

The Case for Hillbillies

Biggar of WLW Says They Help Theaters, Vaudeville, Stations, Instrument Firms, You 'n' Me

By GEORGE C. BIGGAR

IN THE midst of all the high-powered promotion of swing bands, variety show, quiz broadcasts, news commentators and theaters of the air—all featuring "names"—a type of radio entertainment commonly called "hillbilly" around radio stations, agencies and booking offices has steadfastly maintained its popularity. Billed as "singing mountaineers," "yodeling cowboys," "farmerettes," "fiddlin' bands" or "harmonica wizards," the name "hillbillies" is all-descriptive in the trade.

Frankly, I don't like "hillbilly" as an all-inclusive description. It is a misnomer. Real "hillbillies" are found back in "them thar hills," the kind of folks you see burlesqued in the "Li'l Abner" comic strip. Here at WLW, with our *Boone County Jamboree* and *Top of the Morning* programs, we have stressed the term "rural entertainers," altho there are limitations to this name because as many city folks as rural people listen to the programs and patronize personal appearances.

Praised and cursed, "hillbillies"—are in radio in a big way. They'll probably be with us as long as there are radio stations. To compare, Westerns have been filmed by motion picture producers since the early days, and Hollywood will continue turning them out as long as there is a public demand.



GEORGE C. BIGGAR

"Hillbillies" are ringing the cash registers for scores of stations, both in the sale of time and personal appearances. It is only fair, however, to state that the actual cash revenue derived from personal appearances is usually only enough to meet the nut. The audience-building and good-will values of personal appearances are what count.

"Old Reliables"

WLS is credited with the first major old-time show when the *National Barn Dance* took the air in May, 1924. WSM came along with the *Grand Old Opry* in 1926, when the "Solemn Old Judge," George D. Hay, left his berth as the pioneer barn dance emcee on WLS to start the fiddles going in Nashville. Parts of both shows are now commercially sponsored on networks. WHO, KMBC, KNX, WSB and many others have featured shows of this kind.

John Lair, folk song authority, claims the distinction of originating an old-time radio show in the most authentic setting. His *Renfro Valley Barn Dance*, aired thru WLW, is staged every Saturday night in his big barn seating 1,000 people just north of Mt. Vernon, Ky. He features both professional entertainers and neighboring folks who have talent.

Hillbillies have brought stage shows back into theaters which had forgotten or never previously staged vaudeville. Backed by plugging on radio stations, hillbillies have created competition for acrobats, aerialists, clowns, trained animal acts and other types of entertainment which from time immemorial have had the right of way at State

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GEORGE C. BIGGAR, WLW program director, is one of radio's pioneers in "home-folks" entertainment. Born on a South Dakota farm and a graduate of South Dakota State College in 1922. Biggar took up newspaper and publicity work after completing college. He entered radio on May 1, 1924, as farm and market editor of Station WLS, Chicago, then operated by the Sears-Roebuck Agricultural Foundation. He was identified with the WLS *National Barn Dance* at its inception.

Detailed to handle farm and home programs for the Sears-Roebuck Agricultural Foundation at Station WFAA, Dallas; WBS, Atlanta, and KMBC, Kansas City, Mo., between August, 1925, and July, 1929. Biggar returned to WLS, then operated by *The Prairie Farmer*, in 1929, and until 1938 held such positions as continuity editor, program promotion director and program director. He was responsible for building the station's *National Barn Dance* for several years. Biggar joined Station WLW in September, 1938, to build an agricultural department and artists' bureau, his main promotion being the station's *Boone County Jamboree*. He was appointed WLW program director in August, 1939.

Radio Talent New York

By JERRY LESSER

PAUL (NBC) DUMONT back after a six-week sojourn with KAY KYSER and his ork. . . . JIMMY TRANTER is now playink young Dr. Lamson in *Valiant Lady*. . . . Two new shows worth listening to are HARRY MacFAYDEN'S *Human Nature in Action* and LESTER O'KEEFE'S *Rocky Gordon, Engineer*. Cast of the latter includes FRED IRVING LEWIS in the title role, supported by PARKER FENNELLY and CHARLES SLATTERY. . . . FRANK GALLUP is up and around again after a siege of strep throat. . . . ALOIS HAVRILLA, whose wife is a graduate of Vassar and whose daughter is there now, has been doing

so much work for them on the Vassar 75th Anniversary drive that they are deciding to make him an honorary member of the daisy chain. . . . SAM RASKYN, who did Calypso on *Pursuit of Happiness* and *Strange as It Seems*, has waxed an idea on the subject. . . . ISABEL MANNING HEWSON, woman news commentator, may go network this week. She is currently conducting the *Morning Market Basket* series thrice weekly over WEAf locally in New York. . . . *Life Can Be Beautiful* went over CBS airtlines without a director one day last week because CHICK VINCENT became a

(See RADIO TALENT on opposite page)

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A special feature of next week's
issue of

The
Billboard

You're in Radio If . . .

The comments below have been compiled over long and occasionally painful years in radio by Larry Menkin, who, even tho he is still in his twenties, is a radio veteran. As actor and director and now one of radio's leading writers, Mr. Menkin knows well whereof he speaks. It is regrettable that some of his more pungent comments could not be made available.

By LARRY MENKIN

You're in radio if:

You won't allow a radio in your home. Every program on the air stinks but yours!

As a successful actor, you can shamelessly and at the drop of a hat endow Jullius Caesar with a beautiful Brooklyn accent.

You won't be a page boy forever; some day you'll be program director.

In the spring your fancy lightly turns to that 13-week option, which you hope will be renewed.

You admit you're a hack but insist that so was Shakespeare!

Strip, to you, means a "five-time-a-week-daytime-story" that you wish you were writing, directing, acting in, or in which you are doing one of those things against your artistic instincts, but with the full approval of your practical wife or husband.

You're going to write a book or a play or a symphony some day!

You have a script in your pocket which you haven't read but will do on the air at sight. Maybe.

You were in vaudeville doing an act and now you're doing a million variations of that act on the air.

You have been a guest star on a variety hour.

You are always complaining.

You wonder if people REALLY write those letters.

You wonder why Crosley never calls you. You'd tell them something!

You live and commute between the second and 18th floors of NBC and CBS.

You get and give information at the NBC drug store or at CBS's Lebus.

You have said, at least once: "I have a conflict." "Marge Morrow sent me," "I did it before Orson Welles," "How does Don Becker write so much!," "This will make the Hit Parade," "I wasn't the voice type"; "Listen, I know nothing about Stanislavsky—all I do is play inugs at \$50 a throw"; "AFRA better do something about this!"

You're an actor who wonders why agencies won't buy scripts from you; you're a scripter who wants to act; you're a dramatic director who wants to sing; you're a vocalist who wants a band; you're a band leader who hates jitter-bugs!

You think you could read the news you compile for that dumb commenorator better than he could!

You have at some time admitted that Rikel Kent did it first!

You haunt back-number magazine shops hoping to find a gag!

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