

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



**Pantomime**

This evening at 7.30 listeners will hear part of the pantomime *Red Riding Hood* from the stage of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden

**Circus Exchange**

At 8.15 the microphone will visit the circuses at Olympia and Royal Agricultural Hall

THE DEXTERITY OF SOUND ISSUE  
MAY 5, 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.

It's a quiet day along the creek, but a couple of days ago the wind was howling strong along the Catoctin Ridge. I zipped up my jacket and took a walk anyway. The Studio team is in touch and ready to broadcast. Bert and Beverly have

their checklist and are eyeing the clock. Fred has got the old sound board past its squawks and hums; and he's piping in an orchestral piece called "On the Dominant Divide" by the modernist American composer John Adams. It has an old-time feel to it with piano, winds, and vocals all clanging and startling and arresting to the listener. It's part of his piece "Grand Pianola Music". I gulped my tea and pulled up my chair as Beverly signals network feed.

### ON THE AIR

Hello everyone and welcome to the broadcast. Thanks for tuning in! I'm not yet ready for eat-in restaurant dining, but the studio's Mud Room is mine alone, so I've had my sandwich and pastry and now I'm looking over the contents of the dusty old Courier Pouch. Many good items, including a coupon from Kohl's.

Later in the broadcast I will talk on the phone with Joanie Leonard, an astute lady who has listened to radio programs virtually all her life. We know she's well-versed in OTR because these past months she has attended and commented at our Club meetings on Zoom, by way of her preferred telephone dial-in. Also, we shall applaud Larry Maupin for his work as the new editor of the Club's *Radio Recall* journal. He has elicited responses from various OTR researchers; and we will feature them in a "Favorite Shows" segment. That goes hand-in-hand with a new Club member's contribution of his explorations in the world of OTR.

### HAROLD CHEETHAM, PIONEER OF NEIGHBORHOOD BROADCASTING

Harold is a new member of the MWOTRC, and he responded to my GRTR welcome message with a reply about his interests in shows and radio. He hails from upstate New York, and I've sent a Telex of his essay to Bert, who is ready to read it from his front room:

GRTR:

Hello Bert, you have in-hand the essay by Harold Cheetham. He was quite the champion of the neighborhood, once upon a time!

BERT:

Yes, indeed, an interesting piece! Harold writes as follows:

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.

The store had been bought in 1972 by Ray Seppeler when he moved to New York. His first interest had come early in life in Ohio where his father had run a radio shop.

Here is the link to more info on that store and its history –  
[www.http://sunshinemuseum.org](http://sunshinemuseum.org)

Ray showed me the old radio shows he had collected. 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 having found that people still wanted to hear OTR I developed first one website and then another.

I now broadcast on Spreaker – [Harold's Old Time Radio](#), and iTunes and iheart Radio and others. I have a Facebook page and try to draw in people that way.

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 A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR

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 for the lovely vocals, and "... all in turn create a musical holding space for honest and radiant expression."



THE DRAGONS HEAD NORTH TO CATCH THE LOONS

To open the season this week the Dragons will travel to Midland, Michigan to play against the Great Lakes Loons. Tune in at 980 AM for all the action!

A WORD FROM LARRY MAUPIN, NEW RADIO RECALL EDITOR

Larry has been busy these past weeks getting in touch with OTR enthusiasts, to learn about their research and their favorite shows. Michael Hingson of Victorville California has written up a nice profile of shows. He also gives us a glimpse of his own years in broadcasting, from the '60s and '70s.

Michael's first favorite is a scary story: "The House in Cypress Canyon," an offering on *Suspense*, December 5, 1946, with Robert Taylor and Howard Duff. He writes: "As much as I like "Three Skeleton Key" I think this one is scarier as it leaves a bit more to the imagination. The end also has a wonderful twist that adds to the terror."

Michael's next favorite series is *Command Performance*, and the show he chooses has this famously long title: "Dick Tracy in b-Flat: Or, for Goodness Sake, Isn't He Ever to Marry Tess Trueheart?"

Michael writes:

It aired on February 5, 1945, starring a bunch of the most suspicious characters ever to appear on Radio, including Bing (Dick Tracy) Crosby; Bob (Flat Top) Hope; Dinah (Tess Trueheart) Shore; Jimmy (The Mole) Durante; Frank (Shaky) Sinatra, and many others.

Each week *Command Performance* featured radio stars for "our men and women overseas."

When I did radio in the late '60s and '70s this was always one of the shows I featured. I have never heard a funnier show. And I hope to get back to doing radio again, on the 'Net.

John Dunning backs up Michael's enthusiasm with full-page description of *Command Performance* in his *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Dunning writes that the show ran from 1943 to 1946; the stars performed for free; it was produced by the War Department for direct shortwave transmission. Requests poured in, for example, an ambient sound recording of birds chirping in the trees of a GI's

home in Indiana; and a request that "...Charles Laughton instruct Donald Duck in the finer points of elocution." A stellar Dunning quote: "The bizarre fed upon itself..."

Let's hope that Larry Maupin will continue to include "Favorite Shows" in future issues of *Radio Recall!*

#### JOANIE LEONARD ON THE PHONE

Beverly has given the cue that we have an excellent phone connection with Joanie Leonard who will share with us her experiences with life as she knows it, including talking books and old-time radio shows.

GRTR

Hello Joanie, nice to hear your voice! Beverly has gotten us a good connection!

JOANIE

Yes, Mark, thanks! I'm resting easy here; it's a good time to talk.

GRTR

I'm so glad that you got a phone connection to our Club meetings on Zoom!

JOANIE

I'm pleased, too; and we can give a shout-out to Club member Melanie Aultman who helped me figure it out.

GRTR

That's great; and I understand that your most recent contact with the Club was early in 2021 with the West Coast contingent, Walden Hughes and John and Larry Gassman. They featured you on their Yesterday USA broadcast. So that was an East coast, West coast hookup, right?

JOANIE

Yes, I was happy to talk with them. But you know what, the time zone difference was something else indeed! For them it was early evening, but I had to be ready at 10:30 at night! And we talked and they had to get things cued up and all. Honestly, I was awake until 5 o'clock in the morning, Eastern time!

GRTR

But it was fun, though, I imagine.

JOANIE

Oh, yes, it was wonderful. I ended up talking a blue streak and I was so amazed and gratified actually that so many people called in!

GRTR

Really nice! You know, Walden and I talked on the phone for the GRTR Studio broadcast on November 19, 2018 – real nostalgia stuff, and he talked a bit about producing a radio script at the Oceanside Library there in LA. It was “The Maltese Falcon,” so he was able to get a couple of Hollywood theater people to read parts. So, you and Walden, what kinds of shows did you talk about?

JOANIE

Oh goodness! Popular ones, “Escape,” surely, and others. Too numerous to mention, I think the saying goes.

GRTR

Well, let's go to your notes that you sent me. You were a great fan of the daytime soaps back when you were in school. Can you tell us a bit about those?

JOANIE

Oh, I loved the soaps! Sometimes I would say I was sick so I could stay home from school and listen; I liked Helen Trent, and Young Doctor Malone, and one called, I think, Aunt Jenny's Real-Life Story.

GRTR

And you mentioned a show from early Sunday mornings, called "Carnival of Books."

JOANIE

Oh, yes, I always loved books. I was about 10 years old when would listen to that, 7:30 Sunday mornings. My junior high teacher got me into that. In fact my parents always encouraged me to try harder, be self-sufficient. My Mom would say, go out and play! We had a sandbox and kids would come over. I would go out, but I didn't like having to miss a program on the radio. So finally my Dad found an electrical outlet in the garage, so then I could plug in the radio and listen in the yard.

GRTR

It's good that you had such encouragement. As a baby you were in the hospital for a long time.

JOANIE

Yes, I was premature, and my parents told me I was there a long time. I pulled through, but I lost my sight.

GRTR

That's the most difficult thing to overcome, right? You've been a fighter from early in your life.

JOANIE

Yes, but I was also a crier, my parents told me. When I was a toddler, they got me to stop crying one time when they put a radio

beside me, and I responded to the sound, whatever sound it was. They told me I quieted right down. And they told me that later on I was in my crib and the radio was on and it was President Roosevelt making a speech. And when the people started clapping, I put my hands together and clapped right along with them!

GRTR

And it was radio for you from then on! Did you have favorites, and did you go in for premiums for one show or another?

JOANIE

Can't remember if they had premiums but I listened a lot to Voice of Firestone, The Railroad Hour, and one called The Magic Key, with Milton Cross way back in the '30s. I still remember Curley Bradley and Tom Mix. I was lucky with premiums, mostly because my Dad liked cereal. He would eat box after box, day after day! So I got all kinds of trinkets and the like.

GRTR

Imagine that! You were tuned into the different ways that sound was in the world and you that you went with it. That and your love of books led you to libraries and learning to read Braille, and then the Talking Books program from the Library of Congress.

JOANIE

Those recordings were wonderful, but so cumbersome! There was a special machine provided, and 15 minutes per disc, there could be 30 discs delivered in those cases. But after that, along came cassettes as the technology improved. My son and I would listen to recorded books together. But you know what I loved about going to the library, when my mother would take me? The card catalog, you remember the wooden cabinets with the sliding drawers of cards. Well that was so tactile for me, thumbing through the cards.

GRTR

Nice, those memories, aren't they? And you made your way through college; were there people there to help you along?

JOANIE

Yes, I went to Washington College in Chestertown Maryland. It was great. No special program for the blind, but my fellow students were so helpful! I had some grant money to pay them for reading my assignments to me, but some friends wouldn't take the money; they just liked helping me out.

GRTR

Well, Joanie, this has been fantastic! I'm sure that you're still listening to shows and music and keeping up with friends. Thanks for your time!

JOANIE

Thanks, Mark. Very nice talking with you. Take care, bye!

### MUSIC BRIDGE AND "BLINDNESS" ON BROADWAY

Fred is piping in an encore selection from the Silk Road Ensemble 2016 album: *Sing Me Home*. It's an arrangement of two folk songs from a fishing village in northern Japan, being a conversation between a grandmother and a fisherman, the melodies intertwining between a children's game and a rough day in a fishing boat offshore. The composer's notes: "Just as the river bends and turns, we emerge and sail on the open ocean."

A recent issue of *The New Yorker* has an excellent article about a play in a theater on Broadway. It's not Zoom, there are no actors, there is no physical set, but an audience of a few people – checked for COVID at the door, and masked – was allowed into the space. The play is an adaptation of a novel called *Blindness* by the Portuguese writer Jose Saramago. He wrote it in 1997

and the theme is how a society deals with an insidious and spreading epidemic. This one that Saramago conjures up, is human blindness. The narrator is the veteran actor Juliet Stevenson in full voice; the audience hears her chilling rendition of plot and emotion on a recording. The set is a series of intersecting pillars of pure green neon light. Vinson Cunningham's article ("Light of Day," April 19, 2021, p. 72-73) explores every facet of the production and reminds us of our society's past few months of coping with a pandemic and finding new ways of creativity. "There are outbursts of violence and long negotiations over food...". There is in the script a downpour of rain. The "lush rain thrills Stevenson the Storyteller and reminds her of a small, old thing: washing clothes."

Cunningham describes the sound patterns:

The 3-D audio, designed by Ben and Max Ringham, is the real astonishment of the show. It reveals sound – echoes and close timbres; big, panoramic bangs – as an infinitely malleable tool for sculpting dramatic landscapes. Here, sound design is also set design. Sometimes Stevenson sounds incredibly close, a murmur at the ear that made my skin shiver. At other times, her voice – as well as frantic footsteps, and disorienting rounds of gunfire – seems to echo around the room at an uneasy distance. The sound design, which makes proximity an almost tangible material, subtly underlines our lingering social worry: Exactly how far from one another are we? Are we safe?

#### MUSIC CODA AND NETWORK FEED

The sad and soothing music by Nino Rota for Federico Fellini's film "La Strada" takes us to network feed. Beverly taps her clipboard. Thanks everyone for tuning in. Keep those cards and letters coming! Soup and sandwiches this afternoon? We'll manage! Thanks ever,

Mark Anderson