

GATHER 'ROUND THE RADIO  
E-NEWSLETTER FOR THE METROPOLITAN  
WASHINGTON OLD-TIME RADIO CLUB  
THE GRTR STUDIO EDITION



THE BOTANIC GARDENS ISSUE

JANUARY 4, 2021

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.

Our Studio crew is ready from our homes along the Catoctin Range. Bert and Beverly are watching the sweep of the clock towards network feed; Fred has coaxed the creaking old sound board through its squawks and hums, and he’s

piping in a seasonal song by Michael Praetorius, from 1609; Sting and his mates keeps it going with his 2009 acoustic album “If on a Winter’s Night”:

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

From tender stem hath sprung

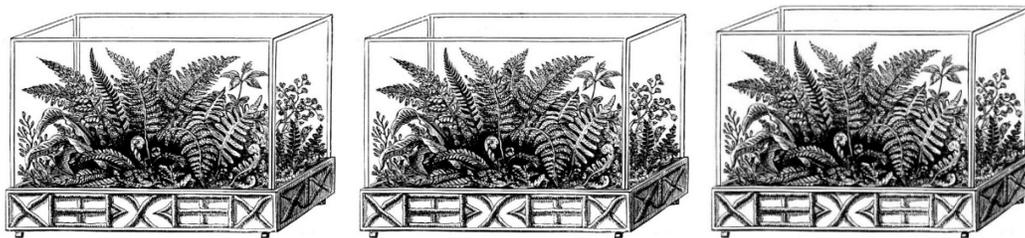
As men of old have sung,

It came a flow'ret bright

When half-spent was the night.

ON THE AIR

Hello everyone, and welcome to the broadcast! Sunrise in the southeastern sky behind long banks of indigo clouds; the creek is running fast, and the leaves are caught in an icy fringe after a nighttime of freezing rain. I've sanitized the old courier pouch, but we still call it Dusty. Plenty of messages; best foot forward, you know. Jack French is sharing an anecdote about a child star and his chaperone. We'll amble down Memory Lane with newsy bits as we start our 17<sup>th</sup> year of the GRTR. Bert and Beverly have their reading assignments for today's broadcast. I sent them their pages via Telex from the depot a couple of days ago. First at the microphone, Beverly will read the anecdote sent in by Jack French. And later on Bert will read an article from the GRTR Archives, about the way Michael Hayde helped a student with research about Superman and the ruthless ways of the networks. Then we'll sift through messages about the how the OTR scene has changed but is still accessible on many fronts.



Bert has his eye on the clock and Beverly settles in at the microphone. She will read about life on the road for members of the “Bobby Benson and the

“B-Bar-B-Riders” radio show. Jack wrote an extensive article detailing the history of the show; it appeared in **The Old Radio Times, May/June 2014**. This reading is excerpted from that.

Beverly reads:

Thanks, Mark, and thanks as well for sending along the Bobby Benson article. Jack did a lot of research and he was helped by several researchers, and he was quite mindful of thanking everyone who sent him material. The show ran from the 30's through the 50's, first from CBS and then from Mutual; and it was ever so popular. Jack writes:

#### BOBBY BENSON, DON KNOTTS, AND MARY JANE

This occurred in the early 1950's; all three participants are deceased now, so it can't hurt anyone to tell this true story. It was confided to me by Mary Jane Mastapeter, who was the executive assistant to the Program Director at Mutual in that era. One of their most popular kids' radio adventures shows was “Bobby Benson and the B-Bar-B Riders.” Our players in this little drama are:

- 1) Ten-year-old Clive Rice, under his professional name of Clyde Campbell, was the title lead in the show.
- 2) Don Knotts, then in his mid-20s, played an old geezer, Windy Wales, on the same program.
- 3) Mary Jane, the 25-year-old chaperone of “Bobby Benson” on personal appearance tours, who was described in press releases as his “tutor”, which she most certainly was not.

Clive and Don were paid only for the radio shows in which they performed; Mary Jane was paid a monthly salary. None of them were paid a dime by Mutual when ordered out on the personal appearance trail. Their travel, lodging, and meals were paid for, but nothing else. Don particularly resented these trips, and he would try to find a side gig at a night club or hotel lounge in

whatever city they visited. At the time, he was trying to develop a stand-up comedy routine.

On this particular trip to a large city I'll not disclose, the trio were housed in a nice hotel. Mary Jane and Clive shared a two-bed suite and Don had another room down the hall. A confirmed and nervous hypochondriac, Don always traveled with two suitcases, one with his clothing and toiletries, a second one crammed with medicine, potions, vitamins, ointments, and sundry health aides.

On this trip, Don had secured a paid evening to do two shows (8 pm and 10 pm) at a local night club a block from their hotel. He would be doing his "Nervous Weather Man" act and he pleaded with Mary Jane to attend so he would have at least one friendly face in the audience. She finally agreed to attend the early show. Clive could be left alone for an hour in his locked hotel room; she told him she'd be back about 9.

She attended Don's show, said goodbye to him, and returned to the hotel at the promised time. She knocked on their room door, lightly...no answer.... knocked loudly....still no answer. Clive was sound asleep. She tried her key, but Clive had bolted the door from the inside. Finally she lifted her heavy purse up and through the open transom above the door. It crashed to the floor inside with a loud bang....but it did not awaken Clive.

However it did awaken the next-door neighbor, a kind, elderly gentleman who peeked out and asked if he could help her. She explained her problem and he let her use his house phone to call Clive. Alas, several rings were unable to rouse the lad. The man then pointed out that their adjoining rooms had a passageway door between, which could be locked on both sides. His side was locked, but perhaps Clive had not locked his. They tried the door, and Voila! Entry! Mary Jane thanked the man, locked the door from her side, and retrieved her purse. Clive snored softly on.

At breakfast, Mary Jane told Clive and Don about the end of her evening. Clive insisted she had made the whole thing up. He thought

that his friends would believe him instead, and he was sure as well that they knew that he was a light sleeper.

Thanks, Beverly, that was nicely done. Quite a good article, too, the illustrations are profuse – the book covers, the premiums, and the details about the marketing especially. Radio stars were in demand, and the networks made them jump through hoops with all those personal appearances.

#### COMMERCIAL AND MUSIC BRIDGE



Someday soon, right? The Cincinnati Reds have renewed their partnership with the Dragons, moving the team to a higher level of play; though still in the developmental A-league.

The bridge song we have is called “Steamboat,” by the Beach Boys, from their late-career album “Holland” 1973. It’s a somber departure from their infectious sound of earlier years, this song is a lament for elusive beauty, and a plea to strive on. A riverboat bell chimes each new verse. A soaring guitar chord and baritone backing vocals are a nice throwback touch.

The river’s a dream in a waltz time, banks of jasmine glaze.

The creek is a trumpet of hard times, in the crystal haze.

The steamboat of living ever faithfully glides.

Oh, don’t worry, Mr. Fulton, we’ll keep your steamboat rollin’

No don’t worry Mr. Fulton, we’ll keep your steamboat rollin’

We’ll keep your steamboat rollin’ ...3x to fade...



### A LOOK AT THE GRTR ARCHIVES: 16 YEARS

Here is a contemporary radio program: a look at the world of sports:

There's a 45-minute radio play, from BBC Radio 4, called "Last Days of Grace." I heard it in 2008, and wrote it up in 2009, and I've listened to it over and over from the BBC Archives.

W.G. Grace was a champion cricket player. The scriptwriter is the veteran Nick Warburton; the star-turn roles are played by Kenneth Cranham and Benedict Cumberbatch. Warburton obviously had his sources for Grace's life-story and the emergence of hero-worship for a cricket player.

Warburton takes a brilliant leap of geography and years. He has Grace appear - flesh, blood, and argumentative - in 2008, a hundred years after he played his final match in 1908. The narrator of the story is a fellow named George. The scene is a cricket pitch in suburban London; all brick row-houses and utility plant chimneys. It is April, opening day for cricket, but the day has dawned cold and gray; a dusting of snow has fallen.

Grace, (played by Cranham) a solid and agile player, walks across the pitch towards the groundskeeper's shed where he finds George (Cumberbatch), and immediately they are at odds. Grace wants to know how George got into Albert's shed: he's got no business being there, "don't touch those tools," and so on. George goes along because he is omniscient about Grace's career and wants to draw him out. How did Grace feel on that day in 1896 when he batted for a phenomenal score?

The soundtrack kicks in with the lofty, formal voice of a BBC sports announcer in modern broadcast style, giving the lineups for that day. The teams are: The Gentlemen of England; their opponent is the formidable Suffolk team. What a triumph for WG! George mentions other matches, other years, and Grace becomes wistful. Grace then turns on George, saying he can't be bothered with the "the likes of you." He has a match to play. He's waiting for his teammates. His mates, of course, won't be making the hundred-year leap to join him.

Warburton captures the idea of the unspoiled sports hero, who played his best; it is an imaginative approach to sports biography. In the time shift, the tension of a match is seen as timeless. In our time we marvel at a batted ball soaring against the sky. Grace, the old cricketer is equally enchanted as he recalls watching his ball reach the sky with the sun and the rowhouses beyond the pitch. He has his own "Field of Dreams."

Now, Bert will settle in at the microphone and read from the Archives:

BERT:

Thanks, Mark, this article definitely shows how research follows a thread and results in a wider grasp of information, and better writing.

From the GRTR of March 17, 2017:

#### A CONVERGENCE OF RESEARCHERS

A while back, our Radio Recall editor Jack French coordinated a series of messages between a researcher named Amanda and Club member Michael Hayde, a prolific author who had unearthed extensive material about the person of Amanda's interest: Robert Maxwell. The thread revealed as well that Jack had printed an excerpt from Amanda's 2008 PhD dissertation, (in *Radio Recall* February 2014 p.10), which coordinated nicely with Michael's contribution: his August 2009 *Radio Recall* article, "Criminal Casebook," (lead story, p. 1); and his book about the Superman phenomenon, *Flights of Fantasy: The Unauthorized But True Story of Radio and TV's Adventures of Superman* (Bear Manor Media 2009).

Amanda's thesis was insightful. She was researching children's radio programs of the 1930s, detailing the distinctions between the themes of shows aimed at

the boys' audience, and those for a girl's audience. The following is the text of what Amanda wrote:

"Over the course of the 1930s (radio) advertising stemmed from the predominately male ad agency professionals' preference for the boy consumer, whom they considered more predictable than girls. Furthermore, advertising professionals and broadcasters believed both that boy listeners favored adult male heroes, and that listening to storytelling and music programs would diminish boys' masculinity. Girls, advertisers assumed, were more flexible in their program choices and would still listen to programs with male heroes. These assumptions had important ramifications for girl listeners, whose favorite music and story programs were cancelled (in) the 1930s due to a lack of sponsors."

BERT:

And thus, did Amanda study the brutal world of commercial radio; and Michael put Robert Maxwell right in the midst of it. Maxwell had made Superman into "the hottest thing on Mutual..." writes Michael. A further quote from his article is this, from a critic who capsulizes the plight of the radio industry: "...which has been shouting its anxious intention to enlighten, instruct, and serve...". Superman scripts began treating "real-life perils," (prejudice and juvenile delinquency for example); and Maxwell was further involved in producing two shows geared towards crime prevention, which presented interviews with real convicts: their dreams, misfortunes, and their remorse. Michael tells us that, "despite plaudits," "I Was a Convict" was cancelled after a short run. "Criminal Casebook" was next, with the goal of benefitting society, and with good scripts, but "Again, critical praise was not enough," writes Michael, adding that "ad agencies and manufacturing concerns" rebuffed requests for sponsorship, relegating the show to being "lost in the ratings shuffle."

So, Amanda's shows for the girls' audience, and the crime prevention shows, lost out in the competitive world of broadcasting. Stories and music on the one hand, and criminal psychology on the other, were excellent efforts, it seems. Michael's phrase puts both in perspective: "...making a little radio history."

Jack French was surely pleased as well that he could make us aware of a “charming small world instance” of researchers sharing information.



Thanks, Bert, a fine reading. And it is a good lead-in to a discussion of the comments that OTR enthusiasts have sent in, about their pursuits and the changes in the way people perceive and follow old-time radio.

### INSIGHT AT THE OTR CORRAL

This discussion began with an email that was sent, forwarded, and then became a thread. An ardent OTR fan named Warren expressed his concerns that OTR sites were either difficult to access or had ceased operation. He writes that, “...there’s hardly anyone left...are they just holograms of the past...?”

It was tagged as “Warren’s Lament.” OTR folks heeded the call and saddled up to tell their tales and point out the different trails to follow. We definitely have a “conversation starter,” and that is exactly the term used on many posts on the Old Time Radio Researchers Group site on Facebook. Martin Grams, Jr. acknowledges this:

At this point a large majority of people in the hobby have migrated over to Facebook where Old-Time Radio groups have a cumulative 10,000+ members, where vendors promote “lost” radio shows and their virtual

catalogs; there are links for sites where radio shows can be downloaded; and new book publications are announced. There's also continuous chats between members of the hobby, etc.”

Martin is joined by Jack French in mentioning that there are still OTR groups in operation.

- SPERDVAC in Los Angeles [www.sperdvac.com](http://www.sperdvac.com) Their journal of researched articles is “Radiogram.”
- MWOTRC (the Metropolitan Washington Old-Time Radio Club) is based in Arlington Virginia. [www.mwotrc.com](http://www.mwotrc.com) Their journal of researched articles is “Radio Recall.” The companion piece is this very one: an e-newsletter called the GRTR (Gather ‘Round the Radio), a personal and whimsical look at the world of nostalgia.

Jack informs us of two stations that broadcast old-time radio shows:

- Steve Darnell in Chicago is still broadcasting OTR shows every Saturday over the Internet at [www.wdcb.org](http://www.wdcb.org)
- WAMU (the American University station) broadcasts “The Big Broadcast,” a three-hour program of OTR every Sunday evening; the shows are archived on the WAMU website: <https://wamu.org/show/the-big-broadcast/>

Joe Webb informs us that the SiriusXM Radio Classics Channel 148 has a good selection of shows, and that it usually ranks in the Sirius Top 10 channels for listenership. Joe writes further that “the SiriusXM Facebook page is full of budding OTR fans, and I do my best to participate in a proactive and educative manner.”

The discussion about websites is headed up by Jim Widner and Jerry Haendiges. It involves sites and domain names, tracking visits and paid renewals which can number in the years. Jim states the “...most of my hits come from the long-running podcast that I had until a couple of years ago but

is still archived on my site.” Jim continues to say that the two continuously long-lasting OTR domain names are his own <https://www.otr.com> and Lou Genco’s: [www.old-time.com](http://www.old-time.com)

#### Where to Purchase or Just Find Fascinating Information

- <https://www.otrcat.com/> Extensive selection, mail, or download. Audio CD, Mp3 or download. I order from this site, in Kansas. Good response with mailing.
- [www.OTRSite.com](http://www.OTRSite.com) Jerry Haendiges’ site; various formats and streaming.
- <https://sites.google.com/view/dr-joes-otr-interviews/home> Joe Webb’s interviews with OTR researchers.
- Joe Webb’s Suspense research page:  
<https://sites.google.com/view/suspense-collectors-companion> is the result of the crowdsourcing of information and tapping into the very many information sites on the Internet.

#### CODA AND CLOSING MUSIC TO NETWORK FEED

Forgive me please if I have (most likely) left out many other OTR sites of information and purchase. I have mentioned here the responses to the “Warren’s Lament” email. I’m still learning; and we have indeed touched on the breadth of interest, research, collecting, and sheer enjoyment.

#### BACK TO THE GARDEN

The Scottish folk-rock band called Belle and Sebastian is still walking along the herbaceous border of melody and insights about life. The Glaswegians are in fine form with this song from 2015, called:

##### Today This Army’s for Peace

Today the wind blows west the heather  
And the broom becalms  
The spirit of a fighting man  
And lays him where his wild spirit belongs.

Beverly is signaling network feed, so thanks to everyone for tuning in! Keep those cards and letters coming! Soup and sandwiches? We'll manage!

Thanks ever,

Mark Anderson

Frederick MD

