

CHUCK SCHADEN'S  
**NOSTALGIA DIGEST** AND  
**RADIO GUIDE** ©

FEBRUARY/MARCH, 1999



PHIL HARRIS

# Big Band Remotes *ON SALE!*

*"Here's that band again...!"*

A collection of 28 remote broadcast excerpts featuring big bands on the air during the golden years of radio.

Compilation by Big Band Historian Karl Pearson.

Detailed broadcast information included with tape album.

## The set features:

HARRY JAMES (10-2-53) Aragon Ballroom, Chicago.  
TOMMY DORSEY (2-24-40) Meadowbrook, Cedar Grove, New Jersey.

JAN GARBER (1950) Melody Mill Ballroom, North Riverside, Ill.

ANDY KIRK (2-6-37) Trianon Ballroom, Cleveland, Ohio.

ARTIE SHAW (1-18-39) Blue Room, Hotel Lincoln, NYC.

TED WEEMS (2-10-37) Trianon Ballroom, Chicago. Perry Como sings.

BENNY GOODMAN (1943) Hotel Astor, New York City.

GLENN MILLER (7-28-39) Glen Island Casino, New Rochelle, New York.

LARRY CLINTON (11-15-38) International Casino, New York City.

DICK JURGENS (1950) Aragon Ballroom, Chicago.

ROY ELDRIDGE (8-5-39) Arcadia Ballroom, New York City.

WILL OSBORNE (10-11-48) Edgewater Beach Hotel, Chicago.

CHICK WEBB (2-10-39) Coconut Grove, New York City.



DICK JURGENS



DUKE ELLINGTON

EDDY HOWARD (12-5-45) Aragon Ballroom, Chicago.

JAN SAVITT (12-2-38) Arcadia Restaurant, Philadelphia.

DUKE ELLINGTON (7-26-39) Ritz-Carlton Hotel, Boston.

GUS ARNHEIM (1931) Coconut Grove, Los Angeles.

BUNNY BERIGAN (3-27-38) Paradise Restaurant, New York City.

BOB CHESTER (9-21-39) Hotel Van Cleeve, Dayton, Ohio.

RAY MC KINLEY (1946) Hotel Commodore, New York City.

BOB CROSBY (1-18-42) Trianon Ballroom, Southgate, Calif.

STAN KENTON (4-5-52) Blue Note, Chicago.

DESI ARNAZ (12-6-47) Palace Hotel San Francisco.

GLENN GRAY (1-18-37) Rainbow Room, New York City.

JACK TEAGARDEN (1-23-40) Southland Restaurant, Boston.

ORRIN TUCKER (4-19-48) Edgewater Beach Hotel, Chicago.

BOBBY SHERWOOD (12-5-42)

HARRY JAMES (11-3-39) College Inn, Hotel Sherman, Chicago.

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# Hello, Out There in Radioland!

BY CHUCK SCHADEN

*Last year was not a very good year for show business. We lost many of our favorite entertainers and personalities during the twelve months of 1998. They're gone, but not forgotten.*

**GENE AUTRY**, 91, Hollywood's original singing cowboy who starred in 95 movies, hundreds of radio broadcasts and television shows, and on 635 records, singing such hit songs as "I'm Back in the Saddle Again," "You Are My Sunshine," and "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer." October 2.

**JOAN BANKS**, 79, radio actress appearing in such programs as *Young Widder Brown*, *Portia Faces Life*, *Today's Children*, *Nightbeat*, *Maisie*. *Widow of actor Frank Lovejoy with whom she also appeared on radio.* January 18.

**BINNIE BARNES**, 95, glamorous British-born character actress who appeared in more than 75 films from 1929-1973. July 27.

**NORMAN BARRY**, 88, pioneer radio and TV announcer-broadcaster who was on NBC Chicago staff for 30 years. December 25, 1997.

**TOMMY BARTLETT**, 84, pioneer Chicago announcer and broadcaster on WBBM; hosted *Welcome Travelers* on NBC; later developed the famous water/ski show at Wisconsin Dells. September 6.

**CLAYTON 'PEG LEG' BATES**, 91, tap dancer with one wooden leg who, in an 80-year career, was best known for his frequent guest spots on TV's *Ed Sullivan Show*. December 6.

**RALPH BELL**, 82, radio actor on such shows as *Valiant Lady*, *This is Nora Drake*, *Mr. District Attorney*, *Ellery Queen*, *Dimension X*. August 2.

**SONNY BONO**, 62, singer-comedian, half of Sonny and Cher team during the 1960s and '70s; U. S. Congressman in the 1990s. January 5.

**JACK BRICKHOUSE**, 82, dean of Chicago sports broadcasters who provided play-by-play

## NECROLOGY OF 1998

### We Remember Them Well



GENE AUTRY



TOMMY BARTLETT

descriptions of Cubs, Sox, Bulls and Bears in an outstanding 40-year career. August 6.

**LLOYD BRIDGES**, 85, versatile stage, screen and television actor, appeared on screen in *High Noon* and *Airplane* and as Mike Nelson, undersea investigator on TV's *Sea Hunt* in 1950s. March 10.

**HARRY CARAY**, 83, legendary sportscaster who announced Chicago baseball for 27 years, including 16 with the Cubs and 11 with the White Sox. February 18.

**LOU CIOFFI**, 72, television news correspondent for CBS and ABC who covered international events from the Korean war to the American hostages in Iran. May 2.

**DANE CLARK**, 85, motion picture actor whose career spanned more than 50 years, appearing in such films as *Action in the North Atlantic*, *Destination Tokyo*, *Pride of the Marines*. September 11.

**LON CLARK**, 87, radio actor who starred as *Nick Carter*, *Master Detective* from 1943-55, and in many other roles. October 4. *See the article about Lon Clark on page 25.*

**FLOYD CRAMER**, 64, versatile pianist, credited with helping to create the "Nashville Sound" that attracted pop audiences to country music in

## NECROLOGY OF 1998

the 1950s and 60s. December 31, 1997.

**BARRETT DEEMS**, 85, legendary "world's fastest jazz drummer" who performed with Louis Armstrong, Jimmy Dorsey, Benny Goodman and others in a career that began at the age of 15 in Chicago and continued until his death. September 15.

**RICHARD DENNING**, 85, character actor on radio, TV and movies, co-starred with Lucille Ball in *My Favorite Husband* on radio and with Barbara Britton on *Mr. and Mrs. North* on TV. October 11.

**JOHN DEREK**, 71, actor-director-producer, best known for being the force behind the screen career of his wife. Bo Derek. May 22.

**DOROTHY DONEGAN**, 76, nationally known flamboyant and brilliant jazz pianist from Chicago. May 19.

**BILLIE DOVE**, 97, one of the most beautiful stars of the silent screen, usually as a damsel in distress to be rescued by Douglas Fairbanks and other heroes. December 31, 1997.

**JIMMY DRIFTWOOD**, 91, Grammy award-winning folk singer-songwriter whose "Battle of New Orleans" vaulted him to fame in the 1950s and 60s. July 12.

**TODD DUNCAN**, 95, operatic baritone who originated the role of "Porgy" in George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*; credited with desegregating American opera when in 1945 he sang the role of "Tonio" in *Pagliacci* for the New York City Opera. February 28.

**DON DUNPHY**, 91, sports broadcaster remembered for his blow-by-blow descriptions on *Gillette Friday Night Fights*. July 23.

**WIN ELLIOT**, 83, host on many radio quiz and audience participation shows such as *Quick as a Flash*, *County Fair*. September 17.

**CHRIS FARLEY**, 33, comedian noted for his work at Chicago's Second City and on TV's *Saturday Night Live*. December 18, 1997.

**ALICE FAYE**, 83, co-star with husband Phil Harris on the *Phil Harris-Alice Faye* radio show 1946-51; singing star of 20th Century Fox musicals in the 1930s and 40s. May 9.

**NORMAN FELL**, 74, actor who played irritable landlord Stanley Roper in the 1970s TV series *Three's Company* and *The Ropers*. December 14.

**MARY FRANN**, 55, television actress, best known as "Joanna," wife of "Dick Loudon" in the



JACK HASKELL



ALICE FAYE

Bob Newhart series set in Vermont. Early in her career she was co-host of *Morning Show* with Jim Conway on WLS-TV, Chicago. September 23.

**VIVIAN FRIDELL**, 85, radio actress who portrayed *Mary Noble*. *Backstage Wife* in the 1930s and '40s. August 20.

**FRED W. FRIENDLY**, 82, television pioneer, producer with partner Edward R. Murrow of news documentaries and the award-winning *See It Now* series. March 3.

**ALICE FROST**, 92, radio actress, starred on *Mr. and Mrs. North* and *Big Sister*. January 6.

**JOHN GARY**, 65, popular concert and recording artist who appeared on radio's *Breakfast Club* in the 1950s, on TV in the 1960s. January 4.

**PHIL HARTMAN**, 49, comic actor on television on *Saturday Night Live*, *Newsradio* and in many films. May 28.

**JACK HASKELL**, 79, singer on many radio and TV shows including *Dave Garraway* and *Stop the Music*. September 26.

**PETER LIND HAYES**, 82, actor-comedian who teamed with wife Mary Healy to entertain audiences on stage, nightclubs, and television. April 21.

**JONATHAN HOLE**, veteran actor on radio, television, movies and stage; appeared on hundreds of radio shows such as *Lux Radio Theatre*, *Dragnet*, *Ma Perkins*, *Straight Arrow*, *Mr. President*. February 12.

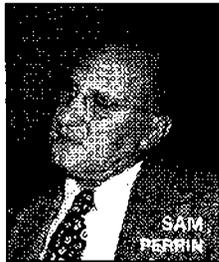
**JOHN HOLLIMAN**, 49, CNN correspondent who was part of the team that covered the early hours of the Gulf war from a Baghdad hotel room. September 14.

**JOSEPHINE HUTCHINSON**, 94, stage and film actress, prominent in the 1930s and '40s, also appeared on TV in the 1950s and '60s. June 4.

**GRANDPA JONES**, 84, banjo-playing performer on radio's *Grand Old Opry* and TV's *Hee-Haw* for more than two decades. February 19.

**BOB KANE**, 83, creator, in 1939, of the popular DC Comics hero *Batman*. November 3.

**STUBBY KAYE**, 79, chubby, comedic singer



on the Broadway stage; most memorable role was "Nicely-Nicely" in *Guys and Dolls* in which he stopped the show with "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat." December 14, 1997.

**LEONID KINSKEY**, 95, Russian-born character actor best known for his portrayal of the bartender at Rick's Cafe Americain in the film classic *Casablanca*. September 8.

**FELIX KNIGHT**, 89, lyric tenor who sang on many radio shows including *Schaeffer Revue* and *Album of Familiar Music*. June 18.

**CHARLES KORVIN**, 90, Hungarian-born motion picture actor, often playing handsome cads in films like *Enter Arsine Lupin*, *This Love of Ours*, *Ship of Fools*. June 18.

**AKIRA KUROSAWA**, 88, much-honored Japanese motion picture director of such films as *Rashomon* and *Seven Samurai*. September 6.

**TEDDY LEE**, 80, Chicago-area bandleader for 40 years, popular with dancers at the Willowbrook, Aragon and Melody Mill ballrooms. February 10.

**PHIL LEEDS**, 82, television and movie character actor with the "recognizable face and unknown name" who often appeared as a funny old man on such shows as *Barney Miller*, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, *Murphy Brown* and *Aly McBeal*. Was "Buddy Sorrell's" brother in an episode of *Dick Van Dyke Show*. August 16.

**SHARI LEWIS**, 65, ventriloquist-puppeteer on television for over 40 years; award-winning creator of "Lamb Chop," "Charlie Horse," and "Flush Puppy." August 2.

**JACK LORD**, 77, star of *Hawaii Five-O*, long-est running (1968-80) crime series in television history. January 21.

**RODDY MC DOWALL**, 70, child actor who moved easily into adult roles in a career that began at the age of 11 and included such films as *Lassie Come Home*, *How Green Was My Valley*, and *Planet of the Apes*. October 3.

**E. G. MARSHALL**, 84, stage, screen, television and radio actor best known for for TV series

*The Defenders* (1961-65) and as host of the *CBS Radio Mystery Theatre* (1974-82). August 24.

**TONY MARVIN**, 86, long-time radio and TV announcer, best known for his 14-year association with Arthur Godfrey. October 10.

**CORBETT MONICA**, 68, veteran comedian and actor who often appeared with Ed Sullivan, Johnny Carson, Merv Griffin, Perry Como, and Joey Bishop. July 22.

**JEANETTE NOLAN**, 86, one of radio's busiest actresses, appearing on such programs as *Cavalcade of America*, *One Man's Family*, *Great Gildersleeve* and hundreds more; also in movie, television and stage roles. June 5.

**DICK O'NEILL**, 70, television actor on many series including *M\*A\*S\*H*, *Mad About You*, *Home Improvement*, and, in his best known role, as the father of Chris Cagney on *Cagney and Lacey*. November 17.

**MAUREEN O'SULLIVAN**, 87, motion picture actress who was Tarzan's most famous "Jane" in a string of films from 1932 to 1942. June 22.

**CARL PERKINS**, 63, legendary rock 'n' roll pioneer whose song "Blue Suede Shoes" and lightning-quick guitar playing influenced Elvis Presley, the Beatles and many other performers of the era. January 19.

**SAM PERRIN**, 96, member of the team of great writers for Jack Benny radio and television shows, joining the program in 1944. January 8.

**LES PODEWELL**, 91, Chicago-based actor appearing on stage, screen, radio and TV. In 1930s and '40s he was heard on *Little Orphan Annie*, *Sky King*, *Jack Armstrong*, *The Shadow*, *The Whistler*. November 19.

**DENVER PYLE**, 77, character actor who played "Uncle Jesse" on TV's *Dukes of Hazzard*; appeared in many films and television shows. December 25, 1997.

**MAE QUESTEL**, 89, original voice of movie cartoon characters *Betty Boop*, "Olive Oil" and "Sweetpea." January 4.

**EDDIE RABBITT**, 56, country-pop singer-

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songwriter-guitarist who topped the charts with "I Love a Rainy Night" May 7.

**GENE RAYMOND**, 89, movie actor who played second leads in major films and starring roles in "B" pictures; long-time husband of Jeanette MacDonald. May 3.

**HUGH REILLY**, 82, actor who portrayed "Paul Martin," the father of one of the families who cared for *Lassie* on TV from 1958-64. July 17.

**JEROME ROBBINS**, 79, noted choreographer and director of some of Broadway's most memorable shows including *West Side Story*, *The King and I*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *On The Town*. July 29.

**ROY ROGERS**, 86, the "King of the Cowboys" in movies, radio, television, and rodeos in a career that began in 1937 and continued for more than 40 years. July 6.

**ESTHER ROLLE**, 78, television actress who played Florida Evans, the maid on *Maude* and, as the same character, starred in *Good Times*. November 17.

**JOHNNY ROVENTINI**, 88, the four foot tall bellboy who shouted "Call For Phillip Morris" to become one of the best known figures in American advertising on radio and TV in the 1940s, '50s, '60s. November 30.

**ROY ROWAN**, 78, veteran announcer heard on radio's *Yours Truly*, *Johnny Dollar*, *Escape*, *Gunsmoke*, *Young Dr. Malone*, and TV's Lucille Ball shows. May 10.

**CARL SANDS**, 84, musical director of Chicago's Oriental Theatre orchestra in the late 1940s, who led a popular touring band from the 1930s thru the 1950s. December 23, 1997.

**FRANK SINATRA**, 82, America's most popular singer of the Twentieth Century; super star of radio, television, records and motion pictures for over 50 years. May 14.

**EMIL SITKA**, 83, character actor in movies, usually as comic foil; seen in many Three Stooges comedies. January 16.

**'BUFFALO BOB' SMITH**, 80, host of *Howdy Doody Time* during early days of television for 13 seasons beginning in 1947. His career began in radio in the early 1940s. July 30.

**PHILIP STERLING**, 76, veteran actor often appearing as a doctor, lawyer or judge on TV and in films. November 30.

**KAY THOMPSON**, 90+, radio singer in the 1930s, composer for films in the 1940s, and au-



JOHNNY ROVENTINI



ROBERT YOUNG

thor of popular "Floise" books for young readers. July 2.

**EDWARD THURGERSON**, 95, pioneer radio announcer who began his career in 1927; was one of Jack Benny's first announcers. December 22, 1997.

**SYLVIA FIELD TRUEX**, 97, stage, screen and television actress, best remembered as "Mrs. Wilson" on the TV series *Dennis the Menace* from 1959-62. July 31.

**HELEN WARD**, 82, big band era singer with Benny Goodman, Hal McIntyre, Harry James, and others. April 21.

**CARL WILSON**, 51, founding member and lead guitarist of the Beach Boys in the 1960s and '70s. February 7.

**FLIP WILSON**, 64, popular comedian in the 1960s and '70s, well-known for his TV variety series which featured his character "Geraldine" and the catch-phrase "the devil made me do it!" November 25.

**GEORGE WRIGHT**, 77, master theatre organist, silent film accompanist, and frequent radio musician during the Golden Age. May 10.

**TAMMY WYNETTE**, 55, "the first lady of country music" whose top selling hit was "Stand By Your Man" in 1968. April 6.

**FRANKIE YANKOVIC**, 83, famed band leader and accordionist, known as the "Polka King" who entertained on radio, TV, and personal appearances during a 60-year career. October 14.

**ROBERT YOUNG**, 91, veteran motion picture actor, well-remembered for his TV roles as the perfect father in *Father Knows Best* and as the perfect doctor on *Marcus Welby, M.D.* July 21.

**HENNY YOUNGMAN**, 91, comedian, "King of the One Liners" who entertained for seven decades with his rapid-fire delivery and his "Take my wife, please" routine. February 24.

**GONE... BUT NOT FORGOTTEN**

*We Remember Them Well*

# THE BOY FROM DO WAH DITTY

BY BILL OATES



During the glory days of his radio career, Phil Harris often hinted to his favorite place on earth as "Do Wah Ditty." He never actually identified the exact place in his song "That's What I Like About the South," but in his biography there may be a clue.

The first possible site for the inspiration of his now famous tune may have been his birthplace and boyhood home, Linton, Indiana, where an only child was born to Dollie and Harry Harris on June 24, 1904.

Phil's musical talents came in part from his father, a clarinetist who often traveled with circuses, tent shows, and to theater pit orchestras. Mother Harris also played in a variety of musical venues, where she performed as a singer. When the boy was old enough, the Harris trio toured with the father playing "character comedy," the mother singing, and Phil acting the part of "Jew comedian." In order to give young Phil a sense of a home, his mobile parents deposited him with his maternal grandparents when mom and dad were on tour. A few years after Phil's birth, however, Dollie decided to settle down and traded show business for a job in a Linton clothing store.

When his father migrated to different musical jobs, Grandpa Allen Wright became Phil's male role model. "Sug"



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Wright, a local policeman, distinguished himself during the Civil War. Even though he was originally from Harrison County, Indiana, he fought for the Confederacy. After the old veteran retired, he was often found in a local general store run by a Union veteran. As the two argued the plaudits of both sides, delighted children like Phil listened on enthusiastically.

As for an education, Phil Harris's main lessons were learned at the handle end of guns and fishing rods. Hunting rabbits in nearby Haseman's Grove, and fishing or catching frogs helped occupy his time when he wasn't collecting hickory nuts, walnuts or persimmons. His in-class records show that he was a pretty decent student, although he often played hooky and was not above mischief. Even when his family moved to a permanent home in Nashville, Tennessee, where Phil finished

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*Bill Oates, of Kouts, Indiana, a high school English teacher and author with a love of old time radio, is a regular contributor to these pages.*

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## PHIL HARRIS

his formal schooling, he continued to avoid the classroom to go fishing. Once his father found out that the boy was skipping school, the elder Harris escorted Phil to the high school front door every day. Unfortunately, the building also had a back door that led to the river.

Even though his public education ended without a degree, Phil's interest in music continued. (Ironically, years later Franklin College and Vincennes University conferred on him honorary doctorates.) When he finally bid a formal good bye to schooling in Nashville, the location where his father found permanent work as a musician at the Nickerbocker Theatre, the dropout did so to form a band. In the long run it was the better choice. The boy had been introduced to the drums ten years earlier, where his first paid jobs included accompanying films in a combo comprised of himself, a lady on the piano, and another on the violin at Linton's silent movie houses. Locals were relieved when Phil graduated to actual drums after he occupied much of his time banging on tin cans suspended from trees. Once he became adept at the drumsticks, he added sirens, guns, and a variety of items to enhance the viewers' appreciation of the film.

As a teenager, Phil Harris left his schooling to help form the Dixie Syncopators. He also filled in on the drums where his father was employed. Former movie star Ruth Stonehouse, who was touring in her own stage act, heard the teenagers and took them along. After arriving at their final gig at her home in Denver, the group was offered a chance to play in Honolulu. However, the boys did not believe the promoter's offer, and they returned to Nashville. The patron again contacted them and they eventually departed Tennessee for the Princess Theatre and the beaches



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at Waikiki. After their engagement ended, the band broke up, and all but Phil returned home.

San Francisco rebuilt into a beautiful travel destination after the great earthquake of 1906. It became a premiere city on the West Coast and offered two important outlets — hotels and radio stations — for musicians' talents in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Phil found his way into a variety of bands, learned to love the city, and made important connections in the musical community. His most important attachment was to a number of musicians who were bound for a two-year stint in Australia. Why the long trip to Down Under? Australians developed a fondness for American jazz, but they had no home grown groups to play the then popular music. A group of first chair musicians, including later famed radio sidkick Frank Remley, embarked to lead the Aussies in their quest to learn music popular in the States. In other words, a whole band was outfitted with key Americans to inspire the locals.

On his return to America, Phil was ready to form his first important organization, the Lofner-Harris orchestra.

The Lofner-Harris band offered listeners a less mellow alternative to the then

popular "crooner" style of dance music. With Harris on the drums, Carol Lofner led the band primarily at the St. Francis Hotel from 1929 until 1932. Many of radio's soon-to-be names, such as Xavier Cugat, Bill Goodwin, Harold "Gildersleeve" Percy, Meredith Willson, and Al Pearce, were also playing San Francisco clubs and appearing on NBC's West Coast hub stations. By 1932, Phil Harris achieved enough confidence to form a band under his own name and opened at the Ambassador Hotel's famed Coconut Grove in Los Angeles. This hotel stint was well-timed, because band remotes soon featured the Phil Harris Orchestra from the hotel, and, in a few years, not only West Coast programs would move to southern California, but also many of the nationwide network shows would also emanate from Los Angeles.

With his popularity growing in the 1930's, Phil Harris found himself touring, starring in his own radio show *Let's Listen to Harris* for Cutex Nail Polish on NBC, being featured in Sara Hamilton's "Hollywood at Play" column in the July 1933 Photoplay magazine, and acting in the 1933 Academy Award comedy short winner *So This Is Harris* (RKO). He also began a feature film career with *Melody Cruise* (RKO 1933) that later included *Man About Town* (RKO 1939), *Buck Benny Rides Again* (Paramount 1940), and *The Wheeler Dealers* (MGM 1963.) In the first feature, Phil Harris etched his playboy persona in celluloid when he played a millionaire who has designing women kept at bay by Charles Ruggles. Phil Harris's first two outings on film were also noteworthy because famed director Mark Sandrich guided them as two of his earliest creations.

During the early years of movie making, Harris came to the attention of rising comedian Jack Benny.

Before he made his hit on network ra-



dio, Harris traveled to New York clubs. The handsome wavy haired bandleader who wowed Southern California audiences repeated his success in The Big Apple. The band even broke up temporarily, but after a reconciliation, the group continued performing stronger than ever. Ultimately, the musical aggregation hooked up with a hotel chain and toured from New York to big cities as far west as Texas and then back again.

After these successes, comedian George Burns beckoned Harris to come from the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans to be the bandleader on the Burns and Allen Show. After breaking the engagement, Harris left Louisiana for Los Angeles. But in the meantime, Burns' producer gave the job to Wayne King and Harris found himself out West with no job.

Enter Burns' best friend Jack Benny, who took Harris out to eat and then queried the bandleader as to what show he would be on during the upcoming season. Benny and Harris had become friends earlier when the two were in New York, and when Phil responded that he was not contracted to any program, Benny said, "Well, you're with me."

Jack Benny had his first network radio program in 1932, but he went though a

## PHIL HARRIS

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number of orchestra leaders until Phil Harris was placed under contract.

On October 4, 1936, Phil Harris debuted on the first show of the season with little fanfare. Essentially, Jack Benny merely referred to the new cast member repeatedly. On this show, Jack mistakenly and intentionally announced Phil with "Play, Don," a reference to earlier bandleaders Bestor and Green. Even though Phil was underplayed on the early episodes of the program, his raucous role as resident bon vivant soon emerged.

The young, curly-haired bandleader became a recognized fixture on the program alongside venerable announcer Don Wilson, female sidekick Mary Livingston, long suffering valet Rochester, and tenor Dennis Day. After sixteen years on the show, Phil admitted that Jack Benny was extremely generous (despite their usually confrontational on air relationship.) Also of great importance, the radio program gave the bandleader an opportunity to establish a permanent home for the first time in his professional career.

Just as Don Wilson became the quintessential Benny announcer, Phil Harris became the oft-maligned drunken leader of his musical rabble, whose tunes were catchy and expert nonetheless.

Not long after Phil joined the Benny show, he claimed that he helped another of the enduring cast. According to Phil, he got hold of Eddie "Rochester" Anderson and told the aspiring actor that the show was looking for Black actors with a Southern accent. Anderson dropped all formal pronunciations and thanks to Phil, got the job. Phil also made sure that Anderson traveled with the band members when the show toured, so that he would be included in all meals. According to Anderson, "If it hadn't been for Harris, I'd still be eating

Chinese" (the only restaurants that readily accepted minorities.)

Over the years, Phil's character (and that of his band) evolved into that of irresponsible, drunken hooligans. Nothing could be further than the truth. Given the rigors of performing under the half-hour comedy clock, the music had to fit the network's time limitations. Often, when the show was running long, because too many laughs emanated from the audience or the response to a joke held on longer than expected, the band had to adjust accordingly. If a band were to play a Saturday night remote with fewer restrictions that was one thing, but to end a half-hour comedy show reasonably close to the appointed final second was a more complex matter. Few bands were able to last as long on such a show as did Phil Harris's band.

Over the years, as was the case with most of the Benny cast members, stereotypes were established. Once Phil Harris burst onto the scene, he eventually took his speaking part on the show, a phenomenon that was relatively revolutionary for bandleaders on radio in the late 1930's. His entrances became flamboyant, egotistical poetry to signal that the real magnet for the audience was on board, much to the chagrin of Benny. One program's plot simply opens with Jack's exasperation over Phil's absence from the February 17, 1946 show. Mary opens the dialogue with Jack, and soon thereafter she has to read Phil's lines in the bandleader's seeming absence. Later when he arrives, his opening line is the typical Harris braggadocio:

*OK, folks, here's your favorite pixie,*

*Harris is here and he's right out of Dixie.*

After his bombastic entrance, he went into his joke:

**JACK:** *What did the wallpaper say to the wall?*

**PHIL:** *You may be a little cracked, but I've got designs on you. (Oh, Harris, they ought*



*to put a slot in your head, because your brains are like money in the bank.)*

While Phil Harris bounded into the evening's story line, so too did the reputations of his notorious musicians. The greatest character to receive abuse for his hard drinking and irresponsibility was real guitarist and long time friend, Frankie Remley. When Harris broke into NBC with his own show in 1946, Remley's character as a musical sidekick received a voice from veteran actor Elliott Lewis.

Because *The Jack Benny Program* often relied on running gags, the core of the February 29, 1948 program revolved around Phil's popular song "That's What I Like About the South." The opening of the show involves Jack and his on air girlfriend Gladys Obisco's sojourn to a lunch counter for a sardine sandwich. On arrival at "the show's rehearsal," Jack attempts to have Phil explain his song. Having believed that he made his point that the lyrics were implausible, Jack moves on to a discussion with Rochester, who validates the seeming fictitious locations and people in the lyrics.

It was not uncommon for Jack Benny to

accommodate projects that involved his cast members. When Phil was unable to travel with Jack Benny, a variety of orchestras filled in. On many occasions, such as the time Meredith Willson wielded the baton, jokes were written to emphasize what a nice change it was to have such a down-to-earth replacement for Phil. Ironically, during a 1943 tour, Bob Crosby substituted as the show's bandleader, a foreshadowing of Phil's permanent replacement nine years later. Perhaps the most generous gift to his cast occurred when Dennis Day, Mel Blanc, and Phil Harris obtained their own shows on NBC. *The Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show* was the most successful.

The half-hour comedy based on the real life marriage of Phil Harris and Alice Faye resulted as a spin-off of their stint on the *Fitch Bandwagon*, a Sunday night show that followed Jack Benny. Starting in 1937 as a primarily musical program with comic bits, Harris and Faye joined the cast in 1946 to reinvent the format while including their domestic trials and tribulations in skit form. Elliott Lewis joined the cast as Remley at the real guitarist's request, and Walter Tetley became the smart talking neighbor kid, Julius. As the Fitch show faded in 1948, the Rexall program with Alice and Phil replaced it. Still following the Benny program on Sunday nights, the new situation comedy debuted on October 3 and began a successful run for the next six years.

The chance meeting of the famous bandleader and the glamorous singer resulted when Alice's Dobermans attacked Phil's Doberman. Alice had met Phil years earlier when he was leading Rudy Vallee's orchestra and she was singing with it. She was married to Tony Martin in the interim but was divorced from the singer by the time the dog fiasco occurred. After sufficient sleuthing, Phil endeavored to confront the owner of the vicious beasts. Upon meeting the animal's master, Phil's con-

## PHIL HARRIS

cerns for the dog mellowed, and he romantically pursued the owner.

On May 12, 1941, the two eloped to Mexico. What was to have been an elaborate Hollywood wedding was replaced with an impromptu ceremony south of the border. When it was discovered that Alice had no bouquet, some of the couple's friends ran to a nearby vegetable market and made a grouping of cauliflower, carrots, and lettuce. The following September the two wed again, this time in Galveston, Texas, to make sure the union was legal. Many of her friends warned her that the marriage would not last, but the couple remained together until Phil's death in 1995.

The key to the success of the program reflected the relationship the real husband and wife enjoyed. By 1945, she gave up a lucrative but tiresome film career to become a wife and mother. This new role was quite ironic, for Phil actually had the domestic skills needed to run a house. Because Alice had been in show business so long, the film companies cared for her needs. She did not even have a driver's license when she married Phil. Whenever she needed a ride before, a studio limousine was sent for her. However, because radio acting was not as rigorous as filmmaking, she agreed to return to work and perform over the airwaves.

Her role became that of the savvy yet unmechanical wife, while Phil assumed the part of the bumbling husband who was bent on engaging in a variety of nefarious activities often concocted by Remley. Young Julius often tagged along to give what he believed was helpful advice to the big kids who were often trying to get out of trouble and to avoid Alice's wrath. In addition, real life Harris daughters Phyllis and Alice were added to the cast but were played by Jeanine Roose and Anne Whitfield.

Few realized that one of the reasons for



the show's longevity lay in Phil's guiding and critical hand, which was not always apparent to the listening audience. Sometimes the program even included touching moments. Numbered among the show's listeners was President Harry Truman, who invited the couple to entertain at his 1948 inaugural ball. In later interviews, Phil Harris was often asked why his radio show was not adapted for television. The show was popular enough on the radio, and theme programs like *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* had set a precedent for this type of family show. But Phil decided that the successful radio show should stand as its own, and so it expired in 1954 after a successful run.

While Phil was bidding Jack Benny a "Good bye, Jackson," as he exited the first of the two Sunday night programs, he was preparing to go to another studio to do his own show. Harris remarked that Jack Benny was extremely generous to his employee by letting him take an early leave from the premiere radio show of the day. It was a challenge for Phil to move from one script to the next, and it became even more difficult when Benny moved to CBS in 1949, when the transfer involved run-

ning from one network to another in the same amount of time. Fortunately for Phil and Jack, by the time the two were working for rival companies, the Benny program was well oiled enough to allow one of Phil's underlings to assume the director's place and finish the show. What was not expected was Phil's painful dismissal from the show in 1951.

For the 1951-52 radio season, many radio programs were forced to make budget cuts. Even the powerful *Jack Benny Program* needed to make such concessions, and for its last four seasons, the popular program included fewer guest stars and Bob Crosby replaced Phil Harris as the orchestra leader.

When Phil was honored on the television show *This is Your Life*, Jack Benny graciously appeared in honor of his old friend. Years later Phil Harris continued to praise his boss who gave the bandleader his big break in radio and referred to the time as "sixteen wonderful years."

After the *Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show* left radio, Phil actively continued entertaining. He was the guest on a variety of television shows like the *Kraft Music Hall*, the *Hollywood Palace*, *The Dean Martin Show*, *Here's Lucy* and the *Love Boat*, to name a few. He even starred in his own hour long special in 1959. He displayed his love for hunting and fishing, when he appeared on shows like *American Sportsman* and *Outdoor Life*. During the 1950's he acted in a number of films, including *Wabash Avenue*, *Here Comes the Groom*, *The Wild Blue Yonder*, *Starlift*, and *The High and the Mighty*.

In 1967 he entered a new phase of entertaining, when he gave voice to Baloo the bear in Walt Disney's *The Jungle Book* animated feature and received an Oscar nomination for his song "The Bare Necessities."

Phil Harris developed an affinity for playing golf seriously. He became a fix-

ture at Bing Crosby's Pebble Beach Clambake and won the event in 1951. After Crosby died, Phil assumed the role as color commentator.

When the "Phil Harris Festival" was established in his Linton, Indiana home town, Phil's own golf tourney with celebrities was included as a fundraiser and eventually became the third largest pro-am tourney in the country.

In March 1979, a moving van, filled with most of the Harris-Faye memorabilia, arrived at the Linton, Indiana library. Regina Kramer of the Linton Library catalogued and oversaw hundreds of items, which provides entertainment scholars with a great deal of the information like that which is used here.

From that moment, his hometown endeavored to honor Phil Harris with an annual festival, and, as a result, the Phil Harris Scholarship began in Linton. Phil agreed to such a festival on three counts: it must be a vehicle to raise money for students in his home town, he was able to organize the celebrities and the variety show, and it had to be close to Indianapolis 500 time, so that he could make one big trip back to his home state and do double duty.

On August 11, 1995, Phil Harris departed the earthly stage that he had entered thousands of times. Perhaps the "Do Wah Ditty" he often heralded was inspired by his idyllic hometown in Indiana, and it may also have had its roots in Nashville, where the young drummer matured as a bandleader. Probably it was a mix of these two elements and the home he and Alice enjoyed in California for over six decades. Regardless of its location, the fictitious place undoubtedly also had a place in his heart for his long time spouse, Alice, (who died three years later, on May 9, 1998).

Their mark on American entertainment was long and wide and is fortunately preserved for future generations to enjoy. ■

# The George Washington Joke Book

BY RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

Back during the golden age of radio, the annual celebration of George Washington's birthday provided comedians with material enough for a splendid assortment of jokes and routines.

During the thirties and forties, radio comedians did 39 weekly shows, all of them live, and the material was certainly more "up-to-date" than it is on your typical taped television show today.

January had its hangover jokes, March its St. Patrick's Day humor, and September was great for its "How I Spent the Summer" routines. October had Columbus Day, November its turkeys, and during December the airwaves were jammed with Christmas shopping gags.

February was reserved for George Washington. There was never an abundance of Abe Lincoln gags, and the Valentine routines, though often tried, never really caught on. February was George's month.

What follows is a collection of vintage George Washington radio jokes --- some good, some bad. It all depends on your sense of humor.

If you are old enough, you may have heard most of them. If you are not old enough --- then judge for yourself.

\* \* \*

Jack Carson was a popular movie comedian during the forties. On his CBS radio show, his nephew Tugwell was played by actor Dave Willock.

CARSON: *I'm ashamed of you, Tugwell. When George Washington was your age, he had become a surveyor and was hard at work.*

TUGWELL: *And when he was your age, he was President of the United States.*

\* \* \*

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*Richard W. O'Donnell is a free-lance writer from Port Richey, Florida.*

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Milton Berle and a lot of other radio comedians used this famous line: "Washington --- first in war, first in peace, and last in the American League."

In those days, the old Washington Senators always ended up in last place at the end of the baseball season.

\* \* \*

ABBOTT: *Well, what did George Washington's father say when he saw his report card.*

COSTELLO: *George, you're going down in history.*

\* \* \*

*Life With Luigi*, starring J. Carrol Naish, was the story of an Italian immigrant who found happiness in America. Luigi attended school to learn all about the American way of life.

TEACHER: *Luigi, who was the first president of the United States?*

LUIGI: *George Washington.*

TEACHER: *Could you be president, Luigi?*

LUIGI: *No.*

TEACHER: *Why not?*

LUIGI: *Teacher, you 'scuse me, please. I vera busy. Worku all day.*

\* \* \*

FRED ALLEN: *All right, Senator, if George Washington was alive today, why couldn't he toss a silver dollar across the Potomac?*

CLAGHORN: *Because a dollar doesn't go as far as it used to in the good old days, son.*

\* \* \*

That silver dollar George tossed also inspired a Jack Benny routine.

Benny, playing George in a sketch, had just tossed a silver dollar into the river. For a second or two there was deadly silence.

JACK: *What have I done?*

SOUND: **LOUD SPLASH**

ROCHESTER: *Come back, Mr. Benny. You'll never find it!*

\* \* \*

*Lum and Abner* operated the "Jot 'Em Down Store." They were constantly arguing over this, that and the other thing. On this particular show, they were discussing the War Between the



ware, why did George Washington stand up in the boat?

MAD RUSSIAN: *His pants were too tight?*

\* \* \*

*Duffy's Tavern* was a mythical drinking spot presided over by Archie, the Manager, played by Ed Gardner. You never heard Duffy. But Miss Duffy, his daughter, played by Shirley Booth, was on hand. MISS DUFFY: *Why did Washington stand up in that boat, Archie? Why didn't he sit down?*

ARCHIE: *I don't know. Maybe he thought if he sat down, somebody would hand him an oar.*

\* \* \*

Fanny Brice played *Baby Snooks* on the radio for years. Hanley Stafford was her long suffering father. From time to time, he did manage to get in a joke of his own. SNOOKS: *Why did George Washington chop down the cherry tree, daddy?*

DADDY: *Stumps me, Snooks.*

\* \* \*

States.

LUM: *Supposing the Southern states had won, and the Confederacy became an independent country — what would Washington have been the father of then?*

ABNER: (after thinking it over) *Twins!*

\* \* \*

FIBBER MCGEE: *George Washington was lazy.*

MOLLY: *Never heard that before.*

FIBBER: *Ain't you ever heard of all those beds he slept in?*

MOLLY: *Never believed those stories. If he was lazy, we'd never have won the Battle of Bunker Hill.*

FIBBER: *We lost the Battle of Bunker Hill, Molly. Washington wasn't there.*

MOLLY: *Why that lazy loafer!*

\* \* \*

BERGEN: *George Washington's father was a very gentle man. Why do you know he didn't spank George when he chopped down the cherry tree?*

McCARTHY: *Maybe that was because George still had the axe in his hand.*

\* \* \*

EDDIE CANTOR: *When crossing the Dela-*

The late Joe Penner of "Wanna buy a duck" fame, had Ozzie Nelson as his orchestra leader and Harriet Hilliard, who later became Mrs. Nelson, was the vocalist. On one show, Penner played Washington, and Nelson was an innkeeper at Valley Forge.

INNKEEPER: *We haven't got an empty room George, but the attic is empty.*

GEORGE: *That's all right*

INNKEEPER: *You'll have to make your own bed.*

GEORGE: *That's all right.*

INNKEEPER: *Fine. You can start now. Here's some wood and a hammer.*

GEORGE: *You Nahh-stee man!*

It should be noted "You Nahh-stee (nasty) man!" was a line Penner used every week to bust up his audience out there in Radioland.

\* \* \*

There you have it — a collection of old time George Washington radio jokes. From five or six decades away they may not seem as funny as they did in the old days.

But way back when, they were side-splitters. ■

# CHARLIE'S BIG NIGHT

OR

## Charlie McCarthy, Mae West, and The Edge Of Propriety

BY ELIZABETH MC LEOD



Mae West.

The "Garden Of Eden" Sketch.

Most old-time radio buffs know the story of how the performance of a mildly off-color comedy piece on *The Chase and Sanborn Hour* in December of 1937 ignited a public furor over decency in broadcasting. But Miss West's indiscretion was no isolated incident. After all, program headliners Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy had been known for "sophisticated" comedy for years.

It may come as a bit of a surprise for latter-day radio buffs to realize that Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy came to radio with a reputation for somewhat "grown-up" material — a reputation earned in the elbow-bending, top-hatted world of the nightclubs.

Bergen and Charlie had moderate success in vaudeville in the late 1920s, with a more-or-less conventional ventriloquial comedy act. Charlie was presented as a wisecracking street-urchin, in "Our Gang" style clothes, and his comedy revolved more or less around a street kid's usual activities. But gradually, thru the early 1930s, Charlie began to assume a

more mature persona. As vaudeville continued to recede in importance, Bergen turned to other venues of show business — venues where the "family audience" was less of a consideration. After spending a year in Europe, Bergen returned to the States ready to try for a more "cosmopolitan" style.

Nightclub entertainment catered to an entirely different sort of crowd than the two-and-three-a-day vaudeville houses. The clubs grew from the speakeasy tradition, and were frequented by a hard-boiled, cynical crowd. Well-to-do, insulated from the cruelties of the Depression, and more than a little bit jaded, these "sophisticates" demanded an edgier approach to comedy. And surprisingly enough, Bergen and McCarthy fit right in — with just a few changes.

In this looser environment, Charlie's familiar personality began to emerge. Bergen was supplementing his nightclub work by making a series of one-reel movie shorts from Warner Brothers at the Vitaphone Studio in Brooklyn. These films reveal a Charlie McCarthy who was growing up fast. In a typical example from 1931, *The Eyes Have It* (Vitaphone #1271), Bergen appears as an optometrist trying to examine recalcitrant schoolboy Charlie — who would rather ogle the nurse's legs. Charlie also hints that his problems in school are "a long story — and a dirty one!"

By the fall of 1936, Bergen and McCarthy had been booked into the prestigious Rainbow Room, atop the RCA Building in New York City. This club was the last word

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in swank, and it was here that Charlie first adopted his familiar top-hat-and-monocle costume. It was here too that the most risqué elements of his personality really came into focus. The mid-thirties popular image of "Sophistication" was a high-glossed, white-tied world of booze and innuendoes — think Nick and Nora in the *Thin Man* films — and Charlie took up this image with a vengeance. The schoolyard scamp of a few years earlier was now a cocktail-swilling bon vivant. And it was this image that Bergen and McCarthy brought with them to radio.

Bergen and McCarthy's radio career grew out of a performance at one of Elsa Maxwell's posh Manhattan parties shortly after they began appearing at the Rainbow Room. Among those in the company that evening was an agent named Julian Field, then employed by the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency as a talent scout for Rudy Vallee's *Royal Gelatin Hour*. Field was taken with Edgar and Charlie's cheeky repartee — and brought the ventriloquist to Vallee's attention. Vallee was impressed — and sensing both Bergen's comic ability and the novelty value of a ventriloquist on radio, he slated the act for an appearance on his December

17th broadcast.

Of necessity, Bergen had to tone down his material a bit for radio -- but he was able to keep much of the "sophisticated" feel. Edgar and Charlie made their radio bow in the featured comedy spot, about three-quarters of the way thru the program and were introduced to the strains of "Cocktails

For Two." Bergen started off the routine with a bit of description — and one of his most trustworthy gag lines.

**BERGEN:** *Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. As Rudy told you, my friend here is arrayed in considerable splendor.*

**CHARLIE:** *Yes, indeedy.*

**BERGEN:** *Yes. And now, young man, I would like to know why you're dressed in tails, and top hat, and monocle. There must be a story in back of all that.*

**CHARLIE:** *Oh, there is, stranger. Oh, there is. There's a lonnnnnng, lonnnng story!*

**BERGEN:** *I imagine so.*

**CHARLIE:** *A lonnnng story — and a dirty one, too!"*

Charlie went on to weave a tale of how he inherited \$200 from his stepfather, and moved to England to enjoy a life of decadent luxury under the name of "Denby." Only after pressure from Bergen did he acknowledge his true name of Charlie McCarthy. They then went into another old standby of the nightclub act, Bergen's "mind-reader" routine, in which Edgar foresaw a new job for Charlie...

**BERGEN:** *The position won't do you much good! It seems that your cocktail parties interfere with your work.*

**CHARLIE:** *Oh, I wouldn't say that.*

**BERGEN:** *It looks very bad, young man.*

**CHARLIE:** *Oh, well, I never overdo those things...*

## CHARLIE'S BIG NIGHT

BERGEN: *Oh, you don't?*

CHARLIE: *No, I never take more than ...ah... four or five scotch-and-sodas.*

BERGEN: *Four or five scotch-and-sodas!*

CHARLIE: *Yeah, that's all, that's all.*

BERGEN: *Goodness! I should think four or five scotch-and-sodas would make you awfully drunk!*

CHARLIE: *Yeah, well, it helps!*

Bergen then went on to assume the role of stern father figure — lecturing Charlie on the evils of drink:

BERGEN: *Don't you know alcohol is slow poison?*

CHARLIE: *Is that so?*

BERGEN: *Yes.*

CHARLIE: *Slow poison?*

BERGEN: *That's what it is.*

CHARLIE: *Well, I'm in no hurry!*

(COCKTAILS FOR TWO up to finish.)

Bergen and McCarthy were an immediate hit, and were signed to a thirteen-week contract by Standard Brands. They were a featured comedy act on the *Royal Gelatin Hour* thru the winter and early spring of 1937, and their material gradually began to lose the most overt elements of its "nightclub" style. But the top-hat-and-monocle approach never completely disappeared and Charlie remained an odd mixture of fresh kid and jaded adult. This bizarre characterization produced comedy which worked on several levels. There were easy gags and one-liners for the kids — and winks and nudges for the grownups. Audiences loved it.

As the thirteen week contract wound down, Standard Brands began to think about how else they might be able to use Edgar and Charlie.

For several years, the company had purchased the Sunday night 8 to 9 pm time slot on NBC's Red network for its *Chase and Sanborn* coffee — and had early success in that period with a variety show featuring Eddie Cantor. But Cantor went on



CHARLIE with  
W. C. FIELDS

to other things in 1934, and the *Chase and Sanborn Hour* had floundered thru several formats in the interval — Major Bowes had occupied the slot to considerable success, but left for more money from Chrysler; a series of tabloid operas had generated critical acclaim but dismal ratings; and the current occupant of the time period, a human interest show called *Do You Want To Be An Actor?* had worn out its welcome after only four months.

The company was putting together a new variety package to fill the slot beginning in May, and had already signed film star W. C. Fields as comedy headliner. But Fields was coming off a severe illness, and his reliability was still questionable — to be safe, it was felt that another comedy act was needed to round out the program. Bergen and McCarthy were naturals.

The new *Chase and Sanborn Hour* made its debut on May 9, 1937 — and was an instant success. Not that there weren't rough spots: ulcers danced at the J. Walter Thompson office when loose-cannon Fields opened his routine with a nudge-nudge reference to the British meaning of "W. C." — perhaps radio's first-ever toilet

joke. (As a result, cast members were ever after required to call him "Bill.")

But the stars of the show were clearly Bergen and McCarthy — their routine toned down quite a bit from their Vallee appearances, and focusing more on schoolyard pranks with Skinny Dugan than on quaffing scotch-and-sodas. Alcohol jokes still had an important spot on the show — but they would be directed by Charlie to Fields, his new arch enemy.

Fields and McCarthy would spar thru the summer and early fall of 1937 — and many involved with the program believed that Fields resented being overshadowed by the dummy. Although Fields retained top billing, Bergen and McCarthy were clearly the most popular part of the show — and it didn't help that Fields refused to take direction, often ignoring scripts in favor of bizarre stream-of-consciousness ad-libbing. During the fall, he began to miss broadcasts, complaining of ill health — and finally, when his contract ran out, it wasn't renewed.

Fields' departure saved the agency a great deal of money — his spot in the cast was filled by the Stroud Twins, a vaude-

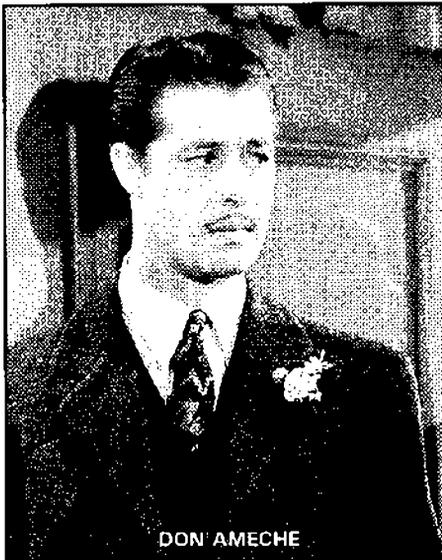
ville comedy team who made considerably less combined than Fields had singly — and the savings made it possible for the show to stretch a bit when it came to guest stars. In December, the *Chase and Sanborn Hour* would take the biggest stretch of all.

Mae West was (and had) one of the most controversial figures in Hollywood — and as a result, made only a few appearances on network radio — a singing stint with Rudy Vallee in 1933, a dramatic skit on *Hollywood Hotel* in 1936. But her career was beginning to sag, and with a new film, *Every Day's A Holiday* about to be released, she consented to appear on the Chase and Sanborn program of December 12th. Her salary wasn't disclosed — but it was reported to "break all records for a one time broadcast."

Listeners that week had some idea of what to expect. Her appearance was heavily promoted in "Radio Guide," with a photo on page one of the December 18, 1937 issue promising "the sex appeal battle of the century: Mae West versus Charlie McCarthy." But nowhere in the magazine was mention made of a ten minute dramatic piece by Arch Oboler — a skit which would live in infamy as the "Adam and Eve" sketch.

The story of Mae West's sultry performance as Eve in Oboler's weak parody of the Bible tale of the Garden of Eden is familiar — with Don Ameche as her Adam, West purred and swiveled her way thru the dialogue, prompting formal complaints to the Federal Communications Commission by Catholic religious authorities in New York, and leading to a formal ban by NBC on any further on-air references to the star.

But there was more to West's appearance that night than just that one skit — and if anything, her second performance that evening could be considered even more outrageous.



DON AMECHE

## CHARLIE'S BIG NIGHT

Introduced by Don Ameche as "the romantic battle of the century (evidently the censors balked at allowing the 'sex appeal' reference) between Siren Mae West and Casanova Charlie McCarthy," West and Charlie exchanged steamy double-entendres.

MAE: *Nothin' I like better than the smell of burnin' wood!*

CHARLIE: *Wonder if she means me?*

DON: *Better watch out, Charlie!*

BERGEN: *Say, Charlie — do you smell that perfume? Isn't it ravishing?*

CHARLIE: *Yeah! Yes it is — it's ravishing! It's weakening! So help me — I'm swooooooning! Wooo wooo woooo! What is it?*

MAE: *Whyyyyy, it's my favorite perfume: "Ashes Of Men."*

CHARLIE: *Uh-oh! "Ashes Of Men?" Holy smoke! She's not gonna make a ...cinder...outa me!* (Another line where you can pretty well guess where the censor hit.)

Or:

MAE: *Listen, Charlie — are these your keys?*

CHARLIE: *Oh, uhhhh, thanks Mae — did I leave them in the car?*

MAE: *No — you left 'em in my apartment!*

Bergen is outraged to learn of Charlie's nocturnal activities — but Mae rises to his defense.

MAE: *If you wanna know, he did come up to see me.*

BERGEN: *Oh, he did? And what was he doing up there?*

MAE: *Wellll...Charlie came up, and I showed him my...etchings. And he showed me his...stamp collection.*

BERGEN: *Oh, so that's all there was to it — etchings and a stamp collection!*

CHARLIE: *Heh, heh, heh — he's so naive!*

And more:

MAE: *I thought we were going to have a nice long talk Tuesday night at my apartment! Where did you go when the doorbell rang?*

CHARLIE: *I was gonna hide in your clothes closet — but two guys kicked me out!"*

And, of course:

BERGEN: *Tell me, Miss West — have you ever found the one man you could love?*

MAE: *Sure...lotsa times!"*

As the dialogue proceeds, recordings of the program show a certain nervousness in the response of the audience — there is a marked edginess to the laughter, which only becomes more pronounced as the routine nears its climax:

MAE: *You ain't afraid that I'd do ya wrong? Orrrr...are ya afraid that I'll do ya right?*

CHARLIE: *Well, I'm slightly confused. I need time for that one.*

MAE: *That's all right — I like a man what takes his...time! Why doncha come up*



CHARLIE MC CARTHY

home with me now, honey? I'll let ya play in my.....woodpile." ( A very nervous laugh from the audience on this line.)

But Charlie won't give in, and Mae finally gives him the brush-off:



MAE: *I don't need you! I got men for every mood — men for every day in the week — Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday — I change my men like I change my clothes!*

CHARLIE: *Mae! Mae! You're not walking out on me, are you?*

MAE: *I got a reputation at stake! No man walks out on me — they might carry them out, but they never walk out!"*

This dialogue was far more explicit than anything in the "Adam and Eve" skit — certainly the bluest ten minutes that the Red network had ever hosted. And Charlie, for his part, certainly seemed to know his way around — he must have kept his eyes and ears open during those nights in the Rainbow Room.

But in spite of this unabashedly gamy routine, virtually all of the subsequent complaints focused on the "Adam and Eve" sketch — and Mae West ended up taking most of the heat, earning a ban from NBC that lasted for nearly twenty years. NBC President Lenox Lohr drew a written reprimand from the FCC. Standard Brands issued a formal apology on the following week's program.

Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy escaped unscathed. They went into the program the most popular act on radio, and their popularity remained just as high coming out of the show. But it's likely that a lesson was learned. While Charlie would continue to show his appreciation for feminine guest stars, never again would he be quite as libidinous as he was that December night in 1937. Never again on radio would his "nightclub" background be quite so obvious.

Because, after all...no matter how popular Charlie was, there was clearly a line that couldn't be crossed.

And Bergen was no dummy. ■

*NOTE-- Tune in to TWTD March 13 to hear the infamous 1937 Chase and Sanborn Show with Mae West.*



Chuck Schaden's

# THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

**FEBRUARY 1999**

## February is Jack Benny Month!

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6th

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13th

**CBS CLOSED CIRCUIT (12-23-48)** A special not-for-broadcast message to management and staff at all CBS owned and operated stations and affiliates. From New York, Chairman William Paley speaks about the success of CBS programming and the impending (January 2, 1949) arrival of Jack Benny to the network. He introduces Jack —and Amos 'n' Andy— who are in Hollywood. Frank Stanton of CBS tells how the network is going to get NBC listeners to switch to CBS. (15 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (1-2-49)** On his way to the studio in the Maxwell with Mary Livingstone and Rochester, Jack is nervous about his first show on CBS. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (29 min)

**HORACE HEIDT YOUTH OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM (5-23-48)** From Chicago, Heidt presents a parade of talent. *This is the series that replaced Jack Benny on NBC when the Benny show moved to CBS on Jan. 2, 1949.* Philip Morris Cigarettes, NBC. (29 min)

**MOVIE PROMO (1939)** Don Wilson hosts a radio movie preview of "Man About Town," Jack Benny's 1939 Paramount film. (12 min)

**BOB HOPE SHOW (11-9-48)** Guest Jack Benny joins Bob, Doris Day and Jack Kirkwood. Bob and Jack become disc jockeys in a "Make Believe Washroom" sketch. Swan Soap, NBC. (29 min)

**JUBILEE #129 (4-16-45)** Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, "star of the Jack Benny Program" is guest on this show for military audiences. Emcee Ernie "Bubbles" Whitman also welcomes the Nat King Cole Trio and "ace clarinetist" Barney Bigard. AFRS. (31 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (5-20-51)** Jack's cast is not satisfied with their new contracts... and Dennis refuses to sing. Bob Crosby makes a guest appearance. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (26 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (4-14-46)** Jack and the gang plus guests Ronald and Benita Colman. Jack's violin practice annoys his next door neighbors, the Colmans. Lucky Strike, NBC. (28 min)

**ACADEMY AWARD (5-11-46)** "If I Were King" starring Ronald Colman in a radio version of his 1938 screen success. Colman is French poet-rogue Francois Villon who matches wits with crafty King Louis XI and falls hopelessly in love with a lady-in-waiting. House of Squibb, CBS. (29 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (4-23-44)** Remote broadcast from Canada, it's Dennis Day's last appearance on the program before entering the Navy. Mary and Phil sing "It's Love, Love, Love." Dennis sings "Amour." Grape Nuts Flakes, NBC/CBC. (30 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (10-22-44)** The cast plans a blood-curdling adventure sketch, "Captain O'Benny, Master Detective." Meanwhile, Jack auditions singers to replace Dennis Day. Lucky Strike, NBC. (26 min)

**PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW (2-13-49)** When flowers begin arriving for Alice, Phil begins to wonder if she has another man in her life. Cast includes Elliott Lewis, Walter Tetley, Hal March. Rexall, NBC. (29 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (10-11-53)** After 15 years in Beverly Hills, Jack decides to put his house up for sale. Lucky Strike, CBS. (27 min)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 20th

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (10-29-44)** When Jack tells guest Fred Allen that he's still looking for a singer to replace Dennis Day, Fred suggests they take a poll of the public to see what kind of singer he should get. They go to Allen's Alley where they meet John Doe (John



PHOTOFEST

MARY LIVINGSTONE and LARRY STEVENS

Brown), Mrs. Nussbaum (Minerva Pious), Socrates Mulligan (Charlie Cantor), and Falstaff Openshaw (Alan Reed). Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (27 min)

**SCREEN DIRECTORS' PLAYHOUSE (2-17-50)** "It's in the Bag" starring Fred Allen in his screen role from the 1945 film comedy-mystery about a flea circus promoter entitled to an inheritance. Cast features John Brown, Sheldon Leonard, Frank Nelson, Hans Conried, Alan Reed. RCA Victor, NBC. (28 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (11-5-44)** Jack and Mary Livingstone go to the Shrine Auditorium to see Dunninger, the Master Mentalist who has found a new singer for Jack's program. He's **Larry Stevens** who is a gas station attendant at a station at the corner of Third and LaCieniga. Larry sings "I'll Be Seeing You." Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (29 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO (10-22-98)** Singer **Larry Stevens**, who replaced Dennis Day on the Jack Benny program (1944-46), talks about his career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded at the Friends of Old Time Radio convention in Newark, New Jersey. (22 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (11-19-44)** Remote broadcast from the U.S. Naval Hospital, Corona, California with Mary Livingstone, Phil Harris, Don Wilson, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, "and our new singer, **Larry Stevens**." Guest is harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler. Larry Stevens joins in the commercial and then sings "What a Difference a Day Made." Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (28 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (2-24-46)** Remote broadcast from Palm Springs, California. To show up Esquire Magazine writer Gilbert

Seldes, who has criticized the brash style of comedy on the Benny program, Jack and the gang presents "a nice, sweet program" with his cast entirely out of character. Larry Stevens sings a new novelty song, "Pickle in the Middle" written by Jack's writer John Tackaberry. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (28 min)

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 27th

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (3-10-46)** Jack welcomes guest Ray Milland, Oscar-winning actor for his role in the film "Lost Weekend." They do the Benny show version of the film with Jack and Ray as twin brothers who drink too much. Jack, announcing that Dennis Day will return to the show next week following his service in the Navy, bids farewell to singer **Larry Stevens**. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (27 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO (8-11-76)** Singer-comedian **Dennis Day** reminisces about his career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded in Mr. Day's Brentwood, California home. He died in 1988 at the age of 71. (28 min)



**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (3-17-46)** **Dennis**

**Day** returns to the program from his World War II service in the Navy. Dennis sings "Danny Boy." Jack and the gang present their version of Fred Allen's "Allen's Alley" with a sketch titled "Benny's Boulevard." The question: "Who is the better comedian, Fred Allen or Jack Benny?" Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (27 min)

**A DAY IN THE LIFE OF DENNIS DAY (10-2-48)** Dennis stars in his own program. To accommodate his girlfriend's mother, Dennis agrees to baby sit a neighborhood brat. Colgate-Palmolive, NBC. (30 min)

**PHILIP MORRIS PLAYHOUSE ON BROADWAY (1952)** "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes" starring Peter Lorre. A gripping fantasy about a magician who has the power to predict the future. Philip Morris Cigarettes, CBS. (25 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM (3-24-46)** A week after Dennis has rejoined the show, the cast gathers at Jack's house for rehearsal. After the gang leaves, Jack reads the book "I Stand Condemned." Guest is Peter Lorre. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (28 min)



Chuck Schaden's

# THOSE WERE THE DAYS

WNIB-WNIZ • FM 97 • SATURDAY 1 - 5 PM

## MARCH 1999

SATURDAY, MARCH 6th

SATURDAY, MARCH 13th

**RECOLLECTIONS AT THIRTY** (7-4-56) Program 4 of 33. Ed Herlihy hosts this series featuring audio clips from NBC's 30 year broadcast history. Rudy Vallee; Clark and McCullough; Lum and Abner; Fred Allen and Portland Hoffa; 1936 band remote; Al Jolson. Sustaining, NBC. (25 min)

**MOLLE MYSTERY THEATRE** (1940s) "The Creeper." When a killer stalks red-headed women in New York, the wife of a detective fears she may be the next victim. Mollie Shave Creme, NBC. (29 min)

**PHIL HARRIS-ALICE FAYE SHOW** (5-1-49) Phil and Remley (Elliott Lewis) help with Spring Cleaning. Rexall, NBC. (29 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (2-19-75) Announcer



**Ken Carpenter** recalls his broadcast career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded in Mr. Carpenter's Brentwood, California home. He died in 1984 at the age of 84. (30 min)

**PHILCO RADIO TIME** (10-15-47) Bing Crosby stars with guest Dinah Shore, the Rhythmairs, John Scott Trotter and the orchestra, and announcer **Ken Carpenter**. In a sketch, Bing visits Dinah's home in Tennessee where Ken Carpenter plays Dinah's father. Later, Bing and Dinah spoof "Your Hit Parade" with a new show they call "Your Flop Parade," sponsored by "Food" (with Ken Carpenter promoting the product!). Philco, ABC. (29 min)

**NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE** (1-14-45) "Murder By Fire" or "Nick Carter and the Mystery of the Midnight Alarm" starring Lon Clark as Nick, Helen Choate as Patsy. Nick rescues a girl from a burning factory. Lin-X Products, MBS. (27 min) *See the article about Lon Clark on page 25.*

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (12-7-71) Actor **Don Ameche** recalls his career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded backstage at the Pheasant Run Playhouse in St. Charles, Illinois. He died in 1993 at the age of 85. (26 min)



**CHASE AND SANBORN PROGRAM** (12-12-37) **Don Ameche** hosts the hour-long variety show starring **Edgar Bergen** and **Charlie McCarthy**, Nelson Eddy, Dorothy Lamour, the Stroud Twins, Robert Armbruster's orchestra, and guest Mae West. Nelson Eddy sings "Road to Mandalay;" Dorothy sings "Every Day's a Holiday." Miss West appears with Don Ameche in an "Adam and Eve" sketch written by Arch Oboler, and in a comedy routine with Charlie McCarthy. Chase and Sanborn Coffee, NBC. (60 min) *Read about the uproar this program caused in the article on page 14.*

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (2-10-75) Comedian **Edgar Bergen** reminisces about his long broadcast career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded in Mr. Bergen's Hollywood, California office. He died in 1978 at the age of 75. (46 min)



**CHARLIE MC CARTHY SHOW** (9-21-41) **Edgar Bergen** with Charlie, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, Ray Noble and the orchestra, and guest W. C. Fields. The insults fly during a classic Charlie McCarthy—W. C. Fields confrontation. Abbott and Costello do a wild animal routine. Chase and Sanborn, NBC. (29 min)

**RECOLLECTIONS AT THIRTY** (7-11-56) Pro-

gram 5 of 33. Truth or Consequences; Bing Crosby and Bob Burns; Jesse Owens; DeMarco Sisters; Tom Howard and George Shelton. Sustaining, NBC. (25 min)

## SATURDAY, MARCH 20th

**SUSPENSE** (3-20-60) "Talk About Caruso" featuring **Mason Adams**, Robert Dryden, Stuart Foster, and Arlene Wacker in the story of a prizefighter turned opera singer. CBS. (23 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (10-24-98) Actor **Mason Adams** talks about his radio career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded at the Friends of Old Time Radio convention in Newark, New Jersey. (11 min)



PHOTOFEEST

**INNER SANCTUM** (1-24-49) "Deadly Dummy" starring **Mason Adams** and Elspeth Eric. After a ventriloquist is murdered, his act is haunted by his dummy. CBS/AFRS. (24 min)

**RECOLLECTIONS AT THIRTY** (7-18-56) Program 6 of 33. Bergen and McCarthy; Little Jack Little; Vox Pop; Al Pearce and Tizzy Lish; Ben Bernie and Bobby Breen; Dixie Lee Crosby. Sustaining, NBC. (25 min)

**ADVENTURES OF OZZIE AND HARRIET** (12-12-48) Ozzie, Harriet and David all have worries. International Silver Co., NBC. (29 min)

**GUNSMOKE** (1-25-59) "The Boots" starring William Conrad as Marshall Matt Dillon, with Parley Baer as Chester, Howard McNear as Doc, Georgia Ellis as Kitty, and **Richard Beals**. Lawrence Dobkin, Vic Perrin. A 45-year-old drunk and a 14-year-old orphan make a strange couple. Many sponsors, CBS. (28 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (10-23-98) Actor **Richard Beals** reminisces about his career on radio and television in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded at the friends of Old Time Radio convention in Newark, New Jersey. (18 min)

**SUSPENSE** (2-1-59) "Return to Dust" starring **Richard Beals**. A lab professor, experimenting with the decreasing size of cancer cells, accidentally gets the formula on his own skin and begins to shrink. Sustaining, CBS. (19 min)



**RICHARD BEALS**

## SATURDAY, MARCH 27th

**GREAT GILDERSLEEVE** (11-9-41) Harold Peary stars as Gildy with Lillian Randolph as Birdie. After Birdie cooks Gildy's birthday dinner for Judge Hooker, the judge tries to hire her as his housekeeper. Kraft, NBC. (30 min)

**NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE** (8-15-48) "The Case of the Professional Beggar" starring Lon Clark as Carter with Charlotte Manson as Patsy Bowen. Nick searches for a messenger boy who may be the only witness to a murder. Old Dutch Cleanser, MBS. (29 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (8-9-76) Actress **Lillian Randolph** talks about her long career on radio, television and the movies in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded in Miss Randolph's Los Angeles, California home. She died in 1980 at the age of 81. (21 min)



**GREAT GILDERSLEEVE** (5-10-50) Harold Peary stars as Gildy with Lillian Randolph as Birdie, Mary Lee Robb as Marjorie. On Marjorie's wedding day Birdie sings "I Love You Truly." Kraft Foods, NBC. (31 min)

**LET'S DANCE** (1-5-35) *Excerpt* from the big band series featuring Benny Goodman and his orchestra with vocals by Buddy Clark and Helen Ward. Uneeda Biscuit, NBC. (19 min) *Karl Pearson, whose article about Let's Dance appears on page 33, will join us on the air to talk about the program.*

**RECOLLECTIONS AT THIRTY** (7-25-56) Program 7 of 33. Jake and Lena; Jack Benny, Kate Smith, Abe Lyman; John J. Anthony; NBC Minstrels; Fibber McGee and the Old Timer; Ben Bernie and the orchestra. Sustaining, NBC. (24 min)

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

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

<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
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## February, 1999 Schedule

<b>1</b> FBI in Peace & War Great Gildersleeve Pt 1	<b>2</b> Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 Gangbusters	<b>3</b> Tales of Texas Rangers Fred Allen Pt 1	<b>4</b> Fred Allen Pt 2 Lone Ranger	<b>5</b> The Shadow Superman
<b>8</b> Philip Marlowe Honest Harold Pt 1	<b>9</b> Honest Harold Pt 2 Dragnet	<b>10</b> Johnny Dollar My Friend Irma Pt 1	<b>11</b> My Friend Irma Pt 2 Man Called X	<b>12</b> Suspense Superman
<b>15</b> Director's Playhouse Jack Benny Pt 1	<b>16</b> Jack Benny Pt 2 Crime Photographer	<b>17</b> Big Town Burns & Allen Pt 1	<b>18</b> Burns & Allen Pt 2 The Falcon	<b>19</b> The Shadow Superman
<b>22</b> Jeff Regan Fibber McGee Pt 1	<b>23</b> Fibber McGee Pt 2 Have Gun, Will Travel	<b>24</b> The Whistler Martin & Lewis Pt 1	<b>25</b> Martin & Lewis Pt 2 Gunsmoke	<b>26</b> Suspense Superman

### OUT OF AREA LISTENERS PLEASE NOTE

If WMAQ Chicago is out of your reception area, "When Radio Was" is heard on a great many other stations throughout the country. For a complete station listing, plus more detailed program information, and a steady audio stream on the Internet, visit [www.radiospirits.com](http://www.radiospirits.com)

## March, 1999 Schedule

<b>1</b> Green Hornet My Little Margie Pt 1	<b>2</b> My Little Margie Pt 2 Director's Playhouse	<b>3</b> Escape Mel Blanc Show Pt 1	<b>4</b> Mel Blanc Show Pt 2 Richard Diamond	<b>5</b> The Shadow Superman
<b>8</b> Luke Slaughter Life With Luigi Pt 1	<b>9</b> Life With Luigi Pt 2 Lone Ranger	<b>10</b> Rocky Jordan Fibber McGee Pt 1	<b>11</b> Fibber McGee Pt 2 Third Man	<b>12</b> Suspense Superman
<b>15</b> Hopalong Cassidy Great Gildersleeve Pt 1	<b>16</b> Great Gildersleeve Pt 2 The Falcon	<b>17</b> The Whistler Jack Benny Pt 1	<b>18</b> Jack Benny Pt 2 Gunsmoke	<b>19</b> The Shadow Superman
<b>22</b> Have Gun, Will Travel Burns & Allen Pt 1	<b>23</b> Burns & Allen Pt 2 Boston Blackie	<b>24</b> ights Out Life of Riley Pt 1	<b>25</b> Life of Riley Pt 2 Tales of Texas Rangers	<b>26</b> Suspense Superman
<b>29</b> Philip Marlowe Father Knows Best Pt 1	<b>30</b> Father Knows Best Pt 2 Dragnet	<b>31</b> Box Thirteen Our Miss Brooks Pt 1	<b>WHEN RADIO WAS--Weekend Edition</b> with host Carl Amari may be heard on WMAQ, 670 AM, Saturday and Sunday nights from 10 pm to Midnight.	

# Lon Clark

BY READ G. BURGAN

"Radio can do very well without you!" Those words etched themselves into the memory of young Lon Clark. In the 1930s Chicago was a leading center of radio production and Clark was making the rounds of Chicago radio stations when a director dismissed him with those words. Words he would remember decades later.

Lon Clark was born of Scandinavian stock on January 12, 1911, in southern Minnesota. His nineteen year old grandfather had immigrated from Norway and founded the town of Frost, Minnesota, where Clark lived as a child after his father died in World War II. When his mother remarried, Clark moved to a farm near Lakeland, Minnesota. In the midwestern countryside Clark formed the values that would guide him for a lifetime. "I have the soil of the country under my fingernails and the dedication to what the soil of that country provides for all of our futures and the kind of democracy that we have today," Clark said.

During his high school years Clark pursued two interests that would parallel his life's vocation: music and drama. To the amazement of his high school band master, he placed second in the Minnesota State Music Contest playing the saxophone. At the same time he entered all of his school's class plays. "I enrolled in all of the ora-

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*Read Burgan is a free lance writer and a former public radio station manager. This article, copyright 1996 by Read G. Burgan and based on an April 1, 1997 telephone interview with Lon Clark, originally appeared in Radio World on November 16, 1997. Lon Clark died October 4, 1998 at the age of 87.*

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PHOTO: NICK GALANTE

torical and declamatory contests and I was always winning. One year I won both the dramatic and the humorous competitions," Clark recalled.

After graduating from high school, Clark hitchhiked to Minneapolis and enrolled at Macthail School of Music. But it was a private drama teacher who had the most influence on him. Clark remembered her with gratitude: "She knew I was on the brink of penury all of the time, washing dishes, playing in orchestras and wherever I could get a job to get by. So she took me on as a student without charging for it. I said, 'Why do you want to do this?' She replied, 'Do you know how much it means to a teacher to have a student who really wants to learn?'"

Clark continued, "Many years later she said, 'I only had four real students that I adopted as my own children; you were the favorite of the two boys.' I didn't ever finish college because I never had enough money. She opened up a world of understanding poetry and the significance of drama."

While in Minneapolis Clark had his first

## LON CLARK

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introduction to radio broadcasting: "When I was going to the Macthail School of music, I was singing in a choir and the first broadcast I ever did was a solo in that choir that was being broadcast at Christmas. I remember it because I had sent a telegram in which I had said, 'Dear mother, I'll be home late for Christmas because I'm singing in a Christmas program being broadcast on WCCO, Minneapolis.' That telegram was dated December of 1928. That was the first sound of my voice going over the air in radio."

Clark and a friend formed a musical team and began broadcasting over local radio stations in Minneapolis. He also had his own dance band. Then he received an offer to work with a dramatic company in tent shows.

"Back in those days the country was jotted with tent shows that would move from town to town. They would stay in a town for a week and do a different play each night and then move on Sunday. That was my first excursion into drama, and I can't think of a better training for a person who wants to get experience because you're playing a different part seven nights a week. I played in the orchestra and then ran backstage and put my makeup on for whatever part I was playing. I did that for quite a few years."

The director of the tent company urged Clark to take his talents to Chicago and try the increasingly popular medium of radio. After a spending time working in Chicago radio, Clark received an offer from WLW at Cincinnati, Ohio, where they had a stock company.

"They hired a group of about ten actors. That really gave me a good working out and a wonderful opportunity to learn the medium. I was there for four years playing all kinds of parts — leads, character

parts and all the rest of it — and getting nice reviews for what I was doing. So I collected all of my reviews and had a brochure made up and I got married there."

Clark had two choices: Hollywood or New York. Hollywood had the added attraction of a potential film career; New York offered the possibility of work in the legitimate theater. Clark chose New York.

"It was 1941. My wife was six months pregnant. I had no job in sight but some hopeful leads. When I got to New York, within my first month I had made close to a thousand dollars, which was very unusual for those days." Clark found himself in constant demand in New York radio circles.

One of those who appreciated Clark's talent was Norman Corwin. "To be able to work for Norman Corwin was like being declared to have graduated from college cum laude, because his works were so remarkable. Everybody wanted to be on his show even though most of the time it was noncommercial. It had prestige. And so I wanted the good stuff even though it didn't make me as much money as I might have on another show. I did maybe thirty shows for him."

In 1943 the Mutual Broadcasting System decided to produce a new detective series based on the pulp fiction detective hero Nick Carter. "When a new show came on the air, directors had a list of actors that they would audition for the part. They would audition about fifty people for it. They tapped me for Nick Carter. I can still remember the night I got the telephone call: 'This is Jock MacGregor. I'm happy to tell you that if you are available, we want you for Nick Carter.' So that's how I got the role on WOR."

"After that phone call, when I went to the next rehearsal of Corwin's show, I said, 'Gee, Norm. I have a problem here. I've been offered a contract to play this private eye who's a famous dime novel character.



# RADIO'S GOLDEN YEARS.

by FRANK BRESEE & BOBB LYNES

FAMOUS OPENING:  
(KNOCKING ON DOOR)  
BANG-BANG-BANG!  
BANG-BANG-BANG!  
BANG-BANG-BANG!  
WHAT'S THE MATTER?...  
WHAT IS IT?  
ANOTHER CASE FOR  
NICK CARTER, MASTER  
DETECTIVE!"

## NICK CARTER MASTER DETECTIVE

NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE BEGAN AS A  
FOLP FICTION HERO IN 1936 IN STREET & SMITH'S  
NEW YORK WEEKLY AND SUCCESSFULLY DEBUTED  
ON RADIO - MBS ON APRIL 11, 1943 & RAN 'TIL 1965...



Lon Clark was Nick Carter

ANNOUNCER:  
MICHAEL  
FITZMAURICE

GIRLFRIEND PATSY BOWEN WAS  
PLAYED BY HELEN CHOAT AND  
CHARLOTTE MANSON

HELEN  
CHOAT

WRITTEN, DIRECTED &  
PRODUCED BY JACK MCGREGOR

SPONSORS:  
OLD DUTCH  
CLEANSER,  
LIX AND  
CUDAHY  
MEATS

CUDAHY  
Plus Product  
VALUE TESTED  
AND PROVED

ARTWORK FROM RADIO'S GOLDEN YEARS ©1998 BY FRANK BRESEE AND BOBB LYNES. REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

And I said, 'They've moved Nick against Jack Benny and how could anybody survive against the Jack Benny show.' It developed that Nick Carter received the highest rating of any show that was put against Jack Benny. I was surprised at that, very surprised at that!"

What was an average Nick Carter broadcast like? "You went in and you picked up your script. Rehearsal time for Nick Carter was 1:30 until about 5:30. You'd go into the studio and get your script and have a read through on it. The director would time the first read through and say 'I guess we're

It's going to be aired on Tuesday nights.' He said, 'Lon, you have to take it, because you are going to get more money for that than I'm paying you, plus I want to see you enjoy yourself as much as possible in building your career. But if the show ever goes off the air and is a non-conflict for me, let me know and I'll have you back again.' He was just marvelous."

Nick Carter, Master Detective proved popular and it established Lon Clark as a major radio actor. Then came a crisis. "All of a sudden they changed our hour on Mutual to opposite Jack Benny on Sunday evenings. I remember going home and saying to my wife 'I guess we had better save our money very carefully.' She said 'Why?'

about four minutes long and we need to make some cuts.' So they'd take a little break of ten or fifteen minutes while he made his cuts. And then he'd give them to the cast."

"We had many different writers on the show and each wrote differently. The dialogue would be differently styled and in a different vocabulary. When I look over the scripts that I've saved over the years, a great deal of change in my scripts in pencil indicates that I had to rewrite in the studio the manner of speech and vocabulary that Nick had established."

"The people who wrote those scripts had to turn them out in the matter of a week's time. It was always a problem to get each

## LON CLARK

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new writer to stick to the style that had been created. Different ones of these leading men had different kinds of terminology in whatever they were doing. Many of us in those days were party to editing the scripts."

What made Nick Carter stand out from the many other radio detective series? "Nick Carter was a show that we settled into on Sunday evening around dinner time so that the children, the parents and the grandparents could sit there and listen. In all the time the show was on the air with Patsy his girl Friday, there was never an overt suggestion that there was a sexual relationship between them except that they were a devoted team to do what they could to catch crooks."

"I never killed a man in all those years. That's unusual. And he had established a downtown boys club."

"And never was there any conflict between Nick and the police department as there were on some other shows. On our program, you heard Sgt. Mathison who was Nick's sidekick and we always worked together. We received several awards for helping the image of the police department."

During his peak years, Clark appeared on an average of twenty radio broadcasts a week. "I used to have standbys who would come in and stand in for me and mark my script and I might show up only for the dress rehearsal." He was particularly in demand for programs like *The March of Time* and *Report To The Nation* that required a variety of foreign accents in a single episode.

Many of us who grew up in the 1950's listened faithfully to *The Comic Weekly Man* dramatize the Hearst Newspapers' Puck The Comic Weekly funnies. Very few people knew that Lon Clark was the *Comic*

*Weekly Man*, and that he wrote, produced and did all of the voices except those of the female roles, which were done by his "Miss Honey."

Clark was never identified on the program's credits and he didn't emphasize his relationship with the program in those days.

"I didn't publicize it very much because I was hoping my career would be advanced more in serious and mature roles. You think you're going to play Hamlet and you don't want to say this is the *Comic Weekly Man* and I want to audition for Hamlet." *The Comic Weekly Man* began with Clark singing, "I'm the *Comic Weekly Man*, the jolly *Comic Weekly Man*, and I'm here to read the funnies to you happy boys and honies." After a short repartee with the "little girl" Miss Honey, Clark would introduce each comic strip with a tongue twister like: "Hippity, hoppity, make it a habit, to give us music for old Br' Rabbit" or "Ramafoo, ramafum, zim, zam, zombec, Let's have music for Dagwood and Blonde."

Each comic strip was treated like a mini-program, complete with dialogue, sound effects and music. Clark produced an amazing number of diverse voices in quick succession, and listening to the program today it's easy to speculate that if Clark had been on the West Coast, he could have made a fortune doing voices for animated cartoons.

Originally Clark was asked to simply audition as an actor for the role of the *Comic Weekly Man*. "I was, among others, called in to audition for it. Being quite versatile to change my voice from one character to another, like, oh let's say Dagwood, I'd try to get a high freakish voice. I'd switch around. I did Maggie and Jiggs with an Irish accent. So I auditioned for it and I got a call saying I was the person they wanted to do it."

"I came in and they handed me a script



NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE  
 Co-stars: Lambiek, Lon Clark, Ed Latimer

and I took it home. It was written by a very good writer, but he apparently didn't have a feel for childhood stuff and what kid's would like. So I went home and re-wrote my own version of the script and took it back to Mildred Fenton the producer and I said I think this is the way the script should be. Read it and call me back. She called me back and said 'I've read the script and you'll be writing it, too'"

"Eventually she got married and moved away and they engaged me to be the producer of it as well during the last two to three years. I had three different girls who played Miss Honey. There were just the two of us who did that show. It was quite a versatility job for both her and me. I had a lot of fun with it. I really, really did."

Clark was an early member of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) and is proud of his affiliation. "I was the first AFTRA man to walk in its first strike in Cincinnati. And I'm being given a special AFTRA award for having given meritorious service to the union."

One day when Clark was building a new

home in Woodstock, NY, disaster struck. Hospitalized with an injured back, several months worth of pain killers damaged his vocal cords. At the time he was a member of the board of directors of the Episcopal Actors' Guild that was dedicated to helping show business people who were down on their luck. They asked Clark to administer their organization, so he embarked on a new career that he continued until his retirement in 1995.

Did any particular radio program or series stand out in Clark's memory? "One I was really thrilled to do was sponsored on Sunday's by the Catholic Church. During WW II, they did a lot of broadcasts about men in the service. There happened to be a man by the name of Lt. O'Shay in the Navy, and the ship went down with him on board, and he had written a letter to his children that was published in all of the newspapers about what he was fighting for."

"I was called to be in the cast for that show, and in the middle of the rehearsals the director said I think I need to change a few characters around for balance of voices and he switched me into the lead role. I've never forgotten how difficult that broadcast was because I had two little boys at that time and to read that man's letter to his baby boy was just too hard for me to contain myself. But I finally got it so that I did it the proper way."

"I've never forgotten it because the director came to me afterwards and said, 'thanks very much for saving my show.' I didn't tell him that I had auditioned for him in Chicago and he said 'I think radio can do without you.' He never knew that the guy who saved his show was the guy who he told that radio could do without you. ■

*NOTE— Tune in to TWTD March 6 and 27 to hear episodes of Nick Carter, Master Detective starring Lon Clark.*

# BY TRAIN TO ANAHEIM, AZUSA, AND CUCAMONGA

BY CURTIS L. KATZ

Anyone acquainted with the *Jack Benny Program* knows the routine — Jack and his friends are at a train station waiting to depart on a journey, when an announcement echoes through the waiting room:

*Train leaving on track five for Anaheim. Azusa, and Cuc.....amonga.*

First heard on the Benny broadcast of January 7, 1945, this line — intoned by Mel Blanc — became one of those running gags that made the Benny show so delightful to listen to.

Actually, the joke behind the line was more than just a litany of funny-sounding place names; with the stolid solemnity usually reserved for calling transcontinental limiteds, the train announcer was describing a train that apparently wandered aimlessly among rural suburbs lost in the orange groves that surrounded Los Angeles in the days before urban sprawl.

Anaheim, 28 miles southeast of downtown L.A., was settled in 1857 as a German agricultural colony. Its name means, essentially, “home by the Santa Ana River.”

Azusa, 23 miles east of Los Angeles, was laid out in 1887 as another agricultural community. It took its name from that of a nearby hill, a name which came from a local Indian word that turned out to mean “skunk place.” In later years civic boosters construed this unpromising name to

mean “everything from A to Z in the USA.”

And 20 miles beyond Azusa is Cucamonga, the oldest of the three, having originated as a

Spanish rancho in the early 1800s. It’s

“kooky” alliterative name came from a Shoshone Indian word meaning

“sandy place.” (Cucamonga may be a funny-sounding place, but at least it’s not a funny-smelling place.)

I don’t believe anyone on the *Jack Benny Program* ever actually rode the train to Anaheim, Azusa, and Cucamonga, although there was one show in which the train announcer plaintively pleads for people to ride the train, then sullenly announces it has been cancelled for want of patronage.

But could one actually travel by train from Los Angeles to Anaheim, Azusa, and Cucamonga? Let’s imagine that Jack Benny’s curiosity has been piqued by this possibility, and find out.

It is 50 years ago, February 14, 1949, a pleasant day in Los Angeles. Jack Benny has just turned 39 (again), and he is cheerfully humming “Love In Bloom” as he saunters across the waiting room of Los Angeles union Passenger Terminal. Despite the heavy wartime traffic of recent years, this grand building, with its unique blend of Spanish Mission and Art Deco architecture, still looks as new as the day it was opened, for it is only ten years old — the last of the great stations.

As Jack approaches the ticket windows, he calls to one of the agents, “Oh, Mister...



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*Curtis L. Katz is a free-lance writer, cartoonist, comedian and Ranger of the Rails.*

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Mister!”

“Yecssss,” comes the unctuous response of the ticket agent (played, of course, by Frank Nelson), “May I help yooouuu?”

“Yes,” replies Jack evenly, “you may help me. I’ve heard so much about your train to Anaheim, Azusa, and Cucamonga that now I’d like to take it.”

“Well you can’t!” comes the inevitable retort. “It belongs to the railroad!”

“Now cut that out! You know very well what I mean.”

“All right, all right,” whines the agent. “It’s getting so a guy can’t have a little fun anymore.” Whereupon Mr. Nelson reaches under his counter, producing a prodigious pile of timetables, and a thick copy of the *Official Guide Of The Railways*, though which he begins paging earnestly.

After several hummed choruses of “Love In Bloom” and a Lucky Strike commercial from the Sportsmen Quartet, the ticket agent finally resurfaces from his research.

FRANK: *Well, I’ve planned your itinerary. You’ll go “Santa Fe all the way,” leaving Los Angeles at 11:10 AM eastbound on Train 42, which arrives Azusa at 11:22 AM, Cucamonga at 12:11 PM, and continues on to San Bernar-*

*dino.*  
JACK: *I presume this is one of those deluxe streamliners, like the Super Chief. I always go first class, you know.*

FRANK: *It’s the doodlebug local.*

JACK: *The what?!*

FRANK: *A doodlebug. A self-propelled gas-electric passenger car that also carries mail and baggage. You’ll love it.*

JACK: *Hmmm...*

FRANK: *Now you’ll arrive in San Bernardino at 12:50 PM where you’ll spend the night...*

JACK: *Spend the night in San Bernardino?! What happened to Anaheim? And why can’t I just come back on the doodlebug?*

FRANK: *Doodlebug. It doesn’t go back until the morning. And it doesn’t go to Anaheim. So you’ll stay overnight in “San Berdoo,” then leave westbound at 7:10 AM on Train 51, the morning milk run, arriving Fullerton at 8:37 AM.*

JACK: *Wait a minute! Can’t I travel on something a bit classier than milk trains and jitter-bugs?*

FRANK: *That’s DOODLEBUG!*

JACK: *Doodlebug, doo-wah-diddy-bug, what difference does it make?*

FRANK: *Well, if you insist, you can wait until 8:45 AM at San Bernardino and take Train 23, the Grand Canyon, our inexpensive tourist train from Chicago.*

JACK: *Inexpensive, did you say?*

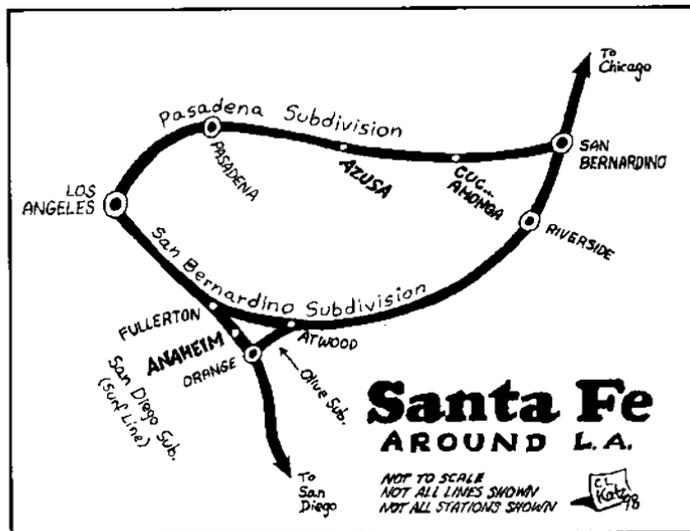
FRANK: *How in the world did I know that would get your interest?*

*Now, No. 23 arrives Fullerton at 9:51 AM, but it’s a flag stop, so you have to ask the conductor, and he’ll put you off. If you’re nice, he might even stop the train, too.*

JACK: *Well, I should hope so.*

FRANK: *Then you wait for Train 70, the southbound Surf Line mail train, which leaves Fullerton at 1:09 AM and arrives Anaheim at 1:19 AM.*

JACK: *You mean I have*



## ANAHEIM, AZUSA, CUCAMONGA

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to stay all day in Fullerton to catch a mail train in the middle of the night?!

FRANK: Well... Fullerton is only two-and-a-half miles from Anaheim. You could take a taxi from Fullerton to Anaheim and catch Train 75, the northbound Surf Line local at 4:56 PM and reach Los Angeles at 6:00 PM the same day..

JACK: Hmm... cab fare in Fullerton is so expensive...

FRANK: ... or you could hitchhike..

JACK: I'll do it!

FRANK: ...but that would be cheating!

JACK: All right, all right. How do I go the rest of the way by train?

FRANK: You take Train 70, like I said, arriving Anaheim at 1:19 AM, and wait there all day for Train 75 at 4:56 PM, which will get you back to Los Angeles at 6:00 PM.

JACK: Wait a minute! If I've got this right, are you telling me that it'll take two-and-one-third days for me to travel from Los Angeles to Anaheim, Azusa, and Cucamonga and back, riding

on four different trains, one of which is some kind of gas-electric insect to San Bernardino?

FRANK: Well, of course you could go the other way, leaving Los Angeles at 12:30 midnight on Train 70, arriving at Anaheim at 1:19 AM, then taking Train 75 from Anaheim at 4:56 PM arriving Fullerton at 5:08 PM, connecting at 6:13 PM with Train 54, the evening local arriving 7:50 PM at San Bernardino where, after spending the night, you'd take Train 45, the morning doodlebug..

JACK: That's doodlebug! So there!

FRANK: ...leaving San Bernardino at 6:00 AM, making a 6:25 AM flag stop at Cucamonga, a 6:57 AM regular stop at Azusa, and arriving Los Angeles at 8:15 AM. That's four trains in only one-and-a-third days. But who'd want to leave Los Angeles at midnight?

JACK: Well, I certainly can't imagine.

FRANK: So... are you ready to travel?

JACK: Yes, I believe I am.

Whereupon our Jack turns and calls across the waiting room, "Oh, Rochester! Get the Maxwell!" ■

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**JACK BENNY'S CIRCUITOUS ITINERARY** is not just another fit of pique typical of Frank Nelson's radio persona. Frank is actually offering Jack the best railroad routings connecting Los Angeles with Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga that were available in 1949. The problem is Anaheim. It is not on the same Santa Fe line as Azusa and Cucamonga, and at that time it was shunned by all but one train each way per day on the otherwise busy Surf Line to San Diego.

Yet despite these details, incredibly, there once was a train from Los Angeles to Anaheim, Azusa, and Cucamonga!

The Santa Fe's "Daily Motor No. 42" — the doodlebug (via the Pasadena Subdivision) to Azusa and Cucamonga in our story — originally did not remain overnight in San Bernardino. Rather, it lingered in "San Berdoo" only for the lunch hour, and at 1:30 PM it became the "Daily Motor No. 53," returning to L. A. on a different route (the San Bernardino Subdivision) via Fullerton with a dog-leg detour (over the tiny Olive Subdivision and the northern extremity of the San Diego Sub) that included a 3:05 PM stop at Anaheim. The train reached Los Angeles at 4:00 PM; the entire round trip took only six-and-a-half hours. Alas, some time early in World War II the detour through Anaheim was bypassed, so by the time the famous "Train leaving on track five..." was first announced on the Benny program of January 7, 1945, it was just a gag-writer's whimsey.

By 1949, only the Santa Fe had passenger trains that stopped at Anaheim, Azusa, and Cucamonga. The far-flung Pacific Electric system served all three communities, but only Azusa, on the Glendora line, was actually reached by train. Pacific Electric Bus lines served Anaheim and Cucamonga. The obscure Whittier branch of the Union Pacific once hosted a modest local that called on Anaheim, but by the late 1930s, this had become a bus service ferrying suburbanites to U.P.'s mainline streamliners.

The scene between Jack Benny and Frank Nelson is the author's invention, but the timetable information it incorporates is absolutely authentic, thanks to the resources of the Northwestern University Transportation Library, of railroad historian Mike Blaszak, and of the author's own library of arcane information.

— CURTIS L. KATZ

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# The Dawn of the Big Band Era:

## Benny Goodman and the Uneda Bakers' Program

# LET'S DANCE

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BY KARL PEARSON



### *Let's Dance.*

Those two words are indelibly associated with the career of clarinetist and bandleader Benny Goodman. The *Let's Dance* program first brought Benny's brand of music to national radio audiences, and also provided Goodman with the theme song that he would be associated with for more than five decades.

*Let's Dance* also played a significant part in the start of the big band era. The Goodman orchestra was something new to radio listeners, playing in a fresh, new style of music that appealed to the younger set. The Goodman band, as heard on *Let's Dance*, set a popular musical style that would remain in vogue for well over a decade. Although dance orchestras had been an integral part of the radio scene for several years, the *Let's Dance* program was perhaps the first show in which an orchestra was permitted to play in its own preferred style with minimal sponsor interference.

It was during the early part of 1934 that Benny Goodman had decided to form an orchestra of his own. The Chicago-born Goodman had been a highly-successful studio musician for the past several years and had played in hundreds of radio bands,

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*Karl Pearson of Park Ridge, Illinois is a big band historian who contributes regularly to these pages.*

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theatre orchestras and recording groups, under the baton of leaders such as Donald Voorhees, Ben Selvin, Red Nichols and Carl Fenton. By early 1934 Benny had found much of his steady studio work evaporating and had decided to form a band of his own. Such an orchestra allowed Goodman to make his own choice of selections and style, instead of the choice being made by another individual. By mid-1934 the Goodman band had landed an engagement at Billy Rose's Music Hall in New York City.

In early October, 1934 Benny was notified that the Music Hall engagement would end within a few weeks. Jobs in the New York music scene were scarce during those depression-era days, and Goodman found his handleading career in jeopardy. A po-

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tential European tour leading an all-star interracial band that would include musicians such as Jack Teagarden, Chu Berry, and Benny Carter, never materialized. Within a short period of time though, Benny's luck would change.

During the year 1934 it was estimated that over 90 percent of the homes in America had at least one radio. Programs such as *Amos 'n' Andy*, *Ed Wynn*, *Rudy Vallee*, and *Jack Benny* offered an inexpensive means of escape to depression-weary Americans. Throughout the summer of 1934 the National Broadcasting Company handed out surveys to over eighteen thousand participants who had attended various NBC studio broadcasts. The results of this survey were published and indicated that dance music was the most popular type of programming on the air, gathering more votes than any other type of show!

Dance music had been an integral part of the broadcast scene since radio's early days. Commercially-sponsored shows such as Wayne King's *Lady Esther* program, Paul Whiteman's *Old Gold* series, B.A. Rolfe's *Lucky Strike Dance Orchestra* and the *Camel Caravan* (featuring the Casa Loma Orchestra) were but a few of the musical programs popular with many radio listeners. Many stations also carried several hours worth of late-night sustaining (unsponsored) band remotes from ballrooms, restaurants and nightclubs across the country. Such programming provided listeners with a variety of music which either offered great listening or gave folks an excuse to roll up the carpet and dance in their own home!

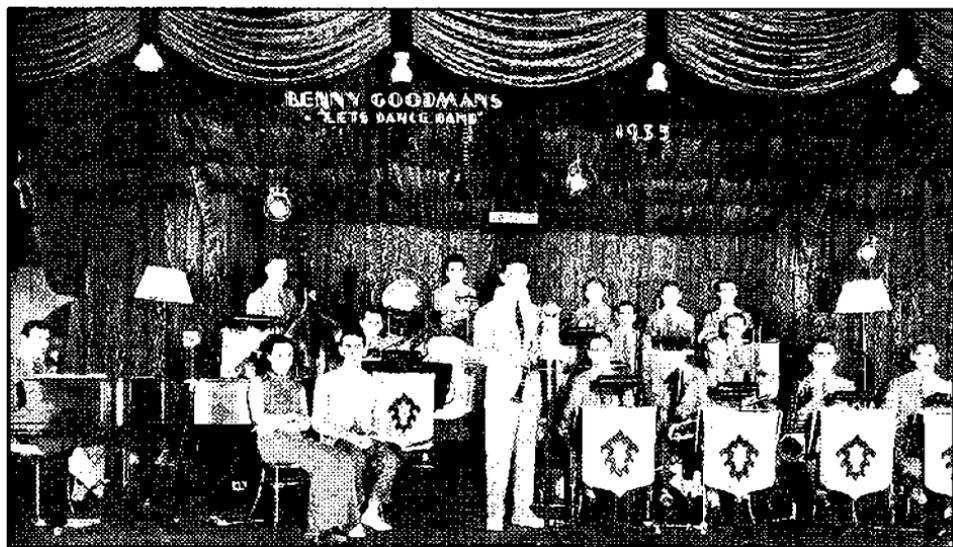
A number of sources credit NBC executive John Royal as the one who originated the concept for the *Let's Dance* series. Royal's idea was presented to executives of the National Biscuit Company (often

referred to as the Uneeda Bakers, the company is known today as Nabisco), makers of cookies and crackers. The pitch was simple: why not sponsor a Saturday evening radio "dance party," featuring three different dance orchestras and encourage listeners to have dance parties of their own? Refreshments were most likely to be served at such an affair and products such as Uneeda Biscuit and Oreo cookies would be perfect for such an occasion! National Biscuit liked the idea and agreed to sponsor the program. McCann-Erickson, National Biscuit's advertising agency, began to assemble the program, and Josef Bonime, McCann-Erickson's music conductor and contractor, was in charge of the project.

Goodman found out about the proposed *Let's Dance* series shortly before the end of the engagement at Rose's Music Hall. Three bands were scheduled for the broadcast: a "sweet" society band, a Latin band, and a "hot" band, one similar in style to the Casa Loma Orchestra. Bonime knew Goodman and had used him as a sideman on several past occasions. An opportunity for Bonime and his associates to hear the Goodman band was arranged, and Bonime, who was favorably impressed with Goodman band, encouraged Benny to try out for a spot on the program.

Final auditions were held on November 7, 1934. The music was piped into the agency's boardroom, and various executives, secretaries and staffers tried dancing to the different groups. By the end of the day the results were in and Benny's band had landed a spot on *Let's Dance*!

Although much has been written about the Goodman band, little is usually written of the two other orchestras which shared the *Let's Dance* spotlight. Murray Kellner, renamed "Kel Murray" for the program, led the sweet-styled society band. Kellner had been Bonime's first-chair vio-



**BENNY GOODMAN'S *Let's Dance* Band at Elich's Gardens, Denver. Photo taken July, 1935 (two months after the *Let's Dance* show left the air). Helen Ward sits out front; Gene Krupa is at the drums; Bunny Berigan is in the trumpet section, just to the right of Benny.**

minist on several other radio shows. Many of the best New York studio men were a part of the Murray *Let's Dance* orchestra, including trumpeters Charlie Margulis and Mannie Klein (one the best lead men in the business), and reedmen Arnold Brillhardt and Alfic Evans. Vocalists heard with the Murray band on *Let's Dance* included Frank Luther, Phil Ducey and Connie Gates.

The Latin band was led by violinist Xavier Cugat, a former member of Anson Weeks' orchestra. The 34 year-old Spanish-born Cugat was beginning to establish his reputation as one of the masters of rumbas and tangos. The Cugat band had just begun a second successful season as the house orchestra at New York's Waldorf-Astoria hotel. Vocalists featured with the Cugat band included Carmen Casteline and Luis Alvarez.

Although not as polished as some of his later groups, the 1934 Benny Goodman orchestra featured several strong sidemen. Harry Goodman, Benny's bass-playing

brother, had left the Ben Pollack band several months earlier for a spot in the Goodman rhythm section. Guitarist George Van Eps was well-known in New York circles as one of the musical sons of Fred Van Eps, Sr., a pioneer banjo-playing musician who had made his first commercial records in 1897. Benny's sax section included tenor saxist Arthur Rollini, brother of well-known jazz musician Adrian Rollini, and alto saxists Toots Mondello and Hymie Schertzer. Both Mondello and Schertzer's distinctive phrasing gave the Goodman sax section its unique sound. The trumpet section included Sammy Shapiro, would soon leave the Goodman band. Twenty years later Shapiro would be become better known as Sammy Spear, Jackie Gleason's television orchestra leader.

Benny had also hired a young singer Helen Ward, who had been singing with Enrique Madriguera's society band. (Madriguera had been offered a spot on *Let's Dance* but had declined the offer.) Although Helen always felt that Benny

## LET'S DANCE

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viewed all vocalists as a "necessary evil," her rhythmic singing style helped set the pattern for future big band singers. Helen's swinging, gutsy style was a strong contrast to most of the "girl chirpers" heard in other orchestras. Goodman also hired a young "boy singer" named Buddy Clark, who would share the vocal duties with Helen Ward.

The two most significant additions to the Goodman band were Bunny Berigan and Gene Krupa. The trumpet-playing Berigan was well known in both the New York radio and recording circles by fans and musicians alike. Bunny's trumpet solos brought new inspiration to the Goodman band, and his ensemble work added strength to the brass section. Drummer Gene Krupa, a Chicago native, was another highly respected musician. Krupa, who had left Buddy Rogers' highly commercial orchestra, joined the Goodman band about three weeks after the *Let's Dance* premiere.

A three-hour program such as *Let's Dance* would obviously require much fresh new musical material (including many of the current pop tunes), and fresh arrangements would be needed for each broadcast. The program's budget allowed Benny to commission eight new arrangements per week for the first thirteen weeks of the program, at a cost of \$37.50 per score. The second thirteen weeks would allow for four new arrangements per week. Although the Goodman band's "book" already included several charts by Benny Carter, Deane Kincaide and others, its library of scores was still fairly small.

Benny began to build the band's library, commissioning new scores from white arrangers such as Joe Lipman and Spud Murphy. Goodman also hired Fletcher Henderson to write arrangements for his orchestra, and Henderson, who had re-

cently disbanded his own group, welcomed the steady income. The Henderson arrangements, as written for the Goodman band, were noted for their clean voicings, wonderful call-and-response patterns, and ample solo spots. The first charts submitted to Goodman by Henderson were mainly instrumentals such as "King Porter Stomp" and "Big John's Special." Benny encouraged Fletcher to begin to write charts using classic popular tunes as well as the latest Tin Pan Alley hits. Soon Henderson was turning out memorable arrangements of old favorites such as "Bluc Skies," "Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea," and "Three Little Words" in his original style.

The *Let's Dance* program, billed as "radio's first three-hour dance party," made its debut over 56 NBC Red Network affiliates on Saturday, December 1, 1934. National Biscuit stockholders and dealers were encouraged to throw dance parties of their own to help ensure the program's success. The gala opening included such guests as Ruth St. Denis, Mae Murray, and Sally Rand. The program included a cast of over 70 musicians and performers, including master of ceremonies Don Carney, better known to younger radio listeners as "Uncle Don." (Carney, dubbed by some radio critics as "too cute," disappeared by the third program in the series.) The Uneda Bakers commercials were delivered by NBC staff announcers including Howard Petric, later the announcer on Jimmy Durante's program, and George Hicks, best remembered for his June 6, 1944 eyewitness account of the Allied landing on the beaches of Normandy in France.

*Let's Dance* was broadcast from Studio 8-H, NBC's largest facility, located in New York's Rockefeller Center. (Studio 8-H was later used by other NBC shows such as Fred Allen's *Town Hall Tonight* and the *NBC Symphony*. The studio still exists and is known to today's television viewers as the



home of NBC's *Saturday Night Live*.)

All three orchestras were featured during the first half-hour of the show and were heard in alternating fifteen-minute segments. Contemporary reports also state that the three bands joined together for one number (under Bonime's baton) during the course of the evening. A *Let's Dance* theme, played by each band in its distinctive style, served to identify each group. The tune, based on Carl Von Weber's "Invitation to the Dance," was written by Josef Bonime, Fanny May Baldrige and Gregory Stone. Goodman had George Bassman, one of Bonime's staff musicians, arrange the *Let's Dance* theme in his band's style. (Bassman later had a successful arranging career in Hollywood and is best remembered for his score for the film *The Wizard of Oz*.) Bassman's arrangement of the *Let's Dance* theme eventually became so closely identified with the Goodman band that Benny dropped his original theme, "Blue Serenade," which had been written by Gordon Jenkins. "Blue Serenade," later retitled "Good-Bye," became Benny's trademark signoff signature.

Although a number of *Let's Dance* ex-

cerpts featuring the Goodman band have come to light, no complete recordings of the program have yet been located. A transcript of the first half-hour of the January 5, 1935 program surfaced recently in the archives of the Library of Congress, and gives a good example of how the program sounded:

SIGNATURE: *Murray orchestra and vocals*  
 PETRIE: *Saturday night, Uneeda Bakers night! LET'S DANCE night . . . and here we are with the National Biscuit Company's three fine dance bands . . . That was Kel Murray's orchestra you just heard... Now here is Xavier Cugat, our tango king.*

CUGAT BAND: *'Let's Dance'*

PETRIE: *And Benny Goodman's orchestra with Benny himself on the clarinet...*

GOODMAN BAND: *'Let's Dance'*

PETRIE: *And now...*

PRISCILLA: *Let's Dance!*

GEORGE: *Let's Dance!*

CROWD: *Let's Dance!*

MURRAY BAND: *Fine and Dandy; On the Good Ship Lollypop.*

PETRIE: *Are you with us at our Uneeda Bakers LET'S DANCE party? It promises to be a good one tonight. As good as Uneedu Biscuit themselves and that's saying something. For Uneeda Biscuit are the largest selling packaged cracker in the world. And this is the largest dancing party in the world, too.*

*That was Kel Murray's orchestra you just heard in "Fine and Dandy" and "On the Good Ship Lollypop."*

*We hear now Xavier Cugat's orchestra who play first a tango "Porque" followed by a rumba medley consisting of "Martha" and "Sefue."*

CUGAT BAND: *Porque; Medley*

PETRIE: *Our musical broadcast brings you Benny Goodman's orchestra next in "Honeysuckle Rose" and "Love Is Just Around the Corner."*

GOODMAN BAND: *Honeysuckle Rose; Love is Just Around the Corner*

A commercial for Orco cookies followed, and then the Murray band played a "Winter Medley," followed by a medley of

## LET'S DANCE

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waltz selections. The Murray band then closed the first half-hour with its version of the *Let's Dance* theme.

While the program was being broadcast to listeners coast-to-coast, three pairs of professional dancers entertained the studio audience. Helen Ward would occasionally leave her chair in front of the Goodman orchestra and also dance with one of the "boy singers" from time to time.

The three-hour time difference between the east and west coasts dictated that virtually all network programming be repeated later for western affiliates. Recordings of broadcasts were not yet permitted by the networks, which meant that a program's cast and crew had to reassemble for a repeat program, usually three hours later. The three-hour length of "Let's Dance" and the fact that various NBC affiliates across the country joined the program at various points created a continuous five-hour broadcast!

This time schedule gives a fairly good example of this situation:

**East:** 10:30 P.M. - 1:30 A.M. Eastern time

**Central:** 9:30 P.M. - 12:30 A.M. (10:30 P.M.-1:30 A.M. Eastern time)

**Mountain:** 10:00 P.M. - 1 A.M. (12 Mid-night- 3:00 A.M. Eastern time)

**Pacific:** 9:30 PM -12:30 A.M. (12:30-3:30 A.M. Eastern time)

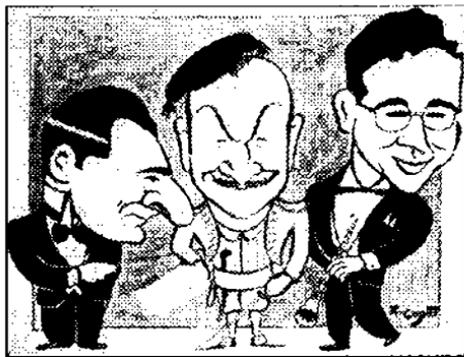
A number of problems occurred with the *Let's Dance* program right from the start. The five hours of airtime caused a number of logistics problems for some of the musicians. Many of the musicians in the Murray band participated in other programs, including west coast repeats of other NBC-Red programs and shows heard on the NBC-Blue network. Many of the musicians arrived from other locations and needed a place in which they could wash up and change. Since 8-H's facilities did

not include such a layout, a makeshift setup was arranged. Catering tables were also set up in the backstage area for the cast and crew of the five-hour program. The Cugat band had its share of logistics problems too, as the Waldorf-Astoria's management requested that the band return to the hotel as often as possible during the evening. Cugat's brother Albert kept a fleet of taxis on standby to whisk the Cugat musicians back and forth between the Waldorf and NBC.

The Goodman band also had its share of problems. One such issue involved the acoustics of studio 8-H, which had never been used by an orchestra similar to the Goodman band. The brass players and Krupa's drums created "blasting" problems, which required adjustments to the broadcast setup. (A number of Bunny Berigan solos on existing early airchecks are played with a mute - undoubtedly at the request of NBC engineers who wanted to prevent sudden volume jumps.) Another problem encountered during one broadcast involved Bunny Berigan, who pushed his chair back slightly and fell off the band's riser. Bunny was slightly injured and Benny had to use Mannie Klein (from the Murray band) as a substitute for the evening.

Reviews of the program in the radio and entertainment trades were generally favorable, although *Variety* criticized the commercials as "too cute." Music publications such as *Metronome* and *Down Beat* liked the show, and raved in particular about the Goodman band. The late-night Saturday evening program earned respectable ratings as well, receiving a CAB rating of 19.8 during the month of February of 1935. Weeknight programming such as the Burns and Allen program (19.6), *Hollywood Hotel* (17.0), Bing Crosby (15.5), and Fred Waring (16.9), scored similar marks.

The younger set was a big part of the program's success, as the Goodman band's



**CHARACTURE** of the three *Let's Dance* maestros, drawn by Xavier Cugat: (from left) Kel Murray, Cugat, Benny Goodman

rhythms struck a chord with younger listeners. Benny and the band played both its up-tempo and ballad numbers with more expression and "bite" than many of its contemporary white counterparts. (Goodman insisted that his musicians play with more feeling and expression, as opposed to just reading the scores "as is.") Fletcher Henderson's arrangements were also big part of the Goodman band's unique sound. Benny, who later referred to each of Fletcher's charts as a "little classic," was quick to credit Henderson as a major reason for his band's success.

Both NBC and the Unceda Bakers continued to promote the show in print and on the air. A special New Year's Eve version of "Let's Dance" (requiring six hours of on-the-air studio time) was carried by both NBC networks (Red and Blue) on Monday evening, December 31, 1934. Unceda Bakers was so pleased with the popularity of the show that it committed to a total of 52 weeks of programs shortly after the show's thirteenth program.

Unfortunately *Let's Dance* came to a sudden end after the May 25, 1935 broadcast. Although ratings were still good, an unexpected bakery strike had left National Biscuit without any product to sell. *Let's Dance* was cancelled, as it appeared that

the labor dispute would not be easily resolved.

Kel Murray returned to studio work and apparently faded from the music scene. Xavier Cugat and his band remained on the bandstand of the Waldorf-Astoria for another decade, appeared on several other radio series, and later moved into television. Although remembered by many for his Latin rhythms, others remember him for the various beautiful women he associated with over the years, including Lina Romay, Abbe Lane and Charo. Cugat made a few public appearances with his band just prior to his death in October, 1990.

The Goodman band experienced a few ups and downs shortly after cancellation of *Let's Dance*. An engagement at New York's Hotel Roosevelt proved to be disastrous, and the initial part of a cross-country tour offered mixed results. Benny's luck finally turned when the band arrived to play at an engagement at the Palomar in Los Angeles. Many of the fans who came to hear the band in person had heard the group on the radio program. A six-month long engagement at Chicago's Congress Hotel followed, once again giving the Goodman band a spot in the late-night radio schedules. Over the next few years the Goodman band would usually take the number-one spot in most of the popularity polls.

In later years Goodman looked back on his *Let's Dance* band with fond memories. Benny, who died in June of 1986, once again assembled a big band during the last year of his life, pulling out many of the old *Let's Dance* charts from his library. Lucky fans who attended a Goodman rehearsal or concert during this period were able to hear a number of old chestnuts from the 1935 Goodman book. During one of his last public television appearances Benny once again gave credit to Fletcher Henderson and even dedicated the program to the memory of his old friend. ■



## Our Readers Write

### WE GET LETTERS

**GLEN ELLYN, IL--** Fifteen dollars seems such a small price to pay for so much enjoyment. I've been a subscriber for many years and a listener for many more. I've always been a fan of old time radio and most anything from the days of yesteryear. Whenever I listen to your show I imagine what my Dad experienced when he listened to those "now classic" shows for the first time. It's great to be able to escape for four hours every Saturday to a time when everything seemed so simple and honest. Please keep up the good work. It is truly appreciated. --**TAMI MAURER**

**WEST CHICAGO, IL--** Enclosed is my check to renew my subscription. You know, this is one check which I am very happy to write. I can't tell you what pleasure I receive every Saturday afternoon when I listen to your delightful program. --**MOLLIE TAYLOR**

**PARK RIDGE, IL--** I really enjoy listening to your program every weekend and I have been listening for a number of years now. I especially enjoy February: Jack Benny Month. Last year you played a song called "Deck of Cards" by Phil Harris and mentioned that the recording was available from "The Good Music Company." The Post Office said that address does not exist. Where are they? --**TONY KOWAL**  
**(ED. NOTE--** Call 1-800-538-4200 to place an order. When we called, they were reluctant to give out an address (!!?) but finally told us to write to Good Music Company, Attn: Customer Service, 2 N. Maple Ave., Ridgley, MD 21660. We'll probably play the Harris "Deck of Cards" recording on *TWTD* during this year's Jack Benny Month.)

**PALOS PARK, IL--** Thanks for bringing back all the wonderful memories of our youth. I look forward to your great *Nostalgia Digest* and radio programs. --**ELAINE RADOVICH**

**CAROL STREAM, IL--** I've enjoyed old time radio since I was 14 in 1983. The shows are much better than anything on TV. Could you print the information on how to join SPERDVAC? Also, are there any other national OTR organizations? --**HENRY TCHOP**  
**(ED. NOTE--** SPERDVAC (Society to Preserve

and Encourage Radio Drama, Variety and Comedy) is at Box 7177, Van Nuys, CA 91409-7177. Phone (562) 947-9800. FOTR (Friends of Old Time Radio) may be reached by contacting Jay Hickerson at Box 4321, Hamden, CT 06514. Phone (203) 248-2887. For information about the Cincinnati OTR group, write Bob Burchett, 10280 Gunpowder Road, Florency, KY 41042. Phone (606) 282-0333. Write to the Radio Enthusiasts of Puget Sound in care of Mike Sprague, Box 723, Bothell, WA 98041. Phone (206) 488-9518. All of these organizations are dedicated to keeping alive the spirit of old time radio and each has an annual convention where fans, buffs, and performers get together to share their mutual interests.)

**ELMHURST, IL--** Thanks for keeping the memories alive. I especially like the articles about the old neighborhoods and the lives of the past stars. --**MICHAEL ESSLING**

**HIGHLAND PARK, IL--** Saturday wouldn't be right without you! I have been with you since you started in Evanston. --**MEL GORELIK**

**ELGIN, IL--** Just wanted to express my delight in finding the October/November issue of *Nostalgia Digest* devoted to Walter Tetley. Bravo! --**KRISTINE RUTTI**

**ELMWOOD PARK, IL--** I don't remember too much of old time radio, but I'm really hooked on it and have quite a collection that I have purchased at Metro Golden Memories. You've heard of "comfort food," well old time radio is comfort to the ears and to the soul. --**EFFIE GINERIS**

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## NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

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PHOTOFEST

← **LON CLARK was NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE**

during the series' entire 12-year run. The article by Read G. Burgan begins on page 25.

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