



GATHER 'ROUND THE RADIO
E-NEWSLETTER FOR THE METROPOLITAN
WASHINGTON OLD-TIME RADIO CLUB
THE GRTR STUDIO EDITION SEPTEMBER 8, 2016
THE GARDEN OF EPHEMERA 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.

The land these days is parched and the streams are shallow and running slow. Seems that folks have traveled many a mile since last we talked. Chuck and Joanie and I are here in the Mud Room with our Costa Rican Estate coffee, corn bread, and the dusty courier pouch. We have our news and views, and we're dipping into the GRTR archives for some good bits; "everything old is new again..." to borrow a line from "All That Jazz," I think.

Chuck has fired up the creaky old sound board, fine-tuning the squawks and hums, and Joanie has her eye on the clock as it sweeps toward network feed. Chuck is piping in a proper nostalgic song, "So Many Stars," written by Sergio Mendes, and sung in this rendition by the great Sarah Vaughan, vintage 1987.

ON THE AIR

Hello everyone, and welcome to the broadcast! Let's begin with a gentle reminder about the MANC, which will be held next Thursday through Saturday, September 15, 16, and

17. I'll spell it out for you: The Mid-Atlantic Nostalgia Convention, hosted by Martin Grams. All eyes will be on Hunt Valley Maryland as celebrities, performers, and vendors will gather at the Hunt Valley Wyndham Hotel for a festive and informative few days. There's a colorful website and various ways of accessing it, including Facebook.

Folks from our own Club will be active participants; the Club meeting is scheduled at Noon on Saturday the 17th. Leading up to that, at 11 AM, Jack French will deliver a presentation on the history of radio sound effects.

Jack has written a nice article about his presentation, featuring a lady who went by the name of "Ora." Joanie is stepping up to the microphone to read Jack's astute and surprising article:

In 1934, she was considered "the most influential woman in radio". Guess who? She was born Aurore Dolores Daigle in Massachusetts but since few could pronounce her first name, she took the nickname "Ora." She eventually married a widower with three children and acquired the married name "Nichols." So who was Ora Nichols, why was she so influential in radio, and why in the heck does virtually nobody in our OTR hobby today know who she was?

Ora started her working career as a bookkeeper who also played the piano. When she married Arthur Nichols in 1920, the two tried to make a living in vaudeville with her at the piano and him playing violin. They had modest success until the silent movies crushed vaudeville. They next took employment playing music for the silent movies. This job was expanded to also doing the sound effects for the films, including hoof beats, crashes, weather changes, animal sounds, etc. They created some of their own devices for producing these sounds and were doing very well until "The Jazz Singer" debuted in 1927. With the birth of movies "that talked", the folks who provide the music and sounds for the silent films were soon looking for other employment.

By 1928 Ora and Arthur had found some free-lance work for CBS and NBC doing sound effects for radio. Within a few years, they were put on staff payroll at CBS and were doing sound effects for their network

shows. Thus Ora became the first, and only, head of sound effects for a radio network. She trained their assistants at the sound table, usually employing drummers who were familiar with percussion instruments. When Arthur died a few years later, Ora continued to do sound effects, create new instruments of sound, and was personally responsible for creating the extensive sound effects studio at CBS.

She was on the team that provided sound effects for “War of the Worlds” under Orson Welles, an erratic and demanding director. She led the sound effects on “Buck Rogers of the 25th Century” and invented the sound of his space ship. With a few others, she did the sound effects on “March of Time” from 1931 to 1945. In 1934, she married a drummer, Louis Dorough but he died in 1943. Ora retired from radio in 1945, probably convinced that she had proven that women could, and should, be hired as sound effects personnel in radio broadcasting. Of course, in the Golden Age of Radio, women were almost never considered for announcers, station managers, engineers, sound effects personnel, etc. so her hopes never materialized. She died in 1951 at the age of 58 after a long illness.

Jack French will discuss Ora Nichols in his presentation on the history of radio sound effects at Mid-Atlantic Nostalgia Convention and will write an extensive article on this forgotten lady for a future edition of RADIO RECALL.

Thanks, Joanie, fantastic! Jack and the Club will surely score high marks as they hold forth on Saturday the 17th, at 11AM, and in the 12 Noon slot as well.

COMMERCIAL AND MUSIC BRIDGE

Our corporate sponsor remains the Dayton Dragons, that colorful and family-friendly minor league baseball team, beloved in the Ohio Valley and beyond. The season is over, and well, the Dragons won 50 games and lost 80. We still love ‘em! “Wait till next year!” That’s great, and we might be one-up on National Public Radio – do they have a baseball team sponsor?

Here's a lovely Portuguese folksong "Bidonville Consolacao," about life in a tranquil harbor town. The vocalists are Natalie Dessay and Helen Noguerra; and in true world harmony style, the opening verses are in French, and the final verses are in Portuguese. Hands across the water; a world saved by song.

FROM THE GRTR ARCHIVES

The more I listen or read one article or another, the name Jack Johnstone often figures prominently. Here, from the GRTR of November 3, 2013, is the lead I followed and the essay I wrote. Take a step back in time, adjust your headphones, and enjoy. Joanie steps up and reads:

I Love a Grabber

You know how I like to study my lessons, so when an OTR pal o' mine sent me this link, I went right to it. It's a blog post by one Bill Tracy, who writes out of New Jersey, and his subject is Jack Johnstone.

Go here: <http://deadreckoning1.wordpress.com/2013/09/17/the-johnstone-enigma-redux/>

Tracy typifies producer/director/writer Johnstone as a man perhaps less well-known than the likes of MacDonnell, Corwin, Oboler, or Welles, but one "who outworked them all." With that as preface Tracy writes with a fast-paced precision that could stand beside the best of any detective story. He pieces together Johnstone's life; he gathers photographs, and he interviews the people who don't leave him standing on the front porch. I was impressed as I read because Tracy nails the details and does not disguise his own sense of awe. He read an interview in which Johnstone recounted that he had directed James Cagney in a film, "a top secret film for the War Department." Tracy's own response: "Just when you think you understand a lot about him, he throws out an offhand remark..." He starts another find with, "People who know how he worked tell me..." Isn't that just made for a noir-style voice-over?

Many readers will connect Johnstone with the "Johnny Dollar" series. Tracy relates that he came to the show in 1955, and wrote 350 episodes. Thus

he worked with Bob Bailey; and wrote the final "YTJD" script which aired in 1962. Tracy chronicles Johnstone's work in New York, and his move to Los Angeles. He was involved in many shows, including a cold-case show with audience participation, called "Somebody Knows." Behind the scenes, significantly, Johnstone directed from the studio floor rather than from the booth. Concerning his "Buck Rogers" scripts, he was a "stickler" for plausibility and detail. And he would call airlines for fares, find out hotel rates, and check hospital costs for any expense account item Johnny Dollar wrote down.

Thanks again, Joanie! The link to the blog "Dead Reckoning" is still active and the article is quite extensive. Photographs include one of Johnstone directing, and Anne Baxter reading.

MUSIC BRIDGE AND NETWORK FEED

Chuck has cued up a rhythmic song from the great Brazilian song-writer Baden Powell. It's called "Samba em preludio," a duet sung by Agnes Jaoui and Helena Noguerra, with Liat Cohen accompanying on guitar.

Thanks everyone! Keep those cards and letters coming! Soup and sandwiches in the Mud Room, anyone? But of course!

Mark Anderson

Carlisle PA