

**J**UST about everyone knows Art Linkletter, don't they? He's been around on radio and television as long as Jack Benny's Maxwell. His *People Are Funny* and *House Party* (the former now in syndication via NBC; the latter at the end of a long CBS Radio run, but continuing on network TV) were playing when LS/MFT, not LSD, was the abbreviation of the day.

He's the gentile's version of Georgie Jessel, the host for all seasons and practically any occasion. Daytime radio and television without him would be a peanut-butter sandwich without the jelly.

He can't sing, can't dance, isn't much of an actor. His special talent is getting other people to perform, particularly children. Probably no broadcast personality ever has been better with the kiddies. He speaks their language and it's always on their level, never up or down. Like Durante's malapropisms, Benny's thrift, Groucho's cigar, children are Art Linkletter's trademark.

It's a meal ticket but some of the fringe effects are showing. Mingling with the skate-board set for 20 years has its drawbacks. Art Linkletter once listed some of the "saccharine labels" that have adhered to him because he plied his trade mostly among those whose minds are still more bland than blown: "toothy, grinning, genial, wholesome, debonair—ad nauseam."

Is the ever-popular, ever-glib Mr. Linkletter really these things? Correction: Most people don't know Art Linkletter.

**Rough Start** ■ This apparently happy man, dedicated to fun and laughter, was thrust into life in a way that would curl David Copperfield's hair. He was born Gordon Arthur Kelly in Moose Jaw, Sask., 55 years ago of parents who were not then married to each other and who deserted him when he was only a few weeks old. The rejection was total. He was never to come in contact with them again. Instead a middle-aged couple, John and Mary Linkletter, adopted him when he was a month old.

Those early years were marred by a succession of relocations that must have devastated the rejected boy's already shaky sense of security. By the age of 7 he'd lived not only in Moose Jaw, but Lowell, Mass., Point Fermin, Calif., and San Diego. In his autobiography, "Confessions of a Happy Man," Art Linkletter tells how it was to be constantly rolling without gathering moss.

"As I look back on those early years," he wrote, "it seems to me that we were always living in little houses behind big houses, and as I grew older my one fervent wish was to have a street number without a half in it."

His foster father switched occupa-

## Shifting styles after 22 years of bland fun

tions seemingly with each move, changing from insurance salesman to operator of a five-and-dime store to shoe cobbler to "hellfire and damnation style" preacher. There were few frills. Money was scarce and hard-earned.

Art Linkletter went to work as a sort of pitchman for an ice-cream wagon, then walked a crack-of-dawn route for the *San Diego Union*, worked a switchboard and was a counselor at the local YMCA; also he was at various

times—in between riding freight trains from place to place—an usher, bellboy, tray washer, sheet-metal helper and shill in a gambling room. Jobs with a wealthy San Diego family and as a cafeteria helper saw him through college.

Are people funny? This side, the dark side of Art Linkletter, was sometimes downright grim. It was a time that shaped character and influenced a slew of diverse interests. Just look in how many directions the man has gone since he teamed up with writer-producer John Guedel and took off for success.

**Vast Holdings** ■ He's a director of Sierra Dawn Estates, a land development firm; owner of Art Linkletter Oil Enterprises; president of Tri Oil and Gas; chairman of the board of Bailey-Zweyer Insurance Co.; partner in Vandeburg-Linkletter Associates, public relations; partner in Swartz-Linkletter Co., builder and developer; director of Linkletter Foundation, a charitable organization; limited partner in Schwabacher & Co., investment bankers, and has extensive land, sheep, cattle and agriculture interests in Australia. He's on the board of directors of Western Airlines, Royal Crown Cola Co., Wilson Harrell Co., Neotec Inc., Valley Music Hall, Woodland Savings & Loan and 15-16 Co., real estate. And this is only a partial listing.

Does a man get this way by being bland? Is his talent and personality range merely limited to being clever at talking to unpredictable children? Art Linkletter has no self-doubts about the answer to this one.

"There are so many things I can say and do," he confided in an interview the other week. "I want to share my interests and knowledge with the public, show there's more to me than my image would indicate."

There's the reason for *The Lid's Off*—*With Linkletter*, his latest television effort. He tried to sell the show, which aims at controversy, to NBC-TV and CBS-TV, but they have him typecast as a top-flight lightweight, not capable of mixing in the heavyweight class. Finally the half-hour series was bought by the ABC-owned stations for programming in station time. It's also being distributed in syndication.

The program is critical to Mr. Linkletter. It's not a matter of profit and loss. Instead, after more than 32 years in show business, he wants to be known for something with mere substance.

Maybe Art Linkletter waited too long to take his lid off. Maybe the public isn't willing to buy anything more than his harmless good fun. Yet he could have stopped with those two shows and come out ahead. He made a lot of people laugh for a long, long time. Is that so bad?

## WEEK'S PROFILE



Arthur Gordon Linkletter—chairman of the board, Linkletter Enterprises, Hollywood; b. Moose Jaw, Sask., July 17, 1912; BA, San Diego State Teachers College, 1934; announcer, KGB San Diego, 1933-35; program director, KGB 1935-36; radio and public-address system director, Texas Centennial, Dallas, 1936-37; same position at San Francisco World's Fair, 1937-39; free-lance writer, producer and master of ceremonies, 1939-40; wrote and coproduced theme for San Francisco World's Fair, 1940; MC for radio shows, 1940-41; part owner and co-MC of "People Are Funny" on NBC Radio, 1941-42; MC and disk jockey on KSFO and KGO San Francisco, 1941-44; did short-wave broadcasts for Office of War Information and radio program director for Kaiser shipyards in Richmond, Calif., 1941-44; back as MC of "People Are Funny" series on radio, 1943-1963; MC of TV version of same program on NBC-TV, 1954-63; MC of "House Party" series on CBS-TV and radio, 1945-present; MC of "The Lid's Off—With Linkletter" series, 1967; author of seven books; m. Lois Foerster of San Diego, Nov. 27, 1935; children—Jack, 29; Dawn, 27; Robert, 23; Sharon, 21; Diane, 19; also has six grandchildren; hobbies—travel, handball, swimming, photography, skiing.