



## **GATHER 'ROUND THE RADIO**

**E-NEWSLETTER FOR THE METROPOLITAN  
WASHINGTON OLD-TIME RADIO CLUB**

**THE GRTR STUDIO EDITION JULY 13, 2016**

**THE AGE OF CHANTICLEER 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.

Chuck and Joanie and I are here with our coffee and Danish in the Mud Room, and we're sorting through the dusty old courier pouch. We hope that you have clicked successfully on the 'attachment' icon and have received this first ever GRTR sent in PDF format. We are of course following in the PDF footsteps of the Club's major publication *Radio Recall*, edited these many years by Jack French. Jack is casting about for someone to take over the editorship of the *RR*. It's a plum volunteer position: a group of astute researchers submitting articles; pertinent books available for review from high-profile publishers; a steady stream of letters of praise and request; a template of your choice; and a Page Eleven space for your own commentary. What more could be better?

### ON THE AIR

Joanie has cued us in from the network feed, and Chuck is piping in a soundtrack piece by Ennio Morricone for the 1980 film "The Blue-eyed Bandit." It's tinged with strains of folklore and might we not imagine the folkloric image of Chanticleer landing on a hillside to preen and challenge; a battle of wits between foes who are by turns able to use guile towards their ends and yet be fooled themselves in a moment's lapse.

## MARTIN GRAMS AND HIS COLORFUL PARADE

Hello everyone, and rest assured that nostalgia champion Martin Grams has been hard at work assembling a stellar cast of celebrities, vendors, and seminar speakers for the September gala in Hunt Valley Maryland known as the Mid-Atlantic Nostalgia Convention. <http://www.midatlanticnostalgiaconvention.com> Go there!

Folks who will be in attendance? Dabney Coleman, Bernie Kopell, John Amos, and Britt Eklund, to name people I have heard of. Among many more, Debra Padget is a recent addition, and Kathy Garver has been doing author appearances for her new book. And a fellow named Kent McCord who was famous for "Adam-12."

Missing that one, well, I lost the Lightning Round, but I did pretty much like "CHiPs" and so I was reminded that there is a poem in the *New Yorker* issue of June 6 & 13, 2016.

It's called "Erik Estrada Defends His Place in the Canon," by J. Estanislao Lopez. It is an amazingly lyrical 19 lines and it encompasses Latino ambition, history, stereotype, and self—realization. The refrain is "back then...back then...back then..." and then a resounding: "Back when I knew what was good for me / The stage ached for my foot to grace it." And Estrada made it, as Lopez writes: "Back then, even my arms had their own scenes / When Hollywood drank the exhaust of my motorcycle."

Around the pivot of the refrain, these lines cut through: "The term 'trailblazer' has been applied," and "Then, I was the question to an answer on 'Jeopardy!' Concluding lines: Back when my father left us – back then, I knew / I'd be a man whose very presence was art." (p. 72)

## THE CONVENTION SCHEDULE

The variety of presentations that Martin has gathered clearly gives pause to the declaration: "The Results Are In: Nostalgia Is Not Mainstream." It's the January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015 entry of Martin's blog. The web-site: <http://www.martingrams.blogspot.com/>

And I wrote it up in the GRTR of January 12, 2015, to wit:

"Martin conducted a poll of folks under the age of 25, by handing out a page of questions in various public places: a mall, and a community college, for example. And he assiduously recorded all the answers, or lack of answers.

Examples: "Someone my grandmother told me about."

"Someone my mother dated."

We lose when Buster Keaton goes up against Batman; or if Jack Benny has to go three rounds with Ironman. And the release of films helps in recognition of characters or actors. Martin has some excellent, well-considered conclusions; it's worth going to his blog."

From Martin's list of presentations here is a very succinct write-up of the challenges – artistic and business related – during the years of radio and early TV:

Saturday 10 AM: Tallulah Bankhead and "The Big Show."

The untold story behind the most prestigious radio program on NBC. After Jack Benny (among other top-rated comedians) switched to CBS through landmark business deals, what is now affectionately called "the talent raids," NBC threw money into a Sunday-night colossus: \$300 a minute by one estimate. A vast budget for a dying medium that was making way for television, soon to be considered prime real-estate. THE BIG SHOW was NBC's final attempt to combat a growing threat of television... and doubled as competition against Jack Benny, who's program aired over the competing network at the same time. Yes, NBC made a deliberate attempt to kill the comedian's career, purely out of spite. Tallulah Bankhead, stage and screen actress, was hired as emcee for these broadcasts, following the network's failure to hire Bette Davis and Henry Fonda for the job. Biographies have been written about Bankhead but this aspect of her career, from mike fright, her radio debut in London, and her attempt to back out of the NBC deal, will all be documented. This is one of those examples where a subject that might be casually interesting will become fascinating within minutes.

Then stay around to round out your morning with Jack French's presentation on "The History of Sound Effects," and the MWOTRC meeting and old-time radio script reading.

#### COMMERCIAL AND MUSIC BRIDGE

Joanie has her eye on the clock and she's tapping her pencil on her clipboard. And indeed we continue to love our sponsor, The Dayton Dragons baseball team. What's to say about a team that lost 50 games before they won 30. No matter, it's developmental level! These are good ball players who came up the right way, with good coaching and fundamentals. In many ways it is truly the luck of the draw: if a scout for the Phillies saw a prospect, good; the Tigers scout may have found a young fellow a bit slower and

signed him. When they play against each other, the proof will be on display. Hope springs eternal.

Take a look at the Clint Eastwood film "Trouble With the Curve," which is clearly made by people who love baseball and the scouting life. Amy Adams, Justin Timberlake, John Goodman, Matthew Lillard – they all talk baseball and the nuances of judging talent. It goes beyond statistics and gets to the heart of hope: will this player develop? We've got A-level stars taking it easy with a stilted script, on location in the sandy pines country of North Carolina.

There is, by the way, a college team in South Carolina which could give the Dragons a tough time on the diamond. Coastal Carolina University in Conway South Carolina recently won the College World Series, beating the University of Arizona Wildcats, two games to one. The Coastal Carolina's team name? The Chanticleers! Legendary!

### BRIDGE

Our long-time favorite Scottish folk group "Belle and Sebastian" sings "I Took a Long Hard Look," a ballad about the appeal, nay, the obsession with style and pop culture in from their youth: "Tell me what's my situation / I saw the film, I read the book / I got the haircut, that's all it took."

Coda: "'Twas exciting and enlightening / Reverberating through my dreams / Goodbye to reality / And set a course for wayward schemes."

### CLARK GREGG

This actor is Everyman and he plays the part to perfection. With a plain face, a little-boy haircut and faint smile, he can play a neighbor, a business man, a lawyer, in a crime story or in domestic turmoil. He was in the wonderful David Mamet film "State and Main." He is his own boss in "Trust Me" (2013) which he wrote and directed.

His character is an agent who had success as a child star and then got left by the wayside. He tells his story to his neighbor (Amanda Peet) and only briefly: His big chance (to have second-billing to Jan Michael Vincent) fell through, so he "has wandered around this town like a ghost for the past thirty years." He tries to be ruthless for his child actor clients but is forever outdone in quick brutal art-of-the-deal dialogue with Allison Janney, Felicity Huffman, and Sam Rockwell. A young client of his says, "Ang Lee, is he important?" He can't land her the part. His righteous if bewildered vision (butterflies wafting across a vacant lot) is his only solace and as his end draws nigh he sprouts wings.

## DOCTORED COPY

No folks, we're not leaving radio by the wayside. Jack French has sent in a timely article about quack doctors in radio, and a recently-released documentary film on the subject. Virility is just a short step away, was the promise, vile though the process of achieving it may be.

Here's a lead-up song by the venerable Australian troubadour Mark Knopfler. It's about the meek little guy who plays guitar to get the public in, and handles the cash for the bottles for the medicine show man. People don't have to come around, he sings, but they want something to believe in. "Tastes like paraffin, it's mostly alcohol," but the patter is: "Miracles don't often fall from the sky / Raise your glass to the doctor / Who is a stand up guy."

Jack writes, with his typically wry humor:

There were several medical quacks on the air during the early days of the Golden Age of Radio, including Norman "TNT" Baker, Dr. Ruth Drown, John "Goat Gland" Brinkley, and Curtis Springer. But Brinkley is the first one we've heard of to be the subject of a modern documentary, a 79-minute movie just released July 1, 2016. Film-maker Penny Lane uses video footage, audio clips, still photos, animation, and voice-over narration to tell the historical tale of this medical charlatan who flim-flammed a nation.

The voice of John Romulus Brinkley began on radio station KFKB (appropriately) on April Fool's Day, 1930. Armed with nothing but some diploma-mill degrees and a ton of bombastic cleverness, over a 16-year period, he convinced nearly 5,000 radio listeners to cure their impotence by paying him \$ 750 to implant goat glands in their private parts. He was an ingenious demagogue with bold insight into the desires and stupidity of the average American male.

Born in 1885 in North Carolina, raised in poverty, he married a backwoods girl and the two traveled the U.S., with John acquiring "medical" degrees from various uncredited venues, including the "Eclectic Medical University of Kansas City." At times he preached herbal medicine and other times termed himself an "Electro-medic Specialist." Eventually his wife divorced him and left with their three young daughters. Unbowed, he found another woman a few months later in Memphis, married her and then they skipped out of town after he passed some bad checks.

By 1918, he had become famous in northern Kansas for his 50 bed hospital that specialized in transplanting goat glands to impotent men and supposedly rejuvenating their sexual prowess. When he took to radio in 1930, he was diagnosing problems on the air which were sent to him in letters. He had taken most typical medicines and supplements and replaced their names with numbers. So crushed aspirin became "2" and castor oil was "17". On one program, he diagnosed 44 different medical problems

from listeners and gave advice as to the cure, by purchasing and consuming his recommended products. He claimed cures for everything from ingrown toe nails to cancer and the money rolled in from radio listeners. At one point he was so popular, he ran for governor of Kansas, but lost in a close race. Over the decades his radio profits netted him over \$ 10 million, which would be an astronomical amount in today's currency.

Opposed by dozens of agencies, both government and civilian, he was finally drummed off the air. But he promptly moved to Mexico, set up his own powerful radio station and was back in business. But he did not last there either and after a few years, Mexico closed down his station for violating medical advertisement laws. Brinkley moved to Del Rio, Texas and landed back on his feet, being elected president of the Rotary Club. But the AMA continued to challenge him and later several former patients sued him for malpractice. Despite his popularity on the air, he kept losing court battles...eventually leading to bankruptcy in 1941. He died of a heart attack in 1942 at the age of 57.

The independent motion picture depicting his colorful life is entitled "Nuts!" and it is uncertain as to whether this relates to Brinkley's mental stability or the operation he performed on hundreds of men. Despite its acclaim at the Sundance Film Festival, the picture will have a very limited distribution and will probably be confined to just cinema arts screenings in the big cities. For example, in Washington, DC area, it will only be shown at the AFI Silver Theater in downtown Silver Spring, MD.

### MUSIC TO NETWORK FEED

Thanks for tuning in folks; we hope you like the PDF. Keep those cards and letters coming! Listen to old-time radio when you can; and new-time shows when you find them!

<http://www.prx.org> Public Radio Exchange has lots of new-time radio programs.

Listen to Terry Gross and her radio show "Fresh Air," on various NPR stations; great interviews.

Send me your personal essays, your life in the entertainment world!

Soup and sandwiches in the Mud Room? Like wow!

Thanks ever,

Mark A.

Carlisle PA

