

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



THE VOYAGE ACROSS TIME ISSUE

JANUARY 17, 2023

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.

Fred, Beverly, and Bert have carpooled their way north, and they braved the bitter cold to stop in Hazleton at the Poor Cousin’s Bakery.

Fred is piping in a wonderful selection from Yo-Yo Ma and his Silk Road Ensemble; it’s a folk song from Macedonia, called “Sadila Jana,” first heard in 1955 on Radio Skopje. The liner notes tell us that this new arrangement is a

joy. A string trio weaves a delicate realm of sound for the lovely vocals, and “all in turn create a musical holding space for honest and radiant expression.”

We're in the Mud Room sifting through the Dusty Courier Pouch and having carrot cake and Costa Rican coffee.

ON THE AIR

Beverly has signaled network feed; Fred has faded the Silk Road folks.

Hello everyone and welcome to the broadcast!

This is a celebration of sorts because this issue marks the beginning of our 19th year of composing and sending out the Gather 'Round the Radio. In 2005 we began as a sunshine newsletter. During those early years Fred Berney and I shared the writing and the sending. We cobbled it together in haphazard Word format with a sporadic timeline. We developed the idea into the current make-believe GRTR Studio with PDF and all the trappings, and numerous Club members have sent in their profiles. We have enjoyed putting it all together, and we hope that the Club is the better for it.

First of all, we shall tell our listeners about our new Club member, Neal Lavon, from Takoma Park Maryland. Neal sent us a profile of his interests, and Bert will step up to the microphone and read what Neal has sent in:

BERT:

Thanks, Lefty. This is our first reading of the new year, and a good one indeed!

Here is Neal's profile:

Neal Lavon worked in public, commercial and institutional radio for 20 years before joining the Voice of America in 1980. At the Voice, Neal produced, wrote, and hosted panel discussions, documentaries, and live-news coverage on radio and television. He also served three years in Bangkok marketing US government radio and television content to stations across Asia.

He retired in 2014. Now he is engaged in historical research into Voice of America programs from the 1950s.

Neal's current projects include a radio series done by the late Telly Savalas when he worked for the Voice of America in the 1950s. It is called "Telly's Coffeehouse," which VOA entered in the 1952

Peabody Awards. Another series is “Billy Brown’s Pen Pals,” which was an historic and influential VOA broadcast to South Asia.

Since 2005 Neal has been broadcasting baseball for a local collegiate summer league wooden bat team.

He is an audio collector of historic news, sports, commercial, and public affairs programming and has also a vast collection of VOA programs from the 1940s to the present.

Pretty much sums it up, says Neal!

GRTR:

Nicely done, Bert, thanks very much! While we’re getting our next Archival piece ready, Fred is piping in a couple of songs sung by Rosemary Clooney from her album *Jazz Singer*: First we shall hear Cole Porter’s “It’s Bad for Me,” Rosemary Clooney and the Benny Goodman Sextet, 1955. Next, Rosemary sings an Irving Berlin song with the brilliant and timeless lyric: “...you’ll find that you’re / In the rotogravure...”. Name that tune!



ANOTHER PROFILE FROM THE CLUB

GRTR: Bert, go ahead and read the next one! It’s an essay by a new member, Harold Cheetham, from 2021. He talks about OTR in upstate New York.

BERT:

Yes, Harold was quite the champion of the neighborhood, with his broadcasts. Harold writes:

My interest in OTR started in the year 2000. I worked as sales manager for SunRad, an electronics store in my hometown of Sodus, NY.

A friend named Ray told me about the shows and I started listening to a few and it wasn't long before I got hooked on OTR. I set up a Talking House AM transmitter and used it to broadcast OTR. I could broadcast about 2 blocks with it and on the weekends people would pull up in their cars and sit out front or in the parking lot and listen to the shows that I was broadcasting. We developed a great following.

In 2016 I retired from SunRad and since I found that people still wanted to hear OTR I developed first one website and then another.

I am a licensed ham radio operator – W2HJC – for all interested. I am a member of this MWOTRC organization and also SPERDVAC and the Antique Wireless Association.

Every day I do something online or offline to promote the OTR hobby and am trying to get more younger people interested towards the goal that OTR doesn't fade away into the past and that the shows will be continually listened to in the future.

GRTR:

Excellent, Bert, thanks so much, nicely done! Now Beverly has signaled that it's time for music bridge and commercial break.

MUSIC BRIDGE AND COMMERCIAL

Beverly cues us to music, and Fred pipes in the lovely “Knoxville, Summer 1915,” by Samuel Barber, to a text by James Agee. It's precise and evocative of families, neighborhoods, and young adults studying the arts. Here the soloist is soprano Anne-Catherine Gillet, with a chamber orchestra, in Liege, Belgium.

OUR SPONSOR, THE DRAGONS from 2019.

The **Dayton Dragons**, yes! Our team is playing hard but still under .500 win/losses. They travelled to Beloit Wisconsin, where they split a series with the **Beloit Snappers**. Now they return home for more stellar efforts in an

extended home stand against the **Fort Wayne Tin Caps** and the **Lansing Lugnuts**. Great names, and good times in any minor league stadium. The competition is keen, and this a tough schedule for the fiery Dragons.



GRTR: In keeping with the ideas of research and the interests of young people, here is a happy example of that, from an earlier GRTR.

A CONVERGENCE OF RESEARCHERS

It's Beverly's turn to read. So please, Beverly, settle in at the mic and read this piece about the cooperation of researchers. Beverly puts her clipboard on the table and steps to the microphone. From the GRTR March 17, 2017:

BEVERLY:

Thanks, Mark. Here is the story.

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.

Here is 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."

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.

GRTR: Thanks so much, Beverly, nicely done!

SCRIPTS AND BEYOND

Now we may reflect on the Club’s interest in and production of radio scripts, either old-time programs or original scripts written by Club members. Sometimes we would read at a monthly meeting, and the Radio Club Road Show achieved great acclaim with performances in famous venues around the D.C. metro area, and beyond. A sound effects table was established, a sound board was fashioned and microphones were placed, audiences flocked to hear the players and watch the wonderful antics of the people running the SFX table.

The late Chuck Langdon, beloved radio pioneer, spearheaded the efforts of the Club in production and scriptwriting. Chuck wrote an introduction to a play by Edgar Farr Russell. These few words capture the essence of the OTR pursuit.

Beverly will read Chuck’s words:

Introduction to “Kiss From a Little Old Lady”

Welcome to Out of the Past. I’m your host, Chuck Langdon. You are about to experience the excitement shared by millions of people in the 1930s and ‘40s during the Golden Age of Radio. On this program we’re

performing a radio play using the only components possible in the medium of radio: the dialogue, sound effects, music, and your imagination. Our newly written play will feature the music of legendary composer Rex Koury, known to many of you for his music on the radio and television series "Gunsmoke." Mr. Koury created and performed an original score for this production. Now let's listen to a mystery drama just as it may have sounded being broadcast during radio's Golden Age. I'll turn on the old Philco, (*SFX tube radio high-pitch squeal*) let the tubes warm up, and tune in the show. (*cue theme music and Quicksilver production intro*).



WALDEN HUGHES TUNES IN FROM LOS ANGELES



Real people in a fanciful setting, that's what the GRTR Studio is all about. Walden Hughes is well-known in the OTR community, from his place on the West Coast. I fashioned an interview with Walden using an essay that he had sent in. From the GRTR, November 19, 2018:

Bert will step up and read Walden's story.

BERT:

Walden gives us quite an interesting story. Norman Corwin helped keep radio great with topical subjects and great writing.

Here's how Mark put it together.

GRTR:

Can you tell us about how you worked with Norman Corwin?

People in the Club and all over the world were quite thrilled when a documentary about Corwin's career won an Oscar in 2006. You remember, it was called "A Note of Triumph: The Golden Age of Norman Corwin," produced by Eric Simonson. And you wrote in your notes that you had interviewed Norman Corwin several times on Yesterday USA.

WALDEN:

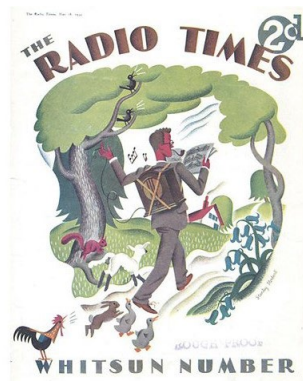
That's right, it was always nice to talk with him. Corwin's last public appearance was at the Grand Wilshire Hotel in May 2011. The Recorded Sound Archivist group asked if I could get Norman Corwin to attend their event. Norman agreed to participate and selected his script "The Undecided Molecule" as the radio play to be re-enacted. Michael Kacey, Norman's business manager, and Norman agreed to direct the show together. We talked about casting, and I suggested Janet Waldo who played Corliss Archer on

“Meet Corliss Archer.” Norman wanted to include Norman Lloyd in the cast. Lloyd was born in 1914 and was part of Orson Welles “Mercury Theater.” He appeared in the first production of “The Undecided Molecule” in 1945. The fact that Lloyd was in the 2011 production was remarkable because of the 66-year span. That production also included Dick Van Patten, Tommy Cook, Ivan Cury, Richard Herd, and Marvin Kaplan. Michael Kacey directed the show and Dr. Michael Biel gave a one-hour talk on Norman’s career. I introduced the cast.

MUSIC BRIDGE AND NETWORK FEED

Beverly is tapping her pencil on her clipboard and looking at the sweep of the clock. Thanks so much to Bert and Fred for digging items up from the Archives. Thanks for tuning in to the show from the Studio down by the creek. The Club will keep on rolling and our closing bridge is “Steamboat,” a slow river song by the Beach Boys, complete with SFX of rushing water and a clanging bell carried away by soaring guitar chords:

The river drifts by in a slow time/ Cloaked in jasmine haze...Oh don’t worry Mr. Fulton, we’ll keep your steamboat rolling...we’ll keep your steamboat rolling...”



Thanks so much for tuning in. Keep those cards and letters coming!

Soup and sandwiches in the Mud Room? But of course!

Mark Anderson