

GATHER 'ROUND THE RADIO
E – NEWSLETTER FOR THE
METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON
OLD – TIME RADIO CLUB
THE GRTR STUDIO EDITION
JANUARY 10, 2018
THE LEARNING CURVE ISSUE



THE SET-UP

Hello fine listeners, and welcome once again to the mythical confines of the GRTR Studio where we broadcast information and inspiration about radio, music, nostalgia, personality, books, and beyond. Terry Gross continues to be our inspiration. Listen to her “Fresh Air” radio show, live or podcast; check your NPR listings for a station where you can tune in.

It’s a wonderful day for the broadcast. Chuck and Joanie are motoring their way across the Potomac and past the hills of Gettysburg; and they have a rider, our guest for the day: Denis Roma. Seems that this carpool idea is working out nicely. Earlier today I took my walk around the neighborhood. My routine in this cold snap is 40 minutes at 11 degrees, all bundled up.

Now as I approach the lane I see Denis down by the creek. We exchange greetings and scuff the frosty leaves as we walk to the studio. Denis picks up the dusty courier pouch from the doorstep and heads for the Mud Room. Chuck has fired up the boilers and is taming the squawks and hums of the soundboard. Joanie and Denis are sorting through the cards and letters and we all dig into cornbread and coffee. Chuck is piping in a Sergio Mendes blend of Brazilian folk and jazz, “So Many Stars,” circa 1987, sung in this version by the incomparable Sarah Vaughan, and he joins us to read the mail.

We are joyful and wistful and sad as we read the messages. Some folks write in with best wishes, surely, for the Club and its great performances of the past year; and from across the country, OTR enthusiasts are voicing their admiration and memories of Bob Burchett, long-time champion of the world of audio, who passed away recently at the age of 84.

And we’ll be able to sit and talk for a while with our guest Denis Roma, who is making a return visit to the studio. We’ll talk audio history with him and the way that each of us finds so much to learn; history always informs the creative impulse, and it’s nice to see new productions using those building blocks. And the search goes on, to find your audience: it’s not just air-time anymore.

Joanie has the sweep of the clock in mind as we go to network feed, and the melodies of the ageless and inventive Sergio Mendes carry us on.

ON THE AIR

Hello everyone, and welcome to the broadcast. Thanks for tuning in! We’ve got some mellow Brazilian music going on, and we’re about to sit down for a talk with Denis Roma, who was with us a couple of years ago, just after the Studio got underway. Nice to have you back!

Denis: Thanks, Mark, it’s good to be back. It was May 2014 that I wrote up my notes and visited you for the broadcast.

GRTR: That's right, you kept the ball rolling for our new idea of having guests in studio to talk about their interests, and I always liked to start by asking about people's early introduction to radio. Can you hark back to that?

Denis: Sure, I would listen to shows on my local broadcast station in my hometown in Maine; a captivating time, as so many of us remember our early listening and favorite shows. And so, I was happy to find an opportunity in school to take it further. My first taste of radio drama production was in my mass media class in high school, where the class had been broken into teams and assigned to write and perform a radio show. I took the lead on my team and enthusiastically wrote and directed a show based on the 1930's pulp magazine action hero, Doc Savage. I was a big fan of the paperbacks being published, and during that era Doc's pulp stories were being reprinted. I hadn't realized that there actually had been two short-lived radio programs of the character, one in the '30s and the other in the 40's.

GRTR: Popular indeed! And in the 80s there was a 10-part Doc Savage series broadcast on The NPR Playhouse, full-production, really nice. I still have it, 5-cassettes, that I picked up at the MANC a few years back.

Denis: Amazing, isn't it? The shows you find, whether from the golden age or any of the decades that followed, you know, there seems to be an attempt in each and every decade to keep OTR alive.

GRTR: It's comforting, as well. And we'll get back to that and the new-time efforts as well in just a bit. But first for our listeners we're going to reflect on the life of Bob Burchett, who passed away recently and who was indeed a friend to all.

MUSIC BRIDGE AND TRIBUTE TO BOB BURCHETT

Chuck is piping in a new choral work called "Cantata Memoria," by the contemporary Welsh composer Karl Jenkins. It is contemplative and resolute,

forceful when it needs to be. Choral music is wonderful; and the Welsh are so good at it!

REMEMBERING BOB BURCHETT

Several people from across the country have sent in messages of reminiscence, universal in their portrayal of a truly good man. Bob's sense of humor, his persistence in keeping his *OTR Digest* in print, and his determination to keep the Cincinnati OTR Convention going all attest to his geniality and his work ethic. He would contribute what he could, and support others by giving them a venue for their efforts.

OTR historian Jack French writes: "He greeted every person, every situation, and every problem with a wide smile and pleasant chuckle. Quite simply, he was the most likable guy I've ever had the pleasure to know." Fellow OTR historian Jim Cox writes of Bob: "I also recall him personally as a friend, colleague and deep encourager. That's the kind we almost never replace."

Bob graced the world of radio history for many decades. His sense of community and wanting to work behind the scenes is highlighted by Martin Grams in his book about the history of the long-running Friends of Old-Time Radio convention. Martin quotes Bob about his experience at an early FOTR convention:

Bob Burchett began taking photographs of the convention beginning in 1978, and quickly became the official convention photographer—a post he held for many years. "My wife had a 35mm camera, so I used it that year and took six rolls of film," Bob recalled. "Only when I got home did I discover only three rolls had been loaded right. But it gave me something to do and I enjoyed it." (*FOTR Celebrating 36 Years* p.11)

And then Bob organized a convention of his own, in Cincinnati. No easy task, as Jack French remembers:

With no club or organization backing him, Bob created and ran the Cincinnati OTR & Nostalgia Convention, recruiting volunteers to assist. With all the many problems of such an undertaking, he had to handle them pretty much on his own. And he was willing to use his own money to backstop several of these responsibilities to maintain quality.

Cincinnati was a hit; many people attended year after year; and celebrities were fond of returning to mingle and perform. Don Ramlow, radio producer from Kalamazoo, was a great help with production over the years. He would arrive with scripts in hand and a group of readers ready to join the celebrities, take the stage and entertain.

Jim Widner, radio historian from Ohio, enjoyed Cincinnati, and writes:

What impressed me a lot about Bob was that he never wanted to be in the limelight despite the impact he made on the hobby. When the Cincy convention was going on, he always stayed in the shadows unless drawn to the light by others. A good example of this was when the Cincy Convention awards were presented, he did the job but always was very soft spoken and uncomfortable doing so. Yet despite this, he was always willing to give 100% to the hobby. Amazing person!

MUSIC BRIDGE AND COMMERCIAL

The Welsh Youth Choir and the Sinfonia Cymru carry us onward with the assured hand of Karl Jenkins.

If it's January, can Spring Training be far behind?

Let's be ready to cheer on our two favorite teams: The Dayton Dragons, and the Louisville Bats. Both these teams are part of the Cincinnati Reds farm system. And we already know that everybody wants to play ball in Cincinnati!

THE LEARNING CURVE

Joanie signals us to keep an eye on the clock, network feed is sweeping in! All right, Denis and I will close out with just a few notes about “What’s out there” with good listening these days.

GRTR: OK, Denis, I’ll mention a couple of favorites that I keep up with, in keeping with my love of literature and history. From the BBC Radio 4 stream, I go to “Open Country,” where listeners can trek with the host across terrain and towns in different parts of Britain. And Melvyn Bragg’s “In Our Time” is a wonderful forum where ideas and personalities are discussed, very insightful!

Denis: I’m currently enjoying a series called ‘The Red Panda Adventures’, a Canadian podcast produced by a company named Decoder Ring Theatre. I believe you had plugged their website in a previous issue of GRTR. Anyway, it’s about a masked crime-fighter – sort of a blend of The Shadow, Green Hornet, and Batman – who battles evil in the city of Toronto in the 1930’s/1940’s. The show premiered in 2005 and it’s now more popular than ever, branching off into novels and comic book adaptations.

MUSIC BRIDGE AND NETWORK FEED

Chuck is keeping us in awe of the full choral sound of Karl Jenkins. That’s the broadcast for today. Our thanks to Denis Roma for the good conversation; thanks to all our friends who wrote in with their memories. Good listening to everyone in the new year. Keep those cards and letters coming! Soup and sandwiches in the Mud Room? But of course!

Thanks ever,

Mark Anderson

