester had been the subject of a controversy when, in a well-publicized case, a film in which he appeared called *Brewster's Millions* was banned in Memphis. The problem, according to a local newspaper, was that the film portrayed "too much social equality and



Buck Benny Rides Again (1940)
 Phil Harris, Jack Benny, Eddie Anderson

PHOTOFEST



Cabin in the Sky (1943)
Lena Horn and Eddie Anderson

PHOTOFEET

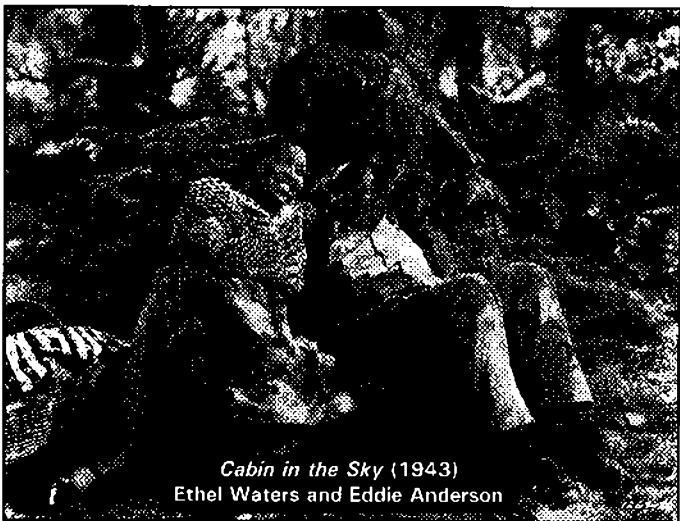
today's standards, was one of the most talent-laden musicals produced by the most prestigious of studios. It was Lena Horne who had the job of seducing Little Joe (Anderson) with her suggestive "There's Honey in the Honeycomb." This Black Everyman could only respond with the song "Life's Full of Consequences" as Kenneth

racial mixture." Prior to this 1945 film, Benny had boosted his black cohort's posture when the film *Buck Benny Rides Again* experienced its world premiere in Harlem's Victoria Theater. An enthusiastic crowd, urged on by emcee Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, roared its approval as Rochester entered the stage smoking, as he said, "one of Mr. Benny's cigars." In another instance of support, Benny checked out of a hotel that suggested, by this time famous, Rochester's occupancy might upset some customers from the South. The former son of a Jewish immi-

grant, Benny Kubelsky, also left a restaurant with his entire entourage when a similar suggestion to remove Rochester from the group was made.

Eddie Anderson's greatest film role came when Vincent Minelli was given his first chance to direct at MGM. *Cabin in the Sky*, though decidedly stereotypical by

Spencer (representing Heaven) and Rex Ingram (from Hell) fought for his soul. One tune, "Happiness is a Thing Called Joe," was one of the few added to the original Broadway score which already included the powerful Ethel Waters tunes "Taking a Chance on Love" and "Cabin in the Sky." Add to the ensemble John "Bubbles" Sublett, Louis Armstrong, Oscar Polk, Butterfly McQueen, Ruby Dandridge, and Duke Ellington's orchestra, and a cast of first caliber black entertainers were gathered for a highlight



Cabin in the Sky (1943)
Ethel Waters and Eddie Anderson

PHOTOFEET

of the 1942 film season.

Numerous other movie roles surrounded Anderson's career. Rochester played in several Benny radio screen spinoffs, including the 1943 film *The Meanest Man in the World*. In this film it was Rochester who suggested to the honorable but unsuccessful lawyer Benny to become mean and aggressive. Success followed Jack in this part, but he reverted to Mr. Nice Guy before he lost the girl and friends.

The last major film that included Eddie Anderson in an important role was *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* in 1963. This Stanley Kramer comedy spectacular included literally hundreds of famous comedians, including Jack Benny for a moment, in one of cinema's wildest chase movies. Rochester and Leo Gorcey drove treasure seekers toward the climax and the "Big W" where Jimmy Durante had indicated the money-hungry might find gold.

It is ironic that fan mail described Benny's horrible treatment/underpayment of the manservant, for the real Anderson was paid quite handsomely. It is, however, common knowledge that Eddie Anderson unnerved taskmaster Jack Benny with his tardiness at rehearsals. Anderson was notorious for being late for practice. He usually had excuses that were accepted reluctantly. After one threat from Benny, Rochester had the police escort him into the studio to vouch that he was delayed because of a traffic problem. Jack actually fired Anderson when an early Ronald and Benita Colman guest appearance was threatened by the valet's absence. Rochester was written out of the script, even though he explained that he was late because of a delayed plane arrival from San Francisco. Jack silently ignored Rochester's pleas until Mary intervened, saying that her husband was breaking Anderson's heart. The old softie relented and all was forgiven by the next week's show. One can hear



"Rochester" and Jack Benny

Rochester crying, "But Boss...." or "Aren't I a stinker?"

Eddie "Rochester" Anderson's job on the air was to keep track of radio's most successful, surrealistic household and, in doing so, broke the ground for other black actors such as Amanda Randolph, Louise Beavers, Eddie Green, and Ernestine Wade, who followed in his footsteps. He died at the age of 72 on February 28, 1977.

The acid test to the success of Eddie Anderson's career as a member of *The Jack Benny Program* is evidenced today when new listeners are exposed to the show or old listeners regroup for another reprise; the results show increased admiration for his contribution to a masterful ensemble of radio comedy. ■

NOTE-- To honor the induction of Eddie Anderson into the Radio Hall of Fame, many "Rochester" radio appearances will be featured during "Jack Benny Month" on Those Were The Days this February. See pages 20-21.

Music à la Andres

BY MICHAEL HAGGERTY

In the 1930s, Milwaukee teenager Jay Andres was fascinated by radio. His enthusiasm was particularly drawn to a station down in Chicago. It was gilt-edged WBBM in the pristine-white Wrigley Building on elegant Michigan Avenue.

He decided that he, too, wanted to be a broadcaster and in 1941 Andres wrote 25 letters trying to get a radio job. He received three replies and one offer of work. He accepted immediately.

The station was located north of Milwaukee in a town outside Green Bay. His first step up the radio ladder was to be in the Wisconsin town of Marinette, which had a population of less than 11,000.

But the 19-year-old found that his reaction of elation was giving way to outright fear. "It scared the hell out of me, frankly," he says in that voice so familiar to so many.

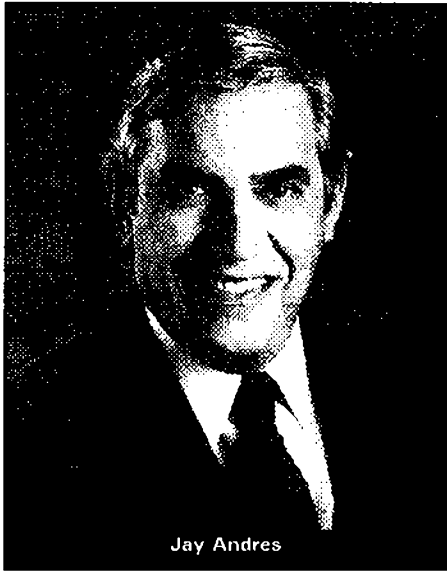
"And I turned out to be terrible," Andres reports. "As a matter of fact I was having a drink in a Marinette bar one night and a guy said, 'Oh, you're that new guy at WMAM? You're terrible!' And I told him that, yes, he was probably right."

The next year it was off to WKBH in the bigger (population: more than 40,000)

Michael Haggerty teaches psychology at Chicago's north suburban Oakton College.

market of LaCrosse, located in the far western part of the state on the Mississippi River.

"Camp McCoy was not far away and of course at this time we were in the Second



Jay Andres

World War," Andres r e m e m b e r s .

"There'd be these soldiers walking along in town, they'd see me and ask, 'Why in the hell are you not in the service?' I'd tell that I was too young and they'd say 'Oh, yeah, sure.' But I knew that I wanted to join. I wanted to be in the Army Air Corps."

He had never piloted a plane before, but had always

wanted to, ever since his model airplane-building days as a boy. By year's end he had been sworn into the military branch of his choice.

"I was so wrapped up in getting to fly that I didn't really give being away from radio a second thought, except that when I was at one of the training stations," Andres says. "They were doing college recruitment radio programs there. I told them that I had been on the radio, so they put me on as the announcer on the broadcasts."

He graduated from flight school in 1944 and had a variety of overseas assignments as a pilot until his 1946 discharge. Andres returned to Milwaukee where he was a student at Marquette University on the G.I. Bill.

By 1949 he was back on the radio, this time in his hometown. He accepted an offer from WISN and eventually moved crosstown to WMAW. It was late in 1950 when he heard that announcer auditions were being held at WBBM in Chicago. That bit of news put him in touch with his earliest radio memories.

"The thing I always had in mind when I was growing up in Milwaukee and listening constantly to WBBM was... that's where I want to go. That's where I want to go," he emphasizes.

Upon his arrival at WBBM, he discovered that there were more than 260 broadcasters assembled, all trying to claim one of just two announcing jobs. He was tested by a litany of troublesome pronunciations and asked to ad-lib on a hodgepodge of topics hurled at him.

He passed the exacting audition with flying colors. Things were really looking up for Jay Andres. He could hardly believe what he had accomplished.

"The WBBM Air Theater. Wrigley Building. Chicago. That's where I had always wanted to be. The Wrigley Building was a basilica, as far as I was concerned," he says. "Gee, here I am. I have wanted to be here forever, and now I'm here. I just couldn't believe all of it. It was just so great."

Those were the days of Julian Bentley and the news. Folksy farm director Harry Campbell. Singer Billy Leach of the King's Jesters. "Billy was quite a tap dancer,"

Andres recalls. "He'd tap anywhere — on the air or off the air. In the hallway. Down the stair. Anywhere."

Andres got along well with Paul Gibson. "Paul was not too talkative when he was off the air or when he was around people he didn't know well," he says.

"But once Paul got on the air he could expound on anything to great lengths. The thing I remember about Paul was that he

could have a subject all ready to talk about; then something would happen in the news and he would throw aside the set format, the prepared copy. He would have the ability to dwell on whatever had broken in the news. He knew what to say about it and he would say it so well. He had tremendous general knowledge."

In 1953 C. R. Smith, president of

American Airlines, came up with the idea of a radio show that was going to be broadcast in the top 10 markets the airline served.

Andres was anointed the Chicago host and the soon-to-be-beloved program was called *Music Till Dawn*. The proceedings were scripted out of the New York headquarters of the airline and Andres was a bit uneasy with the format. He was not quite sure how to conduct things until he decided to simply author his own agenda.

He hit upon a musical mix of classical, pop and jazz and he used his knowledge of aviation for the commercials. His approach became a smashing success. Andres was to have the most listeners within the 10 markets and the biggest over-



night radio audience in the Chicago area.

He savored his *Music Till Dawn* duties. "I loved that show. And I loved the opportunity it gave me," he says. His listeners felt a connection with him, and he with them. He received pies, cakes and other baked goods. From the South came boxes of pecans. He also got marriage proposals, despite the fact that he already had a wife, Virginia. He got hundreds of fan letters every month and he answered every one personally.

Every now and then calls would come into the station protesting that Andres was playing too much classical music. "So then I'd play some more," he laughs. "I would take so many liberties with the music, and I always got away with it. Apparently the people listening liked it. And I liked the fact that I could do that."

Even though they were all-night competitors, after their shifts were over Andres and Franklyn MacCormack often stopped into a restaurant and had a friendly meal together.

In 1968 MacCormack's station, WGN, hired Andres away from WBBM, which had become an all-news station. A few months later it was Andres' sad duty to take the place of his deceased friend. The show was called *Tunes from Talman* and he was given a free hand in formatting the program. Jay Andres was again getting the highest overnight ratings, this time at his new station.

Andres was a fan of George Shearing and enjoyed seeing the piano maestro play. One night somebody told Shearing that Andres was in the audience at the venue where he was performing. "Jay Andres!" Shearing exclaimed. "Where is he?"

"I was never so thrilled in my life," the broadcaster says.

The two were introduced and a warm lifetime friendship ensued. Frequently a car from WGN would pick up Shearing

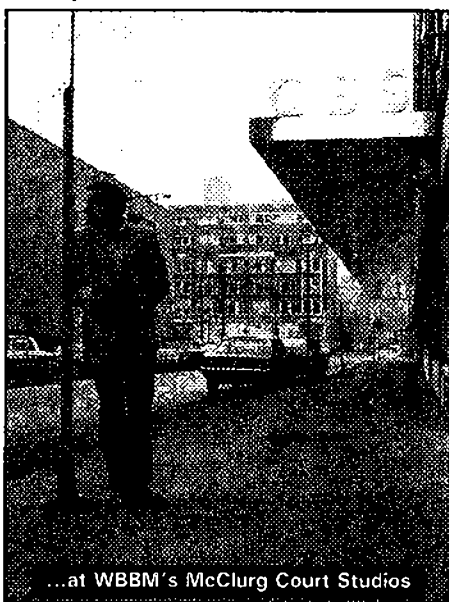
after a Chicago performance and he was driven to Andres' studio. Shearing especially liked the giant spread of food that Andres, an accomplished cook, routinely prepared for station staffers.

"I noticed that every time I'd do a Talman commercial George would be playing the piano that was in the studio and providing background music," Andres recalls.

"Finally one day he told me that he shouldn't work for free and I agreed with him. So he ended up getting paid for it. George had a wonderful personality and a great sense of humor.

"He loved to tell jokes and often they were off-color, so he couldn't tell those on the air. He and his wife Ellic, who was a great singer in her own right, had a great rapport. He really lit up a room. He was blind, of course, and he couldn't see it, but he would light up that room. The whole atmosphere sparkled."

Dizzy Gillespie guested on the show one evening. "He was reading a newspaper and he was mad as hell," Andres describes. "Some columnist had written about Gillespie and the information was false.



...at WBBM's McClurg Court Studios

Dizzy was so angry, but he finally talked with me on the air.

"I thought he was really going to sound off about this guy, but he never did. Dizzy was just so nice, as compared to some others who never minded sounding off.

"Of course," he winks, "I can't remember their names right now."

By 1983 Andres had put in more than 30 years as dean of overnight radio. He decided that he had had enough, walked away from WGN and convinced Virginia that they should sell their Lake Forest house.

They bought a huge motor home, toured the United States and decided to settle in the San Francisco area, where he worked for classical FM KKHI. But unforeseen circumstances brought them back to Chicago in 1985, when he joined classical WNIB as the host of the station's morning show.

His ratings were better than those of classical competitor WFMT for the morning drive slot.

Several years later Andres left WNIB and joined WFMT. Now he was doing evening drive for "Chicago's Fine Arts Station" and was being subjected to rigid formatting at the hands of longtime program director Norman Pellegrini.

The more Pellegrini tried to force his program ideas onto Andres, the more Andres balked. Soon accounts of the struggle became a staple of the newspaper radio-TV columns.

Finally, Andres was fired upon the recommendations of the "Friends of WFMT," a listener support group. Conventional



wisdom within the Chicago broadcasting community was that it was Pellegrini who had been leading the charge for that group.

"That's right," affirms Andres. "Exactly. Absolutely. That's it, and I don't care who knows it. That's the truth."

He was soon hired by public radio WDCB, the FM station operated by the College of DuPage. Andres called his program *Sounds Overheard* and he was happy again. He alone was programming his show and he was attracting listeners in droves with his now time-honored musical mix.

But by the early 1990s the voice of Jay Andres was missing from the radio dial. He had suffered a debilitating fall and was in a life-threatening coma. It was touch-and-go for quite a while. Little by little his medical condition improved and he was able to go home to the place he and wife Virginia, his life partner since 1944, have made for themselves in Highland Park.

There he gets stronger every day. His recovery has made tremendous strides and he has eased into retirement. He still listens to good music and cooks up a storm, secure in the knowledge "that so many people liked what I was doing." ■

NOTE— Tune in to TWTD March 23 for a salute to Jay Andres.

OUR SHOW OF SHOWS

BY WAYNE KLATT

A funny thing happened a couple of years ago. Workers remodeling an aging building in New York opened a painted-over locked closet, shedding light onto a treasure trove of nearly 50-year-old comedy scripts. But these 137 thick manila folders didn't contain just ordinary scripts, they were written for television's *Your Show of Shows* — which may very well have helped shaped your sense of humor even if you never saw an episode.

To understand why, let's go back — way, way back. Until the 1930s and early 1940s, American comedy was based on jokes, whether told by traveling salesmen (they usually used Joe Miller's Joke Book, published by his impoverished family after Miller died) or in vaudeville and burlesque. Then something unique came along, the Catskills subculture. On small stages a two hour drive from the Big Apple, comedians tried to keep families entertained in a variety of ways on long summer nights. Max Liebman put an American spin on the Jewish ghetto tradition of the *schlemiel*, the likable fool who is always getting into trouble. Funny was not new. Slapstick was not new. But a funny likable character, *that was new.*

One habitue of the Catskills was young

Wayne Klatt is an editor at the City News Service of the Chicago Tribune and a free-lance writer.



Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca

PHOTOFEST

comedian Sid Caesar, and in 1948 he and Liebman, who has been described as “having the style and class of a Viennese gentleman,” decided to introduce the new kind of comedy to television at a time “the tube” was occupied by puppets and singing heads. They came to TV on a show called *Admiral Broadway Revue* and although Caesar did not play a specifically Jewish character, he portrayed virtually every other kind.

Liebman also hired the 41-year-old plain and warmly sarcastic comedienne Imogene Coca. The *Admiral Broadway Revue* was telecast simultaneously every Friday evening on two networks: NBC and DuMont. It was a big hit with early televiewers during the first half of 1949, but the program went off the air when the Admiral sponsorship expired.

Pointing to the success of the Admiral series, Liebman convinced NBC to take another chance and suggested to the network that he be allowed to produce a 90-minute comedy-variety show every Saturday night. It would be a skit-styled experiment in entertainment called *Your Show of Shows*.

The 27-year-old Sid Caesar signed on, of course, as did his inimitable co-star Imogene Coca.

The five-foot-three Coca, who in private life was shy, had considered herself a singer until she drew laughs during rehearsals in a stage review by doing a mock fan dance with a huge camel hair coat she borrowed because she was cold. Liebman loved the way she converted her entire body into comedy. "The great thing about Imogene is that her left nostril never knows what the right one is doing."

With Max Liebman as producer, *Your Show of Shows* premiered on NBC-TV on Saturday, February 25, 1950 and the infant medium took a big step.

But what made *Your Show of Shows* an enduring part of our culture was not Caesar, Coca, or his Emmy award-winning backup players Carl Reiner and Howard Morris. It was the writing team needed to create madness that nevertheless all viewers could somehow relate to. The professor who didn't know what he was talking about. The fighting among wooden char-

acters on a giant Bavarian clock. The *From Here to Eternity*-type lovers who can't stand the cold water on the beach and are almost drowned by the waves. But since the scripts were legally the property of Liebman as the producer, the writers never had copies.

Although not all of these writers worked at the same time on the show, over the years they included Mel Brooks, Neil Simon, Larry Gelbart and, in the final shows, a very young Woody Allen. But in some ways the most important writer of them all was Lucille Kallen, the sole female on the team and one of just a handful of women writing for television at the time.

Fans of the *Dick Van Dyke Show*, created and sometimes written by Carl Reiner, might think that working on something like Sid Caesar's show might be a lot of fun. But Neil Simon's play *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* shows more of what it was really like, with the in-fighting among the writers and the emotional unpredictability of the star (in the play, the comedian punches his fist through the wall whenever he's angry).

You also might have glimpsed some of the production problems in the 1982 comedy film *My Favorite Year*.

Sid Caesar, now 79, admits he had problems with his temper during the period. In his autobiography, "Where Have I Been?," he mentions how he also started drinking whiskey to "anesthetize" his tensions and fears.



PHOTOFEST

His sometimes halting delivery on live television was partly because of his insistence that no cue cards be used: he wanted the eyes of the cast directly at the person they were playing off from or on the audience. As in the Catskills.

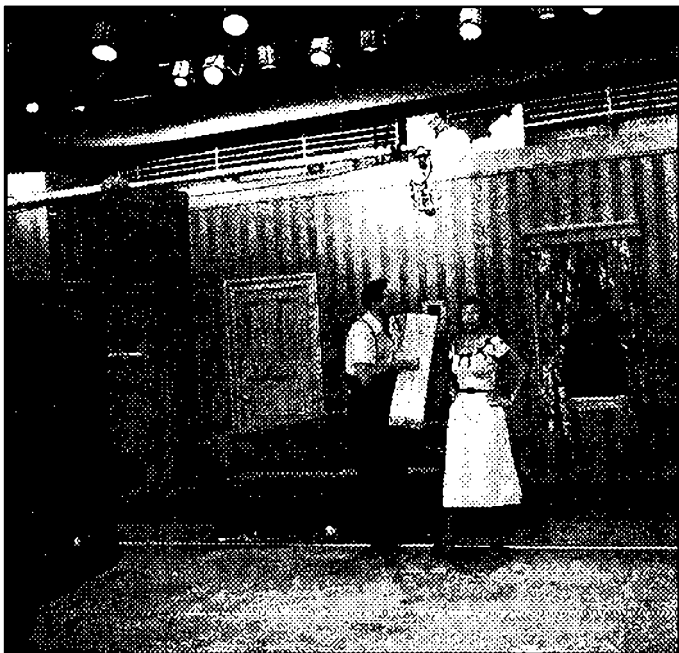
Neil Simon came on as part of a writing team with his older brother, Danny, who later inspired the finicky half of *The Odd Couple*. The eight comedy writers were not only trying

to be funny for the audience, they were trying to top each other. As Gelbart recalls, "It was much like going to work every day of the week inside a Marx Brothers movie."

How funny could skits and popular-movie parodies be? Comedy writer Kurt Luchs of Wheaton not long ago recalled, "My father was such a big Sid Caesar fan that he refused to stop watching *Your Show of Shows* when my mother was giving birth to my brother."

But the comedy team led by Mel Tolkin was so successful that the show became inflexible and eventually irrelevant. From Simon's fictionalized version of those years, we can see that the seven male writers should have paid more attention to Lucille Kallen, who was telling her colleagues that their skits were geared too much toward an urban audience and empty laughs when the population was becoming increasingly suburban and socially conscious in this time of atomic bomb fears and the anti-Communist blacklist.

In 1954, the program was reduced to 60



PHOTOFEST

minutes, renamed *Caesar's Hour*, and started losing its audience. After that version folded in 1957, the more than six-foot tall comedian went into a period of depression, but many of those connected with Caesar found ways to brighten our lives.

Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner were such a hit at private parties as they improvised interviews with Brooks' ancient man that they recorded some of their nonsense. Then Brooks started a string of films including *Blazing Saddles*, *High Anxiety*, and *Young Frankenstein*.

Becoming a full-time writer, Reiner fictionalized his early career in the play *Enter Laughing* and created the *Dick Van Dyke Show*. Remember that newly discovered collection of old scripts? Also in Liebman's locked closet was one of his toupees, which the writers made fun of (as the writers of the "Allan Brady Show" made fun of Brady's baldness on the *Van Dyke Show*). Reiner went on to direct Steve Martin's first films and in the year 2000 received the Kennedy Center's Mark Twain

Prize for American Humor. Still funny at 78, when he heard of the scripts in the closet, he asked, "Did they find any dead writers in there?"

Neil Simon became one of the most famous writers in America with plays and movies such as *Barefoot in the Park*, *The Odd Couple*, *Plaza Suite*, the original *Out-of-Towners*, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Lost in Yonkers*.

Woody Allen began a movie career as just a jokesmith in *Take the Money and Run* but matured during the filming of the Academy Award-winning *Annie Hall*, then wrote and directed films that could be provocative as well as funny.

Larry Gelbart created TV's *M*A*S*H*, co-wrote the hit toga farce *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and contributed to many other films, including *Tootsie*.

And the *schlemiel* tradition lived on in the comedy of Jerry Lewis, Rodney Dangerfield, Jerry Seinfeld, Paul Reiser and Billy Crystal, and skit comedy was the basis of the long-running *Carol Burnett Show*.

Sid Caesar appeared in a few specials but is known by most younger people only for being one of the boxload of comics in *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. Afterward, an hour and a half compilation of his skits, *Ten from Your Show of Shows*, received limited theatrical distribution in 1973, and in 2000 a three-volume set of 18 skits was released on VHS and DVD. But the episodes appear technologically crude to today's audiences.

And yet, what would television and film comedy do without writers who battled inertia and blank sheets of paper and themselves so they could produce such madness? Our popular entertainment would be as vacuous as... well, let Sid Caesar tell us. Television comedy that uses a laugh track instead of a live audience "is like

playing handball without a wall." He also told a magazine in 1987 that when everything someone does or says gets a mechanical laugh, "then nothing is funny."

"I don't know why they play down to an audience," Caesar added. "If you're older than 30, there's nothing to watch."

Imogene Coca kept her talent, but there were no more major roles for her kind of zaniness, and so she had to wait for small parts here and there. She was nominated for a Tony Award for her appearance as a religious eccentric in the musical *On the Twentieth Century* in 1978. She died on June 2, 2001 in her Connecticut home at the age of 92.

Whatever happened to those 47 boxes of old scripts discovered in that New York closet? They papers are now in the Library of Congress. The curator of the Museum of Television and Radio in New York said this will let scholars examine how such ground-breaking shows were put together. And, we may hope, entertainment producers, writers, and comedians may learn something, too. Who knows, maybe the golden age is yet to come. ■



PHOTOFEST

OLD TIME
RADIO

IN THE
20TH

CENTURY

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THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WDCB • 90.9 FM • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

FEBRUARY 2002

JACK BENNY MONTH

Saluting Radio Hall of Fame Inductee Eddie "Rochester" Anderson

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 2

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (3-28-37) Jack and the gang are on the train going to Hollywood after their stay in New York and Waukegan. The porter on the train is played by **Eddie Anderson**, making his first appearance on the *Benny program*. Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris and the orchestra, singer Kenny Baker, Andy Devine, Don Wilson. Jell-O, NBC. (29 min)

SUSPENSE (4-5-51) "Murder in G-Flat" starring Jack Benny as a man who accidentally finds a considerable amount of money on the subway. AutoLite, CBS. (29 min)

★ **MAIL CALL #94 (6-2-44)** Dinah Shore emcees a salute to the State of Georgia with Bob Hope, Maria Montez, Carlos Rameriz, **Eddie "Rochester" Anderson**, Pied Pipers, Mel Blanc. AFRS. (30 min)

★ **G.I. JOURNAL #87 (4-23-45)** Jack Benny is Editor-in-Chief with Paulette Goddard, Arthur Treacher, **Eddie "Rochester" Anderson**, Mel Blanc, Ginny Simms. Treacher takes Rochester's place as Jack's butler. AFRS. (30 min)

RALEIGH-KOOL CIGARETTE PROGRAM (7-20-38) Tommy Dorsey and his orchestra with vocals by Edythe Wright and Jack Leonard. Tommy presents an Amateur Swing Contest featuring Dick Powell on cornet playing "Ida"; Ken Murray on clarinet playing "Three O'clock in the Morning"; Shirley Ross on piano with "Thanks for the Memory"; Jack Benny on violin with "My Honey's Lovin' Arms"; and Bing Crosby on drums with "Honeysuckle Rose." In a "history-making jam session" all five "musicians" offer "When You and I Were Young, Maggie." Paul Stewart is emcee. Raleigh-Kool Cigarettes, NBC. (27 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (5-18-47) Guest Al

Jolson joins Jack and the gang in New York where Jack is about to open at the Roxy Theatre. Cast features Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Dennis Day **Eddie "Rochester" Anderson**, Artie Auerbach, Sportsmen Quartet. Kenny Delmar fills in for Don Wilson. Jack and Al decide their career paths are very similar. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (27 min)



Eddie Anderson

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9

SUSPENSE (6-2-52) "A Good and Faithful Servant" starring Jack Benny as "a man who worked thirty years to prepare a most unusual retirement plan." AutoLite, CBS. (29 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (6-6-37) Jack is upset because he has lost the diamond wrist watch that he got from Phil for Christmas. **Eddie Anderson** makes his second appearance on the *Benny program*. Kenny Baker sings. Jell-O, NBC. (29 min)

★ **JUBILEE #129 (4-16-45)** Ernie "Bubbles" Whitman hosts with Benny Carter and the orchestra. Guests are **Eddie "Rochester" Anderson**, "star of the Jack Benny Program," Judy Carroll, King Cole Trio, and "ace clarinetist" Barney Bigard. Rochester tells Ernie he's quitting Jack Benny to open a weight-reducing parlor. AFRS. (31 min)

GLAMOR MANOR (10-3-46) Kenny Baker welcomes guest Jack Benny who joins regulars Sam Hearn (as Schleppeerman), Barbara Eiler, and Don Wilson. Kenny wants to borrow some

money, so Jack must go to his vault. Crisco, Ivory Snow, ABC. (28 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (5-19-46) Jack's in New York City with Don Wilson, Mary Livingstone, Dennis Day, Phil Harris, **Eddie "Rochester" Anderson**, Artie "Kitzel" Auerbach. Guest Fred Allen asks Jack to be a guest on his program. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (27 min)

FRED ALLEN SHOW (6-9-46) Guest Dennis Day joins Fred and Portland Hoffa, Kenny Delmar, Parker Fennelly, Minerva Pious, Alan Reed. Dennis is working as a waiter during his summer off from the Benny program. Blue Bonnet Margarine, Tenderleaf Tea, NBC. (29 min)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16

SPEAKING OF RADIO: The Jack Benny Program (10-1-94) Program 8 in the 12-part series offers recollections by writer George Balzer who remembers **Eddie "Rochester" Anderson** and tells how the Railroad Station gag developed. Excerpts: How Jack met Rochester (5-31-42); Rochester at sea (2-17-46); Railroad station for Colorado trip (1-11-48); Railroad station in Pasadena (1-29-50). (28 min)

LUM AND ABNER (3-10-39) When guest Jack Benny stops by to visit the Pine Ridge University to pick up his honorary degree he also drops in at the Joe-Em-Down Store. Postum, CBS. (13 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (6-30-37) The gang joins Jack on the set of the movie he's making at Paramount, "Artists and Models." Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Kenny Baker, Andy Devine, Don Wilson, and **Eddie Anderson**, referred to as "Rochester" for the first time on the program. Jell-O, NBC. (29 min)

PARAMOUNT ON THE AIR (1937) A radio preview of the film "Artists and Models" featuring scenes from the picture with Jack Benny, Gail Patrick, Ida Lupino, songs by Louis Armstrong, Martha Raye, Yacht Club Boys, Connie Boswell, and Judy, Ann and Zeke Canova. Movie Promo. (13 min)

SUSPENSE (2-2-53) "Plan X" starring Jack Benny as a Martian in the year 2053 who is chosen to deal with the "invasion rocket" from Planet Earth. Auto Lite, CBS. (29 min)

AMERICARE 39 (1968) Jack Benny appears with his violin and an "all star cast" including Frank Nelson in a two-sided Evatone recording on behalf of American Republic Insurance Company urging listeners to apply for a term life insurance program. An

unusual insurance pitch! (15 min)

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (1-28-51) Jack and the gang are in New York to do his second TV show. Jack visits Mary who is staying at a fancy hotel and they go out to have dinner at a nice French restaurant where they meet guest Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. Cast includes Phil Harris, **Eddie "Rochester" Anderson**, Dennis Day, Bea Benaderet, Mel Blanc, Joe Kearns. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (27 min)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23

JACK BENNY PROGRAM (5-24-53) Jack's sponsor is taking out a million dollar insurance policy on his star, so Jack must go to the doctor for an exam. Frank Nelson as Dr. Fenchel, Mel Blanc as Dr. Gordon, with Mary Livingstone, **Eddie "Rochester" Anderson**, Bob Crosby, Dennis Day, Don Wilson. AFRS rebroadcast. (25 min)

SUSPENSE (1-18-54) "The Face is Familiar" starring Jack Benny as a man whose nondescript appearance becomes a great asset to some underworld types. Co-starring Sheldon Leonard. AutoLite, CBS. (29 min)

FRED ALLEN SHOW (6-8-47) Guest is **Eddie "Rochester" Anderson** who wants to be Fred's summer replacement. Rochester joins Fred for a "One Long Pan" sketch, "I Stand Condemned." Portland Hoffa, Kenny Delmar, Parker Fennelly, Minerva Pious, Peter Donald, DeMarco Sisters. Shefford Cheese, Tenderleaf Tea, NBC. (29 min)

LUX RADIO THEATRE RE-CREATION (2-10-02) Our *Those Were The Days Radio Players* present a re-enactment of the February 15, 1937 *Lux Radio Theatre* which starred Jack Benny and Mary Livingstone in "Brewster's Millions." It's a comedy about a man who must spend a small fortune to inherit a larger one. *Recorded before a studio audience at the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago.* (Approximately 60 min) *See the articles about the TWTD Radio Players beginning on page 36.*

★ **JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (2-22-42) Jack and the gang broadcast before an all-soldier audience in San Francisco, California. Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Dennis Day, **Eddie "Rochester" Anderson**, Don Wilson all appear on the program which is being "short-waved" to military audiences world-wide, including to General MacArthur and his men in the Philippines." Jell-O, NBC. (29 min.)

★ INDICATES A WORLD WAR II BROADCAST OF SPECIAL INTEREST



Chuck Schaden's

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WDCB • 90.9 FM • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

MARCH 2002

SATURDAY, MARCH 2

PHILCO RADIO TIME (10-16-46) Bing Crosby stars in the premier show of the series, with guest Bob Hope and regulars Lena Romay, Charlottees, pianist Skitch Henderson, John Scott Trotter and the orchestra. This is a *milestone broadcast* for radio as it's the first *transcribed* (pre-recorded) entertainment program heard on a network. Philco Radios, ABC. (29 min) *Read the article on page 26.*

HOME FORUM (9-5-39) Elizabeth Hart presents a program for homemakers featuring fashions for the Fall season, "face" fashions, "penny stretchers," and music. WENR, Chicago. (15 min)

THE WHISTLER (12-6-53) "Generous Host" starring J. Anthony Smythe. A man is befriended by a wealthy man who plans to rob him and later marry his niece." AFRS broadcast. (22 min)

SPEAKING OF STARS (6-18-71) Comedienne Imogene Coca and actor King Donovan (husband and wife) recall their show business television careers in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded in Chicago. Imogene Coca died in 2001 at age 92. (24 min)

FORD V-8 REVUE (1936) "Fifteen minutes of

melody" presented by the Ford Rhythm Orchestra, Happy Hamilton, and the Do-Re-Me Girls. Music includes "You Are My Lucky Star" and "Thanks a Million." Ford Motors, Syndicated. (15 min)

BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW (10-18-45) It's George and Gracie with Bill Goodwin, Les Paul Trio, Meredith Willson and the orchestra, and Mel Blanc as Mr. Postman who tells Gracie that Meredith plans to get married. Gracie counsels Meredith on how to handle women. Maxwell House Coffee, NBC. (29 min)

★ **FIRESIDE CHAT** (2-23-42) *Excerpt.* President Franklin D. Roosevelt reports to the nation on the state of the war eleven weeks after Pearl Harbor. He talks about Gen. MacArthur being forced to withdraw from Manila; wartime rumors and truth; Axis propaganda; and mentions the Four Freedoms. All Networks. (22 min)

THE SHADOW (1-19-41) "The Shadow Challenged" starring Bill Johnstone as Lamont Cranston with Marjorie Anderson as the lovely Margo Lane. The Shadow is blamed when Professor Rice is murdered for an ancient manuscript. Blue Coal, MBS. (27 min)

SATURDAY, MARCH 9 OLD TIME RADIO ITALIANO STYLE

Rescheduled from a previous date.

★ **FIRST NIGHTER** (3-10-49) "No Greater Need" starring Barbara Luddy and Olan Soule in a drama from the "Little Theatre off Times Square." After the war, an American doctor returns to the port of Salerno, Italy to see that a shipment of streptomycin has arrived safely. Campana's Italian Balm, CBS. (27 min)

FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY (9-13-37) Jim and Marian Jordan star. As the theatrical season opens in Wistful Vista, McGee — as author, director, producer and actor — hopes to

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present a drama set in ancient Rome. Cast includes Bill Thompson, Harold Peary, Hugh Studebaker, Isabel Randolph, Harlow Wilcox, Ted Weems and the orchestra with singer Perry Como. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

★ **READER'S DIGEST RADIO EDITION** (12-11-47) "Giuseppe and the Sergeant" stars Wayne Morris in a touching story of heroism and sacrifice based on a real incident in Italy during WW II. Everett Sloane is Giuseppe. Les Tremayne is host while Tom Shirley announces. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (30 min)

BIG CITY SERENADE (1953) Offering a musical tour of the famous city of Florence, Italy are singer Kyle Kimbrough, narrator Bill Griskey, and Joseph Gallicchio and the orchestra. Sustaining, NBC. (29 min)

MARCONI MEMORIAL (7-20-37) On the day of his death, at the age of 63, the Mutual Broadcasting System pays tribute to Guglielmo Marconi, "the great Italian inventor and scientist known as 'the Father of Radio'." Charles Benford narrates. Sustaining, WOR/MBS. (14 min)

LIFE WITH LUIGI (3-27-49) J. Carrol Naish stars as Luigi Basco. It's Springtime in Chicago and Luigi has Spring Fever! He has a date but, because he doesn't know how to dance, signs up for a crash course at Arthur Murray's Dance Studio. Regulars include Alan Reed, Hans Conried, Mary Shipp. Sustaining, CBS. (30 min)

THIRD MAN (8-10-51) "See Naples and Live" starring Orson Welles as Harry Lime, the Third Man. In Italy, Lime is after a valuable emerald locket worn by a rich American traveler. Zither music by Anton Karas. Syndicated. (27 min)

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

BUSTER BROWN GANG (1-15-49) Smilin' Ed McConnell tells the story of "The Enchanted King" and presents fun for kids with Squeaky the Mouse, Midnight the Cat, Froggie the Gremlin, and Alkali Pete, the Cowboy. Buster Brown Shoes, NBC. (28 min)

SPEAKING OF STARS (8-11-71) Sid Caesar recalls his television career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded backstage at the Drury Lane Theatre in Evergreen Park, Illinois. (31 min)

★ **GREAT GILDERSLEEVE** (3-29-42) Harold Peary stars as Gildy with Lurene Tuttle as Marjorie, Walter Tetley as Leroy, Lillian Randolph as Birdie, Earle Ross as Judge Hooker.

Marjorie is doing her part in the war effort by writing letters to servicemen. Gildy and Leroy offer to help her out. Kraft Foods, NBC. (30 min)

★ **SUSPENSE** (5-24-45) "My Own Murderess" starring Herbert Marshall with Norman Lloyd, Cathy Lewis, Jane Morgan. A murderer seeks shelter from his attorney by blackmailing him. Roma Wine, CBS. (30 min)

ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET (3-20-49) Ozzie has to discuss the ancient Greeks at a PTA meeting. John Brown is Thorny, David and Rickey portray themselves. International Silver Co., NBC. (29 min)

HALLMARK PLAYHOUSE (4-21-49) "Kitty Foyle" starring June Allyson in a radio adaptation of Christopher Morley's story of a working girl. James Hilton hosts. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (29 min)

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

BOB HOPE SHOW (1950s) Broadcasting from Fort Belvoir, Virginia, Bob talks about Republicans and Gen. Eisenhower. Guest is Marilyn Maxwell who joins Bob in a "Caesar and Cleopatra" sketch. AFRS rebroadcast. (24 min)

CBS RADIO WORKSHOP (10-26-56) "When the Mountain Fell" with Berry Kroeger, Jackson Beck, Joseph Julian, John Gibson. When an avalanche buries a valley, a "ghost" emerges from the dead. This is the series "dedicated to man's imagination... the theatre of the mind." Sustaining, CBS. (28 min)

SALUTE TO JAY ANDRES— Honoring the legendary Chicago broadcaster with selected excerpts from his on-the-air career including clips from *Music 'Til Dawn* (WBBM); *Great Music from Chicago* (WGN); *Morning Song* (WNIB); *Sounds Overheard* (WDCB) and from his early days in radio on station WMAW, Milwaukee. (Approximately 75 min) *Read the article about Jay Andres on page 12.*

JIMMY DURANTE SHOW (3-24-48) Guest Victor Moore joins the Schnozzola in his continuing run for public office, Jimmy outlines his campaign strategy. Cast features Candy Candido, Roy Bargy and the orchestra, Alan Reed, Dave Berry, Crew Chiefs quartet. Rexall, NBC. (29 min)

MR. DISTRICT ATTORNEY (1940s) "Case of One Slip Meant Death" stars Jay Jostyn as Mr. D. A., with Vicki Vola as Miss Miller and Len Doyle as Harrington. It appears to be no accident when a tiger causes a death at the

★ INDICATES A WORLD WAR II BROADCAST OF SPECIAL INTEREST

OLD TIME
RADIO

IN THE
20
CENTURY

CENTURY

Chuck Schaden's

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WDCB • 90.9 FM • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

MARCH 2002

SATURDAY, MARCH 30 RADIO'S EASTER PARADE

circus. Bristol Myers, NBC. (28 min)

PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW (4-17-49)

Alice invites the girls' school principal to dinner on Easter Sunday. Cast includes Elliott Lewis, Robert North, Walter Tetley, Jeanine Roos, Anne Whitfield. Rexall, NBC. (29 min)

HALLMARK PLAYHOUSE (4-14-49) "One Foot in Heaven" starring George Brent in the Hartzell Spence story about a Methodist preacher "with one foot in Heaven and one foot on God's green earth" as he sets up his parsonage in a small Iowa town. James Hilton hosts. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (29 min)

MEL BLANC SHOW (4-8-47) Mel offers a \$100 prize when the Chamber of Commerce organizes an Easter Egg Hunt. Joining in the fun are Mary Jane Croft, Hans Conried, Joe Kearns, Alan Reed, Jim Backus, Sportsmen Quartet, Victor Miller and the orchestra. Colgate-Palmolive, CBS. (3 min)

EASTER PARADE (4-17-36) *Excerpt.* George Hicks reports on the Easter Parade in New York City, speaking to paraders about fashions. He's wearing formal morning attire, but in his top hat he has a small radio transmitter: "a walking radio station" which he describes in detail. Sustaining, NBC. (14 min)



HOLLYWOOD STAR TIME (4-21-46) "The Song of Bernadette" starring Vincent Price, Lee J. Cobb, and Vanessa Brown. Frigidare/General Motors, CBS. (29 min)

FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY (3-23-48) Molly wins a local merchants' contest and the prize is a special Easter dress. Cast features Gale Gordon, Bill Thompson, Arthur Q. Brian, King's Men, Billy Mills and the orchestra, Harlow Wilcox. Johnson's Wax, NBC. (30 min)

GREAT GILDERSLEEVE (4-9-52) Willard Waterman stars as Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve, with Walter Tetley, MaryLee Robb, Lillian Randolph. Leroy, Marjorie and Birdie persuade Gildy to get up a 4 a.m. to attend the Sunrise Easter service. Birdie sings "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" Kraft Foods,

...coming in April...

32nd Anniversary Broadcast of *Those Were The Days*

...and for more good listening...

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 55th year on the air! WJOL, 1340 AM, Saturday, 9-11 am.

SATURDAY SWING SHIFT-- Bruce Oscar is host for this two-hour show featuring swing music on record performed by the big bands, pop singers and small groups. WDCB, 90.9 FM, Saturday, 11 am-1 pm.

MIDWEST BALLROOM-- John Russell hosts a big band program featuring Chicago area orchestras and dance bands. WDCB, 90.9 FM, Saturday, 5-6 pm.

"When Radio Was" -- WBBM-AM 780

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

February, 2002 Schedule

FRI/2-1	Suspense 12-9-43 <i>The Night Reveals</i> ; Blackstone , Magic Detective 1-23-49 <i>Intermezzo</i>
MON/2-4	Nero Wolfe 10-20-50 <i>Stamped for Murder</i> ; Burns & Allen 11-2-43 <i>Jack Benny</i> Pt 1
TUES/2-5	Burns & Allen Pt 2; Screen Guild Players 7-2-45 <i>Standing Room Only</i> Ray Milland
WED/2-6	Have Gun, Will Travel 12-7-58; Abbott & Costello 3-1-45 <i>Guest Frank Sinatra</i> Pt 1
THU/2-7	Abbott & Costello Pt 2; X Minus One 12-12-57 <i>Haunted Corpse</i>
FRI/2-8	The Shadow 2-27-38 <i>Murder Plot</i> ; Vic & Sade 12-7-42 <i>Breaking up Lee Street</i>
MON/2-11	Dragnet 2-22-53 <i>The Big Smoke</i> ; Life of Riley 2-6-44 <i>Riley rents a house</i> Pt 1
TUES/2-12	Life of Riley Pt 2; Big Town 12-1-48 <i>Lost and Found</i>
WED/2-13	Lone Ranger 7-7-54 <i>Mysterious Mission</i> ; Jack Benny 1-2-49 <i>First CBS show</i> Pt 1
THU/2-14	Jack Benny Pt 2; Mysterious Traveler 5-2-50 <i>S.O.S. with Maurice Tarplin</i>
FRI/2-15	Suspense 1-13-44 <i>Dime A Dance</i> Lucille Ball; Couple Next Door 2-10-58 <i>House for Sale</i>
MON/2-18	Gunsmoke 11-29-52 <i>Kitty</i> ; Fibber McGee 2-9-54 <i>New Neighbor</i> Pt 1
TUES/2-19	Fibber McGee Pt 2; Nightbeat 4-10-50 <i>I Know Your Secret</i> Frank Lovejoy
WED/2-20	Box Thirteen 8-15-50 <i>Diamond in the Sky</i> ; Great Gildersleeve 5-17-42 Pt 1
THU/2-21	Great Gildersleeve <i>College Chum</i> Pt 2; Escape 1-17-48 <i>Leinengen vs. the Ants</i>
FRI/2-22	The Shadow 12-21-39 <i>The Cat That Killed</i> ; Bickersons 1940s <i>Ameche & Langford</i>
MON/2-25	Let George Do It 5-14-46 <i>First Client</i> ; Phil Harris & Alice Faye 11-6-49 <i>TV Pilot</i> Pt 1
TUE/2-26	Phil Harris & Alice Faye Pt 2; Takes of Texas Rangers 3-18-51 <i>Death by Adoption</i>
WED/2-27	Rocky Jordan 11-6-49 <i>Black Ball</i> ; Stan Freberg Show 7-21-57 <i>Program 2</i> Pt 1
THU/2-28	Stan Freberg Pt 2; Broadway is My Beat 7-28-49 <i>Paul Thomas Case</i> Larry Thor

March, 2002 Schedule

FRI/3-1	Suspense 8-31-44 <i>Black Path of Fear</i> ; Johnny Dollar 12-5-55 <i>Cronin Matter</i> Pt 1 of 5
MON/3-4	Gunsmoke 8-9-52 <i>Kentucky Tolmans</i> ; Great Gildersleeve 6-9-42 <i>Pot Roast</i> Pt 1
TUES/3-5	Great Gildersleeve Pt 2; Nick Carter 12-24-44 <i>Murder Goes to College</i> Lon Clark
WED/3-6	Richard Diamond 12-3-49 <i>King Tut Idol</i> ; Lum & Abner 11-7-48 <i>Bulldogging</i> Pt 1
THU/3-7	Lum & Abner Pt 2; Texas Rangers 1-14-51 <i>Death in the Cards</i> Joel McCrea
FRI/3-8	The Shadow 9-19-48 <i>Revenge in Murder</i> ; Johnny Dollar 12-6-55 <i>Cronin Matter</i> Pt 2/5
MON/3-11	Dimension X 7-28-50 <i>Potters of Firsk</i> ; Burns & Allen 1-25-44 <i>Paul Henried</i> Pt 1
TUES/3-12	Burns & Allen Pt 2; Dragnet 3-29-53 <i>The Big Dream</i> Jack Webb
WED/3-13	Damon Runyon Theatre 8-22-50 <i>Butch Minds the Baby</i> ; Life with Luigi 1-3-50 Pt 1
THU/3-14	Life with Luigi <i>Pietro needs an overcoat</i> Pt 2; Green Hornet 10-19-46 <i>Killer Carson</i>
FRI/3-15	Suspense 5-24-54 <i>Weekend Special: Death A. Moorehead</i> ; Johnny Dollar 12-7-55 Pt 3
MON/3-18	The Falcon 5-14-50 <i>Case of Amorous Bookkeeper</i> ; Jack Benny 12-5-48 Pt 1
TUES/3-19	Jack Benny <i>Violin Lessons</i> Pt 2; Lights Out 7-16-47 <i>Death Robbery</i> Boris Karloff
WED/3-20	The Whistler 4-8-46 <i>Terror Stricken</i> ; Life of Riley 2-11-49 <i>Babs Elopes with Simon</i> Pt 1
THU/3-21	Life of Riley Pt 2; Cisco Kid 4-7-53 <i>Secret Mission</i> Jack Mather
FRI/3-22	The Shadow 11-7-48 <i>Evil in the House</i> ; Johnny Dollar 12-8-55 <i>Cronin Matter</i> Pt 4/5
MON/3-25	Six Shooter 10-18-53 <i>Rink Larkin</i> Jim Stewart; Fibber McGee 9-27-49 <i>Fish dinner</i> Pt 1
TUE/3-26	Fibber McGee Pt 2; This is Your FBI 9-7-51 <i>Curious Fisherman</i> Stacy Harris
WED/3-27	Lone Ranger 7-9-54 <i>Trouble at Rafter H</i> ; Stan Freberg Show 7-28-57 <i>Program 3</i> Pt 1
THU/3-28	Stan Freberg Pt 2; Bold Venture 10-21-51 <i>Quan Yen Statue</i> H. Bogart and L. Bacall
FRI/3-29	Suspense 5-4-44 <i>Dark Tower</i> Orson Welles; Johnny Dollar 12-9-55 <i>Cronin Matter</i> Pt 5

How Bing Crosby Made Radio History

BY WILLIAM J. RYAN

The love of one Hollywood superstar for his ranch and his dislike of the technological inefficiencies of broadcasting, helped speed the acceptance of audio tape in broadcasting.

Bing Crosby saw audio tape as a springboard to a happier personal life, believing that if he could tape his weekly shows in advance, he would not have to stay in Hollywood during the fall and winter, broadcasting his highly rated *Kraft Music Hall* on NBC.

Crosby also had a strong distaste of being forced to perform a repeat broadcast of *Kraft Music Hall* for the West Coast; he wanted to do one show and call it a day.

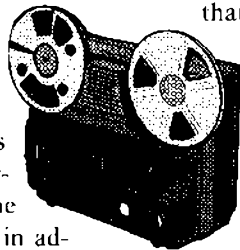
Crosby cherished the ranch he owned in Elko County, Nevada, which was far from Los Angeles.

When it became clear early in 1946 that magnetic tape recording might be feasible, Murdo Mackenzie, the technical producer for Crosby, picked up on it. A demo of the new machines convinced Crosby and Mackenzie, and the rest is history.

In his book "None of Your Business," Carroll Carroll, who was Crosby's writer and the ad agency man for Kraft, wrote that

William J. Ryan is a retired journalist who spent 17 years with United Press International. He was also a college teacher and administrator. This article originally appeared in Radio World newspaper and is used with permission. For information visit www.rwonline.com

Crosby acquired a financial interest in "a clever little item, now called audio tape, that a couple of thoughtful GIs brought home with them from Germany."



Carroll wrote, "It was Bing, with his stake in tape, who used the muscle of his box office power to force it onto the network-dominated broadcast industry." Crosby had hosted the *Kraft Music Hall* for 10 years, beginning in 1936.

Kraft made a huge but unsuccessful effort to keep Crosby, even offering Kraft stock, "a new ploy at the time," according to Carroll.

Neither CBS nor NBC, Crosby's network, would play recorded programs. That was their policy, and they stuck to it. So the Crosby people went out looking for sponsors and for a network that would allow him to record.

"He was then in a position to offer this show to any network that would break down and allow this new form of recording to breach the rule that all its broadcasts must be live," Carroll wrote.

"The American Broadcasting Company, once the Blue Network of NBC, eager to do anything to put itself in contention with the two older nets, bought Crosby's idea in order to get Bing," Carroll wrote. "By so doing it launched audio tape and changed the face of radio broadcasting."

This was a huge prestige coup for ABC. Beginning in the fall of 1946, electronics giant Philco became the new Crosby sponsor.



The familiar *Kraft Music Hall* became *Philco Radio Time*, but with the same cast, same orchestra and guest stars.

One of the ABC engineers who worked on the Crosby show was Bob McGaughey. The Crosby show was recorded for part of the first season on ABC, but it was on a multiple disk and segue arrangement according to McGaughey.

McGaughey played back the show, which had been recorded in sections on 16-inch disks.

"They started on the outside of the disk and recorded three to four inches toward the middle before stopping, with the next disk already going so there would be an overlap and no loss of material," McGaughey said. "They were cut at 78 rpm to preserve the music quality. This made for a stack of disks five to six inches

high, which I had to handle.

"There was a gallery of people in an audition studio behind a glass window who watched every move I made during the playback process," McGaughey recalled.

He said that even though the show ran on the ABC network, it was produced in what was called the "Intercept Studio" at NBC. ABC apparently leased the facility because it had no suitable studios of its own.

"NBC engineers also did the cutting of the show I played back on ABC because they had a large bank of Scully lathes," McGaughey said.

"McGaughey said that after the Crosby show completely switched to audio tape he was the first person to play the magnetic tape for the network.

"We had four of the big Ampexes," he said, adding that the machines were approximately 4-foot tall, 3-foot deep, and 5- to 6-foot wide.

"In the beginning we used the red German tape because the first 3M would not lie flat," he said. According to McGaughey. The original Ampex machines did not use supply and take-up reels, but, rather, large horizontal plates on which the tapes were wound from the center hub, necessitating their lying flat.

As new and more satisfactory tapes were developed, and Ampex made improvements on its machines, NBC and CBS finally agreed that recordings of network quality could actually be made.

ABC managed to hang onto the Crosby show for a few seasons before Bing went to CBS. By this time, magnetic tape recording was accepted throughout the broadcast industry as the standard, thanks in large part to Bing Crosby. ■

NOTE—Tune in TWTD March 2 to hear Bing Crosby's first recorded broadcast of Philco Radio Time.

The Show Did Not Go On

BY DAVID COWAN

“Absolutely fireproof.”

That was how the Iroquois Theater, Chicago's newest and most beautiful show palace, was introduced to the public in late 1903. By all appearances the Iroquois was indeed a bright and modern example of fire-resistant construction, a building the Chicago Tribune called a “virtual temple of beauty.” But just five weeks after opening its doors, the Iroquois turned into a flaming death trap, killing 602 people, mostly women and children.

The weather in Chicago on December 30, 1903, was clear and sunny but very cold. The frigid temperatures, however, did not deter the holiday crowd from venturing to the Iroquois that fateful Wednesday afternoon to attend a sellout performance of the hit comedy *Mr. Bluebeard*. Many in the audience had come from out-of-town and were eager to see popular funnyman Eddie Foy perform his much-advertised elephant act. Officially, the Iroquois seated 1,600, making it the largest theater in the country. But with school out for the Christmas break, that afternoon's matinee performance played to an overflow crowd of nearly 2,000 people, 200 of whom held standing-room-only tickets. Patrons filled every seat and stood four-deep in aisles that

stretched from the orchestra up through three balconies. Crowded also behind the stage were 400 members of the theater company—actors, dancers, and stagehands.

Even before it opened, the \$1-million showpiece theater, designed by architect Benjamin H. Marshall and patterned after the Opera Comique in Paris, had been much acclaimed. Located downtown on the north side of Randolph Street between State and Dearborn Streets, the interior of the four-story theater was magnificently plush, with much mahogany and stained glass throughout. The dazzling lobby, with its ornate 60-foot-high ceiling, featured white marble walls fitted with large mirrors framed in gold leaf and stone. Two grand uncarpeted marble staircases that led to the upper balconies further enhanced the regal appearance of the entryway. Outside, the building's front facade resembled a Greek temple with a high stone archway supported by two massive columns. The archway was the counterpart of a monument in Paris commemorating the death of 150 victims in a fire at a charity bazaar there in 1857. The design would prove eerily prophetic.

To assure the public, Marshall had studied prior theater fires, including the tragic Brooklyn Theater fire of 1876 in which 276 died, and made every effort to establish safety at the Iroquois. The new theater had 25 exits that, it was claimed, could empty the entire building in less than five minutes. In the event of a fire on stage or in the loft above it, an asbestos curtain could be quickly lowered to protect the audience. As an added measure, the Iroquois' management hired off-duty firefighters to be

David Cowan is the author of the new book *Great Chicago Fires: Historic Blazes That*

Shaped a City published by Lake Claremont Press (\$19.95 softcover, 167 pages, 86 photos), 773/583-



7800. Excerpt printed with permission.



Historic front page of the *Chicago Tribune* the day after the Iroquois Theater fire. It was devoted entirely to the names of the victims.

on hand during performances and provided them hand-operated fire extinguishers.

It all sounded impressive, but on the afternoon of December 30, 1903, the reality was troubling. Seats in the "fireproof" theater were wooden and stuffed with hemp, and much of the advertised precautionary fire equipment employed "just in case" a fire should break out had not been installed at all. The theater had no fire alarm, and there was no fire alarm box outside its front doors. In the rush to open the theater on time, several other key safety factors had been either overlooked or ignored completely. It was against this backdrop of greed and careless haste that tragedy struck.

At 3:20 P.M., at the beginning of Act II, the curtain went up and the house lights were darkened. Powerful spotlights created a soft midnight scene, bathing the stage in bluish-green hues as a bright harvest moon, projected against the scenery by another spotlight, started rising in the background. The audience applauded with enthusiastic delight when the orchestra struck up the overture to "In the Pale Moonlight" and pretty ballerinas costumed in blue and gold pirouetted across the left side of the stage.

According to most accounts, it was precisely at this moment that a bright flash was seen near one of the floodlights over the right side of the stage. It was never known for sure whether the light came into contact with a piece of red velvet curtain hanging next to it, or if the light's wires overheated and arced. Regardless of its source, heat generated by the flash produced a finger of fire six inches long and two inches wide. At first the small flame traveled spiderlike across the edge of the drape, the fourth one back from the stage, then spread upwards, catching onto the oil-painted and highly flammable canvas, paper, and wood backdrops hanging by oiled manila ropes in the loft above.

Two stagehands working below saw the flame and reacted quickly. One found a long stick used to change scenery sets and tried beating it out. When bits of flaming curtain and scenery started falling to the wooden floor, an off-duty firefighter and another stage worker ran up and emptied two small Kilfyre chemical fire extinguishers on them. Other stagehands tried and failed to stomp the fire out. Burning debris continued to fall throughout the concealed backstage area, sparking numerous spot

fires. In seconds, the small loft fire spread rapidly to the unprotected upper curtains and heavy combustible sets hanging directly above the stage. From this point conditions inside the "fireproof" theater deteriorated quickly as its auditorium began filling with smoke. The audience became aware that something was wrong when a flaming piece of drapery swung across the stage, causing the cast and several members of the orchestra to look up. But when smoke began filling the auditorium and large pieces of burning scenery dropped on the stage, the orchestra and the playgoers began abandoning their seats.

Eddy Foy was in his dressing room busily applying the final touches of makeup when the drama of the fire in the loft began to overshadow the production on stage. Dressed in his "Sister Anne" costume, he was due to appear in a few minutes opposite a comic elephant. When he heard the commotion he opened his dressing room door, ran to the stage, and saw the fire. Acting on instinct, he burst onto center stage and raised his hands, imploring the audience to remain seated and calm. "Ladies and gentlemen," Foy exclaimed, "there is no danger. This theater is fireproof. Don't get excited." He signaled conductor Herbert Gillea to direct the remaining six musicians to "play, play, play and keep playing." They struck up the waltz from Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* ballet, which had a temporary, soothing effect on the crowd. After more flaming sets came crashing down onto the stage, Foy signaled a stagehand to lower the asbestos curtain to protect the audience. But the curtain snagged half-way down, possibly on a cable wire used to hoist a ballerina, or on an electric light reflector, leaving a 20-foot gap between the curtain's suspended bottom and the wooden stage floor.

The audience's escape down the aisles turned from orderly to panic-stricken.

Foy's one last try to calm them went unheeded, and he fled to a rear stage exit. With hundreds of children in tow, the audience of mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and schoolteachers scrambled for the exits. Almost immediately the aisles leading from the auditorium gallery and upper balconies became clogged and impassable. When the lights went out the crowd bunched up in blind terror and died at the exits and hallway doors that either opened inward or were locked shut to keep out freeloaders. With the auditorium filling with heat, smoke, and poisonous gases that made breathing impossible, children and mothers screamed for one another in the darkness and families became separated in the crushing stampede. Many children fell and were stomped to death.

Backstage, theater employees and cast members opened a rear set of huge double doors which sucked a powerful wind tunnel inside, fanning the flames and sending huge sheets of fire underneath the open asbestos curtain and into galleries and balconies filled with people. A second gust of wind created a fireball that shot into the auditorium, incinerating patrons in their seats or in the aisles. All of the stage drops were now on fire, which spread to the entire auditorium, destroyed the 75,000 feet of oiled manila rope suspended above the loft, and burned the supposedly noncombustible asbestos curtain.

The scene outside the theater was unsuspecting and normal. Most accounts say the fire had been burning for at least 15 minutes before a faint wisp of smoke was noticed by passers-by. Because there was no fire alarm box located outside the theater's front doors, someone ran around the corner to turn in an alarm at the nearby firehouse of Engine Co. 13. Legend says it was off-duty firefighter Michael J. Corrigan, later to become one of Chicago's



The Iroquois Theater after the disastrous 1903 fire that killed 602 people and ranks, to this day, as America's worst single building fire.

more notable fire commissioners; other reports say it was a stagchand. When the first firefighters pulled up moments later in their horse-driven steamers, hose carts, and aerial ladders, they thought it was a false alarm.

That changed quickly when they had

difficulty getting into the auditorium because so many bodies were stacked up at the doors. "Pull a third alarm," yelled Fire Marshal Bill Musham, who had responded from his nearby city hall office. The men tore at the bodies with pike poles, pulling them down and peeling them off one an-

other, clearing enough room to climb over. Once inside, they stretched their hoses through the side doors or directly over the stacks of bodies. It took only ten minutes to douse the remaining flames because the intense heat had already burned up most of the combustibles. As the firefighters made their way further into the darkness of the charred interior, they were met by silence and the stench of burned bodies. "Is there any living person here?" one fire marshal shouted. "If there is any living person in here, groan or make a sound."

No one did.

The gallery and upper balconies had sustained the greatest loss of life. Here, the fleeing patrons had run up against locked doors that blocked access to the stairways. Firefighters found 200 bodies stacked ten high and a score deep. At the very top of the auditorium the audience had fought so fiercely to escape that they ripped the iron railings from the balconies, leaping upon the people below. Death, mainly from asphyxiation, came quickly to those who made it into the hallways and back aisles. But those caught in the auditorium were burned to death. Those who made it to the fire escape door behind the top balcony found the iron staircase missing. In its place was a railed platform that led not to safety but to a 100-foot drop to the narrow cobblestone alley below.

Across the alley behind the theater, painters were cleaning up from an earlier and unrelated fire in a building occupied by Northwestern University's dental school. When they saw what was happening in the theater, they reacted quickly, erecting a makeshift bridge of long painting ladders and wooden planks that they extended across the alley to the fire escape ledge. Reports vary as to how many it saved. One says 12 people crawled to safety, but that at least seven others fell to their deaths. Other accounts say scores jumped or were

pushed off the ledge. Regardless of which is true, newspapers later dubbed the narrow area behind the theater "Death Alley" because of the 125 bodies found piled there—either from falling or being stacked there by firemen.

As the afternoon turned to early evening, bodies were removed from the theater at a rate of four a minute. The dead were covered with sheets and lined up on the sidewalk or taken into nearby stores where temporary morgues had been set up, including Marshall Field's around the corner on State Street. The victims came from 13 states and 86 cities. Chicago's 300 dead included 102 school children and 39 teachers. All but one of the 348 members of the *Bluebeard* Company escaped. The exception was Miss Nellie Reed, the principal of the flying ballet. When the fire erupted in the loft, she got caught on a tight wire and was badly burned. She died later in Cook County Hospital. Several families suffered more than one loss. William Hoyt, a prosperous wholesale grocer who had come to Chicago in the 1850s from his native Vermont, had lost everything in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. But he started over, constructing a new building on the site of the old Fort Dearborn. This time the toll was more than material: his daughter Emilie and her three children, ages 15, 12, and 9, had all died. Hoyt's son-in-law, Frederick Morton Fox, never recovered from his grief, and he too died a few months later.

The next day, newspapers devoted full pages to lists of known dead and injured. A total of 572 had died, some of them never identified. Another 250 were injured of whom 30 would succumb in the following weeks. The heart-breaking death toll included 212 children. News wires carried reports of the holocaust around the country, and it quickly became a national tragedy. Because it was the end of December,



Interior view of the Iroquois showing the stage area where fire ignited draperies and spread quickly to combustible scenery props.

Chicago Mayor Carter H. Harrison, Jr. issued an order banning any public New Year's Eve celebrations. Nightclubs were closed and the sounding of horns and the lighting of fireworks were forbidden. Every church and factory bell in the city was also ordered silenced. Two days later, on January 2, 1904, Chicago observed an official day of mourning.

An investigation of the fire and the findings of a coroner's jury brought to light a number of troubling facts. To begin, because they had not been completed in time for the theater's scheduled opening, two pop-open smoke vents fitted in the roof behind the stage had been nailed shut to keep out snow and rain. These vents had been designed to allow smoke and poisonous gases generated by a blaze in the loft to be filtered out of the building. But because the vents were not working on the day of the fire, the products of combus-

tion had nowhere to go except back into the theater. This fact alone contributed significantly to the high death toll by asphyxiation. Another finding showed the supposedly "fireproof" asbestos curtain that had been designed to protect the audience from flames was not fireproof at all. The curtain, which had been destroyed, consisted of cotton and other combustible materials.

And this was only the beginning.

Because there had been no pre-fire planning by the fire department or theater management, ushers and other personnel had no idea what to do in case of fire. Moreover, the theater had no fire alarm system, and sprinklers were considered too costly and too unsightly, not to mention unnecessary, thanks to all the other "built-in" fire protection. To keep freeloaders out and paying customers in, the Iroquois' management had quietly bolted nine pairs of iron panels over the rear doors and in-

stalled illegal, padlocked, accordion-like gates at the top of the interior second- and third-floor stairway landings. To prevent the audience from being distracted, management ordered all exit lights shut off during performances. One exit sign left on led to a women's restroom, another to a locked door on a private stairway. Those routes ended in fatal cul-de-sacs. Other exits had been covered with thick draperies. The doors of the outside exits that were supposed to enable the theater to empty in five minutes opened *inward*, not outward.

In the ensuing cover-up, officials from the city and the fire department denied any knowledge of fire code violations, instead placing blame on inspectors who allegedly overlooked the shortcomings in exchange for free theater passes. A grand jury indicted several individuals for criminal negligence, including theater co-owners Will Davis and Harry Powers, Fire Chief William Musham, Building Commissioner George Williams, Mayor Carter Henry Harrison II, a city inspector who had toured the building, and two off-duty firefighters who had been hired by the theater as fire guards. All were exonerated. Chief Musham did resign the following October after he was accused of failing to enforce fire laws at the theater. In 1871, he had been the first firefighter to get water on the O'Leary barn, and his resignation came on the 29th anniversary of the Great Chicago Fire. Families of the dead filed about 275 civil lawsuits, but not one dollar was ever collected because the Iroquois Theater Company filed bankruptcy.

With all the scenery, props, and costumes destroyed, the production of *Mr. Bluebeard* came to an abrupt end. But the theater building itself had been practically unscathed; structural damage came to \$50,000. After repairs, the Iroquois reopened briefly in 1904 as Hyde and

Behman's Music Hall, and then again in 1905, as the Colonial Theater. In 1924, the building was razed to make way for a new theater, The Oriental, which operated on the site until the mid-1980s, when it too fell into disrepair and closed. After an extensive restoration, in 1998 the Oriental reopened as the Ford Center for the Performing Arts, the anchor of a revitalized North Loop theater district.

Like many catastrophes, some good did emerge from the Iroquois ruins. Among the benchmark laws enacted in the fire's wake were those requiring outward-opening exit doors to remain unlocked from the inside and to be fitted with panic hardware. Other mandatory upgrades for theaters included exit lights, automatic sprinklers, standpipes, fire alarm systems, and flame-resistant scenery, props, and curtains.

The Iroquois Theater fire ranks as the nation's fourth deadliest and the deadliest single-building fire. For Chicago, only one other calamity proved more lethal: in 1915 the Great Lakes steamer *Eastland* capsized in the Chicago River at Clark Street, claiming 835 lives. (Where the *Eastland* overturned is only three short blocks away from the site of the Iroquois building. Superstitious readers can note that each location is in the fire district of Engine Co. 13, which responded to both incidents.)

Like the Titanic that could not sink, the "fireproof" Iroquois stands as yet another monument to human failure to anticipate the consequences of haste and greed, not to mention our failure to respect the destructiveness of fire. Today the story of the Iroquois is largely forgotten, and no marker commemorates the site. Yet in theaters and public venues everywhere, laws requiring panic hardware on outward-opening doors, and lighted exit signs above doorways, can trace their origin to a cold December day in 1903 when the show did not go on. ■

Those Were The Days Radio Players

A Decade of Re-creations

BY KONI SHAUGHNESSY

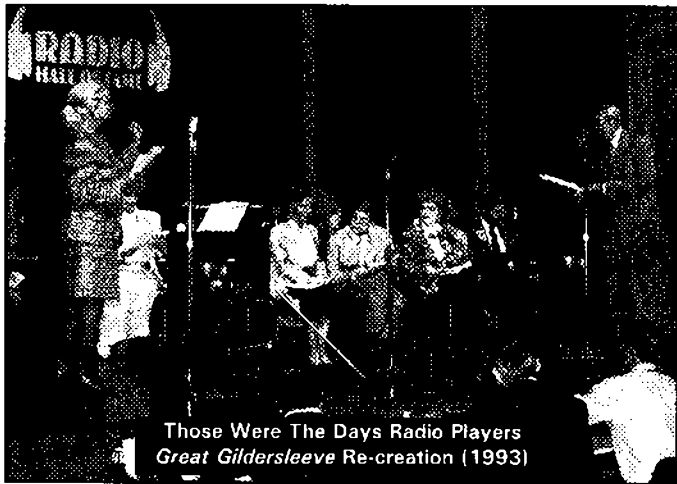
Tired of the everyday grind? Ever dream of a life of... romantic adventure? Want to get away from it all?

Escape with the *Those Were The Days Radio Players*, now observing their tenth anniversary, as they present re-creations of vintage radio shows monthly at the Museum of Broadcast Communications and regularly throughout Chicagoland.

The *TWTD Radio Players* are eight groups of non-professionals from the Chicago metropolitan area who re-enact old time radio shows (OTR) at libraries, schools, retirement and nursing homes, and anywhere else where they can find an audience eager to see how it was done in the good old days. Members of the groups, drawn mostly from the listening audience of Chuck Schaden's radio broadcasts, range in age from eleven to well over the usual age of retirement.

Tom Tirpak is the man who started it all. When he was at the University of Illinois working towards his business doctorate, he went to a friend's room to borrow some music cassettes to listen to while studying. In the box along with the music tapes were cassettes of old time radio shows. Tom lis-

Koni Shaughnessy is a member of the South Side ensemble of TWTD Radio Players.



Those Were The Days Radio Players
Great Gildersleeve Re-creation (1993)

tened and was hooked. He soon put together a group of students who performed re-enactments of those shows in the Champaign, Illinois community.

After graduation, Tom returned to his home in Glenview, Illinois and, being familiar with Schaden's *Those Were The Days* program, presented the idea to Chuck who loved it. He made an on-the-air announcement seeking anyone who would be interested in reading and performing vintage shows. At the initial meeting, more than one hundred people came to the Museum of Broadcast Communications (then in River City) on a freezing, cold day in January, 1992.

As a result six groups were formed, geographically covering the Chicago area. Today there are eight groups of *TWTD Radio Players* and many of the original one hundred still participate, along with many others who have joined over the past ten years.

The goal of the *Players* is to keep OTR

alive and out there, giving the public an opportunity to see how a radio drama, comedy, or mystery was produced on the air, before a live studio audience. In the past decade the *Players* have performed hundreds of such programs and audiences have seen how sound effects are created and how the actors work with their scripts.

On many occasions the *Players* have had an opportunity to work with the actual performers who appeared in the original programs.

In 1993 they joined Willard Waterman, Shirley Mitchell and Mary Lee Robb for a re-enactment of a *Great Gildersleeve* program. In 1994 they appeared with Jack Benny's daughter Joan and his grandson Bobby Blumofc in a tribute to the 61st anniversary of Jack Benny's 39th birthday, written by Ken Alexander.

In 1995, the *TWTD Radio Players* worked along side Shirley Bell Cole, radio's *Little Orphan Annie*; Bill Idleson, Rush on *Vic and Sade*; and announcer Fred Foy, of *The Lone Ranger*. In 2000 the *Players* worked with organist Paul Renard, who provided musical accompaniment on dozens of radio shows during the golden days, for a re-enactment of "The Maltese Falcon."

The *Players* are currently working on a re-enactment of "Brewster's Millions" from a 1937 broadcast of the *Lux Radio Theatre*. It will be directed by Fritz Michaelis and performed at 2 p.m. Sunday, February 10, 2001 in the Radio Hall of Fame Studio of the Museum of Broadcast Communications in the Chicago Cultural Center on Michigan Avenue and Washington Street. There is no admission charge to the Museum and no charge to see the performance. Seating, however, is limited.

For information on becoming a member of the *TWTD Radio Players* or to see if one of the groups is available to do a show in your Chicagoland community, write to *TWTD Radio Players*, Box 421, Morton Grove, IL 60053.

Sound Man Helps Paint the Picture

BY KATHRYNNE SKONICKI

Pausing to rattle a can, bang two wooden blocks together or scratch a chalkboard with his nails may seem like child's play. But for 67-year-old Fritz Michaelis, sound man for "old time" radio show productions, it makes the scripted sound of fiction seem like a realistic presentation. He listens with a careful ear, and if it works, he records it. If not, he moves on. "You try a lot of things," said Michaelis.

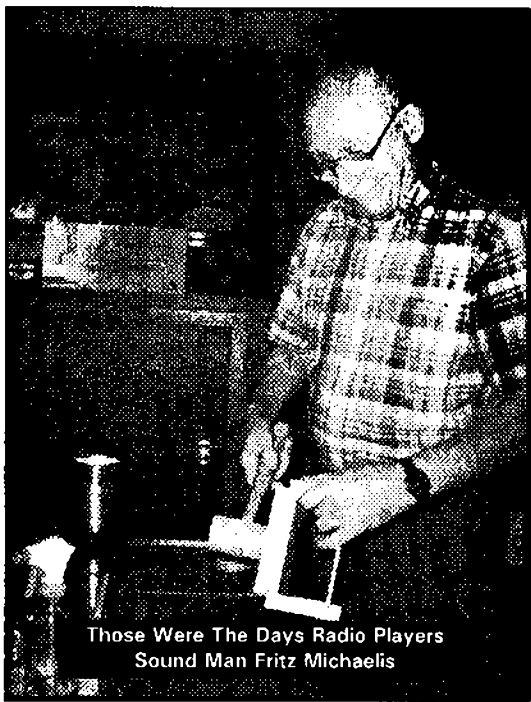
What is he searching for? The noise of an elevator going up and down, the ring of a door bell or the fast-paced clicking of wingtip-style shoes on a tile floor. These are all sounds that he needs for show productions. A metal roller skate, a hand buzzer and an 8-inch by 10-inch piece of wood can be combined in a number of ways to mimic a variety of sounds, he said.

The only other requirement is that the object has to be small enough to fit into his brown vinyl bag. Almost like Mary Poppins' famous handbag, Michaelis' luggage transforms into a magical holder for sounds. When used properly and in the right order, the items assist in the production of a 30-minute radio broadcast of a drama or comedy.

Most recently, a box of glass marbles came in handy during a production of *The Whistler* at the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago. The pea-sized, glass balls served as a substitute for crackling ice cubes, which are impractical to transport on an 80-degree day, he noted.

The 1940s mystery radio broadcast origi-

Kathrynne Skonicki wrote this article for the July 13, 2001 issue of the Catholic Explorer. It is reprinted with permission.



Those Were The Days Radio Players
Sound Man Fritz Michaelis

nally aired on CBS, but last summer about a dozen amateur, old time radio fans gathered to reproduce one of the serial's mysteries. *Those Were the Days Radio Players West* has been performing Old Time Radio shows on a regular basis for about 10 years at various locations.

"What we do ... with scripts in hand, with sound effects and recorded music and other recorded sounds, (is) try to recreate the radio shows as some of us would have heard them when we were growing up," said Michaelis.

Although the actors perform original scripts, troupe participants take the opportunity to reveal to the audience some secrets of the trade. Michaelis encourages audience members to become active listeners. "The wonderful thing about radio ... is (that) the pictures are created in your mind. And all of us who are performing for you today, whether we are doing sound effects or actually reading a script or the other technical aspects, we are trying to cre-

ate pictures in your mind of characters we represent and the actions that we're going through."

Audience member Jim Ferneborg of Oak Park was quite aware of how a slamming door helped to create a picture in one's mind. As a blind man, who is dependent on his sense of hearing to plot movements, he has become a connoisseur of sound technology. He enjoys listening to the group's reproduction of radio shows, "because they know what works." For example, he said they know that two shoes and a pan of kitty litter sound like people walking on a gravel road.

Not only is the sound quality essential in creating a good picture in a listener's head, but also the timing is important, said Dody Streff of Woodridge, who played the main

character in a performance of *Easy Aces*. The comedy was originally broadcast in the 1940s, but the St. Scholastica parishioner revived the role of a "ditzzy" woman assigned to jury duty.

"The timing is always important," she added. If her character is snapping her fingers, the listener needs to hear it. If the pounding of a gavel interrupts a character in the middle of a tantrum, it needs to be heard.

As far as sound coordination is concerned, Streff said, Michaelis has timing techniques down to a science. "He's wonderful to work with and very talented."

She also commended Michaelis for his abilities in other areas. He has been coordinating the group that re-creates the old time radio shows for several years. A retired school teacher with no background in sound technology, Michaelis became a self-taught specialist. "He's a real Renaissance man," said Streff.

Michaelis sought out the arts when he



Those Were The Days Radio Players
Sound Man Fritz Michaelis

pursued higher education at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he gained more than a degree. It's where he met his future wife, Faye.

Michaelis combined his undergraduate education with a master's degree in visual education from the Institute of Design from the Illinois Institute of Technology. "I wanted to share my gifts and do what my teachers did for me," commented Michaelis.

He taught visual arts for 30 years in Cook County District No. 214 to students at Arlington Heights High School, Forest View High School and Elk Grove High School, where he offered the benefit of his experience in drawing, painting, sculpting, jewelry making and print making. He also taught courses in ceramics, calligraphy and photography. His favorite subject was "whatever I happened to be teaching at the time."

After the couple finished raising their own two children, Michaelis retired from

the classroom in 1994. The grandfather of two now enjoys spending time with his family, participating in church activities at Southminister Presbyterian Church in Arlington Heights and volunteering as a tour guide of the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio in Oak Park.

On any given day, in addition to the pitter-patter of a grandchild's little feet across the kitchen floor at the Michaelis' house, one might hear the sound of horses' hoofs in radio broadcast episodes of the *Lone Ranger*. At one time, Michaelis owned a collection of more than 1,800 radio shows that originally aired from the 1930s-1960s.

But the ones he holds dearest are old episodes of the *Jack Benny Show*. Growing up, the former teacher recalled how his family used to sit around the kitchen table at 6 p.m. every Sunday, awaiting the famous comedy program. Reminiscing, he said the times when the familiar crackling noises could be heard from the kitchen's transistor radio were among his fondest memories.

"Those were the days," he said. ■

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 (847) 965-7763.

E-MAIL address: TWTDchuck@aol.com

Annual subscription rate is \$15 for six issues. A two-year subscription (12 issues) is \$27. Your subscription expires with the issue date noted on the mailing label. A renewal reminder is sent with the last issue of your subscription.

ADDRESS CHANGES should be sent to Nostalgia Digest, Box 421, Morton Grove, IL 60053 **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**. The Post Office **DOES NOT** automatically forward the Digest which is sent by presorted standard mail.



OUR READERS/LISTENERS WRITE

WE GET MAIL

DOWNERS GROVE, IL-- I've been a listener to *Those Were The Days* since 1983, when I discovered you by accident while 'radio surfing.' Thanks so very much for all the years of wonderful, old-time radio, and for a fun program to listen to. I'm a 'Boomer' born in 1950, so my earliest recollections of radio were *One Man's Family*, *X Minus One*, NBC Radio's *Monitor*, and *Gunsmoke*. I know there were many more, but I was probably too busy watching television and can't recall having heard Fibber McGee or Jack Benny prior to their coming to TV, or to hearing them on *TWTD*. But thanks to you, old-time radio never really left the airwaves entirely. I remember the renaissance of *The Shadow* on WGN radio on 'Sunday afternoons in the mid-'60s, as well as *CBS Radio Mystery Theatre* a decade later. Thank you for continuing the legacy into this new millennium. I just wanted to write and say thank you for your very worthwhile efforts. It's just a fabulous program! And Ken Alexander has become every bit a fixture on *TWTD* as a Truman Bradley, a Don Wilson, or a Harlow Wilcox. We need you on the air. --**DAVE KENT**

DES PLAINES, IL-- Thanks for the Gloria Van article (Oct/Nov 2001). I saw Gloria at a Concert in the Park this past summer. She was personable, energetic, and entertaining. She talked about her days singing in bands and her husband. She's also the last of the big band singers. --**BARBARA WAGNER**

WARRENVILLE, IL-- Enjoyed the article about Lon Chaney (Oct/Nov 2001). He did appear in Bob Hope's "Casanova's Big Night" (1954) as a Lenny-type character. But some years before, in 1947, he appeared as a similar character (dim-witted) in the classic "My Favorite Brunette." Lon Jr. was sort of a ham actor, but a damn good one. --**CHUCK HUCK**

ALSIP, IL-- Bob Koloski's cover story on Lionel Barrymore and his siblings (Dec 2001/Jan 2002) and their careers taught me a lot about this fine American family of performers that I had not known before. In the

coming months I hope to rent and view tapes of many of the movies described in the article.

Wayne Klatt's article on the Home Front was also well done, but I believe there were two small errors. Mr. Klatt wrote "...unskilled laborers had to be trained specifically for turning cargo vessels into armed 'Victory Ships.'" I may be mistaken, but were not Victory Ships an entirely new class of cargo vessels built on assembly lines by the Kaiser Corporation and other companies? And were not Victory Ships the next evolution in the rapid construction of wartime cargo vessels that was begun with the previous class, the Liberty Ships? Secondly, Mr. Klatt wrote that the term "WAVES" was not an anagram. However, if memory serves me correctly, I believe "WAVES" was an anagram for "Women's Auxiliary Volunteer Enlisted Service." Thanks for *Nostalgia Digest* and *Those Were The Days*. Even though I am not of the WWII generation (actually, I am one of those dreaded Baby Boomers), I really enjoy old time radio.

--**CHET ALEXANDER**

ED NOTE-- We referred your comments to Mr. Klatt who replied, "Kaiser produced the first Liberty Ship, which was launched in September, 1941, even before America entered the war. For the next two years nearly everything contributing to the war effort was called a "Victory..." something, including merchant marine vessels outfitted with guns. The class of Victory Ship, which were newly designed vessels, did not come into being until 1943. I was using "victory ship" in the general sense, before the name was used for a specific class of vessel. WAVES was the name given to the Women's Naval reserve. Since people accustomed to WACS and such wanted to know what the name stood for, it was eventually called the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service.")

BUFFALO GROVE, IL-- Thanks for Dan McGuire's "Ghosts of Halloween Past (Oct/Nov 2001). It brought back great memories for me, also growing up in Norridge on the



MORE MAIL

same street you grew up on [Ottawa Avenue], going to James Giles School from 1956-65, marching in the parades and even going to Elmer's Grocery Store with my mom and dad. And I also remembered Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. I always remember the sorting of the piles of candy when I'd make a stop at home during the Trick or Treating: my really favorite stuff, the OK stuff, and the stuff that I didn't like and my mom would put in the bowl to give to someone else. Great memories. --JIM LEON

NAPERVILLE, IL-- Thanks for your major role in preserving a very special time of entertainment and propelling that bank of wonderful fantasy into the present and future. I remember making sure I had my Captain Midnight Decoder Whistle, a blue and red treasure that helped me "decode" the weekly messages from my fearless idol. --BUD MILLER

GLEN ELLYN, IL-- I have just finished listening to your December 1, 2001 program relating to the attack on Pearl Harbor. I was born in 1946, after my father returned from the war. (He was the Navigator/Bombardier on a B-24 that flew from Britain to bomb German objectives.) Until September 11th, I had no real concept of the shock, pain, and surprise that our nation felt after the attack on Pearl Harbor. This program and your preceding programs have made me aware that there have been times other than the present when fast-moving events caught the nation's attention, and when world geography lessons were taught by way of war maps. (Where is Pearl Harbor? Where is Afghanistan?) You have done me, and I would guess many others, a real service by airing these programs. --DAVID CONDON

E-MAIL-- Personally, I'd give you the Presidential Medal of Honor for what you do for your audience! Especially today's Dec. 1st program remembering Pearl Harbor. How eerie it was to hear it in the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001. Even to the Joint Session of Congress and the presidential address. Long may you wave, Chuck, along

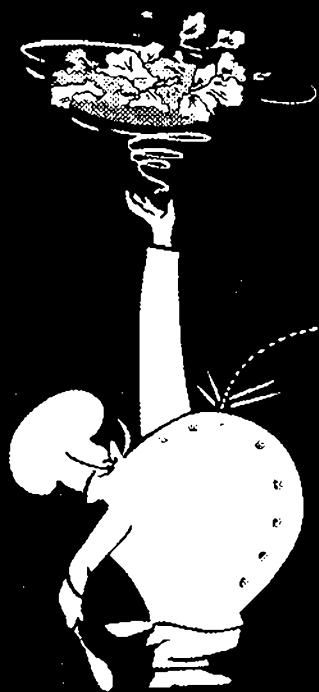
with the red, white and blue. --DOLORES MADLENER

MERRILLVILLE, INDIANA-- Thank you, thank you so much for including an episode of the *Dick Lawrence Revue* in your terrific "Day of Infamy" tribute on December 1. His program was one of my favorite WNIB programs. After all these months I still miss it-- as well as WNIB itself-- tremendously. --KATHY MITCHELL

CHICAGO-- I received my first *Nostalgia Digest* starting with the Oct/Nov 2001 issue and I love it. I had problems tuning in to *TWTD*, but I am happy to say that I am able to get your station on my car radio and recently my sister got me a new radio and am now able to get the station. The radio is a Tozai boom box (am-fm receiver, stereo cassette recorder). It is a cute little compact radio. My sister purchased it from Walgreens for \$17.99 plus tax (on sale from \$19.99). I hope this information will enable others to tune in Saturdays. --ANNETTE SPECCHIO

NILES, IL-- It occurs to me that perhaps you might want to republish the Radio Shack antenna information from Martin J. Dzik in the April/May 2001 issue. I must tell you I have had some success using table model radios that accept FM rabbit ears antennas. Also sets with good discrimination and selectivity help. I find that sets with mechanical tuning (not digital) seem to do a much better job of picking up the WDCB signal. --GENE SWIFT

{ED. NOTE-- Martin Dzik of Schererville, Indiana wrote that he purchased the High-gain directional FM-antenna from Radio Shack (catalog # 15-2163 -- \$19.95) and put it in his attic. "Now I receive WDCB in Northwest Indiana like *Gangbusters*," he said. We have heard from many people who tried this and found that it helped reception considerably. Others have said that by merely facing their radio in another direction improves reception. As for WDCB, the station is doing its part to help. Since none of our old shows is in stereo, WDCB has been removing its stereo signal from 1 to 5 pm on Saturdays. The removal of the stereo signal improves the mono signal somewhat, especially in the fringe areas. How and why this happens is something we'll never be able to figure out, but we're grateful for it!)



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← **BING CROSBY**

made radio history when he insisted on recording his programs. Read William J. Ryan's article on page 26.

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