

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



THE OPERATIC VOICE ISSUE
NOVEMBER 21, 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 rain has run through these mountains, and this morning the clouds over the valley were glowing gold as the sun emerged in a 40-degree frost. Bert, Beverly, and Fred have carpoled north and brought a nice carrot cake from

the Poor Cousins Bakery in Hazleton. It was still sunny as they topped the Sullivan turnoff into the woods, a snow squall blew through, leaving a crusty white layer on everything. Beverly is jotting notes on her clipboard and watching the sweep of the clock towards network. I've got the boiler fired up and Fred is coaxing the creaky old sound board through its squawks and hums. He's piping in a modern Scottish song, it's "Reclaim the Night" by Belle and Sebastian.

ON THE AIR

Hello everyone, and welcome to the broadcast!

We're busy looking through the Dusty Courier Pouch and having coffee. Jack French has sent us a note about the Milwaukee Area Radio Enthusiasts (M.A.R.E.) club who have resumed their meeting schedule. Jack also has news about an article about OTR in the *Air & Space Quarterly*. We have word from the Calico County Players, that they have a new radio script in production. They call Fairfax home and Zoom is their medium. And I've written a bit about a BBC radio play of "Marnie," the drama better known as a lavish and lengthy film by Alfred Hitchcock.

OUR OTR FRIENDS IN MILWAUKEE

They have a noteworthy history, as written by Ron Sayles (2013). And now the Club is back to meeting on Sunday afternoons; glad to hear it!

The Milwaukee Area Radio Enthusiasts (M.A .R.E.) club began in 1975 and once had an extensive tape library of radio shows. We met on Sunday afternoons, hosted speakers giving programs, and wrote a newsletter. One famous bit of radio was produced in Milwaukee, a holiday serial of the adventures of Billie the Brownie. It ran during late November into mid-December, sponsored by Schuster's Department Store. It was the midwestern counterpart to northwest's The Cinnamon Bear series. Hugh Carlson of station

WTMJ figured large in the broadcast, and the series creator Larry Teich was a friend of the Milwaukee club.



fair use. MWOTRC

THE CALICO COUNTY PLAYERS

The new radio play in the works these days has the working title “The Westbound Stage” and keeps up the proud MWOTRC tradition of productions based on the scripts written by Dave Aime, first produced in the 1990s by Chuck Langdon and Mark and Marsha Bush. The readers are Club members and friends, and we meet on Zoom. It’s a lively script with a matron and her mischievous teenage girls booking passage to Silver City. The matron has a rifle and the bandits waiting among the rocks don’t stand a chance. Imagine the Monument Valley locations filmed by John Ford and add the fast-paced and amusing dialogue of trail life, and it’s hats off, all around.



MUSIC BRIDGE AND COMMERCIAL

Beverly is signaling network feed, so Fred is piping in the grand sound of Elgar's Cello Concerto, with fade to a word from the Dayton Dragons.

Individual players and community involvement continue to be hallmarks of the Dragons front office. The team finished just a few games under .500, but they played well enough that the parent club Cincinnati Reds chose four players to attend their Spring Training camp as major league prospects. As well, Dragons shortstop Elly de la Cruz was chosen as All-Star shortstop for the nationwide Minor League system.

Community involvement is thriving:

DAYTON, OHIO – The Dayton Dragons and CareSource, a nonprofit multistate health plan, are continuing their commitment for the Dayton Dragons Veteran Salute program, presented by CareSource. The program is an extension of CareSource's commitment to improve the lives of complex populations including veterans and their families through innovative programs and partnerships to support their health and well-being.

JACK FRENCH ON THE AVIATION THEME IN OTR

A couple of weeks ago Jack French wrote me this letter about his connection to an article in the *Air and Space Quarterly*. With two aviation museums located in the D.C. Metro area, Jack figured that it was a hands-on idea for our Club to know about the OTR shows and especially the premiums they offered.

Bert has a copy of the letter and he will settle in at the mike to read.

BERT:

Thanks, Mark. Jack is generous with his recognition of the shows and the researchers involved. He writes:

Hey, Lefty, I finally got a copy of the “Captain Midnight to the Rescue” article. I was interviewed and quoted about how the networks included children’s characters in the scripts to widen the appeal of shows that were popular with adults as well. The author also includes quotes from two well-known writers, Karl Schadow and Donna Halper. Karl has researched and created files for many shows and has written for our own *Radio Recall*. Professor Halper is quoted, saying that radio, especially during the ‘30s was a unifying factor, a special comfort for folks on hard times, with dwindling opportunities. The author (Damond Benningfield) gives great detail about three shows, “Wings of Destiny”, “Captain Midnight” (my favorite!), and we need to give special attention to “The Jimmie Allen Show.” The sponsor during the ‘30s was Skelly Oil and the show had a newsletter for its young listeners. And can you imagine, the sponsor was sending out 600,000 copies per week!

And next there were the premiums sent out from the “Captain Midnight” program. The sponsor was Ovaltine and Benningfield got ahold of a huge number of those premiums, especially the Decoder Badges. There’s a full-color photo of those premiums. In fact the

entire 7–page article is lavishly illustrated, most in color, of the premiums and posters of the flying heroes of radio’s past.

The third program – “Wings of Destiny” – is a little unusual since it wasn’t aired until late evening when the kiddies were fast asleep. And it was sponsored by Wings Cigarettes! That show also distributed the largest and most expensive OTR premium in history, a Piper Cub, and it wasn’t a model toy, either. It was a full–size 2–seater airplane that you could actually fly. An example of those bright yellow Piper Cubs is on display at the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum. And the magazine where the OTR article appears is published by the museum. *Air & Space Quarterly*, which is a benefit of being a member of the National Air & Space Society. Annual dues, or so I hear, run from 35 to 500 dollars. At any rate, the museums are fantastic to visit – the one on the Mall in D.C. and the Udvar–Hazy Museum off Route 28 in Chantilly.

And that’s the letter from Jack French.

Thanks very much, Bert, nicely done.

A TWICE-TOLD TALE

The 1961 novel *Marnie* by British author Winston Graham whetted the appetites of the artistic and academic communities on both sides of the Atlantic. The setting was the west country of England in the 1950s and the BBC described its theme as “the secrets that lead an attractive young woman to turn to a life of crime.” Alfred Hitchcock bought the rights to it and in 1964 transposed the story to the fields and forests of the Middleburg Virginia horse

country, including a street scene in front of the Red Fox Tavern. His distinctive cinematic style and a brilliant script keep the psychological knife edge in our ribs. Tippi Hedren and Sean Connery help keep it there. The early scene with Martin Gable in trademark horn-rim glasses declaring that his company has just been “...robbed! Cleaned out!” gets the audience ready to ride.



In 2011 BBC Radio 4 and its studio of veteran voices produced “Marnie” as a radio play, returning the storyline to the original English towns of Plymouth, Torquay, and Cardiff. With Jade Williams and Patrick Kennedy in the leading roles, they achieve their effect in 60-minutes with a script that is at once dark and terrifying. Slow and mournful string music is often shattered by storms or clocks; fingernails scraping on a window, or Marnie on a window ledge.

Throughout the radio version, Marnie speaks in first person narration. She grabs the listener's attention early, when she says to us, "You don't think of your own family as peculiar, do you?"

An actor must always find his or her voice. In *Marnie*, both Williams and Hedren must find three voices: Marnie herself as a terrified child, Marnie's stern mother Edie, and her own adult voice, by turns seductive, sarcastic, and defensive. These voices, as defined by a BBC commentator, are "operatic."

Fear and memory drive the story. Marnie's fear of the color red is rendered by Hitchcock by the screen going red over her tortured face. Or it might be the red of the hunt master's jacket. Marnie in her stylish Virginia bedroom is overtaken by a nightmare of her poor childhood row house in Baltimore. She writhes in bed and Hedren's voice goes from deep moan to shrill child, exclaiming "...don't hurt my mother...!" She is shaken awake by her friend who has come into the room. She realizes where she is and in an instant pulls the silk sheets up to her chin. In a snarl of adult venom Hedren tells her friend to get out.

Jade Williams as Marnie is in her psychiatrist's office. She has begun to talk about her painful and nightmarish childhood in Torquay. Williams gives Marnie a normal adult voice which is hesitant, then she slides into a child's terrified voice, soon interjecting the stern voice of Edie. The child's voice doesn't want to leave her warm bed. The voice of Edie says she must. There is moaning and banging as against a wall. The child yells, "...please don't hurt my mother...!" When the psychiatrist brings her out of that horrible memory Williams's adult voice shrieks and with the SFX of a slamming door we know that she has left the office.

SPOILER

In the film Marnie doesn't go to jail for her theft of Martin Gable's safe. Sean Connery, as her husband Mark, "will see to that" by paying back the money, no charges brought. He has aristocratic privilege and the strange feeling that love has reared its unlikely head. Marnie has lost her fears and there's a scene where her mother tells her the salacious painful truth of her upbringing. They leave the Baltimore row house and kids are tossing a ball and singing the rhyme: "Help me help me / I feel ill / Go get the doctor up on the hill / Call for the doctor / Call for the nurse / Call for the lady with the alligator purse."

In the radio play, Edie has died and her neighbor tells Marnie of that horrific night years ago. Marnie's boss Terry in Plymouth has missed out on a business deal and has found out which businessmen Marnie had robbed. He invites them to his house. In walks Marnie and she knows that "time's up," they will bring charges. The adult Marnie lashes out at Terry. He retorts towards this now steely woman: "...butter wouldn't melt..." She narrates her future to us, and surely we must believe that she is free of fear and that after serving her time in prison she will want to be with her husband Mark, with no pretense this time around. And everyone ends up in good voice.

MUSIC BRIDGE AND NETWORK FEED

Beverly is signaling network feed. Fred is piping in the spritely part from "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik." Thanks for tuning in, everyone. Keep those cards and letters coming!

Thanks ever,

Mark Anderson

Wilkes Barre PA