

THE VOICE ON THE AIR



*The Century Changing Story of*

# THE MIGHTY MUSIC BOX

THE GOLDEN AGE  
OF  
MUSICAL RADIO



By THOMAS A. DELONG

# THE MIGHTY MUSIC BOX

By **Thomas A. DeLong**

FOR more than sixty years radio has filled much of our daily lives with varied kinds of entertainment: news, sports, drama, and music. During most of those years it was Music that dominated the airways. All kinds of music.

HERE, for the first time, is the in-depth history of the Golden Age of Musical Radio, from crystal head-sets to hi-fi and stereo. The great singing stars of the 1920s - crooners, country western, romantic and spiritual balladeers and choruses; dance bands and orchestras; grand opera and musical extravaganzas. Symphonies and the classics. Unlimited entertainment at the twist of a dial that changed a nation's lifestyle, its commerce and industry and advertising, and created a new American culture through the magic of a mighty music box.

MEET the stars themselves in the photographic Gallery of Fame. Re-live the whole exciting era through reproductions of posters, advertisements and other visual memorabilia, and over 335 pages of spellbinding text. Bibliography and Index.

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**AMBER CREST BOOKS, Inc.**

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Los Angeles, California

While serving with the United States Army in Germany in the 1960s he observed first-hand the morale-sustaining benefits derived from radio music by soldiers, whether serving in wartime or peacetime duty. Subsequently, he began concentrated research into the complete history of radio, with numerous updating versions over some five years, before he reached the final version of *The Mighty Music Box*; the first in-depth work about radio and the people who built it.

Photography is DeLong's recreational hobby. In pursuit of unusual subjects, he has used up more than 25,000 feet of 16mm film on movies of Shinto shrines, Pope John XXIII, the British Royal Family, and Hollywood Celebrities engaged in off-stage endeavors. As past president and director of the Hong Kong True Light Foundation, a charity organization for funding the True Light Middle School for Girls in Hong Kong, founded in 1872, he is actively interested in Oriental arts and music. He is a trustee of the Westport, Conn. School of Music, and lives with his wife and two daughters at nearby Southport.

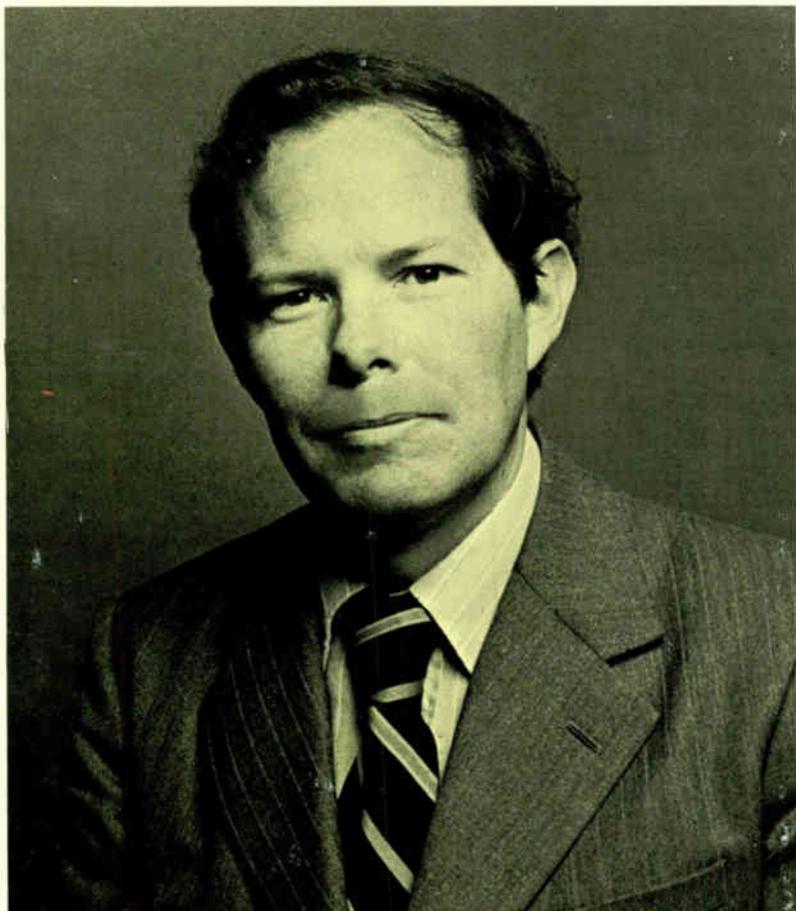


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## THOMAS A. DeLONG

Thomas A. DeLong is a native of New York who early in life began to acquire a thorough interest in radio broadcasting and its development. Shortly before graduation from Williams College at Williamstown, Mass., he took a position with a local radio station as program director and announcer; also supplying news items about radio personalities to local newspapers and magazines. Later, his feature articles appeared in both the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times, Music Journal and Country Music, covering various areas of radio broadcasting and news stories about performing artists. Currently he is a frequent contributor to magazines, and a regular contributor to the Sunday Post at Bridgeport, Conn.

DeLong holds degrees from Columbia University and the Graduate School of Business at New York University. As editor and contributor to a number of corporate publications, he has functioned in creative positions of marketing, advertising and sales promotion.

*(continued on back flap)*

# THE ETHER, EAR AND RADIO

## WHEN THE AURAL ORGAN 'PLAYS'

Marconi Found Missing Link Between Ether and the Ear—Why Some 'Deaf' Persons Hear Radio Sounds

By ORRIN E. DUNLAP, Jr.

IF the two "E's" in wireless signify in particular it is the "ether" and the "ear," both are vital in the wizardry of radio. If either were eliminated, broadcasting would vanish; if, indeed, broadcasting becomes impossible, nevertheless, the listener possibly obtains reflexion on the vast expanse of ether or the wonder of the human ear as a distance gate-way to the brain. These are taken for granted and the listener usually thinks of radio in the terms of the marconi machine. Yet the main instrument is but the missing link Marconi invented to connect the unattached ether and the sensitive auditory nerve.

In the early Twenties, the marconi in the emphasized broadcast, beamed with padding and foam. Now radio is unpadding and foam-proof. The stamp of a "dry" message and the great talent of a kuno enable the listener from city to city, from nation to nation. On the modern all-wise day, London and Berlin are but a fraction of an inch apart. The American hours Big Ben atop the dome of Parliament struck off the time, or the clear articulation of a German announcer in Berlin.

There it was a real thrill for New Yorkers to taste in a whimper or fading stream of music from London. That, in 1923, was a wonderful triumph. To pick up lines from the other side of the Atlantic was wizardry. How could music of mystery ever find the way across the Great Divide and across the plains to Manhattan land?

The ether supplied the answer; the radio set helped, and so did the ear.

### Radio's Mystery Element.

Ether is the mystery element in radio science. Charles Proteus Steinmetz, physicist, declared, "there are no ether waves," others are inclined to agree with him—radio is electromagnetic.

Scientists have little doubt that "the ether," or whatever element that mysterious medium may be, has existed since the creation of the world. Man was busy in finding it. When he did, through James Clerk Maxwell, it remained for Heinrich Hertz to create the waves and give practical proof of the Maxwell theory. The next step was to invent a device to join the ether with the ear. Marconi, of course, did the trick. And that day, particularly since 1920, the delicate membranes of the human ear have been subjected to a human insect never known to the ears of past generations. There was an era of silence compared to this age of sound alchemy.

IT was not long after broadcasting started and earphones were clamped over the ears that deaf people suddenly discovered that many of them could hear music and voices. They found that by turning up the volume control radio amplification crossed their thresholds of

Signal Corps happened to let an elderly man who was deaf don the earphones, and to his surprise he heard certain vibrations. The incident encouraged Captain Marvel to study the effect of radio and vibrations of all sorts on the human ear. Oddly enough, he has discovered that 80 per cent of those who are hard of hearing show the high pitch or screeching lip tones. When a person has a tendency toward deafness, the high tones are generally the first to be missed. Charts taken by testing hundreds of deaf people show that to be true.

### Two Types of Deafness.

"Defective hearing may be divided into two general classes," said Captain Marvel, who contends he has yet to discover a person who is stone deaf. "Mechanical deafness is obstruction of the sound energy. We call it obstructive deafness. The other is loss of auditory nerve action.

"Some people are deficient only at certain frequencies," said Captain Marvel. "I know one man who can hear everything but the rug of a bell."

Captain Marvel's attention was called to the fact that in the pioneer days of broadcasting when deaf people heard through the headphones, radio was heralded by some as a remedy for deafness.

"As the result of hundreds of tests with deaf persons, I have concluded," said Captain Marvel, "if the strength of a radio set exercises the ear at the proper frequency, it strengthens the hearing. But no muscle is strengthened by exercise. Scientific devices such as the Auratone have been developed to determine as exactly what frequencies the ear is deficient and then the proper frequencies can be applied to exercise the part of the ear that needs it. There is no need of exercising the entire ear if only the high tones are missed. The inner extremity, of course, follows the ear just as the touch extends over the arm or leg. Nerve have a vital role in return to normal."

By application of a definite frequency or pitch the ear muscles and parts of the delicate bones are exercised and final communication results. In case of nerve trouble prevented over a period of ten or twelve years the nerve has not been exercised by everyday sounds and is inevitably become weaker, just as an arm would if tied to the side. The nerve fibers become inactive, and the organ they are dormant the less active they become. Old age deafness is the most difficult to overcome, there is nothing to build upon.

"By external instruments the volume can be raised to the threshold value of hearing is reached; it may be forty times higher than normal. When the threshold value is reached a person hears. This value varies with all ears. The right ear does not always equal the performance of the left; and vice versa."

like the wing of a fly, called the ear drum or tympanum.

Sir Ambrose Fleming, inventor of the wireless valve, the forerunner of the vacuum tube, being afflicted with deafness, devoted considerable study to the relation of the ear to radio.

"When sound is created," said Sir Ambrose, "the air particles swing to and fro like little pendulums, and the motion is handed on from particle to particle, traveling away from the source with the speed of about 1,100 feet a second or about 700 miles an hour. When a sound wave strikes the ear it causes the drum to swing to and fro in accordance with the motion of the air. Behind the drum is a hollow space known as the middle ear. It is connected with the back of the mouth by a tiny pipe called the Eustachian tube. A chain of three little bones stretches across the cavity of the middle ear.

### A Harp of 10,000 Strings.

"These bones are connected to one side of the ear drum, and on the other to a thin partition that separates the middle ear from a second cavity, called the inner ear. In this inner ear is a wonderful spiral chamber like a snail's shell, which contains a sort of harp of 10,000 strings, called Corti's organ. It is connected by innumerable nerve fibers with a part of the brain recognized as the auditory centre.

"It is in this last named place that nerve physical vibrations are converted, in some incomprehensible manner, into sensations of sound with its various attributes of loudness, pitch and quality. The normal ear possesses a remarkable power of appreciating quality and instantly analyzing a sound into its components.

"Deafness consists of any derangement of this complicated mechanism of the ear, either middle, inner or nerve centre, which prevents it from being set in vibration sympathetically."

### A SIGNAL OF SPRING.

STATIC, one of the signals of "Spring" approach, has been rampant on the radio during the past week, particularly on Wednesday night.

A magnetic storm of solar origin started last Sunday and spread considerable atmospheric electricity into the air, according to O. B. Hansen, Chief Engineer of the National Broadcasting Company, after he consulted the charts of the solar lanes. He also blamed local conditions, winds and clouds, but said the condition was not unusual for March.

The static hampered the broadcast waves but was more annoying on the transatlantic short waves.

### NEW TALENT FAVORED

#### IN 'TRY-OUT' PROGRAMS

A HALF-HOUR variety broadcast, "A Broadway" goes on the air March 16 at 2:30 P. M. and every Friday thereafter as An op-



Ed Wynn Talking Seriously to

## STUDIO

MUSIC of a lighter vein will replace the Metropolitan Opera and Dr. Leopold Stokowski symphony concerts. The last of the season's broadcasts from the "Met" is scheduled for March 15. The Stokowski musicians will disappear from the broadcasts in April. A European concert to celebrate miniature musical comedies, operettas are representing the attention of broadcast sponsors. Productions of "The Student Prince" and other importations from operettas were broadcast from time to time by the "Show Boat" troupe, test their popularity for another program built around the operettas. The response was encouraging, so the debut of this program is set for WJAF April 3 at 10 P. M. Plans call for the production of fifty-two musical shows to be selected from a list of seventy possibilities.

"The Vagabond King" Rudolph Frim's opera, based on Justus Huntley McCarthy's celebrate play, "If I Were King" which served as a starting vehicle for the late E. H. Sothern, will be the principal offering. Gauda Swarthout

THE ear comprises two main

# WAGE GALA SHOW OF SCIENCE



Microphone While Graham McNamee Apparently "Sees" the Joke.

## RADIO IN JAPAN

### Engineer on World Inspection Tour Tells Of Activities in the Orient .

**R**ADIO in Japan is developing rapidly with the tide of popular favor for broadcasting increasing throughout the Far East, according to Noboru Marumo, divisional chief engineer of the Broadcasting Corporation of Japan, who was in New York recently, en route around the world on a radio inspection tour.

Radio City amazed him. He could think of nothing in the Orient to compare with it, although a new broadcasting house with fifteen modern studios is under construction at Tokyo for station JOAK. A similar installation is being planned for JOBK at Osaka, where Mr. Marumo has his headquarters.

"Japan's ten most powerful stations each has the power of ten kilowatts," said Mr. Marumo, "but several 50 and 100 kilowatt experimental transmitters are under test to determine the most economical power to benefit the largest number of listeners. Several 500-watt stations are also being erected to supply outlying areas with programs.

#### Listeners Are Taxed.

"Japan is thriving on a strict system of non-commercial broadcasting, serving more than 2,000,000 home radios. Taxed at the rate of about 25 cents a month, the licensed sets bring an annual income of between \$4,000,000 and \$5,000,000, which is used to support all radio activities in the Empire. In the future it is planned to gradually reduce the fee until the revenue approximately equals the cost of the public service. Broadcasting in Japan is regarded as a service to the people.

"There are about twenty-five radio manufacturers. The average minimum cost of sets, with tubes, is approximately eight American dollars."

Twenty-five broadcasters are on the air regularly between 250 and 350 meters, from 6 A. M. to 10 o'clock at night. Since the radio spectrum is not overcrowded, highly selective instruments are not in vogue nor desirable, because of their greater cost to manufacture, according to Mr. Matsumo.

#### Simple Sets Are Popular.

"Stations are well separated on the dial and reception over long distances is comparatively easy," he said. "Many Japanese tune in West Coast American stations when darkness covers the Pacific.

"Many thrifty Japanese construct their own outfits, made entirely from parts purchased at village stores. One of the receivers, popular with people who live near the transmitters, consists of an antenna wire, tuning coil, galena or other type of detector and a horn loud-speaker. The actual cost is only a few pennies. At least one store in a town sells the ingredients.

Home-made receivers also come under the same government tax."

A nation-wide network, running the full length of the island empire is fed with programs principally from studios in Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya. Two presentations are on the air continually over twin transmitters in those cities. One program, designed chiefly for rural dwellers and farmers, includes stock and commodity quotations, lectures and educational features of which all Japanese are especially fond, descriptions of sporting events, current news and music. The second program, entirely educational in nature, comprises high-school and college extension courses and authoritative lectures.

"Broadcasters in Japan invariably find time to describe the major football and baseball games, of which the listeners seem never to tire," said Mr. Marumo. "Broad-

casts of dance music are scarce. Crooners, as Americans have labeled their entertainers, are unknown in my country, because radio is considered a serious affair. In fact, every speaker must submit his address to a committee before he is allowed to go on the radio. He is required to abide absolutely by the text as approved.

#### Set Owner Gets Permit to Listen.

"I am told that an American who wishes to listen merely buys a receiver, installs the instrument and tunes in a program without more ado. Not so in Japan. First of all, the Japanese must present an application to the government for permission to install a set, and pay a license fee of 1 yen. As soon as the government sanction is received the Broadcasting Corporation, which handles the formalities for subscribers, issues a listener's mark and the matter is finished.

"Provision is made for the free use of sets supplied exclusively for educational purposes in primary and intermediate schools, and for the consolation of the blind and unfortunate. The government dealt directly with 'pirates' caught listening in without first obtaining the necessary license.

"The oversight of all radio business rests with the Broadcasting Committee, the highest consultative body on general plans. Its members are chosen from among men of learning and reputation occupying important positions in society."

#### BOSTON SYMPHONY SHIFTED.

An entire hour-and-a-half concert by the Boston Symphony will be broadcast on Fridays, beginning at 2:30 P. M. over W.J.Z. Heretofore the orchestra has been on the air a half hour Saturday nights over WVEAY. These broadcasts have been discontinued.

## NEWS AND COMMENT

### Nettles and Comedies Theme of New Series— Plans of Artists

Smith, Charles Warburton  
large chorus.

The Rolfe Orchestra signing  
Saturday night 10 o'clock  
March 24, the sponsors of this  
team are angling for two half-  
periods, if the schedule can be  
made. . . Eddie Cantor will be  
in New York for next Sun-  
broadcast, Jack Benny ends  
today broadcasts on April 1;  
program will be continued with  
"Rent. . . Lanny Ross returns  
Hollywood to rejoin Captain  
y's "Show Boat" troupe at  
City on Thursday. . . Arthur  
K. Hunt, whose Morning Sing-  
y and Weekly Hygn Sing-  
been heard regularly over the  
brks for more than eight years,  
appear on the WNEW Shut-In  
with Lowell Patton, organist,  
Wednesday at 4 P. M.

Disney Introduced Novelty.

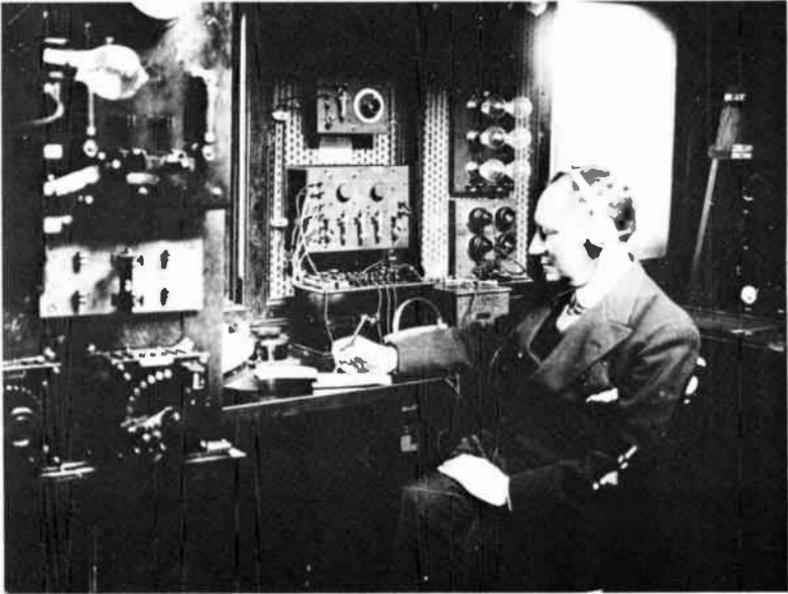
lege in March, 1919, the radio band  
will celebrate the anniversary at  
8.30 P. M. today over WABC. Little  
did the collegians of that time  
dream they were destined for a  
coast-to-coast show all in one evening  
and that the earning power of the  
organization would reach \$1,000,000 a year. But that is what  
happened.

#### Broadcasters Are Happy.

Springtime finds the broadcasters  
in a happy mood. A year ago most  
of them were singing "the blues." But today the sun is shining; the  
theme song is "Happy Days Are  
Here Again."

"We were the last to be over-  
taken by the depression; we have  
been the first to recover," said  
William S. Paley in his annual re-  
port as president of the Columbia  
Broadcasting System. "Our busi-  
ness has reached an all-time peak,  
and we see no indication of more  
than a seasonal decline."

## THE MICROPHONE WILL PRESENT—



*Marconi equipped his yacht Elettra as a floating laboratory for experimental broadcasts. (Marconi Company)*

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of Musical Radio . . . .

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by  
Thomas A. DeLong



AMBER CREST BOOKS, Inc.  
(Division of New World Communications)  
Los Angeles, Ca. 90028

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# Introduction

by Fred Waring

**P**ioneering in radio entertainment was one of the most interesting challenges of my life—a milestone in my career.

During those early days of radio development the potential for musical shows intrigued me. There was much to learn about broadcasting and various methods of improvement. Showmanship, through sound, was a unique element. Proper balance, microphone placement and technical processes, as well as effects, were new factors which we found to be as essential as the quality of the talent. Sound was vital. It stirred the imagination of listeners who could only mentally “see” the performers, and so focussed their attention on the music.

When working in the radio medium I always seemed more inspired to produce irresistible music, than while working in television where one is compelled to be equally concerned with appearance as with sound.

The music industry has flourished because of radio's impact and, in turn, the industry has supplied nourishment for vital advancement in radio for the changing world of the 1980s and beyond. Thus radio becomes a two-way communications system whereby both the recording arm of the music field, and radio, benefit while providing millions of listeners with multiple-choice entertainment.

Having devoted much of my life to music, I have always believed that “The Song's The Thing.” It is therefore meaningful

to me that the importance of music in its many forms, continues to be demonstrated by the international radio media.

Fred Waring  
Delaware Water Gap  
Pennsylvania

## Prologue

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**F**all, 1945. The war was over. The lights were going on again all over the world.

New York City, mecca for entertainment, was ablaze with beckoning neon lights offering a varied feast of diversions. Soldiers in uniform were everywhere. Tens of thousands of homeward bound GIs were pouring through the city. Mankind, having survived the most devastating war in history, now had cause to let off plenty of steam.

Celebrating throngs jammed the street. Every day, every night, was part New Year's Eve, part Mardi Gras. Theaters were playing to standing-room-only crowds. Marquees boasted the biggest names in show business.

Frederic March's dramatic lead in *A Bell for Adano* was winning bravos from packed houses. Broadway's longest-running show, *Life with Father*, delighted audiences at the Empire Theater. *Harvey*, a Pulitzer Prize play about an invisible rabbit, starred comedian Frank Fay. *Oklahoma*, in its third year on Broadway, was still the biggest musical smash of the 1940s. And in nearby theaters, its song-filled counterparts, *Carousel*, *Bloomer Girl*, *Up in Central Park*, *Follow the Girls*, and *Song of Norway*, had festive audiences humming.

Uptown, at Rockefeller Center, *Hats Off to Ice*, a superspectacular ice show, lined them up at the Center Theater. The Rodeo, with "King of the Cowboys" Roy Rogers and two hundred horse-men, ropers, and steer wrestlers, thrilled thousands every day in Madison Square Garden.

The opera and ballet opened its first postwar season with gala productions. Billboards for concerts or recitals in Carnegie Hall, City Center, and Town Hall, advertised pianist Nadia Reisenberg, violinist Fritz Kreisler, the Philharmonic conducted by Arthur Rodzinski, jazz pianist James P. Johnson, and Leonard Bernstein's City Symphony.

Movie marquee along the Great White Way flashed the pick of Hollywood's latest films, plus top on-stage star attractions. At the palatial Roxy: Rodgers and Hammerstein's *State Fair* with Dick Haymes and Jeanne Crain, plus songstress Connee Boswell in person. At the majestic Capitol: Hedy Lamarr and June Allyson in *Her Highness and the Bellboy*, and Gene Krupa's band on the boards. At Warner's Strand: Joan Crawford as *Mildred Pierce* plus Russ Morgan's orchestra and the Three Stooges. At the famed Paramount: Ed Gardner's *Duffy's Tavern*, and on stage the popular Andrews Sisters. Inside the cathedral-like Radio City Music Hall: MGM's all-star *Weekend at the Waldorf*, and at the footlights, ballerina Patricia Bowman, Charles Previn's orchestra, and the high-kicking Rockettes.

Nightclubs and hotel ballrooms were jammed to the rafters. The Roosevelt Grill featured Shep Fields and his Rippling Rhythm. At The Blue Room in the Hotel Lincoln was the upcoming band of Art Mooney. The Marine Grill at the McAlpin featured the perennially popular music of Don Bestor. The Versailles headlined Carl Brisson, a favorite singer of the international set—soon to be known as the "jet set." Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe showcased Manhattan's most gorgeous chorus line. The Hawaiian Room of the Hotel Lexington swayed with the skirts of hula dancers backed by Hal Aloma's Honolulu Serenaders. Cab Calloway and Pearl Bailey led a hot revue at the Cafe Zanzibar at Broadway and 49th Street. The midtown 400 Restaurant with Tommy Dorsey's band nightly did waiting-line business. And downtown in Greenwich Village's Cafe Society, Imogene Coca and Benny Morton's orchestra kept victory celebrators entertained.

Music also dominated the airwaves. Radio, a relatively new form of entertainment, had come into its own during the Depression, and flourished during the war. Musical and theatrical history was being made not only along Broadway but on adjacent side streets.

At the CBS Playhouse, a new young singer by the name of Frank Sinatra was bringing down the house. Crowds streamed to West 53rd Street where CBS was broadcasting this latest and perhaps biggest attraction ever put on the airwaves. The capacity of the studio theater was limited. Long before 9:00 *p.m.*, the time of the coast-to-coast Wednesday broadcast, hundreds—young and old—jammed the sidewalks and lobby clamoring for tickets. Teenage “bobby-soxers,” in their saddle shoes and ankle-length socks, milled about hoping for a glimpse of their newest singing idol—a thin, lanky kid from Hoboken, N.J. Those who could not get tickets persistently squeezed and shoved their way into the rear of the theater, hoping to find an empty seat before air time. Others refused to be ousted; only a policeman could get them to leave.

When at last Frank Sinatra appeared on stage, bedlam erupted in screams, shrieks, squeals, and shouts.

“Frankie, Frankie!” they swooned.

“He sends me!” others yelled.

The theater rocked with cheers for their idol—a former vocalist with the Harry James and Tommy Dorsey bands.

Here and there, wailing bobby-soxers collapsed. Ushers rushed to prop them into their seats. Other girls broke the barricades and raced down the aisle to throw themselves at the feet of the sexy, blue-eyed baritone.

The audience applause was deafening. But when the crowd had been quieted and Sinatra’s voice could be heard in that memorable croon that was to make him a star for many decades later, the effect was mass hypnotism. Each number, from the closing bars of “If I Loved You” to the sign-off notes of “Put Your Dreams Away for Another Day,” was followed by a near riot. Among the bobby-soxers there was scarcely a dry eye.

In the coveted role of distaff singer was young Eileen Barton, the envy of millions of adolescents. Conductor Axel Stordahl, keeper of the music, received a share of the plaudits, as did guest Orson Welles, a favorite of radio listeners since his terrifying dramatization of “War of the Worlds.” But after the show went off the air, these performers were quickly forgotten.

Hysterical teenage females stampeded from the Playhouse toward the stage door to catch a glimpse of, or maybe touch, their

Prince of Swoon. Cordons, manned by police, shielded Sinatra, who battled his way from the theater exit to his waiting limousine, lest his emotional admirers rip the clothes from his bony frame. Some surrounded the vehicle, clawing at their hero through an open window. Police, ushers, and bodyguards finally managed to clear the street. The driver stepped on the accelerator.

Week after week, Wednesday night meant “Swoonatra” for audiences in the CBS theater off Broadway as well as for those millions tuned in at radio receivers from Maine farmhouses to California poolsides. Frank Sinatra was not the first, nor the last, superstar created by radio, but he was one of the biggest who flourished on the air. Scores of other singers, pianists, organists, bandleaders, guitarists, violinists, conductors, and almost every kind of musician, became popular celebrities and household names as coast-to-coast entertainers, through a weekly thirty to sixty minutes at a radio microphone.

Such was the power and the magic of radio—a mighty music box whose songs and stories would create history and enduring legends for many generations.

## At the Twist of The Dial

---

It was the mid-forties—1943, 1944, 1945. A time of Sunday “funnies,” victory gardens, double features, and snow train weekends; Ovaltine and Barbasol, Bluebird records, zoot suits, rumble seats, Eisenhower jackets, and dive bombers.

Listening to the voices of the famous and celebrated coming from a radio loudspeaker was a part of the times; an eagerly anticipated experience that had begun in the late 1920s. By the end of World War II, radio had been broadcasting human voices and music for almost a quarter century. During the early years, with vaudeville on the wane and theatrical touring companies ravaged by the Great Depression, both cities and hinterlands turned more and more to radio, which offered a broad and expanding platform for “famous names” from the entertainment world to be heard simultaneously by a multitude of far-flung listeners.

A twist of the dial on an Atwater Kent console or a Philco table-model brought the world and its multifaceted sounds into living rooms all across America. Instant entertainment and information poured from half a dozen or more radio stations, particularly from major broadcasting centers in New York, Chicago, and Hollywood.

A listener could begin the day with setting-up exercises before breakfast under the cheery direction of *The Early Bird Gym Class*. During breakfast he could hear the news and weather report. And when the man of the house had left for the office and the kids for school, Mama might switch the dial to cooking lessons and shopping advice from Ida Bailey Allen, or find inspiration for the day

from the *Gospel Singer* or organist Dick Leibert. Ironing and other household chores throughout the day were no longer dreaded as she listened to the latest chapter on the Monday-to-Friday adventures of Vic and Sade, or David Harum. Before evening homework, the youngsters caught up on the adventures of Jack Armstrong and the antics of Uncle Don.

Early evening hours carried Stan Lomax's sports roundup, and Edwin C. Hill's world news. Between eight and eleven o'clock many of the top-rated network programs came on: *First Nighter*, the all-star *Hollywood Hotel*, *Lady Esther Program* featuring Wayne King's orchestra, *Eno Crime Clues*, Fred Allen's *Town Hall Tonight*, *Penthouse Rhythms*, *Tip-Top Show* starring Joe Penner, and *George Burns and Gracie Allen*.

As midnight approached, listeners could choose their favorite dance music emanating from the big orchestras at the country's leading hotels and ballrooms. On any given night in 1939 a listener could tune in Jan Garber, Jack Teagarden, Jimmy Dorsey, Red Norvo, Glenn Miller, Blue Barron, Woody Herman, Bunny Berigan, Joe Marsala, Larry Clinton, and Noble Sissle. Music, interspersed with news reports, usually finished the broadcast day.

There were programs of all types and varieties during the madcap 1920s, the lean times of the 1930s, and the war-torn 1940s that entertained or provided diversion from problems of the era. But musical shows were the foundation of broadcasting. Such programs brought listening pleasure and relaxation to those who sought them; to others, active rhythms for dancing and self-expression. And to a vast national and ultimately international audience, music brought inspiration and wider horizons in all cultural areas. The real language of radio during the early golden years was music.

Beginning with the mid-1920s nearly two-thirds of all air time was dominated by music. Static-filled broadcasts emanated from garage lofts, department store closets, and factory rooftops; and as the 1930s dawned, from specially designed "clear as a bell" equipment in "luxuriously" appointed studios. By the time the 1930s ended, radio had matured to music no longer static-filled: the music of symphonic concerts, vocal and instrumental soloists, fast-tempo dance remotes, along with dramatic and comedy shows enlivened by musical fanfares and flourishes, serious instructional interludes, or light-hearted sing-alongs. Whatever the program,

radio in America now excelled by reason of its high-quality production standards, and the professional caliber of the talent heard in a broad spectrum of musical performances. Because of such programs, America was becoming a music-conscious nation. People from all walks of life began to appreciate fine music also as enjoyable music, no longer the privilege of a fortunate few.

By the time Toscanini and the NBC Symphony was welcomed into millions of American homes, a concert hall orchestra was not considered a "long-haired event" to be patiently endured. It was a composition to be enjoyed and understood. Opera, rather than an awesome high-brow affair attended only by the socially elite in evening gowns, was regarded as a dramatic musical event to be enjoyed by the whole family in whatever dress they chose to wear. Popular music, from New Orleans Dixieland tempos to country-and-western rhythms, was also conquering not only America but the world. Musical communication had become international, hopefully paving the way toward better understanding in social and political areas.

Radio music had become a vital part of everyday life, embracing established artists as well as creating many new musical stars, many of whom had been complete amateurs until their radio appearances. Their fame was soon enhanced by concerts, recordings, and film and theater exposure. In turn, these new stars helped to popularize the growing impact of radio. A radio artist on tour was eagerly welcomed as "a real person" by vast listening audiences, and often was invited into private homes in smaller communities where hotel facilities were limited. In thousands of homes across America, photographs of favorite performers were displayed atop a Stromberg-Carlson, or a less costly console radio, which dominated the family living room.

Virtually every capable musician eventually performed at a radio microphone. Many headlined a regular series; others appeared as occasional or perennial guest artists. Some reluctantly agreed to appear on the air although convinced that the "live" microphone was a threat to artistry, especially during the rudimentary phase of broadcasting. But when sponsors began offering large fees and long-term contracts with lucrative inducements, the reluctance soon vanished; for the popularity and even the fame of a singer or musician could literally skyrocket overnight with a radio

appearance. Advertisers eagerly signed up the finest talent, recognizing the medium's tremendous potential for reaching millions of consumers. The commercial aspects of radio, which at first were a source of disagreement, soon made musical variety possible and highly rewarding for both the artists and the producers.

Around the mid-1930s, the radio dial sparkled with the talents of such artists as Russ Columbo, Lucrezia Bori, Jones and Hare (the Happiness Boys), Jessica Dragonette, Little Jack Little, Alec Templeton, Bea Wain, Morton Downey, Vivian della Chiesa, Richard Crooks, Fred Waring, Toscanini, James Melton, Rubinoff, Arthur Godfrey, the Pickens Sisters, and the Goldman Band.

The choice programs ranged from the durable front-ranking *Voice of Firestone*, *Your Hit Parade*, *Maxwell House Show Boat*, *Music Appreciation Hour*, *Grand Ole Opry*, and *The Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air*, to fleeting and less memorable programs such as *I. J. Fox Trappers Orchestra*, *Little Miss Bab-O Surprise Party*, *Hoover Sentinels Serenade*, *Hires Harvesters*, *Pryor's Cremo Band*, and *Uncle Walter's Doghouse*.

Radio also was the "yellow brick road" that eventually led to the magic of electrical recordings, sound movies, and television. While at first broadcasting had decimated the phonograph record business, it soon provided a much bigger way to popularity and wealth. Radio also gave Hollywood a run for its money, but eventually aided and abetted a richer harvest from the glamour-town's celluloid crop. Sales of sheet music and player-piano rolls also had felt the early stings of radio's impact; for the popularity of piano, clarinet, trumpet, and violin rose or fell as radio programs prescribed.

Radio's great legacy is interwoven with the fortitude and challenging confidence of those gifted artists who first ventured before the microphone. The annals of broadcasting now confirm that the music-makers of that significant period contributed perhaps more to the success and popularity of the medium than any other group of entertainers.

Indeed, America's vast listening audiences proclaimed that the most memorable and magical moments of radio were the musical gifts from an amazing and mighty music box.

## Call of the Wireless

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**B**efore 1920, solid breakthroughs in harnessing the airwaves had been achieved by several mentors who became the fathers of the new medium called radio: Bell, Marconi, DeForest, Fessenden, and Sarnoff. Each had an affinity, perhaps a genuine love, for music. Undoubtedly this feeling directed their talents and eventually their careers toward radio-telephone experiments that led to the inventions and refinements which established new frontiers in sound.

Soon other innovators appeared. A small group assembled a transmitter and went on the air. Most of them ended up spinning records to rest their voices or to relieve the monotony of mere chatter. While still a novelty with vague and unidentified prospects and promise, radio now began to attract newspaper publishers, electrical equipment manufacturers, and department store owners. Making and selling receivers, establishing stations, promoting their own products and services over the airwaves, and scheduling regular broadcast “features” and programs, these enterprising businessmen were the first to give direction to radio.

Surprisingly, despite the crackling static, there were thousands of eager listeners. Ordinary citizens all across America were picking up signals and sounds. Soon they began to make their presence and preferences known—once again exerting the power of the majority population. And the unanimous preference was music. Almost overnight the muses had discovered a new and unique outlet that was to become the broadest and most remarkable

vehicle ever devised for the dissemination of vocal and instrumental sounds.

Music-making has been a part of human existence since primitive man rhythmically beat sticks on hollow logs. But until the development of the ornate little music box in the seventeenth century, it had been a manual diversion. During the nineteenth century cleverly contrived mechanical devices such as the barrel organ, player piano, and the phonograph had captured sound by transferring physical energy onto a wooden cartridge, a paper roll, or a wax cylinder. By the end of the 1800s, music had found a new means of dissemination based on electrical current.

It began with the invention of the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell in 1877. One of the earliest applications of Bell's patent was thought to be the mass "broadcast" of music into the home. But this dream temporarily lost out to a wider application—person-to-person communications.

Technically, the telephone soon revealed a new aspect of great significance—the transmission of sound amplification. A Bell component, the electromechanical amplifier, greatly increased the magnitude of sounds and tones. However, it was governed to a degree by manual operations that proved inadequate when used as a remote or automatically controlled relay line. For several years the problem of telephone relay, or repeater, remained unsolved.

A number of late nineteenth century scientists—Maxwell, Lodge, Hertz, and Popov—contributed to the theoretical knowledge of electrical waves, but made no practical application of their work. At last one single-minded entrepreneur emerged. He was Guglielmo Marconi. In the 1890s this Italian-born, English-bred inventor tested his contemporaries' theories and experimented with radio waves and transmission. Some ten years later he had devised a wireless system of communication that could span continents and cross oceans.

In December 1901, Marconi heard a signal—three dots forming the letter "S" (for success)—from a receiver in a makeshift outpost at St. John's, Newfoundland. The coded signal traveled over 2,000 miles from Cornwall, England, to North America where a latter-day Ben Franklin picked up the message from a wind-tossed antenna dangling from a box kite.

A few years earlier, a young physicist, Lee De Forest, had taken a job with the Western Electric Company in Chicago. One of his first assignments was working on the development of telephone circuits. At the end of each day, De Forest and a coworker, Edwin Smythe, devoted half the night to radio experiments in a small bedroom jammed to the ceiling with all kinds of wireless apparatus. Eventually, they fashioned a radio-telephone receiver using an electrolytic detector.

Then, in 1906, De Forest developed the most significant invention of his long career—the audion. This three-electrode vacuum tube made possible the transmission and reception of the human voice over long distances. De Forest's audion was an improvement over the two-element tube conceived a year earlier by Ambrose Fleming, an English physicist.

At about the same time, Reginald A. Fessenden, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh, designed a high-frequency alternator that would produce continuous and dependable radio wave transmission. This major breakthrough in superimposing voice or music on a wireless "carrier" encouraged Dr. Fessenden's experimental broadcasts at Brant Rock, Mass.

A young Swedish electrical engineer with General Electric, Dr. Ernst F. W. Alexanderson, installed the Fessenden alternator at Brant Rock in time for several holiday broadcasts in December of 1906. This equipment made possible the first long-distance radio program. It was even "advertised" in advance—presumably by code—to ship wireless operators of the United Fruit Company. Vessels within a radius of several hundred miles from Massachusetts eagerly waited to pick up the broadcast. Music was featured: a mixture of "live" and recorded entertainment to mark the Christmas season. The station went on the air with a recording of Handel's "Largo," and then Dr. Fessenden played "O, Holy Night" on his violin. The musically inclined inventor ended the broadcast by singing this favorite Christmas song. A second and similar program on New Year's Eve again attracted far-flung radio operators, several as far away as the West Indies.

By February 1907, some three months later, De Forest also had established a laboratory for experimental broadcasts. He set up shop in New York's Parker Building at 19th Street and Fourth

Avenue. "My present task—a happy one," he noted to the press, "is to distribute sweet melody by broadcast over the city and sea, so that in times even the mariner far out across the silent waves may hear the music of his homeland, sung from unseen sources."

One of the first of the "unseen" was, indeed, a sailor. But not on the bounding main. This seaman, Oliver Wyckoff, a young wireless operator stationed aboard the U.S.S. *Dolphin* at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, heard a totally unexpected sound over his receiver—a human voice singing "I Love You Truly," followed by "Just-a-Wearyin' for You." At first he wondered if he had had too much beer at the corner saloon. Never before had he picked up anything other than code signals. He pulled off his earphones to make certain the music was coming from his equipment, not from a nearby Victrola. Then he grabbed the telephone and called a newspaper.

An editor at the New York *Herald* reassured him of his sanity. The voice was no figment of his imagination. Eugenia Farrar, a concert and vaudeville performer, was singing before a microphone in De Forest's lab. She probably earned the title of the first woman to vocalize "live" on radio. For De Forest, Wyckoff's call verified the workability of his transmitter. It reinforced his belief that music over the airwaves would appeal to an audience, although in this instance it numbered, at best, only a handful.

In 1907, De Forest won a U.S. government contract to install forty-four wireless sets on two dozen naval vessels. The ships, *The Great White Fleet*, were sent by President Theodore Roosevelt on a round-the-world cruise lasting fourteen months. Oliver Wyckoff made the voyage as a radio operator aboard the admiral's flagship.

After World War I, Wyckoff installed radios on roller chairs that were pushed along the boardwalk at Asbury Park, N.J. A big success was his pickup of the July 1921 Dempsey-Carpentier prizefight from Jersey City. For a fee, Wyckoff provided headphones to permit boardwalk strollers and riders to listen in. His budding radio activities ended a year or two later when he settled down as a Long Island real estate broker.

For Lee De Forest, the first large-scale commercial application of his amplifier came about in 1915. This device, which he had painstakingly improved year after year, found a viable use as a telephone booster, or repeater. As such, it brought success to an

American Telephone & Telegraph line that stretched across the nation in time for the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition at San Francisco. The AT&T circuit made possible coast-to-coast conversation from New York to California, and pointed in the direction of chain, or network, broadcasting.

Later that year the assistant traffic manager for Marconi Wireless Telegraph in New York wrote a memo to his boss. Young David Sarnoff, who in 1912 had stayed at his telegrapher post for seventy-two hours to report the names of survivors of the *Titanic* struck by an iceberg in the North Atlantic, suggested bringing music into the home by wireless. He viewed the wireless receiver, or radio, as a household fixture like the phonograph or piano. He foresaw a receiver designed as a simple "Radio Music Box" arranged to pick up several wave lengths, or stations. Placed on a table in the parlor or living room, it would receive music for enjoyment by the entire family. Sarnoff's detailed plans got little immediate attention. A half-dozen years later, however, they formed the basis for an entire industry.

Widely scattered amateur wireless operators called "hams" entertained each other by occasional bits of music instead of the usual idle chatter and dots and dashes of the Morse code. Telephone engineers now made an all-out effort toward long-distance transmission and sought to establish radio as a means to extend telephone service to inaccessible places. But before much progress had been made, World War I broke out. Production of compact military receivers and transmitters for ships, airplanes, and land vehicles took priority over domestic usage. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Commerce immediately denied the airwaves to amateur operators by ordering the disassembling of all antennae and aerial wires, and the disconnecting of indoor radio apparatus.

After the war, AT&T accelerated its work to establish regular transatlantic telephone service and radio broadcasting. Stations such as the large military installation built by the U.S. Navy at Bordeaux, France, converted to commercial operations. Companies changed hands, too. The British-owned but U.S.-based American Marconi Company was absorbed by a new organization called the Radio Corporation of America. Its chief owners were General Electric and Westinghouse. In 1920 RCA built a \$10 million radio-telegraph transmitter at Rocky Point on Long Island,

N.Y. Equipped to handle one thousand messages a minute, this post linked Argentina, France, Germany, Italy, and Poland with the United States. Soon RCA would be instrumental in developing the first postwar radio receivers.

During the spring and summer of 1920, major wireless experiments attracted worldwide attention, and, at the same time, gained for music a hold on the air. In London, technicians cut a phonograph recording of a voice transmitted from the Marconi Works in Chelmsford, 40 miles away. Wireless equipment attached to the recording machine picked up the sound. A perfectly audible, though a trifle "patchy," disc was cut. A month later, a memorable concert from Chelmsford wafted over the British Isles and part of Europe. Dame Nellie Melba stood in a small room at the Marconi plant and sang into a large trumpet-shaped horn. Listeners heard her very clearly, as far off as Paris, Madrid, and The Hague. Berlin and Stockholm, too, picked up the voice of the beloved Australian soprano accompanied by a pianist.

Ocean-going ships figured prominently in 1920 broadcast tests. The Marconi Company equipped the liner *Olympic* with a transmitter before she sailed from Southampton to New York. Members of the New York Symphony Orchestra were aboard. They agreed to prepare a concert for the wireless on the last night out when they were about 100 miles from New York harbor. Receivers installed at Long Island's Mitchel Field tuned in, as did guests at the Marconi's Manhattan office.

A month later, music by wireless traveled some 800 miles across the sea. Marconi officials at Signal Hill, Newfoundland, picked up a phonograph at a transmitter aboard the North Atlantic steamer *Victoria*. And in the Mediterranean, guests on Marconi's floating laboratory—his yacht *Elettra*—danced to the piped-in music of an orchestra in London.\* Marconi also listened to news bulletins and, in exchange, sent back Neopolitan songs played on the ship's gramophone.

In December, U.S. naval ships shared a special program of operatic and semiclassical arias beamed from an apartment in the Hotel McAlpin near New York's Herald Square. At the micro-

\*Marconi's daughter, Gioia, described him as being quite a musician, playing the piano remarkably well, "although he had not received a musical education beyond that of childhood scale exercises."

phone was Italian coloratura Luisa Tetrazzini, making a farewell tour of America. Her four songs—"Polonaise" from *Mignon*, "Rondo" from *La Sonnambula*, "Somewhere a Voice Is Calling," and "I Milione d'Arlecchini"—reached hundreds of seamen and soldiers clustered around amplifiers aboard the vessels, some separated by a distance of 400 miles.

On terra firma, listeners in Michigan began tuning in when *The Detroit News* allocated a small "radio phone" room for broadcasts. A three-man crew sent out Station WWJ's first program in August of 1920. Two phonograph records were played, and the program ended with "Taps" performed on a trumpet by a member of the advertising department. Eleven days later, WWJ initiated news reports and sportscasts. The future NBC affiliate soon broadcast play-by-play football and World Series games. The transmitter claims credit for the first complete symphony program on radio: Ossip Galbrilowitsch conducting the Detroit Symphony Orchestra on February 10, 1922.

In Pittsburgh, Dr. Frank Conrad, assistant chief engineer at Westinghouse, had assembled his own transmitter in a room above his garage and began to converse with other "hams." The year was 1916, and not long after, the war put a stop to the broadcasts. In 1919 he resumed operations. One night he tired of talking over the air and placed his mike before a phonograph. For several evenings he spun records. Conrad was soon deluged with song requests. His callers wanted records to be played at special times so they might convince some skeptic that music really could be transmitted through space.

His broadcasts caught the attention of the Joseph Horne Company, a department store. They ran an advertisement in the September 29, 1920, edition of the *Pittsburgh Sun* calling attention to Dr. Conrad's nightly entertainment and pointing out that the store stocked radio receivers, priced from ten dollars and up.

The programs also interested Conrad's employer. Westinghouse vice president Harry F. Davis decided that real promise lay in manufacturing home receivers and supplying radio programs that would make people want to own radios. Conrad and Westinghouse officials submitted a commercial station application. Licensed as KDKA, it went on the air November 2, 1920, with the Harding-

Cox presidential election returns, and made one of the first steps toward radio programming.

The Pittsburgh station claims many broadcast firsts: the first direct pickup from a theater stage (songs by Ruth Roye at the Dais Theater) and from a hotel (The William Penn); the first full-time announcer (engineer Harold W. Arlin); the first religious service broadcast (from Calvary Church); the first sports broadcast (a lightweight boxing match between Johnny Ray and Johnny Dundee); and the first bedtime story (a reading of a Howard Garis "Uncle Wiggily" story).

In and about New York City, a daily audience of approximately 100,000 dial twisters tuned in on a Radiola, Melco Supreme, Grebe, or more likely, on a home-built crystal set. WJZ was a major source of programs. This Westinghouse transmitter (part of the manufacturer's four-station chain that included KDKA, WBZ Springfield, Mass., and KYW Chicago) took to the air in October 1921, from its Newark, N.J., plant. The company engaged a handful of performers to inaugurate the station's first broadcast. Among them were a violinist and a harpist—the first instrumentalists to play at a WJZ microphone.

At the time, violinist Constance Karla was employed by the Ditson & Company music store on New York's 34th Street. She and harpist Anna Welch frequently did after-hours concert work. Hearing them at a recital, Thomas Cowan, WJZ. manager and announcer, asked the two to appear on the station's opening night program.

"He arranged for transportation of the harp," Constance Karla recalled, "and one Sunday evening escorted us by taxi to the studio. The setting there was delightfully casual. The staff consisted only of Mr. Cowan and one assisting handyman-engineer."

The makeshift studio had been set up in a roof loft curtained off with bits of heavy red drape to deaden the sound and prevent echoes. Two microphones commanded attention: one in the form of a dangling saucepan and the other mounted in an old-fashioned phonograph horn.

"Just before we were introduced," Miss Karla continued, "Cowan in an imposing voice announced the station call letters, its location, and the nature of the program. The mobility of the

microphones was limited, so Anna Welch and I had to accommodate each other from separate mikes at opposite walls, which didn't permit too close harmony."

A year later, in 1922, for WJZ's first anniversary program, Cowan invited the two young ladies back for a repeat performance.

"On the way to Newark the second time," Miss Karla remembered, "two other guest artists, discussing the current status of radio, thought it was too bad that the idea of broadcasting had fallen off. They were convinced that radio would never amount to anything."

But WJZ persisted. Nearly every evening, audiences could dial in soloists or an orchestra from vaudeville or a Broadway show or restaurant. Two nights a week, a children's story hour with music called *The Man in the Moon* entertained small fry; and during the daytime, indefatigable Tommy Cowan played phonograph records and read news summaries. Occasionally a well-known diva from an opera company stopped by. One night soprano Lydia Lipkowska of the Chicago Opera sang selections from *Traviata* and *Snow Maiden*, and had the satisfaction of knowing she came across "clear and true."

Far to the West, publishers of the Stockton, Calif., *Record* persuaded Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink to climb two steep flights of stairs to the newspaper's new radio room. It was a few minutes before eight o'clock on November 22, 1921, when the mezzo-soprano reached the KWG studio. She had little time to catch her breath. A capacity audience waited for her at the city auditorium where she was to give a concert. Radiating her usual motherly good nature, Mme. Schumann-Heink gaily chatted with the station owners. While waiting for the signal to go on the air, she hummed a few scales. Introduced to listeners—some of whom a day or two later wrote in from as far away as 1,500 miles—she stepped up to the trumpetlike microphone and sang "At Parting."

"You still have two minutes," the station engineer said when the last note had died away.

"What shall I sing next?" she asked, turning to her accompanist.

"The Rosary,'" he suggested, and once more she turned toward the microphone.

A photographer took her picture as she sang.

"Send me one of the pictures—maybe more than one," the German-born diva asked. "And don't forget to send some to the newspapers. It is the first time I've sung through a radiophone."

With its fleeting moment of celebrity over, the station KWG turned to a staple of virtually every transmitter of that period—the phonograph disc. The brief but "live" Schumann-Heink was followed by a "canned" concert spun from a stack of readily available records.

A few months later one of the most durable and independent stations got its start from a record player in a Newark department store. On Washington's Birthday, 1922, the 250-watt WOR transmitter began operation in a windowless corner just off the sporting goods department of Bamberger's. An engineer placed a Victrola next to a horn-shaped microphone and put a record of Al Jolson's "April Showers" on the turntable. WOR broadcast only two hours a day (with Sundays and holidays off). Nevertheless, people found it on their dial and wrote in to report clear reception from such points as Asbury Park, Staten Island, and Brooklyn. Bamberger's, proud of its new promotional toy, took large newspaper advertisements to let the public know of its spreading efficacy. Before the end of 1922, WOR had won acclaim as the first American commercial station heard in London. The following year, its beam crossed the Pacific; a Tokyo listener had picked up Paul Whiteman and his musicians playing at a WOR mike.

WJZ welcomed its Newark neighbor-competitor reluctantly because it now faced a serious technical dilemma. All transmitters operated on a 360-meter wavelength. When two or more powerful stations went on the air simultaneously, chaos and confusion reigned. Radio fans, for the most part, refused to be subjected to such clamor. They tuned out. Between WJZ and WOR, a "radio war" threatened. WJZ even discussed the possibility of closing down. Instead, the station offered to sign off for an hour or two each day, then allow WOR to come on the air for a few hours. But agreed-upon alternating time segments provided no long-term solution. Different wavelength assignments for every government-licensed station would soon solve the predicament—and give relief to listeners' ears.

In nearby Philadelphia, six stations went on the air in 1922—two of them on the same day, March 18. That morning Mayor J. Hampton Moore helped to open Station WIP, owned by the Gimbel Brothers Department Store. That afternoon, the mayor dashed over to Strawbridge & Clothier to inaugurate their station, WFI. Wanamaker's joined the merchants' air race a month later. They opened WOO, starting off with an organ concert by Mary E. Vogt at the famous Wanamaker Store's grand console.

New stations were springing up like mushrooms. Any group or individual with a basic knowledge of physics who could hook together tubes and coils into a 5-watt transmitter, and then rig an antenna, was likely to be heard. To be legitimately airborne, one only needed a license from the U.S. Bureau of Navigation. Dozens of newspapers, department stores, manufacturers, utility companies, colleges and churches, along with hundreds of individuals, set up stations. By the end of 1922, there were more than five hundred transmitters nuzzling for a niche on the air.

Many listeners were skeptical of radio's lasting power. But their ranks were diminishing as the wireless made more and more headlines:

"Opera Wafted Overseas: London Hears Part of Organ Recital Broadcast"

"Hawaii Heard Georgia Radio"

"Radio Telephony Spans Continent: Concert Broadcast from Schenectady Heard Distinctly in Oakland"

In one of the earliest newspaper feature stories about radio, *The New York Times* took a look at one of the medium's mainstays—music. "The broadcasting of music is still in its infancy," it noted, "but the organization of elaborate musical programs is merely a matter of detail. With programs as 'free as the air,' there is an unlimited opportunity for developing the musical education of the country."

But few, if any, would have predicted radio's powerful grip on music in the coming decades.



## A Fad That Would Not Fade

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**S**pring afternoons along New York's Riverside Drive had long attracted local residents and out-of-town visitors. Many strolled the Paris-like boulevard. Others rode in the English-fashioned double-decker buses that followed the scenic tree-shaded route overlooking the Hudson River. It was a favorite part of town for young men and women, married, engaged, or similarly paired. During the early years of broadcasting, they became part of a unique experiment combining radio, music, and transportation.

Westinghouse, manufacturer of radios and an operator of stations, contacted the Fifth Avenue Coach Company whose buses plied the Drive. The two firms were interested in testing the effectiveness of music broadcast from WJZ toward making bus riding more popular and enjoyable—especially for romantically inclined couples.

The bus company installed radio sets and headphones in the enclosed and secluded upper level of a double-deck bus—the section generally known as “Petters-Paradise.” At a prearranged time, the station would broadcast a program of popular love ballads and waltzes. The bus conductor provided passengers with earphones which, from the street, looked like earmuffs with cat's whiskers. A metal rail inside the vehicle served as an aerial, picking up and feeding the melodic tunes into receivers and on through the headphones. Thus, mobile music was born—a forerunner of things to come. Song-filled rides in “Petters-Paradise” lasted only a brief time, but they had set a precedent. A couple of decades later, such music in one's own car would provide diversion, entertainment

and background for courting couples, parked or otherwise engaged.

Romance and radio, it seems, were linked together from the start! In 1924 Dorothy Hess, a Manhattan actress, heard Thomas Malie sing over a Pittsburgh station. She wrote a fan letter. They corresponded, met and courted, and within three months, were wed.

Soon marriage ceremonies began to preempt the airwaves. One of the first took place as a WEAf remote. A couple tied the knot at the 1923 American Radio Exposition at New York's Grand Central Palace, and received \$100 in gold coins; then they stood by as Hollywood guest Rudolph Valentino talked on "The Truth About Myself."

While radio brought man and woman together, it also broke up a marriage or two. A Minnesota housewife filed for divorce, asserting that her husband paid more attention to the radio than to her or their home.

While definitely still a novelty, radio showed no signs of fading. Listening at "the wireless" became an important pastime in the lives of an increasing number of Americans as the 1920s brought widespread prosperity and more leisure time to enjoy this medium.

Broadcasting, of course, had a long way to go before it would command the attention of a viable segment of the population. Nevertheless, as it struggled to find itself, the medium chalked up a number of "public service" firsts. The airwaves, circa 1923, located missing kin, collected overdue bills, and won paroles. And, at least in one instance, even tracked down a very famous Washington pet!

Glancing over a program schedule in a New York newspaper, Anna Howard noted that Dettborn & Howard, formerly of the Navy's Hawaiian Band, would be broadcasting that evening from WJZ. Armed with a warrant obtained on grounds of desertion, Mrs. Howard went to the station to find out if the team's guitarist was her husband, Walter, who had left her and two infant children several years earlier. The manager confirmed her suspicions. So off went Anna Howard to find a patrolman; returning with him to WJZ, she waited for the duo to finish the program, and then surprised her missing spouse.

Later, at the police station, he exclaimed, "Nix on the static."

The precinct officer replied, "You can broadcast that number tomorrow morning in Domestic Relations Court."

While radio offered an unusual style of tracking down wayward kin, it also helped to settle debts. In the summer of 1923, an actor living on Long Island sailed his boat across the Sound to Connecticut. Once ashore he bought some engine parts. He took the items with him, requesting that the supplier mail the bill to his yacht club. The supplier did so, again and again, but none of the bills were paid. Six months later, he heard the actor on a radio program and recognized his name. The creditor wrote him at the New York theater where he was appearing in a musical comedy. Two days later, the supplier received a check, along with an apology. The yacht club had closed for the season and the bills had not reached him.

Radio also won parole for a convict. The strains of "Oh, How I Miss You, Dear Old Pal of Mine," soulfully sung by a penitentiary inmate over Philadelphia's WIP, brought some one thousand letters, including mail from Maryland's Governor Albert C. Ritchie and a Philadelphia lawyer who visited the musical jailbird and helped gain a parole for him from his remaining three years for a robbery conviction.

It was in that same year, 1924, that radio came to the aid of a distressed president.\*

"Tige," Calvin Coolidge's White House cat, disappeared during a snowstorm. As Coolidge fretted over the loss, police and presidential aides searched in vain for the pet. The Secret Service suggested that an appeal for its return be made over the radio. Washington's WCAP informed listeners of the President's missing feline. A hundred or more offers of assorted replacements poured in, but no word of "Tige." The next morning, Capt. Edward Bryant, in charge of the State, War, and Navy Department guards, received a call from a Captain Sullivan in the Munitions building. Sullivan had a cat on his hands. Bryant remembered the broadcast. "Tige" matched the animal's description. A watchman rushed the whiskered prodigal to the White House. Returned to its famous home at

\*The first wireless receiver was installed in the White House in February 1922 by President Warren G. Harding.

noontime, "Tige" reputedly smiled at the President and then devoured his lunch.

The influence of wireless broadcasting was becoming increasingly apparent. Listeners now began requesting—in some cases, demanding—more programs of greater variety and better quality. Radio, as a novelty, was giving way to a deeper and more widespread interest in its entertainment value, as well as other practical uses.

One striking example of a station quickly evolving from an experimental stage to a genuine entertainment medium was WEAF, the American Telephone and Telegraph transmitter, which had gone on the air July 22, 1922, as WBAY from the twenty-four-story Long Lines Building in lower Manhattan. This five-man operation soon had a daily audience of several hundred thousand within a radius of almost a hundred miles. Most WEAF listeners, according to an audience poll later that year, wanted music: dance tunes, symphony concerts, popular melodies, old-time ballads, sacred songs, and brass band selections. The station recognized these preferences when broadcasting the first program from their new quarters at 195 Broadway early in 1923. This inaugural brought together at the microphones a wide variety of music; baritone John Charles Thomas, operetta star Evelyn Herbert, concern pianist Nadia Reisenberg, as well as the comic-singers the Happiness Boys and the fast tempo of Phil Ohman's trio.

Other leading metropolitan stations, WOR and WJZ, jumped on this more-than-proverbial bandwagon. The sound of orchestras and bands reverberated over the airwaves. It also became easier now for a station manager to line up a band from a New York hotel ballroom or cafe, from a recording company, or from the dozens of musicians arriving each week from every corner of the country.

The Lucky Strike Orchestra, Van and His Collegians, Browning King Orchestra, The Carolinians, Meyer Davis Lido-Venice Orchestra, Bud Fisher's Happy Players, Hotel Astor Dance Orchestra, Banjo-Mandolin Serenaders, Ernie Golden and his Hotel McAlpin Orchestra, California Ramblers, Vincent Lopez Orchestra, and Selzer's Orchestra—all were now heard regularly on the air.

Following close on the heels of dance music came dancing lessons. WOR, the New Jersey station, offered broadcast time to Arthur Murray, president of the National Association of Dancing

Teachers. His programs taught beginners how to “build confidence in private,” how to stand and take their first dance steps.

In 1923 WJZ opened a satellite studio in New York’s Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, then located at Fifth Avenue and 34th Street. Performers were spared the inconvenience of trips to New Jersey, although Newark, for a while longer, remained home base—until a spring windstorm carried away the WJZ aerial and the station faded from the air just as soprano Frieda Hempel began to sing “Home Sweet Home.” A hastily installed second antenna suffered the same fate. At that point, Mme. Hempel undoubtedly wished she were at home and not in Newark trying to sing about it! By midyear, most broadcasting facilities had been moved from Newark to Manhattan. Westinghouse joined with RCA in opening two heavily carpeted, felt-and-muslin-walled studios on the sixth floor of the Aeolian Building on West 42nd Street. New Yorkers soon were given an opportunity to see a radio station in operation. WJZ temporarily converted a street-level showroom into a broadcasting center, complete with reception area. The pioneering station then installed outdoor loudspeakers for the benefit of curious crowds of radio fans.



## The Birth of Radio Advertising

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Until 1923, transmission by telegraphic methods had been designated as “wireless telephony.” Now, with the opening of WJZ’s Aeolian Hall studio, this new entertainment medium was renamed “radio.” Program listings appeared in an increasing number of daily newspapers. Yet one vital question nagged station owners and managers and, eventually, industrialists and major newspapers: Who was to pay for the steadily growing costs of broadcasting?

A *New York Times* editorial noted: “In a new art, whose workings are still vaguely understood and whose code of ethics is not yet formulated, that [the payment of costs] will be a hard problem to solve.”

Herbert Hoover, secretary of commerce during that period, voiced apprehension over commercial advertising on the airwaves: “It is inconceivable,” he declared, “that we should allow so great a possibility for service, for news and entertainment, for education and vital commercial purposes, to be drowned in advertising chatter.”

Idealists, such as these early authorities, conceived the medium as a public service only, which should be supported by a tax on the makers of radio receivers, or a yearly surcharge from set owners. And, if that proved insufficient, by endowments such as were made to libraries and other public service institutions; or perhaps donations, in the form of a permanent legacy, from groups of generous patrons.

In 1924 Postal Telegraph Co. chief, Clarence H. Mackay, joined a number of other distinguished industrialists and bankers to establish the WEA F Music Fund. Among these were Felix M. Warburg, A. D. Wilt, Jr., A. A. Berle, Jr., and Frederic A. Juilliard. Their goal was to raise a quarter of a million dollars from listeners' contributions with which to engage opera singers and musicians to broadcast musical entertainment over WEA F. This, they believed, would stimulate public interest in good music and generate a continuing pattern of donations from an increasing number of listeners.

Voluntary subscriptions, however, fell far short of the committee's goal. Moreover, the efforts would benefit only one station. The other five hundred or so U.S. transmitters, for the most part, would remain unsupported. This situation soon brought strong protesting comments from smaller stations, fearing that the activities of WEA F would result in a monopoly by the three or four large urban stations.

Inevitably, private enterprise began to "hire" air time to stimulate mass consumer demand that would help move merchandise. Among the first radio commercials was a series of six afternoon and evening talks that were broadcast August 28, 1922, just twelve days after WEA F went on the air. These were fifteen-minute discussions on the advantages of living in a suburban apartment; they also served to advertise dwellings that were for sale by the Queensboro Corporation in Jackson Heights, N.Y. Down payments reportedly totaled several thousand dollars.

These programs set a precedent and established a general format for radio advertising. Others rushed to share the harvest! Tide-water Oil, American Express Company, and R. H. Macy promptly engaged air time. During the first two months of broadcasting such programs, WEA F's revenues from three hours of "hired" time amounted to \$550. Nevertheless, most sponsors seemed satisfied to write off radio fees as goodwill. Advertisers were generally content to build ad campaigns through the use of newspapers, magazines, and billboards. Advertising managers haughtily remained aloof from radio largely because there was no solid or definite experience to guide them. Manufacturers who were not so timid went on the air with a major product, incorporating the

firm's name in the title of the radio program, or coupling it with a featured performer.

In this manner, a variety show sponsored by National Carbon Company—*The Eveready Hour*—bowed in during December 1923. It was an instant success, offering everything from jazz to opera, dramatic sketches and monologues. Others quickly followed with hour-long programs: Bakelite, Edison, Palmolive, Philco, and Collier's. Musical groups, such as the Ipana Troubadours, Champion Sparkers, A & P Gypsies, Crack-a-Jack Male Quartet, I. J. Fox Fur Trappers, Smith Brothers' Trade and Mark, Silvertown Cord Orchestra, and Chiclet Trio fixed a trade name or business enterprise in the minds of listeners. A new kind of salesmanship was launched that promoted a company's existence and brought a favorable, and lucrative, response to their products from individual consumers.

A significant example was *The Eveready Hour* that surfaced with only a dignified announcement:

Tuesday evening means *The Eveready Hour*, for it is on this day each week that the National Carbon Company, makers of Eveready flashlights and radio batteries, engages the facilities of these fourteen radio stations. Tonight, the sponsors have included in the program actress Elsie Janis, who will present hits-and-bits of former years, and guest Arthur H. Young will tell some of his experiences while hunting wild animals in Alaska and Africa with bow and arrow.

Nevertheless, experimentation was still the rule. Little factual information existed at the time as to the number of people reached by radio or the degree of consumer interest generated. An advertiser could claim much but could not verify or confirm the effect of such commercial messages.

The music industry, however, soon gauged the effect of radio programs. Sales of player pianos, piano rolls, sheet music, and phonographs were dropping steadily. At the same time, the selective buying of records that characterized the industry showed a remarkable increase. Similarly, sales of saxophones, banjos, and mandolins also increased. Other musical instruments did not fare as well, but music over the air was beginning to create a growing

demand for more efficient radio sets. Anticipating this tremendous new market, Gimbel Brothers department store in New York City ordered twenty thousand Westinghouse Radiola receivers, valued at some \$3 million, for delivery in July 1923.

Simultaneously, the number of music dealers' demonstration and listening rooms for customer use in selecting records, sheet music, and some musical instruments had declined. It was a time of drastic change and surprises. What had been fact yesterday could be the opposite tomorrow.

When WEA's popular singer Wendell Hall chose to sing several songs that were no longer in demand on phonograph records, sales surged upward overnight. The renewed popularity of the numbers could only be attributed to the power of radio. And that power was on the march all over America and in many other parts of the world. Radio's influence in almost all areas of life was making significant and beneficial changes. Broadcasts by singers and orchestras, especially of classical and semiclassical works, were generating a wider appreciation for fine music; often from those who previously had been indifferent to any kind of music except popular ballads and dance tunes. Exposure to the classics expanded the average listener's horizons in other areas as well—books, opera, and the theater.

Impresario Sol Hurok, who had been bringing great singers and musical programs from Europe to America's concert halls and opera houses for many years, described radio's impact on the general public:

"People who own sets look up programs to find out what is being broadcast. They read that an aria from *La Boheme* will be sung that night. They become interested and ask themselves, 'What is *La Boheme*?' They learn that it is an opera. They want to read the libretto. They become interested in the soloists and inquire about them. In this way an interest in music is created which is beneficial because all these listeners are prospective attendants."

Theatrical producers, on the other hand, blamed radio for poor attendance at the theater and for nearly every ill encountered on the legitimate stage.

"Radio is the greatest menace to the theater," said Broadway impresario William A. Brady. "It involves no necessity to dress up or leave the house, and enables one while listening to smoke a

cigar or sip a cup of coffee." He neglected to add: "And it's all free."

E. F. Albee, head of the Keith vaudeville circuit, forbade artists under contract to broadcast. When Albee prevented Maestro Vincent Lopez from giving music lessons over the air, WOR's manager George Beal filled in for him.

Producer John Golden took a more realistic view. "If the theater is not firmly enough established to withstand radio broadcasting, it deserves to die . . . The bicycle was once a dreadful ogre. Then came the automobile and motion pictures. But the theater is still here."

Golden also believed radio would boost theater attendance, since it was a means for advertising, directly and indirectly, new plays and productions to an immense audience. Motion picture producer Harry Warner shared Golden's thinking. He urged Warner Brothers stars to use radio to publicize their latest films. "Radio is here," he said. "It is up to the industry to recognize it and provide some way to make the best use of it."

Moreover, radio was building a remarkable following for performers. S. L. "Roxy" Rothafel, famous for his elaborate stage shows at the new Capitol Theater in New York, first broadcast from there in November 1922. He herded the stage performers—Wee Willie Robyn, Yasha Bunchuk, Evelyn Herbert, Erno Rapee, Maria Gambarelli, Douglas Stanbury, Eugene Ormandy, Beatrice Belkin, and Gladys Rice—into a dressing room where WEAf had installed a microphone. The unrehearsed program known as *Roxy and His Gang* publicized the current show at the Capitol.\*

Shortly thereafter Roxy constructed a special studio in the theater, and installed a microphone to pick up excerpts from the stage and orchestra pit. No act was left out of the broadcasts. Roxy dramatically described dance routines to radio audiences. His accounts of ballerina Maria Gambarelli's pirouettes and jetés brought an avalanche of letters from listeners who now wanted to hear her voice. From then on, she regularly sang comic songs or Italian folk melodies, often with young baritone Doug Stanbury. Her voice and laughter fascinated listeners, and when Roxy publicly kidded her, saying, "As a singer, Gamby, you're a marvelous dancer," many were annoyed by his quip.

\*The famous Roxy Theater was built in 1927.

Wherever Roxy's Gang traveled, huge crowds and bands greeted them at railroad stations. The Gang paraded down many main streets as fans showered them with flowers and gifts. When the troupe performed, the standing-room-only sign went up minutes after the doors opened.

Bands made popular through radio soon became famous names. "Whenever I go on tour," said Vincent Lopez, "I find myself playing to audiences who already have heard my orchestra and are familiar with my music." The Happiness Boys—singers Billy Jones and Ernie Hare—attracted a loyal army of fans and admirers who mailed the pair more than two thousands Christmas cards each year.

What further proof did advertisers need to be convinced that radio was a direct line to thousands of people in all walks of life, and could sell products and all kinds of merchandise as well as theater tickets? The problem was not skepticism, but obtaining the services of a sufficient number of outstanding singers and instrumentalists to "feed music to the magic box."

Despite the many talented performers in most entertainment areas, a considerable number of the "greats" in the musical world refused to appear. Accustomed to "live" audiences and their thunderous applause, many artists were literally paralyzed by the dead silence that followed a sensational rendition of song or instrumental solo. Yet these were the great names that audiences were sure to listen to over the airwaves—and more listeners assured more sales. Winning these artists over to acceptance and mastery of the new medium did not happen all at once. Gradually, a name singer would conquer his or her fears and learn to visualize that vast listening audience and mentally hear their applause. Others soon followed. And no one denied that big fees and term contracts had helped to dispel "mike fright," and to compensate for "thunderous" applause.

## Musical Thoroughbreds Take to the Air

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**B**oth Lucrezia Bori and John McCormack were at the peak of their singing careers when radio claimed them. Each in turn had conquered the fields of opera, the concert stage, and recordings. They were artists in the grand manner with enormous personal charm and charisma. In an age of great voices, theirs unmistakably reigned and commanded the highest fees.

Lucrezia Bori made her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1912 as Manon in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*, singing opposite Caruso. A lyric soprano, she quickly became a leading prima donna, with a repertoire of more than forty major operatic roles.

John McCormack, the Irish-born tenor, had made his debut in 1907 in London as Turiddu in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and continued to sing with leading opera companies in Europe and America before concentrating on concert appearances throughout the world.

By the 1920s Victor Red Seal records by these two artists were selling in the millions. Few phonograph-owning homes lacked at least a handful of Bori and McCormack discs. However, as the popularity of radio listening grew, their record sales began to drop noticeably. Nevertheless, neither performer could see much artistic or commercial gain from singing at a broadcast microphone. A patchy, static-pocked transmission of their voices could only detract from a well-earned, and deserved, reputation. But, behind the scenes, other forces were at work to lure them to the airwaves.

Concerned over radio's competitive inroads, the Victor Talking

Machine Company had kept virtually all of its major artists off the air. Why give away what people would pay for? And at a retail price of 75 cents to \$2 a disc, its coffers had overflowed from 1914 to 1923. Earnings in 1924, however, had fallen to \$1.3 million from \$17.5 million a year earlier. If sales did not recover, Victor, as well as the rest of the industry, would soon face a serious deficit by the end of 1925. With radio offering more and more music at the mere touch of a dial, recording executives foresaw a lingering, and perhaps fatal, depression for the once flourishing talking machine.

Now more visionary ideas prevailed. If radio could sell apartment dwellings, why couldn't it move wax platters off shelves of music shops? Victor's executive board began to see the medium in a very different light: a greatly expanded opportunity to promote its extensive catalog of discs.

When radio listeners opened their daily newspaper on December 31, 1924, they were greeted by Victor's half-page advertisement announcing "the beginning of a new era in radio broadcasting." The Victor Talking Machine Company the following evening would broadcast the first of a series of programs featuring their finest recording artists. Every selection was, or soon would be, available on the prestigious Red Seal label—a reminder that all the songs heard on a broadcast could be bought for playing many times over on a Victrola. The advertisement also admonished reader-listeners to write or call after the program. "How long such programs will continue to be given *will depend upon the response we receive from radio audiences.*"

To launch Victor into the new medium, two of its foremost singers made their radio bow over WEAf on January 1, 1925. As a New Year's greeting to their many admirers, Lucrezia Bori and John McCormack brought to radio an entire hour of favorite songs.

A red-carpet occasion for WEAf and Victor, the broadcast had all the excitement of a Broadway opening night. The formally attired station staff greeted more than a hundred guests in evening clothes, then ushered them to seats in the WEAf studio and reception room. Nearly one-third of the country would be reached via a chain of seven AT&T-linked stations as far west as Pittsburgh.

The mere thought of such an enormous audience terrified John McCormack. He arrived at the studio, noticing its padded ceilings and heavily draped walls to dampen and contain sound. "I can never sing here!" he groaned. Both radio and recording officials swallowed hard. Would the robust tenor flee from the station, disappointing eager fans positioned at countless receivers? A WEAf announcer quickly reassured McCormack. "Mike fright" was something everyone encountered at one time or another. "A mike is just a mike whether for recording or broadcasting," the announcer added, gripping the singer's hand to encourage him as he waited to be introduced.

Miss Bori eyed the microphone nervously while waiting for Nathaniel Shilkret's orchestra to begin "La Paloma," her opening selection. Only for a moment her incomparable voice revealed a slight tension, then quickly soared with all its brilliance and emotion to radio audiences across much of America.

"I was scared to death," she admitted after the epic broadcast. "I generally sing to four thousand, maybe five thousand at most. It's odd what a feeling you get when you see that little instrument in front of you. But after I got started singing, I forgot about it."

John McCormack came through his ordeal in fine form, too. His singing of the cherished and admired "Mother Machree," "Adeste Fideles," and "Berceuse" from *Jocelyn* were nothing short of magnificent. Near the close of the program, he introduced a brand new ballad that he had recorded just weeks before. The name of the song was "All Alone"; its composer, Irving Berlin.

As the program ended, McCormack smiled and thanked the musicians and station staff. "I've had plenty of experience making records. That includes over 170 for Victor, but this beats it."

WEAF estimated that over 6 million people had tuned in the broadcast—reputedly the largest audience ever reached by a musical program up to that time. Thousands of letters poured in thanking Victor and WEAf for bringing outstanding entertainment into the home. The press also praised the event, noting that it brought genuine enjoyment, more distinction, and greater style than previously had been heard on radio. The response was overwhelming. But for the phonograph company, the best was yet to come.

Within a week more than 200,000 Bori and McCormack discs were sold. Demand for McCormack's appealing "All Alone" led Victor to advance the release date. It was soon selling by the tens of thousands; one store alone cleared some forty platters from its shelves in a few hours. Sheet music for the Berlin tune quickly appeared on pianos in over 100,000 homes. McCormack's upcoming Carnegie Hall concert was sold out overnight.

All agreed that it was a fortuitous outcome, especially for radio. Undeniably, a commercial basis, as well as an artistic arrangement, had been demonstrated.

Victor continued the series for another nine weeks, featuring operatic soprano Frances Alda. The following Thursday, she sang three of her fifty-nine Red Seal discs: "Mi Chiamano Mimi," "Mighty Lak'a Rose," and "What'll I Do," a current Irving Berlin hit. In the executive "wings," Victor readied Galli-Curci, Gigli, Jeritza, Martinelli, Werrenrath, Ruffo, and dozens more.

Other record-makers, as well as radio and phonograph manufacturers and utility companies, quickly signed up notable singers and musicians. The Brunswick Record Company, the industry's third largest producer, had permitted its artists to broadcast off and on for about a year. It now upgraded its presentations of serious and semiclassical music. Over WJZ, the company showcased the Brunswick Symphony Orchestra conducted by Walter B. Rogers, with singers John Charles Thomas, Karin Branzell, Edith Mason, Mario Chamlee, and Florence Easton.

Shortly Brunswick's musical quiz program, *The Brunswick Hour Musical Memory Contest*, followed. It was the first of a long line of such drumbeating programs aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of good music and to emphasize the remarkable musical and educational possibilities of radio. Brunswick offered a grand prize of \$5,000 every month to listeners who identified both music and performers, with contest blanks supplied by Brunswick dealers. It kept large audiences alert at their Radiolas. Contestants were urged to "bone up" by buying Brunswick discs, for which virtually every guest performer recorded. So elaborate were security procedures that none of the famous artists singing in the series knew who the others were. Cars with drawn shades whisked them to the studio. Heavy veils or scarves covered their faces, as they entered and left, lest elevator operators or curious bystanders

recognize them. Upon entering, station personnel ushered singers into a room. Even the announcer remained behind locked doors as he introduced (but not by name) the mystery singers. A screen separated the microphone from the rest of the room. Supposedly, members of the orchestra were not permitted to see the singers they accompanied.

The less-than-foolproof series attracted a large following, but was short-lived. Before its demise, a big winner was a 25-year-old salesman from New York. To earn his \$5,000, Robert Lanyon, a one-time usher at Chicago Auditorium concerts, identified a dozen different singers on five separate broadcasts and then wrote an essay on the voice of Mario Chamlee.

A new "Hour" frantically tried to catch up to those of Victor and Brunswick. The New York Edison Company organized the Edison Ensemble, a serious music group directed by Josef Bonime, and featuring guest soloists. Edison's preferential customers, if they wished, listened to the WJZ program from receivers at one of the company's five New York City showrooms.

The WJZ staff announcers were themselves musicians. Milton Cross doubled as a tenor. Godfrey Ludlow and Keith McCloud filled in as violinist and pianist, respectively. Their recitals won an enthusiastic response from studio audiences in Aeolian Hall, as well as from at-home listeners. New musical programs surfaced on the dial during 1925: WEA's Grand Opera Company, Max Jacobs' Symphony Orchestra, Stern's Brooklyn Strand Theater Band, and Nathaniel Shilkret's Salon Orchestra. The Goldman Band gave summer radio concerts from the New York University campus. The New York Philharmonic, which first broadcast in August 1922, played over the air from Lewisohn Stadium.

"The radio audiences, for the most part, still prefer a good jazz orchestra or band," *The New York Times* commented. Nevertheless, it noted the estimated 200,000 or so listeners to the Philharmonic summer concerts. "But the experience in broadcasting the concerts from the Lewisohn Stadium shows that there is a much larger audience for true music lovers in this country than was thought to exist."

The cue was quickly picked up by other stations and sponsors. WOR announced its fall lineup, telling listeners to tune in the Little Symphony orchestra on Wednesdays and *Music While You*

*Dine* chamber music each evening. In September 1925, over WEA, a thirty-week series with a formidable array of musical stalwarts was inaugurated. A radio set manufacturer, Atwater Kent, picked up the tab—a princely gesture considering the famous and costly talent: Louise Homer, Edward Johnson, Alexander Brailowsky, Charles Hackett, Albert Spalding, Anna Case, Frieda Hempel, Paul Althouse, and seventeen other leading artists. At least half of the country's radio audience, as far west as Dallas and Fort Worth, would hear the Sunday night concerts.

Steinway & Sons joined with RCA (and stations WJZ, WRC, and WGY) to plan concerts conducted by Walter Damrosch and Willem Mengelberg, recitals by pianist Josef Hofmann, and vocal programs by Ernestine Schumann-Heink, who commanded the highest fee for a one-hour appearance: \$2,500.

Across the seas, Londoners endured a highly unusual musical segment. Not merely going over the air, it originated *from* the air. A handful of musicians herded into an airplane attempted to perform as it flew over the city. They were barely heard over the engine noise.

Below, in a more serious vein, Russian basso Feodor Chaliapin had made a momentous decision. After much prolonged persuasion, he agreed to sing at a radio microphone. Accustomed to a "live" audience, he became so unnerved by the prospect of the broadcast that the station had to agree to provide a specially selected gathering of fifty bona fide admirers. British listeners, not accustomed to applause over the air, were surprised by the audience response. This novelty proved such a great success that shortly thereafter radio performances were opened to the number of visitors who could be conveniently seated. Station managers also considered the charging of an admission fee to pay artists and meet other expenses. In another effort to make performers feel as if they were on a stage, one London station darkened the studio, then beamed a spotlight at the microphone.

Unlike Bori, McCormack, and Chaliapin, there remained artists who kept apart from radio. Some were convinced that music and broadcasting were incompatible. Paderewski, for one, called it "demoralizing to artists," adding that a pianist on radio performed under conditions not conducive to best expression.

"The radio is a nuisance," claimed Alma Gluck, whose royalties from the sale of a million-plus copies of one single disc—"Carry Me Back to Old Virginny," cut in 1914—enabled her to buy a \$127,000 townhouse on New York's Park Avenue. However, by 1924 record sales were dropping because of the boom of radio sets. "They are perfectly darn foolish things to have around," she said, "and besides the squawks, most of what one hears over them is terrible." Nevertheless, the operatic and concert soprano admitted she had a radio.\*

Here and there, set owners echoed Alma Gluck's aversion to radio. A harried East Orange, N.J., homeowner wrote: "With a radio in the home one's peace is at the mercy of the whole household. Without warning one is pursued by the raucous inanities of Gold Dust Boys or Happiness Twins. I shall not have my expensive radio set repaired . . . I shall keep it in desuetude lest at some future evil moment I be bewitched into buying another."

In spite of such protests, "radio fever" spread. In 1925, the number of set owners reached four million—an increase of more than 14 percent over the previous twelve months. Receivers had eliminated batteries, crystals, and headphones, and now possessed an alternating current power source, vacuum tube amplification, and loudspeakers. Listeners took for granted clearer reception over longer distances. The average price for a set was about \$200, well above a month's wages for most people. Buying on the installment plan made possession possible.

Air time also increased. WEAF broadcast approximately 245 hours a month to a potential maximum of 10.6 million people. Of its 297 regular features, 85 were programs sponsored and paid for by an advertiser. The 212 unsold hours remained "sustaining," or noncommercial.

Radio technology came to the rescue of the phonograph, as dealers choked on vast inventories of unsold talking machines. For several years, both Western Electric and Westinghouse had been working on electrical recording systems that would encompass pickup microphones not unlike those used for broadcasting. Up to

\*One of the last major vocal artists to embrace radio, she made her debut, March 17, 1929, with conductor Arthur Pryor on the CBS series, *De Forest Audions*. Her selections included "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny."

that time, large acoustical recording horns funneled sounds to a diaphragm. The energy or vibrations released from the larynx of a Caruso or the windpipe of a Sousa Band brass player caused a stylus to move back and forth, cutting a master disc. The voice or instrument had to be projected exactly into the center of the trumpet-shaped recording horn to avoid excessive vibration and resulting distortion.

"In those early days," said Douglas Stanbury, who recorded for Edison and other labels in the early 1920s, "we learned to work the horn in the way that was best for our own particular voices. Once the microphone came in, the engineer took over."

With electrical microphone pickup, sound was converted to electrical waves and then amplified to drive a needlelike cutting instrument. Vastly improved reproduction of vocal and instrumental music resulted. Electrically processed discs brought listeners closer to the fidelity and tone of an actual performance. The talking machine itself added electrical amplification and current, replacing hand-cranked or battery-driven turntables.

In November, Victor unveiled the extended range Orthophonic Victrola. This phonograph, containing a powerful speaker and automatic record changer, sold from \$85 to \$300. A number of models combined a phonograph and radio receiver. Advertised as "revolutionizing standards of music reproduction," the Orthophonic machine made Victor again prosperous. From 1925 to 1929, the company sold 67,000 units, worth approximately \$20 million at market.

Brunswick lost no time in securing the research backup of General Electric. Together, they developed the Panatrope, widely recognized as perhaps the best-conceived electrical record player. It came in various models, with or without radio, for \$350 and up.

The inventor of the original phonograph was yet to be heard. Thomas A. Edison, aged and almost totally deaf, paused at his laboratory workbench. Experimenting with a long-playing, extra-groove disc for his Edison Record Company, the wizard of Menlo Park welcomed a chance to advance his machine at the expense of music over a radio.

"Music on radio is very poor because it's badly distorted," he claimed. "I quite approve of radios and think that there should be one in every home, but, at the same time, it should not be used for

musical purposes. It is good for news, reports of games, boxing matches, and speeches. The radio fad will pass," he predicted, "and people will once more turn to the phonograph."

Broadcast leaders questioned Edison's veracity, his impartiality. "Deafness prevents Edison from judging radio music fairly," replied RCA engineer Alfred N. Goldsmith. "Radio aided recording with electrical mechanisms and acoustics. There's more life to music on radio than any old disc."

Still another Edison invention, besides the phonograph, was headed for an enormous change. On June 25, 1925, Warner Brothers and Western Electric signed a contract to develop sound motion pictures. The Edison film projector would soon have a "voice" to compete with the popularity of listening to the radio.

For nearly a year a film and sound crew experimented in a Brooklyn studio and on the leased Manhattan Opera House stage. Called the Vitaphone Company, the new unit signed up an impressive group of artists—tenor Giovanni Martinelli, sopranos Anna Case and Marion Talley, violinists Efrem Zimbalist and Mischa Elman, pianist Harold Bauer—to perform on camera and microphone for a short program of "talking" pictures. At the same time, Warner Brothers took their newest major silent film *Don Juan*, starring John Barrymore and Mary Astor, and added a musical background, recorded by the New York Philharmonic. The score, plus sound effects, was transferred to a dozen or so wax discs and synchronized with reels and reels of film.

"Almost uncanny," *New York Times* critic Mordaunt Hall wrote of the first talking picture, which opened at Broadway's Warner Theater on August 6, 1926. He praised the natural reproduction of voices, tonal quality of musical instruments and timing of sound to movements. So realistic was the Vitaphone program that Martinelli's rendition of "Vesti la Giubba" caused the audience to burst into applause with an intensity that was seldom heard. A year later, when Al Jolson as *The Jazz Singer* delivered the first spoken dialogue from an actor on a screen, moviegoers were electrified. Audiences now demanded sound with their movies—not merely films with synchronized scores but all-talking pictures.

"Talkies" loomed as a formidable competitor to radio. They

also detracted from the newly improved phonograph. Radio, more than ever, stood at the crossroads. Broadcasters now had to commit themselves to a distinct and self-supporting means of home entertainment. To carry out this, they formulated three objectives: technical advances both in broadcasting and the manufacture of sets, better and more varied programs and a practical approach to sustain them, and a national broadcast system. Achievement of these goals lay just beyond the grasp of the medium. There still remained people who believed radio had had its day. They facetiously predicted that it would soon "mount its kilocycle and ride away into the night." Perhaps the excitement and novelty of radio was, indeed, wearing thin. Here and there radio sets were toted off to the attic to join pogo sticks, bustles, and buggy whips.

Although the pickup of a program from Johannesburg, South Africa, by an Ohio listener with a three-tube receiver still made news, and a broadcast of an organ and an orchestra playing five miles apart yet in perfect synchronization gained attention, many radio fans were tuning out the merely unique or long distant. What they sought were more big-time performers on top flight shows originating from the country's major cities.

The solution lay in consolidating the large independent stations and informal small chains into binding networks that would reach tens of millions of people in far-flung areas. Such groups of stations could offer advertisers programs nationally on a regular basis. In turn, better talent would appear at a microphone.

Network broadcasting arrived just in time. It saved radio from increasing disuse. If large scale consolidation of transmitters had not been initiated, radio might have become completely static.

The network concept got its first, and perhaps greatest, boost in mid-1926. AT&T, which had undertaken broadcasting as an adjunct to its telephone system, realized that operations of a commercial station entailed much more than the application of technical know-how. Although WEAF supplied high-caliber programs during its first four years, both locally and via a loosely defined chain as far west as Kansas City, telephone officials decided to concentrate on private communications and quit the broadcasting field. WEAF found a ready buyer in RCA, now operating WJZ. One of the Northeast's most tuned-in stations,

WJZ was hampered in reaching other regions because AT&T generally restricted the use of its telephone lines by others for network purposes. RCA purchased WEAf for \$1 million and made it the nucleus of a large radio station chain: the National Broadcasting Company. The Telephone Company also agreed to make available its lines for network broadcasting. Scattered individual stations, foundering in their search for fresh programming and staggering under the burden of creating a full daily schedule, welcomed NBC's proposal for a single program source. By November, nineteen stations in twelve eastern and five midwestern cities had signed on as NBC affiliates, setting a pattern that would expand and improve the medium.

To bring attention to the fledgling network, NBC invited three hundred guests to the Grand Ballroom of the old Waldorf-Astoria Hotel for one of the longest and most elaborate entertainment programs in radio history. On Monday, November 15, 1926, a four-and-a-half hour broadcast showcased the leading names of show business: Edwin Franko Goldman, George Olsen, Harold Bauer, Mary Garden, B. A. Rolfe, and Walter Damrosch. Will Rogers spoke from a theater dressing room in Independence, Mo. The venerable comedy team of Weber & Fields delighted the old-timers. Ben Bernie and his lads played from the Hotel Roosevelt Grill. Listeners heard symphonic works, operatic arias, art songs, light opera, piano concertos, military marches, and dance band tunes.

Merlin H. Aylesworth, newly chosen president of NBC, greeted the audience, and to open the program introduced the New York Symphony Orchestra and conductor Walter Damrosch. Shortly before nine o'clock, Mary Garden, one of the world's great prima donnas, sang from a microphone set up in her apartment in Chicago. A "bleat note" or whining cry in her voice startled NBC engineers. They later explained that this was caused by interference from other stations on WEAf's wavelength. A network spokesman pointed to the untenable atmospheric congestion with more than seven hundred U.S. stations, large and small, struggling to be heard.

NBC used 5,000 miles of telephone wire and spent \$25,000 in talent fees to put its best "webbed" foot forward. The inaugural set the pace for future network spectacles. All in all, the pro-

gram featured twenty-five well-known performers, from Titta Ruffo to Vincent Lopez, and some forty-five musical selections, from "Lohengrin" to "Nola."

Two months later, NBC organized a second chain, The Blue Network, with WJZ as its key station. Then, in April 1927, the company joined seven Pacific Coast stations into the "Orange Network," serving a Far West population of 9 million people. The opening program from San Francisco combined contemporary Hollywood glamour and old California grandeur with a cast that featured the two singing and dancing Duncan Sisters, tenor Lambert Murphy, Los Caballeros Spanish Orchestra, organist Wallace A. Sabin (as a remote from the exclusive Bohemian Grove redwood preserve), Moseby's Dixieland Blue Blowers, contralto Jeanne Gordon, and the San Francisco Symphony conducted by Alfred Hertz.

NBC announced that in 1927 it would spend \$2.7 million for talent alone—an enormous sum for a contrivance that a year or two earlier could barely afford to pay its station managers. With a potential U.S. audience of 26 million tuning in on about 7 million sets, big corporations and advertising agencies took a close look at radio. More and more beat a path to studio doors. Advertisers began to shape broadcast formats and programs, taking note that people inaccessible to the written word, or even illiterate, could be reached by radio.

General Motors, The American Tobacco Company, Cities Service, General Foods, and Philco were among the first national sponsors. Many contracted with J. Walter Thompson, Lord & Thomas, Young and Rubicam, and other ad firms to bring big names to first-rate programs. And music became the keynote across the land.

But a major job remained before radio could free itself of the many bothersome and unfit stations clawing the air for time, wavelength, and volume.

## The Ether Comes of Age

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**T**here were close to seven hundred radio stations crowding the ether by the end of 1926. Interference among them and their transmitters created aural bedlam. No station or broadcast was ever completely free from the resultant confusion. Stray noises and intruding signals ruined many carefully prepared programs. And the situation threatened to get worse. Applications for more than a hundred new stations were piled up in Washington, D.C. Further congestion was only a matter of time.

Early in 1927 Congress finally took action and passed a law establishing public ownership and regulation of the airwaves. The legislation also set up the Federal Radio Commission (forerunner to the FCC). The agency's first action was to revoke the licenses of some 150 stations that failed to meet certain new regulations, including the scheduling of bona fide public service features. The commission classified stations according to the size of the locality they served, prescribed daily hours of broadcast, and most important, assigned individual frequencies on the radio dial. It also exercised control over a station's wattage or power.

With the airwaves now linked, cleared, and contained, the year 1927 augured well for radio. Another New York-based network, the Columbia Broadcasting System, soon began to take shape. After floundering for a year or so, it finally managed to garner the necessary resources for expansion.

NBC began to move westward across the Rockies for coast-to-coast hookups. The first national breakthrough was the traditional

Rose Bowl football game. Alabama tied Stanford 7-7 as snow-bound New Englanders listened to shirt-sleeved Graham McNamee's play-by-play report of the California classic.

Radio's biggest role in public service was cast in the spring of 1927 when the turbulent Mississippi River overflowed its banks, sweeping away virtually everything in its path. Thousands were left homeless. NBC joined with the Red Cross in providing relief efforts. On a nationwide hookup, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover described the disaster and appealed for money, food, and clothing. His messages brought an overwhelming response from every corner of the land.

A special broadcast in June of that year broke all previous audience records. Charles A. Lindbergh had returned to a hero's welcome after his historic transatlantic solo flight. Thirty million people tuned in to hear President Coolidge's welcoming address, followed by the young aviator's remarks. In advance of the eagerly awaited address, dozens of radio announcers took to the field as news reporters. Others stationed themselves in the dome of the Capitol and at the top of Washington Monument to describe the celebration that began with a parade down Pennsylvania Avenue.

Two big sporting events attracted large audiences that year: the Kentucky Derby and the Dempsey-Tunney prizefight.

The running of the Derby was reported with breath-holding drama over WGN, Chicago. The big event at Churchill Downs opened with the traditional rendition of "My Old Kentucky Home" sung by the Pullman Porters Quartet, two members of which (Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden) later emerged as the fantastically popular radio duo, Amos and Andy.

Then in September, Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney slugged it out in a championship bout at Soldiers Field, Chicago. At ringside, NBC's Graham McNamee relayed the blows as fast as they were delivered—and some said even faster!

It was all big-time radio. But an occasional "brickbat" somehow managed to steal equal time. In New York, the *Keep-The-Air-Clean-Sunday* society publicly scolded WMCA for broadcasting jazz on the Sabbath. Labeling the station's program "degrading and defaming," the group launched a telephone campaign demanding that Sunday blue laws be enforced against popular music. Not only did their efforts fail, they resulted in a victory for freedom of

the airwaves and the right to schedule music—jazz, classical, or whatever—when it best served a station and its listeners. Other crusading groups worried about young people becoming content to lounge in soft chairs before loudspeakers. Schools and churches began forming glee clubs and choirs to combat this “alarming and growing tendency.”

Until late 1927, it had been the custom for Chicago transmitters to go off the air on Monday nights at the request of local listeners, to give them the opportunity to tune in distant stations such as Pittsburgh and New York under favorable listening conditions. Now, as the year ended, this custom was abandoned. Chicago stations were fearful that their place on the dial might be preempted by the Federal Radio Commission and assigned to other transmitters. Moreover, the Chicago stations now realized that they had in their midst both the talent and the commercial resources capable of competing with broadcasting centers in the East and the growing West.

Also in 1927, WEAJ had switched on its new 50-kilowatt transmitter at Bellmore, Long Island. Having relocated the new station from atop the AT&T building in Manhattan to a site some 26 miles eastward, it could now effectively beam its signal over a 100-mile radius.

“Great masses of steel in city buildings,” explained engineer Alfred N. Goldsmith, “often absorb the signals from stations inside the cities and cause a blight on radio reception for many listeners.”

Bellmore real estate agents endeavored to persuade announcers to mention the listening advantages over WEAJ from Bellmore, Long Island. But the request was not granted. The small one-story RCA outpost with two antenna towers brought little if any fame to the semirural community. Ironically, two years later, a bat flew into the transmitter’s power plant condenser plates and knocked WEAJ off the air for eight hours. And the same day lightning hit the WJZ antenna at Bound Brook, N.J., putting that NBC plant out of operation until the following morning!

The year 1927 saw the emergence of a new independent network. It had originated from the activities of a concert manager, Arthur Judson. Early that year Judson, manager of the New York Philharmonic and Philadelphia Orchestra, had offered to supply

NBC's Red and Blue networks with a weekly potpourri of vocalists and instrumentalists for a fixed sum, granting an option to use them separately or in groups—quartets, trios, and chamber music ensembles. Sarnoff, then general manager at RCA, rejected the proposal since he wished to develop his own in-house talent. Undaunted, Judson decided to form his own network and make it a client of his radio program unit. But first he had to get the money. He approached Betty Fleischmann Holmes of the Fleischmann Yeast family, who was an enthusiastic concert buff and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Philharmonic. She provided the \$100,000 with which to organize the United Independent Broadcasters.

Shortly, UIB engaged a promoter, George Coats, to travel the United States, signing up independent stations. A chain of sixteen stations, including WCAU in Philadelphia and KMOX in St. Louis, was thus formed. Since UIB owned no outlet in New York City, it contracted with WOR for the use of its facilities for ten hours each week. Judson's Radio Program Corporation supplied the talent.

But within four months UIB was broke. Not enough commercial air time had been sold to pay the bills, and Mrs. Holmes declined to come up with more cash. Judson began looking around for a new backer. He found one at the Columbia Phonograph Company whose president was H. C. Cox. Columbia also had fallen upon hard times. Its management fretted over the popularity of radio and the persistent rumors that Victor would merge with RCA, which it finally did in 1929. Nevertheless, Columbia Phonograph agreed to acquire half the stock of UIB and bankroll the new operations provided a new company was formed. Thus, the Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting System was born.

For a short time the two entities, UIB and Columbia Broadcasting, operated in tandem, assets and liabilities being dropped into one company or the other as the needs of the moment dictated.

On September 18, 1927, Columbia made its official network debut from the WOR studios that had followed WJZ from Newark to Manhattan. The six-hour musical program featured the new American opera by Deems Taylor: *The King's Henchman*. The Met-recruited cast included Rafael Diaz, tenor, and Marie Sundelius, soprano. Although the opera was sung in English, Taylor as

commentator interrupted the production at suitable intervals to paraphrase portions of the libretto by Edna St. Vincent Millay.

The first classical musical piece ever played over Columbia Broadcasting System was *Ballet Egyptienne* performed by conductor Howard Barlow and a newly formed network orchestra.

"The matter of getting off the air on time was not very important then," Barlow recalled of those first weeks. "The Telephone Company allowed us up to three minutes overtime."

Columbia signed up a number of staff musicians for its chain: Frank Croxton, bass; Charles Harrison, tenor; Elizabeth Lennox, contralto; Elsie Thiede, soprano; and a string quartet composed of Ivor Karman, Walter Edelstein, Samuel Stillman, and Ossip Giskin.

After approximately eight weeks of operations under the control of the Columbia Phonograph Company, funds supplied by Columbia had been exhausted. The network was again broke. Moreover, Columbia Phonograph, disenchanted with the arrangement, wanted out. Columbia's stock in the enterprise was acquired by the remaining major shareholders. In lieu of cash, Columbia accepted advertising time for its recordings and equipment on such programs as the *Columbia Intimate Hour* with the American Singers Quartet, Red Nichols' jazz combo, and Don Voorhees' concert band.

But Arthur Judson was not yet willing to admit defeat. He looked for new backers. Through his Philadelphia friends, he learned of Jerome Louchheim, one of that city's leading builders and contractors. Dr. Leon Levy, part owner of WCAU, introduced Judson to Louchheim, who bought a controlling interest in the chain. Dr. Levy's station, WCAU, was a key transmitter in the network, and he was anxious to have it succeed. Moreover, Mrs. Levy's father, Samuel Paley, also owned a small interest in Judson's network.

One of the chain's first sponsors was Paley's Congress Cigar Company. It already had signed a \$6,500 per week commitment with WCAU for what developed into the *La Palina Smoker*, a highly successful series with pianist-singer Harry Link. Within six months the sales of Congress cigars had skyrocketed from 400,000 a day to over a million. But while the cigar business boomed, Columbia floundered. With twelve employees supervised by Major

Andrew White, it faced losses of some \$40,000 per week and remained solidly in the red.

Then, during the summer of 1928, destiny stepped in. Philadelphia-based Louchheim decided he could no longer manage a radio network headquartered in New York and turned to Sam Paley, founder and president and chief stockholder of Congress Cigars. Paley, with enormous cash assets to put to work, acquired Louchheim's interest for less than half a million dollars. Shortly thereafter, his son, William, manager of Congress Cigar's advertising department, became restless. There was little glamour in the cigar business, but radio offered both glamour and challenge. Already it had thrust the medium-sized cigar firm into the corporate mainstream, and now Congress Cigars owned the biggest part of a broadcasting company. With no hesitancy young William opted for a radio set over a cigar box. And in September 1928, Columbia elected 26-year-old William Paley president of the broadcasting company.

In a matter of weeks William Paley had combined Columbia and United into one large company: The Columbia Broadcasting System. He quickly acquired a flagship station from the inconsequential Atlantic Broadcasting Company and made its WABC the key CBS transmitter. By January 1929, there were forty-nine stations in the network. That year, Paley leased ten floors for studios and offices at 485 Madison Avenue. Gross billings leaped to \$4.7 million from a miniscule \$72,500 in 1927. The magic touch was Paley's herculean push to line up sponsored programs, such as the *Warner Brothers Vitaphone Jubilee Hour*, *The Old Gold-Paul Whiteman Hour*, *Nickle Cinco-Paters*, *True Detective Mysteries*, *Majestic Theater of the Air*, and *Ceco Couriers*. Thus began CBS, a network saved by a smoke ring.

Within a decade radio mounted and transmitted every type of musicians' category and grade of music. There were concerts by major orchestras in Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, Detroit, and Boston during a golden age of symphonic performances; from Europe, rebroadcasts of concerts and opera. There were music education and appreciation features for both adults and young people; pickups of Army, Navy, and Marine bands; daytime light music from Frank Crumit and Julia Sander-

son, Gene and Glenn, Irene Beasley, and Ray Perkins, and choral music on the *Cathedral Hour*. Orchestras led by Ben Bernie, Freddy Rich, Ted Weems, Leo Reisman, and dozens more kept America dancing. Broadcasts by the Boston Pops Orchestra with conductor Arthur Fiedler, the WOR Sinfonietta led by Alfred Wallenstein, and the NBC String Symphony directed by Frank Black were adding new dimensions to musical appreciation. Songs by crooners Crosby, Columbo, and Vallee. Arias by divas Pons, Ponselle, and Moore. First performances of *Emperor Jones*, *Merry Mount*, and other productions from the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House. Concerts by the NBC Music Guild, Leopold Stokowski, and the Philadelphia Orchestra's innovative series. Ernest La Prade's *Home Symphony*, was designed for participation of the radio audience. International folk music was popularized by balladeer Josef Marais on *African Trek*. Columbia regularly scheduled harpsichord interludes by Yella Pessl; also Negro spirituals on *Wings Over Jordan*, and organ concerts by E. Power Biggs. World premieres by CBS of modern works written especially for radio by contemporary American composers introduced and encouraged new musical talent.

There were, of course, a number of local and regional programs carried over from pre-network years. Some of these had first appeared in the mid-1920s, breaking new ground in musical innovations, production and performance, and setting high standards of excellence. The most successful of these were later augmented in cast and rescheduled to different time slots, or transferred to more modern studios to reach the largest possible audiences.

During the Coolidge-Hoover epoch, almost every musically-minded listener regularly tuned in to his or her favorite shows. And there were literally scores of such network musical programs to choose from. A sampling of titles stirs pleasant memories. For light music, there were *Hoover Sentinels*, *Sylvania Foresters*, *Lehn and Fink Serenade*, *Sam Lanin's Ipana Troubadours*, *Seiberling Singers*, *Sweethearts of the Air*, and May Singhi Breen & Peter DeRose. For concert music: *Halsey Stuart Concert*, *Jack Frost Melody Moments*, *Mobil Oil Concert*, *Russian Cathedral Choir*, and the Chicago Civic Opera productions. Musical variety was

supplied by *Champion Sparkers*, *Coward Comfort Hour*, *Fox Fur Trappers*, *Happy Wonder Bakers*, *Whittall Anglo-Persians*, *Wrigley Revue*, and the Guy Lombardo Orchestra.

There were, however, eight to ten light or concert musical variety presentations that irrevocably became interwoven with the warp and woof of early radio listening. They set the pace, the tempo, and the thrust for the widening musical spectrum that soon was to burst upon the ether.

One such pre-network pioneering effort sparkled with a zest and effervescence rarely found outside its sponsor's product: *The Clicquot Club Eskimos*, a fast-tempo, madcap dance band that stressed banjos, brass, and bells. The sponsor, Clicquot Club Ginger Ale Company, had been on the air for four years, when, in 1929, it asked Frank Weston, an advertising copywriter, to leave Providence, R.I., for New York City and take over the job of writing a radio script for *Clicquot Club Eskimos*.

"I knew very little about radio," Frank Weston recalled, "except that it existed and we listened to it at home. But I went down to New York and met chief Eskimo, Harry Reser, and was hired to work with him on improving the program which already was a big success. It wasn't long before I discovered that few people knew anything about radio—including those running the stations. It was an enormous opportunity to upgrade programming."

Weston wrote both commercials and program continuity, and helped select numbers. And more than once, had to explain to the beverage company owner why the Eskimos played a song that he personally disliked.

The star of the show was Harry Reser, one of the foremost banjoists of the 1920s who had directed many semi-hot combos for recording sessions at Brunswick and Columbia. In 1925 he and a half-dozen banjo players lined up an audition for the *Clicquot Company* at WEA. They liked what they heard and promptly expanded the group into a full orchestra.

A week or so before the first broadcast, Reser composed eight bars of introductory music. At rehearsal, he added flourishes—sleigh bells, a snapping whip, and even the bark of an Eskimo husky. He had created what soon became known as the "*Clicquot March*," the first original theme to identify a radio program. The

Eskimos captured the spirit of the carefree 1920s with such novelty tunes as "Thanks for the Buggy Ride," "Barney Google," and "Ain't She Sweet." They played a lot of raucous numbers, but occasionally ventured into the mini-classic, "Poet and Peasant Overture."

For a year or two they had no studio audience, but Reser and his men frequently wore Eskimo-styled outfits. It was Weston who suggested that the sponsor put the fur-garbed band in a Broadway theater and issue tickets. NBC chose the reconstructed New Amsterdam Roof studio on West 42nd Street. It had all the earmarks of a Ziegfeld setting since, not long before, the theater had, indeed, staged some of the great showman's star-studded extravaganzas. Many of the six hundred spectators were Clicquot's own salesmen—often in dinner jackets—with their customers and clients. The sponsor had built a realistic stage set depicting the northern skies' aurora borealis. Props included a mechanical Eskimo dog that jumped up from behind a cardboard iceberg and barked during the opening theme.

"Putting a radio program on a stage and allowing people to see it was so innovative that NBC decided to totally eliminate noise from the audience," Weston said. "An enormous six-ton sound-proof glass curtain isolated the performers. Imagine the Clicquot musicians in their Eskimo fur suits playing on an unventilated stage with five rows of hot lights baking them. The perspiration ran down into their shoes. They nearly passed out. So we decided to raise the glass curtain, and let the audience react by applause. Listeners liked the clapping, coughs, and chair squeaks. And the Eskimos gave a sigh of relief and soon played even better."

A number of pioneering radio announcers worked with Reser: Graham McNamee, Phillips Carlin, John S. Young, and Ray Knight (billed as Bill Borealis). One of these grandees of the mike tarried in a nearby bar before a broadcast, arriving unsteady but in fine voice. The show went smoothly until he crossed the stage and tripped over the cord of a microphone. It took NBC engineers a full five minutes to figure out why the Eskimos had been cut off the air.

The Clicquot Clubbers broadcast regularly for ten years, becoming one of the oldest continuous programs on the network. But, with distribution of the ginger ale limited to the East and part of

the Midwest, it made little sense to advertise on a coast-to-coast show. During World War II, however, a series of twenty-four half-hour transcriptions were cut for franchise bottlers who added their local area commercials. Then, after a hiatus of about five years, the Eskimos once more hitched up their sleds. In 1948 Clicquot brought Harry Reser's troupe to Boston where, for a year, they entertained New England listeners via the Yankee Network.

"By then, the show was competing with television," Weston added, "but surprisingly we had a very large audience. I think Reser got more fan mail than when he played on the full NBC network."

A contemporary musical outfit mounted an analogous program of popular tunes and semiclassicals, even to the point of colorful costumes to match its special brand of melodies. Stressing string and woodwind arrangements, the A & P Gypsies delved into European dance and folk music with gusto and abandon.

Gypsy leader Harry Horlick had fled his native Russia in 1921. Making his way to Constantinople, he carried among his few possessions a violin. By fiddling he earned enough money to book passage for New York. There, he landed a job with the City Symphony, a decidedly new and untried orchestra with a schedule of concerts for local schools and community halls.

Soon Horlick and a small group of string players convinced the owner of a Russian restaurant, *Petrouschka*, to hire them. Their fiery gypsy music won them an occasional job over WEA. Then, a disastrous blaze destroyed the *Petrouschka*. Horlick asked the station if they might use a studio for rehearsals.

One day, the sales manager of the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company—then considering radio as a means to advertise its chain of stores—visited the station. Through a loudspeaker in a reception area, he heard Horlick's musicians sweeping through wild gypsy melodies and distinctive Russian and Hungarian folk tunes. The music was entirely different from anything he had encountered. In less time than it took to say "Jane Page," A & P had signed up the five players as the A & P Gypsies.

The ensemble carefully prepared for its commercial debut. If their gypsy songs caught the public fancy within a week or two,

there was a good chance for a long and lucrative association with the large grocery chain.

Beginning in 1924, the Gypsies popularized such melodies as "Black Eyes," "Shadows of the East," "Dubinushka," "The Old Forgotten Hungarian Song and Dance," and their enduring theme song, "Two Guitars." As their repertoire grew, Horlick's caravan lengthened. A quartet featuring tenor Frank Parker and bass Emile Coté joined it. More strings were added, then a woodwind or two, a flute, a drum, and finally, a brass section. The outcome was a twenty-six piece salon orchestra, not unlike the large ensembles heard on transatlantic steamships in the years between the two world wars. The Gypsies performed popular music of every style, as well as compositions usually reserved to the province of concert hall orchestras. Indeed, a number of Harry Horlick's musicians also played with major symphonies. Long before the Gypsies broke camp in September 1935, ending a run of more than a dozen years, they had blazed a trail for similar radio aggregations.

The *Atwater Kent Radio Hour* ended its first broadcast series with a Music Week Festival on May 2, 1926. Gathered at the microphone were four major artists: Frances Alda, Josef Hofmann, Louise Homer, and Albert Spalding, plus three upcoming performers: contralto Kathryn Meisle, tenor Allen McQuhae, and pianist John Powell. The radio hour had been such a great success that the Philadelphia radio maker willingly paid the Metropolitan Opera Company \$25,000 a year for the right to engage its artists.

The first major "package" show, the *Atwater Kent Hour*, was prepared and managed by John Trevor Adams, head of the Wolfsohn Musical Bureau, who sold it as a unit to an advertising agency. Agencies, still without radio departments or trained specialists, bought air time from a station or network.

Sponsor Atwater Kent had a definite theory about radio advertising. If the script had but two 60-second commercials in the course of an hour, that was adequate, provided the name "Atwater Kent" was mentioned at least a dozen times during the rest of the program. It needed only to be a phrase: "The Atwater Kent Trio," "Madame Diva sings for Atwater Kent," or the "Atwater Kent Symphony Orchestra." The product name was there, and by mere repetition, it sold radios. Many listeners firmly believed they had

to buy an Atwater Kent receiver to tune in the show. Mr. Kent made no effort to change that belief.

At its outset, the *Atwater Kent Hour* had had script problems. Prepared by a copywriter who had no musical knowledge, the script sounded as if it had come straight from the pages of an encyclopedia. A musicologist was engaged to bring about balance and transition, providing enjoyment for an increasing number of listeners.

Unfortunately a tightly written and well-rehearsed show did not always ensure it from disaster. For one broadcast, Mr. Kent had engaged a reigning soprano. The program opened with its usual orchestral piece. Next the prima donna appeared, accompanied by the Kent Quartet. After a few introductory bars of "The Beautiful Blue Danube," the soprano warbled only a note or two, then shrieked and collapsed before the microphone. The awe-struck quartet managed to finish the song as the announcer and station staff carried the prima donna from the studio where first aid was administered. The prepared script and most of the program was abandoned. Instead, listeners heard an unusually long version of the Strauss waltz while conductor Josef Pasternack spontaneously reconstructed the entire show, eliminating the talents of the mike-intimidated diva.

On another occasion, an aspiring prima donna, who insisted upon singing at full volume, almost swallowed the microphone. Throughout the tube-shattering crescendos, a confused engineer sat at the control board, bewildered by the number of control knobs and switches. In desperation, the announcer simply grabbed the mike and tilted it away whenever the soprano reached for a high note. This irritated the busy madame. In the middle of the aria, she caught her breath and shouted, "What are you trying to do, you damned monkey!"

Soon after NBC came into being, Atwater Kent had presented to them a new program idea. Since most of the country could now tune in any network program, he initiated a radio search for undiscovered talented singers. When selected, these young unknowns would appear on radio concerts with the world's finest established artists.

The first of these *National Radio Auditions* were announced by Atwater Kent in 1927. The competition was open to all forty-

eight states. Beginning at the community level, women's clubs, musical groups, and civic associations were asked to hold contests for state and regional trials, and choose winners. To determine the two annual winners—male and female—votes from the listening audiences would account for 60 percent, and the decision of a jury of musical authorities, 40 percent. The award to each grand champion was \$5,000, plus a year or two of study at an accredited music conservatory.

The finals, held in December 1927, brought five men and five women to the microphone, representing the top talent gleaned from some fifty thousand amateur singing contests in over a thousand small towns and cities. The finalists arrived in New York determined to bring acclaim and fortune to themselves and their hometown. The runners-up could only hope to take back with them priceless experience and thrilling memories.

During the finals, Fox Movietone newsreel cameras shot thousands of feet of film, covering each contestant while on stage. The judges were Louise Homer, Edward Bok, and Mrs. Otto Kahn. First place was won by Agnes Davis, 21, a schoolteacher from Denver, Colo., with "Pace, Pace, Mio Dio" from Verdi's *La Forza del Destino*. The male winner was bass-baritone Wilbur Evans, 22, a Curtis Institute student. His rendition of "Le Cor" by Flegier launched him on a long and successful stage career.

Atwater Kent had paved the way for the first of many "amateur hours" which were to follow, although his finalists were a mere step away from the rank of professionals. Future *Auditions* continued to bring undiscovered vocal talent to national attention: among them, Donald Novis and Hazel Arth in 1928; Genevieve Rowe and Josephine Antoine in 1929; Lydia Summers and Thomas L. Thomas in 1932.

For middle-aged Americans who had grown up at the turn of the century, music from their youthful days held a nostalgic hold. Radio found a responsive chord among them by broadcasting operettas by Romberg, Friml, Herbert, and Strauss. Despite outdated plots, musically they could be as fresh and irresistible as the night theater audiences first heard them. Memory-haunting tunes from the pen of these composers regained popularity, chiefly because radio provided hours of weekly entertainment from this treasure chest of romantic, lyrical melody.

The *Philco Hour of Theater Memories*, a pioneering program of light opera, bowed on NBC in March 1927. James M. Skinner, vice president and general manager of Philco, the Philadelphia Storage Battery Company, had asked Henry M. Neely, a former newsman and editor, to put together and host a sixty-minute program.

Neely, billed as the show's "Old Stager," introduced each presentation and narrated the story. Having been a first-nighter at many operetta openings, he drew readily from personal experiences. For the cast, Neely gathered a company of relatively young and inexperienced singers: Kitty O'Neil, mezzo-soprano; Walter Preston, baritone; Mary Hopple, contralto; Henry Shope, tenor; Dan Gridley, tenor; Charles Robinson, bass; Doris Doe, contralto; Jessica Dragonette, soprano; Colin O'Moore, tenor; and Emily Woolley, soprano. His musical director was Harold Sanford, a former violinist in the Metropolitan Opera orchestra under the baton of Toscanini for seven years, and also an invaluable associate of composer Victor Herbert.

Two singers quickly moved to the forefront: Jessica Dragonette, a diminutive soprano, and tenor Colin O'Moore.

The Philco theme song was "Mem'ries," written by Neely and Sanford. In 1928 Brunswick recorded a version of this melodious number sung by Jessica Dragonette. Some years later, in her autobiography titled *Faith Is a Song*, she talked of the exciting challenge of that period of her life because it had given her an opportunity to sing and act with contrasting dramatic range of music and emotion.

During the *Philco Hour's* first season, Jessica performed with members of the original cast of a number of light operas: Wilda Bennett from Victor Herbert's *The Only Girl*; Fritzi Scheff, star of the original 1905 stage production of *Mlle Modiste*; and Donald Brian, who had created the part of Prince Danilo in *The Merry Widow*.

In *Faith Is a Song*, Jessica Dragonette writes of Brian's encounter with a mike. At rehearsal he had been dashing, full of sparkle and bravura, but at the microphone he grew pale, nervous, and terrified of this method of vocal projection.

"Experienced in the demands of the theater, he had not had the occasion, as I had had, to woo the instrument," Jessica relates. "I

seized his hand and held it to prevent him from gesticulating and turning his head in every direction. When he observed me speaking my lines and singing, he could see I was playing to the microphone and not to him. Then the innate artist rose to a fine performance.”

The first performances of famous operettas on the air were heard on the *Philco Hour: The Vagabond King, The Student Prince, Blossom Time, My Maryland, and Maytime*. Philco’s success with radio versions led to stage revivals of *Mlle Modiste, Naughty Marietta*, and other light operas. Broadcast performances awakened public interest. New Broadway and motion picture productions emerged to waiting audiences. *The Hour of Theater Memories* established an enduring format for radio, which thrived well into the 1950s.



## Radio Meccas

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In 1927 Palmolive sought an evening slot for an hour of familiar musical selections that would appeal to a wide cross-section of listeners—after all, didn't everybody use soap? The formula for the program was basically simple: the best, or currently most popular, music would be performed by a group of thoroughly trained radio professionals. What emerged was *The Palmolive Hour*, which quickly became one of the favorite programs on the airwaves, and introduced to a nationwide audience of listeners some of the singers and musicians who were to become the stars of tomorrow.

The orchestra director was Gustave Haenschen who blended a solid sixty minutes of entertainment that ranged from opera to sweet jazz. For lead singers Palmolive engaged the exclusive services of soprano Virginia Rea and tenor Frank Munn; and immediately changed their names to pseudo (and soapy) billings as Olive Palmer and Paul Oliver. For close harmony the Revelers Quartet was chosen: Lewis James and James Melton, tenors; Elliot Shaw, baritone; and Wilfred Glenn, bass. Arranger-conductor Frank Black at the piano added to the swift pace. Contralto Elizabeth Lennox was the only lead vocalist who managed to avoid an euphonic name change, and remained with the program during most of its long run.

Occasionally guest stars such as Claudia Muzio, Fanny Brice, and Nellie and Sara Kouns contributed new sparkle to *The Palmolive Hour*, which was now NBC's most esteemed musical presenta-

tion, and widely praised for its "infallible charm" and "superior artistry." The clamoring demand for audience tickets at 711 Fifth Avenue, the network's broadcast center, was a constant barometer of the program's enormous success.

Visitors to New York eagerly made their way to WEAf's secluded Cathedral Studio high above Fifth Avenue near Central Park, all hopeful of being among the first four hundred applicants who would be admitted. They were quietly seated minutes before showtime, at 9:30 *p.m.*, when the doors were closed and locked and guards took their positions at the entrance.

The spectacle was, indeed, worth the weekly scramble for tickets. Subdued lighting diffused a warm glow over the performers and the orchestra, but left the audience in semishadows, although the conductor's stand was scarcely two feet from the first row of the audience.

Journalist Herbert Devins aptly described the event in a 1929 issue of *Radio Revue*:

"The baton in Gus Haenschen's fingers swoops down and a surge of melody from the orchestra swings into a marching rhythm. . . ." And now the antics begin. "Haenschen, tall and curly-haired, combines an air of authority with irrepressible boyishness. By now he has dropped his baton and is leading with elbows, knees and feet, as well as fingertips."

A duet sung by Paul Oliver (Frank Munn) and Olive Palmer (Virginia Rea) usually opened the show. They were two of the highest-salaried singers on radio, and the most popular. An aura of ethereal romance, which the radio audience eagerly accepted, surrounded them. Although neither was considered a great singer by classic standards, their voices registered a soft melodious quality over the airwaves that was more essential to a broadcasting artist than volume.

"Frank Munn, in evening clothes, is imperturbable at the mouthpiece of the mike, his face a perfect mask as he puts all the expression and color into his voice alone—a rich tenor comparable only to McCormack. He holds one hand cupped over his ear . . . a professional trick of radio that originated in phonograph recording laboratories which enables the soloist to sing softly close to the microphone and still hear his own voice above the louder orchestral music immediately behind him. Virginia Rea uses the same

method, although her body sways in time and her face reflects the emotions carried by her voice."

After commercials by Alois Havrilla or Phillips Carlin, the singers moved out of the spotlight and the famous Revelers Quartet took over. While at the peak of their radio and recording fame, they also toured Europe almost every summer. Paris audiences during their 1929 tour demanded nine encores and fourteen curtain calls, and then cried, "Speech! Speech!"

During its long run, *The Palmolive Hour* introduced many new songs and revived a number of old favorites: "I Want to Be Loved by You," "Racquel," "Valse Scherzo"; along with quartet selections such as "C'est Nous," "Mandy Lee," "Collegiate", and tenor solos "Mascushla," "Kashmiri Love Song," "Dear Heart, What Might Have Been"—to name a few that endured long after the program went off the air.

Elizabeth Lennox and Virginia Rea often opened the second half of the program with request numbers, duets, or solos. "Whispering Hope" was most often requested as their duet, as well as Miss Lennox's solos "Habanera" from *Carmen*, or "O Promise Me." Both women continued to record for Brunswick, which had brought them to the radio microphone in the mid-1920s. New recordings by Miss Rea as Olive Palmer came from Edison under a lucrative contract. Virginia Rea's renditions of "Italian Street Song" and "Indian Love Call" widened her fame and fortunes. And perhaps her misfortunes as well; for Miss Rea's finest hours had been with Palmolive as Olive Palmer. When she returned to her own name, she was never able to regain the earlier acclaim. Several years later, adrift in a sea of domestic and financial woes, she took her own life.

*The Palmolive Hour*, in addition to a great musical program, also brought to radio listeners an assortment of instrumental virtuosos whose genius and antics soon made them favorite performers: Andy Sannella, Murray Kellner, Larry Abbott, and others. Sannella was a master of many instruments, but his fame came from the way he could make an Hawaiian guitar talk everyone's language. Murray Kellner (once a dignified first violinist) became a jazz fiddler. Larry Abbott (once proclaimed as the sweetest alto sax player in New York) now improvised fantastic melodies on an ordinary comb wrapped in tissue paper!

*The Palmolive Hour* signed off permanently in 1931. Its musical format, highlighted by selections from the big Broadway shows such as George White's *Scandals* and *Babes in Toyland*, gave birth to a number of great musical radio programs that followed: *American Album of Familiar Music*, *Highways in Melody*, *Voice of Firestone*, *American Melody Hour*, *Hammerstein Music Hall*, *The Hour of Charm*, and *The Contented Program*. Countless other programs also were traceable to the soap-maker's early efforts.

Variety shows sponsored by large nationally known companies were given a solid boost from network radio. Such programs appealed to a mass audience through a combination of popular music, humor, symphonic works, drama, and topical discussion.

General Motors, with its *Family Party*, came on the air in late 1927 from Carnegie Hall. It divided an hour program into three parts. The first offered symphonic music from a forty-two-piece orchestra conducted by Willem Mengelberg, Cesare Sodero, or Nathaniel Shilkret—all stalwarts of the concert podium. The second changed gears with an all-star vaudeville revue: Willie Collier, Walter C. Kelly, Weber & Fields, Nora Bayes, Chick Sales, Marie Cahill, Leo Carrillo, Lewis James, Jessica Dragonette, and Joe Green's Marimba Band. The final twenty minutes turned to solid music from Goldman's or Pryor's Band.

"Resplendent in personal charm and backed up by strong values of artistry," it gave listeners the best available talent in every category. A year or so later, GM changed the format, featuring only one or two guests, such as Sousa's Band or Met singer Lawrence Tibbett. The *New York Sun* gave Tibbett a rave review: "One of the greatest voices for broadcasting purposes that the Met—or any other unit—has ever contributed to radio within our experience."

*Collier's Hour* was also a good example of early radio showmanship. Sponsored by *Collier's Magazine*, it wove together comedy, music, drama, sports, and current events in a journalistic framework. In his unpublished reminiscences, coproducer Malcolm LaPrade wrote: "At that time *Collier's Magazine* was having difficulty holding its circulation figures and advertising pages in competition with *The Saturday Evening Post*. An advertising agent then handling some business for *Collier's* called on me to ask if Colonel Davis and I could devise a good radio program for promoting the publication. The result was *Collier's Radio Hour*."

Announcer-M.C. John B. Kennedy played the editor, Uncle Henry, and John Greig played the role of Professor Lucifer Butts. Dramatizations of a Damon Runyon love story or a Sax Rohmer mystery, and short talks on current events by Helen Keller or John D. Rockefeller, Jr., were unique attractions. Song-and-dance man George M. Cohan made his radio debut on *Collier's* in September 1929. While he sounded a bit nervous, his voice bore a strong resemblance to that of New York's flamboyant Mayor Jimmy Walker. Ernest La Prade directed a twenty-five-piece orchestra on the Sunday evening program. *Collier's Hour* remained a fixture on NBC for five years.

Ernest's brother, Malcolm, had the unique job of providing the necessary sound effects. Some were quite ingenious. "We found that the best way to imitate the sound of a loud explosion was to hold a small wooden strawberry box close to the microphone and crush it suddenly," he recalls. "The sound of galloping horses was best reproduced by having the orchestra's drummer stand a few feet from the mike and play hoofbeats on a pillow with his sticks. A perpetual problem was the sensitivity of the microphone of those days to what was called 'blasting.' Any loud sound made too near was likely to knock them off the air completely, so we were constantly moving actors and singers back and forth."

*Collier's* and *GM Family Party* prepared the air lanes for the many variety shows that followed. Some of the perennials achieved highest ratings and became a solid part of American life: *Fleischmann Hour*, *Kraft Music Hall*, *Hollywood Hotel*, *The Magic Key of RCA*, *Kate Smith Bandwagon*, *Shell Chateau*, and *Town Hall Tonight*.

By this time radio was featuring music to wake up to, wash by, dine with, dance to, and read by. So why not music to go to bed to? Long before the automatic long-playing disc someone at NBC got the clever idea of lulling away the cares of the day by easy listening slumber music. The *Slumber Hour* soon changed the sleeping habits of one-time sheep counters. A nightly 11:00 to 12:00 *p.m.* series, it invited and prepared listeners for a restful night. The program signed on in 1927, and "put to bed" not only the somnolent but a long string of stations on the network.

Conductor Hugo Mariani and a little group of versatile musicians inaugurated the WJZ late show. By the time Ludwig Laurier held the baton (after brief stints by maestros Sodero and Sanford),

the string-bearing sandmen consisted of violinist Raphael Galindo, formerly of the Madrid Symphony; violinist Angelo Sasso; viola virtuoso Samuel Zimbalist (brother of Efrem); cellist Oswald Maz-zucchi, one-time member of the New York Philharmonic; pianists Milan Smolen and Robert Braine, and organist Carl Weber. Director Laurier had played first violin and managed the Metropolitan Opera orchestra in the early 1900s. Now he spent hours each day wandering among the shelves of NBC's music library, picking out classics from the Old Masters or selecting appropriate melodies for the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, or the Christmas season. Listeners frequently wrote in asking to hear a certain sleep-inducing selection. Rubenstein's "Kammennoi Ostrow" and Schubert's "Ave Maria" and "Serenade" were the three most asked-for requests. The producers carefully studied all such mail, for it represented a cross-section of radio's more cultured and discriminating listeners.

When the *Slumber Hour* shifted to a later time period—midnight to 1:00 *a.m.*—thousands of letters poured in asking the sponsor, the Kellogg Company, to restore it to 11:00 *p.m.* Responding to the public's demands, the station returned the Hour to its earlier time frame.

The theme song, "Slumber On," opened and closed each broadcast. Announcer Milton Cross doubled as a nocturnal soloist for the theme song and other lullabies. But for him greater fame lay just ahead at a microphone *outside* the studio walls.

One alleged nonsoporific effect of the *Slumber Hour*, causing no loss of sleep to the cast or producers, was best expressed by a listener. "Slumber music is it?" he wrote. "Why I'd stay up all night to listen, if they'd play that long." And thus began at hundreds of stations the first of many programs of beautiful and easy music through the night. Morning, noon and night, the country was snuggling up to a radio set.

The Model T and Clara Bow had drawn people out of the home, changed leisure-time habits, and broadened horizons. But, by 1931, radio and the deepening economic depression was bringing many back to the living room where the world and its sounds were at a listener's fingertips.

Radio covered the 1932 presidential election returns, making the newspaper "extra" an anachronism. Four months later 20

million sets were turned on as Franklin Delano Roosevelt took the oath of office and delivered his inaugural address, assuring an anxious country that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Americans floundered in a maelstrom of bank failures, unemployment, bread lines, and social unrest. Radio was sometimes the only, and often the best, companion with which to forget the troubled times.

At the mecca of radio, the days and nights were busy, bright, and buoyant. New York was a beehive of broadcasting, and nowhere more than at the newly built Radio City. At the dedication of this NBC communications center, the playing of Gounod's "Unfold, Ye Portals," heralded radio's far-reaching influence. A skyscraper containing hundreds of executive offices, scores of rehearsal and dressing rooms, and dozens of studios was proof that the medium held a secure place among the performing arts.

The largest broadcast studio in the world, NBC's new 8-H, on November 11, 1933, held a 75-piece orchestra, a 60-voice choir, 24 special artists, plus 1,200 invited guests. The 78- by 132-foot, three-story auditorium included a balcony for several hundred spectators, and glass-enclosed observation booths for engineers and technicians. The ceremony opened with greetings from network chief Merlin H. Aylesworth. He also read a letter from President Roosevelt.

"It is with no little pleasure that I extend to you sincere greetings and felicitations upon the formal opening of the new National Broadcasting Company's Red and Blue networks from Radio City to the nation," FDR wrote.

"Radio is an invaluable instrumentality for public service. Its values to the country are manifold—educational, recreational, entertaining, and serving also the common needs of the people and the government."

The President knew what he was talking about. In less than eight months, his "fireside chats" direct from the White House had made him a formidable radio personality in his own right.

The opening Radio City broadcast continued with the reading of Burke Boyce's poem, "Dedication," by Broadway actress Jane Cowl.

From the concert stage and opera came John McCormack, Maria Jeritza, the Schola Cantorum Choir, and Mr. Music Appreci-

ation—Dr. Walter Damrosch, who conducted a studio orchestra in the March from *Tannhauser*. America's "Vagabond Lover," Rudy Vallee, at the height of his crooning career, stepped to the microphone and sang "Under the Campus Moon," accompanied by the King of Jazz, Paul Whiteman.

The studio audience warmly applauded the introduction of Will Rogers who spoke from Hollywood. The world-renowned humorist had appeared on the first NBC broadcast seven years earlier. He and Dr. Damrosch were the only two to appear on both inaugurals. Via another remote avenue, Amos and Andy delivered a comic dialogue from Milwaukee, where they were on a personal appearance tour.

Next, a group of radio pioneers took to center stage. Soprano Jessica Dragonette, popular star of the *Cities Service Concert*, sang "Indian Love Call." Golden-voiced Frank Munn, with ten years behind the mike, shared the spotlight with frequent costars, Virginia Rea and The Revelers. Another radio trailblazer, conductor Frank Black, led the orchestra in an original composition entitled "SOS" by Robert Braine.

The program closed with a transatlantic conversation between Owen D. Young, General Electric chairman; Sir John Reith, managing director of the BBC; and Gen. James G. Harbord, RCA chairman, in New York; and David Sarnoff, RCA president, in London. Sarnoff welcomed listeners to a week of special programs marking NBC's move to spacious Radio City from its cramped and outmoded 711 Fifth Avenue quarters. At the end of the dialogue, the ex-telegraph operator tapped out the letters "RCA" in code. The message triggered a switch to turn on the floodlights aimed at the RCA building and beamed from its roof, 850 feet above Rockefeller Center.

A commentator that week described the radio metropolis as "a city sired by science, mothered by art, nursed by an economic foster mother, and dedicated to a career of enlightenment and entertainment."

Within the "city," a host of performers—comedians, musicians, announcers, singers, sportscasters, bandleaders, and actors—reached a vast audience that had stopped to listen. The sounds, once static-riddled and patchy, were now clear and consistent.

Radio knowledge, research and experience and perhaps a great deal of magic, had unlocked the portals. But from all the audible arts soon to be beamed over the air, music provided its finest and fullest expression.



## Crooning: Craze and Controversy

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**A** fad-crazy decade of peace and prosperity, the 1920s had a beat unlike any other period, before or since. An era of wonderful nonsense, it pursued fun and games as if there were no tomorrow. From flagpole sitting days on end, to marathon dancing weeks at a stretch, youth of the 1920s rarely stood still.

Pleasure-bound sheiks and flappers lost no time in courting the latest sport, drink, dance, song, or craze. Hell-bent on making their mark, this carefree generation discovered the thrills of auto joy-riding, speedboat racing, and air barnstorming. With the White House prediction of a car in every garage and two chickens in every pot, high living became the order of the day.

Tagged the Jazz Age because of a frenetic, animated pace and get-rich-quick atmosphere, it tossed aside pre-World War I modes and manners. And through the decade, flaming youth sang and danced to the reckless rhythm of the Charleston Chasers and McKinney's Cotton Pickers, the spirited twang of Ukulele Ike and Scappy Lambert, the jaunty cadence of Al Jolson and Ted Lewis, and the sophisticated syncopation of Pops Whiteman and Isham Jones.

Record-makers didn't miss a groove nor did radio broadcasters lose a minute in picking up the full panoply of popular tunes: The zany "Yes, We Have No Bananas" and "Barney Google," and the romantic "Love, Your Magic Spell Is Everywhere" and "I'll Get By," the buoyant "There's a Rainbow 'round My Shoulder" and "Mississippi Mud," and the bluesy "Moanin' Low" and "Am I

Blue?" Music from phonographs and radios, as well as bandstands, reverberated from front parlors to speakeasies.

By 1929 a new voice added to the optimism in the air. A Yale student, who played the saxophone to pay his way through college, organized an orchestra. The group soon began to make records, then played in nightclubs and on radio. From time to time the young leader sang, using a cheerleader's megaphone to make his voice heard over the noisy din of supper clubs. The effect was a smooth, subdued crooning to the lyrics. Overnight, Rudy Vallee was embraced by millions of radio listeners as "The Vagabond Lover."

The first of the great crooners, Vallee's popularity gave rise to a new age in group singing. Even church choir directors frequently emulated the antics of college cheerleaders. His songs, however, invoked neither shoulder swaying nor foot tapping. The tempo of his rich baritone voice was slow with a moderate cadence pitched to harmonize with muted chords that lulled his listeners into nostalgic moods. One critic rhapsodized Rudy's singing as "remindful of lavender and old lace, lazy Sunday afternoons on a porch screened by hollyhocks, the low moan of a pipe organ in a village church."

Backed by his musically adept Connecticut Yankees, Rudy attracted huge audiences. As master of ceremonies on NBC's *Fleischmann Hour* for a solid decade—from the fall of 1929 to the close of the 1930s—he became a coast-to-coast, if not an international, idol. Dreamed about, brooded over and longed for, Rudy Vallee crooned his way into countless female hearts and imaginations. Nonetheless, his phenomenal rise to the very heights of popularity baffled a few. The New York *Sun* critic Kay Trenholm, for one, thought his appeal "a mystery," finding him "slightly tiresome" as he crooned "My Time Is Your Time" and "Say It Isn't So."

Looking back some forty or more years, a never-modest Vallee said: "Ninety percent of the natural-voiced singers who followed in the wake of my meteoric success in radio might never have made it had I not demonstrated that the public was ready to eagerly accept crooning."

Music publishers seemed to agree. They considered Rudy's willingness to broadcast and record a song a virtual guarantee that

it would become a hit, if it had some potential. He even parlayed an obscure college march composed in 1901 into one of the top tunes of 1930. Vallee, an undergraduate at the University of Maine prior to his transfer to New Haven, introduced Maine's "Stein Song" on radio. The song quickly sold over 350,000 copies of sheet music, while Victor disposed of a half-million pressings of Vallee's rendition.

Yet, for crooners like Rudy Vallee, it was not all accolades and orchids. Certain quarters had no use for their languid lullabies or romantic roulades.

"Crooning is a degenerate form of singing and no true American would practice this base art," warned one church leader. . . . I cannot turn the dial without getting these whiners and bleaters defiling the air and crying vapid words to impossible tunes."

Three thousand members of the Boston Holy Name Society listened as Cardinal William O'Connell took to task the predominant vocal style of the late 1920s and early 1930s. "If you listen closely when you are unfortunate enough to get one of these," His Eminence observed, "you will discover the basest appeal to sex emotions in the young. They are not true love songs. They profane the name. They are ribald and revolting to true men."

The New York Singing Teachers Association endorsed the 72-year-old cardinal's criticism. "Crooning corrupts the minds and ideals of the younger generation," the group asserted at its 1932 convention. "A distorted type of singing, crooning limits the development of the vocal mechanism."

The Boston prelate's blast and the teachers' condemnation were a backhanded indication of radio's enormous popularity. The now-viable medium was fair game for insular detractors and would-be censors. The brickbats not only revealed diverse individual and collective music preferences, but listeners' unwritten right to pressure the airwaves.

If crooning was controversial, apparently radio determined to make it the center of attention. Both broadcasters and crooners capitalized on what conventional purists had labeled "a plague of saccharine slurring or callow boop-a-dooping." The dictionary gives the definition: "the deliberate restraining of the voice in order to obtain smoothness and consistent mellowness by

counting on the amplification of the microphone rather than on the normal rise and fall in the volume of the voice." However, radio singers, male or female, quickly denied—at least publicly—such identification.

Reporters asked the reigning king of the crooners, Rudy Vallee, "Are you a crooner?"

He replied, stoutly, "I am not. I have been opposed to the word for a long time."

A newcomer, Bing Crosby, who was completing a record-breaking twenty-nine weeks at the New York Paramount, stated simply, "I'm not a crooner."

Denials also came from Russ Columbo, Kate Smith, the Boswell Sisters, Morton Downey. Each declared that the cardinal could not have referred to *their* manner of singing, and continued to attract large radio audiences. The word "crooner" may have been an unfortunate choice of words, but it remained and became an accepted part of musical language, even as "the king of jazz" continued to identify Paul Whiteman. In essence, it was an adaptation to the techniques of radio broadcasting. The highly sensitive mike demanded a different mode of vocal production. Singing into the delicate carbon microphones compelled artists to use soft, almost caressing, tones lest a loud or high note shatter a transmitter tube. Vaughn DeLeath, often called the "original radio girl," sang recitals of popular songs as early as 1920 over the radiophone from Lee De Forest's experimental station. She weighed about 250 pounds, which made singing something of an ordeal in the small, telephone boothlike studio.\* Usually, there wasn't room for a piano. She sang unaccompanied, except for a ukulele which she learned to strum. Both space limitations and primitive equipment gave rise to an unprecedented intimate and easy-going vocal approach.

Thus, when the Jazz Age was ending in a sputtering whirl, CBS had hatched a large flock of songbirds: Morton Downey, Will Osborne, Bing Crosby, Kate Smith, Ruth Etting, the Boswell Sisters, Art Jarrett, and the Mills Brothers. "The crooner is here to stay," Columbia announced as it revamped its program schedules. From early evening to near midnight, the network featured one or

\*When spotted in radio and recording studios with the equally rotund Frank Munn, pundits dubbed the pair "a ton of talent."

two fifteen-minute song sessions every hour by these smooth-voiced troubadours and their female counterparts.

NBC mounted similar programs with Russ Columbo, Little Jack Little, Jack Fulton, Jane Froman, and the Pickens Sisters.

If one both crooned and led a band, a station allocated more air time. Will Osborne, leader of his own eight-piece group and a band singer with a tenor's range, broadcast thirty or sixty minutes nearly every day. The Toronto-born musician and his aggregation were first heard in 1925 over WMCA. Rather modest in an era of ballyhoo, Osborne personally was not akin to the high-powered publicity mills of the music world. Nevertheless, he recognized its value and hired a press agent. This energetic individual promoted Will Osborne as the original radio crooner and the first to deliver popular tunes through a megaphone. The two worked hard to "legitimatize" crooning.

Later, when a new edition of *Webster's Dictionary* appeared and omitted the word "crooner," Osborne and his press agent flew into a mock rage against the publishers. "They include the word 'croon' and even 'croon song.' But not 'crooner.' "

To protest the omission, Osborne sponsored an "indignation luncheon" at New York's Claremont Inn. Noteworthy practitioners of the art came to defend their profession and with the help of musicologist Sigmund Spaeth, drafted a resolution demanding recognition from the dictionary publisher.

"Crooning is a landmark in the history of American music," Osborne said to the gathering. "It marks the transition from the raucous jazz of prewar days to the sweet, inspiring music that came after the war. There is such a thing as a crooner and he can't be ignored."

Will Osborne claimed that some operatic singers were crooners, too. "When John McCormack sings such numbers as 'I Hear You Calling Me,' he is definitely and irrevocably crooning."

McCormack disagreed. He deplored the inroads of crooning. To him, it tended to warp musical tastes and offend those who still looked upon music as an art. "All you need is a cardboard megaphone and a little nerve. Then stand near a mike and fake it."

Frances Alda, with her Met days past and now singing on a fifteen-minute NBC early evening show, disassociated herself from the network's main contingent of warblers. She complained of too

many crooners, blaming the influx on commercial program advertisers "who seek to ape and to equal certain ephemeral successes which are offensive to listeners of taste and discrimination."

In 1930 Rudy Vallee wrote his autobiography *Vagabond Dreams Come True*. The book claimed Will Osborne imitated Vallee. Osborne, whose style indeed bore a remarkably similar vocal texture, sued for \$500,000, contending that Rudy held him up to ridicule. Osborne also asked for an injunction to have the book withdrawn from circulation. It was the first of a number of attention-getting, generally meritless lawsuits by or against Osborne, who, years later, remarked that he did not like the way his agent sought headlines. But he admitted the tabloids helped advance his career.

Will Osborne also wrote pop tunes, including "Beside an Open Fireplace," "S'posin'," a version of "Dry Bones," and, to capitalize on the singing rivalry with Rudy Vallee, the novelty number "I'd Like to Break the Neck of the Man Who Wrote the Stein Song." One melody incurred the wrath of rival tunesmith Edward G. Nelson, who alleged that Osborne's "On a Blue and Moonless Night" was actually his "Dirty Dishes in the Sink." The tune broke no records, but Nelson's summons did break up a broadcast. That happened Halloween afternoon in 1930.

Osborne's rendition of "My Ideal" was serenading the lunch-time crowd in the Manhattan Towers Grill. A CBS microphone picked up the midday music. Halfway through the song, a nattily dressed man stalked in. He walked up to the bandstand and pushed a paper under Osborne's nose. The startled crooner stopped singing and snarled at the intruder, who suddenly dropped the paper and fled across the dance floor.

In the confusion, the maitre d' shouted, "Hold up!"

Several diners yelled, "Grab that man."

Waiters, busboys, and guests sprinted after the man. Osborne joined them and soon held the lead. The orchestra finished its number, then dropped instruments and followed the mob.

The fleet-footed intruder reached the hotel lobby. A patrolman tried to protect him and, at the same time, calm Osborne, his band, the dining room staff, and patrons.

"This guy's a process server," the cop explained. "I'm here to help him do his job. For over a week, six men have been trying to

serve Will Osborne. Broadcast or no broadcast, we're not taking any chances." Trick or treat, the law was no lullaby to crooner Will Osborne.

But to Gene Austin, lullabies led to a pot of gold. His soft, soothing voice sold more than 86 million discs, a total that no other entertainer surpassed in the 1920s and 1930s. Austin's theme song "My Blue Heaven" alone tallied a staggering 12 million discs and provided him with the industry's first gold record. Austin also coauthored many hit songs: "Lonesome Road," "When My Sugar Walks Down the Street," "Ridin' Around in the Rain," and "How Come You Do Me Like You Do?" If he had concentrated on radio work, he might have rivaled or surpassed the popularity of Vallee. He lost out in the big crooner sweepstakes, settling for guest appearances and performing as band vocalist with Jimmie Grier on comedian Joe Penner's short-lived Cocomalt show.

Morton Downey popularized many tunes in the thirties, yet is best remembered for crooning two moon songs: "Wabash Moon" and "Carolina Moon." Paul Whiteman discovered Downey, then singing in tank town vaudeville and back street restaurants—any place where he was lucky enough to get a job. Whiteman signed him for the S.S. *Leviathan* orchestra at \$70 a week. Four years and some twenty transatlantic trips later, Downey left the Whiteman unit for vaudeville and New York nightclub appearances. Then Hollywood beckoned. He made three early "talkies": *Syncopeation*, *Mother's Boy*, and *Lucky in Love*—all easily forgotten.

In 1929 he landed an engagement at London's Cafe de Paris. One night, at the request of the song-crazed Prince of Wales, he sang "You Took Advantage of Me" eleven times. Bookings followed in Paris and Berlin. During his London sojourn, Morton Downey had sung over the BBC. The experience convinced him that his best career bet lay at a radio mike. Back in New York, he sang on several low budget WJZ fillers. Then CBS caught his act and put him under its banner. He made it big. His fan mail grew to a mountainous stack of twenty thousand or thirty thousand letters a week. Columbia got the message, too. They boosted his paycheck to a reputed \$6,000 a week, putting him in the ranks of the highest-salaried singers in the world.

In June of 1931, he inaugurated a nightly fifteen-minute series,

broadcast at 7:45 P.M. for Eastern listeners and repeated at 11:00 P.M. for Columbia's Western and Pacific Coast stations. Tony Wons, already well known as the host of his talk show *Tony's Scrapbook*, was the M.C., injecting "bits of poetry and gems of wisdom." The sponsor, Camel Cigarettes, brought Jacques Renard's orchestra from Boston to New York to accompany Downey.

CBS thought so highly of its new tenor that they included him on numerous special shows. For *Hello, Europe*, a 1932 all-star hour of typical American music beamed overseas, Downey sang "Just One More Chance," "It Happened to Me," and "Carolina Moon," and shared the podium with most of Columbia's crooning contingent and staff musicians: Kate Smith, Arthur Tracy, Freddie Rich, Howard Barlow, Toscha Seidel, the Mills Brothers, and the Boswell Sisters. At the beginning of a long and lucrative career, the high-note tenor would croon, whistle, and warble into listeners' homes for twenty-five years, thanks to the makers of cigarettes, coffee, laxatives, cosmetics, and most notably, Coca-Cola.

The Downeys and Vallees, no matter how controversial in certain disapproving circles, were enchanting a multitude of radio listeners. Their singing was natural, simple, untrained, and folksy. "They sing like that because they can't help it," *The New York Times* pointed out in an editorial. "Their style," it incorrectly predicted, "is beginning to go out of fashion. Reproving crooners is futile for singing teachers or anyone else. Crooners will soon go the way of tandem bicycles, mah jong, and midget golf."

More voices murmuring the sweet nothings of popular love songs continued to zoom to radio stardom. Arthur Tracy soon joined their ranks, but he was a bit unique. Tracy actually was a full-voiced singer who treated audiences to his own fine-toned interpretations of "Song of Songs," "I Walk Beside You," "San Antonio Rose," "Eli, Eli," and "Serenade" from *Frasquita*—often in one of six languages. Nevertheless, CBS put him on the air in the late evening slot usually reserved for budding crooners. Thus, he carried a patina of purling strains. "But, by contrast, I stood out," he says, "and never entered into the battle of the baritones."

Tracy first sang as a youngster in Philadelphia, organizing alfresco concerts in his father's grape arbor. What he earned as a newsboy and later as a stage extra went toward lessons and helped

buy Caruso records. "I used to study his records for hours. Caruso was my best teacher," he said. Tracy later worked in road companies of *Blossom Time* and *The Student Prince*, and as M.C. in a nightclub. During a New York engagement at Keith's 145th Street theater, the still unknown Tracy stopped the show. The year was 1929. "Talkies" and radio were big, but vaudeville was dying.\*

"I heard about an audition at WMCA. I mingled with a bunch of anxious kids at its Hotel McAlpin studio. When I handed my music to the piano accompanist, she said, 'Let's make it snappy.' I sang 'Ol' Man River,' but she played so fast and carelessly that she ruined the audition. To her, I was another nobody. To me, it was the chance of a lifetime."

Three months later, he auditioned again, but with a different pianist. He was hired on the spot. For a year, he sang for \$10 or \$15 a program. By his own count, he got up to sixty-six shows a week. His sponsors ranged from Adam Hats and Hires Root Beer to a furniture company and an exterminator.

"During the summer WMCA reduced its time on the air," Tracy recalled, "and I was let go. Then I ran into Frank Salt of the vaudeville team of Salt and (Jack) Pepper. He told me CBS was auditioning new singers. I won a hearing—and a job. Starting July 1931 the network gave me a trial six weeks 'to do or die.' I decided to conceal my identity, in case they dropped me. I called myself The International Balladist."

The newest CBS baritone became the latest radio sensation. Still uncertain of lasting popularity, Tracy changed his *nom de mike* to "The Street Singer of the Air." His fan mail piled up. Thousands of letters demanded his real name. Five months later, Arthur Tracy and "The Street Singer" became synonymous to his legions of listeners.

Tracy's first big commercial show was Chesterfield's *Music That Satisfies*. He took "The Sidewalks of New York" as a theme song, but it sounded too political. Al Smith had used it in campaigns for governor and president. One day, at a music publisher's, he listened to possible substitutes. They included a lilting Latin tune

\*The big stars of radio kept vaudeville alive for a few more years. By 1932 Arthur Tracy commanded bookings at \$3,000 a week, and Kate Smith, Crosby, Vallee, the Mills Brothers, and Morton Downey played the major two-a-day circuits for as much as \$6,000 a week.

composed eight years earlier by Moises Simon, a Cuban. After several bars, he knew that "Marta" was ideally suited to his romantic ballad style. English lyrics were added. Few introductory themes identified a singer faster than "Marta, rambling rose of the wildwood . . ." CBS announcer David Ross's follow-up words, "Round the corner and down your way comes the Street Singer," were superfluous.

After three or four years on the network, Arthur Tracy lost favor. (Being on the losing side of a sensational divorce suit brought by his second wife pushed his ratings down.) In 1935 he sailed for England, where he would make personal appearances and films. There he won a large and loyal following. His popularity so outpaced the States that he stayed abroad until the outbreak of World War II. Initially, the craze for crooners touched Tracy. But for a singer "taught" by Caruso, nothing less than a full-mouthed interpretation sufficed.

CBS was equally successful in launching distaff crooners. Ruth Etting, for one, combined a marvelously convincing voice with an engaging personality. Already established as a stage performer, she had appeared in several *Ziegfeld Follies*, as well as opposite Eddie Cantor in *Whoopee* and Ed Wynn in *Simple Simon*.

A blues singer, Ruth Etting popularized such songs as "Ten Cents a Dance" and "Sweet and Lovely," and successfully revived "Shine On, Harvest Moon," first introduced by Nora Bayes in 1908. Lyric writers were delighted to have her sing their verses because her enunciation was so perfect—a fact that led Irving Berlin to seek her out after hearing one of her earliest records.

She appeared on Columbia's *Majestic Radio Hour* and *Music in the Modern Manner*, and programs sponsored by Chase & Sanborn coffee, Fleischmann's yeast, and Nestle's chocolate. At the same time, she played in Warner Brothers movie shorts with Joan Blondell, Donald Cook, Evelyn Knapp, and Humphrey Bogart.

At the close of the 1930s, Ruth Etting retired at 42 to a ranch near Colorado Springs with her accompanist-second husband Myrl Alderman. She attempted a comeback on two occasions. In 1947 Rudy Vallee signed her for appearances on his Philip Morris show. That led to a Monday-through-Friday evening program over New York's WHN. It lasted a season. Eight years later, MGM filmed her life story *Love Me or Leave Me*, with Doris Day as Ruth. James

Cagney played her first husband Moe "The Gimp" Snyder, who shot Alderman over his attentions to Ruth. The motion picture score revived many songs closely identified with her: "It All Depends on You," "Mean to Me," "At Sundown," and the title song. Nevertheless, in the 1950s, few people remembered Ruth Etting. The melodies lingered on and endured quite nicely, but the radio torch singer with the clear diction failed to impress a new generation.

Mildred Bailey held a much-deserved niche in the feminine annals, too. An outstanding singer of the blues and jazz ballad, she was especially adept in phrasing and interpretation. Radio engineers described her microphone technique as nearly perfect. When Mildred sang, it seemed effortless. She "pointed" to the mike and rarely moved, gesticulated, or pulled away.

Born Mildred Rinker (her brother was Al Rinker of Paul Whiteman's Rhythm Boys), she plugged songs in a Seattle, Wash., store. While singing in Los Angeles, Paul Whiteman heard her. As a member of his aggregation, she was one of the country's first female band vocalists. Her best work came later with Red Norvo and Benny Goodman on the *Camel Caravan*. She reputedly inspired Hoagy Carmichael to write "Ol' Rockin' Chair," a tune that fit her sweet, small voice as well as her large frame.

Annette Hanshaw had a brief but memorable career. Her contralto registered as a mixture of blues à la Mildred Bailey and "scat" singing in the vein of Helen (boop-boop-a-doop) Kane. Annette's gentle, subtle voice was discovered by Herman Rose of Pathé-Perfect Records. He heard her demonstrating songs in a Westchester music store. Rose asked Annette's father to let the 15-year-old girl make a test recording. Six weeks later, she waxed her first commercial disc "Black Bottom," one of the biggest hits of the roaring twenties.

Annette turned out hundreds of records, many under such bland pseudonyms as Gay Ellis, Patsy Young, and Dot Dare. Accompanied in studios by many up-and-coming musicians, including Benny Goodman and Jimmy Dorsey, she cut only one record with another singer. It was Irving Berlin's 1932 hit "Say It Isn't So," with Morton Downey and Harry "Singin' Sam" Frankel.

Radio appearances came in the wake of her recording success. *The Eveready Hour* and Clicquot Club Eskimos welcomed her

guest appearances. In 1932 she achieved coast-to-coast prominence as a blues crooner on the Maxwell House *Show Boat*. Basically shy and frequently deterred by a microphone and an audience, she retired at the age of 26 when the continuance of a career threatened her health.

The Boswell girls—Connie, Martha, and Vet—were reared in a New Orleans household steeped in classical music. Both parents were musicians, and the sisters learned to play the piano, cello, and violin—a rather staid instrumental trio compared to their future endeavors.

An extended business trip by their father started the Boswells on a professional career. His train had hardly pulled out, when they took up two of the most popular instruments of the 1920s. Connie reached for a saxophone while Vet chose a banjo. Martha, however, remained at the piano. Blues soon replaced Brahms. The Boswells discovered modern rhythms, singing the tunes they played. Before long, New Orleans took notice of the sisters—a trio that could play jazz, harmonize, and even write songs.

Station WDSU first put them at a mike. They toured the Midwest in 1928, then settled on the West Coast where, from Los Angeles, they broadcast nationally on *California Melodies*. In 1931 CBS brought them to New York, the capital of crooning. They frequently teamed with Bing Crosby on radio (*The Woodbury Hour*), on records (“Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries”), and in films (*The Big Broadcast of 1932*). When Vet and Martha married and retired, Connie as a solo performer went on to become a highly sought-after vocalist, especially for Bing’s *Kraft Music Hall*.

Crosby’s top-rated radio shows, enormously successful motion pictures, and best-selling Decca records carried crooning to a plateau of mass acceptance and solid respectability, not to mention lasting popularity. Gifted with a sincere and intimate style, plus a down-to-earth personality, Bing sang in an effortless, casual manner. “He has a voice of remarkable range,” noted the *BBC Radio Times* in 1937, “is both a tenor and a baritone, can both ‘sort of shout’ a fast swing number and croon a slow sentimental tune, and is capable of an impeccable ‘straight’ rendering of a Robeson spiritual.”

Like Morton Downey, Crosby early in his career had joined Paul Whiteman who heard Bing and his Gonzaga College buddy Al

Rinker as a singing team in a West Coast theater. Whiteman added pianist Harry Barris and called them the Rhythm Boys. Their recording of "Mississippi Mud" won wide acclaim among the college set. After appearing with Whiteman in the 1930 film *The King of Jazz*, the trio left his band to perform with Gus Arnheim at the Cocoanut Grove in Los Angeles. Bing soon ventured into solo assignments, including a series of comedy shorts for movie-maker Mack Sennett. Brunswick Records put him under contract, and he waxed such ballads as "Just One More Chance," "I'm Through With Love," and "I Found a Million-Dollar Baby"—ideally suited to his enchanting intonation.

Radio had shown little interest in his voice. But one afternoon NBC vice president John F. Royal and Bill McCaffrey, a booking agent, were walking along Broadway. They heard a song coming out of a record shop door.

"That's a great record," Royal said. "I wonder who's singing?"

"Bing Crosby," replied McCaffrey.

"I better get him for the network," added Royal.

NBC wanted Bing Crosby on a sustaining basis at no more than a few hundred dollars a week. Crosby's shrewd lawyer demanded a hefty \$2,000, take it or leave it.

CBS learned of NBC's interest in Bing. But it took Paley to put the microphonic gears in motion. He heard Crosby's voice blaring from a portable record player on an ocean liner bound for Europe. A friend on deck was playing "I Surrender, Dear" over and over. Paley, curious to know the name of the vocalist, stopped the machine. Beneath bandleader Gus Arnheim's name, in very small letters, the label read "Chorus—Bing Crosby." Paley immediately sent a radiogram to CBS in New York, urging that Crosby be signed.

"When I got home some weeks later," Paley related, "I asked what had happened. The answer was 'Nothing.' The prevailing opinion had pegged Crosby as a rather unpredictable young fellow, unlikely to fit in with strict broadcast schedules. So the matter had been dropped. I didn't care nearly so much about how this young man observed the calendar as I did about his voice. I told the network to get moving." Crosby signed with CBS for about \$1,000 a week, plus a major buildup in theaters and films.

On September 2, 1931, announcer Harry Von Zell introduced

the husky-sounding crooner whose radio debut had been delayed because of severe laryngitis. The whole country started talking about Bing Crosby. Every entertainment medium beckoned. For seven straight months, day and night, he sang at the New York Paramount, as well as at benefit performances and on recordings. Singing such long hours, he developed nodes on his vocal cords. Two weeks' rest cured his raspy hoarseness, but his voice thereafter fell a tone or so lower to a more baritone sound. All in all, a singularly effective mechanism in rendering the period's lush ballads and romantic laments.

While NBC failed to sign Crosby, it stumbled upon another voice remarkably similar to Bing's in style and delivery. Just four weeks before he broadcast on CBS, the manager of a young unknown baritone called on John Royal.

"He was a bloody bore," Royal says, "and I threw him out because he was so arrogant. But when Crosby signed with Columbia, I said to Phillips Carlin, 'Phil, go and get that fellow we tossed out and book his man.'"

NBC put him in front of its tobacco can-shaped condenser mike three times a week, and gave him a major buildup. That was the start of Russ Columbo, and the so-called battle of the baritones (in turn, inspiring the song "Crosby, Columbo, and Vallee").

This counterattraction to Crosby had a short but meteoric career. A violinist, he had toured with an orchestra before he was 20. He mixed singing with violin playing, and soon had vocal engagements at hotels in Los Angeles. Because he bore a strong resemblance to the late Rudolph Valentino, Columbo picked up small nonsinging parts in such pictures as *The Wolf Song* with Lupe Velez and *The Texan* with Gary Cooper.

Then he organized his own orchestra, playing at Hollywood nightclubs, including his own, The Pyramid. Composer Con Conrad caught his act and urged him to join the crooner sweepstakes in New York. NBC gave Russ Columbo a month's trial, which was not an unusual procedure for unknown radio singers. The popularity of Crosby boosted Columbo's appeal, and the network signed him to a year's contract. He cut dozens of records, including his own compositions: "You Call It Madness; But I Call It Love," "Is It Love?" and "Now I Know It's Love." His song

writing and band-leading talents, plus exceptional good looks, put him a notch or two above Crosby in those departments.

But he was restless. He again pursued film stardom. This time, as a nationally known singer, he won leading roles in Walter Winchell's *Broadway Through a Keyhole* and *Moulin Rouge*. In September 1934 he completed *Wake Up and Dream* for Universal. Relaxing at the home of Hollywood photographer Lansing Brown, he talked about the film's forthcoming premiere. Examining his friend's collection of guns, he noticed an old Civil War pistol. Brown picked it up, pulled back the trigger, and heard it click several times. Then Brown lit a cigarette and unconsciously placed the smoking match in the percussion pin. Once again, he pulled the trigger. In a flash, the match ignited a charge of powder long hidden in the Civil War piece. There was an explosion. A bullet sped across the room, ricocheting off a table where Columbo sat. It hit the 26-year-old singer above the left eye and lodged in his brain. He lived for six hours.

To add to the tragedy, two days earlier Columbo's 70-year-old mother had suffered a heart attack. Her family withheld the news of Russ's death to spare her life. Mrs. Columbo, however, lived on and on. For ten years, word of her son's accident was kept from the bedridden and partially blind woman. She died in 1944, believing he was alive and successful as a singer and actor in England. The family even wrote her letters signed "Russ."

By the time of Columbo's tragic death, crooners competed with newer audio fare and fads. Comedy plus music, or vice-versa, built around a major comedian or singer, now crowded the dial. These all-star, general variety shows filled an hour or two of air time nearly every night.

A gradual westward trek to Hollywood's film factories by a number of radio headliners including Crosby, Vallee, Jack Benny, and Eddie Cantor also de-emphasized broadcasts of pure and simple singing. Hundreds of motion picture players from the Gables and Crawfords to the Gabby Hayeses and Una O'Connors began to augment their studio assignments with radio appearances.

By no means did crooning fade out. By the end of the decade, every dictionary, even *Webster's*, defined "crooner." The mantle woven and worn by the Columbos and Crosbys was now shared by

a newer, larger, and perhaps more versatile contingent. Jack Smith, Phil Regan, Billie Holliday, Ralph Kirberry, Dick Powell, Lee Wiley, The Ink Spots, and Buddy Rogers waxed well on the momentum engendered at a carbon or condenser mike by earlier warblers.

Genuinely gifted and primed for radio's center stage were three youthful troubadors. Each first came into the limelight crooning. But all three—Frank Parker, Kenny Baker, and Lanny Ross—exited with high grades for venturing successfully into more serious music.

Frank Parker danced and sang in the chorus of *Little Nellie Kelly* and *No, No, Nanette* prior to his first radio job as a last minute fill-in vocalist on a 1926 program with Hope Hampton. But not until Emile Côté formed his Four Bachelors radio quartet did Parker have a full-time singing assignment. Later he replaced James Melton as first tenor with the Revelers Quartet. He advanced to solo status with the A & P Gypsies, and on *Gulf Headliners*, *Cities Service Concert*, the *Jack Benny Program*, and his own shows. He earned as much as \$3,000 a week. When Benny took his entire radio cast from New York to the West Coast for film assignments, Frank Parker went along, and even made several movies of his own. Few programs outdrew Jack Benny, and Parker had this coveted spot for a couple of seasons. Then he joined a succession of other radio headliners: Shep Fields, Burns & Allen, and Paul Whiteman.

As audiences turned to the crop of young baritones of the 1940s, his career ebbed. Frank entered into nonsinging enterprises: a Miami nightclub and a transcription business. By 1950 both had failed. The once-affluent songster was broke and without much hope of getting back into show business. No one wanted to take him on. All thought he was past the point of holding an audience—all, that is, except Arthur Godfrey.

They first met about 1938. Godfrey was on a Washington station when Frank, making his debut with the Chicago Opera Company, came to the capital to sing Alfredo in *Traviata*. Over the air, Arthur talked about Frank Parker and the opera. He kept promoting the tenor so much that the house sold out.

When in 1940 Arthur Godfrey came to CBS in New York, Frank endeavored to repay him. He introduced the relatively

unknown disc jockey to a number of key network people. "They liked him, and it cemented a nice friendship," Parker later said. "He never forgot."

A decade later, when 47-year-old Frank Parker started out afresh, he asked Godfrey for a job on one of his programs. "Come on for a guest appearance Wednesday night," he said. Parker did. The following week Godfrey told him to come back, and Parker remained on Godfrey's CBS radio and TV shows through the 1950s.

He caught on with younger listeners and was remembered by the older members of his audience. His vigorous, straightforward style, especially pronounced in duets with soprano Marion Marlowe, helped make *Godfrey and His Friends* an outstanding source of both popular and light classical music. And perhaps Frank Parker's voice even was a bit more controlled and mellow than his heady days as a performer on *Rippling Rhythm Revue* and *Hollywood Hotel*.

A singer who could deliver a lilting yet intimate phrase to ballads, Kenny Baker brought sincerity to everything he did. He aspired to the place in America's musical affection once held by John McCormack. Radio poll after radio poll from 1937 to the mid-1940s rated him high, but always as a singer of popular music. Top honors among classical interpreters always seemed to elude him by a grace note or two.

Kenny Baker first sang on a fifteen-minute sustainer at Station KFOX, Long Beach, Calif., while a music major at nearby Long Beach Junior College. When an earthquake in 1933 virtually leveled the campus, Baker quit school to sing full time. A tenor, he sang with trios, quartets, and large choruses—work that included nine weeks at the newly opened Biltmore Bowl in Los Angeles, and occasional jobs at movie studios as a background singer and dubbed-in "ghost" voice.

He had entered the preliminaries of the *Atwater Kent Radio Auditions*, finishing no better than second in the Long Beach district. Although he had lost faith in such competitions, his mother talked him into entering bandleader Eddy Duchin's Texaco radio contest *Going Places*. Baker was half-way through playing a small part in Lawrence Tibbett's film *Metropolitan* when Texaco called him for an audition. He sang, and was told to enter

the semifinals the next day. To the dismay of the vocal director of Fox Studios, which was making the film, Baker got an hour's leave of absence to compete in the semifinals. He advanced to the finals and won.

The Texaco competition in 1935 provided Kenny Baker with his first coast-to-coast broadcast, plus a week with Duchin at the popular Coconut Grove. He scored an immediate hit, and signed for an additional two or three weeks. Singing in Hollywood with the bands of Eddy Duchin and Ozzie Nelson led to a film role in Mervyn LeRoy's *King of Burlesque*. Another big break followed. Jack Benny asked him to replace Frank Parker. Kenny stayed with Benny's Jello program for four years. In 1940 he signed on as singer with Fred Allen, Benny's rival in the radio comedy ranks. (Upcoming tenor Dennis Day, in turn, filled Kenny's vocal slot with Jack Benny.)

Kenny Baker worked steadily in many fields. He sang and acted in more than a dozen motion pictures, including *The King and the Chorus Girl*, *Goldwyn Follies*, *Mr. Dodd Takes the Air*, *The Harvey Girls*, and *A Day at the Circus*. His performance as Nanki-Poo in the English-made *Mikado* has best stood the test of time. He starred on Broadway in the smash hit *One Touch of Venus* with Mary Martin. He introduced on radio a number of better than average songs: "South of the Border," "Remember Me," "Moon of Manakoora," and "Tippy Tippy Tin." Only Bing Crosby outshone Kenny Baker as a versatile, widely appealing singer.

Compared to the host of radio singers who catapulted to fame overnight, the growth of Lanny Ross was slower and perhaps more solid. He crooned on the Maxwell House *Show Boat*, but gave increasing prominence to his lyric tenor capabilities on this series and such later programs as *Hollywood Mardi Gras*, *Memory Lane*, and *Your Hit Parade*. He, too, strived to emulate the style of John McCormack, with whom he briefly studied. His radio work was supplemented by concert tours and appearances at Carnegie Hall and Town Hall.

Lanny wanted to be a lawyer, possibly for a radio network. After graduation from Yale in 1928, where he sang in the glee club and set track records, he entered Columbia Law School. He supported himself with a singing talent that, at first, he considered negligible. As a member of the Yale Whiffenpoofs, he had made a

few WJZ radio appearances for a coal company. After harmonizing on the "Whiffenpoof Song," the spiritual "I Got Shoes," and one or two other tunes for about three weeks, the group was fired. They just didn't know any more songs.

Graduate student Lanny Ross went on to part-time radio jobs at \$22 per broadcast. A solo spot with the *Raybestos Twins*—Al Bernard and Billy Beard—came his way. He joined these two old vaudevillians who needed a young voice to croon "Pagan Love Song" and other current tunes to contrast with their hoary renditions of "I Want to Meander in the Meadow" and "Then We Canoodle-oodle Along." Billed as the Troubadour of the Moon, Lanny soon had his own Saturday night show, albeit at 11:00 p.m. NBC program director Bertha Brainard found him a lasting theme song, the 1925 hit "Moonlight and Roses." Just as he got his law degree, and a job offer at \$2,500 a year, Best Foods signed him for a 1931 summer series at four times that salary. As the Hellman Mayonnaise Troubadour, his popularity grew.

That season, Russ Columbo was singing for Maxwell House Coffee, a General Foods account. The sponsor asked Lanny if he would like to be on the show.

"Fine," he said, "but don't you already have that baritone Russ Columbo. I just saw a photo of him standing on a scale with his fan mail, and the bags of letters outweighed him. You can't possibly want me to take his place."

The account executive replied: "That picture was a fake. We've had eleven letters, all saying how awful he is. We want you to replace him."

Five days a week Lanny signed on the air with "Let's Have Another Cup o' Coffee"—the Maxwell House Coffee theme—followed by as many other songs he could fit into the fifteen-minute show.

"Broadcasting was changing the music publishing business," he recalled. "In the late 1920s, I sometimes bought exclusive rights to a new song. By 1932, as a singer sponsored by a major company, I was pursued by song pluggers who virtually begged me to sing their newest tune. If listeners heard a number by Crosby on his Woodbury show or by Vallee on the Fleischmann Hour, it had tremendous money-making prospects. At the same time, audiences wanted music that had a familiar ring."

An entire program of original radio music rarely succeeded. Ivory Soap tried it with a weekly full-hour musical comedy, *The Gibson Family*, starring baritone Conrad Thibault and conductor Don Voorhees. Broadway composers Arthur Schwartz and Howard Dietz collaborated on the original songs—no mean task—creating almost instantaneously appropriate and appealing songs. The show was recognized as a milestone in commercial programming, but it stayed on the air a comparatively short time.

Lanny's *Show Boat*, however, sailed on to a solid five-year run, with its tenor star charting more and more of its course. Ross played such an integral role in *Show Boat* that his departure for Hollywood (and the lead in *Melody in Spring* with Ann Southern) was actually written into the script. The romantic-looking radio idol spent eight weeks on the West Coast. The script "kept him" faithful to *Show Boat* sweetheart Mary Lou, played by soprano Muriel Wilson. Each week Lanny would telephone Mary Lou and then sing by wire from California. Don Voorhees' orchestra in New York played the accompaniment.

"I heard Don's music through earphones," Ross explained. "He played a brief introduction to my number and I'd start to sing. Between points 3,000 miles apart, there's roughly a half-second time lag. As a result, by the time my voice reached New York for rebroadcast, I had fallen behind the music, so Don would slow down a bit and I'd catch up. But only for a second or two. Again, my voice lagged a fraction. Then he'd go slower. Totally annoyed, I pulled off the earphones and just sang. Somehow or other, the orchestra would have to follow me. We did two more broadcasts under those conditions. For the fourth, the sponsor finally hired a small orchestra in Hollywood and that eliminated the cross-country time lag."

A similar experience in television a dozen years later proved Lanny could roll with the electronic punches. For the premiere of his *Swift Show*—the medium's first regularly scheduled musical program—Lanny sang accompanied by an instrumental recording. Television in 1947 was so new that the musicians union could not make up its mind on performance fees. At the last minute, the word went out: no "live" musicians on TV.

Audience poll after audience poll voted Lanny Ross one of the best singers of popular songs. But like Frank Parker and Kenny

Baker, he, too, never quite filled the shoes of that paragon of all tenors, John McCormack.

Crooning maintained its freshness and appeal throughout most of the 1930s. But as war clouds gathered, new singers in a slightly different key emerged. Most came from the swing bands that toured the country, played long engagements at big city hotels, cut an increasing number of Bluebird and Okeh discs, and plugged into more and more radio pickups. Vaughn Monroe, Jo Stafford, Frank Sinatra, Mel Torme, Connie Haines, Dinah Shore, Dick Haymes, and Perry Como, among others, kept the home-front fires of the forties burning brightly. They won the hearts, and not infrequently the souls, of teenage bobby-soxers and far-flung GIs.

A decade earlier, crooners already had gained entrance into high circles, even the White House. At the height of the Depression, President Hoover invited Rudy Vallee to Washington.

"If you can sing a song that would make people forget their troubles, I'll give you a medal," the president said to the crooner as the two stood amid a large gathering of aides and press in the oval office of the White House.

Vallee took the cue and began to sing. But the words that poured forth brought only a frown to the weary president's face. What Rudy sang that bleak day in 1932 was not "Betty Coed" or "Your Time Is My Time," but "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"

The country and crooners survived.



## The Met and the Mike

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In 1910 a 13-year-old boy living in Manhattan heard about a wireless radio experiment at the Metropolitan Opera House on 39th Street. He had shown an aptitude for music, and his voice was good enough to secure him a singing job at a local church. He also had won a couple of parts in musical productions at school, and considered himself a bit of an opera buff. Hour after hour, he cranked up the family phonograph to listen to Caruso and Melba. Occasionally, when he had extra money, he often spent it for a seat at the Met, or the Manhattan Opera.

Milton Cross knew a great deal more about the works of Verdi and Wagner than of the tinkering of Fessenden and De Forest, but in the first dozen or more years of the twentieth century, few people had paid much attention to sound transmitted over the air. Even among the most avid opera fans in and about New York, little hope was placed in the efforts to bring the great voices of the Met directly into American homes. But that winter in 1910, Lee De Forest was determined to do so.

After several attempts, he persuaded general manager Guilo Gatti-Casazza to allow Enrico Caruso and Emmy Destin to sing into his radio telephone equipment—directly from the Met stage during a performance. Gatti reluctantly agreed to a microphone or two being placed within the hallowed chamber. On January 13, 1910, De Forest actually picked up the first performance of a Metropolitan Opera production, *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

The "Siciliana" aria, written to be sung from backstage at the rise of the curtain, allowed De Forest to place the mike close up. It fully captured Caruso's magnificent voice, but the voices of the principals on stage were too far from the microphone that was suspended overhead by means of a bamboo fishing pole. A mike placed in the footlights proved equally ineffective.

Listeners at that radio performance numbered only a handful of De Forest's coworkers, several of the opera house staff, and perhaps a score of wireless operators and "hams." They heard mostly distorted squeaks and static that mutilated the brilliant performances of Caruso and his coartists. Less than an aural success, the broadcast managed only to win Gatti's swift veto of any such future endeavors. Furthermore, he feared radio would reduce the attendance at the Met.

More than twenty-two years would pass before radio returned to 39th Street, and by that time, tenor Milton Cross would have given up his pursuit of a singing career. Instead, he had become one of radio's foremost announcers and music commentators along with a number of other early announcers who had begun their careers as singers: Graham McNamee, Ford Bond, Gene Hamilton, Alois Havrilla, Tiny Ruffner, Kelvin Keech, Robert Waldrop, and Harry Von Zell.

Nevertheless, only the rise and development of a new industry could have persuaded Milton Cross to give up singing. He had sung all through high school. He had studied at the Damrosch Institute of Musical Art before it became Juilliard, toured with the Paulist Choristers, and held singing jobs at the First Presbyterian Church of New York City and the Progressive Synagogue in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Then, in 1921, he happened to visit a friend who was an electrical engineer, and had strung wires all about his living quarters. On a table lay a crystal set and headphone. Fascinated by the apparatus, Milton put on the headgear while his friend tuned up the equipment. They picked up only bits of music and weather observations from WJZ and WOR, but Milton was so impressed by his "discovery" of the wireless that he talked about little else to his pals and family. Finally they told him to quit talking about radio and go on it!

Milton auditioned at WJZ in Newark. The station manager liked his voice and gave him a half hour to sing ballads. His rendition of "Ave Maria" and "Mother o' Mine" won special praise from wireless fans, as well as from his accompanist Lillian Fowler who, not long after, became his wife.

WJZ manager-announcer Thomas Cowan wanted to hire Cross as an all-around assistant and fill-in announcer. But Milton wanted a singing job, and was convinced that if he accepted Cowan's offer he would lose out on concert work. Still, he soon discovered that more and more of his musical cohorts were appearing on radio as a means to other careers. He accepted Cowan's offer, which began with reading daily market reports and children's stories, only occasionally announcing musical programs, and even less frequently, singing.

In 1923 he acted as host on the first broadcast from the Manhattan Opera House, an aspiring rival to the Met. Gradually, at his own preference, he devoted more and more time to broadcasting concert music. Milton spent hours in the New York Public Library piecing out scores, comparing lyrics, and studying the lives of composers. His musical training, experience, and research prepared him for bigger things to come.

When NBC absorbed WJZ, Cross became familiar to listeners the nation over as the voice introducing Walter Dämrosch's concerts, as well as the *Sylvania Foresters* and A & P Gypsies. In 1929 he received a gold medal for diction in radio announcing. It was the first such award given by the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Meanwhile, Gatti continued to keep the Met doors closed to radio. "Opera is an art that must be seen as well as heard," he repeated again and again. He also believed that stations still lacked the equipment for transmitting the voices of his company directly from the Met stage. "There's no space for a control room, microphone, and all that paraphernalia without blocking the view of the audience."

Operatic selections, as well as complete operas, however, were reaching radio listeners. As early as November 1921, Westinghouse opened KYW Chicago with Mary Garden and the Chicago Civic Opera. The daily program schedule that winter consisted of opera

performances and little else. In New York, a year later, WEAF broadcast *Aida* with Rosa and Carmela Ponselle, Leon Rothier, and Maestro Giuseppe Bamboschek. AT&T picked up highlights of this opera, not from the Met, but from the Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx during an Armistice Day musical festival attended by 15,000. Perhaps ten times that number heard the opera "clear and without distortion" over wireless sets. No rehearsal at the armory had been possible, but the day before, WEAF had tested acoustics with a half-dozen canaries to make sure the amplifier would catch even the elusive, birdlike notes of Rosa and her sister.

An early attempt at on-stage opera came about in February 1923. The Wagnerian Opera Company with Friedrich Schorr and Elsa Alsen found itself in financial straits during an engagement at the Manhattan Opera House. Paying a modest fee to the Wagnerians, WJZ gained permission to broadcast *The Flying Dutchman*. The Saturday pickup reportedly caused a Monday morning rush for tickets. Broadcasts were repeated in subsequent seasons.

By the mid-1920s opera originating from a station studio was not unusual. WGBS, a small transmitter operated by Gimbel Brothers stores in New York, presented fifteen operas during the 1924-25 season. WEAF's thrust into finer music led to the establishment of in-house groups: the WEAF (later National) Grand Opera and the WEAF Light Opera companies. Cesare Sodero directed both units. Musical director for Edison Records for twelve years, he had accompanied many leading singers. For four seasons Sodero directed the Aborn English Grand Opera Company, and as associate conductor of the Chicago Civic Opera, he gave the first performance in America of Puccini's *Girl of the Golden West*.

By September 1927 he had adapted thirty light and fifty grand operas for radio, including a condensed *Lobengrin* that took eleven days to cut to a one-hour broadcast. Sodero worked with a stopwatch, timing each segment to fit the sixty-minute slot. If the first adaptation ran over, he started at the beginning and again revised the entire production.

"Having learned an opera in its entirety, it is exceedingly difficult to attempt to sing it in parts," he pointed out. "Moreover, the minds of the listeners, not swayed by the visual beauty of the scene, are acute and attentive to the music alone."

During the 1927-28 season Sodero and the Grand Opera Company presented thirty-nine operas in tabloid form, representing twenty-five composers and all except *Martha* in the original language (viz., twenty-two Italian, nine French, four German, and four English).

The Light Opera Company frequently sang Gilbert and Sullivan, perhaps helping to stir new interest in comic opera.

In 1929 six Puccini operas, heard for the first time on radio because of copyright restrictions, brought such Met artists as Frances Alda, Pasquale Amato, Mario Chamlee, and Merle Alcock to the mike in cameo versions sponsored by the American Radiator Company. More a concert of operatic music than a performance of an opera, the series made little attempt at a coherent account of Puccini's works. The New York *Sun* complained of a "general cramping" of voices around one microphone placed in a studio that was too confining.

In 1930 RCA Victor sponsored opera in English. The productions used both a singing cast and a speaking cast—"so that audiences will not only be able to understand what is sung but also will be able to catch the atmosphere and swift movements of the melodramatic story." The series' *Faust* lined up Editha Fleischer as Marguerite, Armando Tokatyan as Faust, and Léon Rothier as Mephistopheles—all from the Met. In speaking roles, NBC cast staff performers Rosalind Green, Allyn Joslyn, and Charles Warburton.

An opera broadcast from Europe occasionally reached American shores. On Good Friday, 1925, from the Berlin State Opera House, a German station beamed *Parsifal* overseas. Max von Schillings conducted and Walther Kirchoff sang the lead. Later, over its networks that linked the continent, NBC periodically rebroadcast operas from Europe. For example, on March 19, 1930, *Fidelio*, conducted by Fritz Busch and shortwaved from Dresden, received praise in spite of a curtailment due to bad atmospheric conditions.

Nevertheless, a good many listeners still waited for complete performances direct from the stage of a major U.S. opera house. An NBC station in Chicago took on the assignment. In 1927 the Chicago Civic Opera agreed to the first national hookup over twenty-two stations. These broadcasts were not complete operas,

but rather only one or two acts such as the third act "Garden Scene" from *Faust* with Edith Mason, Maria Claessena, Charles Hackett, and Vanni Marcoux. The technical logistics were formidable: fifteen microphones, including seven in the footlights, three in the pit, and two in the overhead flies. Later on, a parabolic mike, resembling a huge searchlight, was added to pick up large ensembles—usually the chorus—outside the range of stationary mikes and with better balance.

NBC sent Milton Cross to Chicago to summarize the plots and introduce the cast. While delivering his commentary, Cross stationed himself at a mike in the auditorium cellar. Only a series of signals from an engineer indicated what was happening on stage when the curtain went up or down. The first season's broadcasts came off without incident. The following year NBC expanded the hookups, inadvertently giving Milton Cross one of his most disquieting assignments. It happened between the acts of *Trovatore*.

"I had completed narrating the plot and was waiting for the curtain to go up on the scene I'd just described," Cross recalled. "Instead, the curtain went up on Samuel Insull, chief backer of the Chicago Opera. Word had come through from New York that Insull was going to read the company's annual report, but the network would not broadcast it. Nervously I reviewed once more the story of the opera. Fortunately, I had grabbed a tour list of the opera company before I went on. I managed to use up time by describing each of the towns to be visited . . . a total of thirty-five minutes! Well, this will be my last day on radio, I thought, at the end of the ordeal. I'll be fired for sure. But the experience drew widespread attention, including a favorable editorial in the *New York Herald-Tribune*."

Inevitably, listeners began to question the antiradio policy at the Met. More than two-thirds of its roster of artists, from Alda down the alphabetical line to Whitehill, had been heard individually on the air.

In 1930, NBC president Merlin H. Aylesworth took steps to correct the situation. He pursued and wooed Metropolitan's manager, Gatti. Gatti remained adamant; radio could not properly pick up a performance from his stage, he contended. But he was also becoming aware that attendance at the Met had diminished following the stock market crash of 1929. The network's fees would

supply much needed additional income. Gatti agreed to hear a test broadcast.

NBC took no chances; it installed seventeen carefully placed microphones in the house. The trial run was a convincing success. Gatti approved the installation of mikes and wires, which took up almost a year. Still NBC did not have a contract with the Met. Aylesworth had reason to be "terribly upset" when Paul Cravath, a member of the boards of both NBC and the Metropolitan, telephoned him from Paris.

"I'm sorry to tell you, Deac," Cravath reported, "that Otto Kahn's brother is here and has practically closed a deal with Paley and CBS." He apparently had sensed the dejection in Aylesworth's voice when he added, "I could hold off the deal until I return."

A few days after his arrival in New York, Aylesworth had breakfast with him. "What did Bill Paley agree to pay for the first year of opera?" he asked.

Cravath would not tell him.

"I had previously offered \$60,000," Aylesworth said later, "so I knew CBS had gone higher. I now mentioned the sum of \$110,000."

"That's quite liberal," his host replied.

He decided to shoot an arrow into the dark. "I'll bid \$122,000."

Cravath beamed. "Now I can tell you, Deac. Paley bid \$120,000."

As a final test NBC transmitted by wire a Met rehearsal of *Madame Butterfly* to the 711 Fifth Avenue studios where Deems Taylor and Walter Damrosch listened. It gained authoritative commendations from the two savants.

"I had not thought it possible," Damrosch remarked, "to reproduce over the radio such harmonious distribution of what is going on in the orchestra and on the stage. The beauty of tone and the individuality of the voices are absolutely reproduced."

Thus, on Christmas afternoon, 1931, after more than twenty-one years, radio returned to the Met. The great gold curtain parted for a complete performance in English of the traditional holiday story *Hansel and Gretel*. Milton Cross, Deems Taylor, and two engineers handled the "remote" over the combined Red and Blue networks. Before conductor Karl Riedel stepped to the podium,

Taylor delivered a brief biography of composer Humperdinck. During the opera itself, he frequently broke in with a running account of on-stage action. Both Taylor and Cross sat on high stools in the cloakroom of Box 44, peering over a hodgepodge of coils, tubes, and engineers' heads.

Gatti's initial concern remained with box office receipts, not the day's broadcast. The Depression had continued to drain much of the Met's treasury. For the first time in the twenty-three years of Gatti's reign, the company was operating at a loss. The rotund impresario shuttled nervously from his lookout in the wings to his office radio. By the final scene of *Hansel and Gretel*, he had done more listening than looking. When the principals—Queena Mario, Editha Fleischer, Dorothee Manski, Henrietta Wakefield, and Gustav Schultzenorf—came off stage, they hurried to his quarters to listen outside his door. Curious stagehands left their posts and joined them. When the curtain fell one hour and forty minutes later, cast and crew agreed that NBC had done a marvelous thing. Gatti conceded that the Met had “abided the experience in fine fettle.”

Ecstatic reviews followed. Critics called the broadcast “a beautiful Christmas gift to music lovers.” One reviewer noted that “eloquence of language is lacking when it comes to . . . describing the praise I feel is due the Metropolitan.”

Thousands of letters poured in from all parts of the country. People who had never heard opera before talked about it. “We all agreed it was the best program we have ever been privileged to hear over the air,” wrote a listener in Indianapolis. “As I listened, it created a desire to see with my own eyes the action of the stage. I will be over soon to sit before the footlights.”

Opera had found a new audience. But was it destined to maintain this early surge of interest? Requests for tickets from far-off places were a favorable sign. A Pennsylvania housewife wrote: “We voted to set aside a small sum each week to devote to a trip to New York to see and hear opera in the Metropolitan Opera House.”

NBC broadcast the first Saturday opera the day after Christmas when Rosa Ponselle sang *Norma*. On another Saturday, a woman rushed up to the box office window and said she wanted a ticket for the performance. The seller informed her that the matinee was

half over. "Yes, I know," she replied. "I heard the first two acts on the radio. Now I want to see the rest of the show. Hurry, give me a ticket."

The only complaints received by the Met and NBC concerned Deems Taylor's intrusive commentary during the nonsinging portions of the opera. "Deems talked over the music, but not over the singers," Milton Cross pointed out. "The phone calls, the letters we received! One fellow complained about some idiot who kept talking during the performance. It taught us never to condescend to our listeners, that they were really interested in music."

On Thanksgiving Day, 1932, NBC opened the second broadcast season with *Lakmé* sung by Lily Pons, Gladys Swarthout, and Giovanni Martinelli. The newly developed ribbon or "velocity" microphone replaced the condenser type for the first time and captured a higher degree of vocal fidelity. These ultrasensitive mikes placed in the footlights, wings, and ceiling also picked up extraneous noises. But this only added a touch of realism to the broadcasts. One listener wrote to complain about the coughing in Mimi's death scene, not aware that it was part of the script, and not an inconsiderate stagehand.

During the first few years of Met broadcasts, Milton Cross alone filled air time during intermissions, often adlibbing through as many as twenty matinees. He had developed a variety of techniques for making his audience see the action as he narrated each scene in advance. But sometimes even a seasoned commentator like Cross could make a few flubs, such as on the day he intended to ask listeners to stay tuned for the news. What came over the air instead was, "stay stewed for the nudes."

For forty-three years Cross intoned, "Texaco presents the Metropolitan Opera," then briefed his listeners on the story, and gave correct pronunciation of the cast's and conductor's names.\* On a broadcast of *Aida* during the 1937-38 season, he described Rose Bampton in the title role. He first explained the major arias she would sing in the Verdi opera. Then he briefed the audience on some of the soprano's new roles. Finally, he told listeners about her Egyptian costume and its bare midriff. A few nights later,

\*Actually Texaco began as sponsor in 1940. During the first nine seasons, the operas were sponsored by the American Tobacco Company, RCA, and Lambert Pharmaceuticals.

Rose wore a long white dress and a fur coat to a radio studio. She and Milton Cross were about to take part in a program. Just before air time, she whispered to Milton, "My husband listened to the *Aida* broadcast. He said you described everything except my *belly button!*"

Dubbed "The Voice of the Met" or "Mr. Opera," Milton Cross was the man most identified with opera in the United States. For over four decades—more than eight hundred broadcasts—he never missed a program. Not until February 1973 and the death of his wife did he fail to provide commentary for a Met broadcast. Cross remained "Mr. Opera" for two more years, until his death in January 1975 on the eve of a performance of *l'Italiana in Algeri*. He had contributed more to acquainting listeners with the nuances, subtleties, and grandeur of opera than anyone else in the musical world. Indeed, since 1931 the voice of Milton Cross had become as familiar to listeners as the voices of the Met's foremost artists.\*

From the beginning radio won the Met new friends. It inspired the organization of the Metropolitan Opera Guild, which drew most of its members from radio listeners. The broadcasts also helped rescue the world-famous company from financial disaster. Appeals to listeners by Lucrezia Bori and Geraldine Farrar in the 1930s led to mail contributions of \$250,000, in amounts ranging from ten cents to hundreds of dollars. A similar call for contributions "to save the Met" in 1940 brought a response of \$327,000 from 152,000 listeners. After the successful 1933 appeal, Met Opera board chairman Paul Cravath correctly predicted that "the broadcasting of operatic music as well as symphonic music will have an incalculable influence in developing throughout the country an interest and appreciation for the best music." He hoped that small opera companies would be organized to give experience to American singers and help qualify them for later appearances at the Metropolitan.

Two years later, largely as a result of these broadcasts, an unusual opportunity unfolded for young operatic singers who

\*The first Met *opening night* was broadcast nearly fourteen years after the first hookup. On November 26, 1945, ABC aired the season's opener, a four-hour performance of *Lobengrin*. Listeners also heard a description of the then fashion-conscious, first-night audience.

aspired to the Met. Saturday radio matinees encouraged scores of would-be Tibbetts and Rethbergs to prepare for a Metropolitan audition. Traditionally, hearings were held behind closed doors before the general manager, an assistant or two, and a conductor.

Edward Johnson, one of the Met's ablest tenors as well as general manager from 1935 to 1950, remembered his own audition. It had taken place on a December morning in 1920 in a dark, cold, and dimly lighted building with seats enveloped in gray dust covers. "It was the largest and quietest building I had ever been in," he recalled. Over the years, he had seen many aspiring singers affected by that bleak atmosphere. The feeling of being on trial was depressing. Often despite courage and determination, they could not do justice to their talents. Many failed while actually in sight of their goal.

Edward Johnson and others advocated that a brightly lighted studio with an audience would inspire potential Met artists in auditions. To display their best talents and also permit the public to be "in on" these important musical events, *The Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air* was organized. The Sherwin-Williams Company, the world's largest paint and varnish manufacturer, expressed interest as a sponsor.

From the start the NBC series appealed to a wide spectrum of radio listeners because of three highly significant ingredients: the world's finest music, a wealth of well-trained voices, and the thrill of a contest.

A committee of judges from the Metropolitan Opera Association selected the weekly winners. In the spring, at the end of each season, Sherwin-Williams handed out \$1,000 to the two winning artists and the Met offered contracts.

Wilfred Pelletier, a Met conductor since the latter days of Caruso, took on the arduous task of choosing those best qualified on the basis of voice, musicianship, and stage deportment. More than seven hundred singers auditioned each year. "Pelly" picked about fifty to sing each season. Eventually, nine or ten were chosen as semifinalists. The series' patron saint, Pelletier, almost singlehandedly shaped the *Auditions* into an outstanding Sunday afternoon feature during the years 1935 to 1944. Pelletier gave all contestants two weeks of strenuous coaching before each broadcast. Each artist was given the opportunity to sing whatever he or

she felt would best display musical talent, even if the French-Canadian maestro did not personally approve the choice.

Most winners lived up to the judges' appraisal. Emerging at the top the first year were contralto Anna Kaskas and tenor Arthur Carron. Semifinalists included Annamary Dickey, Joseph Massue, Risé Stevens, and Lucielle Browning. Runners-up in 1937-38 were Margaret Codd, Kathleen Kersting, Philip Duey, and Felix Knight. The winners were John Carter and Leonard Warren.

Warren, a member of the Radio City Music Hall glee club, had made a bet with a friend that he, Warren, could get on the program. His voice mesmerized Pelletier who was conducting auditions from the control room and thought someone had slipped in a recording of Tibbett or Thibault. He was delighted to learn it was a "live" rendition. A few days later Leonard Warren sang "Largo al factotum" from *The Barber of Seville*, and won first place. Shortly afterward, he sang at a birthday party for George A. Martin, president of Sherwin-Williams. Martin was so overwhelmed by Warren's voice that he gave him \$5,000 to go abroad and continue his studies. Warren subsequently joined the Met, achieving world fame as a leading baritone.

"While the primary purpose of the *Auditions* was to serve as an opening wedge to crash the gates of the opera house," Maestro Pelletier recalled, "even many who did not survive the semifinals were able to secure splendid radio and concert engagements." The *Auditions* proved to be a valuable stepping stone for many fine singers. One of the early also-rans was Raoul Jobin, tenor with the Paris Grand Opera, who did not reach the semifinals. A few years later, he asked to reaudition. He acquitted himself nobly, and even before the finals was offered a Met contract.

Met-bound winners of the 1940s included Eleanor Steber, Mona Paulee, Arthur Kent, Patrice Munsel, Walter Cassel, Robert Merrill, and Mack Harrell. The line of hopefuls introduced by announcer Howard Clancy and commentator Milton Cross also contained many who later became well known on radio: Thomas L. Thomas, Jean Dickenson, Frances Greer, Leonard Stokes, Marian McManus, Dorothy Sarnoff, Evelyn MacGregor, Alfred Drake, and Margaret Harshaw.

Others reached stardom at the Met without entering the *Auditions*. Several were well-established radio singers before taking on

operatic roles. Helen Jepson, a graduate of Curtis Institute, achieved prominence on the Paul Whiteman and Rudy Vallee programs. She was the first stellar artist to go from radio to the House of Gatti. Tenor Nino Martini took a similar route two years earlier, in 1933, signing with the Met for a debut in *Rigoletto*.

Tenor Jan Peerce and baritone Robert Weede were discovered and renamed by Roxy; and soon became fixtures on the *Radio City Music Hall of the Air*. By 1941 these two abundantly talented and experienced singers were added to the Met's famous voices.

Ambitious James Melton, first tenor in the Revelers Quartet, sought more and more solo parts. By 1935 he was singing on his own radio shows and in films. A half-dozen years later, Melton won a coveted berth at the Met, and at the same time, maintained a full schedule of broadcasts and concerts.

Radio prepared soprano Eileen Farrell for a place at the Met. CBS engaged her in 1942 to appear on *Songs of the Centuries*, a series particularly designed to give a hearing to new and unknown artists. Within a short time, she advanced to solos on *Gateways to Music*, *American Melody Hour*, the Andre Kostelanetz programs, and *Prudential Family Hour*. Her majestic voice met every requirement of the opera house when she made her long overdue debut in *Alceste* in 1960.

Both the Met broadcasts and the auditions played a part in stimulating studio productions of new operas, especially works written for radio. Earlier, in 1931, Charles Wakefield Cadman had composed *The Willow Tree*, which is thought to be the first opera written expressly for radio. In 1937 CBS commissioned composer Louis Gruenberg's *Green Mansions*. The same year, NBC invited young Italian composer Gian Carlo Menotti to write an opera. The outcome: *Amelia Goes to the Ball*. It later played the Met, and encouraged the network to back a second Menotti work, a satirical farce in English called *The Old Maid and the Thief*. The April 1939 premiere featured Robert Weede, Dorothy Sarnoff, Mary Hopple, and Margaret Daum. Joseph Curtin played the narrator and Alberto Erede conducted the NBC Symphony. Critics praised the fresh voices, musicianship, and excellent diction, noting that Menotti was "on the right track in helping to create a new art form."

Radio brought operas, old and new, into millions of homes, often where a phonograph and recorded music were considered unattainable luxuries. Yet the majority of listeners were average Americans who had never attended an opera. Some never would. But through the outpourings of a Philco or Zenith, they discovered the enduring musical magic of opera.

## Kids, Kitchens, and Keyboards

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**F**or more than a quarter century Walter Damrosch had conducted the New York Symphony, one of America's foremost orchestras which he had helped to organize at the turn of the century. Now, at age 65, after almost forty-five years on the podium, he considered taking a "breathing spell." His wife and four daughters agreed, and urged him to put down his baton and concentrate on composing operas and songs, which had been one of his first musical ambitions.

From the perspective of 1927, Walter Damrosch could look back to the beginning of New York's cultural flowering. When Leopold Damrosch, his father, was conductor of the still young Metropolitan Opera Company, Walter was a violinist and choral director. Then in 1885, when the Met was only in its second season, his father died suddenly. Walter, at age 23, stepped in and conducted the final week's performances of *Tannhauser* and *Die Walkure*. He was hailed as the newest master of the podium.

By the 1920s Walter Damrosch was dean of American conductors, a highly respected musical advisor, and an accomplished composer. His personal appearance fitted the role—tall and of stocky build with ruddy complexion. White hair and bushy brows crowned sharp gray-blue eyes that gave him the mien of a kindly but strong-willed professor.

In 1927, Dr. Damrosch relinquished his duties as conductor of the New York Symphony and devoted his energies to widening the knowledge and influence of fine music. A year or so before, at the

invitation of Atwater Kent, he had conducted his first radio concert. Between musical selections on the program, Dr. Damrosch interjected genial remarks about the world of music. Letters poured into the station from an appreciative public. Subsequently, he conducted several more well-received broadcasts from Steinway Hall and Carnegie Hall. It was he who had encouraged Andrew Carnegie to build the famous edifice and in 1891 had opened it with an oratorio and symphonic musical festival.

In 1926 NBC engaged Damrosch for a series of twenty broadcasts, each of which would reach an estimated 10 million listeners. This enormous national response was an overwhelming experience for the maestro.

"I have never felt so close to so many human beings in my life," he observed when the report came to him.

But perhaps his greatest satisfaction came from the hastily written notes from children, thanking him for bringing music into their homes, and telling him how much they appreciated hearing the music of great composers. These messages moved him deeply. The executives of NBC also took note—but for a less sentimental reason!

Not long after the launching of NBC at which Dr. Damrosch conducted the premiere musical selections, the network enlarged its administrative staff to include musical advisors. Sarnoff had selected three major artists for these positions: Ernestine Schumann-Heink as operatic counsel; Reinald Werrenrath as vocal advisor; and Walter Damrosch as musical counsel.

Dr. Damrosch, however, was not content to make only occasional program suggestions; he insisted upon playing an active role, one that would give him an opportunity to share his knowledge and experience with a fast-growing army of radio listeners. NBC gave him the air time and the resources. With this support, the 66-year-old maestro entered a new phase of his already long career, when he became producer and host of *The Music Appreciation Hour*.

For fourteen years, beginning in 1928, every Friday morning "Papa" Damrosch greeted his audience with "Good morning, my dear children." Whereupon he proceeded to explain and analyze the world's great musical heritage. Using simple and direct lan-

guage designed to reach millions of children, he also opened new doors of music to thousands of adults. His instinctive capacity for understanding the psychology of listening, whether young or old, prompted him to approach each broadcast with the wit and personal charm of a seasoned storyteller.

An enduring effect of these programs was the spreading of an awareness of the great composers and their music which, to the average individual of that era, until now had been a world apart. Dr. Damrosch's descriptions of traditional symphonic and operatic masterpieces, as well as the works of contemporary composers such as Sibelius, Ravel, Elgar, and Stravinsky, created a "living" atmosphere for his listeners that not only informed but inspired. A small symphony orchestra and vocal soloists enhanced the feeling of "being a part of it all." This unsponsored series cost NBC a great deal of money, but President M. H. Aylesworth considered it "about the best investment we ever made."

The success of the Damrosch series fired the imaginations of other musicians who undertook similar projects that were not always produced on radio, but in individual communities and schools. All of these programs helped to make music and its traditional works an integral part of American life. For music teachers, struggling with the indifference of students, the series was a blessing. In many schools regular classwork was suspended so that seventh- and eighth-grade pupils could assemble before radio receivers. An estimated 6 million children in some 60,000 schools experienced the pleasure and delight of these pioneering educational programs.

Laymen as well as educators hailed *The Music Appreciation Hour*. It developed knowledge of, and respect for, Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Verdi, and countless other revered composers, and served as an antidote to crooners and jazz.

In radioland, the Damrosch hour marked a breakthrough of significance beyond musical education. NBC's use of non-commercial air time had proved the value of public service programming. Other programs were soon to follow their example. Meanwhile, Dr. Damrosch pursued his cultural evangelism with increasing success, and his listeners were eager to express their appreciation. An Indiana listener wrote:

“Until radio, the field of music glittered unknown behind a thick gray curtain of distance. We had no means of understanding music when we heard it. Now, after interpretations by you, we listen . . . and are surprised and delighted.”

Thousands of letters came from children, parents, teachers, and principals, all enthusiastic in their praise, and making suggestions for further helpfulness. Thus encouraged, Dr. Damrosch prepared and distributed instructional guides and workbooks based on the comments of listeners. Included were background information on selections broadcast, a few bars of the principal theme, a quiz on the material, and suggested projects for young musicians. When he dramatized a Wagnerian theme, giving it a cowboys-and-Indians touch, school and community orchestras began to organize and be heard. Instrumental and vocal competition became widespread.

In 1930, a National School Orchestra of five hundred young players assembled from every corner of the country and traveled to New York City to be guests on the maestro's morning program. In Michigan, music teachers, encouraged by such group educational techniques, made a similar experiment with some five thousand violinists scattered over thirteen states and in Canada. And at station WJR in Detroit, Dr. Joseph E. Maddy, a music professor at the University of Michigan and founder of the National Music Camp in Interlocken, Mich., directed a small group of student fiddlers while an estimated two thousand other fiddlers at home radio sets picked up their violins and “bowed” in unison. Each player had previously received a free textbook from the university as part of an at-home course of study. In many central states, groups of students regularly practiced together during Dr. Maddy's programs. Often they were startled by his uncanny “radio vision”; for when they held their violins incorrectly, or their posture was slumped and their playing ragged, he would stop the lesson to correct these “unseen” bad habits. At the same time he made music lessons fun because there were no long, dull exercises. Even beginners were given a three-note theme for their first lessons.

Similar courses for piano students surfaced on WEAJ on Saturday mornings and on Tuesday afternoons. Well-known musicologists Sigmund Spaeth and Osbourne McConathy instructed some forty thousand pupils whose ears were attuned to a loud-speaker and hands poised at keyboards.

This urge to create music answered the critics who complained that radio was "turning young people into passive listeners content to sit back and listen while others played and sang for their entertainment."

NBC's *The Music Appreciation Hour*, the *Standard School Broadcast* sponsored by Standard Oil of California for the Pacific Coast, Columbia's *The American School of the Air*, and similar programs were steadily encouraging youth to make their own music. Furthermore, such programs provided a measure of professional instruction for students in remote areas where often there were no music teachers available.

Undoubtedly, during these music interludes and lessons, there were also a great many bored children at their radios who reaped no lasting benefits. Perhaps no more than half the audience appreciated the life and times of Felix Mendelssohn. The rest merely "endured," awaiting the latest episode of Captain Midnight, Superman, or Tom Mix. While the educational value of these cliff-hanger serials may have been nebulous, the dial also offered several high-level children's programs that combined drama and music. Some of these shows were performed by the children themselves, but generally an adult host or narrator held the reins as the pivotal attraction.

One of the very first kiddie shows was Philadelphia's *Uncle Wip*. He read bedtime stories and sang lullabies over WIP. Originally played by Chris Graham, this adventuresome pied piper occasionally broadcast from outside the studio. In 1924 he donned a diving suit and slipped into 50 feet of water at the end of an Atlantic City pier. Equipped with a microphone, Uncle Wip described the ocean depths to his awed young audience. Then, still underwater and accompanied by a piano back in Philadelphia, he sang his usual sandman patter. These "remotes" greatly boosted his standing among the lollipop set.

Other "uncles" soon appeared on the air—if not in the sea. Uncle Robert and his *Radio Pals* in 1929 opened the first broadcasting studio especially designed for an audience of children. Located on New York's East 15th Street, it utilized the joint facilities of WHN and WPAP on Saturday and Thursday afternoons.

Don Carney went before the mike in 1928 with homey songs,

stories, jokes, and advice; and became *Uncle Don* to at least 300,000 children who quickly joined his WOR radio club. Each of them had to perform a good deed to qualify for membership. Very often Uncle Don Carney became the "court of last resort" for parents at wit's end over unruly offspring. The shock of hearing his or her name over the radio was usually very effective. Carney would ask a child the reason why he or she didn't eat his oatmeal, or why young Jimmy didn't practice the piano. He would warn a youngster not to scratch chicken pox because to do so would leave scars. Or he would praise an adolescent for turning in a good school report card. A word or two from *Uncle Don* worked wonders, and the children expressed their appreciation in various ways.

"Maybe you think those youngsters are not a grateful lot," Carney remarked. "They send me all kinds of things: a piece of birthday cake, one of their father's cigars; in fact, I've received everything the postal rules permit."

Uncle Don was born in St. Joseph, Mich., where, during high school, he organized a school dance orchestra. That led to a vaudeville booking as a trick piano player (his specialty was playing while standing on his head). During World War I, he took a job in a Camden, N.J., shipyard at thirty cents an hour. By the end of the first year, he was made assistant superintendent at a salary of \$10,000 per year. The postwar maritime slump cost him his job. Show business once again beckoned.

"I was lucky enough to get work as a movie extra with D. W. Griffith at his studio at Mamaroneck, N.Y.," Carney recalled. "Later he gave me a small part in his 1924 epic, *America*. Actually I played fifteen or so different characters and bit roles."

Griffith had a radio that intrigued Carney. One day, passing the Hotel McAlpin where WMCA broadcast, he went in and asked for an audition. The station offered him a job as an announcer, which gave him a chance to improve his microphone technique. When WOR came along with a better deal, Carney was ready.

Carney played character parts on many early network presentations. Frequently he used his real name (Howard Rice), on *Main Street Sketches*, *Hank Simmon's Show Boat*, *Romance Isle*, and *Cabin Door*. But his talents were generally underrated by the

critics. Actor, musician, acrobat, shipbuilder—a background as good as any for a radio piper!

Carney's jump into the "uncle business" happened by chance. One morning in 1928 WOR's station manager burst into the studio demanding that someone think up a children's program in a hurry for an eager toy-manufacturer sponsor. Don volunteered. Soon *Uncle Don* was captivating late afternoon audiences of children.

"Hello, girls and boys! This is your Uncle Don," he would announce before fingering the keyboard with an E flat chord to herald his unique nonsensical theme song: "Hibbidy gits has-haring boree/ Sibonia Skividy hi-lo-dee/ Hono-ko-doke with an alikazon/ Sing this song with your Uncle Don."

The kids at their radios gleefully joined in, then sat back for a half-hour of stories, songs, jokes, birthday announcements, the reading of newspaper funnies, and advice against misbehaving. Carney rarely used a script and seldom rehearsed. He accompanied himself at a piano, often pointing out to WOR that he saved them \$25 a day in musician fees. At one point, in order to save money, he fired his combination announcer and sound-effects man, to whom he paid \$75 a week, and came on the air without the usual "and now it's time for" introduction. An earmark of every broadcast was his laugh, once described as "like the sound made by ratcheting an old overshoe against a picket fence." Don believed in talking up, never down to his tiny friends. Perhaps that had made him as much a juvenile staple as Moxie or Ovaltine until 1949 when he retired at age 60.

The sharpest thorn in Uncle Don's side was a report that he denied and insisted was started by a rival radio uncle. It was an apocryphal story that when he had finished a broadcast, he wisecracked, "There, I guess that'll hold the little bastards."

The Uncle Don program had reached youngsters in WOR's seven-state listening area (only briefly over a network). The three major chains in the 1930s and 1940s, however, augmented their staff with children's program supervisors: Nila Mack for Columbia, Madge Tucker at NBC, and Bob Emery for Mutual. The emphasis brought to the dial such kiddie fare as *Our Barn*, *Jolly Bill and Jane*, *Songs by Frank Luther*, *The Lady Next Door* (with young Peter Donald), Irving Caesar's *Sing a Song of Safety*, *Let's Pretend*,

*Little Blue Playhouse*, Smiling Ed McConnell and his *Buster Brown Gang*, *Rainbow House* (with Skippy Homier, Ronny Liss, and Beverly Sills), and *The Singing Lady*.

Ireene Wicker—*The Singing Lady*—won the ears, hearts, and minds of more children than any other daytime network performer. She also received solid approval from adult listeners who, through child study groups and PTA organizations, clearly sanctioned her programs while criticizing the hair-raising tales on other juvenile offerings. Miss Wicker researched and wrote her scripts, sang all the solos, and played the leading roles. From the beginning, the program revealed her unusual talent as a front-ranking “one lady” show.

Ireene (she added the extra “e” when a numerologist told her that it would “vibrate in greater harmony”) fashioned stories from history, legends of the Indians, and fanciful trips to faraway lands, as well as traditional nursery rhymes. “I give the children the thriller they like, but temper it with facts, probability, imagination, and intelligence,” she said of her program formula. The narrative was told through, and tied together with, music. A piano accompanist (the first in 1932 was Allan Grant; in the 1970s, Samuel Sanders) arranged and transposed her songs which she interspersed with the story line. The vocal segments often brought out the unusual four-octave range she possessed.

Educated at the University of Illinois and trained with the Goodman Theater Group, Miss Wicker came to radio in 1930 as Jane in *Judy and Jane* from WGN Chicago. She also played in the serials *Today's Children*, *The Moynaban Family*, *Harold Teen*, and *Song of the City*. Soap operas helped to develop her innate skill of juggling a half-dozen diverse parts in a single fifteen-minute episode. Fast character changes were essential. These daily stints were generally unrehearsed. The scripts virtually arrived at air time.

On an early Irna Phillips’ “soaper,” Ireene played five roles: a little sister, a debutante, a young boy, an Irish lady next door, and a dog. One day, they all appeared on a particular installment—and Ireene had a cold. Midway through the broadcast, she and Irna, in the role of the mother, began to giggle over Ireene’s valient but unsuccessful efforts to sound different for each character.

“Everybody around here seems to have a cold,” Ireene ad-libbed.

“Sure,” rejoindered Irna Phillips, “everybody—even the dog.”

When the Kellogg Company in 1931 sought an actress for the role of *The Singing Lady*, WGN program director sent for Irene Wicker. In a burst of frankness, she told him she did not think a child would listen to nursery rhymes and songs for fifteen minutes five or six times a week. She also pointed out that, in her opinion, the “blood and thunder” type of children’s program was not the answer.

“Very well, then,” the director replied, “go home and write your own idea of a show and bring it in for an audition tomorrow.”

She went home and began thinking about the kind of program she would like to have on the air for her own little daughter, the kind she would have loved if radio had been in her home when she was a little girl. The following day, she rendered her version of a storytime series and won, over several competing actresses.

*The Singing Lady*’s unusual stories, especially those of true life childhood adventures of famous people, made the broadcasts both an audience-getting and award-winning program.

“At first I did biographies of young George Washington, Thomas A. Edison, and Abraham Lincoln. Then I branched out to people in the arts and other fields. I once told the story of how Madame Schumann-Heink began her singing career. At the end of the broadcast, I said to my audience: ‘Now, children, you will have a real treat because Madame Heink is in the studio with me to talk to you!’

“‘Boys and girls, I was not such a goot little girl as the Singing Lady told you,’ she said. ‘I once swiped an apple on der vay to school!’”

George Gershwin was another biographical subject. Irene and her pianist Milton Rettenberg went to the composer’s New York office to prepare the program, shortly before his death in California in 1937.

“Do you remember the first thing you ever composed, Mr. Gershwin?” Irene asked.

“Funny, nobody ever asked me that before,” he replied.

Gershwin got up and walked over to his piano. Delighted to accommodate his audience of two, he played and sang “Since I Found You.”

“Don’t forget to mention,” added Gershwin as the song ended, “my brother Ira wrote the lyrics.”

Irene Wicker was one of the first radio stars to regularly appear on television. Later, she took her show to Europe where in 1956 she and her husband, New York art gallery director Victor Hammer, presented “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” to Russian TV viewers. Over the years, her scripts have been the basis of numerous record albums and books. For New York area listeners, she continued her children’s series into the 1970s on Sunday mornings over WNYC. Supreme mistress of audio storyland, Irene Wicker remained just as enthusiastic in bringing playlets with music to a new generation as she had done on coast-to-coast broadcasts over WJZ when radio was not much older than her audience.

Dozens of programs gave juveniles a chance to show their talents and gain experience and poise. Some went on not only to adult radio roles but to achieve varying degrees of success in movies, the theater, and opera.

Personality, voice, and ability to take direction ranked as criteria for budding Hamlets or Jenny Linds. Some of those who made the grade were Billy Halop as a cinema “Dead End Kid,” Jackie Kelt as Henry’s sidekick Homer on NBC’s *The Aldrich Family*, “Bubbles” Silverman as opera diva Beverly Sills, and Patricia Peardon to Broadway’s *Junior Miss*, Billy and Bobby Mauch to leads at Warner Brothers, and Anne Francis to Hollywood and television.

Two young singers—Deanna Durbin and Bobby Breen—gained a special niche, and starred in almost every medium. Both reached national prominence in the mid-1930s with a big boost from Eddie Cantor on his Sunday night radio show. Deanna Durbin became an accomplished lyric soprano at age 13. A prematurely developed tenor voice before the age of 10 took Bobby Breen from low billing on cross-country vaudeville tours to leads in RKO films.

Little known beyond the coterie of dial twisters but winning an intensely loyal following were the Moylan Sisters. These “Angels of the Airwaves,” Marianne and Peggy Joan Moylan, began their radio act in 1937 at ages 5 and 3, respectively. Their parents first noted the harmonizing talent of the girls about the time Peggy Joan began to talk. The story goes that one day they were

listening to a singing group on radio and decided they could do as well or better. With no coaching, the two sisters sang in near perfect harmony. It didn't take long for their parents to line up an audition at NBC for the vocally precocious offspring.

They were too young to read music, but their father taught them ballads, hymns, and popular songs. An engraver by trade but a choir director on Sundays, he brought out their unusual vocal clarity and flexibility. In 1939 they were selected from about two hundred young singers for a weekly program sponsored by Thrivo dog food. Seldom, if ever, had children under the age of 10 been given a network program of their own. The girls wove the Thrivo singing jingle tightly into the song bag of tiny tots to the tune of "The Farmer in the Dell." It was commercial but cute: "We feed our doggie Thrivo/ He's very much alive-o/ Full of vim and pep!/ If you want a peppy pup/ You'd better hurry up/ And buy Thrivo for him!"

Their dog's name was "Rascal," but the pup photographed for promotional purposes was a wirehaired terrier owned by producer-directors Isaac and Alice Clements. A popular feature of the program was a National Dog Hero Award, presented by the two sisters to "America's bravest dog of the week." Courageous canine acts, such as protecting an owner from an intruder or rescuing a child from a fire, qualified many a heroic hound. The girls' theme song, "Sittin' on a Log/Pettin' My Dog," reinforced the sponsor's chow line.

The curly-topped, angelic-looking Moylan girls made guest appearances on the leading adult programs: Fred Allen, Alec Templeton, and Ilka Chase. They sang in a few Warner Brothers shorts and cut a dozen or so Decca recordings. Then it all ended too quickly. As young teenagers, their singing days gave way to new pursuits. Both were interested in medicine. Marianne studied to become a laboratory technician; her younger sister, a medical secretary.

The Moylan Sisters' comparatively brief singing career had started semiprofessionally on the Horn and Hardart *Children's Hour*—a program that probably gave a break to more young people than any other radio show. A platform for hundreds of performers in the minor leagues, the *Children's Hour* was, for many, as much a

part of the Sunday morning routine as Sunday school. A veritable institution, yet never on a network, it endured week after week for twenty-nine years.

The *Children's Hour* began in 1925 over Philadelphia's WCAU. Stan Broza and his wife Esther played cohosts and kept the youngsters in line. Four years later, sponsor Horn and Hardart Restaurants added a counterpart over WABC, Columbia's New York outlet, which later switched to WEAJ where, for most of its long run, Ed Herlihy was a majordomo. He had succeeded Ralph Edwards (who, in turn, had replaced Paul Douglas). The Clements Company, producers and directors of the series, hired Edwards for the M.C. job, his first in New York. It gave him the solid experience needed later to handle the reins of his madcap *Truth or Consequences* and people-juggling *This Is Your Life*.

"Auntie Alice" Clements auditioned the fifty or more youngsters for each broadcast, chose the songs, and wrote all the dialogue for the Radio City *Children's Hour*.<sup>\*</sup> These nonprofessionals, who were strictly New York area talent, sang and danced and joked their way to the hearths of thousands of American homes each week. Both the Philadelphia and Manhattan children's hour programs used juvenile talent. Many of them went on to success and stardom as full-fledged professionals: Bobbie Hookey, Carol Bruce, Roddy MacDowell, Roberta Peters, Eileen Barton, Connie Russell, Ezra Stone, and Eddie Fisher. The Horn and Hardart theme song was "Less Work for Mother." Mothers of these talented youngsters must have frequently declared it quite the opposite!

WJZ also staged a perennial junior romp. The program took form in May 1924. Initially a Hearst newspaper venture, it had been designed to give deserving young talent a chance before the microphone. The WJZ series, under the titles *Coast-to-Coast on a Bus* or *The White Rabbit Line*, supported a cast of a dozen or more youngsters between the ages of 3 to 15, and offered plenty of music and play-acting. Eloquent Milton Cross, WJZ's jack-of-all programs, faced the dubious assignment of handling this lollipop parade.

<sup>\*</sup>The Clements Company supplied radio with most of the popular juvenile talent programs, originating *Hookey Hall*, *Little Betsey Ross Girl*, *Friendship Ranch*, *Olivio Santoro: The Boy Yodeler*, *The Fountain of Youth*, and *The Moylan Sisters*.

The choice, however, turned out to be a fortunate one. Cross, himself the father of a small daughter, was a patient and indulgent steward, while also maintaining a sufficiently austere demeanor to keep the precocious youngsters in line. For almost fifteen years radio's "Uncle Miltie" Cross (but never so addressed by anyone) introduced an array of performers who possessed high hopes but little or no experience. Nevertheless, successful small-fry alumni number such notables as Risé Stevens, Ann Blyth, Mary Small, and Wynn Murray.

Children had their "hour" on Sunday mornings, plus a big chunk of Saturday's programs, and the four-to-six slot each day. Mom also had a slice of the broadcast pie. Her radio diet usually was sandwiched into the daily homemaking routine. Heavier on talk and chit-chat than music, the bill of fare offered a variety of solid courses: wake-up music, inspirational words, hymn singing and organ interludes, poetry, shopping tips and recipes, and weather reports. This potpourri was served by a variety of performers—gospel singers, dietitians, comedians, philosophers, journalists, disc jockeys, tenor soloists, and sometimes a combination of two or more selected from these. Most of the programs were for local audiences. Others reached a wider metropolitan area, and a few were on a full network.

Every station offered one or more announcer-personalities to deliver news, commentary, and sometimes music. Occasionally regional radio stars attained sufficient attention to be signed on with a larger station, perhaps in Cincinnati, Washington, or St. Louis. And now and then a lucky few were chosen for a network program reaching millions of American homemakers.

One of the most successful early morning "regulars" was a most unusual individual who preferred to remain anonymous, broadcasting under the name "Cheerio." It was also rumored that he contributed his services without financial compensation. He had first appeared on a San Francisco station in 1925, but by 1927 he had become a widely popular radio character.

Six mornings each week over NBC, Cheerio recited verse, read listeners' letters, and expounded his "good samaritan" philosophy—that especially appealed to housewives and shut-ins. He believed that 8:30 a.m. was the "psychological moment" to reach that audience; for at that hour homemakers had gotten their husbands

off to work, and the children off to school. It was time for Mom to face her household chores. But first, she needed a few moments of relaxation, perhaps in the kitchen over a cup of coffee. Cheerio believed something more should be added to refresh and revitalize homemakers and homebound shut-ins.

As the day began, he brought them inspiration and comfort when needed, creating a folksy atmosphere via the radio that was as real as a friend's presence. Three or four singing canaries added a down-home touch. NBC had rented the small flock for the program, and for years the birds were the only trained nonhumans regularly permitted on the air. (Dogs, for example, were not allowed in studios; the danger of barking at the wrong time was too great. A bark played from a sound-effects recording, or made by a tin can on the end of a string, or simulated by a versatile actor, was equally effective.)

Cheerio's canaries had their own microphone so that listeners might better hear their chirpings. When NBC moved to Rockefeller Center, WEAf purchased four birds whose quartet from a cage in the network's main reception room when the birds were not on the air became a delightful attraction for guided-tour groups.

Music, other than bird song, also entered Cheerio's scheme of things. Russ Gilbert and Geraldine Riegger of NBC's staff sang and the Parnassus Trio, an instrumental group, played under the direction of Olga Serlis. Later, Emil Seidel's Little Peppers replaced the trio; and still later, pianist Harrison Isles replaced them with his ten-piece ensemble, one of the largest of the early morning orchestras.

Cheerio's identity remained a secret for several years even as speculation mounted over his real name and why he performed without compensation. Then, in 1929, the veil of mystery was lifted when Herbert Hoover became president of the United States. Charles Kellogg Field, who had attended Stanford University in the 1890s with Mr. Hoover as both classmate and friend, was a very successful businessman. The program was his idea, and he had chosen the name "Cheerio." Herbert Hoover had defrayed the expenses of the morning program and contributed suggestions for its content. Until 1929, only NBC's top executive had known his identity and had guarded the secret well.

Field had had theatrical interests as a youth but was discouraged against such "frivolity" by his parents. Accommodatingly, he entered the business world, eventually becoming the editor and joint owner of *Sunset Magazine*, which stressed a western home and garden and travel format. In 1925 Station KGO in San Francisco had asked him to give some inspirational radio talks. His first program on June 22, 1925, followed a morning wake-up exercise program.

"I was conscious that morning of a situation which made me marvel at the ways of fate," he related to interviewers. "My mother had been in good health when I told her about the broadcast and planned the first program. Only a few weeks later that first good-morning program over the radio went directly to her in her final illness . . . I pledged myself to carry on the Cheerio program as a memorial to her."

With the strongest tie to California severed, he came East, imbued with the purpose of devoting his retirement to Cheerio. NBC took an interest, undoubtedly encouraged by Hoover's endorsement of Field's humanitarian efforts. The network contributed three or four hours of free air time each week. Field's philosophical endeavors outlasted Hoover's stay in the White House. Cheerio signed off just before World War II.

Inevitably, Cheerio-type wake-up broadcasters crowded the dial. Phil Cook took a similar approach but added a lot more diversions. One of radio's most versatile performers, Cook was an actor, comedian, mimic, singer, composer, writer, poet, whistler, and guitarist. Early in his thirty-year career, he aptly demonstrated his talents when he played thirteen parts on the *Quaker Oats Man*, a 1930 program whose byword "Okay, Kernal" entered audience jargon.

Cook first went on the air as WOR's *The Radio Chef* in October 1925. At the time, he worked as an artist for an advertising firm and wrote songs as a hobby. On a visit to Newark, the WOR manager asked him to sing some of his own compositions in an impromptu radio recital. It went over well. Not a pianist, he bought a ukulele and a book of playing instructions. He memorized four chords, but no more. They were enough to provide accompaniment to his vocalizing as the *Klein Serenading Shoe-*

maker and on *Cotton and Morpheus* (with Billy Hillpot), *Physical Culture Shoe Prince*, *Flit Soldiers*, *Cabin Door*, and *Flap and Jack*.

In the mid-1930s, Phil Cook inaugurated the CBS *Morning Almanac* with various Cook-created characters, including Sleep Simpson, Office Boy Pete, Snoopy Dingle, and Sandy MacTavish. This man of many voices spliced the dialogue with a dozen or so tunes, old and interesting almanac items, and listeners' questions. The latter were answered from material furnished by staff researcher Henry Untermeyer. In 1941 the *Almanac* became *Cook's Kitchen*, an eleven-year feature on WABC and perhaps best remembered for Phil's singing of the news, weather reports, and school closings.

Cook's many years at a morning mike were a tribute to his multiple talents in a highly competitive radio slot. He ably competed with the *Musical Grocer* and *Kremel Singing Chef* (both played by tenor Irving Kaufman); sultry Lois January, the CBS "Reveille Sweetheart," who both sang and spun records; the madcap *Sisters of the Skillet* (Ed East and Ralph Dumke); baritone-whistler Jack Berch; Betty Crocker's *Magazine of the Air*; John B. Gambling's *Musical Clock*—a morning fixture at WOR for thirty-five years—and Don McNeill's phenomenally successful *Breakfast Club*.

Musical accompaniment, as well as background mood music and even sound effects, for many daytime homemaker programs emanated from an organ. This was especially true after 1935, the year Hammond introduced a portable electric organ. The Hammond organ met a wide range of musical requirements, whether for a serious inspirational ballad, a light-hearted breakfast march, or emotion-charged incidental or transitional music for soap operas and poetry readings. The consoles of studio organs were given a solo workout during organ interludes, usually in the morning, late afternoon, and just before midnight. The versatile electric organ also reproduced sounds: a fog horn, bell, squeaky door, or a bird. If necessary, it could growl. The Hammond gradually replaced small studio ensembles and, to some degree, large orchestras. It was a money saver that never required conventional tuning.

A half-dozen years before the introduction of the electric organ, networks and most individual stations had signed up at least one organist. The nationally known pipe organ contingent included

Lew White (chief organist at New York's Roxy Theater), Jesse Crawford (known as "The Poet of the Organ"), Ann Leaf (unofficially tagged "Little Organ Annie: The Mighty Mite of the Organ"), and Richard Leibert (whom "Roxy" Rothafel selected in 1932 as organist of the new \$250,000 Radio City Music Hall twin-consolidated Wurlitzer). Later, Rosa Rio, Charles Paul, Bill Meeder, Fred Feibel, and Bill Wirges joined them to comprise the busiest group of pedal manipulators outside of a six-day bike race.

Virtually all had honed their keyboard technique as organists in theaters while playing for silent movies. As cinema organists and pianists, they had to improvise, change themes, and play musical bridges for as long as two hours during which the film plot unfolded on the screen; then between shows provide an exit march and an all-stops-out solo. When sound pictures shook the industry, organists in all but the largest city movie palaces were superfluous. Many turned to radio work, where prior experience playing mood music ad infinitum paid off.

Rosa Rio's contract with a New Orleans movie theater had ended when Garbo talked. She came to New York to find a job—any musical job. A nightclub hired her to play the accordion. She accompanied singers, and soon opened a studio to teach organ and piano. One day a friend told Rosa of NBC's need for an organist who could improvise and transpose quickly. She auditioned and was hired as a "temporary" until a male organist could be found. After three weeks she threatened to quit unless offered a long-term commitment. She got it and stayed with radio for twenty years.

"Rehearsal time was always limited and, in many cases, non-existent," Rosa Rio recalled. "We had to roll with the punches. There was always an element of uncertainty in every situation. It was impossible to read a printed score. A radio organist had to be nimble of finger and fleet of foot to cope with the unexpected. The director might have indicated eight seconds for a certain musical bridge to denote the passage of time, only to signal frantically from the control room to cut it to four. That happened many times on the air. An organist had to keep an eye on the script, director, actors and clock all at once."

Organists as well as staff pianists (they included such masters of the keyboard as NBC's Vladimir Brenner, the Blue Network's Ear

Wild, and Columbia's Gordon Searman) put in time as standby musicians. When assigned to this chore, they sat at a piano or organ in a small studio, serving as a safeguard against equipment breakdowns and disrupted or cancelled programs. At a moment's notice, an artist like Rosa Rio would be asked to fill in with appropriate standby music from two minutes to two hours, a task that entailed a large and varied repertoire committed to memory—to say nothing of the physical energy demanded.

Rosa often did "back-to-back" programs, running from one studio to another with forty seconds between shows. She never missed an opening cue and only once struck a wrong introductory theme. Her longest running assignment was *My True Story*, a series that presented a complete drama each week, Monday through Friday, and gave her a greater opportunity for keyboard improvisation than any other serial or soap opera.

In the 1940s Rosa supplied music for six or seven programs a day, six days a week. A typical day at the Blue network began at 10:00 a.m. with *My True Story*. At 10:45 a.m., she played for the *Mystery Chef*. An hour later, she provided mood music for Ted Malone's commentary on *Between the Bookends*. In mid-afternoon, she supported the domestic adventures of *Ethel and Albert*, accompanied singer Clark Dennis, or backed the serial *Appointment for Life*. Two soap operas completed her day: *Lorenzo Jones* at 4:30 p.m., and *Front Page Farrell* at 5:45 p.m.

For several years, she displayed her keyboard artistry on *Rosa Rio Rhythms*, a twice-daily program of organ and piano music. During World War II her schedule expanded. On Sundays she worked from sunrise to nearly midnight: a devotional segment at 8:15 a.m., *Chaplain Jim* at 2:00 p.m., a dramatization of the news by Gunther and Vandercook at 5:00 p.m., and *Deadline Drama* with Irene Wicker at 10:30 p.m.

"The organ," Rosa Rio pointed out, "has been associated with church music for hundreds of years. Its literature actually dates back to ancient times. Since most sacred music had been written for this instrument, radio also adopted it for programs of a religious nature. Sacred music played on a pipe or electric organ generated a warm, soothing feeling and gave spiritual comfort to listeners, especially shut-ins."

Stations regularly picked up church services and programmed hymn singing. KDKA pioneered with the *Sacred Song Concert*. WEAJ offered the *Cathedral Hour* and *The Church of the Air*. WJZ scheduled *National Vespers*. Almost daily, stations—large and small, urban and rural—paused for hymns and gospel songs. Only a few gospel music singers stood out among the hundreds at scattered microphones. One of these who achieved a measure of fame and a widespread following was Arthur Billings Hunt. A noted musicologist and authority on American hymns and folk songs, he broadcast on WEAJ as early as 1923. His renditions of “There’s a Green Hill Far Away,” “Crossing the Bar,” and other sacred standards gained him a place on the dial long into the network era. A baritone, Dr. Hunt sang on NBC’s *Midweek Hymn Sing* and locally on WNEW *Shut-in Hour* with organist Lowell Patton.

From 1932 to 1938 the *Midweek Hymn Sing* received 107,978 request for hymns to be sung, as well as countless expressions of thanks from listeners as far away as Europe. An unemployed miner in Wales, writing to Dr. Hunt after a shortwave broadcast during the winter of 1935, said that he and his wife retired to bed early to save light and fuel. The hymns sung from abroad comforted the weary couple. “It would have done your hearts good if you could have heard my wife singing softly in the darkness, ‘It Is Well with My Soul,’ and this after six years on the dole. Radio is our greatest solace in these difficult times.”

Another five-day-a-week hymn singing program featured Edward McHugh, better known as “The Gospel Singer.” He first achieved prominence at a WBZ Boston microphone before coming to Radio City and a national audience. During his career, he sang some three thousand different hymns, receiving more requests for “The Old Rugged Cross” in each batch of mail than any other hymn.

An organ and church choir that deeply moved listeners and touched their hearts was the Mormon Tabernacle aggregation from Salt Lake City. Year after year from 1929, their radio concerts enthralled network audiences. By the 1970s, the broadcasts had become the country’s oldest continuous series, and is still featured on radio and television.

The Tabernacle singers carry on a tradition almost as old as the

Church of Latter-Day Saints itself. From the earliest days of their history, they were a singing people. Their most requested hymn, "Come, Come, Ye Saints," was actually written in 1847 by William Clayton, a Mormon working closely with church founder Brigham Young.

All 350 members of the choir are church members, representing a cross section of many professions and occupations and ranging in age from 30 to 60. (In earlier years, the span stretched from 18 to 80, but the church later restricted participation, desiring each person to grow by giving different kinds of service to the church in his lifetime.) Directed by J. Spencer Cornwall, then Richard P. Condie, and beginning in 1976, by Jerold Ottley, the nonpaid choir is the largest permanent singing group in the world and contains only a small number of professional musicians.

The placement of microphones contributes significantly to the success of the weekly broadcasts. Initially, a single microphone picked up the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. However, because the large ensemble occupied considerable floor space, engineers began to notice a "sound lag" from mike to control room. To correct this, they installed nine microphones. The engineer for each broadcast—which had no full rehearsal due to the long-distance travel necessitated by some choir members—literally "played" his control board in the manner of an instrumentalist. Sopranos, altos, baritones, tenors, and basses each utilized a mike. Their voices were "mixed" with the pickup from a trio of microphones flanking the organ and from an all-directional one suspended from the 100-foot-high ceiling. The result was a rich stereolike sound, years before even hi-fi had come into the audio vocabulary.

The Tabernacle Organ has long been recognized as one of the most beautifully sounding instruments ever built. Organists Alexander Schreiner and Frank Asper were playing at the console in 1924, when broadcasts from Salt Lake City started locally over KFPT. World-renowned concert artists have made special trips to Utah to play this organ. Joseph Ridges, an Australian convert, built the organ from straight-grained soft pine found in southern Utah. For a dozen years, he worked to shape the seasoned logs into pipes, and in 1858 finished the job—one of the outstanding examples of great organ building. And radio made it one of the best-known and most widely heard instruments in the country.

An organ—whether manual, pipe or electric, whether played during a remote from a great cathedral or inside the studio of a “one-lung,” 50-kilowatt transmitter—was ideally suited for radio’s versatile needs. The organ contributed spritely tunes, mood music, and dramatic sound effects on virtually every type of program. But it found a special niche in support of engrossing daily serials and inspirational songfests. Musically speaking, it was the staff of daytime radio.

## Musical Chairs and Chairmen

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“I remember a time some few years ago when we in our family didn’t near sing our own songs like we used to,” writes Jean Ritchie of her youth in the rocky, isolated Cumberland Mountains of south-eastern Kentucky. “We didn’t sing much of anything though, come to think of it—old songs or new.”

Later, as a successful folk singer and musicologist, Jean vividly remembered the inroads made in the 1930s by a radio crystal set. “I guess if it hadn’t been for the radio it’s no tellin’ how long it would have taken us to find out that we were hillbillies, or what kind of songs we were supposed to sing.”

When radio came into their mountain home, Jean Ritchie and her parents and thirteen brothers and sisters almost stopped gathering to talk and sing. Suddenly the ageless folk ballads of heartache and joy seemed quaint and old-fashioned and boring compared with the out-pourings of Broadway show tunes and Tin Pan Alley lyrics from the new gadget called radio.

Jean and her kin, however, were not alone in dropping guitars and dulcimers. Playing a piano, strumming a mandolin, and cranking up a phonograph now took second place, or were pushed aside entirely in front parlors from the Pecos to Park Avenue. The new melody-making machine was the cat’s whiskers! It played on and on with seemingly endless repertoire. So, tune in the wireless for instant entertainment! Never mind sheet music of a Ziegfeld Follies hit tune, or Zez Confrey’s latest mesmerizing piano roll!

Many so-called musical prophets predicted that all this dial twisting to pick up KDKA or WLW dance music night after night would not last. But these seers had failed to reckon with two important factors: the increase in the number of dance bands after World War I, and the evolution of personalized, easy-to-identify band sounds. Both contributed to the growing exposure and popularity of band music of all kinds over radio as well as in theaters, motion picture houses, on recordings, and in ballrooms at elegant hotels and night spots, or Broadway's dance palaces.

From trios to twenty-man orchestras, such aggregations consumed as many as four or five hours of radio time each day. Nine or ten bands and orchestras were on the air from the dinner hour, and during the night-owl slot—10:30 P.M. to 3:00 A.M. A very large number of musicians made their fame and often their fortunes by sitting in front of a radio mike.

Paul Specht's orchestra was the earliest "name" group to broadcast regularly. It had bowed in September 14, 1920, over WWJ in Detroit, with a six-piece band featuring what Specht called "rhythmic symphonic syncopation." It was a style of jazz Specht, a violinist, had nurtured while playing in the Wabash River town of Lafayette, Ind. Ragtime and Dixieland already had traveled up-stream from the Mississippi Delta and New Orleans to Memphis, then spread to Kansas City and Chicago, and into scores of smaller cities in America's heartland. Because of an even newer sound—jazz—the pioneering Original Dixieland Jazz Band gained acceptance when it came to New York during World War I and recorded "Tiger Rag" and "Livery Stable Blues." During those years Specht was playing in Reading, Pa., and in the Motor City where he made his first broadcast of "classical jazz."

"In Detroit, I watched restaurant and grillroom receipts mount higher and higher as the fame of our musicians spread," the dauntless young leader said. "I decided that they [the band] belonged in New York, and the way to get into the big town was to break in. We didn't have a thing in sight. But the boys wanted to come as badly as I did."

His break came when he performed for the first time in New York at the National Vaudeville Club before a critical audience of his peers. Specht and his jazzmen caused a mild sensation. At least twenty offers simply fell into his lap. He signed with Keith's

vaudeville circuit, starting at the Palace—the hope and dream of every performer.

Sometime later while the band was booked at the Astor Hotel, Lee De Forest, who had overseen the Detroit hookup, urged Specht to broadcast over WJZ. He agreed, and the station made one of the first band remotes by picking up Specht from the Alamac Hotel. Convinced that remotes were a unique form of advertising for a band and could lead to lucrative bookings, Specht jumped on the broadcast bandwagon.

Specht's Georgians, a small jazz group within his larger orchestra, greatly impressed listeners and won the sponsorship of Columbia Records. This 1923 band consisted of six talented sidemen: Russ Morgan, trombone; Frank Guarente, trumpet; Dick Johnson, sax; Johnny O'Donnell, sax; Artie Schutt, piano; and Chauncey Morehouse, drums. Specht soon toured Europe, then concentrated on bookings bands through his own Consolidated Booking Exchange. He lined up many engagements and tours for orchestras that were initially promoted over radio.

Specht boosted the careers of Charlie Spivak, Orville Knapp, Artie Shaw, Bob Chester, and others. He arranged Bix Beiderbecke's first radio job when Bix was playing cornet with the Wolverines in the Midwest. Specht's booking office brought them to Broadway's Cinderella Ballroom and to station WHN, managed by showman Nils T. Granlund. By 1925 Specht's radio pioneering neared an end. Several of his key musicians left for Detroit to join a rising new band fronted by Jean Goldkette.

However, before he began concentrating on multiband bookings, Specht had nudged an up-and-coming maestro, Vincent Lopez, from vaudeville onto the airwaves by convincing him that radio offered vast opportunities. Lopez took the suggestion. He enlarged his band to ten pieces, and added ear-catching, symphoniclike jazz and his own distinctive piano rhythms. Shortly thereafter, Lopez introduced one of the earliest radio-made song hits, "The Parade of the Wooden Soldiers."

At about the same time, another group of midwestern musicians cornered a chunk of the ether. The Coon-Sanders Band started broadcasts over WDAF from the Muehlebach Hotel in Kansas City. Joe Sanders and Carleton Coon christened their program, *The Nighthawks' Frolic*, and issued membership cards to some 37,000

long-distance, or DX, "nighthawks" who listened in from all forty-eight states. Later, they headed for Chicago, playing at the Blackhawk Restaurant. Coon-Sanders, by accepting bookings throughout the country, had helped make one-night stands a way of life for the big bands.

Dance music and dancing epitomized the 1920s, and radio increasingly set the tempo if not the pace. In 1925, B.A. Rolfe, an ex-circus cornetist, led a relatively obscure orchestra at a Broadway restaurant, the Palais d'Or. Three years later Rolfe's Lucky Strike Dance Orchestra was as much a part of the era as Lucky Lindy. The lively, fast beat typified the raucous sound of the dance-crazed twenties. Year by year the orchestra seemed to grow bigger and bigger—and louder and louder. Rolfe had expanded the group to fifty pieces—a formidable aggregation of master musicians picked from both jazz and symphonic worlds—which created sounds so overwhelming that punsters claimed it did not need radio for broadcasting, only open windows. On trumpet was Phil Napoleon, founder and leader of the Original Memphis Five; on alto sax was Andy Sannella from Ray Miller's band; featured clarinet soloist was Ross Gorman, who had been with Paul Whiteman when "Rhapsody in Blue" was premiered at Aeolian Hall in 1924; and at the twin pianos were Frank Banta, another Whiteman alumnus, and Milton Rettenberg, the leading accompanist for Victor Red Seal artists.

Other instrumentalists included George Green of the Green Brothers Marimba Band, at the xylophone; Fritz Forsch, a violinist, who doubled as director of the New York City Police Band; and Charlie Magnante, an accordionist who could play "The Flight of the Bumble Bee" in something over a minute flat.

These notable musicians and forty more, turned the triweekly Lucky Strike cigarette show into one of radio's most danceable segments. From 1928 to 1932 Rolfe made over 460 broadcasts for the tobacco company.

Lucky Strike's top brass set the standard. American Tobacco Company's president, George Washington Hill, personally evaluated both melody and tempo. During rehearsals, he insisted that NBC personnel dance to Rolfe's music. Secretaries and script girls were obliged to try out the week's selections on a makeshift dance floor. The better they danced, the more satisfied Hill was. One

recollection of Lucky Strike preparations mentions Hill's aged aunt. Apparently, she was brought to rehearsals to keep time by beating a pencil on the back of a chair. The band had to be unusually loud for this nearly deaf lady to hear at all. If her pencil ceased beating time at any moment, Hill shouted for the band to stop, complained of a sloppy performance, and insisted on immediate changes.

Hill's aunt might have been partially responsible for Rolfe's loud, fast-tempo band. But being more of a showman than an accomplished musician, B. A. Rolfe easily fitted into the mold of martial volume and peppy rhythm demanded by his attention-seeking sponsor.

"Dance music should throb and laugh with happiness," Rolfe would say. "It doesn't matter whether I play a fox trot hot off the music store counter or one that is fifty years old. Laughing music is what I want. Music that is an invitation to dance."

To explain the basis of his bouncy music, Rolfe would press his right hand into a fist and wave a decisive half circle.

"That one gesture means more to the musician than all the air-beating with a baton. He immediately knows what the conductor wants—more vigor, more strength, and robust finality."

Rolfe's earth-throbbing parade tempo led rival cigarette-maker Old Gold to sign Paul Whiteman for a similar big ensemble, novelty-variety whirligig on CBS. But the Rolfe cadence lost favor by 1931. Whiteman shifted musical gears, retaining his broad popularity. More and more listeners opted for sweet, subdued dance music.

It was during this transition from loud to soft music that a bandleader from Canada began to make popular impact with a sweet-and-low tempo.

Guy Lombardo and his nine-piece band, which included brothers Carmen and Lebert, left Ontario for club dates in Cleveland. They were luckier than most. The Lombardos got a chance to fill in standby time over WTAM, but without remuneration. The exposure, however, led to bookings in Chicago.

"The cafe owner wasn't at all enthusiastic about giving us a radio wire into his nightclub, but we insisted," Guy recalled. "Chicago's newest station, WBBM, scheduled us for fifteen minutes at 9:00 p.m., but at the end of the quarter hour, the

headwaiter ran over to say calls were coming in so fast at the station that it wanted us to continue. We played until the club closed at 1:00 a.m. Business boomed. Our music stressed the sweet, rich tones of Carmen's sax and Lebe's trumpet. Later we tossed in novelty numbers. The station told us they could get plenty of good novelty tunes or jazz elsewhere. They were paying us for our distinctive sound. That's what people wanted, so that's what we gave them. Every time we changed styles our ratings went down. You don't tell audiences what they want. They tell you."

Guy Lombardo arrived in New York in October 1929 to play at the Hotel Roosevelt Grill. Jules Stein, head of a newly formed talent agency, the Music Corporation of America, had first heard Guy in Cleveland and wanted his "Sweetest Music This Side of Heaven" in Manhattan. He lined up the hotel engagement and a CBS program sponsored by Robert Burns Panatella cigars. Not long after, William Paley asked the Royal Canadians to close the year 1929 from the Roosevelt over his network, playing from 11:30 p.m. to midnight.

"And the National Broadcasting Company asked us to *open* the New Year," Lombardo said. "We played for NBC from midnight to 12:30. It was flattering—the two biggest networks wanting us on each side of midnight."

So began Guy's longtime custom of welcoming each New Year at midnight with "Auld Lang Syne" over radio, and later television. The Lombardos created a catchy, original style that listeners liked and could readily identify with. His distinctive renditions of "Boo Hoo," "Don't Blame Me," "That Old Feeling," and "Sweethearts on Parade" may have sounded simple enough to copy, but in fact, they were very difficult to duplicate. Most of the elements that made up the full, mellow Lombardo vibrato had a common bass, or as he described it, "lyric phrasing," with the sax section usually working like a vocalist.

By 1932 Guy Lombardo was not the only sweet-and-low orchestra on the networks every night. The musicianship of such groups as Ted Weems, George Olsen, Lennie Hayton, Don Bestor, and Jan Garber, regularly heard at restaurants and other places of entertainment, improved before a radio microphone. The knowledge that thousands, and sometimes millions, were listening in all over America and sometimes the world, often honed a player's

technique and precision. A live mike usually kept a player alert and resulted in a better performance. But with a few, the sight of a microphone brought on a case of nerves. Young Billy Marshall, trumpeter with the Dorseys, Raymond Scott, and Sam Donahue, confessed: "I was always so jumpy on radio jobs. When the red light flashed 'On the Air,' it nearly turned me off."

Occasionally the music of a dance band might have been distorted by improper placement of microphones and careless instrumental balance, but fortunately such instances were rare. Perhaps the major drawback from a surfeit of sweet-sounding bands was the lack of variety that created a degree of dullness.

Throughout the golden years of radio, backup music was always available from in-house orchestras and staff combos. The larger networks maintained a fully chaired symphonic orchestra, two good-sized dance bands, and a small string ensemble. A few regular studio conductors led them through their paces. At CBS, for example, André Kostelanetz, Johnny Green, Ray Bloch, Mark Warrow, Lyn Murray, Howard Barlow, and Freddie Rich remained on constant call to mount a podium. Even nonmusical programs frequently required introductory, background, or mood music; perhaps only an organist, violinist, bugler, or drummer.

Players with Victor Arden's house band on the *Sunday Night Manhattan Merry-Go-Round* might be playing in the Campbell Soup orchestra led by Howard Lanin on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings at 7:15, and on Friday often were tuning up with Abe Lyman for *Waltz Time*. Musicians in high demand frequently were asked to chair posts with Wilfred Pelletier's Packard Motor Players, or Dave Rubinoff's Chase & Sanborn unit; Peter Van Steeden's *Town Hall Tonight* aggregation; Josef Koestner's *Hoover Sentinels*, or Oscar Bradley's Gulf Orchestra.

The job of scheduling forty or fifty staff musicians on a score of daily shows—plus several hundred more from the lists of freelancers—was monumental. Musical contractors acted as liaison between the network's needs and the available union musicians. They knew the ability and style of practically every musician in town.

Musical contractor at NBC was Leopold Spitalny. His counterparts for many years were Frank Vagnoni at ABC and Angelo Matera at CBS. Spitalny was fond of emphasizing the uncertainties

of his profession with a story about a violinist who could never follow his agenda. "When he saw a fellow musician on his way to a studio, he would simply follow him. On one particular program where an extra violin was needed, I sent him. When he didn't show up at the studio, I sent someone to find out what had happened. Our absent-minded fiddler had gone into another studio assigned to a program that required no orchestra, but there he was, sitting near the mike, ready to play."

This kind of mistake could happen and occasionally did; especially when the Radio City musicians had been killing time next door at Hurley's Saloon. Then they might rush to their assignment at the Perry Como studio, and find themselves at Nero Wolfe's!

Every major station kept on staff two or more full-time musical directors and arrangers. These virtually anonymous maestros often conducted on three or four programs each day. At CBS, Emery Deutsch arranged music for thirty broadcasts a week. Josef Stopak conducted dozens of sustaining programs at NBC. To insure variety, the network ruled that a selection could be played on the air only once each day. Such scheduling was exacting and time consuming.

A number of the busiest conductors and composers relied on the teachings of a Columbia University mathematical wiz to create and arrange the required large volume of music. The man behind these musicians was a little-known Russian émigré, Joseph Schillinger. He taught that composition was not necessarily pure art, but was reducible to a science based on mathematical computations.

The Schillinger System, as it came to be known, abridged original scores and arrangements to a formula, eliminating hours of improvising at a keyboard. In fact, it was possible to write and orchestrate a symphony for a hundred instruments without going within 50 yards of a piano. This music-by-formula left little room for error. And it was fast. Spin a chart wheel, square a couple of binomials, and you got an answer that was good for at least eighteen bars of melody. A few computations with a slide rule resulted in a complete arrangement for a twenty-five-piece orchestra.

In essence, this was the way Schillinger's disciples described the fundamentals of their mentor's system. George Gershwin and

Glenn Miller were perhaps the best-known students of Schillinger, who died in 1943 at age 48. Gershwin took three lessons a week for four years; and while still a pupil, wrote his classic "Porgy and Bess." Miller composed "Moonlight Serenade" as an after-class exercise. A coterie of Schillinger pupils, including Mark Warnow, Lyn Murray, Benny Goodman, Charles Paul, Leith Stevens, Rosa Rio, Jack Miller, and Harry Simeone, provided innumerable radio arrangements.

Paul Lavalle, who had studied with him for nearly six years and had applied Schillinger's principles to his work with a twenty-six piece orchestra on the *Chamber Music Society of Lower Basin Street*, declared: "It was a viable theory. I discovered Schillinger through Gershwin, while he was reharmonizing his own works. Gershwin explained that this unique scientific approach was rekindling his composing skills. The system enabled many of us in radio not only to turn out acceptable music in a hurry, but to get combinations and tonal effects undreamed of from merely working at a keyboard."

The years of sight reading, transposing, and improvising paid off. With a lot of ambition and a healthy bankroll, a radio sideman might break away and form his own outfit. Thus, from the ranks of house musicians came many of the ace band leaders of the 1930s and 1940s.

A young clarinetist from Chicago secured a steady job with Ben Pollack's Californians, who, in 1928, had settled in at New York's Park Central Hotel. In due course, the talented clarinetist left Pollack to freelance, playing with Ted Lewis, Don Voorhees, Ben Selvin, Red Nichols, and Lee Morse in pit bands, and on radio and records. From then on, 20-year-old Benny Goodman was his own boss.

"Radio was just beginning to spread out, and it seemed to me that a musician's future was going to be tied up with it," he recalled. "I had always been able to read pretty well, and with a good foundation on the instrument, I felt that I could work along and find a pretty secure living in that field."

By 1932 Goodman was earning about \$300 a week from radio jobs. Totally involved in music, nonetheless, he was unhappy and restless. Many commercial programs signed up big, established "name" bands like Fred Waring, Guy Lombardo, and Ben Bernie.

As the Depression deepened, the pick of freelance jobs slacked off. Benny found himself playing more and more for conductors he disliked. A few rubbed him the wrong way, especially when they made feeble and ineffective attempts at jazz, the kind of music he knew well. Others found Goodman difficult to work with, and he began to lose one job after another. His income dropped to \$50 or \$60 a week.

Record dates with jazz violinist Joe Venuti and vibraphonist Adrian Rollini offered a measure of satisfaction. Making these discs, as well as a few under his own name for Columbia, stirred up an idea to put together a band that would stress a distinctive syncopated rhythm.

In the spring of 1934, Goodman formed a group, organized out of stubbornness and frustration over having to churn out heavily commercial sounds for others. The band landed a summer engagement at Billy Rose's Music Hall where WMCA picked up the group several times a week. When Rose left for Europe to scout new acts, the club changed managers. Goodman's band was quickly dropped.

"This was probably the toughest blow I ever received, because the Music Hall represented some sort of pinnacle to me," Goodman wrote in his autobiography *The Kingdom of Swing*. "I had actually gotten together a band, rehearsed it, got a job, and held it for three months, and then had it kicked out from under me for no reason at all . . . we had tried to put across something new and had won a certain amount of response from the public."

Then, during his last week at the Music Hall, word was going around that the National Biscuit Company planned a big band program at NBC. They sought three aggregations to play alternate sets from 10:30 p.m. until 1:30 a.m. every Saturday night. The series called for a sweet orchestra, a rumba band, and a jazz, or "hot," outfit. Competition was keen among the better-known groups. Undaunted, Goodman lined up an audition, and by the narrow margin of a single vote, he got the job. "I played as if my life depended on it," he recalled, "for, in a way, it did."

*Let's Dance*—with three solid hours of music to make it the longest coast-to-coast sponsored series ever broadcast—showcased rumba king Xavier Cugat, a house band led by Murray Kellner (billed as Kel Murray), and Benny Goodman. The contract pro-

vided a budget for special arrangements, and Benny eagerly turned to one of his jazz idols, Fletcher Henderson, for help. He worked up four or five arrangements a week, beginning with such evergreens as "King Porter Stomp" and "Sometimes I'm Happy." Benny also found a vocalist, a girl named Helen Ward who had appeared with Irving Aaronson and Enric Madriguera. The Goodman segment of the program generated a certain excitement and spontaneity, and made Benny a giant of jazz.

When *Let's Dance* signed off in May 1935 after six months, the Music Corporation of America secured a booking for Benny in The Roosevelt Grill.\* Long accustomed to the soft, sweet dinner-hour sounds of Guy Lombardo, that hotel suffered a traumatic shock from Goodman's louder, upbeat style. As the band's first hotel engagement fizzled, MCA urged the group to go on the road. Listeners of *Let's Dance* wanted to know more about the Goodman band and when it might travel, especially west. Benny agreed to take his fourteen-piece outfit cross country. MCA arranged a tour ending at the new Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles.

But musical barnstorming didn't help Goodman. Before reaching Grand Junction, Colo., Benny heard reports of possible cancellations, including the Palomar. MCA managed to stave off disaster. But Goodman and the band were worried and perplexed over chronically poor attendance and cool reception, and the reports that saccharine-sounding mickey-mouse outfits were the rage on the West Coast.

On opening night, August 21, at the Palomar, Benny decided to play it safe once more. He'd stick to the sweeter tunes and softer arrangements. But still the dancers seemed bored and unresponsive.

"This went on for about an hour," Goodman recalled, "till I decided the whole thing had gotten to a point where it was make or break. If we had to flop, at least I'd do it in my own way, playing the kind of music I wanted to. For all I knew this might be our last night together, and we might as well have a good time while we had the chance. I called out some of our big Fletcher Henderson arrangements for the next set, and the boys seemed to

\*Whenever the Music Corporation of America booked a band, it sought to connect with a radio hookup. One of MCA's first, Don Bestor at the William Penn Hotel, Pittsburgh, established the pattern.

get the idea. From the moment I kicked them off, they dug in with some of the best playing I'd heard since we left New York."

The reversal caught the dancers by surprise. At first they faltered, then quickly recovered to break out with their fanciest steps. The whole dance floor started to "jump." The audience was under the spell of Benny's clarinet. He made history that night. The kindgom of swing had arrived and Benny Goodman was its sultan.

As half the population of Southern California, including thousands of collegians, poured into the Palomar, Benny's four-week booking was extended to two months. Many of his California fans had listened to Benny Goodman's music the previous winter when the coast-to-coast broadcast of *Let's Dance* reached the West Coast between 7:30 and 10:30 p.m. Goodman also had made it a regular habit to play his best arrangements, like "Sugarfoot Stomp," "Down South Camp Meeting," and "When Buddha Smiles," toward the end of the evening. West Coast listeners who tuned in around ten o'clock had heard these lilting, innovative numbers, and began to identify them with Goodman. A number of small stations in California had been spinning his records. Local disc jockeys had created a tremendous interest in his finely tuned band that melded Dixieland and jazz into swing.

Engagements up and down the Coast came Benny's way. Soon the big cities took notice of the Goodman sound. Chicago's Congress Hotel booked him for the winter. Frequent radio hook-ups brought Benny national acclaim. His sidemen—drummer Gene Krupa, pianist Jess Stacy, tenor saxophonist Art Rollini, and trumpeter Bunny Berigan—were key components as he rode the heights. By March 1936, when he contracted with the Elgin Watch Company for a radio series with Eddie Dowling and Ray Dooley, he led the polls as the number-one band of the country.

After ten months in Chicago, Benny Goodman returned to New York as the "King of Swing." In 1937 the group made music nightly in the Madhattan Room of the Hotel Pennsylvania. Three evenings a week, they broadcast from the hotel, and on Thursdays at 9:30 p.m. dashed to a CBS studio for the *Camel Caravan*. Cigarette-maker R. J. Reynolds gave Goodman free rein to play virtually whatever he wanted, propelling swing to the top of the popular music lists.

No more novelty hokum or syrupy sweetness for Benny Goodman. When the odds were against him, he had taken a flyer with an unusually expressive blend of dance music, and scored with a lively new beat called swing.

With the worst of the Depression behind them, people with a few extra dollars to spend also flocked to see, hear, and dance to the other big bands that followed in the wake of Benny's success. One-night gigs in college gyms, civic auditoriums, and roadhouses became a way of life for Woody Herman, Claude Thornhill, Duke Ellington, Hal Kemp, Glen Gray, Charlie Barnet, and a host of others, giving out sounds from ultra hot jazz to smooth sophisticated swing.

Radio quickly sought them out, and many found commercial programs waiting at networks. Cigarette manufacturers especially hastened to sign up the big swing bands, and thus reach the unsullied teenage smoker. Old Gold hired Artie Shaw. Raleigh headlined Tommy Dorsey. Philip Morris presented Russ Morgan. Chesterfield led with Glenn Miller. The more innovative but less commercial shows emanated from CBS. That network's *Saturday Night Swing Club*, *Young Man with a Band*, and *Nothing But the Blues* brought to the air Fats Waller, Jack Teagarden, Bunny Berigan, and other guest artists in the field of "hot" music. CBS also broke down racial barriers and hired the first Negro staff musicians, albeit a scant half-dozen, including Benny Morton and Cozy Cole.

The repeal of prohibition and a resurgence of public imbibing led to more opportunities for remotes from downtown hotels and chic nightclubs. Each band signed on the air with its very own musical theme. Hundreds of these were made popular by radio: "When It's Sleepy Time Down South" (Louis Armstrong), "Hot Lips" (Henry Busse), "Got a Date with an Angel" (Skinnay Ennis), "Ciribiribin" (Harry James), "Sunrise Serenade" (Frankie Carle), "I Can't Get Started" (Bunny Berigan), "My Twilight Dream" (Eddy Duchin), "The Waltz You Saved for Me" (Wayne King), and "Bubbles in the Wine" (Lawrence Welk).

The continuing search for new and different numbers in a maestro's band book led many to fashion old melodies and the classics into popular tunes. Some updated perennial ballads and traditional songs. Soon "Loch Lomond," "Hall of the Mountain

King," "John Peel," "My Old Kentucky Home," "Hungarian Dance No. 5," "Annie Laurie," "Danny Boy," and "Comin' Through the Rye" were heard at least once a day over radio in the late thirties.

Larry Clinton, for one, borrowed Debussy's "Reverie." He massaged it into the swinging "My Reverie," a tune that led the lists for eight consecutive weeks in 1938. Next, he adapted a theme from Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*, forging another major hit, "Our Love." Freddy Martin heard a NBC Symphony broadcast of Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat Minor* and couldn't get the melodic line out of his head. To exorcise the theme, he and his arrangers pulled out "Tonight We Love." Benny Goodman borrowed some Bach. He gave a December 1938 Town Hall audience his version of "The Rise of Jazz and Swing," including Alec Templeton's "Bach Goes to Town." The fuguelike piece in swing style drew generous applause, and later was heard by millions of radio listeners.

Bach aficionados complained of this and other inroads upon their master's works. The New Jersey Bach Society protested to the FCC, lamenting the fact that Bach's music encountered "slurring saxophones" and the "jungled discords of the clarinet." The group proposed penalties for radio stations that allowed, for example, jazz renditions of Bach's "Toccatina in D Minor."

Davidson Taylor, director of music at CBS, replied: "We do not interfere with the imagination of conductors who want to experiment with new versions of old tunes . . . Raymond Scott can do a minuet in jazz after Paderewski and we don't care."

Paul Whiteman agreed, stating that swing could not hurt great music. He reminded critics that Bach was once dismissed from a job as church organist because he improvised so much that the choir couldn't follow him. "Whether a swing arrangement of Bach is good or bad," Whiteman answered, "depends upon the tact and taste of the arranger, leader, and musicians. There's nothing inherently irreligious about swing or 4-4 rhythm. A bad classical music orchestra can multilate Bach just as can a poor swing band. Artistic popular treatment," he concluded, "invariably increases interest in classical music."

Whether borrowed from the classics or created exclusively in Tin Pan Alley, the music of the big bands had to be danceable. A

few bandleaders added another element: whistleability. Glenn Miller and his orchestra scored on both counts. One of the country's largest bands, it augmented its brass sections with four trumpets and four trombones, and woodwinds, and added five saxes and clarinets. Sixteen men, plus vocalists Ray Eberle, Marion Hutton, and the Modernaires quartet produced the unique Miller sound. It caught on during a 1939 summer engagement at the Glen Island Casino, a dozen miles north of Manhattan. Both NBC and Mutual broadcast what would soon become the most successfully commercial band of that era.

Glenn had started out as a trombonist in Ben Pollack's band. That led to jobs in theater orchestras, recording combos, and radio groups. Like Benny Goodman, he broke away and formed his own outfit—and faced years of struggle. Ultimately Glenn also developed an identifiable swing style—a singing reed sound built by scoring the clarinet and tenor saxophone to carry the melody. His success was nothing short of phenomenal.

In 1941 Miller and his band grossed over \$500,000 from personal appearances, radio, and records. His waxings on the Bluebird label sold nearly 3 million copies during his first big year. The Hotel Pennsylvania paid him \$3,000 a week; his one-nighters often netted even more. Chesterfield Cigarettes signed him for a CBS thrice weekly quarter-hour show at approximately \$110 a minute.

Each week Glenn received more than a hundred new (and generally unsolicited) songs. Only a few made the airwaves—perhaps one reason his orchestra performed more durable tunes (“Serenade in Blue,” “Tuxedo Junction,” “I’ve Got a Gal in Kalamazoo,” “In the Mood”) and less chaff (“Moonshine over Kentucky,” “Pinball Paul,” “The Gentleman Needs a Shave”) than most of his contemporaries. Miller set high standards during a brief but meteoric career.

When he enlisted in the Army Air Force, he entered a new phase and organized a morale-building band of GI musicians, including Ray McKinley and Mel Powell. In December 1944, he left by military transport from England to prepare concerts and broadcasts in Paris. No trace of the plane or its passengers was ever found.

Popular music fans had all too few Glenn Millers and Benny Goodmans. The schmaltz, or mickey-mouse band, continued to

flourish beside the swing kings and never really lost favor. Gimmicky with music made an impact. Sliding trombones (Sammy Kaye), musical straws (Shep Fields), talking a song's lyrics (Ben Bernie), and tic-toc beating on temple blocks (Gray Gordon) identified an outfit with the first few notes. Backed by a radio sponsor's ample budget, placed in prime air time and mounted with a quiz or contest, many bands made it big.

Horace Heidt (and Tums) led off with one of the earliest giveaway programs, *Pot o' Gold*. A runaway success, albeit controversial and short-lived, the show every Tuesday night gave away as much as \$1,000 in 1939 U.S. dollars. Musical numbers competed with telephone numbers. Heidt spun a giant numbered wheel to select the phone listing of a subscriber somewhere in the United States. He awarded cash to those who answered his ring and questions. So many hopeful contestants stayed home on Tuesday nights and seated themselves between a radio and a telephone that theater owners complained about poor attendance. The FCC voiced objections, too, declaring *Pot o' Gold* violated government regulations against lotteries. The crackdown ended the show after two years' running.\*

*Beat the Band* with Ted Weems and his orchestra appeared in the wake of Heidt's money *Pot*. This WEAJ musical quiz reversed somewhat the accepted order of most radio contests. Emceed by Garry Moore, the program provided cash prizes for the performers: Weems' musicians and vocalists Marvell (Marilyn) Maxwell and Perry Como. It set them up as a panel of musical experts whom listeners quizzed. For every question sent in and used, a listener received a cash prize of \$5. If he beat the band, the sender netted \$10. If a musician beat the listener by identifying and playing or singing a correct song title, he or she accumulated points. However, incorrect answers meant the forfeiture of 50 cents—tossed on the head of the band's bass drum. At the end of each show, a high point scorer emerged. At the end of each month, the overall winner collected a \$100 grand prize. Losers presumably consoled themselves with cartons of sponsor General Mills' Kix corn cereal.

During World War II vivacious Hildegard joined Maestro Harry Sosnick as hosts of *Beat the Band*. A new sponsor, Raleigh

\*A modified, little-noted version returned in 1946 over ABC with vocalists Jimmy Carroll and Vera Holley, Harry Salter's orchestra, and M.C. Happy Felton.

Cigarettes, changed a few rules and upped the jackpot to \$50 for write-in questions that stumped the band. Musicians who now lost tossed a pack of Raleighs on the big bass drum "for the boys in the service."

One of the most unusual giveaways combined music, automobiles, and law enforcement. *Musical Safety Patrol*, a local three-times-a-week program over New York's WMCA, featured Lee Grant's orchestra and baritone Siggy Lane. Safe drivers on city streets played this game. By obeying traffic regulations and exercising due caution, they had a chance to be cited as winners by patrolmen in police vehicles cruising Manhattan. Prize-winning motorists tuned in car receivers to note their license plate number as it was radioed over the air by the police. Appropriately sponsored by the borough's Pontiac auto dealers, the *Patrol* also broadcast the commendable course of action that brought the cash prize.

"Even' folks, how y'all?" from bandleader Kay Kyser opened a more stationary and lasting musical quiz. This was the highly entertaining *College of Musical Knowledge*, which began as *Kyser's Kampus Klass* and a sustaining feature over WOR in 1938. The show offered a "session of tantalizing rhythm and musical mirth" and a colorful quiz segment. "Why not have it like a schoolroom and make Kay Kyser the professor?" a production assistant asked at the outset. Kay liked the idea, and it met instant success. In no time, Kyser drew some five thousand quiz questions a week from listeners.

The bespectacled maestro looked like a school teacher, but his vocabulary was pure "jive" and "corn." Catch phrase "Greetings, Gates, let's matriculate" opened the quiz. "That's right, you're wrong" and "Students!"—when a contestant missed a question—stayed in the public vernacular through the 1940s. During its sixteen-year run, singers Harry Babbitt, Ginny Simms, Ish Kabibble, Georgia Carroll, Sully Mason, and Mike Douglas added an exceptionable degree of musicianship on such topical tunes as "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree," and "Any Bonds Today?"

Kyser first organized his band while matriculating at the University of North Carolina. The outfit survived three or four lean years of scattered bookings at out-of-the-way colleges and roadhouses.

Kyser's warm geniality and unrelenting drive helped keep the band together. In the winter of 1932, in a desperate bid for survival, they journeyed 2,000 miles west to play four weeks in San Francisco. But luck still eluded them. During the next five years they experimented, adopted, and discarded scores of musical ideas and sounds. Kay's loyal chairmen studied and compared their own techniques with nearly every successful band in the business. Their enterprising leader never gave up. He finally developed a distinctive touch—one that included the introduction of a tune by singing its title. It pushed him into the big time, and there he stayed until he stepped down by choice to retire with his wife, Georgia Carroll, to his native North Carolina.

Another musical game, *So You Want to Lead a Band*, caught on in the middle of the war years. The swing-and-sway music-maker, Sammy Kaye, built a novel gimmick into an enormous success. From a studio audience he chose three or four people, usually including a serviceman among them. Each was given an opportunity to lead Kaye's orchestra through a familiar tune, such as "The Darktown Strutters' Ball." His musicians took their beat and cues from the contestant. With tone-deaf housewives and tired businessmen on the podium, audiences shrieked and howled. Prizes were unimportant. The would-be maestros kept the autographed baton. (Kaye parted with an estimated 500,000 sticks by 1960.) The winner, selected by an applause meter, walked off with a bottle of champagne and perhaps a chance to compete in Kaye's annual bandleading "battle of the ages" finals at Carnegie Hall.

"The desire to lead a band," wrote radio critic John Crosby, "is apparently one of those basic instincts which, like the mass suicide of the lemmings, is powerful but unexplainable."

The simple format of *So You Want to Lead a Band* helped an ingenious Sammy Kaye stay on top for more than twenty years. He had started on the path of music in 1933 as an engineering student at Ohio State University, where he organized a group for college dances, continuing on to off-campus one-nighters. In 1938 he landed an engagement at New York's Hotel Commodore and the first of his many radio linkups.

Kaye fell title to the most "air exposed" bandleader of the 1940s. He was featured on all four networks: six times a week from the Astor Roof over CBS and Mutual; a Monday-

through-Friday evening show at ABC, and *Sunday Serenade* from NBC.

Several factors accounted for the band's longevity. "If a tune can't be danced to, we won't play it," Kaye always said. "That's our motto. We have a sweet sound, but if a new vogue comes along, such as rock 'n' roll, we adapt it to our approach. Of course, we hit upon a good gimmick and the slogan 'Swing and Sway with Sammy Kaye.' And we always play plenty of good old standards—"My Buddy,' 'Blueberry Hill"—songs that people remember and want to hum."

People long remembered the musical quizzes, too. Spirited and fast moving, they caught on as the big bands moved center stage. A music-filled contest brought smiles and laughs to Depression audiences and later to war-weary listeners. Audiences tuned in for the entertainment, excitement, and outcome.

Suspense and surprise ranked as chief drawing cards to a near-permanent fixture in radio's big band song sweepstakes. Guessing which songs would reach the top each week attracted listeners keenly attuned to popular music and its in-vogue practitioners. For twenty-four years *Your Hit Parade* played "those hits the public liked best," and all America listened.

George Washington Hill had created the idea after his Lucky Strike Dance Orchestra declined in audience polls. Gifted with an uncanny sense of what made popular program formats, he hired several hundred men and women in various parts of the country as song scouts. These individuals visited music stores to find out what sheet music and phonograph records were the top sellers. They also stopped at local radio stations to ask what songs were getting the most play on the air. Last of all, they made the rounds of dance halls and ballrooms to buttonhole bandleaders to ask what tunes garnered the greatest number of requests. These two hundred or more reports were tabulated as they came in to Hill's New York office. The top ten or twelve were skimmed off and reviewed. During the week of August 19, 1940, for example, computations revealed these top five songs:

1. "I'll Never Smile Again"
2. "When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano"
3. "I'm Nobody's Baby"

4. "Fools Rush In"
5. "Sierra Sue"

The tune in first place on the *Hit Parade* was always introduced last with a forceful buildup. A "Lucky Strike" extra—usually the seventh song and just past the midway point on each program—showcased a new tune for which widespread popularity was predicted.

The *Hit Parade* bowed in on April 20, 1935, with Warren Hull as M.C., Lennie Hayton with the baton, and the Rodgers and Hart ballad "Soon" in the number-one position. The hour-long broadcast—initially described by a *Variety* reviewer as the noisiest show on the air—rarely mentioned the names of the relatively unknown singers during the early years. Hill felt that the songs, not the performers, were important. He paid singers \$100 a show. Musicians earned up to \$75, if they added in rehearsal time. Announcers started at \$35 a week. All in all, each broadcast cost Hill only \$12,000. (By 1940, the tab reached \$26,000.)

During 1936 and 1937, orchestras changed frequently. Harry Sosnick, Carl Hoff, Al Goodman, Peter Van Steeden, Harry Salter, and Richard Himber came and went nearly every thirteen weeks. To some degree, the program suffered from a lack of cohesiveness, especially when nonmusicians, including W. C. Fields, appeared as "window dressing" for a month or two. Then, in 1939, conductor Mark Warnow came aboard.

During his eight-year stewardship, the *Hit Parade* developed into one of radio's best pop music shows. The vocalists alone assured high ratings. From 1938 to 1950, Lanny Ross, Barry Wood, Bea Wain, Bonnie Baker (picked up from various parts of the country during the run of her hit "Oh, Johnnie, Oh"), Buddy Clark, Joan Edwards, Andy Russell, Frank Sinatra, and Ginny Simms attracted as many listeners each week as did the suspense over what tune was in first place.

After a particularly stirring broadcast with Frank Sinatra and Bea Wain in March 1944, George Washington Hill verbalized his modus operandi in a memo to Warnow and choral director Lyn Murray. "Every song was on the beam," Hill wrote. "There was fire and magnificent delivery back of each one. The rhythm and

beat justified our feelings that the public love to hear songs with the accent that had made them popular.”

*Your Hit Parade* first starred ex-band vocalist Sinatra in 1943. Each Saturday night several thousand bobby-soxers stormed the CBS Radio Theater on Broadway and 53rd Street to see, hear, and, if possible, touch the most popular singer since Crosby. “Got a ticket for the broadcast?” they asked wistfully to those lucky ones who had waited for months for the mail to bring a pair. The theater held 1,200 people, mostly squealing teenagers.\* Prodigious applause and prolonged cries greeted Sinatra who often looked as if he were both very tired and suffering slightly from malnutrition. His renditions of “Paper Doll,” “You’ll Never Know,” “Long Ago and Far Away,” and “I’ll Be Seeing You,” accompanied by swooning girls, overshadowed the primary concept of the *Hit Parade*. The American Tobacco Company had no complaint over the ratings, but Hill apparently preferred a bit less pandemonium. In January 1945 Sinatra’s contract ran out, causing Hill to look for another baritone. He sought a new twist, packed with tremendous publicity potential. He found his man at the Met. His name was Lawrence Tibbett.

Tibbett wasn’t a novice in handling popular songs. He had starred on the *Voice of Firestone* a decade earlier. Nevertheless, the Met’s prize “Rigoletto” faced the *Hit Parade*’s yelling, screeching bobby-soxers with some trepidation. He expected catcalls and brickbats. On the first broadcast, Sinatra introduced Tibbett and laid down the law.

“Now listen, this man is a friend of mine,” Sinatra said. “You be very sweet and nice to him.”

No feathers flew. While some dissenting letters came in, the overwhelming majority complimented Tibbett. A month later, the Amalgamated Frank Sinatra Clubs of Brooklyn—representing thirty-six clubs and thousands of teenagers—dispatched a formal announcement to the effect that, after numerous consultations and much careful listening and deep thought, they had switched

\*Years later when Sinatra had his own CBS show, the producers attempted to eliminate howling and caterwauling from the younger element. It was said to be extremely irritating to listeners at home. CBS restricted the audience by printing on each ticket of admission: “This ticket is not valid for admission except for the person to whom originally issued provided such person to whom originally issued is at least 21 years of age.”

their allegiance from Sinatra to Tibbett. Although he stirred much talk by singing "Don't Fence Me In" and "My Dreams Are Getting Better All the Time," his concert and opera performances took preference. He left the \$4,500 a week job after six months, to be succeeded by Canada's answer to Bing Crosby, baritone Dick Todd.

A year after George Washington Hill's death in September 1946, Sinatra returned to the *Hit Parade*, bringing as costar Les Brown's former vocalist Doris Day, and as conductor, long-time associate Axel Stordahl with a thirty-three-piece group. Everything was new but the format and the usual hammering tobacco auction commercials.

When Sinatra left two years later, Mark Warnow resumed his conducting chores. Shortly after completing his 493rd *Hit Parade* broadcast in late 1949, Mark died suddenly. His brother, CBS staff conductor Raymond Scott, replaced him. The following year, Scott took the show to television. For a season or two, Lucky Strike broadcast the audio part of the proceedings to the diminishing number of households owning only radios. One of the few musical programs to make a transition to the video tube, it reached its nadir about 1951. That year's hits were "Too Young" (with a record twelve times in first place), "Because of You" (eleven times in first), "If" (ten times), and "Slow Poke" (seven times). They were sung ad infinitum by the cast of the 1950s: Eileen Wilson, Snooky Lanson, Dorothy Collins, Sue Bennett, Russell Arms, Tommy Leonetti and Gisele MacKenzie.

The *Hit Parade* ended in 1959. By then, disc jockeys largely controlled and directed the course of popular music and the selection of songs played on the air.

The initial popularity of the *Hit Parade* and dance bands helped to revive the record industry. In 1938 phonograph owners bought more than 33 million discs—an increase from 6 million in 1932. One-third spun on jukebox turntables. Sales of record players started to rebound. A \$20 phonograph attachment for radio sets especially found a viable market.

The piano, too, showed signs of regaining its position in the country's living rooms. In 1937, some 150,000 uprights and baby grands rolled out of music shops—more than any year since 1921.

Deliveries included many new and streamlined spinet models, built to take scarcely more room than a desk.

With nationally known bandleaders commanding a tremendous following, interest in playing musical instruments once more captured the public fancy. Schools, clubs, and communities organized orchestras and bands. Many groups were attracted to duplicate the prevailing popular tunes pouring from radios and jukeboxes. As the 1940s began, youngsters and adults alike, in the vernacular of swing jargon, took a spirited “get-off” at “spanking the ivories,” “jamming a push-pipe,” or “going to town with a licorice stick.”

*The*

*Mighty Music Box*



*— Gallery of Fame —*

*Melba broadcast from the Marconi plant near London, June 15, 1920. The first publicized program of entertainment in Britain, it took place two years before the BBC began operations. (Marconi Company)*



*Lucrezia Bori and John McCormack inaugurated a new era in broadcasting on January 1, 1925, when Victor presented its Red Seal artists on radio. (RCA Victor)*



*A piano was the focal point in studios of the early 1920s. KDKA in Pittsburgh added carpet, silk drapes, and potted palms. (KDKA)*



*One of the most popular and highest-paid performers of early radio, Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink sang at the opening of KWG in Stockton, Calif., November 22, 1921. (New York Public Library)*



*WJZ in Newark regularly aired well-known entertainers who traveled from nearby Manhattan. In 1923 singer Lydia Lipkowska and formally attired musicians broadcast at the Westinghouse station. (Westinghouse)*



*By 1925 Atwater Kent had become a household name. Here, the Philadelphia radio manufacturer adjusts the volume on his own Model 10 receiver and loudspeaker. (Courtesy of A. Atwater Kent, Jr.)*



*American Telephone and Telegraph Company's WEAJ in New York began transmitting in July 1922 to a daily audience of a half million. From its start the New York station recognized listener interest in music. (A T & T Long Lines)*

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

**Records or Radio**  
*as you've never heard them before*

THE  
**BRUNSWICK**  
**Panatrope**

with Radiola

**The Most Talked-of Musical Instrument of the Day**

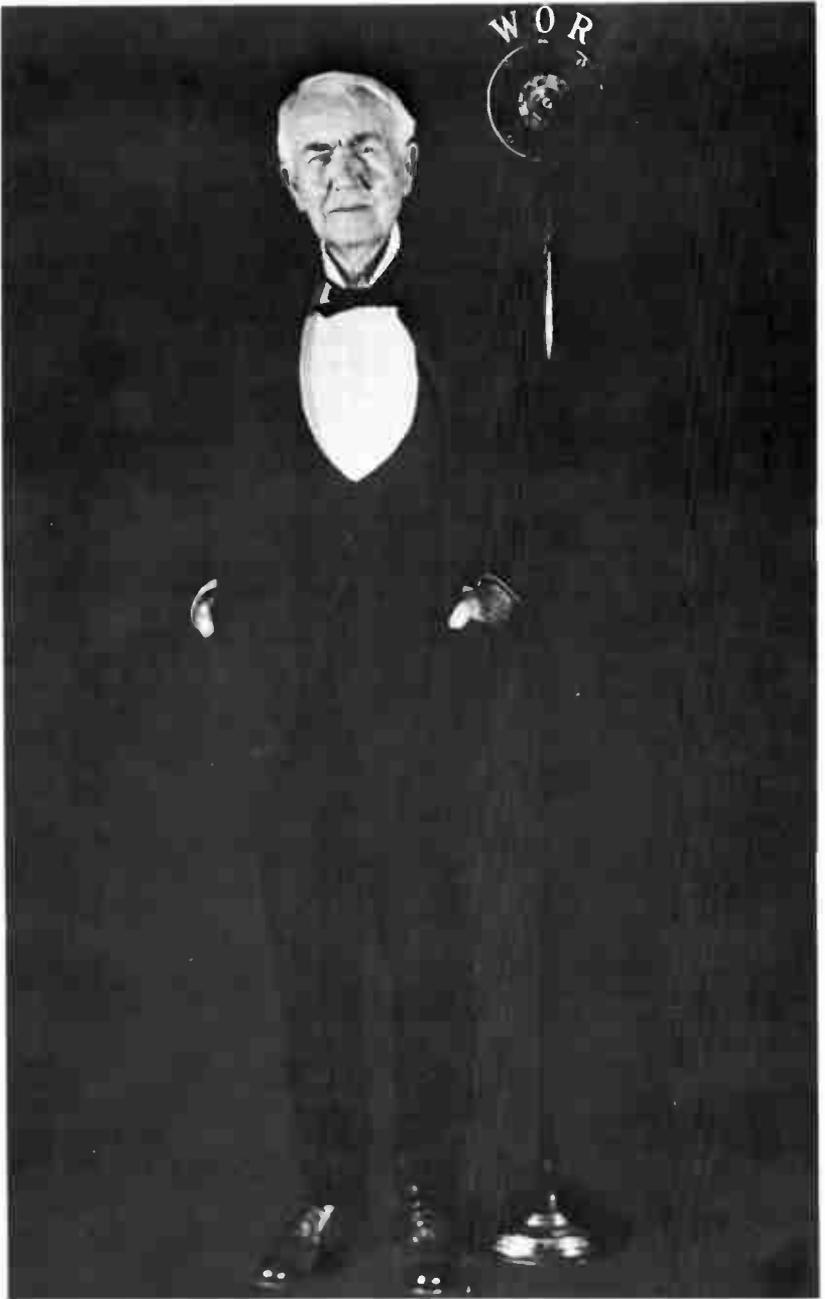
**Brunswick**

The advertisement features a central image of the Brunswick Panatrope, a gramophone with a large horn, sitting on a decorative stand. To the right, a separate radio receiver is shown. The text is arranged around these images, with a large headline at the top and smaller text blocks providing details about the product's features and availability. The Brunswick logo is prominently displayed at the bottom right.

Radio technology rescued the faltering  
 phonograph, converting it to electrical  
 methods of recording and reproduction.  
 In 1927 the Brunswick Panatrope-  
 Radiola projected lifelike sounds. (Morgan  
 & McMahon/Vintage Radio)



*The Happiness Boys—Billy Jones and  
 Ernie Hare—gained an army of WEA  
 radio fans with songs and jokes.  
 (Westinghouse)*



*Although inventor Thomas A. Edison personally preferred music from a phonograph, he manufactured radio sets and sponsored the Edison Ensemble. (U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service)*



*The shadow of a 1920s' microphone towers over young Jessica Dragonette who already had committed her voice to the airwaves. (Courtesy of Jessica Dragonette/Nadea Dragonette Loftus)*



*Bandleader, composer and crooner, Will Osborne broadcast almost daily from New York hotels and clubs. (Courtesy of Will Osborne)*



*The Cliquot Club Eskimos led by banjoist Harry Reser soon faced a studio audience. John S. Young (center, rear) announced the WIAF program. (NBC)*



*From Chicago's WLS, The National Be Dance featured the frolicking Hoosier Hot Shots. (Author's collection)*



*Furrier I. J. Fox (right) sponsored the Fox Fur Trappers, a singing group. For publicity purposes, he outfitted the cast in suitable winter garb. (Courtesy of Emile Coté)*



*Bing Crosby and the Boswell Sisters—Martha, Connie, and Vet teamed up at CBS, adding to that network's reputation for discovering and developing new young singers. (CBS Radio Network)*



*Edward McHugh, The Gospel Singer, built a daily audience for sacred music. (CBS Radio Network)*



*The Street Singer, Arthur Tracy, caused a sensation as a singer of popular love songs on Music That Satisfies. (Courtesy of Arthur Tracy)*



*The Palmolive Hour assembled an exceptionally talented cast of singers and musicians, making it a leading concert program from 1927 to 1931. (Author's collection)*



*A counterattraction to Crosby and Vallee, Russ Colombo had a short but dazzling career that ended tragically in 1934. (Author's collection)*

"RADIO'S ACES"  
**COON-SANDERS**  
NIGHT  
HAWKS Orchestra



**CARLTON COON**



**JOE SANDERS**



Features of **FLORSHEIM SHOE FROLIC**

*Late-night radio remotes from Kansas City made Coon-Sanders Orchestra well known coast to coast. (RCA Victor)*



*Ruth Etting popularized distaff crooning with appearances on Columbia's In the Modern Manner with composer-conductor John (Johnny) Green. (CBS Radio Network)*



*Alice Clements (center rear, with M.C. Ralph Edwards) auditioned and directed the group. Other members include Jacquelin and Billy Daniels, Olivio Santoro, Mickey Barnett, Marion Loveridge, the Mo. Pianist Mort Howard stands at left. (Courtesy of Alice Clements)*

# FAMOUS RADIO BROADCASTERS

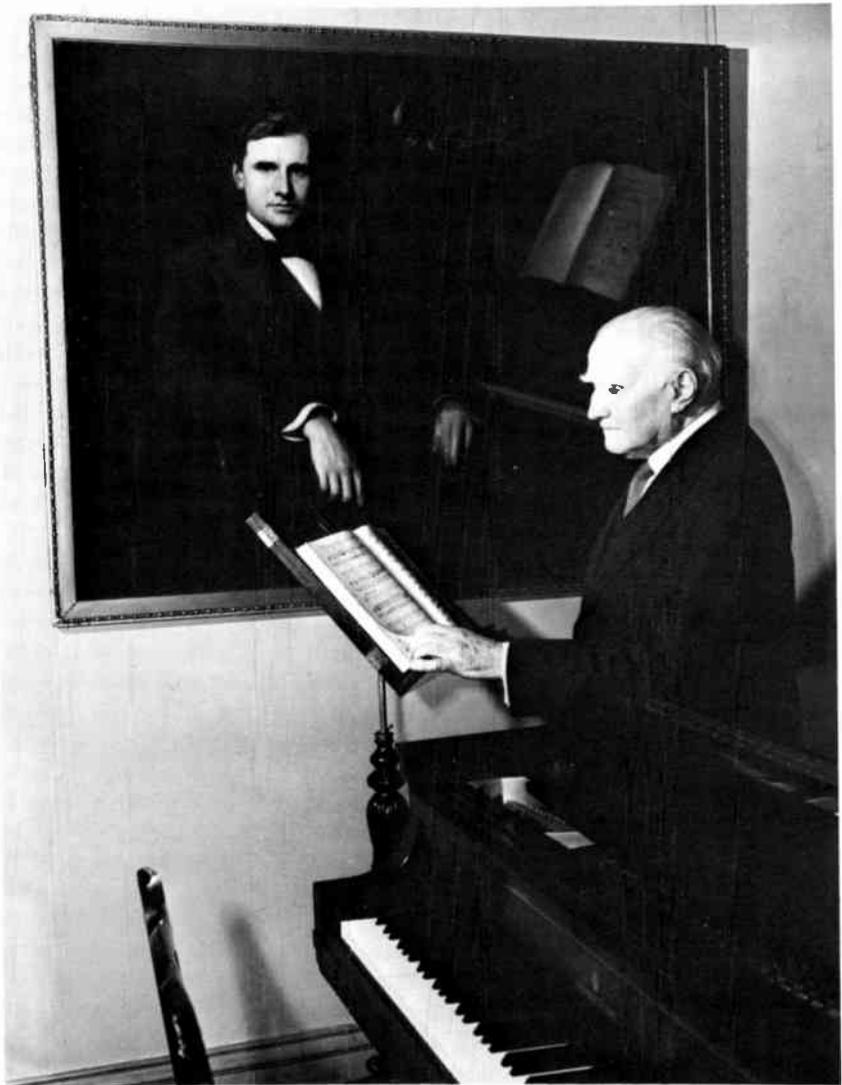


"ROXY'S GANG"

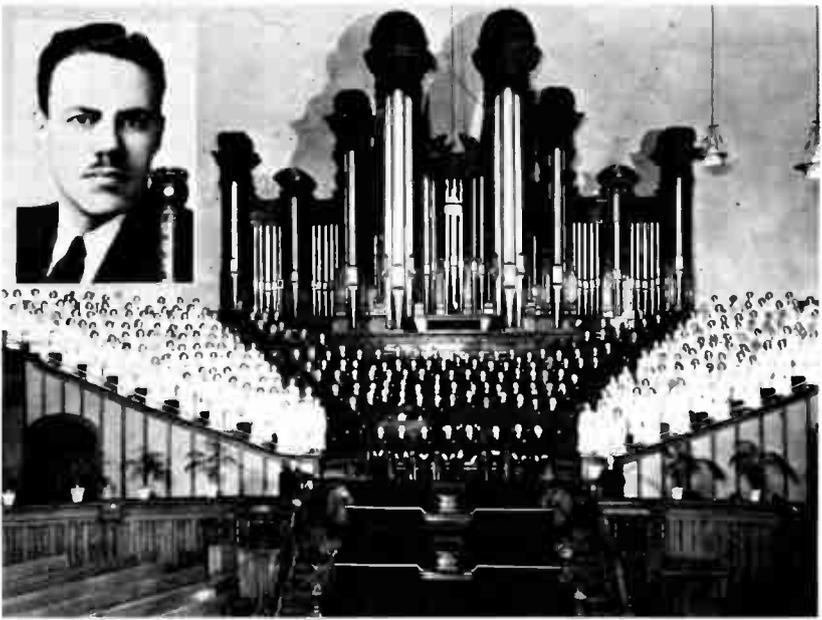
*Radio equipment manufacturers often promoted musical aggregations. The large and talented Roxy's Gang reminded listeners that Cunningham radio tubes ensured perfect reception. (Courtesy of Beatrice Belkin Littau)*



*f youngsters for the WEAF Children's Hour. Cast of the tenth anniversary show includes Horn & Hardart, and Cricket Skilling.*



*Walter Damrosch helped millions of school children and adults to appreciate good music. The oil portrait was painted in 1885 when the maestro was 23. (NBC)*



*The Mormon Tabernacle Choir, organ, and sermonettes by Richard L. Evans (insert) reached cross country as early as 1929. (CBS Radio Network)*



*Commentator on the Met Opera broadcasts, Milton Cross first worked from a cloakroom, peering over the heads of program director Herbert Liversidge and engineer Charles Grey. (NBC)*



*Organist Rosa Rio provided all important musical accompaniment, background, and transition. (NBC)*



*In the early 1930s CBS reputedly paid Morton Downey (left) \$6,000 a week, placing him among the world's highest-salaried singers. Conductor Freddie Rich and announcer Ted Husing appeared on his program. (CBS Radio Network)*



*Rudy Vallee and Graham McNamee (right).*



*Idol of 1940s' bobby-soxers and star of the Hit Parade: Frank Sinatra. (CBS Radio Network)*



*In 1935 Major Bowes presented the Hoboken Four, who won first place by singing "Night and Day." The quartet's baritone was 18-year-old Frank Sinatra (right). (CBS Radio Network)*



# WNEW TIME



*Martin Block on Make Believe Ballroom proved a disc jockey could compete with "live" music. (WNEW)*

★ Your Favorite Station for Music and News ★

**PLEASANT MUSIC**  
ON  
**Make-Believe Ballroom**  
sells **Pleasant-Tasting**



**PERTUSSIN** FOR COUGHS (DUE TO COLDS)  
to your customers



Martin Block praises Pertussin on his Make-Believe Ballroom 6:15 to 8:30 every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday over

**WNEW 1130 ON YOUR DIAL**  
**HAPPY LISTENERS ARE EAGER BUYERS!**  
**STOCK, DISPLAY, "MAKE HAY" TODAY...**  
**WITH PERTUSSIN!**



*Liggett & Myers sponsored programs of "live" popular music until the virtual demise of coast-to-coast radio. Chesterfield Supper Club starred Perry Como, with announcer Ben Grauer, Lloyd Shaffer's orchestra, and The Satisfiers. (NBC)*

# ON THE AIR FOR



**PHILCO**  
presents

## LEOPOLD STOKOWSKI *and the* SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6<sup>TH</sup>-NOVEMBER 3<sup>RD</sup>

**H**AVING secured the most talented and highest priced instrumentalists in the world—and having gained the leadership of conductor Leopold Stokowski, genius extraordinary—the Philadelphia Orchestra has been for years hailed as the finest symphonic orchestra in America or Europe.

With such a reputation to uphold—and being naturally unwilling that radio listeners should form an inaccurate impression of the orchestra's magnificent tone—the officials of the Philadelphia Orchestra have steadfastly refused until the present time to send its glorious music out over the air. But within the past year the whole level of radio reception has been raised, and foremost in progress is the new Balanced-Unit Philco—a radio whose units are so perfectly balanced that it reproduces the most subtle tone-colors of the symphony orchestra. . . . And so, Leopold Stokowski has consented to go on the air for the first time. Now under the sponsorship of Philco, you may listen in your own home to the



Pictured at the left is the blurred, distorted approximation of violin music which you receive from a radio whose units are not exactly balanced; pictured at the right is the true, clear tone that comes from a Balanced-Unit Philco.

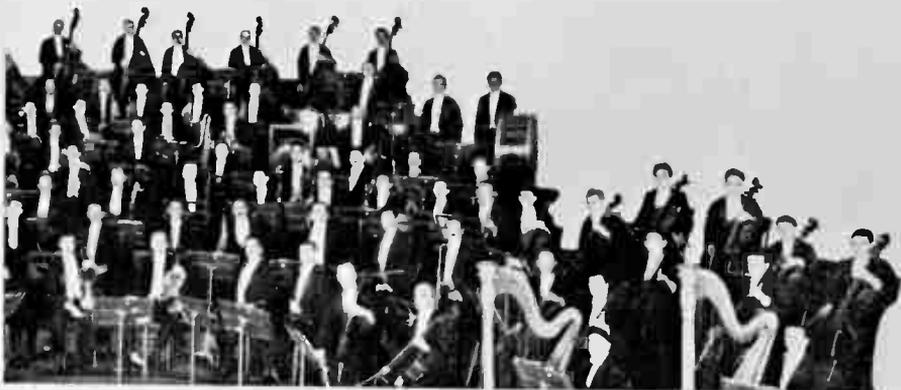
**"AND THEN THEY GOT A PHILCO"**

### *This series of broadcasts will be heard*

Albany W.F.H.; Atlanta W.S.H.; Birmingham W.A.P.; Boston W.F.R.; Buffalo W.G.R.; Charlotte W.B.T.; Chicago W.Y.W.; Cincinnati W.S.A.; Cleveland W.L.M.; Dallas Fort Worth W.F.A.; B.B.A.P.; Detroit W.C.K.; Denver K.O.S.; Elmira W.H.O.; Detroit W.W.J.; Duluth-Superior W.F.R.; Hartford 3.T.H.; Hot Springs K.T.H.; Houston K.F.R.; Jacksonville S.A.N.; Kansas City W.D.A.P.; Los Angeles K.P.N.; Louisville W.H.A.; Memphis W.M.C.; Miami W.I.O.; Milwaukee W.T.M.

5:30 to 6:30 P.M. Eastern Standard Time

# THE FIRST TIME



## PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA and DECEMBER 8<sup>TH</sup>

famous orchestra for which every seat for every concert is reserved by subscription, months in advance.

Demonstrations of the new Philco have proven to leaders in the musical world that here at last is a receiving set which will bring to radio listeners all the sonorous, gorgeously rich, orchestral tone which has called forth salvos of applause from the most sophisticated concert audiences in the world. If you want to hear the music of the Philadelphia Orchestra with all its glamour undiminished, if you want to enjoy every tone-color—from the highest harmonic of the violin to the deep throaty warble of the bassoon, tune in with a Balanced-Unit Philco. If you do not yet own a new Philco, arrange to listen in at the home of some friend who does. The difference in reproduction is worth traveling miles to hear. Or—see your Philco dealer today and arrange for a demonstration. Easy terms if you decide to buy.



### PHILCO LOWBOY

SCREEN CHOICE  
\$119.50  
See tables  
Complete range  
superb models  
from \$67 to \$200

#### over the N. B. C. Coast to Coast hook-up

Albany-WLSY, Paoli-KSTP, WEAU, Ithaca, Mass-WUSH; Norfolk-WMSE, New Orleans-Fltland, Orange-KTGW; Provi-WSHU, New York-WLAT, Radio-Richmond-WBYA; St. Louis-KSD; Salt Lake City-KSL; San Antonio-WOAI, San Francisco-KFO, KGO; Schenectady-WCA; Seattle-KOPM; Spokane-KIP; Tulsa-WATTS; Vandalia-ten W.H., Waukegan-WTAC.

8:30 to 6:30 P. M. Eastern Standard Time

# PHILCO

BALANCED-UNIT RADIO



*Young Hank Williams stopped the show with his melancholy lament, "Lovesick Blues." (Author's collection)*



*Roy Acuff (center) and the Smoky Mountain Boys broke into the Opry ranks in 1938, singing "The Wabash Cannonball." (Broadcast Pioneers Library, Washington, D.C.)*



*Singer-banjoist Dave Macon (right) and a large cast of country music performers soon made Grand Ole Opry a Saturday night tradition. (Country Music Foundation Library & Media Center, Nashville, Tenn.)*



*During the war, Jessica sang on Saturday Night Serenade and made personal appearances for bond drives. (Courtesy of Jessica Dragonette/Nadea Dragonette Loftus)*



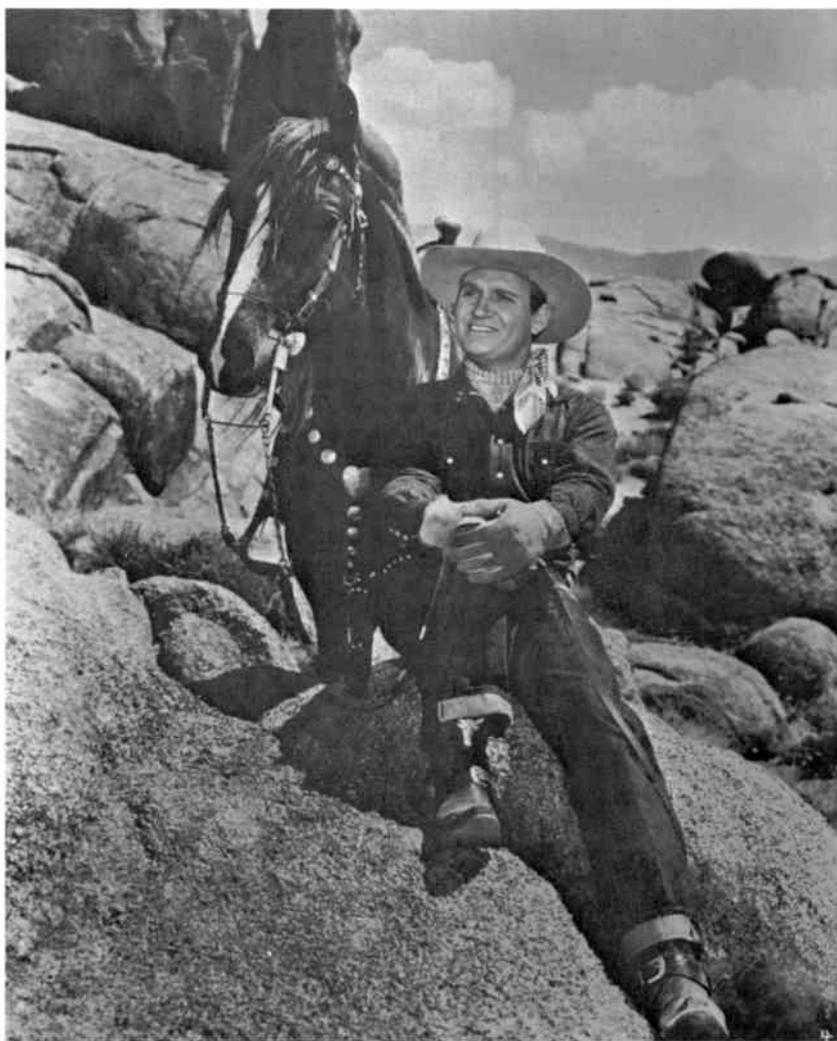
*ABC musical director Paul Whiteman hosted the first coast-to-coast DJ program. (Courtesy of Margaret Livingston Whiteman)*



*Basso Harry Frankel pioneered with singing commercials for Barbasol and electrical transcriptions for Coca-Cola. (CBS Radio Network)*



*WOR's Uncle Don captivated a late afternoon audience with rhymes, riddles, songs, and stories. (Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Collection/Eagle Files)*



*Gene Autry brought cowboy and country music into the mainstream of American music. (Golden West Broadcasters)*



*Fred Waring's Pennsylvanians grew from a four-piece banjo group at Penn State College in 1918. Some 40 years later, Fred Waring, Jr. (right), joined the original members (left to right) Poley McClintock, Fred, Sr., and Tom Waring. (NBC)*



*Glenn Miller won nearly every big band listener popularity poll of the early 1940s. (CBS Radio Network)*



*In 1943 attractive Jane Froman volunteered to entertain troops overseas and ended up a casualty, spending remainder of the war in hospitals or on crutches. (CBS Radio Network)*



*Disc jockey Kurt Webster (right) spun an old waxing of Ted Weems' theme song, "Heartaches." His listeners in Charlotte, N.C., sparked a country-wide revival of the tune and presentation of a Decca gold record. (WBT/Loonis McGlohon)*



*Winners of the 1941 Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air—Lansing Hatfield, Mary Van Kirk, and Mona Paulee—receive medals and checks from Wilfred Pelletier. (NBC)*



*Hardly a day went by without one or more of these vocal stalwarts on network prime time. From left to right: Bill Perry, Thomas I. Thomas, Frank Munn, John Charles Thomas and Conrad Tibbault, with conductor Gus Haenschen in background. (Courtesy of Bruce Fehrer)*



*By 1934 Frank Parker reached network star status. Gulf Headliners with the Pickens Sisters, the Revelers, and conductor Frank Tour displayed his vocal versatility. (CBS Radio Network)*



*As coconductor of the NBC Orchestra, Stokowski highlighted works by contemporary composers Paul Creston (left) and Deems Taylor (right). (NBC)*



*Gene Autry was sworn in as an army private during a 1942 broadcast of Melody Ranch. (CBS Radio Network)*



*The Moylan Sisters—Peggy Joan (left) and Marianne—aid war efforts by collecting fats. (Author's collection)*



*Lucy Monroe, "the star-spangled soprano," toured military hospitals and war plants, and sang at community bond drives. (NBC)*



*At Gimbels, New York, Irene Wicker autographs copies of her children's book, *The Little Hunchback Horse*. (Courtesy of Irene Wicker Hammer)*



*Kate Smith introduced "God Bless America" in 1938 and sang it regularly throughout the war. Here, she visits KNX Hollywood with (left to right) her director, Harry Ackerman; manager Ted Collins; his assistant, Sylvan Taplinger; writer Jane Tompkins, and unidentified publicist. (Courtesy of Harry Ackerman)*



*Duke Ellington and Tommy Dorsey were big-name disc jockeys. (RCA Victor)*



*Munn starred on American Album from its debut in 1931 to his abrupt retirement 14 years later. The 1940 cast (left to right) consisted of Elizabeth Lennox, Munn, Jean Dickenson, Andre Baruch, Gus Haenschen, 32-piece orchestra, and 12-voice choir. (Author's collection)*



*As radio concerts faded from the air, Felix Knight (here with Al Reiser's orchestra) lined up jobs on TV and Broadway, in summer stock and nightclubs. (NBC)*



*Radio discovered Kenny Baker (center) in 1935. CBS featured the vibrant-voiced tenor on the Texaco Star Theater with maestro David Broekman and vocalist Frances Langford. (CBS Radio Network)*



*Rose Bampton and Maestro Toscanini listen to a playback of their 1944 Fidelio broadcasts. (Courtesy of Rose Bampton)*



*In 1937 NBC brought Arturo Toscanini back to radio audiences for 17 memorable seasons. (NBC)*



*Met Opera baritone Lawrence Tibbett came to Firestone microphone in 1932 and stayed for many seasons. (NBC)*

## The Maestros

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**B**y the mid-1930s prime-time radio competed with stage and films for audiences. Each vied for talented headliners from the other two media. It was not unusual for Jack Benny or Lanny Ross to be playing a theater engagement next door to a movie house featuring his latest picture, and a few blocks from a radio station preparing for his weekly broadcast.

By 1937 Hollywood had attracted a large contingent of radio performers before its cameras; and was producing films based upon popular music programs. That year's celluloid crop included several musicals taken directly from studios along radio row. *The Hit Parade*, for one, featured Carl Hoff and his orchestra, plus Phil Regan, Duke Ellington, and Eddy Duchin. *Manhattan Merry-Go-Round*, loosely based on the top-rated Sunday night musical gambol, also starred Phil Regan, Cab Calloway, Louis Prima, and Ted Lewis.

Radio comedians were well represented in films in 1937: Joe Penner in *Life of the Party*, Jack Benny in *Artists and Models*, Burns and Allen in *College Holiday*, and Bob Burns in *Mountain Music*.

Radio's popular singers and musicians also made the big screen. Bing Crosby starred in his thirteenth Paramount Picture, *Double or Nothing*. Kenny Baker warbled in *52nd Street*. Rubinoff appeared in *You Can't Have Everything*. Ben Bernie pepped up *Wake Up and Live*. Bobby Breen hit high notes in *Make a Wish*. Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians contributed to *Varsity Show*.

“Highbrow” artists, long considered box-office poison, now were being lured west. Few, if any, made cinematic history, but their radio fans flocked to the neighborhood bijou when their pictures came to town. Grace Moore, Lily Pons, James Melton, Gladys Swarthout, Nino Martini, Helen Jepson, and Lawrence Tibbett embellished major studio releases in 1937. Their films capitalized on radio’s enormous popularity as well as their own—an appeal that reached all levels of listeners. Universal Pictures went so far as to persuade one of the world’s foremost symphonic conductors, Leopold Stokowski, to don makeup and be featured in *100 Men and a Girl*, Deanna Durbin’s latest film.

As Hollywood continued to raid every network studio, many more radio singers, conductors, comedians, and bandleaders passed screen tests and signed movie contracts during the next dozen years. One widely acclaimed maestro, however, had remained apart, refusing as much as a quarter of a million dollars for a single film. He was Arturo Toscanini, a giant among giants, who late in life carved an unparalleled niche in broadcasting.

It was in December 1937 that NBC brought Maestro Toscanini to radio; not for the first time, but for the inaugural of an unsurpassed artistic affiliation that continued well into the last decade of the medium’s golden age.

On that Christmas night a festive and elegant audience poured into NBC’s huge Studio 8-H. Autograph hounds, congregating in the RCA Building lobby, made entrance difficult for the formally dressed celebrated personalities: New York’s First Lady Mrs. Herbert Lehman, Lily Pons with André Kostelanetz, Kirsten Flagstad, Joan Crawford, Rosa Ponselle, and Grover Whalen, along with 1,500 other distinguished guests, who had gathered to pay almost reverential homage to Maestro Toscanini and the newly organized orchestra of ninety-two instrumentalists that filled the large stage. Never before, or since, had a radio station network or corporate entity created an orchestra of this caliber and size.

All eyes were on the Radio City podium when Maestro Toscanini appeared. The audience rose to express an enthusiastic welcome to the world’s leading musician who had come out of retirement in his native Italy and returned to America to direct this great orchestra. The alliance with NBC lasted for seventeen

years—from the lingering days of the Depression through global holocaust and postwar upheavals; and finally into the invasion of television.

Prior to 1937, two generations had grown up musically with Toscanini. His NBC debut would now bring to a new generation the wonder and magic of his artistic leadership and his passion for musical perfection. The concept for an NBC symphony orchestra with Toscanini as its director had originated with John F. Royal, vice president in charge of programming. At the time, NBC had about seventy house musicians among which were some of America's most accomplished classical artists. Royal suggested to David Sarnoff that these musicians might be used to better advantage if a large staff orchestra were built around them, under the direction of a great conductor such as Toscanini. The orchestra could record for Victor, creating additional income required to sustain itself.

Sarnoff, who also had been brooding over Toscanini's untimely retirement—much too soon for so vigorous and superior a conductor—reacted favorably to the suggestion. With the idea for an expanded orchestra, he approached Marcia Davenport, novelist and music critic, and the daughter of Alma Gluck who had sung with most of the famous conductors, including Toscanini; however, he did not at first mention Toscanini. Marcia immediately approved the idea and suggested that Sarnoff try to persuade Toscanini to conduct a series of concerts on the NBC network. Sarnoff responded by asking for *her* help. She agreed, but declined the task of convincing Toscanini to accept the post of conductor. However, she arranged for Sarnoff to meet a long-time confidant of the maestro, Samuel Chotzinoff, who was music critic for the *New York Post* and who seriously considered the project. Sarnoff offered Chotzinoff a job at the network, which he accepted, although neither as yet had any idea what his specific chores would entail. He soon found out!

His first assignment was to lure the 70-year-old maestro back to America. With an insider's knowledge of his temperament and life-style, "Chotzie" was firmly convinced that under no circumstances would Toscanini again leave his native Italy for the United States. Sarnoff weighed this for a few minutes, then reached a daring conclusion: If the staff orchestra musicians were not pleasing

to the maestro, he would be permitted to change all of them if necessary, replacing them with musicians of his own choosing from anywhere in the world, at whatever the cost!

“Would an opportunity to create his own orchestra—a great symphony orchestra—interest him?”

“I don’t think so,” Chotzinoff replied. Nevertheless, he agreed to try.

Passage was booked to Milan and arrangements made for a visit to the Toscanini villa with instructions to win his approval and services at virtually any price he named. The reunion was at first casual, a visit from an old friend. After two weeks, “Chotzie” broached the matter to his host, taking care to choose a propitious moment when Toscanini seemed to be in rare good humor. He explained in minute details the entire suggestion his employer, NBC’s president, had asked him to place before the maestro.

“It wasn’t easy,” he later recalled. “I had to impress upon him the great impact of radio and to make him realize what it had meant to audiences to hear his broadcasts of the Philharmonic in previous years.”

Exhausted by the ordeal, Chotzinoff had finally leaned forward and asked, “Maestro, will you come and do ten NBC concerts a season for \$4,000 a performance?”

Toscanini did not reply. Seconds ticked away. Then he beckoned his wife, Carla, who was the daughter of a successful and shrewd Milanese banker. Conversing in Italian, the two discussed the proposal. She agreed to the arrangement *provided* her husband’s fee would be “tax free.”

It had taken a great deal of patient and subtle persuasion—and NBC’s agreement to the sum of \$40,000, plus the federal income tax—to settle the matter. But it was mutually agreed upon. The building of the symphony began almost as soon as Chotzinoff’s wire reached Sarnoff with the good news.

Most radio listeners of the 1930s already were well acquainted with the virtuosity of Arturo Toscanini from the late 1920s when he was conducting the New York Philharmonic. At that time CBS had contracted with him and the Symphony for a full season of Sunday afternoon concerts, to begin in 1930. Toscanini’s music had regularly entered some 5 million homes every Sunday.

The network engaged Olin Downes, *The New York Times* critic and lecturer, as commentator on each program. An average single broadcast in the 1930s reached more people than the total of all those who had attended, in person, the four thousand or more concerts given by the New York Philharmonic in its first ninety years. Toscanini himself looked upon radio as a "classical discovery," and in his early network years had compared the quality of transmission in America with that of Europe, where he had led the BBC and La Scala orchestras, and had found American broadcasting enormously superior to that of the Old World. Most major conductors also approved radio's contribution to the development of music appreciation. Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra; Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony; and Gabrilowitsch and the Detroit Symphony were in the forefront of those who, with the CBS broadcasts, created a cherished musical tradition for more than three decades.

As plans for the first season of the NBC Symphony Orchestra took shape, Toscanini asked Artur Rodzinski, conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra, to engage and train the musicians for the NBC Symphony, and to share the podium with him during the 1937-38 inaugural season. Twenty-three weekly broadcasts had been scheduled—ten each under the direction of Toscanini and Rodzinski, and three by Pierre Monteux.

Rodzinski spent months auditioning players. Out of these only those who were available for forty to fifty-two weeks a year were engaged. He lured to Radio City many first-chair players from other orchestras by offers of top salaries and a chance to work under the great Toscanini's direction. These raids, especially on personnel from the Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit Symphonies, left a wake of bitterness among orchestra managers. From some seven hundred musicians auditioned, Rodzinski chose about ninety. Among these were concertmaster, Mischa Mischakoff; violinist, Remo Bolognini; trumpeter, Harry Glantz; cellist, Frank Miller; flutist, John Wummer; and violist, Carleton Cooley. These players, under the direction of Rodzinski, rehearsed for several weeks and had actually given several broadcasts before Toscanini arrived in New York in December 1937.

He immediately established rules for his orchestra: No visitors at rehearsals; no commercials to interrupt the concerts, and no

studio clock. (An exposed clock face, he contended, would tie his performances to fixed time segments. Consequently, announcer Howard Claney worked from a specially built soundproof booth above the control room, although it offered no direct view of the orchestra and it was necessary to glance through the glass window and into a mirror hanging on the outside wall. A matter of "some reflection," as one wit observed!)

In essence, Toscanini's word was law to musicians, production personnel, and network executives. To eliminate studio static and audience noise, NBC printed programs on silk cloth or soft thick sheets of blotting paper. And a note cautioned those fortunate enough to be able to witness a broadcast: "Since the modern microphone is extremely sensitive, your cooperation in maintaining silence during the music is urgently requested." (Including, undoubtedly, the stifling of coughs, sneezes, and burps!) Studio audiences responded almost automatically, already awed by the sharp-eyed, white-haired Toscanini even before he lifted a baton. So, too, were radio listeners awed.

At the conclusion of the first broadcast, which aired Vivaldi's *Concerto Grosso*, Mozart's *G minor Symphony*, and Brahms' *First Symphony*, thousands of letters of praise poured into Radio City: "... soul stirring." "The Maestro is in a class by himself." "... the incomparable Toscanini." Music critics agreed, calling the broadcast "a thing of interpretive and mechanical perfection." The ever-present *Variety* reviewer concluded that the series might even make "a dent in Lucky Strike's *Hit Parade*, synchronously spotted on CBS."

Ticket requests reached twenty-three thousand per month, and soon soared to fifty thousand. A black market developed and flourished for the limited twelve hundred studio seats available at each broadcast. At the conclusion of the second concert when Toscanini conducted works of Schubert, Beethoven, and Strauss, the studio audience stood and cheered. "These were moments," wrote Olin Downes, "when the only natural and spontaneous thing to do was to cheer."

What audiences heard at those early concerts, in the words of Toscanini biographer Robert Charles Marsh, was a "fine, professional orchestra with which Rodzinski could secure excellent results, but which had not become sensitized through long associ-

ation to Toscanini's desires and highly individual rehearsal methods." The best was yet to come.

By 1939, the NBC Orchestra noticeably had gained in clarity, polish, and precision. Toscanini's performances developed a special incandescence through which every player seemed inspired. A performance of Mozart's "Prague" Symphony had, in the words of critic Downes, "That special shimmer, glow, and glory of color which confer the final distinction upon orchestral sound."

Only one problem constantly plagued the producers. The acoustics in Studio 8-H, at best, did not lend themselves to a broadcast of a full symphony orchestra. The hall eliminated nearly all viable resonance. Trombones, especially in fortissimo passages, sounded coarse and harsh. A far from ideal setting for broadcasting or recording, although the results generally compared favorably with most commercial sound reproduction of the late 1930s.

In desperation, engineers relieved the studio of some "dead" atmosphere by feeding the pickup through an echo chamber in the control room. This totally false accouterment brightened and enlivened the works of the maestro's favorite composers: Wagner, Beethoven, Liszt and Haydn, and lesser-knowns such as Respighi and Martucci.

Some five years later, during World War II, NBC gave Studio 8-H an acoustical facelift. Engineers stripped the auditorium and installed new tone-enhancing paneling. Even chairs were replaced to eliminate creaks and slides. Listeners often unconsciously swayed to the beat of the maestro, and when compounded, the squeaks had the sound of a broken clarinet. The results of the revamping added a tonal brilliance but still did not equal the superb acoustics of nearby nineteenth-century Carnegie Hall, the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, Symphony Hall in Boston, the Auditorium in Chicago, or the Lyric Theater in Baltimore.

Wherever he performed, Toscanini could be, and usually was, an uncompromising tyrant. His demeanor rarely indicated a high degree of satisfaction with any performance; music was a most serious business. "I am responsible for the performance and the players must give me what I want," he proclaimed. No orchestra player or vocal soloist could escape his emphatic artistic quest for flawless sounds.

Arturo Toscanini was born March 25, 1867, in Parma, Italy. His

father was a tailor who sent him to the local music conservatory at the age of 9, where he learned to play the cello and piano. At 17, he made his debut as a conductor before a small audience at the conservatory, playing one of his own compositions. His first opportunity to conduct professionally came in 1886 while touring South America as a cellist with an Italian opera company. An audience in Rio de Janeiro declined to accept the orchestra's concertmaster as a fill-in, following the forced resignation of the company's Brazilian conductor. Into the breach stepped Toscanini and led his fellow musicians in *Aida*, a score he had fully memorized. This magnificent performance, plus eighteen or more during the tour, established the maestro's reputation. He conducted in various opera houses in Italy, and at the premiere performances of *La Boheme* and *Pagliacci*. The musical directorship at La Scala soon followed. Then, in 1908, he arrived in New York to conduct at the Met for seven seasons. Reengaged by La Scala at the end of World War I, he toured America as a symphonic conductor. In the mid-1920s, he joined the Philharmonic, conducting about three months each year in New York. The public jammed his concerts; the critics praised him, and the orchestra was acclaimed at home and abroad as the greatest of its day.

By 1930 Toscanini had conducted for most of the legendary great singers of his time: Caruso, Farrar, Sembrich, Homer, Bori, Scotti, Rethberg, and Lehmann. Now he began to work with a whole new generation of young artists: Jan Peerce, Zinka Milanov, Helen Traubel, Nan Merriman, Vivian della Chiesa, Licia Albanese, Leonard Warren, and Robert Merrill.

Among the talented newcomers was Rose Bampton. She had finished her studies at Curtis Institute in 1932, and in the spring of that year, sang one of the principal roles in the American premiere of Schönberg's challenging cantata, "Gurre-lieder," with Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra. The highly praised performance quickly led to a Met contract, and her debut, at 23, as Laura in *La Gioconda* on November 28, 1932. But after three years of contralto roles, Rose wearied of portraying villainous and frustrated females, and set about "restructuring" her voice. By 1937, she was singing a soprano repertoire. Apart from the Met, guest appearances on *The Magic Key*, *Show Boat*, and *Kraft Music*

Hall, as well as the NBC weekly series *Songs You Love*, made the Cleveland-born diva a favorite with a large national audience of radio listeners.

Rose Bampton's first broadcast with Toscanini took place in early 1936, while still singing contralto roles, when he chose her for a performance of Verdi's *Requiem*. About three weeks before the Sunday Philharmonic broadcast, an assistant manager sent her a notice of the first rehearsal time and place: 5:00 p.m. at Toscanini's studio apartment in the Hotel Astor. On the day of rehearsal, Rose practiced and drilled. At 4:15 her telephone rang. It was the Philharmonic manager.

"Where are you?" he asked.

"Where would I be on the afternoon of a rehearsal with Maestro Toscanini!" she facetiously replied.

"I know where you are supposed to be: Here! Rehearsal began at four o'clock."

"Your note reads five o'clock. I have it in front of me."

"Bring it with you. But get here."

Miss Bampton hurried to the maestro's apartment, arriving out of breath and a bit frightened. She had heard fantastic stories about Toscanini's temper. The maestro, dressed in a severely cut black jacket, stood silent as she entered. She tried to apologize, but the impassive Toscanini ordered her to sit down beside her coartists, Ezio Pinza, Charles Kullman, and Dusolina Giannini.

"I thought he was giving me a chance to catch my breath, but when I started to sing, he'd take it out on me," Rose remembered. "Meanwhile I had developed a good case of nerves. At my first cue, I had for all intents and purposes lost my voice. The results were awful."

Toscanini stopped the accompanist, then glared at Rose.

"I am sure you can do better than that," he said. "I am sure you can do better."

Rose tried again—without success. Maestro walked out of the room. Rose began to cry.

"I was sure he would protest, then replace me."

Toscanini returned to the room and dismissed the group. He said that he would call each of them tomorrow. Rose went back to her apartment and cried until her eyes were red.

Early the next morning, the telephone rang.

"Miss Bampton, this is the Philharmonic manager. Do you know Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*?"

"Of course," she replied, although actually she was unfamiliar with the vocal requirements of the work.

"Come to Maestro's rehearsal this afternoon."

From the moment she put down the receiver, Rose studied the score. Overnight, Toscanini had decided to change his program from Verdi to Beethoven. By the end of the rehearsal, Rose had fully met the maestro's demands and those of the different role.

Rose Bampton and her conductor husband, Wilfred Pelletier, soon became close friends of the maestro and his family. After many Saturday broadcasts of the NBC Symphony, they would join him for dinner at his secluded home in nearby Riverdale. One late spring evening during World War II, Rose and the maestro were relaxing on the terrace overlooking the majestic Palisades on the opposite shore of the Hudson River. The bells ringing from a nearby church added to the bucolic setting—one that reminded Toscanini of his native Italy. The maestro broke the silence.

"I think I'll broadcast *Fidelio*."

"Really! That's marvelous, Maestro."

"Si. But who am I going to use?"

"Lehmann, of course," Rose answered.

"She doesn't want to sing anymore."

He paused a minute or so, then asked, "Do you sing *Fidelio*?"

"Yes, Maestro, I have."

"Do you sing it well?"

"Maestro, I never said I sang anything well. I think it was musical. I can't tell you that I was the greatest *Fidelio*, or that I sang it magnificently. That is not for me to say."

"Would you sing it for me, Rose?"

"Yes, but I'll need time. I last sang the role several years ago in Buenos Aires."

Toscanini telephoned Rose nearly every day for weeks. He inquired of her progress with the challenging Beethoven opera. She practically went into seclusion to study and train. Her few free moments were spent in visits to her ill parents. Several months passed. Rose arranged to sing the role at Maestro's studio. Only

then did she learn that practically every soprano in the country had sought the assignment.

The NBC Symphony broadcast of *Fidelio*, sung by Jan Peerce, Eleanor Steber, Nicola Moscona, and Rose Bampton, represented Toscanini's first performance of an entire opera in the United States since 1915. For all but a small segment of the audience on December 10 and 17, 1944, the two-part program offered the first experience of this aspect of his conducting art.

The maestro's musicians welcomed an opportunity to perform opera. They were equal to the challenge and secure enough to withstand Toscanini's exhortations, not unlike a foreman overseeing an agonizing construction job. At rehearsal Toscanini was a rigorous taskmaster, but he was always toughest with himself. Despite having committed to memory the scores of over a hundred operas and two hundred symphonic compositions, he never stopped reaching for the ultimate perfection.

Toscanini illuminated an interpretation of music with flashes of verbal lightning that often terrified hardboiled production aides and control room engineers. Occasionally, when the maestro's sense of humor surfaced, laughter broke the tension. During a particularly painstaking rehearsal, he would instruct: "This segment must sound far away, but not too far . . . about to Brooklyn."

Sometimes his musicians injected their own bit of levity among themselves, remarking that the vigorous sway of the maestro's baton would either decapitate a player or send him home with pneumonia.

Toscanini's mood could change suddenly. His temper tantrums were notorious. He swore, tore up sheet music, or broke batons. On one occasion in a burst of temper, he threw his expensive platinum watch onto the rehearsal stage floor, smashing it into a dozen pieces. John Royal, a top-ranking NBC vice president, hurriedly picked up the pieces. Later he went to a nearby drugstore and bought a couple of one-dollar Ingersoll pocket watches and had a jeweler engrave on the back of each, "For Rehearsal Only." Surprisingly, Toscanini took an immediate liking to these timepieces, wearing them at social functions and at broadcasts.

The unusual platinum watch, once repaired, was never again seen at rehearsal.

“Many times I saw him lose his temper with himself as well as with the men,” Royal remarked years later. “But few musicians, regardless of Toscanini’s eccentricities, ever quit. All of them wanted to work for him and with him.”

Those who worked with Toscanini referred to him proudly as “a great trouper,” the highest compliment a performer can pay to another. He never missed a rehearsal or a broadcast, nor rested on past laurels no matter how formidable the achievement. The NBC Symphony had come into being because of his decision to be its leader; and no conductor ever entered into a partnership with more feverish dedication and vigor. During the orchestra’s second year he made seventeen broadcasts and gave six concerts on tour. The following season encompassed nineteen performances, plus a trip to Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay.

That South American tour began in Rio de Janeiro on June 13, 1940, just two weeks before the fifty-fourth anniversary of Toscanini’s conducting debut there at the age of 19. All sixteen concerts were sold out, and six of these were broadcast to the United States. The month-long tour brought him enormously enthusiastic goodwill in Latin America. Diplomats and businessmen declared it the most effectively enduring event for strengthening the ties between the two Americas at a time when the hemisphere’s involvement with the war in Europe seemed inevitable. Restaurants, by adding special menu items such as “soup Toscanini,” paid their own highest tributes to the maestro.

Toscanini’s popularity south of the border spread to other major cities during the tour. One night in Buenos Aires, when he had ventured into a popular music hall, a gypsy dancer leaped from the stage during the performance and threw her arms about him. The audience cheered. Later, however, sadness encroached upon the holiday atmosphere in Rio when violist Jacques Tushinsky was killed by a bus only a short time before the orchestra’s last concert.

The summer of 1941 brought another kind of trouble. An incident, never fully explained by those involved, nearly ended Toscanini’s work with the NBC Symphony. As was the custom each summer, the network engaged one or two fill-in conductors

for a nine-week series. Since the Symphony was a house orchestra, its members were required to play on extra programs, including chamber music groups and string quartets. Guest leaders such as Fritz Reiner, George Szell, Ernest Ansermet, Dimitri Mitropoulos, and Toscanini's protege Guido Cantelli came to the off-season podium. In 1941, with Europe at war, Toscanini cancelled his annual vacation in Italy, and remained in New York with little to keep him occupied. He did, however, keep in close touch with the orchestra.

One day he walked in on a rehearsal of a Brahms symphony. What he heard outraged him and he went straight to his friend, Samuel Chotzinoff.

"That's not my orchestra," he charged. "What has that man done to it?"

"He is only guest conductor for another week," Chotzie explained.

"He is a disgrace!" Toscanini roared. "He has ruined my orchestra." He glared at Chotzinoff, and left in a rage.

Shortly, he sent word that he would never again conduct the NBC Symphony. Had the war not ruled out such a journey, he would have booked passage for his homeland, never to return to New York. Instead, he shut himself up in his Riverdale quarters and refused to answer telephone calls or letters pleading for his reconsideration. Nevertheless, David Sarnoff had no intention to disband the orchestra; he simply sought a new conductor for the 1941-42 season.

But by September, Toscanini was complaining vehemently of his inactivity. He was eager to make a contribution to the war effort. NBC proposed that he conduct the orchestra to promote the sale of U.S. Treasury bonds. He quickly agreed to a series of five special concerts, and soon thereafter discovered that "his" orchestra had neither lost its character nor its quality. Perhaps it was only his sense of fealty toward the orchestra, plus a feeling of close personal identification with the musicians, that had created the breach at the outset.

During the maestro's "sabbatical," Leopold Stokowski had stepped in. But in the autumn of 1942, Toscanini was persuaded to return as principal conductor of the Symphony. Stokowski was retained as coconductor.

For Toscanini, however, sharing his orchestra held no merit. He believed that his cohort's style conflicted with his own, producing unfavorable results. Therefore, he adhered to his own traditional grouping and seating of symphonic players. Stokowski simply regrouped them for each of his broadcasts. He held that, unlike a concert in an auditorium, the musicians must be seated with an ear to the acoustical effects picked up by a microphone. He also preferred free bowing violinists, believing it more comfortable than following the exact arm pattern of a section leader.

Toscanini disagreed. To add to the quandary, Stokowski favored contemporary composers, especially those who were anxious to get the best possible quality from a major organization. Conversely, Toscanini's programs stressed Brahms, Beethoven, Verdi, Wagner, Mozart, and Tchaikovsky, and his repertoire virtually stopped with Ravel and Debussy.

The inevitable clash between these two great conductors demanded a showdown. One or the other had to leave. Stokowski departed in January 1944, shortly after his controversial premiere of Schönberg's "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra" and Shostakovich's "Seventh Symphony."

For the next decade, the orchestra remained under Toscanini's direction. And by the time World War II engulfed humanity, he was the most famous living Italian with the exception of Mussolini and the Pope. Long a foe of fascism, he had shunned the Bayreuth Festival after the Nazis took over Germany and other adjoining areas. Similarly, Salzburg audiences lost their great mentor. America had taken this "champion of democracy" to its heart. He, in turn, helped innumerable exiled musicians to find work. For the oppressed victims of Hitler and Mussolini, Toscanini generously gave money and time. He had always conducted fund-raising concerts for causes he wanted to support. In fact, his original NBC contract stipulated that he be given the services of the orchestra for two benefits of his choice every year. In 1943 when General Motors sought and won sponsorship of the broadcasts, this arrangement was reconfirmed. Many appearances for war bond drives netted \$1 million or more. For the Red Cross, he conducted a special joint program of the NBC Symphony and the Philharmonic before 18,000 people in Madison Square Garden, and a

600-voice chorus sang. The selections consisted of works by “enemy alien” composers, Wagner and Verdi.

To celebrate the fall of Mussolini, Toscanini revived Verdi’s “Hymn of All Nations,” which he had last conducted in 1915. The U.S. Office of War Information asked him to “star” in a twenty-minute documentary marking the collapse of the Italian fascist regime. The government filmed it at his Riverdale home and in Studio 8-H. The NBC Symphony, Westminster College Choir, and Jan Peerce (often called Toscanini’s favorite tenor) joined the maestro in a stirring performance of this long-shelved ode to liberty. To the Verdian medley of fighting hymns, Toscanini appended an intense version of the Star-Spangled Banner.

Toscanini’s humanitarianism and his unyielding devotion to the cause of human dignity and freedom were praised by presidents and heads of state on the home front, and by GIs and soldiers on the battlefield. At the same time, he scheduled benefits for the Philharmonic pension fund, the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, and other charities.

As the Allied victory approached, the NBC Symphony entered its finest hour. “For those who heard those concerts . . . the effect, the passion, the intensity were unforgettable,” wrote musicologist Charles Robert Marsh.

The momentum continued into the immediate postwar years. In the late 1940s Toscanini averaged seventeen radio broadcasts a season. His broadcast repertoire broadened to include more opera performances: *Boheme* with Jan Peerce and Licia Albanese; *Otello* with Herva Nelli and Ramon Vinay; *Traviata* with Albanese, Peerce, and Robert Merrill; *Aida* with Nelli and Richard Tucker. Then in March 1948, the union ban on “live” television music ended. Toscanini agreed to a telecast of the Symphony. But on that same afternoon, ninety minutes before the Toscanini concert, rival CBS’s TV cameras picked up the Philadelphia Orchestra with conductor Eugene Ormandy, and caught him chewing a cough drop!

At the close of the 1949–50 season, the NBC Symphony took to the road for a six-week tour of the United States, with concerts in Baltimore, Atlanta, Dallas, San Francisco, Seattle, Cleveland, Washington, and thirteen other major cities. A special twelve-car

train carried Toscanini and his 106 musicians from coast to coast. This was the 83-year-old maestro's first transcontinental tour, and it covered more than 8,500 miles. But it gave his many fans their only opportunity to see and hear him in person. Few "long-hair" musicians had ever commanded greater attention from the public. Everywhere he appeared his programs were sold out weeks in advance. The largest crowd—12,000 people—gathered in Cleveland. In the South he delighted one and all by playing "Dixie" as an encore. It was a triumphal forty days and nights—exhilarating for the maestro, unforgettable for his audiences. Had he never conducted another concert after this triumphal tour, Toscanini's NBC performances and RCA recordings would have assured him a lofty and enduring place in the annals of music and broadcasting.

But carry on he did. Although plagued by a knee injury, resulting from a fall at his home, and by weakening vision, he stepped up on the podium in late 1950 to commence his sixty-fourth year as a conductor. During the next four seasons, he directed more than thirty-five broadcasts.

During the last months of the 1953-54 schedule, however, NBC accepted the fact that, both physically and mentally, Toscanini was failing. The network began to make definite contingency plans, hiring a standby conductor to take over. Producer Don Gillis also made backup plans, stationing an engineer to cut the "live" Toscanini and fade in a preselected recording of the Symphony. Surprisingly, Toscanini met the demanding challenge of the last weeks of the spring season, and while on the podium, gave little suggestion of his advanced age until the final concert on April 4, 1954.

Ben Grauer, who had announced most of the Toscanini programs, vividly remembered those anguishing moments at his last broadcast, seen from his post in the control booth.

"During the second half of the broadcast, in the middle of the *Tannhauser* overture, the music suddenly became mushy. You could see the maestro's concentration suddenly dissolve and go to jelly. His right hand was still beating but the orchestra was leading him. . . . Daniel Guilet, the concertmaster, started to conduct with his chin; then led with the bowing up and down of his violin. . . ."

Toscanini followed them even as his own beat became less and

less decisive. And at that moment, Don Gillis shouted, "Oh, God. Do something, do something!"

"I felt he should leave the program on the air," Grauer recalled, "and prayed the music would regain its vigor. I told him, 'Don't do anything for at least thirty seconds or a minute.' But that was guesswork."

The network faded into music from a Toscanini recording of Brahms's *First*. The radio audience accommodatingly shifted from Wagner to Brahms, while the "canned" Toscanini lasted for a full minute; then the "live" performance on stage suddenly improved. Gillis quickly faded back to the stage.

"During those few minutes," Ben Grauer continued, "I watched Toscanini retreating to the back of the podium and the protective brass railing, as if the score were going to attack him. But the music called him back. He lifted his head and moved forward and started to take the beat. What had disintegrated was retrieved. The next, and the last, selection was meaningful and memorable—the Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*. The maestro again stepped into the director's shoes with all of his usual drive and assertiveness. 'Ba ba baba ba.' And the brass answered him. On the last note, he put his right hand down, and the baton dropped to the floor. A member of the orchestra picked it up, handing it to him. He took it indifferently, and slowly walked off, and refused to return to center stage for a final bow."

Toscanini's acquiescence to end his sixty-eight-year career was officially made public after the concert, perhaps to avoid any prolonged or emotional demonstrations by the orchestra and the public. No doubt there were some last-minute regrets—a desire for just one more season on the podium. But at age 87, his style of vigorous conducting was too taxing for body and mind. Shortly, RCA disbanded the Symphony. It no longer wished to bear the enormous expense. Furthermore, they felt that the players in the dawning age of television had outlived their usefulness as radio staff musicians.

The maestro seemed most concerned over the fact that his musicians soon would be unemployed, and appeared most relieved when they decided to remain together, independent of NBC. Under Don Gillis's guidance they reorganized into a nonprofit

membership foundation, The Symphony of the Air. Their first concert at Carnegie Hall on October 27, 1954, was dedicated to Arturo Toscanini; and in further tribute to the maestro, performed without a conductor on the platform.

In subsequent seasons, The Symphony of the Air welcomed such guest conductors as Bernstein, Leinsdorf, Alfidi, and Stokowski. But for Toscanini, there would be no return to this or any other podium. Although he lived three more years, his health steadily deteriorated. He died in January 1957 at age 89.

The Symphony of the Air continued its plans for a lofty and ambitious array of ancillary activities: a summer-long music festival; a film library of great orchestral composition; a masterworks library of music on binaural tape; and a series of public school music appreciation programs through network and local radio stations. But none of it took shape. After almost a decade of dedicated efforts, the foundation succumbed for lack of financial support. Its demise seemed to emphasize the uniqueness of Toscanini's genius. No individual group could duplicate and sustain the brilliant performances of the NBC Symphony under the direction of Arturo Toscanini.

Olin Downes summed up the totality of Toscanini's musicianship after his November 1943 concert. "In an age which is particularly distinguished by the development of virtuoso conducting, this master stands out among the most brilliant of his colleagues or predecessors for his professional knowledge of the innermost secrets of the interpretive art, as well as the singular union of precision, elasticity, and sensitivity of his beat."

Toscanini's reign as a radio maestro encompassed some two hundred NBC broadcasts with more than half commercially recorded on RCA discs. While his seventeen seasons before a microphone represent a mere quarter of his total conducting career, it was this latter golden epoch that gave him his most enduring legacy—the phenomenal mating of serious music and radio.

## Homespun Sounds

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**F**ew customers in the 1920s stopped at the small railroad telegraph office near Tulsa, especially near the end of the four-to-midnight shift. To pass the long, lonely hours, the young operator strummed a guitar and sang cowpoke songs.

One summer night while he was absorbed in one of these cowboy ballads, a rangy, gum-chewing stranger entered the office, and stayed awhile to listen.

“You’ve got a good voice, son,” the man said when the song ended. “Do you know the song ‘They Plowed the Old Trail Under?’”

The young man admitted he did, and strummed a few chords to prove it, then rendered the song with moving pathos. While he was singing, he studied the stranger, and knew he had seen him before. The man thanked him and asked if he might have a closer look at his steel guitar. The stranger picked out a few chords, then began to sing “Casey Jones.” Finished, he handed the instrument back to the young man.

“Stick to your singin’, young fella. You’re good with that guitar, too. Why don’t you go East where the big money is ‘n’ try fer a job?”

Nineteen-year-old Gene Autry had heard that kind of praise before. Because of it, he had left his father’s farm one summer to sing with a traveling patent medicine show. He saved enough to buy himself a saxophone, but put it aside and soon was singing again for neighborhood parties and church socials.

The stranger interrupted his daydreaming. "Reckon I'd better send that message now. But you keep thinkin' about gettin' on the radio, son."

Gene took the message. Even before he read to the bottom of the page, he knew who this customer was. He had no need to glance at the signature, "Will Rogers."

He didn't take Will Rogers' advice right away, but he kept thinking about it. If he *was* good enough to merit praise from a famous star of the Ziegfeld Follies, maybe he'd better do more than just think about it.

As soon as he saved a month's wages—the sum of \$150—Gene Autry left his railroad job. He had his eye on New York, and soon boarded an eastbound train. Riding free on a railroad pass, he slept in a chair for the three days and nights it took to reach New York City. He was on his way, sure that fame and fortune awaited him—well, somewhere! A recording contract was a way to both, so why not take the plunge.

Toting his guitar, he tried for an audition at all the record companies. Day after day, he hoped someone would listen to his cowboy songs, but few did. Then, one morning in the anteroom at Victor, the receptionist asked him to play something. It was all the encouragement he needed. He sang every country song he knew. He was still at it when recording director Nat Shilkret strolled from another office into the waiting room. He listened, and liked what he heard. The next morning Gene cut a test record. After the playback, Shilkret said: "You've got a nice voice, young man, but you lack experience. Go get a job at a radio station and come back in a year or so."

Autry caught a train going west, but he had a door-opener now—a letter of introduction from Nat Shilkret. It got him a radio show at Tulsa's KVOO as the Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy. By October 1929, he was ready to try New York again. On this trip, he landed a record contract and began waxing tunes for Victor and Columbia. Among the early ones were "Hobo Yodel" and "Dust Pan Blues" on which he imitated the bluesy yodeling style of his idol Jimmie Rodgers, who was considered the father of country music by many. Now the breaks were coming Autry's way. He began to get radio jobs at stations throughout the Midwest. Then, his friend Jimmy Long, a train dispatcher and amateur songwriter,

gave his career a boost. Jimmy had an idea for a cowboy ballad, but he thought it needed more emotional pull in the words. Gene helped him rewrite the lyrics, and first introduced "That Silver-Haired Daddy of Mine" on the air in Tulsa. It caught on. In a couple of months, the Autry-Long melody was a favorite in the West and well on its way to becoming one of the all-time hillbilly hits.

The major networks now began to seek out the "wholesome singing cowboy." From WLS Chicago, Gene was soon reaching a national audience. He was a natural, untrained performer and made no pretense of being, or wanting to be, anything other than himself—a simple cowhand with a pleasant singing voice. This added greatly to his audience appeal. By 1934 he was unquestionably the most popular country-and-western singer on the air. And that year he signed the first of several Hollywood contracts that covered a series of musical Westerns that ultimately numbered nearly a hundred.

In 1940, Wrigley's Doublemint chewing gum signed Autry for his own coast-to-coast radio program. The Sunday series, *Melody Ranch*, lasted sixteen years—one of the longest sponsor-star arrangements in broadcasting. The program opened with the *Melody Ranch* theme, "Back in the Saddle Again," sung by Gene, who had now earned the billing of "the world's greatest cowboy." This CBS western variety show featured music, drama, and comedy, and might have lasted into the 1960s had Wrigley not insisted upon a "live" show each week.\* The company disliked taped presentations, and acquiesced only when Autry's rodeo tours and one-nighters kept him away from the studios. But now Gene wanted more programs prerecorded so that he could pursue his other interests, which by 1948 stacked up to a multimillion-dollar empire. His long-time sponsor vetoed the idea. Gene Autry dropped the series in 1956. But he still had plenty to do. He now owned five ranches, two TV stations, two music publishing houses, five radio stations, and part of a Phoenix newspaper. From cowpoke to potentate: Gene Autry, Inc.

Perhaps more than any other performer in this category of music, Gene Autry was responsible for bringing cowboy and

\*A number of dramatic shows and daytime soap operas lasted into the 1960s. *Suspense*, *Yours Truly*, *Johnny Dollar*, *Ma Perkins*, *The Right to Happiness*,

country music into the nation's homes and establishing it in the mainstream of American musical culture. At first his yodeling type of singing had been considered by top radio executives to be no more than a passing fad. But it endured. Listeners remained loyal and increased in numbers. The cowboy ballad, the Appalachian lament, and the yodeling blues grew in popularity, eventually outlasting the generation that had first embraced these folklore melodies, and creating in America a staple musical syndrome that was deep-rooted and perennial. Along the way Gene Autry also blazed a trail for other singing cowboys who swiftly followed in his footsteps.

Tex Ritter came up from radio jobs in Houston to take on singing spots in Chicago and New York; and soon had his own show, *Tex Ritter's Camp Fire*. Bob Wills, who became known as the King of Western Swing, had played violin on Fort Worth and Tulsa stations before he organized and sang with the *Texas Playboys* on radio, and performed in western movies. Eddy Arnold first appeared on radio in his native Tennessee with Pee Wee King's band, where he attracted individual attention and landed a radio show of his own in Nashville; and appeared on many *Grand Ole Opry* programs. In the late 1940s he did a series of programs on the Mutual network.

Roy Rogers emerged in the listener polls as second only to Gene Autry. Born in Cincinnati, he had learned to play the guitar and sing western tunes while he was very young. In 1934, he and two other instrumentalists formed the *Sons of the Pioneers*, which was an immediate success. He left this top-rated unit three years later for starring roles in Westerns with Republic Pictures. His *Saturday Night Roundup* with his wife Dale Evans was the beginning of a decade of Roy Rogers radio shows.

Curt Massey played violin and occasionally vocalized with his sister's group, *Louise Massey and The Westerners*; and together appeared on numerous 1930s shows such as *Dude Ranch*, *Plantation Party*, *Show Boat*, and *National Barn Dance*. When The Westerners disbanded, Curt Massey convinced CBS that he could carry his own daily fifteen-minute program of country melodies and popular songs. The show continued into the late 1950s, establishing a viable format that narrowed the gap between tradi-

tional and contemporary country sounds and mainstream pop music.

“Much of the appeal of country music . . . is in its simplicity, the down-to-earth quality of its lyrics,” wrote music critic John S. Wilson. “Country music deals with human emotions, frequently centered around sin, guilt, and pain. Its words have a tradition of heartfelt simplicity and homespun reality. Among all musical idioms, it is durable, perhaps ageless.”

This brand of music by whatever name—country and western, mountain, bluegrass, hillbilly, or rockabilly—had found a responsive ear with the public as far back as when the crystal set was still largely confined to attics and basements. Atlanta’s powerful WSB station was focusing attention on country music as early as 1922. Fort Worth’s WBAP aired one of the earliest square dance and country music shows in 1923. Nashville’s WSM started broadcasting the music in 1925 with Dr. Humphrey Bate and a five-member string band. Hollywood’s KFWD featured Len Nash and his “Original Country Boys,” in 1926. Throughout the doleful Depression years radio brought country music listeners together, creating a dedicated mass audience. By the 1940s, the intoxicating, soulful rhythm was heard on radio in automobiles, pool-rooms, and coffee shops, and from jukeboxes, as well as in living rooms from radio and Victrola turntables. Broadcasters, record producers, and music publishers responded enthusiastically to the ever-widening and profitable demands for country-style music. Gene Autry, both as a personality and a singer, had opened the doors to singing cowboys all across the nation. Through the pioneering efforts of WSM radio, Nashville became the mecca. Record companies, music publishers, and talent agencies gravitated to this Country Music City, U.S.A., home of *Grand Ole Opry* and the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Nashville’s emergence as the center of country-western music was largely due to the practical idea of an executive with National Life and Accident Insurance Company. Edwin Craig convinced the owners that radio offered a potential for building goodwill for their company with thousands of listeners; and in time, for more policyholders. Craig had been a long-distance wireless enthusiast from its inception, but by 1925 he began to see what a boon radio

might be to reaching all those listeners with their insurance message; more than could be contacted in several years by the door-to-door salesman traveling through the country in a Model T or by the reliable but slower horse-and-buggy method.

The National Life and Accident Insurance Company agreed to put up the money to establish a small station in its downtown headquarters. John H. DeWitt, Jr., a young Nashville engineer with knowledge of radio technology, installed the equipment and stayed to operate the new transmitter and man the control board. Station WSM was ready to go on the air.

It was not a weak, one-lung operation. It went on the air as a potent 1,000-watt station. Broadcasting began on October 5, 1925, from the fifth floor of the Insurance Company's large downtown building.

But after only six weeks of broadcasting, WSM took a daring step. The tranquil atmosphere of the old South was suddenly shattered by lowbrow foot-stomping mountain music from a few fiddle, guitar, and banjo players, pouring forth from the radios. The group of players were introduced by a soft-spoken Indianan, George Hay, who believed that rustic folk deserved a chance to hear music closest to their roots; not merely accept programs that were shaped to please city folk and urban-oriented individuals. For his programs, George Hay sought local talent, chiefly non-professional, who were familiar with the homespun music dear to the hearts of people in rural and mountain areas; especially farmers, ranchers, and woodsmen.

George Hay had come to radio from several years as a newspaper reporter for the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, where he frequently covered radio news and acted as announcer and program director for WMS, owned by the paper. One day an assignment took him to the Ozark mountains to cover the funeral of a World War I hero. Afterward, he was invited to a lively hoedown organized by the deceased's neighbors, which became a night-long tribute of dancing and song. The music impressed Hay. It was different, with tempos and sounds that encompassed every phase of human emotions. From that moment he was "hooked" on country music.

He left journalism in 1924 and entered radio as an announcer at WLS in Chicago. For WLS he barnstormed through the country

with a popular radio and recording team, Ford & Glenn, and introduced a weekly barn-dance program. WLS was pleased, but Hay was homesick for the South where they seemed more receptive to what he termed “genuine” music. He found a spot as guest announcer on WSM. They liked what they heard and offered him a job as program director of hillbilly music. By the mid-1920s, country tunes played on “fiddles” represented a big chunk of “hillbilly” music. It dominated George Hay’s first Saturday night barn dance broadcast on November 28, 1925. Eighty-three-year-old “Uncle” Jimmy Thompson opened the program with the song “Tennessee Waggoner.” An hour later he had scarcely dented his repertoire of “tuneful melodies.”

When Hay ended the barn-dance program that night, listener reaction was swift. Nashville businessmen called the program “awful,” and declared that such music should not be allowed on the airwaves. Others complained that Nashville’s cultural image as the Athens of the South had been defiled and shattered. Hay’s reaction to these complaints was an example of his diplomacy. He announced himself as the “Solemn Old Judge” and told his audience that he would try it one more Saturday, then decide the verdict.

Before another week had passed, letters were rolling in by the hundreds praising the program *because* it reflected the life of honest, unpretentious folk; and a great many of these letters were from cities such as St. Louis, Cincinnati, Atlanta, and Memphis, as well as from rural areas. A generation or more of city dwellers who had come from rural roots now confessed their appreciation for “old time fiddlin’ ” and shouted for more. Country hoedown continued bigger than ever.

The show’s first big act—Jimmy Thompson—came aboard by mere chance. He had journeyed to Nashville for a holiday, arriving a few days before the broadcast. His sight-seeing agenda included the WSM station; and on a Thursday he toured the facilities guided by George Hay, entertaining him with stories about his feats on a violin. Hay invited him to appear on the new program on the following Saturday. His performance brought scores of would-be performers down from the hills on mules or afoot with banjos and fiddles, all begging for a chance to be heard. Many of them later became members of the fast-growing cast of the program that

included names such as Uncle Ed Poplin and his Old Timers; Arthur Smith and his Dixie Liners; Paul Warmack and his Gully Jumpers; and the Brinkley Brothers and their Clod Hoppers. These provided a cross section of country music. Southern folk melodies, however, still filled much of the two-hour program.

One of the outstanding newcomers was DeFord Bailey who played a harmonica that was a variation among the usual string instruments. Six days a week, Bailey operated an elevator (and later a shoeshine parlor), but on Saturdays he gave people another kind of "lift." DeFord Bailey soon emerged as a virtuoso of the harmonica, playing spirited renditions of "John Henry" and "Fox Chase." He was one of the first Negro entertainers to appear regularly on radio. His twenty years with the Hay's troupe were the highest tribute the audiences could pay to his great artistry.

Another colorful and best-loved star on WSM was Uncle Dave Macon, a banjoist and singer. He came aboard in 1926 and soon became widely known as the *Dixie Dew-Drop*. But the engineers had trouble with his microphone approach due to his habit of kicking time with one foot so hard that his boot often knocked over the mike.

Macon's debut preceded by a week or two the incident that gave the Nashville Barn Dance its permanent name. On that particular Saturday, Hay and the cast were listening to an NBC network program with Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony while waiting for their show to go on the air. During one of the interludes Damrosch remarked, "While we think there is no place in the classics for realism, nevertheless I am going to break one of my rules and present a composition by a young composer from Iowa that depicts the on-rush of a locomotive."

Hay picked up the remark and used it to advantage. At the start of his barn-dance program he made this announcement:

"Friends, the program that just came to a close from New York was devoted to the classics. Some folks think there is no place in the classics for realism. So tonight for the next few hours we will present nothing *but* realism—down to earth, and 'earthy'!"

He beckoned DeFord Bailey to the microphone at center stage, and told him to give an harmonica interpretation of an on-rushing locomotive. Bailey responded with a version of "Pan American

Blues,” making it sound like a chugging steam engine with a yelping whistle.

Hay stepped to the microphone again. “Now, folks, you gotta admit that sounded mighty real . . . and classy. Our program can’t be called grand opera. But, folks, I don’t see why we can’t call it ‘opry.’ So from now on we will be presenting ‘Grand Ole Opry.’ ” And from that time on, WSM’s Barn Dance program became the *Grand Ole Opry*.

In September 1928, the *Opry* began giving air time to commercials. WSM’s identification letters stood for “We Shield Millions,” and originally had been established as a public service station by National Life Insurance. However, a point had soon been reached where outside revenue was essential for the growth of operations. Now, advertisers were more than eager to link up with the big nationwide audience that country music reached every week. They came running to buy time on the *Opry*. WSM increased its power to 50,000 watts and constructed one of the tallest antennas in America. Soon the program expanded to four hours, and its popularity led to the building of a larger broadcasting studio that held audiences of five hundred. Then, in a couple of years, the program had outgrown the station itself. National Life Insurance considered dropping the program altogether; for it was now demanding more preparation time than the staff could handle, and expanding the staff was not deemed feasible. Instead, it decided to eliminate the audience. However, before they had time to act on that decision, it became evident that applause and other audience reactions contributed greatly to the *Opry*’s enormous spontaneous appeal.

The program was moved from the studio to the city’s Hillsboro Theater; and later to the Dixie Tabernacle. Eventually it was forced to relocate again. The newly built War Memorial Auditorium opened its doors to the *Opry*. In an effort to curb attendance, an entrance fee of twenty-five cents was imposed. It didn’t curb anything! Long lines of eager country music fans and tourists jammed the lobby and sidewalks. Also, serious students of real American folk music were making pilgrimages to the *Opry*. WSM was forced to find a larger hall. Thus, in 1941 *Grand Ole Opry* moved to the Ryman Auditorium with a seating capacity of 3,600, and found a home for the next thirty-three years.

Finally, in 1974 *Grand Ole Opry* moved into its own specially built home, a \$15-million country music mecca in Opryland U.S.A. that was Nashville's new 110-acre amusement park. Nashville was now duly crowned the country music capital of America. President Nixon came to dedicate "the mecca," and stayed to play a piano on the Opry stage. Busloads of visitors from all parts of the country poured into Nashville on weekends. A Friday night *Opry* show was added to the usual Saturday night six-hour-long program of music and mirth. *Grand Ole Opry*, along with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir broadcasts, held the record for the oldest continuous radio program anywhere in the world.

The *Opry* launched or lent a firm hand to many singers, comedians, and instrumentalists. During the 1930s scores of would-be Gene Autrys journeyed to Nashville for a chance at the *Opry* mike. Roy Acuff broke into the ranks in 1938, singing "The Wabash Cannonball," and "The Great Speckled Bird." Eddy Arnold, Ernest Tubb, and Cousin Minnie Pearl contributed their talent to enliven "hillbilly Carnegie Hall" on Saturday nights just before World War II.

The war uprooted many hillbilly fans and took them to places they had never dreamed of seeing. Their music went with them. Once there, it soon took hold and thrived. In like manner, GIs from the North, who were being trained in the South, heard little else but country music over local radio stations. When an *Opry* unit toured stateside military installations, it found an eager waiting audience. Troops jammed recreation centers to hear the familiar down-home sounds they had left behind, or had recently discovered. Evidence of this ever-widening acceptance of country music was Prince Albert Tobacco's sponsorship of the show in 1943. NBC carried a half hour of *Opry* on its entire coast-to-coast network of 125 stations.

Early in the postwar years, on June 11, 1949, a mournful-looking young man, tall and lean, wearing cowboy hat and boots and clutching a guitar, stepped before the *Opry* mike and sang the first few bars of "Lovesick Blues." In a flash, his voice was lost in an emotional roar. The audience had recognized the popular tune of a fast-selling recording by an unknown singer. Hank Williams stopped the show. The storm of applause brought him back to the mike six times. The response to the singing of this melancholy

hillbilly had never been equaled in the *Opry's* history. His talent was a shooting star that blazed brightly that night, burning ever brighter after his untimely death in 1953. Hank Williams' bluesy lyric "I'm lo-lo-lonesome . . ." continued to propel country-and-western music into the mainstream of pop music in America.

A close competitor in radio's country music jamboree had been George Hay's earlier Saturday night show, first aired over Chicago's WLS. Predating the *Opry* by eighteen months, the *National Barn Dance* became one of the Sears Roebuck station's earliest programs in April 1924. The NBC Blue network had picked up the show in 1933, spotlighting a jovial cast of musicians and comedians. Among those coming aboard in the early 1940s were Pat "Uncle Ezra" Barrett, Lulubelle and Scotty (Myrtle Cooper and Scotty Wiseman), the Hoosier Hot Shots, the Dinning Sisters (Jean, Ginger, and Lou), Eddie Peabody, Pat Buttram, the Maple City Four, and M.C. Joe Kelly who later hosted radio's *Quiz Kids* program.

The show had always attracted large audiences in Chicago. When it moved to the Eighth Street Theater, WLS began charging admission. Although only a few shows had dared to sell tickets to their programs, the *National Barn Dance* turned away hundreds who were willing to pay a hard-earned ninety cents to see some of their favorite country-and-western stars at a radio mike.

A country-and-western tune occasionally crossed over onto the *Hit Parade* lists: "Mexicali Rose," "You Are My Sunshine," "Pistol Packin' Mama," "Don't Fence Me In," and "You Can't Be True, Dear" leaped from country-styled song onto national pop music sales charts. Nevertheless, traditional homespun purity was favored over broad commercial acceptance. Gene Autry was a prolific writer in this genre. Moreover, many of his "hits" bridged the gap from pure country to wide general acclaim: "Tears On My Pillow," "Yesterday's Roses," and "Have I Told You Lately That I Love You?"

Hank Williams was equally successful with "Your Cheatin' Heart," "I Can't Help It," and "Move It On Over." Tex Ritter crossed over with "I Dreamed of a Hillbilly Heaven." Bob Wills made the jump with "My Confession"; Eddy Arnold, with "Just a Little Lovin'"; and Curt Massey, with his "Ridin' Down That Old Texas Trail."

The list of outstanding country singers-composers is long. Their melodic offspring ranges from the fast-passing "event" song to the immortal million-plus hits of the 1970s. The popularity of this brand of music had climbed steadily from lowly beginnings into first place in the hearts of millions of listeners through the 1950s and 1960s, drawing more and more dedicated fans into its orbit; many of them were originally from hillbilly heartland. Radio stations had kept up with their musical metaphors, programming a rich cross section, or hybrid, of American country music. In Boston or San Francisco, it was no longer unusual for listeners to tune in Appalachian folk music, based on centuries-old Scottish, Irish, and English ballads; or Negro blues with religious and inspirational characteristics; or bluegrass music played on unamplified fiddles, guitars, banjos, and bass violins; or loud western rock which appealed mostly to the young.

The march of country-and-western music had continued steadily, expanding from fiddling contests sponsored in the 1920s by Henry Ford over Boston's WBZ station, to the barn-dance sounds of Jimmie Davis on *Louisiana Hayride* in Shreveport, and on to the American Folk Music series offered by Alan Lomax. Lomax was the acknowledged folk-song authority and promoter of Pete Seeger, Burl Ives, and Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie. Country-and-western music then stepped into the contemporary rock beat of the souped-up electronic guitars and WWVA's *Wheeling Jamboree*.

As the mid-1970s dawned, the number of full-time, record-spinning country-and-western stations had increased from some two hundred of ten years earlier, to over twelve hundred. This burgeoning urban popularity led New York's venerable WHN to switch to an exclusively country music format. Lee Arnold, a WHN disc jockey, explained the switch. "People were afraid to admit they listened to country music in New York. Now it's an acceptable art form, so they aren't ashamed any more!"

Six or seven years after that chance encounter in Oklahoma, Gene Autry and Will Rogers again met in California where both were then living. Gene had spotted Will several times but was sure he would not remember their first meeting. One day he approached him, intending to remind him. But before he could speak, Rogers remarked in his inimitable manner, "Well, I see you made it, Gene. But I knew you would, cowboy!"

## Amateur Knights and Days

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**G**ood evening, friends!”

The genial master of ceremonies acknowledged the applause of the crowded theater audience.

“Tonight we spin our weekly wheel of fortune for the 236th consecutive time. Around and around she goes and where she stops, nobody knows. First on tonight’s amateur hour are the Harlem Roustabouts, an instrumental quintet.”

It was Thursday night, September 21, 1939.

Just three weeks earlier, Germany had invaded and crushed Poland. Britain and France had declared war on Adolph Hitler’s unleashed forces. The United States had proclaimed its neutrality; and on September 8 President Roosevelt announced a limited national emergency. Then, on the 21st, the president urged a special session of Congress to repeal the arms embargo.

And on that evening, despite the impending crisis of global war, 20 million listeners turned to their radios to tune in Major Edward Bowes and his *Original Amateur Hour*, one of the most popular programs ever on the air.

Each week, fifteen or more groups or individuals with ambitions to become professional entertainers appeared before the audience assembled in a theater with Major Bowes, and displayed their talents. Upon the applause of the audience, and the votes telephoned or telegraphed in to the station, rested the performer’s fate. Many who became big names in the entertainment world had received their start on Edward Bowes’ program; and eventually

from several imitators of his format on programs that also became popular. Nevertheless, Major Bowes' *Original Amateur Hour* held its top position through the second half of the 1930s and on into the 1940s.

The idea for this kind of program had been greeted with considerable scorn when first suggested by the likes of Major Bowes. Out-and-out amateurs on NBC? Untrained acts on CBS? The thought of nonprofessionals on prime time was horrendous! Only a few years earlier studio doors were hastily slammed shut on would-be Crosbys, Cantors, or Kate Smiths. But much earlier, when radio was still a toddler and vaudeville was an integral part of American entertainment, amateur performances in small communities and off-beat areas in larger cities were commonplace. And radio without blinking a tube grabbed any and every amateur passing by.

Bowes' program claimed to be the "original" amateur hour of radio and was born just a few blocks west of Radio City at a small, local transmitter on Broadway. WHN had been broadcasting since March 1922. Established in Brooklyn by George Schubel, publisher of the local *Ridgewood Times*, the 250-watt outlet moved to Manhattan a year later when Schubel sold it to Loew's theater chain. The station, relocated atop Loew's State Building, concentrated on pickups from nightclubs and dance halls such as Rose-land. Ten years later, WHN press agent and announcer Perry Charles put together a program of competing nonprofessionals. Two weeks after its premiere in April 1934, Edward Bowes, WHN's manager, took over as master of ceremonies and proceeded to make radio history.

By 1934 Major Edward Bowes had already built a career as an entrepreneur-impresario-entertainer, frequently on the ideas or from the talents of his associates. Born in San Francisco, he left school at age 13 when his father died. His first job was as an usher at a school teachers' convention. Then he answered a newspaper advertisement and got a job in a real estate office at \$3 a week. He learned the business so thoroughly that he was buying land for his own account. By age 31 he owned substantial portions of the San Francisco business district, but this wealth was wiped out in the earthquake and fire of 1906. When the fire was out, he started to

rebuild and correctly judged where the city's new business center would be. As a result, he recouped his fortune.

In 1909 he married Margaret Illington, an actress and former wife of theatrical manager Daniel Frohman who had given her her first part on the stage. Bowes became her manager for the next ten years. He still retained his real estate ventures, and when his wife retired in 1919, Bowes opened New York's million-dollar Capitol Theater.

Associated with Bowes at the plush movie-vaudeville palace was S. L. "Roxy" Rothafel. In 1922 Bowes reluctantly agreed to broadcasts from the Capitol to promote its stage presentations and films. Yet, by the mid-1920s, Bowes had upstaged *Roxy's Gang* with his similarly patterned *Capitol Family* program. In 1927 Roxy and his radio troupe moved to the sumptuous new Roxy Theater. Built and managed by Roxy, the 5,700-seat house featured top motion pictures and spectacular stage shows. Every type of act found its way to this cathedral of entertainment. Audiences were completely enthralled by a chorus of one hundred stirring voices and a line of thirty-six high-kicking Roxyettes (forerunners of the famous Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall). New Yorkers and visitors from all parts of the world packed the theater day after day.

And a few blocks away at the Capitol, the Major offered a competing bill in his variety show over WEA. Although never very high in audience polls, Bowes' *Capitol Family* continued on Sunday mornings until 1941. But it was for this program and all subsequent endeavors that Edward Bowes took the title "Major." He claimed membership in the Officers Reserve Corps. But apparently he had never seen active service in the Army. (When he died, he left a great many of his possessions to the Navy!)

In 1934 Loew's was trying to build up station WHN. Amateur shows were an old standby in the theater business for attracting new audiences. Major Bowes okayed Perry Charles' idea for a weekly amateur night broadcast. It was an immediate hit. When the Major took over the *Original Amateur Hour*, he pulled out all the stops in promotion and audience participation. He also had another motive as majordomo. He could pick up acts not entirely free for low pay to appear on his Capitol Family show, and also use them on programs at WHN.

The ruddy-faced, bespectacled showman capitalized on the human interest appeal of listeners who shared an opportunity to discover a rising new star. Ostensibly, the aim of the *Amateur Hour* was to discover talent and launch it toward successful careers. Major Bowes improved upon this old stratagem. Bolstered by the growing use of the telephone for instantaneous communication, he encouraged people at radio sets to vote by phone for their favorite amateur.

“All men at heart are critics,” Bowes observed, “and since time immemorial they have always felt they can run the other fellow’s show better than he can. It gives them a feeling of satisfaction to believe that they may have started someone on the road to success.”

Even when he rang a brass gong to end an act that he thought was no good (a substitute for the hook of the old vaudeville house days), listeners were inclined to share his displeasure. Nevertheless, an indignant few frequently took him to task when he cut short a promising act.

“For showmanship, deft handling, color, and human interest appeal, it’s one of the slickest things yet effected by any of the New York stations,” *Variety* reported. “Pulling two thousand odd calls on a broadcast is no minor feat, particularly when WHN’s comparative status and the strong ether competition surrounding it are taken into account. It won’t be long before this Tuesday night shindig will be alienating ’em in hordes around New York from the networks’ kilocycles.”

A network and national sponsor finally grabbed the Major and his *Hour*. In April 1935, exactly a year after its debut, Chase & Sanborn Coffee picked it up and put it on NBC.\*

As a coast-to-coast network show, the program honored a different U.S. city each week. This recognition saw mayors and chambers of commerce from Bangor to Long Beach vying for the coveted nationwide honor. Moreover, astute amateurs learned when their hometowns were to be saluted and auditioned to be on the *Hour* that night. A native son or daughter usually polled the highest vote, aided by a local toll-free number to call. There was no pretense of impartial balloting by the folks back home. Thou-

\*WHN, nonetheless, continued its amateur hour into the 1940s. Gongmasters succeeding Bowes included Jay C. Flippen, Jack Waldron, and Ed East.

sands of votes came in before half the amateurs had been heard. On Pensacola night, for instance, a mediocre soprano born on the Gulf Coast could easily win over Lily Pons.

The selection of amateurs from an honor city was an important task. A member of Bowes' staff journeyed to the particular honor city to audition applicants. From the hundred or so gathered in a local school auditorium, a talent scout chose a half-dozen acts. A few weeks later they traveled to New York to perform on the show. On the day of the broadcast, Bowes listened to each performer, made suggestions on the choice of music or material, and rehearsed a brief introductory dialogue. Just before air time, Bowes treated the cast to a quick meal at Bickford's or another nearby eatery.

Actually, many of the Major's amateurs, especially in the 1930s, were unemployed professional or semiprofessional entertainers. When in 1935 Bowes saluted Bridgeport, Conn., native son George Wedberg was introduced as a clerk with a local brass company. In effect, this 24-year-old concert pianist taught organ and piano, and had given a number of recitals. Wedberg had attended Yale Music School, and had worked in a plant only briefly as a teenager some seven or eight years earlier.

Professional, amateur or semipro, they occasionally landed a job offer from a theater or roadhouse even before the broadcast ended. Bessie Mack, the Major's Girl Friday, handled these important bulletins, plus the voting tabulations which Bowes read over the air.

Bowes gave unprecedented opportunities to members of minority groups—especially to Negro entertainers at a time when most branches of show business, including radio, shunned black talent. Bowes also opened his mike for humanitarian and public service messages. An appeal for a blood donor one night brought six hundred responses inside of three hours. A request for gifts for orphans elicited thousands of boxes of candy and toys.

As the self-dubbed amateur knight, Major Bowes tried to be genial and folksy. He didn't always succeed. Often he came across as paternalistic, brusque, and hardboiled. His sing-song "All right, all right" spoken to cut off or keep in line a contestant was widely imitated in jest. All in all, the Major and his earnest endeavors became a part of the fabric of American life. So formidable was

his drawing power that even the redoubtable Eddie Cantor on another network grew pale at the prospect of competing with Bowes on the dial. In June 1936, the vacationing comedian declared that he would balk at leading his troupe back into his Sunday night berth unless Bowes settled elsewhere on the weekly radio schedule.

Major Bowes devoted most of his time to the amateur business. It quickly developed into a handful of ancillary enterprises: country-wide touring units, movie shorts, and magazines, all featuring talented amateurs. From them and his weekly broadcast, the Major earned about \$500,000 a year. In the course of a decade, he collected thousands of useless souvenirs and was made honorary mayor of sixty-seven cities. He often drove to a city hall in his \$32,000 Chrysler sedan, which was fitted with venetian blinds, a refrigerator, a bar, a desk, and gold-rimmed china and glassware.

Such mobile accouterments perhaps befitted the Major, who in 1936 secured the sponsorship of the Chrysler Corporation. That same year CBS annexed the valuable property from NBC in what became known as the issue of the tissue.

A stickler for amenities, Bowes moved his prized show to the rival network after he was offended at the treatment received one day in the RCA Building. Arriving at the RCA lobby, he walked toward a bank of elevators. As he started to enter an open door, an elevator operator blocked his path and said, "Sorry, Major, but we have rules that all performers must use the musicians' elevator." A miffed Bowes complied.

A few minutes later, he came into his office and went straight to his private rest room. There, to his great annoyance, he found it out of toilet paper. Indignant and nearly outraged the Major demanded immediate attention. His outcry over the roll of tissue led to a horrendous confab among the building staff as to whether NBC or RCA had the job to provide the essential soft goods. The NBC representative and the RCA delegate argued over each other's responsibilities. But Major Bowes did not wait for the outcome. He rushed to a nearby telephone and called NBC president Aylesworth.

"It seems you are no longer in charge here," Bowes said in icy tones, "and you no longer can give us personal attention. So I'm going to CBS."

Bowes exchanged coffee commercials for car plugs, and at \$5,000 a broadcast never regretted the switch. *The Original Amateur Hour* hardly changed, keeping its potluck spontaneity. Off-key songs, trembling voices, and cracked notes were seldom far away. The Major never had to insert duds in order to ring his gong, placed on his high desk a dozen intimidating feet from a performer. He cut off about one of fifteen performers, though virtually never to an honor city native.

By the end of its first year on the air, Bowes had auditioned nearly 300,000 acts, including several runaways who hitched cross-country to New York. From this enormous pool of amateurs, he chose about 900. Each week, 16 to 20 performers appeared. During and immediately after each broadcast, some 35,000 people cast their ballots by telephone; another 5,000 voted by telegraph. More than 100 special operators were required to handle the traffic.

The week's winner was offered a contract with one of Bowes' road shows, but the key performers with these units were picked by the Major himself regardless of how they placed in audience voting. The Major's dozen or so traveling shows gave experience and employment to struggling, sometimes starving, entertainers. In the depths of the Depression, some road units played towns that had not seen a touring show or vaudeville troupe in nearly a decade.

By June 1935, *The Original Amateur Hour* was the most listened to program on the air—the highest-rated show in every national survey, pushing aside runners-up Jack Benny and Rudy Vallee. It remained number one for sixteen consecutive months.

Bowes' *Hour* continued on radio for over ten years and contributed about one hundred performers good enough to enter the front ranks of radio, motion pictures, musical comedy, and opera.

Sooner or later (but mostly sooner) the majority of amateurs went back home but not to jobs in show business. Others glimmered awhile. Vivian Barlow, for example, appeared briefly on Bob Hope's radio show. A few who were enormously talented were also lucky.

In 1935 an 18-year-old copy boy on a New Jersey newspaper sang baritone with the Hoboken Four, sharing first-place prize for the quartet's rendition of "Night and Day." Bowes sent the group

on tour. It ended abruptly when the baritone got homesick. Returning East to his mom's cooking, he found singing jobs on radio in Newark and Jersey City. He soon auditioned for Harry James and was hired. As a band vocalist, Frank Sinatra followed a path that led to the heights of his profession.

Bowes' graduates into the big leagues also included Beverly Sills, Robert Merrill, Jack Carter, Mimi Benzell, and Teresa Brewer.

Every amateur series had its share of successful failures—those performers who were turned down in auditions but later went on to solid stardom. Major Bowes vetoed a future Metropolitan diva in 1940. Luckily, two members of the CBS casting department, James Fasset and Lucille Singleton, heard her. They gave Eileen Farrell a job singing on staff at \$69.30 a week. One of her first jobs was on *The March of Time*, imitating Rosa Ponselle's rendition of "Home, Sweet Home."

The *Amateur Hour* left the air in 1945. A bit earlier, Bowes had been ordered to a hospital for a rest by his physician. On what was to have been his 500th broadcast in December 1944, Francis Cardinal Spellman, long a friend of the Major, substituted for the showman and read a special Christmas message. Shortly thereafter, Bowes retired from radio. He died a year later, in 1946, on the eve of his 71st birthday at his New Jersey estate. He left memberships in twenty-one yacht clubs and the bulk of his \$3.6 million estate to St. Patrick's Cathedral and numerous Catholic charities.

Two years after the Major's death, television burst into living rooms. *The Original Amateur Hour* proved a natural for the home screen. Ted Mack, who in 1935 had joined Bowes as a combination talent scout and traveling emcee, hosted the TV edition at the Dumont studios in Manhattan. Once again came the starry-eyed legions of animal imitators, barbershop quartets, spoon players, Wagnerian tenors, jugglers, musical instrument inventors—even a man who beat himself over the head with two mallets, producing out of his mouth the melody to "The Sheik of Araby."

Television was developing as had radio broadcasting a generation earlier. Back in the Coolidge era, radio station managers encouraged nearby performers from a repertory company, with a vaudeville troupe or on a concert stage tour, to appear as an added bonus to regular programming. But bona fide professionals, during

those early days, looked askance at going on the air. Frequently staff personnel were required to double as singers, storytellers, and pianists to fill out the broadcasting time. Occasionally, unknowns with dubious abilities helped out, and a stack of phonograph discs was always at hand for any emergency.

By the time broadcasting had come of age and tied into networks, with sponsors vying for prime time on the air, professional talent was mandatory. There was no place in the big time for inexperienced performers, although smaller stations around the country on special nights still warmed up their transmitters for local talent and semipro. One such station, WRNY in New York, programmed an amateur night when only unprofessional performers were allowed to appear. Almost any kind of available act from ocarina players to magicians (who were often limited to describing their sleight of hand abilities) was given a hearing.

Singers and instrumentalists had the best chance of getting on the air. Comedians and impersonators fared well; also whistlers and tap dancers. But aspiring Barrymores and Bankheads faced overwhelming odds. Amateur thespians bored listeners.

Amateur contests on radio increased in the early 1930s when hard times gripped the nation. Out-of-work and down-on-their-luck neophytes had nothing to lose by knocking on radio's doors. Hordes of applicants beat a path to studios, with hopeful illusions of fame and riches. For thousands more, radio provided temporary relief from worry and frustration. Entertainers who could make people laugh, however amateurish, were a boon to misery.

Fred Allen was the first to inject an amateur contest into his weekly coast-to-coast show. In November 1934, he introduced a twenty-minute segment into his *Town Hall Tonight* program over NBC. It caught on immediately. Fred, himself a rare blend of comedian, humorist, and master of ceremonies, introduced each act. He brought brisk spontaneity and ingenious wit to the rep-arte. He brought brisk spontaneity and ingenious wit to the rep-arte.

Allen's All-Star Amateur Contest segment of *Town Hall Tonight* offered a grand prize of \$100 in cash and a week's engagement at New York's Roxy Theater. An applause meter indicated the winner; some weeks the best act was selected by listeners' letters

received during the succeeding six days. The contest brought Connie Haines, Garry Moore, Bob Eberly, Jerry Colonna, and Beatrice Kay to a large national audience for the first time.

The first network program to be based entirely on an amateur night format went on the air two months after Fred Allen started his neophyte contests and three months before Major Bowes began to reach a national audience. In January 1935, comedian Ray Perkins brought to CBS the *National Amateur Night*. Sponsored by Feen-a-Mint in a cross-country hookup, Perkins used a panel of five judges to choose the first-place winner, who walked off with a gold medal and a week or two of radio work. Listeners were then asked to write in and agree or disagree with the decision. A whistle or sour chord from Arnold Johnson's orchestra at anytime cut short an amateur failing to make the grade.

The Perkins show held the spotlight only briefly. It overlooked the audience appeal of picking the best entertainer. Its ratings suffered. Moreover, the show soon faced formidable competition from other amateur hours, including the *Original Amateur Hour* on the very same network.

Above all, the stupendous success of Major Bowes bred imitators overnight, both on network and local stations. Coast-to-coast offspring included *Benny Rubin's Amateurs* over the newly formed Mutual Broadcasting System; *Varsity Show* spotlighting talent on college campuses; and Texaco's "national open tournament" that traveled the country in search of would-be professionals. Several established variety shows occasionally added an amateur night contest. *Show Boat*, for example, staged a juvenile revue. Mary Small, a seasoned pro at 15, introduced the youngsters. One of the acts appearing on January 28, 1937, was the singing DeMarco Sisters, ages 8, 10, and 12.

Hundreds of regional transmitters jumped on the bandwagon, filling hours of air time with unknowns. WENR offered *Sachs Amateur Hour* direct from the windows of the sponsor's department store on Chicago's South Halsted Street (until police and traffic changed that routine). WMCA aired the *Sunsweet Amateur Hour* from the stage of Brooklyn's Fox Theater. WCOL Columbus presented the *Kay Gem Amateur Hour*. WNEW scheduled *Amateur Night in Harlem*, holding no auditions beforehand. The eager but rough-edged acts faced a noisy, often hostile, theater audience.

In Canada, Bowes' counterpart, Ken Soble, emceed the high-rated *Original Canadian Amateur Hour*. Programs from KWKH Shreveport to WJR Detroit crowded as many neophytes as possible into an hour or less.

Most amateur shows originated from movie theaters, and often were part of a weekly stage presentation. The best tyro usually walked off with \$25 or a wristwatch. Periodic grand prize winners competed for bigger stakes: a trip to New York and a network audition.

This great exposure of unimportant talents and naive ambitions led critics to wonder whether the airwaves had reached the saturation point. Were cheap and inexperienced performers overrunning radio? Had it become a mere gimmick? A racket?

The Mutual network gathered mill workers at Wheeling Steel's Ohio Valley plants for harmonizing on the company-sponsored *Musical Steelmakers*. Columbia offered audience sing-alongs. *The Gillette Community Sing* with song leaders Jones and Hare, Wendell Hall, and Milton Berle; and *The Palmolive Community Sing*, cohosted by gospel singer Homer Rodeheaver and announcer Tiny Ruffner, were nothing more than group singing sessions. Both series added frequent "name" guests, but large, eager-to-be-heard studio audiences did most of the vocalizing on old and new tunes. Pre-air time rehearsals for these easily and inexpensively staged songfests took no more than fifteen minutes. At least one show scattered professional singers through the audience and paid them \$15 each. Community sings, however, showed signs of wear, tear, and repetition by the end of a season or two.

The search for new formats in amateurism reached a nadir by the late 1930s. Two examples suffice. A Connecticut sheriff started broadcasts over Bridgeport's WICC direct from the Fairfield County Jail. With no dearth of talent behind bars, the all-jail talent show (with no names mentioned) lasted for years. Actually, it did much to improve the morale of the hoosegow. Listeners responded with gifts of cigarettes and reading matter, and occasionally offered jobs to first offenders. When producers exhausted the vast and seemingly unlimited resources of human talent, they turned to animals. A national contest of singing mice, with NBC pickups from a half-dozen cities, generated a laugh or two, yet little in the way of rodent audibility.

Amateur shows resurfaced in radio's sunset years, but in a refreshingly different form. For one thing, they generally steered clear of the outright neophyte. They now showcased only the near-professional who needed that proverbial "one big break." Two of the most successful in discovering such talent were Arthur Godfrey's *Talent Scouts* and Horace Heidt's *Youth Opportunity Program*. Both launched to stardom many singers and musicians, and at the same time, boosted the careers of their host-impresarios.

Godfrey's winners usually gained a guest spot on his daily radio program. For a few, this engagement extended into months, even years. Vocalist Julius LaRosa, for example, stayed aboard into the heady television days of *Godfrey and His Friends*.

Horace Heidt came out of a brief retirement from bandleading to what seemed to be just another amateur hour due for little listener acclaim. But this master showman, as sharp a man with the gimmicks as there was in the business, took his show to the people. He played, not in small studios, but in auditoriums around the country to as many as six thousand enthusiastic people. Putting on daily stage shows, auditioning local talent, and then holding a contest on his Sunday night broadcast, Heidt broke box office records in the hinterlands, boosted sponsor Philip Morris cigarette sales 28 percent in six months, and placed among radio's top fifteen shows.

Horace Heidt emphasized youth, nearly all of whom were singers or musicians. Accordionist Dick Contino from Fresno, Calif., by chance, appeared on the very first show in December 1947 and went on to win week after week throughout 1948.

Heidt also enlisted the support of numerous prominent people and civic organizations, thus giving the *Youth Opportunity Program* an aura of public service respectability. No less a dignitary than Vice President Alben Barkley presented a gold cup to Horace—a symbol of the appreciation of the Washington Junior Board of Commerce for the work done by him and Philip Morris for the nation's youth. The mantle of the late Major Bowes rested securely on the shoulders of this drum-beating, hard-working showman.

With the amateur show format a perennial part of broadcasting, was it ever easy to break into show business via radio? Were there ways to get a secure grip on a microphone, other than on an

amateur hour? One thing is known: a plethora of already established singers and musicians did not discourage unknown and inexperienced performers from knocking on studio doors. But the odds for success were stacked against the novice. In 1938, for example, NBC auditioned several hundred individuals each month, but only one or two were ever asked back.

Some landed jobs in a chorus. But once they did, only a few advanced to solo work. Furthermore, few stations or networks maintained singing groups on their staff. Producers generally hired choral directors—Lyn Murray, Jeff Alexander, Emile Coté, Murray Rappaport, Ken Christie, Kay Thompson, Ben Yost—to assemble and train from three to forty voices with an ability to sing all kinds of music. Ensemble singers were members of several groups, singing in the Amsterdam Chorus or Hit Paraders one day and with the Buckingham Choir, American Melody Singers, or Serenaders the next night. Scrappy Lambert, for instance, started his singing every Wednesday evening with a trio on the Beatrice Lillie program. Then he walked into Fred Allen's studio to join a quartet identified as the Town Hall Quartet. When it finished on Fred's show, it moved five floors down and sang with *Your Hit Parade*.

New York network stations used about fifteen vocal groups each week, providing some two hundred jobs. "It was not always the best voices that were most in demand," explains Emile Coté, director of the Serenaders on *Saturday Night Serenade* and the Modern Choir on *Show Boat*. "They had to be fast readers of music, able to change things around in emergencies, and all-around singers for ballads, classics, or rhythm songs."

The hundred or so ensemble singers in the early 1940s were paid about \$50 for each broadcast. This included \$24 for rehearsals, \$18 for the actual show, and \$9 for a West Coast repeat. Most of these anonymous voices remained stymied in efforts to move front and center into feature assignments.

A few made the jump from chorister to soloist. Future opera star Risé Stevens bridged that gap. So did tenor Frank Parker. Another was soprano Winifred Cecil. Singing in the *Palmolive Beauty Box* chorus, she had a chance to audition as the new leading lady of *Show Boat*. Scores of girls in 1935 tried out for the coveted part opposite Lanny Ross. Winifred was simply another hopeful. Frank and unpretentious, she believed that she could not

measure up to the petite and demure requirements of the ingenue role. She felt that her bigness would eliminate her from consideration even though radio audiences were "blind" to physical attributes. After the audition, she heard nothing and was certain Lanny's costar had been cast. A month later, producers Benton & Bowles asked her to sing again.

"I did a duet with Lanny, then a solo," she recalled. "They thanked me, and that was that."

But not long after this second tryout, she overheard a conversation in a NBC elevator.

"Benton & Bowles has a new leading lady for *Show Boat*," a voice in the elevator exclaimed. "She's not petite by any means. But who's gonna see her? It's a big break for Winifred Cecil."

Winifred couldn't believe it. Dazed and overcome with excitement, she rode the elevator up and down for the next half hour. The following day, she received confirmation. The role was hers.

The producers decided to call her character "Virginia Lee." If Winifred Cecil didn't "click," they could slip someone else in under the same name. Meanwhile, she gave a highly successful recital at Town Hall. Benton & Bowles took notice. At the next *Show Boat* rehearsal, the name of Winifred Cecil was written into the script and "Virginia Lee" appeared no more.

Other radio jobs soon came to the ex-chorus soprano. Winifred's schedule had room for a second weekly program. But when she told the *Show Boat* producers of her plans to undertake another assignment, they pointed to her contract.

"I thought I knew the terms of the agreement," she explained. "It contained no such restriction. However, they pointed to a short paragraph. It stated that if Benton & Bowles doubled my salary, I had to sing exclusively for Maxwell House Coffee. I replied that they had not done so, and therefore I was free to take on other assignments."

The agency asked her to pick up that day's mail. When she opened their special delivery letter, a check fell out.

"I almost fainted. My fee for ten minutes work rose to \$1,000 per show, retroactive for three weeks. Not bad for a soprano who just a year earlier was unknown and broke."

During the 1930s both CBS and NBC ran artists' bureaus to train and manage new performers with star potential. For a dozen

years, these network subsidiaries secured bookings for their artists. In 1941, the arrangement ended when the FCC pointed out the serious conflict of interest between a network acting as both agent and employer.

Many singers well suited for radio worked on programs produced by Frank Hummert and his wife Anne. The Hummerts shared responsibility for *Waltz Time*, *Lavender and Old Lace*, *Hammerstein Music Hall*, *Manhattan Merry-Go-Round*, and a half-dozen more musical packages as well as a score of soap operas. Virtually all their vocal artists—Felix Knight, Vivienne Segal, Hazel Glenn, Conrad Thibault, Marian McManus, Elizabeth Lennox, Nan Merriman, Frank Munn, Bob Hannon, Veronica Wiggins, Dennis Ryan, Lois Bennett, Alan Holt, Lucy Monroe, Thomas L. Thomas, Jean Dickenson—followed a similar style and for the most part offered the same songs. They rarely deviated from the ballad or waltz tempo. The straight melody dominated. The lyrics were pronounced with uncommon clarity. Elaborate musical arrangements that often made difficult the recognition of a tune had no place in the Hummert “factory.” The Hummerts’ formula paid off. They seldom had a prime-time series receive a rating below the top ten in concert music and musical variety categories.

Frank Hummert—a radio czar who reputedly could “make or break” performers—continually sought new vocal talent to meet his successful musical formula. Few concert or popular singers with radio aspirations failed to pass his ken.

He heard lyric soprano Vivian della Chiesa shortly after she came to New York from Chicago. She had won an Unknown Singers radio contest over 3,700 contestants and gone on to make a name for herself on radio programs emanating from the Midwest. Frank Hummert asked her to sing on an audition record for a possible new series.

A thin, cadaverous-looking chain smoker, Hummert watched Vivian and the radio cast from the control booth. Her singing charmed him. Vivian della Chiesa could handle with ease any piece from “Caro Nome” to “Minnie the Moocher.” Hummert signed her for *American Album* in November 1940.

“Only then did I actually meet Frank Hummert,” Vivian recalled. “I was already working with two other Franks—tenor Frank Munn and conductor Frank Black. To avoid confusion, I

told Hummert I'd call him Uncle Frank. He was totally disarmed. I became one of his favorites, and he called me Butch."

A year later Hummert created a program especially for Vivian della Chiesa—*American Melody Hour*, a Wednesday night spin-off of *American Album*. Two years later, in 1943, she tired of radio and quit. She wanted to prove herself capable of handling serious music away from a microphone and in a concert hall.

"It was an impulsive act," she said. "I sold Hummert short. He had fallen into a wartime sacred music syndrome, and it seemed every other week I was singing 'The Rosary.' I was so 'bugged' with his choice of inspirational selections that I left all his shows. My family, too, thought I was wasting my talent by not pursuing operatic roles and concert appearances with the likes of Toscanini, who had engaged me for two appearances with the NBC Symphony. Alas, if I had stayed with Hummert, I would have been heard by many more people, and, in the long run, probably performed more serious music."

If there existed a radio music hall of fame to enshrine the airwaves' commanding singers, conductors, and musicians, Vivian della Chiesa and many more would qualify. Billy Jones and Ernie Hare, for example. They teamed up as the Happiness Boys, and over a span of eighteen years performed on some two thousand broadcasts. Joseph White, as the "Silver-Masked Tenor" of the 1920s, won legions of listeners. Tenor Frank Crumit met future wife Julia Sanderson when they were costars on Broadway, but they capped their careers as a radio duo. Composer Peter De Rose and spouse May Singhi Breen made music before many a mike.

During radio's first three decades, conductor-pianist William Wirges accompanied scores of entertainers, from the Gold Dust Twins to Jane Froman. Dinah Shore topped popular singer polls throughout the 1940s. John Charles Thomas went from musical comedy and opera to such broadcasts as *Westinghouse Sunday Concert*. Versatile conductor Donald Voorhees joined CBS in 1927 and crowned his career as maestro for the durable *Telephone Hour*, bringing Bori, Heifetz, Iturbi, Pons, Casadesus, Rubinstein, and many more virtuosi to vast audiences.

Jean Tennyson, Frank Black, Lanny Ross, Gus Haenschen, David Rubinoff, Jean Dickenson, James Melton, Kate Smith, and Howard Barlow were among the entertainers who scored their

greatest success on radio. They competed and held their own with luminaries of stage, screen, and opera for the most coveted programs on the air. They gave themselves fully to the new medium and it, in turn, embraced them. They were "made" by radio. At the same time, they themselves made radio one of the most popular and worthwhile vehicles of entertainment in the history of communications.

## Golden Voices-Gifted Hands (3 segments)

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**R**adio created its own stars and superstars.

It would be impossible to pay due tribute to all the fine artists who devoted the major part of their career to broadcasting, year after year. As pioneers of music, they brought new songs by both established and unknown composers to vast and growing audiences. They popularized new singing styles, created unique arrangements, trail-blazed unusual program formats, or made old familiar melodies seem fresh and new again.

Three artists from radio's royalty are perhaps most representative of those hundreds of talented artists who courted, embraced, and conquered the new entertainment medium, capturing the attention and the hearts of virtually all early network listeners, young and old, as well as the musically indifferent.

Among these, the golden soprano voice of Jessica Dragonette was destined to give radio its first singing star in both classical and popular melodies. An almost legendary artist, she thrilled large and loyal audiences for more than twenty years, contributing significantly to the accelerating impact of radio music.

The second of these superstars was Fred Waring with his Pennsylvanians, a conductor with a new approach to orchestral and vocal music. Already well established in vaudeville and on recordings by the 1930s, he introduced an exciting new dimension to radio broadcasting which still endures and which gave added momentum to his own career on the podium for more than sixty years.

The third artist in this troika was Frank Munn who sang unseen, week after week, to his millions of devoted admirers. Beginning in the mid-1920s, this ballad singer, who emphasized sincerity and intimacy that was effectively picked up by sensitive radio microphones, continued singing to the end of World War II, his fame unabated. Throughout his singing career he avoided the limelight and publicity, wanting only to bring pleasure to others with his God-given talent.

### JESSICA DRAGONETTE

Jessica Dragonette's soprano voice possessed a magic quality that instantly created an empathy with her unseen audiences. Their immediate response set the pulse of her selection of material, so that it reached into every corner of America during the early 1930s, pleasing an enormous number of listeners whatever their musical preferences.

Then, in 1935, a national fan magazine poll declared her the "Queen of Radio." Quickly she was established in that exalted position. Her repertoire had always been built on a foundation of enduring ballads, popular melodies, and folk songs, with an occasional light opera aria. There was little need to enhance it, although she now added favorite grand opera selections to her programs. She was the first to bring to radio the music of such diverse composers as Victor Herbert and Gordon Jenkins, and sang more of the world's treasury of great songs in their native languages—Spanish, French, Italian, German, Russian, and Hungarian—than any other individual artist. That her audiences enjoyed whatever she sang, and learned to enjoy her classical selections although many had had no previous exposure to them, is a well-deserved tribute to her instinctive musical genius.

Early in her career Jessica had remarked, "I'm young and radio is young. I believe its advancement will be as rapid as was the moving picture, and that its technique will be equal to pictures in a shorter time. I hope to arrange my career so that I may develop with the new art and, in time, become outstanding in the field."

At the time Jessica made this declaration, few people knew very much about radio. Her friends strongly advised her to remain in

the theater in which she was already securely entrenched. But simply following a tradition was not her concept of growth. In radio she would be blazing new trails, for herself and perhaps hundreds of others with musical talents. She understood that there would be sacrifices and many personal adjustments, but were not these a part of growth? Nevertheless, she approached these challenges with a natural enthusiasm that was one of the keys to her extraordinary success.

Jessica Dragonette was born on St. Valentine's day in Calcutta, India, of an Italian mother and a French-Italian father, at a time when the father's business had taken him to Asia. The parents had been childhood sweethearts. Their families had journeyed separately from Italy to Philadelphia, where later the young people were married.

Jessica was 4, the youngest in a family of two boys and two girls, when her chronically ill mother died. Her father placed her in a convent school at Lansdowne, Pa. Very shortly thereafter, her father was killed in an accident. She remained at the convent for the next five years, then completed her education under a scholarship at Georgian Court College, Lakewood, N.J.

For Jessica, this period of her life was a sad and lonely time. Only her deep religious faith and an abiding interest in piano and voice lessons made her life endurable. But it was during this time that she determined to grow up quickly and be free to do what she wanted to do. And what she wanted most in the world was to study and make music.

Determination without diligence, she told herself, was static. She poured all her diligence into daily practice at the piano. She sang in school recitals. Soon she attracted the attention of several well-connected mentors. Later, they arranged an audition for her with a renowned singer and teacher, Estelle Liebling, whose province was to approve applicants for the recently established Juilliard Foundation. Miss Liebling enthusiastically accepted Jessica as a pupil. Professionally, however, Jessica was still only another aspiring soprano looking for a niche in the musical world. It was soon after she had become a pupil of Estelle Liebling that Max Reinhardt, the German stage director, came to New York City for the American production of *The Miracle*. For the only solo part he was seeking an "ethereal" soprano voice. Miss Liebling urged

Jessica to audition. Jessica won the unique role—"the voice of an angel," heard unseen. Commentary on the performance declared that Miss Dragonette's voice "floated down from the clouds." For her, it was a prophetic appearance on radio a few years later.

Nevertheless, this one-dimensional debut brought both the voice and a very pretty face—a somewhat rare combination—to the attention of producers. She was soon to appear in a stock company production of *The Student Prince*. Then, in 1926, she played the ingenue in *The Grand Street Follies*. It was following that engagement that Miss Liebling spoke with her about a radio audition. WEAF needed a soprano for a light opera-musical comedy company that was being assembled. Jessica decided to try out for the role, and sang Rudolf Friml's haunting "Indian Love Call," for musical director Harold Sanford.

"We will put you on the air October 26th," he told her. "Report for rehearsal at three on the 25th. If everything goes well, we'll use you regularly."

She accepted the assignment—"more from curiosity than anything else," she later remembered. "I was not thrilled by that first microphone appearance. I didn't like it at all. I was nervous and conscious of an immense distraction, like being pulled in all directions at once. The silence, the absence of applause after each performance, appalled me. I wanted only to run far and never return." But return she did, and soon—this time as Vivian, the Coca-Cola girl, in the first singing-acting serial written for radio.

She suggested to NBC that she be allowed to broadcast short scenes from *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and other Shakespearean classics. They agreed. Subsequently she played the lead opposite Ben Grauer in Oscar Wilde's *The Nightingale and the Rose*, an original adaptation by composer Wilhelm Schaefer. Appearances on Colonel Edward H.R. Green's privately underwritten *WEAF Musical Comedy Hour*, and with the Hoover Sentinels and A & P Gypsies, followed in rapid succession.

"More and more I became thrilled by the thought that as I sang in a quiet studio, my songs were reaching out to thousands and then millions of listeners who were hungry for the kind of uplifting that only music can bring."

As the soprano star of the *Philco Hour Theater of Memories*, Jessica's already tremendous following increased. During the run

of that program she signed an exclusive contract with NBC. But when the Philco series switched to CBS toward the end of 1929, she was quickly offered the stellar role with *Cities Service Concert* which aired on Friday nights; an association that soon projected her into greater preeminence.

The Cities Service program had begun on February 18, 1927, with Edwin F. Goldman and his band. Later that year the format of the program changed from brass to a concert orchestra composed of thirty-three pieces, conducted by Rosario Bourdon. A male quartet, *The Cavaliers*, was added. Later, in 1933, *The Revelers*, featuring Robert Simmons and Frank Parker, replaced the earlier foursome. No less than twenty hours of preparation and rehearsal went into this weekly one-hour broadcast. Jessica spent a good deal more time than that preparing her solos and duets, since she never used sheet music during a broadcast. Every word was committed to memory, and each musical selection was rarely, if ever, repeated within a six-month period.

In her autobiography *Faith Is a Song*, published in 1951, she spoke of her indefatigable perseverance and devotion to radio. "I was immune to all but radio's calling," she observed. "Everything else was crowded out to give way to my own artistic development, and the unfoldment of radio; for I was in the studio from morning to midnight, trying to solve the riddle of microphone personality—searching for the secret of good radio entertainment . . ."

She studied every day with vocal and acting coaches: Frank LaForge for general repertoire; H. Maurice Jacquet for French; Arpad Sandor for German; Frances Robinson Duff for acting techniques, and a half-dozen others for language studies. Every performance was a new and personal challenge to meet her own standards of perfection.

Helen Strauss Cotton, director of publicity for Benton & Bowles radio shows during the 1930s, recalled: "She also had a strong sense of obligation to her studio audience. Her broadcasts always were scheduled in the largest available studio in order to accommodate as many people as possible. She dressed in exquisite gowns appropriate to the particular program, and greeted her fans after each show. They came from all over the country to see her in person, and she never let them down . . . making it a memorable occasion for them and herself. . . ."

It was Nora Bayes, one-time toast of Broadway, who gave Jessica the sobriquet, "The singer with a smile in her voice." A voice that now had a weekly audience in the tens of millions. Along with Kate Smith at CBS, NBC's petite lyrical soprano topped the popularity polls. Her renditions of "Alice Blue Gown," "Only a Rose," and Schubert's "Serenade" placed her among the foremost classical and semiclassical singers on radio. And captivated many young musicians, including teenage Leonard Bernstein who admitted to listening week after week at the receiver in his family's home in Roxbury, Mass.

NBC included her on numerous broadcast "firsts" and specials. In 1928 she sang 'L'Amour, Toujours, L'Amour' on a pioneer TV experiment. The telecast, with Mayor Jimmy Walker and RCA Chairman Owen D. Young, traveled 25 miles from the NBC Fifth Avenue studios to the home of RCA engineer Dr. Alfred Goldsmith. In 1929 she performed in the first radio version of Jerome Kern's *Sweet Adeline*, which was also beamed via shortwave broadcast to Antarctica and Commander Richard E. Byrd's ice-bound outpost. In 1930, on a GE special show, *The Hour of Magic*—dedicated to GE scientists and engineers—she joined a galaxy of stars whose talents made radio popular: Rudy Vallee, Ohman and Arden, Frank Munn, Roxy, Phil Cook, and Vincent Lopez. In 1933 Jessica helped to dedicate Radio City, and three years later appeared in the first issue of *Life* magazine in a photo story about NBC headliners titled "National Bedtime Characters."

By the mid-1930s Jessica began to urge Cities Service to include a dramatic scene built around a song. She felt her speaking voice was not being utilized on the program. She had recently made four guest appearances in light opera roles for Palmolive, and now visualized a new format for her talents: a rotating series of light opera, plays with music, original radio presentations, condensed grand operas, and straight concerts. Benton & Bowles liked the idea and convinced Palmolive of its potential success.

For Jessica and her sister Nadea Dragonette Loftus, who was closely associated with her as secretary and gave a good part of her life to her care and well-being, it was the beginning of the duo's "great misunderstanding." Nadea had discovered that Jessica's contract with Cities Service failed to include a renewal option. Moreover, other voices—Olga Albani, Lucille Manners—were con-

tinually being auditioned by the producers. Therefore, Jessica and Nadea felt free to listen to other offers.

The Palmolive series carried a new challenge, a new format, and a fee double her weekly salary of \$1,250. Jessica had hoped to change the complacency of Cities Service at a time when, she believed, change was overdue. But this sponsor was convinced that, if she were given speaking parts, it would remind listeners, even after six years, of her former association with Philco. Stymied in her efforts, she decided to take the plunge, whatever the outcome.

Jessica signed with Palmolive, which insisted the pact remain secret. Most significantly, she believed this new program would originate at NBC where she had “pioneered” for over a decade. Total dismay enveloped Jessica when she learned that CBS was to be her home base. At the same time, NBC press releases told a different and confusing story of her departure: she was being replaced because audience polls indicated a wish to hear new vocal talent.

“I had worked ten years for NBC, seven for Cities Service. It broke my heart to realize that every supposed friend had deserted me and fallen into the trap of intrigue. The tumult and the shouting continued unabated, during which time I never gave an explanation to the press, so sure was I that I would be cleared of ‘the great misunderstanding’ which had arisen between NBC and me. No attempt to clear it up was ever made.”

The *Palmolive Beauty Box*, once opened, became a Pandora’s box. The Romberg, Herbert, Friml, and Lehar operettas suffered from inferior scripts crammed into a half-hour slot. Jessica’s co-stars—Charles Kullman, Robert Weede, Thomas L. Thomas—only sang, actor Dick Kollmar played the speaking part for each. This complicated the placement of Al Goodman’s large orchestra and chorus, the supporting actors and lead singers. Further confusion ensued because Jessica was the only one who spoke *and* sang.

Palmolive broadcast thirty-six operettas, but only two concerts and one original script. The sponsor reaped maximum publicity for signing up one of radio’s superstars, but backed down on its promise to depart from a set formula. The program ended after ten months. Nevertheless it was a popular success, propelling Jessica to Radio Guide’s “star of stars,” a 1937 reader-elected poll.

By then she had left the air for a concert tour—a decision her listeners did not take lightly. Thousands sent letters to CBS and Palmolive protesting her absence and threatening to boycott radio if she did not return.

Jessica Dragonette, however, claimed that she now wished to see her fans face to face through personal appearances. She sang her first concert at Philadelphia's Academy of Music on November 22, 1937. From there, she traveled to California, and on to Hawaii for her second concert and what was probably her first real vacation. Throughout 1938 her voice and personality beguiled huge audiences that crowded into auditoriums, stadiums, and parks to hear and see their "Princess of Song."

Jessica Dragonette resumed broadcasting with guest appearances on the RCA *Magic Key* and Raymond Paige's *99 Men and a Girl*, and as the featured singer of the *Ford Summer Hour* from Dearborn, Mich.\* During the war years, she sang on Pet Milk's *Saturday Night Serenade* with Gus Haenschen, Bill Perry, and the Emile Côté choir. The show's fairly simple format allowed her to accept concert dates; in turn, she accepted a radio salary smaller than she had ever before received.

Jessica increasingly expended more and more time on personal appearances, especially for war bond drives. The results nearly always were phenomenal. In Tucson, Ariz., a single engagement resulted in pledges of \$3 million. The U.S. Treasury recognized her wartime work by conferring its Silver Medal for Patriotic Service. Visits to military bases and camps brought her "wings" from both the Army and Navy, and the rank of honorary colonel from the Air Force.

By 1946 she was singing more currently popular tunes and fewer of the "lasting" numbers upon which she had built a career.

"Our wings have been clipped," she remarked. "We now sing what the sponsor designates. In the old days we had an hour-long program. I sang popular songs, arias, medleys, and a number with the quartet. Now I sing two songs; that's all."

Jessica made one of her last major network appearances six years later, in 1952. Cities Service celebrated its twenty-fifth year

\*One of the program's music arrangers, Carmine Coppola, paid homage to sponsor Henry Ford by naming his son, Francis Ford Coppola, who was born in 1939 and destined for fame as screen writer-director of "The Godfather."

in radio with a musical gala from Carnegie Hall, giving Jessica's fans an opportunity to hear her once more sing "Valse Huguette" from *The Vagabond King*.

The old *Cities Service Concerts* by the 1950s had returned to its very first format, a brass band. Called the Band of America, the forty-eight-piece aggregation (one player for every U.S. state) was led by Paul Lavalle. A men's singing group, the Green and White Quartet (colors of the sponsor's logo), provided the only vocal interludes. Earlier, from 1944-48, Lavalle had conducted the oil company's string orchestra on a program called *Highways in Melody*, successor to the concerts under Bourdon (1927-39) and Frank Black (1938-44). The *Cities Service* series eventually achieved an unbroken record of over 1,500 radio concerts; Jessica Dragonette had appeared on more than 350 of them.

Jessica reigned as a special favorite of both radio audiences and fan magazine readers. Listeners showered her with gifts. Although she was not unique in being the recipient of presents, letters and honors, ranging from the sacred to the inane, her velvety voice attracted a treasure chest.

Her fans sent patchwork quilts, embroidered guest towels, afghans, scarves, dolls, charm bracelets, picture frames, sundials, lamps, paintings, and poems. One year Jessica received an elaborate sixty-page Memory Book in which a loving hand had embroidered the names of all her Palmolive broadcasts, her roles, and words of the songs she had sung. Artist Elisha Brown Bird designed an original bookplate that pictured Jessica on a mountain top singing to the world through the medium of radio. President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent an autographed photo framed by wood used in the construction of The White House in the early 1800s. A Tennessee doctor named his prize Jersey heifer "Jessica Dragonette." A Florida grower designated an orchid for her. Others named their horses, cats, and children in her honor.

At the same time, pulp magazine journalists speculated on more earthly aspects of Jessica's existence. Had she renounced a private life—love, marriage, offspring? Had she forsaken all else, save the microphone and music?

For an answer, her public had to wonder and wait. Only after radio showed signs of succumbing to television did Jessica "settle down."

In 1947 Jessica announced her engagement to Nicholas M. Turner, a New York businessman. They were married on June 28 by Francis Cardinal Spellman in his private chapel.

Nicholas encouraged his wife to write the story of her remarkable singing career, *Faith Is a Song*, which remains one of the most incisive accounts of early radio. Her second book, *Your Voice and You*, appeared in 1967, discussing in depth the human voice, its care, importance, and development. "At your fingertips is the ability to clothe your thoughts in beautiful language, with freedom and poise," she said, explaining the reason for writing the volume.

Manhattan has been home for Jessica since she left Georgian Court College; her Spanish decor apartment fifteen floors above busy 57th Street includes a garden terrace where she avidly raises flowers. The Turner co-op also houses a red-carpeted study containing Jessica's archives: an extensive collection of original scores, scripts, transcriptions, correspondence, and memorabilia. The Dragonette sisters have filled requests for information and radio tapes from the University of Wyoming, Columbia University, the Library of Congress, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and from scores of admirers who seek her out. Jessica's radio transcriptions and other artifacts eventually will contribute greatly to the recorded history of music and broadcasting.

A devout Roman Catholic, she lends her support to a number of church philanthropies, and has received many awards and decorations from church and governments for her humanitarian, artistic, and cultural work. Artistically, Jessica's chief interest is now centered on the dance. She and Nicholas have studied ballroom dancing for many years; they skip off at least three times a week to a nearby studio run by Josephine Butler. Childless, the Turners enjoy a large circle of friends. They include longtime reclusive film star and neighbor, Greta Garbo, who frequently stops by to visit.

Jessica Dragonette's name is sure to be included when music of the early airwaves is mentioned. Bob Hope once observed, "Jessica probably has done more for radio than anyone else."

Millions of listeners heartily agree.

## FRED WARING

One of the most polished and versatile groups to be found anywhere on the dial in the 1930s was Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians. A large and talented company, hand-picked, they included an orchestra, a glee club, and a few outstanding solo artists. No other musical organization in its category had comparable quality. Although widely imitated over the years, it never had a serious rival.

Fred Waring, the leader of this aggregation of more than a hundred instrumentalists, singers, arrangers, assistant conductors, and staff aides, was an efficient businesslike musical entrepreneur and one of the most meticulous craftsmen in his profession. He wore a variety of "hats"—musical director, composer, arranger, publisher, radio M.C., and innovator—and commanded respect and loyalty from the Pennsylvanians as well as his enormous audiences. His extraordinary painstaking regard for detail and perfection became the hallmark of every Waring performance or project. When Fred Waring caustically remarked to his troupe, "You'd better be on your toes tonight or I'll be on yours tomorrow," he meant it.

It was largely due to Waring's standards and goals that he refused to enter radio in the early thirties unless his glee club was included. Rather than drop the choral music from the agenda, he reputedly endured thirty-two auditions for prospective radio sponsors. All said a firm "no"; they wanted Waring and his orchestra only.

"That choir singing," commented an aspiring advertiser, "is good only for Sunday morning. It would flop on an evening show."

Fred replied, "Without the glee club, the Pennsylvanians would be just another band. Take all or nothing." And he went right on saying that until 1933.

Finally, in 1933, Old Gold cigarettes took a chance and the complete Waring troupe went on CBS. To attract immediate attention to his glee club, Fred deliberately used capricious arrangements, startling phrasing, sudden changes in volume and tempo, and emphasized long hums with hymns and swing tunes. No chorus ever had given audiences such swelling, balloon-shaped

notes! It went over big with the audiences, despite *Variety's* caustic labeling as "old-fashioned and non-radio sounding."

The Old Gold broadcasts quickly became a top-rated show. And in a not untypical about-face, every radio advertiser now wanted a big choral group added to the cast of musical presentations; mere quartets no longer filled the bill!

As Waring's glee club demonstrated new styles in choral singing to a receptive public, more and more groups in schools, colleges, and churches began to follow his lead. Youngsters, especially, began to get more fun out of the tunes a teacher assigned to them by demanding they be taught to "sing like the Pennsylvanians." Inevitably, Fred Waring became the hero of school glee clubbers; and when he began supplying arrangements for music teachers and singing groups, they also became his "fans." By 1947 more than eight hundred of them were using his methods and arrangements, while hundreds more were enrolling in his summer courses for choral conductors that were held at his spacious ninety-five room Shawnee-on-the Delaware Inn near Stroudsburg, Pa.

Born June 9, 1900, in Tyrone, Pa., Fred Waring was never very far from the instructional and teaching aspects of music or academe itself. He had studied violin and sung in the Tyrone High School glee club and quartet. At the age of 16, he joined the "Waring-McClintock Snap Orchestra," formed by brother Tom Waring and neighbor Poley McClintock, to play at local dances and proms.

This band really got underway when Fred entered Pennsylvania State College, which great-grandfather William Waring had founded. The three-piece band now grew to four players when hometown buddy and banjoist Fred Buck came aboard. Reorganized as "The Banjazzatra" quartet, it consisted of two banjos (Buck and Fred), piano (Tom Waring), and drums (Poley). The group later played under the name of Waring's Collegians, but as it grew in size, became Fred Waring's Pennsylvanians.

Looking back on that period, Waring recalled that he and his musicians knew very little about show business and learned by playing presentation houses and movie theaters where they observed six or seven acts that changed every week.

"My love of music and choral singing came from my mother who used to rehearse the local choir in the living room of our

home. I played the violin, and later began strumming on a banjo. My first professional engagement took place at a park in Altoona, near Tyrone. I never intended to become a bandleader, but an architect, or a banker like my father. But when I didn't make the glee club or dramatic societies at college, I organized a band with Tom and Poley and Fred Buck, who vocally didn't rate either."

Traveling from town to town, Fred engaged other college men like himself, and soon had a ten-piece organization. On campuses, from Bowdoin to Berkeley, Waring's band of the 1920s was a sensation. It first won attention at the University of Michigan and at the Majestic Theater in Detroit where it also made its first radio appearance via Station WWJ. Coast-to-coast bookings soon brought an end to college life for sophomore Fred and the boys. Much in demand for school dances and theater appearances, they "stole" many a show or prom. Fred devised a number called "Collegiate," dressed his sixteen men in knickers, loud-stripe sweaters, and polka-dot bow ties, and put his Pennsylvanians on that era's ivy-covered map. Vaudeville appearances, radio, recording dates, films, and an engagement in Paris followed.

From the early days all Waring's players sang "good enough." Tom Waring, more often than the rest, vocalized on Victor discs with the group and also recorded a number of solos on that label. Briefly, in the early thirties, Tom, a talented composer as well as singer and pianist, left his brother to form his own band for a NBC series from Cleveland.

While Fred was evolving his own particular style, he kept his eye on other bandleaders. He was a great admirer of Paul Whiteman. " 'Pops' Whiteman gave us jazz dressed up and purified," Fred explained. "Before this, everybody said it was 'sounds from a jungle.' He printed special arrangements of jazz for a special group of musicians, played it in a concert hall and made it acceptable listening. The only thing he didn't do was sing. We learned to do everything Whiteman did, then added our voices."

According to Fred's associates of that period, he never realized what he might do with group singing until 1932 when he began a six-months engagement with a fifty-five piece orchestra at the Roxy Theater in New York. The Hall Johnson Choir was on the bill. When Hall Johnson became ill just before the opening performance, Fred stepped in and led the superb chorus of Negro voices.

As he drew out of them music of genuine warmth and exceptional diction, he later confessed that he experienced moments of soul-stirring excitement. It was then that his glee club was born. Thereafter, instrumental music became less important to him.

Waring's glee club varied between twenty-five and thirty-six men and women, many of whom had college musical training. Some, Waring taught to read music. But no matter how good they were, they served an apprenticeship before they were given a chance at solo.

Fred not only required his choruses to hum like a pipe organ, he taught them to sing words so crisply and clearly they could be understood and, hopefully, appreciated. In a 1940 interview for *Etude* magazine, he referred to his glee club method as the "tone syllable" technique. "A one-syllable word like 'home' has three different types of syllables in singing *ho-ooo-mmm*. By breaking down a word like this," he pointed out, "one can stress the more melodious tone syllables, and by phrasing, avoid the homelier sounds."

Fred Waring's most requested glee club musical numbers included "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "The Rosary," "The Lord's Prayer," "Dry Bones," "Stardust," "White Christmas," and his theme song "I Hear Music" and sign-off tune "Sleep."

He also introduced on Broadway, and via radio or films, such tunes as Cole Porter's "Love for Sale" (thought quite risqué in its day and banned on radio for years); Irving Berlin's "Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor"; Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Some Enchanted Evening," and Johnny Mercer's "Love Is on the Air Tonight."

Maude Howe Elliot, daughter of the author of the "Battle Hymn," wrote to Fred (who had "rediscovered" this classic during World War II), that his presentation was the best she had ever heard. "The words of one of the most stirring poems ever written," she commented, mean nothing to singers or to listeners. It has been sung so badly that people have lost respect for it." But when Waring's group played and sung Julia Ward Howe's work, it became a powerful statement of faith, especially toward the end as the basses hummed organlike chords in the background and the chorus sang slowly and expressively with deep reverence.

No other musical aggregation on radio gave listeners so much variety. Fred would take tunes like "Missouri Waltz" or "Juanita,"

play them straight, then as a march, grand opera, or a swing tune. He arranged entire programs on varied and unusual themes such as the birthday of the Army Air Corps, the State of Oklahoma, the housing shortage, love and marriage, and the Bill of Rights. Audiences liked his approach and told him so. During almost twenty-five years on network radio and television, his fan mail came in large volumes from all parts of America and the world.

The Pennsylvanians performed in a number of series, from prime-time Sunday night programs to Monday-to-Friday morning segments. Sponsors included the biggest buyers of network shows. Their first program for Old Gold, however, was short-lived. The contract's renewal met opposition. Initially, Old Gold offered Waring \$50-a-week raise over his then current \$3,250. Fred turned it down. He had just hired two more people for the show, and this called for a bigger boost in pay. The cigarette-maker tacked on an additional \$200. Still dissatisfied, Waring walked out. Ford Motor Company made a weekly offer of \$10,000. Fred quickly signed. During the three-year association, the program expanded to one hour and added a thirteen-member girls' glee club, headed by Kay Thompson. Waring also featured many solo artists: Priscilla and Rosemary Lane, Johnny "Scat" Davis, the Les Paul Trio, Stuart Churchill, and the "Smoothies."

In 1937 Warner Brothers brought the Pennsylvanians to Hollywood to make *Varsity Show* with Dick Powell. On the trip to California and return, the troupe played theater dates and hotels, including the Drake in Chicago. Crowds gathered wherever they appeared, not only for their exceptional music but the impromptu gags and general high jinks that added bounce and zest to the program. Back in the East again, they went on the air for a season with sponsor Grove Laboratories for Bromo-Quinine.

In 1939 at a figure now close to \$20,000 weekly, the group appeared for Chesterfield cigarettes five evenings a week at 7:00 p.m. on NBC. A highlight of this series was the introduction of original alma mater and pep songs for colleges and universities that were spotlighted on the show.

These so-called "Friday Smokers" of the Chesterfield broadcasts were precipitated when an old friend, the football coach at Colby College in Maine, wrote to Fred asking his advice on how to get a good pep song. Fred replied by writing the song himself and

presenting it to Colby over the air. Waring was besieged by similar requests from other colleges. These written-to-order and written-to-be-sung alma mater and football songs soon became a regular feature on his Friday night show. In 1942, Fred gave college glee clubs another boost by holding a mammoth national competition that was won by the University of Rochester for best all-round singing.

The war further augmented the popularity of the Waring musical format and rationale. His renditions of all-time American songs, especially those with a patriotic and devotional theme, struck a responsive chord. Moreover, Chesterfield changed the name of the series from *Pleasure Time* to *Victory Tunes*, leaving the selection of many songs to servicemen in camps all over the country. Generally, men in uniform comprised a third of the radio theater audience. These GIs were often treated to a postbroadcast show lasting an hour or so, and nearly every Thursday the Pennsylvanians served them a buffet supper.

Fred Waring's radio career moved along in high gear during the 1940s and early 1950s. Soloists now included soprano Jane Wilson, pianist Livingston Gearhart, tenor Gordon Goodman, baritone Joe Marine and announcer Bill Bivens. In June 1945 he brightened daytime radio by signing a NBC contract to broadcast Monday through Friday, 11:00 to 11:30 a.m., at an annual remuneration of over a half-million dollars. Such a musical treat during the morning hours was unprecedented. Waring on the morning dial was NBC's answer to the complaints of discriminating housewives that their radios gave them little more than soap operas and serials. On the premise that quality paid off, NBC installed the Waring group in a very desirable morning spot opposite the popular ABC *Breakfast in Hollywood* with M.C.-interviewer Tom Breneman. It was a bold step in programming, and one that succeeded. Sponsors, such as the American Meat Institute, Florida Citrus Commission, and the Minnesota Canning Company, sized up the audience—predominantly housewives—and signed on. Fred also took on a new assignment for the series. He served as M.C., a folksy ad-libber with bits of philosophy and amusing talk between selections. With the advent of television, this role expanded. The Pennsylvanians in 1949 became the first "name" orchestra on a regular TV show. Host Fred Waring, more

than ever, became the focal center of his musical potpourri via the *General Electric TV Show*.

Meanwhile, Waring's business enterprises, including a number of nonmusical projects, grew. Headquarters for these activities encompassed the whole tenth floor of a building at 1697 Broadway. The front half was stacked high with glee club arrangements, which Fred marketed through his profitable publishing firm, Words and Music, Inc. The rear was chopped into a large studio for the band, a smaller room for the glee club (actually coached and led by Robert Shaw for many years), and cubbyholes for six music arrangers. Fred's own suite, in addition to a large office, included a fully equipped kitchen, a shower room, and a control room for recording his broadcasts. For two or three hours each day, this floor vibrated to the sounds of Waring rehearsals.

Besides having an uncanny acumen for what makes commercial music, Fred's shrewd business sense helped him market several inventions, operate a resort hotel, and run a publishing company. Whether choosing carpets for his Shawnee Inn or talking shop with song-pluggers, he was a stickler for fine detail, and nothing a fraction short of perfection satisfied him. In 1937 he bought up the patents on a mixing machine and made arrangements with a factory in Toledo to perfect and manufacture it. The Waring Blender soon occupied choice space on kitchen counters and bars. The Aluron steam iron was also somebody else's idea, but it stood still until Fred got it moving at a good profit.

Waring's Shawnee Press is one of the world's largest publishers of music for bands and choral groups, and the monthly *Music Journal*, which he helped to start in 1942, is read by thousands of teachers and performers.

As Fred and his Pennsylvanians began to fade from the television screen, he took to the road. "Touring is the most rewarding part of show business," he declared, "You have to know whether people like you, and I don't know of any other way except by going to them."

When he celebrated his fiftieth year in music in 1966, scores of former Pennsylvanians appeared in a two-hour anniversary show. Asked about possible retirement, he snapped, "Why? Do you think I should retire?"

Fred Waring's Pennsylvanians had weathered the experimental

years of early radio and the off-beat musical trends of the swing craze and rock 'n' roll by holding firmly to their original style and standards. By the 1960s they had compiled a record of over five thousand broadcasts that consistently had maintained a high Nielsen rating.

Still "on the road" after sixty years, he fully expects to celebrate many more milestones on the bandstand. Age—young or older—has never kept Fred Waring from doing what he felt needed doing; and music was one of his greatest needs throughout his life. Today, he tours by bus during the fall and winter months, reaching approximately 150 towns, cities, and college campuses, and covering some 40,000 miles in forty states.

In between tours, he plays golf—shooting in the high 70's—at Shawnee and in Palm Springs, Calif., near his winter home. He has married three times. In 1923 he married Dorothy McAteer. His second wife, from 1933 to 1954, was dancer Evalyn Nair. His present wife is Virginia Morley, a pianist and former Pennsylvanian. From his second marriage, he has a daughter, Dixie, and two sons, Fred, Jr., and William, plus a dozen or so grandchildren and several great-grandchildren. Fred and Virginia have a son, Malcolm, and Virginia's son Paul, from a previous marriage.

Fred Waring's other "family," the Pennsylvanians, has long since become an American institution.

### FRANK MUNN

There was at least one top star during the glory-years of radio who quietly and without fanfare bowed out at the height of his career with no regrets, only gratifying memories.

But tenor Frank Munn had never been the "typical" star. He was a singer who sang because singing, to him, was as natural as breathing. Early in his career, he announced that he would retire at age 50, loaf, and sleep late. Frank kept his word. Only once, after four years of "goin' fishing," he made a brief unheralded—and unintentional—return to the spotlight somewhat in the role of a good neighbor.

Billed as “The Golden Voice of Radio,” Frank was happiest when accepted as just another easygoing guy, like the hometown postman or bus driver or grocery clerk. Yet his enormously appealing voice was familiar to listeners from coast to coast during the 1920s and into the 1940s. His mellow renditions of love ballads and art songs—“The Cowboy Serenade,” “Rose of Tralee,” “Miss You,” “Somewhere a Voice Is Calling,” and “Sylvia”—brought enjoyment to countless millions. For over a dozen years, via Friday evening’s *Waltz Time* and Sunday’s *American Album of Familiar Music*, Frank Munn was the dean of ballad singers.

But show business really wasn’t in his blood. He contended that singing was merely a pleasant, effortless way to make a living; a lucrative job. And wasn’t retirement every worker’s ultimate goal? His tastes were simple, his life-style devoid of frills although his earnings from radio eventually netted him well over a million dollars. He had no interest in fitting into the well-publicized party-going set. Physically that might have been a tight fit, at best; for he weighed over 250 pounds and stood only 5 feet, 7 inches. He lived quietly and unpretentiously, his routines as regulated as those of any conscientious businessman. “I come to the studio for rehearsals and broadcasts the same as I would go to any office, then I go home.”

Frank liked his leisure. Even when he had made a name for himself and was eagerly sought by radio sponsors and entertainment managers, he refused to sign binding contracts. Yet in an age of public exposure by many media, his was a radio name solely and completely. During the 1920s and early 1930s he was a highly paid recording artist, but after 1933 he cut only four discs; an RCA Victor Smart Set album of love songs issued in 1942. He never performed in concert halls, theaters, nightclubs, motion pictures, or at private gatherings, and rarely endorsed a commercial product. He shunned publicity in magazines and newspapers.

For several years the city of Milwaukee had sought Munn for its “music under the stars” summer concert series, offering him as much as they had ever paid a world-renowned celebrity. Munn laughed away the high four-figure offer. Finally in 1942 *The Milwaukee Journal* sent reporter Frank McMahon to New York to find out why Munn would refuse such a large fee. Munn granted the interview, the first this contented tenor had given in five years.

"I believe my place is at the microphone, that's all," he told McMahon frankly. "I'm making my living through singing over the air, not through touring the country, making four or five appearances a day and being confined to the theater from eleven in the morning until eleven at night and putting up with the inconveniences of Pullman travel, hotel rooms, and living out of trunks."

While other radio stars, such as Al Jolson, would sing for hours at any time, any place, or Caruso would readily entertain at parties and restaurants, Frank Munn derided the prevalent notion that talent should be flaunted whenever and wherever possible. Was Munn merely lazy, shy, or insecure in not trying new vehicles for his singing talent? Perhaps. He kept late hours and liked to sleep late. Evening radio work made both possible. As for shyness, well . . . he was definitely stout, and disliked folksy, informal photographs. Insecure? Musical contemporaries said that while he was outwardly relaxed before the mike, he was reluctant to team up with new costars or conductors, or to test his talent with more challenging arias from opera and the classics. His sponsor's advertising agency, Blackett-Sample-Hummert, was pleased that he bypassed radio guest spots, and in the 1940s agreed, at Munn's request, to keep studio audiences and public appearances at a minimum. The agency had its own reasons for complying; it did not want to dispel the illusion of listeners whose image of him as a dashing amorous troubadour had been conceived from his romantic voice. Thus everyone was kept happy! Perhaps Munn most of all.

"I was lucky," he remarked, referring to that period. "I was able to retire comfortably, and by choice, at 51—only a dream for most."

But there was an earlier time—before his big break with Gus Haenschen who organized the recording division for Brunswick—when life was not an easy road.

Frank Munn was born in The Bronx area of New York on February 27, 1894. When he was less than a year old, his mother died. He was brought up by his maternal grandmother and his father, a policeman. His boyhood ambition of becoming a railroad engineer was ruled out; there was very little money. As soon as he was old enough to work, he found a job as a shuttle boy in an

embroidery factory at \$3 per week. Munn, who had a natural love for music, picked up the rhythm of the machines, humming to their tempo. Later, in much the same manner, he learned to sing by memorizing the recordings of John McCormack and mimicking them.

“My older brother, Percy, had about the most beautiful tenor voice I ever heard,” Munn recalled. “He took me around with him, and if anyone was giving a party or a dance, we’d get the singing job.”

Percy was never interested in becoming a professional, so in his own spare time Frank began to appear as soloist in local amateur shows; in one of his first attempts, 18-year-old Munn won a gold watch at the McKinley Square Theater. He sang in concerts at the Bronx Union YMCA, neighborhood recreation clubs, and sometimes in churches. Since he frequently received little more than the proverbial coffee and cake for providing such entertainment, he never believed that it would be possible to earn a living from his voice. But fate stepped in. An accident to the index finger on his right hand, while working at a turbine factory as a machinist during World War I, put him in the hospital. It seemed to be only a minor injury at the time; but shortly afterward the bone began to decay, causing excruciating pain. He would not be able to work for a year or more.

“Not until then, when I was half mad with fear and worry, did the thought come to me that my voice could be trained and that perhaps I could make some money by singing—maybe even a living.”

Munn began to pick up singing jobs at club dances. He frequently performed with the five-piece Triangle Jazz Band, an amateur group in The Bronx. About 1920, a music editor from a New York newspaper heard the band and its vocalist. He told the 26-year-old Munn that a voice of his caliber could benefit from some professional training, and urged him to see Dudley Buck, a widely recognized teacher and composer. Munn did so. Although the eager pupil could not pay for lessons, Buck agreed to help him.

At the same time, Munn’s workaday prospects improved. He found a job delivering new cars to New York from Detroit. Between trips, he struggled for a “break;” waxing audition records for any company that would let him through the door.

He visited dozens of studios, among them the Edison Phonograph Works. The manager let him cut a disc and passed it along to the boss, Thomas A. Edison. Although partially deaf, Edison himself checked everything, often rejecting excellent records. Upon hearing Munn's record, the inventor jotted down his reaction: "Pretty bad. Very weak—has a tremolo."\*

Edison's cryptic opinion on Munn's vibrato or wavering pitch dashed the tenor's chances for a job. Nevertheless, he recorded a number of tunes for several minor labels, none of which gained him any recognition.

Then Munn met Brunswick's musical director, Gus Haenschen. He listened and offered to help him. He brought out the exceptional natural quality in Munn's voice that he captured on wax in such renditions as "Just a Flower from an Old Bouquet," "Pal of My Cradle Days," "Memory's Garden," and similar heart-rending ballads. These proved to be big money-makers. In 1924 Munn's full-time professional career was launched.

A year or two earlier Munn had begun making the rounds of local broadcasting stations, singing an hour or more at a mike. Radio's unique requirements appealed to Munn's technical mind, and he determined to conquer the medium. Engineers at WEA and WJZ quickly discovered the unusually expressive quality of this tenor voice, declaring it appealing and most suitable for broadcasting. They were amazed to learn that Munn had scarcely studied music at all, never vocalized or practiced at home, and could not read notes. Although his inability to read music made it more difficult for him to learn new songs, Munn never lost the unique quality that held listeners spellbound.

Throughout the 1920s regular singing jobs came his way on *E. A. White Hour*, *Philco Hour*, *Brunswick Hour of Music*, *Gold Strand Hour*, *Ruud Light Opera Company*, and with the *A & P Gypsies* and *Champion Sparkers*. His mentor, Gus Haenschen, conducted many of these shows on which Munn vocalized with Gladys Rice, Ella Good, or Erva Giles.

"Everything I am in radio," Munn remarked later, "I owe to Gus Haenschen. It is his artistry, musicianship, and advice which have allowed me to achieve whatever success has been mine."

\*Later in the 1920s, Munn recorded a dozen songs for Edison, and in 1928 was offered a lucrative royalty contract. He refused, signing with Victor.

Then in 1927 Munn signed for the *Palmolive Hour*, and soon became a national favorite using the euphonious name of Paul Oliver!

Soprano Lucy Monroe, who sang with Munn in the 1930s on *Lavender and Old Lace* and *American Album*, said of him, “He was always a marvelous colleague, generous and thoughtful, and with a lovely sense of humor.”

He never showed up at Radio City complaining that he didn’t feel ready for his stint at the mike; no one recalled Munn saying, “I’m in bad voice tonight.” Munn’s singing was unfailingly effortless, often brimful of emotion.

“He would sing a song on stage and come back to the control room with tears in his eyes,” NBC production manager James Haupt recalled. “But the audience would never know it. He really did one of the smartest things any singer ever did. A lot of great artists as they got older would never sing a number in lower key because they would be afraid their contemporaries would know about it. If they had sung their repertoire a tone lower, they would have been able to sing it successfully, with just as much interpretation and fine tone. But most singers kept the original keys and had trouble in the upper register. That’s one thing Frank Munn didn’t do. About every year or so, he dropped his keys a half-step or a whole step, so he could sing fluently and in the range of the number.”

Frank Munn established an incredible performing record. From 1923 to the end of 1934, he missed only one broadcast. But, in December of that year, Munn, an avid football fan, journeyed to Philadelphia to watch the Army-Navy game at Franklin Field. He sat through a blinding, bone-numbing rain. A chill developed into a severe cold, keeping him from a microphone for weeks.

In all his years on the air, he never lacked a sponsor—never appearing on a sustaining program. Even more remarkable, he rarely took so much as a week’s vacation, or a summer break, which was *de rigueur* for network stars. A brief cruise to the Bahamas or Bermuda between broadcasts, or a short trip with conductor Abe Lyman to the Chicago World’s Fair, was the extent of his holidays. By the 1940s he wanted to take a couple of months off and travel, but the war curtailed that plan. So in 1941

he added a third show, *American Melody Hour*, to his weekly schedule.

The longer Frank Munn remained on radio, the more popular he became. In poll after poll he was voted one of the most listened-to singers for both popular and semiclassical music. By 1944, along with Crosby, Sinatra, Kenny Baker, and Nelson Eddy, he ranked as one of the medium's top male vocalists. Similarly, NBC's *American Album* won numerous awards for offering pleasurable, appealing music. The long-lasting series advanced the radio careers of a number of young artists: Bernice Claire, Lucy Monroe, Jean Dickenson, Evelyn MacGregor, Vivian della Chiesa, and Margaret Daum.

Before radio and the Depression blitzed the record business, Munn's Brunswick label discs sold several hundred thousand platters, with such popular songs as "Just a Cottage Small," "Old Pal," "My Mother's Eyes," "I Surrender Dear," "Song of Songs," and ageless Irish ballads including "I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen," "When You and I Were Young, Maggie," "My Wild Irish Rose," and "That Tumble-Down Shack in Athlone."

Munn also waxed several hundred discs as a band vocalist, complementing the orchestras of Vincent Lopez, Eddy Duchin, Ben Selvin, Ted Weems, Leo Reisman, Jean Goldkette, and Jacques Renard. In 1932 he added his talents to the very first American album ever made from the score of a Broadway musical—*Show Boat*. The set consisted of four 12-inch discs arranged and conducted by Victor Young, and featuring Helen Morgan, Paul Robeson, James Melton, Olga Albani, and Munn. The Brunswick pressing, against which all other versions of this classic musical have been judged, has been reissued twice on the Columbia label: in 1942 as a 78-rpm album and again in 1974 as a LP disc.

An ardent swimmer, better-than-average golfer, and good fisherman, Munn spent the greatest part of his time away from studios in outdoor recreation. Beginning in 1940 he lived entire summers at his cottage on Peconic Bay, near Southampton, Long Island. Immediately after a program, he scampered to Penn Station for a train to his Merrick, Long Island, home. The next morning he was up early to drive 70 miles to his beach house. That was the last anyone saw of him until the next broadcast.

During most of his career, Munn stayed a bachelor, living in an apartment in The Bronx and commuting downtown by subway. Then, in September 1935, at age 41, he married Margaret Deffaa, a secretary at Radio City. They settled in a Cape Cod colonial dwelling in Merrick, near his friends from early radio, Bill Wirges and Harry Reser. The marriage ended in divorce less than two years later. In 1944, some sixteen months before his abrupt retirement, he married 46-year-old Anne Weisser, a widow who had known him in his youth in The Bronx.

Various reports as to the reason for his retirement circulated throughout the industry when it became known that he had definitely retired. Some said alcoholism, others attributed it to a nervous breakdown or the loss of his voice. One reporter claimed that Munn had entered the priesthood. It was, of course, none of these things. Perhaps the fact that he was stout and fiftyish and feared the coming of television might have contributed to his actions. But there was never much doubt about the real reason—a desire for “taking it easy.” After more than two decades on a vigorous, year-round schedule that often included three network broadcasts each week, and a brief stint as codirector of his NBC series, *Sweetest Love Songs Ever Sung*, with Metropolitan soprano Natalie Bodanya, Frank Munn had good reason to believe he had earned a rest.

Producer Frank Hummert had never subscribed to the annual extended June-September hiatus for his large and efficiently run stable of musical packages and soap operas. But at midsummer 1945 Munn, who had no contract to honor, took a six-weeks vacation—his first real break from broadcasting. He was scheduled to return to the air in September. But once away from the long unvaried weekly routine, he fell captive to the easy life. The war had ended in the Pacific, freeing restrictions on travel. Inquiries about his return from NBC and the sponsor, Bayer Aspirin, became frequent and urgent. Finally, after an absence of eight or nine weeks, Munn informed an astonished Frank Hummert that his vacation was permanent; he was bowing out.\* And so he

\*At a rehearsal a year or so earlier, Munn had made an announcement to the *American Album* cast. In 1931, he noted, Frank Hummert offered him a spot on the new program. “For how long?” Munn asked. “Maybe thirteen weeks, maybe thirteen years,” Hummert replied. “I just wanted to tell all of you,” said the solidly independent singer, “tonight is the anniversary of my thirteenth year.”

did—without fanfare or a single farewell, thus ending an enormously successful singing career.

Munn had often declared: "A singer is good for only a certain number of years. It doesn't matter how much or how little he sings in that period. After a certain age a singer starts to lose his stuff, just as an athlete will. There are, of course, notable exceptions such as Madame Schumann-Heink who was still a fine singer at age 75. But there aren't many Schumann-Heinks in this game."

Unlike most performers, Munn was perfectly content to be bypassed and forgotten in his chosen state of retirement; especially when he considered the advance of television with emphasis on the visual and theatrical. But millions of radio listeners did not forget. For them the Golden Voice of Radio would remain a cherished memory for the rest of their lives.

Frank Munn would be heard only once more, and this time by a selected few. It was New Year's Day, 1950, four years after his retirement. He had accepted an invitation to a neighborhood party—in a way, also a kind of gesture of farewell for he was preparing to sell his suburban home and migrate to Florida for the winters. For several days he had been disposing of career memorabilia, not an arduous task since he had refused to keep scrapbooks and only a couple of dozen of his three hundred recordings. As a gift to the hostess, he took along the piano sheet music of "Lonesome—That's All," which had been one of his most frequent radio requests. The cover was a photograph of Munn, one of the very few times he had personally endorsed a song.

The hostess thanked him. "We miss your voice these days. No one can really replace you on radio."

A guest commented, "Why don't you make a few appearances now and then, or give television a try?"

Munn's response reflected some of his attitude toward visual appearances. "When I retired, I quit completely. I'm not one to sit by the fireside in slippers, listening to my old phonograph records. I'd sooner listen to Perry Como or Bob Hannon or Frank Parker on radio."

An outspoken middle-aged lady quipped, "So now you're peddling sheet music! You should at least be willing to plug the song."

"I sang that song nearly a hundred times on the air, and dozens and dozens of other requests and scores of new songs. They add

up to over eight thousand solos and duets. That's enough work for anybody."

A plaintive voice was heard. "We've been your fans for years and never once had a *real live* performance. Let's start 1950 right with a fireside song by Frank Munn."

To everyone's amazement, Munn consented. Quickly the buzz of conversations ceased. A hush fell over the room.

Casually, with the ease of a gentle summer breeze, Frank Munn sang the familiar refrain, his voice pulsating to all the sincere emotion the words implied. For the duration of that song the room faded away and he was back at the mike singing one of his greatest radio triumphs: "*I'm lonesome for you . . . that's all!*"

The last notes drifted into the silence. No one spoke for several minutes. Out of respect for his talent and the man himself, no one asked for an encore. Three years later, October 1, 1953, just thirty years from the day he had first nervously faced a radio microphone, Frank Munn suffered a fatal heart attack while watching the World Series on television. He would be remembered by the millions of listeners for his "golden voice"; but also, by those who knew him personally, for the cheerful unassuming neighbor he was.



## Do-Re-Fee

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**T**he year 1940 brought the first significant changes in the content and fabric of radio music. The metamorphosis ultimately would affect diva, chorister, piccoloist, and tuba player alike and lead to the popularization of new genres in music, not just on the air but in all areas of entertainment.

Music, to radio audiences, always had been “free” at the twist of a dial. But to some seven hundred commercial stations on the other side of the ether, the majority of musical selections programmed each day carried a fixed fee. Music was a commodity, controlled and copyrighted; never an intangible up for grabs.

Since the 1890s tunesmiths had been hammering out a great supply of popular songs. By the 1930s their efforts had produced an enormous treasury of published melodies protected by United States copyright laws and sheltered for the most part under the aegis of the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers—better known as ASCAP. A scattering of songs had been licensed by the Society of European Stage Authors and Composers (SESAC), a performance rights group organized in 1931 to protect the interests of European copyright owners. But in the United States it was ASCAP that guarded such rights, collecting a fee from its members for public performances of virtually all the songs America was singing anywhere; in the shower or hummed at the cradle, or shouted about at the neighborhood bar.

Year after year, as the popularity of radio grew and its dependence on music in one form or another increased, ASCAP took a

closer look at the silver-lined gadget. Music fans would soon discover that their favorite song was not as free as the air.

Early broadcasters had two choices. They could ask permission to use ASCAP music and pay a nominal, blanket fee, or play copyrighted music without consent and risk legal action. When stations and networks grew into money-making operations, ASCAP requested payment of about \$25 before authorizing the broadcast of the music of a member. Some stations made no protest. AT&T's WEAf, for example, agreed that music writers should collect a royalty for radio performances. WEAf also informed audiences that certain of its programmed music was licensed by the society.

Not all stations were so congenial. Certain broadcasters refused to comply. Program cancellations and legal battles often ensued. Westinghouse-owned WJZ, for one, omitted a broadcast of the opera *Robin Hood* in April 1923, announcing that copyrighted music would no longer be programmed. "The Society can't bulldoze us into paying big license fees for the use of their music." On another occasion, a station cut off a program actually in progress rather than accede to the demands of an ASCAP member. A broadcast of the Boston Symphony in 1926 was interrupted when publisher G. Ricordi & Company refused to grant permission for Eugene Goossens to conduct its composition "Sinfonietta."

This hard fact remained: If the broadcasting choice was narrowed to the few bits of music in public domain, it would neither satisfy the majority of listeners nor encourage big-money advertisers to sponsor programs. Obviously, some degree of cooperation with ASCAP was essential to commercial broadcasting. Outright compatibility, however, was hit and miss.

The 1920s and early 1930s were marked by a deluge of "fee or not to fee" lawsuits and court fights. A Department of Justice ruling stated that ASCAP was not a monopoly, despite the contrary claims of broadcasters that the society throttled radio's freedom to offer music. Stations had no obligation to buy copyrighted music, the government pointed out; but if they did, the going rate had to be honored. Stations were gradually forced to acquiesce, paying both a blanket ASCAP license charge and individual performance fees.

For some fifteen hours a day, hundreds of stations cranked out old and new music that was sung, played, whistled, hummed, or crooned by professionals and amateurs alike. By 1933 radio was paying ASCAP nearly a million dollars a year plus 3 percent of sponsor revenues. Nevertheless, the society sought what they called "proper" remuneration.

The general manager of ASCAP's Music Publishers Protective Association, E. Claude Mills, reiterated this position. He claimed radio blasted popular songs to death before publishers could profit from the sale of phonograph records, sheet music, and piano rolls. "Radio," he observed, "is the greatest influence the world has ever seen for developing public taste for classical music—and the most destructive influence on popular music in the sense of destroying the composers' market."

Music writers and publishers now claimed that the average popular song enjoyed a life of three months; a decade earlier, in the mid-1920s, a hit tune "lived" for sixteen months. As radio listening captured the public ear, the society pointed out, the sale of pianos, records, and sheet music declined sharply. In 1927 sheet music sales for "Ramona" reached a robust 1,750,000 copies; in 1931 the equally popular "Stein Song" sold only 900,000. ASCAP refused to blame the economic doldrums for any substantial sales drop.

Radio was "free." Thus, when Americans spent money on entertainment, motion pictures garnered the lion's share of the leisure-time dollar. The development of "talkies" led most major film-makers to invest in music publishing to provide an in-house source of music for their sound tracks. A number of leading ASCAP firms were owned, either wholly or in part, by studios seeking higher and higher fees. These publishers sought to control or absorb network radio through its dependence on music. If not full control, at least they sought to place broadcasting in an economic straitjacket.

Movie exhibitors never stopped complaining that the public stayed at home listening to screen favorites instead of going out and seeing them on a theater screen. Some studios agreed; others flirted with radio. One year, they would push their stars to a mike. The next, if revenues fell, they pulled them back. In 1938, for

example, Darryl F. Zanuck, head of Twentieth Century-Fox, banned from the airwaves his studio's biggest attractions, Alice Faye and Tyrone Power. Similarly, MGM ended its *Good News* program on which many of its most popular contract players appeared, fearing overexposure would shorten box office lines.

Leading the battle directly against broadcasters was Gene Buck, ASCAP president, himself a writer of several hundred songs for the *Ziegfeld Follies* and other Broadway shows. ASCAP chose this leader in 1924, and he brought to the job a solid background as a showman and lyricist. To actors, composers, and down-at-the-heels musicians, he was a most generous and beloved citizen. But to radio executives, hotel and supper club owners, and operators of nickel-in-the-slot phonographs, he was an exceedingly hard-boiled czar.

Buck had helped to establish ASCAP some ten years earlier. Victor Herbert spearheaded the drive. Herbert had tired of battling alone against restaurants and cabarets pirating his music. He enlisted Buck, John Phillip Sousa, and other composers to help form a society to collect fees from the public performance for profit from copyrighted works of its members. During the first two or three years it encountered both successes and reverses, and was a party to numerous lawsuits, especially on aspects of its charter. At one point, the government sought to dissolve the group for violating antitrust laws.

Buck led a direct foray against radio. In 1922 he heard his first broadcast, chiefly because two of his own songs were played: "Tulip Time" and "Neath the South Sea Moon." He was immediately struck by two thoughts: there had been a birth of a great new entertainment vehicle; and *his* copyrights were infringed. That discovery marked the beginning of ASCAP's running battle with the airwaves. Armed with an inventory of fifty-six years of musical hits (fifty-six years then being the life of a copyright), ASCAP began to battle radio.

"All right," Buck said to broadcasters, "give listeners 'Swanee River,' 'Little Brown Jug,' and whatever is in the public domain. If you quit broadcasting ASCAP music, maybe people will open the parlor piano. Maybe we can sell sheet music again."

Meanwhile, within radio itself, a group of top-notch orchestra leaders in 1934 screened popular tunes for another reason. Called

The Committee of Five for the Betterment of Radio, it placed a self-imposed ban on songs with suggestive titles and lyrics. Rudy Vallee, Paul Whiteman, Guy Lombardo, Richard Himber, and Abe Lyman refrained from playing the likes of "Love for Sale" and "I Found a New Way to Go to Town." They chiefly sought to avoid possible censorship from outside interests and prevent any extension on the air of the then-current crusade against sexually suggestive movies.

A portent of things to come took place in 1936. A partial ban, or blackout, on ASCAP music occurred when Herman Starr, president of Warner Brothers' Music Publishers Holding Corporation, pulled out of ASCAP. He insisted that inasmuch as Warner's 40,000-piece catalogue accounted for nearly a quarter of the society's repertoire, they should be paid a heftier slice of the licensing fees. The withdrawal meant a loss of some of the most popular selections on radio: scores from Jerome Kern's *Show Boat*, songs by Rodgers and Hart, and operetta favorites from Sigmund Romberg. Surprisingly, the public seemed not to miss the "banned" melodies. Warner's songwriters and publishers were the big losers, suffering greatly reduced earnings as their tunes, chiefly from current Warner musicals, were virtually forgotten on the air. In consequence the internal dispute was settled within six months. Starr and his melody-makers returned to the fold.

In 1938 ASCAP prepared for the renewal of broadcast licenses that were due to expire in two years on December 31, 1940. In drawing up the contracts, the society viewed radio as a fully grown, affluent adult, no longer an impecunious fledgling. ASCAP announced its new performance rates: a 7½ percent slice of the network's gross time sales. Broadcasters were jolted, but long ago had received the message. They would either have to pay at the new rate of approximately \$9,000,000 (a 100 percent increase over 1939), or write off such familiar tunes as Cole Porter's "Night and Day," Jerome Kern's "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," Gershwin's "Lady Be Good," and Irving Berlin's "Always."

Radio's major lobbying group, the National Association of Broadcasters, prepared for the worst. Broadcasters, in part, had established the NAB to battle ASCAP about fifteen years earlier. During 1939 and 1940, a series of meetings led to the formation of NAB's own performance rights society, Broadcast Music, Inc.

(BMI). If negotiations with ASCAP broke down, broadcasters wanted to be prepared to draw upon other sources of music and make radio independent of the copyright pool.

Guided by skillful lawyer Sydney M. Kaye—whom CBS loaned to the alternate licensing group—BMI tackled the formidable task of collecting popular songs from foreign sources, from independent writers who had not met ASCAP requirements, from publishers not affiliated with the society, and from public domain melodies dressed up in new arrangements that could be copyrighted. When BMI declared open house to songwriters, it was flooded with manuscripts at the rate of over a thousand a week.

On April 1, 1940, BMI officially opened shop with \$1,140,000 in stock subscriptions and license fee pledges from nearly 250 radio stations. They agreed to pay BMI annual fees amounting to 40 percent of the total fees previously paid by individual stations to ASCAP in 1937. Stations also agreed to limit the number of ASCAP selections. In October, NBC ruled that orchestras, broadcasting on sustaining shows, must play at least three non-ASCAP compositions during each broadcast. CBS issued a similar regulation. On November 15, 1940, NBC promulgated a complete ASCAP ban for sustaining programs, which, in effect, made up 60 percent of their broadcast time.

During the last weeks of 1940, broadcasters asked one another: Could music on radio survive without the vast melodic resources of ASCAP? Would listeners tune in to a constant play of the likes of “Beautiful Dreamer” and “The Hut Sut Song?”

The answer came swiftly. ASCAP music faded from the air at the stroke of midnight, December 31, 1940, New York time. The networks scrupulously monitored shows to make certain ASCAP songs were not on the air. Traditional New Year’s Eve pickups of dance bands across the country gave broadcasters a full night of jitters. With each infringement carrying a \$250 penalty, a network of forty or so stations could quickly tally a fine of \$10,000 or more.

But radio’s first day without ASCAP music brought hardly a ripple. There were virtually no violations. And public reaction was nil. It did, however, dampen a number of New Year’s Day programs, including, curiously enough, the coverage of the postseason football games. Fearful of pickups of college bands playing

ASCAP-controlled football songs, the networks positioned sportscasters in soundproof booths. These lookout posts blocked out not only the bands, but all of the cheering and hoopla of football coverage. Ted Husing, who covered the Orange Bowl game between Mississippi and Georgetown, said at one point, "The band is playing 'The Star-Spangled Banner' somewhere in the background but everyone knows the situation about music today, so I'll just describe the scene."

In a similar predicament, a Philadelphia station canceled its pickup of the traditional Mummers Parade. It feared some ASCAP tune from a marching band would slip by their mike.

One of the first music war victims had "surrendered" a bit earlier. Glenn Miller canceled his sustaining broadcast for WJZ from the Hotel Pennsylvania. The networks required him to sign an indemnification form making him answerable to claims in any legal action brought by ASCAP. Miller refused. So did Sammy Kaye, Richard Himber, Bob Chester, and others. Their non-commercial broadcasts ended.

The prime-time programs of January 1, 1941, reflected the controversy. Both Fred Allen and Eddie Cantor leaned toward classic or semiclassical music in contrast to their usual popular tunes. On the Allen program, Kenny Baker sang the age-old ballad "I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen." The Cantor show featured an aria from *La Traviata* and a jived-up version of "Listen to the Mocking Bird," sung by Dinah Shore.

The Thursday, January 2, script of the *Aldrich Family* called for Ezra Stone as Henry Aldrich to sing a few bars of the well-known ballad "Sylvia," a name that had a plot significance. But, because of the ban, Stone hummed a few notes of "Oh, Susanna" and substituted the name "Sylvia" at the end of the stanza. It drew a big laugh from the studio audience.

Many a theme song got shelved. "The Perfect Song" introducing Amos 'n' Andy changed to "Angel Serenade" by Braga; Philip Morris's *Johnny Presents* switched from the readily identifiable "On the Trail" by Ferde Grofé to Tchaikovsky's "Andante Cantabile." Eddie Cantor's signature, "One Hour with You," changed to the innocuous "Merrily We Roll Along."

During 1940 Thomas Belviso, manager of NBC's music department and its copyright expert, had been preparing nearly 250,000

non-ASCAP melodies for broadcast. His files bulged with such old tunes and spirituals as "Sweet Genevieve," "Turkey in the Straw," "Home on the Range," "Steal Away," and "Go Down Moses." All received frequent play on most big musical shows.

The popular music series—*Your Hit Parade*, *Manhattan Merry-Go-Round*, and *Carnation Contented Program*—were hardest hit. Stripped of the biggest tunes of 1940, these shows had few new or original melodies to replace them. One song from the Broadcast Music catalog, "Practice Makes Perfect," did gain enough momentum to reach the *Hit Parade* three months before the ban. Shows stressing traditional American songs and public domain classics hardly suffered. *The American Album of Familiar Music*, *The Voice of Firestone*, and *The Telephone Hour* merely gave listeners a surfeit of such melodic chestnuts as "Home, Sweet Home," "Santa Lucia," "Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms," Strauss waltzes, and Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata."

Stephen Foster's works also were up for grabs and readily adaptable to every style and tempo. Renditions of his "Beautiful Dreamer" and "I Dream of Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair" were heard almost daily. As a result, these well-aired songs left a lingering aversion (some say, a really bad taste) among many performers and listeners.

*The Music Hall on the Air*, featuring Erno Rapee and a symphony orchestra from Radio City Music Hall, and *Great Moments in Music*, with George Sebastian's orchestra and soloists Jean Tennyson and Robert Weede, tapped deeper into the classical vein. All in all, concert pianist José Iturbi, the string orchestra of Frank Black and the Golden Gate Quartet, for example, gained more exposure than jazz pianist Fats Waller, the band of Tommy Tucker, and the Ink Spots.

At the same time, the ASCAP ban created a near disaster for Jimmy Dorsey's new WJZ program *Your Happy Birthday*. During an engagement at the Lyric Theater in Bridgeport, Conn., and five days before the show's premiere, Dorsey discovered that his folio of BMI arrangements had disappeared. Notices were placed in newspapers, promising "no questions asked," if the supposedly overzealous souvenir hunter returned the sheets of music. No one responded. The day before the broadcast, Dorsey put his arrangers to work to come up with a half-dozen new arrangements for the

band and vocalists Mary Small and Helen O'Connell. But on the morning of the January 3 broadcast, Dorsey's writers were far from completing the job for his variety-quiz show. Then, without notice, the unwitting "fan" appeared at NBC with the music, just hours before air time. Dorsey sighed his relief as he quickly rehearsed the band for this series for Spuds Cigarettes.

Jimmy Dorsey, as well as several other popular leaders, actually benefited from the ASCAP blackout. Dorsey's repertoire included non-ASCAP Latin American numbers "Amapola," "Maria Elena," "Green Eyes," and "Yours"—and all quickly carried his musicians into the front ranks as the most popular band of 1941. The catchy Latin music played by Xavier Cugat and Eric Madriguera also remained outside the embargo. Their supply of South-of-the-Border tunes, for the most part, had been published by Edward B. Marks and Peer International, both of which were allied with BMI. Cugat was one of the few leading bands in the United States having an extensive, ready-made music library that could be played on the air without restriction; and he was besieged with radio offers from important sponsors.

"I selected the ten most advantageous accounts," Cugat boasted, "then accepted Camel Cigarettes as my sponsor."

As his rhumbas, sambas, and tangos caught on, his program ratings soared. "Adios," "Malaguena," "Amor," and other vocal and instrumental numbers with a Latin beat became coast-to-coast hits, joining a select group of enduring favorites. By the 1970s each tune had logged over a million performances on radio and television.

The American public accepted the inroads of such music without missing a beat. The average dial twister appeared unconcerned. Neither outpourings of protest nor picket lines vexed the 674 radio stations that had broken with ASCAP. A *Variety* poll in Philadelphia in mid-January typified the country's indifference. The overwhelming majority had not noticed any change in musical programs. About 10 percent said they had been too busy during the New Year holiday to pay any attention to the radio. Less than one-third replied that they knew about the ASCAP ban and had noticed a lack of tunes. And of those aware of the squabble, only two were annoyed about it. One now listened only to news; the other bought a phonograph.

Stations and advertisers had reported no drop in ratings, and a threatened ASCAP counterattack never materialized. The position of Broadcast Music, Inc., gained strength. Both established and amateur songwriters began to sign up with BMI. This society offered payment for each performance of any given song and did not subscribe to a cumbersome fee-splitting system.

By late spring, one of the networks rebelled against being a part of the continuing ASCAP music blackout. Never a major contributor to a composer's or publisher's coffers, Mutual Broadcasting System had little to lose or gain. The loosely linked chain made a grandstand play during the annual NAB convention in St. Louis by signing a new contract with ASCAP. MBS made headlines, and reaped the ire of other networks.

By a vote of eighty-six stations to forty-six (with forty not voting), Mutual agreed to pay 3 percent of its gross receipts, less discounts and ad agency commissions, during the first four years of a ten-year contract. During the remaining six years, the fee schedule rose to 3½ percent. This agreement was considerably less than the 7½ percent rates ASCAP had originally demanded. The contract applied only on network productions, not for local programs of affiliates. Earlier, MBS had rejected an alternative plan of paying for each performance of a song; bookkeeping would be too complicated.

On May 13 ASCAP music returned to Mutual. A few days later, both organizations celebrated with an all-star unrehearsed pot-pourri called *ASCAP Salutes MBS*. It featured Gene Buck, George Jessel, Judy Garland, John Charles Thomas, Harold Arlen, Eddy Duchin, David Ross, and Dennis Morgan, and several dozen melodies by Berlin, Porter, Romberg, Kern, and Gershwin.

This musical review reminded other networks that ASCAP songs, in the long run, could not be totally, or even, lightly dismissed. It hastened agreements similar to Mutual's. By the end of the summer, ASCAP's portfolio reverberated from one end of the radio dial to the other. The society's receipts began to build up. Within a year, they matched 1940's fees of nearly \$4.8 million.

The controversy never totally abated. ASCAP and BMI clashed time after time and remained at loggerheads long after the big era

of radio music ended. Audiences and composers, however, benefited.

Millions of listeners heard old forgotten songs, as well as overlooked classical pieces and esoteric new tunes.

While building up a backlog of music, BMI became a generous friend of less-established, even amateur, songwriters. Unlike ASCAP, it actually published works of its members. Significantly, BMI brought to radio of the 1940s music not particularly considered commercial—the folk song, hillbilly lament, rhythm and blues, and Latin American bolero. It propelled new musical idioms into the mainstream. One of America's most avant-garde composers, Charles Ives, became affiliated with BMI. So did William Schuman, Walter Piston, Ulysses Kay, and other original writers. Competition between BMI and ASCAP increased the diversity and quantity of American music. Both casual and serious listeners gained from the prolific breakthrough.

No sooner had an accord between broadcasters and ASCAP been reached than another music war broke out. This time, a warrior mustered an active army of more than 130,000 men and women. The troops comprised the national membership of the American Federation of Musicians; their battle gear ranged from hornpipes to harps.

The regiment was led by a combat veteran—a gregarious and pugilistic one-time trumpet player named James Caesar Petrillo. It was said of this union president, “If given the chance, he would organize a cigar band.”

Why was radio his number-one target? More and more broadcasters, especially the small “one-lungers,” were relying on canned music and giving air time to amateur musicians. This rankled the big boss of card-carrying musicians.

Most of Petrillo's battles were directed against mechanical devices that put “live” musicians out of work. His enemies included the nickel-grabbing jukebox, as well as the living room radio. Too many stations, in his estimation, played records, usually on low-budget locally sponsored programs.

While fighting for higher pay for his membership, he also fought against free music played by amateurs. And with the nation at war, and more and more musicians going off to boot camp, the opportunities for nonprofessionals grew.

On July 10, 1942, Petrillo gave teeth to his pronouncements against amateurs. That day, an orchestra of 160 boys and girls at the National Music Camp at Interlocken, Mich., prepared a network pickup. Arrangements with NBC had been made months in advance. Proud mothers and dads across the country warmed up their Philcos. But they were in for a surprise and a letdown. They heard not the tootings of their offspring, but the music of a professionally sounding orchestra.

At the last minute, Petrillo had ordered the substitution of a studio group for the young students. The outcry of protesting parents echoed from household to household. Petrillo replied that these Interlocken musicians, not being union members, took jobs away from his men. But the issue was academic in more ways than one. The average age of the students was 15; they hardly qualified for the union minimum of 16 years.

Later that summer Petrillo struck again. He ordered the dance bands of Teddy Wilson and Richard Himber not to broadcast over WEA. Their music would go to NBC affiliate KSTP in St. Paul-Minneapolis. This station and Petrillo had locked horns. The disagreement centered on the station's refusal to meet the union's demand for renewal of a contract, calling for a yearly payment of \$21,000.

President Petrillo attacked radio a third time. Again, he demanded more money for his membership. This time he served notice on recording companies. No more phonograph records could be cut with his AFM musicians after July 31, 1942, unless the manufacturers guaranteed that their discs would *not* be played in jukeboxes and on radio. When the courts ruled that the companies had no control over their releases after they came into the hands of a buyer, Petrillo's order, in essence, barred the making of recordings. The situation affected everyone, from Spike Jones and "Satchmo" to Toscanini and Fritz Reiner.

"In a period when the spirit and morale of our nation needs music," voiced Edward Wallerstein, president of Columbia Records, "Mr. Petrillo's edict seems particularly ill-considered and ill-timed. The American people will be deprived of enjoying great artists and fine music."

Only acappella recordings by vocalists, that is, recordings without instrumental accompaniment, supplied a flow of new songs.

Several singers went before a microphone backed by a harmonica. Petrillo, it seems, had ruled that the harmonica was not a musical instrument. V-discs for the Armed Forces overseas also escaped the ban. But all other turntables came to a stop. Even President Franklin Roosevelt's personal plea to Petrillo failed to sway his stand.

Disc jockeys, especially those spinners on small stations, were hardest hit. All *new* tunes that came to the forefront after August 1 had to be played "live" or not at all. On the heels of the ASCAP ban just a year earlier, program managers were hard pressed to maintain an input of fresh material.

The output of records dwindled during World War II. Not until November 1944 did the major record companies meet Petrillo's terms.\* By holding out, the musicians' czar had won a complete victory. His terms called for cash on the line—a fee for every record and reproduction of a record made by an AFM member, ranging from one-quarter cent for each 35-cent record to 5 cents for every \$5 record, and a fixed fee from the owner of every jukebox. This coup scooped up some \$4,000,000 a year. The settlement allocated these monies to alleviate unemployment among AFM members and provide free "live" music for the public through symphonic and band concerts.

On November 12, 1944, the first instrumental recording session at RCA in more than two years got under way. Vaughn Monroe raised his baton for the down beat of "The Trolley Song," one of the hit tunes from MGM's *Meet Me in St. Louis*. Six hours later, at Columbia studios, 12-inch master discs turned with André Kostelanetz and an orchestra of fifty-five pieces waxing both the Schubert and Bach-Gounod versions of "Ave Maria." Kostelanetz also recorded highlights from *Oklahoma*, the Broadway smash that had opened to raves nearly two years earlier.

Petrillo made no demands from radio. He believed in the collection of fees at the production source and not in dribblets from individuals spinning recorded music for profit. The Petrillo dispute, however, did test the ingenuity and resources of those broadcasters who relied upon the most current popular recordings and "canned" music. To some degree, regional stations injected local and "live" performers as a substitute for disc sessions. Of

\*In 1943 Decca Records and several small firms signed separate contracts with the AFM.

course, many small transmitters simply turned more and more to CBS, Mutual, NBC, or regional networks for programs. To fill air time, one outlet might increase opportunities for regional talent; another might just plug into a network chain.

The ASCAP music blackout had a much greater effect and influence on radio than the record ban. When contracts between broadcasters and ASCAP were negotiated and signed, Broadcast Music, Inc., remained. It provided a chance for many composers to be heard and compensated. The 1941 ASCAP ban planted the seeds for a broader acceptance of diverse and esoteric music, often emanating from songsmiths and artists far from Broadway, even alien to Tin Pan Alley.

## Over Here-Over There!

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**D**ecember—1942.

On a tiny South Pacific island a group of combat-weary GIs gather beside a shortwave radio receiver. From the speaker comes a familiar voice that stirs thoughts of home and family as Bing Crosby, 6,000 miles away, steps before the microphone in Hollywood to introduce a new song by Irving Berlin that is to become an annual tradition: “White Christmas.”

On that December night, and for many weeks to follow, the poignant melody expressed the longing of every soldier from Paris to Port Moresby, to return to those days “just like we used to know.” The song painted a vivid picture of something no war could destroy.

But twelve months earlier, the threat of war had been overshadowed by joyous preparations for the holiday season, with business as usual. Newspapers on that first Sunday in December 1941 carried the usual preholiday stories and advertisements. *The New York Times* and the *Herald-Tribune* used up dozens of pages filled with gift suggestions: Ski-jackets for \$3.90, Remington typewriters, Chinese hand-hooked rugs, Harriet Hubbard Ayer’s *Pink Clover* perfume, silver-plate trays priced at \$4.98. I.J. Fox emphasized the luxury of Persian Lamb coats. New books were a “best gift” item: *Saratoga Trunk* by Edna Ferber; *Wild Is the River* by Louis Bromfield; *The Strange Woman* by Ben Ames Williams. And the Moore-McCormack Lines announced thirty-eight-day cruises to Rio for \$480, tourist class.

At Davega Music Company, shoppers were reminded of the big sale on Emerson "Miracle Tone" table radios at \$34.95. Liberty Music Shop waxed poetic in its advertising of the Deluxe Capehart radio-phonograph, a chorus of which was picked up by enthusiastic salespeople: "a time-proved record-changer that turns the records for the listener." It played twenty records (forty selections) on both sides, providing three hours of uninterrupted music. Prices started at \$595.

RCA Victor offered record buyers a four-disc album of the Tchaikovsky *Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat Minor* played by Horowitz, with his father-in-law, Arturo Toscanini, conducting the NBC Symphony.

In the Northeast, it was an unseasonably warm and sunny day, encouraging thoughts of spring training and sand lots by sports fans. Many read of Mel Ott's appointment as a baseball manager and his promise "to put fight in the 1942 New York Giants."

A local city reporter covered Mayor LaGuardia's Saturday night talk at a dinner of the St. Nicholas Society. Recently appointed chief of the U.S. Office of Civilian Defense, LaGuardia directed his words to the European war.

"Again we face a war to the East. There stand your cities, occupied but not conquered. We can't be secure as long as liberty-loving people are so harassed."

The front page that Sunday morning indicated trouble to the West as well as across the Atlantic. The *Herald-Tribune* carried banner headlines: *Roosevelt Sends Message Direct to Emperor of Japan. Tokyo Troop Convoys Sighted on Way to Gulf of Siam.* An equally ominous subhead followed: *Hirohito Gets Last Minute Bid for Peace.* The gravure section led off with the photo feature: *Hawaii—Spearhead of Pacific Defense*, emphasizing swimming and surfing at Waikiki in the shadow of U.S. Navy maneuvers.

But for most Americans, December 7, 1941, began as just another quiet early winter Sunday, eighteen days before Christmas. Radio programs for Sunday afternoon offered a wide choice: popular music, Sammy Kaye's *Sunday Serenade*; drama, *Great Plays'* version of *Inspector General*; symphonic music, New York Philharmonic with guest pianist Arthur Rubinstein; pro-football, Brooklyn Dodgers vs. New York Giants; and current events from *Wake Up America* panel discussion on "Can There Be a Substantial

Reduction in Nondefense Expenditures of the Federal Government.” For their 5:00 p.m. show, the Moylan Sisters, accompanied by pianist Mort Howard, were scheduled to sing “The End of a Perfect Day.”

But at mid-day this peaceful security was abruptly shattered. Radio listeners were jolted out of their complacency by a report over the Mutual Network that would reshape much of the free world: “THE JAPANESE HAVE ATTACKED PEARL HARBOR, HAWAII, BY AIR, President Roosevelt has just announced.” WOR’s staff announcer, Len Sterling, had cut into the network’s play-by-play account of the Dodger-Giant contest at New York’s Polo Grounds, reading from a United Press bulletin. He glanced at the studio clock. The hands showed 2:26 p.m.

Minutes later, CBS and NBC networks flashed the news to a stunned America. At Columbia, newscaster John Daly told of the Pacific air attack. At NBC, newswriter Robert Eisenbach grabbed the teletype sheet, rushed into the studio and read the awesome bulletin without waiting for a staff announcer.

In minutes, radio had converted to emergency status, offering air time and communications assistance to President Roosevelt. To speed news to listeners around the clock, radio quickly rearranged schedules to give war-related bulletins priority over all programs. Appeals were broadcast to military personnel and civilian plane-spotters, to report back to their posts. Armed forces recruiting messages dominated the air much of the day. Newscasters and commentators, beginning on that Sunday afternoon, dealt chiefly with the war effort. War news, indeed, had shrunk the world as America joined the Allies. Networks picked up reports from Athens to Chungking by the flick of a switch. Descriptions of global events carried an immediacy and vividness that surpassed newspaper and newsreel.

Music on radio also marched to another drummer. Before December 7, it had provided chiefly entertainment. Now it added a new beat: morale boosting on the battlefield and on the home-front.

No matter how close or far a GI was from familiar surroundings, radio signified a chunk of home, reminding him of prewar days. Servicemen, away from their families for the first time, turned to radio as a link with that more tranquil period before Uncle Sam

beckoned with a uniform. The closest thing to a letter from home was the reassuring, affable voice of a radio favorite. Music, especially the melodic tones of a popular singer, was therapeutic to many weary servicemen. For the folks at home, these entertainers eased wartime fears and cares.

So important to GI morale was radio that broadcasts of network programs assumed top priority assignment. Broadcasters joined together to form a new quasi-military organization—the Armed Forces Radio Service. This network carried not only the top-rated stateside shows, but produced programs especially tailored for military audiences. Servicemen frequently performed on such shows. The Armed Forces Radio Service also established a transcription unit. This arm recorded most popular commercial programs and shipped them directly to military transmitters for rebroadcast.

GIs tuned in shows at every opportunity. The more they heard, the more they wanted. Soldiers and sailors urged—sometimes begged—their favorite stars to visit camps and bases. Many answered their call, bringing entertainment to makeshift stages in front of barracks, beside tanks, or on aircraft carriers. Together with performers from motion pictures and the stage, they traveled cross-country and journeyed overseas, often with the newly recruited USO shows. Many spent an hour or two at Broadway's Stage Door Canteen or in the Hollywood Canteen. They sang, danced, and joked, or merely signed autographs and served doughnuts and coffee. In between, they sold war bonds, promoted scrap metal and paper drives, urged individuals to give blood, joined civilian defense units, and appeared at benefits and government gatherings from Wall Street to Waikiki.

It was radio's finest hour. And the beginning of the end of those great days of "live" coast-to-coast—even continent-to-continent—broadcasting.

Nevertheless, in 1940, and into 1941, radio remained unaccustomed to war conditions, even as the country itself stood unprepared for the mobilization of manpower and the shift of the economy from butter to guns.

A vanguard of citizen-soldiers, before the attack on Pearl Harbor, rallied to the defense of country in the age-old patriotic tradition. Yet, the need for military conscription and preparedness

was vigorously questioned and debated in many circles. In some quarters mass desertion and insubordination were actually encouraged.

“Deliberate efforts were made not only to question the legitimate defense goals of the nation,” said Col. Edward M. Kirby, chief of military radio operations, “but also to destroy confidence in its leadership, weapons and equipment, to poison the mind of hundreds of thousands of young draftees, and to persuade them that they were the victims of a cruel political hoax and ‘suckers,’ unhonored and unsung’.”

Against this background of poor morale—both civilian and military—leading commercial radio programs with their enormous audiences were first permitted and, indeed, encouraged to originate broadcasts from military camps and bases.

Cheers from Fort Dix to Camp Pendleton followed the on-post arrival of network programs, reflecting a positive upswing in *esprit de corps* of young draftees. The appearance in their very midst of Kay Kyser and his *College of Musical Knowledge* and the *Bob Hope Show* during the ten months or so preceding Pearl Harbor gave recognition and assurance to servicemen that they were not forgotten, and in fact were very important to the safety and well-being of the nation.

Such programs blazed new trails, often requiring some adroit action to clear legal and policy hurdles. A disavowal at the start and close of every show—to the effect that “the origination of this program from this military property, in no way implies or is an endorsement for the product advertised”—became routine. Certain elements of security cropped up. Mention of a new weapon or an unusual training center, such as a radar installation, alarmed military security censors. Broadcasters voluntarily restricted what they might say and not say, short of Bob Hope’s ad-libs.

Radio’s top-rated performers and programs at campside attracted millions of listeners, providing the armed forces with an alert, ready-made audience. The army and navy, informally and subliminally, “educated” civilians on the facts of military life. The service branches, in a loosely defined league with the comic and musical talents of Eddie Cantor, Phil Spitalny, Harry James, Bing Crosby, André Kostelanetz, Jack Benny, Gene Autry, Red Skelton and others, sought to build a sense of pride in answering the call to

arms. The military wanted to stimulate recruiting and build confidence in the country's leadership.

The broadcasts also reshaped the attitudes of families with men in uniform. A mother believed more strongly in the necessity of the draft and a wife worried a bit less about her husband after they heard the cheers, whistles, and high-spirited applause at an army camp.

The tremendously popular big name bands were among the first entertainers to go directly to the GI. The Coca-Cola Company sent its *The Parade of Spotlight Bands* to military installations five nights a week. A two- or three-hour variety show, often sparked with a rumba or jitterbug contest, followed or preceded each broadcast.

The army and navy made every effort to bring radio shows to posts, large and small, even to sites far removed from the usual communication lines. For performers, it often meant long, tiring bus trips into isolated terrain and the possibility, if conditions were adverse, that the broadcast would never plug into the network. For such emergencies, most key stations kept on hand two or more prerecorded segments.

Xavier Cugat remembers a near-disaster in the Coca-Cola series. He and his musicians arrived by bus at a camp in Southern California just two hours before air time. Army officers greeted the band unenthusiastically, not with the usual warmth and good fellowship received at other bases. "Suddenly the reason dawned on me," Cugat recalled. "I was at the wrong camp."

The orchestra was 30 miles from where they were supposed to broadcast. Their transport bus already had left. No passenger vehicles were available. Cugat called the other base. It agreed to dispatch five Army trucks to pick up the band and speed it cross-country in time for the broadcast. The convoy averaged 75 miles an hour.

"It was the wildest and fastest ride I ever experienced," Cugat said, "but we did get to the right camp in one piece, in time for our scheduled program. We even had time for a quick rehearsal."

Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, with the war in Europe already two years old, the networks had begun to produce programs that tied in directly with the defense effort. To promote the sale of defense and savings bonds, NBC in July 1941 inaugurated

*For America We Sing*, devoted to American music presented by American singers. Frank Black conducted a forty-four-piece orchestra and chorus. Dorothy Maynor and Frank Munn sang on the first show, and Dr. Black gave the first performance of his orchestral composition *Patriotic Hymn*. Time and talent on future broadcasts were donated by Frank Parker, Helen Jepson, Lanny Ross, Elizabeth Lennox, Robert Weede, Rose Bampton, and Gladys Swarthout.

Bendix Aviation sponsored the *Treasury Hour* on the Blue Network. The all-star series hosted by Graham McNamee also promoted the government savings program. The show aimed for a broad listening audience by including music (sung, for example, by Kenny Baker), sports (dramatized by Bill Stern), comedy (headlined by Phil Baker), drama (performed by Fay Wray), and remote pickups (typified by a test of defense weapons from Aberdeen Proving Grounds).

Toscanini agreed to conduct five special radio concerts of the NBC Symphony to boost sales of U.S. Treasury Bonds. The first program went on the air December 6, 1941, and gave its director Richard A. Leonard an unforgettable, if not horrendous, experience.

During rehearsals, Leonard had explained to Toscanini that at the end of the hour-long program, Deems Taylor, from another studio, would give a one-minute talk on the importance of defense bonds. Toscanini and his musicians, of course, would neither see nor hear Taylor. Then, at a signal from Leonard, the Symphony would end the concert by playing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

No studio audience was invited for the actual broadcast. However, in the 8-H balcony sat a group of distinguished guests and government VIPs, including Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr.

"The program went off without a hitch," Leonard explained, "until the very close. At that point, the engineers switched to the studio where Taylor began his short talk. But, alas, Toscanini forgot to wait for my cue. As the final notes of the last selection, 'The Beautiful Blue Danube,' ended, he immediately plunged into the national anthem. One thing I knew: when Taylor wrapped up his talk, the Symphony would be midway 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' It would ruin the whole program.

“I had to stop Toscanini before he went ‘live’ over the air. I rushed out of the upper-level control booth, ran down a flight of stairs and sped across the stage to the podium. I grabbed the Maestro’s arm. He glared at me, resisted my grasp and continued conducting. Luckily, the orchestra knew something was wrong. One by one they stopped playing as I shouted ‘Taylor’s talking.’

“Toscanini realized his mistake. Two seconds later, the engineer signaled to me. I signaled the Maestro to begin. This time a much chagrined conductor gave the downbeat on ‘The Star Spangled Banner.’ All in all, we had narrowly averted a serious *faux pas*.”

At a postconcert reception, Leopold Stokowski, a studio guest, cornered Richard Leonard.

“The FBI is after you,” Maestro Stokowski jested. “You halted the playing of the national anthem.”

For Leonard, the incident became macabre. At the time of the coast-to-coast network program, the Japanese fleet lay off Hawaii. Fourteen hours later, fighter planes attacked Pearl Harbor and overnight led to U.S. participation in the Second World War.

A cry for more and more music followed in the wake of December 7. Servicemen pleaded, “Give us music—good hot jazz, hillbilly, and classical on radio and records.”

Radio receivers were in short supply. Production of sets, phonographs and accessories stopped. The large 43-acre RCA facilities at Camden, N.J., already had converted to war needs.

The National Youth Administration soon started a drive to collect old radios, which they repaired and reconditioned for army camps. Both GIs and civilians lacked radios and parts. So did a few studio musicians. One morning at NBC, organists prepared to play their Hammonds only to discover the amplification tubes had been stolen.

Bandleaders, symphony conductors, radio singers, and other performers heard the GIs’ appeal for music. They organized Records for Our Fighting Men, Inc., to help build morale through music. The group gathered both new and old discs for shipment to military installations. During 1942 a somewhat conflicting drive for records made headway. The American Legion launched a national campaign to gather old phonograph records for recycling. War production had curtailed the use of shellac, a primary material in record manufacture. However, old discs provided the essential

substance. The Legion collected nearly 24 million records for salvaging into new platters. Priority allotments of records, as well as radio sets, went to military centers and hospitals.

After Pearl Harbor, radio programs had a greater-than-ever role to build an acute awareness that *all* Americans were participants in a conflict that demanded their total support. Established radio formats changed or adapted to war conditions. Initially, all requests for particular songs, for example, were ignored because Washington feared the titles might contain enemy codes. Weather reports were also dropped. Artists, guest stars, and official government spokesmen delivered special messages, spot announcements, and pep talks on joining the WAVES, filing complete income tax returns, car pooling, purchasing war bonds, donating blood, and planting victory gardens. Regional stations and their local personalities similarly promoted the war effort. Visits to military hospitals and plants received high priority.

“Radio, well before the war, had become an almost universal ‘condition of living,’ ” observed CBS vice president Frank Stanton in 1944. “Radio fare has not been rationed. Radio is one product that can be produced for the armed forces without depriving the civilian.”

The war had a great influence on audience listening habits. When factories went on a twenty-four-hour day, so did radio and radio listening. Early morning and late evening dialing increased, but not at the expense of prewar listening peaks. The most popular programs before the war remained unchallenged.

Audience shows with free tickets suddenly “charged” admission—the purchase of a ten-cent savings stamp, or the donation of a jar of fat, a ball of tinfoil or pair of old rubbers. Other programs barred civilians, permitting only uniformed GIs in the studio audience.

The CBS *Gay Nineties Revue*, which specialized in old-time songs and barroom ballads, outfitted its cast in turn-of-the-century costumes. “An escapist-type program, it helped audiences forget the war and look back to happier times,” recalled the show’s singing soubrette, Beatrice Kay.

New wartime shows appeared. They included the Alfred Wallenstein-Treasury Department series *First American Opera Festival*,

the Hummert soap opera *Chaplain Jim, U.S.A.*, quizmaster Bob Hawk's *Thanks to the Yanks*, the War Production Board presentation *This Is Our Enemy*, the Great Lakes Naval Training Station's *Meet Your Navy*, the Dick Haymes-Gordon Jenkins tune-filled *Everything for the Boys*, the weekly serial *Alias John Freedom* and frequent concerts by bands from the U.S. Army, Air Corps, Royal Canadian Air Force, and other branches.

Radio drama emphasized the Allies' common cause. Music played an integral part. The plays of Norman Corwin—*We Hold These Truths*, *The People, Yes*, *The Lonesome Train*, *On a Note of Triumph*, and other scripts broadcast on *This Is War* and the *Columbia Workshop*—added unusual dimensions via music. "If music could convey action and mood without words, we used it," Corwin said. "It became unthinkable to do a dramatic program without it. Composers, such as Bernard Herrmann, Leigh Stevens, Lyn Murray, and Fred Steiner, told me that I provided some uncommon challenges. Their music gave a broader perspective and extraordinary momentum."

A show with the only written "duration clause" was *Stage Door Canteen*, patterned after the actual Manhattan basement rendezvous for servicemen on leave. Actress Helen Menken conceived the idea of an on-the-air gathering of Broadway stage performers, Hollywood film stars, and Radio City notables. The CBS show bowed in July 1942, and soon netted the American Theater Wing over \$3,500 a week to extend its work of bringing actual stage presentations to GIs. A galaxy of stars, from Brian Aherne, Tallulah Bankhead, and Madeleine Carroll to Jeannette MacDonald, Walter O'Keefe, and Barry Wood, were introduced by M.C. Bert Lytell, president of Actor's Equity. Raymond Paige's orchestra supplied the music.

By mid-1942 the armed forces had drafted many musicians. They often played instruments in military bands. Off duty, these GIs organized swing combos and dance bands. They quickly grew tired of stock musical arrangements night after night, and appealed to bandleaders and radio stations back home. "Send us the special swing arrangements of Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Harry James, and Tommy Dorsey," they pleaded. These uniformed sidemen wanted the latest orchestrations, not just run-of-the-mill arrangements. Glenn Miller first answered their call. He transcribed

his library of arrangements and shipped batches of scores to musicians in khaki as far off as Australia.

In a short time, the military forces embraced as many players from the big bands and studio orchestras as remained on radio row. On the homefront, replacements were hard to come by. With manpower in short supply, “raiding” prevailed. Older and 4-F players with a sound knowledge of music had their pick of well-paying jobs.

Yaichi Hiraoka was not so fortunate. A xylophonist with NBC since 1930, the Japanese-born musician suffered an indefinite suspension by his employers. They cited the enemy alien rule as well as company policy. No Japanese national would remain on staff. His friends and confreres rallied to his side. They included twenty-six members of the New York Philharmonic and a half-dozen neighbors from Queens, New York. Even Mayor LaGuardia vouched for the talented musician’s loyalty to his adopted country. It took months before Yaichi gained “clearance” and returned to Radio City.

During that first year of war, a major radio chain left its corporate parent. An antimonopoly edict from the FCC ordered RCA to sell or disband one of its two networks. Without hesitation, Sarnoff made his choice. He held on to the larger, more profitable NBC Red and reorganized the smaller, generally more public service-oriented (and hence, less lucrative) NBC Blue into a separate, wholly owned subsidiary. (The Red and Blue had achieved their designations because of colored pencils initially used by engineers in mapping the station hookup of the NBC system.)

In 1943 Life Saver confectionary manufacturer Edward J. Noble bought the Blue chain, including flagship station WJZ, for \$8 million. The revamped network soon changed its name to the American Broadcasting Company, and within two years, Noble and Mark Woods, ABC president, boosted the number of stations from 168 to 204. Gross sales rose to \$40 million from \$14 million, a result of the booming war years when more and more advertisers took to the air and ABC, in turn, had more available time to sell than its competitors.

Early in the war, England’s BBC jolted U.S. broadcasters and musicians. The British network decided to ban musical “sentiment

and slush” and replace it with “virile and robust” dance tunes and singing. Americans greeted the news dolefully. They were bewildered and surprised, hoping that a similar blackout on sentiment did not spread to Washington.

Bandleader Glen Gray, playing at New York’s Hotel Pennsylvania, said he knew from song requests that “kids going off to war still liked a little romance in their music.” Wendell Adams, supervisor of popular music for CBS, conceded that the censorship on “sticky” songs had some merit, but added: “We have as yet no rousing war songs. Most are sentimental.”

The BBC cited Irving Berlin’s “I Threw a Kiss in the Ocean” as one of the first “mushy” American songs. “They’re taking it too seriously,” Berlin said. The veteran songwriter recalled that World War I popularized many tenderhearted ballads, including “Keep the Home Fires Burning” and “There’s a Long, Long Trail.”

Luckily, the United States escaped such radio music curbs and continued its “production” of emotional war tunes. Radio’s foremost purveyors of unabashed vocal sentiment—Crosby and Sinatra, and the fast-rising Dick Haymes, Andy Russell, and Perry Como—scarcely suffered from a lack or loss of romantic ballads. Composers offered them “We Mustn’t Say Goodbye,” “You’d Be So Nice to Come Home To,” “I Couldn’t Sleep a Wink Last Night,” and “Long Ago and Far Away” to lull listeners from the realities of life. They remained in mufti at the mike while a dozen or so of their counterparts dropped their appoggiaturas and donned a uniform. In many instances, Uncle Sam assigned them to morale-building jobs, such as military bandmaster, Special Services vocalist, or entertainment officer.

Lanny Ross served as an Army liaison officer between USO camp tours and U.S. forces in the Southwest Pacific. Lieutenant Ross also was responsible for organizing recreational and sports programs at Port Moresby, New Guinea. One day Hollywood’s globe circling pin-up girl Carole Landis came by and pinned captain’s bars on Lanny.

Jack Leonard joined the army. He had just left Tommy Dorsey’s band, going out on his own as a vocalist. He had already gained a measure of success with Georgia Gibbs on Columbia’s *Composers Corner*.

Rudy Vallee signed with the Coast Guard. He led the Eleventh Naval District Coast Guard Band. Bob Crosby received a commis-

sion in the marines. Gospel singer Arthur B. Hunt as an army captain in the Special Service Corps rose to director of music for the military forces in Europe.

Sgt. Johnny Desmond sang with Glenn Miller and the AAF Band, achieving well-deserved recognition among GIs in Europe. Lt. Ray Heatherton spent two years with the marines at Guam and Okinawa. Flight officer Gene Autry unsaddled his horse and flew Air Transport Command planes to North Africa and over the “hump” to China.

Distaff vocalists gained greater-than-ever popularity during the war. Many a comely, sweet-sounding songstress parlayed vocal and visual assets into a solid radio career.

Joan Edwards, the female attraction on the *Hit Parade*, drew GIs by the hundreds to her broadcasts. She received dozens of requests for pin-up photos every day. A number of such fans mailed small V-discs on which they sang lullabies for Joan to play to her baby daughter. GIs landing in Naples named a jeep the “Joan Edwards.” Offsetting bobby-soxer reaction to Joan’s costar Frank Sinatra, wounded soldiers in Letterman General Hospital, San Francisco, started “The Moan and Groan for Joan” fan club.

Kay Armen appeared regularly as soloist on ABC programs. Hymns were a specialty of Kay’s. Her rendition of a particularly meaningful composition gave rise to a moving incident.

A recently wed husband and wife were driving back to camp one morning. He was shipping out the next day. Over the car radio they heard Kay sing “God Will Take Care of You.” The couple stopped the auto and quietly listened, assured that God truly would watch over them.

Several months later, Kay Armen received a letter from the wife telling of the morning when they heard that hymn. She ended the letter with the report that her G.I. husband has been missing in action, but she wanted Kay to know that she believed “God was taking care of him.” And the next letter to Kay carried the joyous news that the husband had been found and was on his way home.

Dinah Shore’s wholesome voice reminded soldiers and sailors of the girl they left behind. Songs by the friendly, velvet-toned vocalist—who a year or two earlier had achieved national acclaim from NBC’s *Chamber Music Society of Lower Basin Street*—went out by shortwave or transcription to every place where American

boys were fighting or stationed. They inundated her with mail written during off-duty hours in barracks, tents, and foxholes—letters which asked her to sing “I’ll Walk Alone” or “I’ll Be Seeing You.” Many thanked her for appearing in person at camp shows.

The Moylan Sisters won the hearts of GIs. The captivating youngsters reputedly corresponded with thirty-four servicemen. Their first pen pal was a sailor they had met while performing at the Stage Door Canteen. Numerous pilots wrote telling how they picked up the duo’s broadcasts while at the controls of an aircraft, and often set their course from a transmitter beaming their songs. Every Friday, 12-year-old Marianne Moylan and her 10-year-old sister, Peggy Joan served as volunteer plane-spotters from the top of the town hall at Sag Harbor, Long Island. As a hobby, both girls studied Morse code and collected souvenirs from GI letter writers.

The Moylans were too young to venture overseas with USO shows. Over thirty leading radio performers, however, joined Hollywood stars, Broadway notables, and old vaudeville headliners at the front lines. Frances Langford, Ella Logan, the Andrews Sisters, Joan Barton, Jane Pickens, and several dozen more radio singers took to the skies and high seas to bring “live” entertainment to GIs in Europe, the Pacific, and North Africa. Bing Crosby, Spike Jones, Al Jolson, Frank Sinatra, the Hoosier Hotshots, Nelson Eddy, Fred Astaire, Conrad Thibault, Jascha Heifetz—and many other top-of-the-dial music-makers—brought an hour or two of relaxation to fighting men in places and under circumstances never before experienced by those on *both* sides of the footlights.

Few performers from radio labored as long and hard as soprano Lucy Monroe. Six months before Pearl Harbor, she left radio to tour army camps and defense plants. Mayor LaGuardia put her to work for his Office of Civilian Defense. Then Undersecretary of War Robert Patterson appointed her to the music subcommittee of the Joint Army and Navy Committee on Welfare and Recreation. A star of *Manhattan Merry-Go-Round*, *American Album*, and the concert stage, Lucy gave up well-paying contracts to devote herself exclusively to personal appearances, often at a grass-roots level.

In 1941, Lucy left for an outdoor concert tour. It started in Washington, D.C., with the National Symphony Orchestra. On the evening of the first concert, an August rainstorm washed out the scheduled program. On the spur of the moment, Lucy decided to

entertain the disappointed audience of 40,000. She led a community sing. The spontaneous idea caught on.

A month later, 45,000 jammed Philadelphia's Municipal Stadium to harmonize in a program sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. In November the enthusiastic soprano undertook a tour of seventy-two Army bases. It was only the beginning. By the end of the war, she had traveled 125,000 miles in the United States and Canada conducting group sing-alongs at servicemen's hospitals, war plants, and bond rallies. Lucy Monroe accepted no fees for her work; expenses were paid by RCA Victor, on whose staff she served as director of patriotic music.

"Servicemen and factory workers benefited more from the community sings than people who passively sat in a concert hall," Lucy said. "Music lessened the strain and pressure that these men and women were under; it actually reduced accidents and absenteeism."

Lucy ended nearly five years of war work with a case of yellow jaundice. She took a year's rest from her singing career. "I had a lot of fun along with the stress and strain. Of all the publicity I received, I liked best an enormous sign at a Philadelphia park that read, 'See Lucy Monroe at the Zoo.'"

Early in the war, Lucy Monroe became closely identified with "The Star-Spangled Banner." Her association with the national anthem began at the 1940 New York World's Fair show *American Jubilee*, in which she impersonated Jenny Lind. A press agent decided to promote her as "the star-spangled soprano." During a six-month engagement she sang the stirring song a thousand times, frequently at special events for visiting VIPs. By 1954, nearly fifteen years later, she had performed the national anthem over five thousand times—at conventions, World Series, games, prize-fights, military camps and bases.\* The "star-spangled soprano" of World War II aroused patriotic fervor and raised hopes for the future.

Kate Smith—one of the most popular personalities, not only on the air, but in the entire United States—began singing patriotic

\*By the 1970s baritone Robert Merrill, who went from Major Bowes' *Amateur Hour* to the Met, reputedly surpassed Lucy Monroe's record. A baseball fan, he frequently sang the national anthem at the start of major league games.

songs at army camps at an early age. She was about 8 years old when the doughboys first went "over there" in 1917, and was already hitting high C's in a church choir near her home in Virginia.

At 16, to please her father, she briefly studied nursing in Washington, D.C. But soon music and singing were her life. She landed a part on Broadway in Eddie Dowling's *Honeymoon Lane*. Another big role followed in the 1930 hit *Flying High*. As Pansy Sparks, she sang and danced, but her chief function in that musical was as a target for all the fat girl jokes ever heard.

During its run, she met Ted Collins, a Columbia Phonograph Company manager. He urged her to abandon slapstick theatrics and concentrate on recordings and radio. She agreed, and from that day, as her manager-partner, Ted Collins directed every step of Kate Smith's professional career.

In 1931 she turned to radio, first with a WJZ sustainer.\* *Variety* wrote:

"Her programs are bound to grow in appeal. Miss Smith is one of the novelties NBC is using for some of the time taken from the *Slumber Hour*. Miss Smith appears after 11:30, which seems a handicap, with name orchestras on at the same time. Miss Smith, however, should build up a following as she has a voice which is catchy, using a crooning style which pleases."

In May 1931, CBS signed her for *La Palina Smoker*, the first of many commercials programs, both weekly and daily, that stretched into the 1950s.

A new song introduced on radio by Kate Smith was soon propelled to top-tune rating. Her theme song, "When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain," and "Dream a Little Dream of Me" became best sellers within a year of her mike debut.

A special song introduced in the late 1930s revealed the strength of her popularity, the power of music on the air, and a mounting zeal for patriotic melodies; and also evidenced Kate Smith's fervid expression of love and concern for her country. The song was Irving Berlin's "God Bless America," introduced by Kate on Armistice Day, 1938.

\*Earlier, in 1930, she had made guest appearances for Saks & Company and over CBS and with *Roxy's Gang* over on NBC.

Originally written by Berlin with different lyrics for a World War I revue called *Yip Yip Yaphank*, it was discarded before the show opened. Twenty-one years later, Berlin dusted off his unused score, added new words, and played it for Kate. She like it so much she sang it on radio for three straight weeks. The fourth week she omitted it. Letters poured in at CBS demanding that the stirring anthem be restored. Until the end of World War II, "God Bless America" was sung on nearly every Kate Smith program.

Irving Berlin had given her exclusive use of the song for two years. After 1940 other performers were offered an opportunity to sing it commercially. It soon ranked third in sheet music sales, with all royalties assigned by Berlin to the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America. Many listeners thought that "God Bless America" had become the national anthem. Others urged its official adoption by Congress—at the very least, as a coanthem.

Long before Congress declared war, Kate Smith knew firsthand the unique response generated by a song and the role music could play in building esprit. Moreover, she genuinely liked people. These factors, plus a tremendous vocal talent, made her a "natural" for patriotic activities and fund-raising campaigns. Although she never went overseas, she criss-crossed to camps from coast to coast and into Canada. She made appearances at hospitals and canteens, launched merchant ships and army bombers, and sold (and bought) war bonds. On February 1, 1944, during a twenty-four-hour broadcast marathon, she sold a staggering \$112 million in government bonds.

She urged those at home to write to servicemen, signing off her shows with the phrase, "If you don't write, you're wrong." In "selling" democracy to the nation, Kate Smith pitched in with her voice, her heart, and her checkbook.

Her welcome, "Hello, Everybody," was honest and straightforward on the air and off. Her simplicity in speaking and singing appealed to millions of people. She had an unusual talent for sincerity, a factor that made her a natural sales person and a great performer. Of her extraordinary popularity, a radio executive once remarked: "At first we thought it was just a lovely contralto voice, but now we know it is Kate—the voice is just a medium."

In February 1943, Jane Froman boarded a plane for Portugal

where she would join a USO unit. It was her first trip to entertain GIs overseas. Three years earlier the attractive ballad singer had performed at Fort Belvoir, Va., in one of the very first USO shows. For nearly a decade, appearances on the CBS Chesterfield program and at NBC in Chicago and New York had made her a very popular radio singer.

"In 1942 I was singing at the Rio Bomba nightclub in New York," Jane Froman recalled. "I was very happy over receiving an offer to costar with Milton Berle in a new edition of the *Ziegfeld Follies*. I had my share of radio and movies offers to boot. Then came a call for overseas volunteers. For some reason, the lights of Broadway didn't seem important. Here was a real chance to give Uncle Sam a helping hand."

Jane and her fellow passengers were an excited and nervous group as the Pan Am Yankee Clipper prepared to land in Lisbon. All were professional entertainers who had volunteered for USO assignments. Singer Tamara Smith, dancer Roy Rognan, accordionist Gypsy Markoff, Jane, and several dozen more troupers would reboard the Clipper for London.

As the craft prepared for landing, it suddenly nosedived and crashed. Moments later Jane Froman found herself floating in the Tagus River and calling out for help. Copilot John Burn, the nearest survivor, quickly swam to her side. Together, they found a piece of wreckage and used it to stay afloat until help arrived.

At a Lisbon hospital, doctors reported Jane's injuries. She had a compound fracture of the right leg just above the ankle, a nearly severed left leg below the knee, two broken ribs and a fractured right arm.

"Had I realized the extent of my injuries at the time of the crash, I doubt if I would have made the effort to keep afloat. Fortunately, the crash had not impaired my singing voice. It was the only thing I had left."

Jane Froman spent the better part of a year in hospitals and underwent a dozen leg operations. By late 1943 she returned to Broadway for a role in *Artists and Models*, albeit on crutches and burdened with a 35-pound leg brace. But more operations and physical therapy to save her leg kept her in hospitals for the remainder of the war.

When hostilities ended in Europe, the USO issued a call for entertainers to visit hospitalized troops overseas. Jane had to get into the “act.” Still on crutches, she volunteered.

Plucky Jane sang in ninety-five shows in Germany, France, England, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, and covered 30,000 miles in three months. Hospital doctors and psychiatrists testified to the joy and encouragement that she brought to the disabled and shell shocked. Their reaction was, “Well, if a mere girl can do it, so can I.”

A determined Jane Froman kept her appointment overseas with the GIs. It launched her dramatic comeback—a return that first necessitated a series of long, painful operations. In due course, she fully resumed her career on radio and records, in nightclubs, and ultimately on film as the singing voice of Susan Hayward, who played Jane in the autobiographical *With a Song in My Heart*.

Civilians readily turned to radio, not only for quick and convenient entertainment, but for information from the front. But the medium could not adequately handle such information on regularly scheduled news broadcasts.

About that time the War Department recognized the wish of military commands for public recognition of their operations. When Secretary of War Henry Stimson asked the networks for air time and facilities for a weekly report by the major military branches on various phases of the war, NBC offered its stations, studios, production staff, and musicians for an hour on Sunday afternoons.

The War Department visualized a series called *The Army-Navy Hour*. But the navy rejected the idea, preferring simply to issue news releases and bulletins and let individual radio stations or chains handle the material in their own way. Not until 1945, with the war rapidly coming to an end, did the Navy about-face. It broadcast the Navy Hour with actor-turned-lieutenant Robert Taylor as master of ceremonies, and the ninety-piece USN Symphony Orchestra conducted by Lt. Charles Brendler.

The army, however, wasted no time. It cut red tape to bring the *Army Hour* to listeners coast to coast. Written by army personnel stationed in the United States and overseas, the *Army Hour* bowed on April 5, 1942, and featured, as did all 189 broadcasts, GIs and

generals. Army combat reporters brought home the authentic drama of the battlefield from Bataan to Normandy. World-renowned VIPs—Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker, Gen. Chiang Kai-shek, and Pvt. Joe Louis—appeared, as did battle-honed heroes like veteran fighter pilot Reade Tilley of the Malta and Africa campaigns.

One Sunday, Irving Berlin introduced and sang “There are No Wings on a Foxhole,” a song he dedicated to the infantry. On the *Army Hour*, audiences first heard the official song of the Chaplain Corps, “Soldiers of God.” Pvt. Hy Zaret, composer of such prewar hits as “There I Go” and “It All Comes Back to Me Now,” wrote the lyrics.

Meanwhile, every GI overseas desperately wanted to hear his very own favorite star. Imagine the thrill when a corporal on Wake Island listened to Connee Boswell sing “his song.”

The armed forces asked Lou Cowan, producer of the widely popular *Quiz Kids*, to help devise a way to fill the requests of individual GIs stationed abroad. Cowan selected Glenn Wheaton, a young writer, to take direct charge of the project.

The format of the show, which would *not* be heard on domestic dials, really shaped itself. Trained to obey commands in the line of duty, the GI could now command virtually anything he wanted in radio entertainment. All he had to do was jot it down in a letter, V-mail, or cable.

The result was *Command Performance*—the most unusual radio variety show of the war and perhaps in the history of broadcasting. It brought an array of comedians, singers, pianists, band-leaders, actors, movie queens, and sports figures to a microphone—often on the very same show. The first program from Hollywood on March 1, 1942, gathered Dinah Shore, Danny Kaye, Merle Oberon, Eddie Cantor, Bert (“The Mad Russian”) Gordon, Bea Wain, Joe Louis, Buddy Baer, the Ambassadors Quartet, and Edgar “Cookie” Fairchild’s orchestra. Harry Von Zell served as M.C.

Many guests performed their best-known recordings, compositions, comic routines, or film roles. But often they did an offbeat thing by special request. Everyone donated his time and talent, making every possible effort to fulfill a GI’s “command.”

A request, for example, to hear the world's best and possibly worst violinists together found Jascha Heifetz and Jack Benny working as a duo. A soldier asked to hear the foghorns on San Francisco Bay. A sailor at Pearl Harbor asked Carole Landis to step to the mike and just sigh. Thousands requested Judy Garland to sing "Over the Rainbow."

Week after week, the morale-building *Command Performance* gave the armed forces an hour of "star-spangled" radio shortwaved all over the globe from Greenland to Guam. Ginny Simms garnered the greatest number of song requests. Dinah Shore placed a close second. With every GI a king, his wish was "the order of the day." Such unique and unprecedented teams as Bob Hope and Fred Allen, Betty Hutton and Gary Cooper, Bing Crosby and Lauritz Melchior, Jerry Colonna and Don Wilson, and Clark Gable and Bette Davis entertained the troops.

The show produced the first operetta based on a comic strip. "Dick Tracy in B Flat" starred Crosby in the title role, Frank Sinatra as Shakey, Judy Garland as Snowflake, Bob Hope as Flat Top, Jimmy Durante as the Mole, and Dinah Shore as Tess Truehart. Seven other top stars played supporting roles in this impromptu opera bouffe subtitled "For Goodness Sakes, Isn't He Ever Going to Marry Tess Trueheart?"

Initially, the Armed Forces Radio Service shortwaved *Command Performance*, as well as nearly all other programs. It soon became apparent that overseas radio links were overtaxed and inadequate. Static and fading also marred many broadcasts. The AFRS also sought to beam radio shows at times servicemen and women could hear them. That generally meant before breakfast, at noon, and between dinner and taps. Most significantly, only one out of six GIs had access to a shortwave receiver.

Both the military and broadcasters saw a need for stations where Americans were based—local AM stations operated *by* the men in uniform *for* the men in uniform. Soon transmitters followed the troops wherever they moved, almost from foxhole to foxhole.

To relay the latest show from Hollywood and Vine or Radio City, the Armed Forces Radio Service gained permission to record radio programs emanating from the four major networks. The

AFRS, headquartered in Los Angeles, duplicated prime-time shows on unbreakable 16-inch vinyl discs. Each contained about a half hour of radio entertainment.

The AFRS each month shipped overseas an average of fifty thousand such discs. An additional twenty thousand went to navy vessels for broadcast over public address systems. Air transports flew these transcription packages to designated locations where they circulated from station to station on a round-robin basis. Each week over seventy programs were recorded and shipped, along with fourteen hours of specially tailored armed forces programs, such as *Mail Call*, *Music for Sunday*, *At Ease*, and *GI Jill*.

Those instantly recognizable voices on the radio dial kept their familiar weekly slot on GI radio schedules. AFRS followed, as closely as possible, the program lineup of the particular network show at home. On Mondays, GIs via transcription heard, for instance, Richard Crooks; Tuesdays, Bob Hope; Wednesdays, Kay Kyser; Thursdays, Bing Crosby; Fridays, Kate Smith; Saturdays, Judy Canova; Sundays, Bea Wain.

For the GI disc jockey, Armed Forces Radio Service supplied a basic music library of over two thousand popular, semiclassical and classical selections. It regularly sent out two hundred new selections and provided news and special events programs via shortwave.

An example of AFRS homefront clout was the large stellar cast on hand to record a ninety-minute 1944 New Year's greeting to GIs. At the CBS Theater in New York were Milton Berle, Jimmy Durante, Kate Smith, the Army Air Force Band led by Capt. Glenn Miller and Capt. Meredith Willson, the Golden Gate Quartet, Hazel Scott, Mary Martin, Andres Segovia, Georgie Price, and Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians. Mayor LaGuardia stopped by to invite his far-flung listeners to Broadway. "Hurry up, boys, and finish the job," he said. "We're waitin' for you."

By the end of the war, the worldwide Armed Forces network encompassed about eight hundred stations. Programs on the forty-four stations in England were so novel and refreshing to the British that five million or so tuned in these U.S. military transmitters.

In the South Pacific, stations from Oro Bay to Tacloban formed the so-called "Mosquito and Jungle Network," chiefly because

“commercials” urged GIs to rub on atabrine, a mosquito repellent and prophylactic for malaria. The Mosquito Net’s *Atabrine Hour*, a popular music show, signed on with Harry James’ recording of “The Flight of the Bumblebee” to suggest the buzzing of a mosquito.

The signals of these scattered stations reached out unhindered over the waters of the Pacific. The miles separating island from island shrunk. When these transmitters closed down at the end of the war, New Zealanders, Aussies, Filipinos, and South Pacific islanders, over many thousands of square miles, felt a personal loss. They had shared the pleasures and never-ending wonders of America as reflected through radio.

“More than providing entertainment,” Col. Edward Kirby reported, “radio mirrored for them the U.S.A.—the land that had produced the easy-going, fun-loving yet brave young soldier who had been a friend and honored guest on their soil and in their homes.”

From the Pacific to Europe, radio American-style proved a welcome and effective ambassador.

For civilians and GIs alike, radio momentarily lifted some of the anxiety, pain, and loneliness of war. Music often was the keystone of day-to-day fortitude. A touching example of the impact of music and radio came to light several years after the war’s end. The mother of an ex-soldier from Schenectady, N.Y. wrote to the then-retired Frank Munn:

“When our second son, a prisoner of war in Germany for sixteen months, came home in June 1945, he asked me to write and ask you to sing ‘Forgotten’ for him and the others in Stalag 2B. It was just at the time you had left the air for the summer and we waited for your return and remembered you singing that song. It was a tender and blessed link with home and loved ones.”

The GI and his mother waited in vain for Munn’s return to the air, not aware that he had left the program permanently. Nevertheless, few soldiers from a decade earlier would ever forget the music that had comforted and lessened their fears and given them the strength to persist and prevail.

## Breaking the “Live” Sound Barrier

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**A**s World War II accelerated, changes in radio production, equipment, and priorities were made to meet new demands. Not the least of these originated with GIs at a microphone with a stack of records doing their best to entertain the troops. Thanks to Uncle Sam, the disc jockey and his “canned” music quickly gained a secure foothold. Back home, in major radio centers, broadcasters took notice.

The disc jockey per se was as old as radio itself. Recorded music from a cylinder, disc, or piano roll always had been a staple for small, low-wattage stations. Often, during the early years, large transmitters filled much air time with scratchy shellac records that were available at minimal cost. Later, when many of those stations individually came aboard as a network affiliate, “live” programs superseded disc shows. One of the primary reasons for joining NBC or CBS was the spontaneous convenience of being able to plug into coast-to-coast programs with Jack Benny, Connee Boswell, and Lowell Thomas, any one of whom would boost the local station’s ratings, prestige, and profits.

As early as 1923, the United States Department of Commerce had banned the use of “mechanically operated musical instruments” on certain high-powered stations serving a wide area. Later, the Federal Radio Commission made it compulsory for a station to announce that a program was recorded.

Nevertheless, electrical transcriptions, cut specifically for broadcasting on two sides of a single 12-inch 78 rpm disc, were fre-

quently heard on radio in the late 1920s. One system, labeled *Soatone* by its inventor Raymond Soat, utilized a double 78 rpm turntable with a micrometer tone arm. A half-hour program required at least three double-faced records. Printed sheets with precise time settings and cue words indicated when to change discs. KDKA engineer Joseph Baudino auditioned *Soatone* for a Westinghouse vice president, H. P. Davis, who approved its use at the Pittsburgh station. The Maytag Company, manufacturer of washing machines, sponsored the first KDKA broadcast produced by Raymond Soat.

Another early user, WAAM in Newark, N.J., put electrical transcriptions, or ETs, on the air one hour a week. It cautiously sought to determine whether the listening audience accepted them, or even knew the difference between music on ETs and "live" from a studio. WAAM also hoped to inject greater variety in its schedules and to stimulate time buying by local sponsors.

During the summer of 1929, composer and musicologist Deems Taylor traveled to Europe to record a program of special music for radio. Taylor packed several large trunks of recording equipment—in effect, a portable sound studio. For a two-hour broadcast, he waxed dozens of European folk songs and military marches. The program, sponsored by General Baking Company on Thanksgiving Day, reportedly was the first large-scale network production aired via transcription.

In 1930, WOR each morning injected two 15-minute pre-recorded segments prepared jointly by World Broadcasting System and Sound Studios in New York. Sound Studios originated with radio conductors Frank Black and Gus Haenschen. They were especially qualified to build a large library of musical arrangements for the now longer-playing 16-inch transcriptions. These larger discs also were recorded at the slower speed of 33-1/3 rpm, yielding approximately fifteen minutes of playing time. (A micro-grooved surface had not yet been developed.) Such ETs allowed commercials by "live" local announcers at the beginning and end of each disc.

Transcriptions answered an advertiser's nagging predicament: how to time a program to the best advantage for each individual market. ETs offered the possibility of changing hours on different stations to reach new audiences. A sponsor knew in advance

exactly what he was getting in content and technical reproduction.

ETs quickly found other uses: air checks for stations, sponsors, performers, and producers; unusual sound effects not readily created in a studio, and music reference libraries.

The stock, or basic, transcription library (complete with program scripts and continuity notes) flourished by the mid-1930s. NBC Thesaurus, World, SESAC, Standard, Lang-Worth and Associated (which controlled and serviced Muzak Corporation's music by wire to hotels, restaurants, and eventually, elevators) competed in this field. Transcription services, costing an average small station about \$175 a month, provided musical selections by many big-name bands and singers. Most artists recorded under pseudonyms so as not to compete with themselves on "live" network radio and on commercial recordings. For ET jobs, Benny Goodman chose the name "Bill Dodge"; Tommy Dorsey, "Harvey Tweed"; Jan Peerce, "Randolph Joyce"; Fats Waller, "Flip Wallace"; Gertrude Neisen, "Glida Neilsen"; Glen Gray, "George Gregory."

Several factors pointed to a clear track ahead for transcriptions. Improved electronic equipment for reproduction enhanced tone and pitch. The new lightweight and unbreakable vinylite disc reduced surface noise, cut mailing costs, and virtually eliminated shipping damage.

By 1940 over seven hundred stations in the United States and abroad subscribed to some form of transcription service. An estimated 53 percent of all musical programs on independent stations spun as ETs. Regional networks also invested heavily in such discs. The Don Lee Network on the West Coast, Yankee in New England, and the Chicago Tribune in the Midwest spent thousands of dollars a month on prerecorded shows. Many, including Chevrolet's *Musical Moments Revue* with Rubinoff's orchestra and heard over four hundred stations, ranked as high in audience polls as anything "live."

Nevertheless, few network performers in their own right and name came over the air "canned." Basso Harry Frankel proved a rare exception and thus created a new "first" on radio—the singing commercial.

Frankel had come to radio in 1929 at Station WLW in Cincinnati. With some twenty-five years' experience in vaudeville and minstrel shows, he quickly won over listeners as the folksy, gen-

tle-sounding Singin' Sam. His early sponsors were manufacturers beginning to experiment with radio advertising, among them manufacturers of lawn mowers and of ground coffee. But his fame was assured when he delivered one of his Singin' Sam commercials for Barbasol shaving cream over the CBS network. "Singin' Sam, the Barbasol Man," and his catchy jingle quickly became a part of everyday jargon during the 1930s: "Bar-ba-sol . . . Bar-ba-sol, no brush, no lather, no rub in, wet your razor, then begin . . ."

By the late 1930s Harry had sung his way to financial independence and decided to spend more time as a gentleman farmer near his hometown, Richmond, Ind. When Coca-Cola sought his commercial services, he suggested a transcribed series. The beverage firm agreed to a prerecorded, five-times-a-week series for which he waxed enough ETs to fill five programs during a single recording session. This enabled Singin' Sam to work in New York City only two days every two weeks—a desirable arrangement for both parties. When Frankel wanted a bigger piece of leisure time for any reason—before harvest time or to supply programs for a long vacation—he would crank out twice as many songs. His programs of old-time barbershop tunes demanded little rehearsal and were recorded with assembly-line dispatch. The success of such programs turned the attention of national distributors to advertising over individual stations, not bound together in networks. But not all was on the up and up.

On the flip side, the disc offered an opportunity for unscrupulous and clandestine activities. A number of small, grass-roots stations seized the chance to play commercial records of popular radio singers and bands in direct and simultaneous competition with their "live" network shows. It required only a few selected platters from a record library or music shop.

Although most discs carried the warning: "Not licensed for radio broadcast," individual artists had little or no recourse to prevent radio from playing their commercially released records. A station purchasing a Victor or Columbia disc could put it on the air without permission or payment.

A number of bandleaders retaliated drastically. They simply stopped recording. Soon the disc jockey had access only to out-of-date discs waxed, for example, by Fred Waring's 1929 aggregation but not the latest pop tunes by his 1936 Pennsylvanians. Fred

finally sued in the State of Pennsylvania for performance payments for each Waring record played on the air, and won his case. Disc jockeys in that state quickly shelved Waring's aging discs.

Other stations boldly stole network shows right off the air. They simply recorded them at their own studio, editing them to meet local needs, then picked up off-beat sponsors such as a delicatessen or taxi service. But not for long. Producers and performers went to court and successfully stopped such outright piracy.

For the most part, however, when a listener in the late 1930s heard the very latest song by Fred Waring, Lanny Ross, Peter Van Steeden, or Frank Munn, they were totally "live." Of course, many radio headliners—Bing Crosby, Kate Smith, Rudy Vallee—continued to record, often as many as forty popular songs during the course of a year. But guide lines had been firmly established.

Before the decade ended, the American Federation of Musicians agreed on conditions and terms for transcription work for their members. Provision was made to pay performance fees for ETs. Despite this, a number of musicians avoided jobs on broadcast ETs because they felt threatened; and, indeed, many lost jobs as radio became less "live."

Conductors and soloists were divided in their allegiance. Alfred Wallenstein, symphony conductor and musical director of WOR, remarked, "There is something about a 'live' broadcast that can always be sensed . . . the extraneous noises, squeals, coughs, and rustling of the audience." He seemed to overlook the fact that sneezes, coughs, and other background noises were captured just as faithfully on a disc.

Proponents of recorded music pointed out the certainty of a professional and well-timed performance on an ET. Transcriptions offered flexibility and more than one chance to polish a rendition with no fluffs, clinkers, or missed cues. Moreover, ETs and records could contain diverse material, making the broadcast possible during the same time segment as a symphony by Schubert and a sonata for violin and piano by Ives. Too often such works, performed by the same aggregation on a single "live" program, could do justice to neither.

The network's big advertisers usually cast the deciding vote. Psychologically, claimed many, programs projected vividness and

immediacy in the mind of a listener by the very fact that Abbott and Costello, or *The Hour of Charm*, or Roy Rogers, or *It Pays to Be Ignorant* were spontaneous and a “now” happening. Madison Avenue sages also believed that listeners at home became co-participants with “instantly alive” studio audiences, as well as with much larger groups simultaneously attuned to a program. It gave both advertising agencies and most major networks their best rationale for urging affiliates not to deviate from the status quo.

Only one of the “big four” chains bucked the system. Mutual Broadcasting System—robust in the number of stations but weak in supplying programs to them—found through transcriptions an answer to production shortcomings. Mutual, the youngest of the leading networks, had come into being in 1934. Its key stations were WOR New York, WGN Chicago, WLW Cincinnati, and WXYZ Detroit. Belatedly, they joined together to share schedules. Mutual made consistent and sometimes brilliant use of ETs, especially for the Detroit-originated serials: *The Green Hornet*, *The Lone Ranger*, and *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon*.

By 1945 several factors set in motion a gradual and broader acceptance of transcriptions. And in 1946 a single event broke the “live” sound barrier.

News coverage of the war had often necessitated the recording of battle reports and on-the-scene accounts. At the front lines, radio commentators such as Edward R. Murrow, John MacVane, Eric Severeid, and Bob Trout utilized both wire and uncoated 35-mm film-recording devices powered by storage batteries and generators. As broadcasts from war zones often encountered censorship, recorded reports allowed military and government review prior to air time. Stateside networks had to accept the fact of transcribed “feeds” from overseas.

NBC’s rigid network rule against recorded programs reputedly had been broken for the first time only a couple of years before the war. That occurred in 1937 so that audiences could hear the dramatic eyewitness broadcast of the *Hindenburg* zeppelin crash at Lakehurst, N.J. Herb Morrison of WLS Chicago had come to Lakehurst to make a routine recording of the *Hindenburg*’s landing. As he was describing the descent, the airship burst into a fiery mass. His emotional account was automatically recorded in full.

On the music scene, the country's big bands were definitely on the wane. The military draft, blackouts, and gas rationing had drained away manpower and kept people at home. Fewer bands meant fewer station remotes to fill late night hours.

Staff musicians, once a staple of virtually any station worth its weight in watts, now took a bigger—and often expendable—chunk of broadcast revenues. With the exception of organists and pianists, full-time musicians were disappearing from all but the largest transmitters' staff. Disc jockeys with their stack of 78s began to fill both voids.

Only radio's most popular singer dared to crack the "live" ice. Bing Crosby's career was well established by 1945. He was beginning to rebel against being tied down to a weekly radio appearance. He wanted more time off for golfing tournaments, vacationing on his ranch, and urging to victory his racetrack thoroughbreds. He decreed that any sponsor wanting his future radio services must agree to a transcription deal. Most declined such an arrangement; and it took a court order to get Crosby into a studio to complete an existing contract for the *Kraft Music Hall*. However, Philco and, in turn, ABC soon consented to an ET package—but with one provision. If Bing's ratings fell below the top prime-time broadcasts, either contracting party could insist upon his return to "live" shows.

So it was that on October 16, at the start of the 1946-47 season, *Philco Radio Time* delivered the first major blow to the seemingly outworn and unrealistic taboo against recorded network material.

Philco recorded Crosby's programs with a studio audience about a month in advance. On one of his first broadcasts, when one of his jokes fell flat, guest Fred Allen remarked, "Okay folks, we can wait four weeks for the laughs."

Portions of the final rehearsal, as well as the forty-minute broadcast session, made up the actual show. Approximately ten minutes of so-called dull, or "flat," spots were cut to make a half-hour program. It was then rerecorded by an elaborate and costly copying process. Nevertheless, at air time, the fear of a break or lag during the crossover from one disc to another constantly threatened.

*Billboard*, reviewing the first program, praised the showmanship but withheld full approval of the sound quality. All the Crosby qualities were there, it noted. "The classic casual, off-hand style in delivery; the nonpareil vocalizing, and above all, in his crossfire with his cinematic sidekick, Bob Hope, guesting for the preem, the same ad-libbing and disregard for the script. Wax or not, it was Crosby, and that means top radio."

The trade journal, however, noted a loss in fidelity. When pianist Skitch Henderson played "Turkey in the Straw" with John Scott Trotter's orchestra, the piano sounded metallic and fuzzy. Yet the distortion was no worse than the hollow-sounding hum often heard on programs carried by telephone lines cross-country from the West Coast. Bing's ratings dipped slightly but caused no reversion to a "live" format.

About six months later, Crosby's producers heard a demonstration of a disc transferred to magnetic plastic tape and played on a German-made tape recorder, The Magnetophon. This equipment had been discovered by a technically astute GI named John Mullin shortly after the Allied troops occupied Germany. The Magnetophon had been used by German broadcasters to tape concerts as early as 1936. Mullin quickly recognized its potential. He shipped the recording apparatus and some fifty rolls of tape to his home in San Francisco.

Philco was pleased with the results, and with Mullin's help, arranged to tape future Crosby shows. October 1, 1947, signaled not only the beginning of tape radio programs but a revolution in sound for records, television, and films.

Nevertheless, ABC executives seemed leery of the new method. For each broadcast, they still insisted on the use of discs cut from the tapes. Not until eight months later in mid-1948 were the Bing Crosby programs allowed to go over the air directly from tape.

Bing blazed a new trail in electronics. When more and more advertisers urged NBC and CBS to relax their aversion to transcriptions, they reluctantly acquiesced, agreeing that musical productions on disc or tape could do a commendable job for both sponsor and network. Most significantly, network ETs eliminated the long-standing repeat of a show from New York to the West Coast. Thus, ended happily a costly, time-consuming, and tiresome procedure that usually had to be carried out late at night to reach

California listeners in their 7:30 to 10:00 p.m. prime-time period.

Soon Frank Parker, Wayne King, Burl Ives, Frankie Carle, Guy Lombardo, Barry Wood, and Michel Piastro, with his Longines Symphonette, reached audiences weeks and sometimes months after the recording session in a radio studio. To a degree, the producers of many music shows on ETs restricted the content to long-standing "chestnuts." This gave a program more mileage and greater timeliness. Although a viable transcription procedure, the ETs frequently had a format that lacked the very popular tunes needed to entice the broadest possible audience.

Faced by growing competition from television, Hollywood's biggest studio, MGM, took to the air with nationally syndicated transcriptions of programs featuring its major stars, latest films, and screen properties. *MGM Theater of the Air*, *The Hardy Family*, and other shows were heard over smaller, independent stations. They included New York's WHN, which Metro had owned and operated since 1923, and which now changed its call letters to WMGM.

Within the broadcast industry, the choice between "live" and ET absorbed the energies of producers, advertisers, and technicians well into the 1950s. But their decision scarcely affected the ultimate ear. A listener wanted a good show. He did not much care whether Jo Stafford or Percy Faith came into his home via a simultaneous studio production or a month-old, carefully edited and processed disc or tape. Audience ratings in dozens of cities generally indicated that transcribed shows were taking the lead over "live" network fare. The listener was the one to be pleased—and he tuned in the best, "live" or "canned."

One of the chief purveyors of "canned" material was the disc jockey who had staked his claim on the radio dial during the war when economics had propelled these spinners of shellac to the forefront. They emerged now as the music phenomenon of the 1940s. Anointed first by GIs, they were eagerly crowned by teenagers as pop music princelings.

Martin Block, a pioneering disc jockey, struck gold with his *Make Believe Ballroom* over WNEW. Once a door-to-door salesman, he had talked himself into a staff-announcing job at a small, 10,000-watt New York station. A year later, in 1935, during lulls in the coverage of the Lindbergh kidnapping trial from Fleming-

ton, N.J., WNEW asked him to fill air time with records. He stopped at Manhattan's Liberty Music Shop and bought a stack of Lombardo, Dorsey, and Clyde McCoy records. Instead of playing a hodgepodge of discs, he broke his show into fifteen-minute segments and programmed his records, as did the networks with their "live" music. Block was soon giving listeners a quarter hour of Benny Goodman, then Lombardo, followed by fifteen minutes of Eddy Duchin and Glen Gray. Audiences liked his suave, musically informed manner and his interest-holding material, ranging from Nat Cole to Spike Jones.

The station's sales staff looked askance at a disc show. They refused to handle a program of records, especially since WNEW had used only "live" musicians. Block went out and lined up his first sponsor—Retardo reducing pills. He soon found other advertisers who were not adverse to "canned" music or to the still unknown but efficacious voice of Martin Block.

At the same time, Al Jarvis, on KFVB Hollywood, was busy making his own local reputation with a very similar format that predated Block by a year or two.

In Washington, D.C., a droll, discursive "wake-up" man named Arthur Godfrey took the air from six to nine o'clock for WTOP and for the CBS New York outlet, WABC. His three-hour early morning hitch playing records, giving weather and traffic reports and commercials, reputedly brought in enough revenue to pay all operating expenses of both stations. Similar success stories in other cities made it obvious that the disc jockey was not a passing fad. With the Martin Blocks and Arthur Godfreys chipping away at "live" music and pocketing paychecks of \$100,000 or more a year, large stations and major networks could no longer ignore these money-making magnets.

In the immediate postwar years, broadcasters signed up celebrities as disc jockeys—big name bandleaders, singers, announcers, and sportscasters. The dial bulged with Rudy Vallee for WOR, Tommy Dorsey via syndicated ETs, Ted Husing on WHN, Kate Smith and Ted Collins on WOR, Duke Ellington on the WMCA transcribed *Dial the Duke*, Andre Baruch and Bea Wain as *Mr. and Mrs. Music* at WMCA, Leopold Stokowski on an all-Bach record show at WNBC, and Uncle Don, WOR's DJ for children.

Joining the platter-spinning race on a large scale, ABC appointed its musical director, Paul Whiteman, to host the first hour-long, coast-to-coast recorded music program every weekday afternoon.

Whiteman proved the ideal personality for the job. Not only did he have an extensive and first-hand knowledge of popular music, but also a long and close association with most of the country's leading singers and musicians. Ethel Merman, Mel Tormé, and Guy Lombardo appeared as guests on the *Paul Whiteman Club* soon after it bowed in on June 1947.

Whiteman had introduced dozens of tunes and compositions as far back as the 1920s. Playing recordings of songs he had helped to popularize now filled many hours of air time. He also had acquired an almost inexhaustible fund of stories about these works. Little-known anecdotes about "Whispering," "Avalon," and "Rhapsody in Blue;" facts on composers Buddy De Sylva, Ferde Grofé, and George Gershwin; backstage stories on vocalists Bing Crosby, Mildred Bailey, Morton Downey, and musicians Henry Busse, the Dorsey Brothers, and Jack Teagarden attracted major sponsors for the ABC series over 228 stations.

Only a few celebrity disc jockeys succeeded; and these with a herculean promotional push by stations and advertisers. Big names generally did not make good disc jockeys. Most of them were not doing what they did best. Some lacked that essential, ingratiating quality which Whiteman possessed that generated an intimate person-to-person warmth. Others simply lacked poise.

Disc jockeys, radio soon learned, were regional phenomena. To succeed, they had to be part of a certain locale, know the terrain, and speak the language. A knack for selling in a chatty, believable, one-to-one style made the difference between success and failure.

A disc jockey endorsed and sold a product in a very personal way. He often secured his own sponsors, and was rewarded on a commission basis. He worked closely with writers on his commercials, and sometimes wrote them himself. Or, like Arthur Godfrey, breezily ad-libbed a sponsor's message.

"A disc jockey's stock in trade is his listener following," observed Al Jarvis, an early dean of disc jockeying. "This, hopefully, he builds up, over a period of years." To achieve great success,

according to Jarvis, a DJ needed a sense of timing, imagination, sincerity, and believability. For better or for worse, a knowledge of music was *not* a prerequisite.

“One of the top-notch DJs,” Jarvis revealed, “has someone else select his records. Professionally, he doesn’t know Sammy Kaye from Duke Ellington. But the point is, he could sell Sammy Kaye to Duke Ellington.”

Thomas Ahrens was an early innovator in disc jockeying. A producer-director with CBS, he teamed up with announcer Eddie Gallaher. Together, in the Nation’s Capital, they started a WTOP late night show called *Moon Dial*. It spun not lush slumber music in the mode of Morton Gould or André Kostelanetz, but instead the most popular and current hit records. Ahrens and Gallaher picked out the best sellers in record shops and the favorite selections on jukeboxes. Then Thomas Ahrens came up with a different approach. He researched the background on a current top song—how it came to be written or why a particular artist recorded the tune; in other words, the story behind the disc. Gallaher’s cooing voice and convincing salesmanship attracted listeners and sponsors from the start.

Similarly, the ease and poise of Stan Shaw, Jack Lescoulie, and Art Ford on WNEW’s nocturnal *Milkman’s Matinee*, won attention; initially among wartime night-shift workers. The drawing power of the DJ was affirmed by Steve Allen at Hollywood’s KNX; Freddie Robbins, in the grooves at WITH Baltimore; Ted Brown, WHN/WMGm spinner; Bill Cook, in 1945 the first Negro DJ in the New York area; Jack Sterling, who succeeded Godfrey at WCBS New York in 1949; and dozens more from Buffalo’s Clint Buehlman to Los Angeles’ Peter Potter.

“Just a little while back we jocks woke up and thought we better wise up folks about the plus talent a guy or gal has got to have to be a spinner,” spouted Norman (Red) Barnes of WINS when he helped to form the National Association of Disc Jockeys in 1947. “The big idea came up at a bull session in Chicago,” Barnes explained. “A hundred of us had it easy on the cuff as guests of a motion picture publicity man who was touting a film that had the leading man playing a DJ.”

Although loosely organized but widely recognized, disc jockeys became critically important in the sales of popular records. They

breathed new life into the recording business, which in the mid-1930s had shrunk to fifty or less major retail dealers in the entire country. Radio rapidly became the biggest promotion outlet for the industry, now bolstered by the microgroove, long-playing record and the equally compact and unbreakable 45 rpm disc.

Most DJs spun the releases of both major and minor labels, giving them equal treatment if the song met the criterion of commercial sound and fury. Disc jockeys were a tremendous help to a song, a singer, and a band—and the DJs knew it. Benny Goodman, Frank Sinatra, Nat Cole, Stan Kenton, Jo Stafford—nearly every bandleader and vocalist—owed their success in some measure to the platter and chatter of a disc show. And occasionally a DJ revitalized the waning career of an artist.

Kurt Webster, a disc jockey at WBT Charlotte, N.C., reached into his stack of dusty, old records for a distinct change of pace. He came out with a 1933 platter called "Heartaches." It had a bouncy melody by Ted Weems and his band, and a catchy whistling chorus by Elmo Tanner. Webster spun it on the air. Within minutes, dozens of calls requested him to repeat it. He played "Heartaches" again and again. Its popularity spread.

Victor pressed new copies of the original 14-year-old Weems disc. Decca reissued their own Weems rendition, recorded in 1938. In six weeks, more than a half-million pressings were sold. Ted Weems, who had had his greatest success over NBC and through hotels and nightclubs in the late 1920s and 1930s, now found himself in high demand—all due to the North Carolina disc jockey who had played "Heartaches," and launched the maestro's comeback on records, radio, and the road.\*

Discerning listeners, veteran songwriters, and perceptive educators frequently questioned the DJ's day-by-day control over and choice of musical selections. The most vehement argued that he had the musical discrimination of an alley cat on the prowl. Established composers, such as Richard Rodgers, Cole Porter, and Sigmund Romberg, acutely felt the drift to mass appeal. Their

\*A second Petrillo-imposed recording ban, on January 1, 1948, encouraged a certain amount of disc digging by DJs. This controversy was settled by the creation of Music Performers Trust Funds to which the producers of records agreed to make contributions that would be spent to employ musicians for performances open to the public without charge.

works increasingly lacked air exposure. Up-and-coming tunesmiths churning out ordinary commercial sounds easily drove off music that deserved a better hearing.

As audiences grew and revenues rose, broadcasters kept hands off their DJs. They were money-making machines. Record firms ever eager to grab air time for their latest releases wooed them with money and other indulgences. For the most part, DJs played established "hits" and limited themselves to one or two new tunes each broadcast. Disc jockeys followed the trade charts and the prevailing trends that their listening public already favored. Among radio DJs, nothing succeeded better than a proven, fast-selling record. From the start, the beat of the golden knights of the turntable was more businesslike than audiences were led to believe.

## Friendly Echoes

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**D**isc jockeys and ETs, notwithstanding, the networks had no intention of becoming a waxworks. Small unaffiliated stations needed transcribed music to hold an audience, but key outlets showed no signs of upsetting peak hour evening shows such as the *Voice of Firestone* with radio's familiar and time-tested music that had first aired in 1928.

"We hope your enjoyment may bring us all closer together," industrialist Harvey Firestone, Sr., had said into a tobacco-can-shaped NBC microphone, "and may the Voice of Firestone always have a friendly echo in your memory."

Twenty years later, in 1948, his son expressed similar thoughts as this durable Monday night program of music began its third decade.

Sentimental and sedate songs like "Toujours, L'Amour, Toujours," "Through the Years," "Little Gray Home in the West," and "Just a-Wearyin' for You" still attracted the largest, and possibly the most diverse, segments of the listening public in 1948, as they had when Radio City opened. Audiences clung to the tried and true.

Thus, the venerable warhorses—*Prudential Family Hour*, *American Album*, *Carnation Contented Hour*, *Music America Loves Best*, *American Melody Hour*—offered few musical innovations. The weekly fare on these and other long-lasting programs remained in a middle-of-the-road groove. Some listeners, however, thought it a repetitious rut. A few went so far as to express dissatisfaction publicly with the status quo.

“Cannot something be done about the lack of variety in radio’s musical programs?” wrote a listener in the New York area. “With all the great wealth of music on tap must the listeners hear the same composition five or six times a week, week after week. Can melodic diet survive an occasional original work by a contemporary composer?”

The established network presentations, some of them fixtures on the dial for ten to fifteen years, rarely deviated toward strikingly new compositions or ground-breaking esoteric songs. Pioneering sounds tended to vanish on entrenched commercial programs long sponsored by major companies. Country and western, calypso, or bop had made few lasting inroads on these programs.

Composers of classical works, especially contemporary artists, faced parallel barriers before a microphone; as, indeed, with few exceptions they always had. Lesser-known composers from the past suffered from underexposure or plain desuetude when audiences had Beethoven, Strauss, Schubert, or Brahms at their fingertips.

Within radio itself, musical directors also expressed concern. NBC’s Frank Black observed: “Those who like fine music are not getting as much of it as they want on the radio at the moment, while those who like popular music and semiclassicals are getting too much of them . . . One of the great difficulties is that the networks, in making up their advance programs, do not have any system by which they let one another know what symphonic works they are to play. Thus, it is quite possible that audiences will hear three different performances of Tchaikovsky’s Fifth Symphony in as many days.”

Other circumstances now added to the monotony and sameness. Radio’s panoply of symphony, chamber, opera, organ, and choral music began to shrink. All four networks had programmed high-level, and occasionally experimental, musical presentations; usually as Sunday sustainers in what was frequently called “the weekly cultural ghetto.”

Columbia achieved wide acclaim with *20th Century Concert Hall* featuring Leopold Stokowski and Howard Barlow; *Invitation to Music* and *Exploring Music* led by conductor-composer Bernard Herrmann; concerts by the Columbia Symphony Orchestra, *Columbia Workshop*; and *New Voices in Song*, which introduced,

among others, Eileen Farrell and Russian soprano Maria Kurenko.

Mutual Broadcasting System followed the lead of CBS, chiefly through the efforts of Alfred Wallenstein and Sylvan Levin. During Wallenstein's ten years as Mutual's musical director, he conducted over one thousand first performances of music and in 1940 alone presented all twenty-one operas of Mozart. This network also carried *Music for America* conducted by Morton Gould, *Music for an Hour* with *The Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air* finalist Frances Greer, tenor Donald Dame and Wallenstein, and *The Treasury of Song* starring Met soprano Licia Albanese.

Latecomer ABC broadcast concerts by its own ABC Symphony, Metropolitan Opera auditions, *Carnegie Hall*, and *Piano Playhouse* featuring the talented staff musician, Earl Wild.

The country's first network, NBC, aired Gilbert Chase's *Music of the New World*, a comprehensive survey of the history of North and South American music; *The First Piano Quartet*, which played classical works especially arranged for eight hands, and *Milestones in the History of Music* from the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y.

These and similar programs frequently showcased American and world premieres of the works of Shostakovich, Samuel Barber, Schönberg, Norman Dello Joio, Kodaly, William Grant Still, Philip James, Grofé, Roy Harris, Prokofiev, and Virgil Thompson. Worthy selections by young composers and neglected works of old masters—both of which rarely, if ever, were performed because they were not good box office—were now given a hearing, fulfilling radio's initial promise and obligation to the cause of music and musicians. By the 1940s, there was no reason to call radio, "De Forest's prime evil."

Postwar economics brought change. Payrolls for network symphonies and studio ensembles grew steadily larger until they became out of proportion with the rest of a station's budget. Gradually the number of conductors, musicians, and arrangers on staff began to drop. One by one, almost every large orchestra disbanded; and with them, the human resources to experiment and innovate.

Pent-up consumer demand for the necessities and niceties of life characterized the second half of the 1940s. In this quest broadcasting was not spared. Hard-to-come-by household appliances,

automobiles, boats, wearing apparel, and vacation trips led to a new rage along radio row: the giveaway show. Dozens of producers whipped together quiz formats, through which both studio audiences and home listeners stood a chance to win thousands of dollars in prizes.

"Desperately in need of new excitement in programming," wrote critic Jack Gould, "radio has adopted the press agent's oldest stratagem of strewing coins on the street to attract a crowd."

The first and most flagrant of these large-scale giveaways made music an inherent part of the contest. This quiz idea sprang from the minds of conductors Mark Warnow and Harry Salter, who had just completed a stint with the military. Salter and announcer-director Mark Goodson recorded a pilot version, complete with quiz questions, music, and sound effects. The three men attempted to interest an advertising agency in the program, but no one was buying.

According to Harry Salter, they were "thrown out of nearly every agency on Madison Avenue." Totally discouraged, they were prepared to write off the \$300 or so of out-of-pocket expenses, until producer Louis Cowan took an interest in the format just as the network ratings game swung in their favor.

By 1948 Sunday evening comedy shows on NBC and dramatic offerings from CBS knocked ABC and its Detroit Symphony concerts into the ratings "subbasement." To combat this dismal showing, ABC sought Rudy Vallee as the host of an hour-long variety show similar to his Fleischmann program of the 1930s. The popular crooner-M.C. showed interest. Negotiations got under way, but at the last minute the deal fell apart. The network was left holding an empty bag of air time. It had virtually nothing to fill the prime-time 8:00 to 9:00 p.m. slot.

In near desperation, ABC turned to its remaining house musicians and singers. They could be utilized quickly. But could music compete with front-running CBS and NBC?

Fledgling ABC demanded more than listenable popular tunes and well-arranged melodies. Its Sunday night offering needed excitement, suspense, and empathy. A chance for every listener to actually participate met those requirements. There was also the lure of prizes.

Part *Pot o' Gold* and part *Hit Parade*, ABC's *Stop the Music!* filled the bill and answered the network's wildest daydreams. Within weeks of its debut, it bested all competition. Millions tuned in, launching this quiz into radio's top ten programs. Selecting contestants at random from telephone subscribers, *Stop the Music!* asked them to identify mystery melodies. They ranged from easy-to-name current songs to challenging, little-known themes. The polished professionalism of Harry Salter (who had briefly conducted the *Hit Parade*), his musicians, and singers Kay Armen and Dick Brown, as well as their adaptability to perform all musical types and styles, confirmed the choice of this quick-study cast.

The tremendous success of *Stop the Music!*—the very first jackpot tune was a belly dance number called “The Vision of Salome”—inevitably led to a greater display of histrionics and less and less emphasis on musical forte. Almost every time the singers or musicians got midway into a song, a phone would ring, causing M.C. Bert Parks to shout, “Stop the Music!” Genuine music fans gradually became more and more vexed, not to mention the annoyance of NBC's Fred Allen who faced a hopeless situation of vying minute by minute against ABC's surfeit of riches. To hold his vanishing fans, Fred Allen offered to compensate any listener who, by tuning in his program, lost merchandise given out on a competing show. By 1950 Allen had been dropped by his sponsor and left the air.

The giveaway syndrome rolled ahead at full speed. In 1948 the four major networks handed out \$4.2 million worth of prizes. They were distributed among fifty-four programs, including Mutual's *Queen for a Day* and *Quick as a Flash*, NBC's *Dr. I.Q.* and *Double or Nothing*, Columbia's *Winner Take All*, and ABC's *Go for the House*, which offered a six-room dwelling and lot.

In a musical vein, CBS aired two well-produced and widely popular quizzes: *Grand Slam*, a morning show, which starred singing quiz mistress Irene Beasley; and *Sing It Again*, heard on Saturday night, which featured vocalists Alan Dale and Eugenie Baird, the Ames Brothers, and Ray Bloch's orchestra. *Sing It Again* frequently parodied in music a subject or person as part of the quiz proceedings. M.C. Dan Seymour recalled a show when the

parody focused on Miss America. At its conclusion, Seymour asked the contestant: "Who is the all-American miss?"

"Tom Dewey" was the prompt but technically inaccurate reply. Thomas E. Dewey, the 1948 Republican presidential candidate, again had lost the race to the White House.

Stations, large and small, catered to the public insatiability for commodities and cash, all of which added to the year's programming upheavals. CBS began a determined effort to steal the major stars heard on NBC. This raid on a rival talent bank netted big game: Bergen and McCarthy, Ozzie Nelson and Harriet Hilliard, Jack Benny, Amos 'n' Andy, Red Skelton, and a half dozen others. The "bait" was the outright purchase by CBS of the individual headliner's entire show. The star, in return, received a large lump sum of \$1 million or \$2 million, subjecting the seller only to a capital gains tax of 25 percent rather than the much higher annual income tax bite.

The switch, for example, of Jack Benny and his large cast to CBS made little difference to listeners. His show kept the same Sunday time slot. Audiences only had to dial in a different number. But the lesser-ranking radio performers grew restive. The raids spelled uncertainty. Was their program good enough to be wooed and won by CBS, or protected and renewed by NBC? Or dropped?

Confusion prevailed compounded by the arrival of an exciting and untested medium as old as radio itself. Television had commenced experimental operations before the decade of the 1920s ended, but in the 1930s sight broadcasting seemed to stand still. Radio's enormous commercial success led those best able to promote television to assign it to a state of perpetual development that never quite emerged into an acceptable form from the labs.

Not until 1938 could television equipment measure up to necessary sales potential. The following year, RCA commenced regularly scheduled TV broadcasts, beginning with coverage of the April opening of the New York World's Fair. Only one station in America, WNBT, sent out signals. From atop the Empire State Building it reached a radius of not much more than 60 miles.

Wartime restrictions and government priorities soon curbed the growth of television. Radio faced no threat from its visual coun-

in—at least until 1947. That year GE, Westinghouse, Philco, and RCA rushed into production large and small receivers ranging in price from \$300 for a table model to \$2,500 for a console with a 20-inch screen. Up until then, most American with any exposure to TV, watched the “tube” in taverns and saloons. Now manufacturers aimed to capture the home market.

On the transmission end, the six TV stations in the entire country hardly made an impression. They broadcast, at most, four or five hours a day, usually between 5:30 and 10:30 p.m. Wrestling and boxing filled most evening schedules. Sponsors of any substance were few—if not missing altogether.

In 1948 New York could claim four channels beaming a total of ninety programs, or 125 hours each week. A major TV event that fall was the first telecast from the Metropolitan Opera: the opening night performance of *Otello* with Licia Albanese, Leonard Warren, and Ramon Vinay.

A year later, six Manhattan stations aired 266 regularly scheduled programs every week. Feature films, children’s shows, interviews, sports, quizzes, and news accounted for nearly two-thirds of all TV offerings. Only 20 percent encompassed music or comedy-variety shows.

The earliest and biggest blows to music on TV came from AFM’s James C. Petrillo who, in 1946, issued an edict that his musicians could not perform on television. Asked why, he replied, “We want to find out first where TV is going.”

This ban against music hit the medium just as radio broadcasters had begun to evaluate the visual potential of their prized music shows. For two years there were few “live” musicians on the home screen.

By 1950, with over a hundred stations operating, thousands of TV sets were sold daily. The public became instantly riveted to the screen by viewing fare such as the pratfalls of Milton Berle, the chorus line on Ed Sullivan’s *Toast of the Town*, the thrills and spills of college football, and the décolletage of Faye Emerson. More and more major sponsors began to lose interest in radio, giving TV the lion’s share of their advertising budgets. And it became virtually impossible to interest a sponsor in a radio pro-

gram unless it had video possibilities, or unless the star was being groomed for TV, using radio only as a buildup.

Radio, nevertheless, worked hard at being heard, desperately trying to reassure its listeners that they had not been forgotten.

Al Jolson succeeded, for a while. On the crest of a phenomenal comeback, the rejuvenated Mammy singer headlined the *Kraft Music Hall*. He had starred on the program's first broadcast with Paul Whiteman in 1933. Two years later, in 1935, Jolson brought to the air his *Shell Chateau*, which garnered bad reviews but good ratings. That year, Bing Crosby took over the Kraft show for an eleven-year run. When Crosby left in 1946, Nelson Eddy replaced him. Early the following year, Jolson made a guest appearance on Bing's *Philco Radio Time*, leaving the studio audience shouting for more songs. Al, whose life story had just been released by Columbia Pictures to rave reviews, suddenly had been rediscovered. Philco signed him for a half-dozen more shows with Bing, and they made a superlative singing and comedy duo.

In October 1947, the *Kraft Music Hall* began its fourteenth season with Al Jolson heading the bill. If the vitality of radio was in doubt that fall, one only had to point to Al's weekly fee: \$7,500 a show. Sixty-one-year-old Al and his potpourri of old and new songs enjoyed tremendous success. In 1949 NBC agreed to Jolson's pleas to tape his shows, permitting him to edit his own songs. But by that time Thursday night audiences already were drifting in droves to television, where Kraft had launched the medium's first major dramatic series. The *Music Hall* signed off for the last time on May 26.

The last major attempt to tell audiences that radio was very much alive had broken over the airwaves in 1950. From New York's large Center Theater near Radio City, NBC mounted *The Big Show*. Starring Tallulah Bankhead as mistress of ceremonies and Meredith Willson's orchestra, it brought to the mike eight or more big stars each Sunday. Sparkling with comedy and music from such greats as Fred Allen, Groucho Marx, Danny Thomas, Mindy Carson, Margaret Truman, Ethel Merman, and Frankie Laine, it gained its best ratings only in areas that TV had not yet reached.

"*The Big Show*," declared program announcer Ed Herlihy, "also wanted to topple renegade Jack Benny who had moved his long-

running NBC program to CBS. NBC deliberately ran past the Sunday seven o'clock time check, scheduling the top-of-the-bill acts for that segment and not pausing for the customary station break. But it didn't work. We had high ratings at each end of the ninety-minute program. Apparently most listeners switched to Benny midway."

*The Big Show* ran for two seasons. While it lasted it was not only big but good. "Good enough," said the perceptive Jack Gould, "to make one wish he could have seen it."

But the biggest names in show business could not save coast-to-coast network radio. Singers, popular and classical, drifted from the air. *The Railroad Hour's* Gordon MacRae, the *Hit Parade's* Doris Day, and *Saturday Night Serenade's* Vic Damone concentrated on film work. Perry Como, Kate Smith, Gene Autry, Bing Crosby, and Dinah Shore also made successful transitions to television. But many lacked that indefinable element of personality, that certain chemistry that vitalized a performance and made viewers forget whether the artist had glamour or good looks. On TV, "looks" indeed counted; for in radio they had counted not at all. Dozens of performers with a less-than-pleasant bearing retired by choice or default.

Among the more fortunate stood Felix Knight. When radio studios converted to TV sets, the attractive tenor lined up guest appearances before the cameras, concerts with leading symphonies, stage show engagements in Broadway theaters, dates at hotels and supper clubs, and roles in summer stock.

"Radio was an important part of my career," he admitted readily. "It provided ample income to branch out into concert work, and the Met where I sang for six years."

As a teenager in California, Felix Knight studied voice with Mebane Beasley and soon won roles with the Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and San Francisco opera companies. Solo appearances followed on the *Shell Mountain House* and feature film parts in Laurel and Hardy's *Babes in Toyland* and *The Bohemian Girl*. NBC brought him to New York for a buildup with Leo Reisman's orchestra, *The Magic Key*, and Dr. Damrosch's *Music Appreciation Hour*. He was perhaps the first American tenor to sing Wagner under the old professor's baton.

A finalist on *The Metropolitan Auditions of the Air* in 1938,

Felix Knight had lost out on a Met contract to a young, inexperienced tenor, John Carter. One of the judges, who also managed artists as a sideline, had signed Carter to an exclusive seven-year contract *before* the 1937-38 broadcasts began; and had lined up an important radio sponsor for him, assuring him during negotiations that he was "a guaranteed winner." Although the well-trained Felix Knight had outsung the so-called "favored" tenor and received the majority of votes, the distressed and outvoted judge quickly maneuvered to convince several other judges to switch their ballot to Carter *after* Felix had been announced as *Auditions* cowinner with baritone Leonard Warren.

"I'm just as glad that I didn't go into the Met until 1946," Knight observed. "By then I had gained greater confidence and much more experience. Fortunately, I could handle operatic roles, then turn around and perform lighter items and popular ballads to an equally receptive audience. All this put me in good stead in my prostradio and Met years, and as a vocal teacher."

The 1950s accelerated the departure of music, especially the classical and traditional repertoire. ABC relinquished a dozen or more hours of "live" serious music and dropped its own ABC Symphony. The network now recorded Boston Symphony programs; at one point, they were broadcast midweek at 9:30 a.m., an hour that denied most listeners a chance to hear them if they also worked. Similarly, CBS also transcribed New York Philharmonic concerts for rebroadcast at an inconvenient time.

Gradually, the genuine music lover became a forgotten species as individual stations turned to blanket formats—all news, all rock 'n' roll, all country and western, all talk. Only a few of the one-time favorite network music programs survived: *Cities Service Band of America*, *Bell Telephone Hour*, and *Voice of Firestone*.

The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company had grown big along with radio. An early NBC advertiser, it remained faithful to the ether when other sponsors fled into the arms of a coaxial cable. From its initial broadcast on December 3, 1928, Firestone believed the airwaves could be just the right vehicle to develop widespread goodwill, and, of course, promote the sale of its line.

Harvey Firestone, Sr., sought a wholesome music program that would be welcomed in every household. He and his family took a personal, almost paternalistic, interest in the proceedings. In 1928

they signed the "Original Radio Girl," Vaughn DeLeath, as the featured soloist, along with ex-Revelers Quartet tenor Franklyn Baur. Neither had an extensive serious music background, but in 1928 and 1929, listeners had leaned toward lighter melodies, especially Broadway tunes, Irish ballads, and Stephen Foster songs. Hugo Mariani conducted the Firestone orchestra, a thirty-five-piece aggregation frequently augmented by a male quartet.

From the start, the company did more to make Monday evening radio's weekly night for good music. It remained so for more than twenty-five years. Broadcasting from New York at 8:00 p.m., the show was rebroadcast two and a half hours later for the West Coast. Reputedly the first program to stage a transcontinental repeat, the *Voice of Firestone* established a pattern that many East Coast shows would later follow.

DeLeath and Baur sang for the rubber magnate for two seasons. Baur precipitated his own downfall, not only from the *Voice of Firestone* but virtually from all of radio.

Mr. Firestone had asked Baur to entertain guests at the 1929 Golden Jubilee of the electric light bulb. Organized by Henry Ford, the celebration would bring President Hoover, Owen Young, and Thomas A. Edison to Dearborn, Mich., where Edison would recreate the final stages in the invention of the incandescent light. Baur had relayed a message indicating his willingness to sing for the assembled VIPs for his usual concert fee of \$1,000.

Baur was dropped from his program by an enraged Mr. Firestone the day his contract expired. NBC reportedly never booked him again for a series. He made a few guest appearances including one, oddly enough, on Firestone's tenth anniversary show in 1938. Baur spent several years studying in France, but fell into obscurity rather quickly, a victim of his own blatant avarice. He died in 1950 at age 46.

Franklyn Baur had left the *Voice of Firestone* about the time the Jazz Age of the 1920s faded and a new decade took shape. In the early 1930s, the Firestones turned increasingly to more serious music, even an occasional high-brow selection. The orchestra grew in size to eighty or ninety pieces, and James Melton and Gladys Rice appeared for a season as vocal soloists. They were followed by the first of the Met singers to mount the Firestone platform—

baritone Lawrence Tibbett, who had just completed several musicals in Hollywood, and had become a household name.

A succession of conductors had occupied the podium. Bourdon, Haenschen, Shilkret, and Pelletier had directed the orchestra until William M. Daly was given the assignment in 1931. As an assistant conductor of the Chicago Opera, Daly was well schooled and highly dedicated.

With Daly came tenor Richard Crooks, who alternated Mondays with the American-born Tibbett. These two Metropolitan Opera stalwarts helped the program to achieve a very high level of popularity as well as performance.

Richard Crooks, a native of Trenton, N.J., had sung as a soloist in churches, and studied and performed in Europe before appearing with the New York Philharmonic and in recitals in many cities throughout the United States. Crooks became the singer most closely identified with the *Voice of Firestone* during the 1930s and 1940s. He sang with ease a broad range of material, from art songs to popular numbers, from French operatic arias to old English ballads. He also had played a part in "discovering" the widely recognizable opening theme for the program.

While a guest at the Firestone home in Akron, O., Crooks heard Mrs. Firestone, Sr., play a composition that she had recently written. He expressed much interest in the piece's simple but effective melody and lyrics. When the song was published, Crooks asked to sing it on the air. On July 25, 1932, he introduced "In My Garden."

The Firestone producers received many requests to hear it sung again. Crooks or Tibbett performed Idabelle Firestone's ballad a number of times. A few years later, Crooks suggested that it would make an excellent theme. In 1936, "In My Garden" became ensconced as the opening and closing melody; one of the most familiar program theme songs on radio.

Five years later, when ASCAP barred its music from the air, Idabelle Firestone composed a new theme, "If I Could Tell You." That, too, won high favor. Later, when ASCAP and radio came to terms, the *Voice of Firestone* used Idabelle's newest song to open the program and "In My Garden" to close the show.

Idabelle and son, Harvey, Jr., played a commanding role in shaping the Firestone series, especially after the death of the

company founder in 1938. On one or two occasions, daughter Elizabeth Firestone, a concert pianist, appeared as a guest soloist.

With the sudden death of conductor William Daly in 1936, the Firestones chose Alfred Wallenstein. When he left in 1943 to become director of the Los Angeles Symphony, Howard Barlow, the venerable CBS house maestro, took over. He shifted the *Voice* into more traditional music gear, described by a critic as "somewhat old-fashioned yet comfortable as an old shoe."

Few artists turned down an offer to sing for Firestone. The roster of performers heard during the 1940s reads like a Who's Who in music: Gladys Swarthout, Nelson Eddy, Eleanor Steber, Ezio Pinza, Igor Gorin, Lauritz Melchior, Dorothy Kirsten, Christopher Lynch, Jerome Hines, and Margaret Speaks. All had appeared frequently on a regular basis for many seasons, and through ensuring years to 1953. That year, the *Voice of Firestone* celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. Few network programs, musical or otherwise, had lasted that long. Moreover, Firestone had adhered to the same basic format season after season. At the mike to mark the occasion were a group of artists who had regularly sung with conductor Howard Barlow: Jerome Hines, Robert Rounseville, Eleanor Steber, Risé Stevens, Brian Sullivan, and Thomas L. Thomas.

After the retirement of Richard Crooks in 1946, baritone Tommy Thomas appeared frequently. This one-time Scranton, Pa., machinist became closely identified with the *Voice*. For a broadcast in September 1954, he sang what had become a typical Firestone airing: "Serenade of the Bells," "Through the Years," "This Nearly Was Mine," and "Rose Marie." Barlow's orchestra played Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" and with the Firestone Choir, performed "Oklahoma!" and "Let Me Call You Sweetheart." This was bright, fast-moving, and familiar music to please the greatest number of new listeners.

A significant factor in the *Voice's* durability undeniably rested before the lens of a TV camera. In 1948 the program added sight to its vocal prowess, becoming one of the first simultaneous radio-television broadcasts. Called simulcasts, they flourished from 1948 to the mid-1950s when a network turned over both its TV and radio facilities to a single and usually "live" program.

Sight, however, seemed to hinder rather than to enhance the

full appreciation of its music; at least in 1948, when the rigid, confining techniques of radio production still inhibited TV coverage. Singers stood at fixed places before an upright floor microphone. Scripts were hand-held by the announcer. Guest soloists were always shown from the same camera angle. Although radio listeners heard no difference, viewers were disturbed. Critics fretted, calling the telecasts singularly static and stilted to the eye.

Visual coverage, of course, improved when TV audiences outnumbered radio listeners. But the venerable musical programs that had helped build Radio City suffered most.

The open mouths of singers, the handwaving of conductors, and the bowing arms of violinists did not represent the maximum visual entertainment. Audiences wanted something more dramatic and theatrical above and beyond the gestures involved in singing and playing. TV cameras sometimes became a distraction, taking away from the impact of the sound.

When background effects and visual devices were incorporated, the musical purists took objection.

"When one listens to music, one's own imagination should be able to roam freely," Frank Black observed. "Radio allows this freedom; television, with all good intent, too often suggests the meaning. No one likes to have thrust on him what someone else thinks the music suggests. His own conception of the music is what brings sparkle to the eye, pleasure to the ear."

A generation later, in the 1970s, television discovered the merits of scheduling concert hall programs. Public Broadcasting Service telecasts, both taped and "live," of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and the Metropolitan Opera attracted large audiences and widespread critical praise. To overcome the shortcomings of TV receiver sound quality, the "live" presentations were simulcast in many cities via FM radio stations, giving a rich and full stereolike quality to the all-important audio aspect of these events.

As Dr. Black compared musicians heard, and musicians seen and heard, listeners had only to check the weekly radio program listings to know which medium had gained highest favor. During the 1953-54 season, less than fifteen of the commercially sponsored music shows that had been on the air for at least five years remained.

Gene Autry, Dinah Shore, Bing Crosby, Perry Como, and Curt Massey continued to sing. The Longines Symphonette and the *Camel Caravan* with Vaughn Monroe were broadcast. *Grande Ole Opry* and *The Band of America* stayed on the dial, as well as *Telephone Hour*, *Voice of Firestone*, *The Railroad Hour*, the Saturday afternoon Metropolitan Opera broadcasts, and the NBC Symphony. But, with few exceptions, their hours were numbered.

In the spring of 1954, Toscanini and the NBC Orchestra, after seventeen seasons, closed their music scores for the last time. Loyal listeners were forced to accept the end of this unique era in sound.

ATWATER KENT



R A D I O

## Epilogue

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**P**luck the best orchestra seat right out of the air!”

So proclaimed the headline on an advertisement for Radiola in the 1920s. And no words could have summed up better the magic of radio. Entertainment and information, almost twenty-four hours of every day, poured forth at the twist of the dial: instantaneous music in infinite variety, drama, news, sports, weather, and occasionally world-changing announcements. And it was all as free as the air that carried it into millions of homes.

For more than a generation radio had given the world a cornucopia of treasures through the miracle of sound, conjuring impressions and images of events and distant places that previously had seemed light years away. Small towns and farms even in remote places were no longer isolated; for radio simultaneously was shrinking distance and expanding its concept from fantasy to reality. What had been a novelty was, by the 1940s, a powerful institution that had changed the thinking and the habits of a nation—perhaps the world. Its musical impact surpassed in variety and scope all other mechanical renditions, even the phonograph.

Television, as a concept—but still nameless—had come into being with the advent of motion pictures; sight and sound belonged together as naturally as the stars belonged in the heavens. However, it was confronted by more earthly barriers than film-making, largely due to implementations that had not yet been perfected.

Finally, after years of frustration and near-successes, the big breakthrough was achieved in the late 1940s. Its emphasis was on the visual, with sound incidental although inherent in its structure. This time, television was here to stay. The slow death of radio broadcasting was widely predicted. Certainly there was a measure of logic in the assumption that the aural medium would soon become as obsolete as the horse and buggy.

A backward glance to the 1950s gives radio listeners of today a glimpse of that period in which radio broadcasting faced its greatest challenge—to be, or not to be! Radio City workmen already were dismantling Studio 8-H, the setting for hundreds of great moments in radio musical history. Wreckers were tearing up row after row of comfortable seats, leveling the large stage and proscenium. Engineers lowered the studio ceiling and rigged it to accommodate banks of bright television lights. Rebuilt to television's glamorous specifications, and with a new name, Peacock Theater, Studio 8-H retained few vestiges of its own former glory. The brightly lighted arena was now a thing of cameras, boom mikes, and cue cards. Small wonder that many dedicated radio listeners reluctantly accepted the dire prediction that radio was about to fade from the airwaves.

Fortunately broadcasting studios and networks, and advertising agencies to a degree, had more vision. Thousands of artists and technical experts who had helped to bring radio to its lofty pinnacle also refused to believe that anything as vital as radio could suffer a premature death. But, for the present, the spotlight was on the newcomer: Television. Wisely, broadcasting studios accepted their position as a supporting medium; but only temporarily, while they garnered new forces and adjusted to what they could not change in the natural course of progress. During the interim lull they simply regrouped to accommodate new conditions, and switched focus. Radio would be bigger and better once the public had had time to miss it! And there was prophesy in their confidence.

Radio was more flexible than television; and rightly, for it had been through its mistakes and conquered them. Furthermore, one could listen to music, stories, and news of the world while carrying on with other activities. And for quite a while it was still the only source for relaxing music—the classics, opera, and symphonies.

Dramatic series programs, which had gained great popularity with millions of listeners, still commanded their loyalty. Similar facilities for television productions would require time for organization and adaptation.

One of the areas of accelerated radio focus was frequency modulation—FM. It was not new, but it was not yet refined. Major Edwin H. Armstrong, a professor of electrical engineering at Columbia University and a prolific inventor, had been experimenting with the concept as far back as the early 1930s. By the mid-1930s, he had completed a clear, static-free system of radio signals that promised reception without interference in a given radius. For music listeners, that meant unparalleled high-fidelity broadcasts without frequent commercial interruptions. Armstrong demonstrated his breakthrough to broadcasting and network executives with confident anticipation. But the executives showed no more than mild interest. Why disturb the ethereal goose that was laying golden AM eggs?

Professor Armstrong, as time had demonstrated, was not easily discouraged or rebuffed. If radio moguls wouldn't share their mountain, he would build his own! Whereupon he set about building an FM station high on the New Jersey Palisades at Alpine, and beamed a 20,000-watt signal to the surrounding metropolitan area. Then, in 1941, forces over which he had no control—the coming of World War II—brought about restricted conditions. The station was shut down.

But wartime demands for more and better communications systems, especially one that could be "protected," had created a healthy new climate for Dr. Armstrong's FM system by the end of the war. A group of enthusiastic engineers, musicians, and well-informed laymen with practical vision joined him. Together, they made rapid progress in FM's development as an alternate radio signal. Celebrated musicians and conductors, one of whom was Leopold Stokowski, urged FM adoption for the broadcasting of concerts and opera. FM transmitters could provide recorded classical and popular music which could be heard at the hours of the day and night that previously had been ignored by AM radio. The added attraction was freedom from commercial interruptions, although at first this freedom was largely due to lack of interested sponsors.

Despite its many advantages, FM radio continued to struggle for survival. By the late 1960s, perseverance was beginning to pay off. The FCC ordered most owners of AM and FM stations in the same market to put different programming on each station, rather than merely play the same shows on both. As a result, more music formats were devised, and most FM stations were soon turning a profit. The availability of FM car radios capable of better reception also boosted revenues.

Listeners within dialing distance of New York City fared well. WNYC and WQXR provided a commendable level of programming, especially musical features with depth and originality. In fact, both stations had been doing this long before the networks abandoned their multifarious music schedules. WNYC had gone on the air in 1924 as a municipally owned station, and remained the only transmitter in the United States operated by a city. Through the years much of its programming consisted of "live" music from Carnegie Hall, Lewisohn Stadium, and Central Park bandstands. Records, a necessary staple, were skillfully utilized on such programs as *The Masterwork Hour*, which had signed on in 1928 with a dozen or so borrowed discs and had scored an immediate success, ultimately becoming the longest-running series of symphonic music exclusively on radio.

To promote New York City as the nation's music mecca, WNYC held week-long annual musical festivals, broadcasting a hundred or more studio and concert hall programs dedicated to American music. Among these were a number of violin sonatas written and performed by Juilliard students, and folk music played by Richard Dyer-Bennett.

Station WQXR, long affiliated with *The New York Times*, opened its studios in 1936, and quickly built a large dedicated following with impressive and absorbing classical and folk music programs that challenged the networks; high-caliber series such as *Design in Harmony*, *Woody's Children*, *The Listening Room*, *Music of Our Times*, *Piano Personalities*, and *Everybody's Music*. These were enthusiastically received by older listeners, and enlisted thousands of new listeners among young music lovers. Between WQXR and WNYC the eastern part of the country received a constant flow of diverse and instantaneous music, plus a

familiar blend of middle-of-the-road music over three or four networks and a half-dozen independent local stations.

On the West Coast, KFAC in Los Angeles had been providing all-classical music programs several years before the demise of "live" radio. In 1932 Erret L. Cord, an automobile builder, had established the station to broadcast diversified programs including sports and religious talks. At that time there were only nine stations in the whole area, but as the number of stations increased in Southern California, KFAC's program director, Howard Rhines, gradually moved into a predominately all-music station. By the late 1930s an all-classical format had been adopted, and listeners quickly expressed appreciation.

Among the station's early offerings which soon became increasingly popular, was *Viennese Varieties* which focussed on popular Austrian music, hosted by Dick Crawford. A year or so later the name of the program was changed to *Continental Varieties* to permit a more varied musical program in the romantic-music category.

The early 1940s brought the first broadcasts of *The Evening Concert*, hosted by Thomas Cassidy, and sponsored by the Southern California Gas Company, which still remains "a classic experience" for millions of dedicated listeners six days a week, making it one of the longest-running classical music programs in the nation.

With the steadily growing interest in opera in the western states, KFAC brought *The World of Opera* and *Opera House*, hosted by Carl Princi, to enthusiastic audiences for more than twenty-five years, featuring excerpts from various operas five days a week, and on Sundays complete operas with narration librettos. More recently, simulcasts of "live" performances from the stages of The Metropolitan Opera House in New York City and The San Francisco Opera House, are presented over both AM and FM stations.

As the 1980s dawn, KFAC also broadcasts nightly the programs of *The Ambassador International Cultural Foundation* from the Pasadena college, offering complete works from the Renaissance to the 20th century, which are produced and hosted by program director, Carl Princi. The western segment of the Metropolitan Opera Company's annual talent auditions are carried "live" over KFAC. Occasionally, specialty programs such as *The Collector's Shelf*, compiled from KFAC's extensive record library, are pre-

sented, bringing to modern audiences the voices of Caruso, Calvé, Galli-Curci, Melba, McCormack, Björling, and other great artists of the past, including instrumentalists of renown.

With its exceptional music library and knowledgeable staff, KFAC steadily emerged as the leading classical music station in the western half of the United States, its influence increasingly international.

By the late 1970s, major eastern networks began to take cues from other long-established stations and moved into the vanguard of radio's resurgence. Gradually classical music became a significant part of daily programming. The New York Philharmonic concerts returned to the air over WQXR, and opera performances were heard "live" over the same station as well as over WNCN and affiliated stations nationwide.

Chamber music groups, piano recitals, band remotes, and choral concerts were regularly broadcast on an increasing number of stations that were returning to the musical formats of radio's earlier years, with the added advantages of FM as well as AM bands. Live, and live-on-tape music broadcasts made up a significant amount of daily programming. Individual preferences in music, whether contemporary, classical, country and western, middle-of-the-road, or soul-disco, became available twenty-four hours of every day, for listeners' choice. A twist of the dial, or the touch of a button, made station selection immediate and simple.

With the dawn of the mid-1960s, there were strong indications from many directions that radio was far from dead; that it was off and running, like the thoroughbred it was, and already moving into the homestretch.

As the 1970s gave way to a new decade, radio occupied a dominant position in every phase of American life, and in international communications. By every commercial standard it spelled success in big "sound letters." Gross revenues exceeded \$3 billion per year. Advertisers were finding greater audience selectivity, and market expansions with more flexibility and sustained impact—all at considerably lower costs than with other media. Increasingly, radio was being used to augment or emphasize other communication and entertainment facilities, such as the opening of motion pictures and the launching of new television programs; subscrip-

tions to periodicals; mail orders for records, and the giving of a big boost to book sales through publisher and bookstore advertising.

There were transmitters in over three thousand communities throughout the country, each with at least one station. The average household could count five radios, including portable transistors, in daily use. Weekly audiences matched those for television viewing, with an average listening time of three and one-half hours per day, plus an estimated 18 million listeners who switched on shortwave radio broadcasts at least once each week.

Today, as America and the world move into the 1980s and the probing of outer space in search of new frontiers, radio will continue to take an important place in the ultimate success of such missions. *The Mighty Music Box* has become mightier than ever as once more it adapts itself to the needs of the twenty-first century—and perhaps to the music of the spheres.



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are inclined to agree with him—radio is electromagnetic.

Scientists have little doubt that "the ether," or whatever element that mysterious medium may be, has existed since the creation of the world. Man was slow in finding it. When he did, through James Clerk Maxwell, it remained for Heinrich Hertz to create the waves and give practical proof of the Maxwell theory. The next step was to invent a device to join the ether with the ear. Marconi, of course, did the trick. And since that day, particularly since 1920, the delicate membranes of the human ear have been subjected to a bombardment never known to the ears of past generations. There is an era of silence compared to this age of sound alchemy.

It was not long after broadcasting started and earphones were clamped over the ears that deaf people suddenly discovered that many of them could hear music and voices. They found that by turning up the volume control radio amplification crossed their threshold of hearing.

In the Twenties, while searching for a unit of sound, Captain O. E. Marvel of the United States Army

the high tones are missed. Too much exercise, of course, fatigues the ear just as too much exercise tires the arms or legs. Nature plays a vital rôle in return to normal.

"By application of a definite frequency or pitch the ear muscles and joints of the delicate bones are exercised and 'forced circulation' results. In case of nerve trouble prevalent over a period of ten or twelve years the nerve has not been exercised by everyday sounds and it gradually becomes weaker, just as an arm would if tied to the side. The nerve fibers become inactive, and the longer they are dormant the less active they become. Old-age deafness is the most difficult to overcome; there is nothing to build upon.

"By electrical instruments the volume can be raised so the threshold value of hearing is reached; it may be forty units higher than normal. When the threshold value is reached a person hears. This value varies with all ears. The right ear does not always equal the performance of the left and vice versa."

The ear comprises two main compartments and an entrance tube. The latter opens to the external air, but is closed at the inner end by a delicate membrane

the high tones are missed. Too much exercise, of course, fatigues the ear just as too much exercise tires the arms or legs. Nature plays a vital rôle in return to normal.

#### A SIGNAL OF SPRING.

STATIC, one of the signals of Spring's approach, has been rampant on the radio during the past week, particularly on Wednesday night.

A magnetic storm of solar origin started last Sunday and sprayed considerable atmospheric electricity into the air, according to O. B. Hanson, Chief Engineer of the National Broadcasting Company, after he consulted the charts of the other lanes. He also blamed local conditions, winds and clouds, but said the condition was not unusual for March.

The static bombarded the broadcast waves but was more annoying on the transatlantic short waves.

#### NEW TALENT FAVORED IN 'TRY-OUT' PROGRAMS

A HALF-HOUR variety broadcast, "Airbreaks," goes on the air March 16 at 2:30 P. M. and every Friday thereafter as an opportunity for new talent discovered during auditions at the WEAF-WJZ studios. It will not be an "amateur" broadcast because most of those successful in passing the audition examination have had experience in vaudeville or at other radio stations.

Thousands are auditioned, but the broadcasters admit one in a hundred is catalogued as desirable talent. Even after they are listed, however, generally no place is found for them on the air. It is believed the "Airbreaks" will turn the spotlight on the new entertainers and WEAF's audience response may lift them out of the crowd.

place the Metropolitan and Dr. Leopold Stokowski symphonic concerts. The first season's broadcasts from "Met" is scheduled for May. The Stokowski musicians will appear from the kilocytes in bound for a European concert. Miniature musical comedies operettas are captivating the attention of broadcast sponsors. Portions of "The Student Prince" and other importations from Europe will be broadcast from time to time by the "Show Boat" troupe that their popularity for a program built around the operetta motif. The response was encouraging, so the debut of this program is set for WEAF April 3 at 10 P. M. Plans call for the production fifty-two musical shows to be selected from a list of seventy specialties.

"The Vagabond King," R. Friml's operetta, based on J. Huntley McCarthy's celebrated play, "If I Were King," was served as a starring vehicle for E. H. Sothern, who will be the initial offering. Gladys Swarth, mezzo-soprano, borrowed from Metropolitan Opera; The Webb, baritone, and Frank Intyre will sing the leading roles and Nathaniel Shilkret will conduct the score.

#### Members of Stock Company

Already the rights have been secured for airing "The Rogue Song," "The Student Prince" and "R. Hood." A permanent stock company is being selected for the weekly excursions into the opera field and its members include Peggy Albany, John Barc Lenoa Hogarth, Minerva Ph Junius Mathews, Georgia Baci

## 'MAIL BAG' FLASHES TO ANTARCTIC TONIGHT WITH MUSIC FROM NEW YORK

SINCE the mailman does not have a route across the Antarctic, station W2XAF, Schenectady, is inviting relatives and friends of the Byrd expedition to participate in a radio "mail-bag" broadcast on alternate Sunday nights. Those who find it convenient to be in Schenectady are permitted to speak directly to the men at Little America.

The first half of tonight's program under the auspices of The New York Times will originate in The Times Annex. The WEAF network will function simultaneously with W2XAF, operating on 31.48 meters. Greetings will be broadcast by Arthur Hays Sulzberger, vice president of The New York Times Company; Colonel Julius Ochs Adler, vice president; Dr. John H. Finley, associate editor, and Russell D. Owen, who was THE TIMES correspondent on the first Byrd expedition to Little America. The Times Colored Glee Club will sing "Carry Me Back to Old Virginia," "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," "Sweet and Low," and "Now the Day Is Over."

The letters and messages will be "delivered" by short wave from 11:30 to midnight. The WEAF network will not broadcast "the mail bag." Owners of all-wave outfits can, however, caveadrop directly on the "mail."

The next program, on March 25, will be arranged by the National Press Club.

A special aerial designed as a reflector increases the directional power of W2XAF twenty times, making the station equivalent to more than 400 kilowatts in effectiveness in one direction from Schenectady. The reflector is actually twelve aeriels in one. It is a wirelike scaffold suspended between masts ranging from 150 to 300 feet high. In the parlance of the technician, the broadcasts go southward on the wings of "horizontally polarized waves."

The ground wave is quickly absorbed and the main beam is flashed like the swath of light from a giant searchlight pointed toward Little America.

Reception from the Byrd expedi-

tion has revealed marked improvement since the transmitter has a more permanent camp. A directional aerial also helps. So clear are portions of the regular Saturday night rebroadcasts through WABC's network that it is difficult to realize the voices are traveling across 9,000 miles.

The program from Little America on Feb. 10 was rated by the engineers here as "unintelligible." The Antarctic transmitter was then located temporarily in a tent. On Feb. 17 the broadcast was 70 per cent intelligible, despite the fact that no directional aerial was utilized. On Feb. 24 the apparatus was permanently installed in a shack and the directional aerial lifted the rating to 95 per cent. Atmospheres were not as favorable on March 3, when the rating dropped to 85 per cent.

A new directional wire is being erected in the direction of San Francisco for emergency use in case the weather at Buenos Aires is adverse for relay purposes.

#### ALL THE WORLD INVITED TO PICK UP ONE PROGRAM

SHORT-WAVE stations at Schenectady will crowd twenty-four hours of broadcasting into a single hour on March 16. This is the plan: The broadcast begins at 6 P. M. in the Mohawk Valley, but it is expected to be received during the complete twenty-four hours of the day in all parts of the world. Announcers will speak in ten or more languages. "Believe It or Not" Ripley, who has visited 164 different countries, will be the master of ceremonies.

The two short-wave transmitters have been heard in almost every country at different times on various programs, but this will be the first time the stations attempt to reach all countries with a single broadcast, not relayed by foreign stations. W2XAF, operating on 31.48 meters, or 9,530 kilocycles, is used for night broadcasts, and W2XAD, operating on 19.86 meters, or 15,330 kilocycles, is used to reach daylight regions.



On the Air This Week: Jack Whiting, Songster, WABC, Friday, 9:30 P. M.; Cornelia Otis Skinner, Monologist, WJZ, Today, 7:00 P. M.; (Above) John Charles Thomas, Baritone, WEAF, Today, 10:30 P. M., and George M. Cohan, Songster, WJZ, Today, 9 P. M.

**OPERATIONAL AND COMMUNITIES**

**Theme of New Series—  
Plans of Artists**

Mark Smith, Charles Washburn, and a large chorus.

With the Radio Orchestra signing off the Saturday night 11 o'clock hour March 21, the sponsors of this program are angling for two half-hour periods, if the schedule can be arranged. ... Eddie Cantor will be back in New York for next Sunday's broadcast. Jack Benny ends his Sunday broadcasts on April 1. The program will be continued with new talent. ... Lanny Ross returns from Hollywood to rejoin Captain Henry's "Show Boat" troupe at Radio City on Thursday. Arthur Billings Hunt, whose Morning Devotions and Weekly Hymn Sing have been heard regularly over the networks for more than eight years will appear on the WNEF Shut-In Hour with Lowell Patton, organist, each Wednesday at 4 P. M.

**Disney Introduced Novelty.**  
Walt Disney brought his sunny character in "Mickey Mouse and the Beanstalk" to the microphone and by so doing added a touch of novelty to the air. Disney himself was natural in the ringmaster's job and conducted the procession in a style that made the characters seem real instead of fee, as they usually are. No doubt a host of children, were interested, but it may have cost rather late (10:30 P. M.) for the Easterners. Parents who have been complaining that too many of the children's programs frighten the youthful ears may hope that the animated cartoonist will turn broadcaster and go on the air between 6 and 6 o'clock.

**Hawaii's Fine Music.**  
Radio's ability to extend its tentacles to far-away points was never more clearly illustrated when Hawaii, serenaded the Roosevelt family. Quality of transmission was a fine tribute to radio and telephone engineering. The program was as distinct as a local production, with not the least trace of static or fading. Wireless men have always recognized the Pacific air as ideal for radio.

The showman who planned the program revealed good taste in wafting few spoken words into the air. Wisely they entrusted music to cast the magic spell. Princess Abigail Kawananakoa's introductory speech sent the program off to a good start. The realistic touch, with the surf beating upon the sands of Waikiki as the guitars broadcast entrancing music, probably made many a snore or fog-bound listener in the United States long for the blue skies of Hawaii.

**DAVID LLOYD GEORGE** whom the broadcasters list as "the stormy petrel of British politics" is scheduled for "The Whither Britain" program, March 20 at 10:30 P. M. over WABC and WEA. "The March of Time," the purpose of which is "to make events before the microphone by dramatization, is now in its fourth year—John Charles Thomas, baritone of the Metropolitan Opera, succeeds John McCormack on March 21 for an indefinite number of WJZ recitals on Wednesday nights at 9:30 o'clock.  
Fred Waring's "jazzbo instrumental quartet" having been organized in a dormitory of Penn State Col-

lege will celebrate the anniversary at 8:30 P. M. today over WABC. Little did the colleagues of that time dream that they were destined for a career somewhat show all in one evening and that the earning power of the organization would reach \$1,000,000 a year. But that is what happened.

**Broadcasters Are Happy.**  
Springtime finds the broadcasters in a happy mood. A year ago most of them were singing "the blues." But today the sun is shining; the theme song is "Happy Days Are Here Again."

"We were the last to be overtaken by the depression, we have been the first to recover," said William S. Paley in his annual report as president of the Columbia Broadcasting System. "Our business has reached an all-time peak and we see no indication of more than a seasonal decline."

**THE MICROPHONE WILL PRESENT—**

**TODAY.**  
Missa Solemnis, the noted orchestra and organ religious work of Beethoven, conducted by Arturo Toscanini at Carnegie Hall. The soloists are: Elizabeth Bergling, soprano; Paul Arshouse, tenor; and Ezio Pinza, basso, of the Metropolitan Opera; and Sigurd Odegren, contralto formerly of the Metropolitan Opera. Service, Concertum, assisting vocal organization, will be directed by Hugh Ross. Pietro Yon, organist of St. Patrick's Cathedral, will be at the organ console. WABC, 5 to 5 P. M.

**Vladimir Horowitz, Russian pianist** in recital with a 60-piece orchestra, directed by Wilhelm von Hoegener, first conductor of the Portland, Ore., Symphony Orchestra. WJZ, 6 P. M.

**The Fox-Trot Overture** with Walter Damrosch, conductor. A Stage Door Musical. The Fox-Trot Overture. The Fox-Trot Musical. The Fox-Trot Musical.

**Spanish Espasola (Florencia Traversari)** in recital with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. WABC, 8:30 P. M.

**Fax Balster** is a great star on Act II of the Famous Tenor's "The Song of Songs." W. S. Mitchell, Music Director. For Services Rendered, supported by Frederick Woodcock and John Williams, new agreement with Max Baerler in New York. James Melton, tenor, and the comedy team of Lean and MacFadden are on the program. WABC, 6-7 and 7:30 P. M.

**George M. Cohan**, Broadway's song-and-dance man, who has been active on the Great White Way for more than thirty years as an actor, producer, manager and song writer, returns to the air as a feature of the ethereal spot vacated for an indefinite period by Will Rogers and the Coleman Orchestra. Gaudman's Revue is a Male Quartet and Mr. Cohan will "cover" the popular melodies of the day in a half-hour review. WJZ, 9 P. M.

**John Charles Thomas**, baritone of the Metropolitan Opera, with Nathaniel Shilkret's Orchestra. WEA, 10:30 P. M.

**Ernest Hutchinson**, concert pianist, returns to the air in the first program of a new series with Howard Barlow directing a symphony orchestra. WABC, 10:30 P. M.

**Lawrence Tibbett**, baritone of the Metropolitan Opera, in a half-hour recital with concert orchestra. WABC, 10:30 P. M.

550 meters, from 6 A. M. to 10 o'clock at night. Since the radio spectrum is not overcrowded highly selective instruments are not in vogue nor desirable, because of their greater cost to manufacture according to Mr. Matsumi.

**Simple Sets Are Popular.**  
"Sets are well separated on the dial and reception over long distances is comparatively easy," he said. "Many Japanese tune in West Coast American stations when darkness covers the Pacific."

"Many thrifty Japanese construct their own outfits, made entirely from parts purchased at village stores. One of the receivers, popular with people who live near the transmitters, consists of an antenna wire, tuning coil, galena or other type of detector and a hand-made speaker. The actual cost is only a few pennies. At least one store in a town sells the ingredients

for educational purposes in primary and intermediate schools, and for the consolation of the blind and unfortunate. The government deals directly with "poor" caught listening in without first obtaining the necessary license.

"The oversight of all radio business rests with the Broadcasting Commission, the highest consultative body on general plans. Its members are chosen from among men of learning and reputation occupying important positions in society."

**BOSTON SYMPHONY SHIFTED.**

An entire hour-and-a-half concert by the Boston Symphony will be broadcast on Fridays, beginning at 3:30 P. M. over WJZ. Heretofore the orchestra has been on the air a half hour Saturday nights over WEA. These broadcasts have been discontinued.

**at Carnegie Hall, WOR, 3 to 4:30 P. M.**  
The following are the programs for the week:  
New York Orchestra, directed by Nikolai Scherff, performs at Carnegie Hall for the last time this season. Seventeen-year-old Eira Reymolin is the piano soloist. WMA, 8:45 P. M.

**Chicago Symphony Orchestra** will be at Carnegie Hall, WOR, 3 to 4:30 P. M. The following are the programs for the week:  
Chicago Symphony Orchestra, directed by Frederick Busch, performs at Carnegie Hall for the last time this season. Seventeen-year-old Eira Reymolin is the piano soloist. WMA, 8:45 P. M.

**Albert Spalding**, violinist, Violin Concerto and Grand Tchaikovsky, WABC, 8:30 P. M.

**Martha Aronson**, former Metropolitan Opera soprano, sings with the Little Symphony Orchestra, directed by Philip James. WOR, 4 P. M.

**Leopold Stokowski** conducts the Philadelphia Orchestra of the Academy of Music. WABC, 2:30 to 4 P. M.

**John Charles Thomas**, baritone of the Metropolitan Opera, with Nathaniel Shilkret's Orchestra. WEA, 10:30 P. M.

**Ernest Hutchinson**, concert pianist, returns to the air in the first program of a new series with Howard Barlow directing a symphony orchestra. WABC, 10:30 P. M.

**College Education Is Worth While.** The Chicago speakers representative will be Vernon Lyden and Bernard Meliser. From Boston the speakers will be Malcolm A. Hoffman and Seymour M. Power. Raymond Moley, editor of Today, at a microphone in New York, will act as chairman. Listeners will be invited to judge the contest and mail their votes. WABC, 2:30 to 4 P. M.

**TUNE IN ON GEORGE GERSHWIN**

Orchestra... Singers... Guest Stars Every Monday and Friday 7:30 p.m., E.S.T., Station WJZ



**ON THE AIR THROUGH COURTESY OF FEEN-A-MINT**

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AMERICA'S BELOVED BARTON HINDS HONEY & ALMOND CREAM HALL OF FAME TONIGHT WEA 10:30 P. M.



**FOR RADIO AUDIENCE Synopsis of PETER IBBETSON**

Our booklet is designed to make Metropolitan broadcast of the Drama Tarragon more comprehensible to radio listeners. Mail orders promptly filled. 15c Postage included. EAGLE PUBLISHING CO. PITTSFIELD, MASS.

**SATURDAY.** "Peter Ibbetson," the Deems Taylor opera, broad set from the Metropolitan Opera House, Tullio Serafin conducts. Principia in the cast are: WEA, WJZ, 1:30 to 5 P. M.