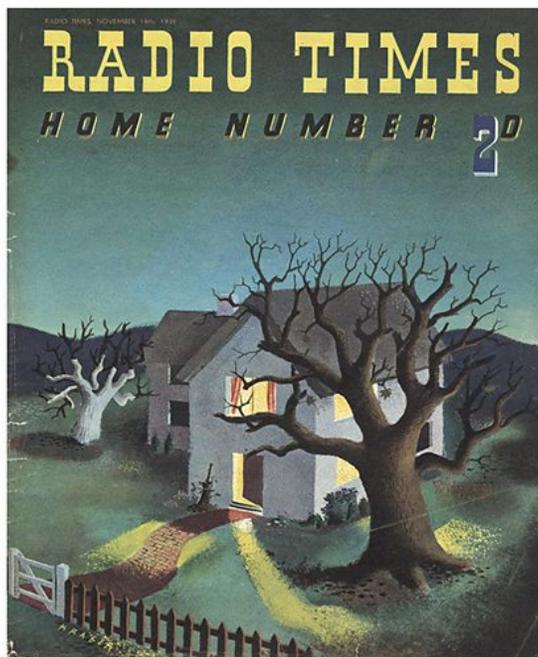


GATHER 'ROUND THE RADIO
E-NEWSLETTER FOR THE METROPOLITAN
WASHINGTON OLD-TIME RADIO CLUB
THE GRTR STUDIO EDITION



THE JACK LESCOULIE ISSUE
NOVEMBER 18, 2019

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 to find a station where you can tune in.

We've settled in nicely at our red barn studio near the creek. Chuck is coaxing the creaky old sound board through its squawks and hums. He smiles as he's piping in a song from folksinger Ray La Montagne; it's "Winter Birds" from 2008 and it captures the feeling of the bitter and changing weather that has blown through here of late:

The stream can't contain such withering rain
And from the pasture the fence is leaning away.
The clouds crack and growl like a cat on the prowl
Crying out "I am...I am..." over and over again.

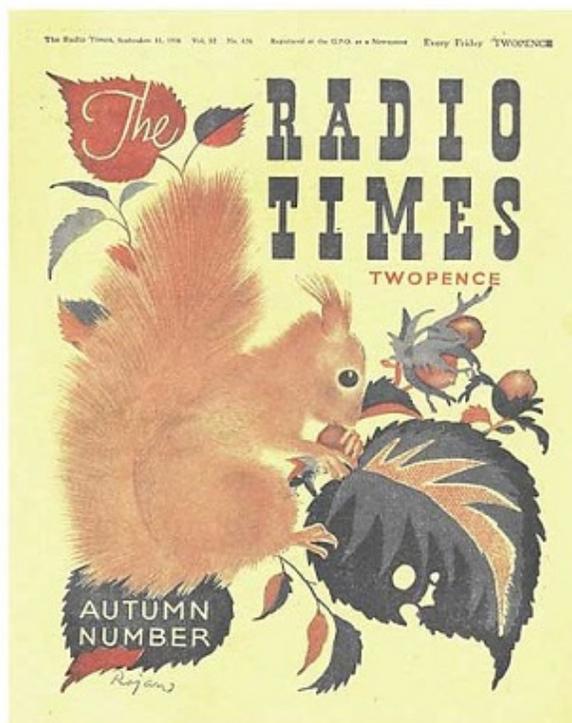
We're enjoying coffee and scones here in the Mud Room, as Joanie checks her clipboard and keeps an eye on the clock for network feed. It's an afternoon to reflect and listen, and we've chosen a couple of programs from the archives. We won't forget our sponsor, so we will look at the Dayton Dragons website. Joanie is signaling and we head down the hall to the studio. Chuck fades the track on Ray La Montagne: "The days grow short and the nights grow long / The kettle sings its tortured song..."

ON THE AIR

Hello everyone, and welcome to the broadcast! Let's right away assuage that uneasy feeling of malaise that has seeped into the atmosphere in the D.C. area. Let's mention sports for a reason to celebrate, with three teams winning: most recently the Nationals are Major League Champions; a few weeks earlier, the Mystics won the Women's Pro Basketball League championship, and early in the year the Capitals showed their streamlined skill as they skated their way to capture the Stanley Cup.

PLAYING FAVORITES

Activities are a big part of retirement home living, and I'm on the schedule here at Country Meadows for a Sunday afternoon OTR presentation. It has gone well, about a dozen or fourteen folks show up, and there are always nurses, family, and residents walking along the corridor, looking in and listening for a minute or two. I follow the format of the First Fifteen show that is well-known at Club meetings; I give an intro and a handout and play a 30-minute show. So far, First Nighter and Cavalcade of America are the standouts; Fred Allen, not so much. But each time it's a conversation-starter, by turns amusing and wistful. Folks remember styles of radio sets, and programs, mostly news, big bands, and variety shows.



VARIATIONS ON A THEME (From the May 22, 2016 GRTR)

Lately I have listened to two radio dramas which nicely span the years between old-time and new-time radio. A "Quiet Please" story called "12 to 5", from 1948, is really good. Perhaps you know it; quite often I'm behind the times in finding the classic stories. It takes place in a radio station. As if I needed a reason, now I know why we never broadcast overnight here at the GRTR Studio.

I find wonderful similarities between that story and a 2009 BBC Radio 4 dramatization of a J. B. Priestley play from 1930, called "An Inspector Calls." The catalyst in Wyllis Cooper's story is a newsman named Herb who comes into the studio at around 1 AM to read some news bulletins. He is played by Jack Lescoulie, and Ernest Chappell's late-night disc jockey character named Connie is happy to turn the microphone over to him.

In the BBC play, the Inspector is played by Toby Jones, and he presents himself in the dining room of a rich urban merchant-class family. Jones is insinuating, and he knows that he is interrupting a family evening. He adds a layer of authority as he implicates each member of the family in the recent life story of a working girl who has lost her job.

The counterpoint in both stories is the element of trust. Lescoulie's Herb is jovial, cynical, and insinuating as he reads about local events over the air. Connie the DJ is so beleaguered by his job that he simply chalks up Herb's crime bulletins to just another oddball night in the city. Priestley's London family is confronted by the Inspector with uncomfortably close knowledge of the different ways they know the girl. They can only beg off with a constant refrain of "...what's that got to do with me?"

We the listener want to ask the intruders: "what kind of business are you in?" And, "why do you choose to carry it out here, or there?"

The Inspector has told the family that the girl is dead; but he is imprecise about when she died. He leaves the house; and soon there is a knock on the door.

In Wyllis Cooper's world, poor Connie isn't feeling very well. The latest news bulletin Herb has read is that there is an ambulance responding. Connie goes out the door. It's 5 AM; his shift is over.

MUSIC BRIDGE AND A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR

Chuck is piping in "Song to the Moon" from Dvorak's opera "Rusalka" sung by Kate Royal from her album *Midsummer Night*.

News from the Dragons front office is good. First, the bad: The team has scheduled The Nitro Circus to perform at Fifth Third Park in May 2020. The photo shows metal scaffolding and hot-rod motorcycles doing flips. I hope they don't tear up the field too much! The Dragons will still have some games to play and townsfolk coming to Yoga in the Outfield need a calm level space too!

The Dragons are hiring new coaches as they continue their march to be more competitive. It's a Youth Quake! The manager will be Gookie Dawkins, age 40, with 15 years playing in the majors and 6 years coaching in the Reds organization. His staff includes young coaches who have worked for the Reds with farm teams in Billings Montana and Orem Utah.

ERUDITE AND ROBUST: WESTERN SCRIPTS

Jack French and I have corresponded about Westerns for years. I read with great interest the book *Radio Rides the Range: A Reference Guide to Western Radio Drama on the Air* (McFarland, 2014 edited by Jack French and David S. Siegel); and I recall his interest in three programs in particular: *Gunsmoke*, *Fort Laramie*, and *Frontier Gentleman*. I shall add to those shows the equally erudite *The Six Shooter*.

Here is an excerpt from the GRTR of September 19, 2018, with a nod to Fred Berney, who wrote the "Six Shooter" essay in the *Reference Guide*.

TWO SCRIPTS AND A HOST OF STARS

There are several parallels to be found in the radio show "Six Shooter" (1953-1954) and the film "The Misfits." (1961) Each had a Hollywood leading man, James Stewart and Clark Gable. Both had writers (Frank Burt and Arthur Miller) who were adept at taking the great swath of land that is the American west and carving out deep character studies that fit the time and place. Stewart was accompanied by established radio actors: William Conrad, Harry Bartel, Virginia Gregg, and Parley Baer, among others. Burt was up to the task of writing true ensemble roles. Gable had an arguably more contentious group around him: Marilyn Monroe, Montgomery Clift, Thelma Ritter, and Eli Wallach. Director John Huston and producer Frank Taylor were arbiters among the troubled few. In the PBS documentary "Making the Misfits" (WNET New York 2001, 55 min. B&W) film clips, still photos, and insightful interviews tell us about these people, the Reno Nevada location, and the way it all hung together to produce a remarkable film.

In each "Six Shooter" episode, Britt Ponset, the tall, laconic cowboy, narrates his travels through the landscape from town to ranch. In the episode "A Friend in Need," Ponset muses on the canyon up ahead: 50 yards wide and several miles long, like two slabs of granite just rising up; he had slept there among the mesquite, and overnight his gear is wet and heavy while he's waiting for the sun to cross the canyon walls one side to the other. In "Quiet City" he muses about the changes over the years: not much frontier anymore, new houses on stretches of desert past the edge of town; ranch land now given over to farming. Maybe not much call for signing on as a roundup hand anymore. And he finds a boy who wants to go back east to study law. Britt says in an offhand way that he would have liked a little more education, himself, hoping to convince the father to let the boy go. It's Frank Burt writing for Stewart's style, right down the line.

In "The Misfits," Gable's character, Gay Langland, explains to Roslyn (Monroe) his idea of a morning in the Nevada scenery: "You go outside, you whistle, you throw stones at a can; you just live!" Arthur Miller said that he was impressed by the long stretches of sand and scrub, that made people seem indistinct. He also makes clear that in that vastness, it is not so much one's outlook, but one's introspection that counts. Tony Huston, an assistant to his father on the film, says that Miller wrote the script as an

“essay in light.” Eli Wallach says that Miller “had written a valentine for Marilyn, a love piece.” Wallach continues to typify it as “an aria of pain;” in effect, the entire script is a tribute to characters trying to ease one another’s pain.

Gay and Roslyn stay together at a house in the desert. Gay has become domesticated. He tells Roslyn that he had never done anything for a woman, not cooked nor cleaned nor planted a garden. An argument between the two takes shape and runs throughout the story. Roslyn is against killing. For Gay it is a way of life: keeping rabbits out of your garden; and he tells her that ranchers are keen on keeping predators away from their lambs. He accuses her of “always trying to change things.” Gay and his friend Guido (Wallach) want to go into the hills to chase down wild horses to sell to middlemen. They call it mustanging. Used to fetch good money, in the old days.

The motif for Britt Ponset is that he wants to avoid domesticity, and yet folks in one town or another want him to marry and settle down. He’s befuddled as he talks his way out of it. “Aunt Emma” is an amusing story in which Ponset’s aunt comes from back East to settle in the town, and she wants Britt to move in. A listener can just see him, twisting his hat in his hand, “Well, you see...”. He relents and lives a settled life with his aunt, for a while. When he finds a way to leave, Aunt Emma says to him that she has seen his room with his bedroll on the floor, where he prefers to sleep. Britt sheepishly says, “I suppose,” as only James Stewart can.

Fred Berney has written an excellent essay on this series, in *Radio Rides the Range*, edited by Jack French and David Siegel, McFarland, 2014, 167-169. Fred gives a nice account of Britt almost getting married in “Myra Barker,” the final episode of the show. Fred writes:

“...they both realize that married life at this time is not possible as long as he still has wrongs to right and people to save. So, in the end, just as other proverbial cowboys had done, Britt Ponset rode off into the sunset.” p. 169.

Gaylord Langland’s refrain in Miller’s story is that: “...they’ve changed everything...” His specialty is roping, and he’s upset that rodeos have changed: too loud, too commercial. He won’t sign on for wages; he doesn’t want anyone telling him what to do. Early in the film, Roslyn asks him, “You got something against educated women?” Gay has no reply; things have surely changed.

Even mustanging is a vestige of a vanished life. Miller is sure to write in the script that 15 horses is all they find, in real life of that era worth no more than a “pittance.” The location footage of the high desert chase is grueling. The ASPCA has a man on the set to

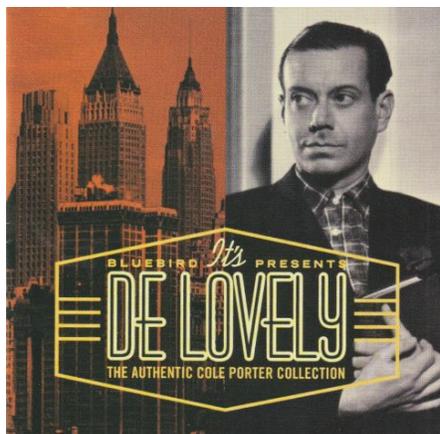
monitor the rough-and-tumble roping. It's the horses that are on the clock: "OK, that's a wrap!". Gable, however, did not give way to a stunt man; he himself gets dragged around, to the horror of his wife and everyone else. It takes a toll on his life.

The film is nearing the end. Gay listens to Roslyn and cuts the horses loose. Guido snarls "...what's next, back to town and look for wages?" It's night under a starry sky. Gay and Roslyn drive back to town. They probably won't stay together. Everyone has unleashed their rancor towards everyone else. Who's to say if she will find a bungalow and a yard where she can feel unburdened and free? Gay most likely will breath the fresh air and look for work. Roslyn asks Gay how he can find the highway back to town. He points to a star and says, "Follow that star. The highway's right underneath it."

Arthur Miller has given us his impressions of the west; Frank Burt affords us the same insight: determination, defiance, and realization, circling around to the kindness found in every human heart.

COLE PORTER, FROM THIS MOMENT ON

Or, audio technicians gone wild! The album art, par excellence!



18 songs, including "Don't Fence Me In" Roy Rogers 1952, with unnamed Orchestra.

Liner notes, renditions from the 30s originals through mixes in 2004.

Cole Porter singing, includes "Anything Goes" Nov. 27, 1934 at Victor Studio #3 NYC.

Lena Horne, Al Bowlly, Artie Shaw, Coleman Hawkins, Dinah Shore, Perez Prado...

Chuck wants to pipe in every song, but Joanie is tapping her clipboard. Thanks for listening! Soup and sandwiches in the Mud Room? But of course! Best, Mark A.