

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



THE FULL SAIL ISSUE
MARCH 10, 2022

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.

The title for this issue is not quite the stirring opening to an episode of “The Scarlet Queen,” but we can pretend that we hear the captain’s cry and feel the salt spray in our faces because we’re going to drop anchor alongside the GRTR Archive Archipelago.

Bert and Beverly are looking over their notes at their home down the valley and Fred has got his sound board going and is piping in a worldview song called “When the Chips Are Down” from the hit Broadway musical *Hadestown*. Beverly signals and Fred fades the music to network cue.

ON THE AIR

Hello everyone and welcome to the broadcast! No more icy roads but keep that heavy coat nearby in case low temperatures come calling again. We will feature articles about books and music; and we’ll play a recorded phone interview with Jack French who will tell us about the dispersal of the Club’s Print Library.

The street scene photo is from my trip to Minneapolis in 2012 to attend a baseball conference at a big hotel not far from the baseball stadium downtown. I got away to attend the musical “Roman Holiday” at the Guthrie Theatre. I unlocked a city bike and rode the few blocks to the theatre.

In keeping with my many travels, we will dip into the Archives to revisit an afternoon of string band music at a library in Durham North Carolina. First we will look at another archival GRTR which featured the Club’s print library from years ago. Then we’ll play a recorded phone interview with Jack French who will tell us about the dispersal of the Club’s Print Library.



From the GRTR issue 10/8/2012

Books, Books, Glorious Books!

Mark and Marsha Bush will have center stage for the evening's program. They will tell us about the Club's marvelous and extensive collection of books, some 220 in number, and all available for rental. The selection of gems that the Bushes will bring to the meeting will launch an in-depth discussion about old-time radio, biography, electronics, the entertainment industry, U.S. history, and where the studios were in Manhattan. Imagine Gildersleeve saying, "Leroy, it's important and somehow enlightening to read about what you listen to..." There you have the idea behind the Print Library. Check out a few of the books, from the table, or from the List of Titles. The fee is modest, and in this economy, circulation stats are kind of down. Everyone will find a favorite, and perhaps Mark and Marsha will have a few acquisition stories, like, um, finding a box of books on the doorstep; or maybe meeting a guy under a streetlamp and slipping him a fiver for a book on farm broadcasting. The Bushes are famous for their many presentations over the years. In recent memory, a sound effects demonstration, and a history of Superman. It should be a great program.

Jack French on the Phone

February the 12th was the final day of the Club's print library dispersal. On that very day I called Jack, and Fred transcribed the call. It's a wonderful update on the Club in these current days of Zoom and illness and stress.

Here's the interview, 2/12/22.

GRTR:

Jack! Good to hear your voice! I guess you've been busy these days monitoring the book dispersal. Did you have any visitors this morning?

JACK:

Hi Mark, yup, I'm just now waving good-bye to Martin and Michelle Grams, who were driving away to Pennsylvania with the remains of the library's holdings. So there they go....about 200 books, magazines, and other OTR materials. Martin will make them a significant part of the fund raiser for St. Jude's Children's Hospital which will be sponsored by his Mid-Atlantic Nostalgia Convention this September.

GRTR:

Well, it was a long process wasn't it? Didn't this start back in November when Mark Bush took that nasty fall and was hospitalized?

JACK:

That's right and things went downhill fast. His injured arm required no surgery but a pre-existing condition in his heel got worse...in fact Mark and Marsha spent the week of Thanksgiving and their wedding anniversary under doctors' care away from home.

GRTR:

As I understand it, our club's large library was taking up a lot of space in their basement.....and it had to be removed in view of the substantial remodeling of their house to make it wheelchair accessible before Mark's return.

JACK:

Correct, and it was time to give up the library anyway; despite the Bush's best efforts, club rentals had trickled off to almost nothing the last four years. The club's officers made a decision to disburse the library to any local members who wanted any of the 300 some books.

GRTR:

But there were several other solutions raised. Rob Farr suggested we donate all the materials to the Library of American Broadcasting (LAB) at the University of Maryland. And former club president Bert Rude said we should consider selling the entire library to Second Story Books, a local resale venue. How'd that work out?

JACK:

Zip...zero...nada. LAB had duplicates of almost everything we had. Second Story was not interested either, as our collection was “too specialized” with a very narrow customer appeal.

GRTR:

But you still had to get the entire collection out of the Bush’s basement and I imagine time was getting short. What happened next?

JACK:

Moving the books temporarily to a local storage rental unit was not feasible. Note only are they expensive, but members would have limited access to them when we declared our give-away.

GRTR:

Ah-hah! And that’s when your lovely wife stepped in?

JACK:

Yes, Cathy raised her hand and told the club “Just move them to my piano studio and we’ll disburse them to any club members who show up.” To sweeten the offer, she bought 20 Banker Boxes and donated them to the club.

GRTR:

Sounds great! So all the club members had to do was pack ‘em up and transport ‘em to your house. How hard could that be?

JACK:

Pretty hard, as it turned out. With a median age of 67 among our membership, we have mighty few members who can carry a heavy box of books up a stairway and out the door to a waiting vehicle.

GRTR:

I saw Wendy Wilmer’s repeated email calls for volunteers in late December and early January. And I know a few younger members like Rebecca Jones, Denis Roma, and Sally Stephens stepped up to the plate.

JACK:

They did, and Cathy Makara volunteered herself and her husband too. Fortunately, President Wendy was unwilling to put that load on just their shoulders so she finally just called a professional moving company to handle the entire job. They took less than two hours on January 20th for all the packing, then transporting the load from Alexandria to Fairfax, and unloading it in Cathy's studio. It cost a little over 600 bucks and it was the best investment the club had made in a long time.

GRTR:

I saw your email invitation to local members offering the books for free. If memory serves, it was something like "Show up masked and fill up your shopping bags" Were you able to accommodate the multitudes?

JACK:

We actually had few takers....Phil Kania, Edgar Russell, Denis Roma, Sally Stephens, Cathy Makara, Lawrence Kandrach...that's about it. All in all, we still had over 200 books, etc. to give away. When our deadline expired on February 12th, Cathy and I were prepared to start trucking around the county, donating all the materials to local libraries for their used book sales. But, of course, Martin Grams saved us all that trouble. He said he'd take whatever was left over....and he did.

GRTR:

What a wonderful turn of events! It was a satisfying end to a great OTR archival collection.....



MUSIC BRIDGE AND COMMERCIAL



The Dayton Dragons aren't answering their phones these days, as the baseball talks have dragged on: billionaire owners trading barbs and smirks with millionaire players and their agents.

Fred had cued up John Fogerty's rousing song called "Centerfield" with the ago-old plea: "Put me in coach, I'm ready to play!"

The Sarnoff Museum outside Trenton says it all: Baseball has become a museum piece.

MUSIC FROM THE GRTR ARCHIVES

GRTR 5/5/2013 from Raleigh NC

Music Forever New

Call it string band music, folk-rock, Americana, bluegrass, or alt-country, there's a movement afoot to keep soulful music alive and vital. A while back I heard a family of musicians play on a Sunday afternoon at a public library over in Durham. Two brothers, a cousin, and a friend played wonderfully, ranging from folk to bluegrass to swinging Texas ballads. They were introduced by a musician-scholar friend of theirs, and the stories ranged from the nearby roadhouse where their father and uncles used to play, to how songs are found, learned, or passed along. The room was packed, I was among the affable family and friends. At one point the cousin fiddler held up his fiddle, and we heard how it had been handed down in the family since the early 1900s. There were

cookies and punch on the table, and a few of their CDs. Heartfelt and down home, it was a wonderful afternoon.

A singer-songwriter named Catherine Irwin writes modern ballads with a refreshingly minimalist approach that harks back to old-style mountain music. The YouTube videos I have seen were filmed in small venues; Irwin and maybe two other string players standing close to a wall, or in a nook near the door. The force of the music remained undeniable. The CD of Irwin's that I have was recorded in Asheville NC, and she titled it "Cut Yourself a Switch." Her song "Hex" has been covered by alt-country powerhouse singer-songwriter Neko Case. It's mournful and turns edgy, a small-town Gothic break-up song with the bite of whatever might be howling in the night-time wind. Irwin herself covers the likes of Roger Miller and A. P. Carter, and the legendary title, "I'm the Only Hell My Momma Ever Raised."

WOODY GUTHRIE AT THE MORGAN

Turning now to a higher and more exalted level of Archives, this is from the Morgan Library newsletter:

Woody Guthrie: People Are the Song



Join Morgan Docents for an interactive visual tour of the exhibition *Woody Guthrie: People Are the Song*. Participants will view (and hear!) highlights from the exhibition that tell the

story of this great American troubadour and writer who authored more than three thousand folk songs and remains one of the most influential songwriters and recording artists in American history. The exhibit features an extraordinary selection of instruments, manuscripts, photographs, books, art, and audio-visual media that reflect the immense creativity of the man whose work maintains vital relevance in today's world.

MUSIC BRIDGE AND NETWORK FEED

Fred is piping in some fine music from the traditions of Ireland.

Paddy Moloney and The Chieftains have been making great music for years; and countless musicians have played with them, such as Kate and Anna McGarrigle (from 1991), Jackson Browne, and some cool local talent called The Wren Brothers. Fred is piping in a medley of tunes done up with a tin whistle, accordion, Northumbrian pipes, and vocals calling out dance steps.



Beverly is tapping her pencil on her clipboard as the clock sweeps toward network feed. Good on 'ya, everyone, keep those cards and letters coming!

The Studio will broadcast next time from Pennsylvania; the Susquehanna Valley beckons once again!

Thanks ever,

Mark Anderson

Frederick Maryland