

subject of his rivalry with wcco—then or now—there is no stopping him. All his life he has been a nonstop talker, whose thoughts race ahead of his articulation. In the late thirties, another veteran broadcaster, the late L. B. Wilson, of wcky(AM) Cincinnati, was introduced to Mr. Hubbard at a broadcasters' convention, Mr. Wilson himself departed from the managerial norm. With elevator shoes he attained the height of 4 feet 11 inches, but as a showman he towered above many contemporaries. His station, which had an exceptional nighttime signal reaching all through the mountains of the Southeast, made a fortune in mail-order business. Between the keening of hill-billy singers and untuned mandolins, it would offer at bargain prices the artifacts its audience held dear. An item dependable for steady volume was a family Bible accompanied by a bonus of a hand-illuminated photograph of Jesus.

After Mr. Wilson had listened in awe to a Hubbard recitation, he turned to his host and said: "That's the only man I ever heard talk shorthand."

### All in the mind

In years of Sunday-night exposure to the radio audience, Charlie McCarthy, as manipulated by Edgar Bergen, became the most successful dummy in theatrical history. To millions of listeners Charlie had a life of his own.

Once, when the act was summoned to perform at the White House. Eleanor Roosevelt, a gracious hostess, extended her hand and said: "So you're Charlie McCarthy."

They never made it in television. Mr. Bergen's lips moved.

### The wondrous world of make-believe

From the earliest days of radio there were disk jockeys, but the craft was lifted to its apogee by Martin Block, a refugee from the New York City streets where for a time he was in business with a suitcase full of razor blades and other notions. He found his destiny at WNEW(AM) New York, an independent station striving for attention in the very fountainhead of big-time network radio. WNEW was then managed by one of the shrewdest women in radio, Bernice Judis.

The two were made for each other, as became evident in a recent recollection by Miss Judis of the great event. "Martin Block came in to see me one day for an audition. He was just a radio bum," Miss Judis paused. "I saw everyone," she said with an indulgent sigh.

"He said: 'You're having trouble with your music, I have some ideas'."

The ideas included a program format called *The Make-Believe Ballroom* with

Martin Block as the master of ceremonies that only a pitchman could describe with a straight face. He wanted Miss Judis to believe he was presiding in a huge hall containing a revolving stage on which were arrayed the most popular musical groups in the country. At Martin Block's command Tommy Dorsey would come and go. Benny Goodman would induce his pack to full cry and then yield to Artie Shaw who, obedient to the master of the ballroom if to no other force on earth, would strike up "Begin the Beguine" and then fade away to a commercial.

The sheer gall of Mr. Block's presentation—delivered in a voice that dripped with pure honey—commended him to the manager of WNEW. He was signed to a contract at 25 dollars a week. At the time neither mentioned—and Martin Block forever swore he never knew—that *The Make-Believe Ballroom* was the earlier invention of a Los Angeles disk jockey, Al Jarvis.

The years of Martin Block were happy years at WNEW, which became the most profitable independent in the nation.

"Block was so brilliant," Miss Judis recalls. "He didn't get up and sell. I remember something called Madison Personal Loan. He wouldn't tell listeners to go and get a loan. He'd say: 'When you're home and the doorbell rings, don't peek through it to see who it is. Don't be afraid. If you think it's a



*Martin Block, the richest of them all, arrives by helicopter at Miami Beach to attend a 1959 convention of disk jockeys. The convention, sponsored by the Todd Storz stations, was among the biggest bashes in broadcast history. It featured an all-night show with the biggest names in music of the time.*

creditor, go to Madison Personal Loan. Then you can go to the door, fling it open and say: "Hello, whomever you are."'"

Grammar would only have encumbered a man with so deep a feeling for the human condition. "In six months," Miss Judis recalls, getting to the essentials of the history, "Martin Block was making 300 dollars a week. Toward the end he was making 200,000 dollars a year. One year he made 300,000."

What was the real magic of Martin Block?

"He had sex in his voice," says Miss Judis. "And he lied."

### The late, late shows of early broadcasting

When Leo J. Fitzpatrick died at the age of 77 a month ago the obituaries noted his managerial associations with, in order, WDAF(AM) Kansas City, WJR(AM) Detroit and WGAR(AM) Cleveland and his later ownership of WGR(AM) Buffalo, N.Y. There was no mention of his creation of one of the earliest and most popular radio shows, *Nighthawk Frolic* on WDAF. Inaugurated in the late fall of 1922, the show was on from 11:45 p.m. to 1 in the morning.

There were several late-night programs on the air in those days. Stations—even those with low-power—could be heard over great distances, especially at night. DXing, or tuning the radio dial in hopes of bringing in a long-distance signal, was a nationwide preoccupation. This growing audience needed a reason to stay up and tune in.

Lambdin Kay of wsb Atlanta, Harold Hough of wbat Fort Worth, George Hay of wls Chicago, Bill Hays of kfkx Hastings, Neb., provided regionally-flavored entertainment. They were welcomed into the home, clasped as friends. Only Mr. Hays, a somewhat more formal personality, was without a nickname. Mr. Kay was the "Little Colonel"; Mr. Hough, the "Hired Hand"; Mr. Hay, the "Solemn Old Judge." To the far-flung audience of the *Nighthawk Frolic*, Leo Fitzpatrick was the "Merry Old Chief."

Fitz, as he was known to his friends, got into radio through the newspaper business. He was an ace reporter for the *Kansas City Star*. The *Star* management thought it possible that the paper's correspondents in Topeka and Jefferson City and Washington could file their stories via short-wave radio and in that way eliminate the costs of telephones. Fitz was sent to find out about radio.

In Detroit he studied wwj, the radio operation of the *Detroit News*. In New York he delved into the technical background of radio, assisted by the people at Western Electric and Bell Laborato-