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FEBRUARY/MARCH 2001



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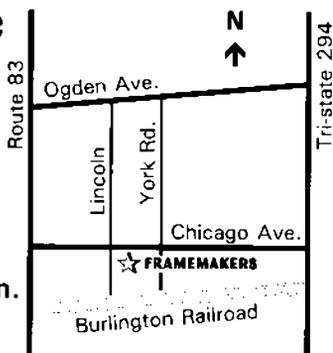
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# CHUCK SCHADEN'S NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

BOOK TWENTY-SEVEN

CHAPTER TWO

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2001

## Good-bye, WNIB

The announcement came at the end of November.

Bill and Sonia Florian, the owners of WNIB, Chicago had agreed to sell their radio station to Bonneville International Corp., the Salt Lake City-based broadcast division of the Mormon Church.

Thousands of regular listeners and, of course, those of us who are heard on the stations were stunned at the news.

Bill Florian started WNIB on a shoestring over 45 years ago and he and Sonia have worked tirelessly to keep it on the air, not an easy thing to do and maintain the integrity of a classical format. They worked at the station every day, seven days a week, every week of the year for all those years. Now, they decided, was the right time to accept an offer they found difficult to refuse. We knew that, sooner or later, this time had to come.

And so, the WNIB we know will leave the air, to be replaced no doubt by a different music format. We have been advised that our *Those Were The Days* program would be cancelled at the time of the actual ownership change, "sometime in February, 2001" or maybe in January. We have been honored to be a part of WNIB for the past 25 years and we are grateful to the Florians for providing us with an outstanding home for our Saturday afternoon broadcasts. Now we must search for another home for *Those Were The Days* and that's what we're doing. In fact, we're doing everything we can.

We've had a number of calls from and contacts with Chicago area stations and are in the process of finding a suitable place for the program.

This process takes time and, even though we've pushed back the printing deadline for this issue of *Nostalgia Digest*, we have no news to report to you as we go to press.

Our February-March schedule of broadcasts, prepared in advance, appears in this issue, but we can't say for certain what's going to happen. If we're still on WNIB in February, we'll begin that schedule. If we immediately switch to another station, we'll attempt to follow the February/March schedule as planned. If not, we'll try to re-schedule the programming as events dictate.

Thanks for your patience during this uncertain time.

Thanks for your never-ending support.

*Thanks for listening.*

--Chuck Schaden



## NECROLOGY OF 2000

# We Remember Them Well

*Last year was not a very good year for show business.  
We lost many of our favorite entertainers and personalities during 2000.  
They're gone, but not forgotten.*

**REX ALLEN**, 77, singing cowboy, popular on radio, in vaudeville and in dozens of B-westerns. December 17, 1999.

**STEVE ALLEN**, 78, late-night television pioneer, comedian, author, actor, songwriter, who started the *Tonight Show* on NBC-TV in 1953. October 30.

**BILLY BARTY**, 76, the 3-foot-10-inch Little Person whose acting career in motion pictures and television spanned 70 years and all types of roles. December 23.

**GORDON 'TEX' BENEKE**, 86, singer/saxophone player who took over the Glenn Miller band after Miller's death in WW II, then successfully formed his own band in the late '40s, appearing through the 1970s and '80s. May 30.

**VICTOR BORGE**, 91, beloved Danish pianist and satirist whose daffy approach to the classics kept international audiences laughing for more than 70 years. His American career began on radio in the 1930s when he appeared as a guest on the *Rudy Vallee Show* and then became a regular on the *Bing Crosby* program. He had his own radio shows in the 1940s and 50s. December 23.

**ROBERT BORLEK**, 75, actor who starred in the popular children's program *Commander 5* on Chicago's WMAQ-TV for five years during the late 1950s. March 7.

**GAYLORD CARTER**, 95, celebrated theatre organist who also performed on radio playing



Steve Allen



Tex Beneke

the "Perfect Song" theme music for *Amos 'n' Andy* beginning in 1936 and continuing for many years. November 20.

**BOB COLLINS**, 57, veteran Chicago radio personality who joined WGN in 1974 and served as host of the station's popular morning drive-time show since 1986. February 8.

**ANN DORAN**, 89, character actress who appeared in hundreds of movies and TV shows. She was James Dean's tormented mother in *Rebel Without a Cause*. September 19.

**ALEX DRIER**, 83, long-time Chicago radio and TV news broadcaster and commentator known as the "Man On the Go" who went on to a secondary career as an actor. March 12.

**DAVID DUKES**, 55, stage, screen and TV actor appearing in more than 35 films and in the TV series *The Winds of War*, *War and Remembrance*, and *The Josephine Baker Story*. October 9.

**LEE ERWIN**, 92, organist and composer of music for silent films and the Cincinnati radio show *Moon River*. He was musical arranger for Arthur Godfrey on radio. September 21.

**DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, JR.**, 90, actor, producer and author who appeared in 75 movies including *Prisoner of Zenda*, *Gunga Din*, *Little Caesar*, and *Sinbad the Sailor*. May 7.

**RICHARD FARNSWORTH**, 80, movie stuntman for over 30 years who turned actor at age 57 and received an Oscar nomination for his



Victor Borge



Alex Drier



Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.



Florence Freeman



John Gielgud



Alec Guinness

performance in *The Straight Story*. October 6.  
**LUCILLE FLETCHER**, 88, well-known author of radio scripts who wrote "Sorry, Wrong Number" which was performed many times on *Suspense* along with numerous other mystery dramas including "The Hitch-Hiker," "The Thing in the Window," and "The Diary of Sophronia Winters." August 31.

**FLORENCE FREEMAN**, 88, radio actress who starred as *Young Widder Brown* for 16 years and as *Wendy Warren (and the News)* for 11 years. April 28.

**VITTORIO GASSMAN**, 77, Italian motion picture actor for more than 50 years, appearing in such U.S. films as *Beautiful But Dangerous* and *War and Peace*. June 29.

**PETER GENNARO**, 80, dancer and choreographer on Broadway and on TV, in the 1950s and '60s, on *The Perry Como Show*, *Your Hit Parade*, *The Andy Williams Show*, and *The Judy Garland Show*. September 28.

**JOHN GIELGUD**, 96, British actor whose 65 year career in England and the U.S. won him recognition for his work on stage, screen, radio and television. May 21.

**LEONARD H. GOLDENSON**, 94, pioneering broadcast executive who bought the ABC television and radio networks in the 1950s. December 27, 1999.

**ED GRENNAN**, 78, Chicago broadcast veteran, staff announcer on WMAQ radio and TV; host of long-running TV series *It's Academic*. August 22.

**ALEC GUINNESS**, 86, renowned British actor whose stage and screen career spanned 60 years. He won an Oscar for his role in *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and appeared as Obi-Wan Kenobi in the *Star Wars* series. August 5.

**TITO GUIZAR**, 91, Mexican cowboy singer and guitar player who entertained U.S. and Mexi-

can audiences for 70 years. December 24, 1999.  
**DOUG HENNING**, 52, "hippie" magician who entertained on TV specials and in Broadway shows since the 1970s. February 7, 2000.

**BOB HITE, SR.**, 86, long-time radio announcer for WXYZ, Detroit, where he introduced *The Lone Ranger* and *The Green Hornet*. Later, on CBS he announced *Casey*, *Crime Photographer* and other network shows. February 18, 2000.

**RICK JASON**, 74, television actor best remembered for his role in the 1960-67 series *Combat* and for roles on *Fantasy Island*, *Dallas* and *The Young and the Restless* in the 1970s and '80s. October 16, 2000.

**JONAH JONES**, 90, jazz trumpeter who sold a million copies of his recording of "Baubles, Bangles and Beads" and "On the Street Where You Live." April 30, 2000.

**TOD KARNs**, 79, actor best remembered as "Harry Bailey," Jimmy Stewart's war-hero brother in the classic *It's A Wonderful Life*. He also appeared with his father Roscoe Karns in the TV series *Rocky King, Detective*. February 5, 2000.

**'PEE WEE' KING**, 86, country-western singer-songwriter who appeared on the *WLS Barn Dance* and *Grand Ole Opry* and who wrote "Tennessee Waltz." March 7, 2000.



Tito Guizar



Ed Grennan

## NECROLOGY OF 2000



Hedy Lamarr



Durward Kirby

**DURWARD KIRBY**, 88, broadcaster and actor whose career began in Chicago on the *Club Matinee* radio program with Ransom Sherman and Garry Moore. He moved on to a successful career on TV as a regular on the *Garry Moore Show*. March 15, 2000.

**WERNER KLEMPERER**, 80, versatile actor best known for his role as Col. Klink, the German prison camp commandant on TV's *Hogan's Heroes*. December 6.

**HEDY LAMARR**, 86, glamorous, exotic motion picture star of the 1930s and '40s whose beauty was universally praised. Co-starred in films with Charles Boyer, Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, and Victor Mature (in *Sansón and Deliah*, her greatest success). January 19, 2000.

**LARRY LINVILLE**, 60, actor best known for his role as Major Frank Burns on the TV series *M\*A\*S\*H*. April 10, 2000.

**DESMOND LLEWELYN**, 85, British actor who appeared as Q, the gadget expert in 17 *James Bond* films from 1963-99. December 19, 1999.

**JULIE LONDON**, 74, sultry singer-actress whose rendition of "Cry Me a River" made her one of the top recording artists of the 1950s. She also appeared in many films and the TV series *Emergency!* October 18.

**MEREDITH MAC RAE**, 56, actress (daughter of singer Gordon MacRae) who played Billie Jo Bradley on TV's *Petticoat Junction*. July 14.

**NANCY MARCHAND**, 71, stage, screen and TV actress best known for her television roles as Mrs. Pynchon on *Lou Grant* and as Livia on *The Sopranos*. June 18.

**WALTER MATTHAU**, 79, Academy Award winning actor who starred in *The Odd Couple* and more than 60 other movies, winning an Oscar in 1966 for *The Fortune Cookie*. July 1.

**CURTIS MAYFIELD**, 57, legendary rhythm and blues singer and writer whose career began on the West Side of Chicago at the age of 8. December 26, 1999.

**DAVID MERRICK**, 88, flamboyant producer of successful Broadway shows including *Gypsy*, *Hello Dolly*, *Oliver!*, and *42nd Street*. April 25.

**MELVIN MILES**, 56, one of radio and TV's popular *Quiz Kids* in the 1940s and '50s. February 27.

**JERRY MITCHELL**, 75, longtime Chicago

area broadcaster for worked for WJOB, Hammond; WLS, WMAQ-TV, WLS-TV, Chicago; and WYLL, Arlington Heights. May 13.

**GEORGE MONTGOMERY**, 84, movie and television actor who appeared in 87 films, mostly westerns, and the TV series *Cimarron City*. December 12.

**CLAYTON MOORE**, 85, Chicago-born actor who became a TV and movie legend as *The Lone Ranger* beginning in 1949. He made hundreds of appearances as the masked Rider of the Plains. December 28, 1999.

**RICHARD MULLIGAN**, 67, Emmy-award winning actor best known for his work on TV's *Soap* and *Empty Nest*. September 26.

**HAROLD NICHOLAS**, 79, younger half of the legendary tap-dancing Nicholas Brothers who performed in vaudeville, on Broadway, in nightclubs, on television and in more than 50 films, including *Stormy Weather* and *Sun Valley Serenade*. July 3.

**AL PARKER**, 74, long-time Chicago radio broadcaster on WIND and WJJD, and staff announcer for 26 years on WLS-TV. He was instructor of broadcasting and administrator at Columbia College for 54 years. September 30.

**DICK PEABODY**, 74, actor in television and films, best remembered as Little John, the gentle giant farm boy in the series *Combat* in the 1960s. December 27, 1999.

**HAL PEARI**, popular Chicago area organist who played for dancers at the Aragon Ballroom for two decades, for roller skaters at the White City amusement park, and accompanied classic silent films on the Channel 11 series, *The Toy That Grew Up*. November 23.

**JEAN PETERS**, 73, actress in the 1940s and '50s in such films as *It Happens Every Spring*, *Viva Zapata*, *Niagra*, *Three Coins in the Fountain*, and *A Man Called Peter*. October 13.



Sybil Trent



Walter Matthau



Loretta Young



Robert Trout

**TITO PUENTE**, international jazz pianist, percussionist and band leader who merged the big band sound with a Latin beat to popularize the Mambo and the Cha-Cha. May 31.

**STEVE REEVES**, 74, action film star in a series of *Hercules*-type movies in the 1950s and '60s. May 1.

**BEAH RICHARDS**, 74, supporting actress whose 40-year career included her film roles as Sidney Poitier's mother in the 1967 drama *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and in many TV appearances. September 14.

**ADELE RONSON**, 94, radio actress in the 1930s who appeared on such programs as *Buck Rogers*, *John's Other Wife*, and *Show Boat*. October 29.

**HANK SNOW**, 85, country music legend and *Grand Ole Opry* star whose million-selling hit "I'm Movin' On" launched a career that lasted 50 years. December 20, 1999.

**CRAIG STEVENS**, 81, actor who played private eye *Peter Gunn* in the TV series. May 10.

**LARRY STEVENS**, 77, singer on *The Jack Benny Program* who replaced Dennis Day for a year and a half while Dennis was in the Navy during World War II. April 5.

**DAVID TOMLINSON**, 83, British motion picture actor who appeared in more than 50 films including *Mary Poppins* (as the father of the two children), *The Love Bug*, and *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*. June 24.

**SYBIL TRENT**, 73, one of the stars of radio's *Let's Pretend* for more than 20 years and who also appeared on dozens of other broadcasts including *Aunt Jenny's Real Life Stories* and *David Harum*. June 5.

**CLAIRE TREVOR**, 90, Academy Award winning actress who won an Oscar for her 1948 performance as a broken-down torch singer in *Key Largo*. April 8.

**ROBERT TROUT**, 91, pioneering radio news anchor for 70 years. He began on CBS Radio's *World News Tonight* in 1938, covered the presidency of FDR and reported to the nation the end of World War II. In recent years he has been heard on National Public Radio. November 14.

**JIM VARNEY**, 50, "Good-ol'-boy" comic who portrayed the rube *Ernest* in the movies and in hundreds of TV commercials. February 10.

**GWEN VERDON**, 75, Broadway's premier female dance in such hits as *Damn Yankees*, *Sweet Charity*, *Can Can*, and *Chicago*. October 18.

**PATTI WILKUS**, 79, Chicago-based actress-singer who appeared in many stage, screen and TV roles, known for her ability to perform in many dialects. October 14.

**MARIE WINDSOR**, 80, actress in 76 movies and frequently on TV, often as a strong, independent woman. December 10.

**MARY HUNTER WOLF**, 95, stage and radio actress whose broadcast career began in Chicago in 1928 and who played the role of Marge, friend of the *Easy Aces* from 1930-45. November 3.

**MIRIAM WOLFE**, 78, child actress on *Let's Pretend*, often portraying witches. She later appeared on *The Witches' Tale* as "Old Nancy, the Witch." September 30.

**LORETTA YOUNG**, 87, Academy Award winning actress (for *The Farmers Daughter*) who appeared in 88 movies and over 300 episodes of her TV series *The Loretta Young Show* from 1953-1963. August 12.

**SI ZENTNER**, 82, big band era trombonist with Les Brown and Jimmy Dorsey who started his own band in the 1960s. January 31.

**GONE...BUT NOT FORGOTTEN**

*We Remember Them Well*

# A GREAT NOSE, A GREAT MAN

BY CLAIR SCHULZ

It stands to reason that anyone constructing an entertainer for the ages would hardly bring together elements resulting in a balding, big-nosed joker whose face bore more creases than a hobo's pants, who often said

rather than sang lyrics in a gravelly voice, and who had difficulty reading speeches of longer than two lines or words of more than three syllables without tripping over his tongue. Yet logic has little to do with the life and lasting appeal of Jimmy Durante.

He couldn't even make a conventional first entrance. Unlike the

dancer in the Beatles' song who came in through the bathroom window, James Francis Durante came in on a kitchen table on Manhattan's Lower East Side February 10, 1893. Photographs of Jimmy suggest that what he called his proboscitor was already blooming at birth, which he later used in jests of the "folks took one look in the crib and wondered of the stork had come to stay" variety.

But the teasing he encountered from

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*Clair Schulz is a free-lance writer, movie historian and collector from Trevor, Wisconsin.*

---

classmates was not a laughing matter. James endured the ridicule until the seventh grade, then left school to concentrate on playing the piano for a living.

Although his father wanted him to develop into a pianist specializing in classical music, Jimmy aimed at more practical venues that would bring in money right away such as playing accompaniment for silent films at local theatres. He developed an affinity for ragtime tunes and by age seventeen could be found tinkling the ivories in what might charitably be called



Jimmy 'Schnozzola' Durante

honkytonks at Coney Island or in Chinatown.

During those early years Durante became friends with waiter Izzy Iskowitz, who later changed his name to Eddie Cantor. In the 1940s and 1950s when Eddie and Jimmy would reminisce on radio and television about the good old days, they weren't just whistling "Dixie"; they were singing, making whoopee, and wondering how they were going to keep 'em down on the farm.

Although Cantor is sometimes acknowledged as the first person to encourage Durante to employ humor as part of his act,

the quaint characters Jimmy met while pounding the keys in dives sharpened his wit by necessity. Close shaves in nightclubs with hoods bearing Runyonesque names such as Hurry-Up Harry, Pretty Boy Moran, and Razor Riley taught Durante that he better have a pleasing quip on hand to convince the mobsters not to shoot the piano player.

While working at the Alamo nightclub in 1918 he met a singer named Maud Jeanne Olson who became his wife three years later. But he had an even better reason to remember the Alamo: there in 1915 song-and-dance man Eddie Jackson softshoed into his life. Jackson became Durante's partner and, more importantly, a friend for life.

Jimmy insisted that the Alamo also figured in another important slice of the Durante legend. After hours one night when some of Al Capone's triggermen were taunting Durante about his nose, comedian Jack Duffy lightened the mood by addressing him as "Schnozzola." So Schnozzola he became, first to the show business crowd and then to the rest of the world.

Durante continued to land jobs in joints like Club Pizzazz that had very little and Club Paradiso whose smoky atmosphere made it seem like the other place. When prohibition rolled in, Jim opened Club Durant, a speakeasy that did standing room only business until it closed in 1925.

By that time the team of Clayton, Jackson, and Durante had become a hot ticket. Lou Clayton, a hooper with a pliable face not unlike Frank Fontaine's, encouraged Durante to promote his most obvious feature by making that nose the starting point of their routines. He would comment on Durante's small feet, Jimmy would say, "That's because nothing grows in the shade," Clayton would come back with "And what about your fingernails? Do you file your nails?" Jimmy would answer, "No



I just throw them away," and the parade of hoary gags would commence.

For awhile during the Roaring Twenties the trio became the rage of New York. Having an editor of *Variety* laud them affectionately in print as the Three Sawdust Bums helped business as did Damon Runyon's assertion that "I doubt if a greater cafe combination ever lived."

By 1927 "dem bums" were commanding \$3,000 a week at night spots and garnering \$5,500 weekly when they reached the vaudevillian's Valhalla, the Palace. There they showcased the highlight of their act, a burlesque routine called "Wood" which, like the classic immortalized by Abbott and Costello as "Mustard," involved snowballing. While Jimmy described lumber's importance in our way of life, his partners filled the stage with wooden items from canoes to a privy. When they brought out *that* house, it brought down the house.

By the time they took their show on the road their fame had preceded them. Audiences expected, and Jimmy delivered, novelty songs that he wrote and that only he

## **A GREAT NOSE, A GREAT MAN**

could put over: "I Can Do Without Broadway, But Can Broadway do Without Me?," "I Ups to Him and He Ups to Me," "Who Will Be With You When I'm Far Away?," and "A Dissa and a Datta."

Flo Ziegfeld, knowing a good act when he saw one, hired the team for *Show Girl*, a musical that was fail-safe with Ruby Keeler in the lead and music composed by George Gershwin. Jimmy's recitation of the repetitious poem, "I Got a One-Room House," delighted both theatergoers and critics alike. Durante mined that concept for decades; years later on radio and TV he would regale audiences with tales of travails in stores going between floors for merchandise or trips at home up and down ladders to go to the telephone or the door.

Following a successful appearance in *The New Yorkers*, a Cole Porter musical, an offer for a movie contract was extended by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer—but only to Durante. By the early 1930s the act had clearly become one of a star and two side-kicks. Though reluctant to split up the team, Jimmy left for Hollywood, but, in a typical gesture that marked his innate generous nature, took his pals along and pledged to give them part of his earnings.

*New Adventures of Get Rich Wallingford* and *The Cuban Love Song*. Durante's first two pictures, made little impression and did nothing for his career except to get his face before a national audience. MGM executive Irving Thalberg attempted to capitalize on Durante's most recognizable feature by churning out publicity that the studio had insured his nose with Lloyd's of London for a million dollars.

Durante fared better in three Buster Keaton films. His vivacity seemed to make Keaton's acting sluggish by comparison as if Buster was not yet comfortable with talkies. Perhaps the best of the three was *Speak*

*Easy* (1932) in which Durante's outfit of striped suit, checked vest, and polka dot tie spoke louder than he did.

*The Phantom President* (1932) is now regarded as a curiosity because it marked one of George M. Cohan's rare screen appearances. Durante's most notable contribution in his role of political advisor is the quotable aphorism, "A Depression is a hole, a hole is nothin', and why should I waste my time talkin' about nothin'?"

Fame of more lasting nature came in *Palooka* (1934). Ostensibly the lyrics he warbled as Jolting Joe's manager Knobby Walsh served as a warning against the boxer signing his name to anything, but for most versions of what became his theme song he rarely got beyond the "Ink-a-dink-a-dink-a-dink-a-doo" stage.

Durante continued to enjoy his greatest triumphs before a live audience. As the star of the Broadway hit *Strike Me Pink*, he wowed the critics with his boundless energy and infectious way of belting out a song.

The writer who suggested that "a herd of elephants could not crash through a show more passionately" turned out to be prophetic for Durante's next (and biggest) stage success came as Brainey Bowers in Billy Rose's *Jumbo*. In addition to the obvious proboscis humor, the show focused on the interplay between Bowers and the titular animal, climaxed by a scene in which the elephant would hold a hoof over Durante, a feat even virile Frank Buck confessed he would not do even once, much less 233 times as Jimmy did.

In the fall of 1936 Durante joined Ethel Merman and Bob Hope as the stars of the Porter musical *Red, Hot and Blue!* During the third act he stole the scene from his co-stars (no mean feat considering their ebullient personalities) when as a con man acting as his own lawyer he did an "ups to him and he ups to me" routine by jumping

in and out of the witness stand to cross-examine himself.

Two other musical comedies, *Stars in Your Eyes* and *Keep Off the Grass*, failed to produce long runs and Durante's screen career had regressed to the point where he had accepted work at republic to provide feeble comic relief in Gene Autry's *Melody Ranch*. When Jeanne died in early 1943, it seemed just another in a series of "catastrokes" designed to break his spirit.

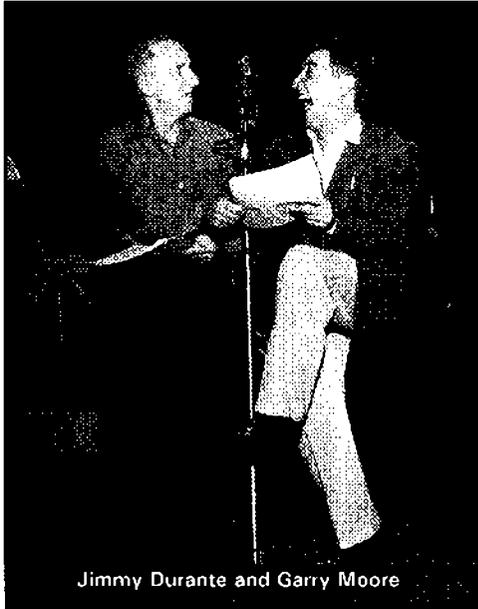
But within weeks of his wife's death the *Cyrano* of clowns was back on top, packing them in at the Copacabana with an act that is still mentioned in the same reverential terms reserved for legendary nightclub engagements of Frank Sinatra and Joe E. Lewis. A two-week booking grew into a three-month smash which in turn blossomed into a new contract with MGM and, more importantly, an offer to bring his act to radio.

And that is actually what Durante did: he brought his cabaret act to the airwaves. When announcer Howard Petrie said, "And here he is, ladies and gentlemen, the one and only... Jimmy Durante! In person!" it was like a Las Vegas emcee beckoning to the star in the wings. Amid applause Durante approached the mike singing "Chitabee." "You've Got to Start Off Each day With a Song," or one of his other ditties before being interrupted or halting the proceedings himself with a raspy order to

"Stop the music!"

After some banter with Petrie or Garry Moore and a commercial, Durante would bring on a guest star who would sometimes join him in parodies of songs or numbers especially written for the occasion. Frequently there would be an opportunity for the guest, be it Dorothy Lamour or Van Johnson, to accent a joke by impersonating the Schnozz and appropriating his famous "I got a million of 'em" line, which would provoke the expected "Everyone wants to get into the act" or "I'm surrounded by assassins" response from Durante.

On *The Jimmy Durante Show* music served not only as a bridge linking the sections of the program but it also acted as a magic carpet that would carry Jimmy and friends on jour-



Jimmy Durante and Garry Moore

neys to different parts of the country, voyages to exotic islands, or just on a whimsical quest to find the lady from 29 Palms.

After the final commercial, Durante returned once more with a few bars of "Who Will Be With You When I'm Far Away?" before bidding Mrs. Calabash good night and exiting with a flourish.

People "loved that kind of carryings on" because "it gets around, it gets around" that, even if *The Jimmy Durante Show* may not have been the funniest program on the air it was a great deal of fun because of its unpredictability. No one, Durante included, knew what would come out of his mouth.



## A GREAT NOSE, A GREAT MAN

The sesquipedalian writers purposely placed polysyllables into Jimmy's speeches because they knew he would wring them out of shape without any help from them. And twist them he did in declarations like "You are equivocally and indubitably kiskkemen and your precocious ratio in non

compos mentis dentis" or "The exubiance of this unxious occasion and the quintessence of your celestial radiance premediates my bountiful soul with palipitation of grandiocious jocanunity." He even gamely struggled with shorter words that were not surrounded by jaw-breakers. After four attempts at trying to ask valet

Arthur Treacher for a certain kind of pipe, the closest he could get to it was "mashearscham."

Some of the most amusing lines on the program turned out to be the speeches following the malapropisms. If Lucille Ball would suggest that "I'm sure you'll take it back," Durante would counter with "Take it back, nothing. I had a hard enough time getting rid of it." After Treacher reminded him that "Those are the words of Patrick Henry," Jimmy would respond with a wish: "I hope he had them insured. I mangled them up quite badly."

The good-natured spirit with which Durante joined in the wisecracks about his nose and his fracturing of the language

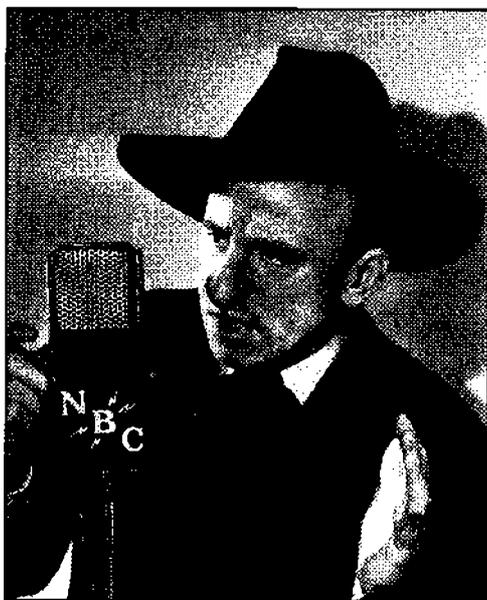
endared him to audiences and his peers. When frequent guest Victor Moore would toss out the groaner "With your voice you could put Perry in a coma," Jimmy would counteract possible criticism with self-depreciating lines such as "Dialogue like this could bring back silent radio" that immediately made us laugh along with the old troopers who were giving it their all with a wink in their eye.

Just a few months after *The Jimmy Durante Show* left the air in May 1950 Durante turned his attention to television as he became one of the rotating hosts of *The Four Star Revue*. In 1952 he received an Emmy as TV's best comedian and by 1954 he had earned his own program.

*The Jimmy Durante Show* took viewers into the

Club Durant. On these live and lively shows Durante would perform his "hot cha" numbers with Eddie Jackson and a chorus line of cuties called (what else?) The Durante Girls. At the end of the program when he walked through a series of spotlights after bidding Mrs. Calabash good night, he was strolling into video immortality for perhaps no other image in television history is as heart-warming and enduring as that one.

Over the years Durante remained rather evasive about the identity of Mrs. Calabash and let rivelets of rumors flow on around him. Actually Mrs. Calabash, like Jimmy's imaginary friend Umbriago, was just a gimmick created to keep listeners tuning



in right to the end of the program.

By the late 1950s Durante had reduced his schedule to doing guest appearances and working in nightclubs. In 1960, as if to prove there was still plenty of life in him, he married a thirty-nine-year old woman he had dated for sixteen years and became a father not long afterwards when the couple adopted a baby girl.

With renewed vigor he returned to the movie sets to take a featured role in the film version of *Jumbo* (1961). His bit as Smiler Grogan in *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World* (1963) triggered the action in the comic-laden funfest when he literally kicked the bucket.

When hosting the *Hollywood Palace* or appearing with veteran comedienne Eve Arden and

Kaye Ballard on *The Mothers-In-Law*, the Schnozz was still very much in his element, but when teamed with the Lennon Sisters in a 1969 ABC series and placed in skits as a wigged and bejeweled Elvis lookalike, the effect was, as Jimmy might say, "mortifying."

Durante fans have a chance to erase the memory of that embarrassment when *Frosty the Snowman*, the animated program Jimmy narrated and which first aired in 1971, returns to recreate its charm every December. Durante could imbue a song with more fervor and sincerity than perhaps any other performer in show business. Scoffers may doubt whether Jimmy Durante was a singer at all, but when he promised that Frosty would be back this time next year or when he told the young at heart that fairy tales can come true or that as time goes by the world will always welcome lovers, we believed.

Less than a year after he finished work on *Frosty* Jimmy suffered a stroke that



turned his rasp into a whisper. He spent the remaining years of his life in a wheelchair. Although he appeared in public a number of times (most notably at a fete for his 83rd birthday at which he valiantly tried to utter the words of "Inka Dinka Doo") his friends knew that his condition would continue to worsen. He tipped his fedora in life's spotlight one final time on January 29, 1980.

Durante was, in the words of one of his songs, a little bit this and a little bit that: ragtime pianist, comedian, radio, TV, stage, and motion picture performer, and one of the most beloved people in the entertainment industry. Often imitated, never duplicated for when they made him, that nose broke the mold. He may have had a million of 'em, but the world has had only one Jimmy Durante. ■

*NOTE-- Tune in TWTD March 3 to hear a 1948 Jimmy Durante radio show with his guest Victor Moore.*

# ME, TARZAN

BY WAYNE KLATT

It's little wonder that "Me, Tarzan; you, Jane" became a joke, because it started out as one. The story is that Johnny Weismuller and Maureen O'Sullivan were bored one day as they sat on a bough of their studio tree, waiting for the next shot to be ready, and they began joking around. When director W. S. Van Dyke overheard Weismuller saying, "Me, Tarzan; you, Jane," he shouted that the line was perfect and he was putting it into the script.

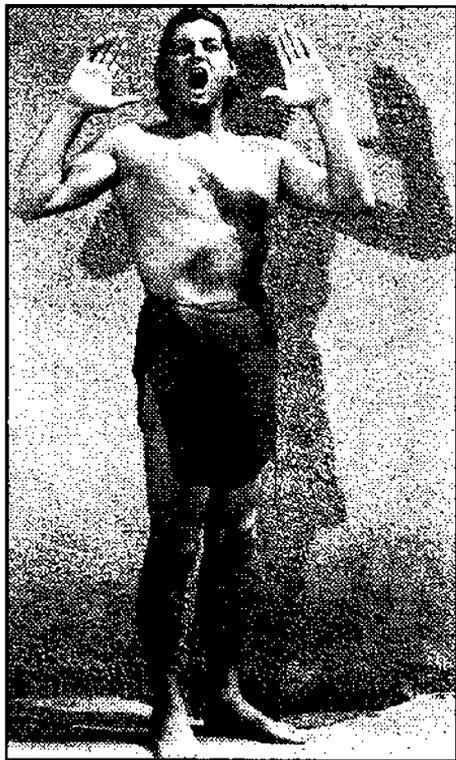
Weismuller was able to carry off a part that made every other actor look a little silly because he not only was a large, muscular man and Olympic swimmer, he actually had saved a number of lives as a lifeguard at Chicago's North Avenue beach, where my father came to know him.

Peter John Weismuller—he used his middle name apparently because it was friendlier and more American—claimed for the sake of entering the Olympics that his birth on June 4, 1904, was in a small town in Pennsylvania. But he actually was born in Friedorf, which was then part of the German-speaking Austrian empire but now is part of Romania. His parents emigrated to the United States when he was less than a year old, settled in Pennsylvania, then moved to Chicago and lived at 1921 N. Cleveland. Although an altar boy at nearby St. Michael's Catholic Church, Johnny was a mischievous youngster. He

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*Wayne Klatt is the night editor at New City News Service, Chicago and a free-lance writer.*

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developed his famously powerful lungs by working for a ragman and calling out to apartments two and three stories above the alleys they walked through.

Johnny's education was skimpy because the tall, skinny boy was one of thousands who had to overcome childhood polio. A doctor suggested that his family take him swimming to build up the muscles he could use, and Johnny fell in love with the power he felt as he propelled himself through the water. But he hated putting his face in the water and holding his breath. His answer was to develop a peculiar backstroke he practiced as a lifeguard off North Avenue Beach after he had worked some time as a bellhop.

Johnny won a blue ribbon at a Chicago Daily News Amateur Athletic Union meet in 1920. That same year Bill Bachrach, the swimming coach of the Illinois Athletic Club on South Michigan Avenue, saw

the teenager swimming high in the water and recognized Olympic potential. Johnny struck up a friendship with future TV "Lone Ranger" Clayton Moore at the athletic club while Bachrach was helping him with his "start" and "crawl," his overhand swimming strokes. A year later, Johnny won the national championships in both the 50-yard and 220-yard distances while the cigar-chomping Bachrach pocketed money from entering him in exhibitions.

From that point, Johnny never lost a free-style competition, winning 55 Amateur Athletic Union championships and eventually breaking 67 world records. His fame spread even farther when he captured five gold medals at the 1924 Paris Olympics and the 1928 Games in Amsterdam, where he carried the United States flag. That, his family would say, was the proudest moment of his entire life.

Where does a celebrity go after such honors? Back to being a lifeguard off

North Avenue. Johnny used all his skill and strength in August, 1927, when the excursion boat *Favorite* began sinking as it shuttled between Navy Pier and Lincoln Park. Nearly 30 people died, but Johnny and several other lifeguards saved 40 others.

Although Johnny was now a hero for a second time, no one thought of using him in films until after he signed a \$500 a week contract Bachrach had put in front of him to promote BVD swimwear in then pool-mad Los Angeles.

Johnny was doing his unique backstroke in the Hollywood Athletic Club in 1932 when British novelist Cyril Hume could hardly believe his eyes. Hume had been writing a screenplay for *Tarzan the Ape Man* for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and realized the hard-to-cast hero was right in front of him.

Hume was no Hollywood hack. He sincerely wanted to craft the best film he could, even though seasoned writers laughed at him for trying so hard on junk. His idea was to develop a light adventure story that would be engrossingly improbable — in its way, like James Bond films of a later generation. After a word from Hume, someone asked Johnny to do a very unusual screen test by putting on what the athlete called a "G-string," climbing a tree, and picking up a young woman. Oh, he needed to say a few lines, too.

Of course, Hollywood was filled with muscular men, but Johnny was special. That he couldn't act was an asset, because he conveyed someone untouched by civilization. He also was untemperamental and worked so well with animals





One Man's Family: Cheeta, Boy, Tarzan and Jane

that he accomplished what the animal trainers thought impossible, riding a ton-and-a-half rhino, since the animals are known to be highly temperamental.

But Johnny also knew nothing about managing money, starring in a major film and doing all his own stunts for the same amount he had been receiving for wearing BVDs, \$500 a week. Even so, Johnny said the role was so easy for him that his salary was "like stealing money."

Weismuller was paired with the lovely Irish actress Maureen O'Sullivan, whose quiet energy and cultured upbringing made them a perfect team of opposites. When Tarzan and Jane adopted Boy, Johnny Sheffield, they created what might have been filmdom's most perfect family, with warmth, humor, begrudging understanding (even after Jane is duped by evil hunters), and lots of animals.

No one will praise the films for their production values — some recycled African

footage from Van Dyke's hit *Trader Horn*, the same alligator is killed repeatedly, you can tell the escarpment is a painting, and in one film a leaping leopard is just a stuffed animal thrown at the villains. But in the best ones, the writing is cleverer than one might expect, and a few scenes early in the series are genuinely harrowing. And as audiences became familiar with Tarzan, Weismuller could show his natural talent for droll throwaway lines. (*Tarzan Finds a Son*, 1939, is worth renting for the baby scene alone.)

In the 1940s, Tarzan fought the Nazis in Africa and Johnny went on a USO tour with "Flash Gordon" and rival "Tarzan" Buster Crabbe. But Weismuller was putting on weight, drinking too much, and getting tired of his monosyllabic role, especially after Maureen O'Sullivan left the series when their sixth film, *Tarzan's New York Adventure*, was wrapped up in 1942. Besides, with the war interrupting the inter-

national market, MGM wanted to churn our easier-to-produce B-films like the *Andy Hardy* and *Dr. Kildare* series.

In 1943 Johnny packed his joincloth and went to low-budget independent film producer Sol Lesser, one person who surely deserved his name. The quality declined (as Jane, beautiful Brenda Joyce looked liked a bewildered society princess) but the series continued until Tarzan was leaping into the waters near Acapulco, Mexico in 1947 for this eighteenth and final film in the series, *Tarzan and the Mermaids*.

The worldwide audience had dwindled but was still there. When Johnny asked for a larger share of the profits, Lesser refused. And so the only real Tarzan for a generation gave up his famous yell. The now-stocky Weismuller starred in a series of films based on the comic strip *Jungle Jim*, but the stories lacked any interest except for children and that made the move from quickie films to early TV all the easier. When the show stopped in the late 1950s, no one seemed to notice.

Johnny Weismuller, the hero and role model for millions of boys, could not help but feel that life had passed him by, with one film and marriage and bad investment after another. He moved to Elk Grove Village northwest of Chicago and became a

spokesman for the General Pool Corporation of Addison. In 1963, he married his fifth and final wife, Maria Gertrudis.

The 1970s saw him as a "greeter" or "host" at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas and helping children through the Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation and the International Swimming Hall of Fame. But then he learned he had a serious heart ailment.

After a series of strokes, Johnny was taken to the Motion Picture and Television Country Hospital in Los Angeles.

By then, Johnny was one of the first celebrities to be diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Later the condition would strike Rita Hayworth, Burgess Meredith, golf hero Ben Hogan, comedian Jerry Lester and Ronald Reagan.

In 1979 Johnny Weismuller was moved to a rented home in Acapulco,

where he was cared for by his wife and a nurse. He was unable to speak well, and increasingly chunks of his memory were lost.

In lucid moments he would watch television and talk to his wife who would not let Johnny be interviewed or photographed. She wanted the public to remember her husband as he was.

The king of the jungle died in his sleep at home on January 20, 1984 at age 79, and was buried in Acapulco. ■



# Soaps with Smiles

BY RICHARD W. O'DONNELL

Not every vintage radio "soap opera" was a tear-jerker, dripping with emotion, loaded with long lost spouses who came back at the wrong time, amnesia cases galore, life and death emergency surgery, lost fortunes, and other trials and tribulations.

Some of them could actually make you smile.

Take *Vic and Sade*, written by the great Paul Rhymer. Vic and Sade Gook were the folks who lived "in the little house half-way up in the next block." Two other characters, an adopted son named Rush and dear old Uncle Fletcher were featured on the daily fifteen-minute shows which were always loaded with humor.

Each day there was a different situation, usually a slice of life made funny by the casual observations of the central characters as they chatted away. One day it might be a discussion about some neighbor or the high price of thread at the local store. An all-time personal favorite had to do with a conversation Sade and Rush shared one hot August day about Christmas cards they planned to mail in December. *Vic and Sade*

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

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was loaded with chuckles every day.

Art Van Harvey played Vic, Bernardine Flynn was Sade, Billy Idleson was Rush, and Clarence Hartzell was Uncle Fletcher. They were about as funny a comedy quartet as show business ever produced. Television has yet to produce anything that matches them. The NBC show came on the air in 1932 and lasted until 1946.

*Ma Perkins*, as played by the wonderful Virginia Payne, was a soap opera that didn't spend all its time crying. They were called soap operas, by the way, because most of them were sponsored by soap companies back in the thirties and forties.

*Ma Perkins* was the brainchild of Frank and Anne Hummert who created a number of daytime dramas over the years. Strictly on the homespun side, radio's favorite mother did have her problems but she gamely survived them with her happy outlook on life and her charming sense of humor. *Ma Perkins* never cried when she could smile. The program started out on NBC in 1933 and was on CBS when it went

off the air in 1960. No soap opera on TV today is as loved as was *Ma Perkins*.

Then there was *Lorenzo Jones*, the only radio character who ever came close to matching Fibber McGee as a comic bungler. He was a great favorite of the youngsters even though he was turned out by Hummert's soap opera factory because he was on in the late afternoon and the kids could follow his misadventures after they got home from school (and before the kids' adventure shows began).

Lorenzo was always doing stupid things in the hope of making a mint; yet you had to love this guy. His long suffering wife Belle was always close by to save the bacon when the script required. Karl Swenson, one of radio's greatest actors, played Lorenzo and Belle was played over the years by Lucille Wall and Betty Garde. The program arrived on NBC in 1937 and remained there until 1955.

Not all of the programs generally identified as "soaps" were on during the daytime hours. Among others *Amos 'n' Andy*, *Lum and Abner* and *Easy Aces* were basically continuing stories held together by a comic thread even though they were heard at night. The story lines on these particu-



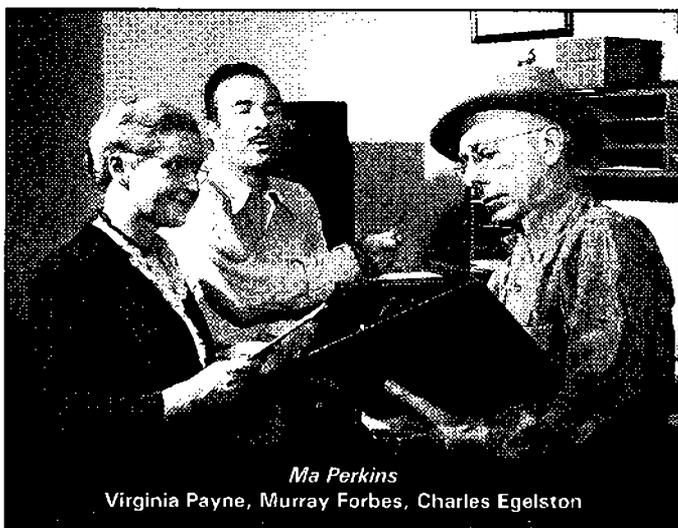
lar shows lasted mostly only a week or two when new comic situations would be created to keep the laughter going.

We must not forget *Ethel and Albert*, written by Peg Lynch and featured on ABC from 1944-1950. The author played Ethel and guess who played the kind and gentle Albert during the show's early years? It was Richard Widmark who became a Hollywood star by playing a sadistic gunman in the 1947 film *Kiss of Death*. After

Widmark left the show, Alan Bunce took over as Albert.

For the record, *Ethel and Albert* had a last name. It was Arbuckle. The shows were humorous conversations between the pair about shopping, work, neighbors, misadventures, everything that went on in their daily lives. Many of their conversations were classics.

*The Goldbergs* ran





*Ethel and Albert*  
Alan Bunch and Peg Lynch



*Just Plain Bill*  
Arthur Hughes

for years as a daytime soap. Gertrude Berg, who created the program and who played Molly, was the star. *The Goldbergs* was the story of Jewish family life in New York City.

Molly Goldberg's sense of humor was the key to the show. Life had its rough sledding, as it did on most soap operas, but Molly's wit and wisdom was close by when it counted. Her husband Jake was played by James R. Waters and Roslyn Silber and Albert Ryder played daughter Rosalie and son Sammy. Beloved Uncle David was portrayed by Menasha Skulnik.

*The Rise of the Goldbergs*—that was the program's full title early on—started out on NBC in 1929 and bounced from network to network over a twenty year run that continued until 1949. Why it never stayed on one network remains a mystery for it was a charming show and an important page

in the history of radio. It was also a popular television program during that medium's early years.

Do you remember *Clara, Lu and Em*? They were three women who sat around on their front porches swapping gossip about their neighbors and the humor worked. The ladies were played by Louise Starkey (Clara), Isabel Carothers and Harriet Allyn (Lu), and Helen King (Em). This soap opera was first on NBC and later CBS from 1932 until 1942. Like *The Goldbergs*, it was one of those soaps that kept disappearing and returning.



*The Goldbergs*  
James Waters, Roslyn Silber, Gertrude Berg, Al Ryder

How about *Just Plain Bill*, another soap that left us smiling. It was on daily radio, mostly NBC, from 1932 until 1955. Bill Davidson, a barber played by Arthur Hughes, was a lovable old soul. He was a widower who endured with a sunny outlook on life and who never let his family problems knock him for a loop. "Polly Wolly Doodle" was the show's theme song.

For some reason female writers seemed to dominate the long-running, amusing soap operas. Myrtle Vail penned *The Story of Myrt and Marge*, another of the great daytime programs that ran on various net-



Clara, Lu and Em  
Louise Starkey, Isabel Carothers, Helen King

works from 1932 until 1946.

Author Myrtle Vail played Myrt and her daughter Donna Damarel was Marge. The story did shed its share of heavy tears but Myrt and Marge, two New York showgirls, never lost their ability to smile at their ups and downs. It was a program that left you feeling good.

*Scattergood Baines* was another good one. Based on *Saturday Evening Post* stories written by Clarence Budington Kellard, the program started on CBS in 1937 and kept the chuckles coming until 1949.

Scattergood ran a hardware store in a town called Coldriver. The kindly old philosopher type, our hero wasn't bothered by the usual problems that torture soap opera types. He was nagged by females who wanted to run his life. He also had an adopted son named Jimmy and for years the child's real mother made life miserable for our central character. Played by Jess Pugh, Scattergood never lost that sparkle in his eyes, no matter what his troubles were.

You couldn't see it, of course. After all, this was radio. But that sparkle came through, loud and clear, over the airwaves. ■



Myrt and Marge  
Myrtle Vail and Donna Damarel

OLD TIME  
RADIO



CENTURY

Chuck Schaden's

# THOSE WERE THE DAYS

STATION AND TIME TO BE ANNOUNCED

FEBRUARY 2001

**SPECIAL NOTICE:** Due to the sale of WNIB and the uncertainty of securing another venue for our *Those Were The Days* broadcasts, we cannot say for sure that the schedule we have planned for February will actually be aired. (See page 1.) If and when we move to another radio station, we'll attempt to pick up the schedule listed below.

We hope to have more information for you in our next issue .

## *Jack Benny and His Friends*

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 3

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (11-24-46) Jack welcomes guest Edward G. Robinson who joins the cast in a Benny version of the film, "The Killers." Phil Harris, Dennis Day, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson, Don Wilson, Sportsmen. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (26 min)

**SCREEN DIRECTORS' PLAYHOUSE** (2-3-50) "The Sea Wolf" starring Edward G. Robinson in a radio version of his 1941 film. A brutal sea captain matches wits with an accidental passenger. RCA Victor, NBC. (27 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (11-9-41) Jack, Mary Livingstone and the gang talk about the film he just started working on in Hollywood. Guest is Leo Durocher, manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Jell-O, NBC. (31 min)

**FRED ALLEN SHOW** (1946) Guest Leo Durocher joins Fred for a "baseball operetta," culled from Gilbert and Sullivan, "The Brooklyn Pinafore." The Allen's Alley question is "What is your reaction to this new drive on gambling and gamblers?" The response comes from Senator Claghorn, Titus Moody, Mrs. Nussbaum and Falstaff Openshaw. United Network. (25 min)

**SPORTS NEWSREEL** (12-28-45) Bill Stern presents the outstanding sports stories of the year 1945 and welcomes guest Jack Benny. Colgate Shave Creme, NBC. (14 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (10-23-99) **Beverly Washburn** talks about her career as a child actress (who appeared with Jack Benny on

radio and television) in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded at the Friends of Old Time Radio convention in Newark, New Jersey. (13 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (4-23-50) Jack and Mary go to the neighborhood school to see the Beverly Hills Beavers present their version of "The Jack Benny Show." **Beverly Washburn** portrays Mary Livingstone in the sketch. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (27 min)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 10

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (1-5-47) On this first show of the new year, Jack tells how he got tickets to the Rose Bowl game on New Year's Day. In a flashback, Mary Livingstone tells what happened at the broadcast rehearsal when guests Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall showed up. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (28 min)

**BOLD VENTURE** (1951) Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall as Slate Shannon and Sailor Duval in "a tale of mystery and intrigue." Shannon agrees to charter out his boat, the Bold Venture, for an excursion in search of gold. Pontiac Dealers. Syndicated. (29 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (2-20-49) Jack is pleased that he's going to appear on the *Ford Theatre* in a version of his great film, "The Horn Blows at Midnight." But the program's director, Fletcher Markel, stops by and tries to get Jack to reconsider. So does producer Jack L. Warner. *First of two consecutive and*

related programs. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (28 min)

**A DAY IN THE LIFE OF DENNIS DAY** (10-22-47) Dennis Day stars with Barbara Eiler, Bea Benaderet, Dink Trout, John Brown. Dennis takes a second job, selling insurance. Colgate, Lustre Creme, NBC. (28 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (4-7-46) Jack welcomes guest Van Johnson who joins the cast in a Benny version of his film "Weekend at the Waldorf." Cast features Bea Benaderet and Sara Berner as Gertrude Gearshift and Mable Flapsaddle, the switchboard operators. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (28 min)

**SUSPENSE** (4-6-50) "Salvage" starring Van Johnson with Joe Kearns, William Conrad, Cathy Lewis and Sam Edwards. A pilot is offered a job to help search for a sunken treasure. AutoLite, CBS. (29 min)

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (1-12-47) The show opens at the home of guests George Burns and Gracie Allen as they listen to Benny on the radio. Later, Gracie shows up at Jack's show, pretending to be Lauren Bacall! Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (27 min)

**BURNS AND ALLEN SHOW** (6-18-45) Gracie decides that George needs a new image and decides to take him out to purchase a new suit of clothes. Cast includes Harry Von Zell, John Brown, Mel Blanc, Veola Vonn. Swan Soap, CBS. (24 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (4-6-52) Jack and the gang, including **Frank Nelson**, Mel Blanc, Bea Benaderet and Sara Berner. Mary has a dental appointment and Jack goes along to have his teeth cleaned. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (26 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (2-18-75) **Frank Nelson** recalls his career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden in Mr. Nelson's home in Hollywood, California. Frank Nelson died in 1986 at age 75. (27 min)

**THE WHISTLER** (9-20-42) "The Fog" stars **Frank Nelson** and Lou Merrill in a story about a man with amnesia who is suspected of murder. Joseph Kearns as The Whistler. Sustaining, CBS. (27 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (2-27-49) Jack and the gang including Mel Blanc (Prof. LeBlanc), **Frank Nelson**, and Artie Auerbach (Mr. Kitzel). Guest Claude Rains, who is scheduled to appear with Jack in the *Ford Theatre* production of "The Horn Blows at Midnight" tries to get Benny to change his mind. *Second of two con-*

*secutive and related programs.* Lucky Strike Cigarettes, CBS. (27 min)

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (3-30-47) Broadcasting from San Francisco, it's Jack, Mary, Rochester, Dennis, Don, Mel Blanc, and Artie Auerbach. Guest is actress Jane Wyman who joins in the fun and talk about San Francisco. Lucky Strike Cigarettes, NBC. (26 min)

**HALLMARK PLAYHOUSE** (1-13-49) "Clay Shuttered Doors" starring Jane Wyman in a ghost story about a lady who "comes back from the dead." James Hilton hosts. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (28 min)

**FORD THEATRE RECREATION** (2-11-01) *Our Those Were The Days Radio Players* present a re-enactment of Jack Benny's appearance March 4, 1949 on CBS' *Ford Theatre* in the radio version of his film, "The Horn Blows at Midnight." It's a comedy-fantasy about an angel sent to destroy Earth with a blast from Gabriel's horn. *Recorded before a studio audience at the Museum of Broadcast Communications.* (Approximately 60 min)

**FITCH BANDWAGON** (11-10-46) Phil Harris and Alice Faye star with Elliott Lewis as Frankie Remley. Alice gets a call from 20th Century Fox who wants her to make another motion picture, but Phil's not happy about it. *This program is from the show's first season on the air.* Fitch Shampoo, NBC. (29 min)

**JACK BENNY PROGRAM** (5-16-54) Jack's preparing for a big date with telephone operator Gertrude Gearshift as he takes her to a French restaurant. Cast includes Bob Crosby, Frank Nelson, Bea Benaderet. AFRS rebroadcast. (26 min)

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CENTURY

Chuck Schaden's

# THOSE WERE THE DAYS

STATION AND TIME TO BE ANNOUNCED

## MARCH 2001

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### SATURDAY, MARCH 3

**SUSPENSE** (10-4-55) "Good-bye Miss Lizzie Borden" starring **Paula Winslowe**, Virginia Gregg and Irene Tedrow. A reporter tries to interview Lizzie Borden who supposedly killed family members with an axe. Sustaining, CBS. (29 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (6-17-88) **Paula Winslowe** recalls her broadcast career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden in Miss Winslowe's Los Angeles, California home. (26 min)  
**LIFE OF RILEY** (3-22-47) William Bendix stars as Chester A. Riley with **Paula Winslowe** as his wife, Peg. A flashback tells how the Riley's lived with Peg's parents when they were first married. Cast includes John Brown, Lou Merrill, Gil Stratton Jr., Herb Vigran. Dreft, NBC. (30 min)

**KRAFT MUSIC HALL** (5-27-37) Bing Crosby with Bob Burns, Jimmy Dorsey and the orchestra. Ken Carpenter, and guests comedienne Zasu Pitts, actress Gail Patrick and pianist Rudolph Ganz. Burns tells stories about



Paula Winslowe

his family in Arkansas and plays his Bazooka. Bing, Bob, and Zasu do a "Christopher Columbus" sketch. Kraft Foods, NBC. (16 min & 15 min & 29 min) *Read the article about Bob "Bazooka" Burns on page 30.*

**JIMMY DURANTE SHOW** (2-18-48) The Schnozz cuts up with guest Victor Moore, Peggy Lee, Candy Candido, announcer Howard Petrie, Roy Bargy and the orchestra. Rexall, NBC. (28 min) *Read the article about Jimmy Durante on page 6.*

**VIC AND SADE** (1942) Art Van Harvey is Vic, Bernardine Flynn is Sade, Billy Idleson is Rush. Sade has a petition to tear down the Bright Kentucky Hotel. (10 min)

### SATURDAY, MARCH 10

**GRAND CENTRAL STATION** (7-1-41) "We Want to Get Married" with Frances Chaney, Paul Stewart, Tom Tully, **Karl Swenson**, and Bennet Kilpack. A newlywed couple get their marriage off to a bad start when the husband loses his job. Tom Shirley announces. Rinso, NBC. (29 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (8-27-75) **Karl Swenson** and **Joan Tompkins** talk about their radio careers in a conversation recorded in Hollywood, California. Karl Swenson died in 1978 at age 70. (26 min & 20 min)

**THIS IS NORA DRAKE** (7-26-48) **Joan Tompkins** stars as Nora



Joan Tompkins

Drake, a nurse on the staff of Page Memorial Hospital, who falls in love with Dr. Ken Martinson, a married man. *Isolated episode of the long-running (1947-1959) daytime serial.* Toni Creme



Karl Swenson

Shampoo, NBC. (14 min)

**CAVALCADE OF AMERICA** (7-21-41) "O. Henry" starring **Karl Swenson** as "America's greatest short story writer." DuPont, NBC. (29 min)

**STEVE ALLEN SHOW** (10-26-49) Al Jolson, promoting his film "Jolson Sings Again" is Steve Allen's guest in this broadcast before a large audience in Studio B at Columbia Square in Hollywood. *This is Allen before the Tonight Show on TV and Jolson after the great success of "The Jolson Story."* KNX, Los Angeles. (52 min) *Steve Allen died Oct. 30, 2000 at age 78.*

**MOON RIVER** (1930s) Bob Brown narrates a program of mood music and poetry. Southern Cross Mattresses, WLW, Cincinnati. (15 min) *Read the article about Moon River on page 35.*

## SATURDAY, MARCH 17 A ST. PATRICK'S DAY RADIO PARADE

**PHILCO RADIO TIME** (3-17-48) Bing Crosby welcomes guest 11-year-old Margaret O'Brien and together they present the playlet "Cinderella Goes to Town." Bing sings "Dear Old Donegal" and "Galway Bay" John Scott Trotter and the orchestra, Rhythmaires, Ken Carpenter. Philco Radios, ABC. (31 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (10-29-76) **Mercedes McCambridge** talks about her radio and film career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden backstage at the Drury Lane Theatre in Evergreen Park, Illinois. (29 min)

**STUDIO ONE** (11-4-47) "Kitty Foyle" starring **Mercedes McCambridge** in the classic story of a working girl who knows she won't fit into the life of the wealthy young man who loves her. Cast includes John McGovern and Elspeth Eric. Host is producer Fletcher Markel. Sustaining, CBS. (26 min & 30 min)

**ACADEMY AWARD** (6-22-46) "Front Page" starring Pat O'Brien and Adolph Menjou who repeat their screen roles in the radio version of the 1931 film. Hildy Johnson, a crack reporter about to be married, becomes involved in the escape of a convicted killer about to be hanged. House of Squibb, CBS. (29 min)

**HALLMARK PLAYHOUSE** (10-28-48) "O'Halloran's Luck" starring Edmund O'Brien as Tim O'Halloran who comes to Boston to

marry Kitty Malone, but her parents have other ideas. James Hilton is host. Hallmark Cards, CBS. (29 min)

## SATURDAY, MARCH 24

**BLONDIE** (10-8-44) Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake star as Blondie and Dagwood Bumsted with Hanley Stafford as Mr. Dithers, and **Tommy Cook** as Alexander, with special guest Fanny Brice as Baby Snooks. Alexander appears to be bored with life, but it seems he may have "girl problems." Ken Niles announces. AFRS rebroadcast. (29 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (5-17-91) **Tommy Cook** recalls his career as a child actor on radio in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded at the Sportsmen's Lodge in Studio City, California. (27 min)

**ARCH OBOLER'S PLAYS** (7-26-45) "My Chicago" is writer-producer-director Arch Oboler's "personal" story of his relationship with the city where he did some of his best writing work... as seen through the eyes of an 11-year-old, played by **Tommy Cook**. Cast includes Cathy Lewis and Elliott Lewis as the boy's mother and father. NBC. (28 min)

**DODGE SHOW** (3-7-36) Vaudevillian Harry Richman and the Dodge Orchestra welcome guest Gertrude Niesen, star of the Ziegfeld Follies. Dodge Automobiles, Syndicated. (15 min)

**LUX RADIO THEATRE** (7-1-40) "Alias the Deacon" starring Bob Burns in a radio adaptation of his 1940 film about a cardsharp who becomes a "Robin Hood" to help a family in trouble. Cast includes Helen Wood, Fred MacKaye, Lou Merrill, Arthur Q. Brian. Cecil B. De Mille hosts. Lux Soap, CBS. (20 min & 20 min & 19 min) *Read the article about Bob Burns on page 30.*

**WORLD NEWS TODAY** (9-2-45) On V-J Day, at the conclusion of World War II, Robert Trout reports: "Japan has surrendered. That's submitting the four home islands to the forces of occupation and renouncing the stolen empire overseas. The occupation troops are moving in gradually, slowly extending the area under Allied control. ...Thousands of miles from Japan, the Japanese forces are slowly yielding the territory they had fought to rule forever." Admiral Radios, CBS. (25 min) *Robert Trout died November 14, 2000 at age 91.*





**Chuck Schaden's**

# THOSE WERE THE DAYS

STATION AND TIME TO BE ANNOUNCED

## MARCH 2001

**SATURDAY, MARCH 31**

**OUR MISS BROOKS** (5-28-50) Eve Arden stars as schoolteacher Connie Brooks, with Gale Gordon as Mr. Conklin, Richard Crenna as Walter Denton, and Jeff Chandler as Mr. Boynton. After his car is scratched, Conklin is on his soap box for "Safety When Driving." Miss Brooks has to pay a ticket for reckless driving. Colgate-Palmolive, CBS. (29 min)

**LAND OF THE LOST** (1947) "Lead Pencilvania." Isabel Manning Hewson tells a story from "that wonderful kingdom at the bottom of the sea where all things lost find their way." Red Lantern, a wise, talking fish played by Art Carney, guides us to the place where lost pencils wind up. Bosco, ABC. (24 min)

**INNER SANCTUM** (7-19-48) "Death Demon" starring Everett Sloane and **Anne Seymour**. After his father has been murdered, a young man tries to summon his father's spirit to learn the identity of the murderer. Bromo Seltzer, CBS. (30 min)

**SPEAKING OF RADIO** (8-3-76) **Anne Seymour** talks about her long radio career in a conversation with Chuck Schaden recorded at Miss Seymour's home in West Hollywood, California. Anne Seymour died in 1988 at age 79. (27 min)



Anne Seymour

**MAGNIFICENT MONTAGUE** (1951) Monty Wooley stars as Edwin Montague with **Anne Seymour** as his wife Lilly and Pert Kelton as their maid Agnes. Lilly and Agnes plan a surprise birthday party for Montague. Cast includes Art Carney and John Gibson. AFRS rebroadcast. (27 min)

**DIARY OF FATE** (3-23-48) "Paul Reese Entry." Reese is a sports reporter who overhears a conversation about fixing a prizefight. Cast includes Lois Andrews, Steve Brody, Herbert

Litton, Jerry Hausner, Hal Sawyer. Syndicated. (27 min)

**LUKE SLAUGHTER OF TOMBSTONE** (3-2-58) "Tracks Out of Tombstone" stars Sam Buffington as Slaughter, "a Civil War cavalryman turned Arizona cattleman." Luke protects a man whom he believes is innocent of robbery. Cast includes Vic Perrin, Lawrence Dobkin, Sam Edwards, Junius Matthews, Jack Moyles. Sustaining, CBS. (25 min)

*...more good listening...*

**ART HELLYER SHOW**-- Music of the big bands and the big singers with lots of knowledgeable commentary and fun from one of radio's legendary personalities, **now in his 54th year on the air!** *WJOL, 1340 AM, Saturday, 11am-2 pm.*

**SATURDAY SWING SHIFT**-- Bruce Oscar is host for this two-hour show featuring swing music on record performed by the big bands, pop singers and small groups. *WDCB, 90.9 FM, Saturday, 10 am-Noon.*

### NOSTALGIA DIGEST AND RADIO GUIDE

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

E-MAIL address: [TWTDchuck@aol.com](mailto:TWTDchuck@aol.com)

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

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

# "When Radio Was" -- WBBM-AM 780

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

### February, 2001 Schedule

THU/2-1 Life With Luigi (6-5-49) *At the Race Track Pt 2*; The Saint (8-6-50) *Corpse Said Ouch*  
 FRI/2-2 Suspense (5-18-43) *ABC Murders*; Vic and Sade (1940s) *Speaking Acquaintances*

MON/2-5 Green Hornet (5-5-38) *Political Racket*; Life of Riley (4-30-44) *Baxter Goes to NY Pt 1*  
 TUES/2-6 Life of Riley Pt 2; X Minus One (12-7-55) *Nightfall*  
 WED/2-7 Have Gun, Will Travel (11-23-58) *Strange Vendetta*; Fibber McGee (1-20-42) Pt 1  
 THU/2-8 Fibber McGee Pt 2; Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons (2-3-44) *Girl Who Flirted*  
 FRI/2-9 The Shadow (9-11-38) *Caverns of Death*; Bill Stern Sports Newsreel (9-12-42)

MON/2-12 Dragnet (9-14-50) *Big Make*; Our Miss Brooks (7-10-49) *Telegram for Mrs. Davis Pt 1*  
 TUES/2-13 Our Miss Brooks Pt 2; Box Thirteen (4-10-49) *Mexican Maze*  
 WED/2-14 The Whistler (10-23-44) *Death Carries a Lunch Kit*; Abbott & Costello (11-19-42) Pt 1  
 THU/2-15 Abbott & Costello Pt 2; This is Your FBI (3-23-50) *Success Story*  
 FRI/2-16 Suspense (6-8-43) *Five Canaries in the Room*; Beulah (1-26-54) *Streetcar Lunchroom*

MON/2-19 Lone Ranger (1-7-49) *Man of Goodwill*; Jack Benny (6-6-48) *Leaves for Detroit Pt 1*  
 TUES/2-20 Jack Benny Pt 2; Lights Out! (10-20-42) *Poltergeist*  
 WED/2-21 Philip Marlowe (10-10-48) *Panama Hat*; Burns & Allen (2-27-47) *House Office Pt 1*  
 THU/2-22 Burns & Allen Pt 2; Tales of Texas Rangers (4-19-50) *By Just a Number*  
 FRI/2-23 The Shadow (10-16-38) *Night Without End*; Sgt. Preston (8-27-43) *298 Lantern Rock*

MON/2-26 Escape (8-4-47) *Sire De Maledroit's Door*; Phil Harris-Alice Faye (11-28-48) Pt 1  
 TUE/2-27 Phil Harris-Alice Faye Pt 2; The Falcon (9-11-52) *Case of the Strawberry Blonde*  
 WED/2-28 Mysterious Traveler (4-29-52) *Murder in 2952*; Duffy's Tavern (11-9-45) Pt 1

### March, 2001 Schedule

THU/3-1 Duffy's Tavern Pt 2; Six Shooter (9-20-53) *Jenny*  
 FRI/3-2 Suspense (6-29-43) *Uncle's Rosebush*; Johnny Dollar (10-29-56) *Silent Queen Pt 1/5*

MON/3-5 Green Hornet (10-31-39) *Parking Lot Racket*; My Friend Irma (1-29-47) *Surprise Pt 1*  
 TUE/3-6 My Friend Irma Pt 2; X Minus One (1-23-57) *Open Warfare*  
 WED/3-7 Nick Carter (10-25-43) *Angle on Murder*; Jack Benny (6-13-48) *From Detroit Pt 1*  
 THU/3-8 Jack Benny Pt 2; Crime Classics (5-26-54) *Lethal Habit of Marquise DeBrinvilliers*  
 FRI/3-9 The Shadow (10-23-38) *Gun Island*; Johnny Dollar (10-30-56) *Silent Queen Pt 2/5*

MON/3-12 Gangbusters (1940s) *Red Hot Readers*; Fibber McGee (2-3-42) *Lost Ring Pt 1*  
 TUE/3-13 Fibber McGee Pt 2; Boston Blackie (6-4-46) *Three Witnesses Killed*  
 WED/3-14 Pat Novak for Hire (4-9-49) *Package for a Friend*; Great Gildersleeve (3-19-47) Pt 1  
 THU/3-15 Great Gildersleeve Pt 2; Screen Directors' Playhouse (12-16-49) *Affairs of Susan*  
 FRI/3-16 Suspense (7-6-43) *White Rose Murders*; Johnny Dollar (10-31-56) *Silent Queen Pt 3/5*

MON/3-19 Sam Spade (6-20-48) *Deathbed Caper*; Abbott & Costello (1-14-43) *Claire Trevor Pt 1*  
 TUE/3-20 Abbott & Costello Pt 2; Dragnet (9-21-50) *Big Pair*  
 WED/3-21 Lone Ranger (1-10-49) *Don Mike and Estrellita*; Burns & Allen (1-19-43) Pt 1  
 THU/3-22 Burns & Allen Pt 2; Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons (10-13-49) *Silver Dagger Case*  
 FRI/3-23 The Shadow (10-30-38) *Isle of Fear*; Johnny Dollar (11-1-56) *Silent Queen Pt 4/5*

MON/3-26 The Saint (8-27-50) *Tony Cartega Case*; Charlie McCarthy (11-4-45) *Elsa Maxwell Pt 1*  
 TUE/3-27 Charlie McCarthy Pt 2; Murder at Midnight (5-5-47) *Island of the Dead*;  
 WED/3-28 Gunsmoke (8-16-52) *The Lynching*; Life with Luigi (6-12-49) *Papa's Coat Pocket Pt 1*  
 THU/3-29 Life with Luigi Pt 2; Broadway is My Beat (8-11-49) *Jane Darwell*  
 FRI/3-30 Suspense (8-10-43) *The Fountain Plays*; Johnny Dollar (11-2-56) *Silent Queen Pt 5/5*

# Benjamin Kubelsky of Waukegan

BY KATHERINE HAMILTON-SMITH

Have you ever tried to get a young son or daughter to practice their musical instrument? Some youngsters have a natural drive to hone their skill with the violin or piano. But for most, practicing is like pulling teeth. Parents don't despair! Practice makes perfect, but it may not be the only thing that will take your child to the top.

Beloved American entertainer Jack Benny, born Benjamin Kubelsky in 1894, was just such a torment to his long-suffering mother when he first started playing the violin as a child. Benny remembered having to practice two hours each day because his mother believed he could become a concert violin virtuoso.

Benny loved the violin but hated practicing. The Kubelsky family lived at 224 South Genesee Street in Waukegan, Illinois, across from his father's haberdashery store. He would wait until his mother went over to help in the store, then he would stop practicing, gaze dreamily out the window and watch the boats on Lake Michigan and the activity on the docks.

Practicing, or rather not practicing, the violin was symbolic for Benny, who was a failure in every traditional academic way. In school, he remembered being in the principal's office so much he became "part of the furniture." He was a dreamer and simply couldn't concentrate. He failed every subject. In the end he was thrown out of Waukegan Central High School after his first year, with the principal pronouncing

that "we have no place in this school for people like you!"

When Benny was only eight years old, he performed in the Saturday matinees at Waukegan's Phoenix Opera House. His grandmother was proud, but his mother still despaired of his chances for success. "Without practicing, he'll be a nothing," she said. She never lived to see her son's great success, dying in 1917 when Benny was 23 and still only a young vaudeville entertainer. She never even saw his vaudeville act, believing that "show business" was immoral.

Despite his mother's desire that Benny become a "legitimate" classical musician, he continued to "go astray" and got his start in show business in Waukegan. He toured as a violin-playing teenager with the Waukegan Junior Orchestra and, at 17, played in the pit orchestra at the Barrison Theatre for \$7.50 a week. A review of the Elks Club Minstrel Show in the February 6, 1911 Waukegan *Daily Sun* said that Benny Kubelsky showed himself to be "a master of the violin" and that his "pleasing, slyly humorous personality made a deep impression."

In 1911 the Marx Brothers performed at the Barrison. Benny's talent was spotted by the Marx Brother's mother/manager Minnie Palmer, who offered Benny a job playing the violin and conducting the pit orchestra. He accepted, but, still too young to make the decision on his own, his parents flatly refused to give consent.

The following year he was invited to form his first vaudeville act with pianist Cora Salisbury, a former Barrison Theatre musician. Benny's parents were still against the life of a vaudeville musician for the son upon which they had pinned such

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*Katherine Hamilton-Smith is Curator of Historical Resources for the Lake County (Illinois) Discovery Museum, which has all new state-of-the-art exhibits including Jack Benny memorabilia. For information call (847)526-7878.*

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Benjamin Kubelsky, Age 4

high hopes. At 18, Benny was no longer dependent on their approval, but he wanted their blessing. It would be hard to get. His father's negative opinion of show business was just as strong as his mother's. Benny's father called people in the theater "rotten human beings" with no morals or decency. And he told his son, "If you go on the stage, don't come home no more. You ain't got no home as far as I'm concerned."

Benny, the good son, said that he would not go against his parents' wishes if it came to an ultimatum, but he begged them to talk with Mrs. Salisbury. Benny's mother acquiesced and made an agreement with Mrs. Salisbury to take care of her son, make sure he ate Kosher food and stay "respectable."

They billed themselves as "Salisbury and Benny - From Grand Opera to Ragtime,"

and commanded \$50 per week. Benny pocketed only \$15 to start, making him a definite "second fiddle." Years later, Benny wrote about his first road trip. "In order to get to Gary [Indiana], we had to take the train to Chicago, which I had done many times before, but this was different. Practically the whole town [of Waukegan] came to see us off." His father had even weakened at the last moment, raided the stock of his haberdashery, and gave Benny the tuxedo, stiff shirt and bow tie he would need for the Salisbury and Benny "class act."

As the Benny and Salisbury act matured, their straightforward offering of musical numbers such as "The Poet and Peasant Overture" began to change. At the end of one piece, Salisbury's theatrical and thunderous show of piano virtuosity was accompanied by Benny's light-speed runs up and down the violin strings. Fingers flying, audiences were impressed. Benny began to pantomime the "terrible effort" of playing so fast and hard. He realized years later that this signaled the real start of his comic career. He had been spoofing the role of a violinist and audiences thought it was funny. The real Jack Benny was born.

Even after Benny became a famous radio and television comedian and no longer played the violin during his act, he still held it on stage. He said in later life that it was his psychological crutch. After Benny's death, George Burns called Benny's violin "a comedian's security blanket." Once, in Schenectady, New York, Benny had tried to go on without it. He told two jokes, nobody laughed, so he borrowed a violin from the orchestra and he was all right after that.

Benny certainly was all right after that. From the age of 16 to his death at 80, Jack Benny's "pleasing, slyly humorous personality," and his violin did indeed make a deep impression in America and around the world. ■

# *It's Elementary, My Dear Classmates*

BY JACK B. SPATAFORA

They say that God gave us memory so that we could have roses in the winter.

Those of us who graduated elementary school in the Forties, as I did in 1945, are not yet in the winter of our lives, but our memories have a wonderful fragrance to them. Even though most of our parents and teachers and classrooms and candy stores and playgrounds and some of our classmates are gone, our sweet memories of them live on. No one can take that from us because memories never die. Nor should they.

Even though many of us are fifty-something years older, have heads of greying hair, are inches thicker, and pounds heavier, there is something mystically bonding us: we shared so many highly impressionable years of our lives together in the same city at the same time and in very much the same way. In an explosively changing world, such continuity and connectedness is rare and I, for one, am proud to claim it.

The way my memory recalls it all, everything took place within three concentric circles.

First there was the larger world outside, the one our parents lived in.

Second there was the smaller world of our snug little Chicagoland neighborhoods.

Third there was the cocoon-like world of those eight innocent years in my elementary school from 1937 to 1945.

My memories of that larger world? Well, 1937 was the start of FDR's second term. It was a time of WPA crews, CCC Camps, NRA Eagles, the explosion of the

Hindenberg, Orson Welles' radio scare, "The War of the Worlds," and the 1939 New York World's Fair. On radio it was *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy*, *Little Orphan Annie* and her shake-up mugs, *Captain Midnight* and his secret decoders, *The Cinnamon Bear*. On records it was Goodman, Dorsey, Miller, Crosby, Sinatra. On the silver screen it was Fred and Ginger, Laurel and Hardy, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Mickey and Judy, *Boys Town*, *Gone With the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Bells of St. Mary's*, *Spellbound*, June Allyson. It was also Gene Autry beating the outlaws and John Wayne beating the Nazis and Japanese.

Speaking about the Nazis and Japanese, we were fourth grade students in December of 1941 when we first learned about a place called Pearl Harbor. That soon meant Wake Island, Bataan, Corregidor, city blackouts, neighborhood air raid wardens, ration stamps, war stamps, scrap drives. For most of us the war meant fathers and brothers and cousins in uniform and blue and gold stars in windows.

By the time we were in the seventh and eighth grade, that outside world was beginning to mean other things as well: Midway, Guadalcanal, North Africa, Anzio, Patton, Ike, Normandy, the bomb. For us, at age 12 and 13, the war helped define forever our perception of right and wrong, victor and defeat, heroes and villains. President Roosevelt died just before the end — I remember hearing the news as I was walking home from school on that April 12.

But we remember another world back then: the smaller world of our neighbor-

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*Jack B. Spatafora is a writer who lives in Park Ridge, Illinois.*

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hood with its shady, safe streets, its red brick bungalows, its nearby retail stores, its within-walking-distance movie theatres. A neighborhood of wash-day Mondays and ironing-day Tuesdays, the old creaking ice trucks and horse-drawn milk wagons, the rags and old-iron man. A neighborhood of Good Humor trucks on summer nights, ice skating on vacant lots on winter nights, and bonfires for potato-baking and Christmas trees after Christmas.

Remember? There was a rhythm of life in our Chicagoland neighborhoods back then. Children returning to school and mothers canning fruits and vegetables in the fall; coal deliveries and holidays in the winter; house cleaning and Eastertime in the spring; vacations in the summer. And, whenever we were home for lunch, we remember mom listening to *Helen Trent*, *Our Gal Sunday*, *Life Can Be Beautiful*, and *Ma Perkins*. How simple it all was, not necessarily because it really was simple, but because mom and dad made it seem that way in our innocence.

Between 1937 and 1945 there were hundred of neighborhood public and parochial elementary schools where kids played Kick-the-Can, Hide-and-Go-Seek, Marbles, Yo-Yo, Hop Scotch, and cowboy-and-Indian games. Nobody ever packaged or sold these games; everyone just knew what they were and how to play them.

School stores featured penny candy like Mary Janes, Black Crows, Bull's Eyes, Milk Duds, corn candy, malted milk balls, and war-card bubble gum.

If you wanted a comic book or a lime rickey or a real chocolate soda, you went to the corner drug store where a quarter went a long way. It could also get you into the movies with a box of pop corn and a

Coke.

When we were in elementary school the old red streetcars with the yellow wicker seats still clanked up and down most of the main thoroughfares. They weren't very fast, but none of us was in much of a hurry back then. We didn't even mind the L — the elevated train— stopping a hundred times between home and Chicago's Loop. Why? Because it was fun! What's more, it was safe.

My memory is a tiny time machine that carries me back.

I recall our teachers helping us on with our winter boots in that wet, crowded cloak room at the back of the class; appointing certain boys to bring up the bottles of white and chocolate milk that were delivered each day; rewarding the best kids by letting them go outside and clean chalk erasers.

I recall how the girls were always the good students and how annoying that was! They were also the ones the teachers trusted for special assignments. Naturally, the girls got to be in all the special events as well.

We spent 1,440 days together in elementary school. Remember the names, the faces, the events. Remember the maple leaves we would bring into class during the fall, the snowball fights during recess in the winter, the smell of paste and glue in the spring, and the aroma of lilac bouquets for the teachers each May.

Those days and years and experiences are past, but they're not really over, for each has consciously or subconsciously contributed to the texture of our personality, our view of the world, our sense of ourselves. Those sweet memories exist outside of time, to be retrieved whenever we need to release their energy. ■

***"I recall our teachers helping us on with our winter boots in that wet, crowded cloak room at the back of the class."***

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# Bob 'Bazooka' Burns

## Radio's Arkansas Traveler

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BY BILL OATES

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One very popular radio comedian of the first half of the twentieth century had the name of his homemade wind instrument, the bazooka, borrowed by the United States military when it developed a weapon to launch small rockets against tanks.

Bob Burns, a favorite of many service personnel during World War II, created the comical instrument and, because his strange looking horn sort of resembled the new weapon, his funny title became enshrined forever as the weapon's namesake.

Robin Burn (the "s" came later) grew up in his oft-touted Van Buren, Arkansas. Born on August 2, 1890, just a few miles away in Greenwood, he and his fairly affluent family left when the boy was three. Soon thereafter he began to exercise his musical talents on the trombone and cornet. By age twelve, he landed a position in Van Buren's Queen City Silver Cornet Band.

Being an inquisitive lad, after band practice one evening he picked up two pieces of gas pipe and a whiskey funnel from behind Hayman's Plumbing Shop, fashioned the pieces into a new instrument by sliding the smaller cylinder into the larger one, and then blew into the end that did not have the funnel attached. He claimed that the new instrument sounded like a "wounded moose." More importantly, this first playing of the bazooka-to-be started his career path through show business. The name,

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*Bill Oates, of Kouts, Indiana, is a high school English teacher and author.*

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which was coined in 1905, came from either the word "bazoo," which can mean a windy person, or is a variation on the word kazoo. Actually, the originator became so adept at the instrument that he played it in the band.

From 1911 through the late 1940s, Bob Burns' primary source of income, though not always adequate to sustain him, derived from entertaining with his bazooka and telling down-home stories. He traveled with carnivals, played in an Atlantic City sideshow, and performed a blackface act in vaudeville. Other jobs that helped feed him, his first wife Elizabeth and Bob, Jr. included those of peanut farmer, hay farmer, salesman, and civil engineer. The last of the four resulted from the comedian's degree from the University of Arkansas. (His father was also a civil engineer.)

Even though the younger Burns often played the slow-mannered backwoods philosopher, he was actually well educated and intelligent. As a matter of fact, because he thought it was demeaning to reinforce a stereotype, he refused any offers to dress as a "hillbilly" when his talents were needed.

After the First World War began, Bob Burns enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. To wile away the lonely hours, he brought with him his bazooka. When the Arkansan arrived for boot camp in South Carolina, his drill sergeant heard the unusual instrument played melodically and recommended the boy's talent to their com-

manding officer. Soon thereafter, Bob Burns became more of an entertainer than a combatant member of The Corps. Even though the boy from Arkansas distinguished himself as a championship marksman, General Pershing himself encouraged Sergeant Burns to lead a jazz band, which would entertain the troupes in France. After the famed General told him and his ensemble



to "Go where you want; do what you want," the musical group played throughout France even after the war was over.

During his nationwide wanderings before the War, Bob Burns wound up at the old Biograph film studios in New York in 1913. He worked there in one picture as an extra in a mob scene for \$3. However, nearly two decades passed before he resumed his motion picture career. After the War he bounced in and out of show business during the 1940s but once the Great Depression arrived, he again tried movies and a relatively new medium, radio.

Although Bob Burns eventually became very successful in radio, his first forays into the medium were relatively non-productive. Hanging around KNX and KHJ in Los Angeles in the early 1930s when he was not waiting for bit parts in the movies, Bob Burns often received next to nothing for his early radio appearances. Actually, one of his performances as the black-faced "Soda Pop" on an afternoon show brought

him some West Coast fans but little money. Just before his big break in radio, he was so broke that he had to feed himself at Rotary Club luncheons where he performed for free.

Many radio greats first appeared before the invisible audience via Rudy Vallee's Fleischman's Yeast program. Francis Langford, Joc Penner, Judy Canova, Red Skelton, and Edgar

Bergen were among those whose careers received early important exposure on the show that would welcome Bob "Bazooka" Burns to the microphone in 1935. (Burns had nervously phoned bandleader Paul Whiteman for an audition when the Arkansas traveler played in New York. To his surprise, Bob Burns received an invitation to appear on the show. The details are not clear as to whether the Whiteman or Vallee show came first, but the results were the same.) The powers-to-be on the Vallee show thought that Burns' Arkansas drawl was similar to that of another radio comedian, Will Rogers, and that the newcomer should imitate the Oklahoman's famous political commentary. (Coincidentally, Burns' Van Buren home rests just a few miles from the Oklahoma border, about 100 miles southeast of Rogers' birthplace.) Unfortunately, Rogers and aviator Wiley Post died in a plane crash in August of that year. Instead of fading away because his intended use on the air was obsolete and now in bad taste, Bob Burns vaulted to the

## BOB 'BAZOOKA' BURNS

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top of popularity when he reverted to his tried and true bazooka playing and tall story telling.

Fortunately for Bob Burns, Kraft Foods obtained Bing Crosby to replace Al Jolson as the singing host of *The Kraft Music Hall* on January 2, 1936. The comedian received a contract to appear for 26 weeks, so he returned to California, where his next visits to radio and the movies proved more rewarding. (Unfortunately, during this first successful year on the radio, his wife died, and the Arkansan found himself raising a young teenage son.)

Crosby's success in both radio and motion pictures started early in the 1930s and as his star ascended to dizzying heights during the last years of the decade, so too did Bob Burns' popularity. This hour-long program usually included a down-home story from *The Arkansas Traveler*, as he was now called, just before an occasional bazooka solo. During one show, to reflect the musical sense of humor that Crosby appreciated, the bazooka honked along side of José Iturbi's classical piano on a Tchaikovsky composition.

The stint with Bing lasted five years and the film opportunities increased dramatically.

According to Dunning's *Encyclopedia of Old Time Radio*, Bob Burns' stay on the program ended because Kraft believed that his salary of \$5,000 per week was too high. During the late 1930s the comedian noted that he made \$1,500 in 1934 and \$400,000 three years later.

Essentially, Bob Burns exercised his homespun wit and musical talents on both the Kraft show and his own radio program. Stories included one wherein local stable boys in Van Buren had difficulty opening the horses' mouths to insert the bits. The grooms invited Burns over and when he

told his jokes, the horses reacted by opening their mouths to yawn and in went the bits.

In another story, he told of a doctor with horribly illegible handwriting. Burns took a prescription from the physician and on the way home used it for a free pass to the movies, a streetcar ride home, and when he got in the house he played it on the piano. Such were his tales of incredible razorback hogs, mules, and his fictional relatives like Uncle Fud, Aunt Boo, and Grandpa Snazzy.

During the comedian's stay with Bing Crosby, several other prestigious participants graced the show. Jimmy Dorsey led the band during the first season, and was replaced by John Scott Trotter. Both Spike Jones and Jerry Colonna emerged from Trotter's aggregation to become musical comedians in their own right. (Jones later showed up as one of the orchestra leaders on Bob Burns' own show.) Connie Boswell offered many of the female vocals, while numerous guests with a wide range of musical backgrounds accompanied Der Bingle. One ancillary benefit of working with the number one crooner in America resulted in the heyday of Bob Burns' film career.

Starting with *Rhythm on the Range* in 1936, Bob Burns began a five-year stint with Paramount Pictures. This first venture had Bing's new sidekick playing the role of Buck, and the following year, the two shared the bill in *Waikiki Wedding*.

He had been making pictures as early as 1913 for the Biograph Company, but he started appearing in films regularly in 1931. After co-starring with Bing, he appeared with Martha Raye in *Mountain Music* (1937), with Fay Bainter in *The Arkansas Traveler* (1937), with Dorothy Lamour in *Tropic Holiday* (1938), and starred in *our Leading Citizen* (1939), *Alias the Deacon* (1940), and *Comin' Round the Mountain* (1940).

While Bob Burns established himself with Bing Crosby, the producers of the *Lux Radio Theater* took notice and starred him in four productions.

The first stop netted him the title role in "Clarence" on January 24, 1938. This radio play honored the 1937 film, which starred Roscoe Karns and was based on the popular 1919 Booth Tarkington play about a talented but

mysterious visitor to a wealthy family.

The bazooka made its *Lux* debut during this first stint. Bob Burns' "The Arkansas Traveler" followed on January 30, 1939 after his 1938 Paramount film of the same title. On a more serious note, but still reflecting the wise country sage, Burns became a self-sacrificing country doctor in "A Man to Remember" on December 4, 1939 (from the 1933 *One Man's Journey* with Lionel Barrymore). Burns' final appearance on the renowned show came when he reprised his own "Alias the Deacon" on July 1, 1940.

Not only did Bob Burns visit on *Lux*, but he also appeared as a guest on many shows, the most noteworthy of which was on Norman Corwin's *We Hold These Truths* on December 15, 1941.

*The Bob Burns Show*, sometimes called *The Arkansas Traveler*, ran on radio from September 16, 1941 to May 25, 1947, as a thirty-minute show. During its heyday, the best programs emanated from the first sea-



son Campbell's Soup sponsorship and the Lever Brothers/Lifebuoy shows through the 1945-46 season. For the first installment, vocalist Ginny Simms offered the serious solos, while guests like Una Merkle played in heart-warming skits with the star. After the fall of 1942, comedienne Cass Dalcy joined the cast, while novelty bandleader Spike Jones provided the show's music. For

the next two seasons, the music featured numbers such as Jones' immense hits like "Der Fuehrer's Face" and "Cocktails for Two." Frank Sinatra visited as a guest on May 24, 1944, and delighted screaming teenaged girls. The following season, Jones left and Shirley Ross became the vocalist, while Leo Gorcey came on board to add his Brooklyn witticisms. For most of its stay on radio, *The Bob Burns Show* offered the star's down-home commentary on politics, social issues, and life in general.

One frequent topic of discussion on the show involved Bob Burns' real hobby of farming at Canoga Park. "I'm a farmer doing radio on the side," he quipped. One advantage to doing both was that "the O.P.A. (Office of Price Administration) doesn't restrict corn on the radio." He added that there was not a hog on his place "that didn't come from a better family than I did." His champion Berkshires had a pedigree "longer than a well rope" and won

## BOB 'BAZOOKA' BURNS

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numerous awards. Actually, the farm grew to 200 acres, and became a place for agricultural experts to admire the radio comedian's successes, especially those in the aviary. In addition to these talents, Bob Burns also authored a syndicated column for Esquire Features entitled "Well, I'll Tell You."

As a result of Bob Burns' popularity with military personnel during the Second World War, the name for his honking horn became the designation for a new weapon. The actual official attachment of the weapon's name began at the Aberdeen (Maryland) Proving Grounds during the early years of the Second World War. In 1941, a United States Army officer named Skinner refined the weapon he developed in the late 1930s by combining parts he gathered from an army warehouse. He placed a Swiss-made charge on a rocket-propelled grenade and attached it to a 60mm mortar tube. First named the M-1, the primary advantage of the weapon was that the device was portable and launched from a soldier's shoulder. More importantly, the tests showed that it proved effective as an anti-tank weapon from ranges upwards to 500 yards. The only down side of the weapon occurred when the dust and smoke revealed the shooter's position; however, the deadliness against Axis tank armor outweighed the risk of such exposure. One witness to the test firings said, "What a funny looking contraption; it looks like Bob Burns' bazooka." The name stuck, and later, an improved version emerged as the army standard named the M9A1. By the War's end nearly one half million bazookas were manufactured.

Being immensely patriotic, especially because of his own service record, Bob Burns generously loaned out the name and continued to play the instrument proudly

and frequently on Armed Forces Radio appearances. Just prior to playing a duet on such a show with famed orchestra leader and trombonist Tommy Dorsey, Burns boasted of the bazooka. "that trombone, all you can do with it is get music out of it ... You would be surprised what the boys could do with that thing (the bazooka) if they had it."

Essentially, after his own radio show ended, Bob Burns made a few guest appearances before retiring to his beloved farm. He, his second wife, and their three children continued to tend the crops and animals. As he was gaining fame on the radio, he likewise invested in San Fernando Valley real estate and died wealthy on February 2, 1956 at age 65.

Many Van Buren residents and Arkansans in general still pay homage to their local boy made good. The hometown still harbors the old Burns residence, and the local train depot has been made into the Bob Burns Museum. Pine Bluff, Arkansas, home of the fictional radio pair of Lum and Abner, hosts one of many Burns built bazookas as a part of a tribute to him in the Arkansas Entertainers Hall of Fame. Rarely did any other musician, professional or amateur, come close to mastering the bazooka. However, one Ormly Gumfudgin (actually 77 year-old C. Stanley Locke of La Crescenta, California) currently claims to be the only living bazooka player. For the radio aficionado who cannot make it to Burns' northwestern Arkansas hometown, to the radio museum at Pine Bluff in the central part of the state, or to a performance by Gumfudgin, a quick search on the Internet can provide the viewer and listener with snippets of the very talented Robin Burns' life. ■

*NOTE--Tune in TWTD on March 3 to hear Bob Burns with Bing Crosby and on March 24 to hear him on the Lux Radio Theatre in "Alias the Deacon."*



ED KNAPP COLLECTION

## Cincinnati's 'Moon River' Anthology

BY ED KNAPP

The concept of broadcasting a very late night radio program of quiet relaxing inspirational music and poetry reading was the masterful brainchild of airwaves showman Ed Byron. The tranquil quarter-hour show had its successful beginnings in the 1930s. The new radio entry readily became a favorite of night-owl romantics. Listeners at that hour welcomed *Moon River* and its leisurely-paced offerings.

*Radio Guide*, the popular programs-listing magazine of the times, listed under the call letters WLW, Cincinnati, *Organ and Poetry*. WLW was a strong, clear-channel, 50,000 watts of power at 700 kilocycles on the dial. It could be heard by late

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

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evening listeners, under ideal atmospheric conditions, nationwide from coast-to-coast.

Lovely introductory strains of soft organ music opened the radio show to the beautiful haunting melody of composer Fritz Kreisler's engaging "Caprice Viennoid." While the keyboard organ stylist set the mood of enchantment, the program's host and narrator delivered, in a mellow, velvet-toned voice, the signature introduction:

*Moon River, enchanted ribbon twined in the hair of night, where nothing is but sleep. Care will not seek for thee. Float on, drift on, Moon River... Moon River to the sea.*

Every evening near midnight, seven nights a week for three decades *Moon River* retained the same format and that poetic opening, proving a rapturous companion to listening couples holding hands and embracing. In a lovers' kiss their profiles were outlined in the dark by the faint glow

## 'MOON RIVER'

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of the radio dial as the program's message of love and romance was broadcast. Young couples captivated by the theme of *Moon River* continued to tune in. As they grew older and the cycle repeated itself, new and old couples alike became dedicated listeners over the decades. And its audience grew every year.

To most, *Moon River* seemed longer than its 15-minute airtime, so entrancing were its velvety organ music interludes, light-hushed feminine vocals, and delicate poetry recitations by a soft-spoken male narrator. Poetry by time-honored poets included recitations from the works of Emerson, Browning, Guest, Longfellow, Tennyson, Byron, and Dickinson. On occasion original poems written by avid listeners found a place in the programming.

The entire nature and theme of *Moon River's* light menu bespoke of gentle thoughts, dreams, longing, love, and comforting fulfillment. Organ melodies featured popular standards like "Beautiful Dreamer," "Stardust," "Long, Long Ago," "Sleep," "Clair de Lune" and more.

During the decades of the sustained popularity of *Moon River*, the only changes that occurred were members of the "cast."

The most distinctive-voiced narrators were Bob Brown, Harry Holcomb, Palmer Ward, Jay Jostyn (radio's future *Mr. District Attorney*), Ken Linn, Charles Woods, and Peter Grant.

Among the talented vocalists whose careers began on *Moon River* were Doris Day, Rosemary and Betty Clooney, the Devoe Sisters, Lucille Norman, Anita Ellis, and Ruby Wright.

The program's best remembered organist was Herschel Luecke who played the studio console in a pleasing inspirational style.

*Moon River* retained its same time slot

and place on the radio dial throughout its run. Its format was welcomed wholeheartedly by listeners in love with life and precious loved ones. All that was warm, sentimental, sweet, beautiful and flawless was represented on this one-of-a-kind radio gem. The content of the show caused listeners to reflect with purpose on the true meaning of life's course and brought an awareness that everyone should take more time to enjoy life and smell the roses along the way.

*Moon River* continued on the air until the 1960s when it was forced to leave the air—as had all entertainment radio—because of few listeners and loss of sponsorship.

On the final Sunday evening broadcast, *Moon River* signed off with the original signature closing it had used for thirty years:

*Down the valley of a thousand yesterdays*

*Flow the bright waters of Moon River  
On and on, forever waiting to carry you  
Down to the land of forgetfulness,  
To the kingdom of sleep,  
To the realm of Moon River.*

*A lazy stream of dreams  
Where vain desires forget themselves  
In the loveliness of sleep.*

*Moon River,  
Enchanted white ribbon  
Twined in the hair of night,  
Where nothing is but sleep,  
Dream on, sleep on,  
Care will not seek for thee.  
Float on, drift on,  
Moon River. . . to the sea.*

A rose from the past, *Moon River* now rests in repose in the memories of its fond, long-ago listeners, "to the sea, to the sea, Moon River, in the loveliness of dreams." ■

NOTE-- Tune in TWTD March 10 to hear a 1930s broadcast of *Moon River*.

# My Parents Were Song Pluggers!

BY EVANNE MARIE CHRISTIAN

As the world changes, many things which were commonplace become uncommon or even obsolete. For example, once there was a rather exciting musical profession known as “song plugging.”

What comes to most people’s minds today when they hear that term, if anything, is a profession that existed during the long ago heyday of Tin Pan Alley, romantically captured in many Hollywood movie musicals.

But as I look through my parents’ sheet music collection I note that phrases such as “For Professional Use Only,” “Advance Artist Copy,” and “No. 1 Plug Song” indicate that even as late as the 1950s sheet music was readily available—compliments of the publisher or songwriter—to scores of vocalists—amateurs, semi-professionals, professionals—so that the songs could be “plugged” on the radio, in nightclubs, or in performance with the big and little



Earl Christian

bands which toured hotel cafes and ballrooms across America.

If you were truly a fine singer, usually there was a small stipend paid for plugging a song or the plugger could get “expenses reimbursed” (or paid “under the table” in some other way). Or, perhaps a gentlemen’s agreement of a paid engagement somewhere was negotiated.

I guess that eventually easy access to recorded music for personal listening pleasure (and the decline in musical instrument playing and sight-reading skills in general) made the middle-class version of “song plugging” less essential. Sheet music sales dropped as record sales soared.

Every family once dreamed of owning a piano and singing around it, but now the dreams are of CD players and music videos.

Established vocalists of today still plug new songs on their recordings, on television, in films and in concert, but music



Ora Christian

## SONG PLUGGERS!

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publishers and songwriters no longer spend much effort using the "stars of tomorrow" to introduce songs to new audiences in any of the ways now considered to be old-fashioned.

The truth is that not many listeners or fans rush out to buy the sheet music anymore; but they do buy recordings.

Since my parents have both passed away, it's no longer easy to get answers to the simple questions I might have about family history. My curiosity about my mother and father working as sheet music song pluggers will never be completely satisfied. However, my 80-year-old aunt (my father's sister) now living in sunny Arizona, tells me that before my parents were married, when they were both very young, they were pursuing careers in show business in Chicago.

My mother, born in Chicago, had a lovely contralto which gained her praise of being "the white Billie Holiday," a compliment which is now, unfortunately, nothing but politically incorrect! Her manager convinced her to change her name from Ora Orvino to Diana (later Diane) Rogers and under that name she not only toured with medium-sized bands, but sang in many local Chicago hotels and in venues from the Orchid Lounge to the Chez Paree. With not only a sultry voice but exotic beauty, she had no trouble finding employment.

My father, born in Gary, Indiana was a tenor. After World War II, where as Sgt. Earl Christian he served as an Army communications specialist (due to his extraordinary knowledge of foreign languages — French, German, Italian, and, thanks to his parents, Romanian, as well as English—he stayed in Europe for a while to study German lieder, determined to become a master of those masterworks. Then he

came back and made Chicago his home base.

Eventually he became known as "Chicago's Newest Singing Find" and because he was also good-looking he was compared by the press to Perry Como! His musical talents also included song writing, but I'm afraid he never got much chance to plug his own songs.

Sometime in the late 1940s my parents met at an amateur talent showcase presented at the Hotel Sherman in downtown Chicago. Afterwards they became part of a group of young singers who made their living as song pluggers in Chicagoland. Music publishers and songwriters literally gave their new songs to these talented youngsters and helped to "sponsor" their careers.

The singers' responsibility was to get those songs heard at nightclubs, hotel ballrooms and, especially, on the radio. One way to get a foot in the door was to audition for an amateur contest. The winners often were rewarded with a radio appearance or even with an engagement at some fancy supper club. Perhaps they also came to the attention of a talent agent or personal manager who would try to advance their careers.

I have not had much success tracking down my mother's early career (although I do have a video tape of a "comeback" appearance she made in 1992 on a local Chicago TV program, *The Jack Hubble Jazz Show*), but my aunt kept a copy of a recording my father had given to her in 1952 when he was a guest on the *Rubin's Stars of Tomorrow* television show, a local Chicago favorite for many years.

He made the decision not to plug a new song, but to sing an old standard. "More Than you Know," and was given the number one spot on the broadcast! He had also won various amateur contests and soon was being booked at several well-known clubs

of the time: The Casino, The Silver Frolics, The Crown "Propeller Lounge," and The Circle Cafe. He was often booked for "gigs" out of town as well and, according to my aunt, consistently received rave reviews. I have a few press clippings that this was so.

As a child, I knew that my parents had a glamorous background, but there was really no trace of it in our home. When my parents were married in the First Presbyterian Church of Chicago in 1952, they knew they would follow the path that their families and society expected by giving up the pursuit of their careers in show business and settling down. The era of glamour was ended and the comedies and tragedies of real life begun. It just didn't seem possible to have a decent home and raise a family if the only consistent—and meager—source of employment was from song plugging and its often fickle rewards.

By the time I was born in 1954, my father was employed as a clerk in a toy store. My mother had just recently left employment as a phone operator for Sears & Roebuck catalog.

Years later when I found their publicity photos from the good old days, the people pictured seemed as distant to me as movie stars from the Golden Age. But there was always music in our home and I grew up with a deep love of all the performing arts. As an arts administrator, I've managed to always make a good living and I think my parents would be pleased to know that their love for music lives on in my life and in my work.

And I will always be proud of being the daughter of Earl and Ora Christian. To paraphrase a well-known quote from the movie *Sunset Boulevard*, "they had voices then!" ■

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*Evanne Marie Christian is a Digest subscriber from Chicago.*

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## Our Readers Write

### WE GET LETTERS

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**CHICAGO--** When I first heard about the sale of WNIB my thoughts immediately turned to the future of *Those Were The Days*. I am one of your many "loyal listeners" and have been for many years. Whether or not *TWTD* survives this change, I am grateful for the opportunity that you provided all of us to experience that kinder, gentler era when radio was king. I sincerely hope that *TWTD* will continue in some venue. I also know that if it does not, it will not be because of a lack of effort on your part. Keeping old time radio alive for as long as you have is not only due to its timelessness but to your vision and determination as well. --**MICHAEL J. CROWLEY**

**ST. CHARLES, IL--** I have been listening for almost 20 years! I play tapes of your shows to my sixth grade students to try and keep Old Time Radio alive. I was devastated to hear that WNIB had been sold. I will not know what to do with myself on Saturday afternoons if you can't find another station from which to broadcast. I sincerely hope for both of our sakes that you will be able to find another station. --**HERB PASTEUR**

**ELMWOOD PARK, IL--** I was in the office working this Saturday and heard your announcement that the station was being sold. Like many of your listeners I started with you from the beginning. You said you will make every effort to stay on the air and I will put my faith in your efforts and will pray to that end also. I don't think there is anybody who does a better job at presenting the Golden Age of Radio than you. Your interviews with the radio stars are priceless. I will look forward to a positive ending to this new challenge. --**RAYMOND SKIPPER MITCHELL**

**CHICAGO--** I want to add my expression of prayers and support to the many others you've received. While the next few months may turn out to be a bumpy ride, I feel certain there will be some pleasant surprises along the way. Though you no doubt realize that your listening audience is a loyal bunch, I think one outcome of this



## MORE LETTERS

transition will be to reveal just how loyal we truly are. Hang in there, Chuck, and think of this as another chapter of the journey -- not the epilogue! --**GREG PORTER**

**ELGIN, IL--** Your fans all over Chicagoland have to feel as shaken as I do. I must say, however, that I appreciate so much your calm, reasoned and reassuring discussion of this situation over the air. WNIB's owners certainly are not to be vilified for their decisions but to be appreciated for what they've given us all these years. And you, too, for that matter have earned the right to a retirement from the field. But what I hear in your voice on Saturdays is a man who absolutely loves this work and is far from giving it up, and that's what gives me great confidence that this same man who found the way to do what he loved in the first place will find a way to continue doing it. --**SHEILA BRENNAN**

**MAYSVILLE, GEORGIA--** Well said! Your comments today were a very proper and gentle reminder of the "facts of life." It was good of you to emphasize that 25 years on a fine station should be recognized for its great worth, and the owners should be greatly praised for their wonderful support of *Those Were The Days* and not be "attacked" for selling. And it was good of you to point out that the new owners could not get a "proper return on investment" to continue a classical music format. As much as I have enjoyed WNIB over the years, both via the airwaves and recently via the Internet, I can understand the economic realities involved. So when you find a new home, your long-time and loyal supporters will gladly send letters of "thanks" to the station that has the wisdom and foresight to present *Those Were The Days*. --**LINDSAY CLEVELAND**

**HOFFMAN ESTATES, IL--** A moment ago I just listened to your touching explanation of "The Change." And the catch in your voice betrayed your own strong emotions about losing your venue. There's always been a real synergy between you and your loyal

listeners. You make OTR happen for us. We, in turn, make it happen for you. None of your loyal fans could lose sight of the fact that our loss would also be a huge personal loss for you. And, quite simply, you deserve to leave the microphone when YOU decide to, not when corporate mandate takes it away. I truly believe you will save *TWTD* in one form or another, for yourself and for us. --**ALAN M. ELLIS**

**HOFFMAN ESTATES, IL--** I heard a catch in your voice today as you told of the sale of WNIB to a huge conglomerate. I heard you tell of the former owners' resistance to sell through the years. It's too bad they could not have found a buyer who also appreciated fine music. You also spoke of broadcasting your show until the station "goes dark." Indeed it will be a dark day for Chicago and broadcasting in general as quality gives way to "more of the same" which has taken over our society and airwaves. --**EDWARD C. COOK**

**CHICAGO--** Everyone likes an "old sentimentalist." Hearing someone express honest emotion in spite of himself --as you do on occasion-- is very moving. --**BILL BUCKLEY**

**AURORA, IL--** The purpose of this message is to thank you for all the great memories and impact that you influence upon others and you may not be aware of. We have listened to you for so long that if we miss a show for any reason, our Saturday seems incomplete. I can't imagine not hearing that great theme song ringing in my ears at least once a week. --**TOM NAWOSKI**

**CHICAGO--** I know that the outlook for *TWTD* is not the brightest right now, but if anyone can save our small nostalgia savings and loan, it's George Bailey Schaden (although I must admit I was surprised to learn that Potter moved to Salt Lake City!). --**TOM O'CONNOR**

**CRESTWOOD, IL--** We are praying for you. The show will go on, it will sell itself. We need your kind of wholesomeness, not to mention your corny jokes. We're behind you. --**NANCY WIERSMA**  
**(ED. NOTE--** We've been bombarded with calls, letters, faxes and e-mails expressing encouragement and hope that we'll be able to continue. We hope so, too.)



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← **JACK BENNY**

used his real name, Benjamin Kubelsky when he lived in Waukegan, Illinois. Read about Benjamin's early years in the article by Katherine Hamilton-Smith on page 26.

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