

GATHER 'ROUND THE RADIO  
E-NEWSLETTER FOR THE METROPOLITAN  
WASHINGTON OLD-TIME RADIO CLUB  
THE GRTR STUDIO EDITION  
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THE VOICES OF TENNYSON 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. 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 cold-snap has settled in. Frosty lawns in the morning and a chill wind sweeping up the valley make us bundle up and breath deep. The creek out back is scattered with leaves which catch the sunlight. Chuck has fired up the boiler in the studio, and he has tamed the squawks and hums of the old soundboard. He’s piping in some luxurious big band music, Nelson Riddle

style. Joanie, Chuck and myself are in the Mud Room, enjoying coffee and scones with our guest: friend of the Club and pillar of the OTR community, Jack French, who is just now telling us how at-home he feels in a studio. We are pleased beyond words that Jack has made the trip. He and Chuck and Joanie carpoled up Route 15 this morning, crossing the Potomac on the narrow iron bridge at Point of Rocks; and they stopped in the storied town of Frederick to walk a bit and dip into our favorite bakery.

Joanie is watching the clock as it sweeps towards network feed. We'll have a good talk with Jack, and further, we will consider how vocal performance is engaging and memorable, focusing on literary recitals of words and music, bringing to light a lesser known text. Jack's in good voice, so here we go.

#### ON THE AIR

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the broadcast! Thanks for tuning in. Chuck is piping in a favorite swing era tune, "Just in Time," this rendition done up in Dean Martin's way: "...I was lost / the losing dice were tossed / My bridges all were crossed..." and here, folks, is our guest and man of the hour, writer, actor, mentor to us all; he's revered far and wide, and he aces the CryptoQuote every day, settling in at the microphone, Jack French!

JACK: Thanks, Lefty, nice to be here! I finally get to see the place we've all heard about, down the woodsy path, broadcasting from the mists down by the creek.

GRTR: We try and keep it going, for sure. When I opened the dusty courier pouch and found the profile you had written for us, I knew a visit was in order! But first I want to give our listeners a bit of a quiz: What do the names Agatha Christie, Parley Baer, and Stan Cawelti have in common?

*(Joanie steps up to the microphone).*

JOANIE: I know that one! The phones won't exactly be lighting up, so I'll go ahead. They are the names of awards bestowed upon Jack over the years!

GRTR: Excellent! Explain a bit for our listeners.

JOANIE: Well, Jack was a winner of the "Stan Cawelti" award in the early years of the Club. And let's see, in 2004, the Malice Domestic Society of Crime Writers awarded Jack the "Agatha" award at their convention for Best Non-Fiction Work, for Jack's book *Private Eyelashes: Radio's Lady Detectives* (BearManor Media 2004). The award is an embossed ceramic teapot. And then in 2015 the people of the Mid-Atlantic Nostalgia Convention gave their Parley Baer Award to Jack. The inscription, it says here, is for: His Continued Exemplary Efforts in Supporting the Preservation and Enjoyment of Radio History, given to Jack at the convention, September 19, 2015.

JACK: Enough! Enough! Much obliged, ma'am, You're very kind.

GRTR: What better time for such accolades, than on the air? Plus, you've got plenty to tell about what you've been up to over the years; your travels, people you've met, what you have researched and written. There's a couple of watershed moments where your pursuit of audio programs involved a bit of luck. How about we start with the story of how persistence helped you strike gold in St. Louis.

JACK: First, my listening has spanned decades. I was born in 1936. So, my childhood and college years were filled with pleasant listening to standard favorite shows of the golden age, with family, and into my college years. When the curtain dropped on radio shows in the 60s, it wasn't until 1972 that my interest picked up again. I had been in the Navy and by that time I was working for the FBI, as a supervisor in their St. Louis office. St. Louis, you might recognize, was the headquarters of Ralston Purina. My secretary knew about my love of OTR, so she gave me as a birthday present a record album of four 15-minute kids' adventure shows, including *Tom Mix* and *Superman*. I was delighted since I had no idea that these shows were still available in audio form. I thought perhaps

there were some OTR groups that might have more of these recordings that I could obtain. I went to the local library and examined the “Encyclopedia of Organizations” and under the category “old time radio groups” they listed only two: North American Radio Archives (NARA) in L.A. and the OTR club of Buffalo. I flipped a coin and thus joined NARA.

GRTR: Amazing! What a good lead you got! But finding shows to collect was still a bit of a chore, right?

JACK: Yes, and about this time I was beginning seriously research OTR independently. So, I wanted to collect! At that time clubs only dealt in reel-to-reel, which members rented from the club. This was rather unsatisfactory since you could only listen to the tapes.....you couldn't make copies unless you had two machines and they were not cheap. I was unwilling to purchase a second one, so I was at a bit of an impasse.

GRTR: Innovations were being made, though; audio cassettes?

JACK: Quite the new thing! A few years later, NARA switched to cassettes. From then on, my collection expanded rapidly.

GRTR: And your research, too.

JACK: I knew that Ralston Purina sponsored the *Tom Mix* radio show from 1939 to 1950 and of course, the Ralston headquarters had always been in St. Louis. On my lunch hour I walked over to their headquarters and was surprised to learn how little they actually knew about “their” program. They caused my first big “Ah-hah” moment in OTR research, pointing out that everything on the *Tom Mix* program was done by their advertising company. And my luck held! The advertising firm, Gardner Advertising Company was not only in St. Louis, but the advertising rep who oversaw the radio show, Charlie Claggett, was still employed there.

GRTR: Another good lead, and getting in some walking, too.

JACK: I got an appointment with Claggett, a grey haired senior executive with an astute memory. I had jotted down a few questions. We talked for about a half hour before I asked Question Number 1: "So, do you have any audio copies?" Answer: Nope, not a one. Question Number 2: "Do you have any of the old premiums?" Answer: Nope; gave 'em all away to the grandkids years ago. Question Number 3: "Do you have any of the scripts?" Answer: "I saved every one and my old office was filled on three sides with director's copies of every episode." (*Hurrah! I shouted silently.*)

Claggett continued: "Trouble is, when we moved to this new office space three weeks ago Gardner hired an outside firm to do the moving over the weekend. They were given clear instructions as to what was to go to the new office and what could be discarded. Some nincompoop misread our instructions and my almost-twenty years of *Tom Mix* scripts went to a landfill." (*Sound of my heart dropping into my shoes.*)

GRTR: Goodness what a set-back, so close!

JACK: Them's the breaks, son. But Charlie was still a treasure trove of details on the *Tom Mix* series, and I obtained a lot of information in a series of interviews with him. Then I wrote up these insights in the newsletter of the club I had recently joined: the *NARA News*. After that I continued my independent research on more of my favorite programs including *Bobby Benson*, shows with an Royal Canadian Mounted Police hero, *Sherlock Holmes*, and any shows that featured a girl detective. When I stumbled across a *Candy Matson* episode in the mid-80s, I began to focus on that series also.

GRTR: That's cool. And about your early club, the NARA and their newsletter. They must have liked your style because you edited their newsletter for, like, 14 years!

JACK: Yes, those were good years. The *NARA News* came out only four times a year, and there were 64 pages I had to fill! I wrote at least half of each issue, under my name and various pen-names. I was doing a lot of OTR research and writing. And after I joined MWOTRC when it was formed in 1984, I later edited its journal, RADIO RECALL for about a quarter of a century. Now that Martin Grams, Jr. has taken over the reins from me, I can concentrate on more OTR research and writing.

GRTR: And we can point to the upswing these days in radio show presentations: evenings of OTR shows with full sound and costume; and new-time scripts being written as well. The Club is doing well in that regard, right? Word has it that you wrote an original script based on the *Candy Matson* motif. How did that go?

JACK: It went very well; we were fortunate to get broadcast time on Channel 10, community-access cable television in northern Virginia. The script is in two parts, and I'm interviewed about the production. Acting and sound effects turned out very well in all aspects. There was good choice of camera angles, where they focused on the actors at the microphones and on the sound effects table, as well. And they were quite skillful with the final cut where they interspersed shots.

GRTR: Sounds delightful! Let's touch a bit on your travels. You're a familiar face at conventions. And most recently you travelled to Chicago to visit family. The photograph you sent me is marvelous! I'd like to post it in the GRTR with the transcript of the broadcast; OK with you?



JACK: By all means. It was a pleasant evening for a stroll to see the famous Aragon ballroom!

Caption: Jack French on a recent 2017 visit to Chicago.

No big band remotes that night!

GRTR: How about that quick trip to Houston in 2014, where you were the keynote speaker for the Houston Vintage Radio Association? Helping them expand their horizons, I take it.

JACK: Yes, they generally deal in equipment and hardware, restoring receivers and the like, both military and civilian. Their dealer's room was amazing, people talking shop, and quite an array of materials. So, I called my talk "When Radio Wore a Cowboy Hat," and it was very well-received, you know, the different approach, information about the classic dramas, and shows that were set in Texas: *Tom Mix*, *Tales of the Texas Rangers*, and one I've researched quite a lot: *Bobby Benson of the B-Bar-B*. The audio clips I played were the highlight, I think; good sound system, as you might imagine! I took along a few autographed copies of *RADIO RIDES THE RANGE*, the book which David Seigel and I had just

compiled and published with McFarland. It was an interesting trip, a fun time.

GRTR: And the sentimental journey you took in the summer of 2014, back to the north woods of Wisconsin, to give a talk at a historical society?

JACK: The neighboring cities of Merrill and Rhinelander were the places I visited. I hadn't been to Merrill for close to 50 years, but their historical society is a thriving place and my talk on radio history at their meeting made for a wonderful Sunday afternoon. The city of Rhinelander, a few miles north of Merrill, is my hometown; I graduated high school there in 1954, and generally like to attend my high school reunion every five years. Beautiful part of the country, nice people, great memories.

GRTR: Good talking with you, Jack, fascinating, thanks!

JACK: Pleasure, thank you.

#### MUSIC BRIDGE AND COMMERCIAL

Joanie signals for a commercial, and Chuck pipes in the opening joyful strains of Stravinsky's tone poem, "Petrouchka".

Our sponsors, the Dayton Dragons Class A baseball team continues to make plans for the new season with their parent club, the Cincinnati Reds. Many of the front office and the players are taking part in community activities. During this off-season the team has been recognized by the community for their support of the military and their activities in promoting health awareness; and Fifth Third Stadium is a popular venue for charitable events. If it's pelting sleet and freezing temperatures, can Spring Training be far behind?



### READERS AND THEIR ROLES

Joanie has cued us back in from commercial; Jack has sauntered over to the sound booth to see how Chuck is doing. Nice to sit and talk with Jack for a while, wasn't it?

The concept of words-and-music is not new; a reader and an accompanist are equally at home in salon, concert hall, or recording studio. The lyricism of voice, supported by the nuance of music is a triumph of introspection for performers and audience alike. Lucy Parham, a pianist and professor of music in London, has researched the lives of several composers, and made stunning presentations of them. Her texts are read by astute readers to her piano accompaniment of the composers' music. Her subjects have been Debussy, Liszt, and Chopin. Her first program was the life of Robert Schumann; she titled it *Dear Clara*. Her readers are, among others, Juliet Stephenson, Roger Allam, and Patricia Hodge. Who would not want to read with Lucy Parham?

In 2015 she presented Alfred Lord Tennyson's 1864 lyric poem *Enoch Arden*, which had been augmented with a piano score by Richard Strauss in 1897. She chose the esteemed actor Henry Goodman to read. The poem is about the love and tragedy that beset three childhood friends in an English seaside town. There is Annie Lee and her playmates: Philip, the miller's son, and Enoch, the rough and restless sailor's son. The story plays out amidst the wharfs and bluffs of the poor village, and on the distant ocean. Enoch marries Annie, and to make his fortune he finds work on a ship, and sets sail. There's a shipwreck, and Enoch lives the life of a castaway for ten years. He is rescued and returns to the village, unrecognizable to the townspeople, including Annie and Philip, who have, reluctantly but with resolve, started a new life together. The music is at times swirling with optimism; then dark and pounding with rage and despair. The question remains, what about Enoch? Will he declare himself to the town, and to the new family, or live on as the strange and broken man at the boarding house?

We have time for a few lines from Tennyson. It's the point where Enoch is rescued. Jack French will step up to the microphone and read. Jack, if you please, from *Enoch Arden*, Part 7.

Thus, over Enoch's early silvering head  
 The sunny and rainy seasons came and went  
 Year after year. His hopes to see his own,  
 And pace the sacred old familiar fields,  
 Not yet had perish'd, when his lonely doom  
 Came suddenly to an end.

Another ship (She wanted water) blown by baffling winds,  
 Like the Good Fortune, from her destined course,

Stay'd by this isle.

They sent a crew that landing, burst away  
In search of stream or fount, and fill'd the shores with clamour.

Downward from his mountain gorge  
Stept the long-hair'd long-bearded solitary,  
Brown, looking hardly human, strangely clad,  
Muttering and mumbling, idiot-like it seem'd,  
With inarticulate rage, and making signs  
They knew not what: and yet he led the way  
To where the rivulets of sweet water ran;  
And ever as he mingled with the crew,  
And heard them talking, his long-bounden tongue  
Was loosen'd, till he made them understand,  
And so, the wild one, when their casks were fill'd  
They took aboard.

And dull the voyage was with long delays,  
The vessel scarce sea-worthy; but evermore  
Enoch's fancy fled before the lazy wind  
Till like a lover down thro' all his blood  
Drew in the dewy meadowy morning-breath of England.

### MUSIC BRIDGE TO NETWORK FEED

Marvelous, Jack, great reading, thanks! And Chuck is piping in the music that follows, Lucy Parham playing the Strauss, so nice! Thanks so much to Jack and Chuck and Joanie for making it all happen!

Thanks for listening, everyone, keep those cards and letters coming! That's all for now from the little tin pot studio down by the creek. Soup and sandwiches in the Mud Room, anyone? But of course!



Thanks ever,  
Mark Anderson  
Carlisle PA

